

TECHNIQUES OF DEVELOPING MUSIC READING  
IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Music is a common language beginning where speech leaves off. Music has come to hold a place of ever-increasing importance in the education of America's children. Music provides educational experiences essential to the development of well-rounded and effective personalities.

The total music program within a school should include the following objectives:

1. Provide emotional release.
2. Provide social unity.
3. Provide individual music skills.
4. Foster understanding of the place of music in the lives of people of other lands and times.
5. Foster desirable attitudes that will lead to an increasing appreciation and enjoyment of music by the child.<sup>1</sup>

In achieving these objectives, various activities should be included within the total music program. These activities include:

1. Singing and playing
2. Writing songs and music
3. Listening
4. Rhythmic activities
5. Reading music.<sup>2</sup>

Music instruction in the elementary school should help develop in boys and girls a desire for an understanding of music. It should furnish opportunities for individual and group development in all boys and girls so that music might provide a pleasurable and worthy occupation in leisure time. It should help to further an understanding of the contribution of music to the civilization of the world.

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<sup>1</sup>Albert H. Shuster and Milton E. Floghoft, The Emerging Elementary Curriculum - Methods and Procedures (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Incorporated, 1963), p. 337.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

### Statement of the Problem

The ability to read vocal music is an essential part of a well-rounded music education program. The purpose of this paper was to examine the various techniques of teaching the reading of music. The necessary procedures for developing the ability to read music were investigated. Readiness for reading, presentation of symbols and vocabularies, attitudes concerning music reading, and accepted procedures for teaching music reading were considered.

### Questions

In attempting to achieve the purposes of this paper, the following questions were considered.

1. What is music reading? What does it involve?
2. At what grade placement should music reading begin?
3. What are some necessary steps in achieving reading music ability?
4. What musical knowledge should be gained from music reading ability?
5. What musical terms are necessary for a musical reading vocabulary?
6. How much of the regular music period should be devoted to reading music?
7. Of what value is music reading to the student as he progresses through school and into adulthood?
8. What are the responsibilities of the teacher in presenting music reading?
9. What are some of the attitudes that are held toward music reading?

### Limitations and Delimitations

This report was limited to the intermediate grades in the elementary school. Music was the elementary school course used consideration, and even this was limited to the area of music reading. This library report used as its main source library materials and other such information.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms were considered to be of primary importance.

Music reading - ". . . the process leading to the ability to understand rhythmic and melodic patterns and to develop skill and power to interpret the music page."<sup>3</sup>

Scale - ". . . a graduated series of tones, ascending and descending in order of pitch according to a specified scheme of their intervals."<sup>4</sup>

Major scale - ". . . a graduated series of tones, ascending and descending in order of pitch according to the specified scheme of step, step, half-step, step, step, step, half-step."<sup>5</sup>

Minor scale - ". . . a graduated series of tones, ascending and descending in order of pitch according to the specified scheme of step, half-step, step, step, half-step, step, step."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Anne E. Pierce, Teaching Music in the Elementary School (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1959), p. 88.

<sup>4</sup>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1953), p. 753.

<sup>5</sup>Willi Apel, Harvard Dictionary of Music (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 421.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Chromatic scale - ". . . a graduated series of tones, ascending and descending in order of pitch according to the specified scheme of twelve successive half-steps."<sup>7</sup>

Sol-fa syllables - ". . . set of syllables, do or ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti or si, sung to the respective tones of the scale."<sup>8</sup>

Step - ". . . interval between two contiguous degrees of the staff or scale."<sup>9</sup>

Measure - ". . . notes or rests between two adjacent bars."<sup>10</sup>

#### Design and Procedures

The design of this report was descriptive. It was a basic compilation of the available information concerning music education reading. The library materials used should reveal the basic procedures and techniques necessary for having an effective music reading program in the elementary school.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 663.

<sup>8</sup>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 805.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 820.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 521.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Music reading is the ability to ". . . understand rhythmic and melodic patterns, and to develop skill and power to interpret the music page."<sup>11</sup> It is an essential part of a well-constructed musical program and should lead to a delightful adventure into the realm of music.

Reading music could be compared to reading in a language arts course. In such a reading course, it is necessary to drill upon various elements such as rapidity of phrase conception, looking ahead, individual words, and constructing original sentences. It is essential to know about the alphabet, phonetics, phonograms, individual words, and comprehension of sentences.

In music study, it is necessary to teach from the beginning that music is composed of tone groups rather than of individual tones, and that in reading music the entire phrase must be considered rather than one note at a time. In language reading, it is the sentence that gives the complete thought, not the individual words.

In reading music, if it is essential to read by phrases, it is necessary to train the eye to look ahead constantly. The same is true in a language reading program.

Also, in language reading, it is important for the students to be so familiar with certain words that no processes need be called upon each time the words are encountered. Students need to have committed to memory certain tone combinations which occur frequently in music and in notation, in order that they can be readily recognized once they have been learned.

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<sup>11</sup>Pierce, loc. cit.



Students, in music, need to be given an opportunity for original melodic construction, just as reading students are given an opportunity for original compositions.

A comparison between language reading and music reading might appear as such:

alphabet	scale
phonetics	interval
phonogram	note
word	chord
sentence	phrase
story	song

Both types of reading ". . . seek to develop a knowledge of mechanics and skill in their application to the printed page that the meaning may be made conscious and expressed."<sup>12</sup>

Although music reading is only a part of the total picture of music, it is a very essential part. Music reading is taught for the purpose of furthering musical development and understanding. Without the aid of the eye, all music learning would have to come from the ear. Also, music reading makes possible more extensive exploration of music.

Music reading can insure values which carry over into adulthood. If music reading experiences are begun and developed in the elementary school, these learnings will be of value as the students proceed through the junior and senior high schools. Skillful reading can provide a means of relaxation through pleasant activities. Any adult desiring to participate

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<sup>12</sup>Frances Wright, Elementary Music Education and Theory and Practice, (New York: Carl Fischer, Incorporated, 1939), p. 141.

in community musical activities will find greater enjoyment if music can be read easily and confidently. "Music experiences and learnings not only enrich the present but they also provide enrichments for all the years to come."<sup>13</sup>

The need to determine when music reading should begin is essential. It is felt by some that music reading should usually not be undertaken ". . . until the second or third grade."<sup>14</sup> There are others who feel that the fourth grade is the best level at which to start reading music.<sup>15</sup> Still others believe that music reading need not be introduced below the fifth grade. "Experience has shown that delay until the sixth grade does no damage to the ultimate ability of pupils to read music from the score."<sup>16</sup>

Although opinions differ as to the specific level at which music reading should be introduced, it is generally agreed that "the actual reading of the printed page in music should be delayed until the child is ready and has a need for it."<sup>17</sup> Those who believe that reading music should begin no earlier than the fourth grade contend that this will provide additional time for real musical enrichment. If reading music were started earlier, time might be devoted to laborious and uninteresting drill. Schools should do well ". . . to eliminate any consideration of teaching music reading

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<sup>13</sup>Edward J. Hermann, Supervising Music in the Elementary School (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1965), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>Peter W. Dykema and Hannah M. Cundiff, School Music Handbook (Illinois: Sunny-Birchard Publishing Company, 1955), p. 208.

<sup>15</sup>Hazel Nohavec Morgan, Music Education Source Book (Chicago, Illinois: Music Educators National Conference, 1949), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup>Robert S. Fleming (ed.), Curriculum for Today's Boys and Girls (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Incorporated, 1963), p. 205.

<sup>17</sup>Morgan, loc. cit.

below the fourth grade even in situations where a wealth of experience in music is provided in the primary grades."<sup>18</sup> "Children will learn to read music when they see the need - when they want to learn music that need<sup>d</sup> to be read."<sup>19</sup>

The principal objectives which should be accomplished in the primary grades are:

1. Help the children to like music.
2. Help the children learn to carry a tune and to use their voices properly.
3. Help the children learn to observe all sorts of structural and expressional details in the music being sung or listened to.
4. Help the children establish a connection between the music they sing and its notation.<sup>20</sup>

To assist in meeting these objectives, the primary children should be involved in numerous activities. They should be encouraged to develop the singing voice through spontaneous singing and group participation. Rhythmic bodily movements, creative expression, listening to music, and good listening habits should be regular parts of the music class. Children should have a concept of the movements and duration of notes by observing the musical notation of songs learned by rote. An eagerness to experiment with percussion and simple melody instruments should be encouraged. Being able to discriminate between high and low pitches, loud and soft tones, and fast and slow music will assist the students when music reading does begin.

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<sup>18</sup> Alfred Ellison, Music with Children (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Incorporated, 1959), p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Robert H. Beck, Walter W. Cook, and Nolan C. Kearney, Curriculum in the Modern Elementary School (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1953), p. 328.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Willson Gehrkins, An Introduction to School Music Teaching (Boston: C. C. Birchard, Company, 1929), p. 25.

"There is certainly little point in attempting to teach children to read music until they have had a rich background of experience in music."<sup>21</sup>

Readiness for music reading will greatly depend on how musically, mentally, physically, and psychologically ready the students are for notational study.

Music reading readiness is the skill and experience that helps prepare a person to interpret the symbols of music immediately. In readiness for music reading, ". . . the basic mechanics are those of time and tone."<sup>22</sup> The time or rhythm mechanics include meter movement and the various rhythm patterns. Meter is initially signified by the time signature at the beginning of a song. Although these numbers may vary, they can be understood on the basis that the top number indicates the number of beats in each measure, and the lower number indicates the particular type of note that receives one beat in the measure. For example, if the time signature was  $\frac{2}{4}$ , there would be two beats in each measure and a quarter note would get one beat. In their musical backgrounds, the students should have experience in bodily activities to assist them in feeling rhythm. Gaining a feeling for the values of notes and rests to be found later in reading material is an important step. When encountering a series of four quarter notes or rests, the students should feel "step, step, step, step," or a walking idea without any conscious thought. Eighth notes or rests, sixteenth notes or rests, and combinations of all the kinds of notes and rests should become associated with various feelings of trotting, galloping, and skipping. The students should be aware of how the dots after notes

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<sup>21</sup>Ellison, loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 144.

affect the value of the note, increasing its value half again as much as the original value. The actual names of the notes or rests and their values can be taught in a relatively short time, provided the feeling for these are experienced first.<sup>23</sup>

The tonal mechanics of readiness include intervals, chords, and scale lines. Intervals involve the distance traveled from one note to another. The students should become aware of intervals so that, when they are viewed on the printed page, the students can "hear" the sound produced. The students must have a number of tone combinations stored in their musical memory. Since a single tone had no musical meaning unless its relations to other tones is considered, all of the short tonal groups must be stored in the memory.<sup>24</sup>

Knowledge of chords should develop from listening for the different chords used in music. Chords are produced by playing various notes in the key. The basic chords are the tonic, dominant, and subdominant. The tonic, or I chord, is composed of the first, third, and fifth notes in the key. The subdominant, or IV chord, is made up of the fourth, sixth, and first notes, and the dominant, or V chord, is composed of the fifth, seventh and second notes. The students should become familiar with chordal progression, or where each chord moves best, and with which notes within the scale each chord may be used.

An additional tonal mechanic is the scale line. The two main scale lines which students will need to be familiar with are the major and the

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<sup>23</sup>Raymond Elliott, Teaching Music (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Incorporated, 1960), p. 104.

<sup>24</sup>Louise Kifer Myers, Teaching Children Music in the Elementary School (New York: Prentice Hall, Incorporated, 1950), p. 147-148.

minor scales. The major scales are most commonly used and the students should be most familiar with them. The major scales are based upon ". . . a graduated series of tones, ascending and descending in order of pitch according to the specified scheme of step, step, half-step, step, step, step, half-step."<sup>25</sup> Whatever key is considered, the scale starts on that note and proceeds with the specified progression. In some keys, it will be necessary to use sharps and flats to make the step progression work. A sharp is used to raise a note a half-step, and a flat lowers a note a half-step. The students should be aware of sharps and flats and their functions. The key signature of each song is made up of the sharps or flats and signifies what key the particular song is in. The key signature appears at the beginning of each song. The students should become familiar with the keys and key signatures of C, G, D, A, E, F, B<sup>b</sup>, E<sup>b</sup>, and A<sup>b</sup>. Although there are other keys, these are the ones which the students will be most involved with. The students ". . . should be familiar with the major key signatures at least to four sharps and four flats."<sup>26</sup>

The minor scales are based upon ". . . a graduated series of tones, ascending and descending in order of pitch according to the specified scheme of step, half-step, step, step, half-step, step, step."<sup>27</sup> The students need not be as familiar with the minor scales as they are with the major scales. They should ". . . understand the differences between the major and minor

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<sup>25</sup>Apel, op. cit., p. 421.

<sup>26</sup>Gehrrens, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>27</sup>Apel, loc. cit.

scales, but should particularly understand the minor scale from the standpoint of the ear."<sup>28</sup>

The Chromatic scale is ". . . a graduated series of tones, ascending and descending in order of pitch according to the specified scheme of twelve successive half-steps."<sup>29</sup> Only the idea of what the chromatic scale is and how it is written should be presented to the students and should not be done before the sixth grade.<sup>30</sup>

In learning and working with the time and tonal mechanics, the teacher needs to be constantly alert to point out small bits of learning when the opportunities arise. Rhythmic patterns and tonal changes can be discussed whenever they arise in a song.

One of the most vital factors in sight reading ability lies in the ability to read rhythmic figures and patterns accurately. Lack of this ability is often a more serious handicap to reading ability than lack of ability to read tonal relationships accurately.<sup>31</sup>

Another step in music reading readiness is to determine the medium with which the students are to read the music the first time. The three main processes which could be used are the sol-fa syllables, numbers, or letters.

The sol-fa syllables are a ". . . set of syllables, do or ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la, and ti or si, which are sung to the respective notes of the scale."<sup>32</sup> Originally, the main purpose for using the syllables was

<sup>29</sup>Apel, op. cit., p. 663.

<sup>30</sup>Gehrkins, loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup>Paul W. Mathews, You Can Teach Music (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Incorporated, 1960), p. 46.

<sup>32</sup>Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, op. cit., p. 805.

to create a feeling for the family of tones and their relationship to each other. This was aimed at developing a feeling of tonality.<sup>33</sup> However, this original purpose has not accomplished its goal in two ways:

1. A song which moves from key to key, or from one family of tones to another through a process called modulation, creates real difficulties when the movable do system is used; the same tone may be do in one key and sol in another key in the same song.

2. When tones in a family are changed from the usual one, chromatically altered, the whole system with its do-di, re-ri, fa-fi, etc., for sharps and another pattern for flats becomes so complicated that it falls under its own weight.<sup>34</sup>

However, ". . . rarely are syllables actually taught for the primary purpose of developing a feeling of tonality."<sup>35</sup> They are ordinarily used as a way to teach a song to children and an aid in learning to read notes.

There is a fixed do system and a movable do system. The movable do system is the only one of concern in the classroom. This system indicates that do is the first note of any key. Therefore, do will vary depending on the particular key of the song.

There are certain advantages or reasons for using the sol-fa syllables.

These are:

1. There is a different syllable name for each chromatic tone.
2. Each syllable, in itself, is euphonious.
3. Syllables help establish a feeling for the key.<sup>36</sup>

However, there are some unfavorable aspects of syllables, which are:

1. There is unfamiliarity of these syllables as terms. Children are not particularly interested in learning what they regard as meaningless nonsense syllables.

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<sup>33</sup>Ellison, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Elliott, *op. cit.*, p. 107.



2. They are useless to explain intervals.
3. Their use makes it unnecessary for the children to understand the key signature, so that understanding of the musical score is limited.
4. In some methods of instruction, the staff is not even used. Instead, by hand signs the syllables are represented, or a chart is employed.<sup>37</sup>

If syllables are used, they should be used in connection with the staff so that the students may make the connection between the two.

Another medium to work in when dealing in music reading readiness is that of numbers. Instead of the scale being represented by the sol-fa syllables, it is represented by 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. The advantages to this number system are :

1. Children more readily recognize the logic of this when sung from the lowest tone upward.
2. There is value in their ability to explain the general classification of intervals.
3. Their applicability to harmony.<sup>38</sup>

The disadvantages of numbers in music reading are:

1. Numbers are not conducive to good vocal habits.
2. Chromatics cannot be explained by their use.
3. Difficulties presented by changing keys within a song cannot be dealt with.<sup>39</sup>

The third medium to be used is that of letter names. In this process, the names of the individual notes are used in learning a song; A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. The familiarity of the note names is an advantage of this system. However, one of the main objections is that all of the letters, except for F and A have a vowel sound of E, the most closed of the vowel sounds. Their use is conducive to vocal tension. G-flat, C-sharp, and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

other such letter names which would be used are too difficult to say quickly. Also, there is no general pattern of relationship indicated between the notes.<sup>40</sup>

Whichever method is used, the emphasis must be placed upon the recognition of tonal groups. Also, it is apparent that some people are certain that the sol-fa syllables are the best way to introduce music reading whereas others are just as certain of the letters and scale numbers. In relation to these different approaches, all methods have produced good results in certain cases. "It would appear that the main concern should be whether or not the approach results in the greatest comprehended understanding for all the children."<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the approaches toward music reading which have been presented, there is also the instrumental approach. The trend toward this approach has gained some momentum in recent years. Melody instruments, resonator bells, electric organs, electronic pianos, and regular pianos are available and more plentiful today, helping to make the instrumental approach more important. "It appears that the instrumental approach is practical and the avenues for learning and understanding which it opens are great."<sup>42</sup>

Some values of the instrumental approach are:

1. The voice is not directly responsive to conscious physical manipulation. We control the voice largely through mental organization of what we hear.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>42</sup>Mathews, op. cit., p. 48.

2. The movement of the vocal cords cannot be specifically described in terms of the reproduction of a single tone or of a group of tones. Consider the tremendous difficulty of relating a specific staff location of a tone to this imprecise and indeterminable physical control of the vocal apparatus.

3. Consider how simple it is to describe and reproduce any single tone or group of tones on a music instrument. When we cover up certain holes or play particular keys, we are playing a tone having this name. In this process, we use a specific muscular reaction to produce a given tone which has a specific staff location. This is rational and subject to individual understanding and control.<sup>43</sup>

By playing one of the instruments themselves, the students can gain broad concepts and a wide range of meaningful experiences in music. Because of its availability, the piano provides an opportunity for developing the total music score. The piano approach is a sensible means of presenting and understanding such things of notation as steps, half-steps, scales, flats, sharps, key signatures, and chords.<sup>44</sup> "By playing as well as singing tonal and rhythmic groups, the child becomes more vividly aware of music notation and its meaning."<sup>45</sup> The aim of the keyboard approach is ". . . to teach children to play short tonal groups as an aid to hearing and as a means of understanding the musical score."<sup>46</sup>

This instrumental approach, as with the syllables, numbers, and letters of the scale, may or may not work in a particular classroom. The important thing is to determine whether it brings about the desired results for the students. Parts of each method might be experimented with in various situations, in attempting to determine which ones are of most value in the particular classroom.

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<sup>43</sup>Ellison, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>44</sup>Elliott, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 111.

Another important aspect of reading readiness is that the students need to have a desire to read music. If the students have had varied experiences and have acquired some of the skills mentioned previously, ". . . it is reasonable to expect that the culmination of these activities will be a felt need for learning to read music."<sup>47</sup>

When the actual reading process is about to begin, the children should be familiar with the information presented to them on the musical page. If this information is understood from the beginning, the possibility of distractions arising later may be avoided. The students should be aware that the name in the upper right hand corner is the name of the composer or that the words there indicate the source of the music. The name of the poet or composer of the words is shown in the upper left hand corner. The children should be familiar with the staff, or the five lines and four spaces upon which most of the music is built. The staff is difficult to comprehend as ". . . its only function is to make possible precise measurements which must first be apprehended through a totally felt experience with tonal relationships."<sup>48</sup>

The children should be familiar with the clef signs and the key signature. The treble, or G clef, shows where G and its neighboring letters belong. The bass, or F clef, locates F below middle C. The key signature, varying from song to song, determines whether or not black keys need to be included to make the melody or the scale sound right. This aspect has been discussed previously. Both of these items are necessary for each song.

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<sup>47</sup>Myers, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>48</sup>Marion Flagg, Musical Learning (Boston: C. C. Birchard and Company, 1949), p. 163.

The meaning of the marks indicating tempo and volume should be observed and understood. Tempo is indicated by words presented at the beginning of the song. Such words as *allegro*, *adagio*, *vivace*, *moderato*, *andante*, and *lento* signify tempo. Tempo can also be shown by a number and a type of note. This signifies that there should occur a certain number of notes per minute. For example, if ( $\text{♩} = 60$ ) were found at the beginning of a song, this would indicate that there should be 60 quarter notes in a minute, thus establishing the tempo of the song.

Children should become familiar with such words as *piano*, *pianissimo*, *forte*, *fortissimo*, *mezzo-forte*, *mezzo-piano*, *crescendo*, and *diminuendo*. These words indicate the volume at which the song should be presented and may be found throughout the song.

It is important to remember that music reading is a building process. It is not necessary that all of the readiness skills be totally learned before the reading process can begin.

After the readiness aspects have been introduced, the real process of music reading begins. The process should begin by singing very easy unfamiliar songs. One way in which this could be done is to write a simple song on the chalkboard and help the students recognize the various parts of the song which are necessary for the effective reading of music. Some things which might be included are key and time signatures, note values, intervals, and note placement, using either syllables, number, or letters. After learning the song and its tonal relationships in this manner, then the song could be sung using the words. It is essential that the students be made aware of the musical page and that they are aware of the information presented to them. It is important that easy songs be selected to begin the reading program.

After reading easy material, using the various media already mentioned, the words themselves can be used in the original reading. Individual classes will vary as to when they will be ready to begin this activity.

As the students read more music, they will gain confidence and be willing to attempt more difficult songs. The goal is then to have the students read two part music. To be able to sing in harmony of two parts, the students need:

1. The ability to sing many simple songs with confidence.
2. The ability to respond to various rhythm patterns.
3. An understanding of the notation representing tone and time.
4. Wide experience in hearing harmonies, played on the piano, song bells and/or other chording instruments during the singing and reading activities.<sup>49</sup>

At first, it would help the students if each part of the song was learned separately and then the parts were put together. Students should not be expected, especially at the beginning, to simply look at the two parts and sing them. They will need experience in working with the two parts together, listening to the harmonies produced. Three part reading could be considered in the latter part of the sixth grade.

Skill in reading music should be acquired through song material. Activities which might help to develop children's ability to read music are:

1. Moving to show the rhythm of the beat, accent, or melody.
2. Identifying the like or unlike phrases of songs.
3. Describing musical structure or form of composition.
4. Creating and writing down simple original songs.
5. Creating and writing down descants to familiar songs.

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<sup>49</sup>Elliott, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

6. Creating and notating rhythmic patterns for drums, tambourines, claves, or maracas, to accompany music.
7. Creating harmonic accompaniments to be played on the autoharp or the piano.
8. Listening to music and at the same time watching the notation of the principal themes.
9. Using the piano for chart lessons in steps, scales, and intervals.
10. Using the piano for chording and accompanying activities.
11. Using the radio and recordings.
12. Using tape recorders to listen to the sounds produced.
13. Singing harmonizations to familiar songs.

The ability to write music follows all of the processes of developing skill in music reading. Music reading involves the printed page which comes to represent heard relationships through the aid of the ear and seen relationships through the aid of the eye. Writing music is a different process concerned primarily with the presentation of the musical symbols in an organized form. Because composition involves a complex understanding of the music reading parts, some may be done in the elementary grades, but the more difficult aspects of composition should be reserved until later.

The teacher will often be the determining factor as to the success or failure of the music reading program. The teacher of music in the regular classroom may be a specialized music teacher who visits the classroom daily or various times during the week, or the teacher in the self-contained classroom. It is the latter teacher, the one who does not have specialized training in music, who will usually find the greatest difficulty in presenting an organized music program. However, "the quality and amount

of effective music reading skill which can and should be taught depends upon the skill and ability of the teacher, first as a teacher and only secondly as a musician.<sup>50</sup>

Teaching music reading does not need to be difficult. In the past, a great majority of the teachers attempting to teach music reading were unable to do so effectively. As a result, while it was well taught in some cases, in others it brought negative results by wasting time or, worse, hostility resulted from the drill involved and there was a lessened interest in music.

"Unless the teacher understands fully the psychological principles involved in the use of drill, whether it be in music or in any other field, it may do more harm than good, and may certainly be a great waste of time."<sup>51</sup> Drill must be used only when the need for it arises, it must be closely related to the problem or situation which is to be helped, it must be used in small amounts, requiring no large block of time at any one sitting. The unskilled teacher should be most careful not to use any large amount of time in attempting to build music reading skill in his students and in himself. The skilled teacher, who is reasonably well skilled in sight reading, should be careful not to expect his students to understand music reading skills immediately, therefore, drilling them for a long continuous period. Each individual teacher must teach music reading in the manner best fitted to him and the method in which he feels most confident. All teachers must remember the correct times for drill usage.

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<sup>50</sup>Mathews, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.



"The ability to read music readily and accurately is granted by everyone to be a valuable accomplishment."<sup>52</sup> Often, the process of gaining this power, with the necessity of neglecting other valuable phases of musical experiences, has caused some controversy over the value of music reading. There are some who urge that more attention be given to music reading because there can never be much singing unless music reading is first learned.<sup>53</sup> The idea is that music reading must be concentrated on heavily for a considerable period of time, regardless of other musical activities, so the music reading skills can be learned. "If the question of enjoyment arises, it is quickly passed over with the thought that once the students learn to read, they will enjoy singing."<sup>54</sup>

There are some who urge that less attention be given to music reading because ". . . there is no real value in music reading when the element of time is considered."<sup>55</sup> This appears to be of main concern, the length of time involved in teaching music reading. If too much time is spent on music reading, its real value is reduced. "In some cases, the casualties and boredom brought about through overuse of effort in the sight reading process have resulted in a greatly increased distaste for music."<sup>56</sup> Music reading should be involved in any and all phases of music study when it can make that study more significant. But, ". . . if the reading approach

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<sup>52</sup>Dykema, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>53</sup>Mathews, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid

<sup>55</sup>Hermann, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>56</sup>Mathews, loc. cit.

hinders instead of helps any phase of the music study, it should be revised or omitted."<sup>57</sup>

Music reading is an involved process. As teachers and students work with the various elements of music reading, it is important to remember the primary goal of reading music which is ". . . to help students deal creatively with music itself."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Dykema, loc. cit.

<sup>58</sup>Beck, op. cit., p. 328.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Music reading is ". . . the process leading to the ability to understand rhythmic and melodic patterns and to develop skill and power to interpret the music page."<sup>59</sup> It involves all of the processes and techniques which help students gain the ability to read music.

The grade at which to begin teaching music reading is not mutually agreed upon, opinions ranging from second grade to sixth grade. However, it is felt that the actual reading of the printed page should begin when the students are ready and have a need for reading.

The students need experience in singing various types of songs, experiences which will help them feel note values, and ability to read and understand the words in the songs. They also should have experience in distinguishing between high and low pitches, and loud and soft passages.

Music reading readiness is the term used to identify the skills which help prepare the students in interpreting the symbols of music. Time and tone are two important elements in readiness. Meter and rhythm patterns are included in time, and tone includes intervals, chords, and scale lines. Syllables, numbers, letter names, and the instrumental approach are the media which can be used to read music in the beginning stages. The students need to have a desire to read music for the program to be a success.

When the actual and apparent time for the reading process is about to begin, the students should be familiar with the information provided for them on the printed page. When actually reading music, the students should begin with simple songs and can then progress to more difficult numbers,

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<sup>59</sup>Pierce, loc. cit.

even to two and three part singing. In the reading process, the students will need to apply the information which they have learned previously.

From being able to read music, the students should gain a broader and deeper understanding of music. From their experiences, the students should have ability to deal creatively with music.

Terms which students should become aware of are those connected with volume, tempo, and other such terms as scales, key and time signatures, clefs, staff, and the different names of the notes.

Music reading should be included in as many of the music experiences as possible when it can make that experience more meaningful. Singing can take place before music reading is learned. It is from varied singing experiences that the students get their background for music reading. Safeguards must be taken that the reading approach is not used too much, harming the total music program.

As students mature, their abilities to read music will be added to as they go into junior and senior high schools. Even into adulthood, the students will find that being able to read can enrich their lives.

Teachers play a vital role in music reading and should always remember that their attitudes can often be reflected by the attitudes of the students. Teachers must help make music reading become a meaningful part of the students everyday lives. The amount of teaching which is done will depend upon the individual abilities and talents of each teacher.

Music reading has been somewhat of a controversial subject. Some authorities believe that more time should be spent on teaching reading while others feel less time should be spent. However, there are others who believe that ". . . learning to read music can be made interesting

and musical, that it can help other desirable aspects of music study, and that it can strengthen the love of music."<sup>60</sup>

The important objective in elementary music education is ". . . to heighten the native enjoyment and to increase the power of the student so that he may continue to enjoy and appreciate music more deeply and consequently become a more complete person."<sup>61</sup> The reading of music notation and the development of skill of performance should be thought of as an important segment contributing to the larger purpose.

It is the opinion of the author that music reading is an important segment of the entire music program. It would appear that most students will not be ready for music reading until at least the fourth grade, and possibly not even until later. One of the determining factors will be how much music experience the students have had in the earlier grades.

It is felt by the author that safeguards must be taken to avoid over-use of the music reading techniques. If too much time is spent on specific techniques of music reading, the students may possibly become uninterested and unmotivated. Care should be taken to insure that work on skills meets the needs of the children, breeds enthusiasm rather than boredom, is related to individual differences, and is kept secondary to the expressive and creative aspects of music.

Teachers in the self-contained classroom may experience some difficulties in teaching music reading. Many of these teachers have little or no training in music, and it would therefore be rather difficult for them

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<sup>60</sup>Dykema, *loc. cit.*

<sup>61</sup>William H. Sutton and John A. Hockett, The Modern Elementary School - Curriculum and Methods (New York: Rinehart and Company, Incorporated, 1959), p. 53

to teach music. To teach music reading would be almost an impossibility. Even those teachers with some music training have difficulties. It seems that, in most instances, if a complete music program is to be carried out in the classroom, specialized music teachers will need to be available to teach daily or at least two or three times a week.

There are many facts and facets in music reading. It may be impossible to teach all of the parts in the intermediate grades. However, an attempt should be made to present as much of the material as possible.

Throughout the music program, it must be remembered that music reading is a part of this total program. If taught properly and presented carefully, the students should gain a valuable addition to their musical knowledge. Music reading can give the students a deeper understanding of music itself.

Whichever method of teaching is used, whoever is doing the teaching, regardless of the musical experience or background, the most important value to be gained from an intermediate music program is enjoyment. If the students enjoy music, they will be willing to learn about it.

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TECHNIQUES OF DEVELOPING MUSIC READING  
IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES

by

JOYCE LYNN FOX

A. B., Baker University, 1963

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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The ability to read music, to interpret and understand the rhythmic and tonal patterns of the musical page, is an important part of a well-rounded music education program. The purpose of this report was to examine the various techniques of teaching the reading of music. The necessary procedures for developing the ability to read music were investigated. Readiness for reading, presentation of symbols, vocabularies, attitudes concerning music reading, and accepted procedures for teaching music reading were investigated.

The sources of information for this report were obtained from library readings. The information was compiled for the purpose of understanding music reading and the steps necessary for developing such a process.

The level at which to present music reading varies. The students should be capable of understanding the information which will be presented and there should be a need for learning to read.

There are certain activities which need to be introduced prior to the teaching of music reading. The students need to have experience in singing. They need to have experience in rhythmic activities, in listening to music, and in working with percussion and rhythm instruments.

Tone and time mechanics, composed of intervals, chords, scale lines, meter, and rhythm patterns, need to be studied and understood. Certain intervals which occur frequently in music should be committed to memory. Chords, their progressions, and the notes which chords correspond with should be learned. The students should know the specified progressions of the major, minor, and chromatic scales and should be able to hear the different sounds produced by each. Meter and rhythm patterns are established through time signatures and notes, rests, and their combinations.

The sol-fa syllables, numbers, and letters are means used to introduce music reading. Each of these methods is used to help in the recognition of tonal groups. The instrumental approach has received some additional emphasis in recent years, based upon the premise that being able to play tonal and rhythmic groups gives more meaning than simply singing the patterns. Although these four methods have various advantages and disadvantages, each has produced good results in certain cases. The important consideration should be the method which provides the greatest comprehension for all the children.

Information available on the musical page should broaden the students knowledge of music. The treble and bass clefs identify where notes are on the staff. Tempo and volume terms should become familiar to the students and they should be aware of how to use them.

As the students become familiar with the various parts of music, they will be ready to begin reading music. If rhythmic and tonal groups are well understood and if a discussion is held concerning the various parts of the song to the sung, little difficulty should be experienced in reading music. It is essential that simple songs be selected as the reading begins. The methods used to help recognize tonal groups should be used when first learning to sing the song and then the words may be added. With experience, more difficult songs and two and three part songs can be learned through music reading.

Teachers having special music training and those with very little music background are involved in teaching music reading. Teachers in both groups must be careful not to spend too much time in drill, but should make each learning experience meaningful. The amount of music reading and the quality

of music reading to be taught should depend upon the skill of each teacher, whether having special music training or not.

Attitudes vary concerning the necessity of music reading in the whole music program. If presented in a meaningful and understanding way, and if time is not wasted on too much drill, music reading can be a contributing factor to all of the phases of music study. Also, music reading should help students deal creatively with music.