

THE SIX MAGIC PRINCIPLES

by Sharla Dance

"I've been asked to teach children's music, where do I go for help? What kinds of things should I do as the teacher?"

"I want to be successful and teach the children well. I don't want them to be bored. I want them to love music. What should I do?"

"I can't seem to get the children to be quiet as I teach. What is wrong?"

These are some of the questions and comments that come up over and over again as I work with teachers of children's music in workshops. Throughout this workshop, you will find teaching suggestions based on the Six Magic Principles listed below. Read them through and see if you can find how they are applied. I will be asking you to stop and write a few notes throughout the workshop that may help you remember how these things were applied.

1 The brain craves variety, yet needs repetition.

You've probably been in a classroom where the teacher presents different information in the same way, over and over again. Learning becomes a labor. You have to use all of your ability to focus to even hear what is being said. The brain bogs down and starts to shut down. The brain craves variety, but unfortunately, we need repetition to learn. How do we teach with both variety and repetition?

2 Every person's brain favors specific styles of learning.

Some people love reading maps, and others would much rather have their GPS systems talk them through to the address. While one person notices the colors and shapes in the world around them, another person might not even notice (or care) if their socks are the same color. Many engineers learn best when they make logical conclusions, work through puzzles, or use math approaches to solve a problem. In contrast, those in the communication field often need to discuss a problem out loud in order to wrap their heads around it. It appears that each human being takes in information differently,

using not just one, but several kinds of intelligences to learn. How do you teach using all different kinds of intelligences so that you can reach each child with their different learning styles?

3 As we learn, we need a flow of concentration followed by a change of pace in order to keep our energy level balanced.

Tension followed by relaxation, climax with a resolution, high concentration then taking a break... we can see examples of this principle in well written literature, in a physical workout, or in the waves of the sea. As we teach a child a song, our presentation also needs to have an up and down flow of concentration with a change of pace directly following a short period of high concentration. We teach using a focused, short-term learning activity, then switch to a completely different type of activity (usually with movement) to either re-energize or relax the body. What kinds of learning require high energy from the children? What are low level, re-energizing activities? How do you know what activities to put in the flow and where to put them as you teach the children?

4 **Line upon line, precept upon precept is a great way to learn.**

The brain needs exposure to a concept, then time to assimilate what was learned before taking in more of the concept. The brain learns best when we revisit the principle or song multiple times, each time taking in a different aspect of the whole. Have you watched one of your favorite movies more than once, noticing things you didn't see before the second or third time through the movie? Have you ever felt your eyes glaze over and your brain start to go numb when you were trying to learn something in a short amount of time? Children have somewhat the same reaction when we present all of a song in one setting. They don't retain well what they have learned with only one or two experiences with the song. Teaching small parts of the whole, with time in between to process, is a great way to teach a child a song. How do you emphasize a small part of the song and yet teach the whole song?

5 **Whole to part to whole gives the brain a great way to see the whole thing, narrow the view down to one of the details, then put that detail back in to the whole for "brain storage."**

When the child experiences the song as a whole, then focuses on one of the detailed parts of that song, he or she will remember the song much more clearly. The brain senses the complete experience, and has a place to "put" the details in the brain as it stores the song. Knowing that, how do you teach whole to part to whole?

6 **Each activity needs parameters.**

What is expected from me? What are the consequences? Am I going to have fun? Will I be safe? Children need "fences" in a class situation so that they can successfully function with one another and still learn. There are times for free exploration, but during a focused class activity is not usually one of those times. Because true learning for children often includes movement, the parameters need to be clear and address the need for safety. For instance, when I pass out Maori sticks, I immediately give the rules: 1. If you use this stick inappropriately, I take it immediately... no warnings given. (With older children, I don't even define appropriate. They already have a good idea.) 2. When I say "freeze," sticks go up in the air and freeze. I then show the movement and rhythm pattern and begin the activity. Children need parameters.

A teacher who is mindful of the six ideas above as he or she teaches gives a great gift to the children they teach. But, what does it look like to teach like that?

Is there a way to "see" a couple of examples using those principles? Take a "look" at the following presentations with your mind's eye.

SHARLA DANCE loves to teach children's music. She has published the book, *To Teach a Child a Song*, and has a Primary blog, TeachingPrimaryMusic.com

PRESENTATION 1

Older children are milling around in their seats and focused on their own little groups. The **teacher's words** are shown in **bold**.

TEACHER: **Hello friends! Here's the pattern!**

Teacher stamps twice, patsches¹ twice, claps twice, and snaps twice. The children one by one begin to join in the rhythmic actions until the whole class has the pattern. The teacher repeats the body pattern a couple of times, then sings the song to the beat as he continues the movement pattern.

TEACHER: **Will you be my partner?** A child comes up and faces the teacher. The teacher and child begin the movement pattern, and instead of snapping, change the snapping to a partner clap (they clap across to each other's hands). They complete the pattern twice, giving an example for the rest of the group, laughing as they work together. **Find a friend!** The other children choose partners. **Ready? Stamp, stamp, patsch, patsch, clap, clap, clap across.** The teacher continues to call out the pattern two more times for the children, doing the actions with his partner as he speaks. He then begins to sing the song as the children continue to move with their own partners to the beat of the song as they move in the partner pattern throughout the song. **Give a high five to your partner.** There is a ripple of laughter and interaction from the children.

TEACHER: **To your seats and look at the board. What does this code have to do with this song?** The children begin the move to their seats and some look up at the board. Teacher sings a different song and moves gently closer to a couple of children who are distracted. He motions for them to look up at the board as he continues to sing. The teacher moves slowly through the room making eye contact with the children and motioning for their eyes to go up to the board as he sings. Eventually all the children focus on the board as they hear the teacher sing.

TEACHER: **What does this code** (he points to the board) **have to do with this song?** One child holds up his hand. **John thinks he knows. Don't**

tell! Anybody else? The teacher continues to sing. A few more hands go up. **Okay, what's your idea, John?** John responds that he thinks the code on the board is the first letter from every word of the song put into a line for each sentence. **Yes! Which of these lines comes first in the song?** Several hands go up. The teacher begins to sing the song, then taps a child on the shoulder and hands the child a piece of chalk to go up to the board and write #1 by the first code line of the song. **Put a #1 by the first line.** (Note: the coded lines on the board are not in order.) **What's next?** The teacher taps another child on the shoulder and hands her some chalk to write #2 by the second line of the song. The teacher continues to sing and tap children on the shoulder to order the code lines according to the song. He continues until all the lines are numbered in order.

TEACHER: **Look at the board and sing the song using this code.** The children sing the song as the teacher points to each line on the board in order.)

TEACHER: (Immediately after finishing the song the teacher speaks.) **Here's a video clip.** The teacher turns on a video clip that has the sound turned off. He sings the third song as the images from the video flash across the screen. The children watch intently, not realizing they are hearing the song as they watch. The teacher turns off the video and bears testimony. The children are quietly listening to him. He finishes. **Thank you for singing with me!**

RECAP: The teacher focused the children with the first activity, then invited them into a contrasting high concentration activity for the second song. The third song was a change of pace which didn't require a lot of thought, yet used a different intelligence than either of the other two activities. Notice that this presentation was aimed at older children that already read well.

1. A patsch is a rhythmic hit with the palms of the hands on your thighs.

PRESENTATION 2

It is the day before summer vacation and the children seem to be excited and wound up. The chatter as they file in. The room is incredibly loud and animated. The **teacher's words** are shown in **bold**.

TEACHER: **Can your hands follow my hands?** The teacher shoots her hands above her head, then pulls them down by her knees. Most of the children begin to follow the teacher. The teacher swings her arms over her head and down to her hips. The children follow, with more of the group following her actions. The teacher continues to move her hands to different positions, looking at the children's eyes, gently playing them, and reacting to them as they follow her. Eventually the teacher settles into a rhythmic swing with her hands from right to left and back. As the children follow her, she begins to sing.

TEACHER: **Freeze! Are your hands pointed just like mine?** The children adjust their hands and giggle a little. The teacher begins to move in the swaying motion again as she sings the song and the children follow. TEACHER: **Freeze! Did your hands circle in a huge circle over your head just like mine?**

Again the children giggle, and the teacher sings and moves again with the children following her.

The song ends and the teacher immediately redirects their attention. TEACHER: **Look at the puzzle pieces on the board. There are three different puzzles. Can you help me put them together as I sing?**

The teacher sings a softer, slower song and touches two children on the shoulders to come up and chose a puzzle piece to move to the center of the board. After the children sit back down, the teacher taps two more children to come up and chose a puzzle piece (and decide which puzzle it belongs to.) All the while the teacher is singing. After they sit down, the teacher again taps two other children on the shoulder to come up. She continues tapping children and singing until the three different puzzles of three pieces each are put together.

TEACHER: **Put these three pictures on your inside chalkboard. I'm going to take one of them away in 5 seconds.** The teacher counts down. **Five, four, three,...** The teacher moves to the board and takes down one of the puzzles. TEACHER: **What color was the cloth in that picture? Was there an animal? What color of hair did the person have?** The children answer the questions. TEACHER: **I'm going to sing our song to give you time to memorize**

the next two pictures. She sings and points to different parts of the picture then to her head (a visual cue to the children to remember that part of the picture). The teacher takes away another puzzle.

TEACHER: **How many people were in this picture? Is there a rock in the picture?** The teacher stands in front of the other puzzle. The teacher continues to ask a few questions about both puzzles and receives their answers. TEACHER: **Let's sing the song together and remember each of those puzzle pictures as we sing.** She starts the children singing with her and points to the spot where each picture was.

Immediately after singing the teacher bears testimony and says, **Can your hands follow my hands?** She patsches 8 times on her legs as she begins to sing the next song, then taps her shoulders 8 times. She continues by tapping her head 8 times, then switching to her elbow to tap 8 times. The song finishes and the teacher suddenly holds her hands above her head, then brings them down to touch her toes. She then splits her hands with one going up, and one going down. The children follow silently and fascinated. The teacher sits down on a chair right in front and folds her arms. The children follow. TEACHER (whispering): **Thank you for singing with me.**

RECAP: The teacher focused the children with the first activity in a physical way, then invited them into a contrasting high concentration activity for the second song. The third song was a change of pace which didn't require a lot of thought, but released energy. It also was a contrast of rhythm with the other two songs. Notice that this presentation was aimed at younger children where movement in space and body placement is still a challenge.

Did you notice the Six Magic Principles woven into the fabric of these two presentations?

How did the presentations differ when they were directed toward older children, ages 8 to 11, or to younger children, ages 3 to 7?

What different learning styles or multiple intelligences were used to reach *each* of the children?