

Music Education Methods for Vocal, Instrumental and General Music Classrooms

Fifty-two members and guests of the European Music Educators Association (EMEA), an affiliate of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), met for their annual fall conference on November 2-3, 2012. President Dr. Patrick Casey welcomed the group to Ramstein High School, hosted by music teachers Jeff Pellaton and Rose Young.

Captain Jennifer Davis of the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center Audiology Clinic provided free hearing screenings for the music educators at the conference. Her presentation on the dangers of hearing loss both from occupational and recreational sources was exemplary. Highlighting the similarities between the decibel levels our young soldiers and our young musicians encounter, we as music educators in military communities should be at the forefront of protecting not only our own hearing, but also the hearing of those around us. Every middle/high school student should have an opportunity to hear and see Cpt. Davis' presentation. The basilar membrane video comparing the hearing mechanism to the piano keyboard was fascinating. Seeing how the cilia are destroyed by overexposure to sound should be a wakeup call to all who spend too much time with "buds" in their ears! My hearing screening was in April 2012 and I received my custom earplugs in July. Although I had minimal hearing loss, I vow to use my musician's earplugs to keep it that way!

Thomas Dean, Eastern Division NAfME President, gave the group an overview of the recent changes in the national organization. This included a philosophical change in how the association plans to serve the constituency, with the staff interacting directly with the membership. Especially important was the sharing of the mission of the organization—to promote the sequential study of music in grades K-12 and to provide music for all. Mr. Dean described the societies and councils that make up the structure of the organization and how their influence will impact the development of new standards. Mr. Dean encouraged the EMEA membership to take an active role in promoting the cooperation of the national music organizations, known as the Music Education Policy Roundtable, in developing the new

standards. The standards will address three artistic processes—Responding, Creating and Performing. A review of the standards will be available to the membership in March 2013. Especially timely in the weekend preceding the US national election, Mr. Dean acknowledged that NAFME lobbyists target both Democrats and Republicans. The fact that the association headquarters is in Reston, Virginia, is directly related to the association’s commitment to influence national policies in music education. With the Obama administration’s “Race to the Top” and STEM initiatives, Mr. Dean challenged educators to determine how growth can be measured in music education. He proposed changing “STEM” to “STEAM”, redefining the acronym to include science, technology, engineering, arts and math. Mr. Dean proposed adding audio engineering as a course directly related to “STEAM”.

The “Reimagine” program sponsored by NAFME will provide professional development tools for music educators to support how music is important in our “Race to the Top.”

Mr. Dean’s second session was a wealth of technical information, especially his recommendations for iPad apps. In addition to the classroom management tools such as SmartSeat and Planbook and the tuners and metronomes and Smartmusic most of us know, Mr. Dean’s recommendations included a few surprises such as the International Phonetic Alphabet Latin pronunciation guide app. I am anxious to explore these apps and to use them with my students. I am hoping that DoDDS-Europe will expand its “Guest Network” so that students will have web access on their personal devices to make using technology in the classroom seamless.

The concert by students of our hosts, Jeff Pellaton and Rose Young, was outstanding. The courage it takes for students (and their music teachers) to perform before an audience of music teachers should be acknowledged. Although we as music teachers have “been there, done that,” the performances by the Ramstein musicians were very professional and the sacrifice of appearing at school on a day they could have been at home did not go unrecognized.

Dr. Michael Golemo’s presentation, “Leadership!” was a semester of music methods and classroom management compacted into one hour. The handout should be required reading for every music teacher (and maybe every teacher) every semester of every year before beginning a

new class. In addition to the practical rehearsal guidance in the handout, Dr. Golemo's suggestions for establishing effective and efficient relationships between student, teacher and content; dealing with risk and failure; and using effective communication are applicable to all classrooms.

Anyone who has taught first grade or beginning band can appreciate the quote Dr. Golemo cited by Henry Ward Beecher: "We should not judge people by the peak of excellence; but by the distance they have traveled from the point where they started. "

Joel Helston's tuba presentation was both informative and entertaining. How can one not enjoy a presentation filled with excellent suggestions on how to play and teach tuba and quotes like "His hobby was breathing!" That was the description of how Arnold Jacobs, one of the gurus of tuba, spent his spare time. Joel brought bags and tubes of various sizes to motivate students to learn to breathe. The most useful fact I took from Joel's presentation was to have brass students slightly cover the exit opening of the mouthpiece with the little finger when practicing with only the mouthpiece. The first assignment I give to brass students is to play "Happy Birthday" on their mouthpieces. With this new information, they will have success sooner. I also liked his suggestions of having students play familiar melodies in the style of a love song and then in the style of a pirate song. It gives a whole new meaning to "expressive qualities" when one hears "Over the Rainbow" as a pirate tune!

As usual, the part I enjoyed most about the conference was the collaboration with colleagues. The formal session of sharing best practices was a springboard for many conversations that happened in the more informal moments of the conference.

Useful suggestions from attendees included the following:

Ask beginning band students to play in small groups by their birth months, the beginning letter of their first and last names, and by any other grouping that will vary the individuals in the group. Use numbers that might be on a volume control knob to differentiate dynamics: 0=silence; 1=whisper; 2=inside voice; 3=outside voice. I could see this working very well in general, choral and instrumental music.

Ask students to keep a rhythm log. This would include kinds of notes and rhythmic patterns. Use a sequential series of rhythm patterns and show rhythmic counting for those patterns as they occur on beat one using traditional subdivided numbers and modified Kodaly syllables.

Use an “upset the fruit basket” approach to seating where occasionally the students in bands and choruses sit next to new people. It’s a whole new sound not sitting in a section or sitting in a new part of the classroom.

Explore “Game Plan” as a possible DoDDS buy for elementary music materials. I looked at the materials on West Music.com and agree that it should be given consideration in what would establish a sequential/spiral curriculum for DoDDS. The standards only address part of what should be happening in the elementary music classroom.

Use the question “Why did I stop?” during a rehearsal to support Standard 5, peer listening. Most of the time students in band or chorus, if they have been encouraged to “listen louder than they play or sing,” will be able to answer the question using appropriate music vocabulary to improve the performance.

The handout, “Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers,” from the Virginia Association of Music Education Administrators website was an interesting article.

It suggested using pre- and post- testing over time. I discovered a ready-made pre-test/post-test combination using Essential Elements Book 1 (EE1) and Essential Elements book II (EE2). All of my beginning band students are required to learn EE1 Line 152, *School Spirit*, by memory. The melody is known more commonly as “On, Wisconsin” and we use it as our school song and play it at all assemblies. Most of the band parts contain a dotted quarter/eighth note pattern and either an ascending or descending scale in the introduction. How pleased I was when my intermediate band players, most of whom I had last year for beginning band, could successfully sight read the introduction to “The Thunderer” in EE2 which has nearly the same rhythmic and melodic (but not always) pattern. They sing pitch names; write in the rhythmic counting; circle the time signature; put a triangle around the key signature; and identify other symbols on the staff which provides comprehensive assessment of student growth. No need to study for a test because all the skills

necessary to “pass” have been used throughout beginning band!!Beginning with the end in mind is a more direct way of saying, “back-chaining” which was a term used in the DoDDS Professional Development Model of “Study of Teaching” back in the 1990’s. Every music teacher who has ever given a concert sets a date and then works with that end in mind. Smart teachers choose challenging literature that supports sequential teaching of standards and concepts.

Thank you-EMEA Board, for a wonderful conference. What a joy it is to still be excited about teaching music! From Dr. Michael Golemo’s presentation--“I don’t warm up because I never cool down.”

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