

Mentoring through small ensemble collaboration

by

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Abstract

In this report, I describe a lesson in which 6th grade through 12th grade students fostered a mentor-mentee relationship while collaborating with each other, using technology, to perform simple duets. In this process, the older student created a recording as a practice tool for the younger student and provided feedback to them as they prepared their separate parts. The completed assignment included video recordings from both students, put together using the iMovie. As a result of close collaboration through technology, students developed a relationship across grade levels that they would not have been able to do otherwise.

I have developed more as a teacher during the Kansas State Masters' of Music Program as I now actively look at finding efficiency and meaning in every aspect of my teaching. As the sole band director of my program, this has maximized the impact that I am able to have on my students. Another development in my teaching has been the more active role I have taken in culture building and relationships. Being rather new to my current position, this has proved to be helpful in recruiting and retention, as well as developing an atmosphere where students want to be. This has built a level of trust from both me and my students, allowing us to create and grow in an entirely new way.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Music is a vital part of our daily life and an irreplaceable part of our culture. It is used to celebrate happy occasions and mourn sorrowful ones. It is sung to us at the earliest of ages and appreciated by older generations, and it is listened to on the radio and can be performed with others on stage. Whatever the medium, its impact on our everyday life cannot be denied. And for this very reason, its role in education is one that should be treated with priority. The teaching of music helps students to not only become well-rounded individuals with an understanding of their cultural upbringing, but it also challenges students to grow into high functioning members of society through quality musical experiences and opportunities.

The purpose of public education should ultimately aim for preparing children for life outside of school and how they will contribute to society once they graduate. The role of music in the education process is to provide students with a well-balanced experience that they may not get in other classes. I believe that music can provide students with a healthy emotional outlet that they are able to build connections with, social bonds made through collaboration and performance, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills that they may not encounter in other academic classes.

Providing students with rich musical opportunities can only happen if they have a safe environment in which they are able to learn and grow. This is done in many ways, one of them by building a strong community culture where students are not afraid to take chances. Music can break down barriers between students, allowing them to see past their differences to create something bigger than themselves. Another way we can provide a safe environment where students feel comfortable to take risks is by building strong, professional relationships with students individually. The rapport made when this happens makes students feel valued and

connected, making them more willing to go above and beyond your expectations. Eventually this pushes students to not only excel musically, but personally as well.

I feel that success in the music classroom can look different for all students, and realizing success means that the student has achieved their fullest potential not only as a musician, but as a person as well. This level of potential should continue to grow as the student progresses, thus making the music learning process a life-long endeavor. Finding success in the music classroom should be as accessible as possible to all students and offered to all everyone regardless of their limitations. The ability for flexibility and adaptation within the subject area makes it a standout amongst others, as all students can actively contribute to the product.

I believe that one of the most unique facets of music education is that it provides students with the opportunity to not only develop technical skills, but emotional ones as well. Students can perform, create and experience emotion through music and learn to build connections in the process. This ability to add more than what is on the page allows the student to challenge themselves both creatively and expressively, something not easily done in other classrooms.

As a teacher, it is ultimately our responsibility to guide our students into becoming well-rounded individuals and productive members of society once they leave the classroom. In order to do it in the most effective way possible, we must be open to learning and growing ourselves. It is important to continue implementing new ideas and improving teaching skills through professional development. Providing students with content that is relative to their lives will allow them to be engaged and motivated to learn. Creating ensemble experiences for students where we share ideas and collaborate will allow them to problem solve and become leaders. At the end of the day, I feel that music education is so much more than notes on a page or bodies in

a classroom. It is about shared experiences and emotional connections with some of our closest friends.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

In my lesson on creating virtual duets, my music philosophy is reflected in my in multiple ways. Creating duet projects based on collaboration gave my students opportunities to improve their problem solving and critical thinking skills, all the while teaching them to work together efficiently. Although we were not able to work together in person, students relied on email, zoom conference, and video call to communicate with their partners. Older students in the project were given a leadership role and encouraged to take responsibility of the younger partner. This meant that anything (from music questions to technology questions) was addressed by the older student before coming to me.

Not only did the students work to create music together, but the older students had to troubleshoot and provide feedback to improve their partner's performance. This is a skill set that will benefit them long after they leave the music classroom. While working on the project, a few younger students struggled with staying in time and completing phrases. Many times, the practice track that was created helped solve this problem. However, some of my students needed extra attention. This was challenging for one of my great high school players, because not only did she have to be able to communicate with a 7th grader about something that comes naturally to her, but she also had to adapt to the recording and follow along even though there were timing issues.

In addition, the partnership provided in this lesson fostered a relationship between students, helping build the culture that I believe is important in providing an environment where students can take risks and challenge themselves to reach their potential. Many students have

continued to be a positive influence for their younger partners, even after the project has been completed. They have assisted them in working on district audition music for next fall, as well as hosted virtual sectional meetings (6th-12th) to vertically build the program from the ground up. The younger students have taken quite a bit of pride in their new friendships and are more excited about progressing through the band program in the future.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan

I developed this lesson while beginning online learning during the COVID-19 epidemic this past spring. One of my biggest fears during this time was losing the social and emotional bond that comes from performing with friends. This is something that cannot be replicated while being confined at home. However, we embraced this time away as an opportunity for our students to reach other members in our program who they may not have had the opportunity to play with otherwise.

Lesson Plan – Virtual Duets

2014 Music Standards Addressed

- MU:Pr4.1.E.5a Select varied repertoire to study based on interest, music reading skills (where appropriate), an understanding of the structure of the music, context, and the technical skill of the individual or ensemble.
- 5 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.
-

Prior Knowledge/Skills

All participating students have been enrolled in band class for at least one year and can read grade level music of 1 or higher. Older students have all participated in small group ensemble contests and are comfortable playing with and offering feedback to others.

Lesson Objective(s)

- Students will pick appropriate literature based on ability level of performers.
- Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of their instrument by performing grade-level appropriate literature.
- Students will record and analyze their performances individually.
- Students will collaborate and give constructive feedback to their partner.

Assessment of the Lesson

Peer assessment will be used in the first portion of the lesson. I will assess the final products by listening to individual recordings and seeing if they can be compiled into a duet performance. After completion, I will survey students to see if the collaboration was beneficial for students.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations

Some students were not able to participate in this assignment due to lack of internet and/or recording devices. These students were given alternative assignments.

Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

- Elementary Duets, Volume 1 (Jim Evans)
- Headphones
- Instrument
- Video recording device (phone, computer, etc.)
- 2nd device to play video (phone, computer, etc)

Lesson Sequence

Activity #1 Objective: Select duet that will be performed.

- a) Older student will pick and share two duets that are suitable for the ability level of their duet partner.
- b) From the two options, the younger student picks the duet they feel most comfortable with.

Assessment: Check-in from teacher to make sure selected literature is appropriate.

Activity #2 Objective: Older student records practice track for younger student to practice with (this track will also be used as a click track that they will play through headphones when it is time to record).

- a) Using chrome-book/computer/phone, record partner's part through audio recording.
- b) 2. Share recording with younger duet partner (email)

Assessment: Check-in from teacher to make sure recording is of good quality.

Activity #3 Objective: Younger partner uses the recorded practice track to guide them in learning their part. Once ready, they then make a video recording to send to their partner.

- a) Practice part until performance ready
- b) Create a video recording of the performance using your phone/chrome-book/computer. Use headphones/earbuds to play the practice track while making video recording.
- c) Share video recording with partner and teacher.

Assessment: Check-in from teacher to make sure recording is done correctly.

Activity #4 Objective: Older student records their part of the duet using their partner's recording as a back track.

- a) Practice music until performance ready.
- b) Create a video recording of the performance using phone/chrome-book/ computer. Use headphones/earbuds to play partner's track while making the recording.
- c) Share video recording with teacher.

Assessment: Check-in from teacher to make sure recording is done correctly.

See Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 below for student handouts explaining guidelines for the virtual duet project.

Figure 2.1 Mentor Guidelines

Virtual Duet Project

Mentor Track

This project will be broken up into six separate parts and will be completed within four weeks. Mrs. Betts will assign a partner to you and share contact information through email (please make sure you are checking it daily!).

March 30th:

1. Select duet to be performed (Elementary Duets, Volume 1)
 - a. Duets are available on Google Classroom
 - b. Pick two duets that you are interested in performing, and email those to your partner (they will select the final one). Have them select which line they will perform.

March 31st:

1. Once they have emailed you back, post your chosen piece to the assignments (Virtual Duet Assignment #1) on Google Classroom.

April 1st-3rd:

1. Record practice track for your younger partner to practice with (this track will also be used as a click track that they will play through headphones when it is time to record).
 - a. This needs to be THEIR part that they will be performing.
 - b. You can use a chrome book, phone, computer, etc. It only needs to be an audio recording.
 - c. Share recording with younger duet partner through email
 - d. Post recording on Google Classroom (Virtual Duet Assignment #2)

Week of April 6th-April 10th:

1. This week your partner will record a minimum of two videos of them practicing and learning their part. During this time, please be available to answer and advise them (check your email daily!).
 - a. Offer critiques and advice to help their performance
 - b. You may email, call, zoom, etc. to aid in virtual instruction
 - c. Be encouraging!

April 13th-14th:

1. Video record your line in the duet using your partners recording as a back track.

Figure 2.2 Mentee Guidelines

Virtual Duet Project

Mentee Track

This project will be broken up into six separate parts and will be completed within four weeks. Mrs. Betts will assign a partner to you and share contact information through email (please make sure you are checking it daily!).

March 30th-31st:

1. Select duet to be performed (Elementary Duets, Volume 1)
 - a. Your high school partner will email you two options. Pick the one you are most interested in performing with them.
 - b. Email your choice back to your partner, along with what line you are wanting to play.
 - c. Post your choice on Google Classroom (Virtual Duet Assignment #1)

April 1st-3rd:

1. Start working on your assigned line for your duet.
 - a. You will receive an email from your partner with a practice track of your part.
 - i. Listen to this track via headphones/earbuds while you record, so make sure to practice that way.

Week of April 6th-April 10th:

2. This week you will record a minimum of two videos of yourself playing your part. During this time, your partner will offer feedback and help (check your email daily!).
 - a. Share each video with your partner via email
 - i. You will need to do a video recording so they can see what is happening
 - ii. You may have to do multiple videos to address problems, that is okay!
 - b. You may email, call, zoom, etc. to aid in virtual instruction, just let them know
 - c. Send final video recording (with the click track playing through headphones/earbuds) to your partner and upload on Google Classroom (Virtual Duet Assignment #2).

April 20th-21st:

1. Review final video and complete reflection
 - a. Final edited video will be available in your inbox by Monday, April 20th
 - b. Reflection available on Google Classroom (Virtual Duet Assignment #3).

Closure

Once recordings are done for both students; they can be put together using audio/video software. For this project I used iMovie to put the recordings together utilizing a split screen. If the project was done correctly utilizing backtracks and headphones, and the older student was

able to follow along with the younger students playing, and the individual parts should line up to create a complete duet performance. Once completed, I sent edited videos back to students so they can view the final product. In addition, I asked students to complete a reflection (Appendix A and B) asking for opinions on the process of the project, as well as how working with a student of another grade impacted them.

Reflection of Lesson Plan

My goal for the project was for my students to create a small ensemble performance through peer collaboration using technology. In addition, my hope was that they would a relationship with each other during this process. Prior to this project, many students had experience performing in ensembles in person, but had not had the experience of doing it all virtually. In addition, my students had not performed in small ensembles with students of other grade levels.

Collaboration and communication were key elements in this lesson, as it was all done online. While performing chamber music individually, instead of together, is not the most ideal performance setting, it did allow for me to pair up students from different grade levels. This aspect of the lesson added a whole other piece to the project, as the older students took on a mentorship role. After working with each other, the younger students observed that they were less intimidated by the older musicians, and that they felt more confident in their playing abilities and more a part of the band family. In addition, my older students were able to practice their problem-solving skills and were able to diagnose instrument technique and timing issues. They found great pride in being able to teach their partner, and many of them found more gratification with the duets than they did with their district small ensemble music they had prepared earlier in

the spring. I believe the relationships that has been developed through the project will continue to grow as the student's progress through band.

If I were to use the lesson in the future, I would like to be able to be able to create a more organized way to collect student recordings, and an easier way for students to leave critiques. With students sending them via email, it did get a little chaotic. It may be more beneficial to utilize Seesaw, FlipGrid or Google Classroom to host their videos and comments. This could also allow for more than one student to share comments at a time. Another adjustment that could be made to the lesson would be to create trios or quartets instead of the limited duets, and to even consider utilizing trios and quartets as well.

This project expanded my thinking by pushing me to utilize technology to create a final collaborative project that my students could participate in. It was important for me to find other ways to continue to teach my students about self-diagnosing and problem-solving skills, instead of them always relying on a teacher for constant feedback. I was surprised at the quality of work and feedback that was shared. While nothing beats making music with each other live, the final video performances left us all with a sense of pride in what we accomplished.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

Each summer attending the Kansas State University Masters' program has invigorated my teaching and refreshed my outlook in the classroom. It has allowed me to deconstruct aspects of my instruction and rebuild them in a methodological way that has purpose. I appreciated the fact that with every class came practical ideas that I could apply to my program immediately.

The beginning of my experience in the master's program coincided with my accepting a new teaching position at a new school. Coming into the new program armed with the information from classes like Marching Band Fundamentals and Organization and Administration of the School Music Program gave me a solid platform to jump in on. Revising my band handbook and creating a leadership handbook was a vital part in the success of my first year at my new job. I adapted my band handbook to reflect my priorities, while also implementing a leadership team that made my transition into the school seamless. Since my first year, our leadership program now includes a workshop for our incoming leadership group, as well as putting in place a mentoring initiative for new students and underclassmen.

With the students taking on more responsibility in my program, the level of ownership has greatly increased, even in the younger grades. Band culture in a small school can be a very fickle thing. With students involved in every activity and athletic group, music can easily become something that does not get the time or attention it may need. Giving them ownership has created a sense of pride within our program and has begun to produce a culture of excellence that is evident throughout the community. Because it is so noticeable, recruiting and retention has been an easy process. Students want to be involved in something much greater than themselves. In addition, participation in extra activities has increased each year. Students are more likely to step out of their comfort zones and push themselves to achieve more musically by

auditioning for honor bands and participating in solo and ensemble contest. The biggest growth I have seen in ownership from my students has been this past spring. Even with COVID-19 and online learning, my leadership team has reached out to students to make sure they are they are doing okay and that they are cared for. They have come to realize that their band family exists even outside of the band hall.

Another aspect of my teaching that I was able to reflect greatly on was literature analysis and conducting. It had been quite a while since I had a refresher in both skills, and after a few weeks in, a noticeable difference had already been made. Since last summer, I have regularly recorded myself conducting in order to make sure that I am accurately conveying exactly what I would like my students to play. I feel as though I have minimized excess movement that was distracting, and my students are connecting with what I am showing them. This extra attention to detail has allowed me to connect more with my ensembles, and therefore our emotional experience while performing together is even greater.

As large group assessment began this spring, I took the extra time to make a thorough literature analysis of each contest piece of the contest program for my 7th grade band, 8th grade band and high school band. While I usually spent ample amounts of time reviewing scores, I felt that I was able to be much more efficient while using the template that was provided during our Literature Analysis course with Dr. Tracz. This efficiency led to more productive and guided rehearsals, more meaningful warmups, and building more connections to help guide my students into making more expressive music. I ended up feeling more confident in my teaching, and more comfortable bringing in clinicians to hear my bands. The four different directors who came to critique my groups offered tremendous insight, allowing us to excel to a whole other level. Even with our contest season ending prematurely, I feel that what we got out of those few months was

a much richer musical experience than what we had in the past. In addition, it allowed us more time to prepare an extra concert cycle in February. This concert was combined with a fundraiser auction that led to our biggest revenue for the entire year, allowing us to purchase much need equipment.

One of the most valuable things I have learned during my experience within the graduate program is to keep asking why and to keep the desire to learn myself. Dr. Payne's classes, Research of Music Education and Theories of Music Education, have provided me with more of an understanding of how students can learn and the changes I can make to educate them to their fullest potential. Knowing there are multiple ways to address a topic or problem and knowing where resources are to guide my understanding will have a positive effect on my students throughout my teaching career. I have taken more risks in my teaching this past year and have not be afraid to evaluate what is most effective with my students through data collection. This has resulted in a change in my assessments with my younger bands. We have changed from weekly playing assignments to utilizing a band karate curriculum that has been more motivating for our students, resulting in a higher percentage of students mastering skills and concepts during the school year.

In addition, refining my own philosophy of teaching has forced me to recognize what I believe to be important to my students, and what their band experience should ultimately be. Knowing that my philosophy aligns with both Henri Tajfel's and Albert Bandura's teachings (social identity theory and social learning theory) has helped me in being able to verbalize to my students what I want them to achieve and has given me a tangible way to measure what I believe success is for my students. I believe students foster a sense of belonging and membership based

on being a part of a large ensemble, and that students are able to acquire information through observation and imitation.

Meeting other educators from various parts of the country proved to be another added benefit from the summer sessions. Being able to talk shop with directors who have had different experiences due their environments has enlightened me to new ideas and concepts. It also provided an extra level of support while completing projects and assignments. These classmates have become not only professional colleagues, but personal friends that I know will continue to a part of my music education journey in the future.

Being able to have a practical and cohesive graduate school experience has reenergized my teaching. Through collaboration with peers, lessons from instructors, and a lot of self-reflection, I feel a greater confidence and purpose in my career. I can see a broader scope of what truly goes on in my band hall, and I have a greater outlook on how I can help my students. My three years in the master's program has also created a greater desire in me to keep learning. I never would have expected to continue my education past my master's degree, but due to my experience at Kansas State I believe I will be pursuing another one in the near future. I am grateful for the time invested in me to grow as an educator, and because of that, I know I will be able to fully invest in my students at my highest potential.

Appendix A – Reflection (Mentor)

5/25/2020

Duet Project (Mentor)

Duet Project (Mentor)

Please complete the project by answering the questions below.

Your email address (**bettse@maysville.k12.mo.us**) will be recorded when you submit this form. Not you? [Switch account](#)

What feedback did you give your partner?

Your answer

Did you feel any satisfaction watching the finalized project?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 absolutely

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Do you believe you made an impact on their band experience?

Your answer

Think about your first years in band. Do you think if you had the opportunity to collaborate with an older student it would have impacted you? How?

Your answer



<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSewD2dAUSno5ZtJqpcwtIWMOispHOzcfQgtavTfi5wXQ5oPRg/viewform>

1/2

Many of you had have worked in ensembles with your peers. Does this final product feel different to you? Why?

Your answer

Will you be more willing to make contact with your partner (say hi, have small talk, etc.) outside of this project now that you have "worked" on this project together?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Any extra comments:

Your answer



Send me a copy of my responses.

Submit

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Google Forms



Appendix B – Reflection (Mentee)

5/25/2020

Duet Project (Mentee) - Google Forms



Duet Project (Mentee)

Questions Responses 2

Duet Project (Mentee)

Thank you so much for participating in my project! Please complete the project by answering the questions below.

This form is automatically collecting email addresses for Maysville R-I School District users. [Change settings](#)

What was the feedback you received from your partner?

Long answer text

Was the feedback helpful to you?

Short answer text

Did you feel any satisfaction watching the finalized project?

None at all 1 2 3 4 5 Absolutely!

At the beginning of the project, were you intimidated by your older duet partner?



<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1NlloMVjDOeCVjN9fvQG9jKnyISL4r-K7XaBQ18OfUPM/edit>

1/3

At the end of the project, rate how intimidated you are by your older duet partner:

Not intimidated at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very intimidated

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

By the end of the project, did your partner make you feel more comfortable and confident in your playing ability?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Absolutely

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Will you be more willing to make contact with your partner (say hi, have small talk, etc.) outside of this project now that you have "worked" on this project together?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Did working with an older student make you feel like a more important part of our "Band Family?"

☐ Yes

☐ No

Any Extra Comments:



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