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High School Methods

Qualitative Research Journal

Cleveland High School
February 20, 2007
Brandon Smith
7:20-10:30

I observed Mr. Smith, the band teacher at Cleveland High School on February 20, 2007.

I arrived early, and saw Mr. Smith in the hallway speaking to a student who had some sort of disability. Mr. Smith said that this particular student stopped by to see him every single day. *The student was very hard to understand, but Mr. Smith spoke to him and understood everything that he was saying.*

I went into the classroom and immediately noticed a painting that went around the room. It was a musical staff, with notes on it. In between pieces of the staff were depictions of different falcons playing various instruments. I also noticed that there was an "Announcement Board", and that he had ACT test dates, and dates of different school sporting events. On another wall there were posters from various local universities with their audition information posted. I was very impressed with this, because obviously the teacher is interested in helping his students exceed beyond the high school level.

As it got closer to 7:30, more students entered the classroom. They were getting their instruments out, and getting set up for that day's rehearsal. Right when the bell rang, Mr. Smith kicked the group off. They started off by playing scales. After they were done, each section took a turn to tune to the piano. When everyone was done tuning, the group was quiet and listened to announcements. *As soon as the announcements were done, Mr. Smith counted the group off. The chatting immediately stopped and the group jumped right into the rehearsal.* They played through the whole song. As they were playing, I noticed that a couple of students did not have their horns. *They sat in their spot and followed along in the music.* When they were finished playing through the piece, Mr. Smith went back and worked some of the trouble spots. At one point he said, "Ok, look at measure 35. We are having a problem hitting all of the right notes." Each section takes turns holding out the last note of the measure as Mr. Smith plays the notes on the piano. While this was going on, some students were goofing off and talking while he was working with the trumpet section. "Spence, we are trying to run a rehearsal here." The student says, "Sorry" and immediately stops what he was doing. The group goes back to the section that they were having difficulty with and plays it slower. The last time through they take it up to tempo.

The group works on another piece called "Since I Fell For You". They

played the whole song again before stopping. There are 3 percussionists for this group, so when they weren't playing, the other percussionists would practice quietly on the floor, or look off of the music of the percussionist who was playing. For the most part they were actively involved.

The next song they work on is called "The Puffy Taco" (I think). Again, they play it all the way through. When they stop, Mr. Smith says, "Pretty good you guys." He goes back over some problem spots. At one point he says to the group, "It's important for you to stay under the bass guitar." They play it again. He also demonstrates to the trombone section how he wants them to sound and then says, "I don't necessarily want the whole thing louder, just the beginning of the notes. They have accents." He sings? He then asks the trombone section what dynamic they want at measure 155. They all look at each other, and then the section leader says, "We don't know." Mr. Smith then says, "Then why don't you put in a crescendo."

Mr. Smith then moves onto another piece. They play it the whole way through. At the end of the first time through, he turns to the drummer and says, "If you can't hear me in your ear, then you are playing too loud." They group plays it through again. Mr. Smith stops them, and then turns to the drummer, "That was better that time. I could here the horns. I do appreciate the enthusiasm, but I just need to be able to hear everything." They play it one more time to make sure the drummer understands everything.

On the next piece the group played, Mr. Smith stopped a few measures in and says, "This piece has a weird groove." He looks at the drummer and says, "You're not quite getting the shuffle." The drummer says, "Sorry, I'm having problems finding my groove this morning." Mr. Smith has just the rhythm section play. The drummer was still having difficulties, so Mr. Smith described to him what to do to get the right beat going. The rhythm section plays a few measures again, and Mr. Smith says, "That's it. Just accent 2 and 4 for these guys. The tendency when doing that is to rush, so just take it easy and lay back." He brings the rest of the group into the piece this time. It comes to a solo part, so Mr. Smith has the different students play the solo. I noticed that most of the students that played hadn't played a solo in the previous songs. I also noticed throughout the whole morning, the soloists stood up to do their solo. After he gives the students a turn, he gives the solo to a student, they play through the rest of the piece, and then move onto another piece.

"Fancy Pants" was also played the whole way through. After they are done he runs a solo part again. After this is done, he demonstrates different figures the group has. "Those parts really rush. Let me hear the 'bones there." As the trombones play, he plays the rhythm on the piano so they can hear it too. Once the trombones get it, he adds the rest of the group, and says to them, "When you get louder, you tend to rush. Let's try it again." The group gets it right, so he adds something else for them to work on. He demonstrates how he wants them to articulate in this piece. The group gets closer to what he wants. When they are done playing he says, "That was the best I have heard that section. You didn't rush."

The next song the group works on is "Lullaby of Birdland". Again the

group played the song the whole way through, and then Mr. Smith went back and fixed problems. There was a difficult part for the drummer near the bridge of the piece. The arrangement didn't give him a good idea of what he should do, so Mr. Smith demonstrates what he should do to make it fit better with the rest of the group. He then lets the drummer try, with the rest of the band playing. After the student does it he says, "That's better, now put the bass on 2 and 4 and you have it." The group plays again. They then jump to the soloist section. The soloist is having problems with the chord progression, so Mr. Smith plays it on the piano, and then has the student listen as the rest of the group plays. The student makes improvements in some areas, but is still not getting the whole idea. Mr. Smith says, "I'll work with you on this part next time."

The next piece that group played was "Pick Up the Pieces". Again the group played it the whole way through. At one point, the intonation got really bad, so Mr. Smith made a weird face, and the group got back in tune with each other. After playing it through Mr. Smith said, "That's it. You all have a good day."

I was really impressed with this rehearsal. The group started right when the bell rang, and then played until about 1 minute before the bell rang. They all had their music ready to go, and they were disciplined. The group quickly put their instruments away and cleaned up before moving to their next class. The rehearsal ran very smoothly.

The next class I observed was a 10 to 15 minute class that was called an "Advisory Session". Mr. Smith explained to me every student in the school attends this class once a week. They go over any announcements and take care of paperwork. The class is set up with chairs in a circle. Students filter in and find their chairs. Once the class starts he says, "How is school going for all of you?" Some students say, "Great!" and others grumble. He then asks if they are all ready for graduation. The response was a little bit more enthusiastic. He then takes roll, and then goes over the announcements. He tells them that he will be passing out transcripts, mid term grades and folders. As he is doing this student body officers come in with Popularity Surveys for the students to take. Students chat with each other until the class ends.

As the next class is getting ready to come in Mr. Smith goes to the door and holds it open. He says good morning to each student and calls them by name. As students come in, they start setting up their section, pull out their music and instruments. I did find it interesting that most students that walked in were listening to their iPods. Some students start chatting with their friends. When the announcements come on, the group quiets down and listens. (An interesting note: a lot of the announcements made, were things that all of the students should have heard in the previous class.) There was a student sitting at the front of the class. As soon as the announcements are done, she starts taking roll. Some students are talking while she is doing this. Once she finishes, Mr. Smith asks, "Was anyone talking during the roll?" Some students say, "Yes." He says, "Okay, do it again." So the student runs through the roll again, and everyone else is quiet. Mr. Smith asks the same question, and they all say "No." He then says, "Ok, good job."

He then turns to a student and says, "You're on." This student then walks around the room, pointing to different papers with key signatures on them. The student would say "One, Two, ready go," to start the group. **It sounded like each instrument is playing their key signature, not the concert key signature.** Mr. Smith had the students instrument and fingered along with the group as they did this. Once they are done with this, the group plays out of "Exercises for Ensemble Drill." Mr. Smith would pick different scales for the specific exercise. One scale wasn't as smooth as the rest, so Mr. Smith said, **"Point to the key signature for your specific G major."** He looks around the room at each student, to make sure they are pointing to their instruments key signature. Once everyone is point at the right paper, he says, **"Okay, this time we are going to take it slower."** **After they play through it correctly he says, "Who needs to pass off their Bb and Eb exercises?"** A student informs him that no one has passed off either of them. Mr. Smith grabs a piece of paper, and then calls on a student who has their hand raised to play the exercise. **When the student is finished, the rest of his classmates clap for him.** Throughout this whole process, Mr. Smith did not stop to talk to the student, and had the next student ready to go. This was nice because it kept things moving. After this whole process is done, he says, **"If you passed it off today, please stand up. I want to hear all of you play it."** The group plays. When they are done he says, **"If you didn't pass it off today, I want to hear you play it."** When they finish he says, **"Everyone stand up. If you want to think that the students who passed it off today sounded more confident, sit down."** The whole class sat down. **"Yes, that's what I thought too."**

Next the group plays a chromatic exercise. The play it a few times starting on different notes. The group then plays out of **"Treasury of Scales". This sounded a lot like a chorale.** While the winds are playing, the percussion is setting up all of their instruments. Mr. Smith kept his arms up at the end of each passage, to try to get the students to keep their instruments up. (He did this the whole rehearsal.) He visibly relaxed when he put his arms down, so the students could see it too.

The first song the group works on is, "Proud Heritage". Mr. Smith lets them play the song the whole way through. When they finish, he says, "Good job. You can all pat yourselves on the back." He then tells the students to turn to rehearsal number 1. The group plays here, and they are rushing a little bit. Mr. Smith turned to a student and thanked them for staying with him. **He then asked the group to stand up if they played at Rehearsal #1. "Take a look around. Now if you play at Rehearsal #2 stand up. Are there more people standing for rehearsal #1 or #2?"** The class says, "Number Two". **"So which should be louder?" "Number 2."** **"If you play at Rehearsal #3 stand up. Take a look around. Ladies and Gentlemen, this section should be the softest."** He then has the students stand up tall if the dynamic is forte, stand up half way if it is mezzo forte and sit for piano sections. He called out the different rehearsal numbers, and the students demonstrated what dynamic they thought should be played during that section. After they are done doing this, they play through the section that was discussed. When they are done, Mr. Smith says, **"Stand up if you can explain line dynamics to me in English. Ok, sit down."** As a side of humor he said, "Can

any of you explain it to me in another language like Spanish?" The group laughs, and Mr. Smith goes to the board. He writes notes up on the board. When he is finished, he sings the melody he has written using line dynamics. He also explains that this is something that the advanced band works on all the time, and that it makes the music more musical. "Ok, I now want you to play this part with line dynamics." As the students play, Mr. Smith demonstrates line dynamics with his left hand. When they have finished, Mr. Smith says, "Great job. Give yourselves a pat on the back."

The next piece the group works on is "Fiddler on the Roof". Mr. Smith snaps a rhythm. He has the students join in once they have had a chance to listen for a while. The students continued to snap their fingers, and Mr. Smith clapped a rhythm for the piece. He stops the group, and then starts snapping again. He tells the students that he wants them to clap the section from measure 122 to 133. Once the students have had a chance to do this for a while, he then isolates different sections to make sure that they understand the rhythm. The main problem with the group is that they rush. **He thanks individuals who don't rush.** One section started rushing more than the others, so Mr. Smith counted the beats out loud. Once they finished clapping, Mr. Smith had them pick up their instruments and play the rhythm using a scale.

I left right after this, because I had to get to a class. I was very impressed with Mr. Smith. **One thing I liked was how he let the students play the song all the way through without stopping them. I think this is a good idea because it helps work up stamina. One of the most frustrating things for me as a musician is playing the song the whole way through for the first time on the concert. It doesn't let me hear the whole song and put the picture together, and it doesn't build up stamina. I also liked how he started class right on time, and demanded that his students behaved. Another trait that I thought was good was that he used different methods to show the class what he was talking about. His technique would work for students that had different learning styles.**

Tammy: I felt like I could of highlighted all of this journal entry. You really paid attention. It seems like Smith has an excellent diversity of teaching techniques as well as fast-paced classes. It seems there is very little down time. He also seems like he treats everyone with a great deal of respect.

50 points for this assignment.