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Intro to Education
ED 2000
Observation Component Paper

I. Introduction

I went through a public school system and experienced the ups and downs of a music program that got pushed aside year after year. Observing at Crossroads Academy, a private K-8 prep school, was a wonderful experience. The potential the students have in the sense of music is astonishing. It just goes to show that with proper teaching and reinforcement, anyone and everyone can benefit from music. I believe that each and every child should have the opportunity to receive the type of music education provided at Crossroads Academy. Music is a form of expression and students should be properly exposed to it, just as they are shown how to write.

Although I love working with younger kids and think it will be easier to teach them, I believe I would have the most impact in a high school position. By the time students have reached the high school level, most have decided whether or not music is a serious subject. My senior year, I had a brand new teacher who reinforced my decision to teach because of his passion for music and teaching. I would love to inspire one person as much as he inspired me, and I believe that will be possible in a high school setting.

II. Self Assessment

Music is something that comes easily to me. I believe that my knowledge, desire, and passion to share music with others are strengths that will help me on the path to becoming a successful teacher. As said before, my band teacher senior year of high school had such a passion for teaching and music; it inspired me in so many ways. My biggest weakness is confidence. I have been working on self-esteem for a long time now, but I often don't realize my full potential and talent. I am very self conscious and constantly worry about what other people think of me, which leads me to be more introverted, even though my true personality is extremely outgoing. I lack the confidence to take initiative, which often comes off as shyness or not understanding.

III. Instruction

Kindergarten class – 3/14

When the kindergarteners walked in to the music room, they knew to sit on their spot in the circle, which is marked by a piece of masking tape with their name on it. To get the students' attention, Mrs. Whittington started the class with a pitch matching exercise. She has a bee hand puppet named Buzzy who can't understand talking, so the kids have to sing to him. Mrs. Whittington asks, "Liz, are you here?" and Liz has to respond, "Yes, I am", and match her pitch. This activity is something done almost every day and up into first grade to reinforce pitch matching. Next, Mrs. Whittington had the kids do an exercise for feeling the beat. She has a "beat frog" the kids imitate. She puts on a song and moves the frog's limbs (i.e. beat with hands on knees, clap, hands on floor, feet on floor).

Next, Mrs. Whittington went over a rhythmic saying from the day before. With younger kids, it is easier to put words to a rhythm. "Ducks in the mill pond, geese in the clover, feel in the mill pond, go wet all over." She asked the students to give her a beat, fast or slow, and they said the phrase a few more times. She then asked one student to pass out rhythm sticks, and the kids have learned to put the sticks on the floor and not play with them until it is time to use them. The kids tapped the rhythm on the sticks while saying the words, and then just thinking the words in their heads. The same student collected the sticks when they were all done.

With such young kids, playing games is a great way of keeping attention and still having them learn. Mrs. Whittington taught the kids a song, "One dinosaur went out to Play", and they used that song to play a game the next day. Using an overhead projector, Mrs. Whittington put a listening map up on the white board. This map shows what the kids need to listen for in a song by using pictures. They were also supposed to raise their hands when they heard "Twinkle, Twinkle". Mrs. Whittington then had the kids scatter around the room and lie down. They have been listening to a set of songs where each movement uses a different instrument and each instrument represents an animal. She had them recognize one of the songs by listening to the instrument, the feel of the melody, and the animal it resembles.

Lastly, Mrs. Whittington played even beats on a drum at different tempos, and the kids had to imitate the beat with their feet, like walking really slow for a slow beat, or switching feet really fast for a fast beat. To close, the kids sat back down in the circle and she dismissed them by colors they were wearing.

The skills Mrs. Whittington focuses on every day with the kindergarteners are matching pitch, beat, and rhythm. She also teaches them to recognize instruments and melodies. For the younger kids, they do a little bit of everything and there isn't really a specific skill of one class. Repetition is one of the best ways for younger kids to retain basic knowledge. The kids really enjoyed music class, and there weren't any apparent learning difficulties.

I thought Mrs. Whittington's kindergarten class went very well. Both her and the kids had fun and learned something. Because the students were so young, she could only stay with one activity for so long, but that kept their attention. The kids had fun and didn't get restless. If I end up in an elementary position, I will definitely look back on this situation and take from it. Mrs. Whittington had a lot of fun, effective ideas that have amazing results. I never thought that an entire kindergarten class would be able to match pitch, but it can be done!

IV. Management

The music room is quite big, vertically, and very bright. There were windows on two sides, a tall ceiling with rafters, and lots of colorful and fun bulletin boards. There are folding chairs that live on the side of the room and get taken out as needed for the older kids. The kindergarten and first grade kids sit on the floor. Each kid had a piece of tape with his or her name on it. The teacher's desk is by the window and the white board. There are lots of plants on the windowsills and they make the room feel more welcoming. The instruments are all on one wall and are usually organized.

Music is a subject that had infinite possibilities. There isn't really a set curriculum that every teacher follows. Mrs. Whittington has lots of programs that she pulls bits and pieces from. She has things that she knows work and she is always trying new tricks. She has loose lesson plans and goes with the flow based on what the students do and do not understand. As for attendance, the classes are very small and the other students know

who is absent. There is not a PA system, nor is there a bell for switching classes. For the younger kids, their teachers bring them to class and meet them at the end to bring them back. The middle school grades walk themselves around, but tend to be late. Discipline is dependent on the class. With kindergarten, they listen very well, which means Mrs. Whittington can enjoy their class without disruption. With 1st grade, there are three disruptive boys she had to be firm with as soon as they enter the room. The eighth grade class will not do anything unless it's for a grade so Mrs. Whittington must be firm with them as well.

V. Activities

The first activity I participated in was a drum circle with about 12 sixth graders. The students were split into groups and given a type of instrument: drums, shakers, metal, and wood. Each group went up and picked an instrument to bring back to their seats and knew to keep them quiet until we started. First, we went over the rhythm learned earlier in the lesson on our instruments. Then the bass drums were given a temp and kept the beat while the other instruments came in one at a time with a rhythm they made up. After the first round of playing, the teachers chose a student to lead the circle. The drum circle is a great way to teach students both music skills and leadership skills. First, they learn and retain the rhythm from earlier in class, and then use their creativity to make up their own rhythm. Not only does the student leading the circle learn leadership skills, but also everyone had to hold their own part. If one student gets off, then the whole circle falls apart.

Next, I helped prepare for a few classes. I cut out a puzzle depicting the different variations of one theme in a song for the eighth grade class, which had about ten students. They had to put the puzzle in order by listening to the piece. This eighth grade class, in the words of the teacher, is a “dead” class. In general, hands on activities do not work with this class anymore and the lessons have turned into lectured with graded worksheets and homework every night. I thought the class enjoyed the puzzle, and most were happy to be doing it. I also wrote out some music for a type of teaching called Orff. Rather than using a staff, the rhythm is written out with the note letters written underneath. I believe that younger kids, even up into high school, learn music best with hands on activities,

such as using instruments and puzzles. Music is not something that can be learned out of a book, but rather through experimentation and emotion.

Lastly, I demonstrated the lower brass instruments for the younger grades. Crossroads doesn't have a big instrumental program, so the students were amazed that these huge brass instruments. I believe that students should be introduced to the common instruments and given the opportunity to play in an ensemble. Music, as well as all the fine arts, continues to be pushed back and cut short. There are students who live for the arts; it is a form of expression, just like writing or playing sports. I believe that the society we live in doesn't embrace artistic expression until it reaches a level of fame. This is slowly changing, but at a very slow pace.

VI. Conclusion

I don't know how many times I've said it, or how many times I will continue to proclaim my beliefs: music is so much more important than the public school system believes. Research continues to prove that music has positive affects on schoolwork and life in general. Students should be exposed to music in a similar fashion to the students enrolled at Crossroads Academy. My experience with Mrs. Whittington has given me hope and motivation to change the way the school system looks at their music programs. I hope that other observations will continue to reinforce my decision to teach the world to sing.