

From Hungary to America: The Evolution of Education through Music



In the February 1986 issue of the *Music Educators Journal*, five individuals, Carl Orff, Zoltan Kodály, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Shinichi Suzuki, and Edwin Gordon, were recognized for their influence on American music education. With the exception of Gordon, all of these approaches were imported from other countries and cultures. Those importations have raised questions about the need for changes in effectively applying foreign methods in American schools. If adaptation occurs, then concerns arise regarding the point at which the adaptation becomes independent and loses its connection with the original method's purpose.

The sequence of importation, adaptation, and new identity succinctly describes the evolution of an approach that has been developing in this country and Canada for the past twenty years. While its roots were grounded in the method created by Kodály, the approach entitled "Education through Music" (ETM) grew up in the United States and Canada. English-based folk songs and language, the structure of American school systems, and the acculturation of American children substantially affected the methodology of ETM.

The Kodály connection

Although many educators have been instrumental in shaping the directions of ETM, Mary Helen Richards is the founder and primary author. In 1958, while a music teacher in California, Richards became

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by Peggy Bennett

Children create form maps as part of a listening exercise. Inset: Mary Helen Richards guides students in an ETM lesson.

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for developing a method for teaching music in North America. Although these suggestions were eventually treated as principles in developing ETM, they also led to major deviations from what has become known as the Kodály method.

In reviewing Richards's materials, Kodály said, "Oh—the children are much too young to study triplets! You should wait until they are nine years old for that!" Richards said, "But listen to 'Humpty Dumpty!'" Kodály listened and agreed. He then issued a series of suggestions on which ETM was founded. He then suggested:

- "You must base all your teaching of music to your children on your own folk songs! Folk songs carry the language well."

- "You must study your language—the way it moves—study the anacrusis in your folk songs. It is very characteristic of your language, and nonexistent in ours."

- "You must teach your children the way children are in your country."

- "The children must sing every day. If children were allowed to speak only once or twice a week, they never would learn to speak, or read, or write!"¹

concerned that the stability of American arts programs was being threatened due to increased national support for math and science study after the launching of Sputnik in 1957. Richards read an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* that described a unique music program in Hungary created by Zoltan Kodály. In an effort to find out more about his program, Richards sent a postcard to Kodály and asked simply, "How do you teach music?"

In response to that inquiry, Kodály sent Richards two method books. Richards then used these books to have charts drawn based on the simplified notation systems, pictures of children playing games, and the text. These charts, used in California's Portola Valley School (1959–61), were the original ideas

used for the publication *Threshold to Music* and were developed prior to Richards meeting Kodály.

On a visit to Hungary in April 1962, Richards was amazed at the music proficiency demonstrated by the schoolchildren. She excitedly asked their instructor, Ilona Andor, "How do you do it?" The non-English-speaking teacher, frustrated with the language barrier in expressing herself, shrugged, threw up her hands and said simply, "With love." Richards has since considered this simple exclamation to be a fundamental principle for teaching.

In July 1962, Richards returned to Hungary, met Kodály, and sought his opinions on the unpublished charts she had devised. In response, Kodály offered some suggestions

One phase ends, one begins

Soon after publishing the book, Richards concluded that the songs, activities, and sequence in *Threshold to Music* were rooted in the Hungarian heritage of songs, language, and culture and were too limiting for both the folk music and children of this country. While *Threshold to Music* was an early attempt to adapt the Kodály method to American music education, dissatisfaction with these materials prompted Richards to restructure her original approach to teaching music.

Guided by Kodály's principles, Richards studied how children learn, how language patterns

1. Mary Helen Richards, *Education Materials List* (Portola Valley, CA: Richards Institute, 1985), 4.

sound, and how music sounds rather than how it looks. Equally powerful in this effort to rethink the methods for teaching music was her determination to maintain *musicality* as music is studied. Practice of the tonal and rhythmic patterns in the *Threshold to Music* charts became drill exercises in many classrooms. Richards recognized that the strategies used to help children study music (such as simplification and repetition) often resulted in an *amusical* performance. Richards said:

I was feeling my way very slowly, and it wasn't until about 1966 that I realized that I was going at the whole thing backwards! I had tried desperately to begin with notation. The children didn't have the sound in their minds so that they could recognize the notation. I tried to use the Hungarian ordering of concepts. They did not match our songs at all. I had tried to lead my children to that which I understood. They did not have in them sufficient background to be able to follow. What I was doing was too teacher-directed. They were imitating and singing well, and having a great deal of "fun." But more was needed.²

It was two years after Kodály's death that I finally took steps to restructure the whole program. I really began to base everything on our songs, and I found lots of them when I looked clearly at them without the image of "reading" clouding my vision. . . . But starting over was not easy, involved as I was with so many other people. Many of them could not understand my determination to change, and there was a difficult transition time of several years.³

ETM grew out of the search for ways to interpret and implement Kodály's four suggestions. In this way, *Threshold to Music* was actually a threshold to ETM. Before characterizing current goals and strategies, it is important to describe how Kodály's four suggestions affected Richards's work in North America.

2. Mary Helen Richards. *Aesthetic Foundations for Thinking. Part Two* (Portola Valley, CA: Richards Institute, 1978), 54.

3. Richards. *Aesthetic Foundations for Thinking. Part Two*, 55.

Kodály Educators Honor Mary Helen Richards

At the request of the southern California chapter of the Organization of American Kodály Educators (OAKE), and Katinka Daniel, national conference program chair, two unique events occurred at the March 1987 OAKE national convention in Los Angeles.

First, the national executive board of OAKE voted to present a special award of recognition to Mary Helen Richards. Also, Richards was asked to copresent two workshop sessions at that conference with Randal McChesney.

At the conference luncheon, OAKE President Lauren Abernethy recognized Mary Helen Richards's early role in bringing the ideas of Zoltan Kodály to the United States and presented her with a plaque honoring her "service to children and music." The presentation was met with warm applause and a standing ovation from those attending.

The historical significance of this OAKE award lies in the fact that for the first time after many years of working in separate directions, Richards was reacquainted with former colleagues and core developers of the Kodály method in North America.

Using Kodály's suggestions

1. *Finding folk songs from the North American continent* was a task that resulted in a core of approximately 150 songs. These songs are the principal repertoire of ETM and have been selected for their simplicity, balance in form, carriage of the language, and resilience to activity and repetition. Studying a few songs in depth and from varied perspectives is characteristic of ETM. Therefore, the procedures by which songs are studied receive emphasis and are intended to be used with "new" songs a teacher may select. Unlike the *Threshold to Music* and Kodály texts, two- and three-tone songs built on *sol-mi* and *sol-mi-la* are rare in these materials. Also, songs with dotted and triple rhythms are as common as

songs limited to quarter and eighth note patterns.

2. *Study of the language* occurs primarily through ear-training activities that include listening to pattern units and the stressed/unstressed sounds within those units. Of primary interest is the way language is patterned and acquired, and the role language plays in perceiving, learning, and performing music. Early work with hearing-impaired, English as a second language, and learning disabled students was invaluable to understandings gained in this area.

3. *The way children are in this country* is not easily summarized. The broad range of application for ETM seems to address and to accommodate diversity in educational settings. The characteristics of

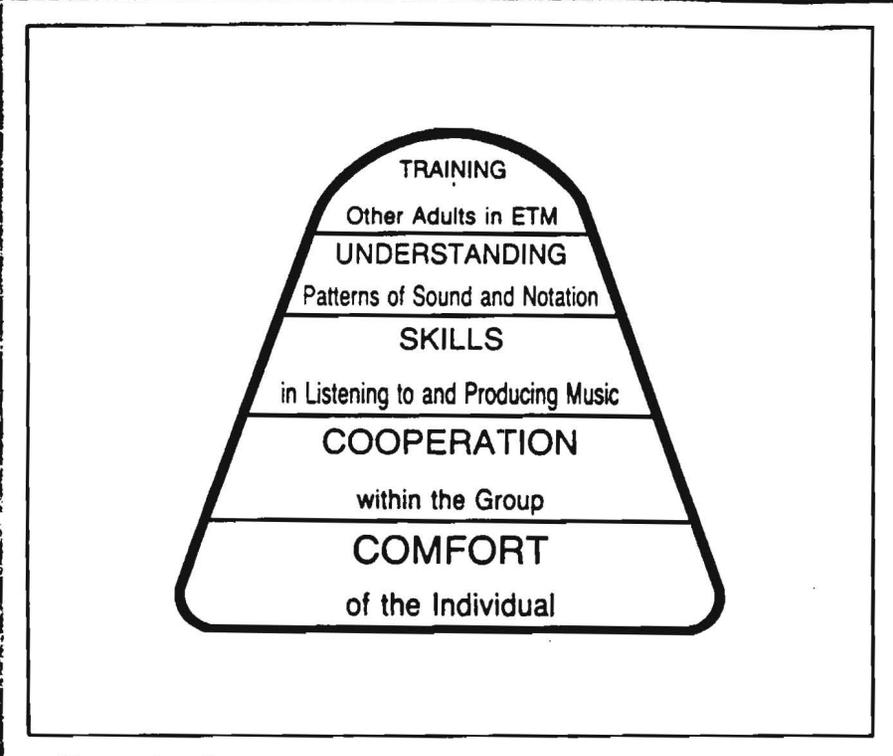


Figure 1. The sequential goals of ETM.

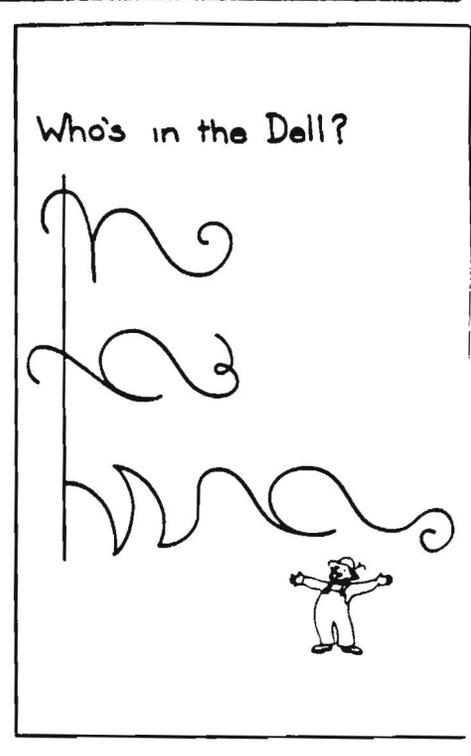


Figure 2. A song map to "The Farmer in the Dell."

schools and children that have shaped the strategies used in music education are the lack of musical experiences prior to formal schooling (for example, singing and playing); mobility of parents, students, and teachers; the need for personalizing and socializing the learning experience; and the need for developing pride in accomplishment. As a result of this diversity and need for flexibility, diagnostic teaching is stressed and teachers participate in discussions and exercises that lead them to consider a variety of ways to accommodate their students' learning needs.

4. *Singing every day*, in the form of an elementary music class, con-

tinues to be a rarity in some regions. At the beginning of ETM (1967-70), regular classroom teachers played a significant role in helping Richards and her colleagues understand how children learn. Some texts and courses during the years of 1969 to 1975 gave the impression that the emphasis of ETM was not on music, but on the language arts, mathematics, and grammar skills that could be learned *through* music. Since 1976, however, using music to enhance learning in other subjects has been slowly deemphasized. Instead, the training of classroom teachers was shifted to recognizing the social, intellectual, motor, and language skills that are

practiced and developed through the study of music, and studying musical knowledge and skills at a level with which the nonmusic specialist and the children can be comfortable. While Richards's original incentive for involving classroom teachers in music education was to ensure that children experience music, the resulting professional exchange continues to produce a mutually beneficial partnership.

What is ETM?

Educators and researchers who have studied ETM and those who have questioned it have tried to determine whether ETM can be described as a method, an

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Figure 2. A masterwork: not to Mozart's Papaver Symphony (Mozart)

foundational for a child's musical education.

To bring the child to a knowledge as well as a love of music is the academic goal of *Education Through Music*. In order to bring him to this knowledge, the first concern is to provide interesting and constructive experiences which he may find to be *aesthetic-foundational experiences on which he can build an ability to respond to all music*. The natural way to do this is through play.⁴

Examination of texts and course offerings suggests five different ETM goal levels. The methodology for teaching music literacy occurs in the third and fourth levels of those goals.

The goals of ETM

Because the methods and materials are considered to be as effective for a classroom teacher as for a music teacher, for a teacher of learning disabled children as for a teacher of gifted children, and for a parent as for a university professor, the goals of ETM cover a broad scope of objectives. Much like Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, ETM goals work from a general focus on the learner to refined levels of music knowledge. For teachers in some settings, the goals are treated sequentially, building from level one (see figure 1). In many music classrooms, however, the goals of levels one through four can be approached simultaneously.

Level one:

Comfort of the individual

Level two:

Cooperation within the group

Most education and music education programs subscribe to the goals stated in levels one and two. Few programs, however, treat these goals as substantive course content and weave them into exercises for teacher training to the extent that this approach does. The goals of levels one and two are considered

to be essential to any lesson and to be bases for maximum effectiveness in achieving goals at the other three levels. A primary concern is the psychological and emotional comfort of individuals in a group. In level two, priority is given to developing social and communication skills within the context of musical activities through cooperative efforts in group singing, playing, problem solving, and studying.

Although positive teacher attitudes may be generally treated as assumed behaviors, teachers in ETM courses are expected to examine how the attitudes they are modeling can influence the quality of their own and their students' involvement in music activities. In addition, teachers are encouraged to diagnose their own and others' teaching by learning to watch, listen, and respond to children during the lesson. Teachers are cautioned against simply executing a lesson plan.

ETM is supporting the position that learning is the dual responsibility of teacher and student. Therefore, "mistakes" that occur during the lesson are treated as valuable indicators of understanding. Rather than aiming exclusively for accurate answers, a teacher will often ask, "Why do you think that?" or "What else could it be?" even when a student's answer is correct. Teachers learn to elicit students' responses during the music lesson; incorporate students' responses appropriately into the music lesson; assess what understandings and misunderstandings are apparent in these responses; and allow the information gained from students' responses to shape subsequent strategies and plans.

Depending on their teaching situations and curriculum demands, some teachers use this approach almost exclusively at these two basic levels where the focus is on creating an environment for effective and efficient learning. For this reason, ETM has become popular with classroom teachers who see

approach, a way of life, an attitude, a curriculum, a system, a program, or a philosophy. While one term may be more satisfactory than another, trying to provide an ultimate definition is probably futile. A more important question to ask is, "What does ETM try to accomplish?"

The first published definition and purpose appears in the 1971 booklet *Education Through Music*: "Education through Music is a way of reaching children through music. Music, by its very nature, focuses and organizes the child's responses." In 1978, the following purpose statement was written, citing the aesthetic experience as

⁴ Richards, *Aesthetic Foundations for Thinking: Part Two*, 7.

these activities and strategies as valid means of offering children educational music experiences.

The tool used to accomplish the goals at each level is the *song-experience game*. Song-experience games provide experiences in the categories of movement, language, music, and social interaction. Because the song game is considered a foundational rather than a supplemental experience, the game is more often the lead-in rather than the follow-up activity for music lessons and study. In addition, a non-competitive, game-like activity usually accompanies the highlighting and notating phases of instruction. Approximately 150 song-experience games offer flexible frameworks that appeal to students' ideas and suggestions for age-appropriate play.

Level three: Skills

Refinement in sound skills are developed during this phase. The primary means through which students perform music is singing; therefore, they are the producers of the sound that they study. Although eventually leading to traditional music notation, activities at this point focus on ear training before symbol training. Teachers are encouraged not to hurry through this phase but to recognize its value in auditory preparation. Typically, as students sing a whole song rather than an extracted four-beat rhythm or tonal pattern, specific patterns selected by the teacher are highlighted for further awareness and study. Procedures for highlighting sound include chinning, movement, inner hearing, and antiphoning.⁵

In recent years, increased emphasis has been placed on voice educa-

tion within this approach. Attention is given to helping children listen to their own and others' speaking and singing voices, experimenting with vocal range and production, and gaining control of their own voices and vocal habits. Teachers explore using and modeling a light, "lifted" voice for speaking and singing. In addition, they are encouraged to monitor the extent to which their voices may overshadow their students' singing.

Level four:

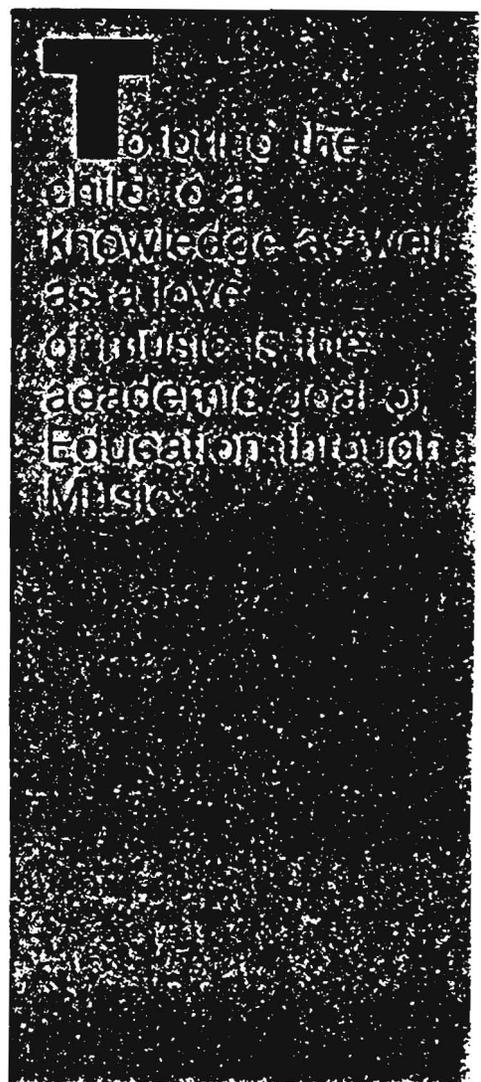
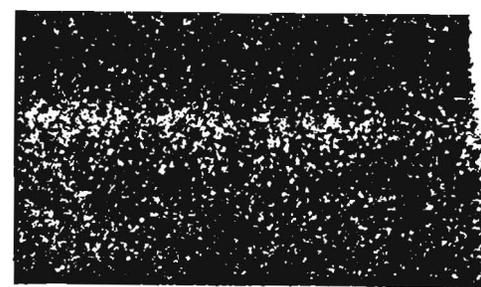
Understanding patterns

In level four, students are led to study the content of music by singing, writing, and reading it (music literacy). At this phase, the music curriculum of ETM is most apparent and appears in *The Music Language and Aesthetic Foundations for Thinking* texts. Background on how and why adaptation occurred is provided in *Aesthetic Foundations for Thinking: Part Two*. Some comparisons of ETM with other approaches can be cited. Common techniques, materials, and principles used are:

- singing games
- folk songs
- moveable *do*
- Curwen hand signs (arm-signal variations were developed)
- *sol-fa* syllables
- rhythm syllables based on the Galin-Parie-Chev  system of *ta, ti-ti*, and so forth.
- masterworks
- sight-singing exercises
- folk dances
- a gradual progression from sound to symbol

When comparing the strategies of methodology in ETM and the Kod ly method, it is necessary to re-emphasize the role the English language has played in organizing music for education. Richards found that English-language folk songs collected in North America offered a different body and sequence of patterns from those used in the Kod ly method. This language/music connection is credited with pro-

⁵ "Chinning" is substituting "loo" or other non-sense syllables for the words to a song. This activity is thought to help focus on the tonal and rhythmic characteristics of a song without interference from the words. "Antiphoning" is a fill-in-the-blank activity for singing a familiar song. When the leader stops singing, the followers immediately fill in the song. When the leader comes back in, the followers stop. Unlike the more common strategy of "echo singing," antiphoning singing keeps the whole song intact from beginning to end.





viding structure, sequence, and musicality to music education. Although the term "song" is used most often here, finding "language-based" patterns in instrumental music also is prominent in these materials. The characteristics of music study in ETM are the following:

1. Language, rather than bar lines, determines the organization of patterns within songs. Therefore, songs are analyzed by the teacher for pattern units based on the "chunking" of the language. Then, within the whole song, those units are highlighted for studying rhythm or tonal patterns. To maintain musicality and musical context, rhythm and tonal patterns are not studied separately from a song. In the Kodály method, tonal and rhythm patterns are frequently organized into "measure" patterns (as in the Hungarian language) and are practiced separately from song contexts.

2. Because distortion can result, ETM avoids notating speech onto traditional rhythm symbols. Therefore, if speech is notated, symbols used are flexible in duration yet indicate the related stressed/unstressed sounds within the pattern. The stress relationship of a word or word patterns is valued over the more arithmetic, durational relationship. In certain activities of the Orff and Kodály approaches, words and names are assigned to music notation and spoken accordingly, usually emphasizing metric accuracy over natural speech inflections. Example: Jennifer is *not* ♩ or ♪, but *could* be — . . ; ■□; or ○○○.

3. Anacruses are constantly present in English speech (for example, the *boy*, a *car*, there *was*) and consequently appear in American folk songs. Therefore, in ETM the concept of anacrusis is felt and identified early in music instruction and is common to many of the beginning tonal and rhythm patterns. Musical scores organized into four-beat measures often do not address the anacruses that flow over the bar lines. Using measures, bar lines, and note beams to deter-

mine pattern units in a song can result in distortion and incongruity between what is heard and what is seen. *Threshold to Music* and Kodály materials often present rhythm patterns in four-beat patterns, seldom utilizing anacruses.

4. Triple and dotted rhythms, such as those common in nursery rhymes, seem to be spoken and sung more naturally than even, duple rhythms. Therefore, the natural ways children sing take precedence over how the song has traditionally been notated. Richards said, "It is important to remember that the songs are sung by the children as they move and that the notation used conforms as closely as possible to the rhythms of the spoken language."⁶ Because children are already adept at performing triple and dotted rhythms, these rhythms are not considered too difficult to introduce early in music study. The Kodály method focuses almost exclusively in beginning classes on patterns limited to quarter and eighth notes. While the Orff approach encourages variety in the performance of rhythm, preparation for reading and studying activities also is geared toward even patterns of quarter and eighth notes.

5. Prescribed movement to the beat can have amusical influence on the quality of singing and the flow of the song. Therefore, focus is placed on word rhythms and the flow they give to the song rather than "beating time" as the children sing and play. Richards says:

The mechanical sound that so often is the hallmark of the beginning instrumental student is partially caused by too much emphasis too soon on the "steady beat" in the music—emphasis that is well-intentioned, but misplaced. The music teacher concentrates on the beat so that the students can learn to read the symbols and signs of music. The sound of the music may then be constructed from its symbol and not



6. Mary Helen Richards. *The Music Language—Part One* (Portola Valley, CA: Richards Institute, 1973), 1.

from the sound of music itself. In other words, the symbol, the notation, becomes symbolized by the sound, instead of the other way around... In this kind of music training, music is not treated as a language, but as a mathematical arrangement of sound.⁷

In ETM, rhythm is studied and notated before the beat, and when the beat is introduced it is felt within the flow of the song often to a swaying motion rather than a metronomic patsch. In Kodály and *Threshold to Music* lessons, recognizing the beat and performing the beat are often considered necessary to singing a song, playing a game, and reading music. In addition, the beat is treated like the governor of a song, with the students patsching the beat as an introduction and monitor for their singing.

6. The notes most often used in many songs that Richards collected range from *sol* below *do*, to *mi* or *sol* above *do*. Therefore, tonal patterns of **sol*, *do*, **sol*.**la-do*, and *re*.**sol-do* are common in the songs and are labeled early in the tonal sequence (* indicates the tone is below *do*). The strength of the low *sol* and its predominance in folk songs seem to be influenced by the melodic inflection of the anacrusis. The more common practices (both in Kodály and Orff approaches) of treating the *sol-mi* falling third pattern as a "universal interval"; singing entire songs or rhymes on the tonal pattern to be studied; and following the tonal sequence of *sol-mi*, *sol-mi-la*, and *sol-mi-do*, are not characteristic in the ETM program. Richards says:

Despite Kodály's constant advice, "Look to your folk songs and take all that you do from them!", I searched in our folk songs for that which would match the Hungarian melody patterns. I looked for *sol-mi* and for *sol-la-mi*. I found a few good examples [but] there did not seem to be very many songs that had any combination of those three

tones in prominent, easy-to-hear places in the songs.⁸

7. Most collected folk songs cadence on *do*, and *do* is commonly the tonal center. Therefore, initial tonal patterns in the scope and sequence of ETM include *do*, for example, *mi-re-do*; *sol-do*; *re-sol-do*.

8. Music notation evolves from students' perceptions of sound. Therefore, the two techniques of mapping and song dotting are used as beginning notation systems for students. Mapping consists of drawing a line to the flow of sound as a song is sung. Intended to foster musicality and a sense of flow, a map can then be read and studied, and parts of the song can be highlighted and notated in the map. Also, form books use prepared maps to show gradually notated sections of the song and masterwork maps lead students in formal analysis of composed music (see figure 2).

In song dotting, a student notates a practiced movement to the melodic rhythm by tapping (dotting) a pen or pencil in a line on paper. In this way a student performs the individual sounds heard within the context of the song, records those sounds on paper, and subsequently reads the dots simultaneously with the song or sound pattern. Eventually, song dots are given *sol-fa* syllables or rhythm syllable labels and are transformed into traditional music symbols.

Both mapping and song dotting are techniques of notating sound that aim to capture the flow of the song as the student is singing, provide notation systems that are not dependent on students' prerequisite musical knowledge, and allow students to notate sounds according to their perceptions rather than immediately channeling perceptions into an elaborate notation structure. By choosing to delay the quest for correct answers in musical perception, ETM uses these two notation sys-

tems to allow students first to respond to what they hear, then to read and compare their response/notation to further hearings and variations.

9. The key in which a song is sung may vary several times during an activity or lesson. The rationale behind this strategy is threefold. First, students benefit from hearing and singing tonal patterns in a variety of pitch ranges. Second, with a variety of keys, students are able to exercise their voices in different ranges and registers. Finally, because the teacher may start the group singing by giving only a starting pitch for a familiar song or phrase, students are constantly exposed to the opportunity for developing skills in auditory transposition. In the Orff approach, using pitched instruments may impede frequent key changes in a lesson or in song repetitions. In the Kodály approach, determining the beginning pitch of a song from a tuning fork and aiming toward students' ability to produce a specific pitch are increasingly popular practices in some regions.

Level five: Training others in ETM

The Richards Institute of Music Education and Research, a nonprofit organization, was established to develop courses and materials for supporting teachers as they educate children through music. Since 1970, the institute has offered courses in the United States and Canada to accomplish this task. Richards and her board of ten trustees teach and oversee the ongoing development and design of curriculum and course offerings. Rather than a campus where teachers study, the Richards Institute is an international network, composed primarily of teachers.

Future research

Since 1969, the Richards Institute has published more than thirty-seven books and papers that have chronicled the development of

7 Richards. *Aesthetic Foundations for Thinking: Part Two* 48

8 Richards. *Aesthetic Foundations for Thinking: Part Two* 53-4.

ETM. While many educators in the United States, Canada, and Japan are familiar with ETM, most are not. This could be because its development and application, rather than its promotion, have consumed the attention of its formulators.

Although titled "Richards Institute of Music Education and Research," the "research" the institute conducts is undocumented field testing of techniques, methods, and materials by teachers working with classrooms of children. To date, no study exists that investigates the effectiveness of this approach to music education.

Richards's work and the ETM format have raised some interesting challenges to several generally accepted practices in music education. Rather than attempting to prove or disprove the method, future research could serve the profession well by examining any one of the several principles at work in the methodology.

Richards Institute publications

Education through Music texts and papers published from 1969 to 1986 are listed in chronological order. Each was published by the Richards Institute of Music Education and Research, 149 Corte Madera Road, Portola Valley, CA 94025. An additional address is Richards Institute, Box 6249, Bozeman, MT 59771.

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Education through Music is a way of reaching children through music

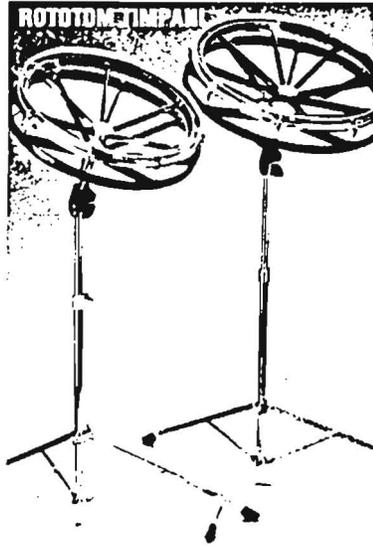
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