

Growing Musicianship with MLT

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I. Introduction

Unfinished Song

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Swing feel

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a time signature of 8/8. It contains a melody of quarter and eighth notes. The bottom staff is a bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a bass line of quarter notes. Both staves end with a double bar line.

What enables us to create an ending that makes musical sense?

II. Audiation...

- means the hearing and comprehension of music in the mind.
- involves a sense of tonal/rhythm syntax.
- is the ability to think in music.
- involves prediction.

The primary goal of Music Learning Theory is to enhance musical skills and understanding through the development of audiation.

III. How can we help our STUDENTS develop audiation?

A. Help them develop a sense of tonal/rhythmic CONTEXT

1. Resting Tone

- Exposure: singing directions, adding V-I
- Singing: gesture, ball toss, bean bag drop, bubbles, games...
- Benefits = better intonation, readiness for harmony and improv!
- Expand to tonic/dominant accompaniments (e.g., chord roots).

2. Macrobeat/microbeat

- Chanting/moving to each separately, then simultaneously
 - Ideas: Patting/swaying, trains, moving body parts, playing on unpitched percussion (rhythm sticks, etc.)
- Benefits = better sense of rhythm/meter, readiness for improv!

B. Help them develop a vocabulary of musical “building building blocks”

1. Rhythm Patterns

- four macrobeats long (initially)
- chanting, playing, recognizing in songs/chants
- neutral syllables first (“bah”); LATER chanting on rhythm syllables, labeling meter

2. Tonal Patterns

- arpeggiations of tonic/dominant functions (initially)
- singing, playing, recognizing in songs
- neutral syllables first (“bum”); LATER singing on solfege, labeling tonality, categorizing function

- Ideas for pattern singing/chanting: gesture for echo in between repetitions of a song/chant, echo a puppet (group/individual), pausing song to toss toy to individual to echo, games, pepper in anywhere!

IV. Audiation informs IMPROVISATION

The better/more we audiate, the better/more we are equipped to improvise!

A. Rhythm Pattern Improvisation

- Example: Rhythm conversation (neutral syllables, later w/rhythm syll.)

B. Tonal Pattern Improvisation

- Example: Create tonal patterns (neutral syllables, later w/solfege)

C. Melodic Improvisation

- Examples: Creating an ending to a song, Q&A phrases, Improvising over a harmonic progression

V. MLT Resources

- Gordon Institute for Music Learning (www.giml.org)
- “Everyday Musicality Podcast” — available on podcast streaming platforms and on the web (www.everydaymusicality.com) or follow on Facebook.
- *Weaving It All Together: A Practical Guide to Applying Gordon’s Music Learning Theory in the Elementary General Music Program* by Heather N. Shouldice—available in ebook and spiral-bound format (GIA Publications).
- Videos on my YouTube channel (search “Heather Shouldice”)
- Alliance for Active Music Making (www.allianceamm.org)