

There is no "I" in teach!

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Abstract

This presentation will show how to work with students who have disabilities, the challenges that present and ways to help them succeed in learning. Eight years of hands on research of how learning can take place and be remembered by the student using repetition, patience, and dedication of the teacher, student and family. Qualitative and quantitative research will show that music can help a student be able to form memories, make connections of previous teaching, and apply these ideals to new pieces as well as make relations in day to day life.

The student used for this research is Jacob, (In this paper, I've used the pseudonym 'Jacob' to protect the privacy of the subject). He was born premature and was not expected to survive more than a few weeks. His mother believed he would live. Her strong belief in the benefits of music inspired her to place a wind up musical elephant in his crib each visit to her son in NICU. She believes some of his love for music comes from the early introduction and continuous music he had as a baby.

Jacob came to me eight years ago through the one of our Utah's Colleges Preparatory Program. He had a love for music that has helped him become what he is today. The first six years were continuous repetition with one-sided teaching from teacher to student. By the start of the sixth year Jacob began to relate and interject previous teaching techniques and learning methods to new pieces. This had not occurred before. An element that came in the seventh year was the ability to add emotion. In fact so much emotion was used when he performed that the playing became mindless and uncontrolled. Now in the eighth year he is learning to balance the emotion so his playing can be musically emotional as well as technical and thoughtful.

A way to understand Jacob's brain is to think of a brain being filled with a bunch of intersections that connect to each other and lead to nowhere but more intersections. After this analogy in the fourth year of teaching Jacob, it was evident that bridges had to be made so the intersections could finally have a logical path for him to follow. So the process began of how Jacob learned. There were a collection of ah-ha moments and many calls to his mom, so a deeper understanding could be obtained. By year six he started to be able to see over the intersections and follow the newly developed paths. This is when the learning started to make sense to him, memories made and the learning was built upon.

Memory is something that takes an interesting path in Jacob's brain. If he is personally involved, and there is music he will remember. During the fourth year of

teaching him there was an interesting discovery with the way Jacob tried to memorize a piece of music. When he came to a lesson I asked him play the memorized page assigned the previous week. He responded that he only had half of the page memorized. He then proceeded to cover up half of the page with another sheet of paper. This made it evident that he did not memorize in phrases, groups, or harmonically but through groups of random notes that were inserted into his computer like brain. This explained why he played so mechanically. It was from this point on he learned how the structure of a piece works and began relating notes to each other and give continuity to his playing. This is when he first started to lay the foundation to be able to put his heart into music and was able to make sense musically to his brain and the audience.

Working with a student who's had a brain injury from birth such as Jacob, using repetition, patience, and dedication have shown to be a key element to improve everyday function. This research has shown that using music can help people with brain injuries to function on a higher level socially and musically. The author can be reached at malindatall@weber.edu