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Inclusive Classroom Matters: Practical Strategies for Creating Inclusive Learning Environments Or Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the Inclusive Classroom But Were Afraid to Ask–A Musician!

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"There are a variety of strategies that we can utilize inside the classroom that will help to make it a more inclusive environment for all learners."

In this day of ever-many attempts at political correctness, multiculturalism and diversity, educators at all levels and from all disciplines are trying to figure out how to make their classrooms "more inclusive." I often hear teachers use the phrase I'm trying to make my class "more this" or "more that" to get all students to participate. The fact that they use the qualifier "more" indicates to me that some sort of attempt has already been made, with which the speaker is not quite pleased. Many times this is not the case - doing "more" actually means making an attempt, and might more accurately be called doing "something."

As a person of color teaching in a predominately white institution, there are many challenges that face me each day I enter the classroom. By profession, my chosen discipline is music—subspecialties include: music education; having spent several years teaching grades 6-12, marching bands/wind ensembles and concert bands, woodwind instruments, piano and history. Immediately, this has the potential to create conflicts in the classroom since music, (especially classical music) is dominated by persons who do not resemble me. I also hold graduate degrees in instrumental conducting; and am currently working at a university level. Upon hearing this, most people remark "music and inclusion? That's easy to do!" Music is a form of human expression found in every culture on earth; therefore, it lends itself naturally as a vehicle for promulgating multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion. Society has defined music and the arts as something closely aligned with those things that make us "more" human. Psychologist Abraham Maslow with his "needs hierarchy" model, places our aesthetic needs at the top of the hierarchy—after we have met those more basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. This is the part of our humanity that allows for appreciation of things beautiful, allows us to express via alternative venues what escapes us in words. This need that we have as humans allows us to do more than merely "exist." The music profession, by its very nature and the fact that it is found in every culture on the planet, naturally lends itself to (in many different forums) issues relative to inclusion in the classroom. In spite of this fact, many times the music profession tends to be one of the most narrowly-focused, biased disciplines in the academy.

The subject of inclusion is one that greatly affects persons at all levels charged with the responsibility of classroom teaching. Most of us can recall classroom situations where some persons (possibly even ourselves) have felt either uncomfortable or unwelcome to present a comment or an opinion on a specific issue. In many instances the sharing of

such comments would undoubtedly help move the discussion forward, or provide information which has not previously been mentioned. Current demographics repeatedly show that the population of this country and certainly that of our schools, is becoming more and more populated by: (1) women who question the dominant culture style, (2) persons from non-European racial and ethnic or non-English-speaking backgrounds, or (3) older adults returning to formal schooling. This listing is not meant to be exhaustive nor prioritized in any way. In view of these statistics it behooves each of us to consider not only "what" we teach, but "how" we teach it. We must take into consideration the more diverse student populations that are coming into our institutions of higher learning. There are a variety of strategies that we can utilize inside the classroom that will help to make them more inclusive environments for all learners.

PRESENTER:

Ronnie Wooten is currently associate professor of Music, coordinator of Instrumental Music Education and conductor of the Wind Symphony at Northern Illinois University in Dekalb, Illinois. In addition to guiding the undergraduate and graduate programs in instrumental music education, he also oversees student teaching, and techniques and methods courses within the School of Music. A native of North Carolina, Dr. Wooten received the Bachelor of Music Education Degree (cum laude) from East Carolina University. He received the Master of Music and the Doctor of Musical Arts Degrees from Michigan State University, where he held a teaching assistantship and a competitive doctoral fellowship in the School of Music. He has pursued additional conducting study at the University of Calgary (Alberta, Canada), where he is a candidate for the Artist's Diploma in Wind Conducting and Literature.

Research interests include: analysis of wind band literature, wind literature by black composers, conducting history, nonverbal techniques and conducting, music teacher education and ethnicity and gender issues in teaching. He was selected in 1995 as a participant in the first NIU Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Institute, and has presented research before the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education, the Illinois Music Educators Association, as well as at various universities across the country. During the summer of 1998, Dr. Wooten was invited to serve as orchestra director for the conference: "A Multicultural Celebration of Diversity in Music" in Flagstaff, Arizona, where he prepared concerts which featured the music of black male and female composers. Those concerts are now being broadcast over National Public Radio. He is currently preparing an annotated bibliography of works for concert band/wind ensemble by black composers. Dr. Wooten maintains an active schedule as guest conductor, adjudicator, lecturer and consultant for instrumental music education across the country, and has conducted honor bands and clinics in over 15 states.
He holds professional memberships in the Music Educators National Conference, Illinois Sinfonia, Pi Kappa Lambda and Kappa Kappa Psi. He is a member of the College Band Directors National Association, where he serves as member of the National Committee on Ethnicity and Gender Issues.