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## The Benefits of Music Education in the Mild to Moderate Special Education Classroom, Grades 3-5

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***RUNNING HEAD: Benefits of Music Education***

The Benefits of Music Education in the Mild to Moderate Special Education Classroom,  
Grades 3-5

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology  
Dominican University of California

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## Benefits of Music Education

**Signature Sheet**

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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### **Abstract**

Though extensive studies exist regarding the use of the arts in general education settings, a comparable amount of research is still needed to support the need for the use of the arts in special education settings. This research study investigated how a once a week music class impacted 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with mild to moderate disabilities in developing their academic, social and behavioral goals as identified in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP). This qualitative research study utilized multiple data forms, including classroom observations of both music and non-music instruction and interviews with teachers, artists, and parents throughout the course of a nine-week music program. Based upon development of participant IEP goals, findings show evidence that the use of art in the special education classroom is beneficial to special education students.

Keywords: music education, special education, students with mild to moderate disabilities, academic performance, social performance

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## **Chapter 1 The Benefits of Music Education**

During the Spring of 2015 I had the opportunity to student teach in a 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade Special Day Class (SDC) while working towards my mild/moderate education specialist teaching credential. In this placement, I gained valuable insight as to what it was like to teach special education students who were performing significantly below grade level in all academic content areas. The student population included a wide range of disabilities including specific learning disability, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), emotionally disturbed, speech or language impairment, orthopedic impairment and multiple disabilities. The learning environment in this SDC was mostly taught in whole class instruction with the focal point being reading and math worksheets. During my solo teaching weeks in this class, I could prepare engaging lessons where I incorporated science, technology, social studies, movement and art into the required reading and math curriculums. By doing so, I could see the SDC students come alive! During one lesson, I taught the students about the parts of an insect by incorporating music, movement and art. At first the students were a little nervous to participate in activities that were so unfamiliar to them but as the lesson went on, I had the students up dancing and singing about the parts of an insect. This day was one of my favorite days in this classroom. These experiences showed me that as a special educator, it is imperative that I use a variety of teaching techniques, especially movement, songs, and art, to offer my students different ways to access the curriculum.

In trying to select a topic for this research study I thought back to my experience while student teaching and knew I wanted to do work related to making special education curriculums more dynamic for students with disabilities. Then in a meeting with my advisor, Jacquelyn

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Urbani, Ph.D., she shared with me that a local arts organization, specializing in bringing fine arts into classrooms, had approached her with some prospective research projects, one relating to a program specifically designed for students with disabilities. Once I heard about this project, I grew very curious, immediately wanting to know what I could do to help.

This research study involved an arts organization located in Northern California with a program designed specifically for students with disabilities. The arts organization brought an artist into elementary special day classrooms for a nine-week music program.

### **Statement of Problem**

At the start of this research study, the arts organization needed new program assessment tools that would improve how they were assessing the impact of their art programs on a per student basis. Since the arts organization served students ages 3 through 23, they needed a way to track the program's impact on students, linking their program outcomes to each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), over the course of their educational career, pre-kindergarten to junior college. The only data available to the arts organization were classroom teacher surveys, in the form of online evaluation tools, that captured the level of impact the art programs have had on each special education class as a unit, not the impact made on the individual students. This research study focused on identifying the influence of an arts program, specifically music, on individual students with disabilities, measuring the impact on student academic, social and behavioral needs. Data was collected on individual students during a nine-week music program lead by the arts organization, linking the music program outcomes to each student's IEP goals.

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### **Purpose Statement**

This research study was part of a longitudinal study lead by Jacquelyn Urbani, Ph.D. and student researchers from Dominican University of California, in partnership with an arts organization in Northern California. The purpose of this research study was to document the effectiveness of a music program on students with mild to moderate disabilities, grades 3-5, in academic, social and behavioral performance. This research study included the creation of pilot assessment tools used to measure the impact of music education, specifically, individual student improvement in relation to student IEP goals, after completing the nine-week music program.

### **Research Question**

This research study will investigate if and how music education impacts 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with mild to moderate disabilities in developing their academic, social and/or behavioral goals as identified in their IEPs.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

The value of incorporating the arts into education was first observed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and has since sparked the conversation of incorporating the arts into various subject areas (Berlinger, 2011). Leaders of the child-study movement, influenced by Darwin's *Origin of Species*, as well as the introduction of empirical psychology, called for a widespread and scientific study of children (Humphreys, 1985). The child-study movement investigated children's ways of learning, including incorporating sensory capabilities, physical characteristics, humor, play, religious ideas, memory, attention span, etc., into learning.

Educator and philosopher, Dewey, was an advocate for integrating the arts into education. Dewey stated that the arts should be a “foundational part of the curriculum because it developed creativity, self-expression, and an appreciation of the expression of others” (as cited

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by Heilig, Cole & Aguilar, 2010, p. 136). Dewey argued that “children need an education that is authentic and allows them to grow mentally, physically, and socially by providing opportunities to be creative, critical thinkers” (as cited by Heilig, et al., 2010, p. 137). Dewey believed that the arts could offer children a way to enhance their view of the world, helping them to create new understandings of the world around them (Goldblatt, 2006).

Gardner (1999) proposed that human beings possess various intellectual possibilities in his theory of multiple intelligences and argued that this theory “provides a basis for education in the arts” (para. 2). Gardner (1999) wrote that schools tend to focus on the two skills of literacy and math, which he identified as the linguistic and logical intelligences, respectfully. Gardner advocated for the recognition and incorporation of “at least six other intelligences: spatial, musical, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic” (Gardner, 1999, para. 2). Gardner (1999) argued that participation in the arts provides a way to develop a wide range of intelligences in children and that the arts allow children to express what is important to them through multiple forms of expression.

Lowenfeld, also known as “the father of Art Education” advocated using art in education and devoted his early teaching career to a school for blind children where he developed a passion for therapeutically using creativity in art (Efland, 1990, p. 234). Lowenfeld’s work established early in the field of arts education that the arts can not only remediate, rehabilitate, and socialize children with disabilities, but that children with disabilities are capable and important (Efland, 1990). In his book, *Creative and Mental Growth, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition* (1970), Lowenfeld described how the process of art promotes self-expression, independence, flexible thinking, social interactions and general well-being. Regarding students with disabilities, art therapy pioneer, Kramer (1971) conveyed that art is therapeutic and that art builds skills and aesthetic awareness.

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### **Assumptions**

The following are my assumptions as I begin my research on the topic of integrating the arts into general education and special education:

1. With the emphasis of Common Core State Standards (Common Core, 2017) and high stakes testing, it is difficult for teachers to incorporate the arts into their schedule that is predominately focused on language arts and math.
2. Federal, state, and local funding do not make arts education a priority.
3. Both general education and special education students retain more of what they are taught if a variety of modalities are included in the lesson, i.e., dance, music, and movement.
4. Some special education students are better able to express themselves in a nonverbal manner using the arts.
5. The arts can help students with disabilities build self-confidence and social skills, as well as improve performance in academic areas.

### **Background and Need**

Within the United States educational system, there is evidence that shows that the arts are not a priority. McMurrer (2008) conducted a survey of 349 public school districts and found that since the inception of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), 58 percent of districts have increased instructional time for reading and language arts, and that 45 percent have increased instructional time for math, while arts education instructional time has decreased by 16 percent (p. 2). According to Gardner (1999) “most cultures, and certainly those that consider themselves to be highly civilized, do not need special arguments for including the arts in their schools. In the United States however, such automatic allegiance to the arts does not exist” (para. 4).

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Berliner (2011) explained that the loss of art in the current high-stakes testing environment is problematic (p. 291). Berliner (2011) argued that the arts provide an alternative means to view reality, expand the way students perceive the world, and often has immediately unobservable benefits for the workers in a market economy (p. 291).

In respect to incorporating the arts into special education, there is currently a need for more research to be done on this topic. Gerber, Keifer-Boyd, and Crockett (2013) write that “students with disabilities can excel in and through the arts” and that “over the past decade, a small but growing body of research is beginning to document and demonstrate the importance of the arts in the lives of students with disabilities” (p. 11). Gerber et al., (2013) state that there is currently no home or central professional location for arts/special education research and that information on intersections of art and special education is dispersed among many journals and is difficult to access (p. 11).

## Summary

While there is a strong body of research detailing the power of incorporating the arts into general education, it is the area of incorporating the arts into special education that more research needs to be conducted. The work that is being done by the arts organization is important work as it incorporates arts education into special education. Smith (2001), founder of the Lab School for children with disabilities writes, “The arts provide all sorts of wondrous opportunities for all children. However, for exceptional students [students with disabilities], the arts are often a savior, a respite, and a solace that give these children a chance to express themselves and feel good about themselves” (p. 4). It is the hope of the researcher that the completion of this research study will address the gap in research to identify the benefits of the arts for students with mild to moderate disabilities in developing academic, social and/or behavioral goals as

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identified in their IEPs.

## Chapter 2 Review of Literature

### The Benefits of Including Art in General Education

Research has identified the benefits of the arts in the general education curriculum. *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Fiske, 1999) provides a collection of seven studies that show the correlation of high levels of arts participation with higher grades and test scores in reading and math. One study included in the collection is entitled, “Involvement in the Arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement in Music and Theater Arts.” Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) conducted this quantitative study using data (standardized test scores, academic grades, and dropout rates) from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) to see how student involvement in the arts affected academic performance. The NELS data used consisted of 25,000 students from the United States in grades 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> (Catterall, et al, 1999, p. 2). The study examined students who were involved in the arts across all disciplines, as well as students that had continued involvement with music in a single discipline, such as playing a musical instrument or being in a theater production (Catterall, et al, 1999, p. 2). Catterall, et al. (1999) found that the students involved in arts had positive academic developments in all grades (8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>), and that students who were involved in the arts showed “comparative gains” over time, specifically pointing out that the same was even found among a subgroup of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds (p. 2). Also, students (including the SES subgroup) who are involved in instrumental music during the middle and high school years show significantly higher levels of math proficiency, compared to students who were not involved in instrumental music (Catterall,

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et al., 1999, p. 2). Lastly, it was observed that SES students who were involved in the theater arts such as plays, musicals, drama clubs, and acting lessons, had “...gains in reading proficiency, gains in self concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others” (Catterall, et al., 1999, p. 2).

Overall, Catterall, et al., (1999) found that even though their research displays a positive association between student involvement in the arts with academic and social outcomes, there is still a need for future research by educators, school leaders, parents, students and artists to continue to learn what art can do in relation to human development (p. 17).

Another study included in the *Champions of Change* collection is entitled, “Learning in and Through the Arts: Curriculum Implications.” In this study, a group of researchers from Teachers College Columbia University, conducted a study of over 2000 students in grades 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>, attending public schools and “...found significant relationships between rich in-school arts programs and creative, cognitive, and personal, competencies needed for academic success” (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999, p. 36). Burton, et al., (1999),

...found that young people in “high-arts” groups performed better than those in “low-arts” groups on measures of creativity, fluency, originality, elaboration and resistance to closure—capacities central to arts learning. Pupils in arts-intensive settings were also strong in their abilities to express thoughts and ideas, exercise their imaginations and take risks in learning. In addition, they were described by their teachers as more cooperative and willing to display their learning publicly (p. 36).

According to Burton, et al., (1999), non-art teachers involved in this study shared with the researchers that the effects of their students participating among strong arts programming could

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be seen in their science, math, and language classes (p. 36). Teachers noticed that these students were “...curious, able to express ideas and feelings in individual ways, and not afraid to display their learning before their teachers, peers, and parents” (Burton, et al., 1999, p. 36). Burton, et al., (1999) found when students that have less access to the arts, this “...exerts a negative effect on the development of critical cognitive competencies and personal dispositions” (p. 44).

The combined efforts of the researchers included in *Champions of Change*, agreed upon the following findings in their studies:

- The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts connect students to themselves and each other.
- The arts transform the environment for learning.
- The arts provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people.
- The arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful.
- The arts connect learning experiences to the world of real work. (Fiske, 1999, p. ix – x)

According to Fiske (1999) when students are exposed to the arts they are provided “with authentic learning experiences that engage their minds, hearts, and bodies” (p. ix). Art allows students to engage in multiple skills and abilities which create meaningful learning experiences that develop a student’s cognitive, social, and personal competencies (Fiske, 1999, p. ix). The *Champions of Change* researchers found that students who are engaged in the arts can attain higher levels of achievement and that the arts can make a more significant difference for students from disadvantaged circumstances (Fiske, 1999, p. viii).

The *Champions of Change* researchers’ combined efforts found that to be effective, the arts learning experience needs to:

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- Enable young people to have direct involvement with the arts and artists.
- Require significant staff development.
- Support extended engagement in the artistic process.
- Encourage self-directed learning.
- Promote complexity in the learning experience.
- Allow management of risk by the learners.
- Engage community leaders and resources. (Fiske, 1999, p. x-xi)

Overall, the *Champions of Change* studies display how incorporating the arts into a student's education "provides unparalleled opportunities for learning, enabling young people to reach for and attain higher levels of achievement" (Fiske, 1999, p. XII).

*Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002) is a body of work consisting of 62 peer-reviewed studies and essays on arts education research that examine how the arts are beneficial to students both academically and socially. The studies and essays in *Critical Links* are organized in five different sections including: dance, drama, visual arts, music and multi-arts. The studies and essays included in *Critical Links* does as the title of the document says and "links" arts education with a variety of academic and social skills including: reading and language, mathematics, thinking skills, motivation, social behavior, and school environment (Deasy, 2003). Deasy (2003) writes,

Of great importance to schools struggling to close achievement gaps are indications that for certain students—most notably young children, those from economically disadvantaged circumstances, and those needing remedial instruction—learning in the arts may be particularly helpful. For instance, studies show that some students who are encouraged to dramatize reading material significantly improve their

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comprehension of the text and their ability to read new and unfamiliar material (p. 16-17).

One study included in *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002) provided an evaluation of a successful art program model: Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE).

The Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) partnered local artists with teachers to design curriculums where a visual art form was integrated into reading or social studies lessons (Catterall & Waldorf, 2002). This study compared student performance of the students participating in CAPE, against a control group of students not participating in CAPE, based on standardized tests scores (p. 72). Their results concluded that the CAPE students performed better, in both their reading and math standardized test scores, than the control group of students who did not have arts education integrated in their reading or social studies lessons (Catterall & Waldorf, 2002, p. 72). Catterall and Waldorf (2002) found that “the low-SES [socioeconomic status] children in arts-integrated schools perform better than those in comparison schools in terms of test scores. The difference was statistically significant at the elementary level, but not at the high school level” (p. 72). Their findings in this study lead Catterall and Waldorf (2002) to believe that low-income schools perform better when partnering with local artists and arts agencies (p. 72). In the *Champions of Change* (1999) report, Fiske writes about the CAPE program in his executive summary stating, “If well-constructed partnerships between school and arts organizations can increase student achievement, then such partnerships must be nurtured and replicated” (p. xi).

## **The Benefits of Including Art in Special Education**

Malley and Silverstein (2014) examined the existing relationship between arts education and special education by presenting current research on the topic and then sharing the results

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from a national forum of stakeholders from both fields. Malley and Silverstein (2014) argue that, “Regardless of barriers, physical or environmental, all students need the opportunity to learn in and through the arts” (p. 39). The arts allow students to use creativity and problem solving, as well as provide opportunity for self-expression (Malley & Silverstein, 2014, p. 39). Students with disabilities may have a difficult time expressing themselves with speech and written language but art allows them to do this. Malley and Silverstein (2014) found that there is current research supporting the benefits of using art with students with disabilities, but there is not work being done to unite the professionals who could design these programs for students (p. 39). For example, the fields of arts education and special education are separate.

Realizing the need for an integration of arts education and special education, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and its affiliate VSA (formerly Very Special Arts) hosted a national forum on this topic in the summer of 2012. At this forum, leaders in the fields of arts education and special education came together to share their knowledge on each field, eventually making recommendations for a national agenda stating that the arts are a necessary component in the education of students with disabilities (Malley & Silverstein, 2014, p. 40). Malley and Silverstein (2014) report that this forum produced two recommendations, the first was that an informational hub/technical assistance center needs to be created to serve as a resource for educators in the arts and special education in the form of a website (p. 41). The second, was to create a consortium of professionals from the arts and special education communities that could move forward with a common goal (Malley and Silverstein, 2014, p. 41). A main priority of this consortium would be to provide professional development for educators including teacher preparations programs, as well as providing in-service trainings for general educators, paraprofessionals, and art teachers, teaching the importance of integrating the arts into

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special education and practical methods on how to do this (Malley & Silverstein, 2014, p. 41).

Rabkin and Redmond (2006), write about arts integration and its ability to raise student achievement. They write, “Two decades of efforts to raise standards, focus schools on academic fundamentals, and close the achievement gap have steadily eroded the place of arts in public education” (p. 60). The arts must compete against other subjects for time and resources and the arts are usually used as a reward or a curriculum enrichment.

Rabkin and Redmond (2006) share that there is now evidence that shows that arts education can have powerful effects on student achievement, especially for struggling students (p. 60). Rabkin and Redmond (2006) write that there are examples of schools that have prioritized the arts, helping to raise low-income and other struggling students’ performance (p. 60). These schools have “began to practice arts integration, an instructional strategy that brings the arts into the core of the school day and connects the arts across the curriculum” (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 60). The low performing students in these schools experienced success in the arts, with many being previously withdrawn or disruptive, now becoming active and productive members in class (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 61). The arts integration approach has artists and teachers working together to design lessons and units, integrating the arts into the core subject matter (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 61).

Rabkin and Redmond (2006) share a variety of examples of arts integration, ranging from having students develop their letter awareness by dancing letter shapes, to writing music and lyrics in social studies, to writing about personal histories after viewing folk paintings (p. 63). They write, “The paired subjects engage the same cognitive processes... Setting these parallel processes in motion appears to generate a cognitive resonance between the two subjects, deepening learning in both” (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 63). By connecting art to the core

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curriculum, the students find the work more interesting and meaningful, creating higher levels of engagement, and student motivation (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 63).

According to Rabkin and Redmond (2006), arts integration is not simple, easy work, and these programs need support at the federal, state and local levels (p. 64). They write that schools should make arts integration a priority by providing professional development and access to local artists, and that teacher preparation programs should make arts integration a requirement (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 64).

Mason, Steedly and Thormann (2008) conducted a study on the relationship between “substantive arts involvement and social, cognitive, and artistic development...” (p. 36). Mason, et al., (2008) found that by including students with disabilities in arts education, the students are given opportunities to make decisions as they create, causing their learning to be more hands-on (p. 37). By giving students with disabilities the opportunity to be hands-on with their artwork, their “learning becomes more participatory, enhancing understanding” (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 38). In their study, Mason, et al. (2008) wanted to examine “teachers’ perception of the arts’ impact on students with disabilities in terms of social, cognitive, academic, and artistic skill development” (p. 39). To do this, Mason, et al. (2008) conducted 34 focus groups over a two-year period in sixteen states with teachers and artists who had experience working with students with a variety of sensory, physical, emotional/behavioral, cognitive and learning disabilities (p. 39-40). As a result, Mason, et al. (2008) found that teachers feel there is great value in including students with disabilities in art activities, as well as integrating the arts across the curriculum (p. 40). Mason, et al. (2008) also discovered that there were three main themes in the focus group data collected, “...with respect to the way in which students’ social, cognitive, academic, and artistic skills developed through engaging in the arts: voice, choice and access” (p. 40). In

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respect to “voice,” they found that the arts can provide students with disabilities an opportunity to find his/her voice (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 40). Mason, et al. (2008) state, “Voice closely links to notions of confidence and self-esteem –when people learn they have something to say, they often want to say it” (p. 41). As for “choice” they found that choice is “central to the art making enterprise” but that students with disabilities often don’t have the opportunity to oversee choices in their lives (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 41). The choice that comes with doing art gives students with disabilities the opportunity for “...decision-making that will enable them to be active and independent members of society” (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 41). In relation to “access” Mason, et al. (2008) found that the teachers in the focus groups agreed that the arts allow students with disabilities to access the general education language arts curriculum, no matter their ability level (p. 41). Mason, et al. (2008) writes that the arts can “level the playing field” and “meet students where they are” (p. 41).

Hillier, Greher, Poto, and Dougherty (2012) conducted a study to see to what extent does participation in music programs, benefit students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), focusing on challenges for students with ASD, specifically: self-esteem, anxiety, and attitudes towards toward and relationships with peers (p. 201-202). The study was conducted on 22 high functioning adolescents and young adults with ASD in two groups, where both groups experienced the same program curriculum and an overlap of program staff (Hillier, et al., 2012, p. 202-203). The students involved participated in a music program called “SoundScape” which was an eight-week program of 90-minute weekly music sessions, where they worked in groups to produce a short movie or soundtrack (Hillier, et al., 2012, p. 203-204). Hillier, et al. (2012) writes, “The program curriculum required minimal musical ability and aimed to present many opportunities to experience success, acceptance from peers, and accomplishment” (p. 205). The

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students with disabilities and their parents completed pre- and post-test surveys before and after the music program. As a result, Hillier, et al. (2012) found that the students who participated in the music program were positively impacted in the following ways: higher self-esteem, improved attitudes towards peers, and in lower self-reported anxiety (p. 209).

## Example Programs Where Art is Included in Special Education

The following four sources present example programs where including the arts in special education programs has shown beneficial to students with disabilities.

Schwartz and Pace (2008) examine a partnership between the special education teacher preparation program at Hofstra University and a school district in Long Island, NY where students from the University run an afterschool program for eighth grade special education students. The program initially emphasized supporting the students in math and literacy in line with state standards and the students' IEP goals (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 50). Schwartz and Pace (2008) present a review of the current literature on the effectiveness of afterschool programming, as well as the importance of incorporating art into both the regular school day and afterschool programs. They found that the research shows that students who participate in afterschool programs have improved attitudes towards school, higher school attendance rates and better work habits (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 51). They also found that there are specific elements that contribute to a successful afterschool program including: structure, caring adults, supportive peer relationships, provide a sense of belonging, chances to be successful, opportunities to learn skills needed in school, and positive behavior models (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 51-52). Next, Schwartz and Pace (2008) present that the literature states that implementing arts into both the regular school day and in afterschool programming helped to improve student academic learning (p. 52).

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Schwartz and Pace (2008) describe a specific project that the University students completed with the special education students where they infused arts instruction into the afterschool academic tutorial program. The project included having the students attend a local art museum where they viewed an exhibit showing social and political issues and then made collages to present their own world view. These collages provided the special education students with an opportunity to express themselves in a nonverbal manner (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 53). Schwartz and Pace (2008) report that the University students could learn more about their students with this project than with any other lesson they had ever completed before (p. 54). The project gave the students with disabilities an opportunity to communicate about the world around them without having to rely solely upon written or spoken language (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 54).

Jennifer Durham (2010), writes about The Lab School of Washington (LSW) which was founded by Sally L. Smith in 1967 when Smith could not find an appropriate school to educate her learning-disabled son (p. 59). The LSW has been educating students with learning disabilities using an arts-based curriculum for over fifty years (Durham, 2010, p. 59). Durham (2010) writes, “Sally Smith’s Lab School of Washington (LSW) is an internationally recognized model for teaching students with moderate to severe learning disabilities...teaching approximately 600 children per year ranging from first to twelfth grade...” (p. 59).

Durham (2010) describes how Sally Smith felt it was necessary to design a program where the arts were infused into all aspects of the curriculum because the arts can be used to, “...ignite motivate, and excite students” (p. 59). Durham (2010) also writes how Smith’s program promotes the fact that, “Self-worth, confidence, and self-esteem, often negatively affected by prior school experiences, are increased when students find success in art form and

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develop a sense of accomplishment” (p. 59). At LSW, students participate in two art classes each day and as they progress through the grade levels, the art classes become more complex, building on what was taught in prior years (Durham, 2010, p. 59).

Durham (2010) explains that LSW conducted their own research to observe academic progress of the students over time (p. 60). This research has lead them to believe that art is a very valuable tool when teaching students with disabilities (Durham, 2010, p. 60). The research conducted was based on student assessment scores using the Woodcock Johnson-Revised Tests of Achievement (WJ-R) (Durham, 2010, p. 60). They found that over a period of five years, students in their program had improved in the WJ-R Reading and Writing subtests (Durham, 2010, p. 60). It was also found that students who received their education at LSW starting in primary school scored significantly higher in the Broad Knowledge cluster and Reading Vocabulary subtest, compared to students who did not start at LSW until seventh grade or above (Durham, 2010, p. 60). The students who received an education with the arts embedded throughout the early part of their academic career performed better than the students without an early arts background.

Wexler (2011) discusses how art educators are now having to include students of all abilities in their art classrooms and how these educators are seeking answers from a variety of sources on how best to serve these students. Wexler (2011) provides an example of a program called Arts-2-gether, serving public school children, aged 12 to 19 years old, with developmental disabilities (p. 54). Arts-2-gether is a program founded by Very Special Arts (VSA), the international organization on arts and disability (Wexler, 2011, p. 56). According to Wexler (2011), “Arts-2-gether offers experiences for children and adolescents with disabilities through one-on-one mentorship with trained art educators and therapists” (p. 56). The Arts-2-gether

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program was offered during the afterschool hours in a variety of environments in order to give their participants an opportunity to have learning experiences away from their school sites (Wexler, 2011, p. 56). Wexler (2011) writes about the Arts-2-gether participants, “The artworks of children with developmental disabilities have not been tentative; the children artists have represented the urgent seeking for a place of belonging populated by peers and adults who befriend them” (p. 57). In conclusion, Wexler (2011) insists that in teaching art to students with disabilities, the students must have the opportunity to learn from “first-hand explorations, rather than second-hand notions of what teachers think they should learn” (p. 67).

In a final example of an arts integrated special education program, Heitin (2014), describes a program called Everyday Arts for Special Education (EASE). EASE is a program developed and administered by a New York City based non-profit, the Urban Arts Partnership. The program consists of bringing teaching artists (musicians, theater actors, and visual artists) into special education classrooms to mentor special education teachers on how to integrate the arts into their teaching and curriculums (Heitin, 2014, p. 12).

Heitin (2014) provides an example of how a school district (New York City’s District 75) has successfully implemented EASE into their special education classrooms. District 75 serves approximately 23,000 special education students with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, emotional disabilities, and multiple disabilities (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). Heitin (2014) writes how, “the district received a \$4.6 million federal Investing in Innovation, or i3, grant—an impressive amount by arts education standards—to offer professional development in EASE at 10 schools and to study the program’s effects along the way” (p. 1). Heitin (2014) reports that Rob Horowitz, the associate director of the Center for the Arts Education Research at Teachers College, Columbia University, heads up the research

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studies on the EASE program (p. 13). Horowitz states, “...there’s convincing evidence EASE has succeeded in improving elementary students’ academic, socialization, and communication skills” (Heitin, 2014, p. 1). Horowitz explains, “As of now, the results have been encouraging...The evidence is strong so far that, in fact, these activities are helping kids communicate and develop socialization skills in new ways” (Heitin, 2014, p. 13). The results from Horowitz’s research from 2012-23 show that between 77 and 84 percent of students participating in the EASE program have made progress in communication, socialization, compliance with directions, time spent on task and engagement in school activities (Heitin, 2014, p. 13). As a result, the Los Angeles school district (serving 640,000 students) is now in the process of piloting part of the EASE program to help redesign how the district includes students with special needs in their general education settings (Heitin, 2014, p. 1).

Heitin (2014) writes that many teachers involved in the EASE program have expressed that it is something that anyone can learn, and that it is even user friendly in very challenging special education settings (p. 12). The teachers attend professional development opportunities as well as have artist mentors come into their classrooms (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). One teacher that Heitin (2014) writes about describes that, “EASE differs from some other arts-integration programs in that the arts are not an add-on—they’re the organizing framework for each lesson” (p. 12).

Many of the special education students in New York City’s District 75 are “working on social-emotional or behavioral goals—maintaining self-regulation, following directions, taking turns, and communicating with peers” (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). The EASE program allows for teachers to be flexible so they can differentiate the lessons to meet the needs of individual learners as each of the EASE activities focuses on communication, social skills, group work, and

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fun (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). Kristen Engebretsen, arts education program manager at Americans for the Arts, a national arts advocacy group stated, “Quality research for arts education with special-needs students is really hard to come by. It’s such a small niche” (Heitin, 2014, p. 13).

## Summary

Research shows that including the arts in the classroom provides benefits to both general education and special education students. The arts allow students of all ability levels to gain access to curriculums that may have been traditionally taught through written and spoken language. The arts have shown to provide support for students, allowing them to succeed academically and socially. Though many extensive studies exist regarding including the arts into general education, such as the comprehensive documents: *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Fiske, 1999) and *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002), a comparable amount of research is still needed to support the need for including the arts into special education.

## **Chapter 3 Method**

### **Research Approach**

This research study utilized a qualitative methods approach. It compared teacher, parent and artist interview data from a nine-week music program, facilitated by an arts organization in Northern California, serving students with disabilities ages 3 through 23. This research study was designed to see if there were any improvements in student Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals at the end of the nine-week program. The researcher conducted interviews with teachers, parents, and artists, as well as conducted student observations during the both non-music classes and the music program classes. Data was collected in the form of: 1) a document review of student IEPs, 2) teacher, parent, and artist interviews, and 3) classroom observations of the non-music classroom and the music program classes.

The nine-week music program consisted of one music class session per week, lasting 30 minutes per session. The same artist taught the lessons each week and each participant was offered the same program curriculum throughout the course of the program. The artist was a classically trained musician provided by the arts organization.

### **Ethical Standards**

This study adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), who approved this proposal (The IRBPHS assigned number is 10392).

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### **Access and Permissions**

The Executive Director of the arts organization provided a letter of support for the researcher to conduct this study. The school administrator at the site granted written permission for the researcher conducting this study. Consent forms for interviews and observations were obtained from teachers, parents, and artists included in this study. Student assent forms were obtained from students included in this study. Parental consent was obtained for each student included in the study, including parent permission for access to student IEPs. Each teacher, parent, artist, and student involved in this study was assigned a pseudonym to protect any identifying information from being linked to the data.

### **Sample and Site**

This study was conducted at a Title I, K-8 public school located in a large suburb of Northern California. During the 2015-16 school year, the school served 731 students of which 52.5% were English language learners and 77.7% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The sample for this study included 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with mild to moderate learning disabilities in a self-contained special day class. There were 3 females and 5 males in the self-contained class and the ages of the students ranged from 8 – 11 years old.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

A document review of participating student IEPs was conducted by the researcher to collect information on student present levels and annual goals, which allowed the researcher to establish a baseline for each student in the study. The teacher, parents and artist were then interviewed by the researcher prior to the start of the nine-week music program. The teacher was interviewed with the goal of learning more about each student, as well as to select one IEP goal for the researcher to focus on for each student throughout the research study. The parents were

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interviewed to learn more about the student, his/her strengths, any parent concerns about their child, and how they thought the music program would help their child with an identified IEP goal. The artist was interviewed to learn more about the artist's plans for the nine-week music program.

Prior to the start of the nine-week music program the researcher conducted observations of the 3-5 grade special day class during regular, non-music class, lessons. These observations allowed the researcher to establish a baseline of the selected student IEP goals during the regular, non-music class. Once the nine-week music program began, the researcher conducted two classroom observations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade special day class in the research study during non-music class lessons. During the nine-week music program, Dominican University of California research students observed and video recorded all nine of the music program classes. The researchers used a classroom observation protocol tool to take notes on what was observed in the classroom, including the artist's instruction, student behavior, and observations of each student in the study related to their IEP goals. Upon the completion of the nine-week music program, the researcher conducted a final observation of a non-music class lesson to assess each student on their selected IEP goal. The researcher then interviewed the teacher to follow up on student progress throughout the music program, linking student progress specifically to the selected IEP goals. Finally, the researcher conducted an interview with the music teacher to gather his overall observational data about the music program and see where he felt each student was in relation to their identified IEP goal.

## Data Analysis Approach

Information was gathered using the data from the student IEPs, teacher, artist, and parent interviews, and classroom observations. Teacher, parent, and artist interview information and

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student observations were analyzed to determine if the students included in the study stayed at their baseline, improved upon, or met their IEP goals.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### Description of Site, Individuals, Data

The participants in this study included three elementary-aged students from a 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade special day class (SDC) of eight students with mild to moderate disabilities. The nine-week program consisted of one music class session per week, lasting 30 minutes per session. The same artist taught the lessons each week and all three participants were offered the same program curriculum throughout the course of the program. The artist was a classically trained musician provided by the arts organization. Signed consent was obtained from the parents/guardians of the three participants at the start of the study. To protect confidentiality, students were assigned a pseudonym.

#### Participant One: Carmen

Carmen was a Hispanic, 9-year-old female with a primary disability of intellectual disability due to a chromosomal abnormality. A teacher interview at the start of the study identified Carmen's strengths as being a hard worker and always trying her best. Carmen's teacher identified areas of concern for Carmen including her low self confidence in herself as a learner and her tendency to shut down if something needs to be corrected. In a parent interview, her mother shared that Carmen enjoys puzzles, singing and dancing. The mother's main concern for Carmen was her preference to play by herself instead of socializing with her peers.

The IEP goal identified as a focus throughout the research study for Carmen was verbalizing her wants and needs. The exact goal states: "Carmen will verbalize her wants and

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needs throughout the day across settings without prompts for basic needs (bathroom, water, help on academic task) with 50% accuracy over 20 school days.”

### *Observations in the SDC Prior to Music Class*

The researcher conducted one observation of Carmen in the SDC during the regular, non-music class prior to the start of the nine-week music program. The observation was conducted during a 30-minute period. During this time, the SDC students participated in whole group circle time activities, which included the morning calendar routine, the daily schedule, taking attendance, and singing songs. The students were all expected to remain seated on the carpet throughout these activities. During this observation, the total number of occurrences where Carmen verbalized her wants and needs without prompting from an adult was recorded. During this observation, Carmen was observed verbalizing her wants and needs on two different occasions (asking to use the restroom and asking the teacher for help on a math problem).

### *Observations of Music Class*

Observations of Carmen were conducted in the SDC during eight sessions of the music classes during the nine-week music program. Carmen was absent for one session. The average length of time for each music class was 30 minutes. During these music classes, the students participated in whole group music activities lead by the musician from the arts organization. The students were expected to follow along with the musician and participate in his music activities. During each observation, the total number of occurrences where Carmen verbalized her wants and needs, without prompting from an adult, were recorded.

Throughout the eight music classes, Carmen verbalized her wants and needs without

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prompting from an adult an average of 1.25 times per session (see Table 1 below). Though, in Session #1, Carmen verbalized her wants and needs without prompting from an adult on four different occasions: 1) asking the music teacher for clarification on his instructions, 2) letting the music teacher know that she did not have a turn, 3) asking the music teacher the meaning of a word, and 4) announcing to the class that she can complete a specific skill. In Session #2, Carmen verbalized her wants and needs on two different occasions, first, she let the music teacher know that the student next her did not get a turn, and second, she stood up and volunteered to model a complex task that was challenging for her classmates. In Session #3, Carmen verbalized her wants and needs on two different occasions, once, asking if she can have her chair back, and then again, asking the music teacher if they can sing a specific song. During Sessions #4 and 5, Carmen did not verbalize any wants and needs. During Sessions #6 and #7, Carmen verbalized her wants and needs one time each class. During Session #6, Carmen asked the music teacher if she could trade instruments with another student, and during session #7, she asks a classroom aide if she can put on her sweatshirt.

Table 1

*Number of Occurrences Verbalized Wants and Needs*

Observation	Type	Length (min:sec)	No. of Occurrences
Session #1	Music	28:18	4
Session #2	Music	36:10	2
Session #3	Music	29:43	2
Session #4	Music	32:28	0
Session #5	Music	17:59	0
Session #6	Music	30:00	1
Session #7	Music	26:42	1
Session #8	Music	24:42	0

***Observations in SDC After Conclusion of Music Class***

An observation of Carmen was conducted in the SDC during the regular, non-music, class after the completion of the nine-week music program. The observation was on one day for a period of 45 minutes. During this observation, the students participated in a whole group morning meeting sitting on the carpet and then small group math centers at tables. During this observation, the total number of occurrences where Carmen verbalized her wants and needs, without prompting from an adult, was recorded. During this observation, Carmen was observed verbalizing her wants and needs on 3 different occasions, asking if she can stand while singing songs on the carpet, requesting a specific song to be sung, and asking her teacher if she could use an iPad.

**Participant Two: Luis**

Luis was a Hispanic, 8-year-old male with a primary disability of intellectual disability due to Down syndrome and a secondary disability of speech and language impairment. A teacher interview at the start of the study identified that Luis's strength included communicating his needs effectively using hand gestures. Luis's teacher identified areas of concern for Luis as his protests when an assigned task is too long or too hard, his tendency to get into physical areas he is not supposed to be in, and difficulty remaining engaged in tasks. Often, this resulted in Luis removing himself physically from a designated task to go into areas, such as a closet in another part of the classroom or the teacher's desk. In a parent interview, his mother shared that Luis liked to learn about things by observing and imitating. The mother's main concern for Luis was his speech and communication, specifically, she wanted Luis to practice using his speech to communicate his needs rather than using hand gestures alone.

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The IEP goal identified as a focus throughout the study for Luis was following teacher and staff directions with no more than 2 repetitions. The exact goal states: “During small group instruction (centers) or during circle time (carpet), Luis will follow teacher/staff directions in simple sentences (verbal, with visuals or both) with no more than 2 repetitions of directions with 80% accuracy.”

### ***Observations in the SDC Prior to Music Class***

The researcher conducted two observations of Luis in the SDC during the regular, non-music, class prior to the start of the nine-week music program. The observations were conducted on the same day for two 30 minute sessions. During both 30-minute sessions, the quantity of reminders per behavioral incident needed for Luis to stay engaged and/or remain on task, were collected (see Table 2 below). The quantities of reminders were grouped into two categories according to how many reminders Luis needed per behavioral incident:

1. *One to Two Reminders*: Behavioral incidents where Luis needed 1-2 reminders to stay engaged and/or remain on task.
2. *Three or More Reminders*: Behavioral incidents where Luis needed 3 or more reminders to stay engaged and/or remain on task.

*One to Two Reminders* per behavioral incident was acceptable behavior within Luis’s IEP goal, whereas *Three or More Reminders* was considered problematic.

During the first 30-minute session, the SDC students participated in whole group circle time activities, which included the morning calendar routine, the daily schedule, taking attendance, and singing songs. The students were all expected to remain seated on the carpet throughout these activities. During this thirty minute session, Luis was observed needing *One to*

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*Two Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task on two different occasions. The behaviors that needed *One to Two Reminders* on these two occasions included: leaving the group to play in the sink at the back of the classroom, two reminders needed, and crawling around on the floor when asked to sit down on the carpet, one reminder needed. Luis was observed needing *Three or More Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task on four different occasions. The behaviors that needed *Three or More Reminders* on these four occasions included: curling up in a ball on the carpet, four reminders needed, lying down when asked to sit on the carpet, three reminders needed, putting his arm on another student, four reminders needed, and getting up from the carpet to sit on the teacher's chair, three reminders.

During the second 30-minute session, the SDC students participated in a science lesson. This was a whole group lesson with the teacher leading instruction in the front of the class and the students seated at their individual desks. Luis was observed needing *One to Two Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task on four different occasions. The behaviors that needed *One to Two Reminders* on these four occasions included: sitting under his desk, one reminder needed, rolling on the floor and pulling a classmate's chair, one reminder needed, distracted from the lesson by another student, two reminders needed, not putting supplies away when asked, one reminder, and taking the teacher's personal belongings from her desk, two reminders needed. Luis was observed needing *Three or More Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task during one occasion. The behavior that needed *Three or More Reminders* was refusing to move from one task in the lesson to the next, 3 reminders needed.

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Table 2

*Number of Reminders Needed Prior to Music Class*

Observation	Type	Length (min:sec)	1-2 Reminders Needed*	3 + Reminders Needed**
Session #1	Non-Music	30:00	2	4
Session #2	Non-Music	30:00	5	1

*One to Two Reminders\* per behavioral incident was acceptable behavior within Luis's IEP goal, whereas Three or More Reminders\*\* was considered problematic.*

***Observations of Music Class***

Observations of Luis were conducted in the SDC during six music classes during the nine-week music program. The average length of time for each music class was 30 minutes. During these music classes, the students participated in whole group music activities led by the musician from the arts organization. The students were expected to follow along with the musician and participate in his music activities. During each observation, the quantity of reminders needed for Luis to stay engaged and/or remain on task were collected. The quantities of reminders were grouped into two categories according to how many reminders Luis needed per behavioral incident: *One to Two Reminders* and *Three or More Reminders* (see Table 3 below).

Throughout the six music classes, Luis needed *One to Two Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task an average of 8 times and *Three or More Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task an average of 1 time.

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Table 3

*Number of Reminders Needed in Music Class*

Observation	Type	Length (min:sec)	One to Two Reminders*	Three or More Reminders**
Session #1	Music	36:10	12	0
Session #2	Music	29:43	13	1
Session #3	Music	38:28	8	1
Session #4	Music	17:59	2	1
Session #5	Music	26:42	10	1
Session #6	Music	25:40	3	2

*One to Two Reminders\* per behavioral incident was acceptable behavior within Luis's IEP goal, whereas Three or More Reminders\*\* was considered problematic.*

During the six music class observations, Luis most often needed *One or Two Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task during transitions and when the music teacher was giving instructions. For example, the music teacher would transition from one activity to the next by having each student take turns touching a visual schedule showing the next activity. During this time, as Luis waited for his turn and then for the other students to complete this task, he would beat his drum loudly or place the drum on the top of his head. Also, when the music teacher gave instructions for an activity, Luis would often beat his drum during this time, interrupting the music teacher. However, as previously indicated, one-two reminders were within the acceptable range, as per his IEP.

Luis would most often need *Three or More Reminders* during specific activities during the music class such as Long & Short, an activity where the students had to follow the music teacher's motions for long and short notes, Counting Game, an activity where the students played various rhythms that increased in complexity, and Soft Medium Loud, an activity where the students had to follow the music teacher's instructions and play their drums softly, medium and

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loudly. During these music activities, the music teacher would often model a specific rhythm or drumming pattern and he would expect the students to repeat his actions. During these activities, some of the behavioral incidents included: Luis beating his drum while the music teacher was demonstrating part of the activity, Luis taking another student's instrument, and Luis kneeling on his chair or tipping his desk all the way forward.

### ***Observations in SDC After Conclusion of Music Class***

An observation of Luis was conducted in the SDC during the regular, non-music, class after the completion of the nine-week music program. The observation was on one day for a period of 30 minutes. During this observation, the students participated in a whole group craft activity lead by their SDC teacher. During this observation, Luis was highly engaged in the craft activity and was observed needing minimal reminders, verbal, visual or both, to stay engaged and remain on task. The quantities of reminders were grouped into two categories according to how many reminders Luis needed per behavioral incident: *One to Two Reminders* and *Three or More Reminders* (see Table 4 below).

Luis was observed needing *One to Two Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task on two different occasions. The behaviors that needed *One to Two Reminders* on these two occasions included: taking an art supply that was not his, two reminders needed, and going into areas of the classroom that were off limits, two reminders needed. During this observation, Luis was not observed having a behavioral incident needing *Three or More Reminders* to stay engaged and/or remain on task. Additional observations of Luis were attempted for more

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comparison data, but Luis was pulled from class one day for occupational therapy and absent another.

Table 4

*Number of Reminders Needed After Conclusion of Music Class*

Observation	Type	Length (min:sec)	1-2 Reminders Needed*	3 + Reminders Needed**
Session #1	Non-Music	30:00	2	0

*One to Two Reminders\* per behavioral incident was acceptable behavior within Luis's IEP goal, whereas Three or More Reminders\*\* was considered problematic.*

### **Participant Three: John**

John was an African American, 9-year-old male with a primary disability of autism spectrum disorder, fragile X syndrome, and a secondary disability of intellectual disability. Through parent interview, the researcher learned that John has cognitive, social and emotional delays, as well as fine and gross motor delays. A teacher interview at the start of the study identified John's strengths as a lover of music and his ability to better sustain tasks during music class. John's teacher identified areas of concern for John including his sensitivity, his short attention span, and his lack of self-advocacy skills, for example, using his words when another student is bothering him. John's parent shared that he loves music and he finds it very engaging. The parent's main concern for John was his ability to be independent in social and independent living skills. The IEP goal identified as a focus throughout the study for John was participating in cooperative activities with his peers. The exact goal states: "John will participate in cooperative activities with peers for 18 min thru observation in 3 out of 5 trials."

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### *Observations in the SDC Prior to Music Class*

The researcher conducted one observation of John in the SDC during the regular, non-music class prior to the start of the nine-week music program. The observation was conducted for a 30-minute period. During this time, the SDC students worked in small groups in math centers. In the math center, the students were expected to work on math activities in a binder with a teacher or aide seated at the table to assist when needed. During this observation, John was observed getting up from the table two times. On the first occasion, John left his math center and walked around the room in circles, fluttering his hands for five minutes. John was eventually redirected to sit back down at the math center. Then, after staying seated for three minutes, John left the math center again and laid down on the carpet. After a verbal warning from his teacher, John got up from the carpet and began to circle around the room, flapping his hands and wiggling his finger. After another verbal warning by his teacher, John went back to his math center and resumed work in his binder.

### *Observations of Music Class*

Observations of John were conducted in the SDC during all nine sessions of the music program. The average length of time for each music class was 30 minutes. During these music classes, the students participated in whole group music activities lead by the musician from the arts organization. The students were expected to follow along with the musician and participate in his music activities. Throughout the nine-week program, John was observed as being actively engaged in each session of the music program, participating in all activities, staying seated and not getting up from his seat or lying down on the floor.

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### *Observations in SDC After Conclusion of Music Class*

An observation of John was conducted in the SDC during the regular, non-music, class after the completion of the nine-week music program. The observation was on one day for a period of 45 minutes. During this observation, the students participated in a whole group morning meeting seated on the carpet and then small group math centers at tables. During this observation, John was observed participating in the morning routine by going to the front of the class and announcing the student jobs for the day, then sitting on the carpet for a short amount of time until he stood up to walk in circular motions around the classroom. After five minutes of walking in circular motions, he laid down on the ground on and off for twenty minutes.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion**

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The arts provide an engaging experience for students with disabilities in the classroom. In this study, a music program brought a more hands-on, interactive experience to a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade, mild to moderate special education students with multiple disabilities. The engaging features that naturally come from music and art create a more inviting and accessible learning environment that is fun for students. This research study aimed at measuring the impact of a music program over the course of nine-weeks on three participants with multiple disabilities. The research showed that the music program offered benefits to the participants socially and behaviorally. This research study found that music and the arts are beneficial to students with disabilities and that more research is needed to show the importance of bringing music and art into the special education classroom.

### **Participant One: Carmen**

Overall, Carmen was more vocal in communicating her wants and needs in the beginning of the music program, than towards the end. Carmen's IEP goal identified as a focus during this study was verbalizing her wants and needs. The types of wants and needs she communicated stayed consistent whether it was music class or regular, non-music class. Carmen's baseline towards this IEP goal stayed the same. Carmen was observed being very excited about music class during Session #1, this along with Session #2 and #3, may account for the increase in her vocalizations. As the music class continued throughout the nine weeks, Carmen was observed losing interest in the activities and needing more verbal reminders from teachers and staff to stay engaged and participating. Carmen's teacher reported in a post-program interview that she saw

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Carmen participate fully in the different activities offered in the music program and that she has since made improvements in self advocating for herself in class.

### **Participant Two: Luis**

For Luis, the rate of *Three or More Reminders* went down during the music class sessions compared to the first observation of Luis in the SDC prior to the start of the music class. It was also observed that during several of the music class sessions, Luis had 10-13 behavioral incidents that required *One to Two Reminders*, acceptable behavior within his IEP goal, while the rate of *Three or More Reminders* remained at one behavioral incident. Many of the *One to Two Reminders* were needed during the delivery of directions by the music teacher or during transitions between one activity to the next. This shows that Luis still needed reminders to stay engaged and/or remain on task during music class sessions, but not as many behavioral incidents required *Three or More Reminders*. Luis's IEP goal identified as a focus during this study was following teacher and staff directions. During music class sessions, Luis was able to get back to the task at hand with fewer reminders, thus, meeting his IEP goal. Also, comparing the two non-music observations of Luis, one prior to the music class and one after the conclusion of music class, the number of behavior incidents requiring *Three or More Reminders* went down from four to zero. Though, it is noted that during the observation of Luis after the conclusion of the music program, Luis was participating in a craft activity. The rate of behavior incidents requiring *Three or More Reminders* may have decreased to zero for this observation due to the fact that the activity was an arts based craft activity that Luis found highly engaging. Luis's teacher reported in a post-program interview that she saw Luis making progress in terms of following directions and making choices.

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### **Participant Three: John**

John presented as a student with different needs regarding this study. The researcher was informed at the start of the study, by both his teacher and parent, that John loved music and that he found it very engaging. By comparing John's behaviors in the non-music class observations, prior to the music program and after the conclusion of the music class, with the behaviors during music class, it became very apparent that John was highly engaged during the music class, reaffirming the teacher and parent comments prior to the start of the music program. John's IEP goal identified as a focus during this study was to participate in cooperative activities with peers. John was quite engaged in the music class sessions, and the common behaviors seen in the non-music observations, such as walking in circles, flapping his hands, and lying on the floor, were not seen during the music class sessions. John met his goal by participating alongside his peers during the music class sessions. John's teacher reported in a post-program interview that John is a musical student and even though it may not be obvious that he enjoys it, he really benefits from it.

### **Comparison of Findings to the Literature**

The existing literature shows that students who are exposed to the arts are provided engaging learning experiences, allowing students to create meaningful opportunities for learning that develop their cognitive, social and personal abilities (Fiske, 1999, p. ix). This was observed with Luis. Luis needed fewer reminders per behavioral event in the music classes to stay engaged in the activity. His personal ability to remain engaged could meet the requirements of his IEP goal during music class. When including students with disabilities in arts education, the students are given opportunities to make decisions as they create, causing their learning to be more engaging and hands-on (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 37). This was observed with John. During

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music class sessions, John was highly engaged and therefore, stayed seated at his desk, actively participating in the music activities rather than his observed behaviors during non-music activities, walking in circles, flapping his arms, and lying on the floor. Hillier, et al. (2012) found that the students who participated in their music program were positively impacted in the following ways: higher self-esteem, improved attitudes towards peers, and in lower self-reported anxiety (p. 209). This was observed with Carmen. Even though the research did not see improvement towards her selected IEP goal, in an interview after the conclusion of the music program, her teacher observed that Carmen was making an increased effort to self-advocate for herself.

Though the researcher was unable to identify academic growth for the participants in this study, since the selected IEPs goals were based on social and behavioral needs, there is existing evidence demonstrating how the arts can offer benefit to students with disabilities academically. One example, Catterall, et al. (1999) found that the students involved in arts had positive academic developments in all grades (8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>), and that students who were involved in instrumental music during the middle and high school years show significantly higher levels of math proficiency, compared to students who were not involved in instrumental music (p. 2). In a second study, Durham (2010) found that students who received an education with the arts embedded throughout the early part of their academic career performed better than the students without an early arts background (p. 60).

This research study also showed that there is still a continued need for research documenting the benefits of including the arts in education for students with disabilities. Studies included in the literature review suggest a need to continue to search for the best models of instruction for students with disabilities (Durham, 2010, p. 60). Durham (2010) suggests that

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more qualitative research is needed to understand the benefit of the arts and the areas it can enhance student learning (p. 60). Catterall, et al., (1999) agreed with this statement and added that even though their research displayed a positive association between student involvement in the arts with academic and social outcomes, future research is needed to see what art can do for students in relation to their development (p. 17).

## **Limitations/Gaps in the Research**

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, due to parent teacher conference week at the school in the study, the music program was only nine weeks long, rather than the customary ten weeks of the program. Also, the music program was only once a week and the length of time for each music class was not always the same. The musician's goal was to teach for 30 minutes each class but the lengths of the sessions ranged from 18 minutes to 36 minutes in length. The schedule of activities in the music class sessions varied from week to week causing the differences in the lengths of music class sessions. As a result, shorter sessions may have resulted in less data observed and collected for each student. Another limitation found in this study were the student absences. Throughout the course of the nine-week program, Carmen was absent once and Luis was absent for two music sessions, as well as for the formal observation after the conclusion of the music program. The researcher was able to conduct a separate observation of Luis after the conclusion of the music program but it was not during the same time and same activities as during the observation of him prior to the start of the music program. The final limitation was related to the parent interviews. The researcher had planned to conduct parent interviews prior to and upon the conclusion of the music program. The researcher had to rely on an interpreter to schedule and conduct these interviews for two of the participants. Also, due to the constraints of both the researcher and the

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interpreter, the researcher was not able to conduct the parent interviews upon the conclusion of the nine-week music program.

## Implications for Future Research

Implications from this study confirm that the need for research on the topic of the benefits of the arts on special education student remains valid. Future research is needed to examine and support the elements of art education that should be continued and applied to support students with disabilities to support their academic, social and behavioral goals as identified in their IEPs. As this is part of a longitudinal study, researchers will continue to work with the arts organization to measure the short term and long term benefits of the arts program on special education students.

Possible next steps for research include: Could another art form be used with the students, such as drama, painting or sculpture? How would this new art form differ in its benefits to students? The study could be conducted with a different group of students, different ages, different environments, and different music/art teachers.

If the researcher was continuing to collect data on the benefit of arts education for these students, the following is suggested: For Carmen, if the activities in the music class were more varied, would she stay interested and engaged throughout the course of the nine-week music program? For Luis, if the transition times and verbal instructions were limited, would his number of *One to Two Reminders* be reduced? For John, since he was so engaged when involved with music, can music be implemented throughout his school day to maintain his engagement? For example, if he wore headphones with music playing during non-music class, would the amount of time he is up out of his seat be reduced?

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### **Overall Significance of the Study**

This research study adds to the current knowledge of the benefits of including the arts in education, specifically music, for special education students. This study provided evidence that there continues to be a need for further research to find ways for students with disabilities to increase their engagement in the academic setting using the arts. This study showed that students with disabilities could sustain in learning tasks when they had access to music. This study is important as it displays examples of students with a variety of disabilities in an arts program. This study offered data showing how an art program, in the form of music, supported students with their IEP goals. Though this research study fills a gap in the research literature on the topic, more research is needed to add to the current knowledgebase documenting that arts education is beneficial to students with disabilities.

### **About the Author**

Kimberly G. Lloyd received her B.A. in Environmental Studies & Planning from Sonoma State University and is completing her M.S. in Education: Special Education from Dominican University of California. She has both a multiple subject and an education specialist teaching credential. Kimberly G. Lloyd teaches special education at a small rural school in Northern California where lives with her husband and two sons.

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