Japanese Voice–Rhythm Ensemble Practice by Using Gordon's Instructional Template (IT):
A Case in Developing World Music Perspectives

Shizuka Sutani
Fukuoka Women's Junior College, Japan

Richard Keith Gordon
Seisa University, Japan & California State University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study describes a music teacher's experience teaching a voice-rhythm ensemble in a Japanese elementary school by utilizing Gordon's instructional template (IT). The IT is a seven-step template used to map a democratically based pedagogy. In this study, 32 (N=32) fifth graders were divided in four groups. The first lesson began with students listening to several musical selections that did not include any melodies. The students then sung a voice-rhythm ensemble called Yasainokimochi, which is constructed just by syllables without any melodies. Finally, small groups of students created and arranged an original voice-rhythm ensemble. During this lesson sequence, the teacher used Gordon's IT to facilitate student-teacher and peer discussions. As a part of the IT process, students and the teacher also reflected on the learning sequence and listened to one another in building the desired musical outcome. An underlying foundation of this classroom is to imbue in students the kyosei principles of understanding each other, leaving nobody out, and making friends.

INTRODUCTION

Rhythm

The word *rhythm* comes from the Greek verb *rhein* meaning "to flow" (Dissanayake, 2000). In and through music, children move intentionally by involving rhythmic experience for listening to music (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2006). With music most children move intentionally by engaging a rhythmic experience while listening to music, playing music and participating in musical ensemble playing (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2006). Rhythm is also experienced outside the classroom in the daily lives of children and adults. Rhythm is embodied in speaking and movement (Dissanayake, 2000). Dissanayake (2000) views rhythm as movement in time in the sense of forward flow of sound and nonsound, both natural or biological and humanly organized in performance.

Yelin (1990) offers that, "every child has a natural sense of rhythm (p. 15)." Perhaps our very first experience of listening to rhythm would be that of one's mother's steady heartbeat. In daily conversations our words make rhythm, while our walking and running also has a rhythm. We intrinsically practice rhythm in our daily lives and our lives flow with music. Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2006), point out that "the rhythm of spoken languages is the gateway to musical rhythm," (p.158). They specifically illustrate that when words become musical they are spoken in a set pulse, their sounds are transformed into longer or shorter chants or musical durations and some words in a set are emphasized over others. "Because language is so fundamental to children's daily lives, they comfortably and easily express rhythmically its phonemes" (p.159).

Across musical cultures there are quite a few common elements such as pitch, rhythm and timbre. These elements are found mostly in Western music. In some other cultures different styles or types of music may emphasize, de-emphasize or omit some of these elements. In this study the authors highlight music expressions constructed in ensemble settings through rhythm generated exclusively by using the human voice.

In Japan this category of musical expression is called "vocal percussion" or "voice rhythm ensemble". Japanese performers speak syllables as a representation of rhythm. A set of collective and/ or solo performance of rhythmic words allow these Japanese performers to create music without pitch in an ensemble setting. The study first overview the music without melody and harmony in the context of the world music perspective. The study illustrate how Japanese rhythmic music was influenced by Asian and other cultures and tradition.

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