How Music Forms a Culture

Our project is about musical history of different cultures. A problem that we saw when observing at our classrooms in Hartford was that the classes were very diverse, but the students were taught very little about their own cultures. Also, many textbooks the students read and the curriculum they learn typically lack the diversity we see in the actual classroom. We would like to fix this because we believe that it is important for the students to feel like their culture and identity are welcome and important aspects of our class. Our main objective is to have our fourth grade students research the history of their own cultures and heritages and find out how music affected the people of that time. Our goal is to help the students understand the value of their individual cultures in society. We want the students to think critically about the importance of heritage and how it shapes our cultural identities. To do this we decided to have the students explore how music affected historic parts of their culture. We want the students to choose a song and analyze how the song described their culture within history and how music also affected their culture. We will incorporate musical instruments, guest speakers, and musical performances to enhance the students’ learning experience. We will spend one and a half hours per day for five days researching the music of different cultures and their historical contexts.

Objectives:
- Students will gain an understanding of the importance of cultural identity and how heritage plays an important role in this concept.
We believe that this is an important concept for the students to understand because in classrooms today, history is taught from limited viewpoints and focuses on very few cultural perspectives. Much of our identity is shaped by our culture. If students are not taught about their own heritages within the school context, they may start to believe that their cultures are not important or historically relevant. We want our students to feel welcome and included because a comfortable environment is conducive to class participation and allows for many different viewpoints to be shared. Therefore, learning is enhanced within the classroom. James Banks, who focuses his work on multicultural education says, “When people view their culture from the point of view of another culture, they are able to understand their own culture more fully, to see how it is unique and distinct from other cultures” (Banks, 243). If we expose the students to the various cultures within our class, the students’ exposure to contrasting viewpoints will further develop their understanding that their culture as well as the cultures of others are significant.

- **Students will develop intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence skills through research of their own cultures and through presentations.**

This objective is important because Howard Gardner states that, “each individual possesses at least seven such relatively independent mental abilities or intelligences” (Gardner, 1). This means that each student in a class has different strengths when it comes to learning. However, in many classes only a few intelligences used. This is obvious because many classes teach to a test, and this form of teaching does not incorporate diverse intelligences. Gardner says interpersonal intelligence is exhibited when students “thrive on small group work” (Gardner, 3). Gardner says that intrapersonal intelligence “helps individuals to distinguish among their own feelings [and] to build accurate mental models of themselves” (Gardner, 3).

- **Students will be exposed to music from various cultures.**
This objective is important because our goal is to use music to explain the history of the students’ cultures. By exposing the children to diverse music we are allowing students to understand aspects of cultural history. We are also giving them a resource from a unique viewpoint taken directly from history. One of the music standards for fourth graders in Hartford is “identify by genre or style aural examples of music from various historical periods and cultures identify and describe roles of musicians in various music settings and cultures.” (Connecticut State Department of Education) By exposing students to the music of all the cultures from their own classroom, we achieve this goal.

- **Students will learn that music differs between cultures and develop an understanding of how music expresses a culture's experiences, beliefs, and values.**

This objective is allowing students to use music as evidence from a historical period in order to think critically about the history of their culture. One of the history standards for fourth graders in Hartford is “Use evidence to identify, analyze, and evaluate historical interpretations (Evaluate the evidence related to different points of view of an event).” The students accomplish this by using their song as a tool to analyze their culture. Another history standard for fourth graders in Hartford is “analyze and evaluate human action in historical and/or contemporary contexts from alternative points of view (cite evidence to explain the various feelings/points of view of people in a historical situation and predict various points of view people might have on a contemporary issue.” (Connecticut State Department of Education). The students accomplish this when they research their own culture and learn about the cultures of their classmates.

**Activities**

**Monday:** On Monday we will introduce the theme of musical history. To attract the students’ attention we will play a song that they will most likely recognize which is “Black Or White” by
Michael Jackson. We will explain that this song is an example of an artist expressing their feelings and reacting to a difficulty they face in their lives, or that they see in their community; which in this case is racism. The purpose of this is to express that music can have more of an impact than just entertainment, and can be used to take social action. We will then show a video that proves that music can vary between cultures. We will show a video of a Native American Rain Dance which uses instruments to replicate rain sounds in the hopes of having a good rain season. We will explain that rain songs were performed before drought seasons as a call for rain because Native Americans depended on rain for their harvest. Rain songs were unique to this specific culture and brought people together to react for a social issue.

Next, we will tell the students that they will be responsible for exploring their own cultures and presenting a short project at the end of the unit to the class about how music affected specific aspects of their cultures. To make this clear to the students we will show an example of what we expect their projects to look like. For example, we will have created a project about the Native American Rain Dance and we will express the impact these songs made on the culture. We will introduce the students to a peer evaluation sheet and have them grade the sample project. The sheet will be introduced at this time so when they actually have to grade each other at the end of the week, the evaluation sheet will not be foreign to them. At the end of the sample project when the students have filled out the evaluation sheet we will create a class rubric. The students will raise their hands and describe what they think is needed for the best presentation. This rubric will remain hanging in the classroom all week as a reminder of what their projects should achieve.

We will spend the rest of the time period answering the students questions and helping them develop research questions, such as “what is my culture” “what type of music is specific to
my culture” “How did this music express feeling, experiences, or values of a historical time period in my culture” “What types of events were occurring during this time period.” In Kelly Dawson Salas’s essay, “Teaching About Toxins” she says, “Fourth-grade students typically don’t know how to write a question that lends itself to a science experiment...but I find that starting with the students’ own questions and reworking them...is the best approach” (Dawson Salas, 24). We will adapt this method to fit the criteria of creating research questions, because she is a professional and had success with it. These questions are a reflection of the history standards for fourth graders in Hartford. We will allow student’s time on computers in class to research these questions. For homework, students will ask their parents, grandparents or any other relatives what songs they like that is specific to the family’s culture. If the family has a heritage that comes from multiple cultures, we will tell them to choose a song from just one. This could be whichever culture they feel the most connected to or whichever culture has a song they like best. They will also ask their relatives research questions designed in class. By talking to their families about their cultures, the students are gaining an understanding of their heritage, and aspects that shape their identity, which is one of our objectives for the unit. This also begins the development of intrapersonal intelligence, which is one of the objectives of this curriculum. The time spent in class and homework helps students to begin to develop an understanding of how music expresses a cultures experiences, beliefs, and values, which is another one of our objectives.

**Tuesday:** On Tuesday the students will come in with the answers to their research questions and have more knowledge about music of their culture. We will give more time in class for research and to pick songs, and continue finding answers to their research questions, just in case they did not do it for homework. To assist with the research we will use the website http://webquest.org
which is a focused search engine that help simplify the research process. In class we will begin to express the importance of music and how it addresses problems in the lives of different people. We will describe how many artists use music in order to express themselves. To start their research for the day we will look into problems the students face in their lives, or in the community. They will begin by searching online and through books about different historical events and issues within their culture. This research will help them first start to understand background and history of their culture more in depth. Next we will focus on how music relates to these issues and how music can express these events. This research helps us to achieve our objective of developing an understanding of how music expresses a cultures experiences, beliefs, and values. It also teaches the students to use evidence to identify, analyze, and evaluate historical interpretations, which is a history standard for fourth graders in Hartford. As a hands on, fun activity to promote musical intelligence, we will invite the school’s music teacher to the classroom in order to talk more about the role music plays in society and how it achieves this. S/he will bring some of the instruments the school has and allow the students to play these instruments. This promotes musical intelligence, which as Gardner says, “allows people to create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound” (Gardner, 2). This is important because some students are attracted to sounds and learn better when making sounds or rhythms with their hands.

**Wednesday:**

On Wednesday we will invite a speaker from The Artists Collective in Hartford. The speaker will begin by performing music for the class. This relates to our objective which is, students will be exposed to music of different cultures. It also allows students who are aural learners a chance at excelling. This also offers another form of intelligence, which is musical intelligence. The
speaker will offer the students an opportunity to learn about the importance of music on cultures from another perspective. Students will get a chance to learn others opinions from a resource outside of the classroom. The speaker will emphasize how music is an outlet of expression about social issues, or the values of specific cultures.

We want the students to learn how to take social action. This is important because it transfers the students’ learning from simply listening to the teacher speak, to actually applying what they have learned. On Bloom’s *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, students will be working on the synthesis level which states that students, “arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write” (Bloom, 1). To achieve this, we will have students use a similar approach to what the artists they are researching would have done. We will brainstorm struggles that the students face and have them write a paragraph, poem, or song that expresses their feelings about the topic. We will allow them to work in pairs and choose what form of writing they want to use, so they can use a format they works with their strengths. By having the students work in pairs, we achieve our goal of increasing interpersonal intelligence. Also constructivist theorists of learning believed that students actually learned when they worked in groups and worked to take social action. Therefore, constructivists would believe that learning was occurring in our classroom. In Linda Christensen’s essay about writing portfolios, “my students walk out the school door to social emergency...I believe that writing is a basic skill that will help them both understand that emergency and work to change it” (Christensen, 162). Some students in Hartford also face social issues and by doing this assignment we not only teach them how to take social action, but show them how words can express the times of a culture, which is a main objective of this
curriculum. This will show them how to express themselves and how to make their voices heard.

**Thursday:**

With the students’ final projects due tomorrow, we will spend this class time finalizing their presentations. They will be expected to make a poster, perform a song from their culture, or any other creative idea that they come up with and present to the class for about four minutes. The students need this time where they can ask questions to the teachers and get help on their projects because they are in a stage in their development where they are just starting to understand how to conceptualize and learn how to be independent. They are not in the final stage of their development that Piaget describes; they are still in the process of learning and need to accumulate experience with this skill to become fully independent (*Perspectives on Learning*, p.43). Students also need this time because of the busy schedules in the other days of the week, if we do not devote this time to help the student prepare for their presentations, there is no guarantee that they will be completed. In their presentation students should introduce their culture, talk about their cultures history, important events from the time period, the type of music, and how the music expressed the culture. If they can do this, that means we achieved our objective of having the students be able to develop an understanding of how music expresses a cultures experiences, beliefs, and values. It also achieves the history standard of students in Hartford which is, using evidence to identify, analyze, and evaluate historical interpretations.

**Friday:**

The final two hours of the day on Friday will be devoted to presentations. While listening, students will fill out a worksheet where they say who is presenting, what culture they are presenting, what type of music, and three interesting facts from the presentation. We will also
have the students give each other grades based on how detailed they think the presentation was, how clear their classmate explained the information, and how much they learned. The students will also evaluate themselves. This allows the students to be introspective and reflect on what they learned about their cultural identity. This will not be the final grade of the presenter but we will take the advice into account when we are grading. Christensen says, “When the teacher evaluates a piece, it takes an essential part of the learning experience away from the student and gives the act of judgment and power to the teacher” (Christensen, 161). We want to avoid this so we will give some of the grading power to the students. Also, in this part of the curriculum, students will be exposed to music of different cultures, which is one of our objectives. Also, by hearing the diverse music, they will complete the objective of learning that music differs between cultures.

**Evaluation:**

We did not want to give the students an exam because we do not believe that exams accurately reflect the multiple intelligences that children possess. Also, it has been proven that simply regurgitating information onto a sheet of paper does not mean that students have actually learned the material. For example, constructivist theorist John Dewey said that, “The primary ineluctable facts of birth and death of each one of the constituent members in a social group determine the necessity of education’.” (Pg. 55) He believed that learning occurs when students talked and shared ideas, rather than spit facts out on a test. Therefore, we allowed the students to come up with a project of their choice that they will present to the class on Friday. This gives visual learners, linguistic learners, and aural learners all a chance at success. Also, having students teach each other is very similar to the cooperative learning strategy, “Jigsaw II” created by Robert Slavin. Slavin says, “Each team member is randomly assigned to become an ‘expert’
on some aspect of the reading assignment…and then return to teach their topics to their teammates” (Slavin, 6-7). By teaching each other the students increase their interpersonal skills.

As we expressed above, we will allow students to grade each other, and themselves, and we will use these assessments to give the students an overall grade for their project. Students will achieve high grades if we believe that they succeeded in completing the objectives of the curriculum. That is, they gained an understanding of the importance of cultural identity and how heritage plays an important role in this concept. Also, they used this to improve their intrapersonal skills. We will also grade them based on whether or not we believe students learned that music differs between cultures and develop an understanding of how music expresses a cultures experiences, beliefs, and values.

Resources:
• Constructivist Theories: Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky, Phillips and Soltis, Perspectives on Learning, chapters 5-6 (from Coursepak)
• Musical instruments from the music classroom in our school
• "WebQuest." Web. 6 May 2013.
Supplements

Peer-Evaluation Sheet

1. Who is presenting?

2. What Culture are they presenting?

3. What type of music are they explaining?

4. Please provide three interesting fact that you learned from their presentation
   a. ______________________
   b. ______________________
   c. ______________________

5. What grade do you think the presenter deserves?

Self Evaluation

1. What was the most important thing you learned about your culture?

2. How do you think this culture has helped you learn more about your heritage?

3. One a scale of 1-5 (5 being the best) how well do you think you did?