

Unit Plan: Musical Quality

Lesson One: Elements of Music; tone, rhythm, technique, intonation and musicianship or musicality

Lesson Two: Aesthetics, the beauty of music expression

Lesson Three: Modality; Major/minor, identifying major and minor scales and chords

Lesson Four: Practice Strategies: for individual practice; what, how, why

Lesson Five: Listening Activities for Ensemble: developing intonation sensitivity

Overall, I enjoyed creating this lesson plan. I feel like it took a long time to determine what the unit study that the students at City would be studying at the beginning of November. And then, I was told the wrong Unit, so my plan didn't materialize the way I envisioned. I thought Musical Quality would flow well from the previous unit on the Language of Music. The Elements of Music were already being talked about on a regular basis, they are posted on the back wall of the band room. I wanted to take those elements and explore specifically, aesthetics. Mr. Schroeder said that would be the sub-topic of the Unit. I then wanted to guide the students through application of the musical elements to the aesthetics. My third lesson originally was called "scales and chords", but then I realized that was way too broad, so narrowed it down to simply Major and minor differences. I wrote all the lessons so that they could be used by the 7th and 8th graders, but could also be expanded to the superior high school classes. I didn't decide until some time later exactly which class to teach. Originally, I was thinking the High School, because I thought the concepts may be a bit too abstract for the younger learners. Also, there are some 7th and 8th graders who are in just their *first* year of playing, so are still stuck in the very basic decoding stage, without much fluency or note reading skills. I put many call response, listening, playing by rote, scaffolding in the plans in order to meet their needs. Mr. Schroeder wanted me to teach the younger groups though, because he felt that the earlier they learn the concepts, the more experience they can have with them as the years pass. In my aiding, I was already leading the entire ensembles in my first week, using the lesson plans Mr. Schroeder had very loosely outlined for me. He basically had the goals, but I was left to my own creativity to decide exactly *how* to meet the goal. Assessments were done daily, but often as a simple definition on the International Baccalaureate standards (where 7 or 8 is an example of what is wanted, 5 or 6 is good, 3 or 4 is satisfactory, and 1 or 2 is limited) applied to sections or individuals randomly.

As I began detailing the plan, I saw that time limits would be my worst enemy. I tried to think through how much time each activity would take, but experience has shown that often students may just as easily catch concepts quickly as get bogged down and take longer than expected. At the same time, I was reading many articles related to Middle School standards, aesthetics, practicing, and a bit on modality. I was mostly concerned with the aesthetics, since that was the lesson I was going to teach from my five lessons. Because of the heavy preparation for marching band, and the limited times in which students practice (7th graders only meet twice a week, for example), Mr. Schroeder and I figured one lesson would be sufficient. As I read Austin's (2006) article about 6th grade practice, I realized that band directors are only a small portion of influence on student's progress. In his study, the home environment, including both physical space and emotional parental support, affected the personal interest and effort which students put into practice. Setting goals, and having structured strategies was key in what the school could provide. The teaching ideas from Hannah Smeltz I read early on, and basically used her article to frame the entire lesson plan on practice strategies. Hewitt's (2005) article emphasized the importance of aural models to help students have a standard to compare to, and this idea is how I began my lesson two, with

the playing of the Peer Gynt selection. Mr. Schroeder had pointed this song out as being in their method book. We were discussing the lack of ability to actually produce the true aesthetic since the 7th graders were beginners, and I thought of the article and suggested I could play an example so they students could hear a model. As Steve Oare explains in *Aural Image in Practice* “Students were more confident when they had an aural image of known songs and were more willing to play them”. I could see the value of playing recordings, and that’s when I researched and built all the listening examples in my first lesson plan. I thought of music which I have played over the years, which had some element of music which was recognizable, timed it out for the lesson plan, and created questions to assess comprehension.

The final two lessons I wrote were lesson three and five, in which I pulled ideas from my past experiences in ensembles. Some were things I had done way back in High School, but most were ideas from Dr. Engle at Calvin, from playing in Calvin Wind Ensemble or Rockford Community Band.

I’m really not sure what the effectiveness of my plan was. I found out on November 9th, when my lessons were all written, that the unit was NOT Musical Quality, but Musical Time. Because of City being closed on November 7 and 8, I was limited on which day to teach, so ended up doing the Wednesday 7th grade class. The significance of this is that the other day of the week these students meet is Mondays. I did not go to City on Mondays, so these students did not know me as well as the T/F group. I can see when I view the video of this lesson, that the students had trouble being attentive and respectful. There were students talking while I gave instruction, for example. I would say “show me when you’re ready”, or “it’s my turn to talk, and your turn to listen”, or affirm students who were doing the right things, positive observations when a thoughtful question was asked, along those lines, for managing the behavior. I had modified my plan’s beginning to be a call and response of “shave and a haircut, two bits”, in which I wanted them to figure out the “two bits” part by rote, and I was going to use that for attendance. However, it was block day, and Mr. Schroeder went first, already had finished attendance. He was introducing a brand new piece, and that is where I took over. I wanted to work on the next section and wrap that up before using my rote piece as an introduction to Musical Timing. My plan was to still use the Peer Gynt, but to emphasize the musical phrase and rhythms instead of aesthetics. There really isn’t a good way to utilize tech in that band room anyway. So, already I was being flexible: changing the unit lesson topic, changing the activities, changing the class I was working with. I was singing parts, having students sing and finger parts, I had my clarinet and was playing pitches (especially for trumpets to find their partials), showing clarinets correct fingerings. As I worked with the individual groups, however, I could feel that the others were not engaged, they were talking (I had told them to check the music with stand partners). Mr. Schroeder had left to work on a couple alto saxophones which weren’t working. My instruction was interspersed with my saying “That’s inappropriate language”, “you shouldn’t be out of your seat”, and “those notes sounded better”. I checked the time, and played through the section again. Then, with 30 minutes of class left, I introduced my call and response idea. Unfortunately, the prior knowledge I was counting on wasn’t there. Students were trying to figure out the notes when we were notified in the school of a Code Red, so everything stopped. I didn’t finish the lesson, no assessment was given.

Through this experience, although I did have an opportunity to interact frequently with the students in large and small groups and one on one during my aiding, I didn’t really get to provide one of my lessons from the unit plan in the way I had intended. As far as my own learning, I know there are many things I would include and enforce as far as classroom rules when I have my own class. Lack of organization and

forethought interferes with learning. It seems that the flow of teaching becomes sluggish without defined plans. Students do need to be engaged, and finding ways to help individuals without having everyone else just sit is a continuing challenge in this type of classroom.

Austin, J. R. (2006, 10). Exploring music practice among sixth-grade band and orchestra students. *Psychology of Music, 34*(4), 535-558

Hewitt, M. P. (2005). Self-Evaluation Accuracy among High School and Middle School Instrumentalists. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 53*(2), 148

Oare, S. (2014, 10). Aural Image in Practice: A Multicase Analysis of Instrumental Practice in Middle School Learners. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education, 34*(2), 37-44.

Smeltz, H. (2012, 12). Reframing Student Practice to Facilitate Lifelong, Joyful Musicianship. *Music Educators Journal, 99*(2), 51-55