

Small Ensemble Diversity

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Less Than Ten

Diversity appears in many forms, some more apparent than others. Growing up in middle class, small town North Dakota tends to have a lack of evident diversity, and understanding a great percentage of the teaching population in our state, the professor at the University of Mary recognize the importance of ensuring their students have as much exposure to populations they may not be entirely familiar with as possible. In this paper, I intend to cover my experiences that I chose to undergo outside of my typical assigned classroom practicums. Being a music education major, I chose to volunteer as a choir director at the North Dakota State Penitentiary, a maximum security prison full of men from all walks of life. The group I worked with was never more that around eight men at a time, sometimes dropping as low as three for the day. I also run my own private music lessons studio where I currently or have taught oboe, flute, saxophone, and piano for the past couple of years. Each one of my students has brought forth a new challenge for me to crack, and I cannot express how beneficial one on one experiences with a private teacher are as an adolescent.

Diversity

In regards to the NDSP choir, I had no way of knowing specific statistics on my students, but based on observation and intuition, I dealt with ages ranging from late 20's to what was probably early 60's. Races were also varied to what I assumed to be Caucasian, Hispanic, and Native American. One of the inmates even spoke five languages, proving his own diverse experiences. At times, a service dog was brought in and some of them would be released to Medline, and one needed to sit more than stand do to back pain, so I concluded that there were a good number of men dealing with physical and mental issues.

My personal music students were a little less diverse, but I have surprisingly had an almost equal number of both genders, and the instruments I teach tend to lean on the female side. I know one of my students is Native American as he had mentioned living on a reservation before, and his own experiences in school were rather unique; he is a middle schooler that goes to Flasher, and their band program has around seven people in it total. I grew up in a rural town myself, but my own highschool band had at least forty students in it, and sometimes I tend to forget that my future job could be teaching an instrumental ensemble as small as the prison choir I volunteered for or my saxophone student's band. The biggest case of diversity I find in my private students is teaching a six year old piano. Since elementary music is the field I feel the least confident in, she provides me with a little taste of the attention span length and the comprehension skills within her age group. A way I would translate this into classroom application would be by thinking about what each individual child may find confusing.

Adaptations

The choir group met in what I would consider a conference or seminar room. It had whiteboards and some technology access if previous permission was granted. The men sat at tables but had enough room to stand. I was given an electric keyboard and everyone had access to writing utensils and whatever sheet music we were using. Overall, even though it was not a true classroom, the North Dakota State Penn did a fantastic job of providing us with what we needed, or at least I expected to be more limited than what we were. Because of this I was able to even integrate small amounts of technology into our rehearsals and the final performance; we used recordings to practice with since I felt as though my piano skills were too limited for how I wanted the accompaniment to be. Considering musical background, it was both a blessing and a

course for me to work with. Their lack of ability led me to feel comfortable in choosing easier repertoire, but it also made it hard to try not to reach for the standards that are expected of college students to reach. I have a sensitive ear and sometimes it was hard to not dwell too long on solidifying their pitch to be the quality I wanted. I sometimes had to remind myself that I only met with them once a week and their skill level was comparable to a beginning middle school choir student.

My private students were a little more moldable being that the nature of children. Some catch on faster than others depending on their motivation to learn the content I was providing for them. My flute student in particular is sometimes hard to pin down in terms of how much she wants to continue lessons. Her progress is slow, her demeanor is very reserved, and at times I am afraid I am unable to hold her interest, yet she keeps coming back and has recently told me she was learning piccolo for band. Situations like these teach me to never fully assume things; students often need time to shine. Lessons are held at my house. My living room is not terribly hard to work with as a teaching space. When I am no longer living with my parents, I plan to dedicate an entire room to just giving music lessons. Running a private studio has always been apart of my career plan.

Community Involvement

I found the other inmates' involvement to be very heart-warming. None of them had decent concert etiquette, but at the observation concert I attended and the concert I helped direct, there was always a decent crowd of other inmates and staff members to show support for my singers. There was even another ensemble of violins and a guitarist that played a few tunes to

add to the festivities. One can tell that they work hard to keep busy and learn what they can in their activities.

For my private students, mostly on piano, I encourage parental involvement for at least guiding my younger students to practice and potentially help them with a few of their assignments. More often than not, a child will need someone to supplement whatever motivation they have to practice, or the instrument may be abandoned altogether. Another example of community that I plan to use more is recitals. I had my oboe student perform in an organized private studio recital via my own oboe teacher where I accompanied him on a solo we prepared together. It is extremely important to give any music student at least a chance to perform if not make it required. He got to show his improvement to a live audience and see me and many other double reed players of varying levels perform.

Objectives and Artifacts

One of the main objectives I had for the choir was to focus on the Benedictian values. It may have been volunteer work, but I realize how some would maybe be intimidated to work with actual prison inmates, yet the more service and respect for persons that people can provide to troubled individuals, the more likely they will be to soak in the positive influence. Here I have an image of them singing and then us celebrating with some confetti after our final performance. They all truly seemed to enjoy their experience.



My main objectives for my private students are to supplement what they are already learning in their classrooms by deepening their knowledge of music in general, edging more on the performance and pedagogy side of things. Standards from sites such as North Dakota Department of Public Instruction have many objectives that can be enriched in a one on one setting.

Translating to the Classroom

My experiences with both of these groups challenges me to get to know my students on a very personal basis. It was tough when only three choir members showed up sometimes or if one of my piano students could not find it in her to sit still and concentrate. These types of situations call for a great sense of adaptation and will continue to teach me how to look at the fine details of my future classroom students and their own unique situations.

References

“K-12 Education Content Standards.” North Dakota Department of Public Instruction,

www.nd.gov/dpi/districtschools/k-12-education-content-standards.