

## TASK 2: INSTRUCTION COMMENTARY

Respond to the prompts below (**no more than 6 single-spaced pages, including prompts**) by typing your responses within the brackets following each prompt. Do not delete or alter the prompts. Commentary pages exceeding the maximum will not be scored. You may insert **no more than 2 additional pages of supporting documentation** at the end of this file. These pages may include graphics, texts, or images that are not clearly visible in the video or a transcript for occasionally inaudible portions. These pages do not count toward your page total.

1. Which lesson or lessons are shown in the video clips? Identify the lesson(s) by lesson plan number.

The first video clip represents a portion of Lesson 1, and the second video clip represents a portion of Lesson 3, the final lesson of my edTPA learning segment.

2. **Promoting a Positive Learning Environment**

Refer to scenes in the video clips where you provided a positive learning environment.

- a. How did you demonstrate mutual respect for, rapport with, and responsiveness to students with varied needs and backgrounds, and challenge students to engage in learning?

Video clip 1 displays how my chosen instructional tactics in this learning segment were catered to the students' incredibly encouraging and supportive dispositions. Because the Treble Chorus is a smaller, more advanced ensemble, the students are committed to each other and to the rigorous study of music. As you will see in the first video clip, the culture of affirmation and inclusion is prominent in the classroom environment. I capitalized on the students' tight-knit bond by focusing on student-centered learning in which students had the opportunity to cement new concept ideas in context from their peers. Three students volunteered to lead an explanation of a written example in the board that the whole class had completed individually. Each selected student was responsible for coming up to the whiteboard and engaging their peers in the learning process. While the students teaching each example on the board were commendable, the learning environment of the class as whole was the most impressive takeaway from the lesson. One of the students in the audience, Hailey, has been in the choir for the past three years. As a senior, she wields a significant positive influence over the atmosphere of the class. In the first clip from 0:35-0:50, Hailey led the charge in the rest of the class supporting Katelyn after her teaching segment. I encouraged Hailey's positive reaction at 0:37 by saying "That's lovely, Hailey! I love when we support our friends." By affirming this inclusive behavior, everyone in the class verbally affirmed the subsequent student "teachers" as well. My student who comes to this class with an emotional disturbance IEP, Liv, was the third student to volunteer to complete an example on the board. Using my knowledge of her accommodations, I was able to quickly redirect Liv at 1:45 when she veered away from the correct answer. This made all the difference as she progressed through the example and found the proper response. The students applauded for her at the conclusion of this section of the lesson. Finally, at 2:26 in the first video clip, I reassured those who might have struggled with the day's content by reaffirming that "we will be practicing with this" and that they will have ample opportunities to improve their skills in this new content area.

In the second video clip, I made it a point to establish mutual respect between myself and the students within the choral rehearsal paradigm. My teaching philosophy mandates that students in my choir program feel that they are musicians of equal value and opportunity in the classroom. They are the singers making the music, so their input in the learning process has great merit. In video clip 2, the choir had made a rhythmic error in this new section of music at 0:50, but I consciously chose to categorize myself as an equal collaborator at 1:10 by saying "The altos... were not tricked, but I know I was even a little bit tricked and some

others were too” before pointing out the counting error. I knew that by including myself in the population of musicians who did not perform the rhythm correctly on the first run-through, I would create a relatable link between myself and any student who also had trouble with the musical passage. At 3:05, the students singing the new section perform the previously incorrect rhythm with much better rhythmic accuracy. This development was undoubtedly a result of our class paying attention to what had gone poorly the first time around so that the students would feel successful in subsequent run-throughs. Sometimes humbling oneself can have a positive impact on the class environment as a whole, and this lesson showcased that principle quite clearly.

### 3. Engaging Students in Learning

Refer to examples from the video clips in your responses to the prompts.

- a. Explain how your instruction engaged students in developing and applying
  - knowledge/skills (e.g., tools/instruments, technical proficiencies, processes, elements, organizational principles),
  - contextual understandings (e.g., social, cultural, historical, global, personal reflection), **AND/OR**
  - artistic expression (e.g., interpretation, creativity, exploration/improvisation, individual choices).

Clip 1: At 0:02, I ask for students to volunteer to work through some posed examples on the board no matter their comfort level with the new material assigned. After giving students about 5 minutes to work through the examples on their own, this task was designed to wed theory to practice and codify the process for identifying relative minor keys. Students were given the option to come to the board if they felt “super confident” or in need of teacher assistance.

Clip 1: At 0:29, I begin this portion of the learning segment by asking my student, Katelyn, to outline for the rest of the class the exact steps that she took in order to complete the question prompted on the board.

Clip 1: At 0:35, I encourage the student presenter to project her voice to the full classroom to engage both her and the rest of the class in the learning process.

Clip 1: I felt it was necessary to engage students in learning not only during this learning segment, but also in preparation for future lessons. At 2:20, I posit to the the students that I feel they are doing well with this content and ask for an informal assessment of where they perceive their progress with the new material to be. I reassure the students that “we will be practicing with this... we are going to keep working with it” to make certain that those who feel less confident with the new materials have the knowledge that there will be time and space for them to improve their skills.

Clip 2: I noticed around 1:43 that my students were starting to zone out of the choral rehearsal. This group of students needed an infusion of energy on my part to activate their learning engagement. I chose to be silly and say “We’re zombifying” before asking the students to stand and actively work against their lethargy. This simple change in level created a vast improvement in their quality of singing and overall interaction with all members of the ensemble, and the moment of levity boosted morale.

- b. Describe how your instruction linked students’ prior academic learning and personal, cultural, and community assets with new learning.

Clip 1: At 2:03, I very simply prompt my example student, Liv, to correct her answer from E major to E flat major by saying “Careful!”. I knew that she would likely amend her response

to the correct answer with that simple prompt because I am familiar with her awareness of recognizing sharp and flat major key signatures from prior learning. The key was understanding her background knowledge to augment her contextual understanding in the real-time setting of Lesson 1. We have spoken about the rules for identifying sharp and flat keys ad nauseam in Treble Chorus, and I recalled Liv answering questions in a similar vane in the past. Using that knowledge, I was able to proceed through this exercise with her in the present.

Clip 2: At 2:03, I chose to pair all altos singing the ostinato line that they had finessed in a previous class period with all sopranos singing their newly-learned part. I used prior knowledge of the choir's learning progress on the piece as a whole to inform how I would reinforce and build upon new material. This organization of voices was an effort to assess the relative independence of the sopranos against a counterpart that would not necessarily help them. Those singing the new vocal line were quite successful in retaining their pitches and articulation because they had the opportunity to identify how that line fits alongside the established harmony.

#### 4. Deepening Student Learning during Instruction

Refer to examples from the video clips in your explanations.

- a. Explain how you **evoked and built on student performances and/or responses** to support students' development and application of knowledge/skills, contextual understandings, and/or artistic expression.

Scaffolding educational content is an essential teaching strategy embedded in my instruction. In Lesson 1, I was so glad to see that Leanne raised her hand to collaborate with other students on the whiteboard examples. She is typically a more timid student, so it was essential to handle her bold participation with enthusiasm and encouragement. When asked to identify the relative minor to G major, Leanne mistakenly reasoned that the minor key would be E sharp minor. I was able to build on her content understandings in two ways: first, I validated her identification of the key signature for G major as well as "count[ing] up six" to find the relative minor key in Clip 1 at 1:27. In order to redirect her thought process to cross-referencing the key signature for information, I prompted Leanne to see if there was an E sharp written in the key signature. When she realized that there was no such symbol, Leanne corrected her answer to E minor. I knew that building on the correct steps in her process rather than completely deconstructing her understanding from the lesson would be the most supportive yet effective form of instruction for this specific student while serving as a thorough example for the rest of the class.

- b. Explain how you used modeling, demonstrations, and/or content examples to develop students' knowledge/skills, contextual understandings, and/or artistic expression for creating, performing, or responding to music/dance/theater.

In the choral classroom, content examples and modeling are the main vehicles to develop students' knowledge and facility with new material. Beginning at 0:28 in Clip 1, we reviewed three content examples on the whiteboard for the entire class to observe. In a music theory lesson, practical experience is everything. I draw significant inspiration from David Elliott and Melissa Silverman's music education philosophy of praxialism, the belief that students learn best by actively *doing* activities to construct or strengthen their own learning (2015). Students are able to extract the most out of each lesson when they are provided content examples to complete individually or collaboratively rather than being lectured non-stop. By encouraging the students to act as teachers themselves, I believed that they would assume the position of someone within an elevated zone of proximal development (ZPD). The three students who performed demonstrations on the whiteboard as well as the rest of the choir was able to benefit from this integrated approach.

Modeling is an essential tenet of choral pedagogy. I don't believe that a music educator should presume to know all that a piece of music may wish to disclose, but students must be able to draw musical inspiration from their teacher. Beginning at 0:14, I modeled for the students what the shape of their musical line could be, even though they are only singing two notes. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn from modeling and imitating examples set before them (1977). Using Bandura's principle, I endeavored to create a vocal model that would elicit expressive singing from my students by creating forward momentum and affirming that "you can do that even with solfège." I knew that the students who tend to grasp new concepts more readily would latch onto the phrase modeling, and those who tend to follow the pack would glean information from their more confident peer models.

## 5. Analyzing Teaching

Refer to examples from the video clips in your responses to the prompts.

- a. What changes would you make to your instruction—for the whole class and/or for students who need greater support or challenge—to better support student learning of the central focus (e.g., missed opportunities)?

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).

Reflecting on one's own teaching is an essential skill to improving as a pedagogue; as trite as it may seem, we learn from trial and error. One of my most significant challenges in the first learning clip was missing the boat on reinforcing content in the moment. In Clip 1 at 0:50, I did not seize the opportunity to elaborate on *why* my student, Katelyn, figured out the correct response rather than simply confirming her answer. She noted that the relative minor key in the given example was F# minor because she had the innate knowledge to cross-reference the key signature and see the accidental. In the two subsequent examples, both Leanne and Liv struggled with that concept. They executed the first step of the process correctly, but both faltered when it came to checking the key signature for the final response. Fortunately, Liv did not get upset when she had to correct a portion of her work on the whiteboard; that being said, she does have an IEP for emotional disturbance. This experience could have been a catalyst for her to shut down and disengage with the learning content. For this student, it could be beneficial to review her work before she performs the example in front of the class. A simple accommodation for individual attention and positive encouragement would ensure that the thought process behind her work is sound and she is able to display it confidently for the whole class. Upon reflection, I believe that taking the moment to fully examine *how* Katelyn provided the right answer would have prevented subsequent errors or those of the observing students in their own thought processes, and previewing the answers of those who wrote on the board could also help in that effort.

In the first lesson, I realized that there was a powerful opportunity to connect these abstract concepts to practical learning. Music theory is nothing without actual music; as simple as that statement may seem, we often examine music theory in an unrealistic vacuum. Following the formal lesson on how to identify minor keys based on a given key signature, I might have seized the ripe opportunity to pull out one of our concert pieces to have the students identify the minor key of the song. This simple step would have seamlessly shown the connection between theory and practice in a constructivist, encouraging manner. Gifted learners in the class could have led the charge in that type of activity. Going forward, it is incredibly important that I take the time to take advantage of these educational nooks and crannies. Profound learning can still occur in the small moments.

As I began to reflect on this learning segment, the second video clip provided more of an analytical challenge for me than the first. My question was whether the students' general lethargy in the rehearsal was due to the difficulty of the music before them or my uncharacteristically calm energy. I am usually a very engaging personality, but Clip 2 does not display that reality as strongly as I would have liked. Especially when teaching these more self-motivated ensembles, I have to act as a conduit for the students to practice their own artistry. This is best done with Treble Chorus when I am energetic and insistent with small chunks of musical information rather than sweepingly analytical with larger sections of music. I should have dived into the music-making process earlier in this video rather than speaking about it for the first 30 seconds of the clip. After noticing a rhythmic error, I briefly explained the idea of feeling the rhythmic subdivision in "S'Vivon" at 1:32 of Clip 2, but I was not insistent about the students maintaining the pulse of the piece somewhere on their bodies to really internalize the meter. Realizing the effect of the teacher's energy on the class dynamic as a whole is a difficult skill to master, yet it is absolutely necessary to promote the strongest learning environment in the music classroom.

- b. Why do you think these changes would improve student learning? Support your explanation with evidence of student learning **AND** principles from theory and/or research.

The educational principle of constructivism is incredibly salient in music education, and I feel that its core tenets would profoundly improve student learning in my classroom. Webster (2011) says that "knowledge exists less as abstract entities outside the learner that are absorbed by the learner; rather, it is constructed anew through action." The essential issue within the first lesson of my learning segment was my inability to facilitate the students' construction of meaning in context. We practiced music theory concepts as an entity devoid of explicit connection to music. While content examples are imperative to understanding the new material, they serve as a bridge to understanding that material when it is presented in everyday learning. I noticed later on in the lesson (not captured in Clip 1) that students struggled initially when identifying the relative minor key of their concert piece, "Truth" by Andrea Ramsay. The piece is written in F# minor, the same key as the first example performed by Katelyn on the whiteboard. Had I encouraged students to take out the piece directly following her explanation, perhaps they would have been able to construct an important connection between the two examples.

When considering constructivism, the discerning educator must examine their role in the learning process as an active instructor versus an active facilitator of learning. Shively (2015) talks about the teacher intuiting when it is time to move in and out of a lesson to allow students to construct their ideal learning atmosphere. The lesson segment represented in Clip 1 was an exploration of that idea for me, as I allowed my students to inhabit the role of the teacher. However, the aforementioned pivotal moment to reinforce a concept early on in that process could have prevented subsequent students from making errors in their examples.

The principles of Gordon's Music Learning Theory combined with the praxial philosophical approach to music education would certainly augment the learning potential displayed in the second video clip. Gordon (2011) was an incredible mind in the field of music education through his research of how people best interact with learning new music. The crux of his work posited that audiation provides contextual meanings for a piece of music before the musician even attempts to perform it; if the sequencing is aligned correctly, the audiation process should be so strong that no glaring errors occur, according to Gordon. I have to believe that my students would have succeeded in their primary read-through of the musical excerpt from Clip 2 had the sequencing of my instruction been more apt. Gordon realized that "microbeats are fundamental for audiating rhythmic patterns," a concept that I only briefly explored in my instruction. When my students thought more carefully about the microbeat subdivision of the difficult musical passage, they were able to audiate and perform



is correctly. Student evidence as well as Gordon's research corroborates the idea that Music Learning Theory could fix some of the instructional pitfalls in this lesson.

Finally, I believe that the adoption of a praxial learning philosophy would positively underscore the above improvements. David Elliott (1995) rejected the seemingly passive tenets of aestheticism, claiming that they did not encourage a sufficiently engaging level of music education. The crux of his argument is that music is learned and absorbed as it is created by the individual through musicing. It is "at root, a human activity" (Elliott, 1995). A comprehensive praxial music program would center around the active process of musicing to ensure that students are truly shaping their own musical constructs. Rather than listening to the teacher analyze the piece in real-time as I did, it would more likely benefit the student to actively participate in a music-making experience and then come to a consensus about artistic decisions. I hope to infuse more of these philosophical underpinnings through my practical instruction to give students a feeling of holistic education.