

# Rhythmically Competent Students and Pin-Drop Quiet Classrooms: The Vital Connection

A Clinic by **David Newell**

## “HOW’S THIS GO?”

- This might very well be the most annoying question music teachers ever hear.
- Students who ask this question simply do not UNDERSTAND rhythm theory.
- There is a hard way to teach rhythm, and there is an easy way.
- The easy way requires that teachers **Think Outside the Box**.
  - The four-sided rhythm box that resides in students’ heads is 4/4 time.
  - 4/4 time is more harmful than we realize; it causes unnecessary confusion.
- Rhythmically competent students can solve their own rhythm problems.
  - They do not need their teachers’ help.
  - It never occurs to them to ask their teachers how something goes.

## RHYTHM: HOW CAN SOMETHING SO SIMPLE BE SO DIFFICULT TO TEACH?

- Our system of rhythmic notation is a perfect system.
  - It cannot be improved upon.
  - It is **the teaching** of rhythm that needs to be improved upon.
- Our system of rhythmic notation is based completely upon **The Whole Note**.
- The whole note does not have a default numerical value of 4 attached to it.
  - The whole note in music is like the X in algebra; it has a variable value.
  - Unfortunately, students unquestionably believe that whole notes are four counts.

## STUDENTS LEARN WHAT THEY DO, NOT WHAT WE TELL THEM.

- Telling is not teaching; *experience is the essence of education*.
- Students **MUST EXPERIENCE** whole notes with variable values before they hear us talk about them.
- Teaching rhythmic understanding by just **DOING IT**—minimal teacher talk!
- Once students can do something, then they can understand our explanations.

## A NEW DEFINITION OF THE BOTTOM NUMBERS OF SIMPLE TIME SIGNATURES

- Redefining the bottom number of simple time signatures solves many problems.
- The “all-important” one-count note is relatively unimportant in this day and age.
- The new definition enables students to know the values of all the notes in a piece.
- The youngest of students can now understand the meaning of the bottom number.

## TEACHING THE PERFORMANCE OF COMPOUND METER AS A UNIT OF STUDY

- The musical magic of Mother Goose.
- We don’t have to teach compound meter; students can already do it.

## TEACHING THE UNDERSTANDING OF COMPOUND METER

- Changing student perceptions from “**CONFUSING**” Meter to “**COMPOUND**” Meter.
- Teaching the understanding of Compound Meter—**the easy way**.
- The Family of **Dotted Notes** (dotted whole/dotted half/dotted quarter, etc.)
  - Inside every dotted note there live three notes.
  - Natural Triplets in Compound Meter—no #3 under or over notes required.
- Simply stated, if the dotted note gets the beat, the music is in compound meter.

## THE FOUR MAGIC WORDS AND WHAT THEY DO FOR THE REHEARSAL

- “Look at the rhythm.”
- Rhythmically competent students fix their own rhythm problems quickly.
  - Showing small groups of students “*how it goes*” takes a great deal more class time.
    - ✓ Often results in boring rehearsals
    - ✓ Bored students are one of the leading causes of **Classroom Management Problems**.

## THE EXPANSION OF TEACHING MUSICAL SKILLS AS UNITS OF STUDY

- Compound Meter Unit so successful, why not expand the concept to others?
- The exponential growth of “The Four Magic Words”
  - “Look at the key.” “Think about the style.” “Look at the dynamics.”
  - All require students to think instead of simply react.
- Interesting question: Are we *Music Teachers* or the *Teachers of Musical Skills*?
- No piece of music is handed out until students have mastered the skills required.

## PIN-DROP QUIET CLASSES AND REHEARSALS: THE VITAL CONNECTION

- Students are active and engaged from the time they enter the room until they leave.
  - Everyone participates in the daily Units of Study.
  - Rehearsals of the literature are fast-paced.
    - ✓ Quick stops to remind students to draw upon their already-mastered skills.
    - ✓ Four Magic Words force student to think and stay mentally active.
- Students have no time and no desire to misbehave.
- **Management Through Music—What could be better?**

