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Preservice Music Teaching Field Experiences Utilizing an Urban Minority After School Program

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The preparation of music educators involves many facets. Students obtain pedagogical knowledge, understanding, and skill development during the college experience. In addition, preservice music teachers do numerous writing and reading projects as well as peer teaching. One area that tends to be lacking in the preparation before student teaching is the inclusion of preservice teaching experiences within the school classroom. Numerous music education programs offer field experiences before student teaching. However, many of these occurrences are not normally with students at urban and/or predominantly minority schools. One important aspect of training is to create an awareness of multi-ethnic classrooms.

According to Campbell and Scott-Kasner (2002) immigration and birth rates in the United States have produced a population increase of “14 percent African Americans, 12 percent Hispanic or Latin Americans, 5 percent Asian American, 1 percent Native Americans, with the remaining two-thirds of European heritage.” (p. 356) Future music educators must be able to go to the source of different cultures and gain knowledge of how their music came to be. Carlesta Henderson (1993) is quoted, “Field and clinical experiences (vocal and instrumental) involving multicultural students are also imperative if our future music educators are to be equipped to teach effectively; that is, to appropriately unite theory with practice. What is more important to this process is the uniting of the music being taught with the students being taught.” (p. 38)

Carter (1993) described Goldberg’s 7-step hypothetical model of a successful teacher to be used in the preparation of minority populations. The first principle explained that a teacher must respect children and when this happens, respect will be received. The second part indicated that the teacher should observe the cultures of

students not as a judge, but from the students' perspective. In addition, there should be an understanding of the environment from which the students came. Teachers ought to know the values toward a range of achievements and the type of lifestyle the children wish to seek. The third area was an awareness of students' connection in the ethnic group (history, traditions, social structure) as well as how that connection forms the child's image. The fourth point specified that a successful teacher should know that the language of the child is closely tied to their way of life. Number five indicated that the teacher should have an excellent awareness of how children's abilities are evaluated. The sixth area pointed out that teachers should meet children on a one to one basis. The last point stressed that educators should realize the danger of self-fulfilling prophecy and the expectations should be more that the child thinks he/she is capable of doing.

Children living in minority urban settings are often referred as at-risk. Ebie (1998) found five points music education affected the lives of at-risk students. Primarily, music was an important issue in all children's lives, including at-risk. Secondly, students had feelings of accomplishments through participation in ensembles. Thirdly, at-risk students were able to have more leadership roles. The fourth point indicated that the music itself was a significant aspect for improving the lives of at-risk children. Lastly, music teachers' involvement with music students' lives tended to ensure student success.

Shields (1997) utilized music education as an intervention for at-risk urban adolescents. She found that after a 16-week period measuring students' self-perception and self-regard, that there was a significant increase in the students' self-perception of musical competence. The students ranked music as an important part of their lives. In a study to determine the relational aspects of a school, a music program and an at-risk student's self-esteem, Jenlink (1993) found that music was a primary means for raising self-esteem by promoting individual growth and providing a common bond between home and school.

In an effort to equip future music educators to teach in an urban Hispanic student population, 11 music education majors enrolled in an elementary music methods course

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participated in the formation of a Latin American Festival Children's Choir. Their involvement included the preparation of 75 children from 3 after school programs to sing in a chorus. Children were to sing folk music from several Latin American countries in Spanish.

Third through fifth grade children were part of the "special" music program. These children were in an after-school program sponsored by the local ISD and 98% were of Hispanic origin. Out of the 75 students, 10 were unable to speak in English. None of the elementary schools had music teachers, so the idea of having a music class was unfamiliar.

The university students chose the repertoire for the concert. Two of the students were fluent in Spanish and were able to teach the class the correct pronunciation. The class determined instrumentation and who would be responsible for each song. Members were paired and assigned to a school. Scheduling was somewhat of a problem because of the odd number of students. The university instructor teamed with each member of the class in order for students to observe and assist the instructor.

Before entering the classrooms, the head of the After-School program gave a seminar about the children and what to expect. University students were told that the children were considered "at-risk" and many were not legal citizens. The children were at the poverty level and several were not expected to finish high school. The original intent of the after-school program was to provide a place for children to be while parents worked and also to keep children off the streets after school. Discipline should be given in a firm but positive manner.

The university professor designed the lesson plans so that each team would be on task during the rehearsals. A schedule was planned and given to each participating school's principal, after school supervisor, the director of the after-school program, and each of the university students. Music students were expected to write an analysis of each teaching session and share what happened with the next group to teach at their site. Team members supplemented the lesson plans with materials to help teach the songs.

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Letters informing parents of their child's participation in the new after school course were translated into Spanish and given to the parents the week before they would begin their music class. Each principal and after school supervisor were notified about the upcoming new course two weeks before the actual classes began. Maps to each site were provided to team members along with the names of each site's supervisor.

Each team armed with posters, instruments, and enthusiasm began their first week at each site. In the beginning there were four sites, however, one of the sites told the university students that they did not have time for them to teach because of previously scheduled events. The students were disappointed and new teams were formed to meet the needs of three sites. This new plan enabled students to teach at each school on a rotating basis with new team members. Two teams reported discipline and teaching space problems. However, these teams did state that once they settled in, they were able to begin some of their lessons and finished on a happier note. Needless to say, the lesson plan objectives were not met, except with the instructor's team.

Students met as a class and discussed a new plan of action and how they could address the problems that were encountered. The class was encouraged to remain positive and be determined to have fun with the children. A new schedule was made; lesson plans were modified; and team members were assigned new tasks.

After the second teaching session, students reported a higher success rate with their teaching confidence, student discipline, and ability to meet more objectives. Class discussions involved what worked for each preservice teacher and how they addressed problems. Groups met to discuss the next lessons.

During the course of the eight teaching sessions, students kept journals describing the best and worst aspects of their experiences. Discipline was the number one concern of all the students. Children's lack of good singing was distressing to each team and their inability to teach them in a short amount of time. The best aspect was the children's reaction to music and their participation. In order to ensure participation, external

rewards were used. Each team designed games to learn words and songs. Candy was used as the reward for winners.

Culmination of these teaching sessions was a musical performance. This performance was part of a University Biennial Latin American Arts Festival that featured world-renowned artists from Latin America. A dress rehearsal was held on a Saturday before the Wednesday concert. Forty students arrived for the combined dress rehearsal. The night of the actual performance, 32 children participated.

Discussion

The purpose of this project was to enable preservice teachers to have a unique teaching experience. Most of these music majors were one or two semesters away from student teaching. This experience gave students the opportunity to see a project process from beginning to end. In addition, they were able to have teaching experiences with children and not peers. Before the project began, each student had taught two lessons appropriate for elementary music. These teaching segments were videotaped and peers, instructor, and self evaluated students. Kerchner (1998) reported that peer-teaching experiences provide self-assurance and help to prepare for student teaching experience.

The after-school coordinator conveyed that the children in the program were considered at-risk. Educators have given the term at-risk to troubled children. Schuler (1991) has defined at risk students as “those who are in danger either of dropping out of school, or of graduating without mastering the knowledge and skills that are necessary to be effective citizens and contributors to the economy.” (p. 22) He also stated that at-risk children fail of two points – the incapability to learn and the overall lack of desire to learn. The university students would overwhelmingly agree that the lack of desire to learn was a big issue during their teaching sessions.

Journal entries indicated that there was frustration that the children did not seem to want to do music class. This could be attributed to several reasons. Number one the children had not had a music class before and there was an element of the unknown. Secondly, the children were seen at the end of a school day and were tired from school

and doing homework at the after-school program. Thirdly, the children were able to sense the insecurity and apprehension of the student teachers. Lastly, there was a language and cultural barrier.

Once the students realized that their subject was motivating, they became more determined to help the children have successful experiences. Students were encouraged to be positive no matter what and have fun. Their enthusiasm was contagious and the children began to bond with the teachers. Each week university students reported experiences such as, "... actually smiled at me today and sang loudly", "...all the children participated and laughed and NOT at me." "...we started to really make progress.", "some of the children told troublemakers to be quiet so that they could learn some music.", "I had such fun today", and "teaching is going to be a blast".

This experience not only affected the university students, but the children as well. No formal evaluation instruments were used to determine the attitudes of the children pre or posttest. University students commented on children's attitudes throughout the experience. The most memorable event occurred during the dress rehearsal. One of the children asked me, "How many kids go to this school?" I replied, "almost 9,000." He was impressed and said, "That's more than my school." Then he asked, "Who is the principal?" I responded that we did not have a principal. He further wanted to know, "Well, what happens when kids fight?" He was informed that students didn't fight at this school. He then looked around the foyer, rubbed his chin and said slowly, "I like it here." This child had not been the best behaved during the teaching sessions, but at the end was one of the leaders.

Parents attended the concert and the majority had never been to any event of this nature. When they brought their children early for last minute rehearsal and distribution of T-shirts, they were unsure of their role. Many came into the choir room during the preparation. In addition, when the children were putting last minute touches on their program on the stage, all of the parents came in.

None of the children had ever performed in any kind of school program. This was a first time experience. The dress rehearsal had been on a smaller stage and the final concert was in a large auditorium. During both rehearsal and performance the children were subdued and in awe of their surroundings. During the concert, Orff instruments were demonstrated and used in one of the songs. University students played the instruments. During the dress rehearsal the children's lack of experience with music prohibited keeping a steady beat.

As anticipated, the concert was a great success. The singing was not what the university students had hoped, but each song was sung with enthusiasm and great fun. The total experience for everyone was successful. University students were able to interact with children from another culture, learn music from another ethnicity, discover process, planning and organization of events, as well as have the opportunity to practice teaching skills.

Audience members were able to hear music from different traditions in Latin America and for some, discover a new venue for music making. University students not involved with the project were supportive and had many excellent comments about the program. Community members attending the concert were able to hear children singing and see them having fun. Remarks after the concert were encouraging with talks of future programs of this sort.

As the university instructor, I saw students grow as future music educators. Students worked in teams to plan, organize and re-organize, and practice individual teaching skills. Most importantly they were able to work with at-risk children from another culture. This experience was beneficial to all participants, students, children, supervisors, parents, and community. Hopefully this experience will inspire the participants to continue in their school education. "I like it here."

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