

Introduction

“If I’ve been asked to teach children’s music, where do I go for help? What kinds of things should I do as the teacher?”

“I want to be successful and teach the children well. I don’t want them to be bored. I want them to love music. What should I do?”

“I can’t seem to get the children to be quiet as I teach. What is wrong?”

These are some of the questions and comments that come up over and over again as I work with teachers of children’s music in workshops around the United States. It is at their constant urging that I write this book.

“Give us a resource of all the ideas you are presenting. We can’t remember it all!”

This book is packed with both guiding principles and action ideas. Take your time as you peruse what is in this book. Try one or two ideas at a time. Use it as a resource to enliven both your presentations and your perspective.

Teach All of Me

The 5 Magic Principles

Throughout this book, you will find teaching suggestions based on the five magic principles listed below. Read them through and see if you can find how they are applied throughout this book.

The brain craves variety, yet needs repetition. You’ve probably been in a classroom where the teacher presents different information in the same way, over and over again. Learning becomes a labor. You have to use all of your ability to focus to even hear what is being said. The brain bogs down and starts to shut down. The brain craves variety, but unfortunately, we need repetition to learn. How do we teach with both variety and repetition?

Every person’s brain favors specific styles of learning. Some people love reading maps, and others would much rather have their GPS systems talk them through to the address. While one person notices the colors and shapes in the world around them, another person might not even notice (or care) if their socks are the same color. Many engineers learn best when they make logical conclusions, work through puzzles, or use math approaches to solve a problem. In contrast, those in the communication field often need to discuss a problem out loud in order to wrap their heads around it. It appears that each human being takes in information differently, using not just one, but several kinds of intelligences to learn. How do you teach using all different kinds of intelligences so that you can reach each child with their different learning styles?

As we learn, we need a flow of concentration followed by a change of pace in order to keep our energy level balanced. Tension followed by relaxation, climax with a resolution, high concentration then taking a break... we can see examples of this principle in well written literature, in a physical workout, or in the waves of the sea. As we teach a child a song, our presentation also needs to have an up and down flow of concentration with a change of pace directly following a short period of high concentration. We teach using a focused, short-term learning activity, then switch to a completely different type of activity (usually with movement) to either re-energize or relax the body. What kinds of learning require high energy from the children? What are low level, re-energizing activities? How do you know what activities to put in the flow and where to put them as you teach the children?

Line upon line, precept upon precept is a great way to learn. The brain needs exposure to a concept, then time to assimilate what was learned before taking in more of the concept. The brain learns best when we revisit the principle or song multiple times, each time taking in a different aspect of the whole. Have you watched one of your favorite movies more than once, noticing things you didn't see before the second or third time through the movie? Have you ever felt your eyes glaze over and your brain start to go numb when you were trying to learn something in a short amount of time? Children have somewhat the same reaction when we present all of a song in one setting. They don't retain well what they have learned with only one or two experiences with the song. Teaching small parts of the whole, with time in between to process, is a great way to teach a child a song. How do you emphasize a small part of the song and yet teach the whole song?

Whole to part to whole gives the brain a great way to see the whole thing, narrow the view down to one of the details, then put that detail back in to the whole for "brain storage." When the child experiences the song as a whole, then focuses on one of the detailed parts of that song, he or she will remember the song much more clearly. The brain senses the complete experience, and has a place to "put" the details in the brain as it stores the song. Knowing that, how do you teach whole to part to whole?

A teacher who is mindful of the five ideas above as he or she teaches gives a great gift to the children they teach. But, what does it look like to teach like that? Is there a way to "see" a couple of examples using those principles? Take a "look" at the following presentations with your mind's eye.

Presentation #1

(Children are milling around and focused on their own little groups. The **teacher's words** are shown in **bold**.)

Teacher: **Hello friends! Here's the pattern!** (Teacher stamps twice, patsches¹ twice, claps twice, and snaps twice. The children one by one begin to join in the

¹ A patsch is a rhythmic hit with the underside of the hands (palms) on your thighs.

rhythmic actions until the whole class has the pattern. The teacher repeats the body pattern a couple of times, then sings the song to the beat as he continues the movement pattern.)

Teacher: **Will you be my partner?** (A child comes up and faces the teacher. The teacher and child begin the movement pattern, and instead of snapping, change the snapping to a partner clap [they clap across to each other's hands]. They complete the pattern twice, giving an example for the rest of the group, laughing as they work together.) **Find a friend!** (The other children choose partners.) **Ready? Stamp, stamp, patsch, patsch, clap, clap, clap across.** (The teacher continues to call out the pattern two more times for the children, doing the actions with his partner as he speaks. He then begins to sing the song as the children continue to move with their own partners to the beat of the song as they move in the partner pattern throughout the song.) **Give a high five to your partner.** (There is a ripple of laughter and interaction from the children.)

Teacher: **To your seats and look at the board. What does this code have to do with this song?** (The children begin the move to their seats and some look up at the board. Teacher sings a different song and moves gently closer to a couple of children who are distracted. He motions for them to look up at the board as he continues to sing. The teacher moves slowly through the room making eye contact with the children and motioning for their eyes to go up to the board as he sings. Eventually all the children focus on the board as they hear the teacher sing.)

Teacher: **What does this code** (he points to the board) **have to do with this song?** (One child holds up his hand.) **John thinks he knows. Don't tell! Anybody else?** (The teacher continues to sing. A few more hands go up.) **Okay, what's your idea, John?** (John responds that he thinks the code on the board is the first letter from every word of the song put into a line for each sentence.) **Yes! Which of these lines comes first in the song?** (Several hands go up. The teacher begins to sing the song, then taps a child on the shoulder and hands the child a piece of chalk to go up to the board and write #1 by the first code line of the song. **Put a #1 by the first line.** (Note: the coded lines on the board are not in order.) **What's next?** (The teacher taps another child on the shoulder and hands her some chalk to write #2 by the second line of the song. The teacher continues to sing and tap children on the shoulder to order the code lines according to the song. He continues until all the lines are numbered in order.) **Look at the board and sing the song using this code.** (The children sing the song as the teacher points to each line on the board in order.)

Teacher: (Immediately after finishing the song the teacher speaks.) **Here's a video clip.** (The teacher turns on a video clip that has the sound turned off.) He sings the third song as the images from the video flash across the screen. The children watch intently, not realizing they are hearing the song as they watch. The teacher turns off the video and bears testimony. The children are quietly listening to him. He finishes. **Thank you for singing with me!**

Recap: The teacher focused the children with the first activity, she invited them into a contrasting high concentration activity for the second song. The third song was a change of pace which didn't require a lot of thought, yet used a different intelligence than either of the other two activities. Notice that this presentation was aimed at older children that already read well.

Presentation #2

(It is the day before summer vacation and the children seem to be excited and wound up. The chatter as they file in. The room is incredibly loud and animated.) **Can your hands follow my hands?** The teacher shoots her hands above her head, then pulls them down by her knees. Most of the children begin to follow the teacher. The teacher swings her arms over her head and down to her hips. The children follow, with more of the group following her actions. The teacher continues to move her hands to different positions, gently playing with the children and reacting to them as they follow her. Eventually the teacher settles into a rhythmic swing of her hands from right to left and back. As the children follow her, she begins to sing.

(More to come right here)

Did you notice the 5 magic principles woven into the fabric of these two presentations? (You might want to look again, if not.) What are the activities that the teacher used? Were these presentations directed toward older children, ages 8 to 11, or to younger children, ages 4 to 6? What were the different learning styles or multiple intelligences used to reach each of the children?

If you'd like to know more about multiple intelligences, the 2nd Magic Principle, read on to the next chapter.