Across the country, underserved populations in school music ensembles is a topic of growing interest and sometimes debate, evidenced by recent music publications. For decades, related research findings have been published in educational, sociological, and psychological journals. Only more recently has music education research increased examination of such concepts as:

- using inclusive teaching techniques for teaching/conducting music classes and ensembles,
- removing unintended barriers resulting from long-standing, traditional organizational methods or structures, and
- raising awareness of contemporary knowledge regarding bias and discrimination within society to recognize any visible or hidden presence within school music programs.

If accommodating underserved populations in school and community music programs is a professional goal, then a solution may be as simple as teach differently. Creating success for underserved or nontraditional students who don’t gain admittance (or fail to thrive after being admitted into an ensemble) likely requires having a music teacher who ensures student success by building community through meeting individual needs. In contrast to the teach differently short answer, the long answer is more complicated because a pathway for success with underserved populations has not yet been clearly defined. Group solutions offered by professional leaders within organizations are likely confounded by the diverse and perhaps conflicting individual solutions brought by members within the group (based on individual teacher attitudes and behaviors).

Given broadly accepted societal expectations for teachers to accommodate typical and underserved students in school music programs, mapping a road to success is a logical next step; employing inclusive, developmental teaching techniques surely should be one dot on that map. Music education research that seeks to determine what it takes to create a highly effective teacher offers guidance regarding the development of inclusive teaching behaviors. Preservice training variables (targeting teachers earning initial certification) can also be meaningful to practicing music teachers. In addition, there are programs that address diverse cultural issues that can also impact preservice and inservice teacher decisions for creating healthy environments, leading to academic, musical, and social growth. To reshape the professional vision (values, goals, etc.), all teachers should be informed and have a voice in how school and community programs find success for all interested participants.

Guidance from Research Literature for Inservice and Preservice Teachers

Investigations of teacher disposition issues have isolated several important variables important for any teacher striving to be highly effective: (1) reflectivity, (2) empathic caring, (3) musical comprehensiveness, and (4) learnability of music. To state these as a parent or principal might describe an ideal teacher, the four items suggest: (1) the teacher is a strong problem solver/decision-maker, (2) the teacher is a caring person who creates a safe environment yet challenges students, (3) the teacher engages students in learning beyond pitches/rhythm needed to deserve a high performance rating, and (4) the teacher builds confidence among individual students so they can be successful in understanding and accomplishing musical tasks—students who have developed their musical self-concept. These four important variables describe teacher effectiveness that students and adults alike can easily identify, though perhaps using different vocabulary, and tend to be implemented across extended interactions with students rather than one-time events.

The four variables share commonalities, such as identifying, analyzing, evaluating, and focusing more on student growth than program or ensemble prominence. Whether verbalized or
modeled, when a teacher listens to a student’s problems, understands, and supports decision-making, the message to the student is that you are worthy of my investment in your well-being. When teachers commit to comprehensive musicianship—insisting students develop music skills as well as understand concepts, vocabulary, music expressivity, and musical analysis to become independent musicians—students learn their teacher considers them capable. Inclusive teaching techniques and methods in music settings can build a bridge, connecting typical and underserved music students through common experiences.

Inclusive teaching methods, such as Developmental Teaching Practice, support student learning by delivering information in a way that provides clarity despite a student’s limited prior musical knowledge. This could be accomplished through one or more of the following methods:

(a) use a teaching sequence that includes smaller steps to allow additional time spent in each and repetition for novice music students,

(b) teach concepts in a non-musical way that students might already understand, and then add musical labels after students have successfully experienced the learning, or

(c) use analogies of relationships students might understand to indicate the musical relationship.

Developmental Teaching Practice contributes to success for typical music students and can be highly effective in structuring success for underserved musicians. While there is little consensus of best practices for teaching underserved students in traditional ensembles/classes, with shifting demographics and societal expectations of the public school mission, agreement is growing that change may be needed in how musical learning should be provided. (For more insight on Developmental Teaching Practice applied to choral instruction, go to www.tmea.org/developmentalteaching.)

**Summary and Professional Implications**

These things we know:

1. Underserved populations abound, and people want or need access to school and community music groups; all students should have equal access to high-quality music education experiences.

2. Teacher effectiveness study results suggest that highly qualified teachers share commonalities that promote inclusive teaching and learning environments that are student-centered, creating relationships of support and respect.

3. Developmental Teaching Practice (using extended sequences to accommodate the true novice in musical knowledge, moving from the non-musical idea or label to the musical, and using analogies to create understanding) allows accommodation of students at almost any level to creatively make music without increased off-task behavior or lowered performance standards—yes, this is possible.

4. Overtly teaching knowledge and strategies for identifying and understanding diversity in others can be done in music programs—I hope this soon will be an expectation in all music curricula.

Whether music teaching gently evolves
or is actively reshaped to intersect with societal change, there are many choices that individual teachers might consider. Central to my current thinking is pondering the role of teachers throughout the transition across coming decades. Certainly social change, technological advancements, and professional considerations (recruitment of quality candidates into teacher education, teacher pay, benefits, empowerment, etc.) may dramatically affect the unveiling of a new era. One critical challenge may be recruiting highly qualified undergraduate students to become music teachers. A similar concern involves maintaining a highly qualified teaching force, which likely implies providing lifelong, high-quality teacher inservice or other support, and more importantly, providing intervention when teachers, both novice or experienced, struggle to succeed. The delivery of professional development for teachers may look very different, but teacher isolation or disconnection from other music educators simply must be addressed.

To meet goals for excellence in every school/community program, consider these points:

1. Current professional development models intended to support professionals who work in challenging assignments are insufficient; often, isolated teachers fail their students and themselves almost daily, as they are overwhelmed by inappropriate challenges or insufficient guidance and support.

2. All music teachers should consider creating plans to make a difference beyond the walls of their school or community program. Look around, identify, intervene, support, network, and refuse to see teachers and their students fail.

My plan for the next few years is to create a team to explore ways that various stakeholders can approach music teacher success: university programs and their graduates, fine arts supervisors and their arts teachers, district music teachers and their colleagues, state professional music organizations and their members. These paired music participants have a relationship, which means they have responsibilities to each other.

We have models, and some work well, but it is time to review our procedures, models, traditions and determine if they still work. If not, then it’s our responsibility to create change.

**What will you do?**

Judy Bowers is the Biedenhorn Endowed Chair in Music Education at the University of Louisiana Monroe and is a 2019 TMEA College Division Featured Clinician.

**References**


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### 2019 Summer Music Camps

- **2019 Summer Winds Band Camp**
  - June 9-15 | Grades 9-12

- **Belmont Academy Piano Preparatory Camp**
  - June 10-14 | Ages 6-12

- **Belmont Piano Camp**
  - June 9-14 | Grades 9-12

- **String Crossings Camp**
  - June 16-21 | Grades 9-12

- **Summer Vocal Arts Intensive**
  - June 23-29 | Grades 9-12

For more information, costs and registration visit [BELMONT.EDU/MUSIC](https://www.belmont.edu/music)