

TASK 1: PLANNING COMMENTARY

Respond to the prompts below (**no more than 9 single-spaced pages, including prompts**) by typing your responses within the brackets. Do not delete or alter the prompts. Pages exceeding the maximum will not be scored.

1. Central Focus

- a. Describe the central focus and purpose of the content you will teach in the learning segment.

The central focus of this unit plan is centered around the use of musical analysis to teach new content material and embolden students' understanding of the minor mode. Their task is to analyze the reciprocal relationship between major and minor key signatures and utilize solfège to augment music literacy when sight-reading new music. The students will deepen their knowledge of solfège as a practical system of musical analysis, and this content expansion will enable them to fully connect with the musical construction of their concert repertoire while serving as a vehicle for meaningful music learning. I used a preassessment strategy to identify which areas would be developed throughout my unit plan. My lesson plans were informed by the content knowledge displayed in that preassessment. These students are accustomed to reading and interpreting music, but my goal is that through their exploration of higher-level analysis connected to music theory, the students will develop a greater understanding of the musical underpinnings of their repertoire that will enable them to be more independent musicians moving forward.

- b. Given the central focus, describe how the standards and learning objectives within your learning segment address creating, performing, and/or responding to music/dance/theater by applying

- knowledge/skills (e.g., tools/instruments, technical proficiencies, processes, elements, organizational principles)
- contextual understandings (e.g., social, cultural, historical, global, personal reflection)
- artistic expression (e.g., interpretation, creativity, exploration/improvisation, individual choices)

The main goal of my central focus is to expand the students' musical toolkit through improving their knowledge of and acuity with solfège. The standards and learning targets in my lessons are predicated on state standards of musical literacy in order to perform music. This unit is designed to explore the ways in which students can interactively respond to music to inform their performance. Each plan touches on forging a connection with one of the pillars of knowledge/skill, contextual understanding, and artistic expression. The standard employed in Lesson 1: Minor Key Signatures and Solfège, is focused on the students' ability to sight-read musical passages with relative fluency. This is informed by material from the preassessment I administered days in advance of the unit beginning; I relied on prior knowledge of the students in order to correlate creation of key signatures to the concept of relative minor keys. Responding to music-reading in this way enables a deeper understanding of the content. Lesson 2: La-Based Minor and Simple Sight-Reading provides for context-building from the material in the first lesson. Students use their knowledge of relative minor key signatures to construct the context of La-based minor, a new form of solfège that is contrary to their default response. By responding with a different solfège construction, students are creating an active personal connection with the musical content rather than a passive one. Finally, Lesson 3: Using La-Based Minor Solfège to Sight-Read shows the students exploring with the new material provided in the previous lessons to become familiar with new music and to make artistic decisions with that new music. It is my hope that the students will be able to read a new section of their concert

repertoire using La-based minor solfège, then transferring to the written text. Their broadened sense of the theoretical underpinnings of the music will create an impassioned performance.

- c. Explain how your plans build on each other to help students to create, perform, and/or respond to music/dance/theater and in **making connections** to knowledge/skills, contextual understandings, and artistic expression.

Throughout the learning segment, I encourage students to draw on contextual understandings of the minor mode in various forms of literature, both in small sight-reading exercises and in their concert repertoire, to develop their technical proficiency with reading new music. As pioneered by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), I have employed scaffolding in the instruction of this unit. For example, one of my learning targets in Lesson 2 was for students to identify the relationship between written key signatures, Do-based minor, and La-based minor solfège. In order for them to accomplish that goal, I first had the students learn to identify minor keys based on the key signature in the first lesson which gave them the skill necessary to complete a sight-reading example in an identified minor key using Do-based minor solfège. In the next lesson, the students were able to draw on their knowledge of how to employ Do-based minor when they endeavored to practice the same activity with La-based minor solfège. Without the foundational step of simply recognizing the tonic of the minor key from the key signature that the students learned in the first lesson, they would not have had success down the road.

It is essential that each lesson gives way to the next so that the students are working from a broad to narrow sense of understanding in their learning process. The students' context for learning builds upon their prior knowledge and will engender artistic expression as their facility with the new music grows. As outlined in the previous question, it is clear that each new plan is a continuation on the last; students are enabled to use both the knowledge that they innately possess and the information that they accumulate through the unit to find success in the final lesson's assessments. Students will contextualize their concert music using the minor solfège skills acquired throughout the unit to create a product of meaningful artistic expression.

2. Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching

For each of the prompts below (2a–b), describe what you know about **your** students **with respect to the central focus** of the learning segment.

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

- a. Prior academic learning and prerequisite skills related to the central focus—**Cite evidence of what students know, what they can do, and what they are still learning to do.**

This learning plan developed from my initial rehearsal observations of and work with the Treble Chorus on their concert repertoire. The students have always been much more confident with music in the major tonality, but their knowledge of the minor mode and music theory are not commensurate with their high quality of sound. In order to be selected as a member of this ensemble, these students had to demonstrate their facility with sight-reading exercises. However, they have never formally explored minor sight-reading passages. This learning plan directly serves to fill that educational gap through tangible experiences. In

terms of music theory, according to the preassessment that I gave to the class two days prior to teaching, I noticed that simple errors pertaining to key signature identification were the most common mistakes. Students universally showed their knowledge of how to identify flat key signatures by “going to the second-to-last flat” to find the key as well as sharp key signatures in which you “reference the last sharp and go up one letter in the musical alphabet” to find the key. However, this rote knowledge did not necessarily prepare them to name the key signatures.

Differentiating student instruction for differently-abled learners is essential to the collective success of this choir. For my student with an IEP for emotional disturbance but a simultaneous drive to participate, I intend to capitalize on her enthusiasm for the subject and use positive reinforcement to check in with her at each stage of the learning segment. For students who tend to underperform on assignments, I have constructed opportunities for small group reviews, partner work, and multiple assessment opportunities within each lesson of the unit plan. That will allow me to understand gaps in instruction that can be repaired quickly rather than festering and preventing future learning. Finally, for the more-advanced students, such as those who are skilled in the band program, I will encourage leadership in the collective pursuit of learning to reliably identify written major key signatures with proper accidentals. I will endeavor to expand upon this knowledge with relative minor keys throughout the learning segment with each type of student.

- b. Personal, cultural, and community assets related to the central focus—**What do you know about your students’ everyday experiences, cultural and language backgrounds and practices, and interests?**

My students benefit from a rich cultural makeup within a vibrant, supportive community setting. They are passionate about a myriad of musical experiences and willing to explore new traditions. Because there is such a significant South Asian population, many of the students, including four in this class, study Indian classical singing. This style of music fosters an appreciation for various modes, which is a great asset to this learning segment. Outside of school, many students participate in activities at local Indian churches, and their commitment to community-building is admirable. There are also several students involved with the school’s marching band, and this is a very active season for them. Most students are driven to audition for region chorus opportunities and they hope to attend college upon completing high school. The area is solidly middle class, and the majority of students have positive home life situations. This group of students cultivates a culture that is very welcoming and energetic with learning possibilities.

3. Supporting Students’ Performing Arts Learning

Respond to prompts below (3a–c). To support your justifications, refer to the instructional materials and lesson plans you have included as part of Planning Task 1. **In addition, use principles from research and/or theory to support your justifications.**

- a. Justify how your understanding of your students’ prior academic learning and personal, cultural, and community assets (from prompts 2a–b above) guided your choice or adaptation of learning tasks and materials. Be explicit about the connections between the learning tasks and students’ prior academic learning, their assets, and research/theory.

It is my belief that guiding students to become musically literate empowers them to view music as their own, something created internally to be shared externally. While that philosophical view guided my planning of the learning tasks for this unit, I incorporated the instructional tactics of the Kodály method, learning theories of Dewey and Vygotsky, and the

tenets of Critical Pedagogy as explained by Abrahams and John to execute on the practical side. Lesson 1 is created to actualize students' previous knowledge of key signatures and Do-based minor to construct new understandings of relative minor keys. Dewey (1938) believed that harnessing of power of continuity between past experiences and their effects on present and future learning is essential to good teaching. The first lesson of my sequence is designed to showcase that principle by validating correct information from the preassessment and promoting the use of new information in familiar settings, such as relative minor identification in the sight-reading assessment. The beginning of this unit is truly a bridge from the known to the unknown with carefully-constructed supports along the way.

Lesson 2 is guided most strongly by the Kodály methodology of music education in which students learn "from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the more complex, and from the concrete to the abstract" (Trinka, n.d.). In this learning segment, the scaffolded framework requires students to build on each concept to create new understandings. My goal is to increase the musical literacy of these students through La-based minor solfège, as Kodály advocates in his method. The students come into this learning segment already familiar with major solfège and tonality, and it is my belief that they will be able to infer more musical information with Kodály's sequence of music acquisition. As mentioned earlier, a handful of students in this choir participate in Indian classical singing within the community. This art form explores non-Western tonalities and harmonic conventions that truly augment the students' aural awareness. These students use skills acquired in those settings to support their musicianship at the high school and to elevate the aural vocabulary of the ensemble. For the students who have been longtime members of the choral program, drawing on prior academic knowledge of key signatures and minor scales will also assist in this effort.

Lesson 3 is an exercise in education as a dialogue (Abrahams and John, 2015). Students are given opportunities to conduct discourse with one another for review purposes as well as converse with musical material in the sight-reading and choral rehearsal segments of the lesson to insert their own musical ideas. In order for the students to fully analyze a piece of music in the minor mode using La-based minor solfège, they must have a dialogue with those concepts, be able to discuss them independently as well as employ them in real music-reading. Through group discussion in their voice sections, I am hoping that student leaders will corral everyone to a place of mutual understanding. A great asset of this group of students is the willingness of certain students to act as role models for their peers in both academic and behavioral ways. The cultural environment in the high school and community at large is one of collectivism; students are very collaborative in nature. In this way, I trust the students to use their agency over their educations to engender high achievement on the final assessment.

- b. Describe and justify why your instructional strategies and planned supports are appropriate for **the whole class, individuals, and/or groups of students with specific learning needs**.

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/ support (e.g., students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

There are instructional and assessment strategies in each of my lessons that explicitly address these three areas of learning support. Because this learning segment takes place in a choral rehearsal setting, it is essential that the whole class feels valued and provided with the opportunity to succeed. Instructional strategies such as group review sessions, collective discourse, and choral rehearsal with the new content are essential when addressing the needs of the class as a whole. Individual instructional supports, such as those for my student with an IEP and others with music literacy struggles, are provided on a case-by-case basis and evaluated through both formal and informal assessment. I will begin the learning segment with review that is specifically targeted to address the misunderstandings that individuals encountered in their preassessments. Through formative assessment, I will constantly check in with the students to ensure that the new information presented in Lessons 1 and 2 is coming across in a salient way. For my students with literacy challenges and emotional support needs, I am relying on the instructional strategy of partner work. Once information passes from teacher to student, I am relying on my advanced choir members to raise the collective understanding. In that way, the more gifted students are reinforcing their new knowledge by teaching it to others and those with gaps in academic knowledge or the need for emotional connection will be supported by the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1931-1934).

- c. Describe common student errors, weaknesses, or misunderstandings within your content focus and how you will address them.

Succeeding within the music theory content area is contingent upon many moving parts; students must find the right answer in the first step in order for the rest to align correctly. I anticipate issues with minor key signature construction because it involves a backwards thought process that will challenge those with less experience reading music. I will teach students how to construct the minor key signature for a given minor key by relating the given key as “La” to the key signature key as “Do.” In anticipation of mistakes with this music theory concept, I built in time for review at the start of each lesson. These review sessions will hopefully drive home the right steps to avoid the precarious nature of this process.

4. Supporting Performing Arts Development Through Language

As you respond to prompts 4a–d, consider the range of students’ language assets and needs—what do students already know, what are they struggling with, and/or what is new to them?

- a. **Language Function.** Using information about your students’ language assets and needs, identify **one** language function essential for students to learn the performing arts knowledge within your central focus. Listed below are some sample language functions. You may choose one of these or another more appropriate for your learning segment.

Analyze	Compare/contrast	Create	Describe	Evaluate
Explain	Identify	Improvise	Perform	Respond
Summarize				

The language function that governs this learning segment is *analyze*. Analysis is a level towards the pinnacle of Bloom’s Taxonomy, thereby denoting a more advanced learning commitment. The goal is for my students to analyze their music critically and from a place of meaningful understanding.

- b. Identify a key learning task from your plans that provides students with opportunities to practice using the language function. Identify the lesson in which the learning task occurs. (Give lesson/day number.)

This learning segment crescendos in terms of analytical opportunities, and the most prominent learning tasks in this vein are found in Lesson 3/Day 3. I have outlined two learning targets that explicitly employ the language function by calling for students to “analyze the connections between major key signatures, relative minor keys, and the perceived tonic (home) of a musical passage” as “analyze a passage of music using La-based minor solfège to demonstrate literacy development.” Students will practice their skills of analysis in a formal, summative assessment that evaluates their ability to analyze not only music theory examples but also a new passage of music from their performance repertoire. They will be given a series of musical problems to solve as a theoretical evaluation and a passage from Andrea Ramsey’s “Truth” to analyze with La-based minor solfège to model the practical side of our learning segment. As Dewey (1938) believes, relating theory to practice is a ubiquitous goal of education. By having students formally analyze a segment of their assigned concert repertoire, my hope is to show the interconnected relationship between music theory, solfège, and musical expression.

- c. **Additional Language Demands.** Given the language function and learning task identified above, describe the following associated language demands (written or oral) students need to understand and/or use:

- Vocabulary and/or symbols
- **Plus** at least one of the following:
 - Syntax
 - Discourse

Academic language is essential in the choral music classroom; music is a mélange of many cultural beliefs, different languages, and forms of literature—full participation necessitates that students quickly recall information based on one word prompts. In order to accomplish the central focus of analyzing the reciprocal relationship between major and minor key signatures and utilize solfège to augment music literacy when sight-reading new music, students must develop a thorough understanding of each vocabulary term. Critical pedagogy explains that “education is a dialogue” (Abrahams and John, 2015). Class discourse, flowing from teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, and student-to-student, embodies that philosophy and can be found in each of my three lessons. It is my belief that students internalize the vocabulary of music, such as solfège, sight-reading, and major vs. minor key signatures through their own experiential learning. Students will practice transferring these language demands from oral use in earlier lessons to written understanding in their final formal assessment.

- d. **Language Supports.** Refer to your lesson plans and instructional materials as needed in your response to the prompt below.

- Identify and describe the instructional supports (during and/or prior to the learning task) to help students understand, develop, and use the identified language demands (vocabulary/symbols, function, syntax, discourse).

Differentiated instruction is built into my educational framework and is present in this learning segment. In an effort to support the language and learning acquisitions of my students, I drew on scaffolded instruction and a mix of both independent and collaborative assessment opportunities. Learning does not exist in a vacuum, and the choral classroom

is by definition an interactive space. Each learning task is accompanied by both formal and informal assessments to support different types of learners. Some of the formative assessments require partner work, which encourages the type of collaboration expressed in Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1931-1934). Other assessments employ class discourse to determine student comfort levels with various instructional materials. While summative assessments are ultimately completed on an individual basis, they are scaffolded to occur at the conclusion of most lessons when students have had the greatest opportunity to engage with new content. By sitting the choir in such a way that less-confident musicians are surrounded by stronger singers, I am relying on students' embodiment Vygotsky's concept of the "more knowledgeable other" to promote their learning growth as well as their neighbors'. I will be constantly on the alert for students who seem to need greater support in their learning practice, whether on an intellectual and emotional level.

5. Monitoring Student Learning

In response to the prompts below, refer to the assessments you will submit as part of the materials for Planning Task 1.

- a. Describe how your planned formal and informal assessments will provide direct evidence of students creating, performing, and/or responding to music/dance/theater by applying knowledge/skills, contextual understandings, and artistic expression **throughout** the learning segment.

It was important to me that this learning segment capitalized on both formal and informal assessments to provide both teacher and student with abundant feedback and validation. I employed a host of formative assessments that dealt with student-centered strategies, such as "think, pair, share" and a simple thumbs up or down to determine. Educational philosopher and practitioner, John Dewey, helped to advance social learning theory, which explains that students learn best when they are able to converse and discover new information in a natural, collaborative setting (1938). This is an educational concept in which the individual needs and contributions of each student are prized above the "park and bark" model of teaching. Through partner work, performance opportunities, class discussion, as well as a collection of summative assessments, students are able to show their facility with new information. There are at least two formative/informal assessments in every lesson as well as two summative assessments. Using knowledge construction as a main objective to pair with my central focus, students are constantly providing and receiving feedback about their progress. I began the unit with a preassessment to tailor instruction to the learning needs of the class at large. This enabled me to design assessments that could track progress easily and with measurable context.

- b. Explain how the design or adaptation of your planned assessments allows students with specific needs to demonstrate their learning.

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

From the start, it was important to me that my students had differentiated opportunities to display their learning achievements. For example, I know that my student with an emotional disturbance IEP, Liv, is best encouraged to learn when she feels supported and included

within the learning sphere. In an advanced ensemble like this one, I notice that she occasionally becomes more reserved and shy with new material. In an effort to preemptively curb that reaction, I built in many opportunities for informal assessments that capitalize on the positive effects of the zone of proximal development as explained by Vygotsky (1931-1934). Using this principle, the informal assessments using partner work will greatly benefit Liv by providing more tools for success with this musical content. Her neighbor in the choir is an extremely conscientious, kind, and capable musician. She is a great asset to my differently-abled learner as someone who can be a supportive presence as well as a resource when learning advanced information. While class discussion promotes this idea in every lesson, the partner work in Assessments 2.1 and 2.2 truly encompasses the ideals of the zone of proximal development and encourages positive knowledge growth from not only my struggling learners but also the entire class population.