

# Differentiation and Charanga's Model Music Curriculum

As teachers, we are constantly working with and making decisions based on differentiating between the different needs and learner profiles of our students. Some subjects and activities lend themselves more easily or more obviously to differentiation.

Music education is extremely relevant to multiple aspects of differentiation for learning.

When it comes to preparation, delivery and facilitation of lessons and learning activities as they happen, there is a lot to consider and a lot of scope for the differentiating educator, as there are for modes of assessment and reflection. This leads naturally to the fact that over the course of a curriculum of learning, a great difference can be made to effective musical learning for each individual student as they develop, if differentiated learning is kept front of mind.

Charanga's MMC curriculum is developed with the express intention of supporting each educator to cater for the variety of individual learner-types as they normally would like to, but through a music education lens.

Throughout the units of learning, you will find that the guidance, supporting documentation and structure of the lessons in the Charanga resources take care of many of the more musical details while empowering you to think about and adapt to the needs of the students you are teaching. In most cases, these will be students you probably already know very well from a holistic, learning perspective, and so, with these supporting materials and your existing teaching skills, you should be able to deliver any Charanga music lesson in a way that caters appropriately for the diversity in your classroom.

Things to bear in mind are:

- Physical differences: music and associated movement such as dance are often very physical in nature. This is relevant to things like quality of hearing and sight (especially when reading), mobility and fine motor skills (especially when playing instruments or dancing/moving to the music).
- Cognitive differences and neurodiversity: musical experience and learning can take many forms for different types of learners. While on the one hand, this might result in an extreme passion and/or aptitude for music, on the other hand issues due to lower tolerance of higher volumes or richness of sound might pose significant challenges when learning music as a large group. Hyperactivity may be either complementary to musical learning or significantly exacerbated.
- Emotional (whether temporary or longer term) and mood considerations also come into play in their own way in the musical classroom. Music can be a preferred outlet for emotional expression or release, but it can equally be a context in which certain students feel much less confident, shy or restrained. Just because a student is not moving, it does not mean they are not dancing to the pulse inside their head!

- Diversity in social, economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds: music is a universal language and art for individual and community expression and identity, which means that it belongs to us all, but also that it belongs to each of us in our own unique way, often in deeply personal ways. Our understanding of music and its role in society, and our personal preferences as listeners, learners, performers and creators of music are not only dependent upon the differences mentioned above, but also on where we come from and our own personal journey.

Elements within the Charanga curriculum that cater for a differentiated classroom include:

- Open ended and varied nature in which the way the Social Themes are approached.
- Spiral and holistic nature of the musical learning over time.
- Multiple parts to choose from in the vocal and instrumental learning, depending on aptitude and preference.
- Regular - yet guided - opportunities to improvise and to create as individuals.
- Not heavy on uniform, quantitative assessment of musical learning.
- A diversity and open-endedness in styles of music studied and considered, to cater for different social, economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and preferences, in the hope that no musical learner feels excluded and that all musical preferences are seen as equal in the classroom.
- Other considerations specific to each activity or lesson concerned, as supported and explained by the teaching and learning materials provided.

Playing and learning about music in a group can often give each individual the choice of how and how much they participate. The world of music, somewhat like the world of sports, can also be thought of as a collection of many different disciplines, skills and activities and therefore allows for a whole range of avenues for learning and performance (think of the individual learning journeys of each member of an orchestra, and then compare all of those with that of a DJ or a Grunge guitarist or a Tibetan horn player or a jazz music journalist, etc., etc.). There is quite literally room for everyone in the world of music, and therefore in the classroom, too!

The distinct nature of musical learning means that it can often reveal new information about a learner that they or their teachers and carers had not yet discovered. This is often just great detail to have to complete a 360 degree character profile useful for all people working with and caring for a student. However, it can also provide new, useful information to help in uncovering an undiagnosed condition, previously unidentified learner needs or issues outside of school. This is a strong argument for always including music specialists in pastoral care discussions (in schools where there are music specialists), and therefore an important fact to keep in mind when observing your own students in music class.

Some students might show themselves to have a particular aptitude or passion for music, which of course should be encouraged and nurtured as much as possible. It should be noted though that, because of the multifaceted nature of music, aptitudes and interests may vary depending on what aspect of musical learning is being covered. For example, some students who are very advanced in memorised musical performance (such as a seven year-old being at Grade 8 ABRSM level violin outside of school), might be extremely uncomfortable and even at

sea when asked to improvise on a xylophone. Or a student who struggles in all other aspects of learning, might reveal a remarkable talent for movement and dance which had previously gone unrecognised and unsupported. Or a student previously disengaged in all prior musical activities may become highly creative when given the opportunity to compose electronically.

Howard Gardner's revised *Theory Of Multiple Intelligences* includes "Musical-rhythmic and harmonic" intelligence as one of its eight specific modalities of intelligence. Although his theory is disputed within psychology and education, it is worth bearing in mind that the sphere of musicality can be considered as one of a handful of key areas which merit consideration as distinct intellectual domains to which some people may be more drawn (and perhaps have a greater aptitude for) than others.

Nevertheless, it is useful to remember (and to remind your students) that we are all born musicians. Our first music lesson was hearing and moving to the pulse of our own mother's beating heart, in the womb. That fundamental musical element - pulse - is the starting point of musical learning and carries through as a backbone of our experience of music for the rest of our lives.