



## Managing the Mainstreamed Classroom

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# Mainstreaming

Photograph by Vivienne della Grotta



## Managing the

by Jane W. Cassidy

Andrea Smith is frustrated and angry. Until two days ago, she felt that her undergraduate education had prepared her well for a career in music education. That was before she knew about Sarah and Joseph, the first of a dozen special education children to be mainstreamed into her elementary music classes. Of course, thought Andrea. "They" think music is a frill anyway. As it is, she has only thirty minutes a week with her nine hundred elementary students and must travel between two schools. Now she figures she will have to spend some of that valuable teaching time dealing with problems these children bring into the classroom—problems that she feels unprepared to handle.

And what about the curriculum? Sarah has cerebral palsy, which has severely limited her fine and gross motor coordination, and is in a wheelchair. Does that mean that movement activities can no longer be incorporated into the lesson? Will Orff instruments have to be put on the shelf for the rest of the year? Joseph is deaf—at least Andrea thinks he is, because he wears

two hearing aids that are connected to some sort of box strapped to his chest—and does not speak well. How can he participate in singing? How will she communicate with him if she does not know sign language? Her experience tells her that children behave better in the classroom when they are actively involved in the music lesson rather than passively listening and watching. How can these children participate? Andrea *wants* these children to succeed in music class, but decides that all she can do is prepare her lessons as best she can and see what happens in the first class.

Many music educators who have had no experience in dealing with handicapped children in an integrated setting voice similar concerns about the mainstreaming process—concerns about the perception that music is an extra and therefore an obvious place to fulfill the legal requirements of Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act); concerns about lack of direction as to how to prepare lessons that will accomplish curricular goals yet include all members of the class; and,

because of a lack of specialized course work in college, concerns about dealing with special learners' academic and social behavior. These areas—teacher attitude, lesson preparation, and implementation—are important because each has an impact on classroom management.

### Teacher attitude

Stop and think! Why are you teaching music? Most likely there are a number of reasons, which include a love of the subject matter and a belief that all children deserve the opportunity to learn to love music as well. Music educators continually fight for a commitment to music as a necessity in the education of every child—not just the smart child, the talented child, the well-behaved child, or the "normal" child, but *every* child.

Reasons for including music in the curriculum for nonhandicapped children—promoting the integrated development of cognitive, motoric, and emotional responses; giving aesthetic pleasure; building self-esteem; providing enjoyment—are the same as those for children with



Photograph by Mark Regan

*Teaching special learners in an integrated setting is often not as difficult as some teachers fear. Jane W. Cassidy, assistant professor of music education at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, details some organizational strategies to guarantee a smooth transition for both the student and the teacher.*

# Mainstreamed Classroom

disabilities. The mainstreaming process is further intended to benefit all children in the classroom. Handicapped children have the opportunity to interact with nonhandicapped children in a positive and normalizing environment, thereby developing social and academic skills that may transfer into other life situations. Nonhandicapped children have the opportunity to change their perceptions of inability or deviance in handicapped children, thereby creating the probability that future interactions will be initiated by the nonhandicapped children.

Why, then, do many music teachers fear mainstreaming? Often, as in Andrea Smith's case, it has nothing to do with a desire to deny access but rather with a feeling of inadequacy in dealing with the academic and social problems these children may bring into the classroom. With a little extra time and creativity in the planning stages, music teachers can actually *save* precious classroom time and begin to feel more confident in their ability to manage a mainstreamed classroom.

## Lesson preparation

One problem that Andrea Smith faces is the uncertainty of the first class. She knows little about Sarah and Joseph other than their most prominent disabilities and *infers* from her observations that these students will be unable to participate in music activities. She cannot adequately prepare for class, as she has no idea what to expect from these students.

It is important to special education children that all of their teachers be involved in the development of an Individual Education Program (IEP) in order to alleviate any misconceptions or false expectations. An excellent source for information specific to the IEP process as it relates to music can be found in an article by Jayne M. Alley in the *Journal of Music Therapy*.<sup>1</sup> At some point during the school year, generally near the beginning or end of classes, this team of teachers meets as a group with other specialists and representatives of the child to discuss appropriate goals and strategies for the coming year.

During this meeting, the music

specialist should become familiar with the behavioral expectations and management strategies of the other teachers. Consistency in behavioral expectations (for instance, that the child will respond immediately, quietly, and appropriately to a teacher's request to perform a task) and consequences (five consecutive minutes of silent time-out prior to return to class setting) among *all* of the child's classes will establish an important link for the child, providing the best chance for meeting with success in all phases of school life. Some children have difficulty transferring learned behavior from one environment to another. However, with consistency across classes and teachers, each time the child behaves inappropriately, he or she will learn to expect certain consequences and make the association that "When I do bad things, bad things happen to me." At this point the child can make a conscious decision to avoid punishment and seek reinforcement by following school rules in each class. The cooperation of all teachers in the IEP can bring about this result most effectively.

Above all, the IEP meeting will furnish the opportunity for the music teacher to become familiar with the special education staff as a support and resource group. As a member of the team, the music teacher may want to suggest a particular classroom in which to place the mainstreamed child for music—perhaps one where there are fewer children, where the children may be more accepting, or where the physical environment may be more conducive to the special needs of the child. The music teacher should also help develop goals and objectives for music class. The other staff members will be looking to the music teacher for help in the mainstreaming process; in return, they can supply valuable information and ideas that the music specialist can transfer into the classroom.

#### Getting acquainted

Once this process has been completed, the music teacher must decide on the best way to implement the IEP within the existing music curriculum. The music teacher may want to observe the child in the special education classroom. What physical limitations does the child have? Does he or she socialize with others in class? How do others communicate with him or her? What behavior problems are exhibited, and how does the special education team deal with them? Does the student enjoy making music or listening to music in the classroom? In a very short amount of time a great deal of information can be obtained.

In addition, it may be a good idea to meet with the child prior to the first mainstreamed class. Perhaps ten or fifteen minutes on three or four separate days could be set aside for individual music lessons with the child. Planning time or a break between classes may have to be used temporarily, but all of this will increase the probability that the first class will be successful for both the student and the music teacher.

During these sessions the music teacher could teach a few skills the

child will need, such as a “hello song” or the appropriate way to play a rhythm instrument. In addition, regular classroom procedures can be taught and practiced. For example, if upon entering the music classroom children immediately select an instrument and situate themselves in a certain spot on the floor, the special education student will need to know where individual instruments are located, what extraneous equipment is necessary (e.g., mallets, beaters), how to transport the instrument appropriately, and where his or her designated spot will be. For some this may be a complicated routine that will need to be practiced and consistently rewarded when each step is completed accurately and in the correct sequence.

Prior to the first mainstreamed music class, behavioral expectations may also need to be explained and practiced, as will the consequences for breaking the rules. If classroom contingencies are such that students who argue over instruments or play before a cue from the teacher lose the privilege of playing an instrument during the first activity, special education children will need to abide by the same rules. Teaching classroom rules and consequences to mainstreamed children before the actual integrated setting may avoid embarrassment for the children and save valuable teaching time as well.

These short music lessons might also include a few of the nonhandicapped children “mainstreamed” into the special education room. Such lessons would take place in a familiar and nonthreatening environment for the special education child, give the music teacher an opportunity to practice teaching music in an integrated setting, and allow nonhandicapped peers to learn appropriate ways to help the handicapped child. The mainstreamed child may feel more at ease once regular mainstreaming has begun because he or she will no longer be an outsider but will have friends in the class. This integra-

tion may even begin prior to music class, with all children meeting outside the music room and coming in as a class rather than as separate groups.

Everyone will ultimately benefit from the extra care taken in preparation for mainstreaming. Judith A. Jellison, Barbara H. Brooks, and Ann Marie Huck have found that positive social relationships between handicapped and nonhandicapped children appear to be facilitated *not* by the music class experience alone but rather by the teacher’s careful structuring of social events before classroom activity and subsequent reinforcement of desirable social interactions.<sup>2</sup>

#### Adapting activities

A crucial component of maintaining acceptable social behavior among *all* children during music class is their active participation in the lesson. Therefore, it is especially important that the handicapped child be a contributing member of the music class rather than a passive observer. While certain activities may not be within the capabilities of a mainstreamed child, this does not mean that an activity should be abandoned or the music curriculum changed. It does mean that portions of the lesson may need to be adapted in order to include the handicapped child. This may be as simple as having the class clap on the beat during a movement activity to provide visual and aural cues for the hearing-impaired child, providing enlarged worksheets for a visually impaired child (many copy centers provide this service), or constructing a larger handle on a rhythm-instrument mallet for a child with a physical disability. If the child cannot successfully participate in an activity, have a *group* of children do a simpler supplementary task. This may take the form of a less complicated rhythmic ostinato or an easy counter-melody on recorder. (For more ideas on teaching special learners, refer to Alice-Ann Darrow’s article in this issue.) The most important point from a management aspect is

that these techniques will allow *everyone* to be involved in music class. Additionally, this will provide academic support for the handicapped child and create an atmosphere where the mainstreamed child is not "different."

To prepare the nonhandicapped children, perhaps the special education teacher could come to their regular classroom and discuss the abilities and disabilities of the mainstreamed child. The teacher may want to discuss with the children what the disabled child can and should do alone and what he or she might need help doing. For example, a child in a wheelchair must learn to be independently mobile in the classroom, but he or she may require some help reaching for things. Children are usually excited about helping their special friends, and such a discussion may alleviate some tension and awkwardness on the first day of music class. In fact, the classroom teacher may find that serving as a peer "helper" to the mainstreamed child will function as a reward for the nonhandicapped child.

### Implementation

Good teaching is good teaching, whether the children are handicapped or nonhandicapped. In general, handicapped children need the same teaching techniques; the difference is that they just need *more*—more cues, more steps to reach a goal, more response time, more reinforcement, more consistency, more structure. A teacher's sensitive use of these augmented teaching strategies will allow the mainstreamed child to participate without the disappointments that often face such children in academic settings. Success will surely promote a positive self-image and attitude toward music, while reducing the chances of verbal and physical outbursts that occur out of frustration.

Social disruptions are probably more difficult to deal with than academic slowness in a mainstreamed classroom, especially with children who have behavioral

problems. These children often need more attention, primarily in the form of reinforcement for appropriate behavior. Through observation or from the special education teacher, determine what functions as a reward for the child, and be prepared to reinforce the child each time he or she follows the rules. This reinforcement does not need to come exclusively from the teacher. If a teacher's aide does not attend music class with the child, other children in the class could learn to give a pat on the back, a hug, or soft words of encouragement as a reward for appropriate behavior.

Mainstreamed children, like all others, need to know that there are rules that must be followed by *everyone* in the music classroom. Likewise, in circumstances where children do not act appropriately and punishment is warranted, *everyone* is subject to the consequences. If the behavior interferes with the safety or educational opportunity of the rest of the class, alternative methods (time-out, for example) should be discussed with the special education teacher.

Often, providing a highly structured environment can prevent inappropriate behavior. Make sure the class offers a variety of activities that will be interesting and keep the children on-task to the lesson. Present the same skill in a variety of ways to reinforce the subject matter—aurally and visually, through singing, playing instruments, movement, or discussion, and by transferring concepts from outside of music. Include a number of these each time a skill is being developed—perhaps in small time segments, as some handicapped children (like some normal children) have short attention spans.

Let's return to Andrea Smith's situation. What should her plan of action be in order to successfully manage a mainstreamed classroom? The first major step has been taken in that she *wants* to provide an educationally sound music class for Sarah and Joseph with as little disruption to the nor-

mal curriculum as possible. Her *values* are in place; she just needs some guidance concerning the *techniques* of mainstreaming.

Andrea Smith's second step should be appropriate preparation for the integration process. She will need to know what these children can and cannot do in order to adapt her regular activities to include Sarah and Joseph, and she will need to know what behavioral expectations and consequences already being used by the special education staff may be transferred into the music class. Her lesson plans for the nonhandicapped children probably will not change, but she could have parallel plans that include compatible (but different) activities for Sarah and Joseph. This will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in music class. She may even want to attend an IEP meeting, asserting her professional input in the program planning for the mainstreamed students.

The last step in Andrea Smith's plan of action will be to implement her lesson with the same good teaching techniques she has developed throughout her teaching career. For the music teacher, mainstreaming does not necessarily mean a change in teaching techniques, but these techniques may need to be broken down into smaller components, repeated more often, or executed more slowly to allow success for the mainstreamed child. This extra effort will likely result in an improved quality of life and enhanced self-esteem for the mainstreamed child, the nonhandicapped children—and the music teacher.

### Notes

1. Jayne M. Alley, "Music in the IEP: Therapy/Education," *Journal of Music Therapy* 16, no. 3 (Fall 1979), 111-27.
2. Judith A. Jellison, Barbara H. Brooks, and Ann Marie Huck, "Structuring Small Groups and Music Reinforcement to Facilitate Positive Interactions and Acceptance of Severely Handicapped Students in the Regular Music Classroom," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 243-64. □