

Dreams Fulfilled Through Music

Bringing the Joy of Making Music to all with special needs
P.O. Box 40548 ~ San Antonio, TX 78240
www.dftm.org ~ info@dftm.org
210-771-5809

Teaching Piano/Keyboard to Beginners with Special Needs

reprinted from:

Using Elements of Applied Behavior Analysis
with *My First Piano Adventure*©

Workshop Presentation @ the Texas Music Teachers' Association Convention
Saturday, June 13, 2009 - 3:00 PM

Mary Kathryn Archuleta, DFTM Artistic Director
Randall Faber, Founder - The Faber Piano Institute

PART ONE

If you are a piano teacher, you have likely considered opening your studio, and your heart, to the 1 in 150 children diagnosed with an autistic-spectrum disorder or other impairment. Music lessons provide the structural regularity that children with special needs require. And, within that structure, it is possible to expand the child's repertoire of functioning. What techniques do you need to know to work with these children? We'll explore some fundamentals in this series of articles, with a focus on Applied Behavior Analysis.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a well documented approach to the science of behavior that offers an important strategy for piano teaching. ABA has been used by therapists and teachers in the treatment of children diagnosed with autism or related disabilities for over 30 years. ABA therapy programs typically require 15 to 40 hours per week at costs ranging from \$2500 to \$5000 per month. In contrast, the private piano lesson is a mere 30 to 45 minutes per week with monthly tuition of \$100 to \$200. So the scope is different, yet the intervention activities are very similar if we incorporate the ABA process into our teaching.

In working with autistic children, much of the teacher's attention must be devoted to influencing student behavior. We typically assume compliant, focused behavior from our students. With the special-needs child, this is rarely the case. It becomes our responsibility to harness and direct the student's attention. This is both a prerequisite to music learning and a secondary objective of the lesson.

The first step is to segment a skill into its most elemental components. Too much information or too much difficulty will overwhelm. It is impossible to control the student's attention when there is too much information. Clarity of instruction is critical for students with special needs. So take the subject in small bites and in incremental, small steps. Often you'll want to modify the standard written instructions.

TMEA 2011: Handout #2

Meeting the Needs of students with special challenges in the classroom

Dreams Fulfilled Through Music

Bringing the Joy of Making Music to all with special needs

P.O. Box 40548 ~ San Antonio, TX 78240

www.dftm.org ~ info@dftm.org

210-771-5809

Use a non-verbal prompt. A prompt is a non-verbal instruction appropriate to the task. It can be a demonstration, such as physical hand-over-hand gesture, a rhythmic nod of the head, or pointing to one's own eyes or ears. A prompt clarifies the requested task, but also cues attention.

Use step-by-step trials and reward each positive performance. The ABA process involves "discrete trials" in which the therapist monitors and rewards appropriate, on-task behavior. This is very useful for the piano lesson. When the student gives an appropriate response, or in some cases after two or three repetitions of a correct response, the teacher gives a positive *reinforcer*. A reinforcer is any positive consequence that leads the student to want to repeat the correct response. You might use M&M's, a stuffed animal saying "Good job," a puppet, stickers, a gold star, or enthusiastic praise. Select a reinforcer that is fun and has the student's interest. Use of reinforcers elicits cooperation in the lesson and inspires practice at home.

Students with special needs typically have difficulty with self-monitoring. So work first toward distinguishing between a response that is off-task and a response that is on-task. At first, we're not even looking for a correct execution of the task but for an appropriate *attempt* at execution. The student is taught that there *is* a difference between an appropriate attempt and a response that is unrelated to the task. So, initially, we reinforce any appropriate response. Later, we reinforce the *correct* response. This is just an application of the step-by-step mandate. Remember to be patient and be willing to experiment.

A summary strategy is to help students to *listen*, *watch*, and *imitate*. Progress is incremental. Small successes are always praised and rewarded. As progress is made, the teacher can systematically reduce guidance so that the student responds independently. Sometimes this can happen within the lesson segment. But be patient; sometimes it takes years of study. And that is okay. The benefits are nonetheless real and important to that individual child—with their own special need.

TMEA 2011: Handout #2

Meeting the Needs of students with special challenges in the classroom

Dreams Fulfilled Through Music

Bringing the Joy of Making Music to all with special needs

P.O. Box 40548 ~ San Antonio, TX 78240

www.dftm.org ~ info@dftm.org

210-771-5809

PART TWO

Let's look at an example as applied in the piano lesson. Page 24 of My First Piano Adventure© introduces the black keys. So let's subdivide the instruction as an example of the Discrete Trial process:

First, review the concept of "2". Sounds simple, but cover it anyway. Focus on the illustration of the "two fingers," find two fingers, draw (or trace) the left hand, then color fingers "2" and "3" black to "match" two black keys.

With "hand over hand" guidance, assist the student to be able to touch the "two black fingers" onto the "two black keys." Some students enjoy having their fingernails colored black with a washable marker. This creates a "visual cue" that helps the student to remember which fingers to use on which keys.

Help the student move easily from one set of two black keys to the next, until this task is mastered. (This may take several weeks!)

Help the student make an upward motion between the touching of each set of two black keys. As you introduce the word "up," be careful to use it only as physical cue, without reference to the aural concept of a higher pitch.

Help the student to verbalize the words of the song and make the up and down movements match the words. If the student is non-verbal, assist by helping him or her to watch your mouth and listen as you speak the words and play at the same time.

Guide the student to play the song while you play the accompaniment slowly. Some students may need a parent/guardian to assist with the physical process. This will lead up to being able to play with the CD.

Be careful not to introduce playing with the CD before the child is physically able to play fast enough to keep up with it, as that may lead more to frustration than to accomplishment and a sense of success.

Children who demonstrate any or all of the following challenges usually respond to formal music study that includes elements of Applied Behavior Analysis (adaptive music education):

1. easily distracted
2. not self-directed
3. difficulty following directions
4. require extra repetition
5. need constant review of previously learned material

TMEA 2011: Handout #2

Meeting the Needs of students with special challenges in the classroom

Dreams Fulfilled Through Music

Bringing the Joy of Making Music to all with special needs

P.O. Box 40548 ~ San Antonio, TX 78240

www.dftm.org ~ info@dftm.org

210-771-5809

For the program of music study to be successful, follow the type of procedures above and ensure two conditions are met: 1) parental follow-through, and 2) appropriate selection of lesson material. The parent needs to use the same ABA strategy at home for a minimum of three days per week. This is vital for learning to occur. The parent may already have a some expertise in ABA, so applications may be repeated in different situations throughout the course of everyday activities.

To maintain the student's interest in learning, choose the right teaching material. This is especially important in motivating practice at home. Presentation on the page is important. Too much clutter distracts. A limited amount of information on any one page (or within any one lesson) provides a setting in which discrete-trial teaching can be used more effectively. Each concept must be broken into smaller components. Even the slowest learner should feel a sense of accomplishment as each step of the process is met with success. Dreams Fulfilled through Music has had great successes using the Fabers' My First Piano Adventure©. It offers a clear and concise presentation which lends itself perfectly to the implementation of effective teaching for students with special needs.

Ideally, there would be an integration of the goals of the behavioral therapist with the pedagogical goals of the piano teacher. If there is no ABA therapist, the music teacher can at least utilize a teaching plan that parallels the goals of occupational, physical, and speech therapists. Let us know your successes!

TMEA 2011: Handout #2

Meeting the Needs of students with special challenges in the classroom

Dreams Fulfilled Through Music

Bringing the Joy of Making Music to all with special needs
P.O. Box 40548 ~ San Antonio, TX 78240
www.dftm.org ~ info@dftm.org
210-771-5809

Music Theory for Students with Special Needs For Classroom or Individual Use

Pre-Primer Reproducible Curriculum: The Pre-Primer series is a music theory course appropriate for students in pre-kindergarten, or for students with special needs. The course offers step-by-step instruction that complements the developmental stages of children, ages three to five or for students with similar levels of cognitive development. Students of any age that require individualized teaching techniques will benefit from the content and format of this material. *The series is co-authored by Mary Kathryn Archuleta, Executive Director of Dreams Fulfilled Through Music, Jeanie Kruyer and Heather Rathnau, NCTM.*

Pre-Primer A

Keyboard, Alphabet & Hands, Black and white keys, music alphabet, name / location of white keys, right & left hand identification, finger numbers, Fun Sheets, Teacher Guide. (5 lessons, 46 pages)

Pre-Primer B

Position / Movement, Music alphabet and Keyboard, Position on the keyboard, absolute & relative, up / down, below/above, horizontal movement on the keyboard, moving up & down, definitions & correlation of concepts & terms, Fun Sheets, Teacher Guide. (5 lessons, 75 pages)



TMEA 2011: Handout #3

Meeting the Needs of students with special challenges in the classroom

Dreams Fulfilled Through Music

Bringing the Joy of Making Music to all with special needs

P.O. Box 40548 ~ San Antonio, TX 78240

www.dftm.org ~ info@dftm.org

210-771-5809

Pre-Primer C

Offers a unique answer to teaching note reading to a very young student, gifted student or a student with special learning needs. By showing how a rotated keyboard can become the lines and spaces of the grand staff, the dilemma of teaching note reading from the perspective of the “Middle C position” or the “C Major position” is solved. Students learn from the very beginning that the grand staff is really just one big staff and the music alphabet is continuously repeated, line-space-line-space. Middle C is the natural division between the treble and bass staves. Emphasis is also placed upon the concepts of HIGH and LOW as the words relate to both location and sound. The challenge of teaching students to write notes ON A LINE is addressed through many examples that explain the differences between what is taught in school and what is learned in music. This packet includes 56 pages.

Pre-Primer D

Presents the basic elements of rhythm, spanning how to draw notes, stems, and rests through time signatures, measures and counting. Worksheets can all be enlarged for the very young student or those with special needs who need extra practice in developing the fine motor skills needed to write notes and rests legibly. Visual and aural recognition and understanding of what is meant by a “steady beat” are emphasized. Students are given written examples to complete and asked to tap and clap simple rhythm patterns. The concept of what a “dot” means in music is explained, and enrichment activities are given to help students understand the relationships between the various note values. The use of the metronome is introduced in a fun and captivating manner in Lesson Four, where counting with note values is initially presented. Lesson Five focuses on time signatures and what they mean. Throughout this packet, reference is made to "<http://www.musiclearningcommunity.com>" for aural-based rhythm games to reinforce the concepts taught. This packet includes 50 pages.

TMEA 2011: Handout #3

Meeting the Needs of students with special challenges in the classroom