

Scaffolding Lesson Report

by

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Abstract

In the lesson clip shown, students are learning to count rhythms containing rests using the Eastman counting method. The learning target is to prepare students to "count sing" during rehearsals in their advanced choir next school year.

During my time at Kansas State University, I have learned several things that have greatly changed the way I conduct a classroom rehearsal. I have begun to pre-teach more, make corrections immediately, and design lessons with more accountability and differentiation.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Teaching Philosophy

Why do we educate our children?

It appears to me that there are nearly as many answers to this question as there are people who attempt to answer it. For myself, I want my children to grow to be well-adjusted adults who are prepared to navigate the world in which they live. I have made every effort to raise children who are socially congenial, psychologically well adjusted, intelligent, and capable. I want them to be participating, contributing members of society. My husband and I strive to equip our children with the tools they will need to be able to chase their dreams; to go wherever they desire, and to be able to figure out what they need to know in order to get there. What parent wouldn't want that for their own children?

In preparation to cross that imaginary threshold into adulthood, students take classes that help them understand the world and how it works. They take classes about the history of our society and culture. They take classes about other cultures from around the globe and perhaps even learn a second language. They learn basic mathematics so they are able to buy and sell. They learn to find the hypotenuse of an isosceles triangle. They learn, quite literally, what makes the world go round, why the sun rises and sets, and why it gets cold in the winter and warm in the summer. They learn to read and write in their native tongue, to understand poetry, and to write with grammatical accuracy. They learn how to be physically fit, prepare balanced meals, and look up information in a library and on the internet. They may even learn how to sew on a button or change a tire.

Often missing from the discussion of a complete and sound education is our students' need to learn about who they are as people and to respect the lives of others. Often times, this is thought to be where the parents or religion should take responsibility. Unfortunately, we have seen in our society that this kind of learning is not happening. Globalization of media, travel, economics, and politics bring us into contact with people who, twenty years ago, we might never have met. People we do not understand and, perhaps, fear. Many parents are dealing with their own personal issues and don't know themselves well. How can they teach their children something they do not know?

With the rise in the number of students who require some kind of therapy or counseling, it is more important than ever schools teach students how to "*be*." They need to understand how to be introspective and thoughtful about their own emotional health and well-being. Students need to be taught how to respect the thoughts of others and to empathize. Are recent movements toward awareness about mental illnesses and subjects like bullying in schools a start, or are they merely a reflection of the desperate need for humans to have some kind of understanding of themselves and those around them?

In reality, learning about one's self can be quite difficult and requires a lifetime to master. Additionally, building this understanding begins at a very young age. Part of what we hope our children learn at school is to navigate the social environment of the world; learn to dialog respectfully, to challenge ideas, to agree to disagree, to debate, to understand, to empathize, to be compassionate. I do not feel that these are things that should be ignored by our country's system of education. They are part of being a human and a fully integrated member of our society. They are too important to ignore.

Education in the United States today dramatically deemphasizes creative expression. In language arts classes, emphasis is on the reading of non-literary texts and expository writing. One of my children's teachers once told me that the goal of his course was my child's ability to read and understand a user's manual. Is this truly what we have become as a society? People whose only goal is to follow the instructions of others? Where is free thought? Where is the ability to gather information, manipulate it, and generate personal meaning?

The arts are the key to understanding the part of education that we have been denying our students: the humanness within. There is a reason these subjects are called the humanities. Art in all its forms deals with the expression of thought and emotion. It is subjective by nature, requiring consumers to express opinions and to disagree. It teaches us to dig into our psyche to defend our decisions, to understand what moves us, and to relate to others. Arts education teaches students to direct their emotions, and provides students an appropriate vehicle for creative expression. The arts give students the ability to work with information, take it apart, manipulate it, rearrange it creatively, synthesize new meaning, and express new thoughts and ideas.

The arts are all around us, every moment of every day. The container that holds your breakfast was carefully designed by someone hoping you would make an emotional connection be it conscious or subconscious. The products you choose for the shower, the vehicle you drive to work, or the brand of coffee you drink – all of these were specifically marketed to you through packaging, placement, or perhaps musical advertising jingles. The arts cannot be avoided in everyday life.

Let's discuss, for a moment, the use of music in our culture. Not only are we consumers of music who make decisions about what radio station we like or which band we will see in

concert, we are consumers who are manipulated by music. For example, when you are in a movie theater and something scary is about to happen, your body tenses and you prepare yourself. Why? The music drives you to it through its compositional timing. In the sad scenes, or even more during the joyful and triumphant scenes, if there are people in the audience who might cry, they all begin crying at the same moment. Why? Music. When I sing a certain jingle, my children suddenly want to go to Red Robin for burgers. If we hum a specific line, it makes us think of coffee. We can hear two specific tones and know it's time to watch Law & Order on TV. This is what music is in our society. If something has this kind of power, shouldn't we learn about it and be made aware?

Music making can also serve to foster trust, build a sense of community, and allow students to practice empathy. Music education can help us learn to listen for meaning instead of listening solely to respond. It helps us connect with people who may be different than ourselves and to get a glimpse of another's culture and values.

When we attempt to define the need for music, we often hit the stumbling block of attempting to quantify musical worthiness. Music has significance to all people, but that value continually changes at various points in their lives. Perhaps it even has distinctly different meanings at particular points throughout a single day. The same music will have unique meaning for each of us. This does not make it any less relevant or less important. Music affects the emotions in human beings, and we ignore emotions to our detriment. Part of learning to be human is learning to identify emotions, understand what has caused them, and respond appropriately.

Music is a means of appropriate emotional expression and release as well as a method of communication when words seem to fail. As we have encountered emotional times that are too

difficult to express, music is often our method of delivery. Weddings and funerals are perfect examples of our need communicate what our soul is feeling. In the wake of terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, hastily improvised concerts, many free and open to the public, were performed. Popular music changed – especially country music. Music helped our nation heal and unite. It gave us a space where it was acceptable to grieve openly and in public; sharing our struggle to understand.

During World War II, music encouraged young people to risk their lives for countries that were not their own. On the front lines, music reminded soldiers of home and gave them a reason to live another day. Music was even written in concentration camps, outliving its composers and lending a human face to the atrocities.

For these many reasons and more, music education should not be reserved for only those who show an interest or talent. As humans who respond to music, we should all have a basic understanding of music. If music is all around us, eliciting our emotions in advertisements, healing our hearts after a tragedy, driving the excitement and enjoyment as a movie soundtrack, shouldn't we understand at least the basics of its structure and essence? As humans who feel and express emotions, shouldn't we understand and know how to utilize the tremendous benefits of music on our souls?

Recent arguments have been made that music should be taught because of its many benefits. Claims have been made that learning music makes students smarter. That because they have experienced learning music, they can more readily learn other subjects. Music is mathematical, has the rhythmic elements of poetry, and has historical and social relevance. All of these have been justifications for teaching music to our children. While I agree with all of these assertions, they are not why I choose to teach music. I teach music because music is

wondrous, mystical, magical, and deserves to be learned and understood. The future of humanity will be blessed beyond measure because it has a relationship with music.

Composer Eric Whitacre recently tweeted, "I believe now more than ever that singing is a universal, built-in mechanism designed to cultivate empathy and compassion." The fact that even musicians and composers are still trying to define the boundaries of music proves its inexhaustible definition. Music is boundless, infinite, timeless, and immeasurable. Music can strike, without warning, the very core of our being. Music is light, joy, desire, and despair.

Music is.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

The most important thing I have developed in my time at Kansas State has been my classroom atmosphere. In reframing my role as the director from "instructor" to "more knowledgeable team member," my teaching methods have evolved. While there are times when the director must dictate, I have found more opportunities for teamwork and leadership among the students. As I back down from always being the person with the correct answer, I find students are more eager to share ideas and take risks. Allowing myself to listen and be receptive to the students' ideas has resulted in the development of openness and empathy throughout the group. I encourage teamwork in my classroom be it individual students helping others or learning to function as a group. In my music classroom, all students are expected to participate to the best of their ability whatever it may be. As we learn information that is new to the students, we purposefully communicate and encourage each student to learn at a personal, individual pace. All the while, expecting students to give their best effort and demanding

precision in rehearsal and performance has built a strong work ethic within the ensemble. Sifting these ingredients together, we have improved the final product of the group - each performance.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan - [View the lesson here](#)

Objective: Students can "count sing" rhythms which include whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes and rests using the Eastman method of rhythmic counting.

Standards Being Addressed: MU:Pr4.2.6b When analyzing selected music, read and identify by name or function standard symbols for rhythm, pitch, articulation, and dynamics.

Materials of Instruction: Classroom set of *Rhythms and Beyond* workbook

Lesson Sequence:

- Entry Activity/Transition: Remind students of previous day's activity with reading rhythms. Tell students we will be doing the same type of exercise with a new component. We are now adding rests to the examples.
 - Activity #1: Students will count rhythmic examples which include rests using the Eastman method of counting.
 1. Review what each type of rest looks like and how many counts does each type get?
 2. How do we read these when count singing in choir class?
 3. Practice with examples.
 - a. First example has the answers written in. Teacher points out that this is how she would like answers on a written assessment. Teacher demonstrates how to read this example allowed.
 - b. Students read example along with the teacher.
 - c. Second example has answers written in. Students read example aloud as a class as teacher fades out.

d. Third example does not have the answers written in. Teacher gives the students time to think of the answer, then all students perform the example as a group.

e. Students move along to the musical example at the end of the lesson. Students guess the name of the piece. Students count the example using the learned counting method. With the teachers help, students add pitch to the counting method.

Assessment: Teacher observation

Closure/Summative Assessment: The next day students practiced more examples of this counting both aloud as a group and individually on a written practice sheet. A line from each page of examples was included on the written final at the end of the quarter.

Lesson Reflection

After viewing the teaching demonstration, I realized how much I was watching the page instead of observing the students. While the rhythms were simple enough to have been memorized at a glance, I continued to refer back to the page. It also occurs to me that an intermediate step would have been helpful. After students read the examples, they could have written the counting on the sheet before reading aloud. This would have allowed for more differentiation and accountability among students. It would also provide an easy transition into dictating rhythms in future lessons.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

During my time at Kansas State University, I have learned several things that have greatly changed the way I conduct a classroom rehearsal.

When I first began teaching, I often would choose to ignore misbehavior from students or make corrections after the fact. Likewise, I often would let minor mistakes in students' musical performance such as articulations or breathing errors slide and focus only on larger issues such as sections who miss notes. I have since learned to stop when there are mistakes and correct them immediately before they become habitual. I no longer allow the thought "we'll fix that later" go through my head.

This also applies to classroom management in that I used to ignore minor misbehaviors such as whispering or off-task behavior and continue to teach. I now insist, for example, that students focus and remain on task during the class period with no side conversation. Along with this, I have learned to anticipate potential for misbehavior and pre-correct or pre-teach.

In my conducting, I have learned that less is more. Before my experience at Kansas State University, I was doing most of the work for my students ending each rehearsal completely exhausted. I have learned to demand that the students do the work that I had been doing for them. When I expend a tremendous amount of energy showing dynamics, for example, students have no need to remember the dynamics for themselves. At the end of this program, I have learned that with economy of motion a greater range of expression can be achieved.

In lesson design, I have begun to approach learning from a more-knowledgeable-other mindset. Instead of thinking of the classroom as teacher and students, I now think more from a teamwork perspective. Framing myself as a member of the team who has more knowledge or experience instead of the expert has created a warmer classroom atmosphere overall. It has

allowed my students the ability to ask questions with less trepidation and given all members of the choir permission to fail as they learn and practice. I have also begun to experiment with lesson design that includes peer coaching as a means of differentiating for students who are struggling as well as those who are advanced.