

Positive Learning Environment

Student Understanding. In creating a positive learning environment, it is important for students to understand how to be accepting of people that may be different from themselves. Look past the external barriers and stereotypes society has created into the essence of what makes each of us special. While working toward this goal, it is important to keep in mind the experiences, or lack of experiences, your students have had learning with students who may learn or interact in ways different than themselves.

Scenario

In the school district where I teach, many of our music students have gone to school together since elementary school. This is a huge benefit when teaching in an inclusive classroom because many students know and understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. However, some may be less understanding than others or do not understand why Maria keeps yelling when she hears loud noises based on their individual experiences. So, I believe it is important to have a conversation with your students about the class as a whole to create a positive learning environment from the very first class of middle school. What I mean by this is, "Good morning class! I'm so glad you've decided to participate in orchestra this year! As we start our year together, I would like to remind you that we are sitting on a level playing field. All of you are equal and important! You all have something wonderful to contribute! You are a team and a family! You have to work together to create beautiful music so we all have to put forth our best effort to be the best person and best musician we can be!"

By making a general statement like this, you've reminded students of what is important – their attitude, work ethic, equality in your classroom, and working together, without saying Jim is different because he cannot read or Joe is different because he cannot sit still – because in music everyone is important to the success of the ensemble!

Mrs. Logston, Orchestra Director

Classroom Environment. When setting expectations and guidelines for your classroom, consider how to lead by example. From the first impression, to the last day of school, students are observing your actions in an effort to understand, process, and learn, whether it is playing an instrument, or showing empathy, kindness, or helpfulness. Setting the standard for acceptance is imperative when engaging students with exceptionalities in your inclusive instrumental music classroom. As the educator, you set the tone. You are the leader. Instrumental music classrooms provide a sense of family, offer leadership and life skills growth opportunities that are not found

in most typical classrooms. Help your students grow together, both socially and musically, by creating and engaging them in a supportive and encouraging environment.

The classroom atmosphere starts with the physical items displayed in the room. When posting classroom expectations and guidelines, use uplifting and positive verbs and adjectives. For example, rather than saying “Do not leave instrument cases on the floor,” you could explain “Place instrument cases under your chair,” or “Return your instrument case to your locker/cubby.” Provide productive guidelines that explain what to do, instead of what not to do. Include visuals along with written instructions to support the use of UDL.

Encourage collaboration, teamwork, and kindness in your classroom. Provide students with the opportunity to help their neighbor, and find a solution to the problem. Motivate students through independent musicianship and student leadership. These opportunities do not need to be lengthy units or extensive projects. It can be as simple as “ask your neighbor” instead of you telling them the answer or “Jim, will you help Bob pick up his music that just fell on the floor?”. Depending on the age level you are teaching, this will come with different levels of interest and willingness. Continue to motivate your students to utilize these outlets by encouraging them to implement kindness, empathy, and support to those around them.

Another important aspect of the classroom atmosphere is equal opportunity. Providing all students with the same experiences, no matter the challenges they face brings a sense of equality for all. This can extend from concert announcements, solo and ensemble adjudicated events, performing at a high school football game, large group adjudicated events, or honors festivals. Any opportunity provided to your students in or outside of your classroom should be available to all students.

Scenario

I had a student with Down syndrome in our high school band. Knowing we were traveling to Chicago to march in a parade, I reached out to his family to discuss the possibility of his participation. His family decided the group travel environment would not work well for him, but still wanted him to have the performance experience. So they coordinated with us, drove together as a family, and met up with us at our unload and warm up location before the parade in downtown Chicago. He marched in the parade with his peers, then his family picked him up at the end of the parade. Was this one more thing to remember when traveling with and facilitating 190 students in downtown Chicago? Yes. But it certainly meant everything to him and his family because they got to see him march in the parade and the student had a once in a lifetime experience.

Mrs. Kenny, Band Director

When taking students to adjudicated events, be cognizant of the need to be forward thinking and rehearse the performance routine to support all students in knowing what to expect. This will not ensure everything will go perfect to plan, however, it will increase the chances of consistency and success. Any time you have a student with exceptionalities participating in an adjudicated event, it is important to communicate to the adjudicator about the student. It is encouraged to type a generic note explaining the student's capabilities and challenges and include it in the front of the score you hand to the adjudicator. Additionally, have several back up plans in place if an issue arises. These can include items such as peer support, similar to what you have in place in class, ensuring all parts are covered if the student is unable to perform, or varying forms of transportation.

Scenario

I have successfully taken students with exceptionalities to middle and high school solo and ensemble contest, as well as large group adjudicated events. I highly recommend sending a note to the adjudicators with your scores prior to performance. This will ensure they are not distracted by anything odd that may occur and will stay focused on your superior performance. I'm confident if handled correctly, your students can have a wonderful experience in adjudicated events.

Mr. Albert, Orchestra Director

Both in adjudicated events participation and travel, understanding the needs and challenges of your students will help everyone be successful.

Learner Characteristics	Possible Adaptations
Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Move equipment, rather than do sight reading ◆ Engage a paraprofessional on stage with flipping music, to ensure percussion stations (snare, bass drum, timpani, auxiliary percussion) are prepared, and to help student stay on task ◆ Ask all spectators to leave the classroom prior to performing at solo and ensemble ◆ Have a mock performance in the space the real performance will take place
ADHD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ask all spectators to leave the classroom prior to performing at solo and ensemble ◆ Physically practice the large group event process, from warm up to performance to sight reading ◆ Have a mock performance in the space the real performance will take place
Autism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Engage a paraprofessional on stage with flipping music, to ensure percussion stations (snare, bass drum, timpani, auxiliary percussion) are prepared, and to help student stay on task ◆ Ask all spectators to leave the classroom prior to performing at solo and ensemble ◆ Have a mock performance in the space the real performance will take place
Physical disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ensure student can reach and facilitate all instruments they are playing ◆ Have a mock performance in the space the real performance will take place ◆ Engage a paraprofessional on stage with flipping music, to ensure percussion stations (snare, bass drum, timpani, auxiliary percussion) are prepared, and to help student stay on task