Teaching Music to Students with Disabilities (Abilities)

September 16, 2011, Christine Lapka

Billy’s Story

Billy Rueckert is 13 years old. And he likes to prove people wrong…Billy has cerebral palsy, and he was barely 10 when he peeked into the band room…and informed Miss Roggen he’d like to learn to play an instrument. Anything. He wasn’t picky.”

I remember him coming through that door with his walker,” says Tammy Roggen, the school’s band director since it opened 12 years ago. “And I’m thinking, ‘What instrument am I going to put him on?’ It was a challenge because he couldn’t hold anything.’ And that’s how Billy came to play the tuba.

He learned sitting down, elevated by pillows, the tuba held up with a special brace, using his three fingers that worked best. “His feet wouldn’t even touch the floor when he first started,” says Roggen. “I was like, ‘How is he going to survive?’ But he just kept trying.”

Billy started in the sixth-grade band and moved up to concert band. By eighth grade, he’d moved on to symphonic band—the choicest band at the school. But this wasn’t enough for Billy.

He told Miss Roggen he wanted to join (marching band)…Not one to discourage, she found a chair with special clamps and suited him up with a sousaphone…”We would carry it on the field and carry Bill out, and we had to put cushions on the chair…Then we put the sousaphone on, then we had to carry out the music stand.”

“You should have seen it,” says Billy’s mother. “It was like the Beverly Hillbillies. We all had something to carry.”

“He didn’t care,” says Roggen. “He was out there playing with the other kids.”

But Billy Rueckert was not done. This fall he tried out for All-State Band.”

References


It’s a bid deal, says Roggen. “I never made all-state.”

Billy got his tryout number, did his tape, submitted his music anonymously to the judges like everyone else.

Nowhere on the audition paperwork did it mention that he can’t write or walk alone or kick a ball…Turns out Billy Rueckert, age 13, is one of the best middle-school tuba players in Florida. In fact, he’s No. 8.

“It just blows my mind,” Roggen says. “It’s such an inspiration.”

…Think about him on the field, playing away, happy as can be, the other kids marching around him.

Think of him wowing the crowd at All-State Band…

Think of the effort it takes for him to dress for school, get to class, scratch an itch. Think of Billy Rueckert, and how he never gives up. Emily J. Minor, Palm Beach Post, February 4, 2003.

Fundamentals

1. Mentors
   Taking a risk
   Asking for equipment-writing tech grants
   Developing new ways of playing
   Commissioning music for Multi-Tiered instruction
   i.e. http://russnewbury.com/Music_Categories/Concert_Band.htm
   Raising money
   Learning about abilities (disabilities)
   Time to make alterations
   Finding help-I can’t do this alone-see #2

2. Collaborate GET HELP!
   Sharing ideas/listening
   Parents
   Special Education Teachers
   Private lessons or needed equipment as part of the Individual Education Plan or 504 Plan
   Special Education Area
   Talk with the student
   Team teaching
   Program Assistants - educate program assistants in music (learn to play or sing along with the student)
   Arrangers
   Adults who want to stay involved in music (former students)

3. Accommodate
   Accommodations refer to the use of an altered delivery of instruction that does not significantly change the content or the conceptual difficulty of the curriculum (Switlick, 1997; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Bielinski, House, Moody, & Haigh, 2001). Or, accommodations can be a change in the test or in the testing environment intended to remove the effect of a disability from a student’s performance on an assessment (Ysseldyke et al. 2001). Modified instruction could include: using materials and devices,
adapting skill sequences, using personal assistance, adapting rules, or adapting the environment (Switlick, 1997). For testing situations, timing (increased time) and format modifications (e.g., Braille or audiocassette editions, large-print tests, give response in sign language, mark responses in a test booklet) were listed accommodations (Thurlow, Hurley, Spicuzza, & El Sawaf, 1996).

Change what they look at...

Texture—classroom environment
Lighting
Visual environment (room decorations)
Seating
Auditory environment
Physical arrangement of the room
Entrance/exit plan for students

Tempo-pacing in the classroom
Order of the lesson plan
Attention span of the group
Movement breaks
Homogeneous or heterogeneous group skills

Dynamics-presentation and teaching techniques
Amount of information
Picture schedules
Modeling
Whole body involvement
Different sensory stimuli (i.e., visual, kinesthetic, aural)

Instructional Accommodations common in music education
Instrument Stands...or find a clever instrument repair person
Time
Memory as part of the Curriculum?
Chunking
Mnemonics
Cues - start stop play
Use of Color Coded counting
Highlight markers for repeat signs
High school band with program assistant
Parent volunteer
Cross age tutors (HS assisting elementary school)
Post Rehearsal order on board
Use peer leaders (section leaders)
Private lessons - intensified instruction
Modeling
Visual, Aural, Kinesthetic
Repetition
Hands on Learning
Repetition
Enlarge music

Focus on what the student CAN DO
Perhaps they play part of the piece
Sing part of the song
Sing some of the songs
Perhaps you do what general music teachers do all the time…
Modified or Adapted Music Curriculum
   Improvisation - Sing/Play only by ear
   Simplified music
   Basic Knowledge
   Teaching multiple concepts in a lesson - Differentiated Instruction
   Define individual goals for students

When the curriculum is altered, educators refer the change in content or the conceptual difficulty of the material as a “modification” (Ysseldyke et al. 2001), an “adaptation” (Switlick, 1997), a “modified curricular expectation” (Friend & Bursuck 1999). Some examples of modifications might be selecting one or two basic concepts from a unit of study or to change the activity that is used to reach the outcome. Some students read tonic solfa and hand signs while a different student labels line and space notes.

Hire a custom arranger i.e. http://russnewbury.com/Music_Categories/Concert_Band.htm

Does everyone have to read notation?
Is learning by ear acceptable for some students?
Is contest and competition necessary?
Is there an option beyond band, choir, and orchestra?
Are some instruments/voice parts easier than others?
Does everyone have to perform at the same level to receive an A (Tiered Instruction)?
Do we need letter grades?

5. Recruiting and Educating an Outstanding Peer Tutor

INCLUDE

Identify classroom demands
Note student strengths
Check for potential successes
Look for potential problems
Use information gathered to brainstorm instructional adaptations
Decide on Adaptations
Evaluate student progress


Why Billy Joined Band

Billy was 11 years old when he attended Watson B. Duncan Middle School. The Junior High Band played at the elementary orientation. “I loved the sound of the band; there was nothing like it. I was looking for my niche so I joined band. (I wasn’t going to be on the basketball team.) My parents were surprised and of course supportive.”

With his parents he went to his band instrument fitting. His first choice was the trumpet because he loved the sound. But, at the time he had braces and “my facial formation needed something with a large mouthpiece.” We tried the trombone but “my arm was too short to reach 7th position. I’m still a small guy, but at the time I was only 4 feet 5 inches. Then Ms Roggen rolled out a tuba; I played it and the tuba was a comfortable fit...I used a stand called a Tuba Tamer and I currently have one myself.”

Billy’s Story Part II

“There is a lot more to music than you may think. Being a part of a musical ensemble is different than any experience you will have. Being a part of a group and being able to make music together as one unit is the most amazing thing.