

Connections: Percussion experiences beyond the band room

by

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Abstract

The lessons designed for this project involve taking the percussionist from the band room, into community performance opportunities. Often, music dies for students upon high school graduation because the band room percussionist does not connect those experiences to performances opportunities outside of band. My goal is to promote experiences for percussionists that lead to lifelong engagement in music. Our school district does not have high school musicals for musicians to learn to be a “Pit” musician. I am teaching my percussion ensemble to navigate the rigorous pit percussion set ups, fast transitions, and unpredictability of being an accompanist for musicians on stage. The end goal is these students will be ready to perform when called upon to perform and engage outside of school music experiences.

My career focuses on designing music programs, supporting the faculty who serve the students and teaching percussion. The coursework provided in this program is enhancing my effectiveness as a leader and teacher resulting in reaching additional students through innovative ideas and sustaining the current students with renewed passion for teaching. As I collect my annual statistics each year, I am reminded that my studies at Kansas State University are creating a story in music education for Austin Minnesota. “Effective communication of a story is key, perhaps the key, to leadership. Why? Because stories are the real thing. They are how we learn, how we visualize what can be. “Don’t just present them with numbers. Tell the story” (Shoop 62). In *World Pedagogy*, I designed a project that turned into 1200 elementary students studying and presenting Korean Folk Songs with Dr. Soojin Lee. I also broke out of the classic western box during the course and created Orange Haze, a rock band project complete with a logo, and community performances. The lessons designed for being a pit musician were designed in *Advanced Rehearsal Techniques*.

I focused my teaching skills by using philosophies of Eisner who believes the benefits of the arts are more than the art itself and merging educational theories like growth mindset which allows students, “NOT YET” in achievement spectrums rather than failure. A self-imposed graduate requirement was to improve my performance skills. After a 17-year hiatus from marimba, I took the stage with a newly formed group named Tryptich. My students were able to watch me achieve goals, hear me tackle difficult passages and see me perform substantial music. The coursework provided during my graduate work at Kansas State University has led to confidence while leading my community, teaching with more focus and intentionality, and becoming a whole musician again.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Chapter 2 - What is the purpose of education?

The general purpose of education is to inform-and-receive information. This inform and receive exchange happens for everyone birth until death. The bigger question is, “Why formal education?” Formal education for individuals in Western society leads to advancement, security, and a more comfortable life. On a larger scale education leads to new product development, medical discoveries, structural improvement for communities, and countless improvements that enhance our lives.

Education in all forms expands our minds to consider alternate views, keeps us from becoming complacent and allows us to better our critical thinking skills. An individual does not depend on formal education for survival, but it certainly leads to improved quality of life. Those without an education might not even realize what they are missing. “While wealthy people think of education as a necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections, and middle-class people consider it “crucial for climbing the success ladder and making money,” people in poverty value education “as an abstract but not as reality” (Payne, 2005, p. 17). Formal education provides a set of standards that all persons receive at a specific developmental point in life. These lessons are delivered to us by individuals who have organized the curriculum found to be necessary. Formal education gives the tools to contribute positively to society. Beyond what is determined to be necessary, individuals chose their education needs or desires. In every society, an individual’s desire for education is what creates unique specialties in career paths and makes each person valuable to the community they live in.

Why Music Education?

Education is essential for advancement in all areas of life. Music education is the vehicle to move all academics forward and should be offered to all students K-12. Music produces positive outcomes for all areas of education through engagement with various learning styles, multiple sensory use, organization, and discipline. The process of learning music provides abilities to problem solve in other educational courses. It can be difficult to prove the power of the process, so performance is the measurement tool that leads to sustainability of the program. The music educator in the classroom brings the stage performer to the class providing real examples that do not occur in other classrooms. For example, math teachers teach math, but students do not display their education gains and not evaluated in a real life setting during the course. The music educator with their unique ability to teach from past experiences takes the education into the real world by way of performance. This performance is on display for spectators and administrators to evaluate. Not hidden on a test that only the student and teacher see. This vulnerability of being on display while burgeoning is unique to music but certainly not unique to careers. Students engaged in music will take this experience and apply to their future careers. The vulnerability shows trust in your educator and trust in your team. It teaches recovery skills and shows the students' dedication and discipline. Investing time and fiscal resources building music programs has more lasting effects on human development than the one-hour character building assemblies.

My Music Education Philosophy

My philosophy is designed to reach the masses but meet the needs of an individual. Jorgensen compared education to a factory line, but music teaching is the farthest from factory line production than any other subject. The end goal of a factory line is to mass produce products

that come out the same, discarding any products that are the slightest bit different. In music teaching K-12 we teach the same concepts to a large number of individuals but create different individuals whose uniqueness together in a group form something special. Music is different for every individual even when developed through the same formula of presented topic.

Elliot Eisner expressed the importance of caring for the student who is producing the art form (Eisner, 1991). I agree the human is more important than the music itself. The composition is merely a piece of paper with notes. The musician makes the piece of music come alive through emotion and interpretation. Through the process of learning a particular piece students develop musical skills. The learning process in music transfers learning notes to other intricacies of life. For example, through repeat practice and correction of musical passages you are creating individuals who progress through practice until the goal is met. I believe in process over performance. This concept can be difficult to explain to an audience or clinician as they see the product not the road it took to the destination. The performance moments we celebrate can receive devastating blows in contest settings because the clinician is blindfolded to the process. However, through the performance wreckage, lessons of self-worth, moving forward, forgiveness and empathy can be taught. When music is part of a K-12 program, evaluation is inevitable for sustaining a program. Performance is the tool most easily used, but the educator must present it with an explanation of growth, statistics, and impactful stories that promote sustaining the program. This means it is the educator's job to create an environment that produces these valuable statistics, evidence of growth and foster an environment that creates impactful stories. The music on a page is not responsible for this.

I believe music learning should be lifelong. In every musician I work with, I embed the idea that music can be enjoyed, performed, and studied birth to death. My greatest joy is seeing

what individuals do with the skills we worked on together. I work deeply on connecting students to opportunities in the communities they move on to after high school. I do not focus on making musicians who will study music in college, I focus on making musicians that will make music to enhance their lives and share with others. For some that is a music education track, for most it is enjoying community music programs and becoming part of the audience. For these reasons, I begin taking my percussionist out of the school band mentality in their senior year. To be clear, we still participate 100% in the school ensemble but instead of celebrating and lamenting last concerts and contests, we focus on what continuing music looks like in the real world. I begin to teach skills that are used universally as a percussionist. For example, because most of my students are part of the public-school music program, I force them to rehearse keyboard percussion even when they have a particular dislike for melody. I stop forcing them in the later high school years. As an adult percussionist, even with a music degree, I'm called to play snare drum, bass drum, drum set, and axillary percussion far more times than I'm asked to play 4 mallet marimba. I want to be practical when training musicians so that students will love music enough to do something with it after high school!

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

Chapter 3 - Lesson Plan(s)

Lesson Plan

2014 Music National Standards (NAfME, 2014)

In this lesson we used the standards of Create, Perform and Respond

- 1) Create: Instruction that results in students improvising, composing, or creating new musical ideas.

Imagined themselves as a pit percussionist in a musical. They created their own set ups and discovered unconventional ways to navigate rigorous transitions required of pit orchestra performing.

- 2) Perform: Instruction that encourages students to perform music.

Students studied the entire process of being a pit percussionist which encourages performance in community college or even Broadway musicals.

- 3) Respond: Instruction that resulted in students responding to music with critical thought.

Students were asked how performing in the pit orchestra is different than concert band or orchestra. Students responded with numerous differences.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students in the MacPhail Austin percussion ensembles have had two or more years of percussion lessons and participate in other music ensembles like the school band program. Students have basic knowledge of snare drum, timpani, keyboard percussion auxiliary and drum set. Students spend about a half-hour in individual lessons per week and over an hour in ensemble. Students are invested in learning and sharing their experiences with the public through performances.

Rehearsal Objective

The objective of these 7 weeks of rehearsals and individual lessons was to teach the unknowns of performing as a pit percussionist. Performing in the pit requires skills beyond musicality, rhythms, and notes. Pit percussion playing requires unique techniques, quick thinking skills, and organization skills. This project gave the students the tools necessary to be successful when called to perform with local musicals.

Assessment of the Rehearsals

Overall, the project was a success and each percussionist walked away with knowledge they previously did not possess. I was pleasantly surprised by the organization of a few individuals. In fact, the students who are typically the leaders did not take as much of an interest in this project which led to seeing the leadership and organizational abilities of other students. Since my class is not evaluated through a grading system, each assignment I give is always optional. The students who followed through on all my assignments were the most successful and are the most prepared to perform. This project will be presented to students at least every other year. Our community needs pit percussionists who are trained. I was shocked how difficult managing multiple percussion instruments, navigating transition, and performing in multiple styles was for these advanced percussionists.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

- 1) Riverland Community College Live performance of *Little Shop of Horrors*.
- 2) Daveroth.com, Computer and screen
- 3) *Little Shop of Horrors* (Broadway Cast Recording) Alan Menken and Howard Ashman

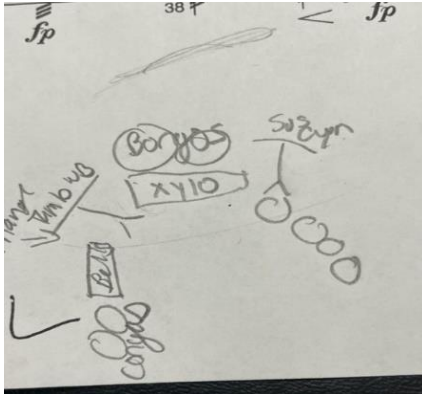


Figure 1 Student set up drawing.

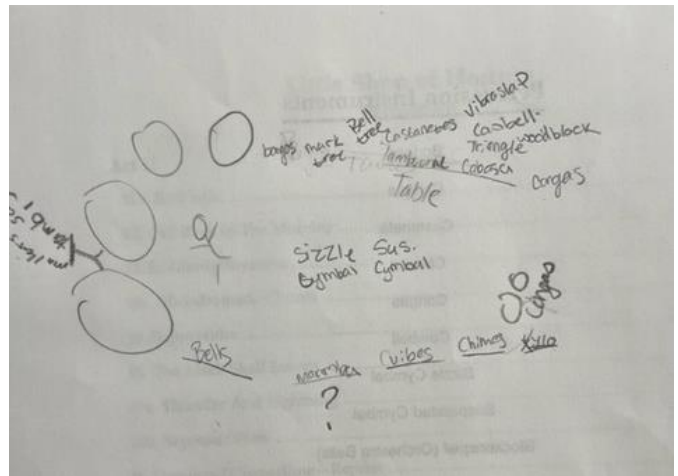


Figure 2 Student set up drawing.

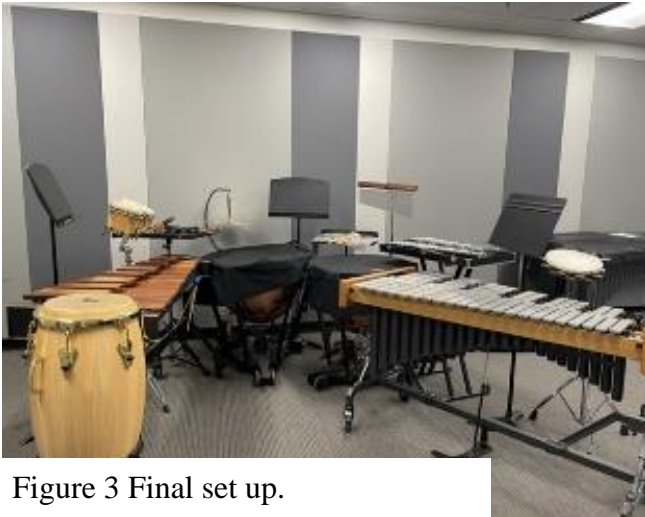


Figure 3 Final set up.

Rehearsal Plan

Week	Activities	Purpose of Activity	Assessment
1	a) Introduction b) Lecture and Video Examples c) Set Development	a) What is the purpose of this project? b) Demonstration of unique set ups and transitions c) Pictures of real set ups, student ideas and developing ours	a) Students actively listening/conversating b) Attentively watching/discussing and excited to see! c) Thoughts and comments about each other's set ups.
Week 2, 3	a) Continued Set development b) rehearse transitions	a) Set up changes necessary to make successful transition b) get from instrument to instrument	a) students move equipment as they discover issues with previous set up b) Students ask question and rehearse going from instrument to instrument
Week 4	a) Continued transition work b) Working on cues c) Working on style changes	a) navigate transitions with ease b) Learn how to listen for upcoming measure c) play style changes with ease	a) Students rehearsed transitions b) Wrote in word cues c) Rehearsed transitions-need work!
Week 5	Rehearse with partners (Drum Set player and percussion player)	Learning to listen to each other	Students had fun working together but because we played to canned music, they are relying on the music instead of each other
Week 6	Final set up changes, final preparations	To make sure students are organized for the run through	Students actively made final preparations for run through
Week 7	Complete Run through	Mock performance. Determine if the objective was met.	Students played straight through their pieces on percussion and drum set.

Reflection of Lessons

The objective of the lessons was to introduce students to performing as a pit musician. I recall as a high school student I was fortunate to perform with a live pit orchestra all four years. I spent the first two years as the pit orchestra drummer and the final two years as a pit percussionist. The experience I had performing in the pit orchestra delivered more performance gains than any other performance opportunity. Playing in the pit allowed me to develop organization skills, learned to listen for cues and I played more styles of music in one musical than a single year of concert band. The current district I attend does not perform musicals, therefore, my students do not have a live experience readily available. This was the best simulation exercise I could offer.

I chose to work with “Little Shop of Horrors,” because our local community college was performing. I placed an advanced senior drummer in the actual pit orchestra and guided him through the process. The drummer was double booked for the last performance which gave me an opportunity to perform. I did not get any actual rehearsals with the orchestra which made me keenly aware of the difficulties my students would encounter.

Before the students began working on the percussion and drum set parts for the musical, they were all offered the opportunity to attend a live show and sit where they could observe the pit orchestra. Sadly, there was only a drum set player and no percussionist for them to observe. Half of the percussionists took the opportunity to attend the musical live. The percussionist who did not attend were asked to watch the musical on YouTube. The students who attended the live musical remained the most engaged throughout the process and the drummer I placed in the “hot seat” is performing the next musical with Riverland Community college this summer.

I spoke with Dave Roth, a Kansas State University graduate prior to this project and he gave me links to his You Tube page where I found videos of him performing in pit orchestras with a Go Pro on his head! This gave the students a real look into all the equipment needs, transition from instrument to instrument and unique mallet and stick choices needed. The students were very engaged when watching the videos commenting on his choices and the placement of music and instruments.

The project spanned 7 weeks of our ensemble time our individual lessons. It seemed to drag on and on yet was not enough time to learn the entire musical. I envisioned being able to sit back and watch my students perform the musical on our last session. The reality was, in week four many students were still trying to figure out where they needed to be in each measure. I had to repeat far more than necessary if they practiced the assignments at home. Even those who spent time working on the music at home did not progress as quickly as I thought would happen. I adjusted my expectations and limited the number of pieces each student would work on. I became frustrated at the slow progression. I wanted to ask them to rehearse longer and add additional weeks to the project. I had to remember that this was an introduction of becoming a pit percussionist and we were not actually performing a musical. In the last few weeks, I relaxed, and the students seemed to engage more. No idea if it was my relaxed approach or if they saved their best efforts for the last couple of weeks.

I have decided to add this project to my curriculum every other spring. Moving forward this will allow each High School percussionist in my program to experience being a pit percussionist. In future sessions I will not give the option to attend the musical live or watch on You Tube. Students who watched the musical live were engaged more deeply all 7 weeks. The varied levels of engagement through the seven weeks did allow me to focus on a couple of

students who are typically in the background of performances. It allowed a couple of students to shine when we did our final run through.

Videotaping the rehearsals was problematic and a bit unauthentic. I do not conduct during rehearsal or stand in front of the ensemble. This group is more of a chamber group and often I am playing with them. During individual lessons, I stand beside my students teaching them with demonstration and rehearsing with them. This project was 43.5 hours of engagement with students. Often, I began taping sessions but stopped because I needed to work closely beside them. I managed to record twelve hours of class and learned much about the dynamic of my group and improvements I can make without changing the favored dynamic. Limiting the mindless chatter would be a great way to get a few more minutes of quality rehearsal. Making certain no one talks when we stop would ensure we remain focused. I do encourage comment and immediate feedback from the group but making the rule that the director speaks first and then, if necessary, asks for feedback would be a better approach. These students have been studying with me for multiple years individually and often compete in a way for my attention when we meet as a group.

The objective to learn how to be a pit percussionist was met. Some individuals are excited to accept performances with community pit orchestras or maybe even Broadway. Two musicians are performing with the community theatre this summer. The education I provide is meant to be used life long and showcase percussionists that are well prepared.

Chapter 3 Reflections

Reflecting on my time spent working towards my master's degree has left me wondering, what is next? This is my second try at obtaining a master's degree and leaving school the first time left me with a huge unfinished project! I felt like a failure in this area, particularly when asked, "do you have a master's degree?" If I had been introduced 23 years ago to the growth mindset, my answer to that question, would have been, "Not Yet."

Covid changed everyone's lives, and I feel incredibly guilty saying that the very dark time in the world led to a light in my own life. I got to pause the tornado I lived in for many years and take care of myself and my family in a way that was not possible unless the entire world shut down. I did not see the changes happening in my quality of life until several months into the pandemic. I grieved just like the rest of the world and in that time of grief I looked for anything to occupy my extra time. I looked for anything to make me feel better or give me a little peace. May 2020 Dr. Gartner told me about the master's program at Kansas State and the changes in structure due to COVID. This made it possible for me to attend so I applied the next day. Working toward finishing this big unfinished project gave me hope during the uncertain time.

My first summer as a graduate student at Kansas State University I spent getting acquainted with how to study, how to read for content and worked on academic writing. The intro to graduate class with Dr. Payne was eye opening! Even learning to use the online library resources was new to me as the last research paper I wrote involved a card catalogue. My career is a bit different than most of my colleagues. I am an administration 75% of the time and teach percussion with the remaining 25%. I am not employee of a public school which allows me more freedom to explore and implement my own ideas daily. Unfortunately, summers are typically my

busiest time. Because of the pause in the world as I knew it, I was provided the time I needed to navigate being a student again. As a mother of five, and a fulltime job, I was clever to find pockets of time that I did not even know existed. This degree is time consuming, cost money and takes time away from my family so I was determined to find value and can be applied to my work and even home. Many of the classes did not seem to align with my job but I was able to make every assignment and every project I created became applicable.

The first summer of graduate school, I attended classes with Dr. Tracz, Dr. Gardner, Dr. Payne, and Dr. Gurgel. I was excited to work with Dr. Tracz and Dr. Gardner as I consider them both mentors. Dr. Tracz was as inspirational on zoom as he was in person for Advanced Rehearsal Techniques. He painted a landscape of stories in all his lessons and delivered from those stories I learned the following: 1) work hard, 2) work smart 3) motivate yourself and motivate your students 4) be honest with yourself and be honest with your students 5) love what you do or find something new 6) love your work but love your family more. Aside from being inspired, I grew academically as we discussed and reflected on our classroom management, rehearsal organization and set up a personal improvement plan. What I enjoyed the most out of this class was being introduced to Dr. Fredrick Fenell. He hardly said more than three and is only 5ft. 1 in (my same height) yet held the attention of the group the entire time. Dr. Fenell seemed to conduct with his eyes and facial expression. Because of this introduction, I have since tried to use less words and more playing time in rehearsals.

Dr. Gartner's Jazz and Percussion techniques class gave me new ways to teach concepts I have taught for years. The resources he prepared and delivered were extensive! During this class I realized I had not stayed current with technology, teaching tools, new percussion music or new marching techniques. I had gaps in my personal education, and I became determined to fill in

those gaps by studying. I purchased many of the suggested curriculum from Dr. Gartner's Undergraduate studio handbook and began working my way through the 4-year curriculum. Much of it is familiar but refreshing the course ideas helps me complete steps with my students that I might have forgotten. I have not completed the curriculum but realizing that the need to learn does not have to come from a teacher by way of assignment is a huge growth moment in my education.

Dr. Payne introduced me to philosophy of music. Each philosopher could have been studied for several weeks alone, but we were introduced to the entire party of philosophers in one summer. The classes with Dr. Payne were packed with materials and reading but because of his passion I remained deeply engaged. I was assigned to study Bennett Reimer whose philosophy has been described as synergistic. My takeaway from studying Reimer is that he was an amazing influencer who created critical thinking among music educators. He gave educators a starting point to compare ideas of music education's role. Philosophers used Reimers philosophy as a model for their own even when disagreeing completely. This course impacted my thoughts about other educators I work with. The way the educators treat their students, programs and concerts are dictated by their personal philosophies. I attempt to figure out directors' philosophies to explain their outcomes and behaviors about their programs. I have watched concerts and been completely unimpressed by the musical outcome then walked into their classroom and become completely been impressed by the growth and development as individuals. On the contrary I have been to performances that were stunning but when in the classroom, I was unimpressed with the teaching model. I feel strongly that outcomes of programs can be dictated by the philosophy used. With the right balance of philosophies, a program becomes musically strong, and the individuals become both emotionally and developmentally strong.

I previously mentioned that I find it important that my graduate courses applicable to both my teaching and administrative work. With permission, I exchanged two band curriculum courses with general music curriculum music 813 Improv/Composition in Elementary Education and Music 814 World/Cultural Pedagogy. The first summer I spent time with Dr. Gurgel in Mus. 813. I was completely refreshed by entering this unfamiliar territory of music teaching. Not only the curriculum impacted me, but also the classroom management of elementary music teachers, and how manage to present and concerts with so many children and so little preparation time. The most impactful lesson from this course was a question. Should we give parameters around improvisation or does the structure we impose hinders students from freely improvising? We discussed developmental stages and learned that the younger the student is the more freely they will experiment. I now consider student's age and personality to work on improvisation in percussion. I know if I have a shy 13-year-old I will see more success giving parameters like, "Please play three measures of time the one measure of fill using quarter notes." When I teach students ages 6- and 7 I tell them to play a drum solo the hear in their head. I do not give them rules or a form to follow because young students are still willing to be exploratory.

I had a lighter summer academically during my second summer. I spent time with Dr. Tracz in Music 685 Org/Admin in school music program, Dr. Payne in 807 Hist./Philo in Music Ed and Dr. Gurgel in World/Cultural Pedagogy. In Music 685 we read *A University Renaissance* by Robert Shoop, and *Leadership Lessons from Bill Snyder* by Shoop and Scott. These books talked about the years of change and growth that took place on the Kansas State University campus. Dr. Wefald and Coach Snyder created the environment through leadership that set everyone up for success. My favorite quote from the book on Dr. Wefald is "Optimism must be combined with

ambition for results to occur. Nothing can ever happen without great ambition. The leader must have an appetite for change” (Shoop,1999, p.135).

Dr. Payne’s course Music 807 History/Philosophy of Music Education was foundational yet applicable today for my students and faculty. Just as I applied philosophies to the teachers I work with, I also look at their teachings and see if I find a commonly used theory. In my students I often associate their learning with a particular theory. I see much cognitive dissonance in learning. I found this theory helpful to identify behaviors that prevent progress. I attempt to help students resolve cognitive dissonance quickly so they further their learning. I began to favor Growth Mindset and the power of “Not Yet.” Since this course I attended a workshop with a leader who spoke on applying growth mindset. I have not reached the speaker’s level of life application but still believe this is the most impactful learning theory.

In Music 814 with Dr. Gurgel, we designed ways to make our curriculum more relevant to all communities. In Austin Minnesota, over fifty first languages are spoken. Students are joined together in Austin from all over the world, yet we only employ white teachers. To show these students that music careers are not exclusive to the dominant culture we are finding ways to collaborate with musicians of color. Dr. Soojin Lee teaches Korean drumming, Korean music, piano and Gayageum. Dr. Lee spent time with my percussionist teaching them Korean Language, History, music, and Drum. This blossomed into her performing Gayageum at MacPhail Austin and in our community. MacPhail received a grant through MA Cargill foundation to support artists of color performing and teaching. I was able to use funds from the grant to place Dr. Soojin Lee in each elementary school. Dr. Lee provided curriculum and training on Korean Folk Songs to the elementary teachers, and she performed with the students at their final concert. Classes at KSU led to a residency that reached nine hundred elementary students!

During my time as a student, I became a performer again. The Kansas State Universities summer master's program did not have a performance requirement. As an older student I determined that I dictate my path and decided I would perform! I have heard of a class called "I used to play the Flute." Any instrument could fit in the space of "flute" and love not fitting into the "I used to play the marimba" class. Giving attention to my need to play, practice and feel all the emotions one feels when preparing for a performance made me better teacher. I will not be receiving a pay increase or new position because I went back to school, but I am a student whose diploma shows growth in teaching, leadership, empathy, understanding and better equipped to deliver impactful programming to students of Austin, Minnesota.

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