

Rehearsing and performing chamber music in the middle school orchestra classroom

by

Megan Gerbrandt

B.M.E., Missouri State University, 2020

A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MUSIC

School of Music, Theatre, and Dance
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

Approved by:
Major Professor
Dr. Rachel Dirks

Copyright

© Megan Gerbrandt 2026.

Abstract

As a middle school orchestra director, I strive to give my students a well-rounded orchestral experience that builds musical competency, personal confidence, and a love for music-making. Oftentimes, the school orchestra experience is centered around large ensemble performances that are director-led, and students have limited autonomy over what they play and who they play with. Large ensembles can be and still are a fulfilling musical experience, but integrating small ensembles provides another creative vehicle for students to grow in musicianship and life skills.

To diversify student performance opportunities, I removed a large ensemble concert from the calendar and replaced it with a solo and small ensemble unit. The goals of this unit were to increase student engagement and agency while building student independence and competency in rehearsal skills. The unit culminated in a concert formatted like a coffee shop “open mic night”. This performance was designed to be low-stakes and joyful in a way that promotes a positive association with performing, something that often feels anxiety-producing in the adolescent brain.

I started planning this unit with research about structuring student-led rehearsals and managing adolescent performance anxiety. I then utilized backward design to create my unit plan, embedding formal and informal assessments. The unit started with a Speed Duetting activity where students practiced basic chamber music skills and duetted with each of their classmates. After learning and reinforcing fundamental skills, students chose their own small ensemble groups and selected a piece of music to perform at our Classical Coffee concert. They worked independently and used a Rehearsal Log to guide their progress.

My teaching has developed through both philosophy and practice in many ways during my Masters' Program. Through my Literature Analysis and Symphonic Literature classes, I have developed a more holistic approach to the study of, teaching of, and enjoyment of music. These classes imparted in me the value of understanding the historical context and background of each piece's composer and composition process. While I used to think this research was a solely intellectual endeavor, the process and product helped me understand and therefore love the music more.

The Curriculum and Learning Assessment course was invaluable in the creation of this project. I learned how to be proactive in my planning and start with the goals in mind instead of planning reactively as I went. This helped me pace my instruction well so students could reasonably achieve their goals and put on a quality performance that resulted from meaningful learning.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Dedication	ix
Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy.....	1
What is education?	1
What should education do?	1
Music in education.....	4
How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching	7
Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)	8
Lesson Plan 1	9
2014 Music National Standards	9
Prior Knowledge/Skills	10
Objectives	10
Assessments	10
Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies	10
Lesson Sequence	11
Lesson Plan 2	15
Chapter 3 - Reflections	28
Bibliography	32

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Speed Duetting Worksheet	13
Figure 2.2. STARS Method for Sight Reading	18
Figure 2.3. Visual and Auditory Prompts for Early Stages of Rehearsing	20
Figure 2.4. Practice Strategies “Cheat Sheet”	22

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Duet Performance Rubric	14
Table 2.2. Rehearsal Log Week 1	17
Table 2.3. Rehearsal Log Week 2	19
Table 2.4. Rehearsal Log Week 3	21
Table 2.5. Rehearsal Log Week 4	23
Table 2.6. Rehearsal Log Week 5	24
Table 2.7. Rehearsal Log Week 6	25

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Rachel Dirks, Dr. Ruth Gurgel, and Dr. Philip Payne, for your guidance and encouragement through the graduate report process and my time in the KSU masters' program. I am grateful to learn from excellent teachers like you.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my colleague and friend, Sheri Cain, for her mentorship, wisdom, and affirmation that I am in the right profession. From the first day of student teaching under your tutelage to the current day of being your colleague, you have spoken over me the strengths I could not see in myself. My inspiration for this project came from your wealth of experience and creativity that you share generously.

Dedication

This report is dedicated to my parents, who have unwaveringly supported my musical education at every step. At every single concert, both as a student and as a teacher, I can look out to the audience and know with confidence that you are there.

Thank you to my students. You are the reason I love my job, and you make me eager to become the best teacher possible so you can thrive.

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Music education is an essential component to a quality education. A quality education creates well-rounded people who understand themselves and the world around them through by building critical thinking skills, exploring a variety of ideas and cultures, fostering creativity, and imparting a love for beauty in the world. Music is the common thread that ties these diverse ideas together.

What is education?

I believe education is one of the greatest determinants of a stable society, therefore education is a human right that must be afforded to all. This is why the right to a quality education is rooted in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, because education is one of society's most powerful tools. It lifts people out of poverty, levels inequalities, and enables other fundamental human rights (UNESCO, n.d.). Article 26 of the Declaration states that "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace" (United Nations, 1948). When people are given the resources and empowerment to understand themselves, the world, and their individual potential, they are able to grow personally in self-actualization and contribute to the greater good around them.

What should education do?

Education is how students increase their cognitive capacity, enabling them to better understand themselves and the world around them. All students need a base-level knowledge of how the world works and how to function in the world through subjects like reading,

mathematics, science, and history. The true purpose of education goes beyond understanding facts to being a critical thinker and well-rounded person, but basic functionality is a necessary starting point. A person must understand and apply basic scientific truths of the world. A person must understand mathematics to be financially literate and solve complex problems. A person must be literate to read and comprehend important documents, self-select literature for both education and leisure, and to be autonomous in the acquisition of knowledge. A person must understand science to understand and be curious about the natural phenomena of the world. A person must understand history and social studies to know how the present-day came to be, learning from the past.

While these subjects are generally regarded as “core” subjects that all students should study, these are not the only subjects that build understanding of the world and increase our cognitive capacity. Subjects such as music and art go beyond teaching us *what* to think about certain irrefutable truths in the world, and they teach us *how* to think so we can be independent learners. By studying the humanities, students explore topics that go beyond black-and-white answers, allowing them to practice metacognition and the process of critical thinking. These skills allow learners to take the information given to them, analyze it, spot biases or blind spots, and then use knowledge and reason to form their own conclusions. Because of this, education is also empowerment. Critical thinkers are not reliant on other people’s interpretations of facts or situations, therefore well-educated people are harder to control, manipulate, and deceive.

Education is exploration. Students are exposed to a variety of subjects, people, and approaches in the learning environment. As students engage with several subjects and forms of learning, they discover their interests, strengths, and talents in different areas. As students grapple with innumerable new concepts and theories presented to them, they are cultivating a

mindset of curiosity and open-mindedness that will serve them throughout their entire lives. A quality education provides students with a variety of opportunities to find what interests them personally. Having these opportunities guides them toward their passions, hobbies, and future career path. Education is also a pathway toward becoming a well-rounded person. For centuries, society has valued education for its ability to develop well-rounded citizens capable of participating and succeeding in society. This is done by providing a variety of subjects and ways of learning so children can become well-rounded in their knowledge and experiences. Charles Leonhard states, “The business of the school is to help young people undergo meaningful experience and arrive at a system of values that will be beneficial to society” (Mark, 2008, p. 151).

Education should educate the whole child. As previously mentioned, education should build students’ cognitive capacity and impart intellectual knowledge. However, education should go beyond intellectual knowledge and educate the whole child. Schools should educate children in accordance with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, starting with basic physiological and safety needs, then working up toward love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Students need “supportive environments that nurture their social, emotional, physical, ethical, civic, creative, and cognitive development” (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007). By providing a variety of academic offerings and working to ensure students’ physical, social, and emotional needs are met, the school can partner with the community to educate a whole child that is “intellectually active, physically, verbally, socially, and academically competent, empathetic, kind, caring, and fair, creative and curious, disciplined, self-directed, and goal oriented, free, a critical thinker, confident, cared for, and valued” (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007).

Music in education

Music plays a large role in educating the whole child, as it has shown throughout history to be an essential part of a comprehensive education. Dating back to the Golden Age of Greece in 500 BC, “the education system emphasized music, which included poetry, and was intended to influence both body and soul” (Mark, 2008, p. 1). Secondary schools in ancient Rome placed music in the upper quadrivium – the four highest liberal arts of education – permitting students to “penetrate the secrets of the universe and grasp the ultimate truth” (Mark, 2008, p. 3). As the city of Boston was considering offering music as a curricular subject in the 1830s, the Boston School Committee found music to be beneficial intellectually, morally, and physically. When the National Education Association surveyed the state of music education in the 1880s, “the report stated that music ‘had withstood the crucial test of experience and critical observation,’ and that ‘music should be regularly and systematically taught in the schools’” (Mark, 2008, p. 77). Music education withstands the test of time and should be taught to every child.

Music continues to be a necessary component of a well-rounded education because it creates well-rounded people. Music benefits students because it cultivates the senses, awakens a love for the beautiful, and provides mental discipline. Alongside these benefits, music also contributes something that cannot be replicated by any other subject. Julia Crane, renowned music pedagogue, states, “We believe that music has a power to reach the emotions which other branches of study do not possess, and that it is therefore not only a desirable factor in education, but an absolutely necessary element for fully rounded development” (Claudson, 1969, p. 402).

Music should be taught to all students because music is natural to humanity. Musicality is expressed very early in human development, similar to speech (Zatorre, 2018). 17th century education leader John Amos Comenius stated “Music is especially natural to us; for as soon as

we see the light we immediately sing the song of paradise... External music begins to delight children at two years of age; such as singing, rattling, and striking of musical instruments. They should therefore be indulged in this, so that their ears and minds may be soothed by concord and harmony..." (Mark, 2008, p. 6). David Elliott asserts "music is, at root, a human activity" (Hodges, 2017, p. 204), and it exists in all cultures in different forms.

Music is naturally part of our daily lives in several ways. Christopher Small calls any musical action - such as performing, listening, composing, conducting, and dancing - "musicking" and any person engaging with music a "musician". Because music is an integral part of the world, it should be an integral part of education. Humans are naturally wired to enjoy and explore music, and education should reflect the world around us and students' interests, therefore music should be part of education.

Many people characterize themselves as "not a musician" for many reasons, but often it is because they believe they don't have musical aptitude or they have been told by someone that they are "bad at music." Because anyone who engages with music in any way is a musician, I think it is impossible to be "not a musician." This makes it especially important for music teachers to provide diverse forms of music-making in their classrooms. All students are capable of making music, and they need to experience their capabilities becoming reality, allowing their musicianship to become part of their self-formed identity. People who call themselves "not a musician" likely view music solely through the quality of their musical product. This is absolutely an easier place to focus, but Elliott places significantly more focus on the participatory process of music making. Like Elliott, I believe it is more valuable for a person to be actively engaged in music-making through performing, listening, creating, or teaching than it is to produce an objectively "good" musical product.

Music is beneficial academically and intellectually in many ways and for many reasons, but the majority of people do not naturally engage with music for its cognitive benefits. They listen to, play, and enjoy music for the social connection, emotional catharsis, and enjoyment of music's inherent qualities. Only a small percentage of people will pursue music professionally or as an academic endeavor, but this is not necessarily the goal of teaching music to every child. I believe the main purpose of teaching music is not to create professional musicians, but to provide students with enjoyable and enriching musical experiences in a school setting that model what "musicking" will likely look like for them in their life outside of school. For most students, this is listening to and playing music for leisure.

Because of this, music education should be relevant to the needs and interests of the students being served. Cognitive Learning Theory states that new knowledge is better processed and retained when the brain can connect it to prior knowledge, giving meaning to it (Ausubel, 1969). As students are constructing their learning, the brain needs to connect new knowledge to prior knowledge to get the new knowledge to stick. Because of this, students need a certain amount of connection and prior understanding of the music they study in school for deeper learning to happen. The music that students study in school should connect to the music students engage with outside of school. When students are able to make connections between their school lives and their home lives, the learning is more authentic and will stick with the students longer in their lives. While there should be prior relevancy in the music studied in school, I believe it is also the role of the teacher to expand students' horizons and expose them to music and learning that is unfamiliar to them, creating more open-minded and well-rounded learners and musicians.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

The goal of my project was to create a music-making environment in the classroom that could replicate a music-making environment that would happen outside of the classroom. Outside of the school music classroom, most musicians are unlikely to regularly perform in a large ensemble like the school orchestra. Musicians are much more likely to casually and socially get together and learn a “fun song” with their friends. I wanted to provide this opportunity in the classroom setting to model what this could look like as an adult and teach them the skills needed to accomplish this. I aimed to do this by providing students with autonomy over the music they played and the classmates they worked with. I provided a low-stakes performance environment that would be the most similar to a casual adult performance setting – a coffee shop open-mic night. I scaffolded student independence in rehearsal time so students could build rehearsal skills that don’t require direct instruction from a teacher all the time. The nature of the project focused on important collaboration and independence skills that will serve musicians both in their music-making and in all aspects of life.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)

I chose to do this project when my orchestra feeder team was restructuring our concert calendar. We had used 3rd quarter in years past for our feeder festival, but we decided it was time for a change. 3rd quarter is a challenging quarter for many reasons: we are in the middle of winter where the daylight is short and the weather is cold, we are over halfway into the school year where routine can feel monotonous, and consistency is intermittent with frequent absences due to illness and snow days. Scheduling and preparing for a large-scale concert at the end of all of this proved to be more stressful than joyful. Considering this is also the time where students make their enrollment decisions for the following year, I knew it was time to brainstorm ways to bring flexibility, novelty, and student choice into this pivotal period.

3rd quarter felt like a great time to bring flexibility to the classroom. Knowing Kansas weather, it is important that January and February have some flexibility with pacing because they are almost guaranteed to be disrupted by sickness and snow days. 3rd quarter also has good momentum built up from the fall semester where students have built technical, musical, and practice skills in the large ensemble, and they can now apply it to the individual or small-group setting. I wanted to bring novelty to 3rd quarter because it is easy for both the students and me to get tired, sluggish, and complacent when the world slows down for winter and there aren't many things to look forward to. This was a good time of year to try something new and bring fresh ideas to the classroom. It was important to bring student choice into this activity to optimize student engagement, allow for more individualized learning, and provide opportunities for students to express and challenge themselves.

My district also self-hosts a middle school solo and ensemble festival in March every year, and many of my colleagues use this time to implement a solo and ensemble unit. Some

teachers split their class time between this festival and a large ensemble concert. Sheri Cain, my feeder colleague and mentor, has culminated her solo and ensemble unit for over ten years with a coffee shop-style concert. She graciously shared her structure with me, and I began adapting it to fit the needs of my students and my personal teaching philosophy.

When I began planning, I started by establishing my goals I wanted students to achieve by the end of the project. These goals were to: perform in front of an audience using mental strategies to manage performance nerves, perform a piece of music with steady beat, accurate intonation, accurate rhythms, and balanced ensemble blend, select an appropriately challenging piece of music and explain the rationale for choosing it, appropriately utilize teamwork and practice strategies in rehearsal time, demonstrate developmentally appropriate goal setting and error detection skills, and to reflect at the end on personal growth in musicality, teamwork, and performance. I mapped out what skills I wanted students to demonstrate in their performance, mental strategies for students to use in their performance, teamwork skills I wanted students to demonstrate in the rehearsal process, and practice strategies for students to use in group and individual practice time. I then went through and embedded assessments throughout the unit to ensure adequate progress, making sure there were a variety of assessment methods and measurements.

Lesson Plan 1

2014 Music National Standards

MU:Pr5.3.E.5a: Use self-reflection and peer feedback to refine individual and ensemble performances of a varied repertoire of music.

MU:Pr6.1.E.5a: Demonstrate attention to technical accuracy and expressive qualities in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire of music.

MU:Pr6.1.E.5b: Demonstrate an awareness of the context of the music through prepared and improvised performances.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students can already define a cue and a cutoff, and they can follow a cue and cutoff given by the conductor.

7th and 8th grade students have performed in chamber groups before and are familiar with the basics of chamber music playing.

Objectives

The learner will demonstrate an in-tempo cue and cutoff.

The learner will correctly follow an in-tempo cue and cutoff from a peer.

The learner will make eye contact with their peer at the beginning, middle, and end of their duet performance.

Assessments

Peer Assessment: students fill out a short assessment of each partner as they speed duet, indicating the quality of their duet performance, checking a box for each chamber music skill they demonstrated, and filling out a spot for freehand notes

Teacher Assessment: students perform a duet in front of the class, being graded with a rubric on the core skills

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Essential Elements Book 1

Essential Elements Book 2

My First Progressive Duets for Strings

Progressive Duets for Strings, Volume 1

Lesson Sequence

Weeks 1 & 2: Introducing the Duets

- As a whole class, we work through the rhythms and notes of the A and B lines of three simple duets. Along the way, I model appropriate practice strategies, such as clapping the rhythm, plucking and saying note names, and air bowing. I utilize guided questioning to help students understand how and where to use different strategies.
- In the initial stages of learning the duets, I model cues and cutoffs for the class. As we progress, I give all students multiple opportunities to lead the cue and cutoff for the class, giving constructive feedback.

Week 3: Speed Duetting

- I set up a ring of stands in our school library, where students will rotate duet partners and practice essential chamber music skills such as cuing, adjusting stands to their proper height and location, and making eye contact. Students with an odd number stay stationed at a spot throughout the room, while students with an even number rotate between the odd numbered people. Once all odd and even pairings have played together, then odd numbered people rotate within each other, and even numbered people rotate within each other.
- Before each duet, I randomly select one of the duets we have learned and decide who will play the A line and B line (taller person plays A, shorter person plays B, darker colored hair plays A, lighter colored hair plays B, etc.)
- I start a 3-minute timer, where students play their duet together. With leftover time, groups can try spots again or switch lines, but they must play the entire 3 minutes.

- Once the 3 minutes is done, I start a 2-minute timer. Students fill out the peer reflection for their partner, then rotate to their next partner.

Week 3.5: Duet Performances

- After everyone Speed Duets together, students write down the top 3 people they worked with the best. Using these rankings, I assign duet pairings for an in-class duet performance.
- After I announce the duet pairings, students have 10 minutes to select and rehearse one of our Speed Duetting pieces to perform for the class.
- Duet pairings play for the class and are assessed via rubric by the teacher on good posture, in-tempo cue and cutoff, proper balance, correct stand placement, making eye contact, and staying together.

This Speed Duetting activity was the introduction of our Solo & Ensemble unit. My goals for this activity were to have students practice essential chamber music skills while interacting with every peer. The students learned essential skills such as giving in-tempo cues and cutoffs, following cues and cutoffs from a peer, making eye contact with a partner while playing, and embodying the delicate combination of being a soloist and ensemble member at the same time. We spent the first two weeks of the semester learning three duets as a group, which we used for the Speed Duetting activity. Through the initial phase of learning the music, I utilized structured practice by modeling helpful practice strategies like clapping rhythms, saying note names, plucking the notes, air bowing, and putting it all together with the bow on the string. I started out modeling these covertly, then over time acknowledged them overtly, encouraging students to use these strategies when they split up into their chamber groups. I also utilized guided questioning while we worked through challenges, guiding students to identify what the challenge was and

which practice strategy would be appropriate. I scaffolded student independence over time by first modeling skills such as how to give a cue and cutoff. I then gave each student multiple opportunities to lead the cue and cutoff, giving constructive feedback and praise.

To assess student learning through the Speed Duetting process, students had a peer assessment worksheet to fill out where they reflected on their performance with each partner. They rated each performance on a scale of 1 to 5, checked a box for each essential skill their partner demonstrated (gave partner full attention, led or followed the cue and cutoff, adjusted stand to correct height and placement), and wrote other notes about how the duet went.

Name: _____ Hour: _____

Speed Duetting

1. Aspen

Rigadoon Black Forest America

How did it go? 1 2 3 4 5

- ☐ Gave partner full attention
- ☐ Lead/followed cue and cutoff
- ☐ Correct stand height/placement
- ☐ Made eye contact

Notes: _____

2. Esther

Rigadoon Black Forest America

How did it go? 1 2 3 4 5

- ☐ Gave partner full attention
- ☐ Lead/followed cue and cutoff
- ☐ Correct stand height/placement
- ☐ Made eye contact

Notes: _____

3. Madison

Rigadoon Black Forest America

How did it go? 1 2 3 4 5

- ☐ Gave partner full attention
- ☐ Lead/followed cue and cutoff
- ☐ Correct stand height/placement
- ☐ Made eye contact

Notes: _____

4. Margaret

Rigadoon Black Forest America

How did it go? 1 2 3 4 5

- ☐ Gave partner full attention
- ☐ Lead/followed cue and cutoff
- ☐ Correct stand height/placement
- ☐ Made eye contact

Notes: _____

Figure 2.1. Speed Duetting Worksheet

After duetting with each peer, students wrote down the three people they worked the best with, and I utilized those rankings to pair students for in-class duet performances. This was the culmination of our Speed Duetting activity so they could apply their chamber music skills to a

performance experience. Students selected and performed one of the duets we learned for Speed Duetting, and they were graded via rubric.

	3: Mastery	2: Approaching	1: Needs Improvement
Posture	Sits/stands up tall and holds instrument correctly all the time.	Sits/stands up tall and holds instrument correctly most of the time.	Sits/stands up tall and holds instrument correctly some of the time.
Cue & Cut Off	All 3 elements are present. Cue and cut off are: Given by the leader, followed by the partner, given in tempo.	2 of 3 elements are present. Cue and cut off are: Given by the leader, followed by the partner, given in tempo.	0 or 1 of 3 elements are present. Cue and cut off are: Given by the leader, followed by the partner, given in tempo.
Balance	Both parts can be heard and are equal in volume.	One part can be heard, but parts are not equal in volume.	Neither part can be heard.
Stand Placement & Eye Contact	Stands are facing each other and are at shoulder level. Eye contact is made 3+ times.	Stands are facing each other but not at shoulder level. Eye contact is made 1-2 times.	Stands are not facing each other and are not at shoulder level. No eye contact is made.
Staying Together	Parts stay together all the time. 0 timing mistakes.	Parts stay together most of the time. 1-2 timing mistakes.	Parts stay together some of the time. 3+ timing mistakes.

Table 2.1. Duet Performance Rubric

Moving forward, I will continue introducing the Solo & Ensemble unit with Speed Duetting. Student feedback was largely positive – many students said it was a good introduction into partner work, and it allowed students to see who they worked well with. They enjoyed playing with different people, especially classmates they do not normally interact with. They learned how to play better together and got better at giving cues. Some students, mainly 8th graders, said they felt it took too long and it became tedious. In the future, I may consider reducing the amount of Speed Duetting 8th graders do, since it will be a more familiar concept to them than the 6th and 7th graders.

This was the second year I implemented this activity, but it was the first time I went in with a methodical approach, utilizing backward design and embedding assessments. I started with the goals in mind, thinking about which habits I wanted my students to exhibit in their chamber groups. I chose these habits to be the focus of this activity, and I made them the focus of the peer assessment worksheet so students would be mindful of them and improve at them. I felt confident implementing this activity, knowing it would be a meaningful segue for students into their chamber groups.

I would like to condense the timeline of this activity in the future, which will provide more time for the bulk of the Solo & Ensemble unit. We spent three weeks learning three duets and speed duetting, and I plan to condense it down to two weeks learning two duets and speed duetting. I think condensing the timeline will give more momentum into the unit, make sure students have adequate time to prepare for their concert, and provide some helpful flex time for potential snow days and cold & flu season absences.

My teaching practice improved through this unit because I became more comfortable using backward design. Knowing this activity would be my unit introduction, I thought carefully about what skills I wanted my students to exhibit and how my instruction should be paced so those skills were achievable by the end of the unit. I made the core chamber music skills the focus of speed duetting so they could practice them in isolation before applying them to new music in a more independent setting.

Lesson Plan 2

After finishing our Speed Duetting activity, students were given freedom to select their small ensemble group members and a piece of music to perform at our Classical Coffee Concert

in six weeks. I gave a few restrictions: groups must be no larger than a quartet, and the selected piece must use a familiar key signature, time signature, rhythms, and notes. I provided some duet, trio, and quartet books for students to peruse, but they were not limited to these books. Students had permission to find music elsewhere, but they were required to get it approved by me and they must make sure they were following copyright laws.

Groups rehearsed daily for about 30 minutes during class, and I floated between groups as they independently rehearsed. This let me listen without interjecting if I was not needed, it allowed me to give feedback, and I was also able to provide more help where it was needed. With the goal of providing helpful structure both for my personal planning and for student independence, all students filled out a weekly rehearsal log. I modified Berg's rehearsal log to fit our timeline (2008). This log gave students concrete goals to accomplish each week, and I reviewed all logs at the end of the week to ensure all groups were staying on track. Reviewing the logs also helped me decide which groups needed more or less of my help during their rehearsal time.

Goals	Decisions Made
Select a piece	Read through 2-3 pieces, select 1: _____ What is your performance tempo goal? _____ bpm
Assign group member roles	Time keeper - _____ Sets a timer and lets the group know when 2 minutes are left Taskmaster - _____ Keeps the group on task during rehearsal Human Metronome - _____ Claps the steady beat/turns on digital metronome, points to each measure of teammates music, if needed. Consensus Builder - _____ Helps problem solve, makes sure everyone understands

Score Study of	S - Sharps and Flats in the Key Signature: _____
Chosen Piece	T - Time Signature & Tempo: _____
	A - Accidentals: _____
	R - Rhythms: _____
	S - Signs (dynamics, articulations, repeats, 1st/2nd endings, D.C. al fine, etc.): _____

Table 2.2. Rehearsal Log Week 1

Assigning student roles was helpful for building student ownership and leadership. Every member of the ensemble had something to contribute, and each role reinforced an important musicianship or life skill. In the future, I will pre-teach and model what each role should look and sound like. As I rotated between groups, many students would forget they had a role to fulfill, and they required coaching on how to fulfill it. I chose to incorporate the STARS method for score study because this is a familiar practice we use in class before sightreading any piece (Garofalo, 1983). In their post-concert reflection, several students said the STARS method helped them select an appropriately challenging piece.

S.T.A.R.S. – Sight-reading Guidelines

S – **Sharps or Flats in the Key Signature.** Identify Key Signature first! Silently practice notes from the Key Signature. Look for Key Signature changes in the piece

T – **Time Signature and tempo markings.** Identify and look for changes in these in the piece of music

A – **Accidentals** – check for any accidentals not found in the Key Signature.

R – **Rhythm** – Silently Count and Clap (when instructed to do so) all difficult rhythms. Pay special attention to Rests!

S – **Signs** – look for all signs that indicate **Dynamics, Articulations, Tempo Changes, Repeats, 1st and 2nd Endings**, and any other instructions printed on your music.

Figure 2.2. STARS Method for Sight Reading

Goals	Decisions Made
Read through the piece	Completed? (circle) YES NO
Set rehearsal tempo (what speed can we play at now?)	Completed? (circle) YES NO Tempo: _____
Identify challenging sections	List measure numbers and describe challenges: _____ _____ _____ _____

Set next week's rehearsal agenda	Measure numbers: _____ Rhythm spots: _____ Tuning spots: _____ Other spots: _____
Mark your music	<i>I have marked the challenging spots in my music. I will practice these things over the weekend so I am prepared for group rehearsal next week.</i> Completed (circle) YES NO

Table 2.3. Rehearsal Log Week 2

To assist students in their first week of true “rehearsal”, I projected a slide onto the screen with some “looks like” and “sounds like” prompts for the beginning stages of rehearsing a piece. The “looks like” prompts were: chairs and stands facing each other, stands at shoulder height, lots of marking music with pencils, and feet tapping tempo together. The “sounds like” prompts were: many starts and stops, clapping rhythms, slow practice, “Can we slow that down?”, and “Let’s try that again”.

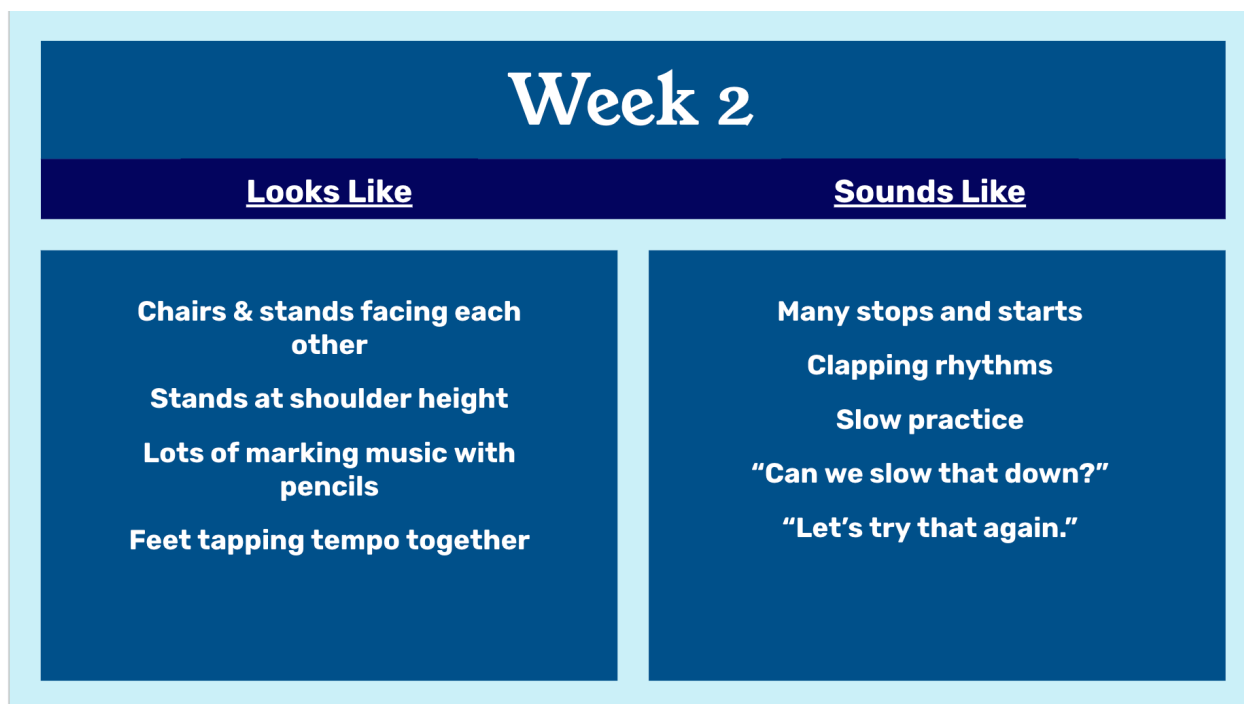


Figure 2.3. Visual and Auditory Prompts for Early Stages of Rehearsing

In the future, I would like to have students brainstorm their own “looks like” and “sounds like” examples, then have each group model at an example for the class. This will give more opportunities for student ownership while reinforcing basic rehearsal skills.

Goals	Decisions Made
Rehearse rhythm spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Rehearse tuning spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Rehearse other spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Assign program note duties (write name of group member next to each task)	Composer background: _____ Piece background: _____ Composer picture: _____ Type program notes: _____

Next week's rehearsal agenda	Measure numbers: _____ Rhythm spots: _____ Tuning spots: _____ Other spots: _____
Mark your music	<i>I have marked the challenging spots in my music. I will practice these things over the weekend so I am prepared for group rehearsal next week.</i> Completed (circle) YES NO

Table 2.4. Rehearsal Log Week 3

I think the most beneficial aspect of this rehearsal log was the planning of next week's rehearsal agenda. This required students to look back on their progress from the week and then utilize planning and time management skills to decide what could be accomplished next week. This log helped students practice executive functioning skills such as planning, reasoning, and problem solving. It was also helpful for students to break down their problem spots into different categories such as rhythm, intonation, balance, and articulation. At the front of their rehearsal log packet, I included a page of practice strategies to use for each category.

Practice Strategies “Cheat Sheet”

Listen-Play-Discuss-Decide

1. *Listen to a suggestion from group member*
2. *Try the suggestion with your best effort*
3. *Discuss if it worked or not*
4. *As a group, decide on a solution*

Rhythm:

- Clap and count the rhythms out loud
 - Does anyone else have the same rhythm as you do? Or are you on your own?
- Pluck your part, make sure everyone's rhythms line up
- Find the pulse, then match
 - Is everyone adding emphasis in the same place?

Tuning:

- Practice the scale for the key signature
- Practice finger patterns for the key signature
- Pick a small section, play SLOWLY and SOFTLY
 - Can you hear everyone's note?
- 1 note at a time - add each person's note from lowest to highest

Articulation:

- Play the articulation on open strings
- Decide what part of the bow AND how much bow
 - Try different ideas to decide what is easiest and sounds the best
- Start with one person, then add in one at a time
 - Is everyone using the same amount of bow? Is everyone in the same part of the bow? Does everyone sound the same?

Balance:

- Decide who has the melody and who has the harmony
 - Can you hear the melody? Is the harmony supporting or overpowering?

Tempo:

- Bump up the tempo a little bit each week
- Play with a metronome
- Play with a drumbeat (musicca.com/drum-machine)

Figure 2.4. Practice Strategies “Cheat Sheet”

I did not see students utilize this “cheat sheet” often. This is likely because I did not spend much in-depth time reviewing this and teaching students how to use it, so I would like to spend more time leading students through it and giving opportunities for application. I already integrate guided practice and guided questioning throughout the year to help students apply

practice strategies should be used in specific situations, but I would like to do more modeling and guided practice specifically in the chamber music setting. As referenced in Berg's article, it would prove helpful to use a demonstration ensemble to model the rehearsal structure and how to give constructive criticism (2008).

Goals	Decisions Made
Rehearse articulation spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Rehearse other spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Rehearse balance spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Play through piece without stopping	Completed? (circle) YES NO
Check performance tempo	(circle) FASTER or SLOWER than originally agreed tempo
Compile program notes	Completed? (circle) YES NO
Next week's rehearsal agenda (last week of rehearsal!)	Spot #1: List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____ Spot #2: List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Mark your music	<i>I have marked the challenging spots in my music. I will practice these things over the weekend so I am prepared for group rehearsal next week.</i> Completed (circle) YES NO

Table 2.5. Rehearsal Log Week 4

For the first time, I had students write program notes for this concert. My main goal was for students to become more curious about the composer and the music of which they were playing. Through their research, they would gain a deeper understanding of the music, which

would in turn influence their performance. Students were required to research their composer and composition using reliable sources (websites ending in .edu, .org, .gov, etc.) and then write a paragraph including three sentences about the composer, three sentences about the composition, and a picture of the composer. Each group's notes were included in our concert program. I enjoyed learning from the students' submissions, and they seemed to enjoy the change of pace in class.

Goals	Decisions Made
Rehearse balance spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Rehearse dynamic spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Rehearse other problem spots	List measure numbers, describe: _____ _____
Mark your music	<i>I have marked the challenging spots in my music. I will practice these things over the weekend so I am prepared for my PERFORMANCE next week. :)</i> Completed? (circle) YES NO
Play through 3x without stopping	Completed? (circle) YES NO
Submit program notes on Canvas	Completed? (circle) YES NO

Table 2.6. Rehearsal Log Week 5

Students were required to submit their rehearsal log at the end of each week so I could check for completion and quality of thought process. Students were expected to mark the spots in their music that needed work, then practice those spots individually at home so they were prepared for group rehearsal. In weeks 1-4, students were assigned a weekly practice video assignment where they selected an 8-measure excerpt that needed work, applying three

appropriate practice strategies to the excerpt. In weeks 5 and 6, students were assigned a weekly practice video where they performed their entire piece for an audience of their choosing. This gave students experience playing all the way through the piece without stopping while managing performance nerves in real time.

Goals	Decisions Made
Concert	
Post-concert chat: What went well, improvements, etc.	Summary of post-concert chat: _____ _____ _____
Chamber ensemble experience chat	Summary of chamber ensemble experience chat: _____ _____ _____

Table 2.7. Rehearsal Log Week 6

This unit culminated in a concert for each individual grade level: 6th grade, 7th grade, and 8th grade. To make it a low-stress, fun, and inviting environment, I structured the concert like an “open-mic night”. I provided decaf coffee, hot chocolate, and tea to drink, and students provided desserts to eat. Audience members sat at tables, and they were invited to enjoy refreshments before the concert, in between student performances, and after the concert. Students joined the audience tables and partook in the drinks and snacks after their group performed. The 7th and 8th grade concerts took place in the evening on our school stage. We dimmed the house lights, and students got to play on the stage with the stage lights. The 6th grade concert took place during their class time in our library. Parents and school staff were invited to attend, and we had a quality turnout. The goal was to scaffold the nerve-wracking experience of playing in an exposed setting like a small ensemble. By starting with a smaller and more familiar environment in 6th

grade, this provided an entry-level experience before leveling it up to an on-stage performance in 7th and 8th grade.

This concert format had overwhelmingly positive feedback. In the post-concert reflection, numerous students said they enjoyed the laidback environment. Students said it was fun performing on the stage, seeing other groups perform and show their individuality, and they of course loved having the snacks and drinks. Students enjoyed the autonomy of choosing their group members and their music, and parents of students said they enjoyed the chance to hear their student play more individually.

This unit was very successful. Students grew in independence, musicality, leadership, and teamwork skills. They had a unique concert experience that ideally gave them a positive mental association with performing. There are also ways I will continue to modify this unit to help students succeed and make the best use of our class time. I utilized the same lesson structure and rehearsal log for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. In the future, I would like to modify it by grade level so there is more scaffolding of skills through the grades. I realized partway through the unit that it was an unreasonable expectation to have 6th grade musicians accomplish the same goals as 8th grade musicians. I plan to add more structure and limitations for 6th grade, keep things similar for 7th grade, and potentially loosen the structure for 8th grade.

For 6th grade, I plan to limit students to duets, and they must choose a duet from a few options chosen by me. This will allow students to build foundational chamber music skills without having to take on a level of independence that is developmentally inappropriate. Several 6th grade groups got excited about finding a song online that they wanted to play, but their hopes were dashed once I showed them the unattainable key signatures, time signatures, and rhythms that would be required. At a younger age where they have not yet developed the self-awareness

of what they can reasonably achieve, I will provide structure that will help them succeed and minimize areas for choice that may cause disappointment.

For 8th grade, I may loosen the structure of the rehearsal log. On their reflection, several 8th graders said the rehearsal log got in their way because it became tedious and used class time that could have been spent practicing. Several students did say the log helped them stay organized and know what to work on, so I plan to keep the planning and reflection elements for 8th grade, but in a different format.

This Solo & Ensemble unit filled all our class time in the quarter, and I originally wanted to split the time between chamber music groups and whole-class technique building. For next year, I will do more advance planning so we can spend about three days a week working in chamber groups and two days a week working on technique. This will still give students their chamber music experience, but it will also strengthen their technique so I can give them a bigger push with music for our end-of-year concert.

In my planning of this unit, I aimed to also focus on the affective side of performing. I did some cursory research into ways to mitigate adolescent performance anxiety. I would like to explore this deeper next year and embed more mindfulness activities throughout the unit. Despite the small amount of mindfulness activities, students still reported high satisfaction with their performances. On their concert reflection, 84% of students rated their performance satisfaction as a 4 or 5 on a Likert Scale rating from 1 to 5.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

My teaching has evolved and my thought processes have deepened in several ways through my work in the KSU Masters' Program. Through the Literature Analysis and Symphonic Literature courses, I have developed a more holistic approach to score study, teaching, and music enjoyment. The 9-part analysis structure given in the Teaching Music Through Performance in Orchestra series has proved helpful to analyze every aspect of the music and to fill in previous gaps of my study. Prior to these classes, I did little to no research on the composer background, composition background, and historical context of the music. Adding these elements to my study increased the cognitive load, but even more it increased my interest, appreciation, and investment in the music. As I aim to program pieces that represent more diverse cultures, this process has helped me put in the necessary thought and care to honor each culture and represent them authentically. As my research and curiosity have grown through this program, I have also pushed my students to be more curious about the music they are playing. When we start a new piece, I now task my students with researching the background of the piece and the composer. The goal is that they find something interesting they connect with. I have been encouraged by my students' increased curiosity, and I have enjoyed learning from their musical findings.

Through the Theories of Music Teaching course, I thoroughly enjoyed studying the science of learning and how the brain responds to music. As we studied a diverse body of theories, I was encouraged to see aspects of my teaching already reflected in what we were learning. The study of these theories gave me confidence in my natural instincts of what felt like quality teaching while also giving me academic language and evidence for why it is quality. I also learned theories were new to me that I wanted to emulate. I became particularly interested in

the Natural Learning Process and have been implementing it in my teaching more since learning about it. The Natural Learning Process states that everyone has a brain naturally wired to learn through observation and trial-and-error. Over-analysis and over-explaining can get in the way, especially in a nonverbal and aesthetic subject like music. I have since begun to talk less, play more, and utilize more modeling, especially for my younger students. By doing this, I am working to actively place trust in my students' ability to hear, perceive, and imitate quality sound and intonation. I utilize more trial-and-error practice, especially with the psychomotor skills built in the initial years of playing an instrument. I do not get upset or concerned when students struggle to use a full bow or produce a quality sound in their first few attempts. I quickly give them more opportunities to try again with concise feedback, allowing their natural desire to improve take charge. In conjunction with deeper score analysis, I have also begun teaching more through story memory rather than just teaching the technical requirements needed to play a piece. Story memory engages multiple senses and allows for deeper learning, also giving students opportunities to make a personal connection with the music, therefore make meaning out of it. This has helped me teach more musically because there is a musical "why" for each technical aspect to improve. We are not improving technique just for technique's sake – it is for a grander, more aesthetic and musical reason.

Through Advanced Instrumental Conducting, I developed an appreciation for the art of conducting. I learned how conducting serves as a practical and pedagogical tool in the middle school classroom. I had little interest in learning more about conducting before taking this class and I placed little value on the subject. I thought conducting would matter more if I was teaching older students, wrongly assuming middle schoolers do not respond much to conducting. I learned a variety of conducting gestures and how to use them in a healthy way that avoids tension or

injury. I learned that meaningful conducting gestures are impactful for musicians of all ages and that meaningful conducting flows from detailed score study. Studying conducting deepened my understanding of the importance of score study, specifically studying musical form. I began thinking more about the character and the intention of each musical phrase and how that is connected to the larger form of a piece. I noticed that as my score study deepened and I was thinking about integrating the gestures I learned through the course, my conducting became less utilitarian with the sole focus of keeping a steady tempo. My conducting became more lively, creative, and intentional with the goal of physically embodying the music to the orchestra and to the audience. With time, practice, and mindfulness activities, I became more comfortable in my body while conducting and learned how to convey gravitas and confidence. I finished the course feeling more confident in my abilities to display easy-to-follow gestures, especially with tempo changes and challenging areas such as fermata and caesura. I know my study of conducting is still very surface-level, and it is an area I want to grow in throughout my career.

The Curriculum Development and Learning Assessment course is likely the class that challenged and developed my thought processes and practice the most. This class broadened my planning on both a macro- and micro-scale. I struggle with vision-casting and planning big-picture goals, and this course provided thoughtful ways to consider the mission of my Orchestra program and the goals I want my students to achieve when they graduate my program. I also thought and planned more for each step along the way. My approach to assessment before taking this class was very passive and reactive. I did not start with the end goal in mind and then work back to the beginning stages – I would make an assessment based on what felt urgent in the moment and then hope it would pay off at the end. I learned a variety of assessment strategies and the importance of assessing students through multiple dimensions. I learned that meaningful

and authentic assessment is not passive and it will not happen on its own. Assessment must be planned, methodical, and intentional. My perception of curriculum shifted drastically through this course. I learned that curriculum is just not the resources you use, but it is the content and way you teach. The intense study through this class revealed more deeply to me how teaching music is both a science and an art. The study of curriculum and assessment gave me a sense of awe for the teaching profession, showing me how the path to becoming an excellent educator is a lifelong and worthwhile endeavor.

Through the KSU masters' program as a whole, I have developed a better understanding of my values, strengths, and priorities as a music teacher. I have enjoyed learning from the KSU professors, collaborating and learning with my fellow classmates and educators, and trying new things in my teaching that I have learned from my courses. I have grown in my understanding of how students learn, developed a fuller vision of what I want my orchestra program to look like, and received both academic and practical knowledge on how to achieve that vision. I have grown in my confidence as a scholar and teacher, which allowed me to tackle the research, implementation, and reflection of this project with curiosity and open-mindedness. Because of the relationships I have built with professors and cohort members and the skills I have gained from my coursework, I feel equipped to continue researching, trying new things, and making my orchestra classroom a joyful and enriching place for my students to grow.

Bibliography

- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2007). *The learning compact redefined: A call to action*. ASCD.
<https://library.ascd.org/m/21e2f544234c3e97/original/WCC-Learning-Compact.pdf>
- Ausubel, D. P. (1969). A cognitive theory of school learning. *Psychology in the Schools.*, 6(4), 331–335. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807\(196910\)6:4<331::AID-PITS2310060402>3.0.CO;2-W](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(196910)6:4<331::AID-PITS2310060402>3.0.CO;2-W)
- Berg, M. H. (2008). Promoting “minds-on” chamber music rehearsals. *Music Educators Journal*, 95(2), 48–55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30219664>
- Claudson, W. D. (1969). The Philosophy of Julia E. Crane and the Origin of Music Teacher Training. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 17(4), 399–404.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3344167>
- Criss, E. (2008). The natural learning process. *Music Educators Journal*, 95(2), 42–46.
- Drennan, H., & Kansas State University, degree granting institution. (2020). *Incorporating chamber ensembles in the middle school instrumental music program* [Kansas State University]. <https://hdl.handle.net/2097/40757>
- Garofalo, R. J. (1983). *Blueprint for band: a guide to teaching comprehensive musicianship through school band performance* (Revised edition.). Meredith Music.
- Hodges, D.A. (2017). A concise survey of music philosophy. Routledge.
- Mark, M. L. (2008). *A concise history of American music education*. Rowman and Littlefield Education.
- National Association for Music Education. (2014). *Core Music Standards*. <https://nafme.org/my-classroom/standards/core-music-standards/>
- UNESCO. *The right to education*. (n.d.). <https://www.unesco.org/en/right-education>
- UNESCO. (2026, April 29). What you need to know about education and why it matters. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-education-and-why-it-matters>
- United Nations. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights* (217 A (III)). <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- Zatorre, R. J. (2018). Why do we love music?. *Cerebrum: the Dana forum on brain science*, 2018, cer-16-18.