

Practice, Practice, Practice... by Deborah Smith

As Kodály teachers we know that out of the three P's (Preparation, Present and Practice) Practice is the aspect that goes on the longest and for which we need the most ideas, activities and resources. We also know how little "spare" time music teachers have in these busy times to prepare these ideas. Practice is absolutely ESSENTIAL for learning to occur and we must not underestimate the amount of practice required for a student to fully understand the concepts being taught.

So, here is the (almost – see note at end) definitive list of practice activities (aimed at older beginners but easily simplified in most cases) beginning with a list of practice activities for rhythm. (With thanks to all the amazing teachers I have been taught by, learnt from, heard and seen speak over the years!)

Practice Activities Part One – Rhythm (in alphabetical order)

- **Beat and rhythm.** Sing known songs with the words or rhythm names, while first clapping the beat and saying the rhythm names then tapping the beat on one leg and the rhythm on the other or on head and lap etc. (An extension activity could be to swap legs on a signal from the teacher). Students can also walk the beat and clap or say the rhythm names and then clap the beat while walking the rhythmic pattern.
- **Beat to rhythm.** Students sing a song with the words or rhythm names, clapping the beat. When the teacher gives an agreed signal (e.g. striking a drum, holding a sign with the word rhythm on it etc.) the students change to clapping the rhythm and so on.
- **Beat to rhythm (walking the beat).** Students stand in a circle facing anti-clockwise around the circle. A piece of string or wool is placed, or a line is drawn, across the centre of the circle. In one half of the circle a card with the word "beat" is placed on the floor. A card with "rhythm" on it is placed in the other half. The students walk around the circle clapping what is on the card in the same half as they are in and swapping as they cross the line.
- **Body percussion metre.** Body percussion is using the body to make different percussive sounds e.g. clapping hands, clicking fingers, slapping thighs etc. To emphasise metre use a loud sound on the 1st beat of each bar (e.g. stamping your feet) and quieter sounds for the other beats of the bar (e.g. clicking fingers).
- **Body percussion rhythmic pattern.** Use different body percussion sounds for the different rhythmic elements of a song's rhythmic pattern. For example, quavers could be clapped, crotchets clicked etc.
- **Compose.** Compose (write down) short 4 or 8 bar rhythms (using very strict parameters i.e. which rhythmic elements are allowed or to fit a given form etc) and perform for the class. These are also great to use as rhythmic dictations for rest of class given by the student (if capable) or teacher.
- **Conducting.** Students should be able to conduct the beat as they sing known songs (beat practice) or read abstract rhythmic patterns. Students could also be encouraged to conduct the class when singing songs specifically for improving musicality etc. Also can be used to reinforce difficult concepts i.e. tam – ti with 2 metre conducting to reinforce 2 beat rhythm. Students can also emphasise the 1st (strong) beat of each bar by stamping.
- **Dictations.** All kinds (written, from memory, immediate, group, individual etc). As well as straightforward "write what you hear" type dictations, students could also add stems to note heads to show rhythm, with or without barlines, flashcards can be arranged in the order clapped by the teacher, given bars full of individual quavers (♫♫♫), students can be asked to add ties to show the rhythm played and then to write it out without ties.
- **Echo clapping.** The teacher claps a bar of rhythm (using only elements known consciously by the students) and the students clap the rhythm back while saying the rhythm names. This is a form of instant rhythmic dictation.
- **Echo clapping in canon.** The teacher begins by clapping 2 beats of rhythm and continues to clap a rhythmic pattern. Students begin to clap what the teacher has clapped after listening for 2 beats. This will be in canon with the teacher. Students will have to listen as they clap to continue the canon once it has begun. Begin with just 4 beats of rhythm at a 2 beat canon and extend the number of beats until students can continue indefinitely. Saying the rhythm names will add to the difficulty of this task as well.
- **Flashcard reading.** Students sight read rhythms from flashcards and clap back or write down from memory. Some students can remember flashcards memorised at a previous lesson. One or more flashcards can be used as ostinati with known songs. Also activities (games) such as rearranging a set of flashcards to make the rhythm pattern of known songs, flashcard bingo (an extension of rhythm bingo where only individual elements are used) etc can be played.

- **Form.** The rhythmic form of known songs and abstract rhythms should be identified (using A, B etc). These forms can then be used for improvisation or composition etc.
- **Hidden rhythm.** Sing known songs in rhythm names, "hiding" various rhythms in your head. For example, sing the song out loud but use inner hearing for all the quavers. Use to highlight new rhythms by hiding the new rhythm or only singing the new rhythm. Alternatively this can be used to hide the rhythmic pattern that occurs on a particular beat i.e. the 1st or last beat in each bar. Best done while conducting.
- **Improvisation.** Improvise (using the new rhythm) an answer to a question or an ostinati to a known song or in a given form i.e. ABAB. Some songs encourage improvisation such as "Wake Snake" and "Mama Don't Low". The use of percussion instruments can add another creative element to this activity.
- **Listening.** Where possible find music from the "Art Music" repertoire and from good contemporary music that includes the new rhythmic element, e.g. the tam-ti in Dvorak's 9th Symphony, 4th Movement. The students can then dictate the rhythm of chosen sections.
- **Melodic rhythm.** Sing single notes, note patterns (e.g. d r m) or scales to a 2 or 4 beat rhythmic pattern. For example:



- **Metre Practice.** The teacher, (or students), create a body percussion pattern which emphasises the metre pattern. This can then be used as a game with songs that have that metre. For example:

3 Metre Song Game (Can be used with any 3 metre song such as "Coffee", "Edelweiss", etc.)

Students sit in a single circle holding their hands out in front of the people beside them. Their left hand should face up under the person's hand on their left and their right hand should face down on top of the person's hand on the right.

On each beat for the first six beats, using your right hand, hit your neighbours left hand then your right knee, your left knee, under your left hand then clap on top of your left hand twice.

For the next six beats, using your left hand, hit your neighbours right hand then your left knee, your right knee, under your right hand then clap on top of your right hand twice.

Repeat to end of song.

- **Multi (2, 3, 4 etc) Part Rhythms.** Clap one part and read time names of the other. Tap both parts. Swap above parts every bar etc. Improvise singing solfa for one part and clapping other. Improvise playing given notes (i.e. d m s) for one part and tapping other. Dictations of one or both parts when one part tapped and one played or similar.
- **Pass the rhythm.** Students sit in a circle and sing the song with the words or rhythm names. The first student claps the first beat of the song; the student on their left claps the second beat of the song and so on.
- **Pass the rhythm.** As above but each student claps the rhythm of their beat. This can also be done with each bar of rhythm.
- **Question and answer.** The teacher claps 4 beats of rhythm (the question) to which individual students clap back a 4 beat answer with or without rhythm names). Discuss what makes a good answer (i.e. being similar but not exactly the same as the question etc).
- **Replacement rhythms.** Have the rhythmic pattern of a known song on the board. Clap and sing the rhythm names. Say the rhythm names again (while clapping the beat this time) and replace certain rhythms with others. For example, clap  when  is written etc. This can also be done with abstract rhythms and can be extended to 2 beat rhythms and so on (e.g. change  to  etc).
- **Rhythm Clock.** Teacher creates a rhythm clock (simply a circle with numbers 1 to 12, as on a clock, on the inside of the circle and a corresponding 2, 3 or 4 beat rhythm on the outside of the circle at each number, in each) on the board. (Students love creating their own too). This can be used in many ways: for sight reading forwards or backwards; as a "which did I clap" dictation exercise; as an ostinato for a song (using one rhythm, several rhythms or all the rhythms); for inner hearing; as a basis for rhythm bingo (this is great if they've made their own).
- **Rhythm Rap.** Give students a few lines of "poetry" and ask them to create a "rap" rhythm using the new rhythmic element. Have them perform it for the class. (Can be hilarious if you get the rap movements too!)

- **Rhythmic canon.** Sing known songs with the words while clapping the rhythmic pattern in canon (after 2 or 4 beats). The rhythm of the song could be on the board to begin with, however asking them to do this from memory means their inner hearing is needed. Begin with half the class clapping and half singing and progress to all students singing and clapping. As an extension, sing the rhythm names and clap in canon. Good with abstract rhythms too.
- **Rhythmic ostinato.** Sing known songs with an ostinato. To begin, half the class sing the song and half clap the ostinato until the students can sing and clap the ostinato simultaneously individually. Also use ostinato to reinforce or highlight aspects of new rhythms e.g. songs that include  are great with a  ostinato as it highlights the middle crotchet equalling two quavers.
- **Rhythmic ownership.** Using known or unknown songs or rhythms, individual rhythms (or rhythmic patterns) are given to individual students or groups of students to perform when they occur in the exercise.
- **Sight reading.** Sight read as much as possible. Sightread rhythmic patterns and the rhythm of given songs. Read rhythms backwards (making sure these rhythms are known consciously too first). Change from reading rhythms forwards to backwards on teacher's signal.
- **Sing one, clap another.** Derive the rhythmic pattern of one known song on the board. Clap the rhythmic pattern of that song while singing another song with the words. Gradually erase the rhythm of the first song from the board as you continue the activity until students are inner hearing the first song as they clap its rhythmic pattern and singing the second song out loud. (An extension activity would be to alternate which song is being sung and clapped).
- **Rhythm snakes.**

Version 1. Students sit in a circle. Teacher begins by clapping one beat of rhythm, which the class claps back while saying the rhythm names. The student sitting on the teacher's left must clap a new one beat rhythm, which the class must clap back, with rhythm names and so on. Next step would be to clap 2, 3, 4 or even 6 beats of rhythm.

Version 2. Students sit in a circle. Teacher begins by clapping one bar of rhythm. The student sitting on the teacher's left must clap the teacher's rhythm (with rhythm names) and then their own bar of rhythm (without rhythm names). The next student on the left claps the previous student's rhythm (with rhythm names) and their own bar of rhythm (without rhythm names) etc. (Each student clapping two bars of rhythm).

Version 3. Students sit in a circle. Teacher begins by clapping one bar of rhythm, using the known rhythms. The student sitting on the teacher's left must clap the teacher's rhythm and then their own bar of rhythm. The next student on the left claps the teacher's rhythm, the previous student's rhythm and their own bar of rhythm etc until the rhythm can no longer be remembered. (Each student clapping all the previous rhythms).

Poison Rhythm Snake. As for Versions 1, 2 and 3 but a rhythm is chosen to be the poison rhythm (e.g. ) and students are not allowed to clap that rhythm. If they do they are "out" and the snake begins again. (An extension of this is to assign a particular beat that the poison rhythm cannot be clapped on i.e. no quavers on the third beat of each bar etc).
- **Written Practice.** In addition to the other written activities already mentioned, students could also add barlines to given rhythmic patterns, add stems to note heads in a specific metre, add a missing time signature, add missing notes or rests to bars etc.

Happy practicing everyone! (Watch out for Practice Activities Part Two – Melody, coming soon).

Note: This “almost” definitive list could benefit from any other ideas and activities readers may have. Feel free to email them to me on deborahsmith@aapt.net.au and I will add them to this list for all teachers to access.

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