

An Analysis of “Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy in the Secondary Classroom”: Through the Perspective of a Music Teacher

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Within teaching, it is important to keep students engaged through inquiry based learning. However, while learning music, students often find their questions from performance based situations. When a student needs to learn more about a certain subject, such as math or science, they get to a point where they experience something new and need guidance on how to proceed further. This is similar within music but one difference would be the appearance of a student's learning process. Music teachers can usually tell how far along a student is by their confidence, knowledge of musical concepts, and their overall performance. On a smaller scale, if a student/teacher hears a wrong note or something being played incorrectly, there is an opportunity for learning waiting to happen. The main concern at this point would be the students retention of information and their engagement with the learning device. To aid this, a teacher can incorporate problem-based or inquiry-based instruction into a lesson in order to encourage curiosity, questioning, and student-led learning.

After reading “Essential Instructional Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom,” I have made connections to teaching in music and will elaborate over the ten devices that are given within the introduction.

1. **Problem-based instruction:** *Develop and implement interactive problem-based units of instruction that frame authentic problems to help establish purposes for students to read, write, and communicate beyond being assigned or expected to do so.*
 - a. In order to make sure my students are developing and asking questions, I will allow them to experiment regularly with the different ways that they are able to express themselves through music and musical literature. I think it is extremely important to teach as a student learns and not bombard them with information that they don't necessarily need yet. One thing I often struggle most with is holding back from over-explaining my own past experiences, mess-ups, and mistakes. I have to always remember that the reason I keep that information in the front of my mind is because I learned it from my own experiences and curiosity. Though it is important for a student to be informed of the “do's and don'ts” of music, I think that they should also be encouraged to grow in a productive way, that is personal to them. I will instruct them as clearly as I can, while leaving room for questions and concerns.
2. **Diverse texts and abundant reading opportunities in the school:**
 - a. In all of my music education classes, we always see new musical concepts as an opportunity for learning. Planning a concert cycle (what pieces will be taught within the progression of each year), is essential to providing a smooth process of learning. With each piece, there might be a new musical concept that the student has never seen before, or a challenging section that can be used as an assessment (chair-test, sight-reading, or lesson assignment). With these new concepts, the student will be able to interact with the music by investigating the new themes or problem areas. Students will also be encouraged to explore pieces of the same era, genre, compositional setting, or composer. For this step, it is essential to properly explain the intricacies of such pieces in order to make sure the student is informed on what varieties to look into. Giving them access to

online databases that involve a diverse variety of genres and composers should be done as soon as they have a grasp of the basics of music. (A great sight that I recently discovered is from the Institute for Composer Diversity or composerdiversity.com) These databases and resources can be really helpful within the band/choir handbook that is given at the beginning of the year!

3. Intentional and standards-aligned instruction in disciplinary reading:

- a. This section has a bit of everything when it comes to the idea of how a student will interact with the idea of learning. One of the first points is, “establishes compelling reasons for reading,” which involves the idea of a student's retention and base-level interaction with the source material. When it comes to a music class, in almost every case, the situation is *optional*. In science, math, or social studies, there is a good chance that the class is required for the student to continue their education. In a band or choir class, one good/bad experience can be the difference between a student continuing with the class and leaving music behind forever. Because of this, it is essential to encourage students at this age by any means necessary. A blockage of information could lead to a student “crashing-out” or shying away from learning more so it is important to also teach them what to do in such situations. For example, if a student finds a new section of a piece particularly challenging because of the speed/range of notes they will need to take a step back and “break it down,” before continuing their attempts at playing it. Similar to reading, a lot of a student's development depends on their own private involvement so we have to be the one to provide them with the tools in order to handle challenges that might come up while they are practicing.
 - i. For example: Set a metronome at half speed and play one measure at a time, record yourself and then play it back at half speed to investigate consistency, listen to recordings of multiple different performers to investigate tendencies and technique choices, try alternate fingerings for particularly difficult sections, etc.

4. Intentional and standards-aligned instruction in disciplinary writing:

- a. This device is similar to number 3 so I will not go into depth but I can relate this section to the performance side of music teaching rather than individual practice (like the idea of identifying the process of creation and the creation itself, i.e. reading and writing). Though it may not seem like it, performing for yourself in a practice room and performing in front of an audience are *completely separate concepts*. Though this is true, we must never let the student think of it that way, lest they start to divide from their own musical focus. Instead of teaching them separate tools, those to use in the practice room and those to use on stage, we must merge them in a way that is seamless enough to become a habit, no matter the setting. Examples of this could mean blend, intonation, spatial awareness, tone, etc.

5. Higher-order discussion of increasingly complex text across varying participation structures:

- a. This device involves student involvement in discussion based and model based teaching. For music, discussion activities could mean that the class is actively involved in voicing their opinions and concerns when it comes to the daily rehearsals. Though group discussion is not one of the main themes within music based learning, the communication can be transmitted through the music itself. Before I digress into that convoluted

statement, I would like to preface that communication through music (from student to teacher) involves many nuances that are not relevant to this topic. To continue, small group discussions, or “sectionals,” are a more accurate description of a device often used to involve students in the rehearsal process. Student leadership is essential to the success of any band or choir because of how large the classes usually are. In sectionals, usually a section leader (or team of leaders) will take the group (usually all of one instrument type/vocal range) and practice parts of the piece that is of particular interest/concern to them. Because large ensemble rehearsals require a single voice of reason (the director) there is not usually a great opportunity for sections to discuss their concerns. In smaller groups, they are able to talk about the piece, the composer, the rehearsals, or any other thing that might be of importance. These can be particularly productive, making way for discussions that surface students’ misconceptions about certain topics and engage students in critiquing conclusions.

- i. To include the discussion of modeling, I would like to point out that it is also at play when we involve sectionals or student leadership. Having a guide for these discussions, large ensemble or small, can mean the difference between a good player and a great player. As the text suggests, the model can provide “instruction and teach students how to generate their own higher-level questions about texts,” (in the context of music).

6. Opportunities for and instruction in speaking and listening:

- a. Similar to the last device, this one points out the importance of the effectiveness of the communication. To touch on some points:
 - i. *“Establishes compelling reasons for presenting and listening to presentations”*: Offering a wide range of literature and musical interpretations can be helpful when a new topic of concern arrives. If students have a more flexible mindset, they will be more likely to come to a compromise or conclusion to a discussed concern/topic.
 - ii. *“Provides regular opportunities for students to listen and respond to oral presentations, including those that incorporate visual and quantitative information to make a students’ conclusions public”*: Like I said before, there are not a lot of opportunities for these kinds of responses in a group rehearsal so it is important that a director checks in consistently with the ensemble.
 - iii. *“Models and teaches strategies for effective oral communication in academic disciplines”*: This type of modeling can be done by having a deliberate tone while dealing with certain tasks and handling group conversations. Students will look to you as a tone indicator for how discussions are handled in sectionals.
 - iv. *“Teaches student strategies for listening and responding to presentations”*: This point could also be related to how students react to different players, one might play something a way that is unlike another. It is important that all ways of playing and communicating are respected in order to encourage learning.

7. Intentional efforts to build vocabulary and conceptual knowledge:

- a. This device points out the nuances that can come with certain vocabulary choices within reading and I think that I can connect this with the way we choose to describe things within music. Classical music, in particular, often contains many different languages.

Certain terms that are seen (andante, allegro, ritardando, accelerando, etc.) are not often found in any other form of study. Musical terms vary from language to language so it is important that students are aware of what they mean, in order to interpret the piece as the composer intended. During the study of any piece, I will have my students check for new terms and find a definition for them. Their own exploration of these terms is important and will be remembered more accurately if they find it on their own. Other forms of vocabulary that we use in music is how we refer to different tones or moods throughout a piece. Though sometimes it might be written on the page, there are a lot of times where both the student and director have to come up with a mutual concept or metaphor that accurately describes the way something sounds/needs to sound. It is important that this process is ever evolving but terms that were used prior might be useful when teaching a new concept.

- i. For example, I might tell my ensemble “we should try and sound less bright during this section.” For seasoned musicians, the message behind this statement goes without saying because it is a term often used during rehearsals. For beginners, or students in secondary education, they should be informed that it means to increase the level of bass in the sound while the “brighter” or higher instruments blend into the bass’ sound.

8. Ongoing observation and assessment of students’ academic language and literacy development that informs their education:

- a. This device shows many ways to assess students while focussing on the development of the students education. In music, we are often assessed by our performance and less by the process of our rehearsals. I don’t think that this should be the case though. When it comes to the development of a student, a singular snapshot of their growth cannot encompass all the lessons that are actually being taught. In secondary education, there is always a point where a line is formed between a person who is making music for fun and someone who intends to be a musician. Thus, assessing the entire ensemble on a group effort is entirely unproductive. Now, a simple solution could be to have every student perform individually (privately or publicly) but then we wouldn’t be getting a good idea of where that student's strengths lie. In my opinion, the proper assessment of a music student should be in multiple parts; term identification, sight-reading (how they play a piece with no preparation), engagement, and group cooperation. I think these assessments should be done throughout the year in order to track a student's progress instead of making a statistic out of them. Getting them involved with the feedback process can also be useful, like a private lesson or even just a one-on-one conversation about their progress. The importance should be gauging the merge of preparation and performance rather than one over the other. The term “practice makes perfect” does not apply to musicians as much as “perfect *practice* makes perfect,” after all.

9. Community networking to tap into available fund of knowledge in support of developing students’ content knowledge and identities:

- a. This device is very important to me because I firmly believe that students should have access to as much knowledge as possible during their time in school. Because of this, gaining knowledge solely from one teacher/director about a certain subject can be a roadblock in their intellectual journey. It is important to have outside resources and

people in order to make sure your students are gaining a variety of knowledge. With this, I will make sure that my students will be engaged with their local community and the community surrounding the subject matter. To start, musicians rely on the audience or group of people watching in order to form an idea of musical identity. With this, it is also true that a community is necessary in order to fund and support said musician. An unknown musician is a lonely performer, stuck in time. Without an audience, a musician's main critique is themselves, which blocks them from further progressing throughout their journey. Students require a bond with their community and with each other, while also needing outside information in order to expand their horizons. Involvement with all three will allow a student to form a more open mind, allowing more information to help them develop.

10. Metadiscursive awareness within and across academic and cultural domains (attention to language use at the “meta” level, e.g. talking about talk):

- a. The “meta” aspect of musicianship and secondary music education is teaching students about why they are playing. This involves the use of historical lessons, philosophical lessons, and lessons about self-identification. It is important for a student to be able to understand the historical context of music and how it plays into society while also forming their own reason for involving themselves with it. They may be in a band/choir because they love music, or they could just be there because their friends are in the same class. No matter what, having them find that purpose is essential. Though this might be more philosophical than what the text suggests, I do think that the subject of art will always be so.