

## JASON MICHAEL ADAMS: PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Music Educator | Singer-Songwriter | Curriculum Designer | Multi-Instrumentalist

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Music has shaped every chapter of my life, beginning with church choir at age four. I have since found myself performing spirituals of the African and African-American diaspora with Dr. Anthony T. Leach in ‘Essence of Joy’ all over the world. I developed from improvising my first out-of-key melody in Mrs. Patti Begg’s music room to recording my own songs with session musicians in Nashville. I am a trombone and tuba player, choral singer, and theater kid; now a late-night rock and roll entertainer and simultaneous church Music Director. I have always been a creative mind and musical dreamer which positions me as student focused educator. Music, across every possible medium, has been my language of praise and vehicle for processing joy, confusion, heartbreak, hope and, faith. My philosophy as an educator is rooted in the belief that every human possesses an innate musical identity. It is the role of teachers to help students to uncover their path and identities. As an educator and community arts leader, I view myself as a facilitator of discovery, offering opportunities where curiosity and confidence can flourish. I seek to empower my students and community alike to discover that vulnerability is a strength and expressing ourselves is a courage that everyone benefits from.

Throughout my three decades of music making, I have discovered when a student recognizes their own voice or agency in creation is an inspirational moment. Whether it is a guitar student finally settling into their own rhythmic groove, a child freely singing for the first time, or a class of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders excitedly chanting rhythms and songs to activate “Ollie’s Machine,” I am always reminded that music education is about expression and choice. The youngest daughter of a long-term family I teach runs out of the hallway screaming “I’m Four years old, so I can take piano lessons now!” This little girl had only spoken a handful of times to me as I was present in her home each week for over two years teaching her older brother’s guitar and piano. Each glimpse from her around the corner as they learned was curiosity met with my encouragement to join. Student’s will best learn when they are seen and heard, encouraged to bring themselves, fully, into the process. My teaching therefore has a foundation of relationship and trust. Connection is the keystone to vulnerability, especially when met with empathy.

My philosophy and charismatic pursuit for individuality helped inspire “Ollie’s Music World,” an immersive, narrative-based learning environment that blends character, storytelling, and student musicianship into a music room filled with imagination. The class embarks on adventures that teach core music concepts through imagination and play. They not only become composers, engaging with their creative voices, but journey through time to meet and explore historical figures and music cultures around the world. As I created Ollie’s world, I rediscovered my own journey and better understood how story, humor, and character transform the way

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children engage with musical ideas. Ollie is pedagogically intentional and always aims to keep students focused within their ZDP. A simple rhythm becomes an invitation to collaboration and dynamic exploration becomes core empathy building. Within Ollie's world, students are not passively participating, they are co-creators and problem-solvers, explorers in a world they own. This intrinsic sense of agency is pivotal to my teaching and by belief that music education is crucial to not only cultivate musicians, but whole, confident people.

My approach to music education is unequivocally grounded in constructivism and culturally sustaining pedagogy. I design musical tasks that invite students to build understanding through active use of music as a language. Through singing, moving, improvising, composing, and the active engagement of choices that matter, students can learn to listen to themselves and others, adjusting and responding along the way. These skills are fundamental to musicianship, but also beneficial to the nurturing of emotional intelligence, empathy, and resilience. I've witnessed students learn to regulate their dynamics because "Tiny Ollie has small, sensitive ears." Then, in turn, demonstrate that kindness to peers. Music offers space for students to rehearse being human.

Cultural understanding and inclusion are vital to my philosophy. As a young musician in choral, band, orchestral, theater, and ballet settings I was immersed in the full spectrum of classical and contemporary music. As a songwriter further influenced by folk, blues, Americana, reggae, and world traditions, I am proof that students thrive when the musical environment reflects the world around us. In my classroom, students might sing an American blues song about thanksgiving, fly across the world to learn an Aboriginal Crane Dance, then travel with alt-persona Oliver Von Oran to meet Beethoven in the early 1800's listening to the second movement of "The Pastoral" all because of bird connections. Music encounters like these teach students more than musical concepts, but history, geography, and cultural appreciation. They may just come to the conclusion that music connects people across time and place.

Versatility has always been one of my greatest strengths, a "jack of all trades" as an educator and musician that allows me to adapt and conceptualize lessons in a fluid way. I meet students where they are and strive to model authenticity and ultimately nurture students to become creative, confident, empathetic learners who know themselves and feel empowered to use their voices. Whether through the imaginative landscapes of Ollie's World or through traditional ensemble work, I hope to guide students to more than just musical skill. They should find a sense of belonging and the courage to express themselves wholistically. Music changed my life, my work as an educator is to assist in ensuring the same for my students.