

A presentation for the Symposium on Music Teacher Education

The University of Utah

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“CAN I STUDENT TEACH HERE?!”

Preservice Music Teachers' Field Observations at a
School for the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Why **CLASSROOM OBSERVATION**?

“Institutions should encourage **observation** and teaching experiences prior to formal admission to the teacher education program; ideally, such opportunities should be provided **in actual school situations.**”

(NASM Handbook 2022-23, p. 128)

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

- ▶ Participants found **observation without context** as lacking in value (Conway, 2002 & 2012).
- ▶ Research examining **observation methods** and sequencing may be especially valuable in understanding preservice music teachers' skill development (Powell, 2011).
- ▶ Early Field Experiences
 - ▶ Importance, value (& NASM)
 - ▶ Field Teaching Experiences
- ▶ Teacher identity development subject to contextual influences, dependent upon experiences and autobiography (Wagoner, 2011)

Why **THIS CONTEXT** ?

- ▶ Music teachers continually report feeling **underprepared to teach SWD** (Gfeller et al, 1990; Grimsby 2018, 2020; Marsh & Esswein, 2022; Vanweelden & Whipple, 2005, 2014)
- ▶ **Lack of coursework** to prepare preservice music teachers (PMT's) to teach students with disabilities (SWD's)
 - ▶ 30% of universities require, only 21% of those are music-specific (Culp & Salvador, 2021) = **6%**
- ▶ A combination of **music-specific coursework** and **observations of SWD being taught music** may be the best way to prepare PMT's to teach SWD (Hourigan, 2007)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine how preservice music teachers enrolled in a course designed to prepare them to teach students with disabilities made meaning of their field-observations in music classrooms comprised solely of students who are blind or have visual impairments.

...how preservice music teachers made meaning of these field-observation experiences.

What do preservice music teachers
notice during their observations in these
music classrooms?

...how preservice music teachers made meaning of these field-observation experiences.

What do they notice?

In what ways, if any, do preservice music teachers draw connections between their teacher identities and what they notice during these observations?

...how preservice music teachers made meaning of these field-observation experiences.

What do they notice?

Do they draw connections between their teacher identities and what they notice?

How do preservice music teachers negotiate the aspects of their observations that conflict with or disrupt their teacher identities?

POSITIONALITY

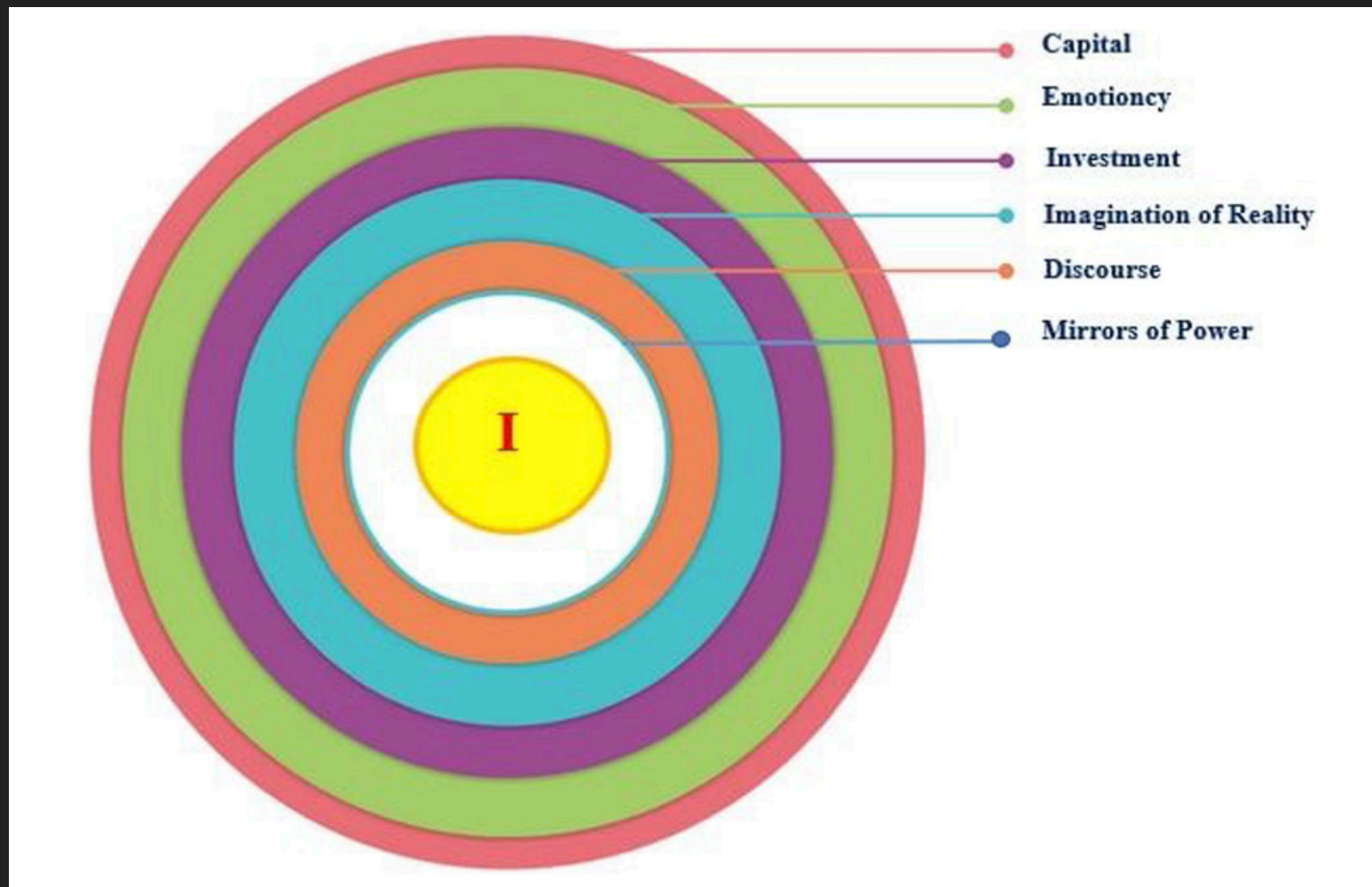
LANGUAGE

ETHICS

METHODOLOGY

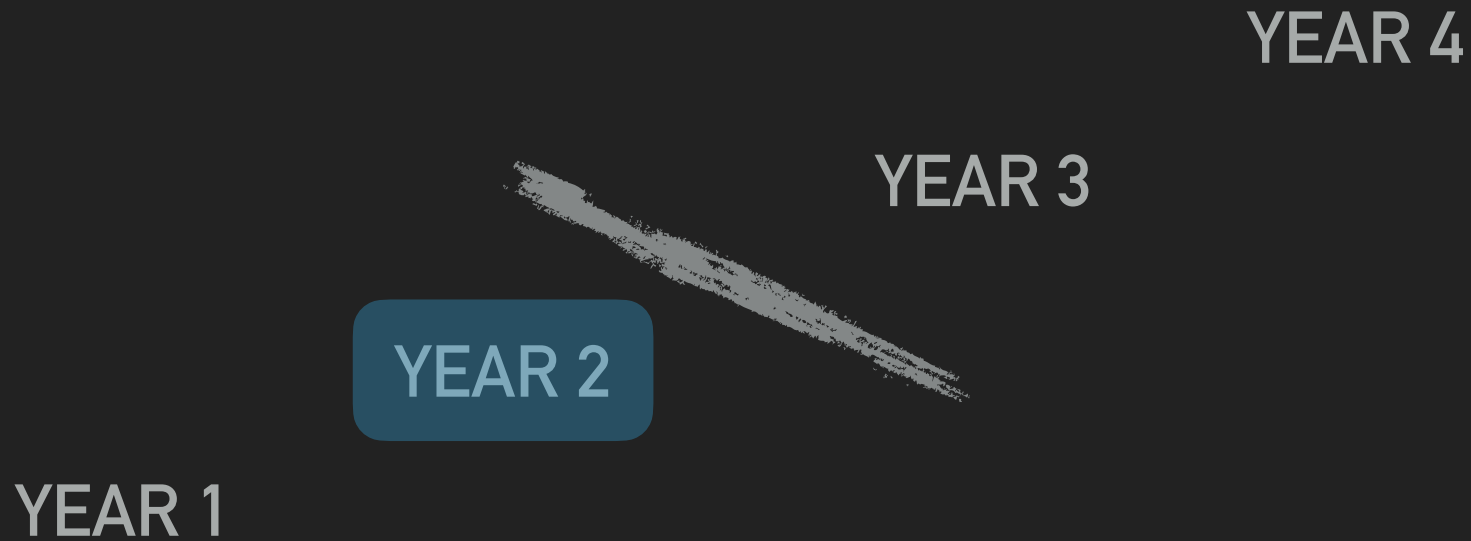
- ▶ Instrumental Case Study Design (Stake, 1995)
 - ▶ Case: Course about teaching diverse learners
 - ▶ Phenomenon: Preservice music teachers' field-observations
- ▶ Theoretical Lens
 - ▶ Framework for Teacher Identity Development from Pishghadam et al (2022)
 - ▶ Social constructivism
 - ▶ Poststructuralism

A New Conceptual Framework for Teacher Identity Development



(Pishghadam et al, 2022)

METHODOLOGY



Field-Observation Experiences at SBVI



Elementary
General Music
Classroom



Elementary
General Music
Classroom (same)



High School
Piano Class



SBVI was established in 1847 and has grown into an institution that provides educational resources that include a residential program and day school, outreach services, and consultative services to those in local agencies.

Elementary General Music

Mrs. Peele

17 years teaching,
13 at SBVI

High School Piano Class

Mr. Berkley

2 years teaching,
both at SBVI

Participants



Max
(he/him)



Meredith
(she/her)



Kallie
(they/she)



Emily
(she/her)



Valerie
(they/she)



Amelia
(she/her)



Lilah
(she/her)

Participants chose their pseudonyms for the study & created their avatars for the visual presentation of data.

Researcher as Participant Observer

Individual Semi-Structured Interviews

Focus Group Interview

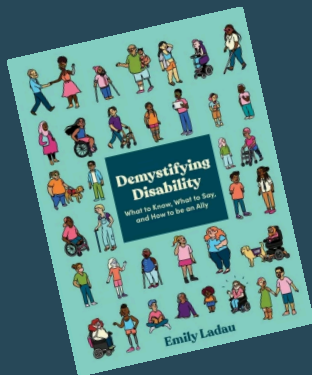
Participants' Written & Recorded Observation Reflections

Researcher Fieldnotes

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Various Articles/Book Chapters

Campus Accessibility Walk



FINDINGS

Interacting

Physical Environment

The Instrument
Petting Zoo

Student Interactions

Student-Student
Student-Teacher
Student-PMTs

Teaching Methods

UDL

"multiple"
"any"

Accessible
Teaching Practices

Teachers
Peers

Just Good Teaching

Changing the Discourse

Disrupting the
Deficit

Increased
Investment

I wonder...

Interacting

Physical Environment

The Instrument
Petting Zoo

Student Interactions

Student-Student

Student-Teacher

Student-PMTs



Max,
Individual
Interview

I noticed two things right off the bat. One, there's a lot of walls in the classroom. It wasn't like one big open space. There was actual delineation between sections with pretty substantial walls, which I thought might not be the best for visually impaired and blind kids—they would like to have it be as open as possible so there's not things to run into. That's what I thought coming in, but then I realized that if there's walls, everything's more enclosed so that the kids—and this goes for all kids, not just kids with visual impairment—more enclosed so the kids can't just roam around.

I noticed that there were many elements of a typical classroom, such as keyboards, Orff instruments, and musical pictures. ... Overall, the classroom seemed very organized, which probably helps for students who are blind or visually impaired because it gives a sense of familiarity; of course, that would be comforting for any person, but I can imagine it helps with moving around the classroom with a sense of ease.



**Meredith,
Observation
Reflection #1**



Initially, I was very surprised at how small the classroom was. I was expecting it to be much larger. In the same vein, I was also surprised that there were only three students. Both the classroom and the class size were much smaller than I expected. I expected [Mr. Berkley's] room to look more like Mrs. Peele's. ... I would like to see the band room and how it compares and contrasts to the general music room.

**Lilah,
Observation
Reflection #3**



**Kallie,
Observation
Reflection #2**

The students seemed very shy at first about the “instrument petting zoo,” but once a few bold peers jumped up to touch the instruments, I loved how they all wanted to feel the instruments. I noticed when one student left their hand on Sam’s double bass for too long they said that “it hurt,” which surprised me and makes me wonder if that student has a heightened sense of touch and gets overstimulated/sensory overload easily from tactile things.

From what I could tell, the students acted like every other 4th and 5th grader I’ve ever met. They all had their own fun personalities, and I could tell that they cared about each other. I could also tell they were very fond of Mrs. Peele, and they respected her.



**Valerie,
Observation
Reflection #1**

Teaching Methods

UDL

"multiple"

"any"

Accessible

Teaching Practices

Teachers

Peers

Just Good Teaching

I noticed that Mrs. Peele used multiple ways to show rondo form. First, she played a song that explained rondo form. Aside from it being tied to music, it's great for those whose preference is aural learning. Then she used rhythm cards in a rondo form and had the students say the rhythms out loud. With the texture of the rhythm cards, this probably spoke to those who need or prefer kinesthetic learning but it was also just a more interactive way to learn the concept. Then she had the students play these rhythms on xylophones, which is another great way to learn, as kids are creating something themselves, which can often be more memorable.

Meredith, Observation Reflection



Me: Let's unpack! Where do you want to start?

Kallie: I was impressed by the ways they helped each other and especially how Mrs. Peel was *amazing* at using her words to guide students to a better understanding of something or to be able to do something better. Like when they were playing the Orff instruments, and she took off some bars for that one student. That works for any student, blind or not. Then she asked him to listen and check that he was playing the same pattern each time—she just always had the right question to ask or the right thing to say.



Emily: AND THE RHYTHM CARDS! She already slayed with that rondo activity, then she busted out the rhythm cards and my mind was blown. Why wasn't I taught rhythm with those? Why aren't we teaching *all kids* rhythm like that? Those work for any kid, and it's another way to represent than just visually and aurally, which is basically all we do right now.



Focus Group Interview

I thought all of the [college] students who demonstrated an instrument did a really good job of challenging their own “normal” speech and way of teaching to be more accessible. It made me realize just how much I rely on sight in my own teaching, especially when choreographing/teaching for show choir. This level of accessibility is beneficial not only to this group of students but could be beneficial to all types of students.



Amelia,
Observation
Reflection #2



Max,
Observation
Reflection #3

There was a lot of student input throughout the lesson, like choosing a rhythm for the progression and choosing which chord they wanted to be in the progression. I liked the way Mr. Berkley corrected the students. It was relaxed but still firm and made mistakes feel much more low-stakes. The students seemed very responsive to him and were able to correct mistakes and address weak spots.

**Changing the
Discourse**

Disrupting the
Deficit

Increased
Investment

I wonder...

After reflecting on it, I think what shocked me the most was how impressed I was at what the students were able to do, but then realizing my own ableism was the reason why I was so impressed. I realized I had judged their disabilities before I even stepped in the door. They live life not being able to rely on their sight, but that doesn't mean that everything they do needs to be looked at as a giant feat, it's just their "normal."



Amelia,
Observation
Reflection #3

They were all so independent. They can all get around easily and know where they were going, maybe with a little bit of help, but even for 5th graders it was impressive.



Kallie



Valerie

I was surprised by the musical vocab that they had. This could just be because I haven't been in an elementary school classroom for a while, but I know I probably couldn't use "tempo" in a sentence in elementary school.

I was surprised at how comfortable they were improvising and composing. I feel like in many schools if you asked a group of students to improv or compose, they would be kicking and screaming!



Meredith



Emily,
Observation
Reflection #1

I thought the students were as average as I expected them to be. They interacted just like typical students would. I assume that being in a specialized school helps, they don't feel out of place nor do they have inadequate care. It made me happy to see them having playful interactions with their teachers. Sometimes it feels like teachers see diverse learners of any kind as burdens and inconveniences and it makes me sad.

I have a feeling the instrument petting zoo will be the most memorable experience of our time at SBVI. It was interesting to see the various ways our [college] students interacted with and adapted their language, both verbal language and body language, when they were engaging with students and showing their instruments. Valerie was absolutely brilliant in how they guided students to touch their trumpet and press the valves. They're a stronger soul than I am because, if that sweet precious angel had put her hand on MY mouthpiece, I don't think I'd be as calm as they were! Pete struggled, and I saw him rethinking holding his hand up for a "high five" when the student wasn't able to see the gesture. Lilah was completely in her element playing her guitar, and the feeling of that room when she started singing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and EVERY single kid joined in unprompted? Even stoic Nathan had a twinkle in his eye. Kallie looked over at me and mouthed, "Can I student teach here?!"

Researcher Fieldnotes,
Immediately Following Observation #2



(continued)

I have to be honest, though, I truly don't believe this is coming from a "Oh, look, this kids with disabilities can do music things!" place. For every comment in those first written reflections directly addressing (dis)ability, there's something implicitly addressing their uncertain or disrupted expectations for kids in general—and we know that elementary experiences, especially in the early field experiences, can be disruptive for PMTs who haven't spent time around young children. Must be sure to take care during data analysis to accurately capture whether my initial thoughts on that turn out to be the case.

Researcher Fieldnotes,
Immediately Following Observation #2



Notes to Myself (In Front of You!)

Limitations

Framework

Sustained Experiences

Keep classroom components...

...but add more prep for working with blind/
visually impaired students

Future Research



THANK YOU!

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