



A Short Guide To Working Inclusively Through Music



Working inclusively through music



We take it as a given that every dedicated professional music educator will work tirelessly to ensure that all the children s/he works with are equally included in activities and have an equal opportunity to progress musically. We understand that music educators will select, design and adapt materials to match the diverse needs, interests and abilities of individual young people they work with. These short notes are intended to both affirm what professional educators are already doing and to provide further ideas to help deepen engagement, strengthen inclusion and promote real equality for all children.

What is musical inclusion?

Musical inclusion is a way of working that gives every child and young person an equal opportunity to participate in music and to learn and progress through music to the best of their individual capabilities. It acts to counteract the effects of exclusion, which may be based on cultural background, level of ability or other factors and to help children overcome barriers to their learning, whether these be physical, cognitive, environmental, emotional, behavioral or psychological.

Who is inclusion for?

Inclusion is for all children and not just for those previously categorized as vulnerable or marginalized. However, we recognize that certain children have life circumstances where they experience barriers that can hinder their progress in music. Musically inclusive programmes are sensitive to the need to fully include these children (now called children in challenging circumstances) along with all others.



Key ideas in inclusive pedagogy:

Inclusive practice is based on the idea of 'universal design', i.e. whatever you design should be useful to everyone. In this case music sessions/ lessons should be accessible, engaging and enjoyable for all the children who attend. The work can then be differentiated for the needs of individual children.

Inclusive pedagogy challenges the idea that the presence of some children (for example those with special needs and disabilities) will hold back the progress of others. Inclusive educators believe that all children can make progress (if conditions are right) (Florian and Spratt, 2015).

Some characteristics of musical inclusion

An inclusive music programme will:

- Help participants develop musically, personally and socially
- Offer every participant a music education that is designed to meet their needs, interests and abilities
- Value all styles and forms of making and learning music equally
- Foster a way of working where young people's voices are heard, respected and acted on while also acknowledging the teacher's expertise and overview in relation to areas such as progression and attainment.
- Value the input of SENCOs, TAs, and class teachers.



Inclusion outside the classroom

- Perhaps one of the hardest things for busy music teachers is to get to know about their students before the year's programme starts. It is difficult to find the time to meet with school staff, often they are too busy and in many cases schools are unwilling or indeed unable to share information about the children. That said, it is tremendously useful to know certain things about the children in challenging circumstances in your classroom:
- Who are they – so you can easily get to know them?
- What are they interested in – so you can build something related into your teaching?
- What might cause them difficulty (for example if the music were quite loud this could cause some children distress / would any of them have specific motor skills difficulties for example)?
- Do any of the children have difficulty concentrating and what are the best strategies to help them with this?
- Are there any specific things that could trigger challenging behaviour? What are the school's protocols in this case?

If possible the best person to give you such information will be the SENCO, the special needs coordinator. They will know the children in challenging circumstances well and be able to give you good information and advice. If it is too difficult to meet them, then a meeting with the classroom teacher is also great.

Inclusion in the classroom

1. Change the seating arrangements:

It makes sense that once you know who the children in challenging circumstances are you should have them sit very close to you so you can have clear and simple communication with them and develop a good relationship, checking in regularly.

2. Develop routines:

Children with anxiety and also those on the autistic spectrum may well benefit from knowing that the session follows a similar format every week so they are not surprised and potentially overwhelmed by new and strange things. This could mean having warmups at the same time every week or having an opening and closing song etc. Also it may help calm nervousness if you briefly tell the children at the start roughly what you will do in the session, as long as you can stick to what you said.

3. Use warm-ups and activities

It can be useful to use warm-ups and activities in which there is no right or wrong to help to get the group bonded. These can include pulse and rhythm games, voice and imagination work etc.

4. Have a positive time out space

Some children will not be able to be part of group music activities for the full session. Give them a way they can signal they need to leave the group and something positive they can do when not in the main activity. Also make it easy for them to come back in.

5. Adapt the pace

All teachers will adapt the pace of the work to fit with the level of the group's general understanding and ability. What is perhaps less well known, is that some children, including many children with ADHD, may have slower brain processing speed than others. This in no way means they are less intelligent, simply that they can take much longer to really 'get' things. If instructions go too fast for them they can get further and further behind very quickly. It may be useful to arrange a visual cue for children to indicate if the information is going too fast for them.

6. Tailor the task to the person

Amend and adapt activities to strengthen the engagement of young people who may be facing difficulties.

7. Share ownership and give choice

Any activity which allows children to be in control and make decisions is likely to be more engaging. Choosing instruments (in say a percussion group), leading a warmup activity, doing some basic conducting, making suggestions about how to structure a piece, or even operating the recording machine are all ways that enable young people to have some power.

8. Think about starting sessions with simple, inclusive songs

Many examples can be found on the Sing Up website if your organization is a member.

9. Operate a buddy system

Find confident and capable children in the group and pair them up with any that might seem to be struggling so they can support each other.



10. Check that everyone has got it before you move on

Of course you do this anyway but double-checking with the children in challenging circumstances is useful.

11. Consider iPads and other tech – especially for some children

Some children, for example those with dyspraxia, may find it very difficult to learn to play instruments in a conventional way. iPad apps such as Thumbjam can be a great tool to get them fully involved very quickly.

12. Give specific praise and affirmation

While praise is sometimes difficult for children to accept, if children are given praise for specific things it can often have a good impact on their self esteem (there are exceptions). A very useful form of praise is reflective praise where you praise the children for something and ask them to think about it after school and share the praise with whoever they live with, parents or carers etc

13. Find specific roles for participants

Finding specific roles for students in challenging circumstances can help sustain their engagement. This could be as simple as leading the count-in or pressing the record button.

14. Try not to punish what the children cannot control

This is much easier said than done. It is worthwhile to remember that many of the children you work with will lose concentration very regularly, will fail to achieve tasks, will misinterpret instructions and will time and again get things wrong. They will also on occasion achieve and this is the real victory. The more you can keep them engaged the more they can achieve. All this said, aggression, hitting and highly disruptive behaviours have no place in the music classroom

15. Incorporate feedback

Try to leave about two minutes at the end of each session to ask the children how it went and how they felt/feel. While you cannot always include everyone in the feedback do always ask some of the children in challenging circumstances to make them feel included. Their ideas will help you plan the next session.

Beyond the session

A big part of working inclusively is reflecting on your practice before, during and after the session. Spending a few minutes before the session thinking about what the issues around inclusion might be and how they could best be tackled will give you a real sense of being on top of things.

Reflective decisions you make during the session as to who to put in which group, which tasks to assign, how to affirm and praise and when etc. can really help every child feel more included.

But perhaps the most important thing is to find time to think through the session afterwards, looking at what worked and what did not in terms of making every child feel more included. From this you will discover what you are doing to make the session more inclusive and what less so. You can plan to incorporate more inclusive ideas into your next session.



This document was written by Phil Mullen and was commissioned by MAC Makes Music (Midlands Arts Centre) following consultation with local Music Education Hubs. MAC Makes Music is a Youth Music funded programme that works to influence music inclusion for children and young people who face barriers to making music.

The MAC Makes Music programme is part of the Alliance for a Musically Inclusive England. The work has been made possible by funding from the National Lottery via Arts Council England.

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Registered company no. 718349 / Registered charity no 528979

 National Foundation for
Youth Music

 Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



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