

“Differentiation as Celebrating an Able Identity or Perpetuating an Ableist Perspective? Critical Perspectives on an Evidence-Based Approach to Instrumental Tuition for Musicians Who Have Down’s Syndrome”

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Introduction

This poster considers a framework for developing instrumental tuition for individuals who have Down’s syndrome, which draws from the evidence-base which asserts that there is a recognisable learning profile amongst learners with Down’s syndrome (Fidler, 2005; Dykens *et al.*, 2006). The value of applying this evidence-based approach to music education is considered through three brief case studies which explore music making with learners who have Down’s syndrome. The case studies demonstrate potential development of provision according to the evidence-based learning profile, while recognising and celebrating a wide range of musicians’ personalities, communication styles, preferences, instruments and intentions. Having considered this evidence-based approach to developing music education to enable learners with Down’s syndrome to play an instrument, read music, and develop enriching musical relationships; a further critical stance considers whether the construct of ‘differentiation’ in itself further perpetuates the dominant ableist discourse (Moore and Slee, 2012; Penketh, 2017).

‘Learning Profile’ of Children with Down’s Syndrome, Reported in the Literature

- Relative strength in visual memory paired with relative weakness in auditory memory
- Stronger receptive than expressive language
- Delayed motor skills and hypotonia
- Relative strength in non-verbal and social skills
- Some degree of learning disability
- Potential sensory impairments
- Potential avoidance strategies when facing new skills

(Dykens *et al.*, 2006)



Piano Lessons with Olivia

- ♪ Colour Muse – colourful and visual method, personification of notation and tangible colours for abstract concepts
- ♪ Sign supported communication to minimise reliance on auditory memory and maximise visual information
- ♪ Familiar melodies and errorless learning to motivate
- ♪ *Melody* certificates



Music Making with Nathan

- ♪ Visual timetable and visual cards to represent story and instruments
- ♪ Sign supported communication
- ♪ Visual, gestural and musical communication rather than reliance on expressive language and auditory memory
- ♪ Favourite characters to motivate and engage



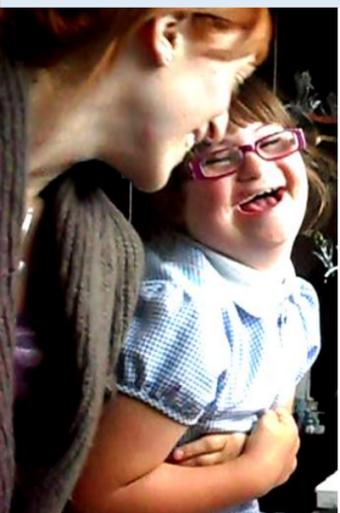
Music Lessons with Griff

- ♪ Innovative notation systems appropriate to visual impairment
- ♪ Sounds of Intent to map musical development in proactive, reactive and interactive domains (Ockelford, 2015)
- ♪ Adapted instruments to enable meaningful engagement and development
- ♪ Sign supported communication



Conclusion

While there is potential for an approach based on learning profiles according to such a broad shared experience as ‘Down’s Syndrome’ to be reductionist and overgeneralised, this poster suggests that this can be a strength-based foundation for music educators, who report as often lacking in confidence or experience to engage with learners with additional needs (Jones, 2015). Enabling the human right of creative expression (Lubet, 2011) through a meaningful and relevant approach is the ethical responsibility of an inclusive music practitioner (Bell, 2014), and it is hoped that research into approaches which increase confidence in practitioners as well as success for musicians can be further nurtured. Rather than utilise the learning profile as recognition of areas of deficit to develop (Fidler, Hepburn and Rogers, 2006; Iacob and Musuroi, 2013), this study sees the learning profile as a recipe for access and success: providing a “maximally supporting learning environment” (Wishart, 2002, p. 18; cited in Germain, 2002, p. 53) to nurture successful outcomes (Lemons *et al.*, 2018). Widening understanding and acceptance of a multitude of approaches to music education, reflecting the diversity of experiences of musicians, aligns with a neurodiversity perspective, which celebrates the value and validity of diverse experiences rather than recognising such diversity as a deficit or a disability (Silberman, 2015).



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