

## INSPIRATION: MUSIC, PERSPECTIVE, AND IMPROVISATION

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As a young boy, I was always drawn to music, and as a result, I began piano lessons at age 4. My musical journey then continued, and I participated in my high school band program which helped to further develop my love for both performing and conducting. These interests then followed me as I continued my education at the University of Arizona and pursued degrees in music performance and education. I was driven to become a university band director, and I did just that. I was fortunate enough to direct at both the University of Wisconsin and the University of Arizona. While completing my bachelor's degree, I participated in a class in early childhood music education, and I was immediately enthralled with the energy of the 3 - 7 year olds. It was that experience that kept calling to me over the years. In addition, while I was the Associate Director of Bands at the University of Arizona from 1992 - 1997, I became a dad. I was completely immersed into the world of the child, and I became fascinated with how young children learn!

That brief window into my years as a child and young man illustrate how I found inspiration early on. I believe this is key in helping our next generation thrive. Music and creating inspired me, and I put into practice that same ideal as I continue to use music and artistic approaches with young learners. When considering my own daughter, for example, I found that she was focused and happy when she was singing. So we sang! We sang about food, about our travels, about our trip to the grocery store... you name it, we sang it! My daughter is 22 years old today, and she is a prodigy level writer and artist. I found through my experience as a dad and as an educator, that music (and play!) was an empowering bridge to building language in contextual ways. Music also connects us to our own sense of who we are and is related closely to elevating our emotional intelligence. I use music when I read to children, and it even fosters a play-based way of introducing complex ideas such as subtext. I'll read a book to a group of young children with music as the backdrop, and I'll change my inflection, volume and pace to match the music. Then I'll read the same book again, and I'll change the music! Same words, different meaning!

What inspires you?

What inspires you so much that you become interested in helping others find their own inspiration?

## PERSPECTIVE AND INSPIRATION

The word "perspective", like many words, has multiple definitions and can be interpreted in different ways. I am currently having an extremely positive and surreal experience co-creating something beautiful with my daughter, and perspective is at the core. Specifically, helping the next generation understand the empowering nature of embracing multiple perspectives. When my daughter, Sam, was 4, she told me she was tired of me reading the same books at night. I asked her what she would like to do. She perked up and said, "Let's make our own stories." Together we created an ant named Sam the Ant. It is now a new series of bilingual books for children. The first several books are PreK - Grade 3 and designed with the intent of helping a young reader extend her comprehension level in addition to helping older students extend their recognition of subtext. The main ideas behind all the books are embracing multiple perspectives, seeing adversity as opportunity, and understanding diversity as community. One example of adopting a new perspective involves rain drops that are huge in comparison to the ants. Another example is the perspective of Sam the Ant's friend, Drag the Dragonfly, from high in the sky. Finally, there is the

perspective of each story (a total of 30) taking place in a different location on earth, and together telling one large story. ([www.SamTheAnt.com](http://www.SamTheAnt.com))

## IMPROVISATION AND INSPIRATION

When I think of improvisation, I think of improvising based on the response of any learner and then taking that response and having the ability to take their own actions and make them a part of the learning experience. I refer to this as “The Art of the Unknown”. We grow up with a lot of things we have to learn. In a simple way, we move from the “Unknown” to as much “Known” as possible. The challenge is if we stay in the realm of the “Known”, we think we know all we need to know. We must embrace traveling with our mind and body back into the “Unknown”. One of the best ways to do this is to use questions more often than statements. Questions lead to authentic dialogue, and what better way to build critical and creative thinking?! It’s alright if you’re uncomfortable with improvising based on the learner response. That’s part of the journey; and after all, we always have to model persistence for our youngest learners.

## CLOSING

At this year’s NYSAEYC Annual Conference, I’ll be using my original brain games to help you experience a unique usage of music and movement which builds perspective. Thanks to Sam the Human, my daughter, these brain games are now inspired by Sam the Ant in animated form. You’ll be laughing and learning and embracing multiple perspectives the entire time. You’ll also leave with the ability to immediately use these skills with your children and colleagues!

No matter what kind of music, perspective games, or improvisation techniques we are using, we must remind ourselves of the importance of the “reason and the process.” No matter the curriculum, we as learning guides, must stay attuned to how we deliver information. It is our approach that can light up any potential learning moment with any age learner.

See you all soon!

Best wishes to a fantastic 2017!

Enrique

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*Bio: Enrique is an Artist and Educator whose influence is worldwide. His highlights include, but are not limited to, Founder and Director of Education at the Global Learning Foundation, co-author of the children’s book series “Sam the Ant”, Creator of iBG, Intellectual Brainwave Games, Senior Facilitator for Arts Integration Solutions, and author of “Living Like a Child”. Together with a team of world class educators and artists, and their partner organizations, Enrique fosters sustainable, organic and research-based learning models which develop the potential of the learner with the intent of revealing purpose.*

*As an artist, Enrique is a film composer (Gun Hill Road/Cruzando), pianist and producer. He is a former professor of music and education at the University of Arizona and the University of*

*Wisconsin. His journey in life is interwoven with his wife and concert pianist Marie Sierra, their 18 year old son, Nick, and their 22 year old daughter, Sam.*