



# Improvise Now! Using Playful Improvisation to Prepare Students for Meaningful Notation

Presented by Matthew Stensrud

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*There's always a place for creation – a folk dance with a twist, a chance to explore the xylophone, or an opportunity to see what your body can do with one word – but sometimes these are the hardest things to pull out of our students. How can finding small steps for improvisation lead students to better notational composition in the future? We'll explore these ideas and more as we bring it back to student-led choices, improvisation, risk-taking and more.*

## **Folk Dance with a Twist**

Los Machetes from Sanna Longden's More Folk Dance Music for Kids & Teachers

- Instead of single circle, try a double circle dance for more fun!
- Part 1
  - Walk R, clicking sticks on the beat, 16 beats
  - Walk L, clicking sticks on the beat, 16 beats
  - Partners walk opposite/away from each other
- Part 2
  - Hit sticks: Under one leg, above leg, under other leg, above leg, behind, front, ta-ti ta stick hits with partner
  - Repeat 3 more times
- Part 3
  - Side sashay with R stick twirling in the air for 8 beats, hit both sticks above head on beat 8
  - Repeat to L
  - Again, partners sashay opposite/away from each other
  - Repeat R and L
- Watch for the accelerando!
- Other Ideas to Try
  - Partner, self, behind, self (4 beats, repeat for an entire section)
  - Back, back, back, back, forward, forward, forward, forward, jump, jump, jump, jump, partner click, click, click, rest (16 beats, repeat for an entire section)
  - Walk R, R, click, click (with someone new), walk, walk, click, click (again with someone new), walk, walk, click, click (again with someone new), walk, walk, click, click (again with someone new) (16 beats, repeat back to the L for 16 more beats)

*Special Thanks to...*

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*...for sponsoring today's session! Find resources used today at their booth!*

- Composition
  - Take a section and have students create their own pattern with a partner!
  - Explore Part 2 (B section). How can you create a body percussion pattern with your partner?
  - What if pairs become groups of 4 for a section?
  - What other choices could we make? The options are endless!
  - How can this lead to students creating their own folk dance?
- How Does this Lead to Notation?
  - What if each aspect of your partner and/or small group creation had a corresponding sound?
  - How could you write down these sounds?
  - How would these sounds turn into notation?
  - Explore as a whole group → smaller notation projects for groups

### ***Exploring the Xylophone***

- If you attended my Teaching Without Words session earlier today, we learned a Keetman xylophone piece that starts like this...
  - C-D-E-G
  - C-D-E-G
  - C-D-E-G
  - E-D-C
- What if it could become this?
  - C-D-E-G
  - Something different
  - C-D-E-G
  - E-D-C
- Something different = ta ta ta ta
- What's your favorite? My new pattern = ta ta ta ta
- Something else, something else = ta-ti ta ta-ti ta
- This is the end = ta ta-ti ta (rest)
- What if it could become this?
  - My new pattern
  - Something else, something else
  - My new pattern
  - This is the end (rest)
  - abac elemental form
- When exploring melody, having a set rhythm can ensure focus is solely on melodic choices
- With partner, one plays melodic creation, other plays a drone of choice (simple, broken, moving) *on the same xylophone* → then switch jobs!
- Could you try it with a different home note?
  - C-D-E-G → D-E-G-A (re-pentatonic)

### ***Movement Exploration with Rhythmic Speech Guide***

- What if you could find a way to sit? To lie? To stand?
  - What's another way? What if you could listen for the sound cue?
- What if you could bend? Twist? Stretch?
  - What if you could sit and bend? Twist and lie? Stand and stretch?
- What if you could start on the floor? And grow into a shape?
  - What could you say to guide you?

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- “Rise and twist and reach \_\_\_ reach \_\_\_”
- What locomotor words could you add next?
- “Zig zag tip toe”
- “Bending melting stretch out lie”
- ABA form created through nonlocomotor → locomotor → nonlocomotor
- Spoken words help direct movements **and** lead toward notation
- *In the FMEA app is an example of a format you can use for students to notate their creative movement choreographies*
- There is a place for both movement free of rhythm and movement with a rhythmic guide
- What about these words?
  - Snow
  - Light
  - Wind
  - Fire
  - Use of images can really assist with students thinking of words to describe what they see
- What if you could choose a word? What are some words to describe it? What if these words become movements? What can you say to guide you as you move?
  - When first exploring this, have a word bank to assist students before moving toward their own imagination and creativity
- Create alone → share with partner → find a way to create new movement piece with ideas from each
- Pairs → share with another pair → find a way to create new movement piece with ideas from each
- There is also a place for movement within song
- What about the round *Shalom Chaverim*?
- Teacher sings with simple movements to phrases and students join in as ready – beginning with mirroring movement and slowly adding words/melody
- Explore different movements for phrases while in a circle: in/out, left/right, turn, partner movements, motions alone
- What if you could try some of these ideas with a partner?
- What if you could make some decisions of movements to connect with the song?
- What if you could share your dance with another pair? And watch their dance? What is similar? What is different? How could you use ideas of both in a new four-person dance?
- *In the FMEA app is the music for Shalom Chaverim and a resource for students to notate their choreography*

### **Materials – look for them in the Exhibit Hall!**

*More Folk Dance Music for Kids & Teachers* by Sonna Longden

*Creative Dance for All Ages* by Anne Green Gilbert

*Erstes Spiel am Xylophon* by Gunild Keetman

### **My Bio and Contact Info**

Matthew Stensrud is an award-winning Elementary Music and Movement Teacher and currently teaching PK-4 music and movement at Sidwell Friends Lower School in Washington, DC. He received his Master of Music Education from George Mason University and Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, is an Orff Schulwerk approved Teacher Educator of Movement, and teaches Movement Levels in South Carolina and Oregon. Matthew is also on *The Orff Echo* Editorial Board and was a key content contributor to the book *Responsive Classroom for Music, Art, PE and Other Special Areas*. He is available for workshops for music chapters, districts, schools, specials teachers, and more. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia. Visit his website: [www.matthewstensrud.com](http://www.matthewstensrud.com) to sign up for his newsletter with lesson plans, articles, and more, or contact him via email at [mstensrud@gmail.com](mailto:mstensrud@gmail.com) or phone/text at 513-703-8012. He is also well-known on social media as @MisterSOrrf on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

