

Music Education Guest Reflection

Dr. Jim Karas

Today, our class had the opportunity to hear a talk given by Dr. Jim Karas. Dr. Karas is a well-accomplished individual in the music education field. His talk was engaging, informative and provided us with an insight into possible techniques to teach an elementary school classroom. Karas pretended we were his students and took us through lessons on tonality and rhythm.

His first lesson focused on tonality. Karas sang a variety of melodies on the word “ba”. The melodies only contained tonic and dominant tones. Then he asked us to sing the melodies back to him. He cued us when to sing it back to him which caused us to focus on him. He believes this is a great way to instill the need to constantly pay attention to the conductor in your students. After doing this, he introduced solfege to us and repeated the melodies except this time on the correct solfege. Following this, he pointed to certain individuals and got them to improvise their own melodies using only tonic and dominant tones. Karas’ followed a similar format for his second lesson. However this lesson focused on rhythm. Karas demonstrated a variety of rhythms and emphasized us being able to feel the steady pulse. He counted out rhythms using words. He used the word “doo” for downbeats and “day” for all of the upbeats. Then he got us to say the rhythms back to him. Finally, he got students to create their own rhythms using down and up beats.

When reflecting on Karas’ techniques, I really liked that he slowly introduced new concepts and always built on existing knowledge. I feel that this way the student is not overwhelmed and can easily manage the new concepts they are learning. They also may not even realize that they are learning. Karas’ techniques also focus on retention. He kept repeating different melodies until they stuck in our heads and we felt that we had memorized the new concepts. Additionally, his technique was very engaging. The melodies were constantly changing which kept us on our toes. Also, I never took my eyes off of him because I didn’t want to miss his cue to come in. His technique also incorporated various learning styles. He captured the auditory learners through the sounds and melodies, the visual learners through his gestures and the kinesthetic learners through standing up and moving our bodies to keep track of the beat. Finally, I also liked that Karas remained calm and polite the entire time. If he pointed to a student and they did not understand what he was trying to communicate, he did not raise his voice or become frustrated. Instead, he politely corrected them and asked for what he wanted in different words to try to get the student to understand. This skill is definitely something a lot of teachers struggle with.

To conclude, Karas provided us with interesting techniques to teach elementary school kids. These techniques were easy to comprehend, built on existing knowledge, were engaging and applied to a variety of learning styles. His presentation made me realize that there are several ways of teaching music and there is not a “right” way to do so. I think the most important thing is to make sure your students are engaged and are retaining what you are teaching.

