

John F. Kennedy Center

**"Promote Dignity - Retain Integrity: Strategies for the
Inclusive General Music Classroom."**

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>> SARAH MITCHELL: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the April installment of our VSA webinar series, which comes to you from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and addresses topics related to the arts, disability and education. My name is Sarah Mitchell and I will be your moderator today.

Today's webinar is called "Promote Dignity - Retain Integrity: Strategies for the Inclusive General Music Classroom."

If you would like to view live streamed captioning of this webinar, you can follow the link you see on this slide and in the chat box of the control panel located on the right side of your screen. Before we get started, let's touch base on the Go to Webinar control panel. This control panel can be hidden by clicking on the orange arrow in the top left corner. If you need to leave the webinar early, you can leave it by clicking on the "X" in the upper right corner. A recording of this webinar will be available afterwards, so you can catch up on any parts you miss.

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You can submit or answer questions using the chat pane located near the bottom of the control panel. I will be monitoring this throughout the webinar. If you prefer to say your question instead of typing it, please click on the "Raise your hand" icon on the control panel and I will unmute your microphone during the questions portion during the end of the webinar. Otherwise, those questions you submit will come directly to me. During the designated question and answer time at the end of the presentation, I will relay the questions we receive to the presenter.

Within the week, we will send out a follow-up E-mail with a link to the recording of today's presentation, a copy of the PowerPoint presentation and handouts, and a copy of the webinar transcript. This means you can go back to watch the recording and review the supplemental materials after the webinar, in addition to any notes you choose to take.

I'd like to invite you to join us next month for "Music & Math in Motion: A New Learning Approach to Counting in 4/4 Time and Tempo Concepts for Students on the Autism Spectrum", which will take place Tuesday, May 24th from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time. If you're active on social media, I invite you to connect with us using #VSA webinar. On Facebook, we are VSA International, and on twitter we are VSAINTL. We

would love to engage with you. And with that, I will turn it over to today's presenter, Sarah Burns. Sarah? Take it away.

>> SARAH BURNS: Hello, everyone, and good afternoon. During our time today, we are going to set the stage for the secondary general music classroom. And I will share some modifications and strategies that I use in my classroom with you.

Having a little difficulty fast forwarding here.

I have seen it in the eyes of my students with special needs. As they enter the music classroom, or as they are presented with an activity that they are not quite sure how they're going to accomplish it without drawing attention to themselves. The look in their eyes motivated me to create in my general music classroom, a place where they could have fun, participate on the same level as other students, and yet find success in their musical experiences.

This is what prompted the title of this discussion. I want all students in my classroom to have musical success. But I especially want my students with special needs to know that when they come in to my classroom, their dignity as students, without any labels, will be retained. It promotes the building of musicianship in every learner, and I feel that as music educators, we need to do this, and I seek to promote that in my classroom.

I also want to stay true to the curriculum that is set forth by my school. In this way, I work to retain the integrity of the music curriculum. Let us learn how to promote dignity and retain integrity.

In setting the stage, we first need to talk about the general music classroom. The secondary general music classroom is where students are given opportunities to explore music in a variety of ways. Ideally, this will actively involve the students and musical experiences through singing, the playing of instruments and movement. Content and curriculum is left up to the teacher, which makes it possible to tailor lessons to fit the student population.

The student population that makes up the secondary general music classroom is a combination of all students in a school setting. You will have the popular crowd, as well as the less popular. You will have the athletes and the non-athletes. Then there's the musical students, those who love all things musical, and are involved in the school ensembles, band, choir, orchestra, as well as those who care nothing about music beyond that which they listen to on their devices, much less care about sitting in a classroom to learn about it.

You will have those students identified as gifted students, as well as those who struggle academically. Many students believe that to be successful in music classroom, they have to

be able to play an instrument or to sing. If they don't have those abilities, then they don't feel they belong in a music class, or they feel they're being set up for failure. With these perceptions, all but the musical students come into the secondary general music classroom with a degree of trepidation. For students with special needs, this type of class is a double whammy. Learning music takes a certain degree of know-how, and the class make-up is sometimes a student population in which they are less comfortable.

The teacher is the one who fosters and encourages a comfortable learning environment. It is the teacher who makes the seamless connection, exposing the students to musical experiences in music and general music. As Suzuki told us, any child can be developed. It depends on how you do it. I love this picture of Suzuki. If you'll notice, he is kneeling as he is playing with the children. This is a sign -- something that Suzuki did many times when working with children. He felt it was important to get on their level and to teach them in the way that they could best learn. And that's what we're doing here.

At this time, we're going to initiate a poll. The first poll question is: How are students with special needs included in your music classroom?

You can be doing this behind the scenes as I go along with the webinar.

Let's talk for a moment about the general music curriculum, as well as my background in teaching general music. My music curriculum was set up for a nine-week exploratory, and I would see students for nine weeks at a time. Basically the cafeteria wasn't big enough, and so they would send the seventh and eighth graders to an exploratory while the fifth and sixth graders would eat lunch, and then that would switch. So every nine weeks, I got a new set of students. During these nine weeks, each week had its own music concept or unit. Weekly, I would alternate between lecture-based concept, or oriented lessons, with activity-base such as movement activities and playing the -- the playing of instruments. This way, as one of my students said, we get to -- we have to do the boring stuff, and then we get to do the fun stuff. The fun stuff he referred to was the weeks which we played instruments and did the movement activities. The Montessori approach advocates students of differing levels learning from each other through the course of exploration. Though Montessori was referring to having differing age groups learn together, the secondary general music classroom, the student population is very similar to that because we have students of all learning abilities.

I have found that sometimes students learn better one-on-one from each other than by a lesson presented to the whole class.

It is often helpful and strategic to seat students with special needs near others who would be able to assist them during lessons. Most students will naturally assist a classmate who seems to be struggling, so there is often no need to give specific directions or assistance.

Also, seating students with special needs with the other students helps them to be involved and feel included. And it all goes back to fostering that comfortable learning environment.

The first thing to look at is modifying your lesson materials to accommodate the students with disabilities in your classroom. Examine your existing lesson materials. Look at what you're already doing. You don't need to reinvent the wheel. You might already have things in place in your lessons that work just fine, or they might just need a little tweaking, and perhaps some of the ideas I share with you today will be helpful with you. The formatting. I have made an effort to modify my lesson materials in such a way so that everyone is working from the same format. You'll see examples of this in a few moments.

While this is not always possible, it is something that I strive to do in my general music classroom. Also, be open-minded about modifications. Find what works, even if it seems a little unorthodox. And use it. After all, it's your classroom. As long as you are able to teach your curriculum, how you teach it is up to you, and how you teach it is based on the students that are in your classroom.

Let's take another quick moment for another poll question. From what do you get the most guidance for strategies to use with students that have special needs in your music classroom?

And think about, was it your schooling? Is it textbook? Online? Webinars such as this? Let us know about that.

>> Hey, Sarah, this is Sara Mitchell just jumping in for a second. Why don't we give our attendees just a minute while the poll goes up to answer it before we move on.

>> SARAH BURNS: Okay.

>> Great. Thanks. Great. And as people are finishing up voting, it looks like by far and away the most popular is teacher workshops and in-services, followed by reading books and articles and online venues such as VSA webinars.

All right. Take it away.

>> SARAH BURNS: All right. Thank you very much. Let's talk now about some strategies. One of the first strategies that I started using was very basic. The musical alphabet. By the secondary grades, most students with special needs know their letters in the alphabet, even if they're unable to put them together to form words. They are usually able to identify those letters. They are usually able to identify those letters and

match them with each other. This makes them an accessible tool for use in the music classroom. As you know, the letters can be used to show absolute note names, as well as musical form. One way that I use them is in creating bell-set song sheets. Here's one example. I chose some folk songs and fun songs that children would know, as well as some songs that I wanted them to learn. In choosing songs that they already know, students are able to practice independently, and they know whether they're performing the songs correctly. I have a classroom set of bells, and if you are like me, the last thing that you want to listen to is 25-plus bell sets playing different things at the same time. My solution to this is to have the students practice using the thick end of the mallets instead of the round end of the mallets. This allowed neighbors to practice next to each other without really disturbing those who are next to them.

By the way, as we're talking about this bell set handout, and you will be -- one is made available for you, I used Excel program in order to create many of my handouts because it helps me to format and to get things in nice, straight columns, as well as add the incidentals that I need.

In this bell set handout, each cell would be a beat, and I've placed a heart at the top of the song. For my students, the heart indicates that it's the beat -- the musical beat. And we started out in kindergarten talking about it as being the heartbeat.

In the rows below it, I would put the absolute note names for the notes in the song that I had chosen. One letter per heart beat indicated a quarter note when they were playing it. As seen on line 1 here. Eighth notes are indicated with hyphens, and if you'll look down on lines 5 and 6, you will see the B to the C as being a hyphenated note. That would indicate to them that they play two sounds on the beat.

The half notes were indicated by an underscore after the letter, and you can see this on lines 2, 4 and 8. And you can see how it -- how the sound would carry over all on that last beat.

Now, you might notice that some of my letters on here have -- are just plain, and others have an apostrophe. The bell sets that I used, we had two octaves. We had the C to C octave in the middle, and then it would go lower down to the low G and then it would go above the C, the high C, to a high G. That meant that I had duplicates of the letters, and I needed to be able to indicate in my song sheets how I wanted the students to play these. So what I did is I would use an apostrophe if it meant that it was the high note. So if it was high C, I would use the apostrophe. And that way they would know to listen for

that high C. And then you can see on line 1 that I have a high C and a high D on that line and throughout the song.

Now, if the song made use of the notes below middle C, then I put a comma, because a comma is down low and they would think it's the lower note because it's down low next to the letter. And it also helped them learn to differentiate between the high and the low on these bell sets.

Now, you'll notice that the majority of our letters do not have an apostrophe or this one does lack having any -- didn't need any notes with a comma. The notes that were without any type of punctuation, I would have them played only within that C scale in the middle of the bell set. They knew that those were in the middle. The apostrophes indicated the high and the commas indicated the low. And a bell set song sheet that I have used in my classroom with my secondary general music students has been made available to you.

We know that working in small groups allows students to work together. And one way that I make use of small groups in the music classroom is in a rhythm band unit. Musically, I use rhythm bands to build confidence in playing written rhythmic notation. This rhythmic notation is usually 16 or more measures long. I believe that in playing these longer pieces helps students to develop their rhythmic pacing, and it prepares them for future music reading in larger ensembles. Strategically, I use the rhythm band to allow students to learn a part together, helping each group member as they work through challenges and to make use of their practice time.

Rhythm bands make use of small percussion instruments. Whatever you have, I would usually use drums, rhythm sticks, Tambourines, triangles, drums, et cetera. I divide my class by the instrument part in the music. This way, all the drums are in one group. All the tambourines are together, the rhythm sticks, and so on. By grouping the likes together, the students can make sure each one of the group is playing the instrument properly and they can work on reading those rhythms correctly. The teacher is able to circulate around the classroom observing progress and assisting as needed. Circulating and being in close proximity to the groups also helps with classroom management during these individual and small group activities.

When left to learn on their own in small groups, you will find that students teach and learn from each other, kind of like what Montessori was promoting.

Once all of the groups have learned their part, I have each group perform together for the class, and then we will all perform together. We'll practice. Then I will always say, let's perform for the camera, and whether or not I'm recording

it, I would try to encourage them to do their best and we would perform it either with piano or with recording accompaniment.

Here is an example of the first rhythm band -- the first music that the rhythm band music -- the music they would see for the rhythm band music. Each measure is on a different line. By practicing measure by measure, instead of having all the rhythms written out, the students would be able to focus on the lines that they have. Normally, when we read music, we read it from left to right, and then you might have eight measures on a line. While some students are not able to keep up if we have eight measures on a line, so I would reduce it and they would have a sheet that each line would be one measure. I also would make sure to number the measures. That way, as they were practicing, and then as we worked together on a certain part, I would be able to say, let us each start at the certain line and we would start there and play together.

You will also notice that I have highlighted a couple of the lines. I tried to highlight and alternate what the students will do. That also helps those students who perhaps have a vision issue. They could focus it on those. I also have, for students, when they see a lot of music, sometimes it just kind of all runs together. And when they have it highlighted, they can get an idea of this is the line I should be reading now.

Each group has its own sheet to follow. So all of the drums would have only the drum part on it. I learned the hard way that having each of the groups represented on one page was confusing for the students, so I would have one page would have that -- only that instrument part. You will notice in this that because of the alternation of the highlighting and with the numbers, the students are able to follow and stay together. Not only does this help the students with special needs, it helps the entire class. This is really one of those examples where the formatting, while it's intended to assist the students with special needs, it really does help the entire class to find success.

Why does this work for me? The students are working in small groups. When they're working in small groups, they have help readily available right there next to them and they're going to help them to be successful to play this. And they can practice it over and over until they get it correct, or until they're able to do the best that they can do. And the numbering and the highlighting will make it easier for everyone to follow.

Another thing I do, for lack of a better description, I've described it the mixed method. And by calling it a mixed method, I'm making use of notation and iconic representation. The rhythmic notation that we're going to use in this can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be. Of course, you can

gauge it by the grade level that you're teaching, what they have been taught previously. You'll notice in the example I'm about to show you that it's pretty basic as far as the rhythmic notation is concerned.

On the screen here is an example of an iconic drum ensemble that I would use for my students. If you'll take a moment to look at this, you will see that first I chose three shapes. I chose shapes that are distinctly different and easily recognizable. They do not have to be colored as they appear on the screen. The reason I chose some distinct shapes is because they need to be easily recognized, but we also know that some of the children with special needs may have difficulty in making those distinctions, or even in identifying them. I labeled each of the shapes group 1, group 2 and group 3. Then, each group is assigned a rhythm S you've noticed I've written in three very basic rhythms here. The rhythms are based upon the known rhythms for the class, and once they learn this one rhythm, it will be repeated or played over and over again. So as long as they know this one rhythm, they're going to be able to perform in this drum ensemble. They will know when to perform because their shape, their assigned shape appears in the grid at the bottom of the page. Each -- you'll notice that the table or grid, we have each numbered column, I've numbered from 1 to 16. Each of those numbered columns represents four beats. When a group's shape appears in a column, then they would play their rhythm.

You'll notice the Z. I, in my classroom, use the Z as a rest, and so that was something my students were familiar with, and whenever they would use -- whenever they would see that, they would have -- they would not play during that number. Now, some may ask why I didn't use a whole rest there. And the reason was purposeful because some of my students with special needs did not recognize the whole rest, but they did recognize this as a representation of the quarter rest, and I would tell them that when they had a Z in that column, and they were not to play, they should count to 4. And most of them were able to be successful in doing that.

I would practice this drum ensemble one column at a time. I would say column number 1, 1, 2, ready, begin, and so on all the way through all 16. Then we would try to do more columns without stopping. And, you know, for them, that would be very daunting, and they'd go, oh, can we do it? And so they would practice those four, and they would be, if we needed to go back and work on something, I would usually work on it once or twice, just so that they would have an opportunity to fix any mistakes.

Now, one of the things you might notice, that in doing this drum ensemble, if they play where they're supposed to play,

nobody's really going to know if anybody makes a mistake. That's another reason that I like this type of activity, because everyone's playing. It's intended to be sound. And so this way, when they play, if they make a mistake, it's all right, because it doesn't matter. For the greater scheme of things.

This type of drum ensemble may be used with the whole class by putting it on the board. Yes, I'm old enough that I used to have to write things like this on the board, or I would use chart paper, and now, of course, we can project it quite easily on the screen. Something else that I've done is I would make copies of several of these and if I did them ahead of time, then I would hand them out and the students would have different rhythms to do in small groups. I also would use this and give them their own template to use, and they would create their own. And in creating their own, they took ownership in their own performances.

Usually those small groups would actually be three students in a group so that they could perform for the class by the end of the period, or maybe at the end of the next period. And I really liked watching how my students interacted and worked with the students that might be struggling some. And I also watched as they would edit things to make sure, oh, let's make sure they have a part and let's make sure that this is easy for them and something that they can do. So I really liked the way that my students took ownership of this, not only in the musical aspect in that they were creating their own musical ensembles, but in how they helped each other and worked with each other.

Why does this work for me? By making the rhythm pattern, each group plays short in length, it is easily learned and remembered by all students. Depending on the abilities of your class, you might give them eight beat measures, or eight beat rhythms to play. I tended to keep to the poor beat because it was easier to rehearse, and I wanted my students to not get bogged down, thinking, oh, if I messed up on beat 4, then they wouldn't play the rest of the four beats. So that's why I could keep it relatively short. By starting small with just that one numbered column and progressing to longer performance times each time would allow the students to not get overwhelmed or discouraged. One of the things I saw with my students with special needs is when we would do something, and if they saw it as a whole picture, some of them would shut down right at the beginning. And I would get the, I can't do this. Watching them, you know, slump because they felt they're not going to be able to do this was really discouraging to me because that meant that I had not made it so that they could learn, and so I've taken great efforts to try and develop things that enabled them to have success. It might be small success in the scale, or the

realm of music, but it's a huge success for them. And it allowed them to be one with their classmates. And the classmates really didn't notice that maybe things were simplified for this because they all have the same thing. So that's really important that you can try and do that without drawing attention to it.

An icon drum ensemble sheet has been made available to you. If you would like to get a template, if you're not able to make up a template of this for your own, I've given you a copy of this one and if you would like a template, you may E-mail me later and I will try and send that off to you.

In closing, I want you to consider quote by Kodaly. One of the things that he said is "Often a single experience will open the young soul to music for a whole lifetime."

When we think about the secondary general music classroom, regardless of what age it is, middle school, junior high and high school, for some of those students, it may be the last formal music class that they will ever have in their life. And we, as teachers, depending on how we present it to the students, and depending on our own attitude towards it, it's going to affect them in the long run. It's always been my goal to have my students leave the classroom just saying, that was so fun, and then when they come into the classroom, this is my favorite class, and they would say, I just can't wait for fifth period because that's when we get to go to music. And I liked hearing that from all of the students. It's my goal to hear that from all of the students. We want them all to be encouraged by what we do in the classroom.

Hopefully something I have shared with you today may be useful for you in your classroom. Remember that these ideas are things that work for me. They're things that I have used in my classroom. That's why I wanted to share things that are successful or have been successful for me in the classroom.

Take these ideas and make them your own. You can tweak them as much as you want. You can use them to use them exactly as I presented them here. You can use them, what I've given you, and then you can create your own off of that. But feel free to use this information. You might wonder why I didn't give you a copy of the rhythm band worksheets that I actually used. Some of those are -- most of those are copy righted, and it's difficult for me to share those through this video, but there are many opportunities or things out there for you to find, and if you need information or need help finding some of those materials, let me know and I would be -- certainly be happy to help you with that.

If I can be of further assistance, don't hesitate to call -- to contact me. My information is here. I'm honored to have had

this opportunity to share with you, and I do want to thank the VSA and accessibility office of the Kennedy Center for making these webinars possible. And I think now I'm going to hand it off to Sara.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Yes. Sarah, thank you so much for that presentation. It was definitely informative. And we are actually now moving into the question and answer portion of our webinar.

So, if you haven't already, please start either raising your hand, and I will unmute your microphone in order to ask a question or you can ask your question into the question and answer box on your Go to Webinar panel on the right side of your screen. The first question I have for you, Sarah, is do you have any specific strategies or tools you use when you are implementing your kind of mixed method of rhythm notation that you were just talking about?

>> SARAH BURNS: You probably noticed on that drum ensemble sheet that I used stick notation, and by definition, stick notation, for me, is when I don't use the notepads on the notes, and that's one of the things that helps me to be able to write things quicker and to write them quickly. But it also helps the students to write it quickly as well.

Sometimes my students with special needs, when we would be drawing the rhythmic notations, it would take them a really long time because they were trying to draw the circle perfectly and they would get frustrated if the note head was not correct. And so I would help them with -- I would give them little old credit cards, or old cards I get in the mail that are credit card size, and they would use those as straight edges to help them draw their stick notation. So that's one that I would use.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Great.

Next question is as you are trying to promote dignity and retain integrity in your classroom setting, are there any particular challenges you face throughout that kind of come up time and time again?

>> SARAH BURNS: One of the challenges that I've found is that every nine weeks, I would get a new classroom of students. So every nine weeks, I was modifying to accommodate for each of the students because I wanted to keep my materials current. Something that I did, in order to keep it modified for the students that were current, if I made a modification or a student with visual impairment, I made sure that I saved that modification, so that if that came up in a later exploratory time, I would be able to pull that out. So being organized and saving your materials, because while the students change, sometimes the needed modifications did not necessarily have to change each time. So I was able to glean -- to build up a file

of the different modifications I would do for each of these activities.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Great. Now, we seem to be a little bit light on questions, so participants, if you are planning on submitting one, I would love it if you would either raise your hand or enter one. In the meantime, Sarah, are there any other kind of thoughts you would like to share with our participants?

>> SARAH BURNS: As my students would come into the classroom, you know, one of the things that I can't stress enough is creating a comfortable learning environment for your students, and you need to stress that because many times, these students with special needs are only with the rest of the student population in your class. And it goes both ways. Those students are a little nervous about coming in and being with students that they may not spend a lot of time with. They're not with their regular teacher. I had some instances where they would come to music class without their aides, so that would put them at -- they'd feel a little bit less comfortable there, so for me, being able to build that sense of community with those students is so very important. Not only do you need to do that with the students with special needs, but you also need to do that with those students who come in to the classroom, and maybe they're not quite sure while they're willing to help them, they're not quite sure how to help them, so you need to be ready to give guidance there in the best way possible so that you're helping the student who needs to help their friend. But you're not putting down that friend who might need the help. So it's really important to make everybody feel comfortable as they're coming into the classroom, and make the classroom a place that these students would leave -- usually leave my classroom being friends with those students, even though they may have only seen them for those nine weeks of the school year.

>> SARA MITCHELL: Sarah, thank you so much. It's really nice hearing about your strategies for making sure that you have a positive learning environment for all your students.

It looks like we have concluded the question and answer session of this webinar, so if you guys do have any additional questions, feel free to contact me, my contact information will be up on a slide in just a second. But also, feel free to fill out our survey. It will be popping up just as the webinar closes. This information is incredibly helpful to us as we look for feedback not only for our presenters, but also how our webinar is run. So if you are able to take that moment to do so, we'd be incredibly grateful.

Other than that, thank you so much for joining us. Again, please feel free to reach out to me by phone or E-mail with any

questions for either our office or to pass along to Sarah. And
I hope that you all have a wonderful afternoon.
[Webinar concluded]