

Chapter 4: Evaluation

Practicum Evaluation

It is the vision of this practicum that a young person will feel confident enough to carry a small, diatonic harmonica with him or her on a camping trip, to a friend's house or a family gathering and play a folk song or improvise a new song for his/her pleasure and the enjoyment of the group. And, when students are able to answer general question about the harmonica and make descriptive responses about the music in terms of style, history or artist characteristics I consider that a successful achievement of this curriculum's objectives.

Student's enthusiasm and progress on the checkoff accountability chart was an indication of their personal success with the harmonica and the unity of study. They were excited to get started on each lessons objectives. Although the musical genre was new and often outside their point of departure they were open to the experience. Many students became familiar with the characteristics of the harmonica artists that were introduced.

I felt the instruction was structured and paced appropriately to this age group of learners. This was evident from the eighth lesson on due to the self-reliance and confidence students were able to exhibit during independent study. During this period of the instructional design, I was able to move among the students, making observations and reflect on the application of the instruction students displayed. It was heartening to see them grasp the concept of improvisation for their own melodic creations. Translating their melodies into notation proved a bit more daunting for some students. I was available to answer their questions, and my own written example on display was able to answer many questions without my intervention. Some students enjoyed the mix-

media aspect of using the Orff xylophone to help them create and notate a melody.

Student Evaluation: Near the end of the eight weeks I distributed a harmonica Unit Evaluation (see Appendix p. xxix) for each student to fill out. Their response to this study of the harmonica was positive and their suggestions were helpful toward future implementation. Sixty percent indicated that they would like even more songs to choose from. Eighty percent stated that they liked playing the songs in the Harmonica Songbook (see Appendix p. i - xiv). When students were asked to list what they liked about their harmonica study their responses indicated that they liked:

- Independent study time
- Playing harmonica as a class
- Working with partners
- Learning how to play harmonica
- The challenge
- Memorizing songs
- The lessons
- Guessing the artist on the CD

As mentioned before, many students would like to have more songs to play. A few students wanted more time to practice in the first seven lessons. Two students wanted the worksheets eliminated, and two students were not enthusiastic about making up their own melodies. Seventy percent rated their progress favorably in the 8 - 9 - 10 range on a 1 to 10 scale, 1 being poor and 10 being excellent, and thirty percent rated their progress in the 6 - 7

range. No students regarded their progress lower than 6. However, in their self-assessment of their on-task behavior during independent study, two students ranked themselves in the 4 - 5 range on a 1 to 10 scale. Sixty percent assessed themselves in the 8 - 9 - 10 range and thirty-four percent assessed themselves in the 6 - 7 range. Ninety percent of the students felt they could play a song on the harmonica for their family.

Peer Evaluation: Dave Mejia, retired music teacher extra ordinaire and owner of The Old Curiosity Shop in Denver, and Dottie Reaves, music coordinator for Jefferson County School District, went through this practicum with fine tooth combs. Many of their suggestions have been incorporated into the instructional design and added needful clarity.

It was one of Dave's suggestions that harmonica music should be playing on the stereo as students walk into the classroom. Dave is also very techno-savvy and found several situations where music technology could facilitate the lesson. For instance, the short segments of harmonica recordings used in Lesson 1 could be compiled with CD burning software, Deck 11 or an audio sequencer to minimize the time switching CD's. He found several places where midi sequencing would fit easily with an activity and suggested that digital video clips of student performances could be posted to a school's web site.

Dottie liked how the lessons were constructed with a review or game activity at the beginning, and she like how listening activities were integrated into the lessons. She suggested that a historical time line or chart could be posted in the room to put artists and styles in context, particularly for visual learners. This would also strengthen the history/cultural piece of the music standards.

They both liked the idea of having students create assessment cues in Lesson 6. The consensus was that the lessons are clearly laid out and easy to follow. The pace of instruction fits the population of early adolescent learners. Both Dottie and Dave and my college advisor, Mr. Steve Mountjoy, thought the material was interesting and enjoyable. I was also invited to present this material at a teacher in-service meeting.

Modifications

I taught a unit of harmonica study during the previous school year. It was from that experience that I expanded and refined this instructional design. I originally had twelve worksheets to choose from during the independent study portion of the curriculum. I modified this to five worksheets for two reasons. First, several students needed more time than I anticipated to complete the worksheets leaving them with too little time to practice the harmonica which was the main focus of the unit. Secondly, to my surprise, there were a few students who preferred doing worksheets to the near exclusion of their harmonica practice. Therefore, I reduced the number of worksheets to the five which reviewed music notation concepts. I also added one worksheet to the Question and Answer Melody section. This is actually a review worksheet from previous years which I inserted here to strengthen their point of departure on the concept of melodic development. This is perhaps more necessary in the population of students I teach than may be experienced in other student populations, particularly due to the transient nature of the population in my school.

I also altered the nature of the written assessment that students took at the end of the unit to reflect a more learner-centered activity. I eliminated one-word answers and instead asked for

more in depth responses to their work on the history of the harmonica and responses from their entries on the List of Famous & Favorites Study Guide. I also opened up the assessment process to eliminate the test-taking anxiety factor and allowed student to work in pairs if they wanted to. This proved more successful than I realized as students conferred and collaborated to answer the questions. In particular, the first six assessment questions became a stronger evaluation tool rather than the result of a guessing activity. I cautioned students to write their own word selection for their answers and that duplicated sentence responses would not be acceptable. Because I informed students about this aspect of the assessment during the lessons, I found that a larger number of students than usual took their note-taking more seriously and had a more positive and fruitful experience during the assessment.

To more effectively validate the students written responses to step 1 of lesson 6, I also used their questions for quick review "pop" quiz activities during the independent study class sessions.

Recommendations for Further Study

My students were generally excited with their harmonica study and concluded the unit with enjoyment and confidence in their beginning skills. I was sometimes overwhelmed with their enthusiasm and impressed to see them try to emulate some of the artistic techniques they heard on the recordings. In the future I will try to invite a local harmonica performer to give a live presentation for my students. I think this would add to their desire to purchase their own harmonica and continue their interest in this medium of expression.

Students responded in their evaluations that they wanted more songs to play. I also

interpret this to mean that they would welcome more challenging music. So in future units I will add a section of duets to the songbook. One duet idea might involve one student playing the melody while another student plays a harmonica chord accompaniment. For another duet idea I will write out a second single-note harmony part to be played along with the melody.

I am planning to create a curriculum for class instruction on the ukelele. When this is compiled and proves successful, I would like to integrate the harmonic with the ukelele, giving students more opportunities for creative collaboration.

The focus of instruction in this practicum is folk style harmonica playing. I found this to be the best entry-level approach to class instruction. Nevertheless, the majority of listening examples are blues oriented and the overwhelming emphasis among published harmonica methods is the blues. Therefore, in order to better facilitate a smooth transition to students possible future study of the harmonica, I will include a section of study on creating/improvising on a blues progression in future harmonica lessons. This will build on a previously taught unit on the blues in which students studied the history of the blues, began to aurally identify the chord changes in a blues progression and wrote and sang lyrics to a blues progression.

In the future I will expand the list of listening resources to include more present-day bands that include harmonica like Blues Traveler. And, I will include historic examples like the Harmonicats to better illustrate a style of harmonica performance that was popular in post-WW II America. The present list of listening examples is flexible and may change from year to year as I become more knowledgeable about this genre of popular music.

I engage my younger students in listening and rhythm activities using the piano, rhythm

instruments, Orff instruments, tonettes and recorders. To add interest and build on their point of departure when they are in the sixth grade, I plan to add the harmonica to my "tool chest" of instruments. I believe this prior visual and aural experience with the harmonica might increase their interest and success with the harmonica in the sixth grade.

Every three years I produce a music class recital with each grade level as a change of pace from the musical play productions in the intervening years. After I finished teaching this unit of harmonica study, I added several harmonica performances to the sixth grade music recital. They did an outstanding job and demonstrated confidence in their accomplishment on the harmonica. I may try to find performance venues at the end of the future harmonica units to better solidify this experience for the students.

I used the notation software program Encore to create the Harmonica Songbook. Dave Mejia, one of my peer evaluators, made me aware of other interesting music technology possibilities, particularly the music sequencer. This is new territory for me which I plan to explore for future application. From my course work at Colorado Christian University, I have been impressed with the use of Power Point for lesson presentations. I would like to develop a Power Point presentation to facilitate the historical study of the harmonica and include student view s sheets with the presentation.

It was suggested that I send some instruction materials home with students, such as the scale drill in lesson 5. I may do this in the future and also post these on my school's music website. There are also several very informative harmonica web sites, a few of which are cited in the Literature Review of this practicum. I plan to make this information more widely known in our community via the school newsletter and web page.