

CONNECTING WITH VOICES TOGETHER

WE EXAMINED MUSIC-BASED THERAPY FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OUR WORK

This study is designed to assess the efficacy of the Voices Together Music Therapy for improving social and communication skills among elementary school age children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder or other developmental/intellectual disabilities. The Voices Together method combines an engaging music-based therapy with evidence-based educational and specialized therapeutic techniques.

This therapy has been used in Durham Public School Special Education classrooms for 6 years, and also serves 5 other Triangle area school districts. The method uses interactive “talking songs” to increase communication, social, and emotional learning.

OUR METHODS

PARTICIPANTS:

- Participants are 33 students, ages 5-13 years from 4 special education classrooms, 2 serving grades K-2 and 2 serving grades 3-5. Students have a wide range of developmental disabilities including intellectual and physical disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorder. Communication skills range from minimally verbal to conversational speech.

OUTCOME MEASURES:

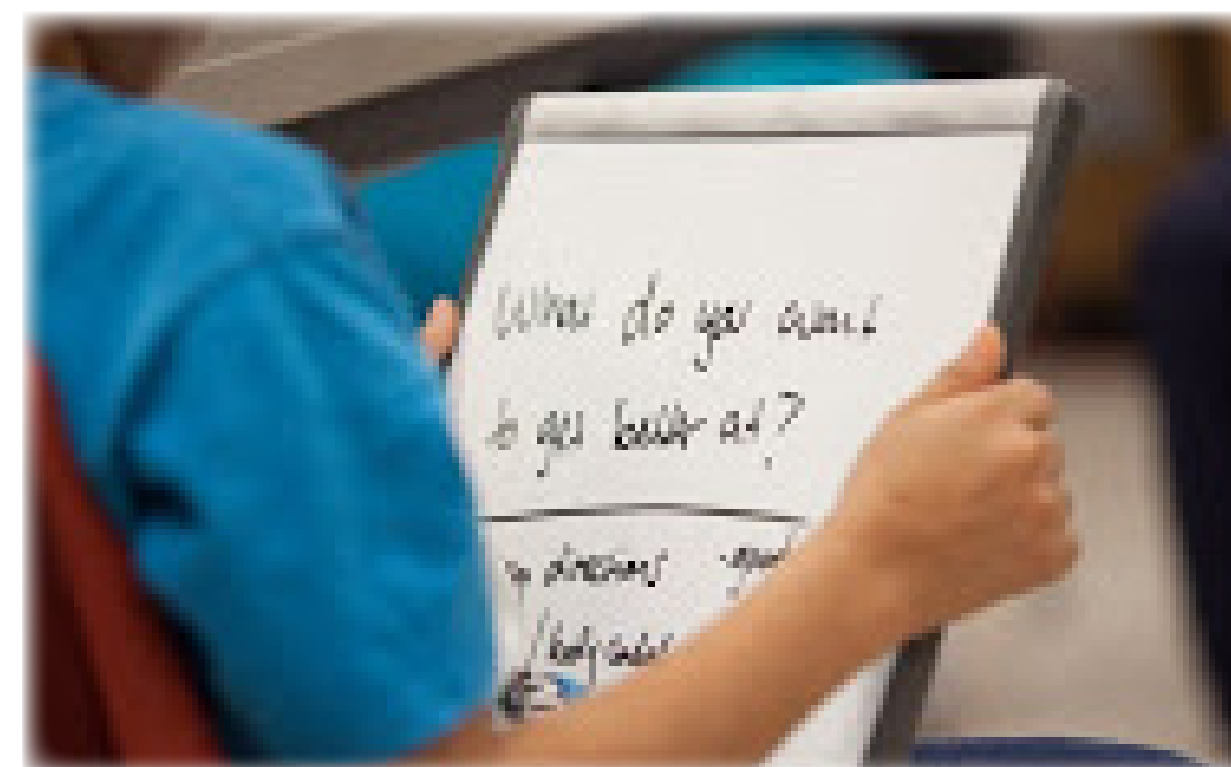
- 15 item Teacher Practices Survey
- 83 item Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scales. (Gresham et al., 2010)
- Behavioral coding in the classroom by trained reliable coders assessing level of communicative response, level of prompt required, and child affect.

STUDY DESIGN:

- Within each grade level, classrooms were randomly assigned to one of two groups: Group one began receiving the Voices Together program starting in January and ended the program in April. Group two began receiving the Voices Together program 8 weeks (end of February) later than Group 1 and ended the program in April.
- Teacher report outcome measures were taken at three time points (T1 – Jan, T2 – End of Feb when Group 2 commenced treatment, and T3 – April)
- Behavioral observation outcome measures were taken at two time points (T2 and T3).
- Both parents and teachers provided informed consent.

DISCUSSION

- Current analyses are in progress to assess the effects of the Voices Together program on communication, assertion, and engagement, as well as on outcome measures derived from behavioral coding.



THE FUTURE

- Automated recording devices can measure language output and frequency. Such measures would allow an objective and quantitative means of measuring improvement in communication in future studies. The use of other rating scales or questionnaires to measure social, communicative, and emotional behavior of participants would provide a more comprehensive assessment of the effects of the Voices Together program.
- Replication of the study with a larger sample, more age groups, and in other school systems is needed.

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