

Chapter 8

Music Therapy: A Pedagogical Alternative for ASD and ID Students in Regular Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The use of music as a therapeutic discipline has become well established in schools over the course of many years. Music therapy has very positive, therapeutic results on children with any type of special educational need but in particular students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual disabilities (IDs). This chapter looks at inclusive education and research-based instructional strategies within the realm of music as a pedagogical alternative when working with students with ASD and IDs in the general education classroom. The chapter presents two case studies—one involving a student with ASD and another involving a student with an ID. Solutions and recommendations on further implementation and research of music therapy in inclusive classroom settings are provided.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of educating students with special needs has evolved from a medical or organic model based on rejection and social exclusion in which the pupils were placed in institutions to these students being seen as passive actors and educated alongside their grade-level peers, which is the sociological model. Within this model, the student is a citizen with rights, and the educative system and curriculum are

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unique for all students and free of discrimination (Ainscow & Booth, 2000; Grau, 2005). The inclusion of every pupil in the education and teaching-learning process is needed in all societies in order to ensure an inclusive system for all (Martínez, De Haro Rodríguez, & Escarbajal Frutos, 2010).

Today, the inclusive movement is having an impact on the attitudes of society and, more specifically, on teachers, changing the concept of educating students with special needs in isolation to educating them in the general education classroom, sometimes with the assistance of a co-teacher. With this change, there is a demand for revision, reconceptualization, and transformation of education systems. Inclusion in education means that all teachers and staff must educate and serve all students regardless of their abilities and characteristics or limitations. When doing this, schools and teachers must provide quality education and embrace student diversity without exclusion of any, thereby approaching equity in the teaching-learning process (European Commission, 2013; Martínez et al., 2010).

The use of music as a therapeutic discipline has become well established in schools over the course of many years. Music therapy has had very positive, therapeutic results on children with any type of special educational need but in particular students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual disabilities (IDs). Thus, this chapter looks at research-based instructional strategies within the realm of music as a pedagogical alternative when working with students with ASD and IDs in the general education classroom.

BACKGROUND

Music has existed throughout history, since the dawn of mankind itself, and has been popular in all eras and across all generations and ethnic groups. It is a prominent form of expression, capable of capturing and exhibiting all emotions. Music has created infinite forms of human relationships, which are key to music therapy. People pick up harmonic sounds, often unconsciously, and retain them in their minds. Music evokes short passages, mood states, or feelings. This nonverbal form of communication is a dominant part of daily life found in all known cultures (Benenzon, 2011).

According to Benenzon (1981, 2000), nonverbal communication allows us to express emotions and feelings that need to be communicated to accomplish a state of well-being and good health. Thus, music is a valid therapeutic means and one of the best ways to enable educational, reactive, emotional, and mental improvement of a student.

Currently, music therapy is applied in education, hospitals, private therapy, and occupational fields. Music therapy can enhance the new, inclusive educational

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