



Differentiation in Action – Conversation with a Specialist in Music Education

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*As part of Inclusion Month in Canada, I had the opportunity and pleasure to speak with Isabelle Perron Desjardins, a learning specialist (agente pédagogique provinciale) at the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development within the Francophone educational services sector. Isabelle is recognized for her expertise in teaching music, and she has generously given her time to share her experience in the application of effective practices for differentiation in the context of music education. **Note:** The following is a translation of our discussion.*

IC: Imagine that it's back-to-school, and you're welcoming new classes. What strategies do you use to promote the inclusion of students with diverse needs in your classroom?

IPD: My mission is to ensure that each student reaches their full potential and that all students find their place in the orchestra. In fact, at the beginning of the year, I take the time to get to know the students, that is, their interests and passions, through discussions and providing them with questionnaires. At that time, I will also assess the group's needs to select a few pieces of music that will allow all students to fully engage with the orchestra. In addition, I consider the complexity of the instrument and the presentation of the musical scores according to the specific profile of students with diverse needs.

Complexity of the Instrument

For example, we provide metallophones with removable blades to simplify the use of the instrument. It is therefore possible to give a blade to a particular student who will only be responsible for one note, and assign this student the task of being the "master" of that note (for example, "Maxime, you will be the master of the note G").

We also use recorders with raised holes to help students place their hands in the right place. These recorders are also twice as quiet as typical recorders, as some students may be more sensitive to loud noises.

I ask the whole class what role each student would like to play in the orchestra so that everyone can participate in the orchestra according to their interests and abilities (for example, dance,

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Isabelle Perron-Desjardins

Isabelle is MéloDys certified, which allows her to offer specialized musical sessions to children with learning disabilities and she has completed several training courses at the Mus-Alpha laboratory in Quebec. She is the recipient of the *Association des enseignants et des enseignantes du Nouveau-Brunswick (2018)* et le *Prix d'excellence en éducation* (excellence in education award) from the Francophone sector of the Department (2017-2018). As a result of her great passion for pedagogy, and for differentiation in music, her leadership and organizational skills have enabled hundreds of students at all levels of elementary school to live enriching experiences that inspire the desire for musical discovery. She has taught a course on this subject at the Université de Moncton, and generously shares her knowledge across the province in her new position as a learning specialist (agente pédagogique).

rhythmic participation, melodic participation, etc.). By making all these options available to *all* students, students with diverse needs are never put on the spot in front of their peers.

Complexity of the Musical Score

There are several ways to adapt the presentation of music sheets based on reading and intellectual abilities of the students. Here are just a few examples:

- For some students, the words of the lyrics are replaced or supplemented by images.
- Music notes can be colour-coded to help the student read and play the right note (for example, a red dot means an F).
- Other students may be called upon to learn only the chorus, while others may be asked to carry the rhythm for part of the song or for the entire song.
- Music sheets can be presented in chunks to help students who may feel overwhelmed by a full sheet.

IC: The strategies you use in the planning process are excellent examples of Universal Design of Learning in action in the context of music class. What are some of your teaching strategies during the lesson?

My students often work in dyads. I use modelling, prompting and a lot of social reinforcement. To be consistent with the classroom teacher, I follow, in my classroom, with the reinforcement system used by the teacher to encourage students' engagement and learning. Some students who need a quieter space can go to a practice room and may be accompanied by an educational assistant.

I treat the music course with the same importance as I would for any other academic course. Music is a tool that allows students to develop their potential and the possibility of becoming musicians in their own right.

IC: What message would you like to convey to teachers interested in differentiation in the context of music education?

Through the various courses I teach, I meet younger and older students who remind me continually that each child is unique. With the right supports, everyone can succeed to their full potential. Music has the power to break down even the most challenging barriers. My students have proved to me beyond a doubt that we must continue to renew ourselves as educators and discover new avenues in pedagogy. Through the many projects I have carried out, my students have been able to join their community and engage in a multitude of discoveries. As they have had the privilege of meeting Acadian artists on several occasions, these experiences have been incredibly rich. They have helped to change their lives and mine as well! Teaching, sharing knowledge, accompanying students in their journey, in their discoveries, in their growth - these are the reasons that continue to nourish my passion and my love for our wonderful field.

About Us

The Autism Learning Partnership, a branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) in New Brunswick (Canada), is the sole provider of the Provincial Autism Training curriculum for preschool autism agency and educational personnel in New Brunswick. The Autism Learning Partnership provides bilingual, evidence-based, high-quality professional learning and resources to support families, preschool agency personnel and educational personnel in the province, and has a mandate to establish partnerships with organizations nationally and internationally.