

Prioritizing Creative Musical Activities in Instrumental Rehearsals

Practical Suggestions for Teachers

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I have never met a music teacher who complained about having too *much* class time! I have found that including creative musical activities designed to increase student understanding of the music actually bought me *more* time. When students learned to interact with music through improvisation and composition, they learned their music faster, and I spend less time telling students what to do because they were able to self-correct. I hope you find these suggestions helpful. It's really as simple as trying just one thing at a time. Start with something easy. If it works, keep doing it!

SIX CONCEPTS FOR CREATIVE SUCCESS

1. Provide a safe environment.
2. Use a sound-before-sight approach.
3. Scaffold instruction using limits and parameters.
4. Plan for various student grouping strategies.
5. Decide whether and how you will incorporate technology.
6. Consider the mixed role of notation.

IMPROVISATION

- Pick your favorite warm-up. Have students create their own rhythms.
- Teach a simple melody to your students by ear and have your students embellish (“decorate”) it.
- Make up a simple melody like the one I included below. Sing or play the first 3 measures, then have your students make up the last bit. Challenge yourself to create melodies that lead the students to land on the resting tone.



NOTATION

- Approach writing notation the same way you'd think about writing in language.
- Students who write better read better.
- Use dictation exercises to reinforce rhythms from current or future performance repertoire.
- Have students notate a melody from your last concert in a different key.

ARRANGING

- Have students arrange songs in small groups between concerts and school breaks.
- Edit one section from a piece you are performing—let students rewrite a rhythm or melody.

COMPOSITION

- Have students write the rhythm to a 4-line poem, then add pitches to the rhythm.
- Perform student compositions (or arrangements) in regular performances.
- Make a compilation of 4-measure student compositions to send home to parents.

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