Welcome to Activate! magazine, a resource for elementary general music teachers. Whether you are a former subscriber or brand new to our magazine, we are excited to share a sample of Activate! with you. We know there are other magazines out there for elementary music educators, but Activate! is different.

What sets Activate! apart?

Reliable
All the lessons in Activate! are written by music teachers. Every lesson has been tested in the classroom and nothing goes to print unless we are confident the lesson can be repeated successfully in a variety of classrooms. Our team of educators shares their best lesson plans with you in order to inspire you to try new lessons, but also to adopt new strategies.

Eclectic
Our lessons focus on five strands of music-making: sing, play, read, move, and create. Some lessons include elements of each of those strands while others focus on just one or two. Some lessons follow a single philosophy while others blend approaches. Taken together, each issue’s lessons meet all eleven of the National Core Arts Standards and cover every grade level.

Thematic
Each issue of Activate! has a set of themes: seasonal, instrumental, music masters, world culture, and musicianship. The material in this sampler is mostly from our recent jazz issue (February/March 2019.) Here is an overview of our plans for the 2019-2020 school year:

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Thorough
Each lesson includes everything you need to teach it tomorrow. Lessons are laid out sequentially and all elements you need are available at ActivateOnline, a password-protected website that includes downloadable content and internet links. Downloads might include assessments, manipulatives, worksheets, or rubrics while the links will take you to webpages, videos, or recordings. (See page 40 for the Sampler’s password.)

Thoughtful
In addition to about twenty lesson plans, each issue also includes articles intended to inspire you to be the best music teacher you can be as well as activities to fill your Sub Tub, worksheets to support your curriculum, a Family Connections page, monthly calendars, suggestions for incorporating children’s literature, technology tips, and more.

Activate! is growing and adapting to the ever-changing world of elementary music education. We hope you will enjoy this sampler of the magazine and that you will be inspired to join our community.

Mari Schay
Activate Asks:
How do you keep track of all the kids you see: names, seating charts, assessments, grades, parent communication, materials, and everything else that goes with organizing hundreds of kids?

There is so much to track, so I let the kids and technology help me. When it comes to grades and seating charts, I use the app Teacherkit, a free app. I can input student names and pictures, then arrange them in any order I need. I can screenshot these and print them out for the sub binder. It allows me to build my gradebook with my rubrics and percentages, and I never mix up a student’s name because their pictures are in there, too.

For every-day organization in the classroom, I let the kids run the app. I list one student each class to take attendance with the Teacherkit app, as well as taking photos for social media and Seesaw. I upload them when there’s time. This student also passes out papers and materials, makes decisions such as who is ready to line up, is the tie breaker if we are split on a decision, and is the go-to person in class. Kids love the responsibility and it keeps some of them on task when otherwise they might look for distractions.

When it comes to parent communication, I have found Seesaw to be the best app for my situation. Parents can see the work we do in class, view the feedback I post on their work, and add their own feedback. I can send direct announcements to them as well. It’s a fabulous communication tool, and helps remind students that parents are involved in the learning process as well.

Abigail Blair

I have SitSpots in a circle and every student has an assigned spot. I use the spots to help with classroom management as well as lining up. My spot faces the door so the children must face me (preventing them from noticing any possible hallway distractions). In the last few minutes of class, I call out “circle spots” and all children stand on their assigned spot. The child in the circle-spot closest to the door will always be the line leader. That child turns to face the doorway and the rest follow in single-file line. In my class, #15 is always the leader and #16 is always the caboose. The children step from sit-spot to sit-spot in numerical order as they exit after they echo sing, “Z you later, Mrs. Zehler. Z you next week.” No one cuts the line or races to be first.

Debbie Zehler

Our computer teacher compiled school pictures from our online portal and made a page of pictures for each class. I use this to help me with names frequently. To keep track of student participation, I have a sheet with all the names in a class and then all of the dates that I will see that class that grading period. While the students are lining up or transitioning, I mark their participation using the district participation rubric. This provides me data on their participation that I can easily use when I need to fill out report cards..

Megan Bricks,
Activate reader
Our school mascot is the bulldog, so I have SitSpot paws on the floor. Each student in each class has an assigned spot. There are five each of six different colors to indicate small groups. They are labeled 1–30 to help kids remember their spots, but also to allow me to pick random numbers to answer questions or perform tasks. They are also labeled A or B to create instant partners. The paws face counter-clockwise to indicate the direction to move in circle activities as well as the direction to pass instruments or other materials. I can just say “dog paw direction” and even my preschoolers know which way to go.

Before school starts, I import each class list into Google Sheets. I use it for any data tracking I need to do. Assessment scores go to the right of each name while non-grading details—seating assignments, recorder numbers, parent communication info, or instruments assignments—go to the left of the student’s name.

I use one mini bulletin board on my music stand for each class. I write the students’ names on pieces of note cards and use push pins. It is a lot of work up front, but it makes adjusting the chart much easier throughout the year and allows for on-the-spot changes during class too.

My daily go-to is a notebook on my podium where I can jot down notes during class. I note absences, students who are having issues, and students who can perform the activities. Then it’s quite easy to flip through the notebook and post grades. For upper grade students, I also keep a separate paper for each class, marking down their grade for written and group activities that are then posted, with comments, in our online grade book, Infinite Campus (IC). I can contact parents through the IC message system, as well as by email and phone as appropriate.

I have daily folders with rosters and seating charts on the podium, as well. Depending on the assessed activity, I will use a check list on the roster. It is helpful to learn new classes by printing out a seating chart with photos from IC. I like to leave a seating chart and pictures for subs.

I love the app iDoceo. It is easy to transfer class rosters by saving them as a PDF and importing them onto an iPad. I can take attendance and create new columns to keep track of all sorts of things, not only grades.

Do you have some strategies we missed? Got a question for our panel?

Post them to our Activate Magazine Facebook group and we may include them in another issue.
Close the Garden Gate

A Name Game with a Twist

Deborah A. Zehler
Heritage Heights Elementary School: Amherst, New York

**Primary Focus:** Sing  
**Secondary Focus:** Play  
**Structural Approach:** Orff-Schulwerk  
**Core Arts Standards:** 4, 5, 6, 11  
**Grades:** 1–5  
**Instruments:** Glockenspiels, Xylophones, and Metallophones, Egg Shakers and Rhythm Sticks (optional)  
**Materials:** SitSpots or other place markers  

**Objectives**  
Students will….  
- Sing a simple song in unison.  
- Build musical vocabulary: steady beat, ostinato, color-part, glissando, bordun, half-note.  
- Play basic rhythms and patterns on barred instruments.  
- Learn each other’s names.

**During Your Prep**  
**Arrange** SitSpots or other markers in a circle. You will need one marker for each student in your largest class, plus an additional marker.  
**Print** class lists to help learn names and to place students alphabetically, if desired.  
**Practice** singing the song while playing each part at the same time for demonstration purposes.
I like starting the year with a name game for two reasons. It helps me put a face with a name—especially since the children have grown some over the summer—and the children get to review names of both old and new friends. As the game is played, children get to leave their circle spot and choose a new spot in the circle, making me really focus on learning who is who.

Lesson Sequence

Phase 1: Play the game and learn the song

1. Invite the students to the circle alphabetically, by assigned spots, or randomly—whatever works best for your situation and helps you put names with faces. (I place children in alphabetical order unless I identify children who would be more successful if they were separated for optimal learning.)

2. Stand in the middle of the circle while the class pats the half-note pulse. Sing the song, pointing to one child per half-note, starting with the child on spot #1 and continuing around the circle.

3. The child named in the first phrase sits on the spot they were standing on. They are out of the game. The child in the second phrase moves to any open spot. This is the fun part. If you have 25 SitSpots and 18 children in the class, this offers a lot of choices. Upper-grade children strategically choose their new spots to give themselves an advantage or to knock out a friend.

4. Repeat the song, starting with the next child in numerical order who is still standing. The last child standing is the winner.

Looking for a way to keep kids engaged when they get out? Put a basket of unpitched percussion in the middle of the circle. When a child gets out, they can choose an instrument and maintain the steady beat while they sing with you. Choose instruments with quieter sounds like egg shakers and rhythm sticks so they don’t cover up the singing.
Phase 2: Add instruments

During this phase of the lesson, you will begin teaching the parts using body percussion, then transfer the rhythms to the instruments. You may also choose to define the following terms: half-note, ostinato, color-part, glissando, bordun, and steady beat.

1. Review the song with the students to make sure they know it well without the game.

2. Introduce the glockenspiel part first with a snap at the end of measures four and eight while singing. Display and name the glissando symbol and demonstrate how to play a glissando with descending motion on a glockenspiel beginning on the high A. Transfer a few students to glockenspiels and add the part to the song.

TAKE NOTE
Use your left hand for a descending glissando and your right hand for an ascending glissando. This results in dragging the mallet rather than pushing it and will prevent the mallet from catching on a bar. This arrangement uses a descending glissando from high A to low C, so use your left hand.

3. Instruct the children to step the half-note pulse, staying in personal space while singing the song. Transfer several students to bass xylophones and bass metallophones playing a bordun on low C and low G. You can double this with a C contra-bass bar if you have one.

4. Teach the melodic ostinato by patting: right-left, right-right-left. (Make sure to mirror your students if you are facing them.) Challenge the students to continue patting the pattern as you (the teacher) either sing or play the melody. Transfer several students to soprano and alto xylophones playing G-E, G-G-E.

5. Have a small group of students perform the instrumental accompaniment while the rest of the class plays the game. Rotate students between the game and the instrumental parts.
Phase 3: Add a more challenging accompaniment

This phase is for your upper grade students who are ready for a more challenging accompaniment. Again, your students will be most successful if you prepare them by using body percussion. Add whichever parts you think your students can manage.

Prepare the parts as follows:

**Soprano/Alto Xylophone**
Play the part for the students several times, then encourage them to pat the rhythm of the first three bars and clap the syncopated rhythm of the fourth measure.

**Soprano/Alto Glockenspiel**
This part is a variation of the part the students already know. Encourage the students to start the eighth-notes with their left hand so they can get from A back to G comfortably.

**Bass Xylophone/Bass Metallophone**
Walk like a robot for six half-notes, then step the “syn-co-pa” rhythm. As they step the rhythm, have the students say “1-2-3-4-5-6 syn-co-pa” as you sing or play the melody.

Look into each child’s eyes at least once throughout every class. You might be the only one who touches their heart today. My son, Luke, said, “Mama, you are the only teacher who lets kids be kids.” —Debbie Zehler

Contact Debbie at Debbie.Activate@gmail.com.
Roll the Dice
A Music-reading Game

Paul Corbière
Tiffin Elementary: Tiffin, IA

Primary Focus: Read, Create
Secondary Focus: Play

Structural Approach: Eclectic
Core Arts Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Grades: K–5

Instruments: Unpitched percussion, Barred Percussion, Recorders (all optional)
Materials: Dice (one for each team), Paper and pencils

ActivateOnline: Game Cards (Beginning Rhythms, Intermediate Rhythms, C to G Melody, BAG Melody)

Objectives
Students will…
- Read, create, and perform rhythmic and melodic phrases using known elements.

During Your Prep
Download and print Game Cards or create your own.

This game provides an opportunity for your kids to review and practice rhythmic or melodic elements they already know. Rolling a die provides a game-like atmosphere and your kids will willingly practice the same patterns over and over without any complaint. The game can be as simple or challenging as you make it, so it is flexible for multiple grades, multiple skills, and multiple instruments.
Lesson Sequence

This sequence uses the Beginning Rhythms Game Cards. There are additional sets for Intermediate Rhythms, C to G Melody, and BAG Melody.

Phase 1: Whole-class lesson

Prepare

1. Display the Game Cards: Beginning Rhythms.
2. Practice each rhythm pattern to be sure entire class can easily read these patterns.

Round one

1. Choose a student to roll the die.
2. Perform the pattern corresponding to the number rolled.
3. Repeat several times so students understand how to play the game.

Round two

1. As each pattern is chosen, have students write out each pattern. (Alternatively, print a set of the Game Cards for each student and let them place the measures in order.)
2. Repeat three more times to create a four-measure phrase.
3. Perform by speaking the phrase.

Extensions

- Classroom instruments: Have the students play the rhythms on unpitched percussion instruments. If using drums, be sure to notate the high/low pattern so that all students are playing in unison.
- Timbres: Divide the class into six groups, each of which has a different timbre. Only the group represented by the number on the die plays the notated rhythm.
• Call-and-response: Give all students instruments (any variety). Roll the die to choose the response pattern. Students will take turns improvising a one-measure call, then the class will respond in unison with the response indicated by the die.

• Math: Tally how many times each rhythm pattern is chosen. See if the class can predict the next pattern to be rolled based on probability.

**Phase 2: Small-group game**

**Prepare**

1. Divide the class into groups of two to four students. Give each group one die.

2. Display rhythm patterns appropriate for the class or grade level, numbered one through six.

**Play**

1. Each group will create a four-measure pattern by using the dice to determine which patterns are used in its phrase. If a die is rolled more than once, the same rhythm will appear more than once.

2. The group should write out its phrase (on paper, white board, or using pre-printed rhythm strips).

   **Tech-savvy types will have a SmartBoard ready with patterns for students to touch and drag into a 4-, 8- or 16-measure phrases. Small dry-erase boards can be used, too. Old school like me? Paper and pencil it!**

3. Monitor the groups as they notate and practice their rhythms. They should be able to play it four times in a row without stopping or making mistakes.

4. Once all the groups are finished creating their phrases, you can:
   - Have each group nominate a member of their group to teach the group’s phrase to the rest of the class. The class can echo the student-teacher with speech, drums, or some other strategy with which your students are familiar.
   - Combine all the phrases together for the whole class to perform. These can be done in unison or you can divide the class into six groups and assign each a number and corresponding rhythm. Each group will only play when their assigned measure comes up in the phrase.
   - Rinse…repeat (as always!!)

   **TAKE NOTE**

   It could be fun to encourage a little showmanship if you want to go there.
Extension: Quick Rhythm Trip

- Create rhythm zones around your room, half as many zones as students in the class. (If you have 24 students, you will have 12 stations.) Each zone will need a rhythm pattern, a pair of instruments (two tambourines, two triangles, etc.), and a die.

- Divide the class into groups of 2 (or 3 if you have an odd number of students) and send each to a station.

- Set a timer so that each round is two minutes (or however long you think your students will need). Partners work together to learn their rhythm pattern. (You may want to do this with clapping and counting only to limit noise and maintain focus.)

- When the timer goes off, each group will roll their die and perform their rhythm pattern for the class, repeating it according to their roll of the die.

- Rotate groups to a new station and play again.

Phase 3: Melodic patterns (upper grades)

1. Divide the class into groups of two to four students. Each group will need a die and at least two melodic instruments (xylophone, metallophone, glockenspiels, steel pans, recorders, ukuleles, etc.). Supplement these with unpitched instruments if you don’t have enough melodic instruments. The unpitched instruments can either play a steady beat to create a timeline or can double the rhythm of the melody.

2. Create and display 6 one-measure melodic patterns appropriate for your students’ skill and knowledge and for the instruments chosen.

3. Choose one of the game variations above and play!

Ultimately, your students are moving toward creating melodic phrases. They can expand those into four- or even eight-measure melodic lines. Once they can create these melodies, they can create songs. Remember that repeating melodic patterns within the melody helps to solidify a melody’s ability to be performed, memorized, and hopefully, become a “catchy tune.”

Tools to Check Understanding

Create a rubric with or for your class that corresponds with your learning targets with elements such as rhythmic accuracy, technique, or proper tone production (especially if you are working with older students who employ a high/low pattern for each used rhythm). The rubric can be used by groups as they are composing and rehearsing or for groups to evaluate each other’s performances.

Choose some of the projects to be performed at a concert later in the year. It’s a great way to showcase the creativity that occurs in a general music classroom.

Create a movie of students playing the game and creating their projects, then show it while parents are waiting for their children’s concert to start. Usually parents show up early so they can watch the projects. If you still print a program, include info about what they are watching and the skills/core standards, etc. that the students are demonstrating. When you start your program, review with the audience what they have just seen. These are also great things for the Seesaw app.

Contact Paul at musithang@mchsi.com.
This Is Who the Kids Need Me to Be

Lessons from a Second-Year Teacher

Russ Kleiner
Ventura Park Elementary: Portland, OR

All of my wisdom came, From all the toughest days. I never learned a thing being happy. All of my suffering and pain, I didn't appreciate it. I never learned a thing being happy.
The Wood Brothers

I love our kids and the greater school community. I am honored and humbled to have the gig I do. This is my second year teaching at a Title 1 school in Portland, Oregon, in which the majority of our 500 students receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch. 60% of students at our school are people of color, and we have two dozen different home languages spoken. Last year, I inherited a group of intermediate students who were infamously challenging behaviorally. Veteran teachers told me stories. I could not believe and made it very clear that it would be an uphill battle. And it was. Ohhhhh boy, was it! I won't get into details, because we all have our own stories, our own struggles, our own kids who have seen too much and who are going through too much. Their trauma, and even sometimes ours, is a real thing.

I'm not here to complain. I am here to be accountable. Because I expect my students to do the same. I am here to be vulnerable. Because modeling vulnerability is crucial and because it breaks my heart to see what a colleague described as “ten-year-olds doing everything possible to avoid feeling their feelings.” I am here to share some of the big lessons I learned during year one, and the subsequent actions I attempted to better myself as a teacher and a human, on behalf of the kids. Self-care is a big part of this. Early on, I failed miserably to recognize this and to act on it. I'm learning to reframe “self-care” as “Who do the kids need me to be?”

Lesson One: Sleep

Sleep? I did not (well, barely). I often stayed up late revising lesson plans or scrapping them altogether. I obsessed over tiny things that I now know were inconsequential. I didn't allow my brain or body the crucial wind-down time it needed. Thoughts of the day lingered in my head:

Am I really cut out for this? What was I thinking?
What if the lesson I've planned is crap?
When 'those kids' inevitably disrupt and sabotage, what is my plan?
How do I reach my quiet kiddos?
Am I causing students to hate music class?
Which kids and teachers do I need to check in with?
What if someone walks in and realizes that I'm a fraud?
It's 1 A.M. WHY. AM. I. STILL. NOT. SLEEPING? 2:30 A.M., 3:15 A.M…..

Everyone loses when you don't sleep. You lose because your chances of being anxious or reactionary greatly increase, while your stamina, confidence, and ability to problem solve decrease significantly. Sleep deprivation perpetuates unhealthy thoughts and leads to resignation. More importantly, the kids lose because their teacher, despite best intentions, exists in a world of fog,
doubt, and grumpiness, unable to change direction if need be, lacking the ability to be as empathetic as possible, to truly listen. What good is a meticulously planned, creative lesson, if you can’t teach it with confidence and joy? I’m embarrassed to admit the frequency with which I attempted to teach while feeling delirious or caffeine-crazed. An educator cannot function in such states and should not try.

I am prioritizing sleep more than ever before, really making an effort to tire the body and calm the mind. I’m cutting off coffee intake at 1 P.M., substituting my 5 P.M. (and at home, of course) adult beverage and short walk for an intense physical workout. I’m trying to read more, stretch more, breath more, just be more. Most importantly, I’ve set a cut-off time for school-work: granted, 9:30 P.M. is still probably too late to work, but it’s a step in the right direction.

I still have a long way to go, but it’s incredible how much a few extra hours of sleep have helped. Most of the questions I obsessed over in the middle of the night last year could not be solved in a day, or maybe even a year, and they certainly couldn’t be solved at two in the morning. Thinking of potential solutions, or at least a temporary plan of action, is so much easier with a hot cup of joe and a well-rested mind. When I sleep, I am a better person: a more patient, cool-headed, happier person. I am a better listener and a more empathetic soul, which automatically makes me a better teacher.

Lesson Two: Failure

When you are in tears; when you feel like you’ve been a disservice to kids; when you’ve possibly added trauma to their day with your inability to manage—it’s easy to feel like you are failing. And frankly, that first half-year, I was (especially with the older kids). But the word “failure” can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, as I quickly found out.

To make it worse, I am a certified professional self-deprecator and perhaps an over-apologist as well. Sorry about that. In conversations with teachers, mentors, family, and friends, I started to realize how much I used the word fail. “I failed to give so and so this opportunity. I failed to reach or reach out to so and so.” Even in evaluating my professional goals, I wrote the word failed a surprising number of times. A few negatives in the day, and the day was a failure. I was a failure.

A song by one of my favorite artists, Hanne Hukkelberg contains the lyric, “Do now as I say, darling, not as I do.” I often thought about these lyrics as I stressed to kids the importance of taking chances, making mistakes, and learning from them. I worked hard (and still do) to create a classroom culture where kids knew that they would be supported, that by working hard and working together, they would not fail because I would not let them fail. Geez. How hypocritical was I?

I know it sounds trite, but shifting mindsets from I’ve failed to I’ve learned to has been transformational for me. Doing so was incredibly difficult, but all too necessary. I’ve failed to is not actionable, and quite honestly it verges on selfishness because it does nothing to improve kids’ lives. In contrast, I’ve learned to is completely actionable, so long as it is followed up by and now I will....

Of equal importance is recognizing the positive aspects of your day. A close friend and mentor once asked me to write down a few “wins” each day. Upon reflection, there were quite a few, even in my first year as an educator. I just chose to dwell on what was going wrong instead of what was going right. Fortunately (and with great effort of course), this year the scale has tipped dramatically toward the positives, toward the “wins.” I am trying to cherish and internalize these moments. Doing so provides encouragement and gives perspective during more challenging times. Taking action on behalf of the young minds you serve feels great. Beating yourself up, it turns out, not so much. (Who knew?)

It gets better: but only if you own it, reflect, and work hard to change!