In order to touch upon more of the national standards during student teaching, I’ve been incorporating more recordings, singing, history, and culture into my lessons over the past couple weeks (InTASC standards 7, 8). Something I’ve noticed is that students at different ages tend to respond very differently to each of these teaching strategies. The sixth grade string class didn’t like singing at first, but I’ve been playing recordings by the string trio Time for 3 of pop tunes they recognize to get them excited at the beginning of class as they walk in (standard 3). Then, when we start working on songs in their book I have them sing their pitches and do their fingerings while I sing the lyrics (standard 5). Afterwards, I take a quick poll of how many of the students know the tune and then we sing the lyrics. This strategy has worked really well for the 6th grade strings class, and similarly for the 6th grade woodwinds. However, the 7th/8th grade orchestra class is not as receptive.

On Monday this week I was working on a piece titled “Light the Candles!” which features original melodies inspired by Klezmer and Jewish musical traditions. To help students connect with the piece I thought I would play a recording of Daniel Hoffman playing energetic Klezmer music on violin as the students walked in and discuss the genre and history with the class. We then picked some of the rhythms in that recording, counted them, and applied them to our scale warm-up. After that we moved to the piece, discussed the programmer’s notes and the history of Hanukkah, and tried to find similar Klezmer elements in the piece. I had several kids tune me out or say that the subject matter was boring despite trying to get these students engaged musically in a variety of ways. I thought it would be interesting to have a fellow teacher in the building bring his dreidel to the classroom for the students and talk about his heritage, which might help get them more excited about the culture and the piece. It might also be beneficial to deliver historical and cultural information in formats that are lesson lecture or discussion based, because the 7th/8th students don’t seem to enjoy it as much as the younger students (standards 2, 4, and 5).

A common theme I’ve seen in all of my classes are student not coming to class prepared with their instruments and materials. In the 6th grade woodwind class the clarinets and saxophones are always prepared and excited. However, the flutes rarely turn in practice cards, say they can’t play because they have a cold (and then claim to have “forgotten” their instrument at home), and still don’t know their notes and fingerings despite multiple flashcard assignments, review days, and audiation activities (including singing, playing, echoing, and echo-translating). Despite this, I still try to keep the flute students engaged. For example, we were working on eighth notes and songs featuring eighths, but I noticed that the clarinets and saxes weren’t matching articulation or note length. I had each section play, and then asked the flutes to tell me what they heard and how they could improve. We determined that the clarinets had the best note length, but the saxophones had the clearest articulation. Even though the flutes aren’t at the same level as the rest of the woodwinds in that class, I still try to keep them engaged and motivate them to be musical even if they are struggling on their instruments. While playing recordings, singing and playing frequently, and talking about music in a variety of ways helps keep kids engaged and interest, I think holding the flutes accountable through playing tests or exit slips (a review of what they’ve learned that day) might help motivate them to practice. Also, random in-class checks (such as book checks or pencil checks) or rewards for being prepared might also help. This is something I will have to discuss with my C.T. to see if we can promote responsibility and ownership in the classroom (standards 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10).