

2015-2016 Community Engagement Fellows
Project Report
Patrick Roulet

Project Overview: Group Percussion Lessons at Fairhaven Middle School

My project connected four percussion performance majors from Western Washington University to two groups of percussion students at Fairhaven Middle School. The project was enthusiastically supported by Morgan Schwab, the band and orchestra director for Fairhaven Middle School.

The WWU students were enrolled in Applied Music Pedagogy, a two-credit course that is a requirement for the Bachelor's degree in Music Performance. The course met over two quarters: winter and spring 2016. During winter quarter, the students and I met weekly to discuss concepts and materials for percussion pedagogy. During spring quarter, the students went to Fairhaven middle school during the school day to coach and teach the 6th and 7th grade middle school percussion students.

Project Details

Scheduling: Fairhaven Middle School's schedule presented a challenge since the daily schedule of "A" and "B" days rotated from week to week with changes to the schedule for occasional early release days. I worked out a schedule that would allow the WWU students to meet with the Fairhaven students 6 times during the quarter. Two WWU students met with the 7th grade band percussionists and two students met with the 6th grade band students.

Scheduling the meetings during the school day presented a problem for the WWU students since it required them to leave campus in the middle of day. They were unable to park close to the WWU Performing Arts Center and were late returning for their afternoon rehearsals. The initial schedule had to be changed when the ensemble director insisted that the students not be late for rehearsal. Changing the schedule resulted in miscommunication and confusion about the Fairhaven schedule and several scheduled meeting times were missed.

The students suggested that an afterschool program would be easier since it would not be tied to the rotating "A" and "B" day schedule and would be more convenient for the WWU students to travel to Fairhaven later in the day.

Documentation: The WWU students kept a journal of each of their interactions with the Fairhaven students. The journal was shared with me through either email or a shared document on Google drive. The journal gave me an opportunity to track what the weekly activities and provide feedback to the students.

The students suggested that for future projects, the journals should be posted as a discussion board on Canvas in order to facilitate more timely feedback from me and to allow for students to offer comments and suggestions to each other. They also suggested that it would have been helpful to meet as a group regularly throughout the quarter to discuss the progress of the classes.

Project Reflection

From Morgan Schwab, Fairhaven Middle School Band and Orchestra Director”

“Fantastic! The kids feel so special to have that extra attention.”

The WWU students found the project to be a positive learning experience. The following highlights are taken from our final reflection of the project. The WWU students:

- Learned to communicate and explain concepts so that 7th graders can understand. The material had to be presented in a way that could be easily understood without sounding condescending.
- Found it helpful to teach in pairs since they could support each other. Having two teachers allowed one of them to work individually with a student while the other teacher kept the entire group engaged.
- Learned to manage a group of 6th and 7th graders and keep them engaged during the class period.
- Learned the importance of being flexible and to be able to adjust quickly from the planned activities in order to provide what the students needed on a given day.
- Observed improvement in the percussionist’s skills from the beginning to the end of the project.

Suggestions for future projects

The following challenges were shared by the WWU students from our final reflection of the project.

- The length of meeting time seemed short. A longer chunk of time would have been better.
- A group meeting and discussion with the band/orchestra director would have been helpful for the WWU students in order to better understand the needs of the students and expectations of the director before they started teaching.
- The WWU student’s believed that an afterschool lesson program would be preferable to a program that happened during the day.