

**Breaking the mold: Designing sequential sight singing and aural  
skill lessons for various learning styles**

by

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## **Abstract**

These three lessons are designed solidify confidence with specific intervals and patterns used frequently in the annual University Interscholastic League Concert and Sight-Reading Evaluation by appealing to visual, aural, and kinesthetic learners. By teaching sight-reading away from the typical format and using creative approaches every singer in the classroom, no matter their learning style, will grow as a musically literate student. Each of these lessons utilize different materials and are designed to feel like activities instead of mundane work, while giving the director invaluable informal and formal feedback about the students' progress as an ensemble and as individuals. These are sequential lessons that can be built upon the entire school year and are inclusive for students of varying ability levels.

My experience with the Kansas State University School of Music has inspired me to broaden my educational horizons and see past the "Texas way" of thinking and teaching. All too often as educators we get stuck in our own standard practices instead of seeking out new ideas, and this program inspired me to be a lifelong learner and constantly look for new ways of doing things instead of doing what is comfortable. By connecting with educators across the country I have gained new ideas and perspectives that have been incredibly helpful in my career, as well as insightful lectures from the faculty I have worked with. My time at K-State has coincided with finding my stride as a choral educator, and I am grateful for this program guiding and shaping me as an innovative director.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy**

Throughout my undergraduate degree, I was required to rewrite my philosophy of music education each year as I progressed through my education. As is characteristic of many college students, I did not think too much about my philosophy and assumed that it had not changed much from year to year and simply scanned over the paper for errors and changed the title before submitting it. Before sitting down to write this paper, I went back and reread my philosophy of music education before I had step foot in a classroom. Three years in the classroom completely shifted my mindset and the things I valued to be of utmost importance took the back burner. I am so thankful to have started my teaching career in a Title I campus, because it altered my core identity as an educator and mentor to my students. Whereas before beginning my teacher career I would have aligned myself with a more formalistic stance on music education, I now lean much farther toward the humanistic element of music and how it furthers the development of social-emotional learning skills alongside the utilitarian values. On the first day of school, I tell my students my goal for them each and every day is to feel safe, supported, and successful in my classroom. This basic philosophy drives every part of my rehearsals and viewpoints on the educational system.

The purpose of formal education is not only to prepare students for their futures but also to expose them to culture, peer relationships, and developing vital social-emotional skills. In Texas, the shift is to prepare students not only to be college ready but also including career or military ready. This development reframes the educational model to be applicable to all students and reaches out specifically to those who are electing not to pursue higher education for one reason or another. School systems should prepare students for whatever future they chose and advertise this openly and proudly. If students believe that high school is simply preparing them

for college, and they know that they are not taking that route after graduation, why would they care about their education? Our society needs functional and prepared members in all career fields, including those which do not require collegiate degrees and experience. However, formal education should not just be for the purpose of preparing students for what comes next but also educating the students in vital concepts that are crucial to their development in society and culture.

On a basic biological evaluation, we educate our youth, because their brains are in the prime stage of development for the intake of language, academics, and social skills. This is the same reason that children learn foreign languages better than adults. When we are young our brains are like sponges for learning, while as we age our developed prefrontal cortexes inhibit our ability to be open to new experiences or ideas. As children, we are more flexible, innovative and creative, because we are not in fixed mindset and are constantly taking in new experiences and information. As stated eloquently in a recent article, “[C]hildren are often better than adults at solving tasks that require a creative solution, such as being set a challenge with limited equipment. Put another way, an adult’s brain is designed to perform, but a child’s brain is designed to learn” (“*Are Children Quicker,*” n.d.). The formal school system is built around this age of development because that is when students best learn these skills and ideas. Additionally, formal schooling solves a problem in our society: what do we do with our children while we are at work? Though we as educators would never see our positions as “glorified babysitters” as some call us, the recent global pandemic and push to reopen schools so we can reopen the economy truly brings out this other crucial benefit of schooling. Without a safe space to leave their children each day, most parents cannot return to work. The formal education system serves many purposes which are designed around the student’s development, that better prepare our

students to be functioning members of their future society and also gives them important skills such as social-emotional awareness, social interactions, language development, and much more. In summation we are preparing our children for the future but also for each stage of development that they experience throughout childhood. As educational leadership in our states and country evaluate how to improve the formal education in our country, they consider the important implications on a student's future, and their culture within their current grade level or campus.

As a music educator, I also place heavy importance on why music education is important not only as an addition to a student's education but also in their development as human beings. I learned about Bennett Reimer and his synergistic approach to music education through this course, and my personal thoughts and vantage point are validated through his writings and teachings. In his 2002 edition of *A Philosophy of Music Education*, Reimer clearly states, "make music experience in all its manifestations as widely available to all people, and as richly cultivated for each individual as possible" (2002). This idea that music education should not only be available to all students, but it should be of good quality and individualized, resonates deeply with me. Music classes are not just for teaching the fundamentals of playing an instrument or learning the names of the lines and spaces, but through these elements we teach empathy, cooperation, confidence, and expression.

There is truly no other subject like music; it is its own beautiful entity comprised of many other elements in education. It is art, arithmetic, reading, language, and much more. You cannot supplement the need for music classes with a different subject. Formal music education is also keeping our art form alive while simultaneously preserving our rich history and educating the future of our discipline. Although the majority of our students will not continue on in careers in music, they have learned the importance of the subject and support it. When my students share

with me that they want to pursue a career that is not in the music realm, they expect me to be upset. Instead, I remind them that if it were not for people like lawyers or scientists who not only donate fiscal contributions to the arts, they also lobby for the importance of music in schools. Our job as music educators is not to expect each student that walks through our door to become professional musicians but expose them to the joy and beauty of music and instill a life-long passion for music, regardless of how that manifests in their future.

Though many justify keeping music education courses as part of the curriculum solely for its utilitarian values and what it can do to enhance test scores, there is far less talk about what students would be missing if they did not have music classes. For many of our students, their fine arts course is the reason that they come to school. While it is valid that many students have a favorite subject that is not considered an elective, it is far more common that students prefer courses like music, art, or dance. For example, if they want to compete in marching competition, they need to make a passing grade in Algebra 2 or they cannot perform in the school musical unless they maintain a passing average overall. Our courses not only offer incentives for coming to school but also doing well. Fine arts also teach the importance of empathy towards others that is so desperately needed in our society. My college professor at Texas Christian University used to constantly reiterate, “it’s really hard to hate someone when you sing with them. You are creating beauty and art that unifies the human spirit.” While we are working on creating and perfecting music for our upcoming concert, we are teaching students about cooperation, self-discipline, patience, and respect. These virtues not only make them better future members of society but also better friends and people to those around them. Additionally, these music classes teach our students about self-expression and creating safe spaces during the period of their development where they are not only the most vulnerable but feel their emotions in the deepest

way possible. Singing, or playing, helps our students express grief, anger, frustration, and many more emotions through music. We are teaching them that it is okay to experience these emotions and how to express it in a healthy way. For many students in low income areas, like my own district, we serve as stable adults and can model positive behavior and interactions with conflict and frustration but also joy. Music classes are a safe space for students to learn vulnerability and expression, which is hard to find in other settings.

Can we have formal education without music education in the elementary and secondary levels? Simply put, no. Fine arts classes, and many other electives, teach many critical social-emotional skills through their individual mediums than other “core” academic subjects simply cannot. The purpose of music classes is not just to better serve the academic subjects, but to complement and supplement what they cannot. However, I do believe that we as music educators need to adapt our curriculum to be more inclusive of different areas of music besides just large ensemble classes. We should offer piano, guitar, digital music, and more. By offering other music classes beyond the standard model we can bring more students into fine arts classrooms. Although the Committee of Ten changed the number of fine arts classes required for a student from four to one, we want to keep students in these classes that help mold them into the most empathetic, passionate, and educated versions of themselves.

When music educators refocus the importance of their course beyond music literacy and performance skills to fostering innate humanness, we better serve the future development of each and every student who walks through our doors. We cannot keep validating the importance of music classes through utilitarian values alone and must stay relevant to the times that are changing around us. It is a privilege to contribute to the development of the future of our society and must be handled as such. It is hard to state the importance of music education better than

Gerald Ford, “Music education opens doors that help children pass from school into the world around them - a world of work, culture, intellectual activity, and human involvement. The future of our nation depends on providing our children with a complete education that includes music.”

### **How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching**

My philosophy is embedded in these lessons understanding that at their most fundamental level, we are encouraging our students to take musical risks in a safe environment where they know their successes will be celebrated, and mistakes will be given second chances. They are not focused on relating music education to other courses or how they can better serve the school as a whole but rather the importance of music education solely for the sake of music. When they practice these skills, they are learning skills that enhance their music literacy while simultaneously developing focus and cooperation.

## Chapter 2 - Background Information

### University Interscholastic League

Although there are opportunities for K-12 choirs across the state of Texas to participate in festivals for fun or competition, the main event that we work toward in the secondary music classroom is the University Interscholastic League Concert and Sight Reading Evaluation. Many districts mandate the participation of at least one ensemble from the school, but directors usually take all eligible groups to participate. This evaluation is heavily valued by administration and can create immense pressure on all parties involved. The UIL was created in 1910 by the University of Texas at Austin “to provide educational extracurricular academic, athletic, and music contests. The initials UIL have come to represent quality educational competition administered by school people on an equitable basis” (University Interscholastic League, n.d.). Under the music umbrella there are contests for marching band, large ensembles, and solo and small ensembles. For purposes of this report, I will focus only on the sight-reading portion of the evaluation.

**Section 1111: SIGHT-READING EVALUATION**  
**(a) PERFORMANCE REGULATIONS.**  

(1) Requirement. Each organization that performs in concert evaluation is required to perform in the sight-reading evaluation for ratings.

(2) Members. All members of the organization who participated in the concert evaluation are required to participate in the sight reading evaluation for that organization.

(3) Music. A committee of five in each division (band, choir, orchestra) is appointed by the State Director of Music to two-year overlapping terms to select and/or edit sight-reading music that conforms to the criteria as stated on the UIL website.

(4) Adjudication Criteria. Each organization shall be evaluated in accordance with the Texas Music Adjudicators Association adjudication rubric.

(5) Non-varsity (Second Groups). All music for non-varsity (second groups) will be the same or meet the same criteria as the selection for corresponding organizations two conferences lower than their varsity organization. Non-varsity groups shall be scheduled as a separate conference.

(6) Sub Non-varsity (Third Groups and Below). Schools with more than one non-varsity group shall designate at least one of those groups as non-varsity (second group). At the option of the music director and local school officials, other groups of the same kind (band, choir, orchestra) may then be entered as sub non-varsity. All music for sub non-varsity (third groups and below) will be the same or meet the same criteria as the selection for corresponding organizations two conferences lower than their varsity organization. Sub non-varsity groups shall be scheduled as a separate conference.

(7) Use of Recording Devices. The use of recording devices in the sight-reading room is prohibited.

**Figure 1- Sight-Reading Rules**

As shown in figure 1, the sight-reading evaluation is required for all ensembles who wish to participate in the evaluation, and no singer may be excused from participation. Thus in preparation for this event directors must place an equal emphasis on sight reading practice as the time spent working concert music. There are very specific rules about what is and what is not allowed in the sight-reading room for both the singers and the director. Before going into specific rules, it is crucial to understand the procedure.

- 1) The choir may not open their music until their director instructs them to do so. Each group has 6 minutes of practice period. During that time, “ At any time during the instruction period the tonic chord may be played once, in broken chord style, and may not be reproduced by the students. The director may instruct the group by tapping out rhythms and talking about any passage of music but may not hum, sing any part, or allow it to be played on the piano. Students may chant rhythms and/or text and tap or clap the rhythms; however, they may not reproduce the music tonally” (UIL, n.d.).
- 2) Next, the choir will sing the piece for their “first read.” Once time is called for the first study period, the director may not speak, sing, tap, or make any sounds. The singers will sing the entirety of the piece all the way through.
- 3) Following the first read, the director will have two minutes to address any problem spots, challenges, or difficulties using the same rules as stated in the first study period.
- 4) Lastly, the choir will sing their piece for their second and final read using the same rules from the first read.

After the sight-reading portion has been completed, the students pass in their music and take a deep sigh of relief. The three judges will assign a rating from Superior (Division I) to Poor (Division V). The rubric is very specific regarding the characteristics of tone and technique that

the judges should base their scores upon but leaves room for ambiguity in the number of mistakes allowed to be “minimal or no flaws” for a Division I.

Each conference, based upon school size, has specific criteria for what the sight reading will include for their appropriate difficulty level. This helps the directors prepare their choirs for what to expect in the sight reading room. With experience, the directors will be able to tell their singers exactly where those things will occur in the music. For instance in the 2C and 3C Middle School Varsity, 2B Junior High Varsity, and 1A, 2A, 3A Non-Varsity categories the singers can expect, “Melodic skips within the I, IV, V chords only, to include all thirds and perfect fourth” (UIL, n.d.). After experiencing a few contests, directors will come to expect that the shift to the IV chord will always happen from measure 8 to 9, at the start of the B section. Altos will have a Do-La in this section, and the sopranos will have some variations of Fa-La. Thus, the director can practice those specific intervals in preparation for contest and prepare the singers for those challenges at that specific spot. Additionally, there are only 3 keys that the choirs may read in: C major, G major, and F major. However history shows that Varsity Tenor/Bass choirs will generally read in G major and Varsity Treble will read in F major. The criteria specifically outlines what kind of note and rest values are allowed and notes the addition of the dotted quarter eighth note rhythm for varsity groups. By knowing what to expect ahead of time, the directors can better prepare their groups. Because the director knows the exact criteria of the sight-reading evaluation and knows that previous years’ examples are great practice for what their choirs will perform, some only practice the octavos from the last few years in preparation instead of practicing sight-reading in a multitude of ways.

The development of the lesson plans outlined in chapter 3 were created out of necessity to develop skills in each and every one of the singers in my ensemble, not just the already-

confident leaders. Like many other music educators, my classroom is filled with a variety of learning needs and learning styles. Thus began the focus on creating lessons that could appeal to all types of learners.

## **Learning Styles**

Although there are numerous theories of learning styles, I focused my lessons around Neuro-linguistic programming and the three styles associated with it: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic. Neuro-linguistic programming is “concerned with how we communicate and how this affects our learning” (Pritchard, 2013, p. 49). According to *Brain-Friendly Study Strategies, Grades 2-8 : How Teachers Can Help Students Learn*, studying with all of the varying modalities makes learning more “efficient and permanent” and helps transfer information to long term memory (Schwed, 2007, p. 14). Although most people have one primary modality, learners can benefit from all three types.

Visual learners learn by seeing. “They have good visual recall and prefer information to presented visually” (Pritchard, 2013, p. 50). In the music classroom, I have found my visual learners to thrive when they can see notes on the page, or written definitions, as opposed to verbal instructions or rote teaching. Although all three lessons utilize multiple modalities, lessons one and two are designed for visual learners in different ways. For lesson 1 titled “Dictation Squares” students are utilizing their ability to see information as a graph. And following Amy Schwed’s advice, it also allows the visual learners to highlight their answers in different colors and codes so they can create a clear picture of the answer and relate that back to the sound patterns associated with it. (Schwed, 2007, p.15) In lesson 2, “Metronome Audiation Drills,” singers are looking at very short four-note patterns and almost instantly singing them after

studying. This allows visual learners to see the space to space or space to line spatial relationships between notes and create an auditory memory based on the visual pattern.

Although auditory learners seem to be smaller in number in my own program, they are sometimes the easiest to reach simply due to the nature of our discipline. These singers benefit from simply hearing the correct intervals or phrase and are able to replicate it with practice. Often times I have found that they are able to create muscle memory better if they close their eyes or audiate along with a phrase before singing it. Because music itself is mostly auditory, this modality is found in all lessons. In lesson 1, the singers hear the patterns and notate it; this learning to associate the sounds with the interval as opposed to the opposite direction. Lessons 2 and 3 focus on connecting the sounds that the singers will make with their internal audiation technique-it is adding an additional layer of “hearing” the notes before producing them. Pritchard describes auditory learners as “lik[ing] sequence and repetition” (Pritchard, 2013, p 50).

Perhaps beneficial to all middle school students is the kinesthetic learning style. Not only do middle school-aged students simply need to move their bodies and have physical activity to break up the monotony of the lesson or day, many students find learning through this domain particularly helpful. Additionally, this is the modality that I find incredibly useful while working on problem issues in repertoire. If the soprano section is struggling to clean a leap to a high note we might try squatting to “ground ourselves” while singing. Or if the ensemble is not effectively crescendoing through a passage, we might try making circles with our hands at an increasing speed to reflect the speed of their airflow. Lesson 3 entitled “Study, Sign, Sing” utilizes the solfege handsigns developed by John Curwen, following Kodaly’s approach to music education. According Alan McClung, 2008, using these handsigns creates a kinesthetic response by “creat[ing] the physical hand shapes for the various solfege syllables while usig the same hand to

relate the intervallic rise and fall of pitches to the thoracic region” (p. 256). By altogether eliminating the aspect of looking at traditional music notation and focusing on the solfege relationships through auditory and kinesthetic modalities, some singers begin to internalize both the physical and aural distance between pitches. It can also serve as a physical break from the monotony of rehearsal while still remaining on task and overcoming musical challenges.

## **Chapter 3 - Lesson Plans**

### **Lesson Plan 1- Dictation Squares**

Objective: Students will be able to notate at least three of the six dictation squares with 80% accuracy, and 95% of students will notate intervals moving in the correct direction on every exercise.

Standards Being Addressed:

- 2014 Music Standards (PK-8 General Music) MU:Cr2.1.7b, MU:Cr2.1.3, (NAfME, 2014).
- 2013 Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Middle School Music 2) 117.209(c)(B), 117.209(2)(B)

Materials Needed:

- Students: Chromebook, iPad, etc. (Access to Google Classroom/Sheets)
- Director: Piano, Computer, Projector.

Set-Up: Students will need to have their Chromebooks open to their dictation squares assignment from Google Classroom. Director will need to have the same dictation squares projected onto the board with a piano at the front of the room to play the exercises. Director will need to decide ahead of time what their patterns will be before starting the lesson.

Sequence of Lesson:

1. Director will tell the student that every exercise starts on tonic or “Do,” and give reminders that each exercise will be played three times. Ask students to notate their starting notes in each exercise. Their screen should look like this:

Dictation Practice

1	S	S	S	S	S
	F	F	F	F	F
	M	M	M	M	M
	R	R	R	R	R
	D	D	D	D	D
	T	T	T	T	T
	L	L	L	L	L
	S	S	S	S	S

2	S	S	S	S	S
	F	F	F	F	F
	M	M	M	M	M
	R	R	R	R	R
	D	D	D	D	D
	T	T	T	T	T
	L	L	L	L	L
	S	S	S	S	S

3	S	S	S	S	S
	F	F	F	F	F
	M	M	M	M	M
	R	R	R	R	R
	D	D	D	D	D
	T	T	T	T	T
	L	L	L	L	L
	S	S	S	S	S

4	S	S	S	S	S
	F	F	F	F	F
	M	M	M	M	M
	R	R	R	R	R
	D	D	D	D	D
	T	T	T	T	T
	L	L	L	L	L
	S	S	S	S	S

5	S	S	S	S	S
	F	F	F	F	F
	M	M	M	M	M
	R	R	R	R	R
	D	D	D	D	D
	T	T	T	T	T
	L	L	L	L	L
	S	S	S	S	S

6	S	S	S	S	S
	F	F	F	F	F
	M	M	M	M	M
	R	R	R	R	R
	D	D	D	D	D
	T	T	T	T	T
	L	L	L	L	L
	S	S	S	S	S

**Figure 2- Dictation Squares Set-Up**

2. Play the tonic note for the students on piano and count four beats (slow tempo) to start.

Each note in the exercise should get two beats. (Note- I change the tonic for each exercise for more advanced groups, but keep it consistent in developing ensembles).

3. Students should notate what they hear on their Chromebooks in the Google Sheet.

Director will give about 20 seconds between each listening to give students time to think and notate.

4. After the final listening, ask a student to volunteer to share their answer. If students are more advanced, ask them to sing the exercise. Once the correct answer is revealed, project it onto the screen. For instance, if the exercise was Do, Re, Mi, Re, Do it would look like this:

Dictation Practice														
1	S	S	S	S	S									
	F	F	F	F	F									
	M	M	M	M	M									
	R	R	R	R	R									
	D	D	D	D	D									
	T	T	T	T	T									
	L	L	L	L	L									
	S	S	S	S	S									
2	S	S	S	S	S									
	F	F	F	F	F									
	M	M	M	M	M									
	R	R	R	R	R									
	D	D	D	D	D									
	T	T	T	T	T									
	L	L	L	L	L									
	S	S	S	S	S									
3	S	S	S	S	S									
	F	F	F	F	F									
	M	M	M	M	M									
	R	R	R	R	R									
	D	D	D	D	D									
	T	T	T	T	T									
	L	L	L	L	L									
	S	S	S	S	S									
4	S	S	S	S	S									
	F	F	F	F	F									
	M	M	M	M	M									
	R	R	R	R	R									
	D	D	D	D	D									
	T	T	T	T	T									
	L	L	L	L	L									
	S	S	S	S	S									
5	S	S	S	S	S									
	F	F	F	F	F									
	M	M	M	M	M									
	R	R	R	R	R									
	D	D	D	D	D									
	T	T	T	T	T									
	L	L	L	L	L									
	S	S	S	S	S									
6	S	S	S	S	S									
	F	F	F	F	F									
	M	M	M	M	M									
	R	R	R	R	R									
	D	D	D	D	D									
	T	T	T	T	T									
	L	L	L	L	L									
	S	S	S	S	S									

**Figure 3- Dictation Squares Example**

- Continue this for all six exercises, building sequentially as the exercises go on. For example increase the number of skips, skips of a whole step, major third, etc.

Assessment: Students will highlight the exercise number with green for correct and red for incorrect as the answers are revealed on the screen. Once all of the exercises have been notated, they will submit their Google Sheet in Google Classroom. The Director will go through and check for understanding and completion of lesson objectives.

## Lesson Plan 2-Metronome Audiation Drills

Objective: Students will be able to demonstrate their audiation skills and specific intervals of a major third, minor third, and perfect fourth by singing prompted patterns with 100% ensemble accuracy.

Standards Being Addressed:

- 2014 Music Standards (PK-8 General Music) MU: Pr5.1.1a, MU:Pr5.1.3b (NAfME, 2014).
- 2013 Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Middle School Music 1) 117.208(2)(D), 117.208(2)(E)

Materials Needed:

- Director: Piano, Metronome
- Students: Paper- Treble Level 2 (shown below)

**Audiation Practice  
Treble- Level 2**

11.

12.

13.

14.

15.

16.

17.

18.

19.

20.

**Figure 4- Sign, Study Sing Student Sheet**

Set-Up: Students will stand in whatever arrangement is typical for the ensemble. Director will be at the front of the room in every students' line of sight with the piano off to the side. Start the metronome at 55 BPM.

Sequence of Lesson:

1. Director will explain the following instructions to students: They will audiate the short pattern for 4 beats, then sing that pattern. Following singing the exercise, they immediately will audiate the next pattern.
2. Director will play the tonic triad in their key of choice. This treble choir uses F Major.
3. Work through all exercises on the page.

\*Optional Variation- Have the sections alternate exercises.

Informal Assessment: These exercises will provide instant feedback. If a pattern is missed, simply correct. Do not simply give the students the correct interval, make sure that learning and comprehension is occurring by talking through the mistake or explaining how/why they know the sound. For example, we should know "So-Mi" from our descending portion of the tonic triad. The director will hear which singers/sections are excelling and where others may need more instruction.

### **Lesson Plan 3-Study, Sign, Sing**

Objective: Students will be able to demonstrate their audiation skills and specific intervals of a major third, minor third, and perfect fourth by singing prompted patterns with 100% ensemble accuracy.

Standards Being Addressed:

- 2014 Music Standards (PK-8 General Music) Pr5.1.1a, MU:Pr5.1.3b (NAfME, 2014).
- 2013 Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Middle School Music 1) 117.208(2)(D), 117.208(2)(E)

Materials Needed:

- Students: No materials needed
- Director: (Piano for establishing tonic only).

Set-Up: Students will stand in whatever arrangement is typical for the ensemble. Director will be at the front of the room in every students' line of sight with the piano off to the side.

Sequence of Lesson:

1. Director will explain the following instructions to students: Each pattern has three parts of instruction. First, they will study the Curwen hand sign pattern as shown by the director. Second time, they will hand sign and audiate the pattern. The third time, they will sing and hand sign the pattern. Their eyes should be glued on the director.
2. Students will sing the tonic triad while the director plays it on the piano. We are working in F Major.
3. Repeat above steps for approximately 5 minutes, focusing on intervals that are proving challenging in repertoire or sight reading.

Sample Intervals (Each should have four notes)

- Do-Do-Mi-So
- So-Fa-Mi-Mi
- Mi-Do-Re-Do

Note: Choose intervals that your ensemble needs to practice. They could be challenging patterns in their repertoire or patterns that they are inconsistent with in sight reading.

Informal Assessment: These exercises will provide instant feedback. If an interval is missed, simply correct it. Do not simply give the students the correct interval, make sure that learning and comprehension is occurring by talking through the mistake or explaining how/why they know the sound. For example, we should know “So-Mi” from our descending portion of the tonic triad. The director will hear which singers/sections are excelling and where others may need more instruction.

### **Lesson Plan Reflections**

In lieu of having students traditionally sight read on a daily basis, these lessons are designed to create variation in the process while still building foundational skills in ways that appeal to multiple styles of learning. As a director I do not want to only teach to the students who already have a grasp of an educational concept; I want every member of my ensemble to hone in on their skills and be proficient musicians. One of the most beautiful parts of teaching music is reaching students who may not be successful in other academic classes and showing them they are good at something when they feel largely inferior. My classroom is filled with students of varying abilities; some are classified as gifted and talented, while others have diagnoses such as Dyslexia, ADHD, Autism, and more. Teaching to the entire room often times takes creative problem solving to teach them those skills in a non-traditional ways. My rainbow

of educational needs inspired these lessons so that all singers can hone in their sight-reading skills and confidence.

These lessons are designed to be sequential and therefore not have one learning outcome. Thus there is no singular concept they should learn by the end of a lesson. Instead they should build upon their skills as they acquire new levels of difficulty. For instance if we are working on the interval of a major third for a few lessons, we would continue practicing that interval while also introducing the perfect fourth in the next few lessons. Lesson 1 employs the “grade as you go” strategy so that students can get instant feedback on their work. This is effective for this lesson as once they can identify that they are doing something incorrectly, they can fix it for the subsequent exercises; it is an effective tool for formal assessment. Lesson 2 uses experiential learning, specifically independent study, to practice their audiation skills. Although this strategy looks different than how it is used in a traditional classroom, they are still studying on their own before “sharing” with the class. Lesson 3 utilizes student movement, which is incredibly effective not only for kinesthetic learners, but also for all students to be physically engaged and as a relief from total body focus. The latter two lessons are informal assessment tools that can be used both for individual students and for the entire ensemble.

Moving forward, I will continue to use these lessons with all levels of the choir department at appropriate levels of difficulty. Additionally, I plan to keep better records of what intervals and skills were the specific focus of each lesson and when in the school year they were taught opposed to simply addressing challenging intervals and patterns that appear in our repertoire. The intention of these adjustments would be not only to keep a better log for myself but also to be able to share the lessons and resources with colleagues. Designing and implementing these lesson plans became a way to challenge myself to think outside of the

everyday method of practicing sight-reading. It is much easier to stay within the mold of doing the bare minimum to practice those important skills so we can focus on concert repertoire, but I found that by investing time in these exercises it in fact made learning music move more quickly because they were stronger readers and musicians. I also found myself able to intertwine music literacy questions into these practices, which I am not always able to do effectively during repertoire work. For instance asking students “Is that a half-step or a whole-step?” when intervals were missed and reinforcing where those steps are in their major scale. It made me a better teacher and my students better musicians.

## Chapter 4 - Reflections

When I first applied to the Kansas State University graduate summer program, I was feeling lost and discouraged in my teaching position and needed something to look forward to. I was hopeful for a new job for the next school year and thought that would be the biggest hurdle of 2020. In March our entire educational system was turned on its head due to the Covid-19 pandemic and we had no idea what music making would look like when and if we could return safely. Educating the students fell to the backburner and survival mode began. “Will these students ever turn work in on time” evolved into “are you going to be able to eat without having school lunch and breakfast?” Once my district ensured they continue to meet the basic needs of our students, we made our first attempt at virtual teaching and quickly learned that distance education in the choral classroom was incredibly difficult. The school year ended, and I was filled with dread for what would happen if we could not get the pandemic under control by the start of next school year.

The start of the K-State summer program offered some sense of normalcy and a hope for what we could accomplish once the pandemic safely subsided enough for us to return. It also gave me a network of educators from across the country to help problem-solve, share ideas, and to simply connect with in a period that felt so isolating. At a time when most everything felt bleak with my professional and personal life, my first summer in this program was the boost of passion I needed. In August I started a new job as a middle school choir director after teaching high school for three years. Although I was nervous to make a career change in general, doing so in a pandemic added an extra layer of stress and worry. In addition to my network of educator friends in close proximity, I now had a group of teachers across the country who I could share

experiences and ideas with. We talked strategies for creating virtual performances, programming repertoire to meet the students where they were at, and more.

Collaboration with colleagues beyond the Texas borders is exactly why I chose this program. There are many ways that I feel like a fish out of water in the Texas music educator scene, I grew up in Kansas and my musical foundation was built in ways that are very different than my Texas colleagues. I learned very quickly in the first year of my undergraduate degree that there is a sense of elitism with Texas in all things from football to barbeque and music education practices. The formal University Interscholastic League evaluation is so deeply engrained in the culture of public school music education here, and future teachers must be ready for this process. As a new teacher I wanted to be successful in this daunting challenge and spent most of my time making sure I taught the skills necessary using only the typical sight-reading methods. Consequently, that first year my students received the lowest overall composite ratings. As I became more comfortable taking creative risks when teaching literacy and sight-reading skills, my students' scores improved. Although the UIL evaluation is only a snapshot of the students' learning, it is still a reflection of their overall learning throughout the year. The more I invested time in my students as musicians instead of singers who also needed to be able to sight-read, the better I found my program to be.

Alongside most other music educators and musicians across the country, my thoughts and belief about choral music shifted during the pandemic. Before March of 2020, I was focused so heavily on technicality and external measures of success. Once the Covid-19 pandemic shut down schools for the remainder of the 2020 school year and we lost the basic aspect of collaborative music-making, it forced me to evaluate what was important to me as an educator and why students come to my class each day. I personally love choral music because it allows

me to be part of creating beauty with other musicians in a way that I cannot do alone. The community of choral music was ripped away, and I missed it desperately. When we finally returned to in-person instruction, educators across the country were no longer charged with simply teaching their subject matter, we were focused on social emotional learning and healing trauma that came from the shutdown, and we still are today. No longer was it important to me that every single chord be perfectly in tune, but rather that my students could sing together with confidence and trust even with masks, face shields, and social distancing. The added challenges of in-person learning while only being allowed to sing in one space for 20 minutes at a time and creating distance learning lessons forced me to get creative with lessons and focus on my students as well-rounded musicians instead of performers. As restrictions lessened, we were able to focus more on tone and technique, but the mindset of that being the most important element of a rehearsal and performance never shifted back.

Going through the summer masters program at K-State during this time also shaped my development as an educator. When I was figuring out new and creative ways to teach content, I was actively utilizing information and techniques that I had experienced the summer before. This reinvigoration gave me energy and inspiration that I desperately needed. Over the past two years, I have developed a true passion for teaching middle school choral music and have realized career goals that will help fill in some of the gaps for training future music educators to teach this unique level of singers. At a time where friends and colleagues were experiencing major burnout and leaving the education world altogether, I found my stride. I attribute this largely to my time with the summer masters program and the freedom it gave me to break out of my comfort zone and inspiration to try new things. Every professor that I have worked with stressed the importance that our assignments are designed to be relevant to our own programs, and I found

this to actually be helpful in preparation for the upcoming school year as I used quite a few of the score studies, lesson plans, and techniques in my classes. I am incredibly grateful for my time at Kansas State University.

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