



Book Review

Teaching Music to Students with Special Needs: A Label-Free Approach

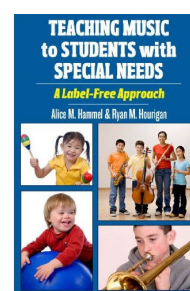
Alice M. Hammel & Ryan M. Hourigan

Reviewed by Kimberly McCord

Teaching Music to Students with Special Needs: A Label-Free Approach

Alice M. Hammel & Ryan M. Hourigan

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Teaching Music to Students with Special Needs: A Label-Free Approach is a co-authored book by Alice M. Hammel and Ryan M. Hourigan, leading researchers in the field of teaching children with disabilities in the U.S. Hammel teaches at James Madison University and Christopher Newport University in Virginia. Hourigan is Assistant Professor of Music Education at Ball State University in Indiana.

Both authors have extensive experience teaching (and in the case of Hourigan, parenting) children with disabilities. The book is a refreshing new perspective on inclusion of children with disabilities by using a label-free approach. This philosophy is centred on viewing all children as individuals without labels. Labelling children as emotionally disturbed, autistic or labels that are even more damaging such as “wheel-chair bound” or “suffering from Tourette syndrome” can impact

children negatively throughout a lifetime. The authors encourage professionals in Part I of the book to focus less on the disability and more on how the child receives, processes and expresses themselves musically. By understanding how each individual learns best, music educators can better design instruction that supports the needs of all children in the music classroom.

In Part II the authors have devoted a section to trainers of music educators. There are helpful sections on how to design observations, assisting in the classroom, discussion and planning in inclusive music classrooms that have students with exceptionalities. In a following chapter the authors offer helpful strategies for professors who teach methods courses on music for children with disabilities or units on this topic within music education methods courses.

Part III offers specific strategies for pre-service and in-service music educators on how to design curriculum for students with disabilities. Classroom management is addressed in detail, an area many new teachers struggle with, particularly with children who have disabilities that impact their ability to function typically in a classroom. Both authors have backgrounds in instrumental music and a chapter has been written that focuses on conductors of instrumental and vocal ensembles. This is a welcome addition to the available literature. Very little has been published about inclusion of musicians with disabilities in the music ensemble.

In Part IV the authors include more than twenty-five pages of resources for music teachers that include web sites and publications. It is unusual to find such a comprehensive list for teachers. Although many of the websites and resources are aimed at teachers from the US, there are still plenty of international resources that include much of the excellent work done in the UK.

Integrated throughout the book are vignettes that are actual stories about music teachers who have taught children with disabilities. Another welcome perspective is that of Dr. Hourigan, a father of two children with autism. The ability to blend the parent and family viewpoint of living with children with disabilities helps all of us to understand that we need to know to collaborate with families and others who have significant roles in a child's life. The more we learn and understand about the individual, the more efficient we as educators can be in the design of music instruction.

There are many excellent examples of forms and checklists that help to illustrate typical paperwork used in special education in the US. Many of these forms are specific to United States disability law but there are a number of other examples that can be used by any music educator who teaches children with disabilities.

International readers will find much information about the disability and education laws in the US, and the book is definitely written with the American public school music curriculum in mind. Despite the focus on teaching music to children with disabilities in the US, there is much new information in this book that will be helpful to all music educators. For example, in the third section of the book are some nice suggestions for socialization opportunities within the music classroom. Socialisation with peers is a critical skill that many students with disabilities need more opportunities to develop. When students are kept in separate classrooms for most of the day with other students with disabilities, it is essential for them and for typical peers to learn skills in communicating with each other. Music is an ideal

platform for students to find similar interests with each other.

Music educators often comment on the challenges of designing curriculum and fair assessments for students with disabilities. The authors have included an excellent chapter with practical considerations and strategies for developing self-contained and inclusive music curriculums and assessments. Constructivism is an approach the authors have had particular success with as a way to include students with all types of exceptionalities, including students who are musically gifted. Gifted students can also be students with disabilities.

This book addresses many areas that previously were gaps in how music teachers plan, implement, and assess musical skills and interests of students with disabilities. I appreciate the positive tone of the book and the conscious effort by the authors to encourage teachers to let go of the need to label and look at students in terms of what they can't do and instead begin to consider each child as a musical child with a right to a meaningful music education, including participation in ensembles. I believe K-12 music educators and university music education professors would find this book a valuable tool toward developing a philosophy of teaching all children music in the 21st century.

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