

Themes

- A Sequencing
- B General music
- C Connecting to students
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- E Teaching material
- F Empowering students / providing ownership
- G Activities
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- J Music literacy
- K Comprehension
- L Personal Struggles
- M Kodaly process / Kodaly related skills
- N Assessment
- O Listening skills
- P Personal reactions
- Q Ages of students
- R Acceptance of music
- S Student enjoyment
- T Special education

B G: My name is Gina DiPalermo. I'm a K to 5 elementary general music teacher at Linendeau Elementary School. } gen. music

A, D, L J: Great, ok. So just describe your teaching experience before your current teaching position.

G: Um, well, this is my second year so I guess my first year of actual teaching was a lot of, I would just say, kind of putting together small pieces. I think looking back at my first year I didn't feel like I had a very good sequence to my lessons. I felt like I was just kind of piecing things together, you know, certain concepts like comparatives. High and low to some extent, rhythm to some extent. Um, and, it was still fun, it was still good, but to me as a teacher it felt disconnected. There was no thread that wove everything together. } sequencing, connections, 1st year

J: Great. Can you specifically describe the different places that you taught before here? Like even just your student teaching?

D, A, E, F G: Oh yeah, sure! So my student teaching was a 5 to 6 program and it was mainly chorus. There wasn't much emphasis on solfege, rhythm, at all really. The kids sang from lyric sheets, and what I had implanted and tried to do was bring elements of what I thought Kodaly was and what I had learned in student teaching. Certain chunking methods or certain clapping patterns that would help set the way or prep the way to help them learn the material. But there wasn't much of that at all. The same goes for my primary level of student teaching. It was a lot more focused on learning concepts but it wasn't in a way, I feel, an entirely authentic and usable way. } ST, sequencing, learning material, setting up for success

J: Ok. So just describe your current teaching position and what your general day looks like here. You talked about how you're off a cart sometimes. Where do you usually teach, what's this room like?

G: Yeah, ok. So for 3 days of the week, Monday through Wednesday, I am in a classroom of my own which is great. I have an instrument section, labeled instrument section in the corner. I

H, I, G, E
have open space in my room, as you saw, and carpet squares so kids can move easily in the room. I have a nice Promethian board that's really great for technology and how I've been incorporating that. As you see, I have my solfege ladder, clear as day on the board and there on the wall! Two days a week I am in a classroom, so it is challenging because you have limited space to have kids move around and have kids play singing games which is kind of that authentic grounding of what gets kids, and what I feel and what I've seen and learned to get these kids to really internalize the music. But, I still do it, even if they're at their seats I have them working on their solfege hand signs or I'll work on call and response or echo songs and just, kind of, weaving those things in. So on a normal day I see some of the upper grades and some of the lower grades at the end of the day and that's just kind of how it all works out. It has to be a lot of...this year it's been a lot of back to back classes. Last year I had a lot of prep periods in between and now there's been a different district mandated prep time, so all of the grade levels have to have common prep time, which leaves all the specials teachers with 8th period prep. So you have to really be like, boom, straight through. It's very taxing vocally. You're constantly singing, constantly moving, and constantly disciplining and walking around. So yeah, at the end of the day, that's where you have to have the most charge and the most energy to kind of push through. I think having a sequence like Kodaly helped me really move along. Like equal amounts of down time, up time, and having that dynamic in the class helps the kids stay engaged.

Structure of
day,
physical
affects,
activities
in class,
materials
used

J: Like a good map!

G: Like a good map, exactly! And you can assess. Sometimes it's good to have a lot of things in your lesson because you are assessing the literacy. When they come in and are doing some sort of moving activity, or some sort of echo song, or they're playing poison rhythm or a solfege song, it's kind of your immediate assessment of the class. Are they rambunctious, are they

D,C,G
focused, are they tired? You know, those beginning movement games or beginning movement songs are how you can direct where you're going. Then you're going to choose am I going to cut some things out today, or am I going to just only do a portion, of this? So those smaller segments kind of put together is what really helped in being stronger in getting the kids to not, you know...be the natural kids that they are and be tired at 2:00 in the afternoon.

"reading the room" activities done

J: Ok. So what was your biggest motivator for getting your Kodaly levels? I know we talked about that earlier a little bit.

D,B,J,K
G: Yes. I think it's just like I said, I did not have...so my student teaching praxis, or my two pre-levels of praxis were a 4 and 5 school, and my actual student teaching was a 5 and 6. My elementary praxis was 4 and 5. Then I went straight to middle school and high school level. My student teaching was 5 and 6, so I never had any sort of groundwork except for what I learned in practicum, for K to 3 or K to 4 really. Those ages are much different than 5 and 6 and so many of those upper levels. When you're in a general music setting and not a choral setting, they all bleed. When you're teaching general music...I needed something. I was missing something. I needed a way to scaffold to get them to a point where...wherever the point is! Music literacy is obviously the end goal, but there are many steps in between that that get them to do that. And, doing things musically and not just singing things and screaming things and actually understanding reasons why. We eventually want to get it so they can look a piece of music and understand all of those steps leading back and obviously kind of not going to say, "Oh Miss D, you did this or you did this and you forgot this", but for me I was looking for that thread, that puts the next step together, because I didn't have that. I didn't feel like I had that next sequence or that direction.

grade level experience, gen. music, music literacy, comprehension

J: Understandable! (Laughter) So did you have any doubts initially when you were going to take these levels, or were you just like "I need to do this immediately"? Did you debate about it?

G: Well I guess I was really excited to do it. I was apprehensive because I know that, even as a freshman in college or even before college, my reading wasn't as great. I didn't have very tight reading skills, which is what you find a lot of honestly for a lot of students. They come in college and high school settings and they don't really know how to read music. I had some great teachers along the way, obviously in college as well. I learned a lot. Kodaly, for me, gave me...you know you're going back to the basics but you're just building such a strong foundation that you really don't even know how much more you're changing until you pick up a piece of music and it's just that much easier to read. And you're just seeing interval relationships better and you're hearing. The biggest thing is your ear. You put it in your ear first, then in your mouth, then in your eyes. And listening to all of the exercises we were put through and all of that...I was very much challenged in that beginning, in like the first level. Kodaly is also la based minor. I was not taught la based minor, so it was like a complete flip of study. So like you're learning a whole new language. But it just trains your eye, it trains your ear, and it just makes you that much stronger. So I was surprised. I was. I was very happy to go in, but then I was definitely surprised throughout the process of the challenging points, but then overcoming that and seeing the change in the process from week 1 to week 2 of this program how much better I had gotten in just 5 days. Like it was kind of crazy!

J: So what did you want to achieve in your teaching by attaining your Kodaly levels? You sort of talked about this before. Was that the scaffolding?

G: Yeah, it really was the scaffolding, and it's just um, having...letting the kids...what I looked for as student, I guess I can say, is being able to pick up a piece of music and be able to read it as

reading
struggles,
surprised
but
excited for
Kodaly,
Kodaly
process,
la based
minor

I would a book. I had always missed that part of...other people were stronger than me and knew how to read music more fluently than I did. That's what I want to give to my kids, aside from having fun in musical activities, but the groundwork. That fundamental basis of learning music. I really want them to go up into their upper levels, their middle school and high school levels, and just have that confidence that they've learned how to sing. Sometimes singers, we're underrated. Instrumentalists, they know how to read music because they're taught to look at music and follow something. And that's the only way to play an instrument, but for singers it's just hearing. So it's kind of bridging both of those things together, and that's what I want them to have. The confidence, you know?

comprehension,
giving literacy,
confidence
for students

J: Great. When in your actual training...so was it what you expected it to be, or did it surpass what you thought in how hard it was going to be, and if not, what else might you have wanted to have gained from it?

G: Right. So I guess we had just talked about that previously. It definitely took me by surprise and exceeded what I thought. There are a lot more components to the program as a whole. I had thought it was just solely about solfege. But it's not only about solfege. Solfege is a tool and it's building that tool so well so that you leave that tool away, and you focus on what music is. I mean, yeah, we had a lot of different experiences, you know? There's so many to focus on, but...even in our musicianship class we were learning to sing la based minor which was a big challenge for me. By the end of the course, seeing that I could look at a piece of music and knowing that I could know la based minor or modes...modes were such a foreign thing to me, and they're not so scary anymore. You know, because there's a strategy and there's a structure of how to attack them. It's all kind of centered around those practices.

structure,
confidence,
solfege, la
based
minor
surprise

J: So what was the most useful technique of teaching that you learned from Kodaly? So I'm guessing they focused a lot on musicianship, is what you said, but what is a specific teaching technique that you didn't know about before then that has really helped you a lot?

G: Whew, that is such a loaded question! Oh man, I mean...teaching technique, I guess, I would still go back to the scaffolding. How to scaffold, what to scaffold, and learning the hierarchy of rhythmic components to melodic components, what is important, what is easiest for kids to learn first? Sol, mi, minor third relationships. There's a whole hierarchy that trickles down to the hardest solfege syllable. Even with rhythm, it starts at quarter note and goes to eighth note, then it just keeps trickling down, and I never really realized...I never knew that, I never had that. So I would just definitely say the scaffolding part. What was the second part of the question?

J: That's all it was, what was the most useful technique...

G: Yeah, and then, in that mindset for the purpose of literacy or assessment. And then the other part was just, what I found really valuable was the authenticity. Kids...I feel like we've strayed away from listening to, from actively listening to music. There's a lot of what I think it 'muzak' or background music, or things that, you know...I respect what's on the radio, but is it always appropriate to listen to? No. Is it always musical? Not really. And so, bringing these folk songs, these traditional songs from different parts of the United States, out of the United States, it's kind of bringing all of those cultures together. And just listening to music, like having that active listening I think is really important for kids. It's really important for adults too. Those are really kind of the label things.

J: Okay. How do you implement creativity in your classroom, and how have these techniques of doing so changed since you got your Kodaly levels?

Scaffolding,
hierarchy
of steps,
solfege

active
listening,
quality of
music,
variety of
music,
literacy,
assessment

F, C, S
G: Whew! Creativity... I think there are always ways within your little segments to give kids opportunities, whether it's doing vocal exploration or letting kids do a little bit of improving. That's a little bit of Orff thrown in there where you can take out a solfege character and you're able to just kind of give them a choice of where they're going to sing. Or even...that's my phone. (Phone ringing) In a song, switching out the words. Having them put a word in kind of gives them that ownership of what they're singing and brings it back to them. "My, my, mee oh my, how I love that cherry pie" (sings). Open grass for talking about Thanksgiving and pie and the seasons, and then the kids can change it to different pies and they can talk about what they like or don't like or all of that. They can add in funny things. I don't know, "how I love 'something'", and it's still musical. It's still putting something musical in but also giving them that creativity.

ownership,
choice,
opportunity,
talking
about
interests,
musical
creativity

J: Would you have done that before you had your Kodaly levels?

N, A, K
G: I did do that. I did actually. But it was just nice...it's a good reinforcement. Yeah, maybe I think...I might, in my second level, that's something I'd want to focus on is learning how to again take ...not be so assessment oriented with trying to assess where they are in the scaffolding process or in the process of those objectives but learning in whole. How to step back and look at a bigger picture. Get them to create more.

re-assess,
scaffolding,
whole
learning
process,
big picture

J: Okay. In what area/grade/class did you find yourself first applying your training?

G: First and second. With the younger grades, it just felt like a very 'home center', like I found a niche especially in second grade. I can't really tell you how to be honest, it just felt like they were grasping to it a lot. And obviously because they're younger, it's...I felt like there was always a place to go. And even though I know that my fifth graders don't have all of those skills yet, some of my second graders actually have more skills than my first graders do. Or the

younger kids have more skills than the fifth graders do. It's just I was in a nice starting spot.

Q, M, K,
F
And just building from there. And it just, you see the transfer of, like the growth from one year to the next, it becomes stronger. The kids realize things. I have this one student who...we'll be singing a sol-la-mi song, and he starts singing another sol-la-mi song that we've learned or other songs that we've learned so they've started to identify those same relationships. They're just like, "Oh this sounds like this song, this sounds like this song". The "Ah-hah!" moment! Those are where you feel like you've done something right!

younger st. are ahead in process, comprehension, relationships

J: My next question was about this. So you feel pretty confident in the changes you've been making?

G: Yeah! Confident that they're learning, that I'm doing it right? Not always. But I'm seeing changes in them, and so I have to find comfort and confidence in, you know, if some of the classes are not super with me, we take it a step back. But yeah, I would say so.

confidence, changes

J: Okay, great. Well you gave some specific examples which was great. That was my next question. So has this been a more gradual process when you were first starting out and how specifically are you going about doing this with your classes? Are you just jumping right into it with certain lessons, or are you putting little pieces in here and there?

G: At first, and it was right in the beginning of the year because Kodaly was so fresh in my head, I dove straight in and I just started sequencing my lessons that way. I would say that I have a lot more growing...growth to do, and if I'm looking to be very specific about things, I would like to put more time into key relationships between songs. That's one component, and knowing different tone sets and knowing how those apply to...just making your sequence just that much more clear and easily directed. And now I'm backing off just because of supervisor preference. They honor me and believes in Kodaly and believes in it holistically, but we do like to

sequencing, relationships, administ., dove in right away, literacy

A, E, P, J

implement other lessons and other things that are not so Kodaly centered. It's a mix now, and I've learned to come off of "Oh my gosh, I have to do all of this all at once". It's just kind of taking, you know, whether it's rhythmic literacy or it's melodic literacy and just kind of focusing on that in a slower process.

J: When has your training been the most useful to you so far? And I don't mean just you as a musician, but when you're teaching something when have you been like "Oh my gosh, thank heavens I knew how to do this because of my Kodaly training". Can you think of any times?

A, L, K
G: Yeah, there are some times when you feel stuck in ways of explaining things. You sometimes think when you're in a program and your colleagues know exactly what you're trying to say and you just go with it. Realistically that's not what happens with children. So sometimes just the wording, phrases, is a huge, huge thing I learned. Um, "Make sure your hands look like mine", "Clapping the way the words go", giving them those higher order of thinking skills of listening ahead and knowing what may come in a song or asking them factual questions, those little things sometimes make a world of a difference, and it makes you sound more...it's just more clear.

wording,
listening,
explaining

And I tend to get wordy and convoluted. I know that that's something that I'm working on.

J: It doesn't seem like it up there!

A, L, K
G: No? Oh wow! Because some of those saving graces...it makes you feel like...you're like, "Man, how can I say this so it just sounds better" or "How can I say this so that they get it" and some of these little phrases that you just pick up from these master teachers really...it was just really like "Okay, like, that what I meant to say! Those were such simple words, and they understand!". So yeah, that's really where it came from.

words,
explaining

J: Great. I think I know the answer to this already, but would you continue to get higher levels of Kodaly training if the opportunity came?

P G: Absolutely. I look forward to finishing all four levels, and yeah.

} yes to continuing

J: So specifically to your classroom and probably like the demographic of your students, which aspect of Kodaly has been the hardest so far to adapt in here?

R,E,C,F G: We spoke about this generational thing and connecting to the students. I guess my creativity, if it's like how am I being creative as a teacher, it's finding those ways to bridge things that are new with these songs. It's also cool because the kids, at first will like shun the music and say "What is that?" or "What does that mean?" or "What does 'weavily wheat' mean?" and then you have a discussion and they actually learn a bit of history. And so you get them to become more appreciative and sympathetic towards music that they don't always know. And I tell them my job is not to teach you all of that's on the radio. You listen to that, and that's wonderful, I listen to it too. In here we learn different songs, songs that you may not know, songs from different cultures, and from history past. And that's kind of where I leave it. Some kids don't pick up to it, don't take to it, and some of the kids do and they find that the games, a lot of those singing games and play parties and that kind of stuff is fun. And they realize that it's like...at the end of the day, they don't really realize what they're totally singing about, they just find it fun. And we still talk about what it is, but for those kids who are not always grasping to it, I'm ok with it. If you're involving yourself and you're engaged, so maybe everyone's not going to like all of the same music. I get it. And so I think having them feel comfortable with some of the folk music that I'm singing with them...it's just been like growing pains for them, but they'll get it right (Laughter).

acceptance of new music, cultural, historical, creativity as teacher, connecting to st.

J: Last question...do you feel changed as a teacher, or is this just another tool for you?

G: Oh absolutely. I mean, I totally feel changed. I feel more in control of my teaching, and I feel more in control, I feel...I just feel like I have a go-to, I feel like I have...it's a safety net, but it's

also somewhere to challenge myself. Somewhere to grow, and to grow with my kids and to see their growth. It's something that is very...it's a system, it's just a great system and there are so many ways to go about it. You know there's no one set way of doing things, as you had said that there are different ways of assessing and different ways of reviewing and different ways of moving around the classroom and getting the kids to just know that...look at the clock sometimes and say "Wow, music just passed by". And that's when you know you're doing the right thing and they're having fun, which is the most important.

having fun
diff. ways
to do
things +
teach,
system that
works

J: Of course, that's the most important thing! Well just so you know so I have this on record, I will give you access to the transcript, and to the interview later so you can read it, and to my final research paper so you know you can see all of that.

G: Thank you so much.

J: Thank you!

S, G, P,
M