Chapter 7

Audiation-Based Improvisation and Composition in Elementary General Music

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"How in the world am I supposed to get elementary students to improvise and compose?" When I began my career as an elementary general music teacher, that question boggled my mind. How could I be expected to teach these skills when I barely had any experience with them myself? Aren't improvising and composing too difficult for elementary students anyway? My first reaction was simply to avoid teaching improvisation and composition altogether. During those years, I found myself in the company of many other elementary general music teachers. Apparently, our reaction was a common one (Peddell, 2005; Strand, 2006; Whitcomb, 2007). Eventually, I decided I should force myself to try. I attempted a few ideas I had gathered from workshops or articles, such as asking students to improvise by creating a melody with a particular rhythm using any bars on a barred instrument or to compose by notating an eight-measure song using particular rhythmic values by placing notes on the staff, beginning and ending on C and then playing it on an instrument to see what it sounds like. However, I found these activities disappointing because most of my students were randomly choosing notes without any understanding or forethought about the musical sounds they were creating. This reminded me of an episode of the television show "My Name Is Earl" in which one of the characters is seen writing a song; after commenting that writing music is "just dots and lines," he goes on to say, "I'm gonna find someone to play [my song] for me. I can't wait to hear what it sounds like" (Garcia, Winston, & Gordin, 2007). Instead of relying on an instrument to tell them how their creations would sound, how could I help students improvise and compose with an aural understanding of the music they were creating?

I eventually discovered audiation as an answer. Audiation is the hearing and comprehension of music in the mind (Gordon, 2012). This includes the

ability to perceive both the tonal context (tonality) and rhythmic context (meter) of the music, whether one is listening or performing. Audiation-based improvisations and compositions are rooted in the musical sounds we comprehend in our minds prior to and as we externally produce them and in our sense of the tonal and metric contexts of those sounds. This may be why audiation has been correlated with greater tonal and metric cohesiveness in children's compositions (Kratus, 1994).

Guiding young children to improvise and compose through audiation rather than relying only on an instrument or notation may seem like a daunting task. After all, many music teachers feel like I did originally: intimidated by the thought of improvising and composing in this way! Our views may change, however, if we consider equivalent acts within the context of language. Improvising and composing are to music what conversing and creating stories are to language; both involve having independent thoughts that are either expressed in the moment or are replicated and edited over time. The average kindergarten student has no problem expressing his or her thoughts through language and eagerly makes up individual stories that can be told again and again. So, what enables young children to do this, and what insight might it offer for the teaching of improvisation and composition?

MUSICAL VOCABULARIES

When we begin learning our native language, we first develop a listening vocabulary by being immersed in and becoming acculturated to the sounds of our native language. When we are developmentally ready, we begin to experiment with and imitate the sounds of language through babble, and we eventually discover how to speak words we have heard others speak and then to string them together to form phrases and sentences. Along with our listening and speaking vocabularies, we also develop thinking and conversing vocabularies as we begin to think in language and express our spontaneous thoughts with others through language. Our reading and writing vocabularies are developed by learning how to understand and manipulate the symbols that represent the language sounds we already understand.

Gordon (2012, 2013) and others (e.g., Azzara, 2005; Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Reynolds, Long, & Valerio, 2007; Taggart, Bolton, Reynolds, Valerio, & Gordon, 2000; Valerio, Reynolds, Bolton, Taggart, & Gordon, 1998) have theorized that music is learned through a similar process. We begin to learn music by being immersed in and becoming acculturated to the sounds of the native music and movements of our culture, which form our musical listening vocabulary. Then we begin to experiment with and imitate the musical sounds we have heard and eventually discover how to accurately

recreate meaningful segments of those sounds, thus beginning to form our musical speaking vocabulary (i.e., singing/chanting/moving/playing instruments by ear). As we develop our musical listening and speaking vocabularies, we develop our audiating and improvising vocabularies as we begin to think in musical sound and express our own spontaneous musical thoughts. As we become fluent musical speakers and thinkers, we develop music reading and writing vocabularies through exposure to notation and develop fluency in reading and writing notation for sounds we can already audiate.

In conceiving of musical development in this way, elementary general music teachers can prepare students to engage in audiation-based improvisation and composition by first providing them with many opportunities to develop rich listening, speaking, and audiating vocabularies. When students have developed the first three musical vocabularies, they have and can express their own musical thoughts through improvising and composing (Azzara, 1999).

DEVELOPING READINESS FOR AUDIATION-BASED IMPROVISATION AND COMPOSITION

We can help our students (and ourselves!) gain the readiness to be successful with audiation-based improvisation and composition by developing their musical listening, speaking, and audiating vocabularies. It is important that we build these vocabularies prior to introducing music notation. Experiencing improvisation before music notation can have positive effects on students' musical achievement (Azzara, 1993, 1999; Burton, 2015; Gordon, 2003, 2004), while prematurely introducing music notation can hinder audiation development (Gordon, 2012). Therefore, students should experience these readiness activities without the aid of notation.

Tonal Readiness

Sense of Tonality

Students will be better prepared to engage in audiation-based improvisation and composition if they are able to audiate tonality, which involves the ability to perceive the tonal context of music. If students can perceive music's tonal context, they will be able to improvise and compose more effectively within that context. The first step in helping students audiate tonal context is to provide them with a rich tonal listening vocabulary. You can do this by singing songs for them in a wide variety of tonalities (Gordon, 2013). However, students should not sit passively while developing their listening vocabularies.

Their active engagement through movement, imaginative play, and listening for sameness or difference fuels their audiation development.

As students are developing their tonal listening vocabularies, they also should begin to develop audiation of the tonal center, which is the most basic sense of tonal context. Tonal center could be referred to as the first scale degree, the home tone, or—for the purposes of this chapter—the resting tone. If a student can audiate the resting tone of a given musical context, he or she will be better able to sing in tune within that tonal context and will have a better perception of melodic and harmonic direction, all of which will better enable him or her to improvise and compose in a way that makes tonal sense (Gordon, 2003, 2012). When elementary students can audiate the resting tone, they will be equipped to improvise and compose with a sense of tonal context.

You can help students develop audiation of the resting tone in a variety of ways. One simple way is to sing the fifth scale degree followed by the first scale degree on *(bum)* after ending each song, which will call attention to and reinforce the dominant/tonic relationship (Taggart, Bolton, Reynolds, Valerio, & Gordon, 2000; Valerio, Reynolds, Bolton, Taggart, & Gordon, 1998). In major and minor tonalities, the dominant/tonic relationship also reinforces the cadences characterizing those tonalities. Another way of encouraging audiation of tonal center is to sing your directions on the resting tone of the song rather than speaking them. You can help students audiate and perform resting tone by inviting them to echo your resting tone on a neutral syllable (e.g., *bum*) and then sing it whenever you pause and gesture during a song. Instead of gesturing, you might toss or pass a prop to individuals to indicate when they should sing the resting tone in solo. Other ways of helping students audiate resting tone include singing resting tone drones or ostinati or dropping a bean bag or other prop and singing the resting tone when the prop hits the floor (Taggart et al., 2000; Valerio et al., 1998).

After learning to audiate and sing resting tone, students are ready to begin audiating and performing simple harmonic progressions to familiar melodies, which can be done through the singing of chord roots, also known as basslines or root melodies (Azzara, 1999; Azzara, 2005; Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Grunow, Gordon, & Azzara, 2001). Hearing, audiating, and singing chord root accompaniments will help students vocally improvise with a better perception of tonality and harmonic progression (Guilbault, 2004, 2009). You can begin by modeling tonic and dominant chord roots (sung or played on an instrument) while the class sings a song in a major or minor tonality (See Figures 7.1 and 7.2 for examples of songs with chord root accompaniments in major and minor tonalities.). Then, model singing the chord roots without the melody and invite the students

Source Unknown

I V7 I

There's some-one stand - ing on a high, high hill. I won - der who it could be. There's

do do sol do

sol sol sol sol

mi mi fa mi

do do ti do

some - one stand-ing on a high, high hill who's e - cho-ing me!

do do sol do

sol sol sol sol

mi mi fa mi

do do ti do

Figure 7.1 "High, High Hill" with chord root and chord tone accompaniment.

to sing them. You and your students may find it helpful to indicate the chord number on your fingers while singing, holding up one finger for tonic and five fingers for dominant, as described by Taggart, Bolton, Reynolds, Valerio, and Gordon (2004). Next, students can sing the chord roots while you sing the melody, and then students can sing the melody and chord roots in two groups. You could extend this by having students sing the melody and chord roots in duets or sing the melody while playing the chord roots on an instrument.

To further develop a sense of harmonic progression, expand singing of chord roots to singing three-part harmony utilizing the tones of each tonic and dominant chord in the progression (Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Gordon, 2003; Taggart, Bolton, Reynolds, Valerio, & Gordon, 2006). (See Figures 7.1 and 7.2 for examples of this three-part harmony.) Model and teach each part in

Lyrics: Traditional
Melody: Heather Shouldice

Hick-e-ty, pick-e-ty, bum - ble-bee, can you move you arms— with me?

la la mi mi la la mi la

mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi

do do re re do do re do

la la si si la la si la

Figure 7.2 "Hickety Pickety" with chord root and chord tone accompaniment.

isolation and then create three groups, assigning each group to sing one of the three parts. Rotate the assigned parts so everyone has a turn to sing each part. The ability to audiate while singing the individual tones within the tonic chord and dominant chord provides excellent readiness for melodic and harmonic improvisation.

Tonal Patterns

Another powerful way in which you can help students develop their musical speaking vocabularies is by providing them with opportunities to echo short musical patterns (Azzara, 2005; Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Gordon, 2003, 2012). Just as words act as units of meaning in language, tonal patterns and rhythm patterns form the building blocks of music (Gordon, 2009). If students develop a speaking vocabulary of tonal patterns and rhythm patterns, they can tap into and manipulate that vocabulary when creating their own musical sounds, similar to how they access and apply their vocabulary of words to converse or create a story. Velez (2009) found that when teachers provided first grade students with opportunities to echo/sing tonal patterns as a group and solo, those students were able to vocally improvise with more tonal cohesiveness than others who did not receive tonal pattern instruction. Giving elementary students many opportunities to echo tonal patterns and rhythm patterns individually and in a group will help them have something to say musically when asked to improvise and compose.

Figure 7.3 Examples of tonal patterns and tonal syllables in major tonality and minor tonality.

Tonal patterns (see Figure 7.3) can consist of arrangements of two, three, or four pitches that outline either the tonic or dominant (or later, subdominant) chord. Model such patterns first on a neutral syllable, such as *bum.* When performed in conjunction with a song, tonal patterns should be sung in the same tonality and key as the song.

You can incorporate tonal patterns into class activities in a variety of ways. One way is to sing or chant a few patterns for students to echo after/in between repetitions of a song. For example, you might invite students to skip around the room while singing "Skip to My Lou," freeze at the end of the song, and echo a few major tonic patterns and major dominant patterns using *bum* while frozen before skipping and singing the song again.

When students have an opportunity to echo tonal patterns by themselves—solo—they benefit from hearing their own singing compared to your model, which powerfully develops audiation and musical independence. In the aforementioned activity, to avoid talking and disrupting students' audiation of major tonality, you might gesture with two hands to indicate when the class should echo as a group and gesture with one hand to indicate when a student should echo individually (Gordon, 2001).

Another way to incorporate tonal pattern echoing is to pause at various points during a song to toss a ball, bean bag, or small stuffed animal to individual students and sing a pattern for each student to echo; for a variation, pass the object around the circle while singing the song, and whichever student is holding it when you pause your singing echoes your pattern. You might incorporate solo pattern echoing into a game such as "High, High Hill" (see Figure 7.1), in which students pretend to climb an imaginary hill (use a step stool, Hula-Hoop, or other visual to represent the hill), and the student on the *hill* at the end of the song echoes a tonal pattern sung by the teacher on *yoo-hoo.* You could also incorporate pattern echoing into your classroom routines. As you pass out materials (e.g., scarves, rhythm sticks), sing a tonal pattern for each student to echo when accepting the materials from you.

Tonal Solfège and Labels

Once students are audiating resting tones and have begun developing their tonal pattern vocabulary using neutral syllables (e.g., *bum*), they can practice those same skills using tonal solfège (Gordon, 2012). Because readiness activities are to be experienced through audiation and without notation, the solfège system should be based in audiation rather than notation. For this reason, I advocate the use of movable *do* with *la*-based minor for tonal solfège, examples of which can be seen in Figures 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3. (See Gordon, 2009 for more information about tonal solfège systems.)

In addition to singing resting tone, chord roots, chord tones, and tonal patterns with tonal solfège, students can also begin using solfège syllables to label tonalities and functions (Azzara, 2005; Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Gordon, 2012). Students can label tonalities by learning that a song is in major tonality when they audiate *do* as the resting tone, and in minor tonality when they audiate *la* as the resting tone. For example, the melody "High, High Hill" can be audiated as major tonality because one can audiate the resting tone as *do*. Students can begin to label harmonic functions of tonal patterns in major tonality by learning that a combination of *do, mi,* and/or *sol* is a major tonic pattern, and that a combination *of sol, ti, re,* and/or *fa* is a major dominant pattern. Similarly, students can sing and label functions in minor tonality by learning that a combination of *la, do,* and/or *mi* is a minor tonic pattern, and a combination of *mi, si, ti,* and/or *re* is a minor dominant pattern. Students can also begin to aurally recognize and orally label the functions of tonal patterns in familiar songs. To guide them, you might, for example, label the pattern *do-mi-la* as a minor tonic pattern (because it is a combination of *la-do-mi*) and aurally identify where that pattern occurs in the song "Hickety Pickety" (i.e., measures 1 and 3 in Figure 7.2). Through learning to label and identify resting tone, tonalities, and functions in this manner, students will acquire shared terminology through which to understand, analyze, refine, compare, and generally talk about music, all of which serve as useful tools when improvising and composing.

An additional readiness for using tonal solfège as a tool for improvisation and composition is the ability to associate solfège syllables with unfamiliar patterns. For example, you might sing new tonal patterns on *bum* and invite students to sing the patterns back to you with solfège. To help students understand this concept, I have found the idea of translation to be a helpful analogy: Just as a person can translate words from one language to another, we can translate tonal patterns from *bum* to solfège. Offering two tonal patterns consecutively for students to infer the solfège extends their translating skills. Application of solfège to unfamiliar patterns will provide students with the readiness to apply solfège to their own created musical sounds when they are improvising or composing.

Rhythm Readiness

Sense of Meter

When students can perceive the rhythmic context of music through the audiation of meter in addition to the audiation of tonality, they will be better prepared to engage in audiation-based improvisation and composition. To guide students to audiate rhythmic context, first provide a rich rhythmic listening vocabulary by singing and chanting to students in a variety of meters. As you immerse them in different meters, model continuous fluid movement (i.e., flow) by moving your arms, torso, and/or other body parts in a smooth, uninterrupted manner. Encourage your students to move in this way as well. Moving with flow is an importance readiness for feeling steady beat because it helps us feel the space *between* the beats and prepares us to audiate and perform music at a consistent tempo (Gordon, 2012; Valerio et al., 1998).

Once students can move with flow, they are ready to develop audiation of beat levels. Beat levels could be referred to as beats and subdivisions or—for the purposes of this chapter—macrobeats and microbeats. The ratio of macrobeats to microbeats gives the feeling of meter, which provides the basis for accurate rhythm (Gordon, 2012). If students can audiate the macrobeat and microbeat relationship within a given rhythmic context, they will have a better perception of the metric structure within that context. Guiding elementary students to audiate, move to, and perform macrobeat and microbeat relationships will equip them to improvise and compose with a sense of meter.

One way to help students develop audiation of macrobeats and microbeats during a song or chant is to model each type of beat through movement (e.g., tapping, patting, swaying, rocking) and invite students to move as you move. Another way of encouraging audiation of macrobeat or microbeat is to ask students to vocalize a sound such as *ch* or *bah* on the beat while moving that beat. Having students pretend to row to macrobeats with a partner or move a prop such as a Hula-Hoop or Co-Oper Band as a group to the macrobeats or microbeats can also reinforce audiation of rhythmic context (Taggart et al., 2000). Similarly, you could have students sit or stand in a line with their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them and rock or sway to the beat while performing a chant such as "Engine, Engine," notated in Figure 7.4 (Taggart et al., 2000).

Once students are able to feel and perform macrobeats and microbeats separately, challenge them to experience both beat levels simultaneously, first by splitting the class into two groups—assigning one to perform macrobeats and the other to perform microbeats—and then by performing both with their bodies (e.g., swaying to macrobeat while patting microbeat) or performing one with their bodies while vocalizing the other. Simultaneously layering

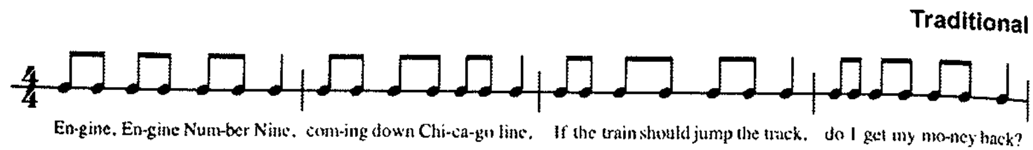

Figure 7.4 "Engine, Engine."

macrobeats and microbeats through movement and/or chanting will solidify students' sense of meter.

Rhythm Patterns

As mentioned previously, echoing rhythm patterns will help students develop a rhythmic speaking vocabulary from which to draw when they are improvising and composing (Azzara, 2005; Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Gordon, 2003, 2012). Rhythm patterns (see Figure 7.5) should be four macrobeats long, chanted first on a neutral syllable such as *bah.* When performed in between or during repetitions of a song or chant, rhythm patterns should be performed in the same meter and tempo as the song or chant.

You can incorporate rhythm patterns into class activities in a variety of ways. For example, after performing a song or chant such as "Charlie the Fish" (see Figure 7.6), use a puppet to perform rhythm patterns and invite students to echo the puppet as a group or in solo. In addition, you can use the previously described tonal pattern activities as rhythm pattern activities.

Rhythm Syllables and Labels

Once students are moving with flow, audiating macrobeat and microbeat, and have begun developing their rhythm pattern vocabulary using neutral syllables (e.g., *bah*), they can practice those same skills using rhythm syllables (Gordon, 2012). The syllable system should be based in audiation rather than notation, which is why I advocate use of the beat function–based rhythm syllable system (see Figure 7.5). (See Gordon, 2009 for more information on rhythm syllable systems.)

Figure 7.5 Examples of rhythm patterns and rhythm syllables in duple meter (4/4) and triple meter (6/8).

Gretchen Coles

Down in the depths of the deep, blue sea lives a lit - tle fish, and his name's Char - lie. He

loves to talk; he could chat all day. When I talk to Char-lie, this is what we say.

Figure 7.6 "Charlie the Fish."

In addition to chanting macrobeats, microbeats, and rhythm patterns with rhythm syllables, students also can begin using rhythm syllables to label the meter of music, which can be useful when improvising and composing music (Azzara, 2005; Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Gordon, 2012). Teach your students that a song or chant is in duple meter when they audiate *du-de* as the microbeats, and it is in triple meter when they audiate *du-da-di* as the microbeats. The song "Hickety Pickety" (see Figure 7.2) is in triple meter because we can audiate the underlying microbeats as *du-da-di*.

Just as inviting students to associate tonal solfège to new tonal patterns you sing using *bum* provides them with the readiness to improvise and compose with tonal solfège, inviting students to associate rhythm syllables to new rhythm patterns you chant using *bah* will build readiness for students to improvise and compose. Application of rhythm syllables to unfamiliar patterns will prepare students to apply syllables to their own created musical sounds when they are improvising or composing.

AUDIATION-BASED IMPROVISATION ACTIVITIES

As previously mentioned, improvisation is "the spontaneous expression of meaningful musical ideas" (Azzara & Grunow, 2006, p. iv). Just as a child can have and express spontaneous thoughts through language in conversation, a child can have and express spontaneous musical thoughts through improvisation—creating the musical sounds in and from audiation. Thus far, I have shared sequences and activities to guide students' success with audiation-based improvisation. To review, students' success depends on the quality of their experiences with movement and with developing audiation of tonal and rhythmic contexts through a listening and a speaking vocabulary of tonal centers, chord roots, chord tones, tonal patterns, macrobeats, microbeats, and rhythm patterns. The deeper and richer their experiences are and the greater variety of patterns with which students have engaged, the better able they will be to improvise within a musical context. If students

are struggling to improvise or their improvisations lack variety (i.e., many students repeat the same rhythm when asked to improvise rhythm patterns), they simply are communicating that they would benefit from more of the previously mentioned readiness engagements to help increase their success with improvisation.

Similar to how students develop tonal and rhythm skills separately as readiness for improvisation, improvisation activities can also be separated into tonal and rhythm dimensions and later combined for melodic improvisation (Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Gordon, 2003, 2012). Doing so allows students to focus on manipulating each dimension alone rather than being overwhelmed by the possibilities of simultaneously improvising in both. Similarly, within each of these dimensions—tonal, rhythm, and melodic—improvisation activities can involve a range of restriction, from less to more. (Note that some persons distinguish between *improvising* and *creating,* whereby restrictions are externally imposed in the former and internally imposed by the improviser's audiation in the latter; in this chapter I use the term *improvising* to include both types of activities.)

Tonal Improvisation

Once students have begun to develop a sense of tonal context and a speaking vocabulary of tonal patterns that they can sing with some level of accuracy on neutral syllables (e.g., *bum*), they are ready to start manipulating that vocabulary by improvising tonal patterns on neutral syllables. Using a neutral syllable for improvisation allows students to focus solely on creating musical sounds while also serving as a readiness for improvising patterns with solfège, which requires students to both create the sounds and apply the correct solfège. To improvise using neutral syllables, adapt previous pattern echoing activities so that students improvise their own tonal patterns instead of echoing yours; for example, alter the "High, High Hill" game by inviting the student on the hill to improvise a tonal pattern on *yoo-hoo* for the class to echo. Tonal pattern improvisation could be incorporated into other singing games, too. Pass out pieces of a Mr. Potato Head toy while singing a song, and then bring the potato body around to those students, inviting each to improvise a tonal pattern before placing their piece onto the body. Or, incorporate tonal pattern improvisation into your classroom routines. Invite each student to improvise a tonal pattern while returning materials to you or the basket. After each pattern, you or the rest of the students can echo each student's pattern. Students love to teach the teacher and enjoy directing whether one or all will echo the improvised pattern or, in turn, improvise another pattern!

After students have gained experience echoing tonal patterns with tonal solfège and labeling tonalities and functions, you can repeat the same tonal

pattern improvisation activities using solfège. When students have labels and syllables as tools in their audiation, you can use those in your directions to place more restrictions on the students' improvisations. During the Mr. Potato Head game, you might specify that students should improvise a tonic pattern with solfège. During the "Hickety Pickety" activity, they can incorporate improvised tonal patterns into the context of a familiar song by replacing *do-mi-la* in measure 1 or 3 of the song with a different minor tonic pattern. In activities like those, encourage students to audiate and perform as many different combinations of minor tonic patterns as possible. Students can take turns singing improvised patterns as a group and individually. Occasionally, take a turn, too, to model possibilities.

You can introduce new activities, too, such as inviting students to choose pitches with which to sing a familiar chant. For example, you might invite students to improvise a way to sing the lyrics of the chant "Engine, Engine." Begin by modeling this for the students and then improvise with the students in a question-and-answer manner: Do this initially by improvising phrases 1 and 3 yourself and asking students to improvise phrases 2 and 4, later swapping roles so that the students improvise for phrases 1 and 3. After students are comfortable improvising in alternation with you, invite individual students to improvise each of the four phrases, using gestures to indicate whose turn it is to sing.

Rhythm Improvisation

Once students have begun developing a sense of rhythmic context and a vocabulary of rhythm patterns that they can chant with some level of accuracy on neutral syllables (e.g., *bah*), they are ready to start manipulating that vocabulary by improvising rhythm patterns on neutral syllables. You can easily adapt the previously described pattern echoing activities by substituting improvising for echoing. For example, when performing "Charlie the Fish," invite student's to improvise a rhythm pattern that is different from the pattern performed by your puppet. Another simple rhythm pattern improvisation activity is to have a *rhythm conversation* by improvising different rhythm patterns back and forth in a question-and-answer manner; in this example, you might start by chanting the rhythmic question patterns and having students answer you with a different rhythm, and then later, switch jobs, having the individual students chant the question patterns for you or other students to answer. You could also ask students to improvise rhythm patterns for others to echo; for example, toss a ball or other prop to a student at the end of a song or chant, and have that student chant a rhythm pattern for the rest of the class to echo.

After students have gained experience with rhythm syllables and labeling meters and functions, you can repeat these same kinds of rhythm pattern

improvisation activities using rhythm syllables, which allows you to place more restrictions on the students' improvisations. For example, you might specify that students should improvise a rhythm pattern in duple meter that only uses macrobeats and microbeats (e.g., *du*s and *du-de*s).

Students can experience rhythm improvisation by incorporating improvised rhythm patterns into the context of a song or chant. For example, you might have students aurally identify where the pattern *du-da-di, du-da-di* occurs in the song "Hickety Pickety," and then improvise other two-beat rhythm patterns in triple meter to replace that rhythm in the song, either as a group or individually. Also, students could improvise rhythms on which to sing the chord roots of a familiar song or by improvising a rhythm pattern to perform as an ostinato accompaniment to a song or chant.

Melodic Improvisation

Steps to Melodic Improvisation

Because melodic improvisation requires students' combining tonal improvisation and rhythm improvisation *simultaneously*, the skill is more complex than either tonal improvisation or rhythm improvisation alone. To support students' success with melodic improvisation, provide scaffolding as you sequence the activity. I find a *Model—Audiate—Group—Individual* sequence to be helpful. First, introduce the improvisation task by modeling it several times so that students can develop a concept of what to do. Next, invite students to audiate their improvisation, which gives them an opportunity to think through some options without the pressure of having to produce the actual sound. Then, invite the students to improvise simultaneously as a group. These steps allow students the opportunity to explore possibilities, which can help them improvise with greater confidence (Coulson & Burke, 2013). Once students have had several chances to improvise within the group, invite individuals to improvise solo.

Melodic Improvisation Activities

In addition to exploring possibilities through this sequence, many students are more successful with melodic improvisation when they first have an opportunity to improvise with minimal explicit restrictions from the teacher regarding the specific tonal and/or rhythmic content being improvised. One example of melodic improvisation that involves minimal tonal/rhythmic restrictions is to improvise new melodic responses to sing within call-and-response songs; for example, in the traditional song "Skin and Bones," you might ask students to improvise a new way to sing the *Oooh* phrases. Another simple melodic improvisation activity is to improvise endings to

songs. One way to do this is to replace the ending of a familiar song with a new, improvised ending; many students, however, may find it difficult to break the habit of singing the learned ending, in which case they may initially find it easier to improvise an ending to a song that has no existing ending, such as "Unfinished Song" (see Figure 7.7). You can apply a melodic-improvisation activity of improvising question-and-answer phrases on neutral syllables using music in any tonality and meter. Simply model several question-and-answer phrases in the tonal/rhythm context of your choice and then invite students to improvise the answer phrases to your question phrases (Azzara, 2005). Students enjoy that same type of activity applied to a song conversation with puppets, in which you and a student (or two students) improvise melodic phrases in a back-and-forth manner as if in conversation. Although you would not explicitly impose tonal or rhythmic restrictions on the students' improvisations in those activities, the students may subconsciously impose those restrictions on their own improvisations through audiating the given tonal and rhythmic context and giving a musical response within that context.

Figure 7.7 **Unfinished Song.**

If students' improvisations in the above activities evidence their secure audiation of tonality and meter, challenge them further. Invite them to improvise a new melody over a familiar harmonic progression. For example, after students have learned to sing the chord roots to the song "High, High Hill" or "Hickety Pickety," model improvising a new melody on neutral syllables while students sing the chord roots to one of those songs. Then ask students to improvise a new melody over the chord roots.

Once students are familiar with tonal solfège/rhythm syllables and labeling tonalities, meters, and functions, they can use those tools to respond to tonal and/or rhythmic restrictions in their melodic improvisation. Initially, you might label the tonality and/or meter of the given musical context and specify that students should improvise within that context. You can add further tonal/rhythmic restrictions by having students label the harmonic progression of a familiar song and improvise within that structure. The

following process was adapted from Azzara and Grunow's seven skills for improvisation (2006):

1. Sing the chord roots to a familiar song, such as "High, High Hill" or "Hickety Pickety," with solfège and then on *bum.*
2. Add improvised rhythms to the singing of chord roots on *bum.*
3. Sing the chord tones in three-part harmony with solfège and label the chords in the progression. If desired, sing the three-part harmony on *bum* and then add improvised rhythms.
4. Improvise over the progression by choosing chord tones to sing on macrobeats, with or without solfège.
5. Improvise over the progression by choosing chord tones to sing on microbeats, with or without solfège.
6. Improvise over the progression by choosing chord tones to sing on macrobeats *and* microbeats on *bum.*
7. Improvise a new melody over the progression using any pitches and rhythms on *bum* or other neutral syllables. (You might model or specify use of chord tones, passing tones, and/or neighboring tones.)

You can also use a similar process to help students improvise over a more complex progression, such as 12-bar blues. Because this includes the addition of the subdominant chord, students would need to be familiar with that harmonic function (i.e., learn that a combination of *fa, la, do* is a major subdominant pattern) and have heard and sung it in chord root accompaniments and three-part harmony. You might also tweak the improvisation process so that it includes the additional steps of singing chord names on each chord root of the progression (e.g., sing *tonic* during each tonic chord, etc., altering the rhythm with which you sing the chord name to fit rhythmically within each bar) and singing arpeggiations of each chord during the progression (i.e., *do-mi-sol* during tonic chords, *fa-la-do* during subdominant chords, *sol-ti-re* during dominant chords). As students gain practice with audiation-based tools, they refine their abilities to choose restrictions and evaluate the results of their performance, thereby increasing their independence.

AUDIATION-BASED COMPOSITION ACTIVITIES

The key differences between improvisation and composition are whether one intends to replicate and revise the music created (Brophy, 2001; Kratus, 1991; Shouldice, 2014). If we create musical sounds spontaneously with no intent to replicate and revise them later, we are improvising. However, we can extend improvisation into composition if we repeat the sounds we have created and decide how we would like to change them, if at all. In this way,

audiation-based improvisation both serves as a readiness for composing and can *become* audiation-based composition.

One implication of audiation-based composition pertains to the role of music notation. Many elementary music teachers believe that composition involves the notating of musical ideas (Shouldice, 2014), which may lead teachers to delay or even avoid teaching composition until students have sufficient notation skills. However, audiation-based compositions need not be notated. When students audiate what they create, they generally can replicate the music in the same manner over time. They are composing, regardless of whether the music is preserved through traditional or invented notation, recorded via audiovisual technology, or remembered. The audiation-based composition activities presented in this section make use of students' tonal and rhythm audiation skills and speaking vocabulary to create musical sounds and replicate those sounds for revision and future performance.

I have found that students typically have more success with audiation-based composition activities if they first experience them in a whole-class setting, which provides a model and thus serves as readiness for composing in a similar manner in small groups or individually. Before expecting students to compose independently, you might consider leading the activity as a whole-class composition through which students can become familiar with the composition process.

When you are leading composing in a whole-class setting, you can help students remember their compositions by notating them and singing them back to the students later. However, when students are engaging in audiation-based composition in a more independent manner, they may struggle to remember how their compositions sound and may need assistance in remembering them. You or they can preserve their compositions via traditional or invented notation, or audio-record the students performing their compositions so they can listen to the recordings later.

Composing a Melody for a Familiar Chant

This composition activity is an extension of the previously mentioned activity in which students improvise a melody for a familiar chant. To turn that activity into composition, ask students to improvise each phrase and then repeat it so that they can remember the melody that was created:

1. Establish tonal context (tonality and key of your choice or the students' choice) and review improvising/singing melodic phrases to the chant "Engine, Engine."
2. Invite students to audiate a way to sing the first phrase, giving them an opportunity to try out their ideas as a group. Invite an individual student to share his/her improvised phrase solo. Sing the improvised phrase back

to the student, and then ask the class to try singing it. (To help the class remember the music created, I notate each phrase on the board so that I can sing it for them if they forget how it went.)
3. Once the class can remember the first created phrase, invite them to sing it, and have the class immediately improvise a way to sing the second phrase. Invite an individual student to share his/her improvised second phrase solo. Sing it back to the student, and ask the class to try singing it, notating it for your reference if you wish. Have the class sing both created phrases in succession.
4. Continue in a similar manner to create phrase 3 and then phrase 4. You might also guide students in editing their melody as they compose.
5. After the complete melody has been created and practiced, record the students singing their composition so they can be reminded of how their song sounded later.

Due to the brevity of the chant and large number of students in a class, it is unlikely that all students will have their musical ideas included in the final composition when composing as a class; however, all students can participate in the initial improvising and replicating of musical ideas. Composing as a class will provide students with the readiness to compose in small groups and then individually.

Composing a Partner Song

In many elementary music programs, partner songs, two melodies that have the same harmonic progression, are used to teach students how to create vocal harmony. You can have students compose a partner song by extending the previously mentioned activity for improvising a melody over the harmonic progression of a familiar song. Invite students to improvise a melody over each phrase of the harmonic progression (either on a neutral syllable or created text) of "High, High Hill;" then repeat each phrase so that they can remember the melody that was created, following a similar sequence to the one described in the first composition activity but adding the appropriate harmonic accompaniment to each phrase. As in the first activity, the students' composition could be preserved through traditional or invented notation or by audio recording. The students' composed melody could then be sung as a partner song to the original melody by performing both simultaneously.

Composing a Melody for a Poem

In this composition activity, students arrange a poem into a song, for which the process is similar to that of the previous two activities; however, because

the only given musical material is the text/lyrics, additional choices must be made regarding meter, tonality, rhythm, and pitch. Before creating the melody for each phrase, take these additional steps:

1. Invite students to read the poem out loud as a group.
2. Remind students that when audiating *du-de* as the microbeats, the meter is duple; when audiating *du-da-di* as microbeats, the meter is triple. Have students try chanting the poem in duple meter and then in triple meter, moving to macrobeats/microbeats for each. Decide which meter will be used.
3. Remind students that when audiating *do* for the resting tone and *do-mi-sol* as the tonic function, the tonality is major; when audiating *la* for the resting tone and *la-do-mi* as the tonic function, the tonality is minor. Have students chant the poem in the chosen meter while you supply harmonic accompaniment, first in major tonality and then in minor tonality. Decide which tonality will be used.
4. Optional: Involve students in determining the harmonic progression by deciding when a tonic chord should be used and when a dominant chord should be used; indicate this in the poem using traditional Roman numerals, letter symbols, or by highlighting the text in two different colors, one for tonic and one for dominant. Alternatively, you might determine the harmonic progression and provide it for your students.
5. Proceed with creating a melody for each phrase of the poem once meter and tonality have been chosen and the harmonic progression has been determined (similar to the sequence with previously described composition activities).

Once students have experienced this composition activity as an entire class, they will be better prepared to compose within small groups, and later individually. To do so, students must have a way of providing their own harmonic accompaniment over which to compose. Keyboards, barred instruments, autoharps, Suzuki QChords, or a tablet app such as "Real Ukulele" or "GarageBand" are useful tools for students to provide their own harmonic accompaniment. By removing the restriction of harmonic accompaniment, you can simplify this activity.

Composing a Blues Song

This composition activity builds on the previously mentioned activity of improvising a melody over a 12-bar-blues progression. Students can extend their improvisations into compositions through the following steps:

1. Review vocally improvising over the 12-bar-blues progression.

2. Teach students to supply harmonic accompaniment for their compositions by playing the chord roots, arpeggiating each chord on a xylophone, or playing chords on a computer/tablet app.
3. Invite students to brainstorm possible topics that make them want to *sing the blues.*
4. Label the lyric form of blues songs as *a-a-b*. Have students write lyrics for each verse (as many as you or they determine) using *a-a-b* form. If students need guidance in writing their lyrics, you might provide a prompt for each line, such as "What is your problem/hardship?" for the *a* line and "How do you feel about it?" for the *b* line.
5. Have students chant their lyrics in rhythm while playing the harmonic accompaniment.
6. Ask students to experiment with different ways that they could sing the lyrics. Proceed with creating a melody for each phrase in a manner similar to the previously described composition activities. Perform compositions for the class.

EMBRACING THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF AUDIATION-BASED IMPROVISATION AND COMPOSITION

I have come a long way since my initial fear and avoidance of attempting to improvise and compose and my initial attempts to introduce those skills and activities to my students. I am so glad that I took risks, embraced mistakes as valuable learning opportunities, kept experimenting, and didn't give up. Increasingly my skills as an improviser and composer and hearing my students' audiation-based improvisations and compositions has given me new windows into their musical understanding as well as my own. I rely on that increased understanding to tailor future learning opportunities to advance students' individual musical skills and understandings. I have watched my students gain insights into their own musicianship, too. They realize that music is so much more than just notes on a page or sounds that someone else has instructed them to make. They now know that musical ideas can come from inside of them, and they realize they are improvisers and composers! I now believe that improvisation and composition are the most important musical experiences we can give our students, because both empower them to be independent musicians who create their own music in personally meaningful ways. As independent musicians, students can continue doing so long after they have left our music classrooms—ideally, for the rest of their lives.

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