

On Programs in Music Education

What should we do to music teachers in training, and what should the music teachers do in teaching, to ensure the musicality of what children learn? Churchley looks at the variety of systems in teaching now extant, and at the adaptive or eclectic measures that teachers resort to when faced with selecting what to do next Monday or next term. His recommendation, "deceptively simple," is to focus on music itself and on the human lives that music is meant to enhance. He analyses for us the sequence in which the constituent concepts of music are naturally acquired — with an eye on the child born into today's world of sound, and with the humanity of an experienced teacher who knows how things get started with young people. In accordance with all this he recommends for the preparation of teachers a sequence of training in basic musicianship, an objective and practical sampling of all the major systems of learning music, and final study of any one such system in great depth.

The music teaching field has been flooded with new programs during the past two decades. Canadian and American music educators visiting other countries brought back to this continent methods that have had success elsewhere. Orff, Kodaly, Suzuki and Martenot are among the most prominent. These methods and others were summarized more than ten years ago in a previous article in this journal (Churchley, 1967). Since that time, two different directions have been followed by the various method proponents. One group has attempted to remain true to the originators of their programs, sticking to "pure" Orff or Kodaly, or Suzuki, or whatever. Others have adapted these methods to suit the North American culture. Mary Helen Richards, who started as a Kodaly advocate, is a case in point with her Education through Music (ETM) program. Sometimes they have veered so far from the original to have virtually developed methods of their own.

In addition to these foreign methods, either "pure" or "adapted," are many indigenous ones. Small committees of leading North American music educators

have collaborated on music programs that major publishers have produced. "Making Music Your Own," "The Spectrum of Music," "Music (Silver Burdett)," "Exploring Music" and in Canada "Basic Goals in Music" are all examples. Most of these programs have taken an eclectic approach, bringing together ideas and materials from many sources. Others, such as M.M.C.P. (Manhattanville Music Curriculum Project) or the Comprehensive Musicianship program, have been developed more distinctively, being based on a central concept such as creativity and exploration.

The problem facing the music educator, therefore, is not a lack of materials or teaching methods, but rather a confusing array of ideas. To compound the problem many provincial education ministries have been decentralizing curriculum planning and delegating the responsibility of more decision-making to the teacher. What course of action therefore should the teacher take? First of all, a look at some of the strengths and weaknesses of the above-mentioned trends appears to be in order.

"Pure" methods, adaptations, and eclecticism

The strongest advantage of any of the "pure" methods is the great enthusiasm with which they are presented. The methods experts are usually prepared in depth through concentrated study at the program's source. They develop much skill in presenting their points of view in workshops, at conventions and in courses. Their evangelism excites teachers to go back to their classes with added zeal of their own and some fresh ideas to impart to their children. Certainly this renewed vigour in teaching is most commendable.

Following one system exclusively usually ensures a unity of purpose. With one's sights focused clearly in one direction, there is a better chance of arriving at a goal. This single-mindedness, even though it is accompanied by tremendous teacher enthusiasm, does sometimes lead to a loss of student interest through the lack of variety. Students in one class were heard asking their general classroom teacher, after the specialist (of the "pure" method variety) had left, "Now can we have some real music?" The expert had been so concerned with following set procedures that what music really is and what it can do for people had been lost sight of.

Another problem arises when one specific method with its own materials that has been produced in one cultural setting is transplanted directly to others. What is relevant in one country or even in one part of a country is not always so elsewhere. Even within Canada, for instance, what are appropriate materials in Yellowknife may not be effective at all in Montreal.

There does therefore seem to be some justification for adaptations of methods. By definition one would expect these approaches to be more suitable

for different settings. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. At times adapters of methods become just as rigid in their own way as the purists.

Adapters, too, have been criticized for lack of quality and taste. There is some evidence to support this accusation. No approach however, be it pure, adapted, or eclectic, has been completely free from this charge. The need for quality is evident no matter what program is followed. The plan of action suggested later in this article may overcome this problem.

In attempting to overcome some of the problems present in "one-method only" approaches, either pure or adapted, many teachers have opted for eclecticism. The true eclectic takes ideas and procedures from many sources and blends them into a pot-pourri — a very individualistic and ever-changing approach. The Music Educators National Conference has even published a book entitled *The Eclectic Curriculum in American Music Education* (Landis and Carder, 1972). It includes summaries of many methods along with suggestions for their blending together.

Eclecticism, too, has not in itself been an entirely successful approach. It is too easy to take a little of this and a little of that, and not have the total add up to much. Superficiality is the main pit-fall of this course of action. This may well be due to lack of a coherent philosophical stance which deprives the teacher of long-range goals. Even worse, if two methods are in fact based on conflicting philosophies, and if elements of each are brought together in the name of eclectic teaching without due regard for the differences, then confusion may well result in the minds of learners, with the gains of one approach being cancelled out by their opposites.

Music Itself

If the narrowness of single prescribed methods on the one hand and the shallowness of eclectic teaching on the other have not been successful, for some of the reasons already stated, then where does the teacher turn for guidance in program planning and implementation? The answer may indeed be deceptively simple: focus on music itself and the human lives that music is meant to enhance, and focus less on the prescriptions of how to teach it. This may or may not seem heretical to state in an Education journal. Indeed, the author hastens to say that methodology and a study of the whole field of education cannot be ignored. The greatest musician in the world might be a very poor teacher. On the other hand good musicians can be good teachers and sometimes without much teacher education, either teaching by instinct or more probably teaching as they were taught. A study of the educational process with a depth of purpose and with a sincere concern for learning should then develop the person we sometimes call "a born teacher" into an outstanding one.

Focusing on music itself rather than on the method of its instruction does not in fact suggest the ignoring of such elements of good teaching as positive reinforcement; preparing the ground for instruction through adequate preparation and motivational techniques; making learning relevant to students' lives; providing opportunities to explore and to experience, rather than simply telling; reinforcing new learnings in different settings; providing practice in the newly learned concept or skill; and many other common educational techniques. One can (and in fact must) put into practice such principles, yet still maintain the subject matter itself — in this case, music — as the basis of curricular organization. It is simply being stated that in some cases the very reason for the music teacher's existence has been lost sight of. It is to guide the child toward an ever-deepening understanding and appreciation for the art of music as an essential part of a civilized life.

A specific example may clarify this point. Teachers sometimes bill themselves as "Teachers of Orff" (or Kodaly or E.T.M. or any other method). Courses of study have been entitled "Kodaly (or Orff, etc.) for Kindergarten" (or Grade One, etc.). Orff, Kodaly, E.T.M., M.M.C.P., Carabo-Cone, or whatever are *not* part of the school curriculum. *Music* is. Teachers of music can teach music at kindergarten or any other level, and use some of the techniques developed by any of the authors of methods. It is a matter of keeping things in perspective.

What is music?

If music is to be considered the central focus, then it requires some analysis. What is music and what are its constituent parts?

Music first of all is an art, not a science. This tells us that decisions about it are rarely a matter of right or wrong, but rather what is more appropriate in each particular circumstance. A chord progression that is quite acceptable in Debussy's style, for example, could well be considered bad in a Mozart Sonata. Teachers often wisely mark such things as O/S (out of style) rather than incorrect. Similarly, a vocal tone quality that is right for a Chinese song is not considered proper for singing German lieder. So it is with most aspects of music. Yet, teachers too often *tell* students they are too loud, too soft, too low in pitch, and so on, rather than encourage them to *listen* carefully and to start making musical decisions themselves from the earliest of stages.

The second characteristic of music that should affect its teaching is that it is the art of *sound*. Being an aural phenomenon is what distinguishes it from the other arts, and therefore should have a major effect on its instruction. Procedures need to be found that develop ears that hear. What works with one child, however, does not necessarily work with another. Utilizing many ac-

tivities in the classroom — moving to music, singing, playing instruments, listening, creating, reading and writing — can all help develop the ear.

Music, too, is a *creative* art. When this fact is kept clearly in the forefront of one's thinking then it has a significant effect on the learning situations. Any methods that lay on specific materials that must be used in specific ways are in fact going against the very definition of music. Yet this often happens. As a result music instruction sometimes makes students less creative rather than more. This is borne out by a recent study in Utah that found that mathematics student teachers were the most creative and music student teachers the least!

As well as remembering what music is, in a general sense, one needs to look at its constituent parts. Only then can the teacher ensure that he or she is teaching *all* the music to children, not just some aspects of it. Melody and rhythm are often thought to be the most basic elements of music and, therefore, are the first aspects of music to be taught. Some methods in fact seem to dwell almost exclusively on these two components. Moving to various rhythms, usually starting with the very simple, and singing simple tonal patterns, starting with the falling minor third for example, are much used activities.

Loudness to timbre to pitch

Other musical concepts, however, should not be neglected. Research indicates a developmental sequence in sound discrimination from loudness to timbre and then to pitch. (Michel 1973) Learning experiences should be provided that reinforce this natural development. The ability to recognize timbre differences should be supported by opportunities to hear and play instruments with different tone qualities. The human voice is our greatest instrument but should not be the only timbre dealt with; a great variety of instruments, simple and complex, cheap and expensive, is available today. In passing, it might be noted here that complex instruments like the violin and the piano have an important place in early childhood education. Suzuki and Pace have shown that when presented in appropriate ways, violin and piano can provide very effective learning experiences for young children.

The teacher can, of course, start children exploring with different timbres without formal instruments at all. The use of environmental sounds is an obvious vehicle for developing an understanding of timbre. A "sound" walk is a fine opportunity for children, after which they can discuss the various sounds they heard — birds, cars, wind, and so on.

Combined pitches (sometimes referred to as "texture"), either as chords (harmony) or combined melodies (counterpoint), are an aspect of music that normally develops later. In this day and age, however, it is so much with us — through

orchestral sounds on television and radio — that it seems unwise to deny the child early harmonic experiences in school. If we are teaching school music that appears to have some relationship to music in the real world, then it must be included.

Again, the complexities of harmony need not get in the way. An exploration of combined pitches can be done most simply. Two or three children can play different pitches simultaneously on bells, piano or whatever. The rest of the class can describe the chords played. Those chords they particularly like can be used as a basis for improvisation.

Ostinati are other devices for providing children with texture experience. A short melodic motif, possibly only two, three, or four notes long, can be played or sung throughout a song as an accompaniment. In this activity and other textural ones it should always be kept in mind that, music being an aural art, it is the sense of hearing that is the music teacher's main concern. The learner, therefore, must be encouraged to *listen* to the combined effect, not just to focus on his or her own part.

Music teacher education: a suggested pattern

In order to prepare a teacher adequately to guide student activities in music, a three-part sequence of courses (or their equivalents) is proposed:

1. Basic musicianship
2. An over-view of all major music programs
3. An in-depth study of at least one major "method"

A solid foundation of the content of any discipline is necessary before one can presume to teach it to others. One would expect this to be a simple truism, were it not for the fact that many teachers attend "how to teach" music sessions without a firm grasp of "what to teach." This article has attempted to shed some light on the basics of music, but can merely point out certain avenues to be pursued. The equivalence of at least one university course is necessary to provide adequate music background.

Following the above preparation, the future teacher is ready to consider the various means of teaching it to others. It is possible and certainly preferable that this be accomplished in as practical a way as possible, incorporating a wide spectrum of ideas from all the major methods. This needs to be approached as objectively as can be, with the opportunity to assess the relative merits of the various methods and their underlying philosophies.

After one has had the chance to survey the broad music education scene and to ascertain what is most compatible with one's personal style and preference, and what seems most appropriate for one's particular teaching situa-

tion, that is the time to study a selected method in great depth. Such a study is much more likely to be kept in perspective and at the same time be thorough if it occurs within the suggested order of events. One is in a position to benefit more from a specialized course when it follows basic musicianship and surveys of methods.

The music teacher is certainly not without suggestions as to what to do on Monday. There is in fact a plethora of methods. The problem is to sort out the available materials and to determine where one is aiming, not just for next Monday, but for next month and next year. "Pure" methods, adapted methods, and eclectic methods have been considered. In order not to lose sight of one's *raison d'être*, it has been suggested that music itself become the focal point of school music activities, not the method of teaching it. The suggestions offered above for a teacher education with a threefold series of courses may sound idealistic and impractical from the point of view of the demand on time and resources, but there are institutions in this country that have established programs of this type. Results appear to indicate that it is worthy of replication elsewhere.

Music programs and their numbers of advocates will no doubt continue to grow. With an adequate background, the discerning music teacher will be in a position to choose those most appropriate for children within his or her care.

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