

GETTING A TURN IN MUSIC CLASS

"But, Teacher, I didn't get a turn yet!" Hearing this impassioned plea from a child does tug at our heartstrings. Our response to this cry and the situation can range from sympathy to irritation. How can we solve the "getting a turn" problems in our classes?

In an effort to be fair in giving turns, some teachers have devised elaborate systems for keeping track of who has and has not had a turn in each class. While this may improve equity in "getting a turn," it can also impede spontaneity in the teaching/learning process. Perhaps the remedy lies in how turns are presented to the participating students.

Based on my observations of my own and others' teaching I have drawn some conclusions about how "turns" can be treated in the classroom. These conclusions more closely address the long-term establishment and maintenance of environments for learning and group cooperation rather than the short-term management of a particular class. Although these points are meant only as suggestions, implementation of them in the classroom may necessitate "re-tooling" of the concept of turns - both for the teacher and for the students.

Suggestions:

1. Try to minimize using "turns" as rewards and/or enticements to "behave."
2. Broaden the scope of "turn" to include all the roles of an activity in addition to the person who is "it."
3. Think of a turn as a specific "job" for the student to do. Comfort, security and focus can come with this specificity.

In the game "musical chairs," the students who most need practice in the auditory-motor coordination necessary to success in the game are the first ones eliminated. A potentially similar condition exists when turns are reserved for those who have shown that they "deserve" them.

Broadening the scope and specifying the "job" of a turn can best be explained by describing

the types of turns available in Education Through Music activities.

Types of Turns:

In considering the various types of turns present in ETM activities, eight categories seem to be most apparent. This list is by no means definitive. It is presented here simply as a means to analyze and organize activities for our students.

1. Singing Turns - as a whole class, small groups, partners or solo. Gives the child the opportunity to sing the whole song, antiphon, echo or explore his singing voice. The task focus is singing.
2. Talking Turns - as a whole class, small groups, partners or solo. Gives the child the opportunity to offer an idea, describe what he thinks, explore his speaking voice, ask questions, or make suggestions. The task focus is on talking.
3. Listening Turns - as a whole class, small groups, or solo. Gives the child the opportunity to "checkout" his perceptions of the song, a phrase, a rhythm pattern, a larger piece or others' voices. The task focus is simply on listening.
4. Watching Turns - as a whole class, small groups, partners or solo. Gives the child the opportunity to observe the "working" of one part of the whole sequence of an activity. Can help a child who is having trouble making a game "work" by allowing him to observe the class play the game. The task focus is in watching.
5. Leading Turns - usually individuals. Gives the child the opportunity for offering an idea, showing/telling the group the idea, leading the group in "performing" an idea or game. The task focus is on leading.
6. Following Turns - as a whole class, small groups, partners or individuals. Gives the child the opportunity to imitate verbally, visually/graphically, and/or kinesthetically. The task focus is on following.
7. Song Starter Turns - usually individuals. Gives the child the opportunity to prepare and begin the song for the group. The task focus is on starting a song.
8. Game Starter Turns - usually individuals (can be partners or small groups). Gives the child the opportunity to prepare and begin the group in the playing of a game. The task focus is on starting the game.

Summary:

By asking a child to take a specific type of turn, we let a child know specifically what is being asked of him. Labelling the kind of turn it will be, helps focus and instruct the child on his "job." Seeing the label of a turn as an aid to participation could be compared to an adult being asked to serve as an officer of a group without knowing the responsibilities of that position.

Statements such as -

"Today we only have time for 4 playing turns of Circle Left";

"Charlie, I'd like you to take 3 watching turns from my chair to tell us what you observe as we play the game";

"Who will be the song-starter for Jessica's turn to start the game?";

"You get 2 listening turns before I ask you to antiphon certain words of this song. Are you ready?";

"Robert, I don't know whether or not you were able to notice, but there were students who worked very hard at their following turns. Why don't you take one more leading turn so you can watch us follow you?";

"We'll only have 3 more playing turns today for this game. Let's see who the song will choose."

- can help your students value various kinds of turns and the "jobs" they require. Children's rising to the occasion for particular turns and realizing that they may be more suited for some turns than for others is not unlike the life situations they will ultimately face as children, adolescents and adults.

From ETM Newsletter, Vol. 3,
No. 1, Fall 1985.