



FIGURES IN MELODY

An Alternative Approach to Music for Children

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The Purpose

The purpose of this workshop is to demonstrate and explain a melodic figure approach to teaching children music. A melodic figure approach offers a substantial shift in methodology for early childhood and beyond. Rather than selecting a preferred tonal pattern (i.e., So-Mi), a scale-based sequence (skips and steps), or a taxonomy of tonal patterns based on "ease of accurate production," a melodic figure approach is derived from aural patterns within an intact song.

With folk songs as core curriculum, figural patterns suggested by language in the song offer tidy, perceivable, logical, and musical patterns to sing, study, play, and notate.

The Premise

Folk songs are especially rich contexts for studying aural and oral patterns of sound. Within a song, language sets up groupings of sounds that "go together." The resulting figures are melody fragments that are at once whole and part. The figures are aggregate units that are part of the whole song, yet can stand alone for study and repetition. When teachers see and hear songs as combinations of these figures, patterns selected for children to study may not match patterns organized by notation: beams that connect sounds within a beat and bar lines that divide sounds into numeric measures. The figural approach to melody is "sound-driven" rather than "notation-driven."

Four Phases of the Symbolization Process

Repertoire	Students' repertoire of songs and sound patterns is built through playful activities that provide varied repetition of song and engage students' attention.
Awareness	Students' awareness of a pattern (melodic figure) is developed by leading them to discover, practice, and label it. Highlight and practice the pattern by using inner hearing, chinning, antiphonning and movement. Movement experiences include precision activities such as tapping, hand signs, and hand staff.
Write	Students write and highlight the pattern by using mapping, song dotting, and conventional notation.
Read	Students read their own and others' notations of the pattern, including practice with playful reading of the pattern in familiar and unfamiliar settings.

Singing from Sound to Symbol

This is not a strict sequence; many of these steps may be successfully introduced in a different order.

1. Be playful about singing and teaching the song.
2. Highlight a figural pattern through antiphonning, tapping, moving.
3. Tap the pattern (or the whole song) and write it on paper with song dots. If the whole song is dotted, the pattern to be studied can be circled.
4. Add handsigns to further identify the pattern, sing solfa syllables, and write/read the solfa score.
5. Connect solfa syllables with song dots for that portion of the song.
6. Create a solfa ladder for singing syllables and experimenting with "sight-singing."
7. Map the song; highlight the figure (section of the map) to be studied. Substitute portions of the map with solfa syllables, dots, hand signs, or staff notation.
8. Learn and play with memorizing numbers for the hand staff, and place the melodic figure on the hand staff.
9. Place notes (no stems at this point) on written staff and sing the whole song, touching notes simultaneously while singing the pattern.
10. Write and read melodic figures in new settings: new songs, new tonal sequences.

Glossary

Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997

"Song dots are made by tapping the rhythm [or beat] of a pattern or a song with chalk or a marker, leaving a visual record of this movement." "Song dots are simple notations for the sounds of all or a portion of a song. Song dotting requires no previous notational knowledge or skill and can be an effective introduction to the individual units of conventional notation." (p. 99)

"Antiphonning is a way of performing a song in which a leader and responders alternate performing successive parts of the song: it is a kind of fill-in-the-blank activity for singing a song." (p. 89)

"A **music map** is a line that represents the flow or movement of music. Drawn [or read] while a song or an instrumental work is being sung or heard, a map is a kinesthetic symbol as well as a visual one." (p. 95)

Principles for Teaching and Learning

Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997

SongWorks 1

1. Students have the right to be treated with respect and dignity for their ideas, skills, and stages of development.
2. Students deserve an engaging learning environment in which they feel safe enough to demonstrate freely their understandings and skills through various types of participation.
3. Student learning is the responsibility of both teachers and students.
4. Learning is holistic and constructive.
5. A teacher's attitudes, behaviors, and methodologies should be compatible.
6. Accurate and constructive feedback helps students become independent learners.
7. Quality of life is enriched through music and singing.

Principles for Teaching and Learning Music Bennett & Bartholomew, 1999

SongWorks 2

1. The major goal of music study is the development of a responsiveness to music.
2. The musicality that is critical to music performance is just as important in music study.
3. The fundamental skill in music behavior is listening.
4. The way music sounds rather than how it looks guides the selection and presentation of patterns for study.
5. A distinction exists between skills and concepts that are musically easy and those that are musically simple.
6. Song provides direct involvement for making music and studying sound relationships.

Sample Melodic Figures in Folksong Cadences

MRD	R/MMRRD	"the farmer in the dell"
	MRD	"tideo"
	R/MRD	"as three blind mice"
	M/RRMRD	"its fleece was white as snow"
	MMRRD	"EIEIO"
	DR/MFRRMD	"please don't take my sunshine away"
D/RS ₁ D	D/RR S ₁ S ₁ D	"who lives on Drury Lane"
	D/RR S ₁ S ₁ DD	"so early in the morning"
	D/R S ₁ S ₁ D	"go this way and that"
SFMRD	SLSFMRD	"all on a Saturday night"
	M/SFMRDD	"to buy a piece of candy"
	SFMRD	"life is but a dream"
	SSSLSFMDD	"way down yonder in the paw paw patch"
S ₁ L ₁ T ₁ D	D/T ₁ S ₁ L ₁ T ₁ DD	"and Bingo was his name-o"
	RM S ₁ L ₁ DD	"won't you be my honey?"
	S ₁ S ₁ /L ₁ L ₁ T ₁ S ₁ D	"Punchinella from the zoo"
	S ₁ /L ₁ DRD	"dear Liza, a hole"

Bennett, 2005, p. 48.

10 Hallmarks of a Melodic Figure Approach to Studying Melody

1. The whole song is the context for highlighting, performing, and identifying melodic chunks.
2. Listening is treated as a fundamental activity in *all* music behavior; listening is a skill at the base of all music experiences.
3. Natural expressions of the English language are preserved in folksong performances and through study of structure, melody, and rhythm.
4. English language folksongs are considered foundational to building a Study Song repertory for American school children.
5. Melodic figures within non-folksong literature extend study of melody in the music curriculum.
6. Vocal and aural variety is inherent in the study process. Figural patterns are sung within the context of whole songs, the keys in which songs are sung often vary during repetitions, and vocal exploration and confidence develop "in-tuneness."
7. Final cadences, phrase cadences, and repeated figural patterns are focal points for highlighting melody. Final cadence melodies tend to be repeated and remembered by children.
8. DO is part of early melody study. English-language songs are most frequently DO-centered, most folksongs cadence on DO, and all intervals (including SO-MI) are identified by their relationship to DO.
9. Anacrusis begin many figural patterns in early music study as natural components of the English language. Preceding nouns with articles, adjectives, and prepositions creates speech patterns that move from nonstressed to stressed sounds.
10. Music notation such as maps, song dots, and ideographs facilitate melodic figure study, moderate the transition from sound to conventional symbols, and provide opportunity for simultaneous reading, writing, and performing of music by children.

Bennett, 2005, p. 47.

Research & Quotable Quotes on Figures in Melody

Bennett, P. D. (2005). So, why sol-mi? *Music Educators Journal*, 91(3), 43-49.

Beginning American children's study of music with musical idioms taken from English-language folks songs seems both efficient and logical. (p. 45)

Bennett, P. D. (1990). Children's perceptions of anacrusis patterns within songs. In T. W. Tunks (Ed.) *Texas Music Education Research 1990* (1-7). Austin, TX: Texas Music Educators Association.

Is it possible that the "sound before symbol" approach, as it is frequently used, is more rooted in teachers' perceptions of the *symbols* of music than in their students' perceptions of the *sounds* of music? (p. 1) The findings that 33 of 40 students included anacrusis in 100% of their responses when words were used and that the remaining students missed only one in five anacrusis, strongly suggests that students are "tuned in" to the figural groupings of music...Because the musical units created by stressed and nonstressed sounds are common to both speech and music, perhaps students' lifetime of perceiving and responding to the architectonic structures of language has provided them with advanced training in perceiving these groupings in music. (p. 6-7)

Bennett, P. D. (1988). Children's pattern perception, accuracy, and preference in three response modes. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 39(1), 74-85.

Bennett, P. D. (1981). An exploratory study of children's multisensory responses to musical sound through speech rhythm patterns. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of North Texas, Denton.

Bennett, P. D. & Bartholomew, D. R. (1999). *SongWorks 2: Singing from sound to symbol*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

What sense does it make to train out of children the musicality that seems to be inherently in them, for the purpose of teaching them music? (p. 35)

Bennett, P. D. & Bartholomew, D. R. (1997). *SongWorks 1: Singing in the education of children*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Attention to the way in which we sing words not only permits the exploration and study of language and music but also allows the experience to become more expressive, more balanced, and in short, more beautiful. (p. 22)

Berr, B. (1990). Misleading music notation. *The Instrumentalist*, 45(1), 64-66.

The most important step in dealing with notational pitfalls is to take a fresh look at familiar symbols, to see the notation through a child's eyes. This requires seeing familiar groups of symbols with a fresh, almost naive outlook. It is your responsibility to show students how to deal with discrepancies between the musical sound and the way it is notated, so they understand that our notation system is sometimes inadequate to communicate even the simplest elements of music. Those students who learn how to interpret written symbols in a musical way right from the start may become good musicians, not just good readers. (p. 66)

Dowling, W. J. (1984). Development of musical schemata in children's spontaneous singing. In W. R. Crozier & A. J. Chapman (Eds.), *Cognitive processes in the perception of art*. Elsevier Science Publishers. B. V. North-Holland.

A persistent observation that I believe to be based on very weak evidence, dating perhaps from studies by Werner (Révész, 1954) is that the interval of a descending minor third is basic to children's singing. . . [My] observations agree with those of Moog (1976) in finding no evidence for the universality of the interval of the descending minor third...Moorehead et. al. (1941-51) found the descending minor third common only in social chants, and not in normal spontaneous songs. The cross-cultural evidence for the universality of a descending minor third outside of Europe is also weak.

Hart, L. A. (1982). *Human brain and human learning*. New York: Longman.

Once we begin to look critically at this notion of teaching in logical sequence, we can see that usually a further giant—and utterly wrong—assumption has been made: that if a subject is fragmented into little bits, and the student is then presented with the bits in some order that seems logical to somebody, the student will be quite able to assemble the parts and emerge with the whole—even though never given an inkling of the whole!...The logic that seemed apparent to the curriculum builder, textbook writer, or teacher may be invisible and incomprehensible to the student. (p. 52-53)

Herman, J. L., Aschbacher, P. R., Winters, L. (1992). *A practical guide to alternative assessment*. Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD.

Learning is not linear. Learning does not best proceed in discrete hierarchies. Because learning is not linear and can take many directions at once at an uneven pace, conceptual learning is not something to be delayed until a particular age or until all the "basic facts" have been mastered. People of all ages and ability levels constantly use and refine concepts. Current evidence makes it clear that instruction emphasizing structured drill and practice on isolated facts and skills does students a major disservice...such learning out of context makes it more difficult to organize and remember the information being presented. (p. 15)

Richards, M. H. (1984). *Aesthetic foundations for thinking: Rethought*. Portola Valley, CA: Richards Institute.

Sweeney, F. (2002). *From sound to symbol: The whole song as curriculum, the whole child as pedagogue, observation as methodology*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Thurmond, J. M. (1982). *Note grouping: A method for achieving expression and style in musical performance*. Pennsylvania: JMT Publications.

Today, even though one cannot play music without the barline, it should be realized that it is only a means to help us to better execute the duration of the notes. Before the advent of the barline (circa 1600 A.D.) the divisions of a composition were indicated by a repose at the end of the phrase and parts of phrases. In this way no vertical line separated the melodic line: and one read, played, or sang the musical idea or phrase, and not the measure (as one observes many musicians doing today). The over-accentuation of the first beat in the measure (or thesis) in serious music, which is at the root of unexpressive playing, can be said, then, to have arisen primarily from a legitimate need for an excess of rhythmic stress in dance music (the same as in popular music today). It is obviously a serious mistake, however, to consider all music as if it were written for the dance, and transfer this stress to every downbeat or every thesis simply because it is first in the measure! (p. 33) Note grouping provides a short cut to the immediate recognition of the germ motives, and consequently the sections and phrases. (p. 53)

Uptis, R. (1987). Toward a model for rhythm development. In J. C. Peery, I. W. Peery & T. W. Draper (Eds.), *Music and child development*. (pp. 55-79). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Standard music notation is based on the metric structure of rhythm but effective performance also requires the ability to respond to the figural grouping of surface events. Most traditional instruction emphasizes the metric aspects of rhythmic structure over the figural aspects. By emphasizing the metric or formal knowledge, teachers not only underplay the equally important figural aspect, but may also be speaking in terms that children cannot readily understand, since the metric notation may not match their internal figural representations. (p. 76)

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