

Feel the Pulse, Hear the Pitch, Make it Music

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Daily Warm-Ups ~

Though not used much in the lesson today due to time constraints, it is vital that you have “warm-up” routines that develop fine and gross motor skills, ear training, pulse and rhythm experience, etc. I highly recommend Keith Terry’s Rhythm Blocks as a place to start, as well as Kodaly Solfege and fun games.

Springtime is here ~

I developed this lesson for my 3rd grade classes to teach proper mallet technique, and allow for improvisation. Through audiation and reading solfege, while learning the rhythm initially, the intention is to highlight rhythmic notation versus pitch notation. Please keep in mind that this lesson is being demonstrated in 50 minutes, where I would typically take two months to teach this once per week, along with three or four other lessons. Keep in mind each class has it’s own character, and specifically attention span :) Mix up your lessons with variety and let your lessons unfold over the course of weeks and months. Have a plan and a purpose.

- 1) Teach the Rhythmic melody, ostinato and Bordun through patting.
- 2) Teach the Melody pitches with Solfege.
- 3) Pat the melody and introduce the melody back in while patting.
- 4) Teach in four part.
- 5) The “B” section becomes an area for improv, and can be used in a variety of ways with call and response, dance and improv, etc. To begin this section, talk about what might grow in a garden. Have cards cued up with those words with the rhythmic notation on the back. You can take the step in between to organize the rhythms using manipulatives such as different size cups or boxes/cubes, string, or???
- 6) Students in groups of three or four will arrange those cards into a four bar phrase of their design. This becomes their “B2”.
- 7) Half the class can play the song on Orff Instruments while the other half performs their compositions then switch.
- 8) Take those compositions for “B2” and put them on the bars! Instant improv opportunity!

Blue Trane, or “So What” ~

This lesson is designed to introduce swing and jazz to the elementary classroom, as well as note reading. Improvisation should often be a part of your curriculum in elementary classroom, and is certainly a part of this lesson.

- 1) Begin with using cups (or whatever manipulative you find your fave) and teach the straight rhythm of “Blue Trane”. Using Solfege (or my preferred Gordon Syllables) and Keith Terry’s rhythm blocks, speak out the notation.
- 2) Swing the rhythm blocks and then read through the notation again. Students should find it very quick and easy to read the rhythm swung.
- 3) Place the cups on a staff. I’ve had teachers tell me after this workshop that they’ve use tape or magnets to put them straight to the white board. I like to use a staff with tape on the ground because you can have students dance on it with the improv or move the cups easier. Whatever works for you!!! It’s your classroom and your imagination!
- 4) Read using solfege or Gordon Syllables.
- 5) Develop a theme with your class and compose lyrics. Use the same lyrics for each chord. Since this is a 1-4-5, you’ll need three lines. My favorite theme was traveling, and we came up with traveling to France. The answer to each line from the teacher can be “So What?” I used this phrase because of the similarity between “Blue Trane” and “So What”. It also created a nice little call and response.
- 6) Take it to the instruments. Keep the bass during the improve section on 1 unless your group is a bit stronger and can handle improvising on 1-4-5. This will depend on how much experience they’ve had over the past few years.
- 7) Add drums (break the kit apart to have one on the high hat, another on the suspended, etc, or if you have a hot shot kid, let them be your drummer!)

Elementary kids playing marching percussion? Why not??

I’ve begun using Boomwhackers to practice with our drumline at the middle school. I’m playing around with ideas of what an elementary classroom might do that would transition well into playing some marching percussion. The more connections we can make between the elementary/primary classroom and high school ensemble classrooms, the higher our retention and the stronger our students’ musicianship will be. High school directors, take your winter line to the elementary school! Let them borrow those instruments, practice, and then when your winter concert comes along, invite them to come “open your show”! Connect :)