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Professional Conference Report

On September 21, 2013, I attended the String Day Conference at Niguel Hills Middle School. The first workshop I attended was taught by Glen Kamida from Torrance Unified. He gave a presentation on teaching ukulele in an elementary general music setting. He mentioned that there are benefits to teaching ukulele, including their low cost, their ability to play well, and the fact that the kids love it. In his own classroom, he gives the students the music, and they are able to learn the musical language through repetition. He also mentioned that he was able to promote his program through word of mouth.

Mr. Kamida has created his own curriculum for teaching ukuleles. He utilizes a book that consists of three chords, which enables the students to be able to play music by the Beach Boys and holiday songs. He also mentioned that it is easy to find kids who can sing in the classroom and sing along to the ukulele playing. In addition, he mentioned that ukuleles are great for special needs students. I asked him how he approaches teaching ukulele to beginners. He said he first teaches them the basic parts, and then he assigns the strings a number. He will call out the string number and then the fret number. He will teach them C, F, and G7 chords to begin. He also emphasized that engages his students in a great deal of review/preview. If anything becomes hard for the students, it becomes obvious to him that he has not adequately prepared his students.

The second workshop I attended was entitled “Teaching Low Orchestral Strings.” I had the opportunity to play the cello in this workshop. Sarah Jay from Concordia University taught us proper bow grip, bowing, and playing technique when playing the cello. I also learned that you can get students to bow correctly by rubber banding a toilet paper cardboard roll to the bridge and having them bow inside the roll to ensure they are bowing parallel and straight.

The final workshop I attended was entitled “Ensemble Preparation and Literature Selection for Bands.” Nancy Robinson taught the workshop. She mentioned that there are several considerations necessary to take when choosing literature, including: range (for brass especially), arrangement, instrumentation (no more than two clarinet or trumpet parts), soli sections, doubling in parts, percussion demands, ensure students will enjoy the music, how many percussionists will be needed, and length (keep it to ten minutes). She also emphasized that it is important to keep a balanced program, the ballad should be a grade level down from where the ensemble usually plays, and be careful with pieces in ¾ time signature.

In regards to festival preparation, she encouraged designing lesson plans by using a judging sheet. An educator should begin sight reading festival material right after the holiday concert and by February 1st, you should begin narrowing into smaller details. In her opinion, it takes at least six weeks to prepare a group. Two weeks before the festival, an educator should focus on: transitions, practicing them everyday, and going over sight-reading procedures. She encouraged beginning with the strongest piece first. She mentioned that as an educator I should know my students. Other suggestions she made included: having a checklist for your percussion section, rehearsing in another room, and standing in the back to gain a different perspective.

This conference proved to be very education and beneficial to my preparations as a future music educator. Much of what was presented in this conference I have learned through my methods course at school, but this knowledge has been reinforced through this conference. I was also able to network with some other educators and was given many suggestions to better prepare as an aspiring educator. They emphasized to me the importance of networking and finding those resources that can assist me in being successful in my first year of teaching.