Bibliography of Pertinent Arts & Autism Literature

Art and Autism - General


A mother’s story of engaging with her son through playing music together.


Authors studied whether one aspect of “cognitive empathy,” the ability to recognize patterns of emotion signaling on human faces, can be taught to children with Autism by creating an entertainment/education DVD series called *Transporters* and showing it to children. Results suggest that improvement is possible, and parents suggested that their children became “more willing to discuss emotions and became more interested in facial expressions.”


Focuses on the possibility that people with ASD bring a strength rather than a deficit to art-making, using Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences as framing and Dr Temple Grandin’s life as evidence.


Challenges the presumption that music is only useful if it assists people with Autism in “personal expression” or emotional communication. “To depersonalize music is not...to rob it of any therapeutic power.”


Grandin describes her own brain processes which she suggests are like an internet search engine and notes that “all my thinking is bottom-up instead of top-down. I find lots of little details and put them together to form concepts and theories.”


Explores different cognitive explanations (such as cortical rededication, weak central coherence, executive dysfunction, mind-blindness, and exemplar-based memory) to move toward explaining the 1 in 10 people with Autism who seem to have exceptional skill in a particular arena like music or visual art. One useful statement: in ASC “there may be no default bias toward global processing - hence no ‘talent-suppressing’ top-down influences.”


Features the artwork of 50 artists with Autism with the aim of showcasing “an array of unique perspectives on how these individuals see the world and their place in it.”

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An older study on an experiment in creating an inclusive classroom context in a museum, focused on studying interactions between children with Autism and their neurotypical peers. Conclusions included the helpfulness of preparing neurotypical students to encourage and include their peers with ASD in cooperative behavior.


Focuses on 20 studies that support the use of music to help children with Autism in the areas of communication, social, and behavioral skills.

*Tools and strategies for engaging children/young people with Autism in a classroom setting*


Focuses on useful strategies for underprepared/undertrained music educators, including ways to achieve the goals of partial participation, interdependence, normalization, and individuality. Particularly of note is the emphasis on quality instruments or accommodations and the four part “Student Information at a Glance” form which can be a collaboration tool and helps teachers identify strengths, weaknesses, IEP details, and tried-and-true strategies.


Makes suggestions for the music classroom, including predictability and structure, peer modeling, partial participation, visuals, limiting choice to start. Promotes the possibility that children with ASD have special music skill and their aptitude “can be use in the music classroom to highlight their abilities rather than the disability.”


Describes a one-on-one interaction with a young artist and engages behavior modification techniques, skill development with materials. Identified benefits include interpersonal and social communication skill increases, alongside an exhibition of his work.


Emphasizes the importance of individual engagement and the value of referencing people with previous experience with an individual. References Temple Grandin’s book *Thinking in Pictures* to argue for the importance of routines like sitting in the same seat and to bring forward the possibility that people on the spectrum may be more likely to choose objects as subject matter.
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Outlines data collected from a pilot community-based outreach program that brought together young adults with ASD and university departments of psychology and music, and aimed at developing generalizable strategies for working with people in groups outside the confines of a school.


Focuses on preparation strategies for music teachers that involve collaboration with students, their peers, and special education faculty that will allow students with disabilities to participate in the “least restrictive environment” possible. Especially of note is a list of possible adaptations.


Particular attention is paid here to helping children with Autism manage the stresses of transition, the loud room, and other environmental factors that might trigger them. Useful model provided of the “Picture Exchange Communication System” to manage transitions.


A book-length volume that details up-to-date information about the diagnostic criteria, background/preparatory information about Autism, strategies for managing the classroom and collaborating with other educators. Also particularly of note are the “community programs” chapters which focus on experiences outside the classroom (like in museums).


Follows a qualitative analysis of a long-term engagement with a group of special-education secondary-education students including students with ASD called “The Story Project.” Claims cognitive benefits for individuals with Autism such as active attending, increasing tolerance for ambiguity, keeping multiple ideas in the air at once, gaining a sense of agency, cultivating empathy, and focusing on symbolic forms; places value not only on including students into mainstream spaces but also “exchanging and sharing unique perspectives and approaches.” Art “could offer students who struggle with learning logic and linguistics an alternative form of language.”


A resource guide on the basics of Autism, the history of and rationales for engaging people with ASD in art-making, and strategies and lesson plans.
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News, popular media, and human interest

Art of Autism. Website.
A “social entrepreneurship project” focused on promoting artists with Autism and educating people about Autism.

Zoe Gross has Autism and runs a blog titled Illusion of Competence. This blog entry tells some of her story, including the flow chart she uses to be sure she gets to class each day dressed, clean, and ready for the day.

Focuses on the artwork of Jessica Park and on her life story, as she has gone from a young child who didn’t speak and who seemed to live in a place her parents called “Nirvana” to a grown woman with a body of artwork.

Sesame Street Live “Elmo Makes Music” is the first attempt by the organization to offer performances with sensory-friendly tactics: prepared ushers, adjusted lighting, quiet areas, extra space in seating areas.

A group of children with ASD share stories about art-making in the lead-up to an exhibition of their work.

Discusses recent research on music’s impact on the brain and on how children with Autism process emotion, linking the two by proposing that children with ASD’s response to music may give us insight into how their brains operate. “While these kids often have difficulty recognizing how others feel, they readily respond to the sentiments of a song,” and “It seems like music acts as a sort of in, or doorway, to the [emotional] recognition system of children with Autism.”

Paredes won a competition sponsored by VSA National to create artwork about “What Inspires You.”

Discusses challenges of “Autism awareness” and communicating about the spectrum of challenges in the aftermath of CDC prevalence updates.

Describes an event that came about as a collaboration between a hospital and the local art commission, with support from the business community.

Cites new research from the University of Nottingham which finds that children with Autism are less likely to copy unnecessary actions (a social behavior) than neurotypical children when learning a task through modeling.

**Music Therapy**


Essay that summarizes existing resource and overall serves as a rationale for the value of music experiences for children with Autism and the usefulness of music therapy for engendering non arts-centered outcomes such as increased attention, decreased agitation, decreased self-stimulation, and improved verbal skills.


Summarizes arguments for the effectiveness of music therapy as a treatment option, presents a brief summary of research, and connects parents with the American Music Therapy Association.


A collection of essays that aim to bring together evidence for the effectiveness of music therapy interventions with young children on the spectrum, alongside strategies for engaging therapists and parents together in treatment. Particularly of note are the chapters that strategize overlaps between other evidence-based therapeutic practices and chapters on collaboration between music therapists and their parents.

**Other Therapies, Including Art Therapy, Movement Therapy, and Theatre**


Many links to model art therapy programs, information on art therapy training, and contact databases for art therapists. Focuses on quotes promoting the strength of art experience for children with Autism such as this quote from Dr Laura JJ Dessauer: “The creative process of art-making allows for a child to move into the psychosocial stage of industry vs inferiority. During this period, a child with ASD can use the creative process to enhance competency…”


Key observations include the criticality of parent involvement and consistent, one-on-one caregiving in identifying effective treatment strategies, the relation between Autism and difficulty with forming schema, and the importance of process. Concludes that nonverbal expression through the arts can help children with Autism develop their sense of self by representing experiences over time.
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Book-length text that explores the outcomes of art therapy treatments for children with ASD. Main suggestion is that art-making with a therapist alleviates “tension” and negative behaviors. Presented with the presumption that these therapies will be incorporated into other therapeutic practices.

Gray, Carol, “Social Stories” www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories. A Social Story™ describes a situation, skill or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. The goal is to share accurate social information in a patient, reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience.

Findings include increased ability to stay on-task, less sensitivity to being touched, less wandering, and less time resisting the teacher.

Identifies the contemporary approaches utilizing art practices (engaged by artists and non-artists alike), problems (including the scarcity of research and disconnect between art therapy and Autism advocacy and education organizations), and advantages of arts therapies. Arrives at the conclusion that more in-depth knowledge is required, beyond “anecdotal case studies.”

Outlines pilot study and partnership between the Nisonger Center, the OSU Department of Theatre and Dance, and the Royal Shakespeare Company in Great Britain to test the efficacy of the Hunter Heartbeat Method, a set of tactics using Shakespeare’s plays and characters to engage children with Autism and improve core symptoms of ASD (especially communication and social skills). At writing research and analysis is still underway. Website features video and links.

An English professor’s account of engaging two teenaged boys with Autism in a dialogue about Shakespeare’s drama.

**Tactics, Strategies, and Rationales for Sensory-Friendly Environments**

Identifies some of the tactics employed by the Kennedy Center (such as vetted music, half-empty seats to allow children to move, and trained ushers) and notes that “the concert hall is arguably one of the most restrictive spaces in American culture.”

Describes efforts to make theatre in New York accessible for children with Autism and their families. Three productions have been made Autism-friendly so far. TDF subsidizes ticket costs for families. The webpage features three social stories, the list of accommodations (including light adjustments, a quiet area, and a staffed activity area) and lists of other theatre organizations who have made steps to create sensory-friendly performances.
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### Appendix 4. Resources in Ohio

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<th>Resource Name</th>
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<td>Interagency Work on Autism</td>
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<td>The Lettuce Work Foundation</td>
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<td>Lil Mac Kids Foundation</td>
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<td>Milestones Autism Organization</td>
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<td>Monarch Boarding Academy</td>
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<td>Nisonger Center at Ohio State University</td>
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<td>Oakstone Academy and Children’s Center for Development Enrichment</td>
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<td>Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence</td>
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<td>Rich Center for Autism</td>
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