Bridging the Gap: Teaching Students with Disabilities in the Choral Classroom

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Privilege and Ableism
- Able Bodied Privilege: a "set of beliefs, presences and practices that produce - based on abilities one exhibits or values - a particular understanding of oneself, one's body and one's relationships with others."
- Ableism
  - Refers to discrimination in favor of able-bodied people.
- Main types of Ableism:
  1. Failing to provide accessibility beyond wheelchair ramps
  2. Using ableist language
  3. Assuming people with disabilities have no autonomy
  4. Feeling entitled to know how people became disabled
  5. Assuming disability is always visible

Language
>**Person-First Language:** ex. *The person with autism*

The choice recognizes that a human is first and foremost a person:
- This language is often seen as respectful by professionals and caregivers, who are recognizing that a person has a disability, but that doesn't define them
>**Identity-First Language:** ex. *The autistic person*

The choice is about empowerment:
- Often preferred by those in the deaf, autistic, and blind communities, who have decided to own the word and use it as a form of empowerment.

<u>Disability is not a dirty word</u>
By using the term disability we:
- Embrace disability identity
- Are disability allies
- Give respect to those who have disabilities
- Avoid erasure of the history and context of disability studies

Bottom Line: <u>Honor the language preferences of the person</u>

Our Role:
"In a changing landscape that honors equity and diversity, music education environments must also change to align with these values."

Rehearsal Solutions:
- Here are a few solutions to consider in your ensemble during rehearsal:
- Pick developmentally appropriate repertoire! With layers of complexity, offering variable levels of challenge in different pieces. Consider teaching in the aural tradition
- Upload relevant materials to a shared drive that contains recordings, videos, or multimedia slides that show a particular line (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) being highlighted as the part is played or sung
- Explore improvisation, playing instruments or composing, and creativity through visual art and poetry to demonstrate understanding. Use a variety of modes!
- Stay organized, minimizing clutter in your physical and virtual spaces

- Use technology! If your singer has an assistive device, become familiar with it and think outside of the box to see if there are creative ways to incorporate those sounds. Use an iPad to assist in making music more clear and helpful for your singers
- Color coordinate whenever possible to keep a consistent system
- Give breaks during long rehearsals, this can be an actual bathroom/water break, or get creative. Lead your ensemble in a quick yoga or meditation exercise

Rehearsal Strategies
1. Breaking Down the Task
2. Repetition
3. Modeling
4. Consistency in Rehearsal

Performance Solutions
- Expand traditional ensembles
- Create peer mentors!
- Think about universal design in your uniforms
- Structure an informance or demonstration concert
- Consider adding an ASL interpreter to your concerts, and use ASL in your pieces!
- Use hand signs or body movement to differentiate pitch, rhythm, etc.
- Present the strengths of individuals!
- Make transitions between pieces as seamless and easy as possible

Additional Strategies:
- Be patient
- Contemplate Location
- Utilize technology whenever possible
- Adapt your score: highlight the singers part, white out others, use boxes, etc.
- Examine Your Environment: ask, what can I change to make my space more universally designed?
- Work with your singers! Singers with disabilities can participate successfully in an ensemble, work with them to determine what success will look like.
- Set high expectations that are reasonable and achievable
- Educate yourself on your student's disability
- Give choices whenever possible!
- Ask for help :) work with music therapists

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Remember:

Accommodations and adaptations provided for one person can benefit all!

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Sources

Adaptations lie inherently within a quality musical process