



CUT TIMES

A MUSIC EDUCATION EDITORIAL

BY I SEE YOU FAMILY MEDIA

EDITORIAL · PAPER NO. 1

Where It All Began

The most important shift I needed to teach effectively

BY DANIEL JAMES FELTON

Cut Times Senior Writer

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It was November 2nd, the year was 2015. I was in Cadiz, Spain at Sotogrande International School teaching and beginning my career from my student teaching and practicum time. While the glamour of taking in the international teaching experience was incredible, I knew the task ahead of me was a great one — as the Black American and music instructor, I had to come with it. Usually with the stigma of being a Black musician is a stereotypical approach to think we're either about hip-hop or jazz. Working alongside Kerry Wickersham, affectionately known as Kez Wix, was the coolest and most laid back music instructor I had ever experienced in my career, and one whose presence would change everything I thought I knew about the profession of music education.

It was after morning break, the class came in, this time the instrumentation was very different from the traditional classroom I was used to. One student on guitar, another on bass, another on set, another on keys and the main student grabbed the mic and the teacher counted them off because it was their time to prepare for the Sotorox concert; a signature Rock Concert put on every few years showcasing primary and secondary music students with their favorite songs, arrangements, lights, choreography — let me tell you, a show for sure. The drummer clicks off and begins the song called Clint Eastwood by Gorillaz and I hear it being practiced in the background while I chop it up with Kez. Mr. Wix sits across from me at his desk while we talk about my plan, I had an incredible music theory lesson in my bag ready to roll that I told him about, I prepared the ice breaker, the engagement for prior learning, utilized multiple modalities for different styled learners in the classroom, and put together a bomb lesson plan and assessment strategy. Kez looked at the lesson plan for 2.5 seconds, said, “let me see that real quick,” he then grabbed the packet. The grin on my face faded faster than the shadow of a Tesla at a green light when he looked at, didn't even read it, ripped it up, and threw it in the trash and said, “this is rubbish.”

My jaw was floored as I looked at that lesson plan in pieces in the trash because now I'm confused, "Yo, what was that? I spent hours on it," I stated as I walked towards the trash, the lesson plan was gone. Kez walked over to me, said, "Daniel that lesson plan was rubbish, nothing on there will help these kids prepare for their show. Yes, maybe some theory here and some pedagogy there, but can you honestly say the lesson plan would prepare them for a concert?" I nodded as I realized he was cooking. He said, "We are educators but we are musicians first, what can you teach to prepare these kids for this show?" He turns my shoulders to the students with their instruments and asks, "Watch this practice, what do you see from the chemistry of the group? What do you notice about the performer singing? Is this ready? What do they need to do better? Now TEACH!" It clicked, I truly realized as an educator how important it was that I taught lessons that were appropriate for the group, of course, but also considered the lens and perspective by which I instructed. It was my first of many lessons I would learn out of my experience, is the lens of a musician educator. It would be the perspective by which I grew in my time teaching in South Minneapolis with great mentors like Dr. Davis and Dr. Diaz and others, it would be the way I understood how to approach growing programs, and established the very framework my career stood on.

"We are educators but we are musicians first, what can you teach to prepare these kids for this show?"

— Kerry Wickersham (Kez Wix) · Sotogrande International School, 2015

Kez was a genius, in every aspect from the moment we met, to the ripping of the lesson plan, to every performance, lunchtime jam session, and interaction I would have with him over the years. The strategy of incorporating all styles of music at this international Baccalaureate school called Sotogrande International School was a walking demonstration of what Ladson-Billings envisioned as culturally relevant pedagogy by the way that every song, lesson, historical context, and cultural significance was masterfully broken down for each primary and secondary student to be exposed to within the music curriculum (1995). For a school to have representation from over 130 different countries, and have music, lessons, and pedagogy centered around this context was truly magical. The campus, the pool, the food, the way each building represented the levels of instruction and flowed well from early childhood to high school was incredible.

The reason why this moment was significant in my career was due to what made me present the way I did to even have written the lesson plan I did. A simple theory 1 level lesson with activities, ear training, and tonal intervals was my way in the door. I knew in time, we would have gotten to some tougher content; I was engaging in prior learning and in this process of thoughts failed to realize they had a very solid foundation with Kez. The way his classroom was created was the framework similar to *Remixing the Classroom* by Randall Allsup where he describes laboratory style teaching which is a very exploratory student centered and responsive classroom environment. I'm all for this because in my head, this is how a music classroom should be, but wasn't at that time. What can I do to change it?

This brings me to my issue of why I prepared the lesson the way I did. Randall Allsup describes a more traditional approach to teaching with a master-apprentice model for how lessons are to be taught, methodologies are to be studied, and techniques are to be mastered (Allsup, 2016). This was a very rigid and traditional model that is common amongst many institutions and amongst apprentices, is unfavorably known as, “my way or my way.” The issue with master-apprentice model instruction is the lack of relevancy across cultures, classrooms, musical genre styles, and lacks in the fundamentals of differentiated instruction for different learners altogether. My ripped apart lesson plan in the trash was evident of a very hegemonic and Western style traditional model of teaching that was not going to be culturally responsive to the very cultured students I was instructing at this international Baccalaureate school. As a Black man, the thought of not being culturally responsive was laughable to me, and yet, I had to check my very approach to my lessons, style, and methodology of how I wanted to instruct. In that very moment, I had to consider if I was going to be a museum style Western instructor from America that viewed learning as master-apprentice in the form of I know this information and you need to be informed of this, or laboratory style which is student centered, collaborative, instructing, modeling, and guiding towards great understanding of specific types of tasks and content. I had to ask myself if I simply wanted to instruct music or if I desired to be a musician educator, and I chose that day.

This is my journey!

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— Daniel James Felton

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Daniel James Felton

CUT TIMES SENIOR WRITER

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