

Improvising and Composing with Familiar Rhythms, Drums, and Barred Instruments

Lesson 4

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INSTRUCTIONAL: Lesson Four

Introduction

As the students are at the barred instruments sitting in the small composition groups, have one group play its composition over the tonic drone. After the first group plays, say the following aphorism:

March comes in like a lion,
March comes in like a lion,
March comes in like a lion, a lion, but
Leaves just like a little lamb.

After each group plays its composition, repeat the speech. Students will begin to say the speech with you simultaneously. Repeat the speech until all are completely comfortable with the words.

Exploration

At the barred instruments, have students say the March aphorism while clicking or tapping the rhythm with their mallets. When this is secure, have students play the entire rhythm on the low D. Repeat this several times. Next, have students play the entire rhythm on the A. Ask students about the relationship between A and D—A is the dominant to D, the tonic.

When the rhythm is accurate, have students play the entire piece on D and F. Gradually repeat this process until the following notes are added: D, F, G, A, C, and D. The primary exploration is focused on rhythmic accuracy and not melodic construction.

As the students become more comfortable with this pentatonic scale, remind them of the criteria of effective melody making:

- The melody used mainly step-wise motion.
- The melody had a defined melodic shape or contour.
- The melody employed pattern.
- The melody was memorable (I could sing it back rather easily).
- The tonic was approached by the note beside it, not a skip.

With this in mind, give students several minutes to work. During this work time, have them play these new melodies for a partner and evaluate each other. When the students are comfortable, have students who are willing to share, play their new melody over a tonic drone.

After several students have shared, have students identify the weak parts of speech on the March aphorism. Again speech serves as a major impetus for music. Students will recognize that the words “in,” “a,” and “but” are not strong words. On these words have students add the E. When this is comfortable, repeat adding the B. This process is very similar to above and the students will readily move faster than with the previous composition.

When students are comfortable with their new compositions, have them play their melodies for members of their small groups and evaluate each other. After this evaluation, students may need time to adjust their melodies.

After the students play their melodies for each other, allow them to choose a melody that meets all the criteria of effective melody making and utilizes half steps in the correct place. Once they have chosen a melody, have the entire class learn this melody for the March aphorism. Perform the new melody several times until the students are comfortable with the new melody.

Culminating Aesthetic Moment

Now students have several elements of music that can be combined. Allow students to try several ideas for the form with student conductors. When a final form is decided, make a map for your students and perform:

Speech March aphorism	March aphorism melody on xylophones	Group one AABC melody	Group two AABC melody	March aphorism in canon with xylophones and drums	Coda: whisper “but leaves just like a little lamb” 3x
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Click to watch video demonstrations. (Please be patient while files download.)

Video 1 Video 2 Video 3 Video 4 Video 5 Video 6

Reflection for Learning

In this process for learning, children have been involved in creating compositions that involve movement, rhythm, and melody. This process has allowed students to identify, construct, perform, and read many elements of music. Engage students in thinking during this process. This will involve the students in metacognition (students examining their thought experiments). Ask questions after the final performance:

What was the easiest part of the piece to perform?

Why was that easy?

What was the most difficult part?

Why was it difficult?

What did you do as a group to solve this difficult situation?

If other students were composing a piece like this, what advice would you give them?

If students are performing for others, encourage the audience to ask questions of the performance. This dialogue will provide for a rich and authentic experience for learning.

Assessment

At the end of large compositions, it is critical to examine what students know. This can be done fairly easily—especially if assessment and dialogue have been woven into the overall process of teaching and learning. Rolling out a very large piece of paper and assigning three guiding questions

will promote myriad material from which you can draw. Ask the following questions and have the students write their answers:

What do you know about the music of this piece?

How did composing this piece make you feel?

What questions do you have about your composition?

From these questions, you can assess students' knowledge as a group, their social development in collaboration, and their metathinking about the construction and fundamentals of music. Reflecting on what students know, do, and think can be recorded as follows:

Facts/ideas about this piece we know and learned.

What we did well that helped us perform.

What the teacher did to help us learn.

This reflection will solidify knowledge and help all members of the community understand teaching and learning efficiently and effectively.

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