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Accommodations for Underserved Students in Music Education

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Abstract

This research examines socioeconomic status and its relation to accommodating students with special needs where access to specific technologies and equipment is limited. For students who need costly accommodations where socioeconomic status affects access, other methods of accommodation need to be found. This paper focuses on the specific goals in a music education classroom and how students with disabilities struggle to achieve such goals without accommodations, as well as examining different personnel and technologies in which access is limited when examining the financial impact. Such accommodations include music therapists assigned to the school, inclusion classrooms, modified instruments, and other technologies and equipment. This research also focuses on special education financial allotment and how funding is provided for accommodations regarding population of the school. Examples of modifications to accommodations are also explored to provide a better understanding of how intricate accommodations can be made that are low cost to the school.

All students deserve access to a music education, regardless of socioeconomic status; however, students with disabilities may require accommodations in their classrooms in order to learn effectively. Depending on student needs, such accommodations can range drastically in simplicity and cost. Cases in which the students need accommodations with higher levels of complexity and higher costs cannot be ignored. For schools or students in lower socioeconomic environments, finding the resources to accommodate students who require expensive accommodations can be a challenge, so it is imperative that all involved parties understand what accommodations need to be made as well as the implications of making such accommodations for the student.

Before specific accommodations can be determined, there must be an understanding of the goals of a music education and how students with various disabilities may struggle to meet requisite goals without accommodations. In a music education ensemble classroom, students are given tasks and music to perform and study in order to meet specific musical goals, and thus “making music and studying music are the primary goals in music instruction” (Salvador, 2017, p. 94). For students with disabilities, achieving musical goals can be problematic, whether that be due to cognitive impairments or physical disability. Salvador (2017) elaborated on this while examining the role of music therapy in a music education setting and describing how the two fields converge. For example, music education has a purpose of achieving specifically musical goals, music therapy uses musical techniques as a means of meeting a therapeutic agenda (p. 94). The two fields can overlap; however, to benefit students with disabilities. Ritter-Cantesanu (2014) emphasized that when the music therapist is assigned to the school in order to help the student meet the goals described on their IEP, and “choosing which goals to focus service on . . . should be based on strengths and needs just as with other models of service” (p. 146), meaning

that the music therapist specializes in helping the student achieve musical goals, and bases the plan on specific needs. The role of the music therapist is like that of other personnel involved in accommodating students with disabilities, and that the music therapist works on the IEP team. It is also important to consider that the implementation of a music therapist for a specific student's needs is a very specific type of accommodation that is more involved than an accommodation that makes slight modifications to the classroom procedures and requires personnel with specific training.

Another accommodation for students with disabilities is the inclusion classroom. Darrow and Adamek (2018) stated that “students with disabilities have the right to a music education that meets their individual needs” (p. 64). In this claim, it should be noted that students with disabilities need accommodation, and that there are several ways to accommodate them. For example, Darrow and Adamek (2018) mentioned in their research several ways to accommodate students in the music classroom, such as adapting instruments for students with physical disabilities that include “limitations of strength, range of motion, fine and gross motor skills, or mobility” (p. 64). In these adapted instruments, students who encounter these issues are able to be apart of a normal classroom setting, and as Darrow and Adamek (2018) stated, “these are the same instruments that the rest of the class is playing, and this creates a more normalized environment for students with special needs” (p. 64). It should be noted that even though these are the same instruments, the process of adapting them to meet the needs of students with disabilities requires the help of “repair technicians, occupational therapists, or rehabilitation engineers” (Darrow and Adamek, 2018, p. 64). Because they require specialization to accomplish, this can be a financial burden on schools and students with lower socioeconomic background.

In order to provide these accommodations to students, specific financial conditions must be met first in order to ensure that the necessary resources for providing such accommodations are present and can be utilized. Depending on the area, special education financing is determined in several ways. Morrill (2018) stated that “[special education funding] policies can be broadly classified by whether they provide reimbursement based on the number of students classified as requiring services versus as a fraction of the total population of students” (p. 387). While in many cases this method for special education financing can be beneficial to students with a significant population; however, for students in smaller populations, there may be less funding available to them. Another consideration in this is that this specific method of financial allotment covers the entirety of special education, and it should be taken into consideration that many musical accommodations regarding physical disability can be costly and require specific technologies and specializations. For example, in Swingler and Brockhouse’s (2009) research, some of the technologies that they cover are Theremin and Soundbeam, and Soundbeam as a technology “incorporates a variable ranging control which allows the invisible beam to be compressed into a few centimeters or stretched out to cover an entire stage area” (p. 50). In this, the technology is relatively expensive, and so schools without access to funding may struggle to incorporate specific technologies. Because of this, music educators may need to find other ways that are cheaper to accommodate students.

Equipment accommodation modifications as a result of financial barriers vary in complication level. For example, in a string instrument classroom, students may struggle with traditional bow holds due to preexisting conditions. Instead of moving to a different music class or giving up music all together, the students can use alternative bow grips to effectively play their instruments. With the implementation of an accommodation that requires little to no additional

resources, students are given the opportunity to continue pursuing music, and financial allocation is not problematic for those in charge of providing accommodations.

Because accommodations for music education are often expensive, music educators may need to find other methods for accommodating students with disabilities. The legal requirements in certain areas for accommodating students with disabilities should be considered as well due to how they affect certain aspects of the financial burden. However, because music education and music therapy converge in many cases, there needs to be clearer guides for how accommodating these students can be met.

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