



Instructional Strategies for the Undergraduate Percussion Methods Course



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Setting the Context

The purpose of this presentation is to share an innovative approach to the teaching of percussion methods and to report on student perceptions of the course. The specific percussion methods course meets three times per week and is team-taught by a percussion graduate instructor and a music education graduate instructor. In the semester that the course was studied there were fifteen students in the course (4 Freshmen, 7 sophomores, 2 seniors, and 2 graduate certificate students).

Aims of the Course

- diagnose problems and prescribe possible solutions for common errors with playing area, hand/finger technique, tone production, articulation, stick choices, intonation, hand position, body posture, and body-instrument relationship;
- plan how you would guide students to use print, web-based, and multimedia resources to analyze their own playing, think critically about the material they learn, and supplement their lessons;
- making music beyond the notation: not just what to play, but how to achieve it with percussion.

Instructional Strategies

Collaborative Learning

Partner Micro-teaching

Students were partnered to co-teach a work for secondary percussion ensemble. Students were given four – 8 minute teaching opportunities to instruct from stage set to final performance. Lesson planning, execution, and reflection (on action) were required components of the experience.

Method Book Review

Students selected a peer, co-investigator to review current method book intended for use in school-based instruction of beginning percussionists. The instructor provided a review protocol.

Score Identification

Students selected a peer, co-investigator to review scores and identify the affordances and constraints of modern instrumental ensemble percussion scoring. Extension of Think Tank activity.

Peer Feedback to Micro-teaching

Students used a backchanneling technique (#UMMUSED207) on Twitter for providing peer feedback to solo and co-teachers. The backchannel was projected on a screen at the front of the classroom and populated live comments throughout the class.

Simulation Learning

Section Rehearsal

Students enacted a middle-level, school-based percussion sectional. The instructor demonstrated both promising and problematic scenarios for rehearsal and part assignment.

Problem-Solving

Brainstorming/Think Tank

Students were requested to solve real-life scenarios of secondary school percussion logistics, instrument doubling, and part assignment.

Conclusion

Balancing performance and teacher skill is not a unique issue to percussion method courses. Thoughtful combination of knowledge in percussion pedagogy and performance skill (both performing and instructing) are suggested for implementation in percussion method courses. Future dialogue about method course instructional and assessment strategies are recommended.

Outcomes & Considerations

Partner Micro-teaching

Found to be useful. Consider partnering with single teacher micro-teaching.

Method Book Review

Positive feedback. Suggestions for independent review with in class collaborative discussion.

Score Identification

Connection of percussion pedagogy to known repertoire is required for transfer of knowledge. Prior experience with percussion logistics, instrument doubling, and part assignment were recommended.

Peer Feedback to Micro-teaching

Limited to 140 characters, peer feedback needed to be concise, specific, and observable. By reading peer feedback populated from a backchannel, the quality of peer comments to micro-teaching demonstrations quickly aligned with the teaching rubric.

Sectional Rehearsal

Overwhelmingly, the most appreciated strategy for student growth. Combination of experiencing scenarios and performing on percussion instruments was perceived to be "the best part of the course".

Brainstorming/Think Tank

In class activity was reported as helpful. Students requested that this activity be an extended learning opportunity for further consideration as their skill as percussion performers develop.

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Abstract

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Guiding questions for acknowledging innovative strategies included: (a) how do participants describe their level of engagement during authentic learning activities and traditional lecture-format?; (b) which strategies for delivering course content were perceived to be preferred over other strategies?; and (c) what were the participants' perceived strengths and weaknesses of each strategy throughout the course? Aims of the course include: (a) diagnose problems and prescribe possible solutions for common errors with playing area, hand/finger technique, tone production, articulation, stick choices, intonation, hand position, body posture, and body-instrument relationship; (b) plan how you would guide students to use print, web-based, and multimedia resources to analyze their own playing, think critically about the material they learn, and supplement their lessons; (c) making music beyond the notation: not just what to play, but how to achieve it with percussion. Assessments include: a) field observation with reflective writing; b)

composing or arranging for percussion in the music classroom; and c) written review of beginning percussion texts in a cooperative learning setting. Learning activities include: (a) collaborative learning while developing strategies for measuring achievement in school percussion; (b) simulation learning while participating in the experience of a middle school percussionist; (c) creation of student-generated rubrics; and (d) engaging in lecture-based, problem solving discussion to accomplish understanding the hurdles of teaching percussionists in the large ensemble through composition and score identification.

Presentation will include feedback gathered from interviews with students at the end of the term regarding their perceptions of the course. Findings and suggestions for future research in curriculum development will be included.