

Comparing the Techniques of Music Educators and Speech-Language Pathologists

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Abstract

Many techniques speech-language pathologists (SLPs) use to improve speech sounds are akin to techniques general music and/or choral music educators use to improve text; however, music educators (MEs) and SLPs may not recognize the ways in which their techniques are similar. The purpose of this study was to examine possible connections between techniques used by SLPs to improve speech sounds and techniques used by MEs to improve musical skills related to singing text for K-5 students; and to compare and contrast the views of SLPs and music educators. Questions that guided the study were:

1. What is the nature of the relationship among techniques used by SLPs to improve speech-language skills and techniques used by music educators to improve musical skills related to singing text?
 - a. How are these similar?
 - b. How are these different?
2. How are MEs' and SLPs' opinions about using musical techniques to improve speech-language skills similar or different?

Results of two survey studies (Study A and Study B) were compared. In Study A (2013), Intermediate Units in Pennsylvania distributed a link to an online questionnaire to SLPs (n=44) designed by the researcher. Results indicated techniques in the oral, onset-rime awareness, and visual intervention categories were used most frequently. While musical techniques were employed least, rhythmic activities were incorporated and suggested more than tonal activities. Overall, SLPs had positive attitudes about incorporating musical techniques. Speech-language pathologists with Master's Degrees in speech-language pathology, 1-3 years of experience and American Speech-Language-Hearing (ASHA) certification were the most likely to incorporate music in sessions.

In Study B, Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) Music Districts distributed a link to a reworded version of the online survey used in Study A to MEs (n=22). Results indicated techniques in the musical, oral, and aural intervention categories were used most frequently. Musical techniques were employed most. Tonal activities were incorporated more than rhythmic activities; but rhythmic activities were suggested for future use more than tonal. Overall, MEs use a diverse range of speech-language techniques; and had positive attitudes about incorporating musical techniques to improve speech skills.

Results of the current comparison study found similarities and differences between MEs' and SLPs' practice. Similarities included comparable use and avoidance of a wide range of individual speech-language techniques (MEs and SLPs shared 35.4% of the top 31/130 techniques) and technique categories (high prevalence of oral; moderate prevalence of syllable structure awareness; and low prevalence of technology-assisted and interventions for achieving speech movements). Differences included divergent use of individual techniques and technique categories (MEs used musical and aural more frequently; SLPs used phonemic awareness and visual more frequently). Both MEs and SLPs had positive attitudes about incorporating musical techniques to improve speech skills and that small groups would allow for the most effective results. However, MEs suggested tonal activities for SLPs most; SLPs suggested rhythm activities most.

Findings from this study could help open communication and collaboration between MEs and SLPs. Implications for future studies include further comparisons between MEs and SLPs methods, and investigations into the effectiveness of rhythmic techniques vs. tonal techniques and development of musical techniques using ME and SLP and input.

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Applications to Teaching

Improve K-5 singing enunciation and articulation

Rationale:

1. Elementary and general music classrooms naturally incorporate language-based activities and perform these for audiences
2. Enunciation and articulation are important for students to glean the most from the text-based singing activities for intelligibility by audiences during performances
3. Elementary students identified with speech impairments has risen*
4. The most common speech impairments encountered in schools impede articulation*
5. The recently-adopted Common Core Standards place high importance on Language Arts on a national level

Solutions:

1. Rich musical experiences can be provided using language activities and techniques that can also help improve students' speech-language skills (articulation and phonological awareness)**
 - a. Songs, rhymes, chants, games, books and poems can foster musicianship while naturally improving speech-language skills***
2. Music educators can collaborate with speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to help improve musical skills related to singing text as well as speech-language skills for *all* students.
 - a. Open communication between SLPs and music educators would allow musical techniques and speech-language techniques to be incorporated in more profound ways.
 - b. Speech-Language Pathologists could incorporate musical techniques in their sessions with students; and music educators could incorporate techniques that would help students achieve speech-language outcomes.
 - c. ***A partnership between music educators and SLPs could bolster musical and speech-language skills***

References

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