

What's in a Score?

Literacy & SongWorks Notation

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A Collection of Favorite Quotes on Musicality & Literacy

“Literacy begins with and culminates in sound. Folksong games and recorded instrumental music are the playgrounds in which language (spoken and sung) is ignited and literacy blossoms. Literacy skills evolve from these playgrounds to evoke conversational responsiveness, demonstrations of sound through movement, movement that graphs into non-conventional notation, and non-conventional notation that systematically transforms into conventional music notation.” (Bennett & Langness, 2016)

“... We have been making some critically mistaken assumptions about our students' healthy musical intuitions—what they know how to do already. We are asking students to begin with what we believe are the three simplest, kinds of elements, but which for them may be the most difficult. In doing so, I think we are confusing smallest elements in music—isolated, decontextualized pitch and duration values—with what we assume are also the simplest elements.” (Bamberger, 1996, p. 34)

“... the smallest meaningful musical unit is the phrase or gesture, not an interval, beat, or measure” and “if we get fixated by the interval notation we may find ourselves ‘barking at print’ . . . [reading] in a stilted way with little idea of . . . meaning.” (Swanwick, 1999, p. 45)

“... teaching concepts for perceiving groups of notes [is the] missing ingredient [in a musical education]. (Harris, 1960)

“Placement of bar lines does not necessarily contribute to our feeling of the natural, musical divisions of a song.” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1999, p. 14)

“Because a song chunk is an interaction of melodic, rhythmic, language, and stress relationships, it preserves context and musical flow even when separated from its whole. For this reason, song chunks maintain a musical shape, making musical singing possible even when focusing on a single element. (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1999, p. 15)

“The concern here is that teaching patterns based on music notation, rather than on the sound of music, is creating unmusical experiences for children.” Bennett, 2016, p. 288.

“...the smallest musical unit is the phrase or gesture, not an interval, beat, or measure.” (Swanwick, 1999, p. 45)

“From the very beginnings of music study, practices should not be rigidly constrained by how conventional notation makes music look . . . in advanced music study we learn to avoid automatically thinking of the sounds and performing them in groupings that the notation suggests, and we should take this into consideration when working with children.” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1999, p. 35)

“[Song chunks] accurately capture a thought and a cohesive unit of sound and language . . . Song chunks, like phrases, result from the interaction of melodic, rhythmic, and language relationships. Like phrases, chunks preserve context and musical flow even when separated from the whole and, for that reason, can maintain their musical shape, making their performance musical, even when we are paying close attention to a single element. Phrases and chunks are organizers within songs that are determined by our perceptions and not by our notation system.” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997, p. 122)

“Learning is not linear. Learning does not 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. . . 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.” (Herman, Aschbacher & Winters, 1992, p. 15)

“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.” (Hart, 1982, pp. pp. 52-53)

“You will always be wise to let the song itself do as much of the teaching as possible. Do not pick it to pieces beforehand. Do not stick in your thumb and pull out a couple of tonal patterns for preliminary study . . . Teach the whole song. Do not teach the materials little bit by little bit, or even phrase by phrase. Remember always that the song itself is the thing.” (Mursell, 1951, p. 192, *Music and the classroom teacher*)

“Understanding the steps in a sequence is not always necessary to accomplishing a task or achieving a goal. But when things are presented in discrete steps, one feels compelled to understand the individual steps. And sometimes this focus on individual steps

- causes students and teachers to misinterpret their importance;
- causes apprehension in students who see the steps as confusing, challenging, and disconnected with the larger picture of music; and
- causes disenchantment with music study when students or teachers equate mastering steps with making or knowing music.” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1999, p. 37)

“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?” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1999, p. 35)

“Fragmentation of musical material, especially when stripped of context, is not an efficient path toward musical understanding or musicality. Ignoring context, making things simple by isolating them from the backgrounds in which they are normally found, can anaesthetize musicality.” (Bennett, 2005, p. 46)

“Do children *hear* the same patterns as their teachers see in music? . . . children may hear patterns that do not necessarily match the visual, metric organization of written notation. When provided with efficient, alternative modes for demonstrating their perceptions, children can accurately hear and perform patterns that may be considered "difficult" in commonly accepted taxonomies in elementary music education.” (Bennett, 1988, p. 84)

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