

Presented for the ABLE October 2020 Assembly, Boston, MA
Berklee Institute for Arts Education and Special Needs

Title: From Monograph to International Movement: Music-Assisted Learning Across the Life Span for Students with Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders

Presenter: Dr. Elise S. Sobol, Director of Music Education, New York University, New York

Description: From her 1994 New York State Council of Educational Associations monograph, “*Music Success for Special Learners, Inclusion Buzzword of Hope for the Future!*” to her driving influence in shaping policy and practice, author/educator will present examples of musical milestones, elementary through post-secondary, leading to her students’ current self-efficacy and independence.

(A précis on the workshop session.)

Greetings! My name is Dr. Elise Sobol and I am currently the Director of Music Education at New York University. I bring to my session, over 40 years of experience teaching in general and special education, public and private music settings. I am thrilled to have had the privilege of being the music teacher for a select group of students in special education from their elementary through their secondary education, and now for their post-secondary education. Today’s session entitled, “From Monograph to International Movement: Music-Assisted Learning Across the Life Span for Students with Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders” is their story.

Three goals frame out the presentation.

Goal 1 to give context to the material, I will identify some of the specific contributions I have made to the field of music in special education.

Goal 2 is to describe the process and benefits of music-assisted learning.

Goal 3 is to demonstrate musical milestones achieved by these special education students not only to celebrate their specific achievements but to inspire others to replicate and improve upon the classroom models provided.

In the 1980’s I started my teaching career by designing an early musical development program for 6 week old neuro-typical babies to Kindergarten age. It was there I developed my facilitative style of multi-sensory/multi-modal teaching. I learned quite early that this facilitative style, now called UDL (Universal Design for Learning) reached learners of all capabilities. As my career progressed, this skill based approach transferred very smoothly to center based special education where the students had developmental issues be they cognitive, behavioral, language-based, physical or sensory. In 1992, the New York State School Music Association President approached me at a Very Special Arts Festival in Albany, where my students were performing, and asked if I would consider becoming the first state chairperson for music for

special learners, and help to develop the field for our membership. I accepted the honor and started my career in public service. I was on the original draft teams for the national and state standards and contributed to the 2nd and 3rd editions of the New York City Department of Education's Blueprint on Teaching and Learning in the Arts (Music). My work, as demonstrated through keynote speeches, professional development workshops both here and abroad brought natural contextual use of colors, shapes, signs and symbols to improve cognitive PK-12 connections to learning across the disciplines. My seminal text, *An Attitude and Approach for Teaching Music to Special Learners*, now in its third edition, was originally written out of service to NYSSMA membership to develop resource materials for teachers across the state. Second, third and foreign language editions published through Rowman and Littlefield Education in partnership with the National Association for Music Education influenced music product development and served as an up to date resource to improve arts accessibility for all.

It was really interesting for me to reflect in 2020 that my 1994 monograph for the New York State council of Education Associations, "*Music Success for Special Learners, Inclusion Buzzword of Hope for the Future!*" actually helped to create a paradigm shift of expectations for school success for everyone. It did give us hope for the future. Tenets of my attitude and approach for teaching music to special learners was formulated in the monograph. "There is no greater lively art than music for bringing out the learning potential of a student." "Special education students can play a vital part in the enrichment of performance groups and general music classes." "This kind of success influences the social and emotional development of all students and improves quality of music education and performance for all." I saw that early in my career that I had a vision for inclusion. My service work took on great purpose.

Every day in the music room, from elementary through secondary, it felt that I was witnessing miracles of the human mind and spirit. This was so exciting! Why use music to assist children in reaching developmental goals? I discovered through my classroom work that the answer is three fold.

- 1) Music builds confidence and provides a fun, engaging, safe, secure, and successful environment to maximize learning potential.
- 2) Music is performed in real time and has a definite beginning, middle, and end for task completion. With this inherent structure, music has the ability to manage a range of behaviors while enhancing the health and welfare of the child.
- 3) Music offers an introduction to competencies in literacy: listening (auditory processing), speaking (singing), reading (notation) and writing (composing). Music serves to link our humanity to science, math, language arts, history, social studies, physical education, business, the visual arts, dance, drama, and theater, building a ridge for success for students of all challenges and learning styles (Sobol, 2017, 65). Wanting school success for all of my students, I developed a driving question for research, "How does musical aptitude help students with significant cognitive/language delay including autism spectrum disorders make developmental academic gains?" The answer came as a result of my 2013 doctoral research study with 77 high school aged students with cognitive/language delay including autism spectrum disorders. Music stimulates new neural networks throughout the whole brain, promoting cross-hemispheric growth for cognitive understanding. The process is steady due to neural plasticity of the brain and function of mirror neurons. Neural plasticity is the brain's natural ability to physically

change itself by creating new pathways and connections. Explicit teaching in a mediated learning environment is key to this process.

The work achieved in the 2013 music aptitude study demonstrated that students with significant cognitive/language delay including autism spectrum disorders have extraordinary capabilities, attention to detail, and ability to demonstrate memory recall through mediated music learning activities (Sobol, 2014, 76). The study further demonstrated important recommendations for teaching of music: 1) there are instructional techniques effective through mediated learning experiences that can promote music learning with target populations. 2) music learning can be measured and demonstrates a positive impact on mathematics concept development. 3) music lessons can incorporate learning activities and dialogue across a variety of curricular areas.

In conclusion, music-assisted learning can be a boost for all learners as it capitalizes on the strength of being a whole brain intelligence, strengthening areas where deficits exist by creating new neural pathways through imitation and repetition for holistic developmental/academic success of all learners. Its skills learned through the musical/rhythmic intelligence grow and generalize for lifelong learning.

Five Video-Clips were shared during the October 2020 ABLE Assembly Session.

Video Clip #1: *NYSSMA Music Views Across the State: Directionality in Sound, Shape and Space*. <https://www.nyssma.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Sobol-Elise-S.pdf>

Aimed to serve as professional development across New York State's rural, suburban and urban classrooms, this 2008-09 DVD New York State School Music Association project included for the first time 22 center-based special education students in a standards-based music learning setting.

Video Clip #2: 150 Students with autism and related disorders are seen in a performance of the William Tell Overture (Rossini) showcasing their ability to focus and attend to task for more than four minutes representing a major developmental milestone for each of them.

Video Clip #3: NAFME 2012 Music in our Schools Month featuring the Rosemary Kennedy High School Glee Club featured in The Star Spangled Banner in "o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave." A truly inclusive statement that our special education students were a part of a greater inclusive community, rippled throughout our profession! This was recognition that came with high visibility.

Video Clip #4: On the eve of the day that I defended my doctoral research for demonstrating how natural musical aptitude can be used to assist students with ASD to improve academic success... an historic recital took place on November 20, 2013 at LU Post with two of my music students. The recital featured two 21 year old musicians, one neurotypical (Kaitlyn) and one neurodiverse (Alan) together with me, in front of a sophisticated musical audience putting theory to practice. The neuro-diverse musician who was non-verbal in elementary school, now demonstrated his musical growth as a young adult, by closing and dedicating and *singing* the song "When You're

Smiling” (L.Shay, M.Fisher, J.Goodwin) to the neuro-typical student who was graduating college. Our inclusion journey came full circle. “With music, there is only ability.”

Continuing the story, based on my doctoral autism research, a societal need was identified to have a post-secondary collegiate program for individuals with ASD and Related Disorders. To that purpose I started the Continuing Education in Arts (C.E.A.) program at LIU Post in 2015 as a unique post-secondary program for adult learners 21 and over, to continue their learning in the Arts. At the invitation of Dr. Rhoda Bernard, I showcased this post-secondary program at the Fifth Annual Conference for Teaching Students on the Autism Spectrum at Boston Conservatory, April 29, 2017 as an inspiration for growth of the newly developing Berklee Institute for Arts Education and Special Needs (BIAESN).

Video Clip #5 shows Alan performing at the Fifth Annual Conference on Teaching Students on the Autism Spectrum on drumset with me on piano demonstrating through the performance how he learned his numeracy skills by music-assisted learning with the jazz standard, Take Five (Paul Desmond).

When I was brought on to the full time faculty at New York University, I brought this concept program to NYU. Hosted by NYU Steinhardt Music Education, Continuing Education in Music (C.E.M.) is an inclusive growing community out-reach opportunity for our students with/without disabilities to learn together with our pre-service music education students. Music-Assisted learning across the life span. Let’s continue the work.

In closing, as a special educator I’ve seen that Music will reach out with Love to heal people of all nations. For children, it is the song for the future. “Be well, stay safe, and believe in the positive and possible. Thank you for attending this session at the October 2020 ABL Assembly.

September 14, 2020
Dr. Elise S. Sobol
Melville, NY

Key References

Available Through Digital Access or Print

Sobol, E.S. (2020). “From monograph to international movement: music-assisted learning across the life span for students with autism spectrum and related disorders”. A précis for October 2020 ABL Arts Assembly. Boston, MA: Berklee Institute for Arts Education and Special Needs

Sobol, E.S. (2018) “Music Assisted P-12 Life Learning for Teacher Preparation Programs” Proceedings of the 22nd International Seminar of ISME Commission on the Music in Schools and Teacher Education Commission (MISTEC), Prague, Czech Republic, July 8-12, 2018, p. 222-229. <https://www.isme.org/sites/default/files/documents/Proceedings.MISTEC.2018.pdf>

Sobol, E.S. (May 2018). Reaching Higher with Music in Education: Early Musical Development for Children for Life Long Learning. Powerpoint for professional development workshop sponsored by Fundacion Pa Nos Muchanan, Oranjestad, Aruba. <https://www.fpnm.aw>

Sobol, E.S. (2017). An Attitude and approach for Teaching Music to Special Learners, 3rd Edition. Lanham, M.D. Rowman & Littlefield Education in partnership with the National Association for Music Education.

Sobol, E.S. (2014). Autism Research: Music Aptitude's Effect on Developmental/ Academic Gains for Students with Significant Cognitive/Language Delays." ProQuest Dissertations: St. John's University, New York.

Sobol, E.S. (2011) "Music Learning in Special Education: Focus on Autism and Developmental Disabilities" in Colwell, R. and Webster, P. (Eds.) *MENC: Handbook of Research in Music Learning, Volume 2, Applications*. New York: Oxford University Press, (6), 233-255.

Sobol, E.S. (2008) An attitude and approach for teaching music to special learners, 2nd edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education in partnership with the National Association for Music Education Foreign Language Translations:2013 Korean Edition, Sigma Press, Korea 2011 Hebrew Edition, Ach Publishers Ltd. Israel

Sobol, E.S. (March 2006). Literacy Support: Applications of the Color Scheme Red, Yellow and Green." School Music News: Westbury, New York

Sobol, E.S. (2001). An Attitude and approach for Teaching Music to Special Learners. Raleigh, NC: Pentland Press.

Sobol, E.S. (August 1994). Music Success for Special Learners: Inclusion Buzzword of Hope for the Future! New York: New York State Council of Educational Associations.