



## **Teaching Music to Teach Other Skills**

Several of the examples in this book have illustrated how music teaches non-music skills. This section addresses how music is used to teach academic, perceptual-motor and certain social skills.

There are various principles at work in the application of music to program skill development:

1. Academic subject matter can be taught through musical subject matter. When learning to read music, one is applying the knowledge of translating symbols across a page from left to right. While clapping a rhythmic pattern, one is using simple mathematics to divide a measure into beats. Writing musical notes requires that the notation remain between identifiable boundaries. These examples of notation alone indicate the complementary nature of music and non-music learning.
2. *Musical involvement necessitates the practice of a continuum of skills, particularly in auditory discrimination, perceptual-motor acuity and speech development.* Singing and playing wind instruments involves proper usage of breath control and articulation. Varying degrees of fine motor coordination are required to play musical instruments. Increasing one's vocal range and improving intonation have obvious advantages in developing language. Rhythmic training holds potential for fostering movement with fluidity and regularity. There are innumerable skills employed in making music, and the incentive of working towards a musical product holds great merit for inspiring learning.
3. *Music allows the student to experience academic learning in another dimension.* There are many songs, dances, and musical games of childhood which reiterate basic skills such as counting ("Ten Little Indians"), body awareness and directionality ("Hokey-Pokey"), and knowledge of animals ("Old MacDonald Had a Farm"). Experiencing concepts, particularly

abstract ones like up-down, loud-soft, and long-short, may aid the process of learning, to the point of having children “internalize” these ideas (Reichard & Blackburn, 1973).

4. *Learning music often results in positive psycho-social and emotional changes.* Achieving a musical goal, such as performing or composing a piece of music, can bring an inordinate sense of pride to an individual. Enhanced self-esteem is a common by-product of such an experience. Further, expressing one's self through music is a way of fulfilling the creative potential that each person holds. As has been indicated, positive involvement in musical activity is incompatible with many inappropriate behaviors. After mastering certain musical skills, options for leisure time activities increase to include community-based groups, ensembles and various social activities.
  
5. *Music provides a structure within which there is freedom* (Gaston, 1968). Music is organized sound in time (Bernstein & Picker, 1966). While it is a highly structured art form, it accommodates individual interpretation and creativity. While an entire group of people are engaged in a musical activity, no two are expressing themselves in precisely the same way. Thus, it provides a format for learning about one's own unique manner of approaching the creative process, expressing one's self, interacting with others, and organizing and interpreting artistic material.

Obviously, while teaching music, one is teaching much more. The subject matter of music, after all, involves the unique interaction of the person with the creative medium. When teaching music to teach other skills, certain guidelines should be considered.

### **Guidelines for Instructional Music Sessions**

1. *Start with music.* Display the musical product of the day's session, when practical. Sing the song to be learned, demonstrate the musical instrument(s) to be used, dance

the dance, play a composition written by another group, listen to a recording identifying themes of the session, or simply state the objective for the day's activities.

2. *Set musical objectives to complement non-music objectives.* Music as well as non-music skills will be learned in the session. List two sets of objectives, citing target behaviors and associated musical outcomes, e.g., playing "Hot Cross Buns" on flutophone and blowing a steady stream of air out of the mouth for six seconds; singing the letters of one's name in song and spelling it upon request. Define successive approximations of the terminal music objective just as you did with non-music behaviors.
3. *Start at the individual's level.* You have already assessed the person's functioning. Refer to the musical assessment profile to determine the present level of musical skills, and keep both in mind as you begin.
4. *Devise an instructional program with small increments of new learning.* Guarantee success by ensuring that one step is mastered before proceeding to the next step. Teach skills of successive difficulty or complexity one by one, introducing a small amount of new learning, and building upon the behaviors already demonstrated. Provide an aesthetically pleasing product at each step, e.g., a song requiring only one note, then two and three notes.
5. *Reward learning appropriately.* Provide incentives for learning by offering approval or other rewards contingent upon progress.
6. *Model when possible.* Demonstrate the music behavior by doing rather than telling. Use other group members as well as yourself to model appropriate music behaviors.
7. *Prompt physically or verbally.* When an individual has difficulty performing the desired task, additional hints or prompts may be called for. To assist in answering a ques-

tion, the initial sound of the answer may be provided by the therapist. A person may require physical guidance in order to respond. The therapist may intervene by actually moving the person in the appropriate manner. When prompts fail to produce the desired response, one should revert to successive approximations of the behavior. Repeated failure requires the therapist to change the instructional strategy or the successive approximations.

8. *Include familiar and simple as well as challenging new music experiences.* Perform music which can be met with success. Repeat activities which have been mastered already to instill confidence and pride. Practice may also “make perfect,” but it should not be overused or abused to the point of becoming aversive or boring.
9. *Select music reflecting interest, performance capability, and relevance.* Criteria for the selection of music could include: age and functioning level; familiarity or interest in the music; variety in style, medium and manner of musical involvement; ability to perform, understand or experience it; and the probability of encountering this type of music again (being familiar to peers or family, hearing it on radio, singing it on holidays, etc.).
10. *End each session with music.* Emphasize the musical learning which has been accomplished by ending with a performance or experience which is a culmination of newly-acquired skills.

### **Music Involvement as Incompatible Behavior**

The ability of music to capture a person's attention and guide one's movements in time has been the subject of extensive study. Active music participation often necessitates the use of mind and body in a clearly specified manner. The natural structure of the musical form can be varied by the therapist to encourage associated behavioral changes. For instance, a group of hyperactive children can begin with a circle activity in which they hold hands and follow the leader's movements to music.

Later, they may drop hands, watch and listen, as one child initiates a movement expressing an original interpretation. This therapist is attempting to increase “self-discipline” by phasing out the physical requirements of the activity and gradually offering more opportunities to move freely.

At another level, musical involvement may be a substitute for less acceptable social behavior during leisure time. Individuals who abuse substances or are juvenile offenders might express their needs and obtain gratification through musical involvement. Yet to be tested on a large scale, this idea seems to hold potential, particularly for the adolescent to whom music is a strong influence.

To state that positive involvement with music is incompatible with inappropriate social behavior may be underestimating its impact. In correctional facilities and other settings where the development of trust between client and therapist is a major obstacle, a shared musical experience may open doors to rapport. While engaged in musical activities, the process of trust-building is initiated. At a large state prison, one recreation area is set aside for music therapy. Inmates are free to select from guitars, drum sets and other percussion instruments. A group of instrumentalists have begun to improvise or “jam” together on a regular basis. The music therapist joins in, but allows the group to set the key and rhythm, only offering occasional feedback. After four sessions, two of the musicians begin to discuss their respective predicaments and hopes for the future. They note the importance of having the opportunity to be themselves and express themselves in the jam sessions. They clearly sense that the music therapist understands this, and is worthy of their trust. In subsequent sessions, a greater segment of time is devoted to talking about their changing self-concepts and plans upon release. Music therapy has not only provided a positive, expressive medium but a supportive, trusting environment for working out solutions to life’s problems.

### **Music Education Techniques**

Music therapists also employ techniques of music education in their work. Music therapists borrow educational methodologies

to structure their sessions and activities to suit the needs of their clients. Of the many approaches which are applied in the music therapy setting, some deserve special attention.

*Orff-Schulwerk*, the approach developed by Carl Orff, offers musical activities which emphasize natural rhythms, speech as the basis for song, and exploration in movement and play to encourage creativity and imagination. The rondo form, emphasized by Bitcon as a structure for clinical music therapy, allows the freedom of individual response within a framework of shared group experience (Bitcon, 1976; Hollander & Juhrs, 1974). Zoltan Kodaly's concepts of rhythmic counting and hand signals in sight-singing comprise another experimental scheme for learning about music (Chosky, 1984). Similarly, Suzuki's methodology in teaching instruments to the very young is becoming popular among music therapists (Suzuki, 1981). Mary Helen Richards' "Threshold to Music" series is another set of materials which may be useful in developing musical skills (Richards, 1971). As the aesthetic needs of handicapped students gain greater recognition and importance, more resources for music in special education become available.

New advances in music technology and electronic music have made music and music instruction accessible to virtually everyone. Nonverbal individuals with severe physical limitations are capable of participating in music ensembles using software such as "Switch Ensemble" (Adams, 1998). Adaptive technology has allowed children and adults with special needs to participate actively in creating and performing music they once only could experience passively (Krout, 1987; Krout, Burnham, & Moorman, 1993).