Structure: Inside-Outside Circle

Date: Tuesday, November 2, 2011

Setting:
I chose to do the *Inside–Outside Circle* activity with my 45 member Treble Choir. We have been studying how to name key signatures in treble clef. We’ve repeated the procedure many times in class and I wanted to make sure everyone would have an opportunity to practice the process through a drill. I actually use this structure quite often because the students enjoy both the interaction with each other and the peer coaching it provides. There is usually far less intimidation working with a fellow-classmate than being drilled by the teacher.

Implementation:
I planned a two-tiered process where the students would first practice note reading in treble clef which is necessary for key reading followed by a switch in cards for the actual key naming exercise once the first “review” was complete. I started the activity by having the students move into a value line based on a statement such as: “Form a line based on how easy it is for you to read notes on the treble staff. If you find it easy, move closest to the east door and if you are really confused stand closest to the west door. If you believe you are somewhere in between find a spot in the middle to form your line.” I then counted the line, splitting it into two equal halves with the first half forming the inside circle and the last half forming the outside circle. My reasoning for creating the value line was that I wanted the inside circle students to be able to help the outside circle students, rather than possibly matching up partners who wouldn’t be able to help each other at all. Each student selected a prepared flashcard of a note on a treble clef staff. All the notes of the staff on, above and below were included. There were duplicates so that all could have a card. Each student was directed to be “master of her own card.” Each was to be able to explain how to find the correct answer. The students were given time to figure out their cards. I went around to “put out some fires” with kids that I knew would have difficulty with even this basic task. Then the inside circle faced and partnered with the outside circle and the activity began. I walked around the circle and helped those who had any difficulty. I signaled the outside circle students to move two people to the right. The move by twos was done to help insure that the person right next to the other didn’t simply listen in for the answer.

Outcomes:
After several turns, I realized that this basic (prep) activity would become the focus for the day! Many of the girls were having difficulty with this basic knowledge level task. There was no way we’d get to the process task of key signatures in the same class period. Further, I heard coaching from both circles depending on which cards the students had selected. Notes above and below the staff still gave several girls some trouble. I suspect that had I asked them to reevaluate themselves in the value line once we had gone around a couple of times, the circle membership might have changed. Still the exercise was very valuable and will lead me to do a quick class review of ledger line note names before we move on to the next tier of key signature naming.