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Case Studies

EDUC350

Prof. MacTaggart

**Case Study Interviews**

I am interested in creating more ways for students with learning, behavioral, physical, and developmental disabilities to access music, especially at the middle school and high school level. In both middle school and high school, most music classes are performance-based. The performance-based ensemble works on repertoire for concerts or festivals and most teachers offer different levels of ensembles from beginning to advanced. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, it seems that students with disabilities are not as involved in higher level ensembles compared to peers without disabilities. I am passionate about empowering all students through music and want to create inclusive ensembles in which both music and instruments can be adapted for students who are unable to read traditional music or play a traditional instrument. Therefore, I chose to interview a student in an upper level choral ensemble, and a student that has a learning disability.

The choir student, an eighth-grade boy, taught me several things about teaching, and mostly about the importance of music. The student sits in the back corner of the classroom with other boys to his right and below him on the risers. From observation, he seems to fit in with the other middle school boys, the boys easily get off task and start conversing with each other. This student has slightly more self-control than his peers, but because he wants to fit in, he will join the conversation which sometimes results in the teacher becoming upset since the boys talk over her. The student has an excellent sense of humor, he sang a solo for a talent show held in the choir class with several other students. He took ownership of the solo and made his peers laugh when he was performing. The teacher asked her students to write an essay about what choral music has done for them. I therefore used some of those questions to interview this student.

The choir student stated that choir has helped his confidence, given him a sense of community, offered him an additional hobby, helped his voice, and offered him a chance to express himself. From the interview, I learned that middle school students want to fit in with their peers. As a male, this student is experiencing a change in his voice, which can be embarrassing. However, the teacher talks about this with her class, assuring the students that it is normal to experience register changes and cracking. The music teacher also encourages singing because it stretches the vocal cords and makes the change in register easier. Luckily, the singers understand this and sometimes laugh about these changes together. The teacher allows some opportunity for students to converse or makes a joke which the students can laugh about together. These opportunities help the choir students establish connections. This student feels supported by his male peers that sing around him and felt supported singing the solo for the talent show, thus making him feel confident in his singing abilities, and more confident about fitting in with his classmates. Middle school students also need outlets for expression. This student felt that choir allowed him to express himself. This was clear when the student did his solo in a funny way to make the class laugh. Additionally, when the choir was singing a piece that was aesthetically pleasing, beautiful, and meaningful, their care and concentration to sing expressively was incredible to watch. The second student I interviewed had several similarities as the choral student.

The second student I interviewed is an integrated services student. Although, being in integrated services does not affect his positive attitude for learning and drive. The student filters distractions, stays focused easily, and is efficient in completing his work. The student is involved in basketball but is not involved in other extracurricular activities. The student enjoys being involved in basketball because it is an outlet for releasing energy and this gives him a chance to be with friends. The student’s favorite subject is English. He feels connected through reading books and enjoys writing because it gives him a way to express himself. The student enjoys school because it gives him space to learn and complete his work, but he enjoys school mostly because it gives the student a place to connect with his friends. This student feels that all teachers at Webber are supportive of his unique learning needs by “walking him through steps” when he asks a question. When I asked the student for teaching advice, he stated that teachers should be patient, positive, and be willing to “walk students through questions.”

Interviewing students can help teachers to establish connection, students will be more engaged when they are involved and something they care about is integrated in the lesson. Additionally, interviewing students can provide direct feedback for collecting data or for assessment purposes. Interviewing both students solidified some of my goals as a teacher. Additionally, I added things that I want the students to specifically experience in my music classroom. I want to empower students through music, create a sense of community, and offer a place for expression. Both middle school students stated they enjoyed either being with friends or feeling supported by peers. Therefore, I believe that it is important to offer opportunities for students to engage and collaborate, emphasize and encourage each other. The students also stated they enjoyed expressive outlets. I believe that it is difficult for males to express themselves because of societal norms, especially young males. In writing and in music, all students can express themselves with the support of peers. As a music educator, I plan to emphasize the expressive element for students. One student also stated that he enjoyed basketball because it was a way to relieve energy. In observation, the 8th grade males in choir also seemed to need a way to relieve energy that had built up throughout the day. Music can be an active experience and I hope that I can offer students plenty of kinesthetic experiences. Being an educator requires patience, flexibility, compassion, and most importantly, a willingness to listen and learn from students.