Teaching music through listening and project based learning

by

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A REPORT

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Abstract

My Master's report will overview my music teaching techniques in Music Technology, my project-based course for 7th and 8th grade students. In this course's second project, students create their own drum loops with a drum machine and match music loops to make a full sounding song. We utilize the music software "Reason" to introduce Basic song form, Intro/Outro, Melody, Bass Line, and Chordal support in project two. Students will do their best to match their drums with appropriate music loops or match their entire, 60 second song, to the drums they create.

A development I'm excited to continue in my teaching for the future is readily teaching the "WHY." I frequently teach in a hurry to convey as much information as possible but forget to give the students an exact reason or goal for each repetition. This has begun to transform many of the musicians I teach and provides greater comprehension every day I teach. Secondly the Master of Music coursework at Kansas State University has given me a new passion for my own philosophy of teaching music, through the main pillar of listening. Listening can provide students with feedback for self-knowledge in many musical and non-musical situations. This has provided many improvements in student behavior, my behavior, and our group cohesion. I now value teaching with this philosophy in mind because I've developed it myself through my coursework. It feels great to teach out of an authentic philosophy, and I'm excited to keep learning and molding what I do for each student.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Schooling has many social, intellectual, economic, artistic, and many other benefits to individuals that create the essence of our culture. Formal education benefits the greater good by maintaining a baseline of knowledge and understanding for our society and country. These values are a commonplace in our government to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn. Teaching the whole child should be at the center of any curriculum decisions and will carry each student throughout their life. The baseline knowledge that every student should attain from formal education is: problem solving, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and working in a group.

In a well-rounded education, music education is essential in helping mold the whole child. With many diverse families and community values, a music ensemble could be the only place where an individual student feels welcome and a part of the greater "family." Music is essential to our humanness, is within each individual, and should be not considered an "extra" but an academic pursuit.

Why teach music in our schools? A paramount weakness in our culture is listening. The art of conversation is on the decline and we expect the information to zip into our brain at light speed like technology. However, we must slow down and listen to our intuition with a calm mindset so that we can receive different viewpoints and learn valuable lessons. What better way to slow down our youth than through music education? Surely clearing the mind is a skill each of our students need to be able to access to de-stress and calm their daily nerves. This clearing of the mind is a tool that is highly valuable in our fast-paced culture and could promote healthy practices through music. As a teacher I have to be the best leader by listening and demonstrating

different ways to listen. Improving my classroom environment through listening will help me understand where each student is at both personally and musically.

Music curriculum is also important to schooling our children for self-knowledge. I resonate with Elliott (2005) in his first basic issue of why teach music: Expressive or impressive, self-growth/self-knowledge, self-esteem/self-identity, and cultural submersion with music achieves the goals of humanistic education (Elliott, p. 10-11). It is hard to work in a group if an individual is not confident, clear-minded, and comfortable. This person will not be able to offer anything to the group because of fear, or not being able to be vulnerable with others. Music can break down these barriers by finding one's place in a music ensemble, and by finding friends who are diverse and supportive. By breaking down these barriers we will create future adults who have clear identities as individuals who understand their strengths and weaknesses when approaching a group situation.

My personal music education philosophy grew directly from my formal education philosophy primarily through the belief that students should have emotional intelligence. In a divisive culture, where most people do not contain the skills to disagree in a healthy way, teaching students how to tap into their emotions is crucial. Music with intentional listening has everything to do with self-awareness that can lead to emotional well-being, and a healthy realization of one's realities. Comfortability with tension and release is honed in a quality music group or class, and strives to bring emotion through the performer and to the audience.

By being self-aware through music on a regular basis, we create strong bonds and sensitivity to others that we may not have tapped into without music. It cannot get more human than that: "Willing the good of another" is love. In all of our humanness and vulnerability to fail, we all seek strong enough relationships that we can feel what they feel, and to try to help them

handle that emotion, and move on. Empathy. Showing others love is the penultimate goal of relationships, and music can be the catalyst that often makes our true colors show. Without music our humanness would be diminished.

The purpose of formal education is to achieve awareness and proficiency for every student in problem solving, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and working in a group. The art of listening has been lost in our culture, and music education is an integral piece. Music education is essential to cultural experiences and group togetherness that create strong bonds between musicians. In order to foster lifelong learners that continually seek knowledge, students need the opportunity to participate in music. This gained knowledge is both measurable and has an immense, long lasting impact on each music student. In order to create self-knowing individuals with well-rounded world views, we need empathy through exploring music from around the world that connects to our students. Self-knowledge gained through music creates whole children and whole adults, who will spread love because of their desire to connect with others and their emotional intelligence.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

My music philosophy is reflected in my lesson through many different factors. Project based instruction lends itself to many experiences that give each student opportunities to improve their problem solving. This self-knowledge is highly valuable for students because it gives them tools to attack different problems through new avenues they may have not tried before. As humans we need multiple attempts to reach our goals, and in giving the proper amount of time my music technology students get to fail over and over until they reach a good outcome. Through problem solving my teaching techniques teach resilience. Our class discussions and group critique offer the most reflection of my teaching philosophy. Intentional listening,

thoughtful opinionated responses, gaining new music terminology for lifelong use, each student being challenged to define why or what they enjoyed about each song, all of this is at the heart of what I believe music can teach all people.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan

https://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/handle/2097/39798

Music Technology Project 2. Creating your own Drum Loops in a drum machine.

Objectives:

- Students will review prerequisite music basics like style, tempo, dynamics, major/minor and their effect.
- Students will create and utilize music/drum loops.
- Students will analyze their balance of instruments, re-calibrate, and mix for acceptable production of sound.
- Students will participate in group critique with sensitivity and understanding of opinion.
- Students will understand quarter note, eighth note, sixteenth note pulses.
- Students will demonstrate basic rock drumming voicing, placement, and compliment their song with drum loops of their own.

Standards Being Addressed:

MU:Cr2.1.T.IIa Select melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas to develop into a larger

work that exhibits unity and variety using digital and analog tools.

MU:Pr4.3.T.IIa Demonstrate how understanding the style, genre, context, and use of

digital tools and resources in a varied repertoire of music influences prepared or

improvised performances and performers' ability to connect with audiences.

MU:Re7.I.T.IIa Select and critique contrasting musical works, defending opinions based

on manipulations of the elements of music, digital and electronic aspects, and the purpose

and context of the works.

MU:Cr3.2.T.Ia Share compositions or improvisations that demonstrate a proficient level

of musical and technological craftsmanship as well as the use of digital tools and

resources in developing and organizing musical ideas.

Materials of Instruction:

- Music software "Reason"
- Drum machine "Re-Drum Drum Machine"
- Live demonstration of multiple drum loops from teacher.

Lesson Sequence:

Entry Activity/Transition: Listen to a song with 4/4 time signature, regular pop drumming pattern with snare on 2 and 4, and also contains a half-time feel. Demonstrate how effective drums can make a song shift speeds without changing anything but the snare backbeat.

Project Journal Assessment (Prior to teaching): Journal #1 What does drumming have to do with the style/genre of a song? What is your favorite style/genre to listen to? Why?

Activity #1: Demonstration of self-created drum loop
1. Teach where quarter note, eight note, and sixteen notes pulses are located within the drum machine.
2. Teach appropriate voicing among multiple styles of drum sets.

Assessment: Individual checkup from teacher to make sure their drum loops are adequate.

Activity #2: Matching music loops to self-created drum loops.
1. Double check music loop pacing/tempo with busy drum rhythm/simplistic.
2. Is the music support melodic or harmonic?
3. How do the sounds blend?

Assessment: Rough Draft Journal:
After creating some drum beats/grooves, what is easy or hard about writing for percussion?
What is a song you appreciate more (for their drum groove) after learning how to create in the Re-Drum machine?

Transition: Mixing your song for a polished product. Peer Assessment will aide with this.

Activity #3: Peer Assessment:

Present your drum creations.

Peer Feedback of drum loops--- 2-4 drum voices? Too simple? Too busy?

Notes:

Present your music loops with your drum loops.

Peer Feedback of Drum + Music Loops--- Balance/Mix? Tempo? Melodic

content?

Notes:

Transition: Final work session to correct feedback from peers.

Closure/Summative Assessment: Project Presentation: Group Critique/Discussion Participation

Grading Rubric:

Project 2 Rubric	4 Accomplished	3 Proficient	2 Basic	1 Unsatisfactory
Song Length	Song is 60 seconds in length	Song is 45 seconds in length	Song is 30 seconds in length	Song was under 30 seconds
Self-Created Drum Loops (Re-Drum Machine)	Drum Loops created are outstanding and fully relate to each other and the music. 3 drum loops used with outstanding timing throughout the whole song.	Drum Loops created are appropriate but don't align with the music all the time. 2 drum loop creations used adequately with timing inconsistency.	Drum Loops creations are present, but don't line up with music or the song's style. 1-2 drum loops created at a basic level.	1 drum loop was attempted.
Music Loops	Music loops complement the drum loops, and the main melody (loop) is apparent. 3 music loops were used seamlessly.	Music loops are paired with drum loops, but the full sound is unclear. 2 music loop used adequately.	Music loops are in the song, but choppy and disjointed. No clear main idea, and no main music idea was present.	A music loop was attempted, but wasn't substantial.
Tempo	Music and Drum loops are perfectly matched with tempo. Outstanding use of space and timing of musical ideas.	Music and Drum loops seemed somewhat slow or too busy in relation to tempo. Music was dragging or rushed.	Music and Drum Loops were uncomfortably out of place in relation to tempo. Music was not clear.	Tempo was left at 120 bpm, and didn't match music/drum loop pacing.
Mix and Balance	All sounds utilized were clear and fit into the whole song's sound.	All sounds utilized were somewhat clear, but fuzzy at times. Drums and/or music loops were sticking out/not audible.	Drums and/or music loops were very unclear. Sounds were hard to hear because of balance problems.	Sounds were very unbalanced, and mixing wasn't attempted.
Introduction/Coda	Smooth introduction was apparent, and the song ended with seamless coda/outro.	Introduction was a solid concept, but not fully cohesive. Ending or coda did not fully complement the song but was attempted.	Attempt for Intro and Coda was not relevant to the song.	Missing either Intro or Coda attempt.

Figure 2.1 Project 2 Grading Rubric

Many goals were prevalent while planning this project including the understanding of

basic drumming backbeat, appropriate amount and voicing of drums, thinking through the

tempo, balance of drums with music and melody, and matching music loops with self-created drum loop. The students now know how to compose a drum beat on a digital drum computer, manipulate drum levels on the drum machine, choose appropriate drums for certain styles, along with matching simple or very rhythmic drums with music loops. They also gained tools to layer in auxiliary percussion that can add new colors throughout their music. While teaching this lesson I included a lecture where I demonstrated composing multiple drum grooves and how to change patches of drum sounds. Also, during the lecture, I presented how to attempt matching drum loops to a music loop and vice-versa. Music Technology class is project based, so this instructional strategy is our regular all semester. I utilized a pre-project and rough draft journal with prompts to accurately see what knowledge each student began with and what became new information as we progressed. A peer assessment was also used to get additional feedback from their classmates about halfway through their project to get new ideas on how to further improve their song. This peer assessment was amazing to watch because the students were highly engaged in listening, giving feedback, and genuinely interested in what their classmates had created.

Next time I teach this project I hope to revise journal expectations to get complete, thought out responses. I may be able to improve this feedback by giving proper examples from past students that fully answered questions or provide more time to each student in their reflection. In my lecture I will give more concrete examples of actual drum grooves from rock or popular music that the students may recognize, and I will demonstrate how to re-create that beat in our software. I believe this could improve my student creations by giving them inspiration to draw from, which will be needed because the majority of these students are not percussionists. This project enhanced my teaching practice by giving the students more freedom to create more

music themselves. With many levels of musicianship, I hesitated to give them full drum composition power, but it gives the students something to be prouder of at the end of the project because they had made it from scratch. Also, it has helped me realize that I must regularly check on each individual to ensure understanding of the drum machine, so they reach an appropriate level and have enough ideas to draw from. This project also helped expand my thinking because each class is a bit different and I have to be prepared for different learners who may need new or fresh approaches to comprehend and create what they need to complete their song. I hope to continue tweaking this project to make it better for the many different types of learners I will encounter.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

My growth and development throughout the Masters' program at Kansas State University is far reaching throughout and directly effects my daily life. In teaching both a 7/8th grade general music technology course and assisting in 5-12th bands my approach is more adequately direct and focused. I have re-energized myself, my curriculum, and my meaning behind teaching music.

I like to say that teaching chose me. Having taught in a private school for my whole career I don't have the same concrete curriculum expectations that public-school administration may request regularly. My coursework at Kansas State has pushed me in the area of writing objectives, goals and measurable outcomes. These tools have been a huge help in how I approach every student I teach and has given me confidence moving forward as a music teacher. I plan on continually adding more year after year. Along with meeting the students' needs in this way, I've realized that a little planning can go a long way as far as advocating for music education as an academic pursuit. In the coming years I hope to break down some of the culture at my school of "academic" classes vs. "enhancement" classes. I hope to encourage all fine arts teachers find new ways to write clear objectives, multiple options for assessment, and take the tangible learning feedback in order to earn respect from administration, teachers, and students. This could bring about positive schedule changes and so much more that would positively effect students, my fellow teachers, and the arts.

One of my biggest realizations came from a marching band assessment following the fall season of 2018. This student had obviously needed to know the "why" of each repetition in marching band, and many times myself or my co-worker were not providing that. This made me realize the simplistic approach that Dr. Tracz introduced to me multiple times: Tell them what

you're going to teach them, teach them, tell them what you've taught them. For my students, both of these approaches help drive home the intentionality of each rehearsal or lesson and give meaning to each repetition. This has helped me greatly no matter the age level I'm teaching, and it helps my students dig in with appropriate knowledge to achieve the group or class's goal.

Class discussions with other colleagues have led to many great developments in my band teaching. Bouncing around ideas of what literature to approach with all levels of groups, how to change rehearsal setup to find new ways to listen, or many other tips that have sharpened my focus as a teacher. One goal this spring semester in my band program was to have each level of ensemble perform a piece from a female band composer. This opened up new literature that not only stretched all of my groups but taught new concepts and inspired a few students to start composing. Julie Giroux's "The Bonsai Tree" was a fabulous piece that my 7/8th grade band performed and enjoyed. I hope to keep exploring her music, and other female composers in the future.

As the assistant band director, I tend to teach smaller sections pulled out from the full group and it's so much fun to get 5-10 students away from the influence of their peers. This has been crucial in helping individuals and harnessing them with practice concepts to raise the level of their group and our school band program. My teaching in these situations is much more pointed than past years. Not only do I aim directly at the task, I do my best understand each group or individual's interest level and help get them to go "all in" on a piece of music or their instrument in general. My passion is there because I've been pushed to create my own philosophy of why I teach, and it gives me fuel because I know I'm changing one mind at a time for the better.

My time management at work has improved in part of being a masters' student at KSU. In juggling my marriage, three kids, performing music, teaching music, and friendships I've realized that a healthy balance is obtainable. Except in April! My knowledge of what to get done at the right time is more efficient, and I'm happy to say that my last two summers have had a lot to do with that. It has been a long-term goal of mine to complete a Masters' Degree in music, and at this point in my career it is the perfect timing to boost my energy and passion for teaching students. This will keep me going for many years to come.

Willingness to be a lifelong learner has always been one of my personal goals, and my masters' coursework has helped me usher in a new season for me as a teacher. It has solidified my music teaching, but more importantly has helped me realize that I want to continue learning following my Masters' degree. I hope to do this by finding resources that speak to student growth and delves into how I can continually add more differentiation and understanding to who I am teaching musically, emotionally, and socially; the whole person. I hope to view student behaviors and collaborate with teachers and counselors to ensure each student is able to get the support that they need for where they are at in life. Through the program's research classes, I've realized that I am a practicing teacher throughout my school year which means I should approach each day with reflections and past knowledge to keep improving. This experience includes both triumphs and failures which inform both myself and my students of what we can do or shouldn't attempt moving forward. These experiences sometimes happen on their own, but through research I now understand how to grow from it. This growth mindset is crucial for all teachers and students.

One of the main reasons I decided to pursue this Masters' degree was to propel me into the next 10 years of teaching. I now feel far more equipped to take on a program that I would

lead, if that opportunity presents itself. My confidence, professionalism, intentionality, and remembering to be myself in everything I teach has blossomed. In beginning this Masters' degree I was ready to go "all in" on being a music teacher and the coursework, professional connections have enriched my work life and beyond.

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