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Observation Protocol Summary

After observing Kassidy, a local 9 year old student, at the Prism Project, I have come to understand a lot about communication issues that students with special needs face as they progress through their schooling. After reflecting on my time with Kassidy, thinking through her strengths and weaknesses with receptive and expressive communication, and pulling from class and textbook sources, I have identified numerous ways I can assist any student struggling with communicating in a music classroom. In this paper I will discuss how this observation and reflection has informed my teaching of students with exceptionalities, related music classroom teaching strategies, instructional adaptations, and my outlook on individualized instruction.

The prompts given in the accompanying observation protocol page give a lot of insight into the teaching of a student with special needs. They told me exactly what I need to focus on when planning for this student's instruction. The first question addresses how a student receives communication. This could include simplified language, accompanying pictures and visuals, gestures, etc. (INTASC 6). I greatly thought about this when planning the language I used during my next teaching episode as well and how I sequenced the instruction. The next prompt addressed expressive communication; how a person uses symbols and images to express and communicate. This could include pointing to pictures, short key phrases, assistive technology, etc. I realized how beneficial these techniques are for students with special needs to have adaptations and options to demonstrate their work for assessment. The final prompt asks if the student has cultural language differences, but this was not applicable to Kassidy.

I discovered many practical strategies to communication in the music classroom through this

observation and the textbook. For receptive communication strategies, I plan on talking less during group instruction and relying more on my gestures and modeling. I will provide students with special needs with a peer mentor buddy to guide them through group performance based activities. Having a schedule on the board with visuals is good for the teacher and all students (INTASC 7). I could even use a projector to keep visuals and definitions large and at the focus of the lesson throughout the class time. Giving older students who have trouble with receptive communication written instructions and agendas would be a good tool. For students like Cassidy, it is very important to allow enough processing time for them to answer, but also be prepared with verbal cues and guidance so they don't get lost or discouraged (INTASC 5). Allowing students to move around frequently is another great strategy that I will use with any age group. These strategies improve the learning environment for all students.

For students with expressive communication issues, plenty of adaptation options should be used for these students to be able to successfully demonstrate their understanding of concepts. The expectation does not need to be lowered, rather the format of assessment can just be altered or made more flexible. Allowing students to access video/audio recordings of the teacher as well as create recordings of themselves to demonstrate their knowledge and skill is a great resource (INTASC 3). A communication journal keeps the student and teacher on the same page and allows the student to let the teacher in on their reality without communication barriers. Previewing what is to come in upcoming classes is something I do for every student; either talking about the next class at the end of the previous one, or posting a schedule on the board or online. Also, keeping assessments short but frequent is especially important for students who have difficulty with expressive communication (INTASC 8).

While observing Cassidy at the Prism Project, I noticed some adaptations being used in the

environment. Having a personal buddy to guide a student through each activity is ideal, but often a lot to ask for. This one on one approach allows the teacher to give their best effort to everyone and for a student with exceptionalities to get the assistance they need as well. Making that all too important eye contact with students like Cassidy can make a huge difference when working with her. Working with a student side by side and then gradually stepping away until they are doing the skill on their own is another strategy that was used while I observed at the Prism Project and it worked very well for the students. Lots of praise was important for almost every student at Prism Project; it kept them focused on what they were doing or supposed to be doing and gave them motivation to stay engaged.

Personally, I wish each student could have as much private tutoring time as they do full class instruction time, but this is not reality. Individualized instruction is a huge benefit to any student despite what exceptionalities they may have. The social element of music though is great for all students. This gets them interacting, cooperating, and discussing together in very unique ways. This element is integral to music making and something the subject can always offer and be taught best through. Each student should be observed more closely though and have a mini-IEP made for them every few years. Through that method, teachers could get data of their classroom makeup as a whole and understand what teaching strategies are best for what students. This could also give teachers insight into their students' past academic records and help them create more realistic, individualized goals. More individualized instruction could be a real game changer in education and set a new path for this country's education system to stand out once again.

Figure 1.2: Communication Observation Protocol (for Music Educators)

Student Name: Kassidy (9 years) Primary Teacher(s): Prism Project

Notes from discussion with Primary Teacher in the area of Communication Needs and Language Learning Strategies (after reading the IEP document*):

-No IEP was accessible to me, but in talking with those that are familiar with Kassidy, she is a very social girl, with lots of musical aptitude (eg: independent harmonizing), and responds well to lots of praise and personal attention.

Class Observed:

-Prism Project 2/15/14

Receptive Communication Strategies observed (e.g. simplified language, picture icons, etc.):

-responds well to visual cues (hand signals) to discuss different procedures in the activity and lots of hand signals and visual cues during instruction
-without these engaging visual cues, her attention is hard to focus
-always awaiting the next instruction, ready to do exactly what is shown, likes specific instruction not free choices

○ Potential strategies in music class:

-talk less during instruction, show and model more
-have a peer mentor to assist and respond
-prepare visual schedule on board
-having a projector that keeps large visuals of the concept easy to focus on throughout the whole lesson
-as her reading skills develop, written instructions could be a good addition to activities
-allow for enough processing time
-have specified space for the student at each moment, but move around frequently

Expressive Communication Strategies observed (e.g. pointing to a picture icon, small one or two word phrases, assistive technology, signing etc):

-doing the activity alongside the student to begin and then slowly stepping away until they are doing it all on their own with their peers
-lots of pointing to express desires and to relay stories, acting out stories with arms and movement
-loves to sing (can independently harmonize)
-keeps her eyes glued to the teacher

○ Potential strategies in music class:

-lots of adaptations for student to demonstrate their musical understanding through doing or telling (multiple options for assessment with the same expectations as everyone else) (recorded audio/visual)
-communication journal
-preview what is to come the next day so the student is prepared
-very short but frequent assessment opportunities

Does the student have cultural language differences (i.e. Is English his/her first language)?

-no cultural language differences

○ Potential strategies in music class:

-N/A