

PROJECT MUSIC: A SERVICE-LEARNING MODEL OF COLLABORATIVE MUSIC EDUCATION

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Slides 1-4:

Project*MUSIC* (Music Uniting Students, Inspiring Communities) is a project formed to engage a mid-Atlantic university's music department in service-learning with a local symphony orchestra, to provide special music programming for an area elementary school. This project, managed by a service-learning scholar, emphasizes that musician visits expand the music curriculum already in place, giving school-aged students a sustained experience with music artistry, meanwhile helping university students develop their teaching-artist practice.

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In this first year, second grade students developed a musical relationship with musicians of the university string quartet. The university string quartet was mentored by the symphony orchestra string quintet and the general music teacher to develop teaching-artist practice. The repertoire that was used in the Project related to the annual symphony orchestra children's concert theme and corresponded to the repertoire used in the general music classroom. A university composition major was commissioned by the service-learning scholar to arrange the music especially for the quartet. Research questions for the evaluation of *ProjectMUSIC* were:

- Does *ProjectMUSIC* assist the service-learning scholar with developing valuable professional skills in an authentic context?
- Does *ProjectMUSIC* enable Blue Hen String Quartet members to develop a teaching-artist practice?
- Is excitement for stringed instruments, classical music & music class engendered at the elementary school as a result of participation in the project?
- Is a musical culture created at the elementary school through the project?
- Has awareness of the importance of music education at the elementary school and its educational community increased from the project?
- Does *ProjectMUSIC* have transformative capacity for all stakeholders?

Data were collected through pre and post project assessments were given to second grade children, their parents and caregivers, and the second grade teachers. The service-learning scholar and Blue Hen Quartet (BHQ) maintained journals and completed reflective writing assignments. Data also included BHQ videotape transcripts and field notes from a meeting with the school lead administrator. Data were coded and categorized in relationship to the research questions using HyperResearch, a qualitative data analysis software program.

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Does *ProjectMUSIC* assist the service-learning scholar with developing valuable professional skills in an authentic context? Bethany, the service learning scholar developed skills in business communication, writing, research, public speaking, organization/management and leadership. She came away with insight on developing and maintaining collaborations. Her participation in *ProjectMUSIC* helped her to obtain an internship with another area symphony orchestra. She

found that educational partnerships are important for orchestras to build an audience and can help orchestras to fund special initiatives to bring music to the masses. She experienced personal and professional fulfillment and satisfaction from the project. “It was the first real world experience I had working with these organizations and I can take what I have learned wherever I go” (Bethany, Service-Learning Scholar).

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Does *ProjectMUSIC* enable BHQ members to develop a teaching-artist practice? As the BHQ developed their lessons for the second grade children, they learned how to teach the children musical concepts and skills that were age-appropriate. At first the BHQ members were worried about the students not liking them or their music. They were concerned about losing control of the students. These fears were alleviated on their first visit.

For the BHQ, comfort was found in teaching familiar content and they discovered a relationship between planning and comfort for teaching. One of the most important lessons learned by the BHQ was that teaching means being adaptable. They found that, while plans are important, they only go so far. For instance, the BHQ ended up teaching in the cafetorium not in the music room, and had larger groups of students than expected--requiring the use of a microphone. They learned that they needed to time their presentations and how to pace their instruction. Confidence increased with each performance, and as they interacted with the students. “I don't think that it was terribly obvious how nervous we were, I think it was definitely obvious how much more comfortable we were the second time around” (Janet, Violin 2). “The children were great, hearing them get excited over the songs they recognized was probably the best part. Realizing that they were genuinely interested was also great” (Sean, Viola).

For the symphony orchestra, transformation did not appear to come to fruition in regard to its educational goals. This was most likely due to personnel changes within the organization. One positive outcome was that the 2nd grade children were entranced with their field trip to the children's concert which was performed by the orchestra.

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Is excitement for stringed instruments, classical music & music class engendered at the elementary school as a result of participation in the project? Although assessments were given to the second grade teachers, and the second grade parents and caregivers, the rate of return was too low to be considered for data analysis.

The pre and post assessments of the second grade children indicated that the children maintained a strong preference for rap music, but that after *ProjectMUSIC* they had an increase in preference for classical music. While not chosen on the pre-test, the violin was chosen as a favorite instrument on the post-test. Anecdotal evidence demonstrated that the second graders enjoyed the children's concert as demonstrated by their remarks such as, “I learned that anybody can play an instrument and what an opera house looks like. And I learned I love classical music.” and “Our field trip was really fun and cool. We saw lots of instruments like the harp, cello, violin, viola, tubas, cymbals, and the drum. That's my story.”

Is a musical culture created at the elementary school through the project? Has awareness of the importance of music education at the elementary school and its educational community increased from the project? The project created awareness of music within the elementary school, but the development of a full-fledged musical culture was not realized. However, at the end of the academic year, the lead principal created additional space on the school calendar to allow for the expansion of the project and announced to her faculty that *ProjectMUSIC* was an important addition to the school year. The stakeholders agreed that this was a big step toward creating a musical culture within the school.

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Goals for the continuation of *ProjectMUSIC* were set for the upcoming academic year. The university service-learning scholar for the second year of the partnership will

- work for greater collaboration with the symphony.
- increase community base and visibility.
- be intentional regarding the inclusion of parents, teachers, and school community.
- seek to offer this experience to more music majors.
- expand the project throughout the grades of the elementary school.
- determine the feasibility of including opera.

Based on her experience with *ProjectMUSIC*, Bethany offered these words regarding successful partnerships:

“For success, all partners need to have an obligation to the cause and a goal with similar outcomes in mind to further the cause. Without these, the partnership won’t succeed. There would be no need to give if a positive outcome was not the common goal” (Bethany).