

Title: Learning Characteristics of College Students: Implications for the Elementary Music Education Methods Class

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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Learning Characteristics Of College Students: Implications For The Elementary Music Education Methods Class

By Eve Harwood

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How do undergraduates make sense of the world in general and our classes in particular? All of us have casual thoughts on the subject, based on intuition and practical experience in teaching music education majors. But preparing a more objective and coherent answer to this question proved to be a humbling task. Teaching people how to teach is what we do for a living, after all, and it was embarrassing to acknowledge that I knew much less about the undergraduates I taught than I expect them to know about the school-age children they are preparing to teach.

The topic of undergraduate education and its reform is in the academic air these days. In 1990, *The New York Times* reported on the Harvard Assessment Seminar, stating that the seminar was created at a time of "growing public criticism of the quality of undergraduate teaching at

American colleges and universities."¹ The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession and the Holmes Group,² among others,

cite improving the quality of instruction for undergraduate education majors as a key component of educational reform. At our most respected research institutions, there have been visible attempts recently to identify and reward outstanding teachers of undergraduates. Even the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports from time to time on the notion of considering excellence in teaching undergraduates as a tenurable activity and of creating university positions that are tenured teaching posts. We are not the only ones looking with new eyes at undergraduates and real-

"[There are] similarities among Perry's notion of the committed individual, Erickson's stage of identity, and what the Holmes Group...might call the fully professional teacher."

izing that they offer a unique set of challenges and rewards to their teachers.³

General Characteristics

Consider some general characteristics of our student population. Who sits in the elementary methods class? By far the largest number are white females in their late teens or early twenties. This is not unique to mu-

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sic education, for demographic studies show that the entire teaching profession is likely to remain white and female into the twenty-first century. A recent article in the *Journal of Teacher Education* reports that a study of freshmen expressing interest in teaching indicates that the typical teacher candidate is a white female who is more interested in elementary than in secondary education and who has a grade point average below the median for all career choices.⁴

Support for these findings comes from an article in the *Review of Research in Education*,⁵ in which the authors report that 80 percent of elementary teachers are female. They also point out that until the last decade, a disproportionate number of teachers were "high status" females who provided a hidden subsidy to education in the form of a bright and committed work force, now gradually being withdrawn. As other careers open to women, fewer bright women are entering teaching. According to the article, "No single subject is more central to the history of the teaching profession than the changing role of women in American society." (See box, next page.)

In addition, many college students find their early college years to be personally tumultuous. Erickson, for example, describes the college years as a moratorium, a necessary period of delay permitted by society to those undergoing a crisis of identity. It is a time when "each youth must forge for himself some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the effective remnants of his childhood and the hopes of anticipated adulthood."⁶ A very revealing book entitled *Stories Parents Seldom Hear: College Students Write about Their Lives and Families* bears testimony to this point.⁷ The book is a compilation of stories by 11 students enrolled in a writing course at Yale during the 1970s. As their writing teacher points out, "all the tales were written, consciously or unconsciously, for parents. It was as if these young people wanted their parents to see them as independent individuals before they could step into adulthood with confidence."⁸ So not only is the "typical" methods student white, female, harried and hurried at school, and possibly working part-time, she is also probably undergoing an identity crisis.

These are general characteristics. In addition, we know some patterns of intellectual growth are taking place over the college years. Two models, those of Perry and Gilligan, seem congruent with my own observations of students. I offer the latter viewpoint particularly because so many methods students are female.

Perry and Methods Students

Perry's model of intellectual development is well known and will be reviewed only briefly here. His nine-stage model was based on interviews conducted primarily with male college students. Two women were included in the interview sample, but the judges who coded the transcripts felt there was no difference between the women and men and that the women's answers could be codified according to the nine-stage scale evident in the men's responses.⁹

According to Perry's model, young adults move from a dualistic perception of the world to a multiplistic view, to a relativistic view, and finally to personal commitment within the context of relativism. Students in the first stage (in Perry's sample, 75 percent of freshmen at Harvard and Radcliffe) exhibit an essentially dualistic view of the world. They expect college teachers to explain the "correct" or "right" answer to problems. They believe the learner's job is to identify and memorize the right answers from the explanation; the teacher's is to make the explanation as clear as possible. Methods students at this stage want to know "the best way" to teach a rhythm pattern, or the best method or text. They seem prepared to accept any answer from a college authority. If the teacher demurs, these students sometimes then suggest that a particular approach seems best to them but look to the instructor for confirmation. A more sophisticated but still dualistic version of this position involves the assumption that a "right" answer exists, but that the college teacher, rather than explaining it, demands that the student discover the answer. This unspoken contract suggests more action on the part of the learner and expects the professor to play fair in the sense of not obfuscating the correct answer.

Occasionally methods students become

Envision, then, a class of mostly white female students. What else does one observe about them? Many are employed. This is true of the college population generally, for many students now work more than ten hours per week at outside jobs. And like all music majors, music education majors commit a significant portion of their time to private study and practice on their major instrument and to ensemble performance. They are also responsible for academic courses, meeting the requirements for state certification and university graduation, and satisfying departmental requirements in music. Music education is an over-crowded curriculum; compared to liberal arts majors, our students are very pressed for time. So picture the white female music education major who is possibly working at a part-time job, harried and hurried from class to class...In addition, psychologists tell us that students attending college are experiencing separation from family, establishing an individual identity, and finding a place in the world...So not only is the "typical" methods student white, female, harried and hurried at school, and possibly working part-time, she is also probably undergoing an identity crisis.

very frustrated when the instructor does not answer such questions as "Which method would you use? Which text do you think is best?" The students assume that the teacher has the answer but withholds it from them for pedagogical reasons. At a certain point, they just want to stop the game.

From this dualistic set of perceptions of right/wrong answers, Perry's model holds that students grow to accept multiple answers, the correctness of any one of which may depend on context. All values, moral decisions, and teaching choices are relative. The methods student who said to me one day in the hall with some perplexity, "You know, when we were studying Kodály I thought it was really the way to go, but now we're doing Orff and I really enjoy it, too," was, I think, arriving at this stage. She simply needed some reassurance that it was all right to value two different teaching approaches, some of the values of which are in conflict with each other. She is beginning to

see teaching as a set of choices, including pedagogical ones, rather than a decision as to right and wrong forms of instruction.

Perry's third stage, commitment, is "an affirmation of personal values of choice in relativism." It has been described as a conscious act or realization of identity in responsibility; a process of orientation of self in a relative world. This stage involves a leap of faith and taking responsibility; it involves identity.¹⁰ Perry also found that many students experience a delay before reaching this stage, and some, indeed, never do reach it. Avoidance of commitment may take the form of a retreat back into dualist thinking, or of es-

cape. Students may reason that if all is relative, then one can't act with certainty. Irresponsibility is the underlying stance of such students. One writer describing this stage says that the leap from relativistic thinking to commitment is lonely, and therefore the role of a mentor is particularly important at this time in life.¹¹

My suggestion is that our students may not achieve the third stage until they are teaching in the schools, but their college mentors may still serve as useful models in memory. In professional life, these new teachers must make choices of repertoire and teaching styles and make the leap of faith to believe in their choices, even though they realize their answers to any given problem are provisional. In a general sense, there are similarities among Perry's notion of the committed individual, Erickson's stage of identity, and what the Holmes Group and other writers might call the fully professional teacher. The committed individual, in Perry's terms, is

“Whatever we do in methods class, it had better be as powerful an experience as we can make it, for we are competing with many other demands on the student’s attention and energy.”

one who will display qualities of personal commitment, will take responsibility for choices, and will continue to consider alternatives and contexts when making decisions in the classroom.

Gilligan and Methods Students

We need to consider Gilligan’s work also, since our population is largely female, to see to what extent female development is different from that of men. Gilligan’s argument, set out in *In a Different Voice*¹² and elsewhere, is far too long to reproduce here. Gilligan makes a convincing case that women’s moral and intellectual development is significantly different from that of men, despite the premise of Perry’s research team. In brief, Gilligan sees men as defining morality in terms of rights, whereas women see it in terms of caring and responsibility. Women are also more likely to define themselves as part of a web of relationships. Professional women, when asked to describe themselves, used terms such as caring, responsible, and compassionate, whereas men responded to the same question by referring to themselves as bright, successful, and fair. Part of achieving “identity” for women, then, is learning to care for themselves; that is, to bring a sense of their rights into balance with their developed sense of responsibility.

Other Views

In addition to emotional and intellectual development, our students are also on a continuum of professional development from preservice to student teacher to inservice professional. They are hardly novices when we see them in our classes, particularly if methods are taught separate from laboratory school experience. A growing body of research literature in education documents the characteristics of novices and experts and the differences between their perceptions of given teaching situations.¹³ While a complete review of such research is not possible here, there is clearly a development of perception, knowledge, and

skill as one progresses from novice to expert teacher. Expert teachers are committed to teaching, affirm that learning is possible in seemingly impossible settings, and know that some things work some of the time with some students. They are also skilled technicians. As Rubin puts it, the pedagogically intelligent teacher is expert at analyzing classroom events so as to do the right thing at the right time.¹⁴ This doesn’t happen without reflection on experience. While methods students can’t achieve this state, they can begin to reflect upon the teaching process.¹⁵

To return to describing the methods student, we have a student who is white, female, physically harried and hurried, possibly employed outside school, going through a personal identity crisis, intellectually somewhere along the Perry path from dualist to relativist to committed individual, intellectually and morally somewhere on Gilligan’s path from defining oneself as responsible for others and part of a web of social connections, to acknowledging responsibility to oneself and having value apart from being part of a social fabric. Finally, this student is in the preservice stage of a teaching career and developing the habit of reflecting upon knowledge and experience in order to someday experience the fully committed professional life where pedagogical intelligence and teaching effectiveness flourish.

Putting Theory into Practice in Undergraduate Education

How does this person learn best, and what does that suggest for methods teachers? First, it is clear that the methods class had better be as powerful an experience as we can make it, for we are competing with many other demands on the student’s attention and energy. More than once my 3:00 p.m. Friday class has said, “Please don’t make us think today.” These students give every indication of being thought out, emotionally wrung out, and just plain tired out. Second, if we want students to develop intellectually from dualistic to relativis-

tic thinking, we need to do more than lecture on the subject. We will have to provide them with models and activities that encourage them to see teaching choices not as right or wrong but as a series of propositions linking theory and practice. For example, if one believes A about music and B about the way children learn, then teaching practices X, Y, and Z are consistent and logical choices. Third, if we want students to develop the habit of reflection, we need to structure our classes so that they are required and encouraged to reflect on their experiences as music teachers, fledgling though they may be.

Beyond those rather general principles, can methods instructors link theory with practice? That is, given models by Perry, Erickson, and Gilligan for how undergraduates develop, are certain teaching practices consistent and logical choices for use in the methods class? One set of affirmative answers is provided in a book called *Passages in Teaching: Developmental Crisis in the Teaching of Adolescents and Young Adults*.¹⁶ The author, a college teacher of human developmental psychology, gives a familiar reason for writing the book: "I have been intrigued over the years by descriptions of identity crisis, by portrayals of moral development, intellectual development, faith development, and other aspects of human development. The question has repeatedly nagged my teacher's curiosity, 'How can I use what I know of human development as a teacher?' Sometimes I wonder whether I don't leave my own knowledge of intellectual and ethical development firmly at the door when I walk into my classroom."¹⁷

Gross presents a reasonable theoretical argument for recommending certain kinds of college teaching over others and illustrates his hypotheses with descriptions from his own college teaching. In sum, his suggestions for college teachers center on two concepts:

- 1) the development of a community within the individual classroom, chiefly through the frequent use of small group tasks; and
- 2) the style of a course which he calls problem-centered.

Gross refers in detail to Erickson, Perry, and Kohlberg, and to examples from his own teaching in supporting this thesis. Small-group work and centering instruction on problems to

be solved, rather than on information to be absorbed, is consistent with what psychologists tell us about intellectual and moral development of young adults. Gross also recommends frequent testing, short individual quizzes, and longer group efforts. Part of creating a community of trust, he suggests, is through frequent and timely feedback. Trust is also strengthened between teacher and students and among group members through frequent feedback and in-class group problem solving, where individuals can express themselves without the time delay offered in mid-term or end-of-semester tests.

Gross is not alone in reminding us that large-group lecture—even lecture with questions to individual students or lecture plus discussion and testing—is not the most powerful teaching strategy we have, although it is probably the one most typically associated with college teaching. Dewey's "We learn by doing," Whitehead's admonition against inert ideas in education (ideas that are merely "received into the mind without being utilized or tested or thrown into fresh combinations"¹⁸) and the Holmes Group's position that true teaching is interactive, not a one-way communication from teacher to student, all express the notion that students at any age benefit from being confronted with problems or tasks to solve. Small-group tasks are a practical means of requiring students to *do* something with the ideas being presented them.

Gross gives several examples in his discipline, human psychology. In my own methods teaching, I think more and more of "seatwork." When I taught grade-school math, lessons consisted of short teacher presentations followed by seatwork, a way for students to put the presentation into practice somehow, and for me to gauge the depth of their understanding. Seatwork in methods class might take the form of small groups deciding which song of five is unsuitable to teach by rote, solving a puzzle where each member has part of a scope and sequence chart and the group has to reconstruct the whole chart, or groups discussing a short description of a teaching event and identifying a particular musical concept or pupil behavior. These are some small-scale samples that represent Gross's small group/active problem-solving.

Empirical Observations of Undergraduate Education

Let me now review where we are in the argument so far. We have a description of the college undergraduate whose features include intellectual and ethical growth patterns defined by Erikson, Perry, and Gilligan. What do those growth patterns suggest for college teachers? I have offered one psychology teacher's answer: small-group work, frequent testing, and a problem-centered rather than information-giving course orientation. Frankly, I latched onto Gross's book with glee because he was one of the few writers who seemed willing to make the leap from theoretical models to implications for college practice. The question follows: "Is he right?" Is there evidence to support Gross's hypotheses regarding the kinds of teaching that best reflect undergraduates' intellectual growth patterns?

An affirmative answer comes from Harvard's recent empirical study of effective college teaching; its stated purpose was to ascertain conditions under which undergraduates do their best work. The study involved 365 students and 100 faculty and used both questionnaires and logs. The report, entitled "The Harvard Assessment Seminars: Explorations with Students and Faculty about Teaching, Learning and Student Life," reported the following:

- 1) College students do their best in courses that include frequent checkpoints. Quick turn-around time in receiving feedback from instructors was important.
- 2) Students do better when they study in groups at least some of the time. In smaller groups, students spoke more often, asked more questions, and were generally more engaged than in larger groups. Faculty were advised to set up study groups as a result of this assessment.
- 3) Men and women contrast sharply in how they study and what they expect from college. Women tend to value more highly advisers who took the time to know them personally, while men like advisers who make directives and concrete suggestions. Men's satisfaction with college is tied to how well they do academically, while women are influenced more by personal relationships and informal encounters with faculty.¹⁹

The first two of these points bear remark-

able similarity to Gross's conclusions based on the developmental psychology of college-age students: Students benefit from frequent testing and from working in small groups engaged in concrete tasks. The third finding supports Gilligan's thesis that women's development is indeed different from men's and suggests that the role of mentor is even more important for women than men. For women students, individual conferences and informal feedback outside of class may be just as powerful, or more so, than events in the music education methods class.

Conclusion

In summary, the authors discussed here offer a number of concrete suggestions for effective methods of teaching. Our instruction should:


1. provide frequent feedback (either formal or informal) about students' understanding of material;
2. consist of interactive teaching in which students solve meaningful problems using information presented in lectures and in printed material;
3. offer many opportunities for discussion and problem solving in small groups;
4. provide opportunities to apply methods knowledge to teaching schoolchildren;
5. offer mentoring by professors, including modeling good music teaching and showing personal interest in students outside the classroom;
6. provide shared discussion and analysis of simulated teaching, perhaps by videotape;
7. require students to engage in reflection on their own teaching and learning.

This final suggestion is particularly important because reflection is a habit good teachers carry throughout life. In methods class, I am content if my students move from Perry's first stage to the second, from looking for the right way to teach to finding merit in many ways of teaching, depending on the context. In the long run, however, students must realize that not all choices are equally effective in given situations. Good teachers don't have the "right" answers, nor do they choose randomly from a multiple set of answers, but rather they choose specifically for given classroom events. They also engage in an active ongoing search for better solutions to the problems that confront them. It is important that from the be-

ginning students cherish the search for solutions to teaching problems; that they see commitment to that search as part of what defines a mature teacher.

Notes

1. *New York Times*. "Harvard Assessment Seminars," Mar. 5, 1990.
2. *Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession: A Nation Prepared* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986). Holmes Group, *Tomorrow's Teachers* (East Lansing, MI: Holmes Group Inc., 1986).
3. Three recent titles attest to continuing national interest in the state of undergraduate education. See Alexander Astin, *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992); Marcia Magolda, *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students' Intellectual Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992); and Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).
4. Ronald Opp, "Freshman Interest in Teaching: Recent Trends," *Journal of Teacher Education* 40 no. 5 (July/Aug. 1989), 43-48.
5. Michael Sedlak and Steven Schlossman, "Who Will Teach? Historical Perspectives on the Changing Appeal of Teaching as a Profession," in Ernst Rothkopf ed., *Review of Research in Education*, Vol. 14 (Washington D.C.: AERA, 1987).
6. Quoted in Francis Gross, *Passages in Teaching: Developmental Crises in the Teaching of Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982), p. 16.
7. Harriet Harvey, *Stories Parents Seldom Hear: College Students Write about Their Lives and Families* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982).
8. *ibid*, Preface.
9. William Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). For an introduction to Perry applied in the music methods class, see Manny Brand, "Toward a Better Understanding of Undergraduate Music Education Majors: Perry's Perspective," *CRME Bulletin* No. 98 (Fall 1988), 22-31.
10. Quoted by Gross, p. 85.
11. Gross, p. 91.
12. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Another view of women's experience of learning is offered by Mary Belenky et al. in *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (USA: Basic Books, 1986). This book presents a female counterpart to Perry's description of male students' development.
13. See for examples, Chris Clark and Penelope Peterson, "Teachers' Thought Processes" in Wittrock, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teaching*

- 3rd edition (New York: MacMillan, 1986); Carol Livingstone and Hilda Borko, "Expert-Novice Differences in Teaching: A Cognitive Analysis and Implications for Teacher Education," *Journal of Teacher Education* 40, no. 5 (July/Aug. 1989), 36-42; and D. Berliner, "Ways of Thinking about Students and Classrooms by More and Less Experienced Teachers" in J. Calderhead, ed., *Exploring Teachers' Thinking* (London: Cassal Educational Ltd., 1987), pp. 60-83.
14. Louis Rubin, "The Thinking Teacher: Cultivating Pedagogical Intelligence," *Journal of Teacher Education* Vol. 40 (Nov./Dec. 1989), 31-34.
15. For a thought-provoking introduction to developing expert teachers through reflection on practice, see David Elliott, "Rethinking Music Teacher Education," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 2, no. 1 (Fall, 1992), 6-15.
16. Francis Gross, *Passages in Teaching: Developmental Crises in the Teaching of Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982).
17. *ibid*, p. 13.
18. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1929), p. 1.
19. Results as reported in "Harvard Assessment Seminars," *The New York Times*, Mar. 5, 1990. 

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