

Preparing Music Educators to Work Special Needs Students

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After a course redesign, students were more engaged in class discussions, made more confident statements about their ability to teach children with special needs, and were better able to adapt lesson plans to incorporate children with special needs in the music setting.

Background

For this project, I redesigned a course that focuses on music educators working with students with special needs, Exceptional Child in Music Education (MEMT 407). Although I am passionate about this subject matter, I feel that I do not adequately balance two essential areas: characteristics of different categories of disabilities, and methods for adaptation and integration of students with disabilities into the music classroom or music ensemble. After offering the course three times, I decided to change several key areas.

MEMT 407 is a required course for all music education majors seeking certification at the University of Kansas. It is part of the professional sequence so cannot be taken prior to the junior year, but when it is taken after that time varies based upon students' schedules. Although there has been a field practicum component in the past, due to students' schedules and the school districts' constraints, this has not been a successful component of the course. Some have already taken a special education course that focuses on education of exceptional children and youth, while others have not. Students can be choral, orchestral, or band emphasis with desires to teach at different levels from kindergarten through grade 12. Some have vast experience with children with disabilities, but most do not. In Fall 2006, I had 18 students enrolled in the course. I had one student with extensive experience as a para educator with children with autism, one student whose significant other has Attention Deficit Disorder, and several others who had passing experience with children with special needs through a previous practical experience, summer camp employment, or babysitting. Most reported having had peers with special needs in their classes in public school, although rarely at the secondary level music ensemble setting.

I have tried different approaches in this class, some more successful than others. I have used two different textbooks; both were designed for working with children with special needs in an educational setting but not specifically a music setting. With these texts, I primarily encouraged reading outside the course without follow up discussion within the class, so that I could focus class time on transferring textbook information to music settings. To help ensure out of class reading and to encourage preparation, I had a content quiz over each chapter as the students entered the classroom. I had a field simulation, an adapted materials presentation, an in-service creation, and an adapted curricula project and subsequent presentation. These four components I have kept as a part of the course, although somewhat altered.

For a redesigned course, I wanted to find how to better manage my classroom time while addressing both key areas (knowledge of disabilities and lesson adaptations). I decided to put together more efficient ways of disseminating the information; i.e., PowerPoint presentations and handouts.

One challenge that I wanted to address was finding ways to help students be successful in implementing appropriate curriculum for students with special needs. This course is often difficult for students, because each child is unique and the issues are not black and white. Due to scheduling issues, we are unable to get students into K-12 schools. Instead, we use abstract individuals as case examples, understanding that two children with the same disability diagnosis can present very different social and academic characteristics that impact their participation in music. We cannot discuss every possible situation with every child. A great deal of this class is based on theoretical discussion of “In your classroom, if you had a child with a particular disability and given context, what would you do?” Thus, I wanted to better facilitate those discussions and provide more background knowledge to help students to better adapt for different scenarios.

In addition, I wanted to rethink ways of assessing students’ learning. I have found that assessment in this class is a challenge, because much of the information is abstract since we are talking about *possible* scenarios. Although I feel that I can adequately assess students’ knowledge of disability characteristics, I wanted to focus on how to address their ability to adapt their lesson planning for these children/youth.

Implementation

Planned implementation for this course for the Fall 2006 offering included the following:

1. Inclusion of a new textbook that included eliminating chapter quizzes and substituting three tests.
2. Creating PowerPoint presentations that would address and expand on textbook information.
3. Creating a flowchart (sequential PowerPoint as well as student template) for historical understanding of special education reform.
4. Having students write a paragraph/page on each disability in class or as a homework assignment.
5. Potentially including additional reading assignments from my online version of this course, MEMT 791.
6. Revising the Adapted Curricula Project.
7. Improving my assessment of their In-service and Adapted Curricula Projects through the use of rubrics.

Progress made during the Fall 2006 semester:

1. Use of a new textbook that included eliminating chapter quizzes and substituting three tests. (completed)

I first adopted a new textbook, *Music in Special Education*, which is well written and nicely organized. The previously used textbook focused primarily on general information about children with special needs and standard information about education programs for them. The new textbook does a good job of giving basic, core knowledge to provide a framework for class discussion, so that during class we can consider unclear areas. I wanted to give students solid, concrete information so that they would have background knowledge to address unique scenarios. The research literature has indicated that academic information about disabilities better prepares pre-service teachers for lesson adaptation and also improves their attitudes toward

individuals with disabilities. The text also came with three tests using a variety of question formats.

2. Create PowerPoint presentations that would address and expand on textbook information. (completed)

The text also came with lecture outlines from which I created PowerPoint slides that I added on to with additional information. The lecture outlines from the text are mostly headings and terms, and I added on examples that would make the information real to the students. I designed the PowerPoint slides to help facilitate discussions, offer more structure to the discussion, function as study aids, and engage students. For each class session, I prepared lectures focusing on detailed adaptations for each disability characteristic and a format for taking notes on these adaptations. I provided scenarios in class for each disability category for students to respond by posing possible adaptations for each disability category. I asked the class to explain not only what they would do, but also a rationale as to why they would do it. I wanted students to understand that I can't tell them the answers to every situation, but I can teach them to be creative and think about appropriate adaptation. I also used PowerPoint to disseminate more information about their projects.

3. Create a flowchart (sequential PowerPoint as well as student template) for historical understanding of special education reform. (completed)

I created a PowerPoint presentation that functioned as a flowchart (additive chronologically) to discuss the historical development of special education reform. I created the flowchart because it is somewhat cumbersome material in the chapter. I wanted the students to have an understanding of the sequence of events and how long it has taken the special education field to get to the point that they are now at. It is a somewhat dry topic, and I thought the visual attraction of a flowchart might make it more interesting and give a visual focus during the discussion. A handout with similar information was provided to students.

4. Have students write a paragraph/page on each disability in class or as a homework assignment. (postponed)

I did not end up implementing this idea.

5. Potentially include additional reading assignments from my online version of this course, MEMT 791. *Instead* students read current short articles and discussed them in class. (postponed/adapted)

Again, due to time, I did not include additional readings from the on-line course this semester. I still think the information would be valid, but time was a concern. Instead of this idea, I included readings from *Spotlight on Music in Special Education*, which is a series of short articles drawn from trade magazines that focus on children with special needs in the music setting. I choose these readings because of the direct application of some of the principles we were talking about in class written by "real" teachers in the field. I had all students read ten short articles that we discussed briefly in class.

6. Revision of the Adapted Curricula Project. (partially revised)

I slightly reformatted the final culminating project that included many of the skills and information addressed throughout the semester. In previous semesters, I had given students more freedom and found that there was an incredibly diverse approach to this project. This past

semester, I realized that I needed to set it up to help students with knowledge transfer, because some of them interpreted the assignment very differently. The written document was to include disability descriptions, likely characteristics, goals and objectives, assessment tools for those goals, and adapted lesson plans. In the past I had students write a set of lesson plans before telling them what disability they were adapting. This seemed to work well and is something that I chose to continue. The format included a set of lesson plans that would either be based on an elementary/general music unit (for example, staccato versus legato) or on a specific tune for the secondary music performance based classroom. Students included an overall goal for the unit or piece, as well as specific goals and objectives for each class meeting time needed to achieve the overall goal. Each class meeting time had a lesson plan that included a goal, objective, materials, assessment, task analysis, and amount of time needed for the segment. After students had completed the lesson plans, they were assigned three fictitious students with disabilities who would be included in this music setting. In an introductory section, students restated the scenario of each fictitious client, gave an overall one-paragraph description of each population, and listed characteristics that would affect musical and social performance in the music setting for each student. The students then described in detail how they would adapt the lesson plans for each special needs student and why they made those adaptations. This was completed as a written narrative following each lesson plan.

7. Improve my assessment of the In-service and Adapted Curricula Projects through the use of rubrics. (partially completed)

I created a rubric for the In-service Project but not for the Adapted Curricula project, because as the semester progressed I realized that, although improved, I still was not satisfied with the implementation of that project. Therefore, creating a rubric should have happened at the beginning of the semester to guide the implementation, not at the end as an assessment only tool. Creating a rubric to be used as an assessment tool for this project would have not created a success oriented environment for the students. I needed to have much more diversity in my assessment based on the varying approaches of each of the small groups.

Student Performance

Adapted Materials

Although not specifically addressed in this portfolio, examples of this assignment are included because they speak to the students' understanding of potential needs for adaptation within the classroom. I encouraged the students to "shoot for the moon" and to be as creative as possible, as many inventions start from an idealistic view on how something could be more functional. These were quite creative. The adapted material examples, as typical from previous semesters, were very well done. Student 1's "Easily Moveable, Attachable, Strapable, Securable Xylophone" was very appealing to me since I've used Orff instruments frequently in my therapeutic practice. How to set up a barred percussion instrument for a student in a wheelchair is always an issue. Student 2's "Baton-onomie 5,00000" would be great for ALL students, as many struggle with watching a conductor and their music simultaneously. It would obviously be an asset to those with limited vision. Student 3's "Pedal Pusher 9400" was innovative yet accessible with its portability opportunities to be used for different pianos. I told them to dream big, and she did!

In-service Project

Again, although not the primary focus of this portfolio, examples of this assignment are also included as they speak to student understanding of various disability characteristics, potential adaptations, and how to disseminate this information to their peers. Students' choices gave me an indication of what they remembered as salient issues from our readings, discussions, and small group curricula projects. The instructions for this assignment, and now the accompanying rubric, seem to provide a solid framework for completion. Overall, the in-service projects were better than in previous semesters. Student 4's topic was ADHD, and he did an especially excellent job describing the use of Applied Behavioral Analysis. Student 5's topic was mental retardation, and he went over and above by embedding audio clips into his PowerPoint with a good group discussion template. Student 6's topic was physical disabilities, and she designed an outstanding small group activity using a disability scenarios worksheet.

Class discussions

Although very subjectively evaluated, I found that students were more engaged and less frustrated that I did not have all the answers, as evidenced by their attitude during class discussions. They seemed to understand that I was not able to provide all the answers but instead was trying to get them to be independent thinkers and to have the skills to be able to adapt curricular components for children with special needs. I felt that there was a positive shift in their attitude toward individuals with special needs and toward their impending teaching experiences. Students talked more, asked more specific questions, and were more willing to offer possible suggestions for curricular adaptations than they have been in previous semesters.

Adapted Curricula Project

I focused on students' final projects because they are compilations of all previous activities, and I hoped to use this to assess how prepared the students became to adapt what they learned in the course to the real world classroom. Although this is a worthwhile project as a culminating experience for the class, it is still not where I want it to be. There are skills internal to the project that need to be addressed more specifically; i.e., creating appropriate assessments to evaluate targeted goals. I think I have relied too heavily on the assumption that students had some of these skills from their methods courses, but in a different context where they are focused on disability adaptations, they do not seem to be addressing assessment accurately. Their task analyses of the individual classes were quite good, though, and the goals and objectives sections have improved from previous semesters.

The student project example that is used to demonstrate the project is an instrumental work designed for a secondary ensemble. Four students participated in this group. Their overview timeline is well-defined. Their task analyses within their procedures sections are quite clearly organized and have timings on each step. I also admired how they occasionally added which *National Standard in Music Education* they were addressing in the lesson. This was not expected but is something I may actually incorporate in future versions of this assignment.

Reflections

Overall, I feel that this was the most successful semester that I have taught this course, in part due to the change in textbooks and in part due to my organization of class discussions. I feel that students were more engaged in the class discussions and that more seemed to do the homework reading assignments because they were more related to their field. In the past, the readings were

general to special education which necessitated students transferring information to the music setting themselves; this was not always successful. I still have some things that I want to resolve before I offer the course again, primarily revolving around the curriculum assignment. I need to break it down into smaller chunks and perhaps incorporate a PowerPoint presentation with examples for each component, especially the lesson plan creation.

Plans for next time

My plans for the next time I teach this course are as follows:

1. Put the course on Blackboard for online assignments, attendance and grading, and timed tests.
2. Blackboard assignment after each chapter in the book that refers to a disability. The assignment would be to write a one-paragraph summary of the disability with a bulleted list of common characteristics.

Assessment for this assignment would include:

- Can the student write a four to five sentence paragraph describing each disability category using appropriate person-first language, terminology common to this category, and salient points from IDEA, in text clearly understandable to an entry-level teacher?
 - Can the student list at least five characteristics exhibited by a specific disability category that may be problematic in the music classroom? Can the student describe how that characteristic may cause social or academic challenges in the music classroom?
3. Using the *Spotlight on Music* series and selected articles I have on e-reserve in my comparable online course, MEMT 791, assign each student an article to read and present on a specific date as appropriate to the topic for that day. Perhaps have the students choose from a list of articles so they have an opportunity to pick one of interest. Ask them to do a quick summary of the article and that how it was useful to them as a future teacher. From this information, create an annotated bibliography so students have a resource for future reference.
 4. Blackboard assignments with written scenarios to which the student will suggest potential adaptations.
 5. Design a rubric for the Adapted Curricula Project.
 6. Switch the due dates of the In-service and Adapted Curricula Projects. Have the Adapted Curricula due earlier and be a written only project, yet still a group project. Have the In-service due as the final project and be both a written (as before) and an oral presentation. This would change from being an individual assignment to being a small group project.
 7. Do a more systematic job of breaking down the written Adapted Curricula Project, including being even more prescriptive of what is to be included. Students still seemed to struggle with this task, partially because some had never written a lesson plan and its component parts and were psychologically resistant to the concept. Although I added more breakdowns with specific segments due throughout the semester, I need to give more in class time devoted to oral and written rehearsal of individual aspects of the assignment. This could include:
 - Revised goals/objectives PowerPoint from Fall 2006 with small group work on creating goals/objectives.
 - Prescribed lesson plan format, blank and completed examples.
 - Handout on data collection/assessment of musical behavior with small group work on determining assessment methods for specific goals/objectives.

- Examples of task analyses for different musical behaviors at the elementary and secondary levels with small group work on writing task analyses to achieve specific objectives.

Assessment for this assignment would include:

- Can the student write a musical goal for a fictitious student using appropriate format and terminology? Can the student write an observable, measurable musical objective for a fictitious student using appropriate components (SMART=specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and timely)?
 - Can the student create a lesson plan following a prescribed format (goal, objectives, assessment for each objective, materials, and task analysis)?
 - Can the student create a detailed task analysis (step-by-step procedure) that will address a specific objective taking the student through a logical sequence from an introductory level through competence in the objective?
 - Can the student describe the specific way that data would be collected/assessment completed on the targeted goal? If necessary, can the student create an appropriate assessment tool to measure the objective?
 - Can the student adapt lesson components (goal, objectives, assessment measures, materials, or task analysis) for a fictitious student with special needs?
8. Modify the three tests that were created by the authors. Remove specific information related to music therapy and focus primarily on music education. Revise or replace ambiguous questions. Include scenarios for creative response where students would suggest an adaptation based on the provided information including a rationale for the adaptation.

NEW WEB PAGE:

Course goals and objectives:

- Acquaint the student with the current literature, research, and laws in music education for children and youth with disabilities in early intervention and K-12.
- Establish an awareness of the responsibility and commitment associated with the profession of special music education through lectures and observations.
- Participate in a field simulation of an assigned disability.
- Discuss teacher and student attitudes that facilitate and/or hinder the inclusion of students with a disability.
- Examine adapted musical instruments, musical literature, curricula, software, and technological devices useful in the inclusive music classroom.
- Review vocabulary/appropriate terminology pertinent to the inclusive music classroom.
- Develop lesson plans adapted for children and youth with disabilities commonly found in early intervention and K-12.
- Identify methods of evaluation and assessment appropriate to the inclusive music classroom.

What I hope that students take from the course is the ability to think about individual differences and situations, then make appropriate adaptations to their music teaching based on their knowledge of different disabilities, appropriate music goals and objectives, and the task analysis to accomplish those goals. The primary target for the students is to determine and successfully implement goals and objectives for their future school-aged students with disabilities. I wanted

students to be able to write appropriate goals and objectives for students with special needs, task analyze to meet these objectives, and create assessments that demonstrate that their students have met these objectives. To achieve these goals, the students also have to have background knowledge about different disabilities with which they may be working.