



# The Maryland School for the Blind

## Philosophy of the Music Therapy Program

Music is used at MSB throughout the entire curriculum. For many students, music therapy is an integral part of each day, but music is also used in other ways throughout the school. Music is used in the classroom, by other staff, to reinforce good behavior, assist in learning new tasks, or as a leisure skill. Music is brought to students in many different ways. Here are just a few of the ways music reaches our students every day: through individual and group music therapy sessions, group music education classes, private music instruction, special guest performers, classroom instruments, radios, individual CD players, performing ensembles, and other instructional staff. The music therapist and teacher often consult with classroom teachers to assist in such daily activities as circle time, field trips, skill acquisition, and behavior programs. A student learning cause and effect may use a switch to turn on a radio; a student learning one-to-one correspondence may use a song to count objects or a drum to count beats; a student learning the concepts “in” and “out” may take an instrument “out” of a basket to play and then place it back “in” when finished.

Music is essential to our students because sound is very important to the visually impaired or blind student. Sound is one of the most important cues a visually impaired individual can use in the environment. That is why, not only sound, but music, plays an important role in our student’s lives. Music is an avenue our students use to make life changes. Sound is not only important to our visually impaired students, but to our deafblind students, as well. Sound and vibration, or the feel of music, is another way to, make possible, non-verbal communication. Sound can facilitate interactions with a seeing and hearing world for an individual who is deafblind. Our students use music to learn the skills needed to become as productive in society as they are able. Because we are a school system, we are able to see long term changes in students. We are able to watch a student grow from childhood to adulthood. This long-term treatment will definitely have long-term effects. Music therapy is useful because it helps our students achieve their full potential.

The philosophy of the music therapy program at MSB is to utilize and enhance the current knowledge base of music therapy for individuals with visual impairments to assist our students in living as independently as possible in the community and achieving their highest potential. This basis incorporates many philosophical theories because of the various learning styles of our students and can, therefore, be considered eclectic in style. The role of music as therapy at MSB utilizes music to bring about therapeutic changes in the students. Music itself is the therapeutic communicator. For example, the music helps an autistic child to communicate or helps an angry or out of control child to calm down and regain control. The music facilitates changes in emotion, mood, and feelings about self.

The philosophy of the music therapy program at MSB includes behaviorism, creative music therapy, and educational theories. The therapeutic focus is on what will work best, for each child, under ever-changing circumstances.

The behavioral approach to music therapy, including applied behavioral analysis and social learning theory, is used at MSB. Applied behavioral analysis operates under the fundamental assumption that behavior is a function of its consequences. Accordingly, treatment procedures are based on altering the relationship between overt behaviors and their consequences. Music therapy at MSB utilizes applied behavioral analysis during individual music therapy sessions while teaching a student to push the “play” button in order to listen to their favorite song or utilizing music to reinforce positive behaviors. Music is also used to reinforce choice-making when a student chooses between two desired instruments. After the student makes a choice, the student gets to play the instrument.

Social learning theory is based on the interaction of three separate but interacting regulatory systems (external stimulus, external reinforcement, and cognitive mediation). In this theory, the influence of environmental events on behavior is determined by cognitive processes, which govern what environmental influences are attended to, how they are perceived, and how the individual interprets them. The person is the agent of change. Humans are capable of self-directed behavior change. Social learning theory at MSB encourages the student to think and determine what he or she would like to do before doing it. We practice these changes in music therapy and encourage generalization of these skills in the classroom. This can be observed during music therapy social skills groups when students learn to move their head and face towards a person that is speaking.

Creative music therapy is used at MSB, including, but not limited to, drumming, improvisation, and some of the techniques applied by Nordoff-Robbins. Drumming is used and loved by many of our students, each working on different goals or outcomes. Drumming can be used with the autistic or non-verbal child to promote communication. MSB’s percussion ensemble uses drumming to increase self-esteem, interact with others, elevate mood, and release tension. Some of the Nordoff-Robbins techniques are used with the autistic and severely disabled students to teach skills, concepts, and communication. Improvisation is used in a variety of ways. One way, in particular, would be to improvise calm music, using the iso principle, to help a non-verbal student who is angry or out of control become more relaxed and responsive through improvised music.

Music is not just an activity. Music is a tool used to facilitate changes in communication, decision making, social behavior, motor skills, personal management, career education, community skills, recreation and leisure skills, and cognitive skills. A student’s response to music is the documentation of change.

For more information please call or write:

Lacy Kidwell, MA, MT-BC

The Maryland School for the Blind

3501 Taylor Avenue

Baltimore, MD 21236

Phone: 410-444-5000 ext. 1266 Email: [lacyk@mdschblind.org](mailto:lacyk@mdschblind.org)