

TEACHING MUSIC DURING A PANDEMIC

A LOWER SCHOOL TEACHER'S JOURNEY

This was a bizarre year for music teachers, but I consider myself one of the lucky ones who was able to teach in person the entire 2020-2021 school year. Greensboro Day School started the year on time and without interruption. After teaching remotely in the spring of 2020, I was excited to get back into The Lower School and teach students from preschool through fourth grade who chose to be in person. Little did I know that this year would stretch my creativity more than any year in my teaching career of over 20 years. As the year draws to a close, I can look back and say that, even with the challenges of Covid, I continued to find joy in teaching music each day. School music is unlikely to revert to the old ways until all ages are vaccinated and can sing safely unmasked, so I'd like to share some success stories before more teachers head back to the classroom and start the 2021-2022 school year.

The Mobile Music Classroom



Many music rooms are not large enough to accommodate full classrooms of students due to spacing requirements. Our school continues to follow the six feet rule for social distancing. Our school purchased heavy-duty carts for specialists to pack with supplies necessary for teaching on the go. While life on a cart might be familiar for some music teachers, this was an adjustment for me. I got creative and installed hooks on my cart to hold charts to use for rhythms and music vocab. I stocked my cart with extra masks, tissues, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes. To outfit my cart for music, I clipped on a Bluetooth speaker for listening and dancing activities, a headset to wear to protect my voice and help students hear at greater distances and outside. My students learned that music is not confined to a designated space and were eager to see the treasures my cart held when I arrived each day.

A Space for Singing Outdoors

In line with guidelines set forth by the CDC, and national singing organizations, our school had a firm stance against indoor singing this school year. While information changes rapidly, it's likely that singing indoors, even masked, will continue to be unsafe for the unvaccinated. Singing is at the heart of music learning for young students, so finding a way for students to sing was imperative.



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With a constant eye on my weather app, I took music classes outdoors at every opportunity. Students were socially distanced in their personal, outdoor camping chairs donated by a parent. For classes too young to set up their own camping chairs, I purchased 24-inch gym mats and sanitized between each use. The school placed large, concrete-appropriate stickers on premeasured spots for students to easily know where to safely space.

While being outside has its own set of challenges (e.g. leaf blowers, airplanes, and bees), it became a familiar space for students to experience music. The social distancing helped younger students understand personal space for movement and exploration. After a few days of acclimating, students cheered when we traveled to our outdoor music space because it was a break from their desk routine, a time to unmask and build community by singing together.



Pandemic Planning

If you're a veteran teacher like me, you have carefully planned music units and activities that you've perfected and added to over the years. Strip away the music classroom, instruments, circle games, and partner dances, and planning becomes brand new! Heading into every unit, I created both indoor and outdoor lessons. Rhythm work, music genres, and composition activities lend themselves to indoor learning when typical singing lessons are not possible outside. There is a huge library of rhythm play-alongs and body percussion dances on YouTube that students enjoyed on rainy days. I videoed myself singing beloved story songs to project in a classroom in pinch. Teachers Pay Teachers provided easy to print rhythm worksheets as backup plans that were also easy to upload to SeeSaw for our remote learners. It was a great year to find new resources and remind myself that there are many ways to achieve lesson goals.



Connected without Concerts

A stage full of performers and a packed audience seems a distant memory replaced by a variety of fancy compilation videos found all over the web. Although we have all spent more time on technology this year than ever before, I fear that music teachers have felt extreme pressure to put together masterfully edited, high-quality video performances to showcase their students in lieu of concerts. At the start of the year, I made a goal to periodically video my students in action in music class. At the end of this year, these videos serve the purpose of showing parents and students the music progress and memories made. My video editing skills have certainly improved this year, but I remain focused on the music that is being made and not the technology used to deliver it. Keeping parents connected to what's happening at school is important and these videos help students find pride in their accomplishments while providing a conversation starter for students to share what they learned in music.

The pandemic has reminded me that creativity is at the heart of teaching music. I hope music teachers all over North Carolina continue to share success stories as they find ways to keep music alive in their schools.



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