

PLAYING TO OUR STRENGTHS: STRATEGIES FOR PIANO STUDENTS WITH ADHD

Temporal Deficits or “I can’t Feel the Beat!”

- Common symptom of ADHD is lack of temporal awareness
 - Often discussed in terms of being late for events, procrastination (Slater and Tate 2018)
- Transfers to rhythmic abilities- Roughly 70% of people with ADHD have difficulties synchronizing to a steady beat (Puyjarinet et al. 2017)
- Temporal deficits decrease with multiple attempts and exposures (Carrer 2015)

Sensitivity to Criticism, “I’m not normal!”

- Many people with ADHD have a high sensitivity to criticism, and high level of perceived inadequacy
- One clinician estimated that children with ADHD will hear 20,000 negative or corrective comments from teachers by the age of 10 (Jellinek 2010)
- Create manageable goals, so success is a part of every lesson
- Be realistic, but generous, with praise

General Suggestions

- Remember that students with ADHD are individuals
 - What works for one student may not work for another
- Minimize frustration wherever possible
 - Students tend to disengage if they are in a constant state of frustration
- Build in additional scaffolding for new concepts
- Give many opportunities for lateral or spiral learning (i.e. don’t progress too fast)
- Plan for activities with short durations
 - Always have back-up activities so you can pivot in case of something not working
- Choose repertoire that is motivating to students- students with ADHD need to buy-in 100%
- Encourage many performance opportunities, both formal and informal

Specific Ideas

- Get off the bench!
- Scaffold new challenges- many more steps to mastery
- Use body movement to demonstrate and practice new (and old!) rhythm concepts
- Translate the rhythms to words, either made up or using rhythm modes
- Teacher can play the piece, or improvise on rhythms to be learned while student moves and listens
- Experience the rhythm in multiple modalities before viewing musical notation
- Provide ways of gaining skills that do not depend on fine motor skills. (50% of children with ADHD also have DCD)
- Choose pieces with many iterations of the challenge

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