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Elements of music form definition

Chapter Summary: The first half of this chapter attempts to define music as a subject and offers perspectives on music, including basic vocabulary and what you should know about music in order to incorporate it in your work with children. The second half gives a brief overview of music education and teaching in the U.S., which provides the foundation of the discipline for the book. I. Defining Music “Music” is one of the most difficult terms to define, partially because beliefs about music have changed dramatically over time just in Western culture alone. If we look at music in different parts of the world, we find even more variations and ideas about what music is. Definitions range from practical and theoretical (the Greeks, for example, defined music as “tones ordered horizontally as melodies and vertically as harmony”) to quite philosophical (according to philosopher Jacques Attali, music is a sonic event between noise and silence, and according to Heidegger, music is something in which truth has set itself to work). There are also the social aspects of music to consider. As musicologist Charles Seeger notes, “Music is a system of communication involving structured sounds produced by members of a community that communicate with other members” (1992, p.89). Ethnomusicologist John Blacking declares that “we can go further to say that music is sound that is humanly patterned or organized” (1973), covering all of the bases with a very broad stroke. Some theorists even believe that there can be no universal definition of music because it is so culturally specific. Although we may find it hard to imagine, many cultures, such as those found in the countries of Africa or among some indigenous groups, don’t have a word for music. Instead, the relationship of music and dance to everyday life is so close that the people have no need to conceptually separate the two. According to the ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl (2001), some North American Indian languages have no word for “music” as distinct from the word “song.” Flute melodies too are labeled as “songs.” The Hausa people of Nigeria have an extraordinarily rich vocabulary for discourse about music, but no single word for music. The Basongye of Zaire have a broad conception of what music is, but no corresponding term. To the Basongye, music is a purely and specifically human product. For them, when you are content, you sing, when you are angry, you make noise (2001). The Kpelle people of Liberia have one word, “sang,” to describe a movement that is danced well (Stone, 1998, p. 7). Some cultures have certain aspects of music. Indian classical music, for example, does not contain harmony, but only the three textures of a melody, rhythm, and a drone. However, Indian musicians more than make up for a lack of harmony with complex melodies and rhythms not possible in the West due to the inclusion of harmony (chord progressions), which require less complex melodies and rhythms. What we may hear as music in the West may not be music to others. For example, if we hear the Qur’an performed, it may sound like singing and music. We hear all of the “parts” which we think of as music—rhythm, pitch, melody, form, etc. However, the Muslim understanding of that sound is that it is really heightened speech or recitation rather than music, and belongs in a separate category. The philosophical reasoning behind this is complex: in Muslim tradition, the idea of music as entertainment is looked upon as degrading; therefore, the holy Qur’an cannot be labeled as music. Activity 2A Listen Qur’an Recitation, 22nd Surah (Chapter) of the Qur’an, recited by Mishary Rashid Al-‘Efasi of Kuwait. Although the exact definition of music varies widely even in the West, music contains melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, pitch, silence, and form or structure. What we know about music so far... Music is comprised of sound. Music is made up of both sounds and silences. Music is intentionally made art. Music is humanly organized sound (Bakam, 2011). A working definition of music for our purposes might be as follows: music is an intentionally organized art form whose medium is sound and silence, with core elements of pitch (melody and harmony), rhythm (meter, tempo), and articulation, dynamics, and the qualities of timbre and texture. Beyond a standard definition of music, there are behavioral and cultural aspects to consider. As Titon notes in his seminal text Worlds of Music (2006), we “make” music in two different ways: we make music physically; i.e., we bow the strings of a violin, we sing, we press down the keys of a piano, we blow air into a flute. We also make music with our minds, mentally constructing the ideas that we have about music and what we believe about music; i.e., when it should be performed or what music is “good” and what music is “bad.” For example, the genre of classical music is perceived to have a higher social status than popular music; a rock band’s lead singer is more valued than the drummer; early blues and rock was considered “evil” and negatively influential; we label some songs as children’s songs and deem them inappropriate to sing after a certain age; etc. Music, above all, works in sound and time. It is a sonic event—a communication just like speech, which requires us to listen, process, and respond. To that end, it is a part of a continuum of how we hear all sounds including noise, speech, and silence. Where are the boundaries between noise and music? Between noise and speech? How does some music, such as rap, challenge our original notions of speech and music by integrating speech as part of the music? How do some compositions such as John Cage’s 4’33” challenge our ideas of artistic intention, music, and silence? Read more/John Cage 4’33” watch this Annenberg Video: Exploring the world of music Activity 2B Imagine the audience’s reaction as they experience Cage’s 4’33” for the first time. How might they react after 15 seconds? 30? One minute? Basic Music Elements Sound (overtone, timbre, pitch, amplitude, duration) Melody Harmony Rhythm Texture Structure/Form Expression (dynamics, tempo, articulation) In order to teach something, we need a consensus on a basic list of elements and definitions. This list comprises the basic elements of music as well as understand them in Western culture. 1. Sound Overtone: A fundamental pitch with resultant pitches sounding above it according to the overtone series. Overtones are what give each note its unique sound, watch this throat-singing Timbre: The tone color of a sound resulting from the overtones. Each voice has a unique tone color that is described using adjectives or metaphors such as “nasally,” “resonant,” “vibrant,” “strident,” “high,” “low,” “breathy,” “piercing,” “ringing,” “rounded,” “warm,” “mellow,” “dark,” “bright,” “heavy,” “light,” “vibrato.” Pitch: The frequency of the note’s vibration (note names C, D, E, etc.). Amplitude: How loud or soft a sound is. Duration: How long or short the sound is. 2. Melody A succession of musical notes; a series of pitches often organized into phrases. 3. Harmony The simultaneous, vertical combination of notes, usually forming chords. 4. Rhythm The organization of music in time. Also closely related to meter. 5. Texture The density (thickness or thinness) of layers of sounds, melodies, and rhythms in a piece; e.g., a complex orchestral composition will have more possibilities for dense textures than a song accompanied only by guitar or piano. Most common types of texture: Monophony: A single layer of sound; e.g., a solo voice Homophony: A melody with an accompaniment; e.g., a lead singer and a band; a singer and a guitar or piano accompaniment; etc. Polyphony: Two or more independent voices; e.g., a round or fugue. watch this Musical Texture 6. Structure or Form The sections or movements of a piece; i.e. verse and refrain, sonata form, ABA, Rondo (ABACADA), theme, and variations. 7. Expression Dynamics: Volume (amplitude)—how loud, soft, medium, gradually getting louder or softer (crescendo, decrescendo). Tempo: Beats per minute; how fast, medium, or slow a piece of music is played or sung. Articulation: The manner in which notes are played or words pronounced; e.g., long or short, stressed or unstressed such as short (staccato), smooth (legato), stressed (marcato), sudden emphasis (sforzando), slurred, etc. What Do Children Hear? How Do They Respond to Music? Now that we have a list of definitions, for our purposes, let’s refine the definition of music, keeping in mind how children perceive music and music’s constituent elements of sound (timbre), melody, harmony, rhythm, structure or form, expression, and texture. Children’s musical encounters can be self- or peer-initiated, or teacher- or staff-initiated in a classroom or daycare setting. Regardless of the type of encounter, the basic music elements play a significant role in how children respond to music. One of the most important elements for all humans is the timbre of a sound. Recognizing a sound’s timbre is significant to humans in that it helps us to distinguish the source of the sound, i.e. who is calling us—our parents, friends, etc. It also alerts us to possible danger. Children are able to discern the timbre of a sound from a very young age, including the vocal timbres of poets, relatives, and teachers, as well as the timbres of different instruments. Studies show that even very young children are quite sophisticated listeners. As early as two years of age, children respond to musical style, tempo, and dynamics, and even show preference for certain musical styles (e.g., pop music over classical) beginning at age five. Metz and his peers assert that “a common competence found in young children is the enacting through movement of the music’s most constant and salient features, such as dynamics, meter, and tempo” (Metz, 1989; Goralı-Turel, 1997; Chen-Hafteck, 2004). On the aggregate level, children physically respond to music’s beat, and are able to move more accurately when the tempo of the music more clearly corresponds to the natural tempo of the child. As we might expect, children respond to the dynamic levels of loud and soft quite dramatically, changing their movements to match changing volume levels. The fact that children seem to respond to the expressive elements of music (dynamics, tempo, etc.) should not come as a surprise. Most people respond to the same attributes of music that children do. We hear changes in tempo (fast or slow), changes in dynamics (loud or soft), we physically respond to the rhythm of the bass guitar or drums, and we listen intently to the melody, particularly if there are words. These are among the most ear-catching elements, along with rhythm and melody. This is what we would expect. However, there are other studies whose conclusions are more vague on this subject. According to a study by Sims and Cassidy, children’s music attitudes and responses do not seem to be based on specific musical characteristics and children may have very idiosyncratic responses and listening (1997). Mainly, children non-discriminating, reacting positively to almost any type of music (Kim, 2007, p.23). Activity 2C What type of music might children best respond to given their musical perceptions and inclinations? Is there a particular genre of music, or particular songs or set of songs? How might you get them to respond actively while engaging a high level of cognitive sophistication? Music Teaching Vocabulary After familiarizing yourself with the basic music vocabulary list above (e.g., melody, rhythm), familiarize yourself with a practical teaching vocabulary; in other words, the music terms that you might use when working in music with a lesson for children that correspond to their natural perception of music. For most children, the basics are easily conveyed through concept dichotomies, such as: Fast or Slow (tempo) Loud or Soft (dynamics) Short or Long (articulation) High or Low (pitch) Steady or Uneven (beat) Happy or Sad (emotional response) Interestingly, three pairs of these dichotomies are found in Lowell Mason’s Manual for the Boston Academy of Music (1839). For slightly older children, more advanced concepts can be used, such as: Duple (2) or Triple (3) meter Melodic Contour (melody going up or down) Rough or Smooth (timbre) Verse and Refrain (form) Major or Minor (scale) Music Fundamentals The emotive aspects of music are what most people respond to first. However, while an important part of our culture, simply responding subjectively to “how music makes you feel” is similar to an Olympic judge saying that she feels happy when watching a gymnast’s vault. It may very well be true, but it does not help the judge to understand and evaluate all of the elements that go into the execution of the gymnast’s exercise or how to judge it properly. Studies show that teachers who are familiar with music fundamentals, and especially note reading, are more comfortable incorporating music when working with children (Kim, 2007). Even just knowing how to read music changes a teacher’s confidence level when it comes to singing, so it’s important to have a few of the basics under your belt. Preparation for Learning to Read Music Formal note reading is not required in order to understand the basics of music. Younger children can learn musical concepts long before learning written notation. Applying some of the vocabulary and concepts from above will help you begin to discern some of the inner workings of music. The good news is that any type of music can be used for practice. Melodic Direction: Just being able to recognize whether a melody goes up or down is a big step, and an important auditory-cognitive process for children to undergo. Imagine the melody of a song such as “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” Sing the song dividing it into two phrases (phrase 1 begins with “row,” phrase 2 begins with “merrily”). What is the direction of phrase 1? Phrase 2? Draw the direction of the phrase in the air with your finger as you sing. Timbre. Practice describing different timbres of music—play different types of music on Pandora, for example, and try to describe the timbres you hear, including the vocal timbre of the singer or instrumental timbres. Expression. Now practice describing the expressive qualities of a song. Are there dynamics? What type of articulation is there? Is the tempo fast, slow, medium? Learning Notation: Pitch It sounds simple, but notes or pitches are the building blocks of music. Just being able to read simple notation will help build your confidence. Learning notes on a staff certainly seems dull, but coming up with mnemonics for the notes on the staff can actually be fun. For example, most people are familiar with: Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge to indicate the treble clef line notes F A C E to indicate the bass clef space notes Good Boys Deserve Fudge Always for the bass clef line notes All Cows Eat Grass for the bass clef space notes But allowing children to develop their own mnemonic device for these notes can a creative way to have them own the notes themselves. How about Grizzly Bears Don’t Fly Airplanes for the lines of the bass clef, or Empty Garbage Before Dad Flips or Elephants Get Dirty Feet for the lines of the treble clef? Notes of the Treble Staff Note/Pitch Name Practice Note Review: Spelling Words with Note names Learning Notation: Rhythm Rhythm concerns the organization of musical elements into sounds and silences. Rhythm occurs in a melody, in the accompaniment, and uses combinations of short and long durations to create patterns and entire compositions. Rests are as important to the music as are the sounded rhythms because, just like language, rests use silence to help organize the sounds so we can better understand them. Notes and rests Whole note Whole rest Dotted half note Dotted half rest Half note Half rest Quarter note Quarter rest Eighth note Eighth rest Sixteenth note Sixteenth rest Rhythm Practice: Label each rhythm 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. Learning Notation: Meter Meter concerns the organization of music into strong and weak beats that are separated by measures. Having children understand the difference between measures, and how they are used, is important. The terms are in Italian, and are listed from slowest to fastest. Larghissimo: very, very slowly (19 beats per minute or less) Grave: slowly and solemnly (20–40 bpm) Largo: broadly (45–50 bpm) Larghetto: rather broadly (50–55 bpm) Adagio: slow and stately (literally, “at ease”) (55–65 bpm) Andante: at a walking pace (the verb andare in Italian means to walk) (73–77 bpm) Andantino: slightly faster than andante (78–83 bpm) Marcia moderato: moderately, in the manner of a march (83–85 bpm) Moderato: moderately (86–97 bpm) Allegretto: moderately fast (98–109 bpm) Allegro: fast, quickly and brightly (109–132 bpm) Vivace: lively and fast (132–140 bpm) Allegro: fast (150–167 bpm) Presto: extremely fast (168–177 bpm) Prestissimo: even faster than presto (178 bpm and above) Terms that refer to changing tempo: Ritardando: gradually slowing down Accelerando: gradually accelerating Activity 2D Exploring tempo in everyday life: The average person walks at a pace between 76-108 beats per minute. Playlists can offer different tempi for different types of exercise. Find your tempo! What song fits a slow walking speed, medium, brisk, running? Stores play songs in slower tempi to encourage you to shop. Go to a supermarket or store and notice your walking speed. Is it connected to the beat of the music? Read More How Stores use Music Scales Scales are sets of musical notes organized by pitch. In Western culture, we predominantly use the major and minor scales. However, many children’s songs use the pentatonic scales (both major and minor) as well. The major scale comprises seven different pitches that are organized by using a combination of half steps (one note on the piano to the very next note) and whole steps (two half steps together). The major scale looks as follows: Whole Whole Half Whole Whole Half or W H W W H. A minor scale uses the following formula: W H W H W W. Pentatonic scales, found in many early American and children’s songs, only use five pitches, hence the moniker “pentatonic.” There are many types of major pentatonic scales, but one of the most popular major pentatonic scale is similar to the major scale, but without the 4th or 7th pitches (Fa or Ti). Major, minor (natural), and pentatonic scales Major Scale (C Major) Scale Practice Label the half steps and whole steps of the C major scale. Practice writing your own C major scale. Label the half steps and whole steps of the A minor scale. Practice writing your own A minor scale. Resources for Further Learning There are numerous websites that cover the fundamentals of music, including the staff, notes, clefs, ledger lines, rhythm, meter, scales, chords, and chord progressions. Music Theory www.musictheory.net musictheory.net is a music theory resource from basic to complex. It contains active definitions for musical terms; music lessons regarding the meanings of musical notation; and exercises designed to further understanding of musical notes, chords, and many other musical aspects. This site also includes a pop-up piano and accidental calculator specifically to help users learn and practice their developing musical skills. It also features a products page with apps people can buy to practice and use music on the go via their smartphones. The site would be appropriate for people ages 12 and up, and is extremely user friendly. Musictheoryvideos.com was designed by Stephen Miles in the hope to make music theory an active part of music learning. The site includes music theory lessons for students between grades 1 and 5 in the form of tables, lists, and videos to help the student better understand the many parts of music. There are videos about the importance and difference of treble and bass clefs; there is a list of music terms and what they mean, and the site even contains videos entailing the transposition of music. It would be a great resource for teachers to offer students, especially those who could benefit from some extra information outside of class. The site contains information that would take a student step by step through the basics of music theory through simple short videos, complete with British-accented narrations. The Mighty Maestro website contains interactive games for children beginning with note values and pitches. Unfortunately, some of the activities require payment, but the free access games are very basic in terms of musical skill and literacy level, and very accessible. Classics for Kids is an excellent website with a wealth of music information geared for children. Games, online listening, quizzes, activity sheets, information on composers, and lots of music history make this website highly valuable. The website is user friendly, bright, and cheerful, and very easy to navigate. It also contains sections for parents and teachers. www.musictheory.com Mymusictheory.com includes helpful lessons for students grades 1 through 6, as well as helpful links for teachers when it comes to teaching music theory. For the teachers, they provide music flashcards, lesson plans, music-reinforcing word searches, and many other helpful resources, all in one location. The site is broken down by grade level, with each level containing exercises and practice exams for the material learned during each lesson. www.8notes.com 8notes.com is a large website full of music lessons for several instruments, including but not limited to piano, guitar, vocal, and percussion. Free sheet music is available for the different instruments, as well as music from different popular movies. An online metronome, guitar tuner, blank sheet music, music theory lessons, and music converters are all available at 8notes.com. This site would be helpful to those learning new instruments, as well as experienced musicians who are just looking for some new music to play. Note Reading Keyboard Skills Many classroom teachers have pianos in their rooms and don’t know how to use them or underutilize them. Learning to play a basic melody on a piano or keyboard or even put a few chords to them is a great confidence builder, and the children love to sing to a piano accompaniment! Notes on a keyboard II. Music Education in America Music education does not exist isolated in the music classroom. It is influenced by trends in general education, society, culture, and politics. —Harold Abeles, Critical Issues in Music Education, 2010 How did music education develop into its current form? Did music specialists always teach music? What were classroom teacher’s musical responsibilities? Well, to answer these questions, we need to look to the past for a moment. Initially, music and education worked hand in hand for centuries. Early Music Teaching 18th century: Singing schools and their tune books Before there was formal music education in the United States, there was music and education, primarily experienced through religious education. Music education in the U.S. began after the Pilgrims and Puritans arrived. When ministers realized that their congregations needed help singing and reading music. Several ministers developed tune books that used four notes of solfège (Mi, Fa, Sol, La) and shape notes to train people in singing the psalms and hymns required for proper church singing. By 1830, singing schools based on the techniques found in these books began popping up all over New England, with some people attending singing school classes every day (Keene, 1982). They were promised that they would learn to sing in a month or become music teachers themselves in three months. Some consider the hymn music of this time to be uniquely American—borrowing styles from Ireland, England, and Europe, but using dance rhythms, loose harmonic rules, and complex vocal parts (counterpoint) where each voice (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) sang its own unique melody and no one had the main melody. Original American composers such as William Billings wrote hundreds of hymns in this style. 19th century Johann H. Pestalozzi (1746–1827) Pestalozzi was an educational reformer and Swiss philosopher born in 1746. He is known as the father of modern education. Although his philosophies are over 200 years old, you may recognize his ideas as sounding quite contemporary. He believed in a child-centered education that promoted understanding the world from the child’s level, taking into account individual development and concrete, tactile experiences such as working directly with plants, minerals for science, etc. He advocated teaching poor as well as rich children, breaking down a subject to its elements, and a broad, liberal education along with teacher training. In the U.S., normal schools would take off by the end of the 19th century, and advocates of Pestalozzi’s educational reform would put into place a system of teacher training that influences us to this day. Lowell Mason (1792–1872) and the “Better Music” movement Lowell Mason, considered the founder of music education in America, was a proponent of Pestalozzi’s ideas, particularly the rote method of teaching music, where songs were experienced and repeated first and concepts were taught afterward. Mason authored the first series book based on the rote method in 1864 called The Song Garden. Mason was highly critical of both the singing schools of the day and where teachers in training could observe and practice teach. Music was a significant part of education. The Missouri State Normal School at Warrensburg stressed the importance of music in their catalog from 1873–74. Vocal Music (Ed.) Basic Writings (143-212). New York: Harper Collins Holgersen, S. E., & Fink-Jensen, K. (2002). “The lived body—object and subject in research of music activities with preschool children.” Paper presented at the meeting of the10th International Conference of the Early Childhood Community of the International Society for Music Education, August 5–9, Copenhagen, Denmark. Janesick, V. J. (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodology, and meaning. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (209–219). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Heidegger, Martin. (2008). On the Origin of the Work of Art. In D. 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Need location of publisher: Silver Burdett and Co. Vocabulary articulation: the manner in which notes are played or words pronounced; e.g., long or short, stressed or unstressed counterpoint: the art of combining melodies dynamics: indicates the volume of the sound, and the changes in volume (e.g. loudness, softness, crescendo, decrescendo); harmony: the simultaneous combination of tones, especially when blended into chords pleasing to the ear; chordal structure, as distinguished from melody and rhythm homophony: a melody with an accompaniment; e.g., a lead singer and a band indigenous groups: people associated with a certain area who formulate their own culture melody: musical sounds in agreeable succession or arrangement meter: the organization of strong and weak beats; unit of measurement in terms of number of beats in a measure monophony: single layer or sound; e.g., a soloist notation; how notes are written on the page pitch; the frequency of a note’s vibration polyphony: two or more independent voices; e.g., a round of a fuge psalms and hymns: examples of church music recitation: reading a text using heightened speech, similar to chanting rhythm: the pattern of regular or irregular pulses caused in music by the occurrences of strong or weak melodic and harmonic beats rote method: memorization technique based on repetition, especially when material is to be learned quickly shape notes: notation style used in early singing schools in the U.S. where each note had a unique shape by which it was identified silence: the absence of sound solfège: a music education method to teach pitch and sight reading, assigning syllables to the notes of a scale; i.e., Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti. Do would be assigned to represent and help hear the major scale pitches sound: vibrations travelling through air, water, gas, or other media that are picked up by the human ear drum tempo: relative rapidity or rate of movement, usually indicated by terms such as adagio, allegro, etc., or by reference to the metronome. Also, the number of beats per minute texture: the way in which melody, harmony, and rhythm are combined in a piece; the density, thickness, or thinness or layers of a piece timbre: the tone color of each sound; each voice has a unique tone color (vibrato, nasal, resonance, vibrant, ringing, strident, high, low, breathy, piercing, rounded warm, mellow, dark, bright, heavy, or light)

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