

# **Building literacy to build confidence**

by

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B.M.E., University of Central Arkansas, 2015

A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MUSIC

School of Music, Theatre, and Dance  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2023

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## **Abstract**

The goal of my lessons is to help my students analyze and store sound patterns in their minds so they are able to learn and perform music at their highest potential and ultimately gain confidence in themselves through a communal activity they enjoy. We spend time in warmups singing patterns and scales on solfege to build an aural library/model that I assess their ability to recognize/notate when played or sung. I also spend time daily practicing sight singing skills, and I assess them as a whole group (in-person) and individually (online recordings). Students were also asked to create short sight-reading passages for their peers with online software so that they could show their understanding of notating pitch and rhythms.

It is my goal to be ever evolving as I find new knowledge and form new connections to the craft of teaching and to the students in my care. Throughout my time with Kansas State University, I have grown to want my students to have a deeper understanding of music literacy and vocal production. This has manifested as teaching more students in small groups and individual settings, when possible, as to focus on each of their instruments with care and attention, and in the way that I approach rhythmic and melodic content in sight reading examples and our performance literature. I have become more aware of the fact that all too often in music education there are performance requirements we expect from our young musicians although we have not adequately taken the time to instruct the basic components of being a confident and versatile musician. Through repetition of sound patterns, isolation and focus on rhythmic patterns, and the teaching of basic vocal production, I have seen growth in more of my students this year that I have in years past. As I move forward, my goal it to be more methodical from the beginning of a student's time in my classroom/choir program.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to professors Dr. Frederick Burrack, Dr. Ruth Gurgel, Dr. Joshua Oppenheim, Dr. Phil Payne, Dr. Amy Rosine, Dr. Patricia Thompson, Dr. Frank Tracz, Dr. Craig Weston, and Dr. Julie Yu.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this report to Mema (Mary Ida Rankin) as a token of gratitude for encouraging me by example to: chase goals, have fun, learn always, and be a giver.

## Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Music education has been under constant scrutiny since the beginning of its incorporation into school curriculum (Mark & Gary, 2007). Music is present in all parts of history and serves a variety of roles and functions. The early Hebrews' religious culture provided a model for society-wide participation in music (ibid.). This was countered by the cultures of the classical societies in the ancient Greek and Roman world where music education was reserved for professionals who came from either the elite or slave class (ibid.). Throughout early Christianity and the Renaissance, music education was kept alive through the church and the newly developed universities run by the church. In the Reformation period, education was transferred from church to state which led to a decline in music education for anyone other than the elite (ibid.). The education systems of Germany, coupled with the private instruction always available, led to the inclusion of music in American public education that has not been seen since the early Hebrew society (ibid.).

There are some purists who try to fit music into an easily labeled box that miss out on the whole view, but I agree with Bennett Reimer's idea that music is multidimensional and is always culturally grounded and serves a plethora of purposes (Reimer, 2003). The experience-based philosophy of music allows for and values all the ways that music can be experienced, and all types of music that allow for a special experience. I also agree with Reimer's idea that music education exists in order to make musical experiences, in all of their various ways of being, as widely available to all people, and as deeply cultivated by each individual, as possible (ibid.). I believe that everyone is capable of participating in music in at least one way that engages them cognitively and aesthetically. In this way, I agree with Christopher Small's concept of "musicking" as a holistic review of everything and everyone involved with a music event (1998).



Taking part in the making of music is an important way to help build preference of style in addition to performance skills and lends to an informed listener who serves an important role in any situation where there are performers.

Music is a multidimensional subject with definitions and purposes unique to each individual and group of peoples. Developing musicianship and listening skills is done through a variety of acts; performance, composing, arranging, conducting, and listening to music (Elliott, 2005). Music uses relationships of sounds to inspire feeling, or as Reimer says, to “make special” (2003, p. 68). Music is important to the human race because it is a unique form of expression and is uniquely human to use sound to “make special”. Whether or not someone is involved in the creation of music, being involved as an effective listener requires the same level of knowing as performing (Elliott, 2005). When we listen to music, our powers of consciousness are challenged in addition to generating thoughts and feelings. Abstract knowledge depends on the ability to relate language to perceptions, and refining the sensibilities secures the semantics of language. In this way, sustained experience in music allows students to build proficiency in the understanding of the subtle qualities used in music. Not only does music contribute to the achievement of the mind in the understanding of its forms, but it also helps build qualitative nuance that provides a heightened consciousness and aesthetic experience (Eisner, 1998). Music is also an artistically constructed representation of culture that operates in relation to the norms of the society it comes from. Works of music can be thought of in the modern philosophical sense of art being a created thing. Christopher Small (1998, p. 2) says that “*music is not a thing at all, but an activity, something people do.*” I like Small’s emphasis on *doing* music and that the reification of music is not the focus, but I do not necessarily agree that the work is not important. Music can also be defined as a work, a “thing” acting as a representation, or an artifact from a culture and time

from which it came. Cultural artifacts are crucial in establishing and preserving a sense of self-identity within social groups (Elliott, 2005). I think that significant works of music that are highly valued for their cognitive and aesthetic value can outlive the culture they were created in and take on a sense of “thingness” that musicians can use for the expressive and communicative purposes of music. Musicianship allows the mental/emotional state of “flow”, which accompanies deep musical enjoyment (ibid.). It also provides for self-growth, constructive-knowledge, and self-esteem through mastering its subtle qualities (ibid.). Through all the benefits that music has on individuals in cognition, aesthetic, and expression, I think that one of the most important purposes of music is the sense of community and belongingness it can bring. The way music is created is filtered through traditions and beliefs of the culture the creator belongs to, and these contextual influences affect the experience we have of the music (Reimer, 2003). Experiencing music with others creates shared memories that act as bonding moments for those you share the memories with. This bringing together of diverse people is part of the magic of music.

Education happens in formal and informal settings in many different institutions in society. Since the conception of the quadrivium in the age of antiquity, formal education has theoretically included music (Mark & Gary, 2007). At times, the inclusion of music in the curriculum was geared towards the scientific and mathematical understanding of musical form. In these times, practical music education existed outside of formal education as a function of the church and society at large. In times when music has revolved around the “professional doer” and the audience members, music education has struggled to maintain its hold in education. This may be due to the philosophy shared by Jorgenson that education should model culture (2011). Being that we live in a production-oriented society, I think that Jorgenson’s metaphor of

education to production in a factory may accurately model our current society. I am of the opinion that we can do better. Jorgenson points out that this model overlooks diversity and spontaneity, but that it also has many benefits for standardization, efficiency, and mastery. Jorgenson says that taken together, the methods used in schooling, training, education, socialization, and enculturation articulate more of a broad view of music education for which we should be aiming.

Eisner describes a style of teaching that encompasses artistic connoisseurship that allows for flexibility and diversification of outcomes that can move in directions unforeseen by teacher or student. In this method of teaching, educational goals are not concrete targets, but rather destinations towards which to travel. This allows the teacher to interpret and judge through qualitative evaluation which can result in unique outcomes. In being an educational connoisseur, both student and teacher are able to take on the role of critic through interpretation and appraisal throughout the musical process. This process yields intrinsic rewards that are just as important as the outcomes. Not everything in music, nor in education, can be reduced to a number. Eisner points out that “the map is not the territory”, meaning that in order to know how to create or interpret music requires more than knowing the elements of music. There are qualitative subtleties to music, and those are objects of knowledge to the listening ear or the seeing eye (Eisner, 1998). Additionally, conventional methods of evaluating knowledge that rely on linguistic thinking are not appropriate for evaluating musicianship because action is a valid way of showing knowledge (Elliott, 2005). You would not evaluate someone’s ability to shoot a free-throw based on their description of the mechanics or someone’s ability to dance ballet on a written test.

Music educators need to see their role as integrating music with life, instead of providing a niche range of knowledge and skills (Jorgenson, 1997). A truly holistic approach to music education for a school or district would require the serious attention and efforts of the administrator of the institution in order to ensure the inclusion of all programs and courses that may be necessary to effectively include all students within a system in music education. I think this would include the traditional ensembles that are currently offered, with the addition of ensembles or courses that appeal to modern styles of musicking (guitar, keyboard, software, etc.). I can enact as holistic a music education as is possible while maintaining my duties as a choral director within a large public district with certain expectations for high-level end product.

Music is something that transcends social boundaries but is usually intimately connected to a social group (Jorgenson, 1997). People say that “music is a universal language”, and while the elements of music are similar, they are used in particular ways in certain cultures that create a uniqueness to that culture. Music education provides a common body of shared knowledge and a basis for conversation between different others (Jorgenson, 2011). Approaching music education from Reimer’s perspective of synergistic accommodation allows for the teaching of music as a form and a practice with attention given to both aspects. Performance is crucial, but by itself is incomplete for all music can accomplish when listening, responding, and connection is included.

Approaching music education from an experience-based philosophy calls for an active involvement in music making, and knowledge of the products of music making as necessary counterbalances of each other. I have previously argued for music with utilitarian values but have taken heed to the advice and warning of Reimer (2003, p. 65) when he said, “*Utilitarian values of music can be achieved as an outgrowth of education devoted to the particular values music offers. We must also recognize that without a clear sense of the special values of music,*

*and the pursuit of them as our primary professional obligation, we are left with no foundation for our presence in education.”* We need to teach music for the sake of music’s special qualities unbound in any other subject.

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

The community I teach in has a globally corporate vibe and expects high-quality products. This region-wide value lends itself well to the production model of education and a factory setting of “schooling”. I believe that students should get a holistic music education and that I can primarily achieve this goal through my job as a high school choral director. I do my best to provide students with a comprehensive music education in the sense of teaching them about the forms of music, but also how to improve in the performance of music. We have a fairly narrow purview of music style in the choral classroom, but I try to incorporate musical literature throughout the course of the year that encompass a variety of languages, cultures represented, religious/secular content, and styles of performance. We talk in class about the meaning of the text and the qualities of sound that we’re perceiving, and through asking questions and guiding understanding of musical form, students are able to interpret and respond and feel about music in any way that music is able to inspire.

At times, I feel limited in my duties as a choral director, so I have started a music club at my school called “Jam Fam,” where as long as the music is school-appropriate, students can elect to sing or play whatever they want to, in any ensemble situation they decide on. There are some pianos at my school and about twenty ukuleles of various types- and students bring any type of instrument from home they desire. Students are expected to lead themselves in selecting music to learn and practice, and we have “Flex Performances” where students can share the work they’ve been doing with other folks in the club. This club has become an outlet for students who do not

find a home in some of the traditional music classes at the school, while at the same time being an additional source of musical outlet and expression for some students who do participate in the traditional ensembles. This intermingling of students from different life situations and with different interests is where many of my students find some of their new best friends since they have a mutual experience with different others. The ability of music to make you *think* and *feel* with the use of vibration and the relation of sound with sound and sound with time is a unique characteristic of music that cannot be compared to any other art form or subject, and thus is reason alone for the continued study and participation in music for all students for all times.

## **Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)**

### **Lesson Plan 1 – Pattern Recognition**

#### **Overview of Lesson 1**

Through repetition in warmups, students learn to sing ascending scales and intervals (3rds/4ths/5ths) on vocalises and solfege. We also do some call and response solfege patterns. For formative assessment I often will play an interval on the keyboard and have students identify what the second solfege syllable is with the first one being “Do”. The goal of all of this is to help students listen critically so they can build a tonal library of sounds and patterns that they are able to access whenever they visually encounter that material in sight singing exercises and performance literature. This activity is in line with the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of Benjamin Bloom’s cognitive taxonomy as described by Adams (2015) by showing comprehension of notation and familiar sound patterns.

#### **Arkansas Fine Arts Academic Standards (2020)**

- PR.4.2 - I can identify, with limited guidance, the elements of music and their purpose within a vocal work.

#### **Prior Knowledge**

- Students can read pitches in staff notation.
- Students can sing diatonic intervals up to a 5th.

#### **Learning Goal**

- Students will be able to analyze and select notated tonal patterns based on aural stimuli.

## **Lesson Objective**

- Select the correct tonal pattern for each example as you hear it played on piano or sung aloud.

## **Assessment**

- Students will circle “A” or “B” on their paper depending on which notated pattern they perceive aurally.

## **Strategies/Accommodations**

- Warmups to include included intervals.
- Sight reading exercise on Sight Reading Factory for practice reading tonal relationships.
- Played examples in different keys than printed in to force my one student with perfect pitch to use his understanding of solfege tonal relationships instead of his knowledge of absolute pitch names.

## **Instructional Materials**

- Piano, pencils, worksheets, answer key

## **Lesson Sequence**

- Play each example 3 times (10s processing time between)
- Play each example 1 more time at the end for review.

## **Adjustments Moving Forward**

Having students identify the correct visualization for the aural input they were receiving was a great step in assessing if students had a firm grasp of the relationship of tones and pitches notated in the musical staff. I only gave them two options to decipher between, option A or option B. Moving forward I think it would be beneficial to start with basic sound patterns in the beginning of the school year and make the patterns more difficult throughout the year. My main



focus this year was to assess if they could hear the patterns that are used in the Choral Performance Assessment manual for Arkansas Choral Directors Association. I would like to expand the concept of this activity with basic tonal patterns to utilizing rhythms, motifs, and phrases from our performance literature. I think that using real examples from music that they are already studying will help solidify their analysis and application of the written music to their performances. My students like doing activities like this because it gives them a break from singing, and it also gives them a new type of mental stimulation. I noticed that when we would do this activity and others similar to it, I didn't have to tell students to "be quiet" or "stop talking" much at all. You can hear some extraneous noises in the video snippet, but it was not enough to cause trouble for the students in the room. Having the students look at the visual examples as they heard a tonal pattern forced them to audiate the pattern options to evaluate which pattern they heard. I imagine that incorporating sections of our performance literature will help students gain a deeper knowledge of how the sounds they hear and create in the performance of choral singing are directly related to the symbols they see on the page. I would also use sung vocal patterns in addition to piano, so students have experience in evaluating sounds with different timbres and frequencies.

This assignment was easy to create and helped reinforce tertian intervals that are commonly used in the levels of sight-reading exercises that we use for practice and assessment in class, and also the level that we are assessed on for our district-required and Arkansas Choral Directors Association Choral Performance Assessment. I have been fearful in the past to take time away from rehearsal thinking that it would be harmful to our performance preparation. My thought was that if we weren't directly practicing sight singing or literature, students would not learn or be able to show their knowledge. There were students who lack vocal control to show

that they know what certain intervals and patterns sound like, but they were very successful in this exercise in selecting the correct notation. This shows that students need multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate their knowledge and that one mode of assessment may not allow a student the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. The example in this lesson had ten examples on the worksheet and took quite a chunk of time out of our rehearsal. This may be a good format for a summative assessment on this skill but could be pared down to allow for integration into a rehearsal setting that uses performance literature for the activity. I plan to have students identify the measure that sounds like what they hear (with limited options in the music). I have not used an assignment like this before with students identifying tonal patterns, but I do sometimes in warmup time have students identify a second interval with the first pitch always being the tonic. I could adapt this even by having the first pitch be a different scale degree than the tonic which would have them listening for function in addition to just intervallic distance. I also believe I could grow this activity into having the students come up with examples for the class to identify which could reinforce creating and performing goals.

## **Lesson Plan 2 - Transcribe**

### **Overview of Lesson 2**

This lesson is oriented towards having students apply their knowledge of the symbols of music notation and their relation to pitch and rhythm. Having built a familiar warmup routine to help my students build an aural library of tonal patterns, this lesson focused on students applying their knowledge of aural patterns and notation by notating the patterns they heard me play on their staff paper. This activity stuck to basic rhythms and simple patterns as it was the first time I have taken this activity to the step of notating.

### **Arkansas Fine Arts Academic Standards (2020)**

- CR.2 - I can develop and preserve a rhythmic or melodic idea or motive.
- CR.3 - I can share, reflect on, and refine motives using teacher provided criteria.

### **Prior Knowledge**

- Students can sing pentascale.
- Students can read quarter & half note symbols.

### **Learning Goal**

- Students will transcribe rhythmic and melodic content in staff notation.

### **Lesson Objective**

- Transcribe two 4 measure examples of quarter & half note rhythms on repeated pitch.
- Transcribe 4 measures of pentascale pitches on steady quarter note values.
- Transcribe 4 measures of pentascale pitches on quarter & half note rhythm values.

### **Assessment**

- Students will notate their answers on paper and will be graded for understanding at the end of the activity.

## **Strategies/Accommodations**

- Warmups to include stepwise pentascale patterns.
- Counting exercises on Sight Reading Factory
- Melodic exercises on Sight Reading Factory

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

- Pencils, worksheets, piano

## **Lesson Sequence**

- Play each example 3 times (15s processing time)
- Play each example 1 time again at the end for review.

## **Adjustments Moving Forward**

I realized in this activity that students are generally more able to decode music symbols than they are to notate aural sounds. Having to translate pitch and rhythms into music notation was a struggle for many students in this particular class. I did this activity with my open choir students, who generally have less experience and less advanced skills. Before moving to this activity of notating melodies I led the students through preliminary activities of circling the solfege syllables they heard in the pattern. I would always give them the starting solfege and then have them circle letters on a worksheet that symbolized the solfege syllables. This activity was fairly easy for my students and so this year I went to the next level of applying the same concept of identifying sound patterns, but I had students use western music notation. I have not done many activities with the students that involved notating music before this activity, so it was a new challenge on top of the challenge of being able to aurally discern the pitches and rhythms. Some of the students may have been able to find better success had I built prior lessons to this that taught more about notating the symbols used for music notation. I have since found curated

worksheets that do this very thing that I plan on using to introduce music symbols this next year. I want students to be able to use their understanding of the aural structure of a major scale and the function of each pitch using solfege to make sense of aural input they receive. I believe that being able to translate the aural stimuli we receive in music is a crucial part of being literate. Some of my students who struggled with the notation of pitches and rhythms had success in writing the solfege letters but did not comprehend how to transfer that knowledge to staff notation. As I continue exercises like this in the future, I will add a place above or below the staff for solfege to be written in so that students can then later review the solfege and translate it post-facto so they're not having to do it in real time as they're listening. This would split the cognitive tasks into separate activities, and while the goal is for the whole comprehension, building this activity into segments would make it more manageable for students who need that approach. This activity had three tasks, and while they were sequential in components added, each exercise was four measures long. Having students transcribe four measures is something that should be built up to, especially since the activity that preceded this was identifying tonal patterns of only four quarter notes. As I continue improving on this activity, I will have students transcribe shorter durations of tonal patterns and lengthen it as their learning continues. I need to build this type of lesson and assessment sequentially instead of jumping to the stage I did for this activity. In following years, I can add to this lesson structure by having students add movements to their perception of the sound structures, be that through solfege or interpretive motion. This could help in solidifying the students' accurate perception of pitch and rhythms. I did not do this activity more than one time with the inclusion of staff notation, which can be rectified in the future with more critical planning of activities of shorter duration that grow in complexity and length. I tried to spiral this activity by first only having students transcribe rhythms, and then simple stepwise

melodies using only quarter notes, and then simple stepwise melodies with both quarter and half notes. I think that my attempt to spiral this activity was short sighted and needs to be more slowly graduated from one step to the next. With repetition of the activity of transcribing, students will learn to audiate and listen more critically and will have a good example of how to notate simple melodic structures.

## **Lesson Plan 3 - Sight Read**

### **Overview of Lesson 3**

This lesson is an individual sight singing assessment/lesson in which I was assessing where each of my students' skill levels were and also coaching them as we went along. We used SightReadingFactory.Net Level 1 exercises for these individual sight singing sessions. Each of my classes works on sight singing as a large group in every rehearsal. This particular lesson is geared to my Concert Choir (non-auditioned) students in March and took different spins with each student that I listened to individually depending on situational need.

### **Arkansas Fine Arts Academic Standards (2020)**

- PR.5 - I can read and sing, alone and with others, basic musical notation based on appropriate time signatures.

### **Prior Knowledge**

- Knowledge of music symbols & basic music notation
- Diatonic scale tonal relationships
- Students can sing major scale on solfege.

### **Learning Goal**

- Students will be able to sight sing limited range melodies using quarter and half values in 4/4 time.

### **Lesson Objective**

- Sing a 4-measure exercise in 4/4 time with correct pitches and rhythms.

### **Assessment**

- Aural assessment of student performance

## **Strategies/Accommodations**

- Teacher feedback & input when errors occur.
- Instruction of the “walk then jump” method.
- Teacher modeling of practice methods

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

- Computer, internet

## **Lesson Sequence**

- Identify pitches using solfege.
  - Use major scale as an aural template of pitches to use.
  - Practice out loud so you can the mapping out of pitch
- Analyze rhythms and assign the previously found pitches into rhythmic patterns.
- Help students identify corrections to make as they work through the exercise.

## **Adjustments Moving Forward**

I realized watching the video for this lesson that I interject quite often with this student. It was in an attempt to give affirmation and guidance, but I think that the student could benefit more by having mental processing time without my input. I gave the student a lot of information that I know I could have guided her to with questioning and time. This particular student has an issue with engagement in class and I wanted to take this time as an opportunity to teach some concepts that are ignored in group instruction time. Still yet, I would like to use more questioning and less telling. I made assumptions for the student at times, but I think that is mostly warranted as we have built a good relationship since her joining choir. In general, using questions more gives students an opportunity to reflect and self-assess to come up with the answer on their own. Although this student did improve in our short time together, she struggled to get through a fairly



basic sight-reading excerpt which made me realize how much I may overlook individual ability in group settings. Part of pulling students individually for sight reading assessment and min-coaching sessions was an effort to focus on individuals and help them feel more confident in their ability while in the group setting.

Some students have the ability to sight sing through exercises of sixteen measures with many skips and variety of rhythm values, but some of my students struggle just going from one note to the next. While my school's sight-reading scores at All State and Choral Performance Assessment events are always among the top few scoring schools, that only accounts for the "advanced" students. I want to scaffold better with my non-advanced students so that they can build skills to reach whatever their next level is and build more confidence in themselves through their ability to achieve success in difficult tasks. This scaffolding can be done by more echo-singing on solfege patterns and more purposeful selection of literature that encompasses particular literacy goals. I also can have students demonstrate their ability to read certain intervals or shorter durations of sight-reading examples so they build mastery in bite-size chunks. I include sight singing practice in every single class every single day to keep the repetition up so my students are getting constant practice. What I do not do well is allow students the opportunity to utilize their sight singing skills with the performance literature they have each semester. This would help enforce the need for building the skill, but I often feel pressed for time in regard to students learning their performance literature in time, so I neglect to emphasize reading as much as I emphasize listening and regurgitating. I also think that I could get students more involved with music literacy if I made it more fun with melodies from some of the music they are familiar with that they listen to in their time outside of school with activities such as *Name That Tune*. *Name That Tune* in this case is when a pop music melody is written in solfege or staff notation

and students have to audiate it to a degree of recognizing the tune, at which point they may be considered a winner of the game. This could be adapted to choral performance literature that is being studied as well. Both methods of having students analyze and evaluate notation is giving students real world examples of the practicality and joy of learning to read music.

## **Lesson Plan 4 - Compose**

### **Overview of Lesson 4**

This lesson consisted of singing through our familiar warmup routine that incorporates scales and diatonic intervals, and then I showed students an example of work to emulate along with a list of parameters for their composition. I wanted to students to synthesize their learning of tonal patterns and music notation in a way that gave them creative freedom within the boundaries of our ArkCDA CPA guidelines. I had the students notate their melody and then record themselves singing alone or in a small group. Those who sang in small groups had the strength of multiple voices, but also had to attempt to learn each others' exercises.

### **Arkansas Fine Arts Academic Standards (2020)**

- CR.1 - I can create and notate a rhythmic and/or melodic pattern, using technology when available.

### **Prior Knowledge**

- Reading staff notation
- Aural relationships between intervals contained in the guidelines.

### **Learning Goal**

- Students will develop a deeper understanding of staff notation and how music is structured rhythmically and melodically according to ArkCDA CPA/State Festival Sight Reading Rubric.

### **Lesson Objective**

- Students will compose an 8-measure sight reading exercise using ArkCDA CPA/State Festival Sight Reading Rubric JH Level 2 guidelines.

- Students will perform their sight-reading excerpt alone or with a small group (2-3) and submit videos to Google Classroom

### **Assessment**

- Rubric will be used to check if students followed the assignment guidelines.

### **Strategies/Accommodations**

- Noteflight software used.
  - Staff paper provided for a couple of students who could not function in the Noteflight software.
- Sing through warm up exercises that involve stepwise motion, 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths.

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

- Chromebooks, internet, Noteflight account, projector

### **Lesson Sequence**

- Students create Noteflight accounts.
- Teacher shows quick tips on how to use software (utilizing assignment guidelines)
- Students have 45 minutes to compose as Teacher walks around room to assist.
- Students have 15 minutes to record and submit their videos.

### **Adjustments Moving Forward**

This activity was a big hit with some of my students! I plan on giving more opportunities for creating and composing in the future so my students can learn a new method of expressing themselves. I have never asked students to compose before, because I have been scared of having to judge and guide since I do not feel particularly advanced as a composer or arranger. I learned through the excitement of so many of my students that this new type of challenge is craved. According to Mishra (2014), composing helps build fundamental understandings of music

notation and helps with the accuracy of sight reading. For these two reasons, I plan on increasing the frequency of composition exercises to at least once per quarter. For this activity, I only introduced the composition unit to two of three choirs I directly teach, and I will expand it to all classes in the future now that I have a template to build from. Each assignment will grow in the types of note and rest values permitted, pitch range allowed, and key signature and time signatures allowed. Advanced students were able to complete this activity with ease, while others had a hard time learning to use the software I asked them to use. I need to give at least one assignment for students to copy a carefully crafted phrase of music exactly so that they get experience using the software I want them to use. I did expect this to be an issue, so I provided blank staff paper for any students who preferred not to use Note Flight.

In addition to using composition activities for sight reading examples, I could have students demonstrate their understanding of form by composing in different simple forms. In order to build up to these simple forms, I would have students write short phrases as in this assignment, and then piece different ones together to make simple form structures (binary, ternary, rondo). Giving this composition assignment was eye-opening in the sense that I witnessed students excited about creating in a way that many of them have never had the opportunity to attempt before. It was refreshing to see a new excitement in students and I want to provide them more opportunities to showcase their understanding of music notation through a creative outlet. This instruction forced me out of my comfort zone by getting into the realm of composing and creating and it allowed students to show their knowledge and understanding of music notation in a format that I have never given as a teacher. With more frequent composition assignments that gradually increase in complexity of rhythmic values and melodic content, I can help students build accuracy in their sight-reading ability (Mishra, 2014) and give them an outlet

to do something that I witnessed them love doing this year the one time we did it. Having students turn in a video recording of their composition had them singing and hearing their own melody, and those that grouped up had the additional requirement of learning the melodies of their group mates. Next year I can pick one or a couple of the exercises that follow the parameters and we can sight read those together as a class so students are seeing superior examples of their peers' work. I believe this could help students feel a sense of accomplishment if their composition is selected.

## Chapter 3 - Reflections

Throughout my time in the Kansas State University Master of Music program, I have been molded by learning in each course. I have been opened up to new resources and professional contacts that have immeasurably enhanced my personal life and approaches to education. One of the most standout discussions I have ever had about music education was with Dr. Payne in Curriculum Development & Learning Assessment when I asked him, “How do we have time to teach the basics when we expect such high standards in performance?” and he responded, “If we have high standards for performance, how do we have time not to teach the basics?” I was struck with an overwhelming sense of responsibility that day for helping my students become more confident in themselves through building confidence in their abilities as a musician. In my Research in Music Education course, I focused on methods and activities that improve sight reading as this is a facet of music education that I feel is lacking in the choral world. There are students who leave the high school who are not confident in their ability to read music, and they turn into the adults who claim that they are a singer but never learned to read music. I sing in an adult church choir where some of the members do not read music and it is clear that they do not have the same confidence in performance that those who read music do. I do not just want my students to be singers, I want them to be whole musicians with choir skills that can continue to bring them joy through group singing throughout life. I focused this report on new types of assignments that I have not given in the past. I want to continue growing and trying new things and improving on teaching that inspires student learning.

There are activities that I began incorporating more routinely this year to help build my students’ sense of musicality, which has been found to build their sight-reading skills (Mishra, 2014). For instance, I taught my choir students the chromatic scale as a warmup this year

thinking it would be difficult for them to get into their ear and take ownership of, but when I asked them if it was difficult, they just said, “no, it is not hard, it is just a different thing you asked us to do.” I started doing more interval training in warmups as well and would ask students to identify the interval (from a given tonic) by showing the Curwen hand sign of the second note played. This activity was something that became a challenge to the students, but most especially my freshmen tenor-bass choir! It was a joy to see them want to be the “winner” (first one to throw their “choir gang sign,” as we joke) of what was ultimately an academic task. This year also saw the implementation of more student leadership in the form of sectionals being student-led. I would give sections of music to focus on and send sections out with Bluetooth speakers and practice tracks to learn their parts. I found that students much prefer being left to their own section to learn notes and rhythms, partially because they do not have constant supervision, but mostly for the fact that they can move at the rate their section needs without being bound to the progress of the large group. I could then spend a few minutes with each section and give small group or individual feedback more efficiently.

We use SightReadingFactory.com each day at the beginning of our ensemble rehearsals. I use this tool to introduce new rhythms, key signatures, tonal patterns and intervals, chromatic alterations, and to give group and individual assessment assignments. One concept that was reinforced by Dr. Tracz’s teaching in Organization and Administration of the Successful Music Program is to never underestimate the power of passion (Shoop, 2001). I have used SightReadingFactory.com in the past and students would complain, but this year I always used an excited tone and cheery voice when talking about sight reading, and my students adopted the same attitude- it was to mock me at first, but then the passion won them over and they began to have fun with sight reading and would ask to speed up the tempo or increase the level of the



exercises we would read in class. Fostering this environment of appreciating a challenge has spilled over into many of my students' approach to performance literature and classwork for other courses.

I have improved my conducting gesture and approach to rehearsals with Dr. Yu and Dr. Oppenheim. I have previously felt that as a teacher of primarily younger singers that my role as a teacher outranked my role as a director. Through Dr. Yu's advice of, "Do not use your words, say it with your hands," I have developed more into my role as director when leading rehearsal and performance. "Simplicity is elegance" is another lesson from Dr. Yu that I took to heart. Dr. Yu instructed me in my conducting of upbeat entrances (such as measure 10) in "The Music of Living" (Forrest, 2012) to put a heavy emphasis on the downbeat instead of trying to conduct the upbeat. She also encouraged me to abandon the idea that I am a metronome and instead be the leader of expression. I have taken these concepts and many others into my conducting throughout the previous year. Dr. Yu taught me in conducting class to always try something new with my gesture until the sound I want occurs. Dr. Oppenheim taught me his method of approaching music one element at a time and then making music out of it. This means that you can add expression through dynamic contrast when you are simply monotone counting rhythms- or you can emphasize rhythmic clarity on solfege before adding text into the equation- either way, you can be musically creative in all aspects of music making. This teaching has equipped me with tools to use in rehearsals with my singers to help build confidence in their mastery of performance literature.

Advanced Vocal Pedagogy gave me a deeper understanding of how to teach my students how to use their voice properly and make vocal corrections that are appropriate to students' needs. The first lesson and assignment I gave in the 22-23 school year was over the anatomy of

breathing to iterate the importance on the breath in properly supporting your tone that is written about in *The Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults: A Manual for Teachers of Singing & for Choir Directors* (McKinney, 1994, p. 46-54). I have changed my vocabulary when I speak about supporting the tone by talking about specific actions to employ in addition to figurative language to portray an idea of an ideal timbre. When advice is given to singers how to correct a vocal fault by guiding them towards certain sensations, it can be very effective if students and teacher both agree on the meaning of the word. (McKinney, 1994, p. 31) Helping my students build an understanding of the way they can manipulate their instrument in order to get the best possible sound has given them more confidence in their ability to produce a good final product as an ensemble. One of the comments we received at our Choral Performance Assessment was about good vocal tone, and is a part of why the choir received Superior ratings. Experiencing success in the form of high ratings at our group assessment will help build habits of hard work and growth in students that will keep the cycle going.

I found that my students had tremendous success on the Pattern Recognition assignment, which shows that they have mastered that content well and that we are ready to include more complex tonal patterns and rhythms. I found that my non-auditioned choir had a varying degree of success on transcribing rhythms and melodies they heard played. This informs me that I need to start with more basic parameters next year when I continue this style of assignment. Working with students individually on sight reading material helped me get an intimate understanding of each students' skill level and know how to guide them moving forward. The composition exercise that students completed showed me that some have a comprehensive understanding of music notation while others struggled to understand some pitch names in the clefs. Forcing myself to get out of my comfort zone in my teaching allowed for my students to grow in ways

that they would not have without it, and also provided insight into new ways to improve in my presentation of content as I move forward in my career. I believe that providing instruction that allows students the opportunity to succeed in an activity they like is a gateway to helping a young human build confidence in themselves and can be an epicenter of positivity as they grow out into the world beyond high school.

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