

Spotlight on Social Learning

May 2021: Teamwork Month

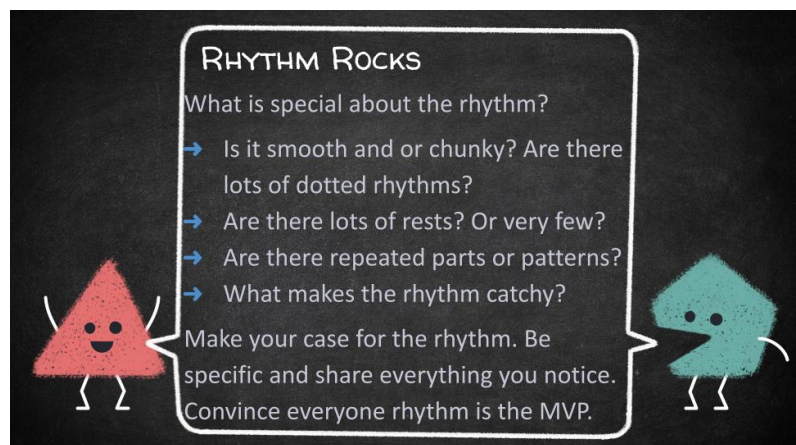
This month's Social Curriculum theme, *Teamwork*, is an incredibly powerful force in human society. Working as part of a team calls for patience, understanding, and flexibility, and it can be very challenging to the ego. Acting as a team also requires good communication skills, to coordinate tasks and develop shared goals. Teamwork can be incredibly rewarding, and teams can accomplish amazing things by working together that no individual could ever experience alone. Teamwork is an essential part of our ensemble-based learning structure, so deeply embedded in our programming that it can easily be taken for granted, but working together over Zoom has taught us to value the experience of working together more than ever. This month at Sistema Toronto we want our students to experience teamwork, and to learn some of the important skills it takes to be part of a team like inclusivity, sharing, collaboration, and participation.

Working together with others can be very motivating. Being part of a team means orienting our efforts to the needs of the group, and reaching beyond our own immediate wants and needs to consider how others can benefit from our work. A [recent study](#) found participants were more motivated, performed better, and found more enjoyment in a task simply because of the *idea* that they were part of a team¹. Feeling connected to others can push us to work harder and do better because we find meaning in this shared success.

Teamwork draws on an enormous range of social skills, and effective teams are as diverse as their members. [A 2012 study on effective collaborations in science research](#) found that the most common shared characteristics of effective teams were strong communication, a shared vision, trust among members, self-awareness in team leaders, a willingness to share credit, and the ability to promote disagreement while containing conflictⁱⁱ. Working together as a team, whether as part of a musical ensemble or as part of other structured learning activities, challenges students to develop and improve these skills that are so important in school and in the workplace.

Working online with our students has been massively disruptive to the most important teamwork we do at Sistema Toronto, playing and singing together. Social curriculum activities have been one of the key tools we have used to address the difficulties of rehearsing music remotely, and to find ways to continue to grow as musicians together. One of the important areas of focus in this has been working on our listening skills, the focus of our first activity for this month.

"Team Players" is a listening activity that divides the class into four teams, each representing a different aspect of the music: Melody, Rhythm, Lyrics, and Everything Else. Each team is challenged to listen for how their musical element contributes to the success of the song, and argue that theirs is the most MVP (most Musically Valuable Property) in the piece.







"Team Players", slide 4, Sistema Toronto 2021

Our second activity this month, “What’s in the Middle?” invites students to work together as a team to create a story. The class chooses the opening line of the story, the teacher chooses the final line, and the students take turns filling in the rest of the story one sentence at a time. This challenge appears simple on its face, but in order to successfully complete the story students need to work together as a team, paying attention to one another’s ideas, planning potential next moves, and adjusting their ideas based on the contributions of their classmates. Effective communication, listening, and planning ahead are all necessary for the team to be able to 2021develop a shared vision of how their story will flow logically and to make sense of the pre-determined ending.



“What’s in the Middle?”, slide 1, Sistema Toronto

Each group is going to work on one part of the body
Practice your part only, then get teach the class how to do it

			
Left Hand	Ears	Brain	Right Hand
Practice just the fingering and get ready to teach it to the rest of the class. You can say it out loud in rhythm or just one note at a time.	Get ready to play all the pitches for the class, one after the other. Listen for how the notes connect to one another, nice and slow.	How does the rhythm go? Will it help the rest of the class if you clap the beats and say the rhythm? Or say the rhythm in TAs and TITI?	Practice the bowing by itself. Will it help the class for you to say the bowing out loud? Or to all do it together in rhythm? Or to shadow bow?

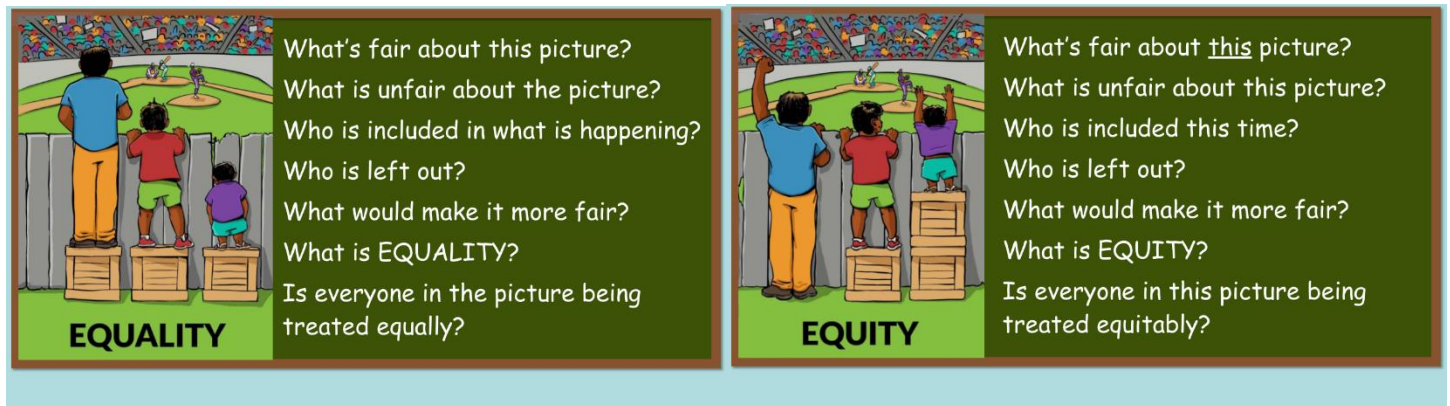
“Team of ONE”, slide 3, Sistema Toronto 2021

The third activity this month, “Team of ONE”, asks our students to consider how their own body works as a team when they play their instrument. The activity presents a simplified model of how the different parts of the body are responsible for different aspects of the music, and invites the students to work through each challenge separately before trying to put them together. Learning to coordinate the left side of the body, which is primarily responsible for pitch, and the right side of the body, primarily responsible for tone and articulation, with the eyes and the brain, is one of the fundamental challenges of playing a stringed instrument.

Teaching our students to break down this complicated coordination challenge into individual elements can help them become better and more efficient at solving musical problems, and help them build their body awareness and confidence.

One of the central aspects of teamwork is inclusion. For a team to be effective, its members must feel like they are all united by a common purpose, and they are all included in the activities and communications of the team. Feeling excluded, on the other hand, makes teamwork difficult or even impossible. Our final activity this month, “Who’s In?”, explores the importance of inclusivity through the lens of a now classic image about equity and equality.

Teams often compete with one another, but effective teams are supportive environments that make all their members feel included, and make sure that they are all able to contribute to the team’s success.



“Who’s In?”, slides 3 and 4, Sistema Toronto 2021

Teams can bring out the best and the worst in us. There may be no I in team, but everyone needs to learn how to work together with others, resolve conflicts, and recognize mutual goals and accomplishments. Learning to be comfortable as part of a team, and how to feel the joy of succeeding (or failing) together with others, is an important part of growing up. As our students grow into young adults and citizens, we want them to experience the joys and challenges of teamwork, so that someday they too can help someone feel included.

ⁱ Priyanka B. Carr, Gregory M. Walton, “Cues of working together fuel intrinsic motivation.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 53, 2014, Pages 169-184, ISSN 0022-1031, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.03.015>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103114000420?via%3Dihub>

ⁱⁱ Bennett, L Michelle, and Howard Gadlin. “Collaboration and team science: from theory to practice.” *Journal of investigative medicine : the official publication of the American Federation for Clinical Research* vol. 60,5 (2012): 768-75. doi:10.2310/JIM.0b013e318250871d, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3652225/>, accessed May 10, 2021