

# Models of disability and music technology

Charles Matthews April 2018 [web: ardisson.net/a/?p=363](http://web:ardisson.net/a/?p=363)

## "Medical" model

Focus on impairment, responsibility falls upon the individual to conform.

Musicians are expected to fit in with a classical tradition and set of instruments. Music is thought of as something heard and played a particular way.

Electronic/adapted instruments are presented/perceived as simplified, easy options.

Designs are closed, adjustments are deemed as compromising existing/mainstream aesthetics and styles.

Alternatives are presented only when needed by an individual.

Disabled performers face discrimination, or might be singled out as "special", "superhuman" or "inspirational" when aspiring to meet common standards. Inclusive practice is viewed as charitable, and achievements of non-disabled technologists or facilitators are celebrated over the music-making.

Adapted instruments and compositions are made for disabled people by non-disabled specialists, with little direct input to the process from the end user. Accessibility is based on assumptions.

## Social model

A rights-based approach that identifies barriers and discrimination as the responsibilities of society.

Electronic/adapted instruments are taken seriously, in their own right and as an alternative/augmentation of traditional options.

Differences are celebrated, and performers and music leaders represent the diversity of society. Disabled and non-disabled role models demonstrate music technology options.

Adaptation of instruments/performance is normalised for many purposes, including access and artistic reasons.

New instruments are presented as an option to everyone, and individual accommodations feed into a wider repertoire.

Designs are open-source and derivatives welcomed, so that opportunities to develop and model access options are present if not integrated into the design stage.

Disabled people form part of a community of makers, musicians, and composers, pushing development forward in collaboration with non-disabled people.

All people are considered as equals. When evaluating artistic work, priority is given to output and individual style.