

The Road to Improvisation

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Guidelines for Success

Improvisation must become an integral part of the instructional process. Students gain confidence when they lead imitation of movement, rhythm and melodic patterns. Early after teacher-led imitation, have the students lead imitation with partners first, then small groups. Later, they can take turns leading the entire class. This process saves class time and builds confidence. Only the child leading the imitation has moved to the exploration stage. Improvisation must be followed by High Quality analysis and evaluation by the student and their peers. This instills higher-level thinking skills.

Five Steps to Improvisation

1. Student-led imitation exercises beginning with four-beat patterns
2. Half phrases; analyze two-beat building blocks to learn how to create connectors and cadences
3. Rhythms or melodies to be completed, four-beat patterns
4. Call & Response when the improvisation comes first you eliminate the ending.
5. Full phrases; Question and Answer form; responding to an antecedent.

“When you understand just enough to confuse everybody” a bibliography

Keetman, Gunild. “Elementaria: First acquaintance with Orff-Schulwerk” Schott, 1970.

Warner, Brigitte. “Orff-Schulwerk: Applications for the Classroom” Prentice Hall, 1991.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

5 The student can synthesize and improvise an understanding of the concept in a new context.

4 The student can evaluate the performance with criteria.

3 The student can analyze the musical concept through reading and writing or observing.

2 The student can use vocabulary properly and apply the learning.

1 The student can only imitate others and uses the vocabulary..

How does anyone prove mastery?

Ideas from the world of mathematics: manipulatives, oral language, pictures, real-world application, symbols. When students can transfer between these five media, they show mastery. We can do the same with movement and music.

Improvise

Read

Write

Play

Sing

Move

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“A Journey” *Spotlight on Music*, Bk. 4, p. 14

Use poetry to transfer rhythmic speech to floor percussion. Accompaniment patterns can be developed by the children or taken from World Music Drumming. The poem is presented in half phrases as in a hocket. Analyze the rhythm for “connectors and cadences.”

Move from Teacher-led to Student-led movement imitation.

Weikart, Phyllis. “Count 64” *Rhythmically Moving #2*

Use the A section of this novelty dance circling forward eight beats counterclockwise, then backward eight beats the same “line of direction.” Change the line to clockwise and circle forward eight beats then backward eight beats the same “line of direction.” Then have students lead movement imitation for four or eight beat patterns. This student-created B section lasts four phrases. Explore direction, patterns, pathways or footwork. Have the children discuss how this experience is similar to rhythmic improvisation.

“Paw-Paw Patch” *Spotlight*, Bk. 3, p. 195, Or Backwoods Heritage, Martha Riley

Use this longways set dance to have children lead rhythm patterns with partners and then small groups. Many activities can be used to imbed improvisation practice.

Longways sets of five or six couples facing up the set. Begin the dance with random spacing in the room. After the song and movements are secure, add the formation.

Verse 1: (solo) “Where oh, where?” The head lady turns away and skips down the outside of the set and back to home around the outside of the entire set.

Verse 2: (half the set) “Come on boys” The head lady repeats the pathway followed by the entire line of boys.

Verse 3: (tutti-everyone) “Pickin’ up paw-paw” Both lines cast off—boat lines—away from their partners and down the outside of the set. The head couple forms an arch at the foot of the set and the second couple leads the rest through the arch to reform the set with a new head couple. This play party can be used to label figures and elements of the longways set.

Create an interlude of four-beat body percussion improvisation with partners working together.

Half phrases are formed from two-beat Building Blocks/Bricks.

Explore two-beat building blocks/bricks in simple rhythm with quarter and eight-note manipulative cards. Some will create a landing or cadence that comes to a sense of rest.

The other will create tension or a lift to create a connector. Check the downbeat with tennis balls. For older students use sixteenth note patterns in the iconic stage with text alone. Lee, Dennis “Mississauga Rattlesnakes” *Jelly Belly*, Macmillan of Canada.

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Melodies to be completed...

“Ding, Dong, Diggi diggi dong” Spotlight, Bk. 3, p. 269

This often quoted melody is a simple example of abac elemental form. The melody demonstrates clear half phrases that can be completed with new patterns. Prepare melodic patterns as interludes for other play parties and singing games such as “Shortnin’ Bread” By Stephen Foster. Students in concentric circles of partners, identify the outside circle. Verse-perform steady-beat hand jive with partner: smack, clap, pat, clap to match the melodic outline. Demonstrate an incorrect pattern backwards and phasing to clean up. Refrain-do-si-do your partner with your arms crossed on your chest until “shortnin’ bread,” then repeat the smack, clap, pat on the m-r-d pattern. Repeat and slide to the left to find your new partner. Create an interlude of melodic improvisation using “Mamma’s little baby loves shortnin’ shortnin’” as a melody to be completed with other treats. The improvisations must cadence on high or low ‘do.’

Rhythms to be completed... “Chicken on the Fencepost” Spotlight, Bk. 3, p. 265

Sing the song in a single circle with two hidden gates. A farmer and a fox are outside the circle waiting for the fence gates to open on the cadence. A rubber chicken is in the center of the circle waiting to become someone’s dinner. On the second round have the circle rotate counterclockwise. In later lessons, create concentric circles that rotate in contrary motion. This concept will be used later in ostinati accompaniment patterns and melodic composition. Develop an accompaniment from melodic patterns for practice. Create half phrases of rhythm improvisation leading/copying with a partner. Use the rhythm from the first four beats of the melody as the prompt. The class uses body percussion to give the prompt, the farmer/fox must complete the rhythm with a cadence and a sixteenth-note pattern to win the chicken. Have the children discuss how this experience relates to melodic improvisation. In a later lesson, have the students create other ideas of farmyard experiences and use manipulatives to show two-beat, sixteenth-note patterns in notation. Work in teams of three and use “hello Susan Brown” as a cue for sharing. This can become a written assessment for a student-learning objective.

Call & Response improvisation... “Sail Away, Ladies” Spotlight on Music, Bk.3 p. 54

Students sing the set response after creating new melodic four-beat patterns with a partner. Take turns leading or copying for a total of four phrases. Sing the refrain while chaining seven in a Grand right/left to find a new partner. In this format the ending doesn’t matter since you are creating the first half of the phrase.

Full-phrase improvisation needs a structure and criteria.

“Heave-Ho Me Laddies” Spotlight, Bk. 4, p. 258

Movement and rhythm improvisation need a phrase structure while melodic improvisation could use a set rhythm. This rhythm could be constructed or set from rhythmic speech. World Music Drumming patterns can be reorganized in forms using a SMARTboard or manipulatives. With this song, drop the text of the refrain and have partners create full phrases of question/answer improvisations using melodic patterns in solfa.

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Improvisation Rubric

Have the students use this rubric to check themselves and each other. This serves to grade the student learning objectives for each grade.

4 The improvisation is Repeatable/Sing-able, by self and others, not composition, but awareness.

3 The student creates cadences. In melodic improvisation, the student must establish tonality.

2 Illustrates the appropriate movement elements, tonal set or rhythmic set

1 The student follows the form or rhythmic structure

Melodic/Movement improvisation to a set rhythm (Music for Children, Vol. I, pp. 60-61)

Melodic/Rhythmic/Movement improvisation to a set phrase structure:

Question/Answer, Call and Response (Music for Children, Vol. I, pp. 64-66, 79-81)

Melodic/Rhythmic/Movement improvisation to an elemental form:

abab aaba aaab abba abac from Elemental folk music and dance