

MONTANA MUSIC EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION  
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“In Tune with Tomorrow”

IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO:  
WHEN 'SIMPLE' IS NOT 'EASY'  
FOR CHILDREN'S STUDY OF MUSIC

Presenters:

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General Music Clinic  
Friday April 8 12:15 pm - 1:30 pm

Description

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Purpose• Have we confused “easy” with “simple” and “difficult” with “complex” in teaching children music?

- This session is intended to be provocative, stimulating, and refreshing for teachers who have experienced some discomfort with the traditional, sequential approaches advocated by many music education methods, curricula, and texts.
- Techniques will be demonstrated and ideas offered for having children identify and notate elements of song in ways that avoid over-simplification and preserve musicality.

- Supported by research and practice, the content of this session is vital to today's teachers who see the need and the desire to make their music programs compatible with the philosophy and practice of how children are being taught to read and write: recognizing the holistic, complex processes of learning.

## 1 A BRIEF DEMONSTRATION

To provide a context for addressing and discussing the content of this session, a brief demonstration of study strategies will be offered. Because the demonstration is meant as an overview, the flow between activities will not include discussion or reflection at this time. Terms and strategies which may be new to you are:

Antiphonning provides for music play in which a leader stops singing at some point in a familiar song and the follower/s must "fill in the blank" until the leader begins singing again. Goals of antiphonning are to be prepared to respond when it is our turn (music responsiveness); to preserve the flow of the song as leaders and responders perform their parts (musicality); and to engage learners to study, perform, and enjoy the music experience. (5, pp. 9-10) Song dotting involves simple dot notations for the sounds of all or a portion of a song. Song dotting is a means of writing down what one hears that combines auditory, kinesthetic, and visual modes. Each dot represents a single sound. Song dotting builds on students' abilities to hear and move to the individual sounds of a pattern; lets students notate individual sounds simultaneously with a performance of the pattern; and translates movement into notation within the song dotting process. (6, p.107)

## 2 HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED? . . . QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Questions addressed here generally have corresponding principles identified in Part 4 of this handout.

### Teaching Intervals and Tonal Patterns

? If SO-MI is accepted as the “universal” interval that children can easily produce, then why is it a building block for music study that necessitates prolonged repetition and practice? If we accept that SO-MI is easily and commonly produced in childhood, does this mean that we should build a curriculum of music study around it?

? In the Moveable DO system, SO-MI can only be identified as such in relationship to DO. Songs of English-speaking culture are most often DO-centered; yet, beginning tonal study in many methods does not include DO—why not?

? What effect does prolonged study of limited pitch songs (SO-MI and SO-MI-LA) have on the development of children’s vocal facility as well as their perception of melody?

? Do we see evidence that sayings, rhymes, and patterns that were initially used as exercises for teaching intervals are now considered to be part of our heritage of children’s songs?

? How might listening, reading, and performing music be affected by use of a “melodic pattern approach” compared to an “interval approach?” A melodic pattern approach recognizes a pattern of tones as a cohesive, musical unit found in English-based folk or composed songs, and an interval approach focuses on note-to-note relationships?

### Teaching Beat

? Why is accurate performance of a beat (through patting, clapping, stepping) considered prerequisite to further music study and learning? What is it that children can not do until they are consistently accurate in “showing the beat?” Various ways of having children “do the beat” are not equally efficient to their accuracy.

? What do children hear and feel in response to music? Do we teach them to screen out some of their sensitivity and perceptiveness to hearing music by over-emphasizing the beat? Many times, beat is addressed as if there is one beat to a song or piece, when in fact, children and adults can hear faster and slower beats.

? Do children become programmed to “doing the beat” as a response to music? How is singing effected by habitual emphasis on the beat?

### Teaching Rhythm

? Why are 4-beat patterns of quarter notes and duplet eighth notes considered the “easiest” for beginning music-makers? What makes such common notations as dotted notes,

compound meter, and anacrusis “difficult” for children? Are we confusing the “simplicity” of the notation with the “easiness” (memorability, accuracy of performance) of studying and performing patterns?

? Have you noticed some songs that traditionally were sung in compound meter (Ring Around the Rosy, The Farmer in the Dell) now are found, in some sources, to be notated and consequently performed in “simple,” duple rhythm?

? Have you noticed that sayings and rhymes are “fit” onto rhythm notation, rather than explored for the rhythm of the language?

? How would musicality be affected by using “figural” groups of language patterns within songs as the basis for study and performance, compared to the use of rhythm notation that is organized by beat groups?

#### Sequencing Music Study\*

? Sequencing of concepts and skills in children’s study of music is based on logic but whose logic? Who determines: what steps to take and when? the size of these steps? when a step is too large or too small? when to skip a step in the sequence? when skipping steps is a disadvantage? when it is an advantage? In other words, how can we tell when the “tail is wagging the dog” as we follow a sequence in our classrooms?

? Is there a potential that the techniques for learning music, the steps in a sequence, can become ends in themselves, can become substitutes for music understanding, or can be more cumbersome than helpful as tools for music study? If so, how do we guard against this?

[\*Some of the questions on sequencing have been adapted from “Freedom to Teach and to Learn:

Embracing Mistakes in the Instructional Process,” a presentation

for the 1994 Texas Music Educators Association Convention by Peggy D. Bennett and Hildegard Froehlich.]

### 3 RETHINKING COMMON PRACTICES

These example practices are intended to offer choices and perspectives for renewed thinking and assessments of current, common ways of organizing, performing, and studying music. Your challenge during this segment is to notice the qualities of performance that maintain a musical and holistic approach to performing, practicing, and studying music.

Activity 1	Antiphonning	Activity 4	Highlighting a rhythm pattern
Activity 2	Highlighting language	Activity 5	Highlighting a tonal pattern
Activity 3	Song dotting process	Activity 6	Walking with the song
Activity 7	Reading scores with comprehension		

### 4 PRINCIPLES & REFLECTIONS FOR TEACHING & LEARNING

Principles for Studying Music (5, p.13)

The major goal of music study is the development of a responsiveness to music.

The musicality that is critical to music performance is just as important in music study.

The fundamental skill in music behavior is listening.

The way music sounds rather than how it looks guides the selection and presentation of patterns for study.