

Using the Artistic Process

Some Structures for Exploring Music

REMEMBER:

DIVE IN! -- use a minimum of explaining and a maximum of doing.

“Simple is best. You can make a lot of music with two notes;
you don’t have to have 14,000 different chords under your belt.”

The voice is a tool of expression; it is “the horn or the speaker of the soul.”

For Classroom Teachers:

Start with an underlying beat.

Instead of telling students what they're going to discover, **let them discover**. In Name Go-Round, for example, rather than introduce the activity by saying, "In this game you can discover the rhythm in music in your name," talk about the rhythms in their names *after* they've discovered those rhythms by doing.

Think about dynamics: play with volume and silences to increase students' awareness and listening skills and to maintain control of the activity.

Using music can provide the tools for encouraging participation:

Give supportive environments and choices, yet balance with class management. For example, to a child who doesn't want to participate in the Name Go-Round you might say, "We'll come back to you." Or, "Let us say your name" or "May we say your name?"

Use the Name Go-Round, Vocal Community, and Sound Orchestra to harness, or manage, energy and to work on vocalizing and using vocalizing imagery [see Vocal Save].

Try to find the difference between being creative, yourself, and eliciting creativity from your students. If you're too caught up in getting your part out, it won't facilitate a lot for the students to do -- other than continue to be led by their teacher. **You need to enable your students to create** immediately.

MUSIC TERMS AND ACTIVITIES: TIPS AND DEFINITIONS

Name Go-Round or Name, Name:

One person on a circle sings out her name and the group echoes it back. Person # 2 then sings his name and the group echoes it back. The process continues around the circle with each student spontaneously singing out his or her name and the entire circle, with the same spontaneity, echoing it back.

Sound Orchestra:

An orchestra of sound in which different groups have different sounds. "Sound Orchestra" can be made up of individuals or different groups, but is usually conducted by one person. The conductor may make changes in both the tempo and the dynamic levels among the groups. ("Vocal Community" and "Sound Orchestra" are separate, but once you have the concept of each of them, they do collapse together.)

Vocal Community:

"Vocal Community" is a kind of "Sound Orchestra" in which individuals lead themselves. They have their parts and essentially conduct themselves because they work together.

1. Assigned Parts

The class stays on the circle, but shifts into three distinct groups. Each group is given a vocal, rhythmic part which is harmonic, or rhythmically congruent, with the other parts. Staying on the circle and in their groups, the students sing their parts altogether.

Next, the students are asked to walk amongst one another, greeting each other with their congruent parts. In discussion afterward students may comment on the experience of being able to hear and greet others with different sounds as well as the comfort of sometimes coming across "one of their own." This combination of a communal and a musical experience is a central element of the "Vocal Community."

2. Creating Own Sounds

After greeting others, everyone rejoins their original group, and each of the three groups creates a series of sounds in succession. One student from each group gives a sound; the next student thinks of a sound that goes with that sound; and then the next creates another sound -- so each group creates its own part, rather than being given a sound by the teacher. Initially, the groups can lead themselves. Later different leaders may try their hand at conducting.

3. Curriculum Connections

"Vocal Community" and "Sound Orchestra" have lent themselves to a wide range of curriculum connections including lessons on weather, dinosaurs, social studies (community interaction), language arts (mood and dramatic intent), and DNA replication. Following is a short example of application to a unit on weather:

Students suggest different types of weather and then create corresponding sounds (“What is the sound of snow? The sound of sunny? The sound of cloudy?”). The group can then develop a “Weather Orchestra,” playing and singing the various sounds either as a vocal community, conducted by a leader, or in conjunction with a narrative using weather as a theme. (Using narrative as a conducting tool is particularly good for young students.)

Rhythm -- Keeping and Playing with a Pulse:

1. Setting 4/4 Time

Set a basic 4/4 count, using a simple walking step in place. Students can explore other methods of keeping 4/4 time by adding clapping, snapping, body percussion, and vocalizing as other ways of maintaining a pulse.

2. Contrasting Rhythmic Patterns

Break the large group into three smaller sections and give each group different accents to count in 4/4 time. Examples: (1) One group counting “one, two, three, four;” (2) a second group counting “one-two, two-two, three-two, four-two;” (3) a third group counting “ta-ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta-ta, ta-ta-ta-ta” -- all of which breaks down to quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes.

3. Adding Body Movement

After learning vocal parts, one student from each group develops a body movement that corresponds to that particular group’s rhythm and teaches it to their group. Encourage students to be creative -- using different body parts and capturing the accent of their respective count. A member from each group can lead their sound and movement phrase as the groups demonstrate around the circle.

4. Words in Rhythm

Use the syllables in different words to establish the rhythm in each group:

example:

Group #1 (accenting every beat of a four-count with the word ‘syllables”):

SYL - LA - BLE - SAH

Group #2 (counting triplets in four):

one-two-three -- two-two-three -- three-two-three -- four-two-three

Group #3 (subdividing to sixteenth notes):

“All I want to do is just sing, sing, sing, sing. All I want to do is just sing, sing, sing, sing.”

Group #4 (swing accent):

“Swing down sweet chariot and let me ride.”

Creating New Verses for Existing Songs:

Branice McKenzie advises, “When using an academic topic as source material for song writing, present and study the material (text, film, etc.) first; don’t tell the students that they will be creating verses from their reading. Reading the material to come up with verses is not the point. The point is to go back into what they’ve already learned and use the song to understand it more fully.” (For example, students who worked with Ms. McKenzie to create new verses to the song “Freedom’s Coming” had been studying the Underground Railroad for some time before Ms. McKenzie began working with the class. Ms. McKenzie says, “They had that information and could call on it when I said, ‘Let’s just write some verses.’ Some students might appear not to remember a great

deal from the chapter on the Underground Railroad. But this might be when they learn it. They start singing verses and then someone says, 'Let's talk about how it's not a railroad.' So then they sing a verse about that and for the first time they learn and remember that particular aspect of the story. There's a whole other learning that takes place.")

Use music you like and with which you are familiar when applying this in the classroom.

Find out what students like and ask them to bring recordings for class listening. Use music from a particular period when studying that era in history. Take care when introducing music from a particular culture. You don't want to be disrespectful of the music of a culture, taking a melody or song out of context and just writing up lyrics to it.

Listen to music from different cultures to gain understanding of those cultures. You're not teaching the culture, you are experiencing the music of a culture along with your students, perhaps while looking at pictures or slides of the country and its people.

Give credit for the music you use. If you play "All Blues," for example, you should say, "All Blues" written by Miles Davis.

Favorite Lines:

When using a song with lyrics, ask students to look at the lyrics and see if there is a line in the song they particularly like. Ask students to share and discuss those lines. After everyone has shared their favorite lines, sing the song again, asking students to remember the feelings different people have expressed about particular lines. Ask them to try to feel the word and convey the meaning as they are singing. This type of exploration of a song and its lyrics encourages awareness of self; lack of fear of self-expression; reaching places in selves that have not been touched; a sense of music and lyric working together and affecting one's emotions and understanding.

photo by: Susan Cook

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