

**Orchestra concert preparation: The impact of knowing the
music's background and having a voice in the decision**

by

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Abstract

The lessons demonstrated in this report are focused on providing context for the pieces my students would be playing for their upcoming concert. Leading up to these lessons, I provided students with a list of songs from different cultures and had those who were knowledgeable in those cultures share their opinions of which were truly representative of their culture. Another aspect of these lessons included students doing their own research on the more classical pieces to find out more information about what might have been going on when the piece was originally composed and how that might have influenced the composer and their work.

Throughout this master's program I have more finely defined my own philosophy and beliefs of teaching and have learned how to more properly program music for concerts that are developmentally appropriate for my students' skill levels. Learning about the different philosophies, beliefs, and the history of where music education has been and the possibilities for the future, I found myself recognizing where I agreed with philosophers and where I disagreed. Digging in to my own philosophy, I discovered my passion for how music interacts and connects with communities. I also solidified my belief that music education is meant for everyone, not only those who can afford it as an extra activity. Music education helps develop well rounded individuals who have learned how to reflect, adapt, and make changes as they are needed. These skills taught by music education are highly necessary within society and are constantly needed to be successful in a community. Though these skills are needed throughout many aspects of life, it is also important as a teacher to be able to apply these skills when it comes to concert planning. Throughout this program I have learned about important music study skills and how to apply them when choosing music. These skills include playing through each part, listening to the music, and researching the piece's and composer's background. After applying these skills, I

have been able to share more information about a piece, conduct more fluidly when it comes to cues, and convey the nuances of each piece my orchestras are playing. Along with more structured prep work for concert pieces, I have also learned that it is okay to drop a piece from a concert when it is not coming together well. When it comes to performances, it is more important for students to feel confident and for the piece to demonstrate the best of their abilities. It is not helpful to try and cram a piece that is either too difficult or just not ready into a concert. By being willing to let a piece go, it helps students with their confidence, self-esteem, and willingness to work even harder on the pieces that are still in the performance.

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I have had a lot of support in brainstorming and planning throughout this process, but I would like to send a special thanks to my students who helped make these new ideas possible. They approached learning how to play music with excitement and continuous curiosity and I appreciate their willingness to try new ways of learning some of the same things.

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Music education, when mentioned is visualized as either an ensemble such as choir, band, or orchestra or as the general music class that provides performances to demonstrate what students are learning within the music classroom. Within this description the “why” of music education would be to perform, but I propose that music education digs deeper and is farther reaching than the performance seen by family, friends, and colleagues. My beliefs about music education are formed by my personal experiences which began with general music classes in elementary school, orchestra classes beginning in third grade and continuing through high school, a Bachelor’s in Music Education, and four years of teaching middle school orchestra. Though this is not where the music experiences stop, this provides an idea of where my philosophy begins. From my experiences and the study of other music education philosophers, I will provide my thoughts on the importance of music education, how it is impacted by the importance of the educational system, and how my thoughts compare to the ideas of others.

Education serves many purposes within a society. The purposes change for each individual and how it impacts their lives. Though the picture that comes to mind first when thinking about education is a school building, education goes beyond what is learned in a classroom. Is the classroom where education is most visible and explicit? Yes, but individuals learn and become more educated on a regular basis outside of the school building even if that learning is not explicit. Lauwerys et al. (2019) eludes to this by stating that “the entire environment and all activities are frequently viewed as school and classes, and many or all adults act as teachers” (paras. 2). Education, whether inside or outside of the classroom, is to provide people with opportunities in learning how to better serve and fit into their community they are in currently and “is designed to guide them in learning a culture, molding their behaviour in the

ways of adulthood, and directing them toward their eventual role in society” (Ibid., paras. 2).

Though many see a community as a city or area of a larger town, I would like to argue that we as individuals are a part of several communities. Each activity and each place we go has different sets of rules and norms to follow in order to be a functioning member of that community. The education happening within a school building is to help students learn the core subjects along with the other cultural norms such as how each location (classroom) may have similar rules with variations that fit the flow of the location, proper ways of communicating, best practices when socializing, and how to be a part of a community (class/grade level) within a larger society (the entire school). Just as music is a part of society and changes its function within each community, music education is a part of a school and a well-rounded education.

Before discussing the importance of music education, I must mention the importance of music within society since music can be heard in almost any community. Within a society, music’s purpose is not to teach English, math, science, or history, its purpose is to influence and teach individuals. A piece of music may include educational contexts from the core subjects, but its sole purpose is not to teach these subjects. Music and the arts as Eisner (2020) mentions “make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know” and that “the arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling” (paras. 6 & 10). Music may envelope the core subjects such as English, math, science, and history, but that is not where music stops teaching. With that being said, music cannot be limited by the conception that it supports the core subjects, rather music extends beyond and teaches individuals more than any one core subject can teach.

In this sense, music education is not and should not be a part of the school system if its main purpose is to teach the core subjects, even if it includes contexts of English, math, science, and/or history. Music education provides its own purposes which is best explained by Eisner (1987) when he states that:

The presence of the arts in our culture and in every culture on our planet is testimony to the fact that humans have always had a need to explore the aesthetic possibilities of form and to obtain through them satisfactions and insights that cannot be secured elsewhere (p. 4).

Just as each classroom contains its own community, the music classroom provides its own rules and norms that help students better understand music's purpose outside the classroom. Music education is not meant for only the elite populations, it should be available to everyone in order to better educate students about the society of music and how it influences society. Some of these education points include, how to better respond to its influences and teachings, how to be a part of a music community in ways of responding and collaborating, and how to participate either by performing or listening within the music community. Though the performance of a music class is important to demonstrate what the music students are learning, there is more to music education than how well a student plays their instrument whether playing by themselves or within the ensemble. In order to teach the music that is to be performed, students must learn about the time in which it was written to help them determine the influences that were being made on the piece and the influences the piece was meant to make on the community. By looking at these influences of another time, students can begin to see the significance music has on their life and the lives of the community around them. While learning a piece for a performance, students are constantly thinking about their playing and constructively criticizing each performance. By doing

this, students are learning how to reflect, adapt, and change based on the given community they are in at the time. While focusing on their own performance, students are also learning how to work together towards a common goal. On top of evaluating their own performance, students are constantly learning how to adapt and change based on how the music and the other individuals within the ensemble change or stay the same. Music influences individuals in ways to help bring people of similar interests together within a community while music education helps teach us how to be a functioning member of that community.

There are many philosophies about the importance of education, music, and music education. My philosophy is based on my agreements and disagreements with philosophers such as Elliott, Eisner, Jorgensen, Kratus, Reimer, and Small. Music and music education philosophers all believe that music is a vital part of the educational system and that every student should have the opportunity to be involved in the music experience. Some would argue that the music education found in schools is outdated. This can be found in Kratus' (2007) statement that "music education has become disconnected from the prevailing culture" (p. 44). I would not go as far to say that the traditional band, orchestra, and choir ensembles are disconnected or outdated, they need to find new ways of being accessible to all students. As Eisner (1987) mentions, "for most children, school is a major resource for acquiring such skills" such as music and arts education (p. 9). Sometimes, though, providing extra support for accessibility is necessary outside the classroom. This support outside the classroom can be seen in programs such as El Sistema which is "acknowledged worldwide as the most significant example of collective music education" which Majno (2012) states is due to:

Strong social principles of integration are combined with specific musical approaches to achieve individual empowerment as a large-scale alternative to endemic juvenile crime,

counteracting the risk factors of social unease, serving as a stimulating example toward emancipation, and providing professional opportunities to the talented. Such a network, in turn, proves to be a powerful instrument of cultural progress (abstract).

Programs like El Sistema are focused on accessibility, which means that they “are free, and are not selective in admission” (Govias, 2011, p. 21). By providing support, music education allows the students to focus on the joys of music rather than the stresses it could bring. This joy as Jorgensen (2016) mentions is “crucial for music and music education” (p. 71). Elliott believed that “performance and authentic music making should be the primary means of education for all music students” (Daugherty, 1996, p. 4). Though performance is a part of music education, I would have to agree more with Reimer, according to Daugherty (1996), that performance “is not a legitimate end in itself for music education” (p. 2). Music education can teach students so much more when the focus is not on the performance. Eisner (2020) saw that music taught “children to make good judgements about qualitative relationships” and “that problems can have more than one solution” among other skills (paras. 2 & 3). Within the music classroom, what is being taught is how to critically think, how to communicate well and compromise because there is not one solution, how to reflect on a performance and critically evaluate oneself, how to relate to others and to the music, and what this all comes back to, how to be a part of a community and society. Both Small and Elliott believe that music is an activity, which I believe is true since we are always actively participating whether it is listening or performing (Ratliff, 2011; Daugherty, 1996). I believe it goes deeper since we can passively listen and perform, but to truly be a part of the music classroom, a student must be active in their learning, evaluating, and communicating in order to create what most would consider music, which would include emotion within the formation of the sounds and a notice of care given to each note and rest being performed.

Music education cannot be fully understood without the contexts of music and education within their separate contexts. Music is a part of the daily life, but until we understand in what ways it is involved in our lives, we cannot understand its significance. We as individuals are a part of many communities which come together within a larger society. Not only is the music different for each community, but the education and norms change even the slightest among the separate communities. A school building emulates these characteristics of communities and music's involvement. Even though music could assist in teaching English, math, science, and history, that is not its purpose within communities and should not be its purpose within a school building. Music education provides context for social emotional learning, which helps teach students how to be a functioning member of society. These qualities of music education should not be traded in for the core subjects, because as Eisner (1987) mentions, "the curriculum of our schools is the major means through which our children learn the 'languages' of [the arts,] and it is by learning these languages that they gain access to the kind of experience that the forms make possible" (p. 9).

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

The lessons that I taught are focused on students analyzing pieces to play and then learning more about the context of what they are playing. My philosophy focuses on teaching students beyond the basics of playing music into how music serves the society it is originally composed. By teaching my students about the context of the music they are playing such as culture and background, I am helping them draw connections from the piece to the society. Also, by having my students have a voice in some of the music selections, I am helping my students see that music serves many different societies, which makes it accessible to everyone.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan 1

Kansas State Music Standards (2015)

Re.1.I (p. 11)

Re.1.P (p. 11)

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students understand the basic skills of playing in first position. Student also know their general ability of what they can play well and what would be challenging.

Lesson Objective

Students will critically evaluate a variety of music and using their knowledge of skills and musicality will rank the pieces in performance preference.

Assessment of the Lesson

Students will have met the objective through their justifications for their music choices and rankings.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

Students will begin this process by selecting pieces they were interested in and believe will fit their abilities. I will then listen to the pieces on their lists and sort them based on genre and playability. As a class we will then listen to the final list and rank the pieces based on skills, instrumentation needs, and preference.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Students and teachers need computers and headphones and will be using JWPepper.com as their primary website.

Lesson Plan 2

Kansas State Music Standards (2015)

Pr.3.P (p. 8)

Pr.3.Ac (p. 8)

Pr.5.P.a (p. 10)

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students have a general understanding of the pieces being rehearsed through sight reading and listening to examples.

Lesson Objective

Students will have a better understanding of the culture and/or background being represented of the piece being rehearsed.

Assessment of the Lesson

Formative assessments will include reflections on rehearsals and conversations about expression in connection to the culture and background. The summative assessment will be the final performance of the piece and how they represent the culture and background being demonstrated through the performance pieces.

Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

Teacher and students will need concert music being rehearsed. Students will need their instruments and the teacher will need material compiled after research of the concert music.

Lesson Plan Reflections

With these lessons, my goal was to create a sense of ownership with my students. By having my students have a voice in the music we were performing for the concert and teaching them more about the music, I wanted my students to form a stronger connection to the music,

which would hopefully influence their performing skills. My students learned that there are many factors that go into deciding which pieces to play and sometimes the music we choose based on listening and seeing does not always perform the way we think it should. They also learned about a variety of cultures and music styles and that there are a variety of reasons music is composed.

When students were picking out pieces of music, students were independently or with a partner looking through JWPepper. Students knew they could ask questions and knew the guidelines I usually follow when looking for music but that if they found a piece they liked they could still send it my way. We then listened to a selection of pieces from their lists and collaborated on the pros and cons of each piece before each student voted on their preferences. The second part of this lesson was collaborative in nature while still providing each student with their own voice for the final vote. When learning about the pieces, I provided most of the information for the lesson but then as we were rehearsing asked how that would sound or how we could make it better. These collaboration moments were the assessments I used most frequently but I also used our performances as their summative assessments.

After these lessons, I had a couple other pieces I planned on teaching about but decided to try having the students look further into the music. I found this more beneficial since I had already provided a guide with my lessons. My students were capable of making their own connections of how the pieces we were playing connected with the world around them. I do think I need to demonstrate the skills of finding information about the music we are performing, but the more I can have them research, the more my students will make those connections. For future lessons, I would like to include some of the students' research in the concert, whether it is the students presenting or something that is displayed for our audience members to look at on their own.

This instruction helped me commit to looking outside of the traditional concert music. By asking the students to share with me their thoughts on possible concert music, I learned what they were interested in learning and playing. When I was presenting the background information about one of our concert pieces, my students did not seem very interested but when I suggested a research project for them, they showed a heightened level of interest. I was impressed with the information they found and how it was presented. The follow up lessons have taught me that my students are interested and want to know more about and have more ownership in what they are playing.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

Though I had already planned on working on my Master's in Music Education, the closing of schools due to COVID helped me make that final step in deciding to get started. Though I taught virtually for the remainder of that school year, I had some extra time to really sit and reflect on my teaching practices as well as the opportunities I provided for my students and realized that I wanted to step outside of the traditional box of learning for the concerts. Also, when I began teaching, I had so many ideas of different activities for my students and I got complacent in what was done by the person who taught in that position before me. Working towards my master's has helped me become more comfortable with stepping outside of the box and more confident in executing my ideas.

Through the exploration of the history of music education and philosophies in music education I was able to reevaluate my how I saw music education as it is in my community, society, and country. I am still curious about how it differs to other countries but I recognize how I agree not only with how other educators are currently teaching music but also with how music has been taught and where we are possibly heading with music education. As I studied others' philosophies of music education, I was able to pick and choose what resonated with me as far as how I want to articulate my philosophy. These reflections also led into studying other theories as they pertain to music education and how people think, develop, and learn. Human development theories have always interested me because I can see how each came up to their own conclusions but when it came to thinking about my own theory, I had to look past how each theory was possible and look at what conclusions I have come to and how I see people learning music.

These lessons have helped me better connect with my students. I am more diligent about conducting more formative assessments and evaluating constantly whether students are ready to

move on to the next skills/technique or if we need to spend more time on the current skill. I have also felt more comfortable with being flexible in my teaching strategies. If I notice a student or a section of students are struggling, I change up my lesson plans and make sure every student understands the skill before we move on as a class. I have also learned how to encourage students to explore and practice things that interest them. Students who would usually be board in the past, now want to show me something new that they have taught themselves, which I find to be some of the most valuable learning because it is self-directed. Another way I am able to connect with my students is through the social emotional skills needed to be a part of an ensemble. Students are more willing to share points of confusion because I am asking them how they are feeling about their skills and abilities. I used to use the sports team metaphor, which I still use but I add an extra point to share with my students that I do not have a bench, which means that each student is important and valuable in the making of our ensemble music. This has led students to be more committed to pushing past their stage fright for their classmates at first and then realizing they might still have stage fright but are capable of being successful in those situations. I had a student share evidence of this and concluded with thanking me for helping her have confidence in herself.

With my string specific skills, I have grown in my ability to guide my students in holding their instrument as well as playing new techniques and growing in their current skills. I have also grown in my comfortability of programing music outside the traditional western style concert music. This last point, I think has been a contributing factor in connecting with my students on a deeper level. This past year, I set a goal for myself to program a piece from another culture. By setting this goal, I became committed to this goal and enlisted a couple students in helping me find a piece that was authentic and respectful of the culture it was representing. After doing this,

I felt more confident in my research with another piece where I almost purchased a piece that was not as reflective of the original as another version. Though, when thinking back this seems small, I know in the moment I was proud of myself for taking that extra step and looking into the history of the original before making my final decision.

Along with taking a step outside of the tradition concert music, I have also connected with my school's community to provide my students with other real world performance opportunities. My students this past year played in three community events and toured the elementary schools for a winter field trip. I was expecting some push back from my students for scheduling the community events but my students surprised me with excitement. They were nervous about performing for people in the community but when we reflected on the events, my students want to continue performing for these events and activities. I even suggested splitting the events so not everyone would have to be at every event and my students shared that though it was a bit hectic at times, they would not want it any other way. I not only noticed a growth in myself in reaching out and communicating with others outside my school district, I recognized that my students grew in their professionalism and their maturity in playing. I could see they were connecting with the why of playing, that it was not just for the traditional concert, but that music serves a purpose in the community and can add to events and that they can be a part of communities coming together.

I am continuously reflecting on my practices as a teacher and as a part of the community and cannot wait to build and improve upon the growth that took place this past year in my program, my students, and myself. I am continuously thinking of ways my students can perform for others outside of the traditional concert as well as ways to add to the concert to make it

reflect who my students are and what they are capable of doing both as a musician and as a person.

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