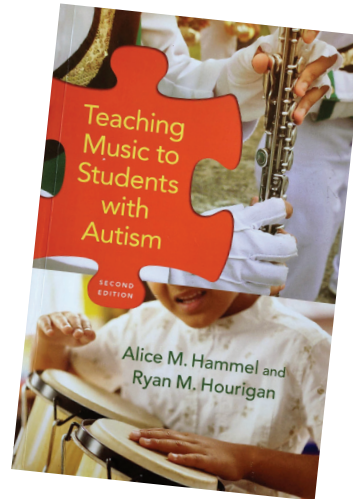


Reviewed by Jennifer WasseMiller

Teaching Music to Students with Autism

Written by Alice M. Hammel and Ryan M. Hourigan
Oxford University Press, 2020



Students on the autism spectrum—some identified, some not—are present in every music classroom across the United States. This second edition of *Teaching Music to Students with Autism* by Alice M. Hammel and Ryan M. Hourigan has been updated to reflect the criteria detailed in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and is a resource that every music educator needs to read. It provides information about how to help students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); many of the strategies in the book will help other students in the classroom as well. Regardless of the type of music situation, the age level, or where you are on your journey of working with students with ASD, this book contains information you can adapt to your situation.

Hammel and Hourigan have created an extensive and practical resource for music educators that presents theory, policy, and research in a sensible and realistic manner. Additionally, they drew vignettes and examples from multiple ages and musical ensembles, not just elementary general music classrooms. Each chapter begins with an overview of topics listed within the first paragraph and concludes with three to five discussion questions along with suggested activities that are helpful during PD/PLC discussions when used as a textbook.

The authors commence by providing an explanation of the ASD diagnosis and the need for a team approach when working with these students. They explain typical intervention and treatment models and describe what those models would look like in a music classroom. They also

cover strategies for collecting data on students with ASD, options for least restrictive environment (LRE), and questions to ask during IEP/504 meetings.

The next several chapters provide insight into communication, cognition, and classroom behavior, and socialization of students with ASD. Every chapter relates to musical experiences, although Chapters 6 through 8 address specific questions regarding how to assist students with ASD to be successful in the music classroom. Snapshots from music educators depicting their “real life” classroom situations fill Chapter 9. Chapter 10 focuses on preservice teacher education. In addition to the normal reference section, Chapter 11 lists and describes myriad resources for music teachers. These include internet resources for organizations and communities as well as apps for communication, scheduling, and teaching/making music. Readers can further their own research by perusing the section on print resources, divided conveniently into articles by practitioners and those from books, dissertations, and research journals.

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In *Teaching Music to Students with Autism*, the authors do an excellent job moving from the broad definition of ASD in the beginning chapters to revealing in subsequent chapters how ASD relates directly to instruction and student learning in the

music classroom (i.e., how ASD might manifest in students, what their responses are to typical music classroom activities, and strategies that might work with them). Each chapter is also designed in a way that encourages readers to explore not just sequentially, but also independently, based on their topic of interest.

I found this book to be a good reminder that with some preplanning and slight modifications, many of the activities educators already use in music instruction—such as “I Love My Little Rooster” and the singing conversations—aid in reciprocated communication and help develop expressive and receptive language. It is important to keep in mind, however, that some students with ASD struggle not only with vocal imitation, but also with physical imitation. Thus, educators must take care to divide class activities into smaller, manageable tasks that facilitate the motor planning that enables imitating fine motor movements. Additionally, providing concrete examples will lead students with ASD to greater understanding of their and their peers’ emotions and facial expressions. This process benefits every student in the class, including multilingual students.

Teaching Music to Students with Autism inspired me to post the following self-reflection questions

from the book beside my computer as a prompt during planning and teaching:

- How many words am I using?
- How fast is my pace?
- Am I making eye contact with my students?
- Does Johnny understand that I am happy with his progress?
- Does Adam understand when I am looking at him to be quiet?
- Am I breaking down my instructions into a logical sequence?

It is easy to become deficit-focused while considering our students’ abilities. This book reminds us to train our lens on their strengths, which ultimately leads to an improved outlook and classroom culture and to greater learning opportunities for all our students. ■

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