

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.

Structures: Five Steps to Improvisation

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

Strategies:

Patterns-“They can’t be all the same, and they can’t be everything different.”

Use the bordun to anchor pentatonic scales and explore upper/lower neighbors.

In modal improvisation, anchor on the tonic and dominant triads and add neighboring tones and passing tones..

“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.

“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”-antiphonal process. Analyze the rhythm for connectors and cadences. Check the downbeat with tennis balls and listen for good *prosody* —*the natural intonation and cadence of speech*.

<http://www.scilearn.com/blog/prosody-matters-reading-aloud-with-expression#.VUkfmsknR7c.facebook>

Move from Teacher-led to Student-led imitation as soon as possible. Use a rhythmic or melodic cue for sharing and a consistent signal for improvisation structures. See part two of Music for Children, Vol. 1.

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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 end with a lift to create a connector. “If you make them longer than two, you’ve left them nothing to do.” For older students, use sixteenth note patterns in the iconic stage with text alone. Lee, Dennis “Mississauga Rattlesnakes” [Jelly Belly](#), Macmillan of Canada. Manipulative patterns: see www.teachingwithorff.com

Rhythms to be complete “Chicken on the Fencepost” [Spotlight](#), Bk. 3, p. 265
Sing the song in a single circle with hidden gates. A farmer and a fox are outside the circle waiting for the gates to open on the cadence. A rubber chicken is in the center of the circle waiting to become someone’s dinner. In later lessons, create two concentric circles of students that rotate in contrary motion.

Create half phrases of rhythm improvisation with a partner. Use any four-beat pattern as the prompt for a rhythm to be completed (R2B). 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 or steal the chicken. Use “hello *new name* Brown” as a cue for sharing.

Melodies to be completed

“Ding, Dong, Diggi diggi dong” [Spotlight on Music](#), Bk. 3, p. 269

This often quoted melody is an 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 a circle of partners explore the do pentatonic scale. Students use the bordun and tonic triad as “anchors” for melodic improvisation

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. Create an interlude of melodic improvisation using “Mamma’s little baby loves shortnin’ shortnin’” as a melody to be completed (M2B). Show the improvisation structure with four snaps. The improvisations will form an Authentic melody and must cadence on high or low ‘do.’ Authentic melodies move above the tonal center or resting tone.

Call & Response improvisation “Sail Away, Ladies” [Spotlight on Music](#), Bk.3 p.

54 Students create new melodic four-beat patterns with a partner. Teach the Response and then begin with four snaps to show the improvisation structure. Take turns leading or copying for a total of four phrases. “They can’t be all the same, and they can’t be everything different.” Sing the refrain while chaining—Grand right/left—to find a new partner. In Call & Response format, the ending doesn’t matter since you are creating the first half of the phrase. The Response already has a cadence.