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Rhythm Research Paper

 Rhythm is the manipulation of beats within a pulse of music that regularly or irregularly occurs on strong or weak beats. Teaching rhythm is, in essence, teaching the pulse and feel of a piece of music. The mentality of the musician is important for effectively teaching rhythm. The ensemble must feel the internal pulse with certain physicality. When students play whole notes they should be thinking eighth notes to solve the common problem of rushing. Students should think of rests as “silent notes” and therefore students’ minds should think of subdividing the rests also. (Pearson, 18) This idea of feeling the pulse throughout playing could prove beneficial to early musical development and build a great foundation for further pedagogical growth. Counting rhythms is important but counting and clapping rhythms is more helpful to good rhythmic execution and development. (Pearson, 18) Counting system can be useful tools for introducing rhythms to students and developing rhythmic literacy.

The most widely used rhythm syllable systems include the French Time-Names system, the ideas of Dalcroze, KodaIy, the "l-e-&-a" or Vander Cook system, the Eastman system, and the "Takadimi" system. One of the earliest known systems for rhythmic training was developed in the early nineteenth century and was called the French Time-Names system or the Galin-Paris-Cheve system. In this approach, notes are counted using a French word for duration regardless of the meter. "Noir" (black) is said for each quarter note, two eighth-notes are "cro-che" (eighth-note), a half·note is "bla-anch" (white), and four sixteenth notes are counted "dou-ble cro-che" (double eighth-note). (Fust, 7) Any simple rhythm can be verbally counted fluidly under this system. Lowell Mason adapted the French Time-Name system for the united states by replacing the French names of notes with a system that identified the value of each note within a meter and the measure. It would count four quarter notes as "ta-ta-te-te," a group of two eighth-notes would become "ta-fa," and a group of four sixteenth notes would be chanted "te-ze-fe-ne." Whole notes are counted by holding out the syllable "ta" for four counts, and then changing the syllable to "e" for the last two counts. In triple meter, quarter notes are counted "ta-ta-te," and six eighth-notes are "ta-te-ta-ta-ta-te."(Fust, 8) This system was revolutionary and lead to many other systems making syllables in an American yet universal way. This system is easier to teach to students and can be taught for educational value to older students who are interested in learning music’s history.

Dalcroze influenced the music world in Switzerland with an approach that he called eurhythmics, a system of teaching music using dance, movement and rhythmic training. He offered no standardized system of counting rhythms with syllables; instead he preferred using mnemonic words. As an example, "run-ning" would be used for two eighth-notes in simple duple meter, and “gal-Iop-ing" for three eighth-notes in compound duple meter, like 6/8. (Fust, 10) This approach to teaching rhythm would be very effective for beginning instruction. Mnemonic devices such as “Hotdog” for eighth-notes, “lollipop” for triplets, and “Mississippi” for sixteenth-notes, have the power to interest students because they are relatable. The young students learning from mnemonic instruction may retain information if it is something that they already know and can connect with music.

Once students have a fundamental understanding or rhythm and how it works from mnemonic devices, the educator could move to a more complex system that has syllables that can be used for subdividing and maintain a uniformity that might not necessarily exist within mnemonics. Systems that are worth stating are the Eastman, the Takadimi, vander cook, Kodaly, and the BRIM system. The Eastman counting system gives all notes on the beat a beat number. The up-beats are on “…te”, the triplets are “…la, li”, and the sixteenths are “…ti, te, ta”. All other note values of further subdivision are on the syllable “ta”. (Smith) This system builds on a basic articulation for duple meters and would be a good option for students to use when speaking rhythms. The Vander cook or “1-e-&-a” system, evolved as a result of the rise of instrumental music in American public schools at the end of the nineteenth century, and is similar to the Eastman approach only more Americanized. A note that begins on the beat is called by the number of the beat and the note that begins halfway between two beats is called “&” (pronounced and). The notes that begin on the second and fourth quarter of the beat are called “E.” (pronounced ee) and “A.” (pronounced uh). As for the notes that begin on the second third and third third of the beat or a division of the beat are called “trip-“ and “let.” Sextuplets are counted as two groups of three, not three groups of two (1 trip-let & trip-let, etc.) and quintuplets are counted as one group of five (1 quin-tu-pl-et 2 quin-tu-pl-et etc.). This system is a mathematical approach to the syllables and works very well as the mainstream counting system in the United states currently. This could easily be used in beginning rhythmic study because it uses the basic vowels of the English language as the syllables. Young students can relate to these and also continue to use this system by maintaining the integrity of the syllable to subdivision relationship without feeling foolish by using mnemonics.

 The Takadimi system links the Eastman and Vander cook systems together by assigning rhythmic syllables to every single subdivision of the beat.  It assigns a distinct syllable for each attack point within a beat.  The beat is always spoken on ta and the division of the beat is always spoken on ta - di or in compound meter on ta - ki - da . The second division (or subdivision) is always spoken with ta - ka - di - mi in simple meter and ta - va - ki - di - da - ma in compound. Every time a students has to make a response happen on their instrument there will be a syllable assigned to that note.(Hoffman) Students would need to take more time to learn this system because of the extensive syllables but in the end they could be more flexible in verbalizing rhythm. In the Kodaly system all quarter notes are counted as "ta," all eighth-notes are counted as "ti," further subdivisions of an eighth-note are labeled as "ri," triplets are counted as ''tri-o-Ia,'' and an eighth-quarter-eighth pattern is counted as "syn-co-pa. This system was developed before the Takadimi system but is more international in the fact that it is simple to learn and serves its purpose.

It is clear that there are many rhythm syllable systems for music educators to choose from, based on their teaching philosophy. Each approach is different yet accomplishes the same main goal: teaching rhythm. (Fust, 17) One system out of them all stuck out because it heavily focused on the feel and pulse of the music being verbalized and that is the BRIM system. Rather than using the widely known Vander cook system, BRIM uses breath impulses, footbeat, and verbal counting to aid in rhythmic understanding. It is less ambiguous and is similar to actual articulations on the instrument. Two equal notes are verbalized as “1 te” (one tay) and three subdivisions are verbalized as “1 la le” (one lah lee). Four subdivisions are verbalized as “1 ti te ta” ( one tee tay tah)and six notes are “1 ta la ta li ta” ( one tah lah tah lee tah).(Hodgecoth, 11) The BRIM technique which includes a precise footbeat pattern, gives maximum amount of body activity in the physical response to musical pulse. Yet this maximum physical response is easily accommodated in a sitting position, fully usable in classroom or studio without hindering counting or performing practice in any manner, whether the student is practicing alone or with a group.(Hodgecoth, 13) The idea of holding out a holding via rhythmic solfege under the BRIM system is to verbalize the breath impulse. The student would say “1” and on every eighth-note, subdivision preceding the first downbeat, they would impulse “-uh-uh-uhn”. For a ¾ measure with a quarter note and a half note the system would called for “1-uh, 2-oo-oo-oo” to be verbalized. That way the student feels the eighth-note subdivision and feels less inclined to rush passages that students in any other counting system would. To genuinely understand a rhythm pattern, students must perform the rhythm while simultaneously keeping a consistent pulse somewhere else in their body. The biggest benefit to this strategy is that students are counting while they perform through long or dotted notes and rests, which is the most important time to count.  Students will find it easier to “count in their head” (and they will beg their teachers to let them do this) because in truth, they temporarily stop counting during the toughest rhythms; instead, they should count out loud, especially when the rhythms are difficult. (Shelby) The BRIM counting system keeps the student engaged with the body and can help wind and string musicians to become as rhythmically accurate as the percussionist.

Above all experience should precede theory. Learning involves moving from something concrete like sound to something abstract like notation. Regardless of what system of counting an educator uses it needs to be functional and move from sound to symbol.(Montgomery, 10) Once students have learned the counting systems and know how to read the rhythm, the process of learning how to recite rhythms is the difficult part. If the educator used an effective counting system then they should not have very many problems in the older students. Because many rhythm problems are actually technique and facility problems, students need to practice slowly and learn muscle memory to get the correct patterns in their hands.

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