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Urban and Rural School Diversity

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### Urban and Rural School Diversity

A school classroom is one of the most diverse areas of a community. Many students may come from the same ethnicity, but their home lives can be completely different. Students will be taught and ultimately learn differently based on their unique circumstances, especially in geography. Urban school districts, those found in large cities, will prepare students differently than those from a rural North Dakota or Montana school. As an educator, it is important to understand that students will come from many diverse backgrounds, including geography. While growing up, I was able to experience a high school of approximately 800 students split between grades 9 and 12. Even though many future educators may only experience rural schools, or only urban schools, it is important to understand the diversity of the schools, especially in regards to music. Many class A schools in North Dakota have multiple performing ensembles for both band and choir, while also having two directors for the ensembles. Rural schools may have one person in charge of music for K-12, while also serving as the band and choir director. Music teachers will be exposed to diverse classroom experiences easily, depending where the actual teaching will take place.

### **Urban School Environment**

In the spring of 2015, the University of Mary Music Department went on tour to Chicago, IL. While in Chicago, the Concert Choir and Concert Band performed at five different schools. These schools ranged in size and diversity, with two of the schools being gender specific. One of the first schools we visited was an all-female school, where our concert choir performed for their students. For many of the students, this was their first time experiencing a mixed choral sound, rather than a women's group. We performed for two of their ensembles while at the school, utilizing their classroom over the gymnasium.

The concert band, in our final performance in Chicago, performed at an all-male high school. We arrived shortly after 9:00am on the school's campus and left after eating lunch in their cafeteria. As we walked through their hallways after arriving and setting up our gear in their gymnasium, many of the classroom doors were open. When our female band members walked by these doors, many of the students started yelling "Girls!!" and pointing to them, so the whole class was aware of their presence. The journey to find a restroom that they could use roused of the school quite a bit; the students were not used to seeing females walk through their hallways during the day or after the school day finished. As we all returned and completed a group warm-up, their high school concert band arrived to observe our full group rehearsal.

The students were very moved by our small rehearsal. For many of them, this was the first time they were hearing a performing ensemble other than their own. Even with the few sour notes that we played, or the few intonation problems, they were all still watching intently. We had the opportunity to work with these students prior to our group concert. They each put their instruments together and joined their respective section in our ensemble. Bringing their own music, we performed alongside these students and gave them pointers on how to improve. Everything from hand placement to embouchure was presented to the students, who were like sponges soaking up all of the information. Their band instructor took the podium a few times as well, leading us in their concert music.

We performed for the students prior to eating lunch and departing the school. The gym was small, but over 100 students crammed themselves into the area to listen to us perform. For many of the students, this was their first time experiencing a band concert. As a promotion for the University of Mary, we brought with old concert programs and information regarding the University. We also brought along old University of Mary Jazz Festival t-shirts, which we gave

to students for answering or asking questions. During this performance, I was able to throw the t-shirts from the band set-up, which we found out may not have been the best choice. For many of these students, they did not receive many free things, so there were many people that worked to get shirts and ask questions. We gave out over six shirts at this stop, when we normally give out one or two.

Their band members stayed behind as we tore down our set-up and prepared for our bus ride back to Bismarck. They were still asking many questions, everything from how to finger a note or what we do as music majors. They also joined us as we ate lunch in their cafeteria. For the students that were unaware of females being in their school, it was a surprise when we all walked in. The assistant principal and the lunchroom monitors worked a bit harder in order to keep control of what was happening in the room. Before departing the school, we took a group photo, which can be found in my journal for this course. A few weeks after returning home, the band director of that school sent us forty copies of the photo, personalized with our information and the date we visited the school.

While in Chicago, we also visited a school that had a huge Apple logo on the front of their building and a sign in the lobby that read “Apple-Certified School.” They had charging stations for the iPads that were issued to each student in the entryway of the school. For many rural schools in North Dakota, electronic devices are not an option. If they are available, they usually aren’t brand new. These students did everything from reading textbooks to submitting homework assignments on their devices. Many of the students dressed nicely and held themselves very well in the classroom and we unloaded our gear and rolled it down their hallway. Classes continued as normal, with many ignoring the distraction.

The Urban school environment is very unique, as the size and experience of the program varies greatly. Many of the schools in Chicago had a large population of students, many of which did not participate in the music department. Athletics seemed to be the most prevalent image in each school, with many have trophies from their various sports, everything from football to water polo, presented for all to see as they enter the school. The music departments seemed underfunded, but the students hardly noticed. They enjoyed making music with what resources were available.

### **Rural School Environment**

Rural school districts are quite different than urban school districts. Through the University of Mary Music Department, I have been able to participate in four tours, visiting states such as South Dakota, Montana, and Illinois. We have performed in urban schools, such as Chicago, IL, while also performing in rural schools and other rural performing venues. During my time at the University of Mary, we have performed in Richardton, ND; Miles City, MT; Hettinger, ND; and Beulah, ND. I was also able to make a separate trip to Zeeland, ND and work with a fellow musician from the Bismarck/Mandan Symphony Orchestra. Each town provided their own unique challenges for the music director. Everything from available equipment to size of their facility both helped and hurt the director.

The first concert of our Spring 2016 band and choir tour was in Richardton, ND. We performed at the Assumption Abbey for an audience of roughly 50 people from Richardton. Due to the size of the facility available at the school, we were unable to perform there. We utilized the percussion equipment and music stands from the school in Richardton. Our band members transported these items back and forth via the bus that we used for the trip. Richardton is a town of approximately 548 people (Richardton, ND). The audience was really supportive of our

playing; performing groups don't stop in Richardton very often. We performed for approximately two hours in Richardton, then continued on our tour to Billings, MT.

On the return trip from the University of Mary band and choir tour to Billings, MT, we performed in Miles City, MT. Miles City, MT has a population of 8,758 (Miles City, MT). We performed in the gym of their high school. Many schools in an urban setting will have an auditorium or theatre for a performing venue for music ensembles. The audience consisted of all high school students, many of which did not seem very interested in our performance. The director was very helpful and excited to have our band and choir perform, but the students may have only looked at the performance as a way to miss class for a short amount of time. The school did not serve a school lunch, which I found very interesting. Our large group ended up eating at a local diner. Our group nearly tripled their daily number of people that ate at the restaurant! We performed for the students for approximately two hours, ate a quick lunch, and continued on our tour to Williston, ND.

In the fall of 2016, the University of Mary band and choir went on tour to Rapid City, SD. On our return trip, we stopped in Hettinger, ND. Hettinger has a population of 1,256 people (Hettinger, ND). Our groups performed in their gymnasium, which could maybe seat a total of 200 people. The choir risers were only able to hold one third of our actual choir members, as only three segments were available for use. The band used the equipment from their high school band room, which had to be carried through the playground of the elementary school. The elementary school, middle school, and high school were all in one building. We performed for approximately 75 students in Hettinger. As we finished our performance, we invited their high school choir, which consisted of 15 students at most, to work with our college ensemble. The

high school choir sang their piece for us as the director accompanied the choir herself on the piano. She was not able to conduct the choir, show expression, or give proper cues.

As the high school choir performed for us, they exhibited many great characteristics of a good choir. They sang with great tone and used proper diction. The choir was a bit overbalanced with women, as there were only three males in the whole group. The males from the University of Mary choir, over thirty, joined the students on the risers and helped them sing. They gained a lot from being surrounded by the University students, such as matching pitch and using more expression. As we finished working with the choir, we were able to eat lunch in their school lunchroom, which had outdated posters hung around its perimeter. We performed and stayed in Hettinger, ND for over two hours.

We left Hettinger, ND and traveled to Beulah, ND to finish our fall music tour. Beulah has a population of 3,356 (Beulah, ND). The choral director at the high school is an alumni of the University of Mary music department. We were originally scheduled to perform in Mott, ND, but due to unforeseen circumstances, the school cancelled our visit. Beulah, with only a week's notice, started to promote the concert and work to gather students for a masterclass. The audience for the performance in Beulah was small, maybe 40 people, but they were all really excited about what we had to offer. Many of the students cheered quite loudly after each of our pieces, both band and choir. We also invited their high school vocal jazz group on stage with us to perform. The auditorium we performed in was quite unique, as it had normal theatre seating, while also have bleachers in the back of the room. We performed at Beulah Middle School, using the percussion equipment from the high school. The directors, prior to our arrival, transported the equipment from one school to another, and transported it back after our concert. The students of Beulah, which made up most of the audience, were quite excited to have the

University of Mary band and choir visit their school for a concert. We performed for approximately two hours in Beulah.

During November 2016, I traveled to Zeeland, ND and visited their school for a full day. Trudy Fraase-Wolf is the music teacher for the school in Zeeland, a K-12 school. She also wears many other hats, serving both as the librarian and principal of the high school and elementary school. Being a town of only 85 people, I didn't know what to expect when I walked into the school after the hour and a half drive (Zeeland, ND). Entering for the first time, I made quite a few observations. The school was larger than I expected and seemed to be just like any other school that I had visited during my diversity practicum experiences. The hallways were spacious and everyone was very friendly! I was able to sit in on a meeting of the Zeeland School Board after arriving at the school. The meeting lasted a total of 15 minutes, as there wasn't much business to bring up during this time in the school year. After helping Mrs. Wolf with a few things in her principal's office, we made the trek down the hallway to the music classroom. Along the way, we stopped by a few other classrooms to see if those teachers were available to cover another class, as there was a teacher leaving early to coach elementary basketball. Most of the time, if a teacher misses part of the day or most of the day, the other teachers in the school will cover those classes, rather than finding a substitute teacher. We also stopped by the school library, only long enough to drop off a few books. The music room was just down the hallway from the library.

The music classroom was a good size for everything that needed to take place in there. After some beginning prep work, we welcomed in our first group of students, roughly grades 4-6. The class of five students had just recently performed in a Veteran's Day program, so the class began by debriefing that performance. After that, they sang a few sight singing exercises

using solfège. Most of the students did well matching pitch, with a few of the men struggling when the notes started to get out of the range of their head voice. After singing through a two-part piece of music, the students packed up began to leave the classroom. A few of the students stayed in the classroom though, as their band class was next.

I had the opportunity to conduct the grades 4-12 band during their warm-ups. For being such a small school, I was impressed at the amount of students involved in the band. Like the class before, this group had just performed in a Veterans Day program, so we spent plenty of time warming up rather than rehearsing actual music. As I conducted the group, Mrs. Wolf walked around and helped to correct the posture of a few students, while also reminding them of articulations and key signatures. As the warm-up progressed, the exercises grew in difficulty. If the younger students didn't know the fingerings or rhythms in these exercises, they were asked to sit out those notes until they learned them in their private lessons. The students handed in their music and read through an easy piece of music, Frosty the Snowman. Observing the students, they all seemed very interested in the music, even the older students as they were rehearsing a piece meant for younger bands. After the band rehearsal ended, grades 1-2 made their way into the music room.

There were three students in the classroom for grades 1-2 music. One student spent his class time on an online music trainer, where he determined if notes were higher or lower than the others. The other two students sang along with a recorded track, with a textbook in hand. The students finished early, so they sang some well-known songs prior to leaving the class. Three kindergarten students entered the classroom next, full of energy! These students worked on the same online music program as the student in the previous class. The students determined if notes sounded higher, lower, or the same as the given note. They also determined the notes on the

piano. The students went directly to recess after the class, which meant that they left with even more energy than they arrived with! Mrs. Wolf then returned to her principal's office and informed me that this is the most important time of the day: the chocolate break! After enjoying a bit of chocolate, Mrs. Wolf returned to the music class and entered grades into PowerSchool before lunch. The high school teachers and students all ate lunch in the same room. We had a choice between white or dark chicken meat, potatoes, gravy, corn, and a salad bar. The meal was fantastic, a home cooked meal with plenty of extra food if we desired!

After lunch, Mrs. Wolf was finished with teaching music for the day. I was able to observe, for a short time, an Earth Science class. The students began a new chapter, studying atmosphere. The teacher explained the content of the chapter found on the first two pages; the students then read aloud the text. She had the students stand up and walk around the class on multiple occasions, using illustrations to show the layers of the atmosphere and radiation. There were four students in this middle school level class. After this, I was able to join Mrs. Wolf again and observe the elementary school physical education class, which combined student's kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade (K-6). The students had a set routine when they arrived in the room. After putting on their gym shoes, the students all stood in one corner of the gym, ready for running around the gym. The students all ran five laps around the gym, then walked three. As they finished this, they sat on certain parts of the floor ready for stretching. Again, there was a set routine for the stretching. Some of the exercises were a bit difficult for the kindergarten students to perform, but they tried their best! The students then split into teams and played a game of kickball.

Next, Mrs. Wolf put on her new hat and entered the school library. She placed books back on the shelves that had been returned over the past few days and put magazines in their

respective slots in the room. The check-out system was done by index card, as Mrs. Wolf is unable to be in the library at all times to do an electronic check-out. Also, since the school in Zeeland may not be around for much longer, Mrs. Wolf does not want to invest a ton of money into something that may only be used for a year or two. After changing out a few bulletin boards in her classroom and the school's hallways, the school day came to a close.

### **Conclusion**

This experience is something that I'll remember for quite some time. As a future teacher, I find it very helpful to visit other classrooms and see how other teachers handle classroom management, run a rehearsal, and work with each of their students. Observing teachers in both an urban and rural setting was very helpful in showing me what I need to do in order to develop my skills as a future educator. With the huge population difference between Chicago, IL and rural North Dakota and Montana, teachers were required to adjust their teaching styles in order to relate to their students.

In an urban setting, the teachers dealt with some very special circumstances. With two of the schools that we visited being either all female or all male, there may have been less distractions to deal with, but it presents its own set of difficulties. In a choral setting, a mixed choir of males and females was not possible. For bands, a proper instrumentation was difficult to achieve, given the instruments played by each person at the school. For the schools that used technology, such as the "Apple-certified school" that we visited, they were quite ahead of the time. Since that tour, I've seen many schools require students to bring their own device, whether it be a Google Chromebook, an iPad, or another electronic device. This presents a new set of challenges, but greatly benefits not only the schools that use them, but the students. Using

technology in an urban school environment is a fabulous way to further the knowledge of the students, but may not be possible for students in a rural school setting.

Being in a rural school district, the teachers wear multiple hats. Mrs. Wolf, the music director in Zeeland, served not only as the music teacher K-12, but also as the elementary and high school principal and librarian. She has to effectively balance each of these jobs, while keeping the best interest of her students in the front of her mind. In music, many of these teachers need to perform in a gymnasium and transport their gear to the facility, or even to a facility across town. The audience for a concert may not be huge in these rural settings, but those that do show up will provide quite a bit of support.

As I begin my student teaching experience, I will look back at the knowledge I have gained through this experience and use some of the techniques in the classroom. Not every technique will work in the classroom, but that will not be known until it is tried. I will now have a basic knowledge of what happens in both an urban and a rural music classroom and use those to my advantage as I apply for music teaching positions in the beginning part of 2017. Even though the populations are different, music still happens in both an urban and a rural environment, and both the teachers and students can share the same passion for making and performing music.

## References

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