

Utilizing pre-teaching strategies in the orchestral classroom

by

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Abstract

The lessons presented in this report are focused on improved lesson planning and pre-teaching strategies. The goal of these lessons was to increase students' success at sight-reading as well as pre-teach necessary concepts and techniques before the introduction of a piece. There are many variants of pre-teaching strategies that cover the vast areas of music and teaching, but specifically the ones in these lessons are centered on creating music within a specific key, the K-T-T-K-M sight-reading process, and rhythm reading in 3/8. These strategies have helped my students grow in a variety of ways, specifically in building independence and self-sufficiency as a music student. They have also given students a chance to see that there are many ways in which you can be a successful musician outside of the performance aspect of making music.

When I began my master's degree, one of my personal goals was to fill in the gaps in my learning and run more efficient and effective rehearsals with students. I found myself teaching in a program with high achieving musicians with a lot of talent and felt like I was doing a disservice to my students for not being able to hold the most effective rehearsals. My entire classroom routine has changed drastically since beginning the MME program. I wanted to get the most out of each lesson, spend less time having to teach the "basics," and make sure that the instruction students were receiving from me would ultimately give them the skills to be independent and lifelong musicians. I believe the information I have gained from my advanced rehearsal techniques and literature analysis classes have greatly aided me in my music selection, score study, and lesson preparation process. The upper and low strings pedagogy classes have helped merge the gaps in my learning and increased my confidence teaching instruments that are not my main instrument. Finally, the theories of music teaching and organization and administration of a school music program courses has given me a chance to reflect and brainstorm ways of making

my program more authentically me and continue to help me create a safe and welcoming classroom for my students to learn. Overall, the biggest takeaway is that I feel more prepared as an educator, I feel like I am able to serve my students in the way they deserve, and I have continued to grow and a person, musician, and educator.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this report to my students. If it were for their brightness, curiosity, and love for music, I would not be where I am today. Thank you for being the reason I come into work every day. As always, it's a great day to be a Lion!

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Throughout my life I have been asked this question, “If money were no issue, what would you do with your life?” My typical answer is that I would travel, learn about world music and culture, and study music and music making around the world. I believe that students should have opportunities in their life to find their passions and interests and be given chances to pursue those passions. I see students come in and out of my classroom every day with different dreams and aspirations for their lives, each one with big dreams and no limits. For students, formal education serves many wonderful purposes, it allows students to explore career fields, teaches them fundamental skills to be a successful adult and citizen of our country, and can provide them with opportunities and experiences that can impact them for the rest of their lives. What seems to be missing and what most school mission statements, goals, achievements, and objectives are missing, is passion. Why do schools not emphasize finding activities and careers around what students are passionate about?

As students begin their freshmen year, they are being tailored and groomed to enter the workforce. They participate in mandatory programs that have students exploring and narrowing down career fields. Students start preparing for these careers by specializing the courses they take in high school, sometimes sooner, and when they are ready to graduate, many are scared and uncertain about their future. As educators, we teach them a myriad of skills that allow them to withstand the rigor and storms that they will face outside of high school, but we do not teach them to seek happiness or find passion in life. We teach them how to cope and deal with their emotions, but we do not teach them how to pursue the fundamentals that make life worth living – joy, laughter, love, and passion. We should be teaching students how to find joy in their life and to find a path in life that brings them the most happiness, not just one that provides a specific set

of skills to hopefully find a job after high school. When you have those life fundamentals, everything else in life improves; from peer-to-peer relationships, work performance, and physical and mental health. There have been numerous studies recently about adolescent anxiety, depression, and suicidal behavior where we are seeing an alarming increase in the number of students dealing with these difficult and debilitating mental health disorders (Dirks, 2020). There are many factors that contribute to these changes, but I cannot help but think that perhaps our current model of education is playing a key factor in the rise of these statistics. We have to do better to serve all areas of our student's health, interests, and passions.

Helping students find something they are passionate about is why I chose music education as my career field. Music is one of few areas of a student's formal education that allows them to explore a potential life passion. While music has many benefits to increasing a student's performance in other areas of learning, I have not had a student choose to join orchestra in order to do better on their math tests. They did not choose to play the cello because in the 6th grade because they thought it would look good on a college resumé. Music was something that they were interested in, curious about, and perhaps even passionate about; and in the very simplest terms it was at least cool. Much like the philosophers Bennet Reimer and David Elliott, I believe that music serves to build the whole human and develops within us the ability to unlock a part of who we are in a way that nothing else can (Elliott, 1995; Reimer, 1989). It also allows us to build deeper connections within our own culture and creates opportunities for students to create meaningful connections with people of other cultures. Estelle Jorgenson said it beautifully when she wrote that music can transcend cultural boundaries and bind us to a particular social group that outsiders just cannot fully understand (Jorgensen, 1997). To even write about the wealth of experiences, opportunities, and happiness that music has brought me within my short

lifetime would take much more time than this essay would allow. As a teacher, I get to see these same opportunities for joy and passion ignited in my students. My classroom serves as a place for students to express and emote in a way that other standard classrooms cannot provide. It challenges them to not only perform at a high level, but also challenges them to be their best selves. They get the opportunity to fail and the opportunity to overcome. They have the chance to express their emotions through music. It encourages leadership and responsibility, while also taking ownership of the product they are producing. It is sharing the most intimate and deepest parts of ourselves with others, without saying a single word. This is why music is necessary in schools, because there is not another class that provides that same opportunity for students. In a society where our youth are struggling, music is the outlet they need to be successful, sane, and a happy and passionate member of our society and culture.

Education is so important for our society to continue and function. To be able to think critically and make informed decisions for ourselves about our own lives is a fundamental right that our country provides. We are shaping and molding these students to be functioning members of our society, but we are doing them a great disservice by limiting their ability to find their own passion and interests in life. The classes that allow students to explore these deep innerworkings of their lives are seen as extra-curricular activities and optional. Music should be mandatory and at the heart of every districts education curriculum so that we can aide our students in finding their passions and interests, so when they are asked the question “If money were no issue, what would you do with your life?”, they can confidently say that they are doing exactly what they want to do and that their occupation is an extension of their passions and interests they have always had in life. Only then will we be giving these students what they really need from their education – joy, laughter, love, and passion.

The lessons presented in this report align with my philosophy by showing students participating and enjoying creating music together. I have found that the more proficient I am as an educator; the more students get out of each class period and the greater appreciation they have for music. I believe it is important to be a living example of the possibilities life can bring you when you follow your passion. Music has given me so many opportunities that I do not believe I would have had otherwise and I am grateful for the opportunity to share them with my students.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans

Figure 1: Lesson Plan 1

Lawrence High School Orchestra Lesson Plan Structure

Day & Date: Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Class: Philharmonic 2nd Hour

Standards: 1- Creating: Cr.1.N, 2 – Performing: Pr.1.P, Pr.3.Ac., Pr.4.I, Pr.4.P

Goal: To warm-up for our contest pieces with a creating A Major activity that also works on tuning chords.

Essential Question (s): We can create music by changing dynamics in the Key of A Major. We can play a 2-octave scale in the Key of A Major. We can work towards proper left- and right-hand technique.

Warm-up:

Scale & Arpeggio:

Key: A Major

8ves: 2 Octaves

Alterations: Half Notes, no repeated notes

Technique:

Strategy or Resource for teaching:

Habits of a Successful String Musician pg. 18

Passage Work:

1. 3 Minutes: 2 octave A Major Scale
2. 3 Minutes: 2 Octave A Major Scale Arpeggio
3. 8 Minutes: Tuning Chords Exercise
4. 15 Minutes: Beethoven Allegretto

Rehearsal Methods:

1. Explain instructions. Run scale 2x through. 2nd time fix intonation issues. Play it in a round 2x.
2. Explain special fingerings for low strings and violas. Give students time to figure it out on their own. Run arpeggio 2x.
3. Run tuning chords 2x through. Ask students what dynamics they would add and change to the tuning chord exercise. Talk through any technique difficulties that might arise with the dynamics they chose.
4. Starting at mm. 52 – A Major Section

What were your goals? My goals for this lesson were to implement some tuning and creating pre-teaching strategies for improving intonation in our A Major section of contest music. I incorporated a simple creating activity to get students engaged in the lesson and preparing to make this concept more complicated in future lessons.

What did the students learn? Students practiced A major scales, arpeggios and their specific fingerings, dove further into fixing intonation issues in A Major, and reinforced the basic dynamic creation and what they must do to perform those particular dynamics.

What instructional strategies did you employ? For this lesson I used cues, questioning, and prior knowledge accessing. I also utilized hands-on learning, direct instruction, modeling (not see in videos), and some student self-assessment.

What assessments did you use? I used informal aural and visual assessments as a teacher and some informal and quick student self-assessment.

How will you continue to adjust this instruction moving forward? I would perhaps reduce the variety of activities. I think with the two-octave scale twice through, then twice through in a round, the arpeggio twice through, and then the tuning chord activity, that was a lot of warm-up for the A-Major section. I think doing one of these activities or two would be better use of time in the future.

How did this instruction expand your thinking and enhance your teaching practice? I think a quick exercise like this that utilizes the creativity section of music standards is important. I think this is an area that I overlook quite a bit as an educator because I assume it will take up more time that I feel I cannot sacrifice, but this exercise proved that I can incorporate it in small sections over time. It was great seeing students get excited about creating music and giving them opportunities to explore an area of music that might become a future passion of theirs.

Figure 2: Lesson Plan 2

Lawrence High School Orchestra Lesson Plan Structure	
Day & Date: May 18, 2022	Class: Symphonic 3 rd Hour
Standards: 1- Creating: Cr.1.I, 2, Cr.3.I, Cr.4.I – Performing: Pr.1.Ac, Pr.3.Ac, Pr.4.I, Pr.4.P	
Goal: To warm-up in G Major before sight-reading Don Quixote Suite.	
Essential Question (s): We can create music by changing rhythm and dynamics in the Key of G Major. We can play a 2-octave scale in the Key of G Major. We can work together to solve technique issues that might arise with our composition.	
Warm-up: Scale: Key: G Major 8ves: 2 Octaves Alterations: Half Notes, no repeated notes	Technique: Strategy or Resource for teaching: Habits of a Successful String Musician pg. 16
Passage Work:	Rehearsal Methods:
1. 2 Minutes: 2 octave G Major Scale	1. Run scale 2x through. No issues anticipated.
2. 3 Minutes: 2 Octave G Major Scale Arpeggio	2. Run arpeggio. Work the last 8ve note by note to check for understanding. Run arpeggio again.
3. 10 Minutes: Tuning Chords Exercise	3. Run tuning chords 2x through with no changes. Ask students what dynamics they would add and change to the tuning chord exercise. Ask students what rhythmic changes they would like to see made to the exercise.
4. 10 Minutes: Don Quixote Suite: Rocinante's Gallop.	4. Sight-read using KTTKM System. Evaluate qualities we like and dislike.

What were your goals? My goals for this lesson were to prepare students to sight-read the first movement of the Don Quixote Suite arrangement we were playing as well as further advance the lesson that I had taught previously. While this was a different class, each class did the same beginning lesson, which was lesson number one listed above.

What did the students learn? Students reviewed the G major scale and arpeggio as well as accessed prior knowledge regarding specific notations in music.

What instructional strategies did you employ? For this lesson I used cues, questioning, and prior knowledge accessing. I also utilized hands-on learning, direct instruction, modeling (not see in videos), student self-assessment, and effective questioning.

What assessments did you use? I used questioning, informal aural and visual assessments as a teacher and some informal and quick student self-assessment.

How will you continue to adjust this instruction moving forward? We started off with creating dynamics for the tuning exercise and then moved towards changing things rhythmically. I think depending on the class I would give parameters for specific rhythms, but I knew this class would do well without the need for such supports. In addition to this I think I could reduce the time this exercise took by having pre-filled dynamics and then provide tasks or questions that I wanted them to achieve or answer. For example, coming up with a specific bowing that would fit the dynamics listed.

How did this instruction expand your thinking and enhance your teaching practice? This exercise was a great way of quizzing my students on specific notations without planning on doing so. I think I could use something like this in the future for a final in class and students have to arrange or compose their own short melody using specific criteria would be a fun and engaging activity for them, but a way of creative assessing for me.

Figure 3: Lesson Plan 3

Lawrence High School Orchestra Lesson Plan Structure

Day & Date: May 18, 2022

Class: Philharmonic 2nd Hour

Standards:

Goal: To warm-up in G Major before sight-reading Don Quixote Suite and pre-teach rhythms in 3/8 time signature.

Essential Question (s): We can play a 2-octave scale in the Key of G Major. We can read complex rhythms in the 3/8 time signature. We can evaluate music based on a set of criteria before sight-reading to establish understanding of a composition.

Warm-up:

Scale:

Key: G Major

8ves: 2 Octaves

Alterations: Half Notes, no repeated notes

Technique:

Strategy or Resource for teaching:

Habits of a Successful String Musician pg. 16

Passage Work:

1. 4 Minutes: 2 octave G Major Scale
2. Use KTTKM(M) system for Sight-reading Don Quixote Suite: Rocinante's Gallop
3. Pre-teach tricky rhythms in Rocinante's Gallop
4. 10 Minutes: Don Quixote Suite: Rocinante's Gallop.

Rehearsal Methods:

1. Run scale 2x through. Do again in a round 2x through. No issues anticipated.
2. Key: G Major, Time Signature: 3/8, Tempo: Allegretto = Moderately Fast, kick your bum, Road Map: Repeat to 33 from 1st ending at 41 and 2nd ending at 42. D.C. al Fine (To the top and play to the Fine in end of 32). Miscellaneous: Nothing anticipated
3. Run through 6 tricky rhythms found in Don Quixote suite prior to sight-reading.
4. Sight-read using piece. Evaluate qualities we like and dislike. 1-10 scale of enjoyment.

What were your goals? My goals for this lesson were to prepare students to sight-read the first movement of the Don Quixote Suite and to pre-teach the 3/8 rhythms present in this movement.

What did the students learn? Students learned about 3/8 rhythm and how to apply what we already know about 6/8 time signature to 3/8 time signature. We also reinforced basic music theory and examining a piece before sight-reading it.

What instructional strategies did you employ? For this lesson I used some discovery based learning, direct instruction, hands-on learning, and cues, questioning, and activating prior knowledge.

What assessments did you use? I used questioning, and informal visual and oral assessments.

How will you continue to adjust this instruction moving forward? I would have liked to have the rhythms on the board before introducing the piece. I think that would have saved time and allowed me to move through the lesson quicker. This is the middle of 3 back-to-back classes so sometimes the set-up from one ensemble to the next is messier than I would like it to be. I think I would also like to have students provide more answers in regards to tempos and what the definition is of many of the Italian words.

How did this instruction expand your thinking and enhance your teaching practice? The pre-teaching strategies have made a huge difference in the success of learning music quickly and being able to move from the sight-reading process to expression and music making. These strategies have given students opportunities to practice more efficiently, analyze music on a deeper level, and allows them to build the skills necessary to guide them into independent learning. That is one of my goals as an educator, to give students the tools needed to continue to grow, learn, and make music long after they have left my classroom.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

This master's program was genuinely a dream come true for me. I spent many years in toil not knowing when the right time would come for me to begin or feeling anxious just to begin, but I am so grateful for having done so. The program began during the first COVID-19 summer and I remember sitting in classes thinking about how I would alter my teaching to best serve my students in an online environment. The lesson that we all learned is that we would be teaching completely different individuals when we returned to in-person learning. While this was a tumultuous time for many, I am grateful for the opportunity to change classroom routines and ideas with little concern from students. So much had shifted and changed in education that the details and organization of my classroom did not have the same impact as it would have prior to the pandemic. I have implemented so many changes to my teaching that have shown some beautiful and positive results in learning and relationship building with my students. The biggest additions would be altering my classroom routine, the implementation of various pre-teaching strategies, greater focus towards student independence, and building a meaningful and safe musical environment for my students to grow.

My classroom routine is now based on the “5 course meal” plan that Dr. Dirks discussed with us in the Advanced Rehearsal Techniques course. Students enter my room, we do physical warm-ups that Dr. Cooper spoke about in her Upper Strings Pedagogy class, and then we dive into the other 4 courses of the “meal”. The warm-ups for my class are pre-teaching tidbits that I have chosen from the music we are studying or a technique from various supplemental materials that I have learned about in my lower or upper strings pedagogy classes. These pre-teaching strategies will greatly aid the learning and rehearsing of the music selected. While these ideas were not new to me in concept or theory, they were new to me in application. Finding ways of

efficient score study and preparing lessons and material ahead of time on each piece of music has saved me more time in rehearsal. Students move through music quicker, pick up on the necessary details and techniques faster, and we are able to talk more about the history behind the piece and how we want the piece to be portrayed to our audience. It has also given me more confidence on the podium. I am feeling more prepared, I am working through the details beforehand, and taking time to understand the steps that need to be taken so that I can anticipate errors ahead of time. It has genuinely made me a much better educator all around and it just took some reminders, practice, and practical application to get to this point.

A product of proper planning and pre-teaching strategies has been greater student independence while making music in and outside of the rehearsal setting. I have observed that my students spend less time thinking about the corrections they need to make in their playing and are asking deeper questions about the music. They ask about phrasing, proper techniques to play specific dynamics or articulations, and have grown more knowledgeable in their evaluation and analyzation of pieces of music. This is exciting because I feel like we have genuinely grown together. In addition to this, I am seeing leadership outside of the music making setting. Students are taking initiative to practice together during free time in other classes, they are seeing professional performances together outside of school time, and are asking for ways to become more involved in the program. One of my goals as an educator is to build lifelong learners who have a passion for music and I feel like I am on the right path to achieving that goal.

I have heard from many of my students that the orchestra feels like a family. That they can come into my classroom and feel like they have a safe place to be who they are and participate in something that allows them to let go and find enjoyment in their day. During the pandemic we started doing daily chat questions with students. These questions have found their

way into our weekly rehearsals that we have with students. Occasionally these questions are music related, but many times they are ways that we connect person to person. Students can discover people in the ensemble who have the same passions and interests as they do. Some of the topics that we spoke about in the Organization and Administration of a School Music Program class were around social justice, recruitment, retention, and creating a classroom culture that reflects both the students and the educator. When selecting music, I am more culturally conscious about who has composed and arranged the piece, their intentions and motives for doing so, and also who is benefiting in the arrangement of that particular piece of music. This allows me to provide culturally relevant materials to my students that are authentic and meaningful to the populations that the piece might represent. This allows my students to be seen and gives them a chance to have their culture represented authentically in the classroom. I have also completely changed the way in which I seat students in my ensemble. Previously, I had sat students seated based on playing test scores, but what I found is that this hinders the ensemble as a whole and only continues to perpetuate a classroom environment that caters to students who can afford to take private lessons and participate in additional opportunities that they have been able to afford. While the back of my section is made up of hard-working kids from families that focus more on day to day survival. What I have seen as a result of alternative seating practices is a classroom environment that has students working more collaboratively and giving opportunities to those students who have extra experience and skill a chance to mentor and coach other members of their sections. There was initially some push back from students when introducing alternative seating practices. Kids felt like their hard work would not be recognized or that their families would think less of them if they were seated in the back of the section, but what happened is that nobody said anything. Students were more concerned with making the

ensemble as a whole sound better instead of on their own sound. There were times when it was necessary for the top players to be in the front of the ensemble, but we all learned lessons about the importance of seating for the benefit of everyone, not just the privileged few. When we create classroom environments that benefit all students in the classroom, we create a place for students to feel safe and for them to feel they can be their true and authentic selves. In my opinion, that is one of the most important aspects to being a teacher.

The final and most important skill I gained from my master's degree is learning how to be more confident. Imposter syndrome is something that many people struggle with and I am no stranger to the challenges that come with never feeling like enough. What this program has given me is the opportunity to learn from my mistakes, act in healing and repairing my shortcomings, and to be reminded of all the beautiful aspects of teaching. It has been a gift being able to reflect on my teaching practices and to have taken time to look at ways of being a better practitioner and musician for myself and my students. In summation, this degree has changed almost everything about how I teach and has given me the confidence to be able to say why I teach.

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