

Activities for People with Cognitive Disabilities (Higher Functioning)

The Monkey Pats, Pats, Pats His Head

Present this song, demonstrating actions while serving as a model for students to imitate. When singing the last phrase of this song, "Just like you," point your finger to one of the students with cognitive disabilities to indicate that it will be that student's turn next. Ask the student to present another action that represents a behavior a monkey would perform. The student would then serve as the leader for this activity, with other students imitating the action/behavior. If the student perseverates by choosing the same action modeled by the teacher/therapist, one more step is needed to facilitate successful participation:

Lead a discussion in which students are asked where they have seen monkeys. Let them talk about monkeys they have seen in the zoo, in people's homes, on the street, or even possibly in the wild for people who have had that opportunity. Allow students to demonstrate actions/behaviors that they remember seeing the monkey exhibit. Talk about each example and allow the student who shared the example to serve as a leader for others to imitate. Following this review about behaviors that may be noted in monkeys, it should be easier for the students to share ideas about actions/behaviors to incorporate into the song.

Examples of actions/behaviors may include climbing a tree, swinging from a branch, eating a banana, cracking open a coconut and drinking milk from it and scratching under its arms. Students may also share sounds made by a monkey.

Sakura

To better understand the learning needs of people with cognitive disabilities, here is an activity you could try with people who do not have cognitive disabilities.

Present the Japanese song *Sakura* at a singing tempo. Next, ask your audience to sing along with you after performing it for them only once. Most of them will be able to sing the phrase *Sakura* twice, but will not remember any more words or be able to continue singing along. Ask them what you would need to do to help them learn the song. Four considerations would make this activity accessible to people with cognitive disabilities:

1. Repetition
2. Chunking (presenting small bits of information at a time and then chaining them together)
3. Slow rate of presentation
4. Making what is abstract become concrete (i.e. Use pictures to correspond to the Japanese words. Use sign language or gestures, or actually teach the Japanese meaning for each word or phrase).

Get in the Party Game

Tell students that you are hosting a party and would like them to bring along some music. Explain to them that you will be screening your guests to choose who will get to come in for the party. Explain to half of the class in private what trick you will use to allow them into your party. Do not tell the other half of the class what the trick is. Invite each student to the party and ask what item he or she plans to bring. The half of the class that does not know the trick will have to observe and listen closely to try and get into the party. Examples of tricks may include: having your leg crossed when you state what item you plan to bring to the party, a song with a title that begins with the letter 'm', a song about a food item, clearing your throat before stating what music you will bring, a song written or performed by a specific music group.

This activity challenges these students to think outside the box. Direct the attention of students to observe what is done and said by students who are allowed entrance into the party in comparison to what is done or said by the students who are denied entrance to the party. After allowing them to observe a few rounds, provide verbal, eye gaze or gestural cues in an attempt to draw their attention to the trick used to get into the party. You may even exaggerate a physical example if that is the trick – example: if having your leg crossed when you say the song title is the trick, demonstrate yourself getting into the party and exaggerate crossing your leg. If another cue is needed, use your eyes to stare at your leg while crossing it and once again exaggerating that movement. Try to encourage the students to continue to play along and problem solve, rewarding them when they achieve success. Your encouragement may help them avoid frustration which can lead to depression and a sense of failure. Helping them persevere with patience to try to determine the trick may ultimately lead to a sense of mastery and boost their self esteem.

Helpful Ideas for How to Structure Teaching Dance:

Use of Colored Tape on Floor to Show Position

If you are teaching a dance that involves stepping behind and in front of a given point on the floor, use three different colors of tape to designate positions on the floor. For example, use red tape to form a line in front of the starting positions. Use yellow tape to create a line on which they will stand on the starting position. Use green tape to designate the line behind the starting position. You may then tell them to step forward on the red, backward on the green or to return to the yellow.

Chunking

When teaching a series of dance steps, teach one step separately and then teach the next step separately. Wait until the student is secure in performing each step separately before sequencing them together. Then learn the next step and secure it. Chain that step in with the second step in the first set of two steps. Wait until the chaining of those two steps is secure and review

performance of the first two steps which were chained together. Finally, practice all three steps together. Be patient and use much repetition, along with verbal cues. Once the student is secure with performing the steps, add in the music and separately present each learning series previously described. It is important to include each of the connection steps for these students. It is also important to first learn the steps apart from the musical context and then to practice each set of steps separately within the musical context by trying to chain it all together.

Harp

We have found harp to be an easier instrument for these students to learn than piano or guitar. The position of holding hands at the midline of the body may be the feature that makes harp easily accessible. The use of red strings for C and F serve as markers which help students remain aware of spatial relationships.

Color Coding

Color coding may be used for keyboard activities, tone chimes, melody bells... You may choose to tape pieces of color on the corresponding instrument and to use a chart with colors to indicate which notes to play, having one color associated with each different note available. Extra color props may be helpful. For example, use strips of paper to represent finger nails and place those strips of paper on the five fingers of one hand to correspond with a five note keyboard position which also has the color coding. Having the finger color line up to match the color on the piano key improves success. Keyboards with blinking lights in which the key itself lights up are much easier to play than keyboards with a light that is placed above each key.

Rhyming Chants

"E G B D F – These are the lines of the treble clef."

This chant may be used to help students name notes on a staff.

Use of Yarn to Cue Attention

To assist students in reading musical notation on the staff, use yarn to depict melodic contour from one note to another in a melody line. You may glue the yarn to the staff paper. Allow students to trace along the yarn with a finger while humming to reflect the melodic contour prior to attempting to sing or play the melodic line.

Adapted Cueing for Tone Chimes

There are several different ways to lead group members in playing tone chimes.

Methods of color-coding:

Tie yarn around the tone chimes, using a different color of yarn for each note. Use a color-coded chart to present the series of notes in the order in which

they appear. When using a baton to cue each note, use a contrasting color on the tip of the baton to help students focus attention to the cue that is being given. For example, if the color-coding is presented on a black background, wrap or paint the tip of the baton with bright yellow or white.

This approach may be adapted from using melody notes to using chords with students who may not be able to keep up with the fast pace of playing notes in a melody line. For example, tie red yarn around all tone chimes in the C chord (CEG). Tie blue yarn around each tone chime in the G chord (GBD). Tie yellow yarn around each tone chime in the F chord (FAC). Seat the students playing tone chimes in the C family together in the center of the room. Seat the students playing tone chimes in the G family together to your right. Seat the students playing tone chimes in the F family together to your left. Cue the students by standing directly in the center of the students with the tone chimes of the C chord to indicate that they should play. Step to your right to indicate that the students with tone chimes in the G chord family should play. Move to your left to indicate that the students with tone chimes in the F chord family should play. You may sing or play an instrument while simultaneously providing these cues. The audience may not even realize that you are using your steps to cue the students to know when to play.

Use of Light-Bulb for Cueing

For students who are too low-functioning to follow directional cues, you may hook light bulbs up to a keyboard to cue them by having a light bulb come on a few seconds before it is time for them to play. You will need to practice ahead of time when cueing in this way because you will need to play the keyboard a few seconds before you want to hear them play their corresponding tone chimes.

Use of Scroll to Help Focus Attention

When leading tone chimes by using a baton to point to symbols indicating to play corresponding tone chime, a scroll affect may help students visually focus. Use a scroll so that only the symbol you are cueing shows.

How to Cue Starting and Stopping

It may be helpful to actually flap your hands in front of you from top to bottom in rhythm to cue the students for how and when to play the tone chimes.