

**Processfolio**

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### Introduction

I entered the music education program at the University of Oregon (UO) for a few reasons. I wanted to expand my knowledge of teaching music to elementary school students and to obtain a music teaching licensure in order to teach at a public elementary school. My decision to return to graduate school was heavily influenced by my belief that students deserve quality and meaningful music education. Prior to the program, my approach to teaching and learning was firmly based on my experience as a pianist and as a private piano instructor. In other words, my understanding of music education prior to starting my music education degree was influenced by the environment I was raised in and was not necessarily inductive to how K-5 students learn and engage with music.

Throughout my years as a music education major at the UO, there were many opportunities and courses that shaped my approach to teaching and learning music. My thought process slowly became more student-centered: How do *humans* learn? How do *children* learn? How do children learn *music*? I have learned through the program that the latter question is not as simple as it seems. Teaching music to K-5 students requires knowledge of the students as individuals, as well as the content knowledge of and delivery of instructional materials. These all work in tandem with my informed beliefs and values of music education. As I engaged with the course materials and faculty members at UO, the three components of music teaching and learning came to the forefront of my perceptions and approaches: the students, the educator, and the instructional materials. I have learned that all three of these components must be understood/aligned for meaningful music experiences to exist in the classroom.

This processfolio project is a culmination of my graduate studies at UO. A processfolio is a process-centered portfolio that “demonstrate synthesis of the multiple facets” (Silveira, Beauregard, & Bull, 2017, p. 18) of learning. It allows me to reflect on my growth and journey

as a graduate student in music education. Additionally, it motivated me and will continue to motivate me to “take charge of my own learning” (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991, p. 61).

The following core question guided my thought process: How has this master's program enhanced or altered my perceptions and approaches toward music teaching and learning?

Reflecting on this question led me to consider the three components of teaching and the relationships between them: student-educator, educator-materials, and materials-student. It allowed me to think about the how, what, and why of music teaching and learning. As I explore the three components and their relationships, I provide artifacts to support these relationships, followed by knowledge transfers from the classroom to my teachings.

The following three questions guided my thinking between the three components (student, educator, and instructional materials):

1. What was my understanding of music teaching and learning before starting the music education program at UO?
2. How have I changed as a result of the music education program at the UO?
3. How will the changes and new knowledge inform my future teaching?

## **I. Student & Educator**

### **Before UO, what was my understanding of students as individuals?**

As a private piano instructor, I have always believed in respecting students as individuals and catering instruction to the students' needs. While I had good intentions of helping students, I realize now that my decisions and actions were not always effective in facilitating musical growth of all my students. I helped students to the best of my abilities with the knowledge I had

at the time. However, as I reflect to my time before starting the music education program at the UO, I realize now that I did not understand the intricacies of meeting students' individual needs.

There was one student in particular who motivated me to pursue a graduate degree in music education. Matt was on the Autism Spectrum Disorder, and he was in the first grade when he started group piano lessons with me. It was my first time working with a student with a diagnosed disability, and I had zero knowledge of the Autism Spectrum Disorder. Due to my lack of experience in the subject and in working with a student with an exceptionality, I started teaching Matt as if he was a neurotypical student. For example, I provided fun imageries for him such as rainbow hands for the piano hand shape and melting chocolate for legato playing. When I realized these "effective" imageries were not helping Matt, I was confused and, for a brief moment, attributed his unresponsiveness to his lack of abilities. I soon realized I was wrong. For Matt, a simple modeling without imageries would have been effective.

I thought I was catering to Matt's musical needs; however, I was catering to the neurotypical age group. When I replaced the imageries with simple modeling, I had taken away the barrier that I had placed on him. Because I did not understand the characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder, I used the same teaching techniques that I was familiar with and had used on neurotypical student. This example is just one of many that I experienced with Matt and other students in my piano studio. Through the class lectures, readings, assignments, and many resources, I gained knowledge and a better understanding of what it means to treat students as unique individuals.

### **How has my understanding of students as individuals changed?**

My approach to teaching music has changed in two significant ways. First, I have a deeper understanding of students as unique individuals. Second, my understanding of an

educator and their role as a facilitator of learning has also broadened. I am able to view students as individuals as I consider their differences and the possible variables that affect their learning. This is exemplified through my experience with two of my piano students, Piper and Ellie, whose disabilities and life events, respectively, affected their learning experience.

### **Piper**

Piper had recently been diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and social anxiety disorder at the age of 10. I had been Piper's piano teacher for a few years and had noticed changes in her behaviors and attention levels in our lessons. Before finding out she had ADHD, I attributed her change in behavior due to puberty and school activities. When I became aware of Piper's diagnoses, I was able to clearly see Piper's struggles in a different light. As a result, I was disappointed in myself for not seeing the changes as closely as I should have. There were times when I dismissed her lack of attention and attributed to other factors.

Some characteristics I observed in Piper's lessons are common to many people with ADHD: time blindness, executive dysfunction, inattentiveness, non-linear thought process, difficulty switching tasks, lack of attention to details, forgetfulness, inability to understand and follow instructions (Adamek & Darrow, p. 192). After taking Music in Special Education, I could pinpoint, analyze, and evaluate Piper's struggles. In doing so, I was better equipped to help Piper by finding effective solutions that fit her needs.

The first change I implemented was a checklist for her homework. Due to her executive dysfunction, Piper had trouble organizing her practice time and balancing her tasks. Before this, many of my instructions were verbal. She was expected to remember them at home, because that is what worked for us in previous years. The checklist included important information regarding

what to practice, how to practice, sometimes how long to practice for, as well as what to watch out for during practice.

Following my advisor's suggestion, I started incorporating a timer for short drills to help Piper stay on task. Simply telling Piper to practice a chunk of music was not structured enough for her. Before, Piper was visibly uncomfortable making mistakes, which hindered her from practicing. With a timer, Piper could focus on the task at hand. The result was quick and drastic. What usually took us 5 minutes to fix our mistake only took 30 seconds. Piper needed to be part of this process: I set the metronome tempo, but she pressed the start button. Although I knew she was ready to move on to the next task, I asked her, "Do you think we need to practice this again?" This way, Piper was also in charge of her own learning. She said "no" with confidence. We adjusted the timer according to the task. Without hesitation or nervous laughs, she was only focused on the task. When she made mistakes, she got back to the task without letting her anxiety get in the way of her succeeding. It showed Piper that not only is she capable of improving, but it also showed her that she can feel good about her efforts. I even saw a genuine smile on her face, not a smile born out of nervousness or discomfort.

As I was learning how to work with a student with ADHD, I also learned how to work with a student with a social anxiety disorder. As it often happens in private lessons, I would often ask questions to check Piper's understanding of the concept at hand. I came to learn that for a student with anxiety, however, it is essential to give them space and time to process their thoughts. This allows the response to be separated from the anxiety response. The anxiety response may not accurately represent their knowledge and understanding. Giving Piper time to think meant that I was not putting her in the spot, preventing negative thoughts from being dictated. I often saw Piper sink into her bench or notice an uncomfortable smile or laugh. I

started to understand that that was a sign of her anxiety that was expressed outwardly. Knowing the characteristics of ADHD and anxiety helped me identify the issues and develop solutions to tailor my teaching approach for Piper.

I have learned that one of the important aspects of teaching students with exceptionalities involves the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), a written educational plan for student receiving special education services. Educators are legally required to provide essential services in order for students to learn to the best of their abilities. In the music classroom, the individualized need of the student may differ from student to student. My final project for Music in Special Education involved writing accommodations and modifications for three students who required instructional strategies to learn and participate at their highest possible level. I created [three IEPs](#) at a glance for students who belonged to different disability categories. Creating the IEPs allowed me to understand the components of the plan and the process of writing the plan to realize the possible difference it can make on the students.

When writing the IEP at a glance, it is important to know the students, including their strengths and motivators. This knowledge helped me focus on students' assets rather than their weaknesses. Student A, for example, loves socializing with her peers. Knowing what she loves doing helped me write her accommodations that fit *her* needs in order to reach her objectives. One of the accommodations was to pair the student with a peer. In doing so, Student A is provided with an opportunity to succeed like the rest of her peers. Thinking of students' assets was one of the major factors that contributed to my growth as a preservice teacher. I enter the classroom now with the belief that every student has the ability to succeed if they are given the right guidance and instruction. The knowledge I have gained through Music in Special Education

and in writing the IEPs at a glance have helped me inside and outside the music classroom, including in my private piano lessons.

### **Ellie**

Ellie was a nine-years-old student who recently went through significant life-changing events that affected her daily behaviors. I have learned through various communications with her guardian that, as a result of these events, she had immersed herself in extracurricular activities to help her address her grief and to escape from managing her emotions. As a result of these drastic changes in Ellie's life, I gradually saw a shift in her behaviors in our lessons. At first, I did not see the symptoms nor make connections between what was happening in her life and what I observed in our weekly lessons. It wasn't until after one of Ellie's guardians mentioned the significant events months ago that I could see Ellie's behaviors through a different lens.

She was always the type of student to verbally express her mind when playing certain songs or engaging in certain activities. She would confidently say "I don't want to" or a firm "no" or even communicate with me through body language that she did not want to. She would see challenges as unachievable tasks and undermine her knowledge and skills by stating, "I can't do it" or "I don't know how to." These behaviors would also show up with straightforward tasks, such as labeling middle C or playing a 5-finger scale within a song. Ellie's resistance and unwillingness to challenge herself were strong, but her excitement about favorable activities was just as intense. I've learned that Ellie saying "I don't know" may be a coping mechanism. Her way of seeking out a conversation, possibly communicating to me that she's seeking out socialization.

I refocused Ellie's attention away from labeling the music as "difficult" to engage her curiosity. Ellie can recognize the "fun" part of the activity. For example, if a song is about



Autumn leaves, I comment about how the leaves outside turn different colors and engage Ellie in the conversation. She loves her two cats, so we often bring them into the conversation. We would then shift the conversation to musical elements. For example, I would ask Ellie what falling leaves sound or how the melodic and/or rhythmic motives resemble falling leaves. I've learned to use Ellie's stuffy as a tool for learning. It allows us to step away from the piano to couch the challenge into a fun game. Instead of Ellie learning a new concept or skill, the stuffy is taught the concept or skill. The goal is for Ellie to feel confident and comfortable to try. While she is using the stuffy, I would assess her skills and understanding.

Teaching music to Ellie requires a different approach and instructional strategies than teaching to Piper. For Piper, my priority is breaking down music into manageable chunks and helping her navigate through the music. For Ellie, however, it's more about helping her see that challenges are fun and good for our growth as pianists and musicians. The goal was the same for both Piper and Ellie: to help them navigate the journey of learning music and piano to provide a creative outlet. Identifying these different needs to change my approach to teaching has drastically impacted my understanding of teaching and students learning experience.

### **How will this change and knowledge inform my future teaching?**

I have learned that supporting students' musical growth starts with understanding students as unique individuals. As Jellison (2015) states, the more educators understand students as individuals, the more teachable they are as learners. Students come into the classroom with their own sets of values, attitudes, beliefs, abilities, and behaviors. Additionally, students have different interests, intellectual capacities, and musical skills (Kelly, p. 117). In other words, two students in the same grade and classroom might share the same interests and intellectual capacities, but their attitude toward music and their musical skill levels may vary greatly.

Understanding the needs of students with exceptionalities is another example. As an educator, I have the responsibility to provide appropriate instructional strategies and accommodations to those students who need them to learn to the best of their abilities. In doing so, I hope that my future classroom becomes an inclusive and safe learning space for all students.

Prior to entering the music education program, I had limited knowledge of disabilities, let alone working with students with exceptionalities. It was through the Music in Special Education that I was first exposed to the characteristics of different disabilities, how it affects students, how it affects their learning, and what my role is in facilitating learning. In fact, I am grateful for the opportunity to have taken this course with Dr. Beth Wheeler in my first term as a music education major. It allowed me to be more aware of learning differences and receptive to the new information I was learning regarding student individuality. Additionally, my [philosophy of music education](#) has shifted since starting the music education program at UO. First, I had to reassess what music means to me, and separate my personal experience and bias. Second, I had to rethink the nature and value of music in our society and what it can do for students. Third, writing my philosophy of music education allowed me to explore what meaningful music experience means and looks like. Finally, engaging with courses and faculty members at UO has made me more open to change and view change as a positive experience.

## **II. Educator & Material**

### **Before UO, what was my understanding of the instructional materials?**

When I started the music education program at the UO, I have had years of teaching experience as a solo piano instructor. I soon realized the many differences between private solo instruction and general classroom instruction. One of the big adjustments I had to make when I

entered the program was to get familiar with the instructional materials for classroom instruction. It included various curriculum, songs, and activities that were developmentally appropriate for K-5 students, as well as an understanding of how students that age learn and engage with music.

When I taught private piano lessons, many of my choices in instructional materials were based on my personal experience and biases. For example, as a young student, I was given Hanon exercises to make me a “better” player. When I started teaching, I stayed away from teaching my piano students the pieces such as Hanon exercises that I learned as a child. My sole reason was based on a personal bias; I had bad experiences learning those pieces, because I was not taught the right techniques to play them. Therefore, I assumed that my students would also have the same or similar experience. My personal experience allowed me to be partial to what would have been resourceful to some of my students.

### **How has my understanding of instructional materials changed?**

My approach and relationship to instructional materials has changed in three significant ways since I started my degree at UO. It includes the quantity and quality of instructional materials, as well as the appropriateness and inclusivity of the materials. Through my method classes and student teaching experiences, I have gained knowledge of the various curriculums and teaching materials for the K-5 classroom.

### **Conversational Solfege**

I learned about the First Steps in Music and Conversational Solfege curriculums in Elementary Methods and Contemporary Methods, respectively. The First Steps in Music develop musical individuals who are “tuneful, beatful, and artful.” Once students establish these musical skills, the Conversational Solfege curriculum helps them develop musical literacy skills. Through the twelve sequenced steps, students engage in reading, writing, dictation, improvisation,

and composition. I had the opportunity to engage with the Conversational Solfege curriculum in Contemporary Methods with Dr. Wheeler. Through my final synthesis project, I create a tonal unit plan for grades two to five. Each unit plan consisted of 21 lesson plans that included all 12 steps. The unit plan mapped out the songs and materials, carefully picked for their appropriateness for the grade level. The project also included an Orff-style song arrangement, which allowed students to explore the different instruments and gain ensemble experience. The project concluded with a virtual classroom. Learning how to set up a virtual classroom was a valuable experience not only because I have never done it before but also because I learned the importance of it, having taught during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While each lesson plan consists of planned activities and objectives, there is room for students to participate in ways that give them a choice in their learning. This could be from how students respond to prompts through verbal responses or physical demonstrations to how they choose to participate during the creating and writing portions of the lessons. Some students may prefer to work in groups or individually. Some may even want to skip or need more time for activities that require individual participation.

The Orff-style arrangement of “Juba” is an excellent example of a student-centered approach. Students have space and opportunity to voice their creative ideas. Students may collectively decide to switch the instruments or change the words to the parts. For example, they may want to bring in another instrument, change the text "meow" to another word, or even add or change the movements to the parts. In doing so, I'm opening the classroom for students to include their ideas and interests.

### **Contemporary Methods**

Before Contemporary Methods, I accepted all children's songs as appropriate for children. I learned through lesson planning that this is not the case. I thought some of the songs in the Feierabend books were sexist or not inclusive to all students. For example, the text from "Scissors and String" implied that a man is powerful and free when single, but the "trouble begins" when he is married. Not only is it wrong, but it is incredibly sexist. This is something I would not teach in my future classes.

While I have experienced lesson planning in other classes at UO, it wasn't until Contemporary Methods that I learned to sequence and scaffold on a larger scale with a better understanding of children's learning process. For example, the fourth and fifth graders' pace in learning a new song might be shorter, but they would engage with the material in more complex ways. For the second graders, depending on their level, they might need more time with the initial stages of learning the song through the whole-part-whole approach. How students learn is closely linked to their development, and I was able to write the lesson plans with the student's points of view in mind. The first graders might need more time with physical activities, while the older students can engage in cognitively more appropriate activities for their age.

Lesson planning for the multiple grade levels allowed me to rethink my language and behavior when I teach in the elementary music classroom, especially regarding instructions and demonstrations. How I provide verbal instruction may significantly affect the classroom flow and student engagement. My vocal and physical demonstrations also play a significant role in student success. Through our weekly teaching demonstrations, I learned that even small demonstrations, such as decoding familiar patterns and introducing new songs through the whole-part-whole approach, require preparation and practice before teaching. Through this

project, I was able to experience the process involved in unit planning and lesson planning that was purposeful for my learning and practical for my future.

Additionally, I was able to understand what quality instructional materials looks like in music education through these curriculum and resources as well as how they are implemented. As a result, I am able to critically think about a piece of music. For example, I ask myself, “What can students gain by learning this piece of music and will this piece keep them engaged both musically and intellectually?” Also, I have learned the importance of asking myself, “How can I expand on this piece for further musical growth?” It is not about how many different pieces of music the student can learn, but rather about deepening students’ learning experience through scaffolding materials.

### **Feierabend’s DEI Statement**

The critical thinking skills I have learned through the music program also extends to the appropriateness and inclusivity of instructional materials. When I was teaching private piano, I blindly trusted what was included in the method book was appropriate to teach to students. My thought process was that if the method book is one of the best-selling method books, published recently, and the songs sound good to my ears, then it must be appropriate for me to teach and for the kids to learn. I did not realize the importance of researching the origin or the history of the piece. Now I ask myself if the piece is developmentally, culturally, and socially appropriate.

Reading Feierabend’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statement assisted me in understanding the importance of considering the cultural and social aspects of repertoire choices. According to the DEI statement, “folk songs are a fundamental part of human history and represent diverse people of different times, however imperfect those times have been.” (Feierabendmusic, 2024). Therefore, it is important to carefully examine the text and the

message they communicate. The DEI Committee, which is composed of music education experts, recommended a list of criteria for evaluating repertoire. These criteria were helpful in choosing my repertoire for my final synthesis project in Contemporary Methods.

I have referred to this DEI statement numerous times as I worked on various projects and assignments at my time at UO. Not only did this statement help me navigate through culturally and socially appropriate repertoire, but it is also a reminder that I need to ask important questions when I come across a new piece of music. Through my experience in the music program at UO, I have also learned the importance of cultural awareness. For example, when I taught private piano lessons, there was a piece titled *Russian Sailor Dance*. In the reprint of the method book, it was changed to *Lead On, Black Horse* and indicated as a Ukrainian folksong. Prior to UO, I would not have realized its cultural significance. I eventually decided to drop that piece from the repertoire to be culturally sensitive to what was happening across the world. My decision was not based on a personal belief or bias. Rather, I did not feel comfortable teaching that song knowing what I knew.

### **Multicultural Music**

In addition to broadening my knowledge of culturally appropriate and cultural awareness, I have also developed a new appreciation for multicultural music. Teaching multicultural music was not part of my everyday teaching experience with piano instruction, but I have realized the significance of multicultural approach as a multicultural person. With the expanded knowledge and understanding of the instructional materials through Elementary Methods and Contemporary Methods, I have started to learn the ways multicultural music can be incorporated into the classroom. For example, incorporating multicultural music does not need to be a frustrating process for me or the students. It can start with a small step, especially for someone like me who

is not familiar with cultures that are not my own. A small step could involve teaching a folk song from Indonesia to the younger grades and expanding the lesson by exploring instruments from Indonesia with the upper grades. It is, however, important to learn multicultural music not just for the sake of learning them. While I have not had ample opportunity to practice teaching multicultural music during my student-teaching experiences, I understand the necessary steps in teaching multicultural music to students.

The same questions regarding the quality of the instructional materials also applies here. It includes asking myself what the students will gain by learning the song, if the song will keep students musically and intellectually engaged, and the ways the song can be expanded for future musical growth. I have come to believe that quality music is invaluable for many reasons, and quality multicultural music is no exception. It also has the extra benefits of creating cultural awareness, deepening cultural appreciation, and promoting cultural tolerance in students.

### **How will this change and knowledge inform my future teaching?**

The knowledge I have gained through the Music Education program will significantly inform my future teaching. Through my method courses, I had the opportunity to engage with various instructional materials, as well as how to implement those materials to students. I have learned that quality instructional materials provide students critical opportunities to learn musical concepts by performing, responding, and creating music. While I have learned tremendously while engaging in course work, I understand that I have the responsibility to my profession and students to continue learning to be a better educator. As a result of engaging with Feierabend's curriculums in my method courses, I have decided to gain certification in First Steps in Music in the near future. I want to increase confidence in what I teach, establish credibility in my work, and gain networking opportunities with other educators.



From learning about the various instructional materials, I have learned the importance of asking necessary questions in terms of the quality and appropriateness of the materials. For example, how can I enrich my students' learning experiences? How can I structure my lessons so that students become "tuneful, beatful, and artful" individuals? I understand that I do not have all the answers or know all the instructional materials that will work in my future classrooms. I do know, however, that I have resources I can refer to when needed. Feierabend's curriculum and DEI statement will continue to affect my choice in repertoire. Additionally, organizations such as National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and state conferences will be invaluable resources for the newest updates, current trends, and workshops.

In addition to promoting a "tuneful, beatful, and artful" classroom, I will continue to explore multicultural music as part of a well-rounded music education for my future students. I understand that doing so will involve research on my part in order to be culturally sensitive to the current events and the cultural significance of a song or an activity. My hope is that through quality instructional materials and exposure to multicultural music, students experience meaningful music education and become well-rounded musical individuals. Reflecting on my growth as a person and a future educator has helped me better understand what I want for my future students and classroom. I have grown as a person and a future educator since starting the Music Education program at UO. The most important lesson I have learned as a future educator is to have a curious mind so that I can continue to learn and grow.

### **III. Material & Student**

**Before UO, what was my understanding of students' relationship with instructional materials?**

Throughout my years as a music education major at the UO, there were many opportunities and courses that shaped my understanding of how children learn music. Prior to my time at the UO, however, I had limited opportunities to interact with children in the K-5 age group. While I have always enjoyed working with young students, teaching them how to play the piano, I lacked the necessary knowledge to understand how children think and learn.

For example, when I first started teaching private piano, I distinctly remember a lesson where I introduced a quarter note to a four-year-old student. I had the student draw quarter notes before having her experience them with gross motor movements, such as walking to the beat and clapping the rhythm. I lacked the knowledge then to realize that the typical four-year-old learns new concepts by gross motor activities. She also struggled to hold her pencil, and I did not make the connection that her frustration with the activity was due to the stage of the child development, not due to a lack of abilities or interest. There were numerous times where I was not attuned to the developmental and cognitive needs of the student. As I reflect on the core question, I am able to analyze my growth from how I was before as a novice piano instructor to how I am today as a teacher candidate.

**How has my understanding of the relationship between students and instructional materials changed?**

As my understanding of instructional materials and the students as unique individuals has evolved, so has my understanding of the relationship between the two expanded. More specifically, my understanding of how children in the K-5 age group learn in the music classroom has broadened. In Dewey's view (2016), a child's immaturity suggests the possibility of growth. Immaturity is not a lack of inherent abilities, but a result of their current state of development. This is just one example of many. I was able to understand this relationship

through studying John Feierabend's curriculums in Elementary Methods. The First Steps in Music was my first exposure to a music curriculum specifically for the K-5 music classroom. According to John Feierabend, the creator of the curriculums, students who engage in the First Steps become "tuneful, beatful, and artful" individuals.

### **First Steps**

As students participate in various "musical workout" activities, they learn to become musically independent through engaging their singing voice, internalizing the beats, and nurturing their expressive sensitivity. The musical workout activities are divided into two categories: singing/tonal activities and movement activities. The singing activities develop students' singing abilities through five activities that consist of vocal warmups, fragment singing, simple songs, arioso, and song tales. What fascinated me the most about this curriculum is that the activities are purposeful and intentional, but most importantly, promote musicality and creativity to young students.

In Elementary Methods, I had the opportunity to engage with the First Steps materials by designing a [unit plan](#) and writing a [lesson plan](#) for a first-grade class. I composed a lesson plan that incorporated many of the singing and movement activities, and taught it to my peers in my class. Each of the activities were developmentally appropriate for the grade level. Post-lesson, I reflected on my lesson through guided questions. As I reread my reflection, I am able to compare myself as an educator from a student teaching the micro-lesson to now as a teacher candidate at my site school. I have become more knowledgeable with the content and the delivery of the content. As a result, I am more present and aware of the behavioral management skills, which was lacking in my micro-teaching.

### **Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development**

I was especially interested in Piaget's theory of cognitive development. According to the four stages of Piaget's cognitive development, children's thought processes grow as they engage with the world around them. The rate of their intellectual growth depends on their biological and environmental factors. While educators cannot control the hereditary aspect of children's cognitive development, we can influence their interactions with their environment in the music classroom. As a result of this knowledge, I can understand and justify what I teach as I process the activities through Piaget's theory.

After gaining this knowledge, I could transfer it to the classroom during student-teaching. The information regarding the preoperational period was especially relevant as I observed kindergarteners and taught first-graders. Students in this age group learn through play and symbols because they are at the preoperational stage of their cognitive development. Many of the five observable behaviors in this stage were present during my lessons. The most prevalent behavior was imitation. Students imitated motions for "Big Black Cats" and many other songs that they learned. After a few repetitions, they could do this without my modeling. The symbolic play is also a considerable part of the first-graders' activities. They pretended to be bears in one activity as they sang "Grizzly Bear." For a movement exploration, students explored different levels as they pretended to be elevators. Students knew that they were not bears nor elevators, but they were able to successfully engage with the materials I presented because it was through play. While this type of learning is developmentally appropriate for first grade, it would not be for fourth or fifth grades. Students at the preoperational stage are also able to use words to explain past events. A child is able to think, reflect, and communicate their understanding of the

past activities or musical symbols they have learned in previous classes. I saw this behavior consistently throughout my observations.

How first-grade students learn is quite different to how fifth-grade students learn. I experienced this in my full-time student teaching at Awbrey Park Elementary School with Stacie Yarbro. While I focused on singing and movement activities with the first graders, the fifth graders participated in a recorder learning segment that consisted of five lessons (here is [lesson plan 1](#) and [video](#)). According to Piaget's theory, children aged 10-11 fall into the concrete operational stage. In this stage, children are able to think more logically. For example, if a certain note on the recorder is not sounding the same as others, students at this stage are able to think through how to change that: check posture, check air flow, and check fingers and their position. Due to learning differences, some students in the same grade may need more guidance and reminders than others. At their age, students are also able to be reflective of their own learning. Knowing this, I created a checklist for my fifth-grade students for them to assess their learning and playing. They also had to assess two reflective questions as part of my formal assessment: "what is still challenging?" and "what am I good at?" As students reflect on these questions, they gain a better understanding of their learning process and progress, and celebrate their growth regardless of their level of progress.

I was able to understand that students in fifth grade are also less egocentric than their younger peers due to their cognitive and emotional development. They are able to consider others' feeling and are more aware of what other think of them, which was both a positive and a negative element depending on the lesson and student. As I closely worked with fifth graders at Awbrey Park Elementary School, I noticed this in both academic and behaviors. Because students are more aware of how they might be perceived by others if they don't perfect the note,

some students might not participate fully perhaps to avoid embarrassment. Some may try to strive to be more accurate with their playing in order to not stand out or due to intrinsic motivation. Analyzing students' academic performance and behavioral characteristics in relation to development was a new concept for me when I first entered the music education program. As a result of this knowledge, I am able to understand why students might act and talk in unique ways, treat others in different ways, and learn and engage with music in certain ways. Most importantly, I am able to design my lessons in ways that challenge students that is appropriate to their developmental level.

### **How will this change and knowledge inform my future teaching?**

The lessons I have learned in my courses at UO will also continue to influence my lesson planning and instructional strategies I employ in the classroom. There are various instructional strategies that have changed how I approach teaching to young students. I employed these strategies in my student teaching experiences, and will continue to do so in my future classroom. I have seen first-hand in classrooms how effective these strategies are in helping students engage with the materials. For example, I understand now that there are effective and ineffective ways to teach students a new song. Students learn best through the whole-part-whole approach. Depending on the length of the song, they must be able to hear the song in its entirety and be given opportunities to sing in small chunks. Doing so engages their voice and mind, and challenges them to improve their listening and singing skills.

As a result of engaging in the courses at the UO and various meetings with my advisor, Dr. Wheeler, I have become more aware of the importance of understanding how children, especially ages 5 to 11, think, learn, and explore. Before taking Elementary Methods and Contemporary Methods, I was not knowledgeable about what materials and activities are

developmentally appropriate. In other words, I did not understand that what and how I teach to the students is heavily dependent on the developmental stages of the students. Therefore, I realized that understanding children's cognitive development is essential for student engagement and effective instruction. I think back to that four-year-old piano student I taught in the beginning of my years as a piano instructor, and I know now the various ways I could have engaged the student in learning the quarter note.

I also identified and observed egocentric thinking among younger students, especially kindergarteners. For example, some students could not understand how others could do XYZ when they themselves could not. Students experience the world from their point of view. This concept was remarkable for me to understand. Children's thought processes grow, and their environment greatly impacts their learning. Many children at this stage do not exhibit behaviors because they want to disrupt your classroom, or they want to be disrespectful to their classmates. They have not yet learned the skill to think more logically or manage their emotions inside their heads. Knowing how students learn affects what they learn.

### **Conclusion**

The following core question guided my thought process: How has this master's program enhanced or altered my perceptions and approaches toward music teaching and learning? My perceptions and approaches toward music teaching and learning has significantly changed as a result of my time as a graduate student in the music education program at the University of Oregon. I reflected on my growth and journey through the three components of a meaningful music experience. By engaging with the three questions regarding my past, present, and future, my understanding of the relationship between the student-educator, educator-materials, and

materials-student has deepened. First, students are unique individuals and I have the responsibility to provide opportunities for all students to engage in music learning. Second, quality instructional materials provide students critical opportunities to engage in music that is inclusive to all students. Third, children learn differently as a result of their cognitive development. Therefore, it is crucial that music instruction be developmentally appropriate and challenges students in an age-appropriate manner. As I reflected on student individuality and the role of the educator, I also had the opportunity to reflect on how I have grown as a student and what kind of educator I want to be. This Processfolio was a way to celebrate my growth and journey as a student and realize that learning does not stop when I enter my future classroom.



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