
BY UTILIZING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN READING MUSIC AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE, WE CAN CREATE A NEW TYPE OF TEACHING, AS WELL AS A NEW TYPE OF LEARNING. THERE IS NO NEED TO CONTINUE TO ISOLATE EACH INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT TO A FORTY-MINUTE BLOCK IN A DAY. NOW WE CAN APPROACH THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SUBJECTS AND TEACH TO THOSE CONNECTIONS.

tation. Take the piece and remove all rhythmic values. By making this change, one makes the music slightly more accessible for students to make the piece *ridiculous*. Then, just as we did with *fallen leaves*, allow the students to play the piece however they want. We must encourage students to really go to the point of *ridiculousness* because they will inevitably be less comfortable with reading music than with reading English. Provide more examples of how the music can be interpreted. Show the students examples ignoring or embellishing dynamics and playing or disregarding notes. After we have made the student comfortable with taking music to the extremes to which they took *fallen leaves*, let the student make the piece their own. Emphasize the running concept of *ridiculousness*. Let them play the notes out of order, or reverse all of the rhythmic values. What is crucial, though, is that the students understand what they are doing. This exercise is not an attempt to play as many notes as possible, or randomly jab at the strings. Rather, this is an *experimental interpretation*. As we did with *fallen leaves*, our musical *ridiculousness* has a very clear structure that was derived from a creative thought process. It is this realization on the part of the students that we are striving for. Each student must comprehend how he or she can make sense of the dots on a page. There is one final step. Now that we can make music incredibly individual, we also must learn how to make it communal. The community that is formed by an orchestra or a class

ensemble is incredibly strong. And to create that strength, we must agree on a single way to interpret the dots on the page. So after all of the *experimenting* and *ridiculousness*, a certain level of uniformity must be creatively established.

Now we start to see how the two exercises are related. In order to accurately convey a literary or musical message to our community, we must follow the most basic and simple rules of reading English or music. We are much more free to interpret when people understand the context of our message. We can go up in front of an auditorium and read a book in a *ridiculous* fashion. We can also take that same stage and use the same *experimental interpretation* on a sonata. But what emotional message are we then conveying when no one in the auditorium can understand the gibberish that we spoke or played? Music and reading open themselves up to interpretation and are completely dry without our emotional input; however, it is crucial to acknowledge that the interpretation is constrained ever so slightly by the fundamental rules that are established through knowledge of conventions of music and language literacy. While the conventional rules give music and English its universality, the art of interpretation gives these symbol systems universal appeal.

When students interpret any sort of information and turn it into something that is their own, they can flourish. They know that no other student is going to

have the same idea, and that no two ideas will turn out alike. Thus, their performances will be unique and have no possibility of being “wrong.”

By utilizing the connections between reading music and written language, we can create a new type of teaching, as well as a new type of learning. There is no need to continue to isolate each individual subject to a forty-minute block in a day. Now we can approach the connections between subjects and teach to those connections. Instead of students saying that they have to do their math homework or English paper, they will simply have “work,” which requires thinking and interpretation in multiple fields. When we encourage students to interpret their work, they can no longer put themselves in boxes and argue that they are no good at reading or no good at music, because everything they do is now intensely personal and ultimately cannot be “wrong” or “bad.”

When we explore the transfer between music and English through *ridiculous* interpretation, whatever students see as their weaknesses will also call directly upon their strengths. With this method, students cannot be discouraged by fear of failure, because there is an almost guaranteed success. It is in this type of environment that children will learn the most, develop a sense of individuality and become more open thinkers. ♪

WHILE THE CONVENTIONAL RULES GIVE MUSIC AND ENGLISH ITS UNIVERSALITY, THE ART OF INTERPRETATION GIVES THESE SYMBOL SYSTEMS UNIVERSAL APPEAL.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO WRITE AND CONDUCT ORIGINAL WORKS OF MUSIC

by

SARA LEIB

As I transferred to New England Conservatory to study jazz voice with a specific teacher, I came upon the Music-in-Education program by accident. I hadn't had experience with conventional music education programs, but I knew that teaching was something I would love to do, and that if a musician loves to teach, she should. Because I wanted to finish my degree in two years, I was pleased that NEC offered the MIE classes for no credit. I was also intrigued by the program's central concept that all musicians, not just music education majors, are at once artists, teachers, and scholars.

Two years later, the NEC Music-in-Education program had literally changed my life. The program not only encouraged me to participate in useful discussions about pedagogy and provided me with invaluable hands-on teaching experience, it ultimately changed my whole outlook on education and the learning process. As a result, I feel it has even brought me closer to a better understanding of the world at large.

The MIE program at NEC teaches students how to teach, how to think, and how to better observe the student mind, a focus which is sadly lacking in a world where more and more students are feeling alienated and left behind by the tunnel vision teaching methods in overcrowded public schools. In a conventional music education program, students learn different instruments for about a semester each. However, since in a conservatory environment it is safely assumed that it is unnecessary to teach fundamentals like how to play one's instrument, music theory and ear training, the MIE teachers at NEC are free to help their students learn much more creative approaches to teaching. For example, MIE interns at NEC learn how to make useful musical instruments from easy-to-find items; how to recognize cognitive patterns in children; how to incorporate other subjects into a music lesson; and how to get young students to self-assess and find patterns.

I experienced an extremely fulfilling example of this approach to teaching and learning during my first internship at the Beethoven School in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, an elementary school in which each child is required to play an instrument. My MIE Improvisation In Music professor, Warren Senders, had received a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council to bring members of a group he's involved with, the Jazz Composers Alliance, into the Beethoven School for a semester-long residency. Warren said he needed an intern, and since I needed two semesters of internships for the MIE concentration, and since it sounded like interesting work besides, I jumped at the chance.

Each week, Warren and I and a group of musicians from the Alliance came into the fourth grade class at Beethoven with the ultimate goal of getting the students to write their own pieces of music, and then to play and conduct those pieces with the professional musicians. At the start of each lesson, the fourth graders filed into the room, put their instruments under the seats (the school gave an instrument to each student), and took their seats in a semi-circle in front of us. The Alliance members always began by giving a short performance playing free music with Warren as conductor, and afterwards Warren would talk about ideas like form, dynamics (louds and softs), rhythm, tempo, and frequency (highs and lows) in a way that allowed the students to discover the concepts for



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EACH WEEK, WARREN AND I AND A GROUP OF MUSICIANS FROM THE ALLIANCE CAME INTO THE FOURTH GRADE CLASS AT BEETHOVEN WITH THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF GETTING THE STUDENTS TO WRITE THEIR OWN PIECES OF MUSIC, AND THEN TO PLAY AND CONDUCT THOSE PIECES WITH THE PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS.

themselves. Each week they would cover one idea, and then the next week Warren would ask them questions for review. When the students demonstrated that they remembered the concept, Warren would present a new idea and incorporate them both. For instance, if in the first week he talked about highs and lows, in the next he'd ask the kids to sing a high note and make it louder or softer, thus introducing the idea of dynamics.

I noticed that Warren always taught by asking questions: *What did the students hear when they listened to music? What was the guy waving his hands in front of the orchestra doing? What was he trying to convey?* Such questions led the students to discover that the gestures of the conductor corresponded with the music and the orchestra and that the conductor was trying to get the orchestra to play the music in different ways. For someone who has little grasp of the musical language with which the conductor speaks, this is not a simple concept. However, the students were encouraged to invent their own signs for conducting. For example, waving their hands high (near their heads) meant to play high-pitched music, and waving them lower meant to play low in pitch. Moving their hands rapidly from side to side meant the music's rhythm should be faster, while moving them in wavy, circular motions meant more slowly. My personal favorite was a hand motion that looked like a conductor pulling the horn on a train, signifying that whatever the musician was doing should quickly change to something totally different.

In a similar fashion, Senders taught lessons about form, and the students soon came to understand on their own that different instruments in the ensemble were featured in different parts of a piece. The students eventually broke up into groups to write their own pieces of music in a form that they had decided upon themselves. The finished products were not symphonies with a 50-page score on staff sheets, but they were just as effective. Their pieces looked more like maps, written on a big white notepad. They had color-coded sections, and under each section was written which instruments should play that section, and at what tempo they should play and what dynamic level. Then I and the members of Jazz Composers Alliance (comprised of conservatory students and

graduate professionals on the trumpet, saxophone, French horn, flute, and voice) broke into groups and rehearsed with the fourth graders who had been studying instruments like the trumpet, recorders, and violin for a short time in school, as well as with others who played xylophones and drums that Senders provided. It was a fascinating, fun experience. Our score was the big white notepad, on which were drawn four boxes indicating sections, each with specific instructions. For example, the first section might be colored red, the second blue, the third yellow, and the last red (to indicate an ABCA form). The first section might read "xylophones, hand drums, trumpets, soft"; the second "xylophones, violins, voices, loud"; the third "just drums, very loud"; and the fourth would have instructions similar to the first A, such as "xylophones, hand drums, trumpets, loud then soft." It was then the student conductor's job to convey this piece to our orchestra. The entire orchestra improvised, so each time we played a piece, it sounded different; however, the basic elements of the piece were always just as the student-composers had specified.

So what did these fourth graders learn? For one thing, they learned that "the guy waving his hands in front of an orchestra" is not a foreign concept, an intellectual exercise relevant only to a particular culture, race, or socio-economic class. They learned that making music—conducting, writing,

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The NEC Music-in-Education program routinely offers multicultural entry points for students interested in global perspectives on education. Both of Warren Senders' MIE classes, "Cross-Cultural Approaches to Music-in-Education" and "Improvisation in General Music," encourage students to think broadly about emergent mentoring relationships, which are central to the MIE Guided Internship program. Here, MIE intern Beatrice Anderson collaborates with classmate Hector Mir in Senders' drum-making activity. Beatrice now works in New York in the Education Department of the Jazz @ Lincoln Center program. (Photo: Warren Senders)

composing, and improvising—was something that they could do too. As an MIE student and intern, I imagined the possibilities after they'd been reading music for a few years. I thought about ways they could take those skills they'd learned and apply them elsewhere. They learned the value of leadership and group participation. They learned the value of taking direction, listening, following instructions, and making and dictating instructions. They learned to take music and analyze its parts to understand the whole—a useful skill they could to apply to studies in grammar, mathematics, science, dance, or any number of subjects. The applications of these skills were endless.

I have since graduated from the MIE program and am now living in Los Angeles, working as a musician and teacher. I'm currently teaching Jewish music in a religious school where I'm required to teach kids a specific set of songs in a specific amount of time, rather than to present the kind of music lessons and music enrichment projects we presented in the MIE program. Although unfortunately this position doesn't allow me to do much outside of songleading, even so, as a result of the MIE experience I feel like I bring an understanding of the children's learning process that helps me know what they'll retain and what will

keep them interested. I can perceive what comes easiest to them, the notes or the rhythm. I'm much better at assessing what I need to work with them on, and I can try to give them a better understanding of the music without giving them a formal music lesson. I used to think that teaching music was impossible without immersing the students in confusing music theory jargon; if the students weren't up to learning it on that level, then they were too young or not talented enough. But now I know that if I can just tap into the students' natural abilities as musicians, they will more or less teach themselves—and thus me too. ¶