

Creating Empathy Through Connection

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Introduction/Background

The purpose of peace building through music is to develop a safe place for people to express themselves and form connections, learn about each other's cultures, and find a community of people who can share their ideas and feelings and can empathize with each other. The themes of respect, understanding, empathy, and creativity foster this and are explored in the textbook *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics* by Olivier Urbain. Each of the authors in this book write about a specific area of peace building through music and how to incorporate this in the music classroom. Chapter 1 goes over how to be empathetic and have understanding between participants through music. Chapter 2 discusses how to incorporate culture into our music lessons and represent the culture respectfully and appropriately. Chapter 3 discusses how cultures can be combined to make new genres of music and how cultures can work together to make this happen, whether it is an even balance of power or not. One of the examples in the textbook is about how Paul Simon interacted with those in the African culture to make a new style of music, but because Western culture is bigger and more dominant, it very well could have taken over instead of there being an even collaboration between Western and African culture. In the final chapter of unit one, Johan Galtung writes about how music and art can lift us up to this heightened place which brings us together and creates unity and peace. As Baruch Whitehead says in the textbook *Music and Conflict Transformation*, "Peace researcher Johan Galtung defines peace as "the capacity to transform conflicts with empathy, creativity and nonviolence" (Galtung 2000). Galtung's emphasis on empathy is an important one, for without empathy we have no framework in which to understand others". Empathy is the backbone of music making in a comfortable and safe community.

Introduction/Background (cont.)

In Chapter 5 of this textbook, Anne-Marie Grey describes how music can connect us to our history and allow us to understand what happened in society. There are struggles that go on in the world that are better understood when those pains are put to music so people can relate and empathize with them more. In Chapter 6, Dr. Baruch Whitehead explains how it is very important to teach our students about music in peace building and how topics surrounding struggles in history such as social justice, disability rights, and racial justice can be put to music so people can better understand them and connect to them. Chapter 7 is about how music can heal the soul, create understanding, and bring people together despite their differences in background. Chapter 8 is the opposite of what has been discussed so far in the textbook. It is about how music can also cause division among people, create violence, hatred, and war. This is unpeaceful music. Each of these chapters provide a unique element surrounding the themes of creating empathy, connection, and community through music.

In my classroom, my goals are to create a space where students can express themselves and communicate their thoughts and feelings with their peers, connect with each other over struggles that they may be having, and learn about cultures in as respectful and appropriate of a way as possible so that they are learning about them as a whole and not just how we as outsiders know the culture. As Felicity Laurence states “Above all, there is a recurrent conjecture that music can enable people, somehow, to “get inside” each other’s minds, feel each other’s suffering and recognize each other’s shared humanity – that is, in common understanding, to have empathy for each other.”

Project Description

The purpose of peace building through music is to develop a safe place for people to express themselves and form connections, learn about each other's cultures, find solutions to their conflicts, and find a community of people who can share their ideas and feelings and can empathize with each other. The themes of respect, understanding, empathy, and creativity foster this and go into the project I created called "Creating Empathy Through Connection". The activities included in this workshop allow the participants to get to know each other, be vulnerable through music and words, create music through improvisation, and create a community with people they may not have spoken to or interacted with before. Some of these activities involve physical contact to create an inanimate object, improvisation through acting, improvisation through music making, and creative writing. Through this wide variety of activities, it is essential that a safe space is created by the teacher and followed through by the students/participants so that everyone participating feels comfortable putting themselves out there and trying something new. I see each of my classes 2-3 times a week for 40 minutes depending on if it is a blue or white day, so this project takes place over the span of two weeks for me personally with my students, but you can adapt this to fit your needs. These activities can be used and adapted for many grade levels and for various classes in or out of school as well such as students in music ensembles or general music classes, general education classes, after school programs, or community programs with teens and/or adults. I use the word students throughout this project, but you can replace that with the word participants depending on the age group. Anyone can benefit from doing these activities in a group setting. Community is key no matter where you are. I hope you find these activities to bring your community together and create a strong foundation for love and empathy so these feelings can be passed onto others in the community.

Project Overview: Promoting Empathy, Conflict Resolution, and Community Building

Week/Class	Lesson/Activity	Description	Goal/Purpose
Week 1 Day 1	Introduction Name Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students enter the music classroom and stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder.• Once they are in their places, the teacher teaches the activity.• The students go around the circle introducing themselves and use an adjective to describe themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help students learn each other's names• Help remember their peer's names when matched with an action• Get to know their peers' personalities

Week 1
Day 2

MWB Activity #1
The Virtual Machine &
The Human Orchestra

- The teacher describes the activity (The Virtual Machine)
- Before the activity begins, the teacher chooses an item to be “built” by the students.
- One student comes to the center of the room to do a movement to build the chosen item through improvisatory mime. All of the other students join in one by one to add more parts to the machine that is building this item.
- The teacher explains how to do The Human Orchestra activity.
- The students are split into two groups, one short sounding group and one long sounding group. They create an improvisatory composition using these sounds.

- To promote teamwork and inclusivity
- To have the kids become comfortable experimenting in front of the class and being vulnerable as a group
- To start getting comfortable improvising using short ideas to create a bigger product

<p>Week 1 Day 3</p>	<p>Improvisation Activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● The teacher gives the class a theme and explains how the activity goes.● The teacher asks for volunteers to demonstrate the activity for the class● The students sing melodic ideas that go along with the theme and add body percussion or other sounds using their body and the floor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● To develop their improvisatory skills● To listen to their peers and change what they are producing verbally based on what they hear around them● To be vulnerable and try new things vocally
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Week 2
Day 1

MWB Activity #3
We Shall Overcome

- The teacher teaches the melodic line of “We Shall Overcome” by rote
- The class writes an acrostic poem using lyrics revolving around a concept that they think should be spoken about in our community/school. This is done in groups.
- Each group presents their new lyrics

- To come together as a community and bond over their common struggles/observed struggles of the community
- To promote creativity

Week 2

Day 2

MWB Activity #4

My Life

- Students sign up to improvise using a pre-recorded track
- Using their poems that they wrote, students are called up to improvise a rap
- This allows the students to express themselves in a safe and supportive environment
- To improvise using a backing track
- To express their thoughts in a safe environment

Activity Bank

Activity	Description
Introduction Name Game	<p>Students say their name, an adjective that goes along with it, and a body movement or pose to reflect this. Each person in the circle does the same. As an extra challenge, someone can volunteer to say everyone's name with their adjective along with the pose.</p>

MWB Activity #1
The Virtual Machine

Gather a small group of students, friends, or family members. Choose something for the group "to build", as a human machine, through improvisatory mime. It could be a chocolate bar, a cuckoo clock, a flying bicycle, let your imagination go here. It is usually best to decide this before presenting the activity or most of your session will be taken up by people arguing about what the machine "will build" and as a result safety, inclusion and equality might be dissolved. Talk through the things that might be required for the machine in order to build the item but try not to let people get too bogged down in the details. There are two ways to present this activity:

Seated, the leader stands up and starts his/her motion. Taking turns, each person adds their part of the machine when it comes to their turn, through a brief miming motion connected to the virtual machine. Each person models their movements to include a repetitive vocalized or body percussion sound. (The voice of experience says that as the first person to start is going to be doing this for quite a while, so they should choose something they can sustain!) Once everyone is involved with their miming machine motion, play around with sounds only, movements only, getting louder, getting softer, faster, slower etc.

This version is safe because everyone has their own personal space.

During the activity, anyone can enter "the machine" as they wish and not have to wait until it's their turn. Participants add their sound and movement when they feel ready to join. This version is safe because it eliminates potential fears that it's almost my turn and instead allows participants to start when they feel ready.

MWB Activity #1 (cont.)

The Human Orchestra

Gather a small group of students, friends, or family members. Each person thinks of a vocal or body percussion sound. The conductor forms two sub-groups: the people with short sounds and the people with long sounds, then gives non-verbal conducting directions such as start, stop, louder, quieter and combines the groups into an improvisatory performance.

The conductor can give a specific rhythm to the short sounds group through visual directions. For example, the conductor could motion by pointing one finger at a flattened hand in the rhythm he/she would like them to play. Divide the groups as you like, you could invite solos or duos, etc. by cuing them in/out of the performance.

Remember to include everyone! If doing this with younger or high energy participants consider getting everyone started before dividing the groups (entrances/exits) so that everyone is occupied right from the start. Have fun!

Invite others to be the conductor - this can open a great conversation about what we need from our leaders and what leaders need for the people we are trying to lead.

Improvisation Activity

A theme will be chosen for the class. For example, nature. I will demonstrate this theme with a few student volunteers for the class. We will make these nature noises by either using small melodic patterns, sound effects, or our body. This could be a major 5 finger pattern for the sun, a dripping sound for rain, a wind sound by blowing air etc. Once this is shown, then the activity is done as a class. Each student will join in with their own musical idea that relates to nature for example or the chosen theme. The teacher signals for the improvisation to stop after about 10-15 minutes.

Here is an example of the activity.

<https://youtu.be/9TgZ0Ynd0Ts?si=7XjDKWflIFWWLI52>

MWB Activity #3
We Shall
Overcome

The following "We Shall Overcome" songwriting activity is a variation of a MWB songwriting activity by Dr. Caron Collins:

Establish a theme (i.e. Equality, Peace, Justice, ect.) based upon the cause or concern that is meaningful for your school or community.

Gather a small group of students, friends, or family members to participate.

Acrostic

Acrostic - writing down the theme word vertically and writing "We shall ____."

Provide a social/historical perspective of "We Shall Overcome". Practice singing the original lyrics. It is helpful to have a melodic instrument on hand to accompany the songwriting process and the group learns the melody through

- Humming or inner vocalization
- Slow repetition

Here are some video examples of the song "We Shall Overcome".

https://youtu.be/M9QO7GJj-lg?si=XauQmha_8ZjsBaU2 - Unity in India- We Shall Overcome at #StandWithJNU

<https://youtu.be/-WiqRwrOpA?si=9I7ED7BsncT-wxHX> - Nepal School Children in morning prayer- We Shall Overcome someday

MWB Activity #3 (cont.)

We Shall Overcome

Verses

With the original song comfortably learned, split the group into smaller teams (pairs or individuals) and assign each with at least one letter of your thematically chosen acrostic word. Provide 10 minutes for the participants to write out the fill-in-the-blank portion with words that match the letters of the acrostic word and match *rhythmically with the melody*, to create their individual verse. Here's my example:

PEACE: (5 verses)

P: *We shall _____. "We shall **P**ray for peace"*

E: *We shall _____. "We shall **E**ducate"*

A: *We shall _____. "We shall **A**ll join hands"*

C: *We shall _____. "We shall **C**are for all"*

E: *We shall _____. "We shall **E**nd the hate"*

Coming back together, each team (or individual) shares their verse, then puts the verses together in a song performance, along with the chorus between each new verse, "*Deep in my heart, we do believe, that we shall overcome some day*".

MWB Activity #4

My Life

Using the poems from the previous activity, students will work together to create their own rap elaborating on the conflict for their group. Then play around with the words so they can figure out the rhythm of it. Finally, they will put their lyrics to a backing-track. This is a very vulnerable activity, so students can either record their creation and send it to me, they can share this recorded product for the class, or they can present it live in front of the class.

Video/audio example: <https://youtu.be/zTXxKXoOIgk?si=qDRKPMm25ONkRNbZ>

Helpful Tips

Before starting any of these activities, make sure that the classroom expectations and expectations for each of these activities are established. A safe and supportive environment is needed so that the students feel comfortable experimenting and being themselves. That is the whole point of these activities. Also, it is important that the students are original and stay true to themselves. If they are just copying what their friends are doing, then it won't be as authentic of an experience and the students won't get as much out of the exercises as they could. Finally, these activities can get heavy, especially the poem and rap activities. Make sure that your students feel heard while also promoting an environment that is school appropriate and safe.

Helpful Tips (cont.)

Also, keep in mind the 5 principles of Musicians Without Borders which is to provide:

- Safe spaces for participants
 - Remind students to always be respectful of others' voices, lyrics, responses, and remind that there are no wrong answers when it is sincere.
- Experiences of inclusion
 - Ensure all members of the choir have an active role in music making
- Opportunities for creativity
 - Remind students to be open minded, try new things, and step out of their comfort zones. This is a safe space and creativity is encouraged.
- Equal treatment of all group members
 - Make sure every student's voice is heard
- High quality music making
 - Provide helpful feedback to the students and have them engage in self reflection throughout every activity.

Conclusion

“Creating Empathy Through Connection” provides the students with experiences that they probably don’t get to have in their other classes. These activities give them hands-on, engaging, and creative opportunities to express themselves, build understanding of their classmates, be inventive, and put their feelings to music. Through hands-on activities, the students learn how to work as a team to create a musical product bigger than themselves and it helps them to feel more connected to their peers. By doing improvisation, it helps them feel comfortable creating small musical ideas that could then be built into longer musical phrases. This helps them be more independent musicians so they can hold their part while singing with other people who are singing something different. The poem writing and improvisation activities allow the students to form bonds with their peers, see who they are similar to, provide insight on what’s going on in their peer’s personal lives, and form a stronger community. These activities create connections between the students and community so that the community has each other’s back, they have a better understanding of one another, and there is more love and respect. These feelings are passed on from person to person and make their way around the school and community so that everyone is more united than before.

References

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