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## ABLE 2020: Modifying and Adapting Music Education Curriculum for Students with High Support Needs

Attendees can expect to learn ways to work with groups of students who have diverse needs in the music classroom, specifically students with higher support needs. Working with students that have varying degrees of support needs has given me the opportunity for trial and error, to come up with some creative ideas for making music accessible. We will cover how to incorporate students that may not be responding in expected ways, and the importance of sharing expectations for class with caregivers. During the presentation we will see examples of modified and adapted curriculum, choice boards, tiered questioning, prompting, and support staff communication.

This presentation is geared towards music educators who have students with special needs and are looking for ways to keep students with varying abilities engaged in a class. This will include students with high support needs, students who are non-verbal, have developmental delays, and students with attention issues. The session will focus on meeting students where they are, and how music teachers can create an engaging and enriching class for students of differing abilities. Attendees will leave knowing about the hierarchy of prompting, meaningful participation, and how to provide appropriate instruction and accessibility for students in the same class who may be at different stages in their development.

It is important to get to know your students to the extent that you can. The more you know about your students, the greater the quality music class. It is great to get in touch with

classroom teachers and specialists to discuss educational strategies for the students that need support in class. Modifying and Adapting music education curriculum can be as creative as needed to make the content accessible for each student. Accessibility really is the key. Students may need extra visuals to go with directions, they may need to see an activity demonstrated before they can proceed, they may even need some prompting to participate, or a schedule to let them know what is coming next.

Meaningful participation comes when students have complete accessibility to the curriculum presented, and a meaningful response emerges when the student is engaged in the least restrictive environment during music class. Universal Design for Learning offers some guidelines on different ways to create a more accessible class. It considers all areas of learning and growth to build accommodations into your curriculum. Visuals are a great way to help convey communication to students. Having pictures that show actions, like clapping or stomping, or even items, like instruments or fruits, could be helpful for a student to be able to participate in class. Color coding can be a great way to adapt material for students. In my rhythm lessons (example shown in the slides) I color code music notes (beamed eighth notes have a blue background, quarter notes have a purple background, rests have a yellow background, etc...) for many different purposes. The color coding can be useful for identification which can aid in note reading. Along with the color coding, I use foods to describe the rhythm of the notes (beamed eighth notes are called apple, quarter notes are called pie, etc...). Many of my students are emerging language learners and working with foods, something that they are familiar with, is a great way to hone rhythm skills, it is also a great way to teach syllables.

Music teachers should maintain high expectations while also differentiating lesson activities. Having choice boards can aid in full participation from all students in class. Choice

boards are boards with two or more different options of items to choose from, represented by clipart images and sometimes words to accompany the clipart. The themes of the choice boards can vary between body parts, foods, actions, emotions, and many more. Students can have multiple different choice boards depending on the activity, or questions during class. Sometimes students can be reluctant to participate in class. It is important not to force a student to perform and participate in class, only to encourage and provide opportunity. Putting low demands on students who are reluctant can often provide a comfortable space for them to participate when they are ready. For some students, asking open ended questions to the entire class rather than to a specific child is a way to lower demands while also being accessible and inclusive. Using a choice board to ask the class a question such as, “What fruit should we sing about next?” may be more likely to elicit a response and even allow students to generate independent responses.

In any given class we will have students that have a vast array of abilities. Through differentiation I can diversify the content enough so that it is accessible to all of the students that attend class. It has always been important to establish a safe space in my classrooms for students to explore and express themselves. One example of differentiation is during an echo chant activity, in which we typically use the neutral syllable “Ba” to keep the activity accessible to all students. During the activity there are many different responses that we receive. Some students that have high support needs may have a goal to utter “Ba” at least once during their response opportunity. Students that have moderate support needs may be able to chant back some, or most of the rhythms in the response opportunity. Students with low support needs may be able to respond with one hundred percent accuracy to the rhythmic chants, as well as compose their own rhythms and lead the group in chanting. For students that are non-verbal, rhythms can be presented with body percussion, or with rhythm sticks or other percussive material available. We

emphasize to support staff and caregivers (depending on what kind of support you have in class) that we are looking more at participation, not perfection. It is important to remember that any response is a response. Responding doesn't have to be verbal, and students do not have to be attending one hundred percent of the time to be absorbing material and participating meaningfully. Opportunities are given for students to interact with music activities and we lean into support persons to help facilitate a healthy and safe learning environment. Don't require perfection when leaving opportunity for student input in class, just encourage trying out the activities to the best of their abilities.

Some students may need something called prompting. Prompting is a procedure used with students in order to provide supports in the learning process. The first part of prompting is obtaining a baseline. Finding the baseline for a student means to find the ability of the student performing a certain task or answering a question independently. What can they do independently? Once you have found the baseline performance of the student you can move on to other more restrictive, or intrusive, prompting. Prompting should be attempted from least to most to provide opportunity for students to respond to the least restrictive environment before moving on. Here are the stages listed from least to most:

- Verbal
- Gesture
- Visual
- Modeling
- Physical

A verbal prompt is a spoken question or request. An example of a verbal prompt could be "Hit the drum." Or something that is more or less elaborate depending on the student. Next in the list, descending more restrictive, is a gesture prompt. A gesture prompt is a non-verbal prompt in which you can use your finger to point to the drum (still using the "hit the drum" verbal request

and showing the stages “hit the drum” can go through from least restrictive to most restrictive). Next down the list, more intrusive, is visual prompting. Visual prompting requires some kind of tangible, visual, picture. Examples of visual prompts could be a picture of someone hitting a drum, a picture of a drum, a first then board (this is a two step schedule board for a student. Example: First we will play the drum, then we will sing goodbye), or a picture schedule. The next stage of prompting, more intrusive, is modeling. Modeling means demonstrating the desired request. If the desired request is “hit the drum”, model hitting the drum. You can even add in a verbal prompt after such as “your turn”. The last stage of prompting, physical, has two parts. Physical prompting could entail guiding, gently tapping, or nudging body parts that should be performing the request. For example if the request is “hit the drum” tapping a hand or elbow might be an appropriate prompt. Most intrusive prompting will be hand over hand prompting where you are moving the individual’s body for them. It is important to figure out if students need this kind of extra support, and if they do, what stage will they need.

The last thing that I wanted to discuss was support staff. I work at a private school for students with autism where we have a large amount of teachers that provide 1:1 or 2:1 services for the students. Even when working in public school settings where support staff was limited I always found it helpful to have a good relationship with them. Providing clear, and concise direction and expectations, in the music class, for the support staff will really be meaningful in the long run. Don’t be afraid to ask a support staff to help prompt a student, or to prompt a student less so that they can be more independent. The goal is to provide supports through modifications and adaptations, and slowly fade them out over time. I consistently am in a growth mindset with students. Growth is not linear, there could be months where students may seem to be in the same spot, and one day they make very visual, obvious progress. It is important to keep

communication open between classroom teachers and support staff so that everyone can be involved in the positive growth of the student and make sure that all material and curriculum is accessible for all students that attend.