

**Incorporating hip-hop composition into the traditional middle  
school band setting**

by

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## **Abstract**

In this report, I describe a lesson in which students learned ways to create modern hip-hop styled compositions that would connect to a traditional example in their band method book. Through composition, students were able to discuss larger concepts that would not come by naturally by only looking at sheet music and not creating their own music. After their compositions, students were able to reflect on music they have played and relate what composers wrote to make a piece into music.

Through this program I have developed into a more well-rounded teacher by learning more practices for my classrooms, how to continually reflect on a daily basis to improve and learning more deeply about pedagogical philosophies that help me further define my own teaching philosophy. I learned the following practices: use of composition in any ensemble level, technique in instrument pedagogy, and learning more literature by looking at the history and development of wind band literature. My ability and knowledge as a band director have improved during my time in this program. All the tools mentioned have already made me and my students a better musician and learner. The skills I gained from lessons on organization and delegation have helped give ownership to my students while relieving duties from daily tasks.

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# Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Schooling in the United States has the goal to provide experiences and learning that will lead to a well-rounded individual. While this is the intended goal of schooling, there is an unintended goal by which schooling is setting up to categorize students by skills and develop primarily only those skills. The newer focus that schools are implementing with college and career pathways are to focus mostly on skills needed for the workforce. While being able to develop individuals ready for the workforce and post-secondary education has important factors for immediate needs in society, this has the effect for individuals to only be well-versed in one area. This is why it is more important than ever to have a relevant, engaging, and reflective music education presence in schools and community.

The ultimate value and purpose of education that should guide decision makers as they make curricular plans is to create a well-rounded individual, lifelong learner, and contributing member of society. Students need to learn a variety of different disciplines to help them understand how the world works, where they fit in, and how to enjoy life with balance. To learn about the world and society, students learn from the past through information in courses in arts, math, science, literature, language, and history. The more the courses are interrelated the stronger connection to society it makes and provides opportunities for students to learn with depth. Without each part being learned there is a significant part of history and culture that is being ignored. This is creating individuals with narrow understandings of the bigger world. This can cause conflicts especially when the world is much more connected through the internet and has created larger communities. Without knowing the society and cultural influences in aspects can cause conflict when someone is only developed in one area and has only one solution to a problem. To focus on a pathway to develop primarily only skill is not feasible in a world where

communities are much more linked. Developing well-rounded individuals assures that members in society will have the knowledge to create solutions to problems, see where they can be successful in society, and enjoy life through the many cultural situations that they will be able to participate by being well-rounded individual.

Music education exists for students to experience music for themselves through performance, creation, and listening. By experiencing music, anyone can express themselves and possess it while enriching their lives and education. According to the “2014 Standards Overview” from the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME, n.d.):

Students need to have experience in creating, to be successful musicians and to be successful 21st century citizens. Students need to perform – as singers, as instrumentalists, and in their lives and careers. Students need to respond to music, as well as to their culture, their community, and their colleagues.

Anyone can participate in music and have positive outcomes. In most secondary schools in the United States the focus of their music education is through performance ensembles like band, orchestra, and choir. If the ensembles’ focus is on the performance aspect of music by looking at the music standards for ensembles we can see what all is developed in that individual. The national standards established by NAfME (2014) mention:

Select varied musical works to present based on interest, knowledge, technical skill, and context. Analyze the structure and context of varied musical works and their implications for performance. Develop personal interpretations that consider creators’ intent. Evaluate and refine personal and ensemble performances, individually or in collaboration with others. Perform expressively, with appropriate interpretation and technical accuracy, and in a manner appropriate to the audience and context. (pp. 3-4)

This is an individual who can successfully participate in the workforce and society by the skills they can transfer from being in an ensemble. Music education in ensembles is not only focused on performance but also creating and responding. Creating is an ultimate experience for students to express themselves. Giving students the opportunity to compose or improvise a piece that is their own is a great way for them to combine their knowledge of music with what they want into one composition that is reflective of their creative individuality. Being able to reflect on their own creation, performances, and others' music are difficult to be done without listening. Listening is another way for students to connect to music and express themselves by the music they listen to. Often this is a way society can experience their own culture as well as others is by listening to music. The skills applied and learned by participating in music is difficult to ignore if the goal of education is to create a well-rounded individual.

Music is an important part of history, culture, and human nature. Studying the music of the past helps us gain better understanding of our current music but also develops the music in the future. This is similar to the how and why our schooling system teaches history. We look at the past to understand the present and develop the future. In history courses when looking at the past is through the lens of our current perspective that is hazed by our society influences. But if students also study the music during the part of history they are learning about, this can give them an insight to more than facts and relate the history to a current situation. Especially if the issue is still very relevant in current society. A prime example of this is studying American society and the lingering presence of social injustice and racism. While a history course can have student study the civil rights movement in the United States from the 1950s into 1960s by learning facts from a history book, but learning about the feelings, emotions, culture of a past society must come from the arts. To learn in greater context about the humans involved, students

studying the music and art of that time to gain a bigger scope on society of that time can help them connect to a previous society. Also playing music that gives reflection to the past and allows students to feel the emotion of performing and listening to a piece with strong meaning behind it. According to Elliot (2005), “In the process of inducting learners into unfamiliar musical practices, music teachers link the basic values of music and music education to the broader goals of humanistic education” (p. 11). An example of music that music teachers can link to broader goals is by Mark Camphouse, *A Movement for Rosa*. Playing the music alone has a value to it, but by making connections of the piece that is reflecting the life of Rosa Parks students can learn so much more about themselves. Making connections between this piece of music and the historical facts or making connections to current situations is necessary to improve our society and well-being. By bridging both disciplines there are stronger ties to the learning outcomes and further reinforces both disciplines in their respective course.

Music is a powerful way to learn about people and their culture. Because of this I strongly believe our music education in any level must include a diverse use of music from many different periods, styles, and parts of the world. My personal philosophy relates to the philosophy of David Elliott. According to Elliot (2005), “Entering into unfamiliar musical practices activates self-examination and the personal reconstruction of one’s relationships, assumptions, and preferences” (p. 11). If a student only learns one specific style that does not relate to any of their own music they listen to outside of the classroom, how will they make a connection emotionally and cognitively to what they are learning. Or greater connections to human nature and society. Their music education will lead to being used only inside school and not serving the larger purpose of personal challenge and growth. Using music that relevant is the only way for music to stay alive in a society that traditional European or Western music education is not as relevant to



the general population. That does not mean we should only use music that is favored by the general population, but does not mean we should completely ignore it or look down upon it by our tradition Western music approach that most educators have been trained under. All music has its purpose to performer, creator, and listener. According to David Elliot (2005), the auditory events we call music engage and challenge our power of consciousness on many level and pieces of music are multidimensional challenges and are thought-and-feeling generators (p. 8). Not only can this be done in a traditional music class but can be done in recorded music. This is another philosophical connection I have to David Elliott, is the musicianship that we educators must develop but also the listenership. By looking at our current society, there are music creators, developers, and listeners. The listeners greatly outnumber the makers but everyone who is an active listener of music is still having a thought and feeling generated experience from music. Just as diverse the listeners of music are, music education must use diverse music to create strong connections to music and take advantage of what all is provoked cognitively and emotionally by music-making and listening.

Music is much more than what is on paper, what a musician plays, or what someone listens to. Music education programs are much more than learning about pitches and rhythms. Through music, individuals learn about themselves through creativity, expression, culture, and past musical works. Music educators help students experience music through performing, creating, listening, and responding to not only create musicians but a well-rounded student that will lead to a whole human that improves the world we live in.

## **How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching**

My teaching philosophy is reflected in the lesson described through connecting student creativity through music playing, creating, arranging, and listening. My lesson focuses on linking music that is relevant in the classroom to music that is relevant to students' life outside of the classroom. Also, students will be able to attach their own emotions to the music they make and develop self-growth through the process

## **Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan**

### **Lesson Plan**

#### **National Music Standards for Ensembles (2015) Addressed**

Cr.2.N Select and develop draft melodic and rhythmic ideas or motives that demonstrate understanding of characteristic(s) of music or text(s) studied in rehearsal preserving draft compositions and improvisations through standard notation and audio recording.

Cr.4.N Share personally-developed melodic and rhythmic ideas or motives – individually or as an ensemble – that demonstrate understanding of characteristics of music or texts studied in rehearsal.

Pr.1.N Select varied repertoire to study based on interest, music reading skills (where appropriate), an understanding of the structure of the music, context, and the technical skill of the individual or ensemble.

Pr.2.N Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how knowledge of formal aspects in musical works inform prepared or improvised performances.

Pr.3.N Identify expressive qualities in a varied repertoire of music that can be demonstrated through prepared and improvised performances.

Pr.4.N Use self-reflection and peer feedback to refine individual and ensemble performances of a varied repertoire of music.

Pr.5.N.a Demonstrate attention to technical accuracy and expressive qualities in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire of music.

Pr.5.N.b Demonstrate an awareness of the context of the music through prepared and improvised performances.

Re.1.N Identify reasons for selecting music based on characteristics found in the music, connection to interest, and purpose or context.

Re.3.N Identify interpretations of the expressive intent and meaning of musical works, referring to the elements of music, contexts, and (when appropriate) the setting of the text.

### **Prior Knowledge/Skills**

Students have been working on playing music in their band method book. In class we have used hip-hop beats as our metronome and would explain what elements made up the beat. Students have also created an account on Soundtrap and have basic knowledge on using the program's loops.

### **Lesson Objectives**

Create a composition using hip-hop style rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic loops that will accompany a melody of their choice from their method book.

### **Assessment of the Lesson**

I will listen to projects to give feedback also peer assessment and reflection will be used.

### **Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations**

All students will need to create an accompaniment track to the level of their playing and more novice students will be able to use earlier pieces in the method book.

### **Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies**

Whiteboard, *Tradition of Excellence* method book, projector, computers, sound system, document camera, internet, and headphones will be needed.

### **Lesson Sequence**

Entry Activity: Students will play along with my example track made and discuss what elements they heard.

Activity #1 Objective: Students need to find which melody they want to create their accompaniment for.

1. Step 1- Students will need to grab their method book from their stand.
2. Step 2- Have students look for a melody they can play well.

Assessment: They will be able to tell me what melody they choose

Transition: Use my example melody on the document camera to model how to analyze the melody and what information they need to find

Activity #2: Analyze their melody

1. Step 1- Look at the name to see if there are is any outside context to their melody to take into consideration
2. Step 2- Look at the time signature.
3. Step 3- Count the number of measures needed.
4. Step 4- Make notice of any repeats or other essential music markings to indicate the path needed to take to play the whole melody.

Assessment: Discuss with the class how many measures they found and use the document camera to have students show their peers any other music markings that they need to take into consideration.

Transition: Demonstrate on my computer how I took the important info from my melody and began to make my accompaniment.

Activity #3: Begin making their accompaniment with loops

1. Step 1- Add a rhythmic or beat loop
2. Step 2- Add a bass line loop
3. Step 3- Add any transition sound or effect loops

4. Step 4- Check mix volumes and adjust accordingly

5. Step 5- Record the chosen melody with either Midi or with your instrument

Assessment: Walk around the room to make sure each student has at least 3 tracks and have recorded their melody into their accompaniment.

Transition: Begin to share student samples and discuss elements they heard.

Summative Assessment: Students share their projects to their peers in a whole class setting and everyone gives feedback while addressing these four reflection questions.

1. What do you like best about this composition?
2. Can you hear the melody?
3. Are the volumes of each track balanced?
4. How could this composition be improved?

This lesson helped students create their own accompaniment to a melody in their band method book. Since 2017, hip-hop has been the most consumed music genre in the United States (Nielsen, 2018, p 31). I wanted to teach students how to compose a hip-hop style song and incorporate what they are learning on their instrument. Prior to this specific lesson, they explored the program Soundtrap to learn how to make a song with loops. Through this lesson, they would explore contemporary music composition and learn how to bridge the two mediums.

This task helped solidify what each student knew about their melody and have a personal connection through composition. These connections would not happen with a traditional approach of learning to play the melody and being able to play it without any extension lesson. Students had to be able to play their melody with a metronome so it would align in their accompaniment. The students who chose a later melody in the method book learned advanced

techniques used in the music with repeats, codas, key signatures, minor sonorities, pick up notes, and other composition techniques used.

The instructional strategies used in this lesson were a combination of interactive instruction, direct instruction, demonstrations, and project-based learning. I first presented information to the class through direct instruction, then shifted to interactive instruction with class discussion as I demonstrated what steps they needed to follow. I asked them what parts make up a song they would hear on the radio or wherever they would hear their favorite song. When students did choose their melodies, we would go around to check if they counted the measures correctly as a class. We would also address any items they did not understand that would be important to their composition. By asking the overall question of “What accompaniment would model the style of music you hear on the radio?” I gave students a driving question for this project-based lesson. I assessed their understanding by checking their projects to make sure it had the needed parts to make their composition. We also went through the projects as a class to give feedback to each project so they could be improved upon.

This instruction can be adjusted to be incorporated over a longer timeline. This is the first time I have done a composition project in a beginning band class and I did not know how much time to plan for the lesson to be completed. I originally planned for this project to take two class periods to create their composition and one day to review each project. With students not always being in class every day or some needing more time, I had to adjust to four class periods to create their composition and one day to review each project. On the days the class worked on the project, I planned for the class to play their instruments twenty minutes of the forty-two-minute class period. But with the adjustment of needing more time, I adjusted the time so students worked on their project the whole class period and did not play their instruments. I think if this

lesson was used for ten or fifteen minutes a class period for five days, this would help the balance between working on a project and playing their instruments. There were some technical issues students went through as their devices would sometimes prevent them from hearing their project or being able to record. I did not plan for these issues so when they did happen, I would let a student collaborate with another student for the day so they could still continue to work. I had to coordinate with the district technology director to have the broken devices fixed. After seeing how well students would collaborate and how much pride they had in their projects, having a collaboration aspect incorporated at some point to the lesson would improve student learning and knowledge.

This instruction expanded my thinking and enhanced my teaching by having students draw on their individual experiences with popular music to model their accompaniment after but still enhancing their melody from their method book. It enhanced my teaching because everyone was able to go deeper into music by having a composition component. Another important part of teaching is the social and emotional aspects, after this project I noticed the class as a whole become more positive and willing to share with their peers. The cooperative skills developed as a class were great to incorporate in future rehearsals because everyone would reflect on what they hear and help each other improve and gain musical concepts.



## Chapter 3 - Reflections

Since starting the Kansas State University Masters' program, my teaching has improved with learning more techniques from percussion pedagogy to program management. Also having added pedagogical tools have helped me feel more confident as an educator and willing to try different rehearsal strategies and lessons with the tools I have gained from this program. With the added knowledge I felt it was important to hold myself accountable of improving each day by reflecting on every lesson. I would video record lessons to check my conducting but also assess students in the ensemble. This helped me notice if there were students or certain sections I needed to address more or show a certain technique. Especially after taking the Concert and Ethnic Percussion Techniques class, I was able to address percussion questions with concrete answers and demonstrate when needed.

My teaching has improved as well through studying music education learning theories and seeing how my own classroom can benefit from incorporating learning theories and research that other educators have found. After studying Edwin Gordon's research and practical field testing, I noticed much of my beliefs were aligned with Gordon's Music Learning Theory by modelling teaching music reading similarly to learning a language. According to Gordon (1997), by developing student's tonal and rhythm audition will lead to greater meaning they will draw when listening, performing, improvising, and composing. I have taken this learning theory into consideration when teaching newer concepts by sequencing a lesson in a way that students experience verbal or aural association before connecting their audiation to symbolic association then later improvising with these patterns. Before showing students sheet music, every day we worked on listening, modelling, call and response, discriminating rhythms, and improvising. Once students are playing rhythms both simple and complex, I showed them what they played

and worked as a class to explain what learning was going on. I used this extensively with my beginning band class from day one to the last day of the school year. I noticed they would point out examples of what they heard in music examples on their own but also developed a strong sense of rhythm and tone. By sequencing lessons, it was easier for students to recall previous knowledge and build upon it every day. Building upon their previous experiences also made a logical sequential decision to try a lesson of creating an accompaniment. Being able to make decisions on what supplemental lessons to include in my curricula is greatly in part to developing my own music philosophy since starting the Masters' program at Kansas State University.

Developing my own music education philosophy helped me reflect on what I want students to take away from being in my class and the benefits of participating in a music class. Students are able to become well-rounded individuals through their participation in band and learning life skills by achieving individual and group goals. This philosophy is shown from every grade that I teach, but also exposed to the community by showing group growth in musicality and sharing students' achievements across all activities that band students participate in.

Being able to set goals with correct literature for an ensemble is greatly in part to the History of the Wind Band class and Literature Analysis class that taught me to dig deeper into a piece of music before choosing it for my ensembles. In the past I would choose pieces without taking much consideration to the instrumentation needs, the technique needed for each instrument, or the bigger connections to life music was written for. These classes also helped expose me to great works of the past that I often overlooked for newer pieces. Taking the time to expose my students to a variety of great works helped them develop techniques and other concepts that they have little to no experience with.

The techniques and practices taken away from the class Organization and Administration of the School Music Program have greatly influenced my teaching and classrooms. By prioritizing daily work, I have become more efficient and have less stress on daily tasks. In learning Dr. Tracz's Hot, Warm, and Cold organizational system, I make a daily checklist of tasks that need to be done within a certain timeline. I can put paperwork and tasks in categories with "Hot" for urgent and important that needs to be done by hours, "Warm" for somewhat urgent and important that can be done by the end of the day, and "Cold" for not urgent and important that I can get done within the week. By categorizing daily tasks, this system helps with time management and making sure tasks are being completed at the end of the day. This has been especially crucial when school became greatly affected by the pandemic COVID-19 and shifting education to online within a week. With this great task it would have been more stressful, and with the little time given it was crucial to incorporate the Hot, Warm, and Cold system. Another important takeaway from this class was how to keep up with email. By always replying to student, parent, or administrator emails immediately even if the email says "I received your email and I will get back with you by 4PM" helped keep strong communication through remote learning. The Masters' program at K-State has helped my thought process by helping me to optimize my time management to become less of a procrastinator and more of an efficient planner.

My teaching has developed since starting the Masters' program at Kansas State University and it reflects in my classrooms becoming more of a collaborative learning environment where everyone can give feedback to improve, everyone sets goals, and everyone is held accountable. Students become well rounded citizens and enjoy being in my classroom. I am also able to address situations with confidence because of tools and technique gained.

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