


Preparing Music Educators to Work with Students with Diverse Abilities: An Introduction to Music Therapy

Elizabeth Mitchell

Western University, emitchel@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tips>

 Part of the [Music Pedagogy Commons](#), [Music Performance Commons](#), [Music Therapy Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Elizabeth () "Preparing Music Educators to Work with Students with Diverse Abilities: An Introduction to Music Therapy," *Teaching Innovation Projects*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 1.
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tips/vol4/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching Innovation Projects by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [Natasha Patrito Hannon](#).

Preparing Music Educators to Work with Students with Diverse Abilities: An Introduction to Music Therapy

Summary

Music education programs are uniquely situated within Canadian universities as most disciplines do not offer honours *education* programs at the undergraduate level. Within faculties of music, honours music education students engage in both practical and philosophical preparation for their teaching careers prior to acceptance and enrolment at a Faculty of Education. These students often return to departments of music education to pursue graduate work after having taught music within public or private school systems.

Music teachers regularly teach children with special needs within self-contained as well as integrated or inclusive classrooms. Research indicates that music educators are enthusiastic about the prospect of teaching children with diverse needs but feel underprepared as to how to teach them effectively. Music therapists have specific training in using music with individuals who have diverse needs so as to help these specific individuals accomplish goals in both musical and non-musical domains. This introductory workshop, led by a music therapist, will develop graduate students' understanding of music therapy and introduce them to techniques based on music therapy literature. Relevant also for undergraduate music education students, as well as for pre-service and practicing teachers, this workshop addresses ways to further cultivate practical skills that are useful for any music educator. Although the content is specific to working with children in self-contained special-needs classes, applications to inclusive classrooms will be acknowledged throughout this workshop as well.

Keywords

Music Education, Music Therapy, Special Education, teacher training

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

Preparing Music Educators to Work with Students with Diverse Abilities: An Introduction to Music Therapy

Elizabeth Mitchell, Western University

SUMMARY

Music education programs are uniquely situated within Canadian universities as most disciplines do not offer honours *education* programs at the undergraduate level. Within faculties of music, honours music education students engage in both practical and philosophical preparation for their teaching careers prior to acceptance and enrolment at a Faculty of Education. These students often return to departments of music education to pursue graduate work after having taught music within public or private school systems.

Music teachers regularly teach children with special needs within self-contained as well as integrated or inclusive classrooms. Research indicates that music educators are enthusiastic about the prospect of teaching children with diverse needs but feel underprepared as to how to teach them effectively. Music therapists have specific training in using music with individuals who have diverse needs so as to help these specific individuals accomplish goals in both musical and non-musical domains. This introductory workshop, led by a music therapist, will develop graduate students' understanding of music therapy and introduce them to techniques based on music therapy literature. Relevant also for undergraduate music education students, as well as for pre-service and practicing teachers, this workshop addresses ways to further cultivate practical skills that are useful for any music educator. Although the content is specific to working with children in self-contained special-needs classes, applications to inclusive classrooms will be acknowledged throughout this workshop as well.

KEYWORDS: Music Education, Music Therapy, Special Education, teacher training

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- distinguish between the discipline of music therapy and the therapeutic use of music through citing examples of each;
- identify at least one model of music therapy practice and explain several techniques employed within it;
- compare the fields of music therapy and music education and articulate commonalities and differences between them; and
- adapt an existing music therapy intervention for use in an educational setting and understand the principles of music therapy being employed within the experience.

REFERENCE SUMMARIES

Clements-Cortes, A. (2012). Designing an inclusive music classroom for students with autism and autism spectrum disorders. *The Canadian Music Educator*, 53(3), 35-37.

Clements-Cortes (2012), a music therapist, aims in this study to assist music educators in increasing their confidence and effectiveness in working with children with autism. The

article refers specifically to children with autism; however, it also offers techniques for promoting inclusivity that are relevant and important for working with children who have a variety of needs. After describing autism broadly, Clements-Cortes lists a range of evidence-based educational strategies that are effective in engaging students with autism. The use of music to develop communication and social skills is highlighted throughout the study, and Clements-Cortes also interviews a music educator with extensive experience in promoting inclusivity in her classrooms. While acknowledging the challenges that students with special needs may face in the traditional classroom, the author also highlights the many benefits available to *all* children when inclusivity is promoted.

Gfeller, K., Darrow, A., & Hedden, S. K. (1998). Perceived effectiveness of mainstreaming in Iowa and Kansas schools. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 38*(2), 90-101.

This article describes legislation that took effect in the United States in 1978, mandating that education for students with disabilities take place in the “least restrictive environment” according to their needs. Through a questionnaire distributed to music teachers, Gfeller, Darrow, and Hedden (1998) examined a variety of topics pertinent to the inclusion of students with special needs within mainstream classrooms. For example, they considered the extent of educational preparation and support available for educators working within these classrooms, and whether the amount of support available correlated with teachers’ perceptions of their success in mainstreaming students.

The authors found that educators perceive that they have received minimal education in this area, and that these same educators also lack preparation time and in-service education. Gfeller, Darrow, and Hedden (1998) state: “Most music educators are attempting to meet the educational needs of handicapped students with little or no educational preparation” (p. 99). They also emphasize the importance of educators establishing clear learning objectives and receiving adequate instructional support as well as better educational preparation in order to facilitate successful mainstreaming in classrooms. Though this study was conducted in an American context, the results are absolutely relevant in Canada since undergraduate music education programs in Canada do not require that students undergo specific training regarding working with children with special needs.

Goodman, K. D. (2007). *Music therapy groupwork with special needs children*.
Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Goodman (2007), a music therapist experienced in working within school settings, offers a comprehensive overview of group music therapy within educational contexts. Sharing vignettes from her clinical work as well as providing detailed explanations of musical interventions, she clearly articulates the ways in which musical experiences can be used to address a variety of goal areas that are both musical and non-musical. She provides a detailed analysis of assessment techniques used in music therapy practice, offers guidance for teachers and therapists in setting goals and evaluating student progress, and provides practical ideas and musical resources for the classroom.

Goodman's (2007) work represents a natural meeting place for music therapy and music education: music therapy within school systems. The resources that she suggests for music therapists working in these contexts are equally relevant to music educators who are looking for innovative ideas in working with children with special needs; these resources are also helpful to keep in mind when working within self-contained special education classrooms.

Nordoff, P. & Robbins, C. (2007). *Creative music therapy: A guide to fostering clinical musicianship* (2nd ed.). Gilsum, NH: Barcelona.

Ritholz, M. S. & Robbins, C. (Eds.) (1999). *Themes for therapy: From the Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy at New York University*. NY, NY: Carl Fischer.

Creative Music Therapy, also known as Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy, is a model of music therapy practice that was developed by Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins. Rooted in humanism and a client-centered approach to therapy, it recognizes the inherent potential and musicality within every individual, and largely draws upon improvised music making from both the client and therapist. In this foundational text, Nordoff and Robbins (2007) describe the key underlying principles of their approach which are illuminated through case examples of individuals and groups.

The value placed upon the exploration and development of musical creativity within this workshop's experiential component is strongly rooted in Creative Music Therapy practice. The second source listed above, "Themes for Therapy," is a practical resource of musical experiences based on this approach. Musical interventions from "Themes for Therapy" will be used during this workshop.

VanWeelden, K. & Whipple, J. (2005). The effects of field experience on music education majors' perceptions of music instruction for secondary students with special needs. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 16(2), 34-44.

Emphasizing the importance of academic preparation with regards to teachers' success in mainstreaming students with special needs, VanWeelden & Whipple (2005) review the literature pertaining to music education majors' and practicing teachers' perspectives on this topic. They conclude that although music educators generally have positive attitudes toward creating inclusive classrooms, many are reluctant to actually re-order their classrooms, according to inclusivity principles. This reluctance is often due to the challenges involved in classroom management, a perceived need for skill development, and the difficulties accompanying creating a successful learning environment for *each* student.

This study explores the effect of exposing undergraduate music education students to pre-service placement opportunities with students who have special needs. Upon comparing students' responses from a pre-service versus post-service perspective, it was found that students' confidence in general interactions with children with special needs, as well as their perceptions of their levels of preparation and comfort, significantly increased. Though this workshop does not provide direct experience in working with children with special needs, it does allow participants the opportunity to learn, and role-play, practical musical techniques that will be beneficial to them in classroom and pedagogical contexts.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

This workshop is intended for approximately twelve participants and is designed to last ninety minutes, though it could be expanded to fill a longer amount of time. For example, the facilitator could share listening examples from Nordoff & Robbins (2007) and / or allot more time to the experiential component. Due to the experiential nature of the workshop, if group enrolment exceeds twelve participants, the “Group sharing of musical experiences” component will likely take longer than the suggested fifteen minutes. It is important to note that, as the workshop is intended for graduate students in music, there is an assumption that participants will have vocal and/or instrumental proficiency, as well as the ability to read music notation.

Materials Needed:

- Piano and / or guitar. You may wish to request that participants who have their own guitars bring them to the workshop.
- White / blackboard.
- One small percussion instrument for each participant (can be varied: drums, bells, maracas, etc.).
- Photocopies of the following three songs from “Themes for Therapy” (Ritholz & Robbins, 1999): “Let’s Sing a Song” (pp. 44-45), “Beat! Beat! Beat the Drum” (pp. 74-75) and “Can You Play the Bell?” (p. 73).
- Preferably, there will be extra rooms / spaces available for small groups to practice in during the “Small group music-making” component.

Duration (min.)	Subject	Activity	Purpose
6	Introductions and Icebreaker	Invite participants to split into pairs. Request that they introduce themselves to one another and then answer the following question: “Aside from your university studies and / or career, what role does music play in your own life?” After a few minutes of discussion in pairs, invite participants to share their responses. Generate a list of the various “uses” people have for music in their lives.	To create comfort and familiarity within the group and to facilitate dialogue between group members. To explore the various “therapeutic” roles that music plays in participants’ lives.
5	Defining Music Therapy and Distinguishing Music Therapy from the Therapeutic	Display Bruscia’s (1998) definition of music therapy and ask participants to pick out what they think are its most important components. Then, using these components, introduce the idea that all contexts of music therapy can	To develop an understanding of music therapy as a clinical and professional discipline. To distinguish the

	Use of Music	<p>be characterized by the presence of music, a client(s) and a therapist.</p> <p>Ask participants to consider the differences between the discipline of music therapy and the instances of the therapeutic use of music that they described earlier.</p>	clinical practice of music therapy from more informal therapeutic uses of music.
7	Distinguishing between Music Therapy and Music Education	<p>Facilitate discussion surrounding the following two questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you define music education? • Based on the above definition of music therapy, what are the differences between music education and music therapy? <p>Use Bruscia’s (1998) categories to organize and guide discussion. Be sure to note that music therapy and music education vary in terms of goals, relationships, and training. Highlight the fact that though this workshop provides participants with an introduction to the field of music therapy, it does not equip them to practice music therapy.</p>	To clarify the essential differences between the fields of music education and music therapy.
10	Music Therapy and Music Education: A Continuum View	<p>Invite participants to turn to their handouts and have them individually complete the “continuum” activity (see Appendix A).</p> <p>After participants have completed the activity, draw a large version of this continuum on the whiteboard, with music therapy and music education as the “poles” at each end. Ask for volunteers who can place their answers onto the continuum—in the location that they suggest is most appropriate.</p> <p>The following scenarios are to be placed on the continuum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private clarinet lessons 	To explore possible areas of intersection (“grey areas”) between the disciplines of music education and music therapy.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual music therapy with a child with autism• Individual piano lessons with a child with autism• A music educator delivers a choral program in a prison• A music therapist delivers a choral program in a long-term care facility• Elementary school music program• Private voice lessons• Private voice lessons with a student looking to overcome performance anxiety• A special music education classroom <p>There are no correct answers! The purpose of this activity is to generate discussion and to challenge the conception that the fields can always be tidily distinguished from one another. For example, if a music therapist is conducting a choir at a long-term care facility, are the aims educational or therapeutic ones? The answer is likely both, and participants' opinions as to where these situations lie on the continuum will vary, based on their philosophies of education and past experiences.</p> <p>A diversity of answers can be used to generate rich discussion, and to encourage participants to critically explore their own perspectives on education.</p> <p>Robertson (2000) also advocates for a perspective that views the fields of music education and music therapy as existing on a continuum, and discusses the overlap between the "educational music therapist" and the</p>	
--	--	---	--

		music special educator.	
12	Musical Experience: "Let's Make Some Music"	<p>It is recommended that the facilitator lead this experience from either the piano or the guitar.</p> <p>Invite four volunteers to choose a small percussion instrument and then sit in a semi-circle around you. Lead "Let's Make Some Music" (Ritholz & Robbins, 1999, pp. 88-89). During the "A" section of the piece all volunteers will play together, and then during each repetition of the "B" section, prompt one participant to play at a time.</p> <p>As the leader, use the notation as a guide but be sure to use a flexible tempo as well as improvised melodic / harmonic / rhythmic material so as to support each individual's solo playing.</p> <p>Repeat the song as many times as is necessary so that each volunteer has a chance to play individually. If there is time, you might choose to repeat the experience with another small group of participants.</p>	<p>To engage participants in an active music-making experience.</p> <p>To discover resources from the music therapy literature that are relevant to special music education.</p>
10	Discussion Based on Musical Experience: Structure and Freedom in Music-Making and the Use of Improvisation	<p>Ask the volunteers from above to share their experiences playing as a part of a small group, and also as playing solo with the support of the leader.</p> <p>Then, open the discussion to the larger group, asking: <i>What types of goals, both musical and non-musical, might a child work towards through an experience like this?</i></p> <p>Some examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musical goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> keeping a steady beat; imitating rhythmic motives; 	<p>To explore the musical and non-musical benefits of the musical experience above.</p> <p>To explore musical techniques and principles from music therapy that can be adapted for use in special music education.</p>

		<p>initiating rhythmic motives; and listening to other group members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapeutic goals: developing turn-taking; developing group-awareness; developing self-confidence and self-awareness; and developing creativity <p><i>Which musical principles should the leader be aware of?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation: In order to truly follow and support each individual student's musical ideas in the "B" section, the leader must be prepared to leave the sheet music behind at times! Recommend having a basic chord structure written out which gives the leader something to base his / her improvised music on. Encouraging creative and improvised music-making from students is vital. The teacher's flexible musical support allows each student's unique musical contribution to be fully heard. • Balancing structure and freedom: The "A" section of the piece provides predictability and consistency, whereas the "B" section provides each individual an opportunity to be musically expressive and creative. • Roles: During the "A" section, the leader provides a predictable and steady accompaniment for the participants so that they 	
--	--	---	--

		<p>can play together with cohesion and confidence. During the “B” section, when individual participants have the opportunity to play solo, then it is the leader’s responsibility to follow and support the participant’s musical ideas. This practice is in contrast to a typical student / teacher dynamic in which the student follows the teacher.</p> <p>Relate these musical principles to Creative Music Therapy practice, and refer group members to resources should they be interested in learning more about them.</p>	
20	Small Group Music-Making	<p>Split the group into approximately three groups of four, preferably with at least one participant per group who is comfortable playing either the guitar or piano.</p> <p>Distribute photocopies of music from “Themes for Therapy” (Ritholz & Robbins, 1999), “Let’s Sing a Song (pp. 44-45), “Beat! Beat! Beat the Drum” (pp. 74-75) and “Can You Play the Bell?” (p. 73), assigning one song per group.</p> <p>Instruct groups to take twenty minutes to prepare a “role play” of this activity. In this role play, one group member will lead and the others will act as students. The piece can be adapted, musically and / or lyrically in order to reflect the members of each group. Instruct the leaders to consider the balance between structure and freedom in the music, and encourage them to engage flexibly with the written notation so</p>	<p>To engage in active music-making.</p> <p>To provide participants with ownership over, and leadership of, their musical experiences.</p> <p>To adapt music therapy resources for use in the special music education classroom.</p>

		<p>as to provide group members the chance to improvise and participate creatively.</p> <p>It is important, here, to share the caveat with the group that twenty minutes is an extremely short amount of time to become familiar with a new piece of music. The aim of this exercise, then, is to explore a flexible style of group music-making, and certainly not to achieve any kind of musical “perfection”!</p>	
15	Group Sharing of Musical Experiences	<p>Invite each group to share their musical “role-play” with the larger group. Afterwards, ask participants to verbally share their experiences. Reinforce concepts such as balancing structure with freedom, the importance of improvisation for both leader and participants, and the leader’s flexibility with the musical notation.</p> <p>Encourage participants who role-played as students to consider the musical and non-musical benefits of the experience.</p> <p>Recognize that experiences such as those presented today can be modified so as to be applicable and relevant to the inclusive classroom as well as to the self-contained special education class. As a group, briefly discuss applications to the mainstream classroom, including the benefits and challenges in working within these settings.</p>	To reinforce musical principles from music therapy that are relevant to special music education.
5	Resource Sharing and Conclusion	<p>Summarize the principles and techniques from music therapy that have been highlighted in the workshop.</p> <p>Encourage participants to consult</p>	<p>To summarize workshop content.</p> <p>To provide participants with resources should they be interested in exploring the topic</p>

		<p>further with music therapists in their communities should they find themselves working in special music education or teaching undergraduate students who will be working in special education.</p> <p>Direct participants to the list of web and print resources that they can consult to further develop their understanding of music therapy (see Appendix B).</p>	<p>further.</p>
<p>Total Time: 90 minutes</p>			

PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

This workshop is interactive throughout its duration. It engages participants in discussion and both active music-making and listening while also encouraging critical reflection upon the topics and experiences presented. Depending on participants' levels of prior knowledge about the field of music therapy, the leader may, at times, albeit briefly, need to employ a more didactic style of teaching. For example, when introducing the definition of music therapy, participants will likely require some specific information about the training involved in becoming a music therapist or the settings in which music therapists are employed. If participants have a thorough understanding of the practice of music therapy already, this content need not take up too much time, and more time can be spent upon musical examples. Overall, flexibility based upon group dynamics, levels of knowledge and past experiences is required.

The leader must be prepared to act as a role model of expressive and confident musical leadership in the "Let's Make Some Music" experience. Depending on the group members' areas of specialty and past experiences, some may be uncomfortable with group singing or improvised instrumental playing. Many university music students, despite being accomplished performers, have had minimal exposure to improvisation. Encourage the creation of a safe and positive atmosphere among participants, and be willing to be vulnerable yourself as a leader. For example, consider modelling short improvisations on various instruments so that participants have a clear idea of what is expected of them. Display creativity and playfulness in your own music-making and always sing audibly and confidently. You may want to consider talking openly about the vulnerability associated with musical improvisation; for instance, you could share your own experiences or facilitate group discussion surrounding this topic.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Bruscia (1998). *Defining music therapy* (2nd ed.). Gilsum, NH: Barcelona.

Bunt, L. (2003). Music therapy with children: A complementary service to music education? *British Journal of Music Education*, 20(2), 179–195.

- Darrow, A. A. (1996). Research on mainstreaming: Implications for music therapists. In B.L. Wilson (Ed.), *Models of music therapy interventions in school settings: From Institution to inclusion* (pp. 27 - 47). Silver Spring, MD: American Music Therapy Association.
- Darrow, A. A. (1999). Music educators' perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in music classrooms. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 36(4), 245 - 273.
- Gascho-White, W. (1996). Music therapy and music education: Our common ground; Our separate paths. *Canadian Music Educator*, 38(1), 33-35.
- Hall, J. (2012). The school challenge: Combining the roles of music therapist and music teacher. In Tomlinson, J., Derrington, P., & Oldfield, A. (Eds.), *Music therapy in schools: Working with children of all ages in mainstream and special education* (pp. 75-87). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Jellison, J. A. & Gainer, E. W. (1995). Into the mainstream: A case study of a child's participation in music education and music therapy. *Journal of Music Therapy*, XXXII(4), 228-247.
- Martinson, A. & Montgomery, J. (2006). Partnering with music therapists: A model for addressing students' musical and extramusical goals. *Music Educators Journal*, 92(4), 34 - 39.
- Patterson, A. (2003). Music teachers and music therapists: Helping children together. *Music Educators Journal*, 89(4), 35-38.
- Robertson, J (2000). An educational model for music therapy: The case for a continuum. *British Journal of Music Therapy*, 14(1), 41-46.

LIST OF APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Music Therapy and Music Education: Exploring a Continuum Model

Appendix B: Music Therapy Resources

**APPENDIX A:
Handout
Music Therapy and Music Education: Exploring a Continuum Model**

Instructions:

After reading through the following list of music education and music therapy scenarios, place each scenario's corresponding number in the place on the continuum (below) that you believe is most appropriate and accurate:

1. Private clarinet lessons
2. Individual music therapy with a child with autism
3. Individual piano lessons with a child with autism
4. A music educator delivers a choral program in a prison
5. A music therapist delivers a choral program in a long-term care facility
6. Elementary school music program
7. Private voice lessons
8. Private voice lessons with a student looking to develop self-confidence and overcome struggles with performance anxiety
9. A special music education classroom

Music
Education

Music
Therapy

Appendix B: Music Therapy Resources

Websites:

Canadian Association for Music Therapy: www.musictherapy.ca

Music Therapy Association of Ontario: www.musictherapyontario.com

American Music Therapy Association: www.musictherapy.org

Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy: www.voices.no

Books:

Bruscia, K. (Ed.) (1996). *Case studies in music therapy*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona.

Bruscia, K. (Ed.) (2012). *Readings on music therapy theory*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona.

Bunt, L. & Hoskyns, S. (Eds.) (2002). *The handbook of music therapy*. East Sussex, UK: Brunner-Routledge.

Hanser, S. B. (1999). *The new music therapist's handbook*. Boston, MA: Berklee Press.

Hibben, J. (1999). *Inside music therapy: Client experiences*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona.

Kirkland, K. (Ed.) (2013). *International dictionary of music therapy*. East Sussex, UK: Routledge.

Meadows, A. (Ed.) (2011). *Developments in music therapy practice: Case study perspectives*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona.

Pavlicevic, M. & Ansdell, G. (Eds.) (2004). *Community music therapy*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley.