

LIGHTNING SESSION

ASD & ADHD

Overlapping Characteristics & Teaching Adaptations

In this 2024 MTNA GP3 Lightning Talk, I presented three overlapping characteristics between students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as well as applicable teaching adaptations for these students.

There are growing figures of students diagnosed with ADHD and ASD among the K–12 population. The CDC estimates almost 10% of students aged 3–17 are diagnosed with ADHD while 3% of K–12 students receive ASD-related services. The overlapping traits between the two disorders are important—around 30–50% of students with ASD also have ADHD.

My talk focused on three overlapping traits: sensory sensitivities, emotion dysregulation

and poor executive functioning. I suggested that students with sensory sensitivities could benefit from physical studio or classroom modifications such as using soft or yellow lights, utilizing noise-reducing headphones, soundproofing studio space and removing scent sources. Students with emotion dysregulation, who often have difficulties managing their feelings and emotions, can benefit from a physical chart of emotions as well as a calming corner with sensory toys, e.g., fidget toys, kinetic sands and twisty hand puzzles. The last trait, poor executive functioning, describes students who struggle to manage impulses; have problems with starting, organizing, planning or completing tasks; and have trouble listening or paying attention. As executive functioning is a learned skill, teachers could aid students in developing these skills. Modeling how to practice at home during lessons or classes, breaking tasks step-by-step, using external motivations and taking short breaks are helpful tools for students with this trait. ◀◀

Michelle Sulaiman serves as an instructor of keyboard and music theory at the University of Oregon. Her current research interest includes AuDHD (ASD and ADHD) and late 19th-century Indies (present-day Indonesia).

