

# CASMEC Annual Conference

San Jose Convention Center – Saturday, February 18, 2017 – 8:00 AM

## ***“Teaching Kids to Play By Ear, Improvise, and Compose”***

These exercises may be added to *any* existing music class; band, choir, orchestra or general music. Use these activities for five minutes or fifteen minutes each class period. You decide. New activities and/or more complexity should be introduced gradually over time. Use of these simple exercises over time will produce proven creative results with your students.

- I. **Start With Rhythm:** *“Clap, Snap, Stomp”* – Call and Response. Teacher leads.

Simple – increase complexity – add body percussion – combine sounds.

LISTENING SKILLS are emphasized. Use lots of teacher modeling.

- II. **Rhythm Student Leaders:** *“Clap, Snap, Stomp”* – Students lead the class.

Students improvise their own rhythms (emulate the teacher). ALL kids lead

LISTENING and IMPROVISATION SKILLS are emphasized.

Teacher continues to interject and model, but students primarily lead sessions.

- III. **Singing Simple Rhythms:** *“Do Re Mi”* or *“One Two Three”* or just *“La La La”*

Add pitch to Call and Response activities. Teacher sings rhythms on ONE NOTE (“do”), adding another note (“do-re”), eventually adding three notes total.

“One note – two note – three note.” Again, LISTENING SKILLS are emphasized and SINGING, with lots of teacher modeling. Students will be excited and anxious to move to the next stage!

- IV. **Singing Student Leaders:** *“Do Re Mi”* or *“One Two Three”* *“La La La”*

Students lead the class. LISTENING, SINGING and IMPROVISATION emphasized.

Kids sing rhythms on ONE NOTE, then add “One note-two note,” and eventually

“One note – two note – three note.” Teacher continues to model during sessions.

- IV. **Playing with Rhythm:** Show students how to play one note on any instrument (in band, orchestra or general music class). Check they have good posture, technique and tone (for a beginner). **Play** (or sing) a rhythm on an instrument. Have students **play by ear** and echo what you played. LISTENING SKILLS and PLAYING BY EAR are emphasized. Either model with an instrument or with your voice (it is GOOD for you and kids to sing in Band and Orchestra classes!). Use lots of teacher modeling. Check for articulation (tonguing).
- V. **Student Leaders Play:** Students play one note and lead the class improvising rhythms and having the class echo what they play. Teacher may “take over” and lead and continue to model, but students primarily run the exercise.
- VI. **Add More Pitches- Add More Leaders:** “*Do Re Mi*” (or whatever your method book uses), teacher adds new notes, one at a time, modeling rhythms and two-note “melodies.” Students echo and play by ear what they hear. As students learn new notes and are comfortable doing so, they add these to their improvisations. “One note – two note – three note” improvisations are played from the students and the teacher. Teacher often leads, students often lead, building on skills.
- VII. **Singing and Playing/Playing and Singing:** Alternate between all previous exercises, sometimes using “*Clap, Snap, Stomp*” or singing “*Do Re Mi*” or “*One Two Three*” “*La La La,*” or playing “One note – two note – three note.” Return to singing and also simple clapping, etc. as you add new notes and rhythms and meters. Teacher models and leads students to new musical ideas.
- EVENTUALLY STUDENTS WILL HAVE LOTS OF GOOD MUSICAL IDEAS**, and they will want to “save” or “remember” these ideas. Recording ideas is great!!

- VIII. **Simple Composition:** Encourage students to create their own musical “sentences” or melodies, based on their improvised ideas. Usually two- or three- note melodies are best with which to start. You may want to record these ideas, or have the kids record them (Garage Band). Ask students to “work” with their ideas, maybe adding new notes once learned, or changing rhythms. Keep going back to improvisation as the source of ideas, and keep modeling ideas as the teacher.
- IX. **Need for Notation:** Many students may want to share their compositions with other students and have them play their ideas. Explore ways to write the musical ideas down. These ideas do not need to be conventional. Use numbers for “one-two-three” or “high-medium-low.” You may also want to introduce conventional notation. Have students write down, or “notate” their ideas and have kids play their classmates music. Continue to “work on” or add to the compositions as student learn.
- X. **PLAY BY EAR – IMPROVISE – COMPOSE:** Over time these simple exercises will lay the groundwork for your students to **make their on music**. As the teacher, you should model composing simple musical ideas as well. Share your work with your kids, and have everyone play or sing other “composers” music.

As students learn more notes and techniques, be sure to add this complexity to their improvisations and compositions. Return often to the simple early exercises. Always make sure it is fun and light and active for the students, just a few minutes each class will pay off over time.

**THANK YOU FOR COMING TODAY!**  
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