

Materials-Traditional & Constructivist

Each applied instructor differs with regard to what materials should be used in the applied studio. Much is determined by the instructor's experience as a student toward the literature and method books used by their applied instructors. Whether one practices the traditional or constructivist philosophy, there will most likely be strong similarities in the types of materials used. It should be noted that this will differ for either philosophy depending on the level of the student. Such materials that would most likely be used by either are method books that concentrate on specific technical skills, editions of orchestral and solo literature of various time periods, reference materials that may pertain to one's applied area, such as the *Groves Dictionary of Music* and *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Stereo equipment that is accompanied by an array of symphonic and solo recordings with a concentration toward those works to be studied would also be used.

What will most likely differ between the constructivist and the traditionalist is how these sources are used and whether or not they are amended. For example, traditionalists may strictly adhere to their curriculum design regardless of how the student learns. Thus, the instructor expects the student to adjust to their style of teaching. In comparison, the constructivist will most likely consider the student's interest in a particular musical genre or era; how they learn, how and what the instructor wishes the student to focus on. Furthermore, the instructor may request that the student compose an exercise that focuses in improving their technical deficiency. In addition, the constructivist may want to incorporate the use of computer programs that rewrite or arrange works that enhance the student's understanding of the material. This may also be accompanied by other musical programs that focus on theory, composition, musicology, and solfeggio.

As previously indicated, the use of a portfolio engages students to closely observe their needs and progress. Thus, they can analyze what specific exercises are needed for their development. The instructor will also maintain a similar journal of the student's progress, comparing their observations with the student's.

Therefore, designing, thinking, changing, evaluating, most particularly in response to a felt need, create interest and energy. Cognitive processes work to address effectively driven issues. Helping students or groups of students to clarify for themselves the nature of their own questions, to pose their questions in terms they can pursue, and to interpret the results in light of other knowledge they have generated is the teacher's main task (J. Brooks & M. Brooks, pg. 31, 1999).

It should be noted that the use of alternate (or amended) assignments is not strictly that of the constructivist. The traditionalist may also wish to alter or write technical exercises and incorporate computer programs or multi-media instruction by either recording his students or showing them an instructional video. In summary, the difference between these two philosophies will be how the instructors utilize these materials, and whether or not they choose to alter their curriculum in order to better meet the needs of their students.

Assessment-Traditional & Constructivist

Assessing a student's growth, especially when affixing a grade to it, can be rather nebulous and subjective when teaching music performance, especially in an applied setting. It is fair to say that...

in the academic music world, we have constructed a rather strange set of criteria. Often we define educational success in terms of how long a student continues formal study in an institutional setting. Accomplishment then is defined by the duration of study rather than by what the student achieves during a given period of study. According to some people, success is achieved when a beginning student continues lessons at an elementary level and then at an advanced level; greater success is recognized when a high school graduate enters a bachelor's degree program and later pursues a master's degree; an even greater level of achievement is acknowledged when a master's degree student completes a doctorate and a doctoral student receives a post-doctorate fellowship (B.E. Maris, pg. 14, 2000).

Even though this is a personal process as defined by the instructor, there are similarities regardless of which philosophy the instructor follows. For instance, the traditionalist may apply the following criteria when assessing their students: How well the students are prepared for each lesson and how well they perform their assignments. Has the student accomplished the goals established by the instructor by the end of the grading period? Has the student shown progressive growth in technical proficiency? Is the student performing with greater confidence and musicality within the lesson and with performing ensembles? Is the student following the conductor properly? Has the student's ability to blend well with the various sections of the ensembles improved during the grading period? Can the student explain why their tone production, phrasing and technique is proper for the given composition as taught by the instructor? Is the practice regimen, as defined by the instructor, showing evidence of improvement. If not, have the students applied themselves to the instructor's expectations? In turn, the onus is on the student's ability to meet the expectations of the instructor. Thus, these expectations are not based on how the student learns, but whether or not they meet the established criteria as required by the instructor. The instructor does not evaluate himself/herself to determine if they have provided the necessary guidance for the student to succeed. The assessment is based solely on the student's effort (or lack thereof) to master the assignments.

In contrast, the constructivist would most likely not follow such a rigid criteria to assess a student's progress. The constructivist is primarily interested in how well the student can reason in such musical terms as phrasing, tone production, and technique. Can the student explain and justify why their musical interpretations are valid without help from the instructor? This process of evaluation may be accompanied by student and teacher journals which outline the student's growth. The student's journal is part of their portfolio which also includes a practice grid, compositions studied, researched and composed, and technical exercises studied and composed. Lastly, the instructor will review and discuss the student's expectations that were established prior to commencing study. If the student and

instructor feel that these goals were not attained, the instructor must, in consultation with the student, determine if this was due to a lack of effort on the part of the student or failure on the part of the instructor to provide the direction needed for the goal to be achieved. Thus, the constructivist is observing how his student...

processes the result of questioning, interpreting, and analyzing information; using this information and thinking process to develop, build and alter his meaning and understanding of concepts and ideas; and integrating current experiences with past experiences and what he already knows about the given subject (Marlowe & Page, pg. 10, 1998).

Closing Comments

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this paper was to delineate a comparison between the philosophical approach of the traditionalist and that of the constructivist in the applied music setting. The purpose was not to demonstrate that one of these philosophies is superior to the other. Yet, it is fair to say that the constructivist approach is focused more on how the student comprehends and questions the material being taught. It is more focused on how the student best retains the material being presented. This writer is more inclined to combine both philosophies primarily based upon the student's level of expertise and maturity. He does not admonish or laud those who wish to focus entirely on either philosophy. Thus, whether one wishes to accept either philosophy as their primary mode of teaching applied music, (or a combination of the two) it is this writer's belief that the student's growth as a technician and as an artist who can express their inner thoughts about music is paramount.

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About the Author

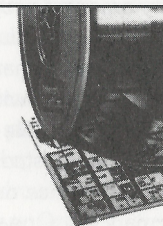
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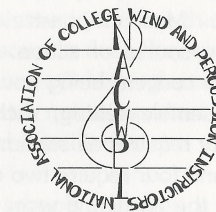
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