

Better Together: Fostering Unity and Peace through Musical Activities

with Young Children

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Peace Building Through Music Education

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Introduction and Background

This workshop familiarizes participants with group dynamics that promote cooperation, unity, and empathy. Activities include: singing, movement, breathing exercises, body percussion, improvisation, and the use of percussion instruments to interpret visual arts. Where visuals are unavailable, the use of one's imagination is suitable. Each of these activities may be modified according to the materials available. Likewise, these activities may be repeated and modified on a regular basis. As students become familiar with the activities, they may assume more and more of a leadership role.

This workshop is most suitable for young children, parents may also participate. It is designed to take forty minutes, however, activities may be lengthened or shortened according to fit the needs of the circumstances. Middle school and high school aged children also benefit from participation and may do so more willingly in the role of an assistant or leader. The activities bring awareness to our bodies, our reactions to the world around us, and our feelings and expressions. Third graders have expressed to me that in our school, bullying is an issue. I believe that the input from Jones, an incarcerated individual, sheds light on the benefits of using music to resolve conflicts. In writing to the author of our text, Jones expressed what music does when used for peaceful purposes in prison. I assert that music can do the same for all individuals and that includes:

Reducing Tension

Connecting people and bringing peace

Increasing empathy and reducing animosity

Providing an outlet for creativity and self-expression

(Jones, 2005)

Additionally, the author points out that music can be used to raise self-esteem, encourage teamwork, and provide opportunities to engage with the community (p. 123).

Developing trust between individuals provides an emotional unity that opens a path for “communicating sincerely, respectfully and constructively” in an atmosphere of mutual recognition (p. 142). The activities in this project provide a solid basis for developing trust that can lead to candid, non-threatening conversations among individuals. According to peace researchers, “conflicts are part and parcel of the human lot, not to be avoided, but to be transformed” (p. 4). A pioneer of peace studies, John Galtung, defined peace as “the capacity to transform conflicts with empathy, creativity and nonviolence” (Galtung, 2000). Conflicts arise as people confront incompatible goals, bullying is often at the heart of such circumstances and “creativity is needed to unlock the powers of the imagination, enabling each party to see the conflict in a different way” (p. 4). The activities within this project are inherently nonviolent and foster the development of empathy, imagination, and creativity. In an atmosphere of safety, individuals are more likely to take accountability for their actions and work towards the type of reconciliation necessary when bullying occurs. These activities and songs are designed to break down barriers and build trusting and empathetic emotional connections.

Participants contribute with song, motions of their choice, body percussion, and improvisation on instruments they select. The assortment of activities provides opportunities for all to participate. Activities move at a pace that is flexible yet dynamic to keep participants actively engaged. There are opportunities for group members to contribute as leaders. Participants need not have formal musical training; they feel comfortable engaging in activities of their choice and suitable to their needs. Equal participation is valued among participants.

Project Description

All join in a circle for the duration of this process. Activity lengths can be extended or shortened to maintain a steady and engaging flow. All or some of these activities may be carried out at the discretion of the leader.

Time	Workshop Activity	Description	Why?
10 minutes	Opening	Participants engage with the leader through activities involving singing, moving, and breathing activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● To warm up bodies and voices● To establish a playful and interactive atmosphere● To develop group cohesion● To reduce tension● To welcome everyone and emphasize equality and inclusion
20 minutes	Interaction & Creativity	Participants explore body percussion, emotional expression through improvisation, and interactive play activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● To engage the imagination● To provide an outlet for creativity and self-expression● Practice group participation● To Increase awareness of emotions● To promote peaceful communication
10 minutes	Closing	Participants sing and play instruments together	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● To develop empathy● To encourage self-expression● To reinforce individual

- worth and inclusion
- To connect people and bring peace

1. Opening

1.1 “Do as I’m Doing” - Sing along song with motions.

[Do As I'm Doing \(Latter Day Saints Primary Children's Song\)](#)

This song encourages participants to sing and move in playful and engaging ways. The leader projects this video to be sung and moved along to. The group marches, roll their hands, wiggle, hula, jump, move like a chicken, and more as prompted by the images accompanying the song. Motions will be done high in the air, low to the ground, quickly, or slowly as indicated in the lyrics. If the leader is familiar with the song, it may be lead without the video and other motions can be used.

Lyrics:

Do as I’m doing;

Follow, follow me!

Do as I’m doing;

Follow, follow me!

If I do it high or low,

If I do it fast or slow,

Do as I’m doing;

Follow, follow me!

Do as I’m doing;

Follow, follow me!

1.2 Five finger breathing exercise

[How to Do Five-Finger Breathing](#) This video for reference; it may be too lengthy and slow for young children to appreciate.

The leader models this five-finger breathing technique and instructs all to inhale and exhale in unison while tracing the outline of their fingers. This activity is calming the energy and prepares the group to focus for the next song. This exercise may be used at any time throughout the workshop if needed to bring calm and focus within the group.

1.3 “We are different” - Call and response

[We are Different | Élida Veiga](#) 🎧 🎧

This is a call and response song. The leader plays the video and sings while indicating for the group to echo sing at certain times. The leader may present the activity without a video and instead; chant, sing acapella, or accompany themselves with an instrument of their choice.

Lyrics:

Leader sings, “I am different”, then the group echo sings, “I am different”

Leader sings, “So are you”, the group echo sings, “So are you”

Leader sings, “That’s ok”, the group echo sings, “That’s ok”

Leader sings, “That’s so good”, the group echo sings, “That’s so good”

Leader sings, “Put a smile”, the group echo sings, “Put a smile”

Leader sings, “On your face”, the group echo sings, “On your face”

Leader sings, “We are different”, the group echo sings, “We are different”

Leader sings, “That’s ok”, the group echo sings, “That’s ok”

Leader sings, “We can make a better place together. We can make a better place together. We can make a better place together. We can make a better place together.”

Then the song is repeated from the beginning.

After the repeat, the Leader improvises with simple improvisatory sounds like “La da da da da,” in place of the lyrics and the group echoes those syllables.

2. Interaction and Creativity

Activities in this section involve creating sounds with hands and with instruments. Some of these activities pair images and words with emotional expressions through improvisation. An

awareness is made when we connect our feelings with our actions and this is the basis for discussing how to resolve issues such as bullying. As in all of the activities presented here, safety is reinforced as we remind participants to be gentle to protect their voices, hands, bodies, ears, and instruments. We must take care not to clap too hard or to be too loud in order to maintain safety for all.

2.1 Body Percussion and Rain Storm

[How to Create a Rain Storm with Your Hands](#)

This activity engages participants in discovering ways to create sounds like wind and rain with their bodies. The leader shows the group how to create the sounds of a rainstorm with their hands. Beginning with the sound of rain drizzle, all begin to brush their hands back and forth. To create rainfall, finger snaps are made. If participants are unable to snap, they can tap 1, 2, or 3 fingers on the palm of their hand. For thunder, hands will clap! This video is a good reference. If the leader wants to use it to show the group, start at about 1 minute into the video. The video alludes to staggered entrances, for simplicity, it is not necessary to address staggered entrances with young children.

2.2 Listen to a choir make the sounds of a rain storm

[A Choir Making the Sounds of a Rain Storm](#)

The leader shows the group this video of a choir making the sounds of a rain storm. Participants may simply observe the video or choose to join in. Notice how the choir jumps to create a booming thunder that echoes as each group takes a turn jumping. Participants may want to jump or stomp to create a thunder sound. Another option for creating thunder is to have participants clap or pat their legs in unison. Model gentle jumping, clapping, and patting and praise the group for being careful as they practice gentle jumping, clapping, and patting.

2.3 Images and Improvisation with percussion instruments activities

This activity connects participants with their emotions and how they relate to images, words, and sound. Through improvisation, different moods and words are portrayed. The

Leader sings or chants, “Here are the instruments for us to choose from, gathered in the circle we’ll all have fun. Pick your own with a hum, hum, hum, tap it once and sit on your bum.” The leader shows images (or says to imagine the word they say) and instructs the group to make sounds that reflect how that word makes them feel. Participants may also use their voice if preferred, or an assistive device if they are non-verbal and prefer not to use an instrument. Images (or words) may include nature settings such as a sunset on the ocean, a volcano erupting, snow falling in a forest, or a tornado. Similar to the previous activity, present the following words in order; gentle rain, medium hard rain, very hard and fast rain, thunder, very hard and fast rain, moderately hard rand, soft and gentle rain. Again, communicate safety and caution prior to this activity to protect one from soreness from hitting an instrument too hard and also to protect the instruments. Protecting our ears from loud noises is also important.

Next, explore facial expressions and words with improvisation. For each of the following emotions, either shown on the leader’s face or in an image (the word is not spoken or revealed in spelled form), participants create sounds that reflect the meaning of the word; sad (frown), surprise (raise eyebrows, open mouth), anger (frown brows, show teeth), happy (raise eyebrows, smile), tease (stick tongue out), bully (glare), love (look into everyone’s eyes and smile gently), bored (relax all facial muscles, lower eyelids part way). In image (or spoken word) can be displayed for the following; porcupine, flower, rabbit, and lion. These are merely suggestions; the options are limitless.

This next activity is an interactive game that requires group collaboration. One person leaves the area briefly and becomes the “detective.” The group then selects a secret leader to make facial expressions and accompanying emotive sounds on their instrument. The “detective” returns to solve the mystery of “who is the secret leader?” The secret leader makes a face and creates sounds on their instrument as the group copies those expressions. If the detective cannot guess the secret leader after three tries, the gig is up and the group reveals the secret leader. The secret leader may require a reminder to change their face as soon after everyone is

copying them - this can be announced to the group in general so as not to reveal who the secret leader is. This helps the pace to stay quick. Participants take turns being the secret leader and the detective until the allotted time for the game is spent. To assist with this game, three words or images may be displayed for the secret leader rotate making expressions. Those words or images may be changed for each round.

3. Closing

3.1 Sing “We are Different”

This song provides an opportunity for children to cool down on their instruments and remember to honor each member of the group. The leader establishes a steady beat for the participants to keep as they all sing together. A video with the words is played as participants sing along. [LDS Primary Song - We Are Different](#)

Lyrics:

I know you, and you know me.

We are as different as the sun and the sea.

I know you, and you know me,

[Chorus]

And that’s the way it’s supposed to be.

I help you, and you help me.

We learn from problems, and we’re starting to see.

I help you, and you help me,

[Chorus]

And that’s the way it’s supposed to be.

I love you, and you love me.

We reach together for the best we can be.

I love you, and you love me,
[Chorus]

And that's the way it's supposed to be.

The following activity requires the instruments to be put away allowing for participants to engage in movement free from obstructions. A simple change to the words of "We are Different" can guide the group to return their instruments; sing, "Thank you for playing today, please take your instrument and put it away. When you're done, then please sit down, we'll play one last game all together now."

3.2 "Do as I'm Doing" - Song with voluntary rotating leaders

[Do As I'm Doing \(Latter Day Saints Primary Children's Song\)](#)

This activity circles back to the opening activity and provides a final opportunity for individuals to shine. Students who would like to improvise an action for the group to follow may do so. Whoever would like to have a turn raises their hand for the leader to take note of. The leader initiates singing and points to participants one at a time throughout the song as they lead the group motions.

Helpful Hints

Students benefit from repeating these activities periodically. To keep it interesting and increase the challenges with each session, here are some suggestions: During the "Do as I'm doing" song, have the leader use their instrument to make a unique rhythm or sound for the group to copy. In the "la da da da da" portion of "We are different," make the scat more complex and try something like "do bee do be do wah." As students become familiar with different scating patterns, let them take turns making up a scat for all to copy. For improvising to images and words, change the images and words. If your students can read, add words they recognize. Also, new vocabulary words that convey emotions could be introduced; keep it simple yet

challenging enough for growth. Communicate with your group's teachers, counselors, support givers, care givers, families, etc., and find out what you can do to support the emotional and overall development of individuals within your group. The calming technique of five-finger breathing can be used periodically throughout the activities to bring focus and quiet.

Remember to keep in mind the 5 principals of Musicians Without Borders: safety, creativity, inclusion, equality, and quality. The first 4 principles are addressed throughout this project; quality is ensured as careful attention is paid to the efforts put forth by each participant. Encouragement is always given, but no one is forced to participate. Recognize the efforts contributed by each group member, even if their contribution seems very small, take care to notice and show appreciation. Give genuine and specific praise when participants engage positively and demonstrate quality music making, teamwork, cooperation, and empathy. Workshop leaders serve the group best when striving to set the standard of quality through an example of genuine caring, gentleness, kindness, compassion, empathy, and love. In this workshop, many opportunities for participants to show empathy towards each other arise. Instruct the group to watch for those moments and honor them as they occur.

Conclusion

The purpose of fostering peacebuilding through music education is to lay the foundation for individuals to access creative problem solving in an atmosphere of safety, creativity, inclusion, equality, and quality music making. As participants in this workshop utilize their imagination and contribute with their individual ideas and music, they may grow in appreciation of themselves and the uniqueness of others. Participants may let down their guard and enjoy a sense of freedom to express themselves.

The opening song "We are Different," by Elida Veiga, and the closing song "We are Different," by Patricia Kelsey Graham, each convey an appreciation and acceptance of

differences. When conflicts exist in a community or school, it is helpful to have songs in mind that unite and focus on how our differences can lead to peaceful solutions. Getting to know others, helping each other, and working together are actionable items which can be discussed and celebrated as an outgrowth of this project. In working with school counselors, community members, parents, and teachers, together we can foster the development of peace within our children

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