

USING DIALECTICAL JOURNALS FOR ASSESSMENT OF MUSIC TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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The development of meaningful reflection skills for music education pre-service and in-service teachers has long been a goal of music teacher educators. Borrowing a technique for improving thinking skills utilized in many English literature classrooms, dialectical journals were used in this study to improve critical thinking and problem solving with in-service teachers enrolled in a summer masters program. In this preliminary study, students were first introduced to the strategy and then asked to practice dialectical journaling when observing three rehearsal teaching episodes presented by the instructor.

In this study the dialectical journals were found to be a very efficient means for evaluating these in-service teachers' understanding of content, process, and student product in the observed teaching episodes. Critical thinking and problem solving skills were in evidence as many of the students were able to make advanced transfers to other content areas and were able to assess the classroom management and on-task student behavior concurrently with the examination of the teaching strategies being observed.

Slide 2—The examples listed here of the various types of learning constructs we are supposed to be using with our students are all important and provide many different modes of reflecting for our pre-service music education students. Each of these constructs also comes with concerns and problems. Observation poses many issues as students are frequently not taught to observe, and observation in the public schools comes with the risk of possibly not seeing effective teaching. Finding good teaching models is always tricky. Should the observation task be specific and focused, or holistic, or some combination of these? Taking the time and energy to read and analyze case studies sometimes seems counterproductive when students could actually be spending time getting experience teaching. The art of reflection is often skimmed over and pre-service teachers have trouble discerning what is most important in their teaching. How and when do we assess student content knowledge? The task of engaging students in critical thinking skills is a hot topic now on many secondary and post-secondary campuses but HOW do we go about teaching these skills, or in our case, teaching our students to teach these skills?

My frustration with this list of learning constructs and their inability to develop the kind of teacher/musician I felt my students could become, lead me to seek another mode of assessment.

As the result of membership on a University-wide committee to select the most effective undergraduate teachers on our campus, I learned of the use of dialectical journaling by one of our Women's Studies faculty members. This professor used dialectical journals to help engage her graduate assistants in a large lecture class of undergraduates so that the graduate assistants might be more informed about her teaching and could more effectively lead small group break-out discussions after the lecture sessions.

Slide 3—This student-created lesson plan for a peer-teaching lesson shows the lack of content knowledge in planning this lesson. The lesson is supposed to be for a beginning band class, yet this student thinks an appropriate warm-up for the group is to play the F Concert Scale, one octave, up and down. However, this student failed to realize that as a beginning band class, the students probably only know 5 notes at this point in their instructional process and could not begin to play an entire octave yet, much less in quarter notes ascending and descending. This student, despite having already taken the wind/percussion techniques classes, and having struggled to play a full octave when learning these instruments himself, did not use critical thinking skills or content knowledge when planning this lesson.

Slide 4—This snippet from an actual student reflection shows that the student has trouble identifying what is most important in her teaching and is fixated on personal attributes not teaching behaviors. She is unable to use critical thinking skills to reflect on the efficacy of her own teaching or to assess the student outcomes from her lesson. She does not relate her understanding of content knowledge in her critique of her teaching.

Slide 5—Frustration with the learning constructs for reflection discussed previously led me to explore whether using dialectical journals as a mode of observing teaching and self-reflection could be a better “mouse-trap” for training pre-service teachers.

Dialectical journals are used primarily in literature classrooms for exploring the thinking that students use when reading a text. This process elicits a specific kind of thinking in response to written (or orally) presented material. It can give the teacher an insider’s perspective into the sorting ability, the reading comprehension skills, and the ability of the student to focus and format responses to their reading. Many educators believe this can be a training format for improving student thinking skills.

Slide 6—There are many types of dialectical journals. The most common type is an interpretation journal where students record the actual text (what it says), reinterpret the text (what it means), and then make a transfer of this information to themselves (what it means to me).

Slide 7—No notes

Slide 8—Another type of dialectical journal commonly used in the literature classroom is the character analysis journal. In this case, the student shows how he understands the qualities of the “character” through the interpretation of the text.

Slide 9—There are many other types of dialectical journals, including ones for measuring interpretation of science texts, math texts, and measuring metacognition while taking in new information such as watching a film or doing a note-taking exercise.

Slide 10—What could a dialectical journal for music education contain? What if you developed one for live or video-taped observation instead of interpretation of text? This model could be used with observations of expert teaching or for self-observation of a video-taped lesson. The journal should therefore contain a timeline or time sequence, and should contain a framework for

sorting the various teacher and student behaviors (borrowed from sources above and condensed into three main categories).

Slide 11–The dialectical journal for music teacher education might look something like this. The words in black wouldn't be printed but could be taught and would be inherent in the students' understanding of how to complete the journal. This is an example of one of the entries from a graduate student observation of a wind conductor working with a summer camp honor group.

Slide 12–This preliminary study included 11 graduate students with an instrumental music background, they were enrolled in a summer masters program in music education in a large southeastern university, most had between 3-5 years of teaching experience. After a brief introduction of the journaling technique, participants used the music teacher education dialectical journal for (3) 20-minute observation cycles of a model teacher conducting a large group rehearsal, and (1) 20-minute observation of a sectional rehearsal (small group).

Slide 13–No notes

Slide 14–Under the category of content knowledge, the participants were able to identify 48 different teaching strategies (this was only a compilation of the large group observations). Since the students weren't required to see the same portions of rehearsal, they didn't all necessarily view the same types of teaching strategies, however, there was a large degree of agreement on identification of the teaching strategy as well as identification of why that strategy was being implemented at that time.

Slide 15–Some of the participants identified teaching strategies that weren't content-specific such as using approval to appropriate student behavior (all good teachers should do this regardless of content area), reinforcing having materials (in this case using a pencil to mark music), proximity changes, providing challenges to students, and using good eye contact and student names; all of these could be identified in any effective classroom irrespective of content area. These teaching strategies fall into the category identified by Shulman as the general *“pedagogy of teaching.”*

Slide 16–All of the music content teaching strategies identified by the participants had appropriate pedagogical foundations. In other words, participants seemed to understand WHY a particular strategy was being implemented though some of the explanations for why were basic.

The area where there was the largest variability (as expected) was in the Goals/Changes/Thoughts (how this strategy and pedagogy related to student outcomes and context). Since this was the area of the journal where the participants were supposed to create their own meaning and transfers, it is understandable that these were the most dissimilar.

Slide 17–For this portion of the responses, I used the Fuller & Brown, Stages of Concern for new teachers to code the participants responses. Fuller and Brown use three stages of concern Self (SE), Subject Matter (SU), and Students (ST). Since I had no relationship or previous knowledge of these participants, there were many answers that didn't fall neatly into one of those three

categories but were somewhat of a hybrid of two stages, thus I created Self/Subject Matter (SE/SU), and Subject Matter/Students (SU/ST) for coding these responses.

Slide 18—While participants in this study were largely identified as being in stage three (Student Issues or Outcomes), there were a large number of responses that were coded as either Self (SE) or and hybrid of Self and Subject Matter (SE/SU).

Slide 19—Some of the possible reasons for this could be their experiences in a challenging setting (graduate school) where things they do in their regular teaching life are daily being called into question, or perhaps these participants were already familiar with some of the teaching strategies they observed and therefore had trouble making transfers beyond their own knowledge or use of a particular technique.

Slide 20—Even experienced teachers (including myself) have trouble distinguishing between content Knowledge and pedagogy of teaching knowledge. Perhaps our students don't understand how content knowledge without pedagogy of teaching knowledge can lead to an ineffective classroom and vice-versa. Can we help them distinguish one from the other? Would this be helpful in the development of effective practitioners?

Slide 21—No notes

Slide 22—If experienced teachers can readily identify specific teaching strategies and the underlying pedagogy, can pre-service teachers learn to do this as well?

Slide 23—No notes

References

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