Improvisation In the Elementary General Music Classroom

Maryland MEA 2018

Roger Sams
Director of Publications and Music Education Specialist
Music Is Elementary
www.MusicIsElementary.com
roger@musiciselementary.com

Rain on the Green Grass
from Purposeful Pathways, Book 1
Used with Permission

PATHWAY TO SINGING: Vocal exploration
  • “What brings in the rain?” The wind!
  • Students explore finding the head voice by following the wind pathway on 00000.

  • Rote teaching of song and text through echo imitation.

PATHWAY TO LITERACY: Discovering
  • Students pat the steady beat while singing the song. Point to icons as they sing.

  • Use questioning to support the children in discovering that when the umbrella appears there is one sound on the beat and when the raindrops appear there are two sounds on the beat.
• “What happens when the sun appears?” No sound at all!
• Label the beat with no sound as a rest -- 🕳️

PATHWAY TO LITERACY: Decoding so and mi
• Students determine when the melody moves to mi and move the icons down one space. (All of the icon begin in the so space.)

```
S 🌧️💧

M 🌧️💧
```

• Convert the icons on the staff to rhythmic notation.
• Students sing in rhythm syllables.
• Students sing using solfa and hand signs.
• Students sing with text.

Rain on the Green Grass

Traditional/arr. Sams

```
\[\text{\textcopyright 2012 by MIE Publications}\]
```

PATHWAY TO ENSEMBLE: Steady beat chord bordun with color parts by word cue
• Students pat the steady beat and sing song. Transfer to chord bordun on BX/BM.
• Clap on the rests. Students determine the pattern and join in. Transfer to triangle.
• Prepare guiro part by scraping arm with finger on cue words, “green grass” and “roof-top,” then transfer to guiro.
• Put all parts together with song.
PATHWAY TO RHYTHMIC IMPROVISATION: 4-beat patterns using \( \frac{4}{4} \) pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( \frac{4}{4} )</th>
<th>( \frac{4}{4} )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \text{Hear the rain-drops.} )</td>
<td>( \text{Hear the rain-drops.} )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Speech followed by four beats of rest (2X).
- Fill in the rests with four \( \frac{4}{4} \) (clapping).
- Fill in the rests with \( \frac{4}{4} \).
- Model improvisation using \( \frac{4}{4} \), \( \frac{4}{4} \), \( \frac{4}{4} \).
- Students improvise.
- Small groups of students transfer improvisation to triangles.
- Put together with song in ABA form.
- ADVANCED CHALLENGE: Transfer the speaking part to finger cymbals.

PATHWAY to FORM: Creating an introduction soundscape

- Consider reading the following poem, by Roger Sams, about the rain with sound effects chosen by students, then bring in the BX and begin the orchestration for the song after the steady beat is established.

Rain is falling down.
Such a peaceful sound.
Oh, so gently, rain is falling
All around.

Rain is falling down.
Thunderstorms abound!
Lightning crashing, storm clouds thrashing,
What a sound!

Rain is falling down.
Such a peaceful sound.
Oh, so gently, rain is falling
All around.

PATHWAY TO CREATIVE MOVEMENT: Sudden and sustained movements accompanied by percussion soundscape.

Movement Exploration

- Students begin in one place, exploring the way rain drops fall (sustained movement):
• Slowly on the wind, straight down, swirling, twirling. (List more with class.)
• Explore the various rain movement ideas in self-space.
• Students imagine they are raindrops, and chose a “spot” somewhere else in the room where they will land. Can they travel to that place (locomotor movement) in a way from the previous list? Explore several ways.
• Chose their favorite, and travel to their “spot”.
  • Now explore sudden movement -- very angular, like lightening.
  • Encourage angular movement in legs, arms, head, etc.
  • Create a movement sequence: Sustained, Sudden, Sustained

Add percussion accompaniment
  • Students watch a partner dance their sequence and decide what instruments can accompany their movement.

Possibilities for Sustained Rain Accompaniment:

Glockenspiel, wind chimes, earth bell, triangle, rainstick, spring drum, metallophone.

Possibilities for Sudden Thunder Accompaniment:

Drum, cymbal, woodblocks, temple blocks, vibraslap, slapstick, thunder drum

Alternative accompaniment
  • Consider combining with PATHWAY TO FORM poetry/soundscapes.

Wee Willie Winkie
from Purposeful Pathways, Book 1
Used with Permission

PATHWAY to LITERACY: Rhythm detective game
  • Lead 4-beat patterns (below). Students echo.
  • Students identify which card matches the rhythm performed.
  • End with $ to prepare the ostinato used later in the lesson.

PATHWAY to PARTWORK: Poem with ostinato
  • Students read rhythm of poem.
  • Add text.
  • Students speak poem and pat steady beat.
• Performs BP ostinato (pat/clap). Ask the students to join in when ready. *(simultaneous imitation)*

• Divide class. Half performs rhyme. Half performs ostinato.

• Trade jobs.

• Transfer BP to drum/triangle. Pat=drum. Clap=triangle.

• Transfer rhythm of poem to woodblock.

• Students perform in ABA form with UTP ostinato.
  - A=Rhythmic Speech with ostinato
  - B=Woodblock with ostinato

---

Wee Willie Winkie

Traditional/ arr. Sancts

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Time for bed</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Time for bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

---

Copyright © 2012 by MIE Publications
PATHWAY to IMPROVISATION: 4-beat rhythm patterns

- Review above as needed.
- Transfer BP to rhythm sticks. Play the floor on the pat. Click the sticks together on the clap.
- Rote teaching of the following chant (B Section):

  Listen to Wilie go. Run-ning up and down.

  Tap-ping ry-thms ev’ry where. All through the town.

- Speak the chant (count to four during the four beats of rest).
- Play four with rhythm sticks on the floor (like a drum) during the rest measures.
- Play four during the rest measures.
- Model 4-beat improvisation using
- Students improvise.
- ABA Form
- Grand Rondo for assessment. Each time you get to the B Section four students get a turn to improvise solo. This is a perfect opportunity for formative assessment of all the students in the class, while everyone is actively making music together.

Chick, Chick, Chatterman
from Purposeful Pathways, Book 2
Used with Permission

PATHWAY TO Literacy: chick chick chatterman

- Students read the rhythm of the rhyme, saying rhythm syllables.
• Add text.
• Study the text and notice that there is a conversation happening between a buyer and a seller at the market.

  **BUYER:** Chick, chick, chatterman. How much are your geese?
  **SELLER:** Chick, chick, chatterman. Five cents a piece.
  **BUYER:** Chick, chick, chatterman. That’s too dear.
  **SELLER:** Chick, chick, chatterman. Get out of here!

• Divide the class in half. Half speaks the buyer’s words. The other half speaks the seller’s words. Trade parts.

**PATHWAY TO Partwork: Rhyme over body percussion ostinato**

• Perform the **BP ostinato**. Once you have established the **ostinato**, bring the students in, speaking the rhyme in two groups.
• Ask the students to join you on the **BP ostinato (simultaneous imitation)** and then you drop out once they have it. Perform the rhyme over top of their **BP ostinato**.
• Divide the class in half. Half performs the **BP ostinato**. The other half speaks the rhyme (both roles). Trade parts.
• Divide the class into thirds. The middle of the three groups begins the **BP ostinato**. The other two groups perform the rhyme in two parts. Rotate the students through all three groups.
• For an advanced challenge ask the students to perform the **BP ostinato** and the rhyme simultaneously.
PATHWAY TO Improvisation: Question and Answer

- Speak the following chart (say “Question” for the Q and “Answer” for the A), while pointing the steady beat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Repeat. This time you speak the questions and ask the students to speak the answers. Continue pointing to the steady beat.

- Say to the students, “I just got out of my rocket ship on your planet. I do not speak your planet’s language. You do not speak my planet’s language. We’re going to have a conversation. I ask you questions and you give me your answers. Each of us speaking our planet’s language.” Then model very silly rhythmic
“space talk” as you do the first question. The students will follow your lead. 
WARNING: There will be laughter!

- Divide the class in half and experiment with different characters having rhythmic conversations such as farm animals, dogs and cats, baby talk, etc. Ask for student ideas. Trade which group gets to go first.
- Once the students have explored this rhythmic improvisation through vocal play, explain that this is called **Question and Answer Improvisation** and it can be performed in different media.
- Improvise clapping questions. The students improvise clapping answers.
- Divide the class in half for clapping improvisation. Trade parts.
- When the students have become comfortable with **Question and Answer Improvisation** in a large group (and this will likely be on a subsequent day working with this material), have them work on improvisation with a partner. Spread the pairs out around the room so they have their own little space for this practice. There will be lots of sound and it will appear a bit chaotic. That’s part of the process. You can almost count on this failing the first time. Don’t give up!
- Use the rhyme as a recurring A Section, giving students a lot of opportunity to practice **Question and Answer Improvisation** in contrasting sections of a Grande Rondo.
- Add the **BP ostinato** to your final performance.

**Lil’ Liza Jane**
from Purposeful Pathways, Book 3
Used with Permission

**PATHWAY TO Literacy: ✨**:  
- Lead **4-beat echo patterns**, making every second pattern ✨ ✨  
- “What pattern am I playing repeatedly? How would you write this rhythm?” ✨ ✨  
- Sing the melody on “loo” and ask the students to listen for ✨ ✨  
- Sing on “loo” again. Students clap the syncopated rhythm whenever they hear it.  
- Students learn to sing the two syncopated patterns in **solfa** through **echo imitation.**

    ✨ ✨ ✨  
    la so mi so  

    ✨ ✨ ✨  
    mi mi re do
• Sing the odd numbered measures in solfa and ask the students to sing the even measures, alternating between their two patterns. (Substitute ♪ for the ♩ in the first measure.) Repeat this several times to reinforce the pattern aurally.
• Students sing the entire song in solfa, as you point the pitches on the solfa tone ladder.
• Put the text on the board. Students learn the song with text through echo imitation.
• Students sing the entire song with text.

PATHWAY TO Movement Play: Play Party
• Create longways sets with 6-8 couples facing each other.

• On the phrase, “I’ve gotta house in Baltimore,” partners step in towards their partner for three beats and clap their partner’s hands on beat 4.

• On the phrase, “Lil’ Liza Jane,” partners step back to their place and clap their own hands on beat 4.
• Repeat the same movements for the second phrase.
• Both lines cast off for the remainder of the song, with the head couple forming a bridge for the others to go under. The head couple stays at the bottom of the
set, so a new head couple is formed. Each pair of partners takes one step toward the head of the set.

• The new head couple then becomes the focus for Question and Answer Improvisation. You might have this head couple perform Question and Answer Improvisation as soloists, with one partner answering the other. You could also have one of the head couple players improvise a rhythmic question and have all of the dancers in their row improvise a rhythmic answer. Switch and have the other head couple player improvise a rhythmic question and let that row improvise an answer.
• Half the class can accompany the game while the other half sings, dances, and improvises.

PATHWAY TO Partwork: Melody with melodic ostinato
• Students read the rhythm of the melodic ostinato.

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{4}{4} & \quad \frac{4}{4} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{mi} \\
\text{so} & \quad \text{re} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{mu} & \quad \text{mi} \\
\text{so} & \quad \text{mi} \\
\end{align*}
\]

• Students read the melody, using solfa with hand signs.

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{4}{4} & \quad \frac{4}{4} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{mi} \\
\text{so} & \quad \text{re} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{re} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{so} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{mi} \\
\end{align*}
\]

• Students sing the melodic ostinato, using solfa and hand signs, while you sing the melody.
• Students add text to the melodic ostinato.

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{4}{4} & \quad \frac{4}{4} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{mi} \\
\text{so} & \quad \text{re} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{re} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{do} & \quad \text{do} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{so} \\
\text{mi} & \quad \text{mi} \\
\text{Li} & \quad \text{za}, \\
\text{lit} & \quad \text{tle} \\
\text{Li} & \quad \text{za} \\
\text{Jane} & \quad \text{Li} \\
\text{za} & \quad \text{Li} \\
\text{za} & \quad \text{Jane}.
\end{align*}
\]

• Students sing the melodic ostinato with the text, while you sing the melody.
• Divide the class in half and sing in two parts. Trade parts.

PATHWAY TO Ensemble: Broken bordun, melodic ostinato and UTP ostinato

• Pats and sing the solfa for the BX broken bordun. Students join in when they are ready. (simultaneous imitation)
• Divide the class in half. Half sings and pats the BX broken bordun. Half sings the song. Trade jobs.
• Transfer to BX/BM and add the singers.
• Students clap the rhythm of the GL ostinato.
• Students sing the solfa for the GL ostinato.

GL
\[ \text{do} \text{ re} \text{ mi} \text{ so} \text{ mi} \text{ mi} \text{ do} \text{ re} \text{ mi} \text{ so} \text{ mi} \text{ mi} \]

• Prepare the GL ostinato with patting and transfer to instruments.
• Students read the temple blocks ostinato (patting) in conjunction with GL ostinato.

GL/TB
\[ \text{do} \text{ re} \text{ mi} \text{ so} \text{ mi} \text{ mi} \]

GL/TB
\[ \text{do} \text{ re} \text{ mi} \text{ so} \text{ mi} \text{ mi} \]

• Transfer to temple blocks and put together with GL ostinato.
• Put the singers, temple blocks and GL together.
• Put all parts together with singers.
PATHWAY TO Improvisation: Question & Answer

- Execute a phrase form analysis of the piece: a a’ b b’
- Remind the students that this is Question and Answer form. Question and Answer form is especially useful when improvising. Notice that every phrase...
ends with ♬♩♩♩♩ as the final motive. Tell the students they will be doing the same thing with their improvisation.

- Speak the **questions** and ask the students to speak the **answers**.

**Question and Answer Improvisation**

![Improvisation Example]

- Improvise the questions rhythmically on **BP**, making sure to end each phrase with a syncopated rhythm. Students answer with a **BP** improvisation, making sure to end each phrase with syncopation.
- Individual students improvise the **questions**.
- Break the students into pairs for paired improvisation. If possible, have two timbres working in each pair. Example: one hand drum and one pair of rhythm sticks. Hand drums improvise the **questions** and rhythm sticks improvise the **answers**.