

BLUES FOR BEGINNERS

clinic notes

MMEA midwinter clinic

February 2016

based on ideas developed from the master's thesis,

REFLECTIONS ON

THE USE OF MOVEMENT TO TEACH

THE METRIC FEEL OF JAZZ SWING

by

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- Piano
- Snare Drum or other untuned percussion capable of playing light and heavy sounds
- Visuals:
 - Card with “doo-DAH” written on it -- “doo” and “DAH” have quite a bit of space between them
 - Card with “doo-bee-DAH-bee” written on it – if you line this visual up with the previous, the doos and DAHs should have equal spacing
- Optional: Ride cymbal for swing eighth notes

Activities:

DAY 1

- Students are encouraged to silently experiment with movements that reflect the sounds they hear from an unpitched percussion instrument. Encourage arm movements as well. The unpitched percussion plays several heavy sounds, then light sounds. (Dalcroze advocates using piano, however Gordon advocates a non-pitched instrument when teaching rhythm so students discriminate between rhythm and pitch. The researcher has decided to start with a non-pitched instrument, but later add piano if students are responding appropriately.)
- Eventually the teacher plays a “light, heavy, light, heavy” quarter note pattern on snare drum or conga for the blues macro beat. (aural/kinesthetic generalization – similar to Gordon’s aural/oral generalization)
- Teacher asks them to describe the pattern they heard. (light and heavy)
- Teacher: “I wonder if sounds like those are in this piano music. Show me through your movements.”
- Students are encouraged to silently experiment with movements that reflect the sounds they hear from the piano (teacher improvises on piano). Encourage arm movements as well. The piano plays several heavy sounds, then several light sounds.

¹³³ Bruce Pearson, *Standard of Excellence: Comprehensive Band Method*, (San Diego, CA: Neil A. Kjos Music Co., 1993).

- Eventually the teacher plays a “light, heavy, light, heavy” piano pattern for the blues macro beat.¹³⁴ She may add a blues progression to this pattern.
- Pause and ask students, “If your arms were moving through liquid, what kind of liquid would it be - especially on the heavy notes?”
- The teacher may ask students to try the movement ideas of other students who seem to be reflecting an appropriate swing feel. She may even demonstrate herself.
- Teacher: Let’s call this light-heavy-light-heavy pattern “doo-DAH-doo-DAH” (“doo” for light and “DAH” for heavy). **This light- heavy steady beat pattern happens a lot in jazz music. I CAN FIND THE LIGHT-HEAVY STEADY BEAT PATTERN IN JAZZ MUSIC. (doo-DAH, doo-DAH)**
- Teacher: “Can you find this same ‘light, heavy, light, heavy’ feel in this recording and move to it?” The teacher may ask students to try the movement ideas of other students who seem to be reflecting an appropriate swing feel. She may even demonstrate herself.
- Play recording of *Good Mornin’ Blues* vocal track as students move.
- Find a group of 3-4 and come up with a light-heavy movement. (Share ideas)
 - Rules on finding a partner/group (21st Century – Collaboration)
 1. Don’t touch
 2. Walk around and ask
 3. You must say “yes”or “I already have a partner, but I’ll help you find a partner”.
 - Share/perform ideas for others with piano or recorded track
- Teacher: “Let’s see if we can recreate these light and heavy ‘doo-DAH’ movements using only our hands.” Students sit in a circle and transfer the heavy and light movements to a hand pattern – touching shoulders, thighs, shoulders,

¹³⁴ Dunscomb and Hill, *Jazz Pedagogy: The Jazz Educator’s Handbook and Resource Guide*, p. 65.

and thighs. Continue this movement pattern while students listen to an excerpt of *Good Mornin' Blues* or *Swamp Blues*. Stop track. Continue this activity while echoing

1. real word phrases, (ex. "IMproVising CAN be FUN." "What did you have for breakfast today?") or Simon says say this "do-be-Dah-be "do – DAH")
2. scat phrases
3. students vocally echo teacher's instrumental improvisations (using all 1 pitch or mostly 1 pitch)
4. phrases from the *Good Mornin' Blues* song so as to learn the first verse.
 - o Sing above song with visual

DAY 2?

- Teacher: "I have a new blues song for you with that same light-heavy swing feeling. Can you find it and show it through your whole-body actions?" Teacher plays *St. Louis Blues* recording.
- If about 90% of students demonstrate the feeling, she will move onto the next step. If not, she may ask others to try the ideas of students that demonstrate an appropriate metric 'feel' and / or introduce other blues recordings and piano material to move to.
- Teacher: "Here are those light-heavy doo-DAHs again on piano. I wonder if you could move only on the "DAHS"? ' ...maybe do it on the conga (I anticipate that this may be especially challenging for some students. They may need to make a slight gesture to feel the "doo"s). Teacher may add some melodic material as they move.
 - o Create action for "DAH" only in small groups
- Now I'm going to **play a brand new jazz rhythm pattern. GO TO THE CONGA*** How would you move to this?" Teacher plays swing eighth notes. Again, the teacher observes and asks others to try the ideas of students that

demonstrate an appropriate metric 'feel.' She will continue to do this whenever movement is used in lessons. Can you hear that pattern in the piano?

- Teacher labels this swing eighth note pattern as "doo-bee, DAH-bee". This is a rhythm pattern frequently used in blues (show visual with syllables "doo-bee, DAH-bee").
- Students are now challenged to **follow** the rhythms they hear with their movement through an interrupted canon ("Echo the piano rhythms with your feet"). Teacher plays doo-DAH or doo-bee patterns on the conga, then the piano through (Dalcroze game).....ADD VOICES ECHOING THE RHYTHMS TOO??

FOR BAND STUDENTS:	FOR NON-BAND STUDENTS:
• Students get their band instruments and sit in their regular band seats. • Woodwinds echo the teacher's instrumental improvisations as the accompaniment track of <i>Good Mornin' Blues</i> plays. We will play on tonic only. (Also known as "the note in the yellow box on page 8, exercise #21, from your band book¹³⁵" – concert F. This may be modified down an octave for F Horn players) • Simultaneously, the brass and percussion do a body percussion pattern for "doo-DAH" while echoing patterns through vocalization. Improvising is on tonic only. • Sections within the band rotate assignments.	• Students find a partner and go to 1 Orff barred percussion instrument with their partner. Partners decide who will be the "A" partner and who will be the "B" partner. • Both partners do a body percussion pattern for "doo-DAH" while vocally echoing the teacher's instrumental improvisations as the accompaniment track of <i>Swamp Blues (D)</i> plays. • The "B" partner continues the previous exercise while the "A" partner echoes on the barred percussion. We will play on tonic only. • Partners rotate assignments.

¹³⁵ Pearson, *Standard of Excellence: Comprehensive Band Method*, 8.

- Optional: a few students who have demonstrated a sense of swing may be selected to be the leader in place of the teacher for this call-and-response exercise.
- If the students' interest is still piqued and there is still time, add some steps from the next day.

DAY 2 or 3?

- Teacher: “Remember those light-heavy ‘doo-DAH’ body movements from last time?” (Show visual.) “Remember the ‘doo-bee-DAH-bees’?” (Show visual.) “Show me which one you hear as you listen to the piano.” (Dalcroze “**follow**” or “**interrupted canon**”)
- Teacher: “Can you find ‘doo-bee-DAH-bees’ (show **visual** for doo-bee-DAH-bees) in this recording and show me with your body?” Play *St. Louis Blues*.
- “Where are the light-heavy ‘doo-DAH’S’?” (show **visual** for doo-DAHs)
- When teacher says “change” or shows the other visual, students switch back to ‘doo-bee-DAH-bee.’ On the next signal, students go back to ‘doo-DAH’ (Dalcroze quick-change game). The teacher might need to reinforce those rhythm patterns by playing them on an instrument along with the recording, but will do so as little as possible to keep the authenticity of the recording.
- All sit. Teacher: “How can we transfer “doo-bee-DAH-bee” to our hands? Teacher may use conga if needed.
- Continue this movement pattern while students listen to an excerpt of *Swamp Blues*.
- Continue this activity while echoing
 1. real word phrases, (ex. “IMproVising CAN be FUN.” “What did you have for breakfast today?”) or Simon says say this “do-be-Dah-be “do –DAH”)
 2. scat phrases
 3. students vocally echo teacher’s instrumental improvisations (using all 1 pitch or mostly 1 pitch)
 4. phrases from the *St. Louis Blues* song so as to learn the first verse.

FOR BAND STUDENTS:	FOR NON-BAND STUDENTS:
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• Students get their band instruments and echo the teacher's instrumental improvisations as the accompaniment track of <i>St. Louis Blues</i> plays. We will play on tonic only. If more variety is needed to keep up student interest, add concert Eb and or concert C. • Just the woodwinds echo their teacher's improvisations as the accompaniment track plays. Simultaneously, the brass and percussion do a body percussion pattern for "doo-bee-DAH-bee" while echoing through vocalization. Improvising is on tonic only. • Sections within the band rotate assignments. If more variety is needed to keep up student interest, change the groups (ex. By what they color they are wearing) and/or have 3 group assignments that rotate: 1 playing, 1 vocalizing and using "doo-DAH" movement, 1	• Students get into partners (A & B) sharing an Orff barred percussion instrument, similar to last time • Just the "A" partner echoes their teacher's improvisations as <i>Swamp Blues (D)</i> plays. We will play on tonic only. If more variety is needed to keep up student interest, add b7 (C) and 5 (A). • Simultaneously, the "B" partner does a body percussion pattern for "doo-bee-Dah-bee" while echoing through vocalization. • Partners rotate assignments. If more variety is needed to keep up student interest, change into groups instead of partners (ex. By what they color they are wearing) and/or have 3 group assignments that rotate: 1 playing, 1 vocalizing and using "doo-DAH" movement, 1 vocalizing and using "doo-bee-DAH-bee" movement
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vocalizing and using “doo-bee-DAH-bee” movement	
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- Optional: A few students who have demonstrated a sense of swing may be selected to be the leader in place of the teacher for this call-and-response exercise.

DAY 3 or 4?

- Students vocally echo phrases from a visual (start with the first 2 and add more as you go)
 - Do DAH maybe “hey THERE”
 - Do be DAH be “how ya DO-in’?”
 - Do be DAH “do-in’ FINE”
 - Do DAH be “hey BAbeh”
- Students improvise their own short phrase using the phrases above. Teacher may use a visual with empty lines to assist with timing. Students should do “do-DAHs” or “do-be-DAH-be”s with arms to maintain metric feel. Opportunities for students solos.
- Students insert their short improvised phrases at the ends of the sung phrases of “Good Mornin’ Blues.” -- collective improv and solo improv
 - Talk about when we improvised/scatted within the song.... Why?
 - Talk about blues jams and “stepping on” someone’s solo
 - Do the same sequence but use instruments instead of scatting (if you are using Orff barred percussion, consider scatting while playing). Limit to 1 pitch or untuned percussion if students are not successful
 - For Band groups, use the Silver Burdett recording which is in in concert F. For groups using Orff barred percussion, sing the “Good Mornin’ Blues” words with the *Swamp Blues* track in D

DAY 4 or 5?

- Next, we need to work on improvising an entire 12-bar form
- note 12-bar form and AAB form of the lyrics (I suggest using the *Jazz for Young People* curriculum by Wynton Marsalis/Lincoln Center Jazz; available at Perpich Center for the Arts)
- Improvise 3 short rhythmic phrases – AAB form
 - Use the previous chart as an aid for timing
- Could mix-up 12-Bars in various formats for a concert
 - examples:
 - sing “Good mornin’ Blues”, for the first 12
 - sing “Good morin’ Blues” with an instrumental soloist filling the end of the phrases
 - instrumental soloists improvising 12 bars each (possibly in AAB form)
 - vocal soloists scatting 12 bars each

DAY 5 or 6?

- Students are presented with rhythms from *Hot Cross Buns* and are asked to read each rhythm with jazz syllables (“Do DAH” for 2 quarter notes, “do-be DAH-be” for 2 pairs of eighth notes, etc.).
 - Students guess the name of the tune.
 - Can they play it/sing it with the real lyrics/pitches but with jazz rhythms? Add arm “do DAH”s and “do-be DAH-be”s as needed to assist in the “feel” or swing eighth notes.
 - Do the same with other simple, familiar tunes; such as *Mary Had a Little Lamb*
 - Advanced – Can they play it once with swing eighth notes and once with straight eighth notes?

Another Day?

- Note the I, I, I, I, IV, IV, I, I, V, IV, I, I Basic Blues Progression (Also explained very well in the *Jazz for Young People* curriculum by Wynton Marsalis/Lincoln Center Jazz; available at Perpich Center for the Arts).
 - Sing roots with solfege or numbers over a backtrack, like *Swamp Blues*
 - Small groups create a 3 different group statues –
a statue for I, a statue for IV, and a statue for V
 - Sing roots while doing matching statue (sing with blues backtrack or piano accompaniment)
 - Perform statues for others in class while everyone sings the roots
 - Find I, IV and V on instruments – play roots with blue backtrack
 - Play basic jazz rhythms (swing eighth notes/“do-be DAH-be” and “do DAH”) on each root. This is another approach to basic blues improvisation. Add arm motions for the macro beat (“do DAH”) and swing eighth notes (“do-be DAH-be”) as needed.

RECOMMENDED SOURCE FOR YOUR INSTRUCTION

“Jazz for young people curriculum”

Marsalis, Wynton, 1961-, Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra., Jazz at Lincoln Center (Firm)

New York, N.Y. : Miami, Fla. : Jazz at Lincoln Center ; c2002.
Warner Bros. Publications,

Check it out from the Perpich Center

<https://mplus.mnpals.net/vufind/Search/Results?lookfor=jazz+for+young+people&ty>

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