

**Fostering creativity in the elementary music classroom through
actively creating and performing**

by

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Abstract

The activities created for this lesson plan were designed to allow students the opportunity to create as a small group and have that creation fit into a larger ensemble for performance. Students were allowed to select one of four modes for creation: instrumental accompaniment, movement, singing, or body percussion ostinato. Their compositions were based around a section of poetry that then tied back into a full Orff ensemble using rondo form.

The two areas in my teaching where I see the most room for development as a result of my graduate studies are active music making and creativity. As a Kodaly-inspired teacher, my classroom is full of opportunities for students to joyfully experience music by singing, dancing, and playing games. However, my experiences at graduate school and through teaching during the pandemic have challenged me to incorporate more instrumental music opportunities using Orff instruments and ukuleles. I have been working to hone my skills at providing the students a music-making experience in each class where they leave feeling excited at performing a piece of music together, be that instrumental or vocal.

Continuing to foster creativity in my classroom is another area of development. My studies have convinced me of the need to let students more freely explore compositional opportunities without too many rules and prompts as a means of developing the students' own areas of musical interest. In this area I feel I am often limited by my own desire to control their creations as well as the logistics of creating a safe, structured learning environment. As the students become more comfortable exploring and creating in a setting with few limiting parameters, I anticipate being able to add specific rules back into the process to allow them to record or notate their creations in order to share them with others.

This set of lessons allowed me the opportunity to work on efficiently teaching parts for an Orff ensemble and on structuring varied creative tasks for student success in developing the rondo. Both of these are skills I hope to build on as I plan other, similar activities in the coming school year and continue to build a sequence for fostering creativity in my classroom.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

The importance of education cannot be understated. Schooling helps our children develop into responsible, caring human beings and citizens. Educated citizens are able to make well-informed choices about their lives, their country, and the world. Because of this, education is a key element in fostering freedom for all.

Throughout the world, access to learning opens doors to gaining a broader knowledge of societies that are different from one's own. This contributes to an understanding for all learners of the power of the human spirit to stand up to oppression and injustice. Education empowers learners to use knowledge and critical thinking and make individual choices about what is fair and right in the world. For many nations, including the United States, education has become a key element in helping oppressed minority populations gain agency, rights, and freedoms.

Our public school systems mirror society as a whole by exposing students to races, cultures, and ideas that are different from their own. Because of this, the process of making our children into responsible, caring human beings and citizens is best served in public schools. Education should always push children to see and engage with the broader world.

Educators have the daunting job of cultivating the greatest resource in our society. While we cannot measure monetary profit margins as the goal of our profession, developing tomorrow's citizens has the utmost impact on almost all sectors of our nation. If we believe children are our greatest resource and legacy, then the question that should always be considered in making decisions about education is, "What's best for kids?" From the broader federal sense to the local level, this question must prevail. When the decisions being made at schools and in our education system are based on finding the best ways to care for and mentor the next generation into responsible citizenship, we are educating well.

Music education plays a large role in the process of educating our children. Throughout time, humans have been making music together. Estelle Jorgensen (1997) says:

Music making is a characteristically human activity. It is so pervasive that it appears to be universal. From antiquity, people have been making music, whether singing, playing instruments, or dancing, in religious rituals, family festivals, theatrical spectacles, political events, musical concerts, and a host of other social occasions. An enormous variety of musical expressions and a plethora of musical beliefs, customs, and traditions exist throughout the world (p. 1).

Experiences of music making can shape us into better people as the values of music impact our lives and the lives of those around us.

The values of music are many. Musicologist Susan McClary says, “the power of music - both for dominant cultures and for those who would promote alternatives - resides in its ability to shape the ways we experience our bodies, emotions, subjectivities, desires, and social relations,” (Krumhansl, 1997, as cited in Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 73). Broadly speaking, music impacts humans in three ways. It cultivates creative thinking, allows us to explore and express emotions, and helps us understand and connect with others.

Frequent music makers should be able to think divergently. This thinking is developed naturally through participation in a variety of music making activities, including singing, playing instruments, composing, and improvising. While it is certainly possible for music makers to learn and perform without creativity, the fact that music has continued to exist and evolve throughout time indicates that creativity is an integral part of that existence. Creative musicians are creative people, able to solve problems and look at issues, both musical and non-musical.

Music also allows us to engage with and express our emotions both through listening and actively participating. On emotion and music, Elliott (2005) says, “Musicing (of all kinds) and musical works extend the range of our expressive and impressive powers by providing opportunities for us to create musical expressions of emotions; musical representations of people, places, and things; and musical expressions of cultural-ideological meanings,” (p. 9).

Music is arguably part of the life of every person in the world. It becomes deeply personal to all who engage with it. It provides music makers and listeners an outlet for feelings and thoughts, many of which cannot be expressed otherwise. It has the power to remove us from our lives for the moments of performing or listening, or to step into ourselves and evaluate the meanings behind our thoughts and actions. Music education should help people more deeply connect with music. This happens through actively taking part in music making in school or in the greater community, and also through greater appreciation of the elements heard while listening to music.

Finally, music helps us to better understand other people. For those who participate in music making communities -- be they formal ensembles like choir or band, or informal groups like rock bands and drum circles -- connections to one another are forged through the music-making process. For example, the singers in a choir develop relationships with one another as they sing together, making music. While the relationship-building element might seem similar to other community activities like sports, the difference is in the emotions. Not only are the singers in a choir connecting to one another as they sing, they also connect emotionally with the music being performed, and with their audience. Their connection to others deepens due to the connection to the music and vice versa. The deep bonds that can be forged in music making communities allow for a better understanding of each participant’s humanity.

Music can build our greater communities because music making can connect people from varied backgrounds almost anywhere. In our country, we make music in church, in school, in community organizations, at celebrations, and at sporting events. We even use music to express our patriotism. If our goal is to make students into good citizens, they must be able to interact in these varied settings, and music is an integral part of them all.

Connections in music do not end with local and regional groups. As stated, music exists throughout the world, in most cultures. It cannot be isolated from the people making it or the cultural forces impacting it. Because of this, music from diverse groups of people and countries can give us insight into the lives of others across the globe. This music must not be separated from the circumstances of its creation and must be listened to or performed with that in mind to bring relevance and understanding to the music makers. When music of different cultures is made contextually, the opportunity for connections between different groups are vast. These connections can breed compassion and tolerance, traits that are important in developing caring human beings and citizens.

Music teachers in our country come from a variety of backgrounds and bring their musical and life experiences with them into the classroom. In the same way, the students in our classrooms represent an even more diverse picture. Music should be taught in a way that connects with the students in each specific learning setting. If we believe education is about doing what is best for students, then every music classroom will look different. However, there are two elements which should be universal. Students in our schools must always be active in making music and each encounter must be presented so that the students experience joy.

In all forms of music education, students must be taught to *make* music first, through a wide variety of activities such as singing, dancing, playing instruments, improvising, and

composing. Standard notation is important to furthering music learning in the current system. To that end, all students should become literate in notation so that they are best able to engage with a wide variety of music. However, notation is not music and should be shared only as a tool that aids in music making.

Regardless of the circumstances, all teachers must strive for their students to have joyful experiences making music of all kinds. And thus, the second universal element of music education is the most important -- that we provide joyful music making experiences for students. Relating to joy and music, Zoltan Kodály was specific in saying, “Teach music and singing at school in such a way that it is not a torture but a joy for the pupil; instill a thirst for finer music in him, a thirst which will last for a lifetime,” (Houlahan & Tacka, 2008, p. 20). Our students must be engaged in joyful music making because joy breeds love, and people want to continue doing things that we love. Music education will make an impact in students’ lives only when they participate.

As music educators we must strive to use the values of music to impact the lives of our students. This impact should be available to every student in our country, and it is our task to fight to make that so. Music education can make a difference in the way students see themselves and one another, serving to build responsible, caring human beings and citizens. As Leonard Bernstein said, “The point is, art never stopped a war and never got anybody a job. That was never its function. Art cannot change events. But it can change people. It can affect people so that they are changed... because people are changed by art – enriched, ennobled, encouraged – they then act in a way that may affect the course of events... by the way they vote, they behave, the way they think,” (Gruen, 1972, p. 231).

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

The following lesson demonstrates my philosophy in three main ways. It was designed to allow students the opportunity to work collaboratively, to push them to create their own elements in a musical piece, and to inspire joy.

In structuring the project so that students worked in pre-selected small groups, they were able to connect with one another as they shared ideas about the composition they were creating. Groups were challenged to listen to, and respect each members' ideas and perspectives. In addition, many groups needed to adjust their initial ideas to accommodate the unique needs and capabilities of each member in their group. The work done together in groups established a sense of ownership and pride among group members, demonstrating one way relational connections can develop through music.

This set of lessons also helped students work to think divergently. Rather than learning the ensemble and performing in a more standard setting, they were challenged to create their own parts of the rondo. In addition, the students were tasked with listening to and refining their overall performance.

Finally, this activity was designed to be fun! The students enjoyed working with their peers and creating in a new way. They approached the activity with joy and excitement which motivated them to continue working to refine their work for a final video performance to share with parents.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans

3rd Grade General Music

Spring 2022

Lesson Objective(s)

- The class will perform a rondo incorporating Old Mr. Rabbit as the A section and smaller compositions from groups as BCDE sections.
- The students will compose BCDE sections based on the poem using one of four modalities of composition: melodic, movement, accompaniment of spoken word, and body percussion.

2014 Music Standards Addressed

MU:Cr1.1.3b Generate musical ideas (such as rhythms and melodies) within a given tonality and/or meter.

MU:Cr3.1.3a Evaluate, refine, and document revisions to personal musical ideas, applying teacher-provided and collaboratively developed criteria and feedback.

MU:Cr3.2.3a Present the final version of personal created music to others, and describe connection to expressive intent.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

- The students have practice decoding and reading rhythms with ti-tika (♪♪).
- The students have regularly sung “Old Mister Rabbit” and played the singing game.

Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

- Soprano and alto glockenspiels
- Soprano, alto, and bass xylophones
- Tubano drums

- Rhythmic notation slide
- Poetry sections for each group
- Center 1 – Poetry section, Soprano metallophone
- Center 2 – Poetry section, Triangle
- Center 3 – Poetry section, Various unpitched percussion instruments
- Center 4 – Poetry section

Old Mr. Rabbit

arr. Anschutz

The musical score for "Old Mr. Rabbit" is arranged for a four-part ensemble. The top staff is the vocal melody in 4/4 time, with lyrics: "Old Mis - ter Ra - bbit you've got a fun - ny hab - it of". The second staff is for SG/AG (Soprano/Guitar), the third for BX/BM (Baritone Xylophone/Bass Maracas), and the fourth for Tubano (Tubano). The Tubano part uses a rhythmic notation system with 'x' marks for beats and horizontal bars for specific rhythmic patterns. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 3.

Figure 2-1: Score for Orff arrangement of "Old Mister Rabbit," (Anschutz).



Figure 2-2: Rhythmic notation slide for tubano part

Lesson Sequence

DAY 1: Teach background orchestration for Old Mr. Rabbit

1. Refine rhythmic pattern to pat, pat, clap, clap, clap, snap
2. T sing song while S perform ostinato
3. Divide class in half between ostinato and singing. Switch.
4. Students sing song and perform ostinato.
5. T select students to play pattern on tubanos.
6. Sing song and add body percussion snaps to teach glockenspiel part.
7. Transfer part to glockenspiels.
8. Review crossover bordun on legs with patting and transfer to xylophones.
9. Practice all parts together and then switch so students play at least 2 of the 3 parts.

DAY 2: Create compositions based on the poem “Rabbits”

1. Review the orchestration from last class period.
2. T read poem to class.
3. Divide class into 4 groups and hand out section of poem.
4. Lead discussion of imagery in poem.
 - . What pictures come to mind when you read this section?
 - a. What sounds come to mind?
 - b. Are the sounds you hear from nature or somewhere else?
2. “Now each of your groups is going to compose something to go with your section of poem...”
 - o Group 1 - Use barred instruments to set the words of the poem to music. Your part will be sung.

- Group 2 - Create a movement composition using your bodies and 1 triangle or tambourine to perform the poem.
 - Group 3 - Create a background accompaniment to be played while your poem is read by one person.
 - Group 4 - Create a body percussion pattern that you will perform as an ostinato while someone speaks your poem.
3. Give groups a chance to practice and come up with ideas.
 4. Perform the rondo with student creations.
 5. Discuss what students liked about each part and if they would change anything.
 6. Adapt and perform again.

Assessment of the Lesson

The assessments of this lesson will be observational, based on the teacher's in-class observations. The teacher will rate the students' engagement in the creative process using the rubric and use this data to inform future creative composition projects.

3	Advanced: Came up with new ideas easily and naturally and helped others.
2	Intermediate: Came up with new ideas, or used others ideas but made individual changes.
1	Beginning: Did not come up with original ideas or used others ideas without making changes.

Table 2-1: Rubric for observational assessment.

My goal for this lesson was to have students create their own group compositions that fit into a larger musical work. I wanted students to have the opportunity to work with others in a small group setting to create compositions, but also have those compositions be part of a piece that could be performed. The students enjoyed creating parts of the larger work and it was neat to see them move from their more random, experimental creations, like we had done earlier in the year, to creating for something they could all be a part of.

The instructional strategies I used were very standard, Orff ensemble teaching processes; working together in small groups; and rehearsing and refining for performance. For the ensemble itself, the students learned the different parts of the piece with body percussion and then transferred to barred instruments and drums. For the creative section however, I gave the groups chunks of time to work together in a less structured, more exploratory setting. I found that each different class and sometimes groups within the class used that time differently. For some classes, I simply walked around and monitored, giving very little guidance. For others, it was necessary to take a more active role in helping the students work together and agree on the various elements of creating and performing that creation. The final part of this project involved most classes creating a video performance of their piece to share with parents. I did have one class choose to perform live for a group of younger students who follow their class in the schedule. As the project was about students responding creatively to their poetry prompt, I assessed each individual and group on their ability to work together and share creative ideas with one another.

Teaching this project was a stretch for me in my teaching because it combined both the creative elements of letting students experiment and come up with their own ideas in combination with learning and performing the Orff ensemble. For future classes, this might be a

set of lessons that I break up throughout the semester. It might be more effective as a demonstration of creativity if students learn the ensemble early on in the year and then are asked to come back to it to add the creative element. It is my hope next year to add creative composition and improvisation projects into my curriculum a number of times throughout the year. With more foundation and experience exploring and creating prior to this assignment, I think the students will make even more connections when it comes to creating to perform.

Overall, this was a project the students enjoyed and really took ownership of, not only in their creations but also in the performance itself and the logistics of that. I was surprised by one group that asked to watch their video performance (which I had intended as the final cut) and then asked to refilm because they felt they could perform their transitions more smoothly.

For me, this unit was a great reminder to give students space to explore and create. Most of the compositions happening in my classroom have been completely exploratory or based on practicing concepts. While the process of finding a piece and poetry to engage and excite the students took a bit of work, the advantages of them seeing their compositions as a larger piece were invaluable. I plan to continue finding places to give space for students to create (for both performance and exploration) in the coming year and this unit gave me much more confidence in my ability to do that.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

Since beginning the master's program at Kansas State two years ago, my teaching has changed dramatically, just like most teachers who are navigating these challenging times in education and our world. I began the graduate program after taking a year off from teaching and started a new job after my first summer of classes. That fall, I began teaching not in my new classroom, but on a cart, moving from room to social-distanced room, unable to invite students to sing or even leave the safety of their desks. I was not alone in the challenges I faced, within my own building and around the world. However, I was able to use many of the ideas shared in my first summer to propel myself and my students through that first, challenging year. I have continued to use these ideas even as things have become more normal.

One of the biggest convictions that has shaped my teaching philosophy these past two years is the need for students to be actively engaged in making music as much as possible. Throughout my teaching career, I have always had a pretty active elementary music classroom. Most lessons see students transition through a variety of activities quickly and often at different locations in the classroom. My experience progressing through Kodaly levels has given me a wealth of singing games, dances, and movement activities as well as an understanding of how to engage students in various learning modalities. I always work to plan a mix of activities involving visual, auditory, and kinesthetic responses to music. Much of how my classroom looked pre-pandemic, however, was based on students singing and moving physically, often with one another.

As I began exploring how to teach in this new paradigm, Elliot's exhortations to actively make music were at the front of my mind. He cites Israel Scheffler's idea that "*making* ought to be central in all domains of education. For if a student knows how to *make* something, says

Scheffler, he or she *understands* it,” (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 271). Even though we were limited in the allowed music activities, I did not want my classroom to become a place where students “sit and get,” listening to lectures about music theory or notation while losing the experience of really understanding through making music in community with one another. While this was a format my colleagues on the secondary side were more readily able to embrace, it was neither developmentally appropriate for young children nor would it foster good classroom management. I decided instead to commit to planning at least one activity in each lesson that involved students physically making music. This resulted in hauling around Orff instruments on a large flat cart for the first few weeks of the school year, ordering more Boomwhackers and unpitched percussion instruments, and working to keep one step ahead of my students in learning ukulele, all the while religiously sanitizing every item between classes. The extra effort needed in all these areas was ultimately worth it as I finished my first year at a new school having built relationships with my students with many expressing excitement at coming back.

This school year, with more relaxed guidelines for social distancing and masking, I have returned to many of my previous activities. I spent the year working to blend together the instrumental work with my more familiar singing games and movement activities. Longer class times than I had previously have helped in this blending process, allowing for a division of lessons to include singing and Orff instruments or ukuleles, which the students enjoy. In addition, I have been able to build on the communal nature of music as I have included more opportunities for students to interact and make music in small groups or centers. In all, the motivation to encourage active music making gained from my first year in the graduate program really pulled me through the hardest parts of pandemic teaching. While there were many days I wanted to give up and have the students sit and listen or watch rather than do, I was most often

able to fall back on my goal and the instrumental activities I had put in place to keep music class a fun, joyful place for students.

Another area of change in my teaching mindset has been a desire for students to be engaged in creative music making on a regular basis. Our studies of different activities and sequences for building creativity through composition and improvisation in the elementary classroom were eye-opening as they showed new ways to make music composition relevant for even the youngest students. Combining that learning with study and reassessment of my own philosophy of music teaching was very significant. I was able to see the value of what Elliott meant when he said, “making music through performing and improvising takes learners to the heart of musical practices, and improvising links students to performing and composing in practical and musical-social ways,” (2015, p. 271). Activities where students were able to experiment with different instrumental or digital sounds in creating were both beneficial to student learning and easy to carry out during the first year of social-distanced teaching. I am still finding ways to build these activities into my larger curriculum sequence in a way that will help students grow and use the knowledge and skills they already have.

In addition, my studies in the graduate program have helped me better incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into my classroom. When I came back to teaching after one very short year off; our country was much more openly engaged in conversations about racism and its effects, and my knowledge of how racism exists in everyday life changed. It no longer felt like I had a choice of whether or not to refine my song collection and teaching practices. I have removed many songs from my collection that I had used regularly due to racist, sexist or otherwise problematic undertones. Also, that first summer, I refined my philosophy with an understanding that I never want students to look back at their time in my class and realize we

sang or did something with an underlying racist meaning that ultimately changes how they felt about the class.

Through work in our Culturally Relevant Pedagogy class in the second summer, I gained more strategies and perspectives to use. I worked to incorporate a song of the month unit into my curriculum this year. This unit proved to be a great way to include songs and cultural discussions that exposed students in my rural Missouri district to different cultures and ideas.

In conclusion, these past two years of teaching since the beginning of my studies, have been some of the most challenging and intense of my career. While many of the challenges were due to outside factors, my work in the graduate program helped energize and sustain me through the tough times. In many ways, I feel this time of learning has helped me find affirmations for much of what I have already been doing in my classroom. I have always borrowed and used good ideas and training from others. My time in graduate school has given me a better understanding of why many of these ideas are successful. I am coming away from this time with a more comprehensive view of my teaching and the places where it can have a bigger impact, as well as the places where I still have much room to grow. For all of this, I am truly grateful.

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