

Music 495 A -Spring 2026
Student Teaching Reflection
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My goal in returning to school for this post-baccalaureate certification was simple and singularly focused. All I knew was that I wanted to become a music teacher in a broader sense than I had been as a private instructor. My work in private lessons has always been meaningful, but it is inherently limited in reach. At 35 years old, with years of musical and teaching experience and encouragement from mentors in my life I was ready to step into the classroom. What I was not fully prepared for, however, was how much this experience would deepen not just my skill set, but my understanding of what it truly means to be a teacher.

In many ways, I have not changed as much as one might expect. From the very beginning, I approached both placements with confidence and immediacy. In my elementary placement, I quickly immersed myself by observing Mrs. DeRemer and then jumping into teaching within the first week. While this eagerness initially led me to take on too much too quickly, it also revealed something essential about who I am as an educator: I am someone who learns by doing, by engaging fully, and by trusting my instincts in front of students.

That same instinct carried into my high school placement with Dr. Eldreth. Despite joking advice from Mrs. DeRemer not to “jump in,” I found myself doing exactly that and teaching on day one. Partnering with Dr. Eldreth, who knew my abilities where they were, had me conducting choir and working closely with students immediately. The difference, however, was not in my willingness to engage, but in how I paced myself and how intentionally I approached my role. What changed over time was my ability to calibrate the needs of students and my ability to guide them, to better understand when to step forward, when to step back, and how to shape learning experiences with greater awareness and purpose.

My elementary placement fundamentally shaped this growth. Through studying educational psychology, the previous semester and applying concepts such as Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, I better understood not just what to teach, but how students learn. This understanding, paired with my own creative background, led to the development of narrative-based and play-centered approaches evolving in Ollie’s Music World. In that environment, I witnessed students learning through play, storytelling, and exploration. They were not engaging with musical content alone, but with their own creativity and identity. There is a drive in me to approach the

FUNDamentals of music with the sense of creativity and student voice, something that I could not have truly identified prior to returning school.

As I transitioned from elementary to my high school placement what became most striking was how transferable these principles are. High school students, in many ways, are elementary students in older bodies. They still crave engagement, ownership, and meaningful connection to what they are doing. All humans do, regardless of age. The difference lies not in their need for these elements, but in how often they are given permission to access them. This realization allowed me to bring foundational teaching strategies into this secondary context. Whether through scaffolding musical concepts, encouraging improvisation, reframing important practice and rehearsal strategies, or simply playing along in their bands, all students became individual students. In the group context I was constantly connecting learning to individual student interests in a culturally responsive way granting them that permission to be invested and creative.

The high school environment allowed me to fully utilize my private lesson background to help individual students regularly. I was able to work one-on-one with students toward their highly individualized goals almost daily. My strengths were applied when coaching vocalists for performances, guiding advanced instrumentalists to higher skills, and even mentoring a student through the full repair of a damaged guitar. These moments reinforced the importance of individualized instruction within a larger classroom setting and demonstrated that meaningful growth often occurs when students are given focused, personal attention.

One of the most impactful challenges I encountered occurred during my elementary placement when I lost my voice due to illness. Unable to speak, I was forced to rethink my entire approach to instruction. Rather than stepping back, I leaned into the moment, using gesture, modeling, and silence to guide the class. What emerged was a powerful shift in student ownership. Students began holding each other accountable, responding to my nonverbal cues, and engaging more deeply in the musical process. They already knew the music and songs of Ollies World to sing, so even in my silence on those days they were able to practice and grow in their abilities together. What initially seemed like a limitation became an opportunity to explore a more student-centered approach to learning. Over time, the class adapted more quickly, demonstrating that students are capable of self-regulation and musical independence when given the space and expectation to do so.

In contrast, my high school placement presented challenges of a different nature, particularly in navigating varying levels of student engagement. Some students were deeply invested in the music-making process, while others demonstrated apathy or

reluctance to participate. Balancing accountability with relationship-building became essential. Through consistent expectations, individualized support, and a focus on musical excellence, I was able to help guide students toward meaningful participation. Slowly some of those students choose to participate and we could hear improvements in the music. Then seeing their confidence increase, and witnessing their pride in performance during the concerts was one of the most rewarding aspects of this experience.

Ultimately, this student teaching journey has clarified who I am as a teacher. I am someone who prioritizes relationships and individual student needs. I believe it is not only possible, but essential to be a reliable, supportive presence for students. I will always seek to create a space where they feel safe to take risks, to grow, and to express themselves. At the same time, I recognize the challenge of balancing those individual needs within a full classroom environment. This experience has brought the realization that while it is difficult, it is absolutely achievable through intentional design, flexibility, and a commitment to meeting students where they are.

One of the most meaningful realizations I have had is the value of collaboration in teaching. Working alongside Mrs. DeRemer and DR. Eldreth has demonstrated how powerful co-teaching truly is. This is not an advocacy to divide responsibilities or lighten a teachers teach load, but as a way to expand what is possible for students. The ability to share perspectives, adapt in real time, and provide multiple points of access to learning greatly enhances the educational experience. It has led me to believe strongly in the potential for more collaborative teaching models in the future.

As I reflect on my experience since January, I see the elevation of my teaching practices, but also a deeper understanding of the role itself. Teaching is not about delivering content, it is creating conditions in which students can discover, connect, and grow. It is about balancing structure with freedom, guidance with independence, and expertise with empathy. Most importantly, it is about being present for all students, in each moment and recognizing the profound impact that presence can have for them on their journeys.

This experience has affirmed the decision I made two and a half years ago to pursue this path and has strengthened my commitment to becoming the kind of educator who not only teaches music, but uses music as a vehicle for connection, expression, and lifelong learning.