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## Music education for the whole child

Musical creativity and collaboration are just some of the skills that TIS music teacher Peter Musselman radiates throughout his program. When Peter came to TIS in 2010, he developed a curriculum that emphasizes the process of learning to play music from a variety of musical cultures as a way to establish group working skills and collaborative thinking.

“There is a major difference between learning the technical skills to play an instrument versus using the world of sound and story to foster creativity,” Peter says. “In elementary school, learning the art of being creative is just as important as learning techniques and theory of music. Improvisation and collaborative play give students a more personal connection to music, and help develop skills which apply to other areas of life.”

TIS parent Amy Swartz sees the impact of Peter’s approach on her fourth grader. “As an individual, my daughter has become much more aware of music in her life,” Swartz says. “She connects with music in public forums and performances, applying knowledge and understanding that she has gained in Peter’s class. She enjoys music on her own and likes to experiment, such as applying the rhythm of one song to the music of another.”

Peter is certified in Kodaly



and Orff-Schulwerk approaches which promote active involvement in music with a balance of emotional and intellectual stimulation. His methods incorporate speech, singing, movement and instrument playing in a creative environment. His classes are child-centered and inquiry-driven – a perfect match for the school’s International Baccalaureate philosophies.

For example, in first grade, students illustrate their version of “Rain, Rain, Go Away” by tapping out the rhythm of rain drops and floating around to different instruments like rain clouds. The lesson effectively combines creative movement and improvisation.

Second graders learn to improvise and notate their own music, working in groups to compose and share

melodies. They also identify and compare different types of rhythms in common rhymes or tongue twisters, sometimes in their track language. Once they understand the rhythms, the students improvise melodies to make the rhymes come alive.

Third Graders use their knowledge of the musical scale to play a piece with three independent musical layers. “Students start learning the balance between playing their own part while listening to all the other parts,” Peter says. “At the same time they learn about being part of a team that is creating music.”

Through these types of lessons, Peter’s students learn musical skills and life skills that increase their competence and confidence. “The students are learning to read,



compose, and improvise music, developing fluency as they do in their other languages,” Peter explains.

Amy Swartz feels that the impact is clear. “Peter has nurtured a wonderful self-confidence that my daughter carries with her in larger settings such as festival performances and in smaller settings such as Girl Scouts. She has gone from agonizing over her own stage fright, to engaging with her focus on a song, dance or musical instrument she is sharing.”

This year, Peter is teaming up with TIS art teacher Julie Jansen to connect with the fourth grade IB unit on fictional stories. The students will learn storytelling techniques by studying musical themes such as those used

in popular cinematic scores. They will develop musical accompaniment to go with story illustrations they have created in art class.

“I am always amazed at how gifted Peter is,” Swartz says. “He brings out the amazing things our children are capable of as individuals and as members of the community.”

Peter’s curriculum:  
[intlschool.org/music-elementary/Kodaly](http://intlschool.org/music-elementary/Kodaly): [www.oake.org/AboutUs/KodalyMethods.aspx](http://www.oake.org/AboutUs/KodalyMethods.aspx)  
Orff-Schulwerk:  
[www.aosa.org/orff.html](http://www.aosa.org/orff.html)  
TIS Early Childhood music program: [intlschool.org/music-ec](http://intlschool.org/music-ec)



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