Field Experience #1: Write Up

By: Carinna Sabetti

On Wednesday October 3rd, 2018, I got the opportunity to observe a session of a children’s music choir. This experience opened my eyes and allowed me to branch out and explore new perspectives on the approach of teaching music to children. I have worked with children of a variety of different ages for many years, but I have not had the liberty to work with children in a musical manner. This musical field experience was located at First St. Andrews church. I observed one class on Wednesday October 3rd, 2018 and the instructors name is one of my classmates Marija Ristic. The class consists of 18 girls and boys from ages 3-7, with one 2 year old. When I initially was told the age range of the class I was a bit spectacle and wasn’t sure how Marija was going to teach music to a class of such a wide range of different skill levels, knowledge and attention spans. Marija’s class had opened my mind with my initial perspective and I am excited to see how I can apply this knew knowledge to this course and any other future opportunities that come my way.

The setting of the classroom was in the basement of the First St. Andrews church in a medium size room. It had a piano, small chairs and tables, a carpet, and children’s artwork displayed all around the room. It was a safe learning environment for the children and I felt very content in this classroom setting when I came to observe.

Before the rehearsal, the church offers the children and their parent’s dinner beforehand. It was nice to see everyone coming together as a community and enjoying every one’s company. There was also toys for the children, so they were very happy and had lots of energy. I got to talk to the mediatorof the choir before the rehearsal began and it was so lovely to get to know her and see what this whole program is all about. I learned a lot just from this one conversation. One day I would love to work with children in either a choir or a music classroom setting.

During the beginning of the rehearsal Marija put together a program plan that allowed the children to warm up their bodies and voices through different exercises that focused on specific elements. She got the children to sing a song they already knew and then taught them a new one. I appreciated Marija’s approach to all these exercises and songs. She incorporated a brief explanation of why she choice this certain exercise or song, which I thought was a great idea. There is a reason for doing certain warmup exercises and activities and at a young age, theses children can not necessarily put two and two together, so an explanation is very beneficial. This allows the children to have something educational to think about while they are having fun.

Here is the layout of Marija’s program:

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| Choir Rehearsal Plan | Explanation/Reasoning |
| 1. Introduce Yourself Game: sit in circle - tap knees and clapping, say name, everyone repeats 2. Body Warm Up: hand in - shake for 8 seconds (done also with other arm, legs and silently with entire body) 3. Being Aware of Our Surrounding: sitting in circle- closed eyes and humming any pitch, high, low or middle quietly 4. Reflection: closing your eyes while listening - what did you hear? 5. Sang “Come Through Now Hurry”: first two verses were already learned before this rehearsal – taught new actions for verse 1 and 2 with lots of repetition 6. Range: buzzing like a bee – when Marija’s finger goes up buzz loud on higher pitch and when Marija’s finger goes down buzz quietly on a lower pitch 7. Learned A New Song Called “Be Like Jesus”: Marija and helpers taught using rote  * sang whole song (used piano for starting pitches) * all 4 verses were taught separately with 5 repeats of each verse * everyone clapped together before singing to keep the beat before singing – continued to clap while singing * entire song sung 4 times  1. Closing Song “Go Now In Peace”: children sit in a circle with legs out and feet to the center of the circle (feet touching feet) and all together sing song – they allow one children to start the song and the rest join in after | 1. -brings more comfort to the children.   -allows them all to get to know each other more   1. -releases any tension from their energetic bodies 2. -trains their ear   - listening to what everyone else is doing  -listening for a good balance     1. -allow the children to think about why this exercise was used (what is the intention of it)   -allow them to really think about the sound that surrounds them (beneficial when singing a song in a choir)   1. -applies both the singing and the movement of the song brought out the skill of memorization and also multitasking   -brings a challenge to the children and it is also a lot of fun to participate in   1. -focused on range   -the piece Marija wanted to teach the class that day had an appropriate stretch with the range of the piece and wanted to warm up the higher and lower range and work on making the children more comfortable when singing in the higher and/or lower range   1. -learned by rote   -worked on memory, multitasking, team work (since you are with a partner)   1. - a nice goodbye song to close the rehearsal sending off peaceful and good vibes to everyone   -brings relaxation to the group |

Throughout the session, I noticed that some of the activities and exercises Marija was getting the children to participate in were all techniques that I am either currently using now or have also used in the past. The only difference is the approach and explanation of the technique. Since we were working with the age group of 3 to 7 year old’s, the choice of vocabulary varies and changes versus with a university or high school level student, but, the idea and/or concept is basically the same. For example, one exercise Marija got the class to partake in was doing an exercise many people know as is doing sirens. The idea of this exercise is to warm up the lower and higher register levels of the range and you would sing it on any vowel. For Marija’s activity she got the children to do the exact same exercise but instead of singing she got them to buzz like a bee. She also used her hands to show the motion of going up and down the range which is a great visualization for the children. This was very intriguing and having a connection between my own personal experience and working with these children was fascinating to come to this conclusion.

After observing the class, I was able to reflect and come to the realization that you don’t need elaborate materials and tools to have an effective learning experience for children when learning music. There are so many approaches and technical exercises to teach a choir when tackling a new piece of music that is more beneficial when it is simple then more complex. It is the exercise in itself that makes it effective versus the materials being used. I thought Marija did a great job with this approach. She also had a lot of patience when it came down to handling some of the behavioral issues she had with the class. She handled it with grace and had a great variety of techniques to keep the class focused.

After the class, I noticed Marija was talking to one of her students and it was a student that did not particularly participate a lot throughout this session. Marija went and spoke to the child and asked why he wasn’t participating with the group. Since she spoke with this child one on one, the child was able to comfortably open up to Marija. He explained to her that all the loud noises bothered his ears. Marija was very understanding to this and told the child that if he every needed a break, he could take one. I really appreciated Marija’s calm approach to the situation and had options for the child. She did not once force him to do anything he didn’t want to do. I believe it is so important to care about your students on a personal level. It allows the instructor to have a better connection with their students, but the instructor should also be able to alter and make any appropriate changes needed to the rehearsal plan.

Overall this has been an exhilarating and educational experience that I am so thankful I was able to be a part of. I will be able to take this new knowledge and incorporate it into anything I do as an educator. Children can be a lot to handle but it is the love of music, the love of helping others and the love of seeing a child smile that keeps educators devoted to teaching children.