

Answering Interview Questions Related to Disabilities and Exceptionalities

Q. In terms of natural ability, we have a very diverse student population (large numbers of learning disabled as well as gifted/ talented students). How would you attempt to address the needs of all students in your music program?

A. As a tenth-grade choral studies teacher, it is important that I meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and exceptionalities. This educational goal is important because a teacher must plan and implement instruction so that all children, including those with special needs, are active and successful classroom members. A teacher must possess a variety of instructional methods to meet all students' individual needs. Inclusion in all chorus class activities such as concerts, contests, and festivals are an integral part of a student's education.

One strategy I would use to achieve this goal would be to set up my classroom in a way in which students with special needs respond, act, and perform in rehearsals. One way to implement this strategy is to keep the rehearsal room neat. I would also have a consistent seating arrangement and clearly mark any changes to the classroom set-up. I would prepare the students by making signs and announcements before changes took place. Furthermore, I would always write the rehearsal plan on the board. In addition, I would give early notice of changes to students who are mentally retarded, visually impaired, or attend class in a wheelchair. I would plan the necessary logistics, especially if those changes would need to take place within the course of a single rehearsal (e.g. changing from section seating to quartet seating). I would have alternate seat assignments for those students who are prone to move about the room and I would keep an open mind to using other preventative measures.

This strategy is effective because keeping the rehearsal room neat helps students who get disoriented or confused if things are not in their “proper places.” Students with autism, mental retardation, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder will especially benefit from learning from an orderly learning environment. A consistent seating arrangement also allows students with visual impairments or wheelchair requirements to find their correct places within the ensemble without them needing to have constant reminders from me. Writing the rehearsal plan on the board helps students with hearing impairments because they rely on visual cues. Using this strategy maximizes their degree of learning and their self-esteem.

Another strategy I would use to accomplish this goal would be to promote quality singing. I would use modeling by clearly demonstrating the appropriate and inappropriate vocal techniques. I would also teach some music by rote. In addition, I would make sure that the students’ music has his or her vocal line highlighted. As a reinforcement, I would make rehearsal tapes of the students’ individual part so that they can practice outside of class. Furthermore, I would not allow students to criticize their peers during rehearsals. If any student makes disparaging remarks to another student, whether disabled or non-disabled, I would say “That’s not necessary,” to the offending student. When students can learn in a non-threatening environment, the quality of the vocal ensemble and students’ self-esteem improves. I would also praise students’ efforts and work together with the special education department to develop specific musical goals for the students in their IEPs (Individualized Education Plans).

Another strategy I would implement to address to needs of all the students in my classroom would be to assign a “buddy” to students who were having difficult keeping

their place in the music. This strategy serves two purposes a) it provides assistance to the disabled student who will now be able to keep pace with the flow of the lesson and b) it allows the exceptional student to make the best use of his/her abilities by helping others.

Promoting quality singing using these techniques avoids stigmatizing students who have special needs. Modeling good vocal technique helps students who have difficulty in cognitively processing lengthy verbal explanations. Rote-singing helps students who have visual impairments to compensate by strengthening their memory skills. Highlighting the students' vocal line draws his or her attention to the specific notes and text that are being studied. Eliminating critical remarks by peers has a positive effect on the climate of the class. Collaborating with other professionals in the school helps disabled students become more confident about their own skills. Assigning a "buddy" to a disabled student provides benefits to both the disabled student and the "buddy."

Again, meeting the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and exceptionalities are an educational important goal. Classroom set-up, promoting quality singing, and assigning a "buddy" to disabled students are all excellent ways to achieve this goal in a tenth-grade choral studies classroom.