

## **Title: Singing About Expected Behaviors For Group Instruction**

### **Abstract**

This poster will present results of a study in which a song was used to gain and maintain the attention of first grade students with Autism Spectrum Disorder during group instruction. The study will be conducted using an AB design to determine if interruptions decrease after introducing a novel song.

### **Research Question**

Will singing a song paired with visuals gain and maintain the attention of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder during group instruction?

### **Statement of the Problem**

With an increase in prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) more students are being placed in self-contained classrooms to accommodate their needs to provide an appropriate education. The current maximum for an ASD self-contained classroom in the state of Florida is set at 12 students. Teachers may find themselves in a room with varying behaviors and only one paraprofessional to assist them. With a 2:6 adult/student ratio, teachers may find it difficult to gain attention from their students to begin lessons and also maintain their attention throughout the lesson. This is because one of the key behaviors in ASD is a lack of joint attention. Student attention is vital to learning and with the No Child Left Behind Act, it is becoming increasingly important for children to show adequate academic growth in school.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine if singing a about expected behaviors will increase student attention before and during whole group academic instruction.

### **Literature Review**

Music has been used to teach children a variety of skills for years because of the many benefits it provides. Music and music therapy have become popular resources when teaching typical children and children with ASD. Music therapy is, “The interactive use of live music for engaging clients to meet their therapeutic needs” (Bruscia, 1998, p. 10). Depending on an individual’s goals, such as decreasing social withdrawal and isolation characteristics or increasing communication skills, which are common characteristics in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), therapists try to match the mood of their client with the use of musical instruments to relate to and engage children in a shared experience (Music Therapy Association of British Columbia, 2013).

Whether children listen to music while completing class assignments or instructors use songs to help children memorize information, research has shown music has positive correlations to increasing desired behaviors, such as, increasing time on task, communication, and joint attention skills (Dinsmore, 2003; Gold, Wigram, & Elefant, 2006; Kim, Wigram, & Gold, 2008). These results are crucial to increasing and maximizing student learning, especially in the rising ASD population.

There have also been studies with results indicating children with ASD benefit from visual supports (Carnahan & Musti-Rao, 2009; Kolko, Anderson, & Campbell, 1980; Tissot & Evans, 2003). Using pictures, concept maps and graphic organizers make information more concrete and assist children with ASD with comprehension skills.

### **Research Methodology**

This action research study will be done in a first grade self-contained ASD classroom with 9 students with ASD and carried out before and during group science instruction. The teacher will teach a pre-recorded song to the students to familiarize them with the words and

visual aids. During the intervention stage, when the teacher is ready to begin a lesson, she will play and sing the song. The song will explain that it is time to learn and describe behaviors that are expected from the students during the lesson. When students show behaviors that contradict these expectations, she will sing the portion of the song that will help the student maintain attention. Data collection will be done by the teacher and classroom paraprofessional for 8 weeks. This includes recording the student response time to follow directions during baseline and intervention phases, a tally sheet indicating the number of times the song was used during a lesson and which part of the song was sang to identify specific behaviors exhibited by the students during lessons, and a five item student questionnaire to determine the student's opinions about the effectiveness of the song.

## **Results**

The findings of this action research study support previous research using music as a tool to teach appropriate social skills, self-regulation behaviors and cues to specific events. The use of the song paired with visuals drastically decreased the amount of time the teacher used to gain student attention to begin instruction. Baseline data indicated the students used an average of 137.2 seconds, to exhibit behaviors necessary to learn during instruction. During the intervention, however, this response time was recorded with an average as low as 5 seconds. There was a slight decrease in student interruptions during instruction. The highest recording of 8 interruptions occurred in the first week of intervention and the least amount of 4 interruptions occurred in week 4 of the study. Finally, a majority of students answered positively to the student questionnaire with 100% of the students indicating they knew the expectations to stop, look, and listen when the song was sung.

## **Implications**

The implications of this study may be that using both music and visuals paired together, helps create a desirable classroom atmosphere and increases the attention and comprehension of students with ASD during group academic instruction. Because there is limited research that addresses using music during academic or group instruction, these findings may contribute to the related literature. It is hoped that these results will be useful to those who instruct individuals with ASD and, therefore, ultimately benefit the ASD population.

## References

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