

“Literacy in the Large Ensemble: Nurturing Rhythmic Independence in Our Students”

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<p>independent (adj.) thinking or acting for oneself; not relying on another or others for aid or support; self-confident; unconstrained; autonomous; free</p>

The *rhythmically independent musician* possesses vast knowledge/skills in at least these domains:

- Kinesthetic - the ability to demonstrate a consistent musical pulse at a variety of tempi while simultaneously performing rhythmic figures accurately.
- Rhythmic Pattern Vocabulary - a vast vocabulary of rhythmic patterns in a wide variety of meters that can be recognized, recalled, and performed accurately.
- Theoretical Knowledge - an understanding of theoretical foundations of rhythm (terminology, notation - note and rest values, meter, etc.).

Complications and Confounding Issues in Teaching for Rhythmic Independence

- “Transfer” in all learning is a by-product of tremendous intent on the part of the educator.
- In the large ensemble, the phenomenon of “rhythmic mimicking” is exceptionally common.
- Building rhythmic vocabulary is best accomplished out of context, not in one.
- Effective teaching/learning is a by-product of effective sequencing of student experiences.
- Teaching exceptionally well - each and every day - is always hard work.

Existing Research and Researchers to Aid Us in this Endeavor

Duke, R. A. (2007). *Intelligent music teaching: Essays on the core principles of instruction*. Austin, TX: Learning and Behavior Resources.

Froseth, J. O. (2005). *Rhythm flashcards*. Chicago: GIA.

Gordon, Edwin E. (2012). *Learning sequences in music: Skill, content, and patterns* (8th ed.). Chicago: GIA.

Newell, D. (2008). *Teaching Rhythm: New Strategies and Techniques for Success*. San Diego: Kjos.

Language Learning as a Model for Rhythmic Learning

Newell’s “Rhythm Learning Sequence”

1. Perform it [“I play, you play.” “I sing, you sing.”]
2. Count it [“I count, you count.” “I sing, you count.” “I count, you sing.” “I count, you play.”]
3. See it [Use all combinations in step 2 above.]
4. Test it [How confident are the students with the new patterns?]
5. Understand it [A deeper, theoretical level of understanding the new patterns.]

continued ...

Overarching Concepts of Teaching in this Way

“Teach the sound well before the symbol.”

Introduce new rhythmic patterns according to the sequence before students encounter them in repertoire. In doing so, students are entirely versed in a composition’s rhythmic content from the first encounter with the piece of music.

Teaching this way calls an educator to plan weeks ahead in rhythmic skill development.

The ideal amount of time dedicated during any one rehearsal to these experiences is only a few minutes total.

When done properly/effectively, much of this is “game-like” to the students (all the better!).

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Features

1. Library of nearly 1800 rhythm pattern “slides” from which to create a “slide show”
 - a. meters currently include 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8
 - b. slides are grouped by rhythmic combinations (“Half, Quarter, and Eighth Notes”) for ease of organization
 - c. slides include both note and rest values in combination
2. Slide show options
 - a. once selected from the library, slides can be manipulated within the show (e.g. changed order, duplicated, deleted, etc.)
 - b. a slide show can be as long or as short as a teacher’s desires
3. “Settings” options
 - a. a built in metronome (with subdivision capabilities)
 - b. ability to “display” a given slide for minimal or maximum beats within any meter
 - c. two playback options: “automatic” or “manual”
4. Other features
 - a. users can sign-in with their Google credentials
 - b. once signed in, any slide show can be exported, named, saved, and later imported for re-use
 - c. as a web-based platform, updates happen directly to the site itself

Questions, Comments, and Conversation