Final Paper: Personal Thoughts on the Psychology of ME

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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 (Gordon, 2012). 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.

Audiation is the key to student motivation at all levels of music learning, yet many methods present it out of order or omit it entirely (Gordon, 2012). The process of audiation involves listening, playing, reading, composing, and improvising music while at the same time focusing on key and tonality, meter and rhythmic patterns, and tempo. While the foundation of audiation has been introduced in those earlier years, I need to continue to develop and expand my student's understanding of it.

Prior to this course, I had never heard of audiation. The concept was never introduced in my formal education, even during my undergraduate degree. Gordon states that notation and theory are often taught to students in place of audiation (2012), and that was my experience as a public school student and undergraduate student. Liperote (2006) agrees with that assessment when recounting his first band experiences, wondering if he was cheating by using his ear rather than written notation to learn melodies. He comes to the understanding that it is his musical ear that drove the development of his musicianship,

rather than the written notation. He continues by saying that, as a new teacher, his sole focus was to teach his students notation rather than anything relating to audiation.

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, learning the importance of audiation compelled me to research how I could incorporate it into my rehearsals 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. Maerker Garner (2009) describes a good characteristic tone coming from good posture. This begins with a feeling of energy originating in the feet, moving through the back of the legs upward through the body. I find that describing posture in terms like this is more meaningful to students, rather than just telling them to "sit straight," or "sit tall."

Perhaps the most important aspect lacking in my current lesson plans are singing. Gordon and Kodaly were firm believers that singing should not supplement, but 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 (1999) posits that the true instrument is the internal audiation mechanism inside of our mind, and that we play our tangible instrument as an extension of that internal mechanism. 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).

Adding scales and arpeggios to rehearsals is another easy idea to address audiation. Hiatt and Cross posit that, in addition to being essential technical exercises, scales and arpeggios help introduce audiation (2006). I plan to 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.

The second core part of MLT is sequence of learning, which is divided into Discrimination Learning and Inference Learning (Gordon, 2012). Discrimination Learning, which provides the fundamentals necessary for inference learning, serves to build vocabulary of notes and rhythms and is typically taught by rote via call and response.

There are five levels of Discrimination Learning from most basic to most advanced: 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, will 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 greater expression and sensitivity.

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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 (Gordon, 2012). 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. I will incorporate these into my music selection decisions to provide the most well-rounded experience for my students.

In the past, I have utilized Tonal Learning Sequence by selecting music pieces that include major and minor tonalities and Lydian and mixolydian modes. This class and my research have given me ideas to further explain tonal learning to my students.

It is important to establish tonality prior to beginning a piece, at modulation points, and the conclusion of a piece to assist students in tracking 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, have students play the bass line, and then 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, audiating, and ready to echo the pattern.
6. Begin with tonic and dominant functions in major and minor tonalities because they are 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 can 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 most 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.

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 music pieces. 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 repertoire that presents students with those musical opportunities. I would ensure that every student would be presented with those new concepts through my study guides.

I also 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 can 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.

The Whole/Part/Whole approach is a common way for teachers to organize content (Gordon, 2012). 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.

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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 (Education Encyclopedia, 2021). Constructivism focuses on the learning, thinking, and development of the learner with problem solving being the most important component. Students construct their own understanding by analyzing previous and current experiences. Social constructivism is related to Gordon's MLT in that, while still laying a solid foundation for music learning, teachers can adapt instruction to the way children naturally learn rather than forcing children to adapt to traditional learning instruction (Liperote, 2006).

While there is some fluidity during my rehearsals, I am unable to just present an environment and let the kids explore. That just is not feasible in 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 (Education Encyclopedia, 2021). My students learn and grow together during our large ensemble time. As my enrollment continues to grow, I am also 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.

Vygotsky describes the Zone of Proximal Development as the set of abilities that an individual can accomplish with the guidance of an expert or collaboration of peers, but cannot yet accomplish on their own (Marsh & Ketterer, 2005). ZPD relates to MLT's Discrimination and

Inference Stages. Students must progress through each 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 the human brain attempts to simplify complex images/designs by subconsciously arranging the parts into an organized system that creates a whole. Simply put, our brains seek out structure or patterns to better understand our environment (Chapman, 2018). I believe that MLT is effective in part because it follows the Gestalt Theory by dividing 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.

In conclusion, this course has afforded me many opportunities to improve my psychological approaches to teaching music. I especially look forward to implementing more formal instruction in audiation as I better understand the vital role it plays in developing the musicianship of our students.

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