

Music for All: Developing Music Instruction for Students with Higher Support Needs (Brian J. Wagner-Yeung)

Hi everyone, welcome to Music for All: Developing Music Instruction for Students with Higher Support Needs at this year's ABLE Assembly. My name is Brian Wagner-Yeung, and I am the NYSSMA (New York State School Music Association) Special Learner's chair. In addition, I am also a special music educator for the New York City Department of Education, where I mainly teach self-contained and inclusion general music, k-12 adaptive string orchestra, and also musical theater. I am also an adjunct faculty member at CUNY Brooklyn College. And lastly, I am also a music education consultant.

Our focus for today is how can music teachers engage all students to the best of their ability in musical settings, and how can music teachers utilize universal design for learning, assistive technology, and a strength-based model to allow all students to find success? Our schedule for today is first we're going to focus on who is in our classroom, and who are the students that we teach? After that, we're going to review some key concepts, and hopefully, these are things you might already know. And after that we are going to focus on three areas: singing, playing instruments, and developing independence - all within the music room. I will close up with some key takeaways.

When we are thinking about who is in our classroom, it is important that we take a step back reflect on who are the students that we are teaching - especially if we are in an inclusion classroom. It is always important to remember the different types of students we might have in our musical classrooms and ensembles. For example, we might have neurotypical students in our classroom, in addition, we might have students who receive special education services - students who have an IEP, or even some students who have 504s. It is important to take into account that we might have some students who need some extra support in different domains, and these domains are coming from Dr. Alice Hammel and Dr. Ryan Hourigan. We are looking at the areas of cognition, behavior, sensory, emotional, communication, and physical/medical. I am also including mental health because I think especially after the last two years, it is important to be addressing the mental health of our students, our families, and ourselves as well. We also might have students in our classrooms who are classified as gifted and talented, or students who are twice-exceptional, or 2E. And lastly, students who are coming from diverse backgrounds, or English is a new language. We have this large diversity of learners, and that's what makes our classrooms beautiful and unique.

It is important to remember that while our students may be different, they all can find success in our music classrooms, and that is why I capitalize the words CAN - All of our students have abilities and they CAN. It is when we take a step back, and allow opportunities for their strengths to be initiated, that is where our students can find success. It is important for us to incorporate ways in our classrooms that showcase their strengths, interests, identities, and cultures. When we do this, our

students are going to feel more valued, comfortable to take risks, and safe. When they feel that their background and identities are incorporated, they are going to be more comfortable to be engaged, motivated, and willing to learn. Our students need to feel comfortable, and they need to feel valued - so we need to set up these environments where these are initiated.

In some musical settings, we also may have students who have higher support needs. When I am talking about higher support needs, I am referring to students who might have limited verbal access or are nonverbal. Some students are either hyper or hypo sensitive - these are students who are a little bit more sensitive to things such as lighting, sounds, or smells - or other students who might need sensory input in the classroom. We might have students who require hand-over-hand assistance or prompting. Whether this is from a paraprofessional or teaching assistant. And we might have students with limited ambulatory access. I know as teachers we tend to find these are students that we are more challenged by because we have to find a more in-depth way to engage them. Nevertheless, it's still possible. And again, when we go back to their strengths and focus on what they can do, we can easily find ways to engage all of our students. That is why it is still important to remember that all of our students can, no matter what their ability is. As teachers, it is for us to just take that step back and rethink how we are shaping the environment around the needs of our students, instead of making our students conform to how our environment is. It is all about how we just break things down, provide opportunities based on their strengths, and celebrate each success.

So some key concepts are going to be coming up. One is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Hopefully, this is something that you have heard of before. UDL comes from the architecture movement from the 1970s. This is when we are removing any barriers to the learning or physical environment for a student with a disability - but while this happens, we are also providing strategies that are benefiting all students. So as we are providing support for our special education students, those supports can be utilized for all of our students at the same time. An example of this in my program: I use a lot of technology. I use iPads which can easily benefit students who are nonverbal, but at the same point, I can use an iPad and the applications for everyone. Maybe I have a student who is having an off day, or is just not motivated at that time. The app on the iPad is just providing another way for them to engage in the classroom, and that's UDL. Another thing that we incorporate is what is called Assistive Technology (AT). This is any sort of technology device, manipulative, or support that allows students to have accessibility into our classrooms. For example, some of our students who might be in a wheelchair, or who have limited ambulatory access, might be able to use a device that holds up an instrument so they do not have to. This way, it is just a little bit easier for them to reach over and play the instrument. So we are using a device that is giving them access to what we are teaching, and to the music-making experience. There is a lot of assistive music technology that is out there - you can always check out West Music or NAFME Special Research Interest Group, where they already have a lot of AT that is out there. Teachers can even design their own if that is what works. Unfortunately, a lot of AT is expensive, but you could easily just create your own. Whatever works for your students. And last is task analysis. This is when we are breaking things down. We are either breaking down concepts, learning ideas, curriculum, learning

objectives - we are breaking things down into smaller chunks, and putting them together into something larger. Sometimes when we are teaching a skill or a concept, it is just too much information at first. So if we just break it down into smaller increments, and build it together into something larger, sometimes it just makes more sense. Task analysis can easily be done within one class, one activity, long-term within a week, or even a unit. This is just how we break things down into smaller chunks. So for example, let's say we are teaching a traditional folk dance to our students, and it is just too much information at first. Just break it down to one move at a time, with the supports provided. You are breaking things down into smaller chunks, and then just putting it back together. We are going to look at three different areas where UDL, AT, and task analysis can easily be utilized for our students with higher support needs.

One area is singing. We definitely want to incorporate as much singing in our class, because singing is natural, part of our bodies, and part of every culture. Singing, and accessibility to vocal music, can easily be possible for all of our students. Some strategies that I would recommend using are multimodal or multi-sensory elements to songs. When we think about multimodal or multisensory, we are thinking about the four learning modalities. Having a visual element, having an auditory element, having a kinesthetic element, and having a tactile element. Visual is seeing - whether that is pictures, text, or maybe they are watching us doing something - that is still visual if they are watching us. Auditory is listening to us speak, or even through music-making. Kinesthetic is when they are learning through movement. I use a lot of gestures, and I incorporate American Sign Language as well in my classroom. I think it is universal, and our students should have connections to this. Lastly tactile - some of our students learn through touching, so maybe they are touching pictures, maybe they are touching manipulatives to make connections to the text or words in a song. I incorporate AT to get students to connect to words or music, and you will see some examples in a second. Sometimes, for some of our students who have limited verbal access, utilizing technology is how we are giving them accessibility to engage with what we are doing. I use a lot of manipulatives paired with singing and text. Sometimes using things just beside our voice deepens that connection to find alternative ways to engage, because we are thinking about multiple ways for our students to engage in the same activities. I choose repertoire that our students are familiar, comfortable, and identify with. I am definitely exposing my students to new music, new genres from around the world - but it is always important to incorporate what they are listening to as well because it just makes them feel more comfortable and valued. I choose songs that have repetition, clear form, and clear words and syllables for a lot of our students who are emergent speakers. Having songs that are simple, but with clear words and repetition, allows more opportunities for engagement. I am also choosing music that is age, developmentally, and cognitively appropriate. Since I work with kindergarten through eighth grade currently this year, I choose specific repertoire that I am working with my kindergartners, and specific repertoire that I'm working with my eighth graders that is age, developmentally, and cognitively appropriate for them.

Let's go through some examples. One area is the multimodal element. For example, on the screen right now this is the song "It's Ok" by Imagine Dragons, which I just taught a couple of weeks ago.

When I am teaching a song, I always have visual supports. You can see on the board there are pictures, there is also the text, there are also highlighted words that represent the key words for each part. There is also the auditory part. I am singing it, or speaking it, and we might be listening to the audio track when I am singing with my students - and I always choose tracks that have the text being sung so my students can hear that in addition to me. I do have some tracks where I will use karaoke, but that depends on the class and depends on my students. I always want to provide the amount of support so they can be successful. In addition to that, I am also doing gestures. You can see each key word that's highlighted in yellow. I will have a gesture paired with it to help guide my students. Some of my students are not visual learners or they are not readers yet, and that is ok. I am using movement to help guide memory, and allow them ways to recall the words to the song. When I am using gestures, sometimes we just use gestures that might describe what is happening, or describe the picture. In this example, I actually used American Sign Language. In this example is the chorus to the song, "it's ok to be not Ook, it's just fine to be out of your mind, breathe in deep just one day at a time, cause it's ok to be out of your mind." So here I have the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic element. Some of my students may be able to tap the picture or have AT, but you will see that in a second. So I am offering multiple different ways, and if some of my students are only showing the song by showing American Sign Language to it, I'm ok with that. They have access, and they are able to engage with it to the best of their ability. When we are thinking about AT, some of my students are emergent speakers, so I am using technology as a means again to give them access. This is an example of the song "Day is Done" that I am doing with my second graders,. That little orange circle that you see - that is a little button that I bought on Amazon. You have probably seen them before, where a student can press the button, and it speaks the word back to you. So I am able to pre-record what word I am working on. In this example, the word is "done." There is sign language for done, there is a visual aspect, and some of my students are able to press the button. So I will sing the text, and they will say the last word by pressing the button. I would have the visual of the picture "done" on the button, right now, unfortunately, I am out of ink at work on my printer, and I only took the pictures this week. But this is just another way that I am giving access, and even for my students who are able to sing or speak the words, sometimes just pressing the button makes that connection deeper. Or sometimes, they are just not engaged at that moment and that's ok. Maybe they are just a little bit tired. I am giving them another way to have access, and show what we are doing. Another example of AT: this is coming from Chrome Music Lab. As part of my vocal warm-up, I have different things that we do. One of the things we do is make your voice go high and low "aaah." These are oscillators, where a student can press either one of the different colored little creatures. They can press down on an iPad and use their finger to drag, sliding up and down, and letting it become the voice for them. For some of our students using iPads or Go Talks, this might be part of their IEP. This might be part of their speech goals. So I am using technology to become part of their voice, and it's almost like AAC. Another example of this is an App that is called Painting Music. It is the similar as with high and low, I might actually draw my voice going high and low, and then a student can imitate it back or do it independently. Again, the iPad becomes the voice for the students. So I am still giving them access, and a lot of times when you are adding the tactile element, it makes that connection even more. And I have seen some students who are still just starting to go,

as they do it because having that tactile element with the technology is building the connection. Another example is incorporating manipulatives. So this is again the song “Day is Done,” which I am doing with my second graders. I have the visuals, I have the auditory - we are listening to the song, I have the text, I also have sign language, “so if you take my hand my friend, all will be well when the day is done.” And if you know the song, I just changed the words a little bit from “son” to “friend.” But also you will notice at the bottom I am using dancing scarves. So we are learning up and down, we are going around the circle, and we are throwing and catching with the song. Right now, I am only teaching the refrain. What you see at the top when we hear the first verse, we are going up and down, the second verse we are going around the circle, and the third verse we are throwing and catching. What we are doing is we are learning form, and we are learning about the different parts to a son. But having those manipulatives is just making a deeper connection - and I am noticing that they are singing a little bit more, or they are engaged a little bit more just by having those manipulatives. And lastly, choosing age and cognitively appropriate repertoire. So for example, this is a song I am doing with my kindergarten class right now, “Going on a Picnic.” “Going on a picnic leaving right away, if it doesn’t rain we can stay all day.” And then it just goes on about different types of food that we can bring to a picnic. We are working on students making choices, maybe singing some of the text to the song, and creating a new version to the song. I am using the Raffi version for it, you will also notice that the pictures I am using are cartoon pictures that I got offline. This is fine because they are kindergarten students. On the other hand, I teach 6-8th grade also, so I am choosing more age-appropriate repertoire for them. This is the song “Brand New Day” from the musical *The Wiz*. You will notice that the text is a little bit more complicated, even though I might still only be working on one word per picture. You will notice that the visuals are a little bit different, they are more age-appropriate - and they are realistic images. I tend to use pictures of people as students get older, and I am also making sure that all my visuals are representative of diversity, because I think it is important for our students to see themselves in our visuals. So I am just showing how this could be a little bit more age and developmentally appropriate.

Another area that we want to think about when giving access to our higher support students, is playing instruments. We are thinking about instrumental music-making, which can easily be adapted to provide accessibility to all students. One way is to adapt how to play, or use an instrument. We can change the way technique looks, we can change how we provide support, or posture. For example, I teach string orchestra. I have no problem if my student does not hold the violin in the traditional way, as long as that is going to give them access and allow them to be successful - that is ok. For example, years ago when the Brooklyn Philharmonic used to exist, I watched a performance of them. There was a violinist who sat in the back of the first violins, who I noticed had their violin on the opposite hand, and their bow on the opposite hand. I do not know why they were playing that way, I am sure there was a reason. However, they were still able to play high-quality music, and as long as they are able to be successful, who are we to determine that they cannot hold their instrument in a different way that works for them. Secondly, providing multiple ways that instruments can be utilized. For example, changing posture, changing the way it is held, incorporating AT, or some sort of device to hold an instrument. For example, I am drumming in my

classroom with my second graders, and I have a student who right now we are working on getting him to grasp a mallet - and this is a little bit hard for him. So what I am doing is I am creating and taking Velcro, and I use Velcro around the mallet with a little strap for him just to hold onto, because it is a little bit easier. I have also used a string to tie around his wrist gently with his paraprofessional, helping just to give him access so he can just let go when he needs to, but it is still there for when he is able to play. While the rest of the students in the class are using their hands to play the drums, he is using a mallet, and I am ok with that. I am just providing additional ways for him to have access. I also provide lots of visual support. We assume that our students already know how to play an instrument, but sometimes we need to model and teach it to them. I have a lot of visuals paired with every little thing that I am teaching. So if it is teaching students how to hold a mallet, I will have a visual paired for that. If it is teaching a student how to pick up an instrument and clean up, I will have a visual paired with that. These are things that we need to teach. I also adapt the way music literacy looks. I use different sorts of colors, pacing, size, and modes. So again, everything is visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile when I am teaching music literacy. I use color-coded notation using green and red for Go and Stop, and I use different types of icons. I use Lego pieces to represent different size note values for my students to sometimes find another visual aspect to see note values, but also to touch them. Maybe they need to feel that a quarter note feels this long, and two eighth notes are a little bit smaller, but they fit inside of a quarter note. And lastly, providing AT. I mentioned maybe we have to adapt a mallet - sometimes when we are doing instrumental music in my classroom, again I am using iPads, I am using computers - I find alternative ways to engage and give access to my students.

And lastly, developing independence in all of our classrooms can provide multiple ways for our students to learn important skills. When we are thinking about independent skills, we are thinking: language, social skills, and working together. We can easily provide scripts to teach our students how to communicate with each other, and with us. If we were to teach leadership, we could provide visual prompts that will allow students to engage with each other. We can allow opportunities for student choice, and we want to be doing this with everything from our repertoire, to what we are teaching to our students. We want to allow students to be part of classroom procedures. Every part of my classroom has a lot of set up and clean up, so I teach my students how to do this themselves. And yes, it takes time - but again I am using task analysis, I am breaking it down, and I am teaching them because they take more ownership when they are responsible, rather than me doing everything for them. And lastly, allow music-making to teach language to all of our students.

So for example, I provide scripts for when we warm up our voices every single time before we sing. Instead of me leading the warm-up, I provide a script so I have a student leading it. There are three different parts - first how long is your voice (which is just a sustained sound), can your voice go high low, and can you sing the notes (which we are just singing a scale on solfege with Curwen hand signs). Paired with this, I will have AT. I will have iPads for all my students to have access, but again, I am having a student leader. So first, a student would say my turn to show you, and they can model it to the rest of the class. Then they will choose someone - so maybe it is John's turn, and after John

has a turn, they can say “great job because...,” or “try again because...” You are also teaching critical thinking, while they are having an ongoing conversation. So we are teaching language, communication, and critical thinking. Another example is I want my students to engage with each other. I work with students who are on the autism spectrum, and sometimes engaging with their peers is something that we are working on. It does not come naturally, so I provide prompts or supports to teach this. So for example, when it is time for us to pick a friend, I have different visuals prepared for this. You will notice there are two examples. One of them is with a cartoon image, this is for my elementary students. For my older students, it is the same visual, just a little bit different - it is more age-appropriate. And again, I represent the diversity that is found in my classroom. So when we are picking a friend, we would have this visual prepared. And on the back of it, I would have pictures of all the students in the classroom so that students can either verbally say, they can touch, or they could just take a Velcro picture off and put it on the front side. For example, “Bobby’s turn,” this way you are giving them that access using visuals, and again multiple different ways to engage, while they are also having that visual which will lead to them actually engaging with each other. I also provide support procedures as mentioned. I want my students to be part of every aspect of the class, including setting up and cleaning it up. One activity that I do with my older students is called Time to Move. We are learning that the dance is representing what we are learning in a song. We are learning the form to it, and we are learning the different sections to it. We are also learning how to move, such as learning how to move in space right now. I am currently teaching my students to dance with different types of movement: to go side to side, front to back, and around in a circle. I am using the four cardinal directions to teach north, south, east, west, - and the different directions of a clock to move in a circle either clockwise or counterclockwise. And before we even do that, to help guide and give support to my students, we put a piece of tape on the floor that I call the “stage.” I am technically teaching at the same time that when we actually go to the auditorium and get ready for a performance, we are learning those skills in the classroom first. We are generalizing this, so the line represents the stage, the spots represent our dancing spots. So when we get our stage ready, I have a helper. You get to choose which job do you want - the green job or the red job. The green and red connect back to go and stop for me. So the green job, I am going to hold the tape, and the red job I am going to pull it. So you will eventually have two people working together, standing on either green or red - the person on the green holds the tape with a little stick, and the person with the red pulls and then they put the tape on the floor. Then we do our dance, and when the dance is done, we take a bow and then we clean up. We work together and then as you see in the last picture - it is another visual I broke down because I noticed in one of my classes my students were arguing with each other over what to clean - up so we pick jobs. One person is in charge of cleaning up the tape, one person is in charge of collecting the dancing spots, and one person is in charge of bringing the chairs back to the circle. So you are just breaking it down into smaller chunks to allow it to happen.

Our key takeaways: all of our students are able to have access to high-quality music-making when we provide universal design, assistive technology, and task analysis. It is just how we break things down, how we provide more support, and multiple ways for our students to engage - that even our

students who have higher support needs, you are allowing them opportunities to have accessibility and be successful. And when we do that, all of our students can. Thank you.