

Jazz Pedagogy in the American Elementary General Music Setting

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American general music classrooms are often heavily influenced by methods of teaching originating outside the United States. The most common of these practices are the Orff, Kodaly, and Dalcroze pedagogies. These methods have become Americanized and serve as a strong foundation for music teaching and learning, often incorporating such musical traditions as improvisation. Though teaching improvisation through certain methodologies has become important in elementary general music practice, one might question whether a jazz perspective is present in American elementary general music classrooms.

Jazz education is considered by many to be an offering unique to the secondary level, primarily associated with ensemble performance, and therefore may be missing from, or underrepresented in, the elementary general music curriculum. Music educators must move further toward providing authentic opportunities for elementary students to participate in jazz activities. Systematic implementation of jazz pedagogy and performance opportunities will foster a deeper and more meaningful experience within the jazz idiom. In turn, this will lead to a better transfer of knowledge to ensemble playing which typically occurs after the elementary general music level.

Improvisation is an important part of jazz music. Many research studies and practitioner articles have explored improvisation in the elementary general music setting. However, rarely do such studies or articles focus on improvisation as it relates to jazz. The purpose of this study was to determine what techniques are being used to teach the genre of jazz in elementary school general music classrooms across America.

The main research question of this study was: To what degree is jazz education present in American elementary general music classrooms? Secondary research questions of this study were: 1) To what degree is jazz improvisation present in American elementary general music classrooms? 2) To what degree is jazz terminology present in American elementary general music classrooms? 3) To what degree are jazz listening activities present in American elementary general music classrooms?

A Google Forms survey was sent via email by NAFME to all members who indicated elementary as a teaching level. The survey was intended for practicing elementary general music teachers and generated 770 responses. Though data collection is complete, data analysis is currently still in progress. This poster shows the frequency of inclusion of specific jazz activities and the most common uses of the topics as reported by participants.

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Applications to teaching:

- In elementary general music, folk dances and singing in a round, as well as other activities, are often part of the full-year curriculum.
- Jazz activities should also be a part of the full-year curriculum, instead of viewed as an “extra” item only discussed during a certain unit or time of year, or, in some cases, not discussed at all.
- It is important to listen to jazz.
 - Of 768 responses, 69 (9%) *never* do any jazz listening activities and 224 (29%) *only* do jazz listening activities as part of a jazz-specific unit.
- It is important to discuss jazz terms.
 - Of 765 responses, 111 (15%) *never* include jazz terminology in their lessons and 231 (30%) *only* include jazz terminology as part of a jazz-specific unit.
- Improvisation is an important part of jazz.
 - Of 768 responses, 254 (33%) *never* include any jazz improvisation activities and 224 (29%) *only* teach jazz improvisation as part of a jazz-specific unit.
- Elementary students should have some experience in performing jazz in their concerts or showcases, whether through singing a jazz song or playing a jazz instrumental piece.
 - Of 766 responses, 228 (30%) *never* include jazz as part of elementary general music performances.
- Including jazz as part of the full-year curriculum at the elementary general music level and providing authentic opportunities for students to learn about jazz, participate in jazz activities, and perform jazz pieces will allow them to have more meaningful experiences with jazz.
- In my experience as an elementary general music teacher discussing my curriculum with the other music educators in my district, I realized that a lot of my job is to make the jobs of the middle school and high school music teachers easier.
 - Transfers: singing songs, matching pitch, reading rhythms, learning note names, learning what all the different instruments look like and sound like, properly playing classroom instruments, properly caring for classroom instruments, reading simple melodies while singing or playing instruments, concert etiquette, etc.
 - But what about jazz? What about jazz improvisation?
- Teaching jazz at the elementary level, as part of the full-year curriculum, will only increase the number of skills that will transfer from elementary general music to the higher levels, potentially increasing the quality of jazz education and jazz performances district-wide.