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Music 4822

Jr. High Observations: Sandra Day O-Conner Middle School

Teacher: Jeannette Samson

Wednesday October 11, 2006 8-11 AM

## INTERMEDIATE ORCHESTRA

Mrs. Samson set-up the classroom, putting out chairs for the few students in the classroom and moving stands down. As students walked into the classroom, Mrs. Samson reminded them that there was to be a scale test on A Major. Students immediately went to get their instruments and sit in their assigned sections. Mrs. Samson passed out white boards and Kleenex in anticipation of doing some rhythm exercises. However, she couldn't find the markers for the white boards. *She didn't stress about not finding the markers. She looked for a few minutes, but when she didn't find them she simply changed her plans for the day and didn't make a big deal out of it. Effective teachers are flexible and can think on their feet.*

### Tuning

Mrs. Samson played an A on the piano repeatedly and let the students tune their instruments. One girl was practicing another song and Mrs. Samson asked her to stop so others could hear while tuning. After the kids had a chance to get themselves tuned, Mrs. Samson went through each student and had them play open fifths. She helped each student fine tune. One girl was having trouble playing her A and D strings together. Mrs. Samson pointed out which strings she needed to play and finally *held the bow with her to get her to play the right strings. A Good example of Bruner's enactive mode. Folks need to feel what it is like.*

After tuning, Mrs. Samson reminded the kids that their practice records were due today and because it was a short week, only one hour was required. Other school announcements were also made at this time. I was impressed at the way in which Mrs. Samson gave the announcements. They were clear and concise and didn't take up a lot of time. She successfully answered legitimate questions and *avoided those designed to take up time. It's very important to be able to ignore or not react to what some students do and say.*

### Warm-ups

Mrs. Samson asked everyone to get out their warm-up sheets. This is a paper with different exercises numbered for easy reference. One student asked if they could practice the A Major scale. Mrs. Samson said of course, but mentioned that they would do the test on Monday because one student was missing. The class was very relieved and excited about that, but then one kid said "let's just do it today and get it over with." That wasn't a popular idea with the rest of the class. Mrs. Samson just smiled at them and announced which warm-up they would be doing. Throughout the class I was impressed with how *she just smiled at some of the funny things middle school children do and moved on with whatever was going on.*

Mrs. Samson says instruments up. Most students immediately raise their instruments and get ready. Mrs. Samson waits for two students. She looks at them to let them know she is waiting especially for them.

When all the students have their instruments up she reminds them to check their bow hold, check their thumb, check their wrist and don't squeeze the mouse.

To start the warm-ups Mrs. Samson counted off emphasizing the main beat of the warm-up. i.e. 1-2-ready-go, tri-pl-et tri-pl-et ready play, 1-e-&-a 2-e-&-a ready go.

As the students play, she plays with them, but watches and reminds them about different things i.e. holding instrument up, smiling the thumb, etc.

The sixteenth note exercise was not quite together. Mrs. Samson asked the students to play it again, but this time accent the first note of each beat. This improved their rhythmic alignment, but the pitch was off. Mrs. Samson asked everyone to play their D string because "we're not all together". This comment and many others throughout the class emphasized that this was a group effort and that all the students were working together. Mrs. Samson pinpointed the out of tune instrument and helped the student get in tune.

One particular warm-up the students were having a hard time playing in tune together. She asked the students to play the difficult measure one note at a time reminding them which finger should be down (fourth finger). Above the warm-up was written "open pattern" – she asked the student what that meant. The students look down not offering any answers. So, she told them it means that the notes are all whole steps apart and demonstrates what the hand position looks like. **This not only gives them a definition or terminology to understand, but connects that understanding with a physical application. So, when they see that term again not only can they repeat the definition, but they have a physical picture of what that means for their hand. It would have been great to go one step further and have each student hold their instrument that way. Associating the visual with the feeling or doing.**

Mrs. Samson then asks what the designation of 1-2 above a warm-up means? One student is playing his instrument during the discussion so she calls his name and repeats the question to him. (An effective way to get the kid to stop an undesirable behavior) He doesn't know so she again addresses the whole class. One girl begins to answer, but only some students are listening. She turns to some students who are disputing amongst themselves and draws attention to them. They are having a dispute because the girl keeps "unintentionally" poking the boy with her stick. Mrs. Samson asks the girl to scoot over slightly and hold her bow differently as to avoid poking him again. She then asks the girl if she knows the answer. This girl didn't have her warm-up paper or even know what the question was. Mrs. Samson comments that she is "unprepared" and hasn't been paying attention. She then asks them to listen to their fellow classmate that was explaining the answer to the question. All students now focus on the other student as she explains the correct answer. Mrs. Samson takes that definition (the numbers tell where the half steps are – in between the first and second fingers) and has the students apply it to other exercises. "What does the "3-4" above exercise 21 mean? She asks all the students to answer a similar question to ensure that they all understand what the numbers mean.

All during warm-ups Mrs. Samson was playing with the students yet watching them very closely. She made many comments reminding them about proper technique during warm-ups. I was impressed with her multi-tasking.

## **Playing Songs**

Mrs. Samson asks the students to take out **Two Songs of Newfoundland** and start at measure 39, playing slowly. She sings the first phrase to help them know where they are and give the tempo. After they have played the measure, she instructs that the *f*# needs to be higher. She stops playing with them to listen

and fix more intently. Just the violas, then the violins play the measure. After fine tuning those parts everyone plays the measure again and it sounds much better. She also fixes a rhythmic problem of holding the last note too long.

They play m. 39 again and then go on. One student keeps playing the C#. Mrs. Samson reminds the kids that they are in the key of G, so there is no C#, but an F#.

The bell is going to ring soon so she tells the students to put their instruments away. The kids do that very orderly and also remember to write down their practice time and turn it in. They turn in the white boards as well.

## **ADVANCED ORCHESTRA**

The Advanced Orchestra worked much the same as the intermediate orchestra except that it was much larger. (25ish students compared to 8ish). I was again impressed that the students came right into class and got their instruments out and set-up the chairs where they should be. Mrs. Samson has made it clear that they need to be in class and ready to go when the bell rings. Just after the bell rings, she plays an A and the students start tuning. The tuning is interrupted by **some video news broadcasted throughout the school. This news segment took about 15 minutes, which is scheduled into the class period so it is not taking away from rehearsal time.** **Did you know that the often times the audio-visual equipment is loaned without charge as long as the school agrees to play the channel for the students? Mrs. Samson** doesn't seem to care if students are watching or not. Many students are still setting up and most are talking. Mrs. Samson also passes out the school newsletter so many are reading that instead.

After the newscast, Mrs. Samson starts to tune again. This time she is interrupted by an announcement from the principle over the loud speaker. A few minutes later, tuning is interrupted for the last time as the students stand and say the pledge together.

Everyone tunes together. She listens and points out if an individual is flat, but for the most part lets students tune on their own.

### **Warm-ups**

Mrs. Samson asks the students to take out their warm-ups and the music for **Two Songs of Newfoundland.** She explains that they are not going to play this piece, but she wants to see that they all have their music with their name on it. **This is a preparation grade.**

The students start warm-ups and this time Mrs. Samson is not playing with them. **She walks around the room checking bow** holds and listening for intonation. **It's very useful for a teacher to be able to move about the room. Staying on the podium limits what you can see and hear.** She reminds the whole class about having a smiling rather than frowning thumb and mentions that many people on their midterm observation did not have a smiling thumb.

### **Playing Songs**

Mrs. Samson asks everyone to take out Concerto Grosso. She notices that one student does not have it and comments that **"you are unprepared."** She then reminds all students that they need all their music everyday asks another student to share their music.

Throughout the piece, Mrs. Samson would tap her baton on the stand or a chair to keep the beat steady. At one time it was rushing particularly badly and she played the part on the piano with them. That seemed to help them slow down.

In this orchestra I was impressed that Mrs. Samson would start and stop without talking, only by her directing. She demanded that all the students watched her (waiting for all eyes to be on her) and then just directed. That infers that the students understand where the notes fall in a measure (either an upbeat or a downbeat) and how that transfers into a conducting pattern. Some college students don't even understand that – I was impressed.

Mrs. Samson asks the students to always follow all of the dynamic markings. She then asks what dim means. One student says diminuendo and she replies with the question of what does that mean? The correct answer is given. (evidence that music terminology has been covered in this class.)

Other good rehearsal techniques I noticed:

Mrs. Samson points out to a struggling student, who is playing the same part as she so she can listen and follow.

One student expressed that she is having trouble playing loud. Mrs. Samson tells her to play with her whole arm not just her wrist and gives the student a visual of having a "heavy" arm.

The violas were struggling with one part of the song. Mrs. Samson stood right in the middle of the section and counted it with them, sang it with them and finally clapped it while they were playing. She also pointed out that they echo another part, so they could listen to the cellos and then just play what they play. Effective music teachers can provide aural models by singing or playing instruments.

At the end of class, as the students were putting away their instruments, Mrs. Samson asked if anyone was going somewhere for the long weekend. One student stayed after class to inform Mrs. Samson about progress she was making on a piece. She gave this piece a candy bar. I think these situations demonstrate the repertoire she has with the students.

## GENERAL MUSIC

As students walked into class, Mrs. Samson reminded them that they needed a pencil. The students set up the chairs and sat down. When Mrs. Samson was ready to start she said give me five and raised her hand. Most of the students stopped talking and raised their hands as well. There were three kids in the back that weren't paying attention and kept talking. She looked straight at them and said, some of us are not paying attention. She then asked everyone what "give me five" meant. "Silence" was the answer. I thought it was good to have a cue to get students to stop and listen to you. You will save your voice from yelling by doing this.

There was a new student in the class today. Mrs. Samson asked the class to go over the class rules. They raised their hands and said things such as:

No gum or candy

Raise your hand if you need to sharpen your pencil

"Give me five" means silence

No shouting out answers

Only item allowed at chair is a pencil. Backpacks stay at the front of the classroom.

The students were taking a test that day. Mrs. Samson went over rules for taking a test:

No wandering eyes – you will get 0 points no matter why you were looking at your neighbor's paper.

No talking! – you will get 0 points no matter what you were saying.  
If you do need to ask a question, raise your hand and ask the teacher NOT your neighbor.

After explaining the rules of test taking, Mrs. Samson went over what was required on each problem of the test. I think this eliminated a lot of questions while taking the test. She hadn't passed out the test yet which allowed the students to focus on her and what she was explaining rather than the excitement of having a new paper. She also pointed out that the last problem was just like a problem they did on an earlier quiz.

One student asks if he can use the bathroom. Mrs. Samson says No because it is only third period and she doesn't give bathroom passes until 4<sup>th</sup> period. That was a good way to keep students in class for importance things. The student didn't whine or complain which is evidence that she made that rule apparent at the beginning of the school year and he was just trying to get around it. **I think if you initiate rules and what is expected at the beginning of the year, then students are more likely to accept them and follow them.** Mrs. Samson also did this with the new student – right off she informed her of class rules and how things worked there.

Mrs. Samson has the kids sit on the raisers and use their chair as a desk – a great idea for classrooms with no desks. She then hands out the test and reminds kids not to talk or look at their neighbor's paper. She also asks them to cover their answers.

The test included basic theory principles such as:  
Naming notes in treble clef.  
Drawing note values and rests  
Understanding how many beats a note would get in 4/4 time  
Using that understanding to “fill in the blanks” of a measure

**Would this test be more effective if it was tied to actual music that the students had sung, played, or had listened to?**

The last question she asked them to draw a staff on the back of their page and write a four measure melody/rhythms that started on quarter note C and ended with half note C and half rest in 4/4 time. I was impressed that she would give them something so difficult, but it was apparent that many of them had no clue what to do. Mrs. Samson emphasized that they needed to have 4 beats, not notes in the measure and encouraged them to do something different with each measure.

As students finished the test she reminds them to continue to not talk and to cover their papers. She collects the papers and tells those that haven't finished that they can do so Monday after school.

To fill the time until the bell rang, Mrs. Samson sat down at the piano and began to play a song. The kids immediately joined in. This was obviously something they had done before and enjoyed. The songs they sang were “Wont grieve my Lord no more” and “Jonah was swallowed by a Fish”. The first was a gospel call and response song. It had different tempos and an accelerando that they stayed together on very well. During the Jonah song, the bell rang. Many students jumped up to leave and **Mrs. Samson raised her hand. The kids then sat back down. When everyone was sitting, she said “you're excused” and then everyone jumped up to leave. She had great control over the class and exhibited by excusing them and the quietness during the test.**

**50 points for this assignment.**

