Differentiation in Music Instruction: Implications of MTSS and Common Core for Inclusion Settings

Recent educational initiatives have implications for the way we teach as music educators. Among these are the Common Core Standards (http://www.corestandards.org/), Core Arts Standards (http://www.artaeducators.org/research/nccas), Understanding by Design- UbD (CAST, 2001) and a variety of new special education initiatives including Universal Design for Learning-UDL (Rose and Meyer, 2002), Differentiated Instruction (Tomlinson, 2001), and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Each of these initiatives provides information that can assist music teachers as they work to meet the needs of all students who are served in music education.

Currently, forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards (http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states, retrieved 6/23/2013). The Core Arts Standards for Music recently were offered for public comment, and it is time to begin the reauthorizations for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In an effort to help music educators in meeting the needs of all learners in Kansas, the KMEA board has developed an advisory position for Special Needs with current co-chairs Elaine Bernstorf and Kris Brenzikofer.

Given this effort, this article focuses on how Common Core Standards, especially Anchor Standards, and the principles of MTSS may be used to address student needs for differentiation in music education.

Historical perspective

Education laws were designed to meet the needs of students in our public schools. The ESEA laws started in the 1960's to provide funding and encourage civil rights practices aimed at desegregation and reducing the effects of poverty. Special education laws quickly followed in the 1970's (P.L. 94-142) to foster disability rights. Reauthorizations of these laws provided the funding and guidelines that currently govern national education practices, as implemented by each state. More recently, the 2001 ESEA reauthorization of ESEA (better known as No Child Left Behind—NCLB) and adjustments to IDEA in 2004 have developed toward a continuum of overlapping educational services. Most students were served in regular education under ESEA. Extra services, primarily in reading and math, were provided through Title funding. Special education laws (including Section 504) provided other services. Some services are funded by federal dollars. However, many are mandated at the federal level but funded and overseen by the states, thereby closely involving state departments of education.

Over time, more and more students received a wider array of student supports—from free lunches to tutoring to ELL (English Language Learning) support to related services like speech and occupational therapy. Given a huge push
toward full inclusion by parents and advocates, very diverse students are now served together in the same classrooms by a variety of staff. The one class, one teacher model is seldom what we see except, perhaps in music.

At this same time, Arts advocates have succeeded in adding a required credit for fine arts to the graduation requirements of most states. With this change, music educators saw an increase in the variety of learners they served in their classes. The result has been a push for regular music educators to serve all students, but to do so in totally inclusive settings across the educational age span.

The move toward full inclusion of all students to obtain fine arts credits has been an especially big change for music educators in secondary programs. The social nature of performing arts make music a perfect environment for inclusion; but exacting and synchronous skill orientation is needed by every student in order to deliver the accurate music performances we have come to expect. A danger of inclusion in these settings is that some individuals who have few skills can literally become an in-house audience. Despite the fact that the vast majority of music educators in the field now were trained at a time when they have been exposed to an "exceptional child" course of some kind, those courses were seldom designed for the intricacies of music instruction (Collwell and Thompson, 2000). Over a decade later, there are still few courses designed specifically to address music education for special needs students.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports: MTSS

With international efforts toward Common Core and the move toward full inclusion, a new model of services for "at risk" and "high risk" learners has evolved. In many states, this model is called Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS). MTSS advocates for a common curriculum at the foundation, with additional supports for learners who are not able to handle that curriculum independently. The model was embraced by several states that have been leaders in special education such as Kansas, Massachusetts, and Florida.

MTSS is an outgrowth of the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) guidelines in the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). Under RtI guidelines, instead of singling out one student in the classroom or pulling that student away from the regular class instruction, related services personnel such as speech pathologists or counselors began to provide the services called for by the Individual Education Plan (IEP) in small groups settings or even as a co-teacher for the entire class. Over time, personnel noticed that more children were benefitting from these supports and that frequently the student who actually did have the IEP would do even better when peers were included. In secondary music, this could function in the form of music sectionals with a good coach. In an effort to provide the most students with maximum support through efficient use of resources, states like Kansas began to coordinate support services offerings into a system that became known as MTSS (http://www.kansasmtss.org, retrieved 6/23/2013).

During this same time, global issues and the related economic impacts of workforce development have driven new curriculum decisions. The result is Common Core meets MTSS. In one very long sentence:

We are on the verge of supporting a unified (common) curriculum that is supposed to be delivered appropriately to the most diverse set of learners possible by highly qualified personnel certified in specific states using discipline based standards that were originally written to reflect the views of those individual states.

What a challenge!

Fostering Inclusion with Common Core Standards

We all have ideas for how to integrate Common Core Standards into our music programs. When the Core Arts Standards are finalized, we also will have specific guidelines to inform our curriculum planning and daily activities. We know that the National Core Arts Standards are being built around a conceptual framework that emphasizes student tasks of Perform, Respond, and Create (NCCAS, 2013. See http://nccas.wikispaces.com). When we think about music education, our goal is for all students to experience music and know music. In 1983, Howard Gardner described the musical intelligence as a primary area that could and should be fostered. His approach of "know how" and "know that" aligns with the both Common Core and MTSS. As educators, we must give students opportunities to grow and develop in both knowledge and skills. This is the premise of work force development. Valued workers have both the skills to do a job and the knowledge of what to do when, where, how, why and with whom. In the same manner, a major goal of special education has been to balance knowledge and skills so that each student functions at his or her best and most independent level, whether that level is arrived at through an adapted educational curriculum, or through functional experiences that mirror sheltered home and work environments. We also must consider affect (Tomlinson and Imbeau, 2010). Many people with high level or specialized training, still have problems with the "soft-skills" needed to seek and
hold employment with those skills. Music is no exception—the best player is not necessarily employed more than once for a gig.

A student's level of independence is central to the success he or she ultimately will have as a life-long learner. It is for this reason that we want students to be comprehensive musicians. Those who have both the knowledge and skills will be independent. Those who can engage in music-making activities also should be independent. They should be able to find what they need and want to know and then understand the information. Small (1998) coined the term musicking in an effort to describe this active side of the equation, in all forms. His definition stated:

*To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.* (p. 9)

It seems to me that musicking really is what most students want to do—but that in our quest for competitive performance ratings, we have sometimes unintentionally narrowed the options for students with special needs to the “listening” role only. At the same time, we have done the work FOR non-special needs students who show great promise. Teachers usually do the searches for literature, the score analysis, determine all markings, and then push the music through—sometimes even by rote. For some of our bright students, it may feel like they still have their food cut up and fed to them—when they really want to learn how to cook for themselves.

**Adjusting for lower and higher learners**
Recent research by Gerrity, Hourigan and Horton (2013) studied conditions that facilitate music learning for students with special needs. In this study, sixteen students with disabilities (cognitive delays, autism, and down syndrome) received music instruction with university student mentors, but not through inclusive settings. Qualitative results demonstrated improvement in both knowledge and skills. Three strategies were identified as especially effective for increasing student engagement: repetition, student choice, and increased response times. Gerrity, et al, cited other music educators who also have demonstrated the value of music education for students with disabilities. (Colwell & Thompson, 2000; Gefeller, Darrow & Hedden, 1990; Hammel, 2001; Hourigan, 2009; Jellison & Taylor, 2007; McCard & Watts, 2010; and VanWeelden & Whipple, 2005). Since the adoption of the special education law P.L. 94-142 in 1975, music educators have suggested a variety of adaptations to facilitate music learning for students with special needs. In their special music education text, Adamek & Darrow (2005) offered teaching strategies for successful inclusion as well as suggestions for motivation and behavior management. Hansen, Bernstorff, and Stuber (2004) offered adaptations and enhancements related to meeting the literacy needs for different types of learners in music settings. Although we know the value of music education for students with special needs, educators still struggle with some generic guidelines for how to design music adaptations that increase effective music learning for all students.

**Multi-Tiered System of Supports**
Three curriculum development movements have converged during the last decade. In regular education, the Understanding by Design (UbD) movement has focused on topics such as backward design using essential questions (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). Students are asked to explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathize, and self-assess in their learning activities. In the area of special education, two primary movements have converged. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) focuses on accessibility and inclusion for all students using guidelines fostered by Rose & Meyer (2002) and supported by the work of CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology), while differentiated instruction concentrates on accommodating the different ways that students learn and is used to describe the work of Carol Ann Tomlinson and her colleagues (Tomlinson, 2001).

Differentiation is the term used by Tomlinson and Imbeau to describe "classroom practice with a balanced emphasis on individual students and course content" (2010, p. 14). Again, the term balance is important. True differentiation considers both student needs, and the importance of course content (standards-based instruction). In the Multi-Tiered System of Supports, the course content assumes the Standards-Based Curriculum. For music educators, that curriculum is based on the National Standards for Music as articulated by each state and ultimately by each district. Very soon, we will adjust to new Core Arts Standards. The process of developing and implementing these new standards will take time and will involve many conversations on how to facilitate all learners under the new system. In an effort to maintain balance, it may be important that we broaden our stance and look for additional models of support to facilitate our instruction. The reality is, we are being encouraged to hold to a standards based curriculum, yet design instruction for the continuum of learners who make up our inclusive classrooms. The MTSS model (see Figure 1) offers a three-tiered approach based on the following general assumption: **All students should be afforded the opportunity to experience the standards-based curriculum with some students needing supplemental instruction and a few students needing intense intervention.**
(Based on Riley, 2011). For example, statistically we can assume that approximately eighty percent of the students in any class will learn the standards based curriculum through regular teacher instruction, while about fifteen percent will need some supports for learning through adaptations to curriculum or instruction; and about five percent will need major support through related services, special education, or alternative placements.

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) suggested looking at student assessments to gain information about student needs related to both the curriculum and the type of instruction needed. (Note: Tomlinson’s model is directly reflected in the Kansas MTSS model. The work of Tomlinson is highly recommended reading for any music educator. Her books are readily available through www.ascd.org.)

Tomlinson and Imbeau suggested that teachers should assess students in order to address their needs in three basic areas: readiness, interests, and learning profile. They also describe the value of differentiation of instruction in the areas of Content, Process and Product. As a matter of practice, music educators engage in continuous assessment (both formative and summative) of readiness to ascertain student reading and playing ability levels for music performance. These assessments can be found in singing and playing tests (formative) as well as solo and large ensemble performances at concerts and festivals (summative). Despite required literacy training in the content pre-service courses and many in-services, music educators are far less informed about student readiness for language reading.

In order to make appropriate adaptations related to "readiness, interests and specific learning style profiles", music educators should talk to parents, classroom teachers, special education teachers, and even to the students themselves to gain more information about specific student needs. This may be a challenge in large ensembles—but it should be noted that most music educators can error detect a specific student who is not singing or playing on pitch.

**Differentiation throughout the school year**

Under IDEA guidelines, information from IEPs and assessment data should be made available to all teachers, including the music teacher. Time is precious in music instruction, but spending a half-day to establish relationships with and gather information from classroom and special education teachers may be well worth the time later in the year if a student encounters some difficulty. While confidentiality is important, music educators are fully certified teachers who need information in order to plan effectively for their learners.

With regard to Content, Process and Product, the following remarks are offered.

**Content:** Music is the primary content for music education. Given the "sound" making nature of the medium, the aural...
musical content will generally be the same for most, if not all, students. Consider the actual features of sound and how they are structured (Bernstorf, 2008). Start with breadth using the global elements (beat, meter, melodic direction, contour). Allow a few students to continue with global elements while most then move toward recognition and performance of the most obvious segments that formulate melodic and rhythmic patterns in the musical example. Finally, focus on distinctive features of music for those who really understand the nuances. Use of age-appropriate music is very important. Adolescent students should not perform pre-school level music just because they are reading at a primer reading level. Use simple pentatonic songs from cultural sources instead. Pull out ostinatos or simplified patterns for content that is simple yet musical within more difficult pieces.

Process: Music educators can be masters at differentiated instruction related to process. From group instruction to individual applied lessons, we do it all. This is an area of strength for most music educators. However, a few pitfalls may occur with regard to music literacy. As stated earlier, students who have difficulty with music and language reading will need assistance. Music teachers often do not monitor the language reading level of their students. Keep in mind that the poetic texts in music material may contain a higher language level than almost anything else a student is asked to read and music is not coded for reading (lexile) level. The way vocal music text is visually divided by syllables may actually facilitate and encourage students to read both the music and the language. Use of solfege syllables and stick notation is helpful. Divide new music vocabulary words into syllables to facilitate reading. 

Product: This is the area that may seem most difficult. Music educators usually are quite tolerant of mistakes during the initial learning of music, but our ultimate goal is almost always a flawless performance. When working with full inclusion of students with severe disabilities, to have a perfect product for every musical offering may be unrealistic. However, there can always be opportunities for students who excel musically to demonstrate their skills. As music advocates, we must understand that for some students, MTSS means establishing a multi-tiered system of support musically by offering solos, small ensembles, and alternative courses such as theory, keyboard, guitar, composition, and technology/audio production. Not every student must do every music task simultaneously in an inclusive music classroom. This is one reason that many special needs students are finding inclusion in pep bands, vernacular music groups, and with small group instruction (class within a class) experiences. Technology is a valuable tool for these types of accommodations. In regular education classrooms, perfect uniformity of work is never the expectation for every assignment. We must give music educators permission to feature a variety student products at the end of each unit, even in larger ensembles like band or choir.

Music education differentiation
The following table suggests potential points of differentiation for higher ability and lower ability learners in music settings. The adaptations suggested here would be for students primarily considered "at risk" and needing some support for their learning. Again, It should be noted that high intervention (Tier 3) students may need alternative placements or special assistance. Even with paraprofessional assistance, the high level needs of Tier 3 students may require the expertise of the special education teacher or related services personnel such as a speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist or behavior intervention specialist in order to adjust content, processes or products for these students in a music setting. Table 1 provides some suggestions for how differentiation might occur in a music setting.

Table 1: Music Education Differentiation Based on Student Need*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readiness</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Learning Profile</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use materials of varied reading levels</td>
<td>• Provide a range of materials</td>
<td>• Vary teaching modes (auditory is always present but add visual, kinesthetic, tactile)</td>
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<td>• Provide different manipulatives using photos, graphic drawings (icons), stick notation, and regular notation depending on student level</td>
<td>• Use interesting age-appropriate texts with simple musical structures (play party songs are a good example for adolescents)</td>
<td>• Provide pre-teaching materials or extension materials that students can access in their classroom or library or online.</td>
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<td>• Use PECS (picture-exchange communication system) materials</td>
<td>• Tie music to other learning themes in the school setting</td>
<td>• Video or audio notes may allow additional repetitions (e.g. Digitally record public domain songs and burn to CD's or load on donated iPODS so students can check them out for home repetition).</td>
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<td>• Front-load vocabulary with visual reminders (such as word walls)</td>
<td>• Provide a range of materials including examples that will be heard frequently in real-world exposure (popular, patriotic, scores from video games/TV/movie themes).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Highlight single parts or important patterns</td>
<td>• Link to student interests (culture, favorite artists, interesting composers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Highlight text in one color and music left white (or opposite)</td>
<td>• Model musicians' behavior. Encourage development of performance repertoire related to</td>
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<td>• Simplify content (give some students</td>
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Anchor Standards: Tooling for Differentiation

The Anchor Standards developed for English Language Arts (ELA) reflect a balance of “know-how” and “know-that” described by Gardner. The ELA Standards include Anchor Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking/Listening, and Language. These Anchor Standards are culminating standards designed to represent high levels of integrated knowledge and skills that individuals should have in order to be prepared for higher education and/or entry into the workforce. ELA Standards also address literacy as related to content areas History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. Mathematics Standards are organized around eleven mathematical domains. While arts integration using music is probably possible for all of these standards, those related to Listening and Speaking have direct applications for music education.

The 1994 National Standards for Music Education were designed to address a sequential curriculum from PK-12. However, music educators were realistic and wise in originally defining the standards into categories of BASIC, INTERMEDIATE, PROFICIENT, and ADVANCED. The result is a continuum of skills and knowledge that could actually be carried into adult education. Such is the wisdom of Anchor Standards that reflect end goals that are appropriate for students to enter higher education and/or employment.

If we use this same approach to develop culminating goals for music education, the Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening may give us ideas for adjusting our instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Again, as arts educators, we notice the needs of high achievers as well as those who have learning difficulties. Using Common Core Standards may help us make creative modifications and adaptations to our music content and processes, as well as provide optional products for students who need additional supports. The goal of the Common Core is to provide a single foundation of learning that unifies educators to support student achievement. The goal of MTSS is to provide multiple tiers of support that are designed around a single system, again to facilitate student achievement. Both systems have the goal of student achievement. In that, music educators also have a role. Students who are engaged and who are achieving are learning.

Table 2 suggests ways to both adapt the ELA Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening, and to apply these standards in a music education setting.
Table 2: Standards for Speaking and Listening: Sample Music Adaptations (Bernstorf 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anchor Standard for Speaking and Listening</th>
<th>Typical Music Activity</th>
<th>Adaptation for lower level learners</th>
<th>Adaptation for high achievers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
<td>All types of rehearsals activities, especially those using sectionals, chamber ensembles or part work. Group work of all types (especially group improvisation or composition using a criteria).</td>
<td>Beginners: Sing/play alone and with others using Imitation; call-response or union. Bourdons or simple ostinatos. Manipulate icons to show understanding of musical structures. Collaborate through expressive movement (non-verbal) to interpret a variety of musical styles.</td>
<td>Work with others for score analysis, improvisation, composing, evaluation, and, of course, performing. Part work of all types; independent practice with a peer; assist others with something you already know (NOTE: Tutoring should not be a primary role for high achievers—they need their own adaptations—not to become unpaid “paras” due to lack of adequate support).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally</td>
<td>Score analysis of all types, using icons, graphing, and contour drawing. All types of aural dictation. Read from scores, tablature or lead sheets. Any music activities where students follow a conductor, mark scores, discuss musical structures (from the score or aural examples, or to evaluate musical performances).</td>
<td>Arrange pictures to show either musical structure, or to demonstrate the story of the text. Choose, point to or arrange visual graphics of what is heard. Evaluate the most obvious musical element first (most repeated, clearest example, most novel). Use icons or graphics that represent elements (such as large and small items for dynamics; match replicas or photos of actual instruments for timbre, etc.) Touch shapes, trace contours or tap switches to show form (patterns, phrases, sections). Choose icons or physical manipulatives showing melodic or rhythmic patterns that are heard, or to create music.</td>
<td>Virtually all ethnographic experiences with music will fulfill this anchor standard. Take musical dictation, such as short folk songs, jazz riffs or pop music charts from a recording. Read and perform using lead sheets. Experience or invent a visual graphic notation system. Experience ancient and 20th C. graphic notation styles. Use bar or line graphs to analyze a piece of music. Translate between systems (#’s, solfege, absolute pitches). Transpose music in various ways.</td>
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<td>Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric</td>
<td>All performance evaluations. All music and other art critiques. Evaluations of musical accuracy. Read, write, and discuss music and other art categories. Create a group evaluation rubric.</td>
<td>Students with disabilities can compare two different performances of the same music and verbally describe similarities and differences, as well as their preferences. For non-verbal students, use an adapted rubric that has icons or emoticons. Use a para or peer reader to assist.</td>
<td>Evaluate the works of various musical artists, composers, conductors, critics, etc. Consider support or criticism of specific musical examples. Learn and use empathic critique techniques. Create personal evaluation rubrics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Present information, findings, and supportive evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.</td>
<td>Draw graphic organizers of all types (including staff notation) to demonstrate understanding of musical examples. Design listening maps for different groups of people. Use music to prompt short technical writings describing what is heard.</td>
<td>Use graphic organizers or manipulatives to respond non-verbally to compare (same-different), or classify examples of musical elements, form, etc. Use interactive whiteboards, picture exchange communication (PECS) and assistive technology as needed.</td>
<td>Research and write critiques, program notes, or biographies with representative score examples. Develop listening anthologies for varied audiences, to represent musical styles, genres, composers, time periods.</td>
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<td>Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations</td>
<td>All types of musical notation and composition software programs are appropriate. Use audio-visual sound production activities to create “found sound” or layered</td>
<td>Use computer programs and apps for the iPad to foster music expression. Use icons and graphic scores to create sound stories (Pair visual communication tools like Boardmaker™ with programs like Morton Subotnik’s “music making” software). Use percussion apps,</td>
<td>Use digital notation programs and sound production programs to compose for a variety of purposes. Help students use</td>
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compositions (such as Orff activities).

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<th>Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate</th>
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<td>Respond, perform or create using speech or music to communicate and demonstrate their command of musical terms. Pair foreign language terms with their English definitions for dynamics, tempos, articulation, and timbre markings. Sing using varied pitch and number systems (solfége, counting systems).</td>
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<td>Speak orally or use adaptive communication devices to demonstrate understanding of musical elements. Gazing at the correct answer or pointing on a communicate grid is still a communicative task. Include similar answer choices where one is more correct because of music vocabulary or English grammar used. Speech pathologist may be quite helpful if a student needs adjustments as these tasks may also meet speech goals.</td>
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<td>Describe, sing, play, improvise, or compose for a variety of purposes. Music examples can become prompts for analyses in technical writing by advanced students. Student critics can write for a school newspaper or send letters to the editor commenting on recent musical performances in the community.</td>
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With new teaching evaluation systems, it is not a matter of if, but when music educators will demonstrate their ability to integrate Common Core Standards in inclusive music settings. It is our goal to facilitate that process with information and collaboration. We welcome both your success stories and your questions.

**Footnote**

1. Empathic critique is the search to discover what has happened in the work. Since much of what happens in any creative endeavor is intuitive, capricious, and unintended, we naturally expect the unexpected and unintended to make significant contributions and make new insights possible. The empathic critique finds ways to allow the creator of the work to discover what has been noticed by others. The maker gets credit for the potential value of their own unintended outcomes (mistakes). The maker is made to feel empowered by self-awareness. The artist constructs new knowledge based on discoveries brought to light based on considerate questioning. The art studio class becomes a community of learning. (Bartel, M. 2013. Retrieved 7/4/2013 at http://bartelart.com/arted/critique08.html.

**References**


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