

MUS 775

Discussion 9

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Now that you have provided a review of your understanding of the various theories of educational psychology and how they might look in a music classroom, I would like you to consider your own classroom(s) and how you teach. Some of you teach several subjects and some teach only one and/or lessons. I would like you to analyze your own teaching style in the realm of the various theories. Talk about what you have learned that may or may not influence how you teach - and perhaps how your students learn at various ages/levels.

As director of bands at Harrisburg South Middle School, my job consists of directing 6th grade band, combined 7th and 8th grade band, jazz band, and instructing students individually in once per week lessons. I utilize several components of Music Learning Theory in my instruction.

Music Learning Theory

I like Gordon's idea of comparing music to learning a language. By middle school, most of my students have been participating in music for at least five years – general music every year from kindergarten on as well as one year of band instruction, so a lot of the introductory/basics of MLT have already been taught to my students.

Prior to this course, I had never heard of audiation. The concept was never introduced in my formal education, even during my undergraduate degree. I was taught notes and rhythms, then dynamics and articulation, then phrase shaping, and somewhere in that process I began audiating. I would guess that most of us who went to school in the 20th century went through a similar process. Consequentially, I am eager to add audiation learning techniques into my lesson plans.

The second core part of MLT is sequence of learning, which is divided into Discrimination Learning and Inference Learning. I use components of each of these for my students.

The five levels of Discrimination Learning from most basic to most advanced are: Aural/Oral, Verbal Association, Partial Synthesis, Symbolic Association, and Composite Synthesis (Gordon, 2012). At the Aural/Oral level, which includes listening, imitation, and developing audiation skills, I play a recording of the new piece to my students, both to give them a sense of the larger work and to excite/motivate them to want to play it. In individual lessons, I implement imitation

for students struggling to find pitch or play a rhythm by playing it myself. This is always followed by an explanation of what was being performed inaccurately and how they might approach it differently.

The Verbal Association level adds meaning through tonal and rhythm solfege. At the fifth-grade level, students have already moved past solfege on to associating letter names with fingerings. They have also moved from rhythmic thinking in terms of ta's and ti-ti's to a traditional numeric counting system. I expand upon that knowledge both in terms of more advanced range and chromatic pitches and more intricate rhythms.

At the Partial Synthesis level, tonal patterns and rhythm patterns are incorporated into a series. I plan to address this level by carefully choosing concert literature that presents tonal and rhythmic patterns appropriate for the ability level of my ensembles. I will introduce this by creating study guides so that every student, regardless of what instrument they play, could learn and perform the tonal and rhythm patterns. Ideally, this should help the ensemble identify those key patterns in the actual pieces.

The Symbolic Association level includes adding reading and writing notation. In elementary school, the students associate music symbols through written notation and by mechanically learning to play their instruments. At the middle school level, we build on those skills through more advanced performance concepts, such as articulation, dynamics, and rhythm complexity.

The Composite Synthesis level occurs when students audiate tonality or meter while reading and writing patterns. This stage can happen at any rehearsal but occurs most often once the students have gained a fundamental mastery of their individual parts and have a greater comfort with a piece in general. At that point, they have more flexibility in their musicianship, and can play collaboratively with a greater expression and sensitivity.

In Inference Learning, students are not rote learning, but are instead applying the information they acquired in Discrimination Learning to identify, create, and improvise new patterns. Honestly, my focus with the ensembles I have, particularly since I only see them once a week this year, lies heavily in the realm of Discrimination Learning. I simply do not have the time to introduce these higher-level concepts and quite frankly only a small portion of my students would be developed sufficiently to be receptive. However, I do my best to lay the groundwork so that they can accomplish these skills in their continued study of music into high school and beyond.

I value the opportunity to see my students individually, because then, for those who are ready, I can introduce them to higher-level concepts. As an example, I am currently preparing a student for her spring solo who quickly progressed through all 5 of the Discrimination Learning stages and is moving into Interference Learning. Now, following her mastery of the solo from a technical standpoint, she is identifying phrases herself and creating moments of rubato that suit those musical phrases.

Other components of MLT include Tonal Learning Sequence, Rhythm Learning Sequence, Pattern Learning Sequence, and Whole/Part/Whole (Gordon, 2012). I appreciated learning about these different aspects of music education and, while I do already incorporate these into my music selection decisions to provide the most well-rounded experience for my students, I plan to do more in the future.

I have utilized Tonal Learning Sequence by selecting music pieces that include major and minor tonalities and Lydian and mixolydian modes. Moving forward, I plan to bolster this area.

To incorporate Rhythm Learning Sequence, I build upon the numeric counting system taught to the students in fifth grade by subdividing all macrobeats into microbeats using a variety of repertoire. All quarter notes are subdivided into eighth- or sixteenth-notes depending upon the tempo or application. By gaining knowledge, comfort, and command of Tonal and Rhythm Sequencing, students' competency will flow naturally to identifying tonal and rhythmic patterns while reading new music (Pattern Learning Sequence). It is important for me to choose music that presents students with those musical opportunities. I would ensure that every student would be presented with those new concepts with my study guides.

The Whole/Part/Whole approach is a common way for teachers to organize content. It is a highly effective rehearsal technique that I use every rehearsal. First, I do an initial run-through of a piece or section. Then, the rehearsal becomes more pointed on predetermined areas that I feel need attention, such as identifying incorrect notes and rhythms, focusing on articulations, following dynamics more closely, blending and balancing, etc. After the individualized attention, we move to the second whole section, which typically is a run-through of the section again. This gives the students a chance to apply what they have learned/corrected to the full ensemble.

I think this is an effective technique because students experience immediate feedback and growth for their efforts. In a typical rehearsal you would apply the whole/part/whole approach to a section of music and then immediately apply it to the next section and so on. I also appreciate that it keeps students on task and focused as they know what section is being worked on and are prepared to play it again in the second whole section.

Other Music Learning Theories

Social constructivism, which is an active form of learning, is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the traditional approach to education. While there is some fluidity during my rehearsals, I am unable to just present an environment and let the kids explore. I struggle to see how that would fit into my band program. I feel most closely connected with the philosophy of Dewey, who believed that the most effective learning occurs in environments where students work together (i.e. social settings) discussing differing opinions, variables, and solutions. My students learn and grow together during our large ensemble time.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development relates to MLT's Discrimination and Inference Stages. Students must progress through each stage before they are ready for the next. I use this informally as I assess the progress of each student during their individual lessons.

Gestalt Theory posits that our brains seek out structure/patterns to better understand our environment. I believe that MLT is so popular because it follows the Gestalt Theory in that it divides music education into rhythmic and tonal patterns and sequencing with a firm focus on audiation to develop a student's music skills. I use Gestalt indirectly by incorporating MLT's sequencing and whole/part/whole techniques into my lessons and rehearsals.