

Students with Special Needs in the General Music Classroom: Overview and Interventions

Autism

Defined:

Autism is a developmental disability generally occurring within the first 3 years of life. Considered a neurological disorder affecting the functioning of the brain, the behaviors manifested may include impaired social interaction, impaired verbal and nonverbal communication, repetitive body movements such as rocking or hand flapping, unusual responses to people and objects, and resistance to change. Autism is defined by a set of behavioral criteria and results in persons falling somewhere on an autistic continuum. This also allows for autistic-related disorders including Autistic Disorder, Rett Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified.

Characteristics may include:

Impaired speech

Echolalia

Repetition of words, unrelated phrases

Impaired social interaction

Lack of social interaction

Idiosyncratic voice inflection

Unresponsiveness or aversion to touch

Resistance to change or routine

Dependency on a set schedule

Extreme mood swings

Impaired skilled motor function

Ritualistic or stereotypical behavior such as clapping, hand flapping, finger flicking, and rocking

Extreme fascination or preoccupation with inanimate objects

Impaired cognitive functioning
Self-injurious behavior

Music Therapy Approaches:

Objectives might be aimed towards developing attention span, developing appropriate social interactions and communication, developing tolerance for sensory input, developing acceptance of change, and improving body awareness.

General Music Interventions/Techniques/Considerations:

Provide a structured environment

Decrease auditory stimulation (move them further away from sound sources)

Decrease visual distractions (lower the lights, for example)

Redirect for self-stimulating activities

Provide opportunities to develop skills and strategies for appropriate social interactions

Pair with a "buddy"

Provide alternate communication methods (Use of yes/no cards, pictures, signs & gestures)

Use pictures and visual aids

Provide opportunities for "choices" by the student

Use transition songs (beginning, ending, activity-changing songs)

Use age-appropriate music

Provide physical assistance (as appropriate) when playing instruments to improve body awareness

Hearing Impairments

Defined:

There are four types of hearing loss: Conductive Hearing Loss, caused by diseases or obstructions in the outer or middle ear; Sensorineural Hearing Loss, caused by damage to the delicate sensory hair cells in the inner ear or nerves; Mixed Hearing Loss, involving problems of the outer or middle ear, and the inner ear; Central Hearing Loss, caused by damage to the nerves or nuclei of the central nervous system. Persons said to be "hard of hearing" have some degree of hearing loss, but can still decipher speech and process language. Others who are considered "deaf" may detect some sounds, but it has no meaning for them. The onset of deafness varies with the individual and may affect the individual's language development. The amount of hearing loss is measured

in degrees by decibels (dB) ranging from slight loss (from 27 to 40 db) to profound loss (91dB or more).

There are several different forms and symbol systems for communication used by Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons, each representing different philosophies. These include American Sign Language, Fingerspelling, Manual Communication (a combination of sign language and fingerspelling), Oral Communication (speech and speech-reading), Cued Speech, Simultaneous Communication (speech, signs, and fingerspelling), and Total Communication (use of all methods).

Characteristics may include:

Impaired verbal communication skills

Impaired speech fluency and vocal tone quality (affecting pitch, control, volume, rate, breath control, stress and inflection)

Isolation and loneliness

Problems with equilibrium

Music Therapy Approaches:

Objectives might focus on linguistic, behavioral, academic, motor skills, social interaction and self-concept.

General Music Techniques/ Interventions/Considerations:

Reduce or eliminate unnecessary noises

Provide good lighting

Provide good seating arrangement with close proximity to the teacher

Make sure speaker's face is clearly seen

Speak slowly and clearly (not exaggerated or overemphasized)

Avoid unnecessary pacing

Provide assistive communication devices as necessary, such as microphones; Use of visual aids – paper and pencil, overhead projectors, diagrams, charts, etc.;

Repeat questions or statements from class

Provide opportunities for increased social interaction

Remember these individuals are more responsive to rhythmic aspects than tonal aspects

Use drums and percussive instruments as useful media to transmit vibrations

Use sustaining instruments such as low-pitched Orff instruments to assist with sound detection and discrimination.

Use manipulatives to represent auditory stimuli, such as streamers and parachutes for fast/slow and high/low concepts.

Provide singing and vocalizing opportunities to assist with appropriate verbal inflection and fluidity

Wear a stereo microphone (when appropriate) for those with implants

Visual Impairments

Visually Impaired may refer to individuals who are legally blind, or who are partially sighted. Legally blind refers to a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye after correction. Partially sighted individuals have a visual acuity of between 20/200 and 20/70 in the better eye after correction.

Characteristics may include:

Lack of confidence

Lack of freedom in movement

Slow progress

Self-focused

Anxiety and insecurity

Easily frustrated

Lack of socially acceptable outlets for emotional expression

Increased compensatory skills (such as heightened auditory skills or good memory)

Music Therapy Approaches:

Objectives may be aimed at developing body awareness, spatial awareness, and locomotor skills, developing auditory skills, increasing self-esteem, and providing an appropriate expressive outlet.

General Music Techniques/ Interventions/Considerations:

Provide printed materials which are large – black letters that contrast with background

Provide large, simple, and uncluttered visual aids

Label instruments such as Autoharps, bells, and piano keys with Braille letters (as appropriate and when possible)

Provide opportunities to explore instruments kinesthetically and aurally

Reinforce with tactile experiences when possible

Intellectual Disabilities

Defined:

Intellectual Disabilities refer to individuals with below-average intellectual functioning. Classifications are defined in terms of an Intelligence Quotient, with Moderate Intellectual Impairment being an I.Q. of 35-40 to 50-55, Severe Intellectual Impairment being an I.Q. level of 20-25 to 35-40, and Profound Intellectual Impairment being an I.Q. level below 20-25. Mild Intellectual Impairment would be an I.Q. of 55 to just below normal (70-80). The causes of Intellectual Disabilities can be a result of congenital and genetic disorders, or a host of other non-genetic causes ranging from malnutrition, neglect, prenatal exposure to drugs/alcohol, difficulties during labor/delivery, post-natal infections, or head injuries. Common terms for some intellectual disabilities include Down Syndrome (I.Q. in the Moderate range) and Fragile X Syndrome (I.Q. in the Severe range).

Characteristics may include:

- Poor academic achievement
- Memory deficits
- Decreased attention span
- Poor social development
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty with appropriate daily living skills
- Impaired balance
- Delayed or idiosyncratic language development
- Impaired or slow speech

Music Therapy Approaches:

Objectives will vary depending on the severity of the disability. However, common objectives might focus on gross and fine motor coordination, spatial perception, reading recognition and comprehension, body image, self-help skills, impulse control, social skills, leisure time skills, daily living and work skills, frustration tolerance, and attention span.

General Music Techniques/ Interventions/Considerations:

- Provide close proximity to teacher

Assign a peer buddy
Provide room for wheelchair accessibility
Use devices utilized in academic classroom for communication
Provide opportunities for appropriate social involvement
Provide activities for auditory awareness and sound tracking
Use songs to teach academic concepts
Use movement songs
Provide positive feedback for following directions and staying on task
Provide many visual cues

Learning Disabilities

Defined:

Public Law 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines a learning disability as a “disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations.” Learning Disabilities, also referred to as Speech-Language Disorder, include such conditions as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, hyperlexia, developmental aphasia, and brain injury. Learning Disabilities do not refer to learning problems that are result of other conditions such as visual, hearing, or motor impairments, Intellectual Disabilities or emotional disturbances. Persons with a learning disability can have average or above average intelligence.

Characteristics may include:

Short attention span
Difficulty following directions
Poor memory
Easily frustrated
Impulsivity
Coordination problems (appearing “clumsy”; problems with fine motor activities)
Hyperactivity
Difficulties with sequencing; skipping steps
Poor reading ability and comprehension
Difficulty distinguishing between and among letters, numbers, or sounds
Lack of fluidity in speech

Attention seeking behaviors

Learned "helplessness" ("This is too hard." "I can't do it.")

Music Therapy Approaches:

Objectives might be aimed towards building self-esteem, developing auditory processing skills, increasing attention span, enhancing speech and language skills, improving fine and gross motor skills, promoting academic concepts, developing appropriate social skills, and expanding leisure-time activities.

General Music Techniques/Interventions/Considerations:

Provide close proximity to the teacher

Reduce or eliminate distractions in the environment

Provide frequent positive feedback

Use overhead projector

Be consistent

Be repetitive

Modify color, size, modality, and pacing in learning:

--use color to denote changes in music and color code notes

--use a highlighter to attend to certain parts

--simplify music, making it larger and bolder

--provide various modalities in teaching same concept

--allow for hands-on examinations of materials and equipment

--provide a word bank for written assessments

--allow extra time for assignment

--provide step-by-step directives

--provide frequent review of concepts

--initially separate rhythmic and melodic elements

--separate learning into smaller pieces

--allow extra time for responding to questions

Orthopedic Impairments

Defined:

Orthopedic impairments refer to a type of motor dysfunction that interferes with the functioning of the bones, muscles, or joints of an individual. Generally they refer to

medical problems and do not refer to interferences with intellectual functioning. These impairments can be of a neurological type affecting the Central Nervous System. Impairments of this type include Multiple Sclerosis, Spina Bifida, and spinal cord injuries. Orthopedic impairments can also involve the skeletal system and include Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis, amputations, and congenital malformations. Orthopedic impairments can be a result of congenital or adventitious (acquired) conditions.

Characteristics may include:

- Poor motor coordination
- Poor balance
- Poor range of motion
- Grasping difficulties
- Difficulty functioning independently
- Poor muscle tone
- Impaired breathing
- Poor self-esteem
- Poor communication
- Uninhibited primary reflexes
- Need for assistance in activities of daily functioning
- Performance below academic grade level

Music Therapy Approaches:

Objectives might be aimed towards improving movement/range of motion, relaxation exercises, increasing appropriate social interactions, increasing self-esteem and body awareness, improving communication skills, and self-expression.

General Music Techniques/Interventions/Considerations:

- Use communication and augmentative devices such as Big Macs and Tech Talks
- Provide room for wheelchair accessibility
- Provide movement opportunities and range of motion exercises
- Provide opportunities for socialization and group interaction
- Adapt tools and devices as necessary
- Assist physically as needed when playing instruments (hand over hand)

Emotional/Behavioral Disorder

Defined:

Behavioral problems are a challenge to identify and define. They can refer to a wide range of emotional disorders including depression, affective disorder, anxiety disorder, and schizophrenia. For the purposes of this discussion, the writer will try and limit this to the specific categories of behavioral and conduct disorders. Generally any definition relies on descriptions and characteristics of the behaviors, but does refer to behaviors that fall outside of the realm of socially accepted "normal" behavior. These behaviors are long-term and persistent, and are generally unresponsive to direct interventions applied in general education.

Characteristics & Definitions may include:

Behavior disorder--

School learning problems

Unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships

Inappropriate behavior and feelings (to a given situation)

Pervasive unhappiness or depression

Physical symptoms or fears associated with school or personal problems

Oppositional Defiant Disorder –

Negative, hostile, disobedient behaviors

Defiance

Irritability

Vindictiveness

Swearing, use of obscenities

Low self-esteem

Blaming others

Disruptions; creating problems between others

Mistrust of authority figures

Conduct Disorder

Persistent pattern of antisocial behavior

Inability to function within school, family or social environments

Hyperactivity

Impulsivity

Irritability
Destructiveness
Blaming others
Theft
Use of alcohol or drugs
Arson
Running away

Music Therapy Approaches:

Objectives might be aimed towards exploration and appropriate expression of feelings, values, ideas, and opinions, socialization, problem solving, self-esteem, relaxation techniques, and development of appropriate leisure time outlets.

General Music Interventions/Techniques/Considerations:

Provide structured environment
Have consistent routines
Plan for transitions to and from classroom
Develop plan for behavior modification with fixed set of rewards and consequences; develop behavioral contract
“Interpret” and reflect presenting behavior (“Sounds like you are really angry right now...”) – validate feelings
Process through problem area
Have available time-out area, away from other students if possible
Be non-confrontational
Avoid arguing
Provide choices
Provide appropriate ways to release anger
For oppositional defiance – Avoid obvious positive reinforcement. Use indirect reinforcement such as whispering supportively, leaving notes, and/or providing rewards.

Acronyms Used in Special Education in Georgia

Quick Reference

ADD - Attention Deficit Disorder
AT - Assistive Technology
BIP - Behavioral Intervention Plan
CEC - Council for Exceptional Children
DFCS - Department of Family and Children's Services
DHHS - Department of Health and Human Services
DHR - Department of Human Resources
DOE - Department of Education
EBD - Emotional and Behavioral Disorder
FBA - Functional Behavioral Assessment
GAO - Georgia Advocacy Office
GLRS - Georgia Learning Resources System
GLS - Georgia Legal Services
GPAT - Georgia Project for Assistive Technology
HI - Hearing Impaired
IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEE - Independent Education Evaluation
IEP - Individual Education Plan
IPP - Individual Program Plan
IQ - Intelligence Quotient
IST - Instructional Support Teacher
LD - Learning Disabled
LEA - Local Education Agency
LSS - Local School System
MID - Mildly Intellectually Disabled
MOID - Moderately Intellectually Disabled
MH - Mental Health
OCR - Office for Civil Rights
OHI - Other Health Impaired
OI - Orthopedically Impaired
OSEP - Office for Special Education Programs

OT - Occupational Therapy

PID - Profoundly Intellectually Disabled

PL 94-142 - Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now IDEA)

PT - Physical Therapy

SEA - State Education Agency

SID - Severely Intellectually Disabled

SLP - Speech/Language Pathologist

SSI - Supplemental Security Income

VI - Vision Impaired

VR - Vocational Rehabilitation