

Artifact Analysis

"I've got Ska in my suitcase"

Teaching Social Studies through Music

Brief Description of the Artifact

Domain 1: Knowledge of Students

Domain 1A - Development and Learning

Development is the driving force for intellectual development and the level of a child's development determines the limits of what can be learned as well as the comprehension of the learning that occurs. According to J. Piaget's theory the level of children in grade 5 and 6 includes several ranges. Some are in the onset of the concrete operations stage, while others are in the mature part of this stage. A few children will already be at the onset of the stage of formal operations. During this stage children learn classification and seriation and can manipulate symbols logically. The main activity of the lesson, listening to music samples and then classifying symbols accordingly is aimed at this stage of development.

J. Piaget called the intellectual structures individuals use to adapt to and organize their environment 'schemata'. The process which a person goes through to integrate new knowledge, skills or concepts into the existing schemata is called 'assimilation'. During assimilation only growth of schemata occurs. If an individual has no existing schemata to which a new concept can be added, a new schemata must be created or an existing one must be changed. J. Piaget called this 'accommodation'. Both, assimilation and accommodation are needed to develop intellectual structures. To construct knowledge children need internal motivation which occurs when the balance of assimilation and accommodation is disturbed. J. Piaget calls this a disequilibrium. The purpose of the hook

is to create a disequilibrium. The teacher can create this disequilibrium by presenting something unusual or surprising to the children or present them with an intellectual confrontation that raises questions. In the remaining part of the lesson children can examine the disequilibrium and try to make sense of it. During a phase of explanation assimilation and accommodation is stimulated by the information provided by the teacher. This stimulates the children to either place the new concept into an existing schemata and eventually modify an existing schemata or construct a new one. The assessment is used to check if student learning has occurred and to give children a chance to reach the level of equilibrium again.

Paying attention to multiple intelligences gives students opportunities to develop themselves. School mainly addresses two intelligences: linguistic and mathematical-logical, which are the ones that are valued most in Western culture. Incorporating elements that appeal to interpersonal (group work), spatial (sorting visuals and placing them on a map), and musical intelligences (use of music samples) engages the students who are more talented in these areas.

Domain 1B - Sociocultural Factors

The topic of this lesson is inoffensive. One of the reasons to pick "Ska music" as a topic was, that most likely no students will be part of this subculture and therefore stigmatization can be avoided. It is a neutral topic that can be used to teach an introduction to subcultures. In the Washoe County School District many schools have a high percentage of English language learners. When I planed the lesson and created the worksheets I did keep in mind that some students may not have language skills that meet the standards and made sure that I included enough visuals. The visuals give those with less language skills more opportunity to understand the instructions. Because students may come from lower socioeconomic status I refrained from asking them to contribute

materials that would be needed for this class. I remembered this from my own school experience. Teachers regularly asked us to bring material and were not aware that for some children it would be difficult to even find an empty shoe cartoon, or an old t-shirt, etc.

As students are most likely not familiar with the lesson topic it is not possible to let them learn independent completely. To ensure that the students understand the connection between Ska music in different countries and also realize how music travels today the teacher must provide verbal instruction and give information.

Domain 2: Knowledge of Subject Matter and Planning

Domain 2A - Goals and Standards and lesson sequence

The three learning objectives of this lesson were to determine the factors which contributed to the development of ska, understand how the development of technologies contributed to the spread of Ska music and to understand what a subculture is and that a subculture can have its own style of dress, music and dance. These learning objectives are in contrast to presenting only factual knowledge to students, like dates and names of important musicians. The students are required to compare different music samples, and examine their historical context. Students may mentally form their own hypothesis and then compare them with the information given by the teacher. They will then analyze what a subculture is and deduce that nowadays many subcultures exist which can be identified by style of dress, music and dance.

Domain 2B - Content Knowledge

Ska music happens to be one of my favorite music styles. I knew that it had originated in Jamaica and that musicians brought it to the United Kingdom from where it spread to many different countries. Also, I had known that during the 1950's Rhythm & Blues as well as Jazz were immensely popular on the island. It was radio technology that

had brought this music to Jamaica and contributed to the development of ska. I did know the names of many important Ska musicians but when I prepared the lesson I realized that I didn't know a lot of details. There are a few good websites that give good overviews and sufficient information about the development of ska. During the research I learned that the traditional music of Jamaica was called "Mento" and also learned more about the culture of 'rude boys'. Another interesting fact that I wasn't aware of before is that the Ska bands in the United Kingdom wanted to promote racial unity. They did this because a change in immigration rules had caused racial tensions. The ska bands started to use the colors black and white to enforce their message. I did know that Ska music had some popularity in Japan but out of curiosity decided to research other music. To my own surprise I found a whole range of modern Ska bands in the United States and Mexico. Taking into account that a lot of students have a South-American background it was nice to know that there is also some music that those students could connect to.

2C - Instructional Strategies

The instructional strategies I chose were small group-work and direct instruction. Previously I mentioned that most likely student will have little background knowledge about the topic. To yield better results from the activity I decided to do group-work instead of an individual activity. This gives students a chance to discuss with each other and it also puts an emphasis on learning, whereas individual work could feel like a test of what students already know. The group-work also provides a good opportunity for cooperative learning. The main reason for choosing direct instruction was the time constraint. When I planned the lesson I noticed that this topic was rather suitable for an extended lesson series and then had difficulties to formulate a condensed lesson.

Domain 3: Delivery and Management of Instruction

Domain 3A - Content, Concepts and Communication

After I taught the lesson there were two students who commented that they really liked the lesson because the idea of using music and linking it to geography was unusual. In one of the previous lectures we had learned about South-America and different countries and this provided the link to prior knowledge. In a real life situation I would also mention the United Kingdom because this country has most likely be addressed in the history lessons. It could be pointed out that Jamaica was once a colony of Great Britain and how many former colonies continue to have some connection with the former colonial power.

During the lesson I tried to use open ended question like "Why do you think?" but afterward I realized that I too often had posed suggestive questions like "Don't you think this is....?" I came to realize this when I reflected on the lesson and couldn't remember good student answers.

Domain 3B - Manages, Materials, Learning Environment and Children

When I taught this lesson I tried to create an atmosphere that would make all students feel welcome and encourage them to participate without having the feeling that they were judged for giving 'correct' or 'wrong' answers. Before I started the lesson I waited until I had everyone's attention and then presented them with the hook. When I asked the students "What can travel?" it was interesting to observe how giving them time to come up with answers and not label them as right or wrong eventually yielded the desired answer I needed to continue into the main part of the lesson. The time management of this lesson turned out to be

more challenging because the main activity and whole-group brainstorm that followed it up took much longer than I had anticipated. After I had completed my direct instruction part to provide students with background information I had little time left to round the lesson up and had to cut it short.

The management of student behavior was of course no issue during this teaching session. However, there was one situation in the beginning of class, that could also occur with elementary students. I had handed out the materials and many students were absorbed with examining the pictures instead of paying attention to me. What works very well here, is the technique of pausing and silently look at different students. It will quickly be conveyed that I wait for students to be ready and they will correct each other's behavior.

Domain 3C - Monitors and Adapts Instruction

I didn't adapt the lesson plan during the lesson consciously. As I ran out of time I had to cut the last part of the lesson short and wasn't able to hold the classroom discussion the way I had planned it. I also wasn't able to sufficiently teach the objective of the subcultures, as I could only mention this at the end. Naturally this wasn't my intention and I wasn't satisfied with that part. My intention was to check on students if they had understood the main objectives at the end of the lesson.

Domain 5 - Professionalism

Domain 5A - Professional Qualities and Relationships

In order to be professional and deliver a good lesson I started brainstorming and thinking about the topic well in advance. At first I had chosen a more

common topic which would have allowed me to adapt an existing lesson plan. Later on I thought that for my own professional development it would be better to chose a topic that entices me and then create a lesson from scratch. This resulted in more work but as a professional teacher I am also aware that students usually enjoy topics that are a bit out of the ordinary. In Germany and Holland, where I went to school and studied professors are not very available and it is unthinkable to consult someone for advice on an assignment that will be graded. It has taken me a long time to adjust to the different culture in the U.S. but with this assignment I was able to get over this culturally ingrained student behavior of not consulting a professor and saw the professor to get feedback on the draft of my lesson plan.

I did take this feedback into account when I prepared my lesson. Even though I was teaching this lesson to my fellow students I made an effort to plan it well and made sure I had my materials ready before class and had gone through the lesson plan again the previous night. I took this teaching session as serious as if it had been a real class in an elementary school.

Domain 5B - Ethical Conduct and Commitment to Students

The content of the lesson was inoffensive and I didn't think that I had to explicitly be sensitive to cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, religion, etc.

Domain 5C - Reflective Practice

Reflecting on this lesson helped me to detect its flaws and think of what I would have to adjust to make this a more effective lesson in the real classroom. I do think that walking away from a lesson without looking back and reflecting on it is a missed opportunity. For a real grade 5/6 I would spread the lesson plan over two lessons. This way I

would be able to eliminate the direct instruction and provide each groups with written information instead. I would then use whole-group instruction to compile the visual together, which the students first had assembled in their groups. Also, a second lesson would allow me to go more in-depth about the subcultures and what defines a subculture. This would help students to better understand the objectives and also to complete their assignment. The way the lesson was taught I couldn't expect a 5/6th grader to complete the homework assignment on a satisfactory level.

Planning, delivering and reflecting on this lesson has certainly helped me to become more competent with regards to teaching Social Studies. Although I very much enjoy to read about anything that is related to Social Studies, teaching it is a very different matter. This assignment was helpful to learn how to organize content, link it to objectives and also how to simplify content so it can be taught to a certain age group. At first I didn't think the topic would work out for a lesson, but as I proceeded I learned that even an unusual topic can be used for teaching. I found this experience in particularly rewarding because from my teaching experience I know that teachers tend to avoid unusual content. Teachers often avoid it because they think a class is not ready for it, that it will become too loud or chaotic or that it will not appeal to the students. By choosing a topic out of the ordinary it provided me with a learning experience that will encourage me to do something similar once I can teach again.