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Collaboration and Access for Our Children: Music Educators and Special Educators Together

By Kimberly McCord and Emily H. Watts

Ricardo couldn't wait to be in the fourth grade. In the fourth grade, students could learn band or stringed instruments, and Ricardo wanted to play the drums. He made sure his mom signed the permission form and marked the date for the parents' meeting on her calendar. Ricardo brought the form to school the next day, gave it to his teacher, and counted the days until the meeting.¹

Sandi, Ricardo's special education teacher, knew that the last three band educators had denied her students who were deaf a place in the band, so she decided to hand deliver the form to the new band director, Anita. Sandi explained that Ricardo was very excited about playing percussion, that his mother had given permission, and that a paraprofessional named Jordan would be coming along with Ricardo.

Fortunately for Ricardo, the educators in his school believed that they shared the responsibility to teach all students. Sandi, the special educator, was committed to collaborating with the band director, Anita. Anita was open to suggestions about accommodations. The assistant principal gave Anita and Sandi time to meet by covering Sandi's class. Jordan provided sign language interpretation for Ricardo as well as valuable suggestions on how to accommodate for his needs. And Ricardo wasn't the only student with a hearing impairment in band that year. When two other fourth-graders who were hard of hearing found out that Ricardo was going to join band, they convinced their parents to give them permission as well.

Sandi helped Anita understand that when teaching students who are hard of hearing, she needed to make sure she had their attention and not to turn away when giving directions. Ricardo had some residual hearing and could hear low-pitched tones with the assistance of a hearing aid, so Anita started Ricardo on bass drum rather than snare drum. Ricardo had the opportunity to play in the band, and Anita had Sandi's input about his unique needs.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Would you have welcomed Ricardo into your class? Would you have thought that students who are deaf could play instruments? By denying students who are deaf or hard of hearing access to instrumental music classes, the previous music educators at Ricardo's school may have violated the law and put the school district at risk for a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights or a discrimination lawsuit. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides broad civil rights protection for individuals with disabilities.² All students must have access to classes and ensembles that are available to the general school population. If students aren't allowed to participate in ensembles or general music classes that are open to all students, then the school is likely violating the intent of both the ADA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004).³

Although the challenges of including students with disabilities may seem daunting, the articles in this special issue of MEJ can help. (See the Special Focus on Children with Disabilities sidebar for details.) You can find additional support in the books and Web sites listed the Resources sidebar, but perhaps the best resources are the special educators in your school and the information in each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Individualized Education Programs

Ricardo's band experience was successful partly because both Sandi and Anita had access to Ricardo's IEP, a document that outlines the student's capabilities, needs, and services provided. The IEP includes demographic information, diagnostic statements, and test results describing the child's current level of functioning. It also lists the student's strengths, needs, and goals, as well as the accommodations and support services required. Monitoring procedures as well as evaluation activities are also included.

The IEP team develops the document and monitors the student's progress, while ensuring that his or her needs are being met. This team could include the general educator, a special educator, related service personnel, an administrator, and parents or guardians. At a minimum, there must be at least one representative from the general education curriculum on the team. When appropriate, the student is also included. Music educators can also be part of the team.

IDEA allows individuals who are part of a student's IEP team to have access to that student's IEP files. Other educators who are responsible for implementing IEPs are also allowed access to IEPs for their particular students. In practice, however, music educators are often unaware which students in their classroom have disabilities and don't know how to adapt instruction to meet these students' needs. In a recent survey, 201 K-12 music educators were asked about their involvement in the IEP process.⁴ More than half of the music educators surveyed did not participate in IEP development for students with disabilities. To collaborate effectively with the special education faculty, the music educator must be aware of the needs and abilities of the students in music classes. To obtain this information, it's a good idea for music educators to ask the school principal or special education representative in their building if there are students with disabilities in their classes and then review those students' IEPs at the start of the school year or before, if possible. An even better way to help students with disabilities is to be part of the IEP team.

Making Time for Collaboration

Often the biggest challenge to collaborating with special educators or participating in IEP meetings is finding a time to meet during the school day. Music educators and special educators have many responsibilities. Usually, educators can meet during common planning periods or lunch. Unfortunately, music educators often teach classes or provide lessons at this time. Meeting before or after school is not a solution for music teachers because they often must conduct rehearsals or provide access to the music room so students can pick up or drop off instruments. It's often equally hard for special educators to find unclaimed time during the day. This means there are limited opportunities for music educators to directly participate in IEP meetings with special educators.

Administrative support is needed to facilitate collaboration among the music educator, special educator, and other members of the IEP team. An administrator could cover classes or arrange for a substitute on the day set aside for IEP planning meetings. If planning and progress meetings are all scheduled on a single day, a roving substitute could cover classes, roaming from class to class as the individual educators are called upon to meet with other IEP team members.⁵

IEP Team Meetings

Ann Halverson and Thomas Neary highlight the need to respect educators' time by using an agenda and setting a time limit for the meeting.⁶ If the meetings are carefully structured, they won't waste your valuable time. A structured team meeting includes an agenda, an allotted time for discussion of agenda items, a way to disseminate information to those who do not attend, a designated facilitator, a recorder to take notes, a timekeeper, assigned tasks for team members, and dates for tasks to be completed.

IEP team members typically rotate roles so that each member shares in facilitating the meeting and taking minutes. This reflects the philosophy that IEP team members are "in this together." For music educators who are new to IEP meetings, the responsibilities associated with different meeting roles may appear intimidating. The special educator should model for the music educator how the IEP team meeting is facilitated and recorded. The music educator's entry into a rotating facilitator role should occur only after he or she has had time to feel comfortable.

In this age of digital information, IEP team members can share information "at any time of day or night."⁷

E-mail, chat rooms, and online discussion groups allow for flexibility in communicating and sharing information about students. When communicating electronically, team members must remember that confidentiality guidelines apply for all students with disabilities. Rather than using students' names in electronic communications, team members should use initials or pseudonyms. They should also avoid revealing other identifying personal or school information.

Preparing for Students with Disabilities

It's important that music educators be apprised of students who may be entering the music program. In the spring, educators who will have students with disabilities in their classrooms in the upcoming school year should have the opportunity to meet with the IEP team to plan for a successful transition into their classrooms. Meeting during the first couple of weeks of the new school year will also help the music educator plan for accommodating students with disabilities in the classroom. See figure 1 for an example of a form that might guide discussion with the special educator.

IDEA allows for individualized planning at transition periods. Common transition times are from early childhood programs to primary, from primary to intermediate, from intermediate to middle school and from middle school to high school. In two years, Ricardo will be transitioning to middle school. The collaboration between the music educator and the special educator needs to continue for a smooth transition to the middle school band program. The elementary school music educator will be key to Ricardo's continued success in band as she shares her strategies with the middle school band director.

Support from Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals can be instrumental in promoting learning for students with disabilities in music classes and ensembles. Paraprofessionals who accompany students to music classes function as a source of information and ideas and can relay suggestions between the special education and music faculty.

The paraprofessional can also share how classroom dynamics affect the student with a disability. For example, typical students may not choose students with cerebral palsy who have limited vocal abilities for small groups when singing canons. The paraprofessional can alert the music educator to the fact that students with disabilities aren't participating with their typical peers.

Paraprofessionals also can support the music educator's teaching and actively engage the student in music learning. For example, Jordan, the paraprofessional who accompanied Ricardo to class, used sign language to interpret Anita's instructions to the class so Ricardo could participate along with his classmates.

Curriculum Access: Universal Design for Learning

When music educators include children with disabilities in their classrooms, they typically identify what the child cannot do and develop accommodations based on that information. Savvy music educators have discovered that many of these accommodations also are helpful to typical children. For example, Anita used her left arm and hand to model the bass drum part while keeping her conducting pattern going in the right hand. Ricardo was able to keep a steady beat by matching Anita's physical cues, and the saxophones didn't speed up as much because they could also see her steady beat. When Anita helped Ricardo feel the vibrations of the bass drum by leaning against the drum as he played, the other students wanted to try it too. The percussionists discovered that when they felt the drums vibrate the most, they might be playing too loud.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which has a foundation in the ADA, requires architects to design public buildings that are accessible for people with disabilities. Architects have found that considering accessibility in design has resulted in buildings that are more friendly for everyone, whether able-bodied or disabled.

The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) adopted the idea of universal design and applied it to school curricula.⁸ Universal Design for Learning represents a shift from thinking about adjustments made for each incoming student with a disability to thinking about varying the materials, methods, assessments, and the curriculum so that they benefit a range of learning styles.⁹

For many years, educators have understood that people have different learning styles: kinesthetic, aural, and visual. General music educators often use multiple learning modes in their teaching. Movement is considered essential for teaching music at the elementary level. They also use visual aids, such as charts with iconic notation under the words, and they often model musical behaviors so children hear good aural examples. Using some of these in instrumental and choral ensembles can help increase learning for all students.

The Learning for All sidebar includes descriptions of how music teachers have adapted their instruction to meet the needs of all their students. These educators prepared for the whole range of learners who might be enrolled in their music classes. Instead of rushing to make adaptations for students with disabilities as they show up, these educators developed materials that could be used as needed.

The general music educator described in the sidebar first looked for alternate ways to notate music to help her two students with learning disabilities. The display of music notation in GarageBand allows users to see different durations and pitch represented by color and size.

The band director created a videotape of a student saxophone player for a saxophone player with a hearing impairment. In the video, the student could see the music and the saxophone player's fingers at the same time. Parents of a student with autism who transferred to the school also found the video helpful. Sharon, a typical student who struggled with a difficult saxophone passage, used the video and discovered an easier way to play B-flat.

The choir educator first recorded parts of songs for a student with Down syndrome and then discovered that the recording could also help students who are blind, students with learning disabilities, and students with ADD/ADHD. The typical students also used the recordings to learn the songs. The parents of one child appreciated the Web site with music in black and white because the father was color-blind and had trouble seeing colored print on some Web sites.

Making the curriculum flexible and accommodating a variety of learning styles produces better results and eliminates the need to customize adaptations for specific students with disabilities. By collaborating, special educators and music educators can contribute their individual expertise toward this mutual goal. The outcomes are access, participation, and success in music for all students.

Notes

1. The story presented here is true, but names have been changed to protect the student's identity.
2. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Public Law 336, 101st Cong., 2d sess. (July 26, 1990).
3. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Public Law 446, 108th Cong. (December 3, 2004).
4. Kimberly A. McCord, Emily H. Watts, and Brian W. Wojcik, "A Survey of Music Educators' Involvement in the Individual Education Program Process and Their Knowledge of Assistive Technology" (unpublished manuscript, Illinois State University, Normal, 2005).
5. Ann Tiedemann Halvorsen and Thomas Neary, *Building Inclusive Schools: Tools and Strategies for Success* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001).
6. Ibid.
7. Priscilla Norton and Debra Sprague, *Technology for Teaching* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon), 133.
8. Halvorsen and Neary, *Building Inclusive Schools*, 5862.
9. Chuck Hitchcock, Anne Meyer, David Rose, and Richard Jackson, "Providing New Access to the General Curriculum: Universal Design for Learning," *Teaching Exceptional Children* 35, no. 2 (2002): 817. N

Special Focus on Children with Disabilities

This special issue of Music Educators Journal, guest edited by Kimberly McCord, offers insight into the challenges of helping children with disabilities succeed in music. Articles in this special issue focus on two topics that are sometimes forgotten in discussions of helping children with disabilities - the importance of collaboration and special challenges related to inclusion in instrumental music. We hope that these articles will be a valuable resource and a source of inspiration for the many music educators who work with students with disabilities. The following articles make up this special issue:

- "Collaboration and Access for Our Learners: Music Educators and Special Educators Working Together," by Kimberly McCord and Emily A. Watts, discusses how you can work with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team and develop teaching strategies to benefit all learners.
- "Partnering with Music Therapists: A Model for Addressing Students' Musical and Extramusical Goals," by Janet Montgomery and Amy Martinson, explains how you can work in partnership with a music therapist or other member of the special education team to meet all the goals on a student's IEP.
- "'I Send My Best Matthew to School Every Day': Music Educators Collaborating with Parents," by Margaret Fitzgerald, promotes a strong, positive partnership between teachers and parents to support students with disabilities in a music program. Fitzgerald speaks from the dual perspective of teacher and parent.
- "Children with Disabilities Playing Musical Instruments," by Kimberly McCord and Margaret Fitzgerald, provides strategies for helping students with disabilities to read music, select appropriate instruments, and play in an ensemble.
- "Students with Disabilities in a High School Band: 'We Can Do It!'" by Christine Lapka, shows that close collaboration between music teacher and special education teacher is the key to full integration of students with disabilities into an ensemble.

Resources

Web Resources

- ABLEDATA (www.abledata.com) provides information on assistive technology and rehabilitation equipment.
- The Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP, www.atap.org) is a national organization comprising state Assistive Technology Act Programs funded under the Assistive Technology Act (AT Act). Contact information for state programs is listed.
- The Center for Applied Special Technology (www.cast.org) offers information about Universal Design for Learning and a free Web-based service that will check your Web pages for accessibility.
- Closing the Gap Inc. (www.closingthegap.com) focuses on computer technology for people with special needs.
- The Council for Exceptional Children (www.cec.sped.org) is a professional organization for special educators. The Web site offers information on IDEA, fact sheets on a variety of topics, and links to other helpful Web sites.
- Dancing Dots (www.dancingdots.com) offers a variety of products for the visually impaired, including Braille music courses and assistive technology.
- Illinois State University's Special Education Assistive Technology Center (www.seat.ilstu.org) offers information about assistive technology devices and music education and music therapy resources.
- Learning Disabled Online (www.ldonline.org) is a Web site on learning disabilities for parents and educators.
- The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (www.nichcy.org) has information on disabilities with fact sheets and other resources for teachers and parents.
- The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals offers information on the role of the paraprofessional (www.nrcpara.org/resources/stateofheart/parateacher2b.php).
- Soundbeam (www.soundbeam.co.uk/) offers products that convert physical movements into sound.
- The Postsecondary Education Consortium at the University of Tennessee's Center on Deafness has a chart comparing IDEA Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (<http://sunsite.utk.edu/cod/pec/products>).
- The U.S. Department of Education Web site covers the rules and regulations of IDEA 2004 (www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/idea2004.html).

- VSA Arts (www.vsarts.org) promotes access to the arts for people with disabilities.
- Watchfire WebExact (<http://bobby.watchfire.com/bobby>) is a free service that allows you to test Web pages and find and repair barriers to accessibility.
- Webaim (www.webaim.org/info/asdvideo/) offers a multimedia presentation on Web accessibility.

Print and Media Resources

- Atterbury, Betty W. *Mainstreaming Exceptional Learners in Music*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.
- Council for Exceptional Children. *Universal Design for Learning: A Guide for Teachers and Education Professionals*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall, 2005.
- Miles, Tim R., and John Westcombe, eds. *Music and Dyslexia: Opening New Doors*. London: Whurr, 2002.
- Perry, Terry M. *Music Lessons for Children with Special Needs*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1995.
- Robbins, Carol, and Colin Robbins. *Music for the Hearing Impaired*. London: Magnamusic-Baton, 1980.
- Rose, David H., and Anne Meyer. *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002.
- Tomlinson, Carol Anne. *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999.

Learning for All

The following examples illustrate how teachers can use the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to help all students learn.

General Music

A sixth-grade general music educator is planning a lesson on composing. The students can invent their own notation. For example, they can use a grid system listing sounds on the left side of the page with boxes across the top of the page for eight measures of music in 4/4 time. Students can put an X in the box to show when the sound is made. Students can also create music in software like GarageBand or a notation program on the two MIDI stations in the classroom. Students can even print out their compositions in traditional notation. Computers equipped with microphones can record live audio. The special educator working with students who are blind or who have low vision might print Braille music notation or use a computer program for converting MIDI files into Braille notation. The faculty workroom copier can enlarge copies and print on larger paper as well. The teacher's composition assignment is flexible enough to work for a variety of learners. The educator presents examples of previous students¹ compositions in the following ways:

- Showing videotaped performances
- Spreading copies of the notated compositions on a table where students can see them
- Posting copies of the scanned compositions and sound files on the music Web page
- Placing video clips of students performing their compositions with spoken descriptions of the performance on the Web for students with visual impairments
- Including closed-captioned video to describe what the music sounds like for students who are deaf or hard of hearing

Instrumental Music Example

Students in high school band are preparing three pieces for a contest. The music educator chose the pieces far enough in advance to develop materials that would allow a variety of learners to work on the pieces.

- The music educator wrote to the publishers of all three pieces and obtained permission to put MIDI files of the music on the band Web site. The MIDI files were in formats that could be listened to on the Web site from a variety of environments. They were also available in several tempos so students could practice at tempos slower than the intended performance.
- The music educator asked the special educator to have the music translated into Braille for a flute player in the band.
- The band director created simplified parts that could be played on any instrument in the group for

students with cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities, and certain physical disabilities.

- The band director recruited students on a variety of band instruments to play selected parts that were videotaped with close-ups of the hands and fingers. A stand with the music on it was sitting next to the player, and the band educator pointed to the music as the student played.

Choral Music Example

The middle school chorus was preparing for a joint concert with the local elementary choir. The educators at both schools had been working together to plan the concert. Each choir would perform some pieces alone and some pieces together. The educators prepared the following tools to help students learn the music:

- Practice recordings for students to take home. Some recordings were made at slower tempos, some were excerpts only, some recordings had piano accompaniment, and some had solo voice only. (Permission may be needed to make recordings. See www.menc.org/copyright for details.)
- Links to Web sites where students could find professional recordings to play on school or home computers.
- Lyric sheets uploaded to the two schools' music Web sites. These appear as black print on a white background to help students with visual impairments who need good contrast.
- Lyric sheets with small icons or graphics that represent words or their meanings. Poor readers, students with cognitive disabilities, English-language learners, and young students benefit from materials with symbols or pictures.
- A list of commercially recorded versions of the Disney songs that the choir will be singing. Listening to the different versions of the song can motivate reluctant learners and help students apply what they have learned to different materials.
- A videotape of the sign language interpreter signing the words to the songs for student performers who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- A program that includes a canon, which is good for students with memory problems who find it hard to learn several verses of a piece.

MENC Resources

The following books and articles from MENC offer additional information on working with special learners. You can order books and available back issues of MENC periodicals by calling 800-828-0229. Articles are also available in many library periodical databases.

- Butler, Maureen. "How Students with Hearing Impairments Can Learn and Flourish in Your Music Classroom." *Teaching Music* 12, no. 1 (2004): 3034.
- De l'Etoile, Shannon K. "Teaching Music to Special Learners: Children with Disruptive Behavior Disorders." *Music Educators Journal* 91, no. 5 (2005): 3743.
- Hammel, Alice M. "Inclusion Strategies That Work." *Music Educators Journal* 90, no. 5 (2004): 3337.
- MENC. *Spotlight on Making Music with Special Learners*. Reston, VA: MENC, 2004. (MENC members, \$18.00; nonmembers, \$24.00)
- Mixon, Kevin. "Including Exceptional Students in Your Instrumental Music Program." *Teaching Music* 13, no. 3 (2005): 3034.
- Patterson, Allyson. "Music Teachers and Music Therapists: Helping Students Together." *Music Educators Journal* 89, no. 4 (2003): 3538.
- Pontiff, Elizabeth. "Teaching Special Learners: Ideas from Veteran Teachers in the Music Classroom." *Teaching Music* 12, no. 3 (2004): 5258.
- Scheberg, Gail. *TIPS: Teaching Music to Special Learners*. Reston, VA: MENC, 1988. (MENC members, \$7.50; nonmembers, \$10.00)
- Siligo, Wayne Roy. "Enriching the Ensemble Experience for Students with Visual Impairments." *Music Educators Journal* 91, no. 5 (2005): 3136.
- Special Learners column, *General Music Today*, most issues. Available at www.menc.org/journals.
- Vance, Kate O'Brien. "Adapting Music Instruction for Students with Dyslexia." *Music Educators Journal* 90, no. 5 (2004): 2731.

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