

MUS 775

Discussion 10

Jim Novak

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In this final discussion, please talk again about your thoughts on the psychology of music education. Be sure to keep the topic to how the brain learns and how your classroom instruction is evolving with your new knowledge of all of the theories you have learned about this semester.

The theories we learned about this year have helped me define my student's abilities and progression through stages. I had not specified a stage-by-stage development for my students because I did not know such a thing existed. It is interesting to utilize these theories with how the brain learns to make my lesson plans – for both ensembles and individuals – more organized and effective.

As I mentioned earlier, I felt I had the most to learn about audiation. In preparation for the final paper, I found research articles that specifically addressed how the brain learns audiation using practical applications. The remainder of this discussion includes the various exercises I plan to incorporate into my teaching moving forward.

Before I get started on the techniques, my research pointed to the vital importance of something all teachers know, but sometimes forget to address. Good playing posture both in rehearsals and lessons should be considered from head to toe – relaxed but engaged, solid but not tense or limp. Teachers need their students to envision “a natural flow of energy coming from the grounded position of the feet through the backs of the legs and torso to the upper-body weight to produce a full, round tone” (Maerker Garner, 2009).

MLT – Audiation

Perhaps the most important aspect lacking in my current lesson plans is singing. Gordon and Kodaly were firm believers that singing should not only supplement, but also come before, instrumental instruction (Liperote, 2006). Established musicians agree that sight-singing, the ability to sing music that is seen but only heard mentally, is a valuable skill for singers and instrumentalists alike (Hiatt & Cross, 2006). Dalby believes that the “goal is to play the instrument as an extension of the mind's inner audiation instrument.” (1999) Singing is the perfect way to develop that skill, as it improves melodic and harmonic intonation as well as phrasing. Through singing, students will also discover the flow of breath necessary to produce a

good tone and/or to reach a particular pitch, and feel the distances between the intervals, such as the stretch for a high note or reach for a low one (Maerker Garner, 2009).

A simple way to include audiation in my rehearsals is to play a phrase or chord at the piano, have the students sing it, and then have them play it on their instruments. Following this easy three-step process, intonation can be significantly improved (Dalby, 1999). Gordon called this a “continual reciprocal aural-oral process” as he too emphasized the importance of repeated listening to, then singing and chanting tonal and rhythmic patterns (Hiatt & Cross 2006).

Another easy idea to address audiation is the addition of scales and arpeggios to rehearsals. Hiatt and Cross posit that, in addition to being essential technical exercises, scales and arpeggios also help introduce audiation (2006). I will add these to my piece-specific study guides as a way to warm up as well as introduce the key(s) in which the pieces are written.

MLT – Tonal Learning Sequence

First is the importance of establishing tonality prior to beginning a piece, at modulation points, and the conclusion of a piece to assist students track tonality throughout the piece (Dalby, 1999). Liperote suggests teaching a rote song and bass line since students can use that to think about and develop their audiation skills – both in their minds and the mechanics of playing their instruments (2006). Dalby asserts that the bass part is critical to understanding harmony and suggests the following exercise: teach students to sing the bass line, students play the bass line, create a duet by splitting the group in two – half signing or playing the melody and the other half singing or playing the bass line (1999).

Liperote suggests the following procedure to help students develop a tonal pattern vocabulary: (2006)

1. Choose 2- to 5-note tonal patterns that match those in the music students will be rehearsing on their instruments.
2. As with teaching rote songs, establish a context (tonality) with the voice or a harmonic instrument (e.g., I-V7-I harmonic progression).
3. Sing patterns on a neutral syllable (e.g., *bum*), separating notes within the patterns. Students should experience the flow of each tonal pattern to understand its content (e.g., tonic) rather than focus on individual notes.
4. Point to yourself to indicate it is the teacher’s turn to sing. While singing the pattern, move your hands and arms out in front of your body as if preparing to cue (your hands should be outstretched with elbows slightly bent by the time you complete the last note of a pattern.) Then, “tap” the air (as if lightly tapping the top of a pool of water) as a gesture for students to breathe and echo your pattern. Immediately point to yourself

again to prepare students to hear the performance of your next pattern. (This should look less deliberate than a conducting gesture for a downbeat).

5. Call on individuals as well as the entire group to echo the pattern. For individual performances, gesture to the selected student at the last moment. This keeps everyone interested, attending, and ready to echo the pattern.
6. Begin with tonic and dominant functions in major and minor tonalities because they're most recognizable, and therefore, most familiar and accessible. As students' skills increase, progress to new, more complex patterns. This also increases students' sight-reading skills and their understanding of harmonic progression.
7. When most students are able to sing the patterns with a neutral syllable, teach the same patterns using tonal syllables. Use movable *do* and *la*-based minor so students can associate different labels with different sounds; that is, how the resting tone changes with differences in tonality.
8. Teach a sequence of patterns in an order that becomes familiar to students, just as in language children learn a familiar order of words to describe objects or people. Once the majority of students are able to perform tonal patterns in a familiar order, sing them in an unfamiliar order. This will help students recognize patterns in unfamiliar contexts, such as a new piece of music.
9. Remember to engage the entire class, including percussionists, in tonal-pattern (and rote-song) instruction. Percussionists should understand the tonal content of any given piece as much as the rhythm content.

MLT – Rhythm Learning Sequence

I plan to incorporate Liperote's suggestion for developing a rhythm pattern vocabulary: (2006)

1. Select rhythm patterns that match those found in the music students will be rehearsing on their instruments. Start with four-macrobeat patterns.
2. Establish a rhythmic context (meter and tempo) by asking students to join you in tapping their heels on the floor to feel the large beat (macrobeat) and tapping their hands on their thighs to feel the small beat (microbeat). Some teachers may prefer having students tap two fingers of one hand in the palm of the other to represent the microbeat.
3. Chant each of the patterns with a neutral syllable (e.g., *bah*) while maintaining a consistent tempo using expressive vocal inflection. (Vocal inflection helps students differentiate between patterns, retain rhythms within patterns, and avoid pure imitation.)
4. In duple meter, continue tapping macrobeats with the heels throughout the patterns. On the third macrobeat of the pattern, stop tapping microbeats on the thighs and move

your hands out in front to prepare for a breathing gesture on the fourth beat. (Students should continue tapping the microbeats.) On the very next macrobeat (downbeat), cue in the whole group or an individual. If calling on an individual, try not to communicate who that individual is going to be until just before the downbeat. Keep all students on task and ready to echo while you assess student performances.

5. When most students are able to chant the patterns with a neutral syllable, teach the same patterns with rhythm syllables. Rhythm syllables, like tonal syllables, provide a strong link between rhythms and meters that the students have been chanting and the performance of those patterns on their instrument. The specific syllables you use are not as important as choosing syllables based on beat function; that is, syllables consistent with the way the rhythms feel, regardless of how they appear in notation.
6. Start with rhythm patterns that contain macrobeats and microbeats in duple and triple meters because they are most common and familiar to children. Chant patterns in familiar and unfamiliar orders.

Social Constructivism - Dewey

Dewey believed students learn best when working together. As my enrollment continues to grow, I am considering the implementation of a “band buddy” program. If one-on-one lessons become impossible due to increased enrollment, I plan to partner small groups of students to engage in their own lessons, which would afford them the opportunity to collaborate, hold each other accountable, and work through problems together.

References

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