

# Lesson Planning Strategies for the Busy Music Educator

by Dr. Brashier and Patrick Lawrence



Lesson planning is a required skill for collegiate pre-service teachers. However, it seems many of us give it up after a few years, because it can be cumbersome. Yet, I think we would all agree that our instruction is much better when we have done our homework and have a great plan at the ready.

The authors developed the lesson plan format we present in this article for the music education students at the University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point, where we both teach, because we wanted students in the program to have a uniform lesson plan template designed for use

throughout all the music education classes in the curriculum. It simply was not proving very effective to have our students submit different plans for all the professors, and it was not helping them engrain thoughtful lesson planning as a helpful habit. Prior to using the lesson plan we developed, students were required to use a lesson plan format from the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (EdTPA), which had great leading and reflecting prompts, but was eight pages long, making it not just cumbersome, but impossible to teach from in class.

None of us became music teachers with the dream of spending our evenings and weekends creating lesson plans, so when we approached this lesson plan template, we knew we wanted it to be as efficient as possible. Our criteria for our new format were that it needed to be 1) straightforward, 2) easy to complete in a short amount of time, and 3) easy to read while propped on a music stand during class. Being the self-avowed music nerds that we are, we quickly discovered that the structure of what we wanted in our plan just happened to be in sonata form!

Our lesson plan format in sonata form has five parts: an introduction, an exposition, a development, a recapitulation, and a coda. We are clearly excited about our application of this format to lesson planning for music instruction. Not only does the sonata form allegory make the format easy to remember, but we also have found that the plan helps our pacing and sequencing. It has proven to really work well for us and our students.

## The Introduction

The introduction includes the objective and “hooks” the students into the content. We want to ‘shock and awe’ the students so they’re ready to learn whatever comes next. A good hook gets the students’ attention and draws them in from wherever their brain has wandering before class started. It should provide a clear reboot for the class and get all the students engaged and on the same page.

To create a good hook, as a music teacher, ask yourself, WHY you are teaching this lesson? What is the essential question, the big takeaway that will last a lifetime, that students will learn in this lesson? How can I make this information mentally “sticky,” so that the students can retain the information? Playing a short video, putting on a related funny hat, wearing a headband with antennae, or anything at all out of the ordinary will do the trick. As you plan, ask yourself what the students will be able to do (the “SWBAT”) when they finish this lesson and plan your short hook accordingly.

Remember, learning is a doing thing. Active student participation in music making should really be our mission statement – it is a simple and effective goal we should set as music teachers for each class. Accordingly, no matter what you call it, build your introduction, your hook, your anticipatory set, to help the students activate prior knowledge. The students need to know how what you’re about to teach them relates to what they have already learned to get them interested ready for the next part of the lesson.

It is also not fair to assess what we did not set out to teach in the first place! To make sure we are starting off right, we must also consider how everything you are doing in all parts of the lesson steers the students towards our objective, and that our objective aligns with the assessment for that lesson. It may seem

strange to start from the assessment and build a lesson plan backwards, but your objective and assessment should have the same wording and match up. If our objective tells us what students will be able to do (SWBAT), then our assessment should tell us what we as the teacher will assess that students can do as measured by something tangible. So, we should always start lesson planning with both our objective and assessment in mind. Once the students are fully wowed and engaged by our introduction, and we are clear about our objective and assessment, we are ready to move on to the exposition section.

### **Exposition**

The exposition is where the students are exposed to the new content for a particular lesson. Ask yourself as a teacher, how will I deliver this new content to my students? At this point we really want to think about how to approach the learning. Just as a composer really works at getting that melody just right, we should be doing the same thing in how we deliver our content. All too often we see ourselves as teachers passing up the opportunity to teach a concept. This is not the time for us to ask students what they might know about a new concept, because our goal is not for our students to hear some partially correct, muddled response from one of their peers. Simply asking questions is not teaching (it is assessment). In the exposition, we must put the time into figuring out how to really teach a new concept.

So how might we deliver your content through direct instruction, leading the students to discover? Modeling is wonderful, picking up an instrument and playing a phrase for our students is worth a thousand words. Does our lesson address different modalities? Since we all learn in different ways, and our students are no different, students should see, hear, and feel engaged with the material. And, as teachers, we should be aware of our ‘burden of knowledge.’ That is, it is very easy to forget what the students do not know that we already think of as habit. When designing a good exposition section, we should ask ourselves if we are sequencing things in the correct way, because what is mundane for us might be new and difficult for our students. We should ask ourselves as we plan, are we missing a step the students might need? Academic language often trips students up; we all know what a hemiola is, but they may not. We are constantly reminding student teachers in our classes to ‘downshift’ — to keep it simple and use as few words as possible to convey the idea.

We also try to practice and teach our student teachers to use what we call the “I do, we do, you do” model, in which the “I do” part is the exposition of new information from us as teachers. This is what many of our students say is the “teacher talking” part of the lesson, what most in the general public think of when they think of what teachers do. However, please note that this should comprise only about 30% of our lesson plan. We need to be sure of what we need to teach and teach it succinctly; we never want to belabor the point. Remember, saying “I taught it” is not synonymous with saying “they learned it.” So, once we have taught the new material in the exposition, it is time to move on to the “we do” part, the development, to make sure our students continue to learn as they do guided work with the material.

### **Development**

In the development, we change from focusing on “I do” modeling to what “we do” with the students. This helps the students take the information presented and develop it in their own ways. Remember that learning is a doing thing, much more a process than a memorization of factoids. Therefore, the development should be the largest portion of the lesson, timewise. Think about all the things our students can DO to wrestle with the content, and do not forget about all the different learning modalities – how will they see, hear, and move?

Just as with any good musical development, in the development of a lesson plan there should be transfers of themes from the exposition (a learning of the knowledge) but also modifications and changes. Students should come to make the information being learned their own. The teacher and students should be working alongside each other.

Bob Duke (2009) talks about transfer – working something in a slightly different way to help reinforce the original task. We do this all the time as musicians. If something is marked staccato, we play it longer when we develop it. If it is fast, we might play it slow, or if it’s written high, we may take it down the octave. When we see fast eighth note runs, we may choose to play each note four times, then three times, then two times, and then play it as written. This is what makes working with the musical material fun, it is a type of repetition, but it does not really feel like repetition. Also, when we model this musical transfer with students, what we are doing, essentially, is showing our students how to practice. The more we approach material in this manner, the more likely students will use these techniques, and come to do the same thing in the practice room,

because they develop better frameworks about what to work on when they are practicing on their own. As teachers, we should constantly be thinking about when to increase or decrease the complexity in a lesson. Whatever the task, our internal dialogue should question: Do most of the students need more help understanding something before they could start practicing what is being learned on their own? (If so, repeat back to the point in the lesson where they got lost or there was a gap between what you expected and what they seem to have grasped.) Or are the students generally now ready to do it on their own? (If so, time to move to the next section, recapitulation). Most importantly, the development should be fun, active, and engaging for the students.

### **Recapitulation**

Once the students have experienced having some success together as a whole class, it is time for the recapitulation section of the lesson in smaller groups or individually. This is when we change from the “we do” mentality to the “you do” focus. At this point, we teachers back out and let the students show us what they now know. Of course, we should do our best to set them up for success, but if they are not being successful on their own then this is the chance to redirect the students, so they get more practice. There are going to be those students at this point that still are not quite getting it. When this is most of the students, we can do a Da Capo to reteach and fill in the gaps and give them more practice together. Remember, recapitulations can go on for a long time in music and lesson plans – they are typically much longer than exposition sections. Thus, the recapitulation section of a lesson plan is where we as teachers can foster independence in student learners, by trying to get out of the way as teachers.

Every teacher will need to make some decisions about how the students be grouped for the recapitulation and by what criteria they will be grouped. We want to balance when it is best to employ heterogeneous groupings (which will help learners still struggling with material to try to catch up with their peers who are already mastering the material) and homogeneous groupings (in which students of similar learning levels are grouped together so that they all can have a chance to shine as they work together). Remember, making students helpers is not always the best way to challenge your advanced students, but when students in a group are similar in ability level it requires more work on the part of the teacher to help meet each group’s needs (whether they are leading the group, struggling with the material, or somewhere in the middle).

During this time where students work without us in groups, our job as a teacher is to give feedback, what has been called “snoopervising,” as we move around the room to communicate with the students, correct misunderstandings, and show them how excited you, as their teacher, are that they are engaging well with the material themselves. How will you differentiate those who are ahead of, or behind, the curve? As a rule of thumb, remember, if 80% or more have mastered the learning, then the teacher should add challenges and increase the complexity, but if only 20% or less are getting it, then we must re-teach. But, once it seems clear to us as teachers that the most students have mastered the learning material, and all of them have had some success, there is often only five minutes left in class (or less), so it is time to move to the final section, the coda.

### **Coda**

This is where we get feedback from our students, and we come to close the learning loop. In these precious last few minutes, we help bring the lesson to a close logically, like a piece of music might come to an end with a coda. (Rather than, as we unfortunately all have done as young teachers, simply stopping where we are when the bell rings!) During the coda, we as teachers can consider questions like: What assessments were used to monitor/measure the lesson objective(s)? Are they specific? How do we know, and students show, that they are learning, or on their way, working towards the goal? What do we expect to observe if students are successfully learning? How will we document this? If we have asked students to work in small groups, we might have a group or two share what they have been working on. We could encourage peer-to-peer feedback in a discussion. It is important to teach the students how to give constructive feedback to one another during the coda of the lesson, addressing each other by name, making eye contact, and providing feedback by using prompts to convey something they noticed, appreciated, or might suggest to their peers. This practice of ending a lesson with kind and constructive feedback not only helps students know how they were successful and what they need to do to improve

next, but it also goes a long way towards helping students at all age levels develop interpersonal skills. At the very end of the coda (the final cadence) we teachers can take a moment to provide a teaser about the extension or new topic for the next lesson – to get them excited to come back tomorrow, or, thinking about what they should work on before your next session.

## Template

We have included a full-page copy of our sonata form lesson plan template on the page following this article. Please, feel free to use it, modify it in any way that best suits your teaching style. Do notice that the plan is in five parts. A helpful tool for remembering the pacing of the parts of the lesson is to reference the length of the fingers on your hand as they relate to the length of each section. The short hook is represented by your thumb, the longer exposition of direct instruction (“I do”) by your pointer finger, the longest section development by your longest (middle) finger (“we do”), the only slightly shorter recapitulation by the ring finger (“you do”), and then a short coda by the pinky. Another hint we have found helpful is scripting the last phrase we plan to say in each section of the lesson plan at the end of each box helps us to make a smoother transition to the next section.

We hope the template and information in this article is helpful for both new and veteran teachers as they start using, or perhaps get back to using, written lesson plans in the same way that we as musicians use written scores – as a map to guide where we are going and mark our progress.

Citation: Duke, R. A. (2005). *Intelligent music teaching: Essays on the core principles of effective instruction* / Robert A. Duke. Learning and Behavior Resources.

## UWSP Music Education Lesson Plan

*(Replace this with lesson title, grade level, and teacher name)*

- Materials:** List materials to be used in lesson here for quick reference.
- Standards:** List the content standards here that will be addressed in this lesson.
- Objective:** (SWBAT) Students will be able to...
- Essential Question:** List the overarching question or justification for teaching this lesson, the big takeaway, or why this should be taught.
- Duration:** Estimate the time to complete lesson plan (can be only during one learning session or occur across multiple days).
- Context:** List any student accommodations anticipated and prior knowledge students need to be ready for this lesson.
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### Suggested Rules for the pacing grid:

1. Students/Teacher must change relative positions for each consecutive box. Thus, between boxes, either teacher or students must change direction, or partner, or get in or out of groups, or get up and move, increase complexity, vary modalities for transfer, or think, pair, share, or change something with each transition.
2. The longest box should be in the middle, and the shorter boxes at the start and end, so that it resembles a bell curve/messa da voce in form.
3. This should fit onto ONE PAGE, and be dated and labeled, so that you can refer to it NEXT YEAR when you teach this lesson again, and it should be able to fit on your music stand while you teach so you can write in column 3 during or right after the lesson.
4. You can print it in landscape or portrait orientation...whatever works for you. Little drawings are allowed for notation and dance steps, solfège, and/or sign language, as needed.

### Reflection: (After teaching the lesson, briefly answer the questions below.)

What was successful in this lesson?

Did all learners meet the objective—how do you know?

What will you do differently when you next teach this lesson?

Procedure

Minutes	Lesson Plan: with bullet points and & scripted transaction	Notes for next time (plus, check, or minus)
2	<p><b>Hook:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask what they know or get the students' attention (shock and awe)</li> <li>• Anticipatory set –Activate prior knowledge– how does this relate to what we've already learned?</li> </ul> <p>Put the last thing you will say here to transition to next box in italics....</p>	
8-10	<p><b>Exposition (Direct instruction - Me): New information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students do this...</li> <li>• Then they do this...</li> <li>• How will you teach/model the concept? <i>**Note asking questions is not teaching!</i></li> </ul> <p>(Stage directions to self go in parenthesis, for example, hand out something or set up something. – Be sure you are using and encouraging the use of Academic Language in Every lesson here!)</p> <p>Put the last thing you will say here to transition to next box in italics....</p>	
10-12	<p><b>Development (Guided instruction - Us Together): Meat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students do this...</li> <li>• Then they do this...</li> <li>• Maybe they do something else...</li> <li>• How will you engage the students?</li> <li>• Modifications, transfer, modalities—how will you engage all learners?</li> </ul> <p>When do you increase/decrease complexity?</p> <p>(Stage directions to self are in parenthesis, for example: hand out worksheet or set up instruments. Allow students to repeat the academic language above.)</p> <p>Put the last thing you will say here to transition to next box in italics....</p>	
10-12	<p><b>Recapitulation (Independent/Collaborative learning – You All/On Your Own):</b> Success or Redirect or Da Capo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students do this that can relate to the prior box or not...</li> <li>• Then they do this...</li> <li>• Then they do maybe one more thing...</li> </ul> <p>How will you structure practice? Will students be grouped and, if so, by what criteria?</p> <p><b>Feedback:</b> communicate with learners. How will you correct misunderstanding? <b>Success:</b> Additional challenges. Increase complexity. <b>Middle group:</b> Repetition, keep working. Scaffold/change modalities. <b>Lost/confused:</b> Da Capo, re explain, interventions. Decrease complexity.</p> <p>Put the last thing you will say here to transition to next box in italics....</p>	
2	<p><b>Close/Assess/Preview: Coda</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students do this...</li> </ul> <p>Why was this of value? How will students</p> <p><b>Assessment:</b> What assessments were used to monitor/measure your objective? How will you know that the students are learning/working towards the goal? What specific actions do you expect to observe? How will you record what you see and hear?</p> <p>Put the last thing you will say here to transition to next box in italics....</p>	