

Self-rehearsal in the beginning orchestra classroom

by

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Abstract

For my project, I created a series of beginning orchestra lessons that focused on breaking a piece of music into learnable sections, brainstorming effective rehearsal strategies, creating a rehearsal plan, and rehearsing with peers. The first lesson focuses on analyzing a short excerpt of music. As a class, we broke an example excerpt into four learnable sections: key signature identification, rhythm practice, measure-by-measure practice, and playing through the whole excerpt. Following this, students broke into small groups and repeated the process without teacher intervention. In the second lesson, students brainstormed previously successful rehearsal strategies. They then taught themselves an excerpt of music and were asked to create a rehearsal plan to teach their peers. In lesson three, students executed their rehearsal plans. Afterward, we reflected as a class on what went well and what needed improvement in their rehearsals. Overall, this series of lessons was a successful introduction to self-rehearsal. Students excelled at breaking their excerpts into sections for each other. They were also able to hear when their peers were making mistakes but struggled to fix the problems. Students concluded that they need to work on giving more positive feedback and collaborating as a team.

During my time in Kansas State University's Master of Music program, I recognized that my students greatly relied on teacher-led rehearsal to learn their music and improve their ensemble. A development in my teaching has been to help students break down their music into learnable, focused sections. I have also developed my lessons to include student-led error detection and peer feedback. In the classroom, this is shown through increased small group work, encouraging feedback between sections of the orchestra, and additional questions to students to encourage error detection. As a result of these developments, I have noticed my students are learning notes and rhythms more quickly and communicating better with each other.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy.....	1
How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching	6
Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s).....	7
Lesson Plan 1	8
Music National Standards (2014)	8
Prior Knowledge/Skills	8
Rehearsal Objective	8
Assessment of the Rehearsal.....	9
Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed	9
Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies.....	9
Rehearsal Plan.....	10
Lesson Plan 2	11
Music National Standards (2014)	11
Prior Knowledge/Skills	12
Rehearsal Objective	12
Assessment of the Rehearsal.....	12
Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed	12
Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies.....	13
Rehearsal Plan.....	13
Lesson Plan 3.....	14
Music National Standards (2014)	14
Prior Knowledge/Skills	14
Rehearsal Objective	14
Assessment of the Rehearsal.....	14
Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed	14
Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies.....	15
Rehearsal Plan.....	16
Chapter 3 - Reflections	20

Bibliography	24
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List of Tables

Table 1 Number Rubric	9
Table 2 Rehearsal plan 1	11
Table 3 +/- Rubric	12
Table 4 Rehearsal Plan 2.....	13
Table 5 Rehearsal Plan 3.....	16

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Music Education

Why Schooling?

Throughout my ten years of teaching, one image has prevailed when observing our modern-day educational structure: a factory used to produce people for the workforce. From the time students are in middle school, they are taking career tests to inform them of their strengths and interests. We give them these tests in hopes that they will tailor their classes to train for their future occupations. While I believe exploring career choices is important, it should not be the purpose of education. Schooling should focus on preparing the whole child to function as a member of society. We should be concentrating on helping students to become better, whole people who can operate physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally in the world.

At the most basic level, education should teach children how to physically exist in our world. School in the early years does a good job at this. Pre-schoolers and kindergarteners refine fine motor skills by cutting out shapes with scissors, drawing, and even playing with blocks. Most elementary students are exposed to art, PE, and music classes that also help to develop their physical skills. As students enter higher grade levels, many of these subjects become elective. This is something we need to re-evaluate as a society. In the age of technology, fine motor skills and physical well-being in general are taking a hard hit. If we are going to educate the whole child, should we not include courses that continue to refine physical skills?

I would make the argument that current education is mostly focused on improving cognitive skills in certain subjects. Specifically, math and reading skills are emphasized in schools and in testing. While math and reading are important to know as a functioning human, we need to ask ourselves, do they encompass the total cognitive growth a student can gain?

There are further areas of cognition that can be explored. Critical thinking, decision making, and problem-solving skills being an example. If we are to educate the whole child cognitively, other subjects must be held at equal importance.

Children must also learn to function socially in our world. School should offer them opportunities to practice listening, collaboration, empathy, conflict resolution, feedback, and diplomacy skills. Students will need these skills both inside and outside of the workforce. They will use them in professional, platonic, and romantic relationships. School is the number one social atmosphere in which children are involved. They have opportunities to engage in social interactions with peers, authority figures, and people of different races, backgrounds, religions, and opinions as them. As a society, we must find ways to use schooling to harness and grow these skills so students are prepared to communicate effectively in both work and social atmospheres.

Finally, the school has a responsibility to help a child grow emotionally. Self-awareness, emotional regulation, confidence, mental health awareness, and resilience are some examples of skills we need to function as humans in the world. Without these skills, students will run into a myriad of problems that can affect other areas of their lives. Students who are self-aware of their emotions and mental state can communicate better, create stronger relationships, and become better problem solvers. They can handle their stress more responsibly and can function better in society. It is important that the emotional growth of the child is considered in education.

What is Music and Why Music in Schools?

While it would be easier to define music as an organized pattern of rhythms and pitches, I do not believe music is that simple. Much like Estelle Jorgensen, I believe that music is culturally defined (Jorgensen, 1997). What may be considered music in one culture may not be

considered music in another. It is difficult to define without considering the background and cultural context of a piece of music. What we do know, however, is that music plays a role in every observable society (Gottlieb, 2019). Music making appears to be an important part of being human. I believe human beings are attracted to music because music making encompasses the whole person. Music engages us physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. For this reason, music education in our schools is vital.

Music is a physical experience and helps develop physical skills. Whether singing, playing, or listening, the body is engaged in some way. Instrumental playing requires the use of fine motor skills. Singing requires use of the jaw, tongue, neck, shoulders, core, etc. Listening requires use of the ears. Dalcroze uses eurhythmics to engage students through bodily movements. If music is involved, there will always be a physical component involved as well. In fact, music activates the motor system of our brain without any movement at all (Gordon et al., 2018).

Music also engages students cognitively. Students are involved in decoding musical symbols and notes. They are asked to analyze rhythm from a fractional standpoint (how many notes fit into one beat). Components such as melodic and harmonic analysis are also considered. On another level, students are asked to think critically about music. For example, they are encouraged to evaluate the music, think about the composer's intent, and offer opinions on expressivity. Students also develop decision making skills in the music classroom. For example, students in the orchestra classroom need to make decisions about what position to play an excerpt in. They must consider aspects such as ease of playing, timbre, and tone. Problem-solving skills are often utilized in the music classroom as well. In music practice, students must find difficult sections and think about how to best approach them.

By nature, music is a social activity. In any ensemble, students work with their peers to create a musical experience. The skill of listening is constantly practiced as students listen to themselves and one another while playing or singing. Students also must collaborate and decide together what they are trying to portray in their performance. They must problem solve together in difficult passages and find a solution to improve their playing/singing. This requires the use of diplomatic feedback so the task at hand can be accomplished. On a different note, music can be used to connect human beings of different cultures together. As Jorgensen states, “comparative and contextual study of world music helps students understand other cultures, grasp perspective and expressions of others (what people have in common and how they differ), and foster tolerance of cultural differences” (Jorgensen, 1997). The study of music helps create more tolerant and empathetic people.

Last, but not least, music helps children grow emotionally. Music invokes emotion within people. Students are asked to identify emotions and sometimes express them through their music. When students become self-aware of how they are feeling, they are more easily able to regulate. Music even offers a healthy outlet for students who need it. Students who participate in musical learning also learn resilience. There are times when musical skills do not come easily, and students must persist through those difficulties to improve. Not only does this improve resilience, but it also improves confidence in their own abilities.

Music education lends itself perfectly to educating the whole child. For this reason, every child should be involved in music education. Our position as music teachers is among the most important in the school. We have the unique opportunity to engage our students physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. While this can happen outside of formal schooling, public

education is the easiest way to reach the general population. Music education must be involved in our public education system if we are to educate the whole child.

Compare/Contrast

While reading other philosopher's writings, I found myself agreeing with many of their points but also wishing their views encompassed a broader scope. My philosophy of education and music encompasses ideas from all these philosophers. I agree with Elliot Eisner's idea that the arts should be used to help students develop cognitively in a way that other subjects cannot (Eisner, 1998). I also value David Elliot's emphasis on valuing self-growth and self-knowledge (Elliot, 2010). Christopher Small focuses on the idea that music is a physical activity (Small, 1998). While it does incorporate physical aspects, I do not agree that is all music is. Estelle Jorgensen's emphasis of music and music education as a tool to continue cultural tradition and grow an understanding of other world cultures is important (Jorgensen, 1997). I also agree with Bennett Reimer's idea that music is for all, helps us become fully human, and enriches the quality of life (Reimer, 2003). These philosophers cover a little bit of everything I believe. Music education should help cognitive growth (Eisner), music should help emotional intelligence (Elliot and Reimer), music should be a physical action (Small), and music should connect us socially (Jorgensen). The difference in my philosophy is that I believe all of these things are equally important in educating the whole child for the world.

Conclusion

The purpose of education should be to prepare the whole child for life outside of school. This includes preparing the child cognitively, socially, physically, and emotionally. Education should not be a factory that produces human beings for the workforce alone. There is life outside of work that requires multiple levels of maturity to function as a happy, healthy adult. Music

education lends itself to the growth of all these areas. Music is essential in creating well-rounded adults ready for today's society.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

My philosophy of music education reminds me to engage students as whole people. I do not think of my orchestra classroom as a space where students follow every direction I want, play their instruments, and pack up. Students need to go beyond the physical of playing their instrument. Music can help them to practice their critical thinking, social, and emotional wellness skills. Students in my classroom are given the opportunity to critically think about what we are doing and why through reflection and discussion. They are also given social opportunities to interact with their peers and give each other feedback. We discuss emotional intent and expressivity within the music as well. All the strategies I use are meant to help the whole child grow and learn.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)

I chose to focus on self-rehearsal in the beginning orchestra classroom for two reasons. Firstly, I became concerned with the amount of time it was taking my middle school students to learn notes and rhythms. They were solely relying on me to teach them how to “decode” the music. Several students mentioned to me that they struggled with teaching themselves music without guidance. The second reason is that I noticed my high school orchestra students were adept at rehearsing themselves when I was not present, but my middle schoolers were not. I wanted to see if self-rehearsal is a process we could start earlier in the classroom.

Self-rehearsal is important because my goal is to create independent, lifelong musicians. If students do not learn practice/rehearsal skills, they will not be successful once they graduate. I want students to be able to leave my classroom and play a quartet for their aunt’s wedding, or even play happy birthday for their grandmother. Students need to learn how to decode and make music on their own if they are going to participate in music outside of school.

I decided to do these series of lessons with beginners because self-learning is something I want to encourage from the beginning of a student’s musical education. My goal with this specific class was to help students learn how to use “chunking” and break sections of music down to learn it easier. I also wanted to give them experience with student-led error detection. The following lessons reflect these goals by giving students a chance to chunk a small excerpt into sections with teacher instruction and then again in a small student-led group. Students are also given the opportunity to experience teaching their peers and detecting errors within the ensemble.

Lesson Plan 1

Music National Standards (2014)

- Performing: Analyze: MU:Pr4.2.E.5a Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how knowledge of formal aspects in musical works inform prepared or improvised performances.
- Performing: Rehearse, Evaluate, Refine: MU:Pr5.3.E.5a Use self-reflection and peer feedback to refine individual and ensemble performances of a varied repertoire of music.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students should be comfortable counting quarter, half, whole, and eighth notes and rests. They should also be able to name and play notes on all four strings in three different keys (C, G, and D major).

Rehearsal Objective

Students will practice identifying key signatures and finger patterns, count and perform rhythms that use quarter, half, whole and eighth notes and rests, identify and play notes on each string, and successfully perform self-taught music for the class.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

	4	3	2	1
Rhythm	All rhythms are performed correctly.	At least 75% of rhythms are performed correctly.	At least 50% of rhythms are performed correctly.	Less than 50% of rhythms are performed correctly.
Notes	All notes are performed correctly.	At least 75% of notes are performed correctly.	At least 50% of notes are performed correctly.	Less than 50% of notes are performed correctly.
Key Signature	The key signature is followed 100% of the time.	At least 75% of notes follow the key signature.	At least 50% of notes follow the key signature.	Less than 50% of notes follow the key signature.

Table 1 Number Rubric

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

Several groups will be working in one room. We may need to modify the noise level.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Whiteboard, Pirates of the Caribbean arranged by Lavender, instruments.

Rehearsal Plan

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
12:42	Tune	To get our instruments in tune	1. Sing the note 2. Evaluate if the note matches 3. Tune the instrument	Auditory assessment of whether the student was able to match pitch
12:50	Clap and count rhythms as a group	To practice rhythm counting	1. Write in rhythm counts 2. Clap and count rhythms	Auditory assessment of correct rhythm counting/clapping
12:55	Identify key signature and finger pattern. Say notes and finger along as a group	To practice note naming and playing	1. Students get a minute to look over the line 2. Say notes and finger along	Auditory assessment of correct note names. Visual assessment of correct fingering
1:00	Play through one measure at a time as a group	To learn our music in small, doable sections	Play one measure at a time	Auditory assessment of correct notes and rhythms. Visual assessment of correct bowings/fingerings
1:05	Play through the whole section as a group	To put into context what we just practiced	Play the whole section.	Auditory assessment of correct notes and rhythms. Visual assessment of correct bowings/fingerings
1:10	Break into small groups and clap and count the	To practice rhythm counting without teacher assistance.	1. Write in rhythm counts 2. Clap and count rhythms	Visual assessment of written counts and auditory assessment of correct counting.

	rhythms of the next section			
1:15	In small groups, identify key signature and finger pattern, say notes and finger along	To practice note naming and fingerings	Say notes and finger along	Visual assessment of fingerings and auditory assessment of correct notes
1:20	Play through one measure at a time as a group	To practice small, doable sections	Play one measure at a time	Auditory assessment of correct notes and rhythms, visual assessment of correct bowings/fingerings
1:25	Play through the whole section as a group	To put into context what was just practiced.	Play through the section.	Formal rubric assessment of notes, rhythms, and key signature identification

Table 2 Rehearsal plan 1

Lesson Plan 2

Music National Standards (2014)

- Performing: Analyze: MU:Pr4.2.E.5a Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how knowledge of formal aspects in musical works inform prepared or improvised performances.
- Performing: Rehearse, Evaluate, Refine: MU:Pr5.3.E.8a Develop strategies to address technical challenges in a varied repertoire of music and evaluate their success using feedback from ensemble peers and other sources to refine performances.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students should be comfortable counting quarter, half, whole, and eighth notes and rests. They should also be able to name and play notes on all four strings in three different keys (C, G, and D major).

Rehearsal Objective

Students will practice identifying key signatures and finger patterns, count and perform rhythms that use quarter, half, whole, and eighth notes and rests, identify and play notes on each string, and successfully learn a piece of music in a small group setting. They will also create a rehearsal plan for the class.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

	+	-
Warm-up	The rehearsal plan includes a warm-up that relates to the piece of music being taught.	The rehearsal plan either does not include a warm-up or does not relate to the piece of music being taught.
Rhythm	Rhythm work is included in the rehearsal plan.	Rhythm work is not included in the rehearsal plan.
Note work	Note work is included in the rehearsal plan.	Note work is not included in the rehearsal plan.
Key signature identification	Part of the rehearsal plan includes identifying the key signature.	Key signature identification is not part of the rehearsal plan.

Table 3 +/- Rubric

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

Several groups will be working in one room. We may need to modify the noise level.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Whiteboard, Essential Elements for Strings book 1, rehearsal plan template, speaker, tuning app.

Rehearsal Plan

12:42	Tune	To get our instruments in tune	1. Have a student or group of students lead the tuning	Auditory assessment of whether the student was able to match pitch
12:50	Sticky note activity in groups	To brainstorm the best ways to rehearse and learn music	1. Break students into groups 2. Give each student 3 sticky notes 3. On the sticky notes, each student writes one strategy for rehearsing/learning music that they think works for them 4. Students share their sticky notes by placing them in the middle. If someone else has a sticky note similar, they read it and add it to the pile	Visual assessment of class participation
1:00	Small group rehearsal to learn an assigned piece	To use previously discussed strategies to learn a new piece with the purpose of teaching it later	Students will receive 10 minutes to work in their groups to learn their assigned piece	Visual and auditory assessment of strategies used to learn the piece
1:10	Rehearsal plan with an assigned piece	To create a rehearsal plan based on previously discussed strategies	1. Hand out rehearsal plan paper 2. Give instructions In their groups, students create a rehearsal plan together that includes a warm-up and teaching a song from the book	A +/- rubric that measures the inclusion of a warm-up that relates to the piece, rhythm work, note reading work, and key signature identification

Table 4 Rehearsal Plan 2

Lesson Plan 3

Music National Standards (2014)

- Performing: Analyze: MU:Pr4.2.E.5a Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how knowledge of formal aspects in musical works inform prepared or improvised performances.
- Performing: Rehearse, Evaluate, Refine: MU:Pr5.3.E.8a Develop strategies to address technical challenges in a varied repertoire of music and evaluate their success using feedback from ensemble peers and other sources to refine performances.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students should be comfortable counting quarter, half, whole, and eighth notes and rests. They should also be able to name and play notes on all four strings in three different keys (C, G, and D major). They should have the ability to play the piece their group was assigned. They should have a basic idea of how their rehearsal plan is laid out.

Rehearsal Objective

Small groups of students will lead a rehearsal to teach their peers a new piece of music.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

There will be visual and auditory assessments done by both students and the teacher to gather what the class has learned. There will also be a group reflection/discussion that focuses on what the group needs more work on, what the students could have done better, and what the students did well.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

None.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Whiteboard, rehearsal plan template, speaker, Essential Elements for strings book 1, tuning app.

Rehearsal Plan

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
12:42	Tune	To get our instruments in tune	1. Have a student or group of students lead the tuning	Auditory assessment of whether the student was able to match pitch
12:50	Group 1 rehearsal	To give group 1 time to self-rehearse their piece	3. Students will run their portion of rehearsal and then get brief feedback from their peers	Reflection at the end of the lesson
1:00	Group 2 rehearsal	To give group 2 time to self-rehearse their piece	3. Students will run their portion of rehearsal and then get brief feedback from their peers	Reflection at the end of the lesson
1:10	Group 3 rehearsal	To give group 3 time to self-rehearse their piece	Students will run their portion of rehearsal and then get brief feedback from their peers	Reflection at the end of the lesson
1:20	Group 4 rehearsal	To give group 4 time to self-rehearse their piece	Students will run their portion of rehearsal and then get brief feedback from their peers	Reflection at the end of the lesson
1:30	Reflections	To reflect upon rehearsal techniques and what went well/what needs work	Students will participate in a group reflection that includes three sections: 1. What went well 2. What needs work 3. What does the group need to work on as a whole	These will be graded based on thoughtful, active participation

Table 5 Rehearsal Plan 3

My goal with these lessons was to help students learn how to break down different components of music to be able to learn it themselves. This will help students with personal practice and set them up for success as an independent musician. The components they had to break down included analyzing the key signature, rhythm, note identification, fingering practice, short section practice, and whole piece practice. After completing this process as a class, I wanted students to be able to repeat the process in a small group setting. I also wanted students to reflect on the strategies that help them learn best so they could utilize them in lesson plans for their peers. The goal was to create an opportunity for students to plan and run a rehearsal with their peers and gain experience in error detection and giving feedback. These are skills that are necessary if students participate in music outside of school in a teacherless setting.

In these lessons, students learned how to break music apart into different components to make self-learning more accessible and then learned how to put those components back together to perform their piece. Students also gained experience collaborating in a small group setting to learn and plan music learning for their peers. They practiced creating warm-ups and teaching note and rhythm reading skills. Students received feedback on how to give appropriate feedback and how to work as a team and solve conflicts. Finally, students learned how to listen for errors and began learning how to rehearse through those errors.

I used the following instructional strategies in these lessons: me-we-two-you, peer teaching, and chunking. Me, you, two, you, focuses on the gradual release of responsibility. First, I demonstrated how to break the music apart (chunking) for easier learning with the whole group (me and you). Following that, students broke into small groups (two) to practice the process. The next step would be to have individual students show they can break down the music and learn it. Peer teaching occurred when the small groups implemented their rehearsal plans in class.

I used several types of assessments in these lesson plans. These included: self and group reflection, number and +/- rubrics, and informal auditory and visual assessments. For reflections, students were able to self-assess what they did well, what needs improvement, and how to help the group overall. The number rubric assessed what percentage of notes, rhythms, and key signature students were able to teach themselves. The +/- rubric assessed the completion of each rehearsal plan component. The students and I were able to make formative assessments by listening and watching each other to make corrections.

In the future when I use these lesson plans, I will add several components. The first thing I will incorporate is teaching and practicing how to give constructive feedback. I was hoping students would be positive with one another when giving feedback, but after observing the student-led rehearsals, I recognize that students need more guidance in this area. I could pair students up and give pretend scenarios and have them practice giving positive and negative feedback to each other. Another way to incorporate giving feedback would be to have sections within the orchestra give each other feedback while we rehearse individual sections. Additionally, I would add a discussion about common rehearsal errors, how to listen for them, and teach some practice/rehearsal techniques to address those errors. During these lessons, students were able to hear that something was wrong, but they struggled with pinpointing exactly what was happening and how to address it. By adding instruction on common errors and rehearsal strategies, students will be better prepared to address the problems they are hearing.

These lessons have changed the way I approach student-led learning. I have realized that students need to be taught rehearsal and practice techniques to successfully self-rehearse. Students also need opportunities to practice expressing their thoughts and feedback in a conducive way. When using a chunking technique to break the music apart, beginning students

are capable of learning notes and rhythms by themselves. This has shown me that there are moments when having the conductor up front is unnecessary. Finally, I have learned that student-led rehearsals give an amazing opportunity for students to do ear training and error detection practice.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

My thoughts about teaching have changed throughout my work in the Music Education Masters' Program at Kansas State University. Through reading about different learning theories in the Buttram's "Learning theory and related developments: Overview and applications in music education and music therapy," (Buttram, 1996) I have realized the importance of more student-led learning in the orchestra classroom. My goal is to create independent musicians. Students need to learn how to practice and rehearse efficiently on their own for this to be achieved. This can be done by giving each group instruction on effective rehearsal strategies and helping them practice student-led rehearsal. For example, with beginning orchestra, we might focus on learning strategies to count rhythms and practice note reading. In advanced high school orchestra, we might focus more on strategies for finding phrases and enhancing musicality. I have also changed my attitude about assessments. When completing the final project in the class "Curriculum Development and Learning Assessment," Dr. Payne encouraged me to give more detailed feedback to students and to see assessment as a helpful tool to constantly adjust my teaching to student needs.

The way I teach has changed because of these new thoughts. Students in my classroom were greatly relying on a teacher-led rehearsal to learn music and improve as an ensemble. For example, I would have second or third-year students who needed my help to play basic rhythms and notes. As a result, we were spending a lot of our class time learning notes and rhythms instead of focusing on the other aspects of the music. I have learned to step off the podium and relinquish control in small steps. In the beginning classroom, we often start new music by chunking a section into more learnable parts. Chunking is a teaching strategy that I learned during my undergraduate degree but was reminded of during the class "Theories of Music

Teaching.” I will start by having students count and clap measures 1-8 of a new song. They will then identify the key signature and say notes/finger along. The next step is to play one measure at a time. Finally, they will play all eight measures together. Following this, I relinquish some control and have them follow the same chunking method in small groups. I have also grown in my ability to encourage student-led error detection and feedback. For example, if I am working with the violins alone, I might ask the cello section to listen to their rhythm and give feedback on what went well and what needs work. Another way I strengthen error detection in the classroom is by asking questions when mistakes are made. I often ask students “Why did I stop?” Students are then engaged in a conversation with me and amongst their peers about what went wrong and how we can fix it for next time.

My attitude toward assessment has changed. Through an assigned reading “Music assessment concepts” (Asmus, 1999), I have learned to be mindful about what I am trying to assess. I have been creating assessments that give me more information on what students need help with. For example, instead of just giving paper tests that require students to fill in the note name and fingering, I now give multi-part tests that include note naming, fingering naming, playing, and ear training. One such assessment is called “familiar tunes on the G string.” With this assessment, students must write note names and fingerings underneath the notes. They then play through each line and write the name of the tune above the line. This helps me assess if students can recognize G string notes and fingerings, if they can play fluently enough on the G string to recognize the tune, and if they can use previous ear training skills to recognize the tune.

These new thoughts and teaching strategies have changed the way I view my classroom environment. I view the learning in my classroom as more collaborative and student-centered. Student centered learning and class discussions based of the article “Social Justice and ensemble

success: Implementing alternative seating practices” (Yi, 2019) in the class “Organization and Administration of a Successful Music Program” have encouraged me to change my seating practices and add more community-building events into the school year. My students now rotate seating every quarter. I believe it is important for everybody to be seen and heard and that the same people should not always sit up front. It also helps build a sense of community because more students get to know new people around them each quarter. Another way I have built community is by adding an “orchestra fun night” to our calendar. Students gather at the high school one night for a few hours and we eat pizza and play games. These changes have greatly changed the sense of community amongst students and as a result, they are more comfortable giving each other feedback and learning from one another.

Student learning in my classroom has changed since implementing the practices mentioned above. In the past three years, I have noticed that students of all levels have become better at reading notes and rhythms. Their experience and consistent practice of figuring out rhythms and notes on their own has helped greatly. For example, my beginners at the middle school usually take the full quarter to master their notes and rhythms. This year, the beginning orchestra had their notes and rhythms of *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Lavender, 2005) learned in the first four weeks. As a result, we were able to focus on musicality skills. This gave the students a more well-rounded musical education.

I have noticed these note and rhythm reading skills transfer from beginning orchestra into my more advanced groups. As students move up to the next level, they bring these skills with them and can learn harder music at a faster pace. I have a few examples of this. At the high school level, we do a chamber music unit. Students are split into chamber groups and mostly self-rehearse their pieces. In previous years, freshmen have struggled to learn amongst their

peers with little teacher intervention. This year, I was able to create an entire chamber group of freshmen. They were able to learn correct notes and rhythms with very little help from me. Another example of how students were able to use these skills is shown through my students who took solos to contest this year. Due to scheduling conflicts, I was not able to see my soloists much before contest. As a result, students mostly taught themselves their solos. Not only did my students learn notes and rhythms themselves, but they also surprised me with their musicality.

I believe the most important result of the changes in my thoughts, teaching, and environment due to my experience in the Masters' Program at Kansas State University is the sense of responsibility students have taken for their learning and how that has built a culture of hard work and teamwork. I have watched students, who started orchestra as argumentative and divisive, turn into students who are team players and help each other willingly. Students are even coming in during their free hour and rehearsing together. We have truly created a safe environment to learn and grow together.

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