

Rejuvenation

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Abstract

My desire with the lesson plans I describe in this report is to demonstrate a return to the beginnings of my career as a music teacher. The lessons, therefore, will show my return to grounding my choir students in a solid foundation of singing technique, understanding their voices, and mastering concepts such as breath management and resonance. I will show a return to good techniques that include structure and purpose. I will show a renewed understanding of my role as the voice teacher in the choir class. I will work to stay true to my philosophy that all students can learn if they desire, and I believe the videos will show that my students are learning to be wonderful singers with the hope that they will continue in my program and help shape it into the program that I know they deserve!

My time with the professors in all my classes has been eye-opening and informative. I was reminded in Survey of Vocal Music for Adolescent Singers that I in fact, am a voice teacher, a role I have never placed on myself. It was the work and discussion in this class that helped me realize that I have the skill and the knowledge to help young singers develop healthy singing habits, I just needed to be reminded of my education. This has helped me a great deal in working with my changing voices. I am much more careful to listen to the individual voices as they sing to be certain they are using their best skills to sing. History and Philosophy of Music Education saw to it that I reviewed my first philosophy, written in the early 90's, and made sure that I was being true to what I thought so many years ago. I was pleased that many of my beliefs as an early educator had not changed, and I was equally proud that time and experience have encouraged some new thoughts in my philosophy. Advanced Choral Rehearsal Techniques had the most influence. Although my rehearsals have been successful, it was a nice reminder of the importance of routine when developing a choir program. For years, I have admittedly been more

focused on product rather than process simply due to the make-up of my singers. I teach in a Title 1 school, as I have my entire career, and have become accustomed to teaching the song but never the mechanics in order to keep class moving and students working. I spend a great deal of time behind the piano, and while I am always proud of their performance, I fully know that taking the time to teach my students to read and understand music with conviction would have so more impact on their lives as singers. It was the introduction of new ideas and the discussions in this class that helped me gain a new focus on the importance of what, why, and how I rehearse on a daily basis.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy of teaching has always been that every student deserves the best possible education. I know that if students are engaged in the learning process, they will find success. I also know that engaging students in learning is very difficult work but worth the time to ensure success. In this thinking, I find that I am in agreement with Elliot Eisner who states, “Teaching that is not hog-tied to rigid specifications often moves in directions and explores ideas that neither the students nor the teacher could envision at the outset” (1991, p. 68). It is our duty as teachers to ensure that students are given every possible option in which to access the information we are trying to share in our classrooms.

My earlier years in the classroom were like many young teachers. I felt my job was to hold kids accountable for their learning and behavior and to teach them to learn from their mistakes when they make poor choices; a very black and white system of learning and discipline. I still very much believe in holding my students accountable, but I have come to know that all things do not work for all children. There has to be an understanding, as best you can, of each individual and what influences they carry on a daily basis.

Much like Eisner’s experience, (1991, p. 12) my career has been working in schools with high populations of at-risk students. In my current school, we are encouraged to spend time fostering positive relationships with our students. We are an under-performing, high poverty school, and at times, the relationships with teachers are the only positive adult influence. I build these relationships through our work in music. I often explain that for many people in music, we are successful because of opportunity, and I do my best to encourage and show them a future that has many opportunities and most importantly, to take advantage of those opportunities when they arise. Many of my students don’t see music as a future, and I tell them often that had it not been

for my high school choir teacher I would have never thought of music as a career. For many of my students, choral singing is something they are willing to try but may not necessarily develop a long-lasting love, I do, however, have many that find they enjoy singing once I have won them over. I do my best to deliver a quality music curriculum so my students and their families can be proud of their work.

The question for me, then, is what is my role in making sure my students have access to a quality music education that is long-term and competitive with students in schools who have access to funding and opportunity? My first duty is to ensure that my students are given opportunities to showcase what they have learned in my classes. To that extent, I agree with Elliot's (1991) belief that the pieces, or musical works, we perform are central to what we call music. The musical works are the product that we share. These products - performances, improvisations, compositions, and arrangements - come from the context of why they were created and how they are used. In my classes, our performances are the display of what I have been teaching and what the students have been learning over the course of preparing for a performance. It is also my duty to teach my students how to listen with a critical ear so they can make musical decisions based on the information I have presented and they have learned. This is not always easy, but it is an important aspect of developing musicians who have the necessary skills to make informed decisions and judgments about the music there are being asked to present and interact. I further agree with both Eisner (1991) and Elliot (2005) that the cognitive aspect of music is of most value. True knowledge of what we do as musicians is necessary for us to learn and perform musical works in a manner that we relate to our audiences. We must be able to share the details of each work and that requires us to have a deeper understanding of what a composer or musical work is trying to share within each particular work.

As I read the philosophies of music educators, I began to realize that I do not, necessarily, disagree with any one in particular. I find that I see bits and pieces of each that I can apply to my own philosophy. Bennet Reimer's (1993) belief that music education based on experience values all experiences in music is my own personal experience. I grew up singing gospel music in church, and it wasn't until high school that I had my first experience with choral music. It was my beginning in church that connected me to singing, and the opportunity to be part of an outstanding choral program in high school led me to a career of teaching music. Had I not already had the experience of singing in a choir, it is most likely that I would not have joined my high school program.

Small's (1998) belief that music performance involves all persons participating has definitely opened my thinking to what truly makes a performance. I think on my situation. My maintenance team sets-up and breaks down after each concert, my front office fields tons of phone calls from parents with questions, my students have to engage their parents to get them to the concerts. Yet, I do not ever think of the people "behind the scene" as part of my performance. This is one aspect that I will change going forward with my programming. Acknowledging all those involved with my performance may seem minute, but I do believe it is important, especially with the current climate regarding music in public schools and the constant need to justify its importance within the public-school system.

My years of experience in the classroom has had a great deal of influence regarding what I consider to be education. This experience has shifted my opinion in that I no longer feel every student should feel obligated to attend a 4-year college or university. I do feel, however, that an important aspect of our job as educators is to help our students engage in learning of all types so they are able to make informed choices upon graduation. While I would love nothing more than

to have all of my students continue on to a high school music program and follow that with a college major, my experience has taught me that what is most rewarding is my students continuing to participate in music. I look back at my own experiences in high school music along with my fellow classmates who were also actively involved. While there are only 2 or 3 of us who went on to become music teachers, many still participate and perform in some manner. That is life experience telling me that students can and will connect with music and they will make it a life long journey if they are encouraged to find the joy, connection, and relationships in their continued participation. I think David Elliot said it best, (2012),

When music education is ethically guided - when we teach not only in music (i.e., to do music) and about music but also (and crucially) through music - we empower people to pursue what many philosophers throughout history consider to be the highest human values: a virtuous life well lived, a life of well-being, flourishing, fulfillment, and constructive happiness for the benefit of oneself and others (p. 22).

In my career, I know of two former students who have gone on to major in music, but there have been many who continued and were quite successful in high school although choosing other paths for their professional lives. The ability of each student to make those choices is to me, what is most important in education. These choices are what lead to students having the ability to live a well-balanced and meaningful life. As a music teacher, I love nothing more than seeing my students leave my middle school program and continue to be actively involved in high school. If they remain active in college, even better. Most importantly I like to believe their ability in making informed decisions and the successes in their lives were influenced by the choice to continue with music as part of their educational growth.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

My philosophy is a belief that all students can learn to be good musicians if given the proper guidance and instruction. That instruction begins with me leading with focus, structure and consistency. Students will respond when they know what is expected and how those expectations will help them to be successful in learning. The lessons I am presenting will show my return to grounding students in a solid foundation of singing technique, understanding their voice, and mastering concepts such as breath management and resonance. I will show a return to good rehearsal techniques that include structure and purpose. I will show a renewed understanding of my role as the voice teacher in the choir class. I will work to stay true to my philosophy that all students can learn if they desire, and I believe the videos will show that my students are learning to be wonderful singers and will help shape my program into one I know they deserve!

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)

6th Grade Choir

2014 Music Standards Addressed (NAfME, 2014)

-MU:Pr5.3.E.5a - Use self-reflection and peer feedback to refine individual and ensemble performances of a varied repertoire of music.

-MU:Pr6.1.E.5a - Demonstrate attention to technical accuracy and expressive qualities in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire of music.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Basic singing, basic knowledge of vocal use, beginning levels of counting and sight-singing

Rehearsal Objective

SWBAT: Understand the use of their upper range in singing; Count rhythm alone and in context; understand and demonstrate proper breath management for healthy singing in choir.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

My main assessment will be listening to students as we progress through each section of our rehearsals.

Students should be able to demonstrate breath management.

Students should be able access their upper ranges with a healthy clear tone and carry that tone through-out the vocal registers.

Students can demonstrate correct rhythm in counting and correct use of Solfege syllables for Sight-singing.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

Students are preparing for concert and no modifications at this time

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Octavos, Sight-singing materials, Expanding Ball

Rehearsal Plan

Day 1

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Purpose of Activity</u>	<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Assessment</u>
10 min	Warm-Up	Getting the mind and voice ready for singing	5 note scales for easing Short 5 notes scales for feel of breath control 5 note legato scale for connection and phrasing Sirens – for accessing upper ranges Counting Sight-Singing	Listening and watching
30 min	Song rehearsal	Preparing for end of year concert	Selection 1: Working for memory and clarity. Making sure we are accessing the upper range with good support for a good tone.	Students are singing with good tone in all registers.
			Selection 2: Working for memory and clarity. Making sure we are accessing the upper range with good support for a good tone. Working on	Students are sustaining through the phrasing and

			connected singing for the purpose of legato singing.	line of the song.
			Selection 3: Working for memory and clarity. Making sure we are accessing the upper range with good support for a good tone. Working specifically on text so we are able to share song with our audience.	Students are enunciating and using the voice to share the text clearly with the audience.
5 min	Closure	Recap/Encourage	Close rehearsal with a reminder of the good work/announcements as needed.	

Day 2

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Purpose of Activity</u>	<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Assessment</u>
10 min	Warm-Up	Getting the mind and voice ready for singing	5 note scales for easing Short 5 notes scales for feel of breath control 5 note legato scale for connection and phrasing Sirens – for accessing upper ranges Counting/Sight-Singing	Listening and watching

15 min	Rounds/	2 pt singing practice	Working on listening, blend, balance, part independence Making sure we are accessing the upper range with good support for a good tone.	Students are singing with good tone in all registers.
15 min	Concert Rehearsal (Not shown in video, but included in the lesson plan for continuity)	Prep for concert	Working for memory and clarity. Making sure we are accessing the upper range with good support for a good tone. Working on connected singing for the purpose of legato singing. Working specifically on text so we are able to share song with our audience.	Listening, observation
5 min	Closure	Recap/Encourage	Close rehearsal with a reminder of the good work/announcements as needed.	

Table 2.1 Rehearsal Plan

Chapter 3 - Reflections

My goal with this lesson was to focus on returning to a solid foundation of singing and choral music. As I mentioned previously, the past few years have found me working very hard to ensure students are ready for performance, and as such, the focus on skills has not been as present as it should be for a quality music education. While I have always been proud of the product my students produce, I know that the lack of direct focus on skills has not been helpful when they move on to sing in other programs. It was my desire to reset what has been the practice in my classroom, particularly after dealing with shutdowns and online learning due to COVID. The time away from singing forced me to come to the realization that musicianship is more than singing. Students must know the fundamental elements of music if they are going to be lifelong musicians.

In these lessons, students began to focus on breathing and using the breath for healthy singing. I began using a Hoberman Sphere when we work on expanding and contracting for breathing. The first few weeks, I did not really see much change in student breath work, but as the year progressed, students began to connect what they were seeing with what their body was doing in connection with breathing. I will certainly continue to use this approach in the future and plan to expand to include more individual connections with the sphere. I think that having students actually holding and connecting with the expansion will be a wonderful way to get those students who struggle with the concept to connect earlier in the year. Students also began to connect breathing with singing in their upper ranges. We used sirens this year which is something I had never really tried. Being a male singer with a very limited upper range I have always found it difficult to get my unchanged voices to find their upper ranges. I found a few videos on YouTube that helped with discovering range, and from there, I was able to work with

getting students to hear and sing in the higher parts of their ranges. It took some work but we will continue to develop those upper ranges as we sing throughout the years.

One instructional strategy I used this year, though not new, was consistency. We began every rehearsal with a focus/warm-up, rhythm or sight-singing in some form, review of previous work, learning of new work, and closure of previous work. This sounds simple, but again, when my focus has been to work on just getting our songs performance ready, I did not always maintain a strict routine with my rehearsal process. One positive of this change, was any day that I did not have an agenda on the board for various reasons, my students immediately asked me what we were doing in rehearsal. That alone has encouraged me to be certain I have a visible agenda for students every rehearsal.

With my focus on returning to a solid foundation, I did more individual singing assessments. Due to the changes that were required for working during the COVID pandemic, we became a one-to-one district. The ability to have students record themselves and submit for assessment was a wonderful addition this year. As it was new for me and my singers, I only used this method a couple of times this year but it will become the major mode of assessment as I move forward with building my program. The addition of technology has also allowed me to use any number of websites, games, platforms for assessing the other skills necessary to be accomplished musicians. Sites like Kahoot! and Blooket allow me to use or create fun ways to assess theory, history, and listening.

Moving forward, I will continue to focus on a consistent, focused music classroom. This year has proven to me, though I knew this, that students respond when they know what is expected. I will admit that it becomes laborious to have to write out rehearsal plans for several

different classes 5 days a week but I also learned there are ways to lessen the load. The important function is to have a plan and to work the plan for a successful program.

The work in the Master's Program at Kansas State University has been pivotal to my rejuvenation. Over the course of this work, I have had the ability to learn from students who are also building programs, some in schools just like mine. I have had the opportunity to learn from professors who are experts in their fields who have encourage vastly different ways of approaching music education. I have been given multiple opportunities to reflect on my own practice as a music educator and how I can become the best at what I do. I have learned I am a researcher, vocal coach, conductor, leader. I have learned that I have influence, much more than previously thought, in the lives and futures of my students. I have the ability to bring them to music and to encourage them to remain connected for life to this wonderful art. I can connect families and friends with music. I can connect and heal communities with music. I can bridge much needed societal gaps with music. My time in this program has taught me that no matter how long you have been doing what you love, there is always more to learn, more ways to grow, a never-ending supply of support, and most importantly, as paraphrased from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, Music is the Food of the Soul.

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