



*Georgia State MIE Guided Intern Jason Mraz challenges children to participate in an interactive rhythm exercise using sophisticated call-and-response patterns with movement and pitched boomwhackers at Centennial Place Elementary School.*

material with a broader exposure of different ideas. Too often performance groups come into schools and introduce their instruments, play a few songs, talk about a lot of information, and then leave. A phrase I have always liked for this kind of presentation is “drive-by music education.” The other extreme is for a performance group to come in and teach one topic or idea in great detail. The problem here is that the advantages of the performance group are not being utilized; they are functioning as an expensive one-time teacher group. While there is something to be said for classical music exposure without specific topical learning, drive-by music education fails to impact the children’s musical education to the fullest extent.

The balance between the two was extremely difficult to achieve. Our trio was constantly having problems, either with far too many ideas to actually teach anything, or with too much talking about one idea and not enough involvement. Even though a guest performance group does not come to the school to be the music teacher, we were trying to put together educational programs, not concerts.

**What was the best thing you learned about yourself during your involvement with the MIE program?**

The target audience for the majority of our trio’s work was the first grade. Since our school had certified music specialists, we decided to focus on aspects of music outside their already existing curriculum. Teaching to children who were still learning the fundamentals of the musical language, we chose to isolate fairly fundamental and even visceral aspects of music. The end result was a series of programs that taught aspects of music which were basic and obvious but still exciting and powerful – ideas like production of sound, improvisation, musical styles, traditional and non-traditional instruments, and rhythm. Organizing these programs and playing for and with the children brought

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back all the reasons why I fell in love with music in the first place. I was not a child virtuoso; I just love music. Theory and orchestration were not the reasons why I went into music; MIE helped me remember why it is that I do what I do.

**In what way did the MIE program most uniquely contribute to your overall musical education?**

I have a degree in orchestral percussion performance. One thing I have never in my life wanted to do is teach music in a school setting. That does not mean, however, that I don’t have strong interests in every aspect of music – including concepts traditionally classified as educational. Most students, including myself, are too busy to take non-required courses from a separate concentration. MIE, however, is a ‘line-blurring’ class. The class is built around participating chamber performance groups. All of the presentations were fundamentally performance-based presentations, but the bulk of the class focused on educational topics. We learned about learning styles and multiple intelligences and such, but we learned how to implement them in an effective educational performance setting. We all know that being a well-rounded musician should enhance your performance and marketability. Whether you subscribe to the Artist-Teacher-Scholar model, or you simply believe in knowing as much about your trade as you can, the MIE experience really helped me flesh out my performance major into a fuller musical degree. ¶

## STAYING FRESH: THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS OVER PROCEDURE

by

JIM STALLINGS

In the classroom, one always feels a generative tension between a structured approach to teaching and an unstructured approach—between the creative and the pedantic, the vicarious and the experiential, and the kinesthetic and the auditory. As teaching artists, classroom teachers, and music professionals, we need to be aware of how we are asking our students to interact with the presentation of musical ideas and concepts we bring to the classroom. An experiential, kinesthetic approach which involves the students in the actual doing of music and which reinforces the skills and experiences relevant to the student’s development as a musical person is central to effective teaching. At times, however, even the most creative lesson plans can succumb to the pull of the auditory or the pedantic. This is especially evident when one presents the same material in various group situations. An exercise in creative musical expression designed to foster independent reaction to a musical stimulus may in subsequent presentations be blunted by leading queries and directives on the expected response.

As teaching artists, we should be prepared with a clear objective and a well- thought-out method of presenting our ideas in the classroom. However, familiarity with the presentation can make us somewhat impatient with importing the experience to the students. We trade the risky course of allowing the students to have individual reactions or expressions for the safety of directing the responses in order to ensure that our point is reached in a way that we can easily ascertain. In doing so, we can ironically short circuit the very process we are seeking to encourage. We find ourselves devoting our energies to ensuring that the intended point of our lessons does not go undiscovered. This approach in turn reinforces any doubts we may have that we will not be able to interpret and respond to a variety of undirected expressions from our students.

Before becoming involved as a composer in the MIE program at Georgia State University, I had taught preschool music, served as adjunct music professor at the local college, and worked as a graduate teaching assistant. In each of these situations, I constantly worked to actively involve my students in the process of creative musical thinking and music-making. The music internship program at Georgia State has been an invaluable asset for me in refining my philosophies and techniques on teaching music, involving students in musical activities, and helping them discover the innate capacity for musical expression that lies within each of us. The discussion and evaluation process which we go through as a class following our school visits has proven particularly useful in helping me plan and work towards a classroom presentation. It was during this process that I discovered a potential pitfall which can easily thwart our efforts to bring creative musical experiences to our audience.

During our school visits, I have noticed that the first time a classroom teacher experiences a program by a visiting artist, the teacher, being unfamiliar with the presentation, is involved mostly as a spectator observing the interaction of the visiting artist with the children. However, upon subsequent collaborations, bringing the same program to a different group of students, I have observed that often the teacher begins to offer leading discussions, questions or suggestions in order to elicit “appropriate” responses to the material being presented. As a result, the aim of the presentation, which is to evoke genuine musical responsive behavior or to involve the students in independent creative expression, is immediately thwarted.

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For example, in one presentation in which I was the visiting composer, I held up a sheet of music written for two violin players and asked the children, “What is this?” One of the children in the group answered, “Music!” I asked the children if they would like to hear the music, to which they all answered enthusiastically that they would. I then went around with the sheet of music and held it up to each child’s ear and asked them how they liked it. The teachers and children all fell out laughing because of the ridiculousness of the presumption that anyone can hear anything from a mute piece of paper. This opened the door to a discussion and a demonstration of the cooperation required between musicians and composers in order for the audience to hear the music notated on the page.

However, when I made the same query in a subsequent presentation, a teacher immediately offered “You can’t hear anything can you?” before the children had the chance to realize on their own the ridiculousness of the supposition. Instead of reveling in the joy of spontaneous discovery with laughter and enthusiasm, the children giggled slightly and nodded that it was true; the page was mute. Almost immediately their minds began to wander and some restlessness set in, which meant that we had to spend the next few minutes trying to regain their full attention.

In short, whereas in the first presentation the children experienced the joy of the discovery of the ridiculous, in the second presentation the children were asked to follow a prescribed line of reasoning. In our haste to bring the point home, an experiential creative teaching moment was transformed into a pedantic auditory exercise where the students became followers rather than discoverers.

It is important to note that classroom teachers are not the only ones who have this tendency to prevent children from coming to their own un-coached conclu-

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sions. For example, in another classroom experience, I served on a composer/artist team with an oboist and a flutist (See guided Interview with GSU MIE Intern John Samuel Roper in this *Journal*). We devised a presentation around the premise that just like a story, a piece of music needed not only a main idea in order to be interesting, but details as well. The program began with one of the members of the team presenting a “story” that she had written. Unfolding a piece of paper, she read, “I have a dog. The End.” The children immediately responded, “That’s not a story! That’s only a sentence.”—i.e., they offered an autonomous un-coached conclusion they’d reached in response to the information they’d been presented with. Later in the presentation, our flute player decided to play a really cool piece of “music” he had written himself. After saying how very excited he was to be playing this music and how very special the music was, he sat down and began to play. The music consisted of three quarter notes D, C, and B played in a descending repeating pattern that never varied. In our presentation to the first group of students, I allowed him to play this banal series over and over as the children listened. Since the music did not have a stopping point like the story, the children sat listening politely while waiting for him to finish. To provide what I thought was a necessary cue, I came up behind him and interrupted his playing. This led to a polite discussion between ourselves and several of the students that, as with a story, it wasn’t

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enough to have a single idea alone to have a complete piece of music, but rather to be interesting the piece needed to have details, such as supporting lines, a variety of content, or an elaboration of the subject. During this discussion, we found ourselves asking many questions in order to fuel the discussion and stimulate their thinking about our music and story examples.

The next presentation in an adjacent classroom went just as described previously, only instead of interrupting the flutist myself, I let him continue until the children began to react to the repetitive playing, interrupting the musician and asking if he was going to play anything else. This experience also resulted in a discussion, except that this time the children took ownership of the concept in a way that required no prompting on our part. Whereas the first discussion was initiated by the musicians using leading questions and suggestions, the second discussion was



*In the Sound Learning program, students’ performance on boomwhackers mirrors the interplay of melodies produced on the marimba by the performing artist.*

fueled by the excitement of the students with their observations on what they were hearing. In this case, instead of leading the children through a predetermined line of reasoning, we served as sounding boards and moderators for their suggestions, queries, insights and suggestions on what was required in order to make the music and the story more interesting. As a result, since they were all engaged in the process, there was much more overall participation by members of the class.

Central to my concept of music-in-education is the notion that individuals have an innate capacity for original musical expression and that the role of the teaching artist is to bring this out. As a composer involved in this process, I am always interested in empowering the children to create, providing opportunities for realization and expression which may, and should, differ from class to class and from individual to individual. This implies an active teaching

style, which allows for spontaneous discovery and individual expression, giving the children ample time to come to their own unique conclusions or reactions. This type of approach, which may seem risky to some because of the unpredictable responses it engenders, can not co-exist with an approach that employs instructions defining the “correct” response or leading questions that draw the children’s attention away from engaging in the presentation and toward following a prescribed course of thought. Music-making is by definition an active, creative process. Authentic musical learning is kinetic, and being involved in the process is exciting and stimulating. In our approach to music-in-education, we cannot allow ourselves to default to a teaching style that encourages passivity and substitutes following for discovering. We must present and engage, allowing our students the excitement of discovery and the joy of the creative expression of the musical person within. ¶