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HOW WILL SELF-CENTERING AND BREATHING PRACTICES TO IMPROVE
AND PROMOTE PURPOSEFUL LEARNING IN BEGINNING BAND

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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To my family, friends, and colleagues for your continuous encouragement and support. Thank you to my Capstone Committee. Your guidance, extreme patience, and support for this project was fruitful and kept this journey exciting.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My capstone project is motivated by wanting to promote positive, purposeful learning in my classroom as well as develop a curriculum that includes proper breathing techniques and self-centering practices during band rehearsal warm-ups. My project question is: *How will self-centering and breathing practices improve and promote purposeful learning in beginning band?*

Teaching a room full of beginning band students is a joy and a challenge. Students are excited to learn a new instrument and perform with their classmates. The most challenging part of teaching a large ensemble of students is keeping them on task and focused on learning proper instrument playing techniques while preparing for concerts throughout the school year. It is with hopes creating a warm-up routine that involves centering, mindfulness, and breathing helps focus students as individuals and as an ensemble.

It is important to warm-up properly on a wind instrument individually and as an ensemble. Throughout this Chapter, I will share my rationale, context, and motivations as to why I have chosen to focus on incorporating centering, mindfulness, and breathing techniques and practices in my classroom. When was the last time you breathed with intention?

Rationale and Context

As a band director, I have opportunities to work with all ages. At this time, I teach fifth grade beginning band at two elementary schools in a suburb of the Twin Cities.

Outside of school, I direct an adult handbell choir, as well as take on other outside performances such as performing with a local community band. I love that I get to work with young musicians and older musicians. Learning how to play an instrument, sing, or create music is a life-long skill and hobby. What I enjoy most about directing and performing with a variety of ensembles around the area is that no matter the background of who is all in the ensemble, we leave all of our worries at the door, take a break from reality, and are there to create beautiful music.

Participating in music or the arts develops life-long skills such as self-discipline, time-management, and teamwork. These skills promote positive purposeful learning. I see this when I am rehearsing with my handbell choir and when I am performing with the community band. This realization of continuous learning and musicianship has propelled and inspired me to want to create the best learning experience for my beginner band students.

Personal Motivations

As a specialist, I feel the pressures of testing, grading, and the stress of my students. At the elementary level, I wonder if I can create a space that allows mindfulness, concentration, and safe learning to promote purposeful learning, especially with a limited rehearsal time. My rehearsals could improve on concentration between the transitions of pieces. Through this project, I want to be intentional, grasp the attention of my students, and promote positive attitudes.

My experience with breathing exercises and techniques come mostly from my high school band experience, college music experience, and practicing yoga at home. My

mindfulness and self-centering experiences also come from practicing yoga. I practice yoga regularly and love how centered and de-stressed I become.

Self-centering practices have been around for centuries. Spiritual participation, reflection, prayer, yoga, zen, etc. are still around to this day. “These exercises increase self awareness, self-understanding, and give the body a great ability to relax and release physical tension” (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016, p. 121). I enjoy that practicing yoga can change my overall mood and I believe it is important to be able to separate worries from immediate tasks at hand, such as learning, for not only myself, but for anyone. This is a skill that anyone can seek to develop. With the many stressors in education for both students and teachers, why are mindfulness and self-centering practices not used more?

In order to enhance the mindfulness and self-awareness in my classroom, I must also practice self-care and the embodiment of mindfulness. My students really pay attention to my actions, how I present myself, and how I state directions. This motivates me to become more aware of how I present myself and why warming up properly on instruments is important.

Professional Motivations

One of the foundations of being a wind musician is breathing. Proper breathing techniques can enhance tone production, posture, and control of an instrument (Pearson, 2006.) Due to limited rehearsal times each week with the students at multiple schools, the idea of taking more time in a warm-up to do simple breathing exercises has always been trumped instead by focusing on repertoire for concerts. I instruct phrasing and set goals

of how many beats we can play before we must take our next breath, but do not go in more depth at this level.

Every music director has different views on this topic. Those who are lucky and have forty-five minute to one-hour rehearsals spend at least a quarter of their time on warm-ups, breathing, and techniques before diving into repertoire. Some band directors spend even more time warming up their ensemble. Other directors may have one thirty-minute rehearsal a week and travel to multiple buildings. These directors hope their students remember their instrument for their one rehearsal and then attempt to pull off a feat of a concert at the end of the year with so little time. I am one of these directors. I rehearse with my students twice a week for thirty minutes. I want to change the mindset of feeling pressured for time to make it through performing pieces of music for a concert, to feeling satisfied with having a well-rounded rehearsal that is focused and concentrated.

Wind instruments have been around for about 300 years. Proper breath is one of the major foundations of learning a wind instrument. “Without the engagement of the breath in the musicing process, the sounds that follow always seem to be a bit labored and thin, and the sounds seemed handicapped and unable to carry meaningful human emotion or to communicate anything to anyone” (Jordin, 2011, p. 19). It is with hope, incorporating centering, mindfulness, and proper breathing exercises will help focus and engage students from the very start of rehearsal. Not only will students be able to maintain their focus, I also hope they develop these mindful skills to use outside of our band room.

Summary

I am curious to find out if I can enhance my students rehearsal warm-ups to benefit them individually and as an ensemble. I wonder if the repertoire I have chosen will benefit students from the mindful-based warm-up techniques. I also wonder if future audiences will see a difference in student focus and performance. Most importantly, I hope incorporating mindfulness in my class will transfer these soft-skills such as: communication, self-discipline, self-awareness, concentration, and responsibility, to other courses of study.

In Chapter One, I discuss my motivations of why I want to incorporate centering and mindfulness practices into my beginning band warm-up. I want my project of warm-ups involving centering and mindfulness practices to benefit both the students and their director. I know there are many directors in the same position as myself who have time constraints with their band students. I hope this project helps improve the focus of my own and other ensembles who face time-constraints. Specifically, this project is meant to help the focus ensembles who have a large number of young musicians. *How will self-centering and breathing practices improve and promote purposeful learning in beginning band?*

I am motivated to incorporate top-notch breathing technique building and self-centering practices within just a few minutes at the start of each band rehearsal with hope rehearsals start immediately focused and are well-concentrated throughout. It is also a goal these practices also carry over into their other classes, and hopefully on as an adult. Skills gained that are used in and outside of music benefit not only the students, but their

community by creating well-rounded students. I am hopeful incorporating breathing and self-centering practice improves student concentration and focus throughout rehearsals.

In Chapter Two, I will be presenting and reflecting on the benefits of self-centering practices such as those used in yoga, mindfulness activities, and why incorporating breathing techniques used by other music directors are beneficial to becoming a well-rounded musician. Something as simple as focusing on our breath, has so many health benefits, as well as focused rehearsal benefits. Chapter Three provides my project's framework, setting and participants, warm-up procedure, rehearsal methods, data analysis, and my project's timeline. Chapter Four is a reflection of my project which includes my learnings from the capstone process, my connections to the literature review, limitations to my project, and my project's impact. Let's dive in.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

It is with hope that when students walk into my room to begin rehearsal, offering mindful words and incorporating mindful activities into our daily warm-ups will allow them to ignore outside distractions and allow them to focus on music making. “Through meditation and other activities, we can improve what were once thought to be innate and unchangeable qualities like attention, intelligence, and even mental health by essentially rewiring neural connections” (Willard, 2010, p. 8). The benefits of increasing a healthy and focused ensemble experience enhances the music learning and performing experience. My literature review focuses on addressing the question: *How will self-centering and breathing practices improve and promote purposeful learning in beginning band?*

In Chapter One, I explained my personal and professional motivations of why I want to improve the student focus of my beginning band rehearsals. In Chapter Two, I will describe the sub-topic reasonings of the benefits of incorporating mindfulness and centering activities in our band rehearsal warm-ups. Warm-ups should involve mindfulness and centering, while incorporating breathing, movement, and musical engagement of technique building. None of these can be completed and positively reinforced without a solid foundation of classroom management and quick transitions along with routines and repetition.

Band Warm-Ups

Warm-ups are important to not only warming up our muscles and minds, but to also settle into the sound of our ensemble. It is important to set the tone and pace of our rehearsal with a solid warm-up routine that warms up our minds, bodies, breathing, embouchures and posture (Pearson, 2006). In beginning band, most of our focus is on reviewing our first few notes, tonguing, matching pitch, and knowing our rhythms. “Playing daily fundamentals can and needs to include musical expression. Directors may use a variety of exercises day-to-day that includes scales and other fundamentals performed in an expressive manner” (Sparrow, 2006). Warm-ups are an ensemble's foundation of technique building.

Warm-ups should always have a purpose. The purpose of warm-ups are intended to warm-up musicians' embouchures, hand technique, note reading, rhythm reading, tone, and breathe support (MacKenzie, 2018). Incorporating mindful challenges of becoming focused as one ensemble or individual challenges develops a natural engaged classroom. “This variety helps keep the classroom becoming a daily instant replay, and students become less bored” (Sparrow, 2006). How my rehearsal begins, sets the tone and expectations for rehearsal.

Movement

Incorporating movement into warm-ups, specifically mindful breathing warm-ups, has many benefits. “Movement interacts with neurological development factors, but cognitive growth is also a major influence on movement and learning” (O’Leary & Dorfman, 2010, p. 9). Unfortunately, students sit more than they move

throughout the school day. Should they be expected to continue to sit through another class?

When adding movement, the body and mind creates excitement and purpose, which helps reinforce what is being taught. For example, if I have my students act out inflating a balloon with their hands while they breathe out, they can correlate how their air affects the movement of their hands. Incorporating movement not only benefits getting the mind moving, but also helps create energy needed for proper breath and technique building needed while performing an instrument (O’Leary & Dorfman, 2010). “Many practices in music education, especially in elementary general music, include movements not only as reactions to music, but also as a component of the creation of music” (O’Leary & Dorfman, 2010, p. 2). Incorporating movement, whether it is simple as performing breathing exercises, or incorporating stretching, benefits the mind, body, and musicianship of an ensemble.

Pearson (2006) informs us:

Every sound that musicians make is created by movement: tone, rhythm, technique, and musicality are all created by subtle and complex movements that take years to refine. Therefore, movement education is critical so that musicians have as complete an understanding of the way they create sound as of the way they hear and interpret sound. (p. 1)

Movement does not mean performing jumping jacks or running around, but instead is exploring deepening the breath of the diaphragm by incorporating arm movements and stretching. Warming up with bad technique or not focusing on proper technique does not

benefit the student. If students warm-up and move in a way that is consistent with the techniques needed to perform, this will transfer over to their music reading and rehearsing.

Benefits of Incorporating Mindfulness

I find myself often sucked into the business of life, not being mindful of taking the time to recenter myself. “From earliest childhood we learn to see mind and body separate and unquestioningly to regard the body as more important” (Langer, 2014, p. 92). Connecting our mind and our bodies creates a sense of calm and focus. The goal of incorporating a mindfulness activity at the start of rehearsals is to not only help students become present in class as we settle in, but it will also help myself become ready to direct our rehearsals. To help define mindfulness, Schonert-Reichl and Roeser (2016) share, “Mindfulness is often referred to as a conscious-ness discipline” (p. 83). Incorporating mindfulness in how I approach warm-ups will also benefit how my students center themselves.

Practicing mindfulness has other benefits for my students that are outside what they would ordinarily gain from practicing music. “Mindfulness activates the areas of the brain associated with healthy regulation of emotions, happiness and a positive outlook, as well as physical and mental resilience” (Willard, 2010, p. 8). Additionally, developing an awareness of your surroundings benefits how students will work together as an ensemble. “While musicians are generally trained in the use of visual and auditory senses, they are often less developed in the tactile and kinesthetic senses, the most important senses for telling you how your body moves and feels” (Pearson, 2006, p. 12). Students begin to

become mindful of how they fit into the ensemble and how their focus affects the ensemble when having them explore how to connect visual, auditory, and their kinesthetic senses together.

Along with developing the awareness of our senses, there are three large umbrella ideas of mindfulness to develop. “Mindfulness comprises three core elements: intention, attention, and attitude” (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Schonert-Reichle and Roser (2016) explain:

Intention involves knowing *why* we are doing what we are doing: our ultimate aim, our vision, and our aspiration. *Attention* involves attending fully to the present moment instead of allowing ourselves to become preoccupied with the past or future. *Attitude*, or *how* we pay attention, enables us to stay open, kind, and curious. These three elements are not separate—they are interwoven, each informing and nurturing the others. Mindfulness is this moment- to-moment process. (p. 83)

When I practice yoga or take a moment to perform a breathing exercise, I instantly feel a sense of calm and relaxation. This is because I focus on the intentions of each movement I practice. I have to focus on staying attentive and in the moment. Finally, my attitude while practicing affects my body. Staying relaxed and connected with each movement deepens my breath and relaxation. This relaxation helps drive my reasoning how beneficial it can be to incorporate mindfulness into daily band warm-up routines.

Practicing mindfulness aids in helping the body develop healthy habits.

“Mindfulness practices promote many positive benefits such as: increased self-awareness and self-understanding, improved concentration, great control over one’s thoughts with less domination by unwelcome thoughts, and great opportunities for deeper communication and understanding between adults and children” (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016, p. 121). Students walk into my class with so many other things on their mind. I hope our daily warm-ups help students ignore outside distractions and allow them to focus on music making.

Benefits of Centering

There are many factors that could affect a student's behavior and attitude when walking into my class, such as they just came from taking a test, there is something going on at home, they are super excited about getting a dog, or all of the above. Incorporating centering when starting warm-ups should help the mind focus on warm-ups and learning targets for the day. “Centering stops the chatter of the mind, bringing us to the present moment. Eliminating distractions and promoting awareness, centering empowers us to be calm, focused, and ready for anything” (Roberts, 2014, p. 68).

The goal of centering is to stop mental and physical chatter in both myself and my students during warm-ups, in order to create a focused learning environment.

Schonert-Reichel and Roeser (2016) state:

Attunement to fundamental needs, a component of self-awareness, would then increase the likelihood of an individual engaging in autonomous action that is congruent with personal values and fulfills their fundamental needs for

relatedness and competence. It is through this process that self-awareness is fostered—the ability to recognize one’s values, emotions, strengths, and limitations. (p. 70)

Developing self-awareness is a life-long practice. Becoming self-aware as a musician allows students to become independent of themselves as well as aware of how they are engaged and working with the rest of their classmates. If I am in need of finding moments to center myself, I know it is beneficial to continuously incorporate a moment of centering at the beginning of every rehearsal. If I can stop the chatter mentally and physically in both myself and my students during warm-ups, it should increase the focus of our rehearsals, as well as the direction of how I lead our rehearsal.

Breathing

Centered and mindful focus can all be performed using breathing techniques. Proper breath support as a musician develops correct posture and tone production (MacKenzie, 2018). Pearson (2006) explains:

The quality of your movement determines the quality of the sound you make. In general, fluid and supported movement produces a full, rich, and free sound. Tight or rigid movement tends to produce a sound lacking in depth and without the full range of tone colors. This is true whether the instrument is the flute, the violin, or the voice: resonating chambers are affected by the quality of the tissue around them and whether it is free all the way from the floor. (p.11)

It is important that we breathe with intention, just like we center ourselves with the intention of becoming focused on the now. “Breath, when viewed from this perspective

in the music in process, will refine your awareness and bring you into a deeper, more profound, and more meaningful relationship with the composer's intent" (Jordin, 2011, p. 23). When practicing breathing exercises as an ensemble, students are aware their classmates are performing the same breathing exercise, creating a sense of teamwork and uniformity. Breathing exercises are silent, focused, and engaging.

Focusing on small details may be overwhelming to students or students may not understand the purpose of focusing on details. It is important to develop an inclusive attention to detail. "How ensemble students fundamentally approach music will shape the collective ensemble sound" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 13). A director should show an example of breathing posture and breath support and explain how to engage the correct muscles. Explaining the activities gives students an example of what the correct expectations are.

As the director, how I approach and conduct my warm-up breathing exercises is what my ensemble will copy. "All conductors bring their own values, interpretations and expectations to their ensemble" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 1). In each rehearsal I will make sure to choose a breathing technique or mindfulness practice that will emphasize or contribute to the goals I have for the class or piece we are learning. For example, if we are performing a piece with whole notes and extended slurs, I will choose a breathing exercise that develops sustaining air exhalation. Pearson (2006) shares a reminder to both myself and to promote, "in any movement or exercise, think of the direction in which you are going" (p. 3). It is crucial to exemplify correct technique and explain the intent of our breathing warm-up exercises in order to develop the skills needed to perform a good tone.

Incorporating breathing exercises into band warm-ups not only improves tone and proper posture, it also engages an ensemble to work together as one. Students are focused on their director all at the same time, following specific instructions along with their classmates at the same time.

Classroom Management

Classroom management can make or break the focus of a classroom. I know this is something I am constantly trying to improve. “In a well-managed musical ensemble, students are on-task and involved in the rehearsal. They know the teacher’s expectations for them and are successful in learning musical concepts and developing performance skills” (Bauer, 2001, p. 27). With only having two short thirty-minute rehearsals a week, I have learned to keep comments short and precise, and continue to keep my ensembles playing. Having so little time in between the transitions of pieces we rehearse limits the amount of time students can become off task. I will admit that some rehearsals are better than others. There are days students come in ready to learn and then there are other days students are excited and harder to have focus because they just came back from a field trip or school assembly.

The first few moments of a rehearsal set the tone for the next half hour of class. Making wise choices about the most effective instruction strategies to employ, designing classroom curriculum to facilitate student learning, and making effective use of classroom management techniques can make or break rehearsal rules and procedures. Successful teachers take the time to explain rules and their reasonings (Marzano et al., 2003, p. 3). Incorporating both centering and mindfulness practices will benefit the

overall classroom environment, supporting students to stay focused throughout our rehearsals.

In the past, I would announce the pieces we are working through so percussion could get their equipment out and ready to go. I would explain *what* we were performing in our warm-ups, but never the *why*. I also never made consistent connections in our concert repertoire back to our warm-ups to acknowledge how our warm-ups benefit everything we perform in rehearsals. Now, as soon as rehearsal begins, it will be time to announce our learning target goals, rehearsal intentions, and class expectations. It is important to inform students the purpose of achieving these goals and how they tie into our future performance. Clear and consistent communication is key to running a well-managed classroom.

Giving Instruction

Berzozky (as cited in Burton, 2012) stated “Effective education in a prefigurative culture succeeds when teachers focus on teaching students how: how to think, how to solve problems, how to evaluate, and how to adapt in an effective manner” (p. 8). In the beginning band, my students soak up anything and everything I say. This is such a fun perk with what I do because each of them have chosen something they want to learn and perform.

I have learned to give clear and precise instructions to my students as we go through the steps of learning a new instrument. Marzano (2005) shares, “giving direct and simple instructions will benefit a focused rehearsal” (p.18). How I present myself and

speak to my ensemble, also plays a factor into how my instructions are received by my band students. Linsin (2014) explains:

Your temperament has a profound effect on behavior, much more than most teachers realize. If ever you're stressed and uptight about anything, then you'll bring a heaviness to your classroom or gymnasium your students will feel the moment they walk through your door. Even a general uneasiness about what the day may hold can be so powerful and disconcerting to students that it will cause them to become excitable, which is a major cause of misbehavior. (p. 15)

My manner, wordage, and approach to greeting students, giving instruction, and my reactions all affect the environment of my room and the learning that happens within.

“Central to understanding anything with an intended function are (1) a clear definition of its purpose and (2) a reliable measure of the extent to which it accomplishes its purported goal” (Duke, 2012, p. 10). Reinforcing positive behaviors and growth in performance throughout rehearsals helps build a more confident and driven rehearsal.

Learning music involves the development of physical habits associated with music performance. Habits should be developed correctly so it is important to be aware of the techniques being developed. “Just as there are physical behaviors and physical responses to stimuli that become habits over time, there are intellectual processes (habits of thought) and emotional responses that also become habits over time” (Duke, 2012, p. 145). Speaking clearly and with intention simply creates clear communication.

Performing examples and exhibiting proper posture and breathing gives students an example of my classroom expectations.

Giving clear instructions to students and also showing them your expectations will help students stray from becoming off task so easily. For example, if I ask my students to take out a specific concert piece after our warm-ups, it opens up an opportunity for them to let their mind wander or talk to their stand partner. What I should ask them to do is take out a specific concert piece and repeat the rhythmic pattern I am speaking on a “too.” This rhythmic pattern keeps them engaged, repeating rhythms they will be rehearsing in their concert song, while also practicing using their tongue when speaking “too.” Students cannot read our mind as we cannot read theirs. Direct instruction can lead to successful, quick, and purposeful transitions between playing materials.

Rehearsal Transitions

Transitions and their timing can make or break the focus of a rehearsal. If a transition is too long, students do not stick to our rules and play out of turn. “Practicing transitions is something that needs to be taught with high expectations. Simple, direct instructions, set the tone” (Marzano, 2005, p. 18). If a transition is too quick, students are not ready and miss instructions. It is also important to keep in mind my tone and the approach of each transition.

Using mindful practice at the start of rehearsals helps students and myself to become centered, and this focus will remain throughout rehearsals. Friendly reminders about how we centered ourselves prior or during transitions between activities should help maintain our learning target goals. High expectations and clearly stated directions should make transitions between rehearsing pieces and activities run smoothly.

Routines and Repetition

With the challenge of seeing students for a short time each week to rehearse, it can take a little longer than the average classroom to create routines the students become familiar with. “Routines are among the most important strategies a specialist teacher can use because they make everything easier” (Linsin, 2014, p. 39). Linsin (2014) also states: The focus required to perform a routine with excellence will transfer to your lessons and activities. (p. 41). Routines help create and develop the expectations associated between doing things the right way, doing things successfully, and developing a love of learning within each classroom.

I have noticed from my experience as an educator that if there lacks a consistent routine, students tend to be more out of control. Developing strong and firm routines at the start of the school year, set-up the rest of the year to become successful.

Routines should be memorable and easy to follow. Linsin (2014) states:

The secret to teaching memorable routines is to make them highly detailed--much more detailed than you're probably used to. You have to show your students from start to finish precisely and explicitly what you want them to do, and in a way that makes sense to them. (p. 43).

Incorporating centering and mindfulness routines will be a new and fresh teaching challenge, however, the researched benefits are too great to not incorporate.

Schonert-Reichel and Roeser (2016) share a list of the benefits of practicing mindfulness regularly. Some benefits of practicing regularly are: increased self-awareness and self-understanding, the greater ability to relax the body and release physical tension,

improved concentration, and the improved ability to deal with stressful situations more effectively by creating a more relaxed way of responding to stressors (Schonert-Reichel & Roeser, 2016, p. 121). Starting off rehearsals with an expected and centered routine focuses the entire group right from the start. The goal then is to keep this focus maintained throughout rehearsal with precise instructions and quick transitions.

Conclusion

As Duke (2012) shares:

For a skillful student of any discipline, knowledge is almost always readily accessible. The acquisition of skill, on the other hand, requires consistent, deliberate practice over time. (pg. 31)

In order for students in beginning band to acquire the musical skills necessary to perform, they must have a classroom environment that supports the attentiveness and mindfulness required to consistently and deliberately practice a skill. Incorporating mindfulness and centering develops mental clarity, readying a large group of students to become focused for rehearsal. Incorporating these focuses benefits the mental and emotional well-being of each student and promotes practicing positive intentions, both overall, and when rehearsing instrumental techniques (MacKenzie, 2018). Clear instruction, efficient transitions between rehearsing pieces, and routines and repetition will help reinforce these new centering and mindfulness activities that are for helping focus my ensembles.

Chapter Three explains how I will incorporate mindfulness and centering into our band warm-ups as well as share how I will reinforce these techniques throughout the rest of rehearsal with hopes students remain mindful and focused throughout. The transitions

from the downbeat of rehearsal, to warming up the ensemble, then focusing on concert music needs to be swift and seamless. It is with hope that over time, students become familiar and in routine with our class expectations as individuals and as an ensemble, maximizing student engagement. Chapter Four will provide a reflection of the creation of my capstone, which will include the learnings of my capstone project process, connections to my literature review in Chapter Three, the limitations of my project, and finally, the impact of my project.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT

Introduction

I travel between two schools and teach fifth grade band in a large school district in a suburb of the Twin Cities. Learning how to efficiently compact lesson targets into short amounts of time each week, while only seeing students for a short lesson and two thirty-minute band rehearsals a week, is challenging. With so little time and teaching at two different schools, my goal is to always spend the time I have with my students productively.

Factoring in testing, field trips, holidays, sports, homework, etc., there is a lot that my students juggle. Getting a large ensemble of ten and eleven-year-olds to focus playing instruments, while thinking as one large ensemble, is both a joy and a challenge. If I struggle with the focus and pacing of my rehearsals, I know other educators might be as well. This is why I am now sharing my project plans for: *how will self-centering and breathing practices improve and promote purposeful learning in beginning band?*

In Chapter One and Chapter Two, I shared that the focus of the project would be to incorporate centering and mindfulness in the warm-ups of a beginning band rehearsal. Chapter Three will share a deeper rationale behind this project, ensemble warm-up process, transition explanations and data analysis.

Project Description

Project Rationale

There are unique challenges in managing a large ensemble of young musicians compared to other various learning environments. For example, if I am rehearsing at one of my schools, in the cafeteria I set up my own chairs and stands. I do not have any technology or a white board to write down our rehearsal plans or draw out visuals for students during rehearsals. I have to bring all of my back-up music copies and emergency instrument repair kit with me on a cart. Students must place their backpacks and instrument cases in designated areas so we can exit the cafeteria safely in case of an emergency. On top of all of these small housekeeping items, students are excited to show up, continue to learn how to play their instrument, see their friends, and make music together. Not only is there a responsibility for students to arrive in a safe and welcoming make-shift classroom environment, there is also the factor of having a population of different personalities coming together, from a handful of different homeroom teachers, all with different classroom expectations. I agree with Linsin (2014):

The biggest disadvantage to being a specialist teacher is that classroom teachers will always have more influence on your students. Despite your greatest efforts, the students that come to see you every week will be molded, good and bad, by their classroom teacher. (p. 5).

Despite the array of housekeeping items needed to create the most efficient make-shift band room for students to learn in, the goal of this project is to increase student focus right away as students enter the bandroom, as well as throughout rehearsal, to improve musicianship and teamwork.

My beginning band rehearsals are always focused the first few months of the year. Typically, this is because the band is new, playing is new and the students typically play loud so they really have to pay attention to stay together. Not only are directors rehearsing many students, sometimes even one-hundred plus at one time, but our fast moving, technology involved world has changed how we have had to approach using fast-paced rehearsal techniques in order to keep the attention span of our musicians. “Students’ views of the world often reflect this getting-through-the-tune way of thinking.” (Duke, 2012, p 27). This is true, for even myself. Auerbach and Delpont (2018) felt that slowing down in this fast paced world has impacted how students learn with stating that, “Unfortunately, children today grow up in a society of fast increasing and changing electronic technology, polluted with noise. As such, they have learnt to curb the impact on their auditory senses” (p. 1). Getting both myself and my students to slow down, focus, and become centered and mindful of how we create music will be beneficial for each ensemble.

Participating in music ensembles allows students an opportunity to collaborate and work together as a team. Burton (2012) wanted to share that O’Dea (2003) also promotes, “Programs that focus on the positive development of identity and self-esteem in adolescents have been noted to be successful especially when students are provided with opportunities to thrive in non-competitive environments.” Since band is an added elective, I have the advantage that students sign-up for my class which means they want to go to lessons and band rehearsals. If the fifth graders improve and can perform at a high level at the end of the year, it is more likely the fourth graders will sign-up the

following year. The goal is for the journey to be focused and successful from the very first rehearsal to when they graduate onto middle school.

Project Framework

This project is a unit of eight band rehearsal templates for band directors. This project offers mindful and centering activities developed in lesson plans specifically chosen for beginning band students. Each lesson within the unit includes centering, mindfulness, and breathing activities during warm-ups, an open rehearsal section to customize the rehearsal plan of the day, opportunities for reflection, and affirmations of mindfulness saying and motivational quotes for each lesson.

I will be creating this unit using the framework of Understanding by Design (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). I have chosen to use this framework because of the backward planning design and planning templates. Within the Understanding by Design framework, I will focus on using Direct Instruction strategies because these are founded on these principles:

- Effective modeling
- Emerging Independence
- Learning by Question
- Ongoing Assessment (Silver et al., 2007, p. 38)

I will be selecting specific centering and mindfulness activities, creating a script for each activity, break each activity down into clear steps, and model each step. I will also reinforce what we learn from the daily lessons centering, mindfulness, and breathing

activities throughout the rest of rehearsal. Finally, students' focus will be assessed with the evaluation and feedback methods using rating skills and holistic rubrics (Shaw, 2018).

Setting and Participants

Fifth grade band students at two elementary schools will experience a new warm-up routine at the start of rehearsal. One elementary school fifth grade band will rehearse in the cafeteria at the end of the school day and the other elementary school fifth grade band will rehearse before lunch in their designated band room site. Each band will be an average of 65 to 100 students.

Each ensemble has a healthy balance of instrumentation. Woodwind players are towards the front, high-brass in the middle, and low-brass in the back of the room. Percussion will be stationed off to the side of the band, closer to my podium for easy access and communication. There is a ratio of 50/50 girl and boy participants.

The two elementary schools that are participating are of the two elementary schools in our district who have the highest number of students who do not need financial assistance obtaining an instrument to participate in band. I have only five to ten students at each school who have requested financial assistance scholarships to rent an instrument from the school. Everyone else in the ensemble has purchased an instrument, is renting from a local music store, or has inherited their instrument from a family member.

How students enter the room plays a part in the expectations of the classroom. Any materials that are not an instrument and music folder are to be left in the hallway or in a designated holding area. Students' expectations for entering the room are putting their instruments together and getting their music out, waiting quietly and patiently until

signaled to focus on the director to start our warm-up routine. These expectations will be expressed clearly and reinforced as students enter.

Warm-up Procedure

The ensemble warm-up procedure for this project will go as follows: centering, breathing, mindfulness, warm-up our instruments with our warm-up repertoire, and short daily announcements. When students enter the room, they are expected to gather their instrument and music, take their seat, and sit patiently and quietly until I signal it is time for rehearsal to start.

The goal of our warm-up includes centering, mindfulness, breathing, and the start of our long tones and focused technique builders. Each warm-up will take at least 5-8 minutes before diving into the concert repertoire for about 18-20 minutes. The final few minutes are for announcement reminders, rehearsal feedback, and for cleaning up and putting instruments and music away.

When rehearsal begins, centering our minds and bodies will get everyone attuned into one large machine. As students become settled into their spot and their instrument is ready, they will begin to listen to the welcome and words of centering I will use to begin our warm-up. Students will perform a centering activity each lesson followed by a mindfulness activity.

The transitions from centering to mindfulness will flow naturally, followed into our breathing warm-up. The breathing warm-up has been chosen specifically to help develop proper inhalation and exhalation for playing an instrument. Breathing creates support of both centering and for musicianship skills. "Support includes the processes

and the structures that aid our breathing. Support makes breathing easier, gives vibrancy to the tone, and helps us get the kinds of long exhalations necessary for playing” (Pearson, 2006, p. 90). Students will begin to become mindful of their breath and breath support as a musician throughout this warm-up routine by reinforcing using proper posture and breathing out sustained, cool air.

Connecting centering practices with specific centering exercises and recommended musician exercises has multipurpose benefits within the first two minutes of our warm-up. If breathing is not incorporated into a warm-up routine, this can affect the overall tone and timbre of an ensemble. “Conductors who do not breathe usually are severely limited in the colors they can achieve with their ensembles. In most cases, the sound of those ensembles is monochromatic, robbing the conductors of an expressive device” (Jordin, 2011, p. 19). What is most beautiful about incorporating centering and mindful exercises, is that there is a lot of crossover between these breathing skills and diaphragm breathing exercises for musicians.

Following breathing, mindfulness will be incorporated and developed. With a focused mind-set, the band will then begin working through warm-up exercises with their instruments, being mindful of their breathing and starting and stopping together as an ensemble, being mindful of their breathing and starting and stopping together as an ensemble.

Rehearsal Methods

Following our warm-up procedure, rehearsals will focus on concert repertoire. This part of the project will be left open for other directors to write in their rehearsal

notes for the lesson. Directors should keep in mind that the goal is to always have students playing with a good sound. Evan et al. (2012) states:

A good sound is a good sound, and if you simply expect that regardless of the technical demand, then students will always value a good sound. The individual sound quality, along with ensemble balance, becomes the signature of a group's ensemble sound. These are the first things I hear when the baton goes down. (p. 13).

This reminder, as well as optional thoughtful mindfulness quotes and motivational quotes, will be available for directors to incorporate into their daily lesson plans to help reinforce this unit of mindfulness and centering.

When the ensemble is focused, learning increases. Mindfulness reminders will be given throughout the remainder of rehearsal, especially prior to transitions between pieces. At the end of rehearsals, students will be given a summary of the positives of rehearsal and a positive “looking forward to making more music with you next time.”

Data Analysis

Since my project is meant to improve student focus throughout rehearsal, I will have students rate their focus prior to rehearsal, after our warm-up routine, and at the end of rehearsal. To collect the overall ensemble progress of incorporating a more focused warm-up routine and check-ins of mindfulness throughout rehearsal, students will rate their focus prior to rehearsal, during, and after on a slip of paper. These anonymous results will be collected and analyzed over the three weeks of the project.

To keep track of student data, after each rehearsal I will input each student's ratings of how focused they were onto a Google Form. Each lesson in my unit has a separate color coordinated Google Form so it is easy to keep track of the lesson that is being analyzed. Once the entire unit is completed, I will be able to download and compare each lesson's results.

Project Timeline

This project will involve two different ensembles performing this unit over the course of four weeks. My unit includes eight lessons and each band will have two rehearsals a week that includes my centering, mindfulness, and breathing scripts. I will have both bands start this unit as soon as they can perform the entire first page of our beginning band first five note warm-up packet. This will take place around the last week of October, or first week in November, fall of 2020.

Data collection will be analyzed over the course of four weeks. This time period is long enough to collect and compare the results of student focus from when students first start the unit, compared to the end. I will also be able to see how their focus improves how we learn new concert pieces, sight-read read repertoire, and if the tone of students and the band in general improves.

Summary

Throughout Chapter Three, I explained the rationale behind my project, who is participating in my project, and where my project is taking place. Most importantly, I highlight the procedure for our rehearsal warm-ups that involve centering and mindful practices to encourage and develop a more focused rehearsal setting for beginning band

students. This unit is set up to promote a more purposeful and focused rehearsal experience.

Chapter Four will provide a personal reflection of my project as well as the results of how focused my ensembles were throughout the process. You will see the developments in the use of centering, breathing, and mindfulness exercises used with the ensemble, as well as their effectiveness. You will also learn how the unit starts with an introduction of centering, mindfulness, and breathing activities, to how the final lessons in my project reinforce and connect my unit together.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

Rehearsing a large ensemble of beginning band students is a joy and a challenge. Each student is new to performing an instrument. Every student is learning how their sound fits into the band, and it is my job to help them grow and improve on their instrument, build multiple trusting relationships, and direct them to create music together as one ensemble.

Rehearsing many students with different personalities can be a challenge. I have caught myself just going through the motions of keeping rehearsals fast-paced with hopes students do not become off-task in between songs. This is why I created a project that incorporates centering and mindfulness. It is with hope that having students enter my classroom, become centered and mindful, help settle their minds and bodies, to become focused to be the best selves they can be. You cannot expect students to be their best in a group setting if they are not their best self. This is why my project: *How will self-centering and breathing practices improve and promote purposeful learning in beginning band?* Is so important to me.

Overview

In this Chapter, I will share my journey of completing my capstone project, the successes of my literature review, project overview, the limitations of my findings, the impact of my project, and my final summary.

Learnings from the Capstone Process

I love sharing with everyone that my capstone process was as if I were on a rollercoaster. There was an incline of wondering what I should focus on at the start of capstone and settling on my choice, the nose dive into my literature review, another incline of starting the creation of my project, to once again racing to the finish line.

The further I was into creating my project unit, the more clarity I gained with how I wanted my unit to flow that made sense to myself and my students, while also considering if it would make sense for other beginning band directors. I can now say confidently I can explain my intentions of this project, clearly explain its layout, and answer any questions about how to incorporate centering and mindfulness into a beginning band rehearsal warm-up.

I will admit there were weeks I felt overwhelmed and anxious about finishing my vision or completing my research to support my project. Spending a little time every day or every other day really helped my anxiety calm down towards the end. Now, after my unit is complete, I felt proud and excited to finish sharing my journey with you here.

Connections to the Literature Review

Incorporating centering, mindfulness, breathing, and movement all encompassed the start of every warm-up in my project. The purpose of incorporating these activities and exploring them in my rehearsals is to help students focus, to promote purposeful learning. More so, the purpose is to also help my students to carry these learnings to promote purposeful learning in their other classrooms.

I could not find any band warm-up routines that specifically included centering and mindfulness activities. There were many recommended breathing exercises available,

and there were general centering and mindfulness activities available for any age for counselors or teachers to use, but none that focused on promoting purposeful learning in an ensemble setting.

In my literature review, I shared the benefits of movement, centering, mindfulness, and breathing. Combined and done properly, they benefit the mind, body, and improve overall musicianship. Shapiro and Carlson (2009) inspired the creation of my lessons as they shared, “Mindfulness comprises three core elements: intention, attention, and attitude.” My project specifically focuses on student awareness of themselves, their instrument, and their surroundings. Each student focuses on themselves each lesson centering, they become mindful of them and their peers, their place in the classroom, and then each student breathes together as one, setting the tone of the remainder of the rehearsal.

I noticed when researching literature on centering, mindfulness, and breathing topics, there was no evidence of negative feedback. Everything I researched only promoted positive and purposeful outcomes. Although there were no specific mindfulness activities selected for ensembles to use, that did not mean there was not a plethora of resources available to pull from. Overall, my literature review springboarded my project to have a solid foundation and argument as to why my project is important to myself, and suggests why others should try incorporating centering, mindfulness, and breathing activities daily into their warm-up routines as well.

Project Overview

My final project is a series of eight lessons which include: centering, mindfulness, and breathing activities, customizable warm-up and rehearsal section, tips on transition jargon for throughout rehearsal to keep students focused, areas for reflecting on lessons, and recommended mindfulness quotes to be visuals for each lesson. Students will keep track of how focused they are prior, during, and after each rehearsal on a slip of paper. After each lesson, I will collect the results of the student data on a Google Form and I will be able to keep track of if the rate of focus in my rehearsal is improving.

The layout of this unit starts with introducing centering and mindfulness to students. The first few lessons include simple, calming, and short focused activities. The breathing activity that follows the centering and mindfulness activities every lesson expands focused lung exhalation. Not only is another activity meant to help focus each student, it prompts proper breathing needed to perform on instruments, and makes the ensemble breathe together at the same time. Finally, the last lesson includes a fun activity involving balloons to have students physically see and measure the focused air they breathe out with each warm-up, and also includes a mindful activity of sharing compliments with their stand partner about what they have improved on throughout this unit.

I created each lesson's warm-up to be relatable, interesting, simple, and beneficial to beginning band students. There is purpose to the flow of every activity and their scripts. Each lesson's motivation mindfulness quotes of the day also tie into each lesson. It is with hope using visual, physical, and auditory senses will reinforce each activity.

Limitations to Project

I teach at two different elementary schools and each of my classrooms are different. At one school, I teach band in the cafeteria where I do not have a whiteboard or move-able television stand. At my other school, I have these options. I know many other band directors who travel between schools also face similar situations where there may be limited resources available to them in their rehearsal space.

When providing visuals for each lesson's mindfulness quotes of the day, I will have to make sure to either print these or ask for a mobile tv monitor to have for this unit in the cafeteria for rehearsal. I will also need to put a student leader in charge of turning our lights on after we finish our warm-up with them half-off because it can be challenging to step-away from a large ensemble of students. I want to be able to keep our focused warm-up activities moving into our playing warm-ups.

I understand that other directors may not be able to use balloons in their classroom for the final breathing activity in my unit. Instead, directors can possibly use slinky, hair ties, scrunchies, or anything else that is available to them. Also, the purchasing of my recommended Teachers Pay Teachers mindfulness poster links are optional, but highly recommended.

Finally, directors may not feel comfortable leading centering and mindfulness activities. Essentially, they must have a zen-like, calming presence when presenting my scripted activities. No matter what prior knowledge a director has had, remember that presenting this material to students will also be new for them. Be patient and kind with yourself. You should find yourself also improving with each lesson throughout this unit.

Impact

The realities and ever changing Covid-19 updates have created social emotional learning as a hot topic on many teacher social media platforms. Educators are seeking out materials to incorporate mindfulness into their lessons for their students. The impact of Covid-19 was not a factor or had any influence on my project. After completing my project, I believe the material I have pulled is relevant and will be sought out. I am excited to share this project with my PLC, team building leaders, and other band directors. After I teach this unit with my band and reflect on my outcomes, it is my goal to share these outcomes and these materials with other educators at my district's yearly personalized learning summit and at other educator conferences as well.

I hope after teaching my centering and mindfulness unit in my beginning band rehearsals, that I become a more centered and confident band director. I see myself becoming more comfortable leading activities, stating things more articulate and clear, and I see myself becoming better at reinforcing the whys of my warm-ups and their activities I have chosen throughout rehearsals. I am excited for not only giving students an opportunity to enter my classroom and know they are safe, welcomed, and be able to create music with them, but I will also feel the same.

Summary

This chapter was a reflection of the creation of my capstone project. It included the learnings of my capstone project process, an overview of my project, the importance of my literature review, and my understanding of limitations of the project. Finally, in Chapter Four I explained the impacts of my project about myself and the impact it can have for others.

Throughout my capstone project journey, I have learned that I have a true passion for my project. I always want students to be their best selves and this project allows me to give them an added level of awareness of who they are as individuals and how they play an important role in our ensemble. This project also allows myself to grow and be mindful of how I teach others. I am constantly adding ideas to my teaching toolbox. Centering and mindfulness now have their own important compartment in my band toolbox.

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