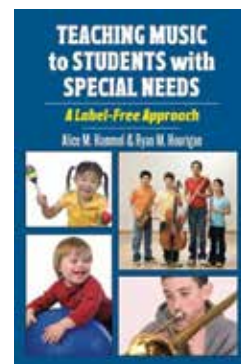


Teaching Music To Students With Special Needs: A Label-Free Approach

By Alice M. Hammel and Ryan M. Hourigan
New York: Oxford University Press, 2011



What can you do as a music educator to understand the students you teach?

By focusing on removing barriers and implementing the tools to aide music educators, *Teaching Music To Students With Special Needs: A Label-Free Approach* guides teachers to meet the needs of all students through good teaching.

Good teaching treats each student as an individual. This is the essence of fairness in education. It gives everyone the tools necessary to be successful in the music classroom, free of labels. It accommodates all students with and without special needs.

As the authors of this book note, “It is imperative for music educators to strive for [a] caring, inclusive environment conducive for all students to learn. The practical strategies are presented to encourage music educators to create a tolerant, caring classroom that is conducive for music teaching and learning. Many of the techniques are examples of good teaching, regardless of what population of students you are teaching.”

Key concepts in the text include a team approach, label-free learning, and the concept that fair is not always equal. The authors add, “Successful teaching of students with special needs requires an extensive knowledge of subject matter, a willingness to participate as a member of a team, [and] a philosophy [that] places the students first, to provide each student with what they need [*sic*] to have an opportunity to succeed.”

This book also stresses enabling a support team of adults who collaborate and communicate, along with effective

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behavioral plans. In the chapter “A Resourceful And Pedagogical Approach To Teaching Students With Special Needs,” music educators will discover many tools available to support music instruction to all students. As the book explains, “The music educator who finds ways to positively reinforce good behavior, compliance, and academic success will be far more successful than a music educator who believes that all students should follow the same set number of rules to the same degree every day of the school year.”

The chapter “Teaching Music To Students Who Are Intellectually Gifted” emphasizes the responsibility of the music educator to modify expectations and create appropriate accommodations for students who need an intellectual challenge. The authors suggest adaptations to meet students’ special needs while creating a successful experience for all children. The task for music educators is to channel cognitive abilities into an artistic endeavor.

However, the authors also note, “While the philosophy of this text has placed importance on encouraging ‘label-free learning’ for students with

special needs, there are times when a distinction is necessary.” For example, in defining the “gifted” student, the authors encourage teachers to consider:

- categories of giftedness
- elitism versus egalitarianism
- characteristics of students who are gifted
- instructional delivery/pacing/process/modifications
- successful teacher characteristics for teaching gifted students.

“Creating accommodations that honor the student and his [*sic*] needs,” note the authors, “as well as his musical strengths is another example of ‘fair is not equal’ and of considering the person rather than the disability.”

A compilation of many successful adaptations, accommodations, and modifications for the music classroom is organized according to five important domains: cognitive, communication, behavioral or emotional, physical, and sensory. There are many other possible adaptations and accommodations. As the authors state, “the strategies you find most successful will be the ones you develop and use when considering the needs of the individual students who are in your classroom.”

How do music educators focus on their own curricular goals while adapting them to the individual needs of students? How do teachers assess and reflect on goals to make effective adjustments?

Adjusting curricula and assessment strategies for students with disabilities is outlined in four primary teaching practices: modality, pacing, assignment size, and use of color. The National Standards for Music Education are the framework used to discuss

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music therapy and music education and how to adapt techniques within the music classroom. Formative assessment and establishing baselines with charts offer examples for writing clear, obtainable objectives for students with special needs.

Additionally, the chapter "Teaching Strategies For Performers With Special Needs" is designed to help ensemble conductors prepare to teach music to such students. It offers advice to help these students be more confident in their attempts to experience a worthwhile performance.

The book concludes with a chapter of useful resources for music teacher educators regarding teaching students with special needs.

The majority of this text is built around the concept of teaching students with special needs in an inclusive, label-free, environment. As a practical guide and reference manual, it supports, maintains, and encourages music educators to create a positive learning environment for all students. ■

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