

Incorporating music theory in the 7th and 8th grade band class

by

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Abstract

In my 7th and 8th grade band classes, knowledge and understanding of basic music theory concepts was lacking. The purpose of my project is to fill this need. To measure the gap of knowledge my students had, I administered a pre-test that covered topics such as identifying basic music notation and symbols as well as labeling key signatures. During our in-class warm-ups, I dedicated a section of that time to music theory concepts. The lessons included building scales, learning songs by scale degrees, and learning the order of sharps and flats. The goal of these lessons was for students to gain a better understanding of musical terminology and for them to be able to apply those terms and concepts to the pieces they play. As a result of these lessons, students could communicate with me and each other more efficiently, and more peer teaching occurred in the classroom.

During my master's degree, I have been introduced to many different approaches to conducting rehearsals and giving students more opportunities to learn. As a new teacher, I am always searching for ways to improve my teaching and ways to give students a well-rounded music education. In my Rehearsal Techniques class, we extensively discussed different approaches that can be used in class and how fundamental warm-ups are to a productive rehearsal. These discussions allowed me to better understand how to structure my rehearsal and how to make warm-ups beneficial instead of them being seen as a chore to be marked off the list. While working through the units, I found myself utilizing different teaching strategies. Many of the strategies, such as Project Based Learning and peer learning, I learned about in Research class. By having more tactics to use in class, I was able to help students learn in ways that worked better for them. The knowledge I have gained from this program has changed how I run

my classroom and has made me more confident in my teaching, which in turn has made my students more confident.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vi
Table 2.1 Sharps and Flats	8
Table 2.2 Scale Degrees	12
Table 2.3 Peer Teaching.....	13
Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy	1
How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching	4
Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans.....	6
Lesson Plan 1	6
National Music Standards (2014).....	6
Prior Knowledge/Skills	6
Rehearsal Objective.....	7
Assessment of the Rehearsal	7
Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed.....	7
Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies	7
Sharps and Flats Warm-up	7
Lesson Plan 2	8
National Music Standards (2014).....	8
Prior Knowledge/Skills	8
Assessment of the Lesson	9
Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations	9
Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies	9
Scale Degree Warm-up	9
Lesson Plan 3.....	12
National Music Standards (2014).....	12
Prior Knowledge/Skills	12
Rehearsal Objective.....	12
Assessment of the Rehearsal	12
Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed.....	12
Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies	12

Peer Teaching.....	12
Chapter 3 - Reflections.....	17
References	20

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Sharps and Flats	8
Table 2.2 Scale Degrees	12
Table 2.3 Peer Teaching.....	13

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

What is schooling? A large focus of educational institutes is academic achievement of its students. While this should be a component of academia, it should not be the main priority. I think schooling should concern itself more with the social and societal impact it can have on students. Missions of the early school included molding responsible citizens, creating a common culture, and reducing American society's inequalities. There are six main goals that American schools have traditionally been expected to attain. These goals are to provide universal access to free education, to guarantee equal opportunities for all children, to unify a diverse population, to prepare people for citizenship in a democratic society, to prepare people to become economically self-sufficient, and to improve social conditions. Public schools must provide free education to all children that live within their school's boundary no matter their academic record, their discipline record, or their disability. Public schools must guarantee equal opportunity for all children. Public education is an entryway for people of all backgrounds to have the same opportunity. While there are differences between public schools, like the quality of education and funding, every child that attends the same school should receive the same education and educational chances. The third public school goal is to unify a diverse population. The main way schools accomplish this is by teaching students from different socio-economic backgrounds and cultures to respect each other. This respect is meant to foster cooperation and conflict resolution. The next goal of public education is to prepare people for citizenship in a democratic society. Democracy depends on how competent the people are. School teaches students high morals and critical thinking which will help people make informed voting decisions. School helps a democratic society beyond the walls of the school building. People with more education are more likely to participate in elections (Holder, 2006). Supporting public school is a test of

citizenship because it is the people's time, effort, and money that fuels public education. The next goal of schooling is to prepare people to become economically self-sufficient. When children are of a lower economic class, education helps them to get good jobs and reduce wage inequality. Finally, schooling improves social conditions. Education reduces the likelihood of people committing crimes, feeds low-income students, addresses health issues, and lowers the chance that people will struggle with substance abuse (Kober, 2007). Overall, education serves society in multiple ways. I believe schools should still focus on academics, but their main goal should be educating and providing for the entire child.

Music education has been defined as “a wide area of study that includes singing, playing, moving, creating, composing, improvising, and music technology” (Siva et al., 2022, p. 235). While this definition of music education is technically true, music education goes beyond the textbook definition. Music classes teach students more than music, they teach students about themselves. David Elliott (1993) wrote that “self-growth, self-knowledge, and musical enjoyment are the aims of music education overall and the primary goals of every music teaching-learning episode” (p. 83). Music should be an emotional and personal experience for students and should be done for the sake of oneself. Music classes also demand that students use multiple forms of knowledge and present unique challenges to students. To participate in music to its fullest extent, students must have formal music knowledge, informal knowledge (like how their sound blends with other players), and knowledge of cultures and traditions. Music education, in my opinion, embodies the idea of educating the whole child. The goals of schooling are for educators to focus more on the child and not fixate on academic success. The overarching theme of these goals correlates with the goal of music education which is to teach students more than just the knowledge they need to do well academically. By dedicating instruction time to

lessons about cultures, giving students time to reflect, asking open ended questions, and giving students a say in their education, teachers are cultivating an environment that can mold well-rounded people.

I agree with many aspects of Christopher Small's philosophy of music. He believes that directly experiencing music is the key to musical learning. I agree with Small's views on this because there is a difference between knowing about music and doing it. Putting into practice all the lessons students have learned about music is, in my opinion, the best way to gauge whether learning has taken place. Small saw musical performances not as objects but as processes, experiences, and actions. I think a good musical performance should make both audience and performer feel some emotion. Music allows ideas and emotions that are difficult to put into words to be expressed. Small also believed musicking was not about the individual but was about the relationships that are necessary for music making. One individual does not make an ensemble but the relationship that individual has with the rest of the ensemble, both musically and socially, will impact the music experience (Cohen, 2010).

Estelle Jorgensen believes that documents like the Declaration of Independence hold lessons in them that are valuable to music and education. While this idea at first seems to be a far-reaching one, the points that Jorgensen makes are valid ones. For example, when she describes how the unalienable right of life fits into the music classroom, she talks about making lessons exciting, creating an inclusive environment, and allowing students multiple ways to experience music. In my own music classroom, I try to emulate these values that Jorgensen described (Jorgenson, 2010, paras. 2-20). I think it is important for music educators especially to make engaging and engrossing lessons because there are many students who do not see the value in arts education. In my experience, there are students who view their related arts classes as do-

nothing fun classes and while class and learning can be fun, educational value can (and should) be found in these classes. Making the classroom an inclusive environment is necessary for all educators to create, not just music educators. However, as music educators, the students who elect to take our ensemble classes are many times the students who are labeled as weird kids. By building a welcoming environment, we as music educators give these social pariahs a place to feel comfortable.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

For my project, I wanted my lessons to be more interactive. I believe students need to be involved in their music education so they are engaged with the content. What I mean by this is if students are not actively involved in making musical decisions or if they are not given opportunities for collaboration, I think students will begin to just go through the motions of band class. Incorporating dedicated group work, peer teaching, and using an increased amount of active question and answer in my project lessons seemed to keep students focused on what they were learning. I also think these techniques I used helped to create an inclusive classroom environment. Students being comfortable enough to not only answer questions in class but also teach their classmates, is, I think, an indication of a classroom that is inclusive.

As a teacher, I want my students to understand the value of music. In my opinion, music is valuable for the unique lessons that can be learned from music. Music can teach students about themselves. Music allows students to express feelings that are hard to express. I want my students to use music as a creative outlet whether that be through playing instruments, composing, or even making playlists for certain moods or events. In my classroom, I want students to be comfortable and find success in music. Everyone has some sort of musical ability, and I believe that it is my responsibility as a teacher to find what my students will succeed at.

Seeing my students enjoy music and seeing signs that they are learning (like how they talk about music or playing progress) fuels my teaching. I believe teaching should be student-centered and I try and plan my class around the potential accomplishments my students can succeed. Students should be given opportunities to discover answers for themselves and cultivate critical thinking in my students by asking them open ended questions like “How can we make this phrase more musical?” Overall, my goal in teaching is not to create outstanding musicians. While that would be great, I am more focused on helping to create good people who have a respect for music.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans

Understanding music theory is a necessary step of becoming musically literate. I have observed that some of my students were unable to answer basic music theory questions and were also unable to identify musical symbols like clefs, expression markings, rhythms, and notes. This project was developed to fill the gap in knowledge my students had. To begin, I administered a pretest that consisted of matching symbols to their name, building scales, identifying key signatures, and identifying intervals. This assessment determined that most students were severely lacking in their ability to identify key signatures, intervals, and scales. Instead of committing entire class periods to music theory lessons, I decided to create warm-ups that cover these concepts. This way students still learned music theory and had class time left to play concert and festival pieces. The idea is that these music theory warm-ups will enhance students' abilities to play these pieces. Warm-ups used included learning the order of sharps and flats, learning how to name key signatures, identifying common intervals, connecting scale degrees with note names, and learning how to build scales.

Lesson Plan 1

National Music Standards (2014)

MU: Re9.1.5a Evaluate musical works and performances, applying established criteria, and explain appropriateness to the context, citing evidence from the elements of music

MU: Pr4.2.4a Demonstrate understanding of the structure and the elements of music (such as rhythm, pitch, and form) in music selected for performance

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students will need to know what a key signature is.

Rehearsal Objective

Students will be able to identify sharp and flat key signatures.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

Students will be orally assessed during rehearsal by being asked to verbally identify the key signature of the pieces played during rehearsal.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

On the board, the acronym used to remember the order of the sharps and flats will be written.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Needed materials: white board, dry erase markers, and sheet music

Sharps and Flats Warm-up

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
7 minutes	Create a sharps and flats mnemonic device	Creation of mnemonic device to help with memorization	On the board, write the Gb major key signature on both a bass and treble clef staff. As a class, identify in order the flats in this key signature. As the flats are identified, write the note names on the board. Repeat process for F# key signature. Have students create a mnemonic device for the order of sharps and flats.	Students will be able to correctly identify the notes in each key signature and are able to create a mnemonic device with the notes in the correct order.
3 minutes	Share created mnemonic devices and	Application of created sayings	After willing students have shared what they created, write one	Students can identify the keys written on the board and the keys

	use them to identify the accidentals in the key signature		of them on the board for the class to use. Order of flats: Before, Eating, A, Donut, Get, Coffee, First Order of sharps: Fuzzy, Cats, Get Dirty, After Every, Bath Using these sayings, write the keys of Bb and G on the board and have students determine what accidentals are in those keys. Throughout rehearsal, students will identify their key signatures in their concert music.	used in their sheet music.
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Table 2.1 Sharps and Flats

Lesson Plan 2

National Music Standards (2014)

MU: Re9.1.5a Evaluate musical works and performances, applying established criteria, and explain appropriateness to the context, citing evidence from the elements of music

MU: Pr4.2.4a Demonstrate understanding of the structure and the elements of music (such as rhythm, pitch, and form) in music selected for performance

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students will need to know their concert Bb scale

Lesson Objective(s)

Students will be able to connect scale degrees to their notes in the concert Bb scale

Assessment of the Lesson

Students will be orally assessed during rehearsal when given a scale degree to play

Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations

On the board, the concert Bb scale will be written out for each instrument family

Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

Needed materials: white board, dry erase markers, and sheet music

Scale Degree Warm-up

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
2 minutes	Review key signatures and intervals	Measure student understanding of previous lessons and correcting any misconceptions	On the board, have the key of Eb and D drawn. Students will call out what sharps or flats are in the key and what the name of that key signature is. Next, write on the board; draw a staff with the following notes on it: E, G, C, D. Have students first identify each note. When correctly identified, write the letter name under the notes. Then have students find the interval between E and G (third), G and C (fourth), C and	Students will correctly identify key signatures and intervals when called upon.

			D (second), and E and D (seventh).	
5 minutes	Playing a chord using scale degrees	Opportunity for students to make connections between their Bb concert scale notes and scale degrees.	Write a Bb concert scale on the board. Explain to students that each note has a corresponding number. Ex: 1 = C, 2 = D, etc. Have students say what number goes with each note when you point to that note on the board. Have students think about their concert Bb scale and then give each section a scale degree to play. Bb instruments play 5 (G). C instruments play 1 (Bb), and Eb instruments play 3 (B). Give students a few seconds to think about what note they should play, then have the class play the chord. What is the interval between those notes? Draw the triad on the board to help students	Students will be able to correctly play a chord in the key of Bb concert.

			visualize the interval.	
2 minutes	Mystery song	Measure students understanding of scale degrees	On the board, write a sequence of scale degrees. Students must figure out what song is on the board using just scale degrees. For example, 3212333 will be on the board for students to figure out it is “Mary Had a Little Lamb”	Students will identify the song and be able to play it with correct notes
5 minutes	Connecting scale degrees and intervals	Students can practice identifying scale degrees	Have students turn in their warm-up book to exercise 6: essential patterns. Before playing the exercise, have students identify the three scale degrees used (1, 3, 5). Guide students to observe that each note has a skip between them which makes them what interval (a third)? Now have students get out their piece <i>Divergence</i> . Have all students find their measures with the main melody. Are there thirds in	Students will be able to identify the scale degrees used and the common interval used.

			that melody? What are the scale degrees?	
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Table 2.2 Scale Degrees

Lesson Plan 3

National Music Standards (2014)

MU:Re9.1.5a Evaluate musical works and performances, applying established criteria, and explain appropriateness to the context, citing evidence from the elements of music

MU: Pr4.2.4a Demonstrate understanding of the structure and the elements of music (such as rhythm, pitch, and form) in music selected for performance

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students will need to know their concert Bb scale and what scale degrees are.

Rehearsal Objective

Students will be able to use scale degrees to teach their classmates a simple song.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

Students will be orally assessed when they write their song's scale degrees on the board and when they play their peers' songs.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

On the board, the concert Bb scale will be written out for each instrument family.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Needed materials: whiteboard, dry erase markers, and sheet music.

Peer Teaching

Time	Activity	Purpose of Activity	Sequence	Assessment
1 minute	Review scale degrees	Measure student understanding of	Hold up a series of random	Students will play the correct

		previous lessons and correcting any misconception	number of fingers to indicate what scale degree students will play.	note based on the scale degree given.
10 minutes	Peer teaching and ear training	Measure students understanding of scale degrees and their aural skills ability	Remind students of the mystery songs from the week before. Students will break up into groups and be assigned a simple song to figure out the scale degrees that song uses. Give students five minutes to figure out the notes by ear. After five minutes, they may use their beginning band books or their computers to find the notes. Once a group has their notes, have them come up to the board and write their scale degrees for the class. The class must figure out the song. Once all students know the song, the group will teach everyone the rhythm before playing the song.	Students will be able to write out a song using the correct scale degrees and the class will be able to play the song with correct notes

Table 2.3 Peer Teaching

My goals for these warm-ups were to increase my students' understanding of basic music theory. I wanted my students to learn how to identify common music symbols such as key and time signatures, how to read key signatures, how to build scales, and how to identify the interval between notes. The main instructional strategies I used were lectures, didactic questions, and demonstration. There were also some lessons that utilized the strategy of peer teaching. During every lesson, I used oral assessment where I prompted students to answer questions about what was covered during the lesson. For example, when we discussed key signatures in class, students had to immediately apply their knowledge when asked to identify the key signatures in their music. Moving forward, I would like there to be a more seamless connection between the concepts taught in warm-ups to the literature being played. Planning my warm-ups around specifics that are found in our music instead of doing broad, generic warm-ups would be one way I could accomplish this. Doing this instruction made me reevaluate what a band rehearsal can look like. Usually, a band rehearsal would consist of as much playing as possible. While that is important, I learned that I could take time to develop students' skill and knowledge, which may reduce the time they played in class, and still have a meaningful rehearsal. For instance, when I gave my children an opportunity to work in groups and peer teach, they made good use of their time and seemed to enjoy what we were learning.

Overall, students responded positively to the lessons. They enjoyed the moments they could be creative, like making their own mnemonic device, and they enjoyed when they could work with their classmates to complete a task. Students even seemed to enjoy answering my questions and demonstrating that they know what they are talking about. Even some of my quieter students participated in calling out answers because they were excited to know the correct answer. I think through these lessons, my students were able to build confidence in their music

abilities. Students seemed to be more engaged with the music and were playing their parts out more than before we began this project.

There were signs of musical learning during this unit. The first learning I noticed was occurring had to do with key signatures. As we would play our concert pieces, some students would play wrong notes. After the cut off and before I could make corrections, those students would raise their hands and tell me they forgot the key signature. Yes, they are still making note mistakes, but now they know they are making mistakes. Another sign of learning is that students were seeking out knowledge. I would have students ask me to teach them more scales or they would ask me if I could print them a scale sheet. Once students understood scales and how they were built, they became less intimidating and maybe even enjoyable to play and learn. For an overall assessment, I administered a post test that covered the same materials as the pre-test. On the pre-test, I had a few students not earn a double digit score. On the post test, every student scored above at least a ten. Although some students still scored very low, they did improve their score. This post test also showed that my 7th grade band class had a better understanding of concept than my 8th grade band class. The average 7th grade score was 42/50 while the average 8th grade score was 38/50. On the pre-test, the opposite was true with 8th grade during better on average than 7th grade. Some factors I think contributed to these scores are that 8th grade band is at 7:30 in the morning so students might not have been tired when taking their post test. Another possible factor was that the day they 8th grade took their test, they had a field trip that day so students might not have been focused. Finally, the last factor that could have contributed to these scores is that the test was administered by a substitute teacher. Luckily, the substitute was someone with a background in music and they were able to review before the test, but it is

possible that the substitute did not review everything, or the students felt uncomfortable asking an unfamiliar teacher questions.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

During my time in the Kansas State Masters' Program, I have been introduced to many new ways of thinking. The different class topics, the readings, and even my classmates have made me evaluate how I structure my classes and evaluate what I want my students to take away from my classes. While I still think I have so much to learn and improve on, this program has positively impacted my teaching. My teaching style and how I plan lessons have changed because of the information and knowledge that this program has provided me.

Although in my county I am considered a veteran teacher, at only four years in I do not feel like a veteran teacher. When I hear that phrase, I think of educators that have solidified their style of teaching and are confident in what they do. I feel like I am still very much in development. While in this program, I have learned about different instructional techniques that I did not learn about in my undergraduate studies, and I was also given a reason to research additional information about techniques I was already familiar with. My undergraduate program did not have a class dedicated to general music techniques besides elementary method. Therefore, when I got my current job and had to teach three sections of general music, I had no idea where to begin. Because of this, my first two years of teaching were almost exclusively lecture based. Now, I use a wider variety of instructional techniques in my lessons. David Elliott (1995) believed that all music students ought to be taught in the same basic way: through performing, improvising, composing, arranging, conducting, and listening (p. 40). In my class, I was truly only doing one of these and that was listening. I started doing more project-based learning in my class that included students doing aleatoric composing, body percussion composing, creating background tracks for rap songs, and writing lyrics to a song based on the background music provided. There are aspects such as arranging and conducting that I have not

yet incorporated into my teaching but finding a way to effectively incorporate those into lessons allows me to do more research and experimentation. This year, I started integrating opportunities to peer teaching in my class. In his book *Music Matters*, Elliott (1995) includes a quote from Professor Israel Scheffler that reads, " ... if a student knows how to make something, he or she understands it" (p. 173). If students can accurately explain a concept to their peers, they are proficient in that topic. I have also observed that some students learn better when it is a peer teaching them. Examples of peer teaching we used in class include students giving presentations on their favorite artist, conductor for the day, and small group activities.

Learning about the different theorists impacted how I plan lessons because it made me consider all the different ways students might learn best and how what I do in the classroom impacts what happens outside of the classroom. Christopher Small's interpretation of musicking focused largely on building community (Odendaal et al., 2013). This past year in my band classes, I tried giving students more say in what music we played and how we played that music. When selecting festival music, I had a list of pieces the students could vote on. We listened to recordings of all the options, and students took notes about what they liked or disliked about that piece. Students then presented their reasoning for their top selection to the class. Many students used music specific terms in the argument (such as liking the main melody or commenting on specific rhythmic figures). Another way I tried building community in class was by having band classes lead themselves. I work primarily as a middle school band director, but I am also the assistant director at the high school. Because of this, I sometimes must go to high school rehearsals in the middle of the school day and my classes are covered by other non-music teachers. On those days, I had the class run rehearsal themselves. As a class, they selected who they thought the best leader would be and we practiced rehearsing without me. They had to play

through all the concert pieces and then decide if it was a good run through or not. If as a class they decided they could play that piece better, they rehearsed it again. Both the students and the coverage teachers would report back to me and 90% of the time, the reviews were very positive. Since I helped them create these independent skills, I have students willingly come in during their intramural time and run rehearsals on their own because they want to and have gained the ability to do so. David Elliott (1995) thought students need to learn how to assess their own musical thinking. I have students critique their playing and their performances whether that be with a formal concert critique worksheet or if it is just asking them their opinion on how we just played that section of music. Both philosophers (and undoubtedly the other philosophers were discussed in class) influenced how I plan lessons because I know think about how these lessons will build relationships in my class and about how these lessons can cultivate self-growth in my students.

I am extremely satisfied with my time at Kansas State University. I still have much to learn and improve on, but I believe I am a better educator. I feel like this year especially, I have less students telling me they hate music class and some who tell me that music is their favorite class. While I would not complain if every student's favorite class was my music class, that is not the goal I am working towards. My goal is for every student to see the value in music and at least find one musical thing they enjoy. My semesters spent in this master's program has benefited me greatly and I will continue to recommend this program to anyone thinking about furthering their education.

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