

**Fostering musical independence in students by teaching rhythmic
accuracy using the curriculum Teaching Rhythm Logically**

by

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A REPORT

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Abstract

The following lessons will focus on teaching using the methods in *Teaching Rhythms Logically* (Potter Williams, 2016). This method uses the Eastman counting system with the breath impulse subdivision of the eighth note. Before teaching the students this method, they took a written pre-test and participated in an informal group aural assessment. As each class encountered new material, students used the following approach to learning new rhythmic and melodic passages alike: they would count the example, say or sing the selection using a "ta" syllable, practice the example by blowing air through the instrument but not creating a sound (also known as air playing), and finally play the example on instruments with full sound. Through this process, the goal was to see improvement in rhythmic accuracy and sight-reading ability. This method helped the students become more independent, assisted them in learning new passages and performed with more rhythmic stability and confidence. Upon completion of *Teaching Rhythm Logically* (Potter Williams, 2016), students took a written post-test and participated in an informal aural assessment to address whether there was an improvement in rhythmic accuracy.

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Dedication

I dedicate this report to my mom and dad, my daughters Samyra and Khalia, and my husband Corey. Without your continual support, this would not have been possible.

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Throughout history, there has been one thing that has been consistent for every civilization, and that is music. Music is innately human and, thus, should be a subject that is included in education and should be available to every student. I believe music plays a significant role in enriching the lives of children and can help students with Social-Emotional Learning. Becoming a music educator was my way to help students experience music in similar ways I experienced in school. I have taught for twelve years, and in that time, it feels like many social shifts have occurred. Looking at my first philosophy, I can see where I have changed how I view music education and why it is essential. On the flip side of that statement, I can see that some concepts still ring true to my current thought process. One thing that has not changed is that I intend to teach in smaller schools and strive to offer the best possible experience for students to learn how to express themselves through creating, performing, and responding to music.

My teaching philosophy revolves around the idea that music can teach students how to express themselves, enrich a student's life, and have healing effects. I hope to give students the avenues needed to experience music through creating, performing, and responding to music, and hopefully, by doing this, allow the student to forget about any worries they have and give them a chance to live in the moment. Not every student will share the same experience in music as their peers. For some, music is a way of helping them cope with reality. I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic helped bring perspective to the state of mental health for our students. I feel like it was due to this that once we returned to in-person education, educators had a stronger push to include Social-Emotional Learning in their lessons. During this time, I learned about the connection between music and Social-Emotional Learning.

A prominent advocate for music education, Estelle Jorgensen, believes in a holistic approach to teaching music. She highlighted the transformative power of music in fostering Social-Emotional Learning. She believes in the idea that music as an art form has the potential to enrich human lives and promote personal growth. She also believed that music could cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and empathy and contribute to well-rounded individuals' development.

With the teachings of Jorgensen in mind, one of the vital aspects of my education is integrating Social-Emotional Learning activities into lessons. Social-Emotional Learning provides students valuable skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making. Students can explore and develop these skills through music in a safe and expressive space. I strongly believe in the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2023). The hierarchy is especially true when it applies to my students. The concept revolves around the idea that humans have a series of needs that must be met in a specific order, starting with basic survival needs like food and shelter before progressing to higher-level needs like belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization. If a student does not have their basic needs met, it is challenging to learn. I try my best to have a safe space for my students and hopefully allow them to feel like they can be their true selves. My students know they can take time in an area designated in my room called the calm corner and return to class after a few moments. I have found that this approach has helped students return to learning with more focus and, in some cases, more emotionally stable.

Music provides a safe outlet for students to express and process their emotions. Whether through improvisation, composing their songs, or analyzing the emotional nuances of musical pieces, students learn to identify, understand, and regulate their feelings. Music becomes a tool

for self-reflection and emotional exploration, promoting self-awareness and self-management skills.

In my classroom, I prioritize creating a nurturing and inclusive space where students feel valued, respected, and supported. I actively encourage open discussions about emotions and create opportunities for students to share their musical experiences, thoughts, and feelings. By fostering a positive and empathetic learning environment, I aim to enhance students' Social-Emotional well-being while nurturing their musical growth.

In conclusion, my teaching philosophy combines the power of music with Social-Emotional Learning to foster holistic development. By incorporating Social-Emotional principles into music education, I empower students to explore their emotions, build empathy, and develop vital life skills. Through music, I aim to create a transformative educational experience that nurtures harmony within students' lives, both musically and emotionally.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

My teaching philosophy serves as the compass that guides my instructional practices and interactions with students. It is essential that students enter my room feeling safe and know that I will do my best to put their individual needs first. My philosophy informs all aspects of my teaching. With a strong belief in the power of music as a means for self-expression and personal growth, I strive to create a nurturing and inclusive environment where students feel safe to explore their musical ideas. Additionally, my philosophy highlights the importance of Social-Emotional Learning, prompting me to create opportunities for students to develop their self-awareness, empathy, and collaboration skills through musical activities. Through active engagement, open dialogue, and a focus on holistic well-being, my philosophy ensures that my teaching fosters a love for music, promotes personal growth, and cultivates a sense of community

within the classroom. From my time at Kansas State, I have developed into an educator that attempts to emphasize the importance of allowing students to express their need for special considerations. When students feel safe and know that they can communicate their needs, they become more knowledgeable about their emotions. In turn, I think many students who feel safe and know they are allowed to take a moment to reregulate on bad days, become more expressive musicians.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans

I used the following lessons in beginning band classes. These students were in fifth and sixth grade. This is my first year in the district, and I noticed inconsistencies with my second-year students playing notes at full value. The first- and second-year students were combined in the same class for the first part of the school year, so over time, the first-year players picked up on the habits of the second-year students and did not hold notes to the correct length. I thought it might be beneficial to add a few extra lessons focusing on rhythms, adding the pulse while counting, and playing to emphasize the length of the note.

Lesson Plan 1

Oklahoma State Music Standard (2020)

The lesson uses the following standards from the Oklahoma State Department of Education's 2020 Music Standards (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2020). Develop strategies and evaluate success using feedback from ensemble peers and other sources to address challenges in a varied music repertoire.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

The first- and second-year players were combined in the same class at the beginning of the year through the third quarter. Most students knew how to count rhythms with the Eastman counting system. The second-year students were more comfortable than the first. The first-year students had used this system in their elementary general music classes, but not as much as they would have if they were in a band class. From the beginning of the year, students displayed difficulty playing quarter and half notes at full value and keeping the eighth note steady.

Rehearsal Objective

The rehearsal objective for this lesson is to introduce the breath impulse and begin using the method book *Teaching Rhythm Logically* (Potter Williams, 2016). Students will work through rhythm examples from Chart 1 of *Teaching Rhythm Logically* (ibid.). Students will count the example, repeat using the "ta" syllable, and finally play the example using a concert B-flat or a concert B-flat chord. After the first lesson, the class works on new examples from their method book. Upon encountering a new example, we used the counting method we had just learned to work through the sight-reading. The goal would be that, over time, students will begin to feel more confident with reading new music and have the knowledge for isolating and breaking down problem spots during individual practice sessions.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

- Informal assessment of student engagement with the new information based on what I see and hear while students count and play
- Have students answer questions
- Have volunteers count measures by themselves
- Have students raise their fingers, rating themselves 1-5 depending on how comfortable they feel with the material. A rating of one would indicate a low comfort level, and a rating of five would suggest the highest comfort level

Instructional Materials, Resources, and Technologies

- Smartboard at the front of the classroom to project Chart 1 rhythm sheet
- *Teaching Rhythms Logically* (ibid.)

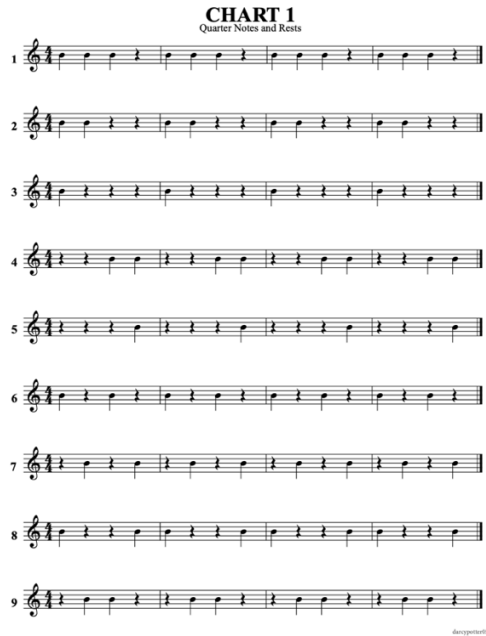


Figure 1 (Potter Williams, 2016, p. 78)

Lesson Plan 1 Reflections

This was my first year at this school district, students had been introduced to the Eastman counting system by the former band director, but there were some inconsistencies in note length that I wanted to correct as quickly as I could. I decided to introduce the impulse to the system of counting they already knew to hopefully help them feel and hear the difference in note length. Due to this, I wanted to make sure the students fully understood the Eastman counting system and to introduce the pulse on the subdivision of the beat.

During this lesson, I also introduced the process I use for sight-reading new examples out of the method book. I learned about this process through those who created the *Teaching Rhythms Logically* (Potter Williams, 2016) method. This process includes the following steps: count it, "ta" it, say it, airplay it, and play it. Since my band classes are heterogenous, I will skip the "say it" portion once they have learned their note names. When I do use this step, I have all

instruments in the same key and read out their note names. The goal is for students to know this process so well that during class, all they need is four counts to introduce the next step before they proceed to the next step virtually without stopping. My goal is that by following this process, students will begin to feel comfortable with learning new music by themselves and know how to break the piece down when they encounter something new.

Overall, students did well with Chart 1 (shown in Figure 1) with counting and adding the pulse, but when it came to playing a given rhythm line on the chart, students would begin to rush. They were not internalizing the beat. The students were not playing the quarter notes to the full length of the note. Since they were playing the quarter notes too short, once it was time to come back in after a rest, they jumped ahead of the beat by not accounting for the missing portion of the note before playing after the rest.

I expected this since the students have tended to do this, so I wanted to see if teaching to count with the addition of the breath impulse would help this. I noticed the most improvement in my fifth-grade percussion section. I could see they were counting as they were playing and tapping their toes, but they were not feeling the entire beat. I told them that while counting in their head, I wanted them to imagine that breath impulse we just used while counting the chart. After several attempts, all students played with the correct length on their quarter notes.

In the following days, after lesson one and before I began lesson two, the classes reviewed parts of the lesson and played a couple of the rhythm lines as a part of our daily warm-up. To help train their ears to correct incorrect note length, I would also play listening games with them where they would tell me which one they thought was correct or incorrect. One of the more fun activities I had students do following lesson one was rhythm bingo. Each student was given a bingo card with four counts of quarter notes, quarter rest, and some eighth note patterns.

I would give them the following rhythm by asking a student to demonstrate how to count and play the rhythm in front of them. This allowed me to listen to and correct each student as we played the game. The students enjoyed the chance to choose one of the coveted prizes in my treasure box full of small candies and water bottle stickers.

Part of my growth as an educator through my time at Kansas state was learning about the connection to music and Social-Emotional Learning. I believe that being in a performing ensemble gives students a chance to express themselves, allowing them a chance for a creative outlet. Through this lesson, students also noticed the change in their performing and they began to think more positively of themselves as time passed. The simple task of learning how to count and play notes to the fullest length helped them not rush and play in a more musical way. Their mindset seemed to change as they experienced more success on their instrument. I try to encourage students to understand that they will not always be successful on the first few attempts. Too often students let themselves feel defeated before giving any amount of quality effort. My goal is to help students experience what it is like to push themselves past the feeling of defeat and realize that once they start giving more effort towards performing that they will begin to experience more success. This is one way I am attempting to use the Attribution theory with my classes.

Lesson Plan 2

Oklahoma State Music Standard (2020)

The lesson uses the following standards from the Oklahoma State Department of Education's 2020 Music Standards (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2020). Develop strategies and evaluate success using feedback from ensemble peers and other sources to address challenges in a varied music repertoire.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students have previously learned the Eastman counting system with quarter notes and rest with a pulse added to the subdivision of the quarter note. Students have applied this knowledge to work on examples in the method book in the days following lesson one.

Rehearsal Objective

During this lesson, students were introduced to half notes and half rests. Students were asked how many pulses they should add to the half note. The answer was the beat number plus three pulses. Students were then expected to count the rhythm with the correct length of half note before moving to the next step of playing the rhythm line.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

- Informal assessment of student engagement with the new information based on what I see and hear while students count and play
- Have students answer questions about the number of beats and pulses
- Have volunteers count measures by themselves
- Have students perform a "down the row"
 - Each student performs a measure followed immediately by the student sitting next to them
- Have students raise their fingers, rating themselves one to five depending on how comfortable they feel with the material. A rating of one would indicate a low comfort level, and a rating of five would suggest the highest comfort level

Instructional Materials, Resources, and Technologies

- Smartboard at the front of the classroom to project the Chart 1 (see Figure 1) rhythm sheet

- *Teaching Rhythms Logically* (Potter, 2010)



Figure 2 Chart 2 (Potter Williams, p. 81)

Lesson Plan 2 Reflections

Lesson 2 went very well, as the students were accustomed to Chart 1 (see Figure 1). The first step was establishing how many pulses a student would have on the half notes. They responded well once the students were past the silliness of how the half notes sound when counted. By the time classes were introduced to lesson two, students were accustomed to the sight-reading process and counting routine with the newly added pulse on the quarter note.

The sixth-grade class struggled the most with the half note. They habitually did not play half notes and whole notes at full value. Adding the pulse when counting seemed to help them feel how long they needed to play. They seemed to have what I call a light-bulb moment. We did several rounds of counting a single measure, followed immediately by playing the same measure. This helped them feel the difference between how long they count the half note versus how long they play. Breaking it down to one measure made it easier for the students to compare counting

and playing. After attempting to play a rhythm line with the metronome the first couple of times, they adjusted their note length. They were able to hear how the length of the half notes they were playing was not the note the full length. As they were more aware of the metronome, they worked to lengthen the note to a satisfactory length.

After completing Lesson 1 and Lesson 2, students began to correct inconsistencies on their own, helping their classmates if they noticed a mistake. The interaction between students was positive and did not end with students getting upset from being corrected. During the learning process, the biggest change for the students to get accustomed was using the impulse, especially on longer notes. It was exciting to notice that students were helping each other through this process by helping their classmates remember how many pulses they should use and some students even used their hands to indicate the down and up movement a tapping toe would make while playing a note by that length. Compared to the first few weeks of school, where students would get defensive if even I gave them guidance, seeing the students engage in this amount of cooperation with each other makes me think that some of the Social-Emotional skills that have been taught through the year could be a contributing factor to the respect being shown to fellow classmates.

Another way I attempt to connect with students is by passing out entrance slips. The concept came from the book *The Mindful Music Classroom* (Hart, 2022). Students circle the note on the scale that indicates their current mood (see Figure 3). By doing this, I am better able to gauge which students might need more support throughout the class. If a student turns a card in that catches my attention by either circling the note that indicates they are extremely upset or by adding a note on the back, I can talk to that student before class begins to see if they need to speak to a trusted adult or time in my calm corner before joining class. I have found that by

having students fill out these slips, I am able to make connections with students by showing that I truly care about their emotions and wellbeing.

On a Scale from 1 to 8

NAME _____ CLASS _____

Circle the note that best describes how you are feeling now.



Feeling great— ready to work!	Struggling but can focus.	Extremely upset— cannot focus.
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Figure 3 (Hart, 2022)

Chapter 3 - Reflections

In February of 2021, I told my husband I wanted to start my master's degree. I had not been planning to go back to school as I was happy with having my bachelor's degree, but one day I just decided that this was something I wanted to pursue my master's. This decision was so entirely out of the blue that I even surprised myself. When people ask me why I returned to school, I tell them various reasons. I have told people I wanted to show my daughters that education is essential, and maybe one day, they will follow in my footsteps. I would also sometimes tell people that it was a goal I decided to set for myself. Regardless of my reason, I have been delighted with my decision to begin this journey three years ago.

My mindset was one of the most significant changes in my teaching while attending Kansas State. Before beginning my master's, I struggled with wondering whether I had what it would take to be able to complete graduate courses. I was very nervous about beginning the courses, thinking I would not be ready. Upon attending my first summer term, I got to know the professors and other students and more about the curriculum. Learning about and listening to the views of the other students helped me realize that we are on more of a level playing field than I had realized. Through the next two summers, I started to gain more confidence in myself as a music educator and think of myself less as an imposter. This confidence carried over into the classroom, and I could tell the difference in how I approached my students, peers, and my curriculum.

I contribute how I have changed and reflect upon myself as an educator to a change in my mindset. In Theories of Music Education, we learned about various learning theories, and Growth Mindset seemed to resonate with me. I have several posters around my room that correlate with Growth Mindset. Part of my teaching that I have always tried to incorporate is that

mistakes happen, but how we recover is what matters. I have encountered several students who seem to break down when they feel like they might make a mistake. The age of beginning band students is a sensitive time given that many of these students are preteens, and they are acutely aware of what their peers might think or do if they "fail." As an educator, I have made it my goal to help students learn that they are welcome to make mistakes, not only in my class but in other aspects of their lives.

Another thing I learned in Theories of Music Education was about Attribution Theory. Part of the class included a project where we were assigned a theory to research and present to the class. The theory I was given was Attribution Theory. I was pleasantly surprised once I began my research that I also seemed to connect to this theory. Attribution Theory explains how a person attributes success to either luck or hard work. The goal as an educator is to have your students realize that success generally comes from hard work and the amount of time committed to reaching their goals. I think this theory is especially easy to connect to music because it is well-known that when learning a new instrument, that practice is pivotal. I have observed that some students are accustomed to being successful in other subjects or activities without much effort then once they begin learning an instrument and do not experience the same success that these students have contributed their lack of success to the amount of talent they may possess as opposed to the amount of effort they need to put into the task. To battle this mindset, I have used the idea of "the power of yet." It is an idea shared in class from another student. I especially liked the concept of the power of yet and how it is a great extension to the Attribution Theory. When my students start to get frustrated and say they are not able to play something. I tell them they must end that statement with the word yet. I feel like this helps students learn that just

because they are not able to perfect something in a few attempts, that it is important to remember the word yet.

Intro to Graduate Studies and Research in Music Education helped me twofold by allowing me to choose a topic of interest to use for assignments. With this, I was able to research and learn about the connections between music and Social-Emotional Learning and possible ways to use it in the classroom. Due to my research, I was able to implement a few different activities or elements of Social-Emotional Learning in my classroom.

One of the changes I made was a daily check-in that students would turn in as they arrived (see Figure 3). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the idea to use daily check-in slips with my students came from the book *The Mindful Music Classroom* (Hart, 2022). Using the check-in slips served two purposes: how daily attendance was recorded, and upon filling out the card, I could read through their responses to get an idea of what mood each student was experiencing. The students were instructed to circle one of the notes on the scale, each note indicating different mood, and to feel free to include a note on the back to be read by me if they decided they would like to share more, regardless of whether it was something good or bad they wanted to share. If students indicated that their mood was close to the top of the scale or extremely upset, sometimes including a note, I could offer them time in the classroom calm corner or the opportunity to talk to a trusted adult. This helped students feel validated, and their moods regulated quickly once class began. When the student took a moment in the calm corner, I allow them as much time as they need, joining the class once they felt ready. Fortunately, the use of the calm corner was not taken advantage of, and all the students used the area for what it was intended and did not use the area as an excuse to get out of class or overstay their welcome.

Other Social-Emotional activities included discussing how music made students feel. This activity was intended to help expand students' emotional vocabulary beyond the simple sad and happy. Students also discussed how they believed the composer would want them to perform the piece to convey that feeling. I think this activity helped students expand their vocabulary but also helped students connect to the music in a way they had never experienced before.

Another class that affected my teaching was Organization and Administration. The first assignment for this class was to read the book *Leadership Lessons from Bill Snyder* (Shoop et al., 1999). The book detailed how head Kansas State football coach Bill Snyder helped turn around the football program to benefit the whole university. A large portion of coach Snyder's plan for the program was to create valuable goals for the football program, himself as a coach, the other coaches, and his players. I was very interested in this aspect because I also try to emphasize program and individual goals for my students. I was impressed by the part of the book where it stated that coach Snyder would meet with his players and coaches individually practically every day to check on the progress of their goals. Although I was impressed with this fact, I also wondered how feasible it would be to meet with all students individually daily as the only band director in the program amid my other responsibilities. I plan to have students set goals for themselves and the program. I plan to split the group into two and meet with them bi-weekly. I hope this will allow me to have the chance to manage the time given appropriately and still can meet with students and discuss the progress of their goals. Through this process, I hope to increase accountability across the ensemble.

In Literature Analysis, we learned about and studied several pieces. We learned how to take our analysis and categorize what we learned from the score into a graph. Using this graph analysis helped me in how I approached studying scores before handing them out to the students.

Taking the time to take a deeper dive into the music before reading the piece with a class, has helped me learn how to try to figure out what areas will probably need more isolation than other sections. Literature Analysis has helped me learn how to break a score in the smaller parts so that I can try to know what problems might arise before they happen.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, I used a teaching method to try to help students learn about correct length to notes. The approaches and techniques I used during my lessons were a culmination of what I had learned for the past two years. I used the method book I did, because students had shown that they had knowledge of correct note lengths and were able to read the rhythms correctly, but but they struggled playing notes the correct length. I decided to use the book *Teaching Rhythm Logically* (Potter Williams, 2016) with the Eastman counting method. By doing this, I was able to use the pulse to help students be rhythmically accurate than they had been before.

Three years ago, I started this journey with a split-second decision. The changes I have made as an educator and what I have learned throughout the past three years are immeasurable. The changes that I have listed above are just a part of the more significant changes that have taken place in my teaching. There are so many more areas that I have grown through this process. I could not be the educator I am today without the experiences I have had while at Kansas State.

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