

## Title

Utilizing Research Articles to Enhance Pre-Service Teacher Understanding of Recorder Instrument Performance

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**Course Name:** EDUC 304 - Teaching Music in the Elementary and Middle Schools

**Course Description:** This course is a required academic interdisciplinary core class required of all pre-service teachers at the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay seeking certification in Level I (ages birth-8) and Level II (ages 6-13) state licensure areas. Instruction is designed to provide the future classroom teacher with a basic overview of preschool through middle school general music education. The identification of children's musical needs is key; and classroom teachers learn materials and methods to assist in meeting pupil's needs. Teachers can integrate music activities; approaches with the school curriculum after developing some basic music performance proficiencies, knowledge, and teaching methods. Hands-on activities, group work, projects, and outside study are the curricular focus for this methods course.

**Executive Summary:** Future professional educators need to consult scholarly research to develop teaching philosophy, learning theory, and methods/pedagogy. This lesson study was designed to encourage students to go beyond the classroom by utilizing research to improve performance skills on the Soprano Recorder Instrument, and to further their practical knowledge of teaching pedagogy.

Past experiences indicate that students practice in different ways and often inconsistently. The course instructor emphasized learning how to practice efficiently and effectively by directing the students to the literature on musical practice approaches.

The specific goals of the lesson were as follows:

1. Students will be exposed to literature regarding formal systems of musical instrument practice.
2. Students will be exposed to ways of improving their understanding of different methods of teaching/practicing instruments.
3. Students will engage in small group and large group discussions to identify themes in

the literature regarding efficient practice of musical instruments.

Students were required to find an article (ideally, an article on Soprano Recorder Instrument practice) through an over-night assignment (see Appendix A for Overnight Homework Assignment handout). They were to write a summary of the article's content and describe how the article related to their own practice of instruments. Additionally, students examined the article to see if it enhanced their understanding of different music education methods and pedagogy.

The activity was successful in several ways. The students received an opportunity to be exposed to the literature on musical instrument practice. They had the opportunity to see if their method of practice was actually one discussed by authors in the music education field. Students were exposed to various teaching methodologies in addition to a variety of practice methods in the literature. Students also were able to share their summary and findings with their peers in both small groups (n=10) and large groups (n=30) settings.

## **Part II: The Lesson**

### **How to Teach the Lesson**

Thirty students were given the overnight assignment to find a short article regarding practicing musical instruments from the music education literature. Professor Kiehn, the course instructor, provided students with examples of journal sources, and recommended keyword phrases for electronic database literature searches. Students were required to write a short summary of the article and bring both the summary and article to class for group discussions. Students were first asked to identify the method or process they personally use to practice recorder in the summary. Students were then asked to connect their own method/process of practice with the particular method(s) described in the article. If there was no connection or match, they still were expected to report.

On the day the assignment was due, the three researchers placed students into three groups of students (n=10 per group). One student was elected to be the recorder for the small group, and report out later to the large group. Although these are not typically small group sizes; for this activity, it was believed that three groups would be easier to observe than six cooperative groups of five students (as had been done in a previous lesson). Students were guided by the student recorder of the group to discuss their article and share their findings. While the student groups were engaged in discussion, each researcher observed the group discussion and interactions.

Students were asked to return to the large group after 30 minutes working in small groups. Each group recorder was asked to report to the large group (class of N=30). The course instructor directed a 30 minute reporting out and discussion session. Key concepts about practice and teaching methodologies (main themes) were listed on an overhead as they were provided by each group's recorder. Additions or deletions to the list were sought from the large group and a final list was then generated based on the large group session (See main themes listed in Appendix B).

### **Student Learning Goals**

Three specific goals of the lesson were:

1. Students will be exposed to literature regarding formal systems of musical instrument practice.
2. Students will be exposed to ways of broadening their understanding of different methods of teaching/practicing instruments.
3. Students will engage in small group and large group discussions to identify themes in the literature regarding practice of musical instruments.

The first goal of having students go to the literature in search of a specific topic was achieved since all thirty students completed the assignment. Students all brought a written summary and an article to class relating to the practice of musical instruments. Several students found articles on the Soprano Recorder Instrument. It is interesting to note that no two articles were alike.

The second goal of broadening student understanding of different methods of practice (along with teaching) was achieved since there exists a myriad of practice approaches in a wide body of established literature. The literature on instrumental practice ranges from practical field-based short articles to original research published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Of interest was the wide range of journal sources provided by the students.

The third goal regarding students engaged in both small group and large group discussions to identify themes was achieved. Students were placed in small groups and later came together as a large group to discuss what had occurred in those small groups. A comparison of themes reported in the large group setting from spring semester 2006 to the fall semester class in 2006 points to several main approaches common in the literature. An analysis of both lists of themes pointed to five practice areas for efficiency and effectiveness. Main areas were: (a) set up a regular practice time of 10-30 minutes each day for muscle memory, (b) slow the tempo down to focus on problem spots in the music, (c) practice music in smaller segments, (d) find ways to reward oneself for practicing, and (e) repeat a problem spot three times in a row accurately before moving on.

### **Part III: The Study**

#### **Approach**

The Lesson Study was designed by Professors Lor, Kiehn, and Kimball after many preliminary meetings, including Kimball's attendance at a Lesson Study Grant workshop. All three instructors had the same interest in getting students to go to the literature and look at research to support what was presented in class lecture and rehearsals. We decided to design our lesson around this topic and would utilize Dr. Kiehn's music methods class in our study.

In spring, 2006, Kiehn taught the first lesson and Kimball and Lor served as observers. Following a number of meetings in the spring and again in the fall, a modified lesson was taught in fall, 2007. Again, the lesson was taught in Kiehn's music methods class and Lor and Kimball served as observers. After the second lesson, a final meeting was held to

discuss the lesson study findings.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Evidence in student learning from this activity came from the list generated by students in the whole group setting. In the first lesson, students came up with approximately 10 themes. In the second lesson, students came up with 20 themes. There was the same number of students in both classes and the same amount of time was devoted to the small group discussions. Obviously, differences in students could account for the difference in number of themes presented, but the controlled circumstances did not vary.

During the first lesson study in spring 2006, we divided the class into six groups of five students. The authors each monitored two groups of five students. Following the small group activity, Dr. Kiehn called all the students together into a large group from which a class list of 10 themes emerged.

The second lesson study in fall 2006 was designed exactly as the first but the number of groups was narrowed to three. The assignment was the same for the students in the second lesson as in the first. Students were placed into small groups (n=10) with the expectation that each student report with the group. Later the small groups came together as a large group and 20 themes were created.

Since there were only three groups in the second lesson, the professor and the observers did not have to physically move around the classroom trying to listen to what was being said in both groups; they each had one group. In the second lesson, every student in the group was expected to speak, and did so possibly because of the closer physical proximity of each author to the group.

Aside from the main focus of this investigation, the authors observed through a tally sheet that noticeably more participation occurred in the cooperative group format (n=5) in the first lesson study. A higher frequency of involvement via sheer numbers in a very small sized cooperative group format is to be expected, since this finding is well-established in the body of literature in education.

As mentioned above, the goal of having students refer to the research for specific topics was met as well as was both small and large group participation. If the lesson were to be repeated, the same assignment and small/large group configurations would be used. However, students would be given instructions that it is expected that everyone participate in the small group. As also mentioned earlier, there is no need to having observers in the classroom under normal circumstances. Trusting the students to each respond should be sufficient; and the group recorder could be encouraged more to monitor the group making sure that each member responded. The benefit of having each person participate in the conversation is that when the larger group convenes, the chance of a more exhaustive list occurs. And in this specific case, a longer list of ideas could result, providing students with more methods to teaching as well as providing them with an artifact to place in their electronic portfolio. Students are required to create an e-folio containing artifacts as evidence of meeting the Teaching Standards. The electronic portfolio is a requirement for licensure.

## **Appendix A**

EDUC 304 - Spring 2007

Overnight Homework/Class Participation Assignment-Practice for Recorder Performing

I. Search for an article explaining steps for individual or group music practice that would relate to developing performance skills or technique on the soprano recorder.

Below are some recommended keyword phrases for your on-line article search:

Recorder practice techniques

Music practice techniques or approaches

Effective or good practice techniques

Soprano recorder practice or performance

Strategies for learning music reading

Practicing music reading

Recommended e-journal and paper journal list:

Teaching Music

Music Educators Journal

General Music Today

The American Music Teacher

Instrumentalist

International Journal of Music Education

Journal of Research in Music Education

Journal of Music Teacher Education

Music Education Research

Update

Recommended e-databases via Cofrin Library (click-Articles and Databases)

ERIC

Education Full Text

International Index to Music Periodicals

Academic Search Elite

Humanities Full Text

Recommended web sites:

menc.org, wmea.com, wsmamusic.com

II. Keep me posted on your search progress via UWGB e-mail or during our class meetings.

III. Print a hard-copy of the article and write a paragraph summary. Bring your article and a typed brief summary to class on Monday, Feb. 26; and we will discuss your findings during class.

### **Appendix B**

EDUC 304 - Teaching Music in the Elementary and Middle Schools

Spring 2006 Large Group Discussion of Practice Techniques for Musical Performance

(30 minute report/discussion as a large group following the small group discussions)

The following main themes were listed on the board:

1. Greatest teacher is the tape recorder, metronome, and mirror
2. Write down or mark in pencil problem spots in the music
3. Slow the tempo down (half speed) to focus on working out problem spots
4. Repeat a problem spot in the music numerous (three times) repetitions before moving on (muscle memory)
5. Practice the problem, and try to avoid practicing the mistakes
6. Reward yourself for playing and practicing with intrinsic rewards such as free practice time
7. Practice material in stages (scaffolding)

8. Set short-term and long-term practice goals
9. Set up a regular practice time of day and length (10-30 minutes/day)
10. Try to develop an appreciation for the repetitious nature of practice (skills growth)

Fall 2006 Large Group Discussion of Practice Techniques for Musical Performance

(30 minute report/discussion as a large group following the small group discussions)

The following main themes were listed on the board:

1. Establish a daily practice routine for muscle memory
2. Begin the practice session with a warm-up scale or easy tune
3. 10-30 minutes practice per day and at the same time of day is recommended (time dependent on stage of development)
4. Avoid being too rigid with time amount (e.g. 30 minutes and quit)
5. Listen to the tune first for an idea of the finished product (model sounding performance)
6. Set achievable goals
7. Slow down the tempo considerably (at least one-half speed) for practice sessions
8. Avoid practicing mistakes
9. Practice small parts or segments often; and not for long time periods. One can then put the parts together to complete the tune. This technique is called segmentation.
10. Aim for playing a section of music three times in a row accurately before moving on
11. Listen while we practice to see if it sounds good (maybe record to analyze the sound)
12. Avoid distractions such as background talking, TV, or other noise when playing.
13. Look at visual and auditory models of correct posture, positioning, tone quality.
14. Utilize relaxation techniques for enhanced practice and performances
15. Try to practice with a partner to develop consistency
16. Practicing to a steady beat w/a metronome or person clapping will develop consistency.

17. Find ways to enjoy practicing!
18. Playing mental games with the material may help motivate
19. Setting up unique challenges for yourself may help motivate
20. End the practice session with a song you know well (positive reinforcement)

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