

The Inclusive World of Music: Students With Disabilities and Multiculturalism

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Abstract

The Tanglewood and Housewright Symposia concluded that music programs should include music from other cultures, as well as teach students of all abilities. Yet teachers sometimes feel uncomfortable attending to both of these values. Some music teachers have found creative solutions to incorporating world music into their curriculum for students with disabilities. Two case studies regarding steel band and taiko drumming are discussed. Advice for teachers of students with disabilities is also included.

Keywords

world music, culture, folk music, elementary general music, music education, secondary general music

The diversity seen in music curricula across the United States is a wonderful testament to music education's understanding of our plural society. Many directors of traditional performing ensembles, such as band, chorus, and orchestra, regularly include selections from around the globe in their concerts. In recent decades, nontraditional performing ensembles, such as mariachi and steel band, have flourished. These world music opportunities serve the dual task of incorporating music from the diverse cultures of our students, as well as exposing all students to unfamiliar musical sounds and cultural concepts. These musical exposures are an effort to increase students' musical knowledge and tolerance for others (Campbell, 2004; Fung, 1995). Interestingly, this belief in inclusion that underlies world music pedagogy is also the basis for exceptional student education. In fact, many definitions of multiculturalism not only include the expected categories of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender but also special abilities (Banks & Banks, 2010).

Music educators recognized the value of diversity in classrooms at least as early as the Tanglewood Symposium in 1967. In the *Documentary Report* from the symposium, the authors concluded that music education should contain music from "all periods, styles, forms and cultures . . . including currently popular teen-age music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures" (Choate, 1968, p. 139). Also reflecting the emphasis on student diversity, the symposium included a panel discussion on accommodating students with different abilities. Later, the *National Standards for Art Education* further acknowledged the importance of diversity with respect to both culture and ability. The standards called for curricula to address

culture, ethnicity, religion, and gender. They also included exceptional students, reminding educators that "students with disabilities—who are often excluded from arts programs—can derive a great benefit from them" (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994, p. 85). Because music is a core subject, they argue, all students deserve instruction for competency, regardless of ability. These assertions of inclusiveness were echoed in the *Housewright Declaration from Vision 2020*, which said, "all persons regardless of age, cultural heritage, ability, venue or financial circumstance deserve to participate fully in the best music experiences possible" (Madsen, 2000, p. 219). Addressing the diversity of curricula, it also declared "all music has a place in the curriculum," and music educators "need to be aware of other music that people experience and be able to integrate it into classroom music instruction" (p. 220).

Teaching world music is sometimes challenging for teachers who feel uncomfortable teaching an unfamiliar style of music (Teicher, 1997). Simultaneously, music teachers are asked to adapt instruction for exceptional students, while teaching toward competency and maintaining an environment where aesthetics are paramount. Music educators have found creative solutions to introducing world music to exceptional students. In the following two case studies, music educators were able to incorporate

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adaptive strategies for exceptional students, while maintaining the integrity of the cultural material in their curricula.

Steel Band and Autism

Over the past few decades, steel bands have become a popular choice for music educators looking to diversify their curriculum. Originally from Trinidad, steel pans are a family of instruments ranging from the highest-pitched tenor pan to the lowest-pitched bass pan. Together, the various voices of the steel band create a rich harmonic and rhythmic texture suitable not only for the Caribbean genres of calypso and soca but also jazz, pop, and classical.

Ed Anderson is the steel band director at Space Coast High School. In 2003, he was asked to teach a general music class for students with disabilities, primarily autism. He began by teaching students songs to reinforce learning in other areas (e.g., the “Wash Your Hands” song), and then moved to classic calypsos, such as *Marianne* and *Island in the Sun*. He soon brought pans into the classroom and placed colored stickers on a few, select notes that allowed several students to play simple accompaniment while others sang (Anderson, 2008).

When Mr. Anderson was asked in 2007 to combine his steel band with his class of students with disabilities, he was at first hesitant. The steel band was auditioned and had a history of being a top-notch performing ensemble. However, with his prior experience teaching exceptional students, Mr. Anderson decided that inclusion within the ensemble could be effective through simple adaptations. Some of the exceptional students were taught to play shakers and tubano drums. Along with the typical developing students on drum set and brake drum, these students helped comprise the “engine room” of the steel band—the nonpitched percussion section that drives the beat of the band. Mr. Anderson also purchased several miniature pans that had a reduced number of notes and taught the other students with disabilities to play pan as accompaniment in the ensemble. Similar to his previous experiences, students were able to perform well with a reduced set of notes. Furthermore, because calypso and soca are typified by rhythmic ostinati in the middle-register instruments—“strumming,” in steel band jargon—the exceptional students playing pan fit in well with the other students. With the beat clearly played by the drum set player, the students with disabilities playing in the engine room and strumming on the pans were able to follow the beat, all the while performing important musical tasks within the ensemble. Mr. Anderson also reported that the students with autism would entrain their repetitive self-stimulating movements to the beat of the music. Connections between students were also forged when the typical developing students helped teach their peers in class. In this example, Mr. Anderson successfully mainstreamed the students with disabilities in a manner that maintained the



Figure 1. The Space Coast High School steel band

performance demands of his ensemble, while providing a multicultural curriculum for everyone.

Taiko Drumming for the Hearing Impaired

Taiko drumming is a highly energetic, loud, and visually impressive Japanese percussion genre. Though taiko (literally “large drum”) has its roots as a solo instrument to accompany traditional festivals and Buddhist rituals, it saw great growth in the 20th century in both Japan and North America with *Kumi-daiko*, or “group” taiko. These ensembles contain drums of various sizes, performed rigorously with accompanying choreography. These movements are a hallmark of taiko and are as much a part of the genre as the booming sounds they create. As *kumi-daiko* proliferated in Japan and the United States, it became less attached to its traditional Buddhist roots as musicians fulfilled new musical objectives within community and university groups.

Of the thousands of taiko groups in Japan, it is estimated that there are more than 50 taiko ensembles for individuals with hearing losses (Tharp, 2008). Because playing taiko requires choreography and grand movements, deaf and hard-of-hearing musicians are able to synchronize their strokes with each other using visual cues. Additionally, the sounds created are so loud that they can be heard by many with residual hearing and felt by those with complete hearing loss.

For the last decade, several of these Japanese ensembles have performed for deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences in the United States. *Koshu Roa Taiko*, a taiko ensemble of individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing from Japan, performed at Gallaudet University in 2003 (Gallaudet University, 2003). They also participated in a symposium held at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and sponsored by PEN-International (a nonprofit organization for deaf education) to connect taiko musicians with deaf networks in the United States (PEN-International, 2005).

This outreach led to a 2004 artist residency, where students at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf spent 3 weeks learning taiko, culminating in a concert in front of their peers. For musicians who were deaf in these taiko ensembles, effectively no adaptations were necessary for them to fully participate in this multicultural music experience.

Further Considerations

Students in your classroom may be exceptional because of physical, behavioral, or cognitive reasons. In each circumstance, there are appropriate adaptations that will promote success (Adamek & Darrow, 2005). For students with physical limitations, incorporate world music that matches their abilities. Taiko would also be a good choice for some students with physical disabilities because of the gross motor movements required to play the instruments. Interestingly, there are many Japanese taiko ensembles with musicians who have physical disabilities (PEN-International, 2010). For students who cannot perform on the larger taiko drums because of the range of motion the instruments require, they can play the smaller drums (e.g., the tsukeshime-daiko). Other percussion genres, such as West African or Afro-Cuban music, might also suit students with various physical disabilities. Fortunately, there is a world of instruments out there that allow all students to participate!

For students with behavior disorders, such as oppositional defiance and socialized aggression, world music can be a part of their Individualized Education Plan. Previous research indicates the effectiveness of music in managing behavior disorders through a system of contingent rewards (Standley, 1996). Perhaps more than traditional music curricula, world music provides an opportunity to reward students with a unique musical experience. Though world music may present opportunities, teachers should take care to follow classroom guidelines for students with behavior disorders. With the unfamiliar music and instruments, be sure to give students clear and uncomplicated instructions in order to reduce the chance of misbehavior. Also, with the excitement of a room full of exotic and valuable instruments, be sure to organize the classroom in a way that promotes student focus and classroom control.

World music provides a unique opportunity for equality among students with behavior disorders. Because most students in a world music ensemble begin with little to no prior background in the genre, mainstreamed students begin with the same foundation as other students. This equity could promote self-efficacy and feelings of achievement that may not be possible in traditional ensembles. In fact, steel bands have long been used to reach students who were at-risk due to behavior (Jette, 1991; Williams, 2008).

Finally, as the Space Coast Steel Band example illustrates, world music can also be effective for students with cognitive disabilities. In this example, Mr. Anderson used

specific adaptive instructional strategies to meet the needs of his exceptional students. By modifying the instruments, and by adapting the difficulty of the strumming and engine room patterns, the students with disabilities were able to play alongside their peers.

Music educators have always been creative in developing curricula that best meet the needs of their students. Students with disabilities, like all students, deserve a diverse curriculum. Additionally, world music may provide a unique solution to the musical needs of special learners. As we continue to find ways to integrate world music into our classrooms, we should be sure to make these multicultural opportunities available to *all* students.

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Bio

David H. Knapp is a doctoral teaching assistant at Florida State University. His research interests include multicultural music education, steel band pedagogy, and music education in nontraditional communities.