

Orff Schulwerk: Enhancing Rhythmic Skills in Early Childhood Music Classrooms

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Abstract: This project applies the Orff Schulwerk approach to improve rhythmic skills in children aged 3-5. Through singing, movement, and rhythmic speech, children develop steady beats and rhythmic understanding. The lesson plans include body percussion, improvisation, and group activities to foster musical and social growth. The project emphasizes flexible, child-centered teaching methods.

Keywords: Orff Schulwerk; early childhood music; rhythmic skills

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1. Introduction

The Orff Schulwerk approach integrates music, movement, and speech to develop young children's rhythmic and musical skills. This project explores how Orff can enhance rhythm in children aged 3-5, promoting creativity and coordination through interactive activities. By engaging in body percussion and improvisation, children strengthen their musical foundations in a playful, child-centered environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Orff Approach

Orff Schulwerk emphasizes experiential learning, helping students develop musical skills through singing, movement, instrument playing, rhythmic speech, and dramatic improvisation^[1]. It taps into children's natural playfulness to engage them in music, movement, and drama. Orff believed children should discover music themselves, starting from simple rhythms and progressing to more complex forms^[2]. Musical content begins with simple rhythmic patterns and scales, advancing to harmonies and chord progressions^[1].

The four stages of Orff Schulwerk are: 1) Exploration - Discovering sound and movement, 2) Imitation - Developing skills in speech, body percussion, singing, and instruments, 3) Improvisation - Creating patterns, 4) Creation - Combining materials to create compositions^[1]. These stages are flexible and can be adapted to meet lesson goals. Orff supported musical literacy but did not provide specific guidelines for its implementation^[1].

2.2. Purpose of Project and Background of Topic

The purpose is to use Orff Schulwerk to enhance rhythmic skills in children aged 3-5. Through rhythmic activities, students learn music by listening and imitating, with rhythm serving as the foundation for musical understanding. I aim to help students express rhythmic concepts through body movement.

Music consists of patterns of duration and pitch, with rhythm forming the foundation of melody^[2]. Rhythm enhances musical learning when combined with other elements^[3]. Orff Schulwerk uses speech rhythm, chants, songs, and movement to help children internalize rhythms like pulse, beat, and duration, laying the groundwork for deeper musical study.

2.3. Young Children's Rhythmic Capabilities

"Rhythm is everywhere in the lives of children"^[3]. Children naturally engage with rhythms, developing rhythmic skills through everyday activities. Teachers and parents help cultivate this ability, progressing from basic listening to more advanced skills like reading and writing music^[3].

At ages 3-5, children sing songs with beats, mimic rhythmic patterns, clap to pulses, and replicate rhythms with instruments. Rhythm in speech, through clapping, tapping, and stamping, further enhances their understanding. By age three or four, children begin responding to music in various meters, with some naturally grasping rhythmic nuances while others need guidance^[3].

2.4. Young Children's Movement Capabilities

Music and movement are inseparable for children^[3], with movement being integral to music education^[4]. Children naturally respond to music with movement and emotion, and teachers guide these responses to teach rhythm, melody, dynamics, and form^[3]. As children enter kindergarten, their physical coordination improves. Teachers support creative movement by providing examples, opportunities for choice, and a safe, respectful environment^[5]. Imitating peers and teachers helps students build movement vocabulary, enhancing expression^[3].

2.5. Goals for Young Children in Music

NYSSMA^[6] emphasizes key music areas for young children: "Performance," "Listening," "Musical Elements & Notation," and "Creating." Children learn rhythm and tempo through songs like "Hello" and "Bim Bam" at Eastman. NYSSMA encourages singing, instrument playing, listening to musical elements, and fostering creativity in early childhood.

2.6. Using the Orff Approach with Young Children

It is suggested integrating the Orff approach with CCR standards using speech games and chanting^[7]. Age-appropriate, kinesthetic Orff activities^[8]. It is noted Orff's role in language and imaginative play for preschoolers^[9]. Gunn discussed developmentally appropriate music practices, focusing on sensory, motor, and musical engagement for young children^[10]. Lange recommended combining Orff and Gordon's Music Learning Theory to teach audiation, pitch, and rhythm^[11].

3. Lesson Plans

3.1. Teaching context

The Music Makers class at Eastman Community School, taught by Sam Webber, is a 45-minute session focused on bringing joy through music.

3.2. Lesson Plan 1

Context for Lesson Plan 1

In this Orff Schulwerk lesson, students tap their thighs to a song, follow rhythmic cues, and tap their names' syllables, ending with a shake egg percussion exercise.

Yingying Liu

MTL 471

03/24/2024

Teaching and Leading Plan: Full Lesson

Part 1: General Information

School/Location: Eastman Community School

Regular Music Teacher: Yingying Liu

Class Name: Early childhood - music maker

Date of Lesson: 04/13/2024

Length: 45 minutes

Student Ages/Grade(s): 3–5-year-old

Caregiver(s) Present: (Yes)

Standards: MU:Re8.1.PK: a With substantial guidance, explore music's expressive qualities (such as dynamics and tempo).

Objectives: Students will demonstrate an understanding of a steady beat by tapping their legs in sync with the teacher's singing; Students will follow the teacher's lead, tapping their legs in rhythm with the melody; Students will sway and move their arms to the steady beat of "Somewhere in My Memory" and shake their shakers in rhythm with the tambourine during the music's climax.

Materials:

Songs
Beanbag
Box of books
Shakers in a box
Drum
Speakers

Part 2: Plan

(1) Prepare activities

5 minutes prior to the start of class

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher prepares name tags and books. Students pick a book and, at 11 AM, clean up to the song "It's clean up time," then return to their seats.

Transition: The teacher sings "It's clean up time," guiding students to tidy up and move the box. Then, they sing "Come and make a circle," and students return to their spots. The teacher introduces themselves next.

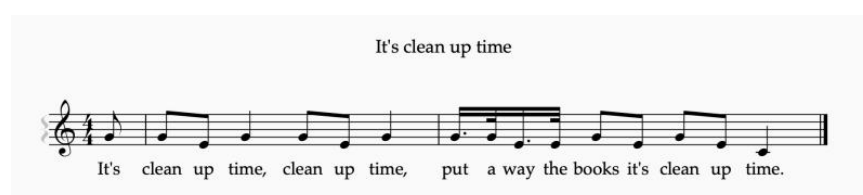


Figure 1. It's clean up time (episode)

Come and make a Circle

$\text{♩} = 120$

Come and make a cir - cle cir - cle cir - cle, come and make a cir - cle round and round.

When we make a cir - cle cir - cle cir - cle, when we make a cir - cle then we all sit down.

Figure 2. Come and make a Circle (episode)

(2)**Hello Hello Hello** [A (Mixolydian), Duple (4/4), 120 BPM, Seated]

5 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings “Hello Hello Hello,” guiding students to tap their thighs. Then, students sing or improvise as the teacher tosses a beanbag, building rhythm and participation.

Hello Hello Hello

$\text{♩} = 120$

He-llo he-llo he-llo, How are you to-day? He-llo he-llo he-llo, you look fine to day!

Ba ba la ba ba ba ba ba la ba ba, Ba ba la ba ba ba ba ba la ba ba.

Figure 3. Hello Hello Hello (episode)

Transition: Dovetailing: Both songs are duple meter, and both songs needs the same body movement.

(3)**Heckety Peckety Bumblebee** [G (Major), Triple (6/8), 90 BPM, Seated]

5 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings, students tap their legs, then throw a beanbag while naming each other, using “my turn, your turn” to build rhythm and participation.

Heckety Peckety

$\text{♩} = 90$

He - cke - ty Pe - cke - ty Bum - ble bee, will you say your name for me?

Figure 4. Heckety Peckety (episode 1)

Transition: Dovetailing: After name activities, the teacher taps the drum to “Heckety Peckety Bumblebee,” and students stand, following the rhythm. The teacher taps four times per syllable, repeating three times.

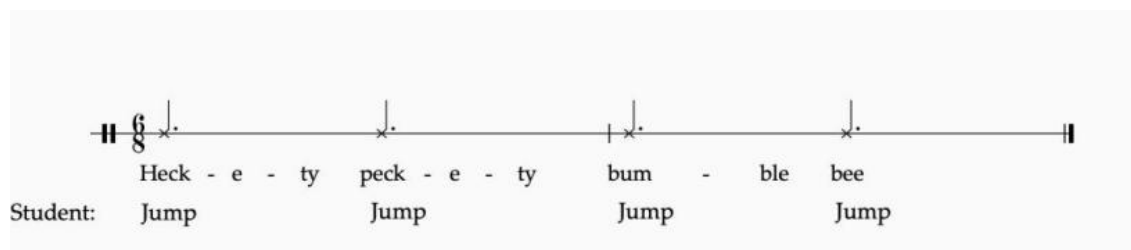


Figure 5. Heckety Peckety (episode 2)

(4) Drum Talk [No pitch, Duple (4/4), 90 BPM, Moving]

5 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher taps the drum to establish the pulse, recites the lyrics, and introduces tempo variations to improve body movement skills.

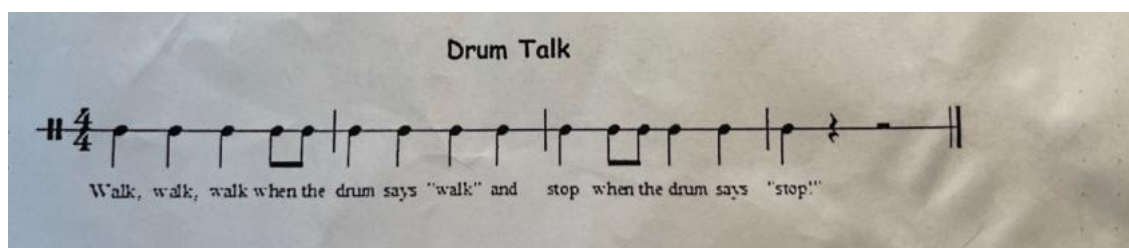


Figure 6. Drum Talk (episode)

Transition: Dovetailing: After “Drum talk,” the teacher demonstrates drumming rules and guides students back to their positions with “Come and make a circle.”

Bim Bam [A (Minor), Duple (4/4), 90 BPM and 110 BPM, Moving]

5 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings “Bim Bam,” guiding students to tap their thighs and adapt to changing tempos, with body movements for imitation, improving rhythm and movement skills through repetition.

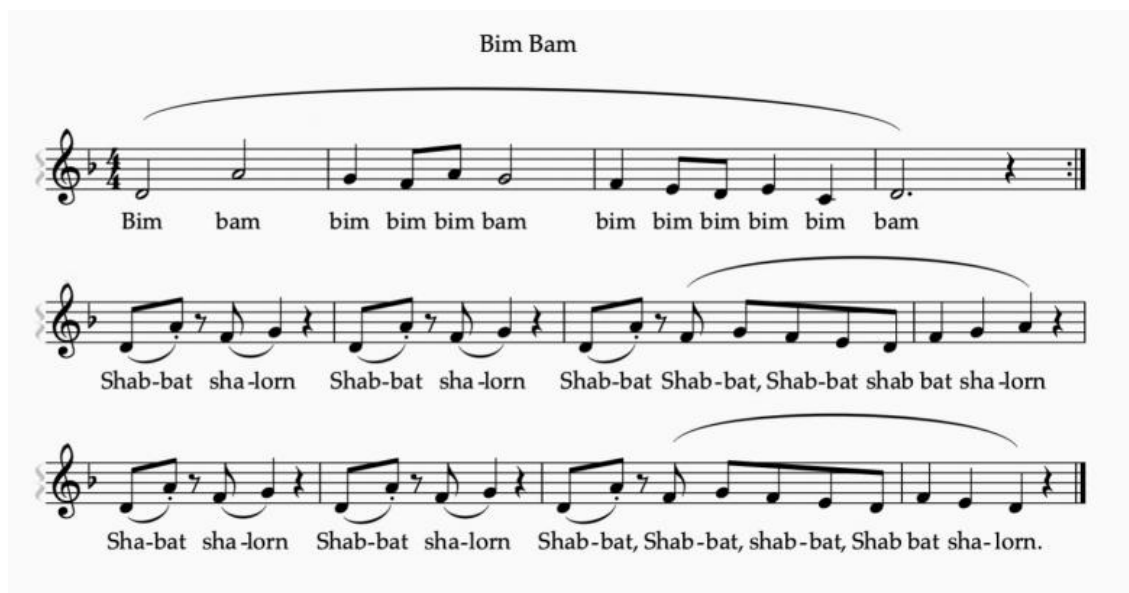


Figure 7. Bim Bam (episode)

Transition: Dovetailing: Before class, I'll ask if anyone wants to showcase instruments. Afterward, students guess the "music maker," and the remaining time is led by the music maker teacher.

(5)Music Maker Time [Seated]

15 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher invites students and a guest teacher with instruments to showcase and demonstrate them. Students are asked simple questions about the instrument and encouraged to touch it.

The music maker leads the class, but if needed, I will assist by organizing questions and improvising activities to support them.

Ask the music maker and students question about the instrument's tone: Is it high or low? What is it made of?

I will organize activities to help the music maker improve students' movement skills:

Ask the music maker to play a melody, prompting spontaneous movement from students and the teacher.

Transition: Dovetailing: The teacher announces the upcoming shaker activity, then brings a box of shakers for students to prepare. After students take their shakers, the teacher removes the remaining ones.

(6)Somewhere in My Memory [D (Major) – B (Major), Duple (4/2), 80BPM, Seated]

5 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher plays "Somewhere in My Memory" to teach rhythm. Students move during the prelude, then shake shakers in sync with the tambourine at the climax.

Transition: The teacher brings the box to the center of the students' circle and invites them to put their shakers inside the box, preparing for the "Bye Bye" song.

(7)Bye Bye [D (Minor), Duple (4/4), 122BPM, Seated]

2 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings the "Bye Bye" song, distributes students the relevant musical materials related to specific instruments featured in the lesson while singing the "Bye Bye" song.

It's Time for Us to Sing Goodbye

HEATHER KIRBY

With a swing ♩ = 122

Heather Kirby

Dm C Dm C

It's time for us to sing good-bye, good-bye. Time to line up and sing good-

bye, good-bye. We sang and moved and had lots of fun, but

7 Dm C Dm Dm * *

it's time for us to sing good-bye, good-bye. Good-bye [child's name]

Figure 8. It's Time for Us to Sing Goodbye (episode)

Closure: The teacher expresses joy in learning together and asks students to share their most memorable moment.

Part 3: Musical Information

Musical information related in the class procedure can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Related Information in Lesson 1

Song/Tune/Chant Time	Modality Start/End Pitch	Meter (Time Sig) Tempo (bpm)	Activity/Musical Element(s) Motion/Sequence
It's clean up time 2 minutes	G/G	Duple (4/4) 140	Preparation activities/prepare Move/Old
Come and make a circle 3 minutes	D/D	Duple (4/4) 120	Preparation activities/prepare Move/Old
Hello Hello Hello 5 minutes	A/D	Duple (4/4) 120	Greeting/Dynamics Seated/Old
Heckety Peckety Bumblebee 6 minutes	G/E	Compound Duple (6/8) 90	Rote Song/ "Hello" Seated/Old
Drum talk 3 minutes	Chant	Duple (4/4) 90	Movement/ Phrases Move/New
Bim Bam 5 minutes	D/D	Duple (4/4) 90-110	Development/ Rhythm (AB) Seated/Old
Somewhere in my memory 5 minutes	A/B	Duple (4/2) 80	Recording Seated
Goodbye song 2 minutes	D/D	Duple (4/4) 122	Closing/Form (AABA) Seated

Part 4: Environmental Considerations

Brief description of how you considered ways are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Environmental Considerations in Lesson 1

Recognize and respond to diversity meaningfully	Use materials to support musicking
I built rapport through a name activity, introduced diverse styles, and used parent surveys to create an inclusive, supportive environment.	I use beanbag, shakers and drum as materials to support the music class.
I fostered inclusivity, built rapport with a name activity, exposed students to diverse music, and used parent surveys to address individual needs.	
Incorporate technology to enhance musicking	Incorporate assessment purposefully
I will use recordings to help students develop musical skills, including an appreciation for Mozart.	The teacher will assess students' understanding of steady beat and rhythm.

Part 5: Developmental Considerations

Brief description of how this lessons honors and extends children's ability is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Children’s Development in Lesson 1

Musical Development	Social and Emotional Development
This lesson promotes cooperation, empathy, and creativity while encouraging self-expression through music.	Students develop social skills, emotional regulation, and communication through music, boosting self-identity and self-esteem.
Physical Development	Cognitive and Linguistic Development
Students provide feedback on music activities, enhancing their body control and expression through music exploration.	Teachers support students’ cognitive and linguistic development through targeted activities and personalized instruction.

Reflection

I’m pleased with the lesson and engagement. While using Orff Schulwerk to improve movement and rhythm, I realized I needed more preparation time. Next time, I’ll offer clearer cues and more praise.

3.3. Lesson Plan 2**Context for Lesson Plan 2**

Lesson Plan 2 focuses on exploration, imitation, improvisation, and creation, building on Lesson 1. It deepens rhythm exploration, promotes teamwork, and incorporates songs with instruments for interactive learning.

Yingying Liu
MTL 471
03/24/2024

Teaching and Leading Plan: Full Lesson**Part 1: General Information**

School/Location: Eastman Community School

Regular Music Teacher: Yingying Liu

Class Name: Early childhood - music maker

Date of Lesson: 04/20/2024

Length: 45 minutes

Student Ages/Grade(s): 3–5-year-old

Caregiver(s) Present: (Yes)

Standards: MU:Re4.1.PK: a With substantial guidance, demonstrate and state preference for varied musical selections. MU:Re8.1.PK: a With substantial guidance, explore music’s expressive qualities (such as dynamics and tempo).

Objectives: Students will demonstrate understanding of a steady beat by tapping their legs in sync with the teacher singing “From Wobbleton to Wobbleton.” And they will play instruments and explore sound using non-melodic instruments.

Materials:

The same as Lesson Plan 1.

Part 2: Plan**(1) Prepare activities**

5 minutes prior to the start of class

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher prepares name tags and scatters books for students to pick and read. At class start, the teacher sings “It’s clean up time” to guide tidying up and seating.

Transition: The teacher sings “It’s clean up time” to guide tidying up, then “Come and make a circle” to have students return to their seats. The teacher counts “one, two, three, four,” leads leg tapping to establish a steady beat, and begins the “Hello song.”

The same as Figure 1.

The same as Figure 2.

(2)**Hello Hello Hello** [A (Mixolydian), Duple (4/4), 120 BPM, Seated]

5 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings “Hello Hello Hello,” guides thigh tapping, and tosses a beanbag to a student for singing or improvising, developing rhythm and improvisation skills.

The same as Figure 3.

Transition: Dovetailing: Both songs are duple meter, and both songs needs the same body movement.

(3)**Heckety Peckety Bumblebee** [G (Major), Compound duple (6/8), 90 BPM, Seated]

6 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings a song while guiding students to tap their legs to the beat. Then, students sing their names in a “my turn, then your turn” format, reinforcing previous lesson content and improving attention.

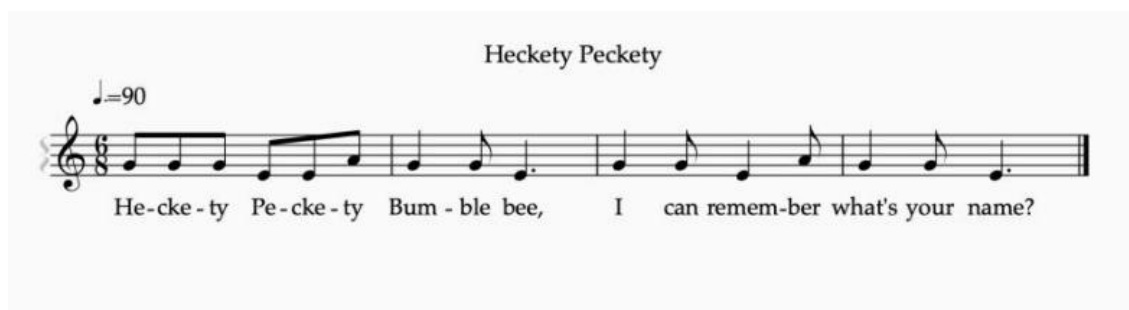


Figure 9. Heckety Peckety (episode 2)

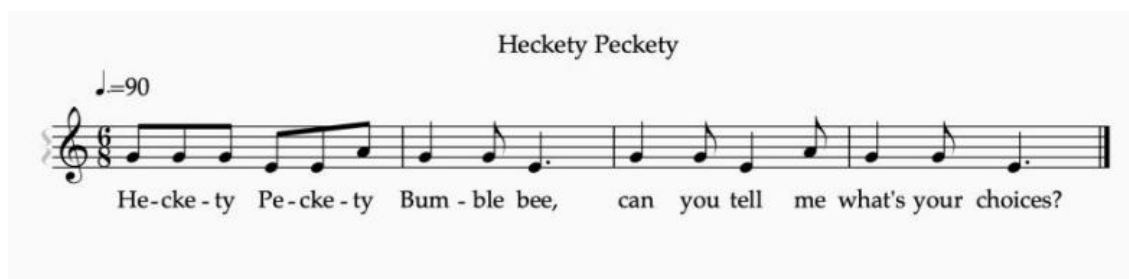


Figure 10. Heckety Peckety (episode 3)

Transition: Dovetailing: After the name activities, the teacher taps a drum to signal students to stand, then leads a “Go and Stop” game with varying drum speeds to improve rhythm and prepare for “Drum talk.”

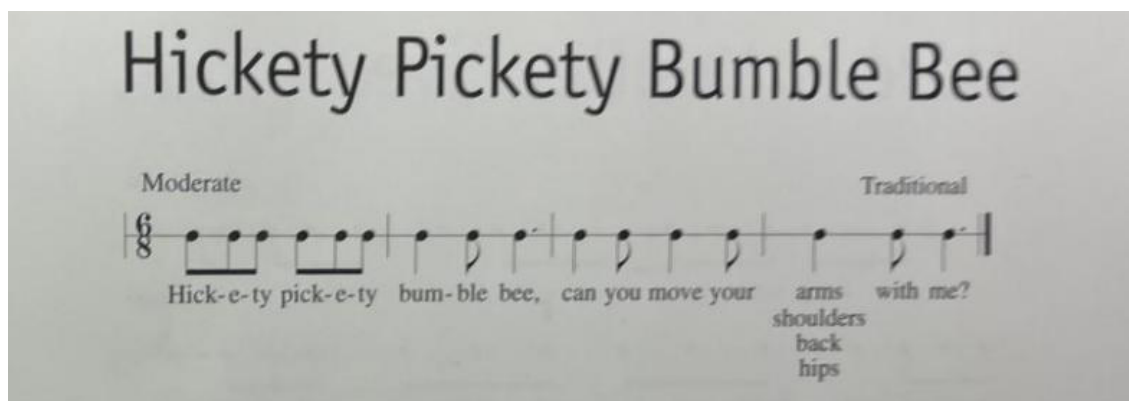


Figure 11. Hickety Pickety Bumble Bee (episode)

Go and Stop

Moderate/Fast*
Traditional

*Alternate tempos on repetitions.

Figure 12. Go and Stop (episode)

(4)Drum Talk [No pitch, Duple (4/4), 90 BPM, Moving]

5 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher taps the drum to set the pulse, guiding students to walk, run, or slow down with tempo changes. Lyrics are adjusted to encourage movement, improving rhythm and body skills.

The same as Figure 6.

Transition: Dovetailing: After “Drum talk,” the teacher demonstrates drumming sounds, leads students in a circle, and sings personalized “music maker” chants. The class guesses the “music maker” before handing over the activity.

Music Maker song:

Music maker chant

Figure 13. Music Maker Chant (episode)

(5)Music Maker Time [Seated]

12 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings the “Music Maker song” and invites students to showcase their instruments. A guest teacher then demonstrates an instrument, asks questions, and encourages students to explore it.

Ask them questions about the instrument's tone: Is it high or low? What is it made of?

Ask the music maker to play a melody, encouraging spontaneous movement from students and the teacher.

(6) From Wobbleton to Wobbleton [No pitch, Duple (4/4), 105, Moving]

8 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher recites a tongue twister with a steady beat, and students imitate. Then, students shake shakers in rhythm, exploring sounds when “fifteen miles” is mentioned. This enhances rhythm skills and introduces non-melodic instruments.

Tongue twister:

The image shows a musical score for a tongue twister in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as 120. The score consists of four lines of music, each with a corresponding line of lyrics. The lyrics are: "From Wobbleton to Wobbleton is fifteen miles. From Wobbleton to Wobbleton is fifteen miles. From Wobbleton to Wobbleton, from Wobbleton to Wobbleton. From Wobbleton to Wobbleton is fifteen miles." The music is written in a simple, rhythmic style using eighth and quarter notes.

Figure 14. From Wobbleton to Wobbleton (episode)

Transition: Dovetailing: Both pieces utilize the shaker instrument and are in duple meter.

(7) I can play on the beat [G (Major), Duple (4/2), 145BPM, Seated]

2 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher plays a recording and guides students to shake shakers in sync with the rhythm, adjusting the rhythm to match the lyrics to improve their skills.

Transition: The teacher brings the box to the center of the students' circle and invites them to put their sticks inside the box, preparing for the song.

(8) Bye Bye [D (Minor), Duple (4/4), 122BPM, Seated]

2 minutes

Teaching Description/Notes: The teacher sings the “Bye Bye” song while distributing musical materials related to the instruments featured in the lesson.

The same as **Figure 8**.

Closure: The teacher expresses joy in exploring music together, encourages students to share their favorite

instrument, and highlights activities that improved rhythm skills, looking forward to the next class.

Part 3: Musical Information

Musical information related in the class procedure can be seen in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Related Information in Lesson 2

Song/Tune/Chant Time	Modality Start/End Pitch	Meter (Time Sig) Tempo (bpm)	Activity/Musical Element(s) Motion/Sequence
It's clean up time 2 minutes	G/G	Duple (4/4) 140	Preparation activities/prepare Move/Old
Come and make a circle 3 minutes	D/D	Duple (4/4) 120	Preparation activities/prepare Move/Old
Hello Hello Hello 5 minutes	A/D	Duple (4/4) 120	Greeting/Dynamics Seated/Old
Heckety Peckety Bumblebee 6 minutes	G/E	Compound Duple (6/8) 90	Rote Song/ "Hello" Seated/Old
Go and Stop 2 minutes	Chant	Moderate/ Fast	Movement/ Phrases Move/Old
Drum talk 3 minutes	Chant	Duple (4/4) 90	Movement/ Phrases Move/New
Music maker chant 2 minutes	Chant	Duple (4/4) 120	Listening/Tempo Seated/Old
From Wibbleton to Wobbleton 8 minutes	Chant	Duple (4/4) 120	1. Listening/Tempo (fast/slow) Seated/Fast-Slow 2. Listening/Instrument Seated
I can play on the beat 2 minutes	G/Major Recording	Duple (4/4) 120	Listening/Tempo (fast/slow) Seated/Fast-Slow
Goodbye song 2 minutes	D/D	Duple (4/4) 122	Closing/Form (AABA) Seated

Part 4: Environmental Considerations

Brief description of how you considered ways is shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Environmental Considerations in Lesson 2

Recognize and respond to diversity meaningfully	Use materials to support musicking
I created an inclusive music class by connecting students, incorporating diverse styles, and addressing individual needs through parent surveys.	I use beanbag, shakers and drum as materials to support the music class.
Incorporate technology to enhance musicking	Incorporate assessment purposefully
Recordings of Mozart help students improve musical skills, explore melody and rhythm, and use instruments to enhance movement skills.	The teacher will assess students' understanding of a steady beat and rhythm, helping them enhance movement skills by tapping the beat with hands or a shaker.

Part 5: Developmental Considerations

Brief description of how this lessons honors and extends children's development as in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Children's Development in Lesson 2

Musical Development	Social and Emotional Development
The teacher engages students with call and response, walking, and dancing, allowing them to explore music, rhythms, and instruments during "music maker" time.	This lesson fosters a supportive environment, encouraging participation and promoting positive behaviors to enhance musical and social skills.
Physical Development	Cognitive and Linguistic Development
The teacher promotes physical development through age-appropriate activities like walking, jumping, and dancing to enhance learning.	This lesson boosts curiosity, cognitive abilities, and communication skills through personalized challenges and cooperative activities.

Reflection

In this class, I learned the importance of flexibility. Although time constraints limited some activities, students actively participated. I focused on rhythm and movement, using Orff Schulwerk and adding prompts to help with the steady beat. This experience reinforced the need for adjusting to students' needs and providing clear instructions to keep them engaged^[12].

4. Summary of the Process

This project taught me the value of purpose-driven activities and adapting lessons to students' needs. With support from Dr. Culp, Miss Sam, and Miss Laura, I refined my lesson plans using Orff Schulwerk to enhance rhythm skills. The experience shaped my teaching approach, and I look forward to continuing my growth as a music educator.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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