The background features a dark blue field with several curved lines in shades of blue, green, and red. Scattered throughout are various musical symbols, including blue and purple circles, stems, and beams, some with white highlights, creating a sense of movement and rhythm.

Origins
Principles and
Practices of
SongWorks
A Brief Overview

Peggy D. Bennett, PhD

Share the wealth! This booklet is designed to share the background of SongWorks. My initial conference and workshop presentations spiraled into multiple requests, and I'm thrilled that this continues to be important teaching and learning. SongWorks is a gift to students, teachers, schools, and programs all over the world.

For more information about the SongWorks project, visit the [SongWorks Educators Association website](#) where you will find descriptions of activities, song materials, audio and video examples, as well as conference and local event information. You may even be inspired to join with these teachers as you explore what SongWorks might mean for you.

Resources:

<https://www2.oberlin.edu/library/digital/songworks/>

<https://songworkseducatorsassociation.com/resources/books/>

<http://www.peggydbennett.com/books-2/>

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Origins

Make teaching playful and learning vibrant. *SongWorks* educators make a habit of learning from learners as they preserve the musicality of music. In this work, they aim to engage learning by creatively tapping into the various facets of holistic learning and teaching. Looking back nearly 60 years, it was a blend of ideas from Zoltan Kodaly and Mary Helen Richards that formed the grounding now known as *SongWorks* teaching.

How do you teach music?

was the question Richards wrote to Kodaly in the early 1960s. A few months later, two small “Kodaly method” books arrived in her California mail box. From the ideas in those books, Richards created graphics and content published as *Threshold to Music*. On a 1962 trip to Hungary, Richards learned more about Kodaly by conversing with music teachers and observing children in music classes. On a return trip to Hungary that same year, Richards first met Kodaly. Important discussions between the two educators ensued and yielded four pivotal recommendations offered to Richards by Kodaly. Just as he himself had done

in his own country, Kodaly encouraged Richards to explore the roots of American language, music, and culture.

1. “Base your teaching on folksongs of your language and culture.”
2. “Study your language, especially triplet patterns and anacruses.”
3. “Teach children according to the way they are in your country.”
4. “Just as they learn to speak by speaking every day, children must sing every day to learn¹ music.”

Shortly after that meeting, Richards turned to general classroom teachers to see “how children learn.” Richards spent decades gathering English-language folksongs. She experimented with ways to study anacruses and patterns of triplets. “Watch the children” became a catchphrase for deciding how to proceed. By 1970, Richards had abandoned *Threshold to Music* and founded the Richards Institute for Music Education and Research. She named her new program *Education through Music (ETM)*. For the next 20 years, *ETM* evolved into a play-based, folksongs-oriented approach that emphasized preserving

¹ Peggy Bennett, “From Hungary to America: The Evolution of Education through Music,” in *Music Educators Journal*, 74 (1) 1 1987, 36-45, 60.



the natural flow of oral language while singing and studying music.

In 1984, Richards was in failing health and eager to secure the future of *ETM*. The *ETM* Trust was formed with ten *ETM* faculty members:

- *Mary Helen Richards* (California)
- *Margaret Wharram* (Ontario)
- *Douglas Bartholomew* (Ohio)
- *Anna Langness* (Colorado)
- *Randy McChesney* (California)
- *Fleurette Sweeney* (British Columbia)
- *Peggy Bennett* (Texas)
- *Mariam Allen* (California)
- *Barb Shaw* (Ontario)
- *Gerry McGeorge* (Ontario)

Differences within The Trust led to its dissolution in 1991. In 1992 six departing members of The Trust gathered with like-minded *ETM* faculty and course attendees to create the non-profit *Music Edventures Incorporated (MEI)*. Aiming for a greater clarity and identity in defining their work, *MEI* members cast a unanimous vote in 2016 to rename the

group *SongWorks Educators Association (SWEA)*. With the new title, four strands of organizational identity came into focus:

- ***SongWorks Educators Association (SWEA)***
- ***SongWorks Certification Program***
- ***SongWorks 1 and SongWorks 2***
(books with comprehensive descriptions of *SongWorks* principles and practices)
- ***SongWorks websites***
(Featuring publications, video, song repertoire, and samples of *SongWorks* practices.)



Principles

Playful Teaching, Vibrant Learning

epitomizes *SongWorks* intentions, evoking curiosity, eliciting engagement and stimulating recall. Well-crafted questions that invite children to think and solve problems are foundational. “How else could you make that work?” “What is another way you could read that score?” “Did you hear anything familiar in that phrase? If so, how would you notate, describe, identify, show hand signs for it?”

Grounded in a set of beliefs and practices, thirteen principles guide *SongWorks* pedagogy. While offering educators structured freedom, the principles “*shape the boundaries and supply the tracks for our choices and teaching behaviors.*”² Principles aim to liberate rather than confine. In their wildly varying settings, *SongWorks* educators feel free to shape student learning according to the contextual needs of their students and schools.



Principles of Teaching and Learning

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

Principles of Teaching and Learning Music

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

Folksongs and singing games are foundational repertoire for *SongWorks* teaching. Additional songs, dances, and instrumental experiences supplement *SongWorks* singing repertoire and study. The choice of musical materials (songs, recordings, dances, and so on) remains based on musicality, student backgrounds and interest.

Movement and social interaction are at the heart of music experience and study. With emphasis on cooperation rather than competition, students shape their playful study by making choices and using imaginations. Listening skills evolve into music literacy.



Practices

SongWorks practices align with the thirteen *SongWorks* Principles to create a holistic fusion of kinesthetic, linguistic, social, and cognitive learning experiences. Sound study and sound skills are core emphases in the curriculum. Literacy is paramount, and the notational pathways to literacy are unique.

Dr. Fleurette Sweeney, Mary Helen Richards' closest friend and closest teaching partner from 1967 to 1992, best captured the underpinnings of *SongWorks* in her dissertation title, *From Sound to Symbol: The Whole Song as Curriculum, the Whole Child as Pedagogue, Observation as Methodology* (Sweeney, 2000). Watching children, listening to children, and fostering music responsiveness led to practices that were based in *“learning by ear and writing what we hear.”*

Commitment to teaching and learning, according to the way music sounds and the ways children learn, liberated *SongWorks* educators to create unique pedagogical and curricular practices. Six of those pedagogic practices are described here. The first four focus on listening and

analyzing musical sound. The last two practices focus on notating and reading the symbols for sounds.

Sound Play and Sound Study

① Clusters

Clusters of meaningful syllabic groups (aural, figural groupings), rather than bar lines, beats, and note beams (visual, metric groupings), are the musical patterns studied and typically are clustered around a single primary emphasis. Think, for example, of:

“the FARmer, “go THIS way and that,”

“This land is YOUR land,”

“Did you EVER see a LASSie?”

Anacruses are a natural and common element of the clusters for study. Notice how common it is to see and hear an anacrusis at the beginning of songs and leading into the cadence phrase of a song. With the bridge notation of song dotting and clusters, anacruses can be easily studied even in compound meters such as 6/8.

[See Samples 6 and 8]

Rather than the more common practice of teaching tonal intervals and note-beaming, teaching clusters provides mini-melodies such as a cadence phrase or a repeated pattern for rhythm and tonal study. When clusters are used as “study patterns” the spirit, content, and musicality of a whole song can be maintained while a cluster is studied.

“Clusters are the music of language. Because the English language features adjectives, articles, and prepositions, many English songs naturally feature anacrusis patterns. Clusters appear in both language and musical patterns, yet conventional metric notation is often at odds with figural patterns, the smallest unit is the phrase or gesture, not an interval, beat, or measure.”

--Swanwick, 1999, p. 45³

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

--Bamberger, 1996, p. 34⁴

② Antiphonning (rhymes with dawning)

A “fill in the blank” activity, antiphonning is used for review and focus. The leader begins singing, then pauses for listeners to fill in the next cluster segment. Responders

sing until the leader continues with the next cluster. Listeners are highly attuned and ready to sing when the leader stops singing. Antiphonning can occur with singing, tapping, reading, (maps, song-dotting, idiographs), notating, or playing an instrument. Antiphonning contrasts in several ways to the more common practice of echoing.

③ Beat

Learners are encouraged to perform the beat with flow, expression, and nuance, showing the sensitivity and fluidity that a conductor might display instead of with metronomic regularity. When students are invited to move to the beat, teacher modeling helps them feel the lift of the beat, without overemphasizing or pounding.

④ Tone Syllables and Rhythm Syllables

Tone and rhythm syllables are the key to identifying patterns heard in music and speech. The Movable Do system provides ways to name and sing patterns accurately and fluidly. In early phases of singing and learning there is no need to rely on absolute pitches or staff notation. Similarly, rhythm syllables allow a singer to aurally identify clustered rhythm patterns without relying on eighth and quarter note labels. In both systems described here, learners sing by ear the patterns they detect.

Notation Play and Study

① Bridge Notations

Why is alternative notation needed for children's study of music? Very often there is a mismatch between the way music sounds and how conventional notation makes it look⁵. Conventional notation can easily become more mathematical than fluid, more precise than flowing, more amusical than musical. Bridge notations ease learners into reading and writing based on how they naturally parse the song. Bridge notations offer simple, logical ways to transition from hearing and singing to notating and reading. Through line map scores (Samples 1 and 2), ideograph scores (Samples 4 and 5), and song dot scores (Samples 7 and 8), these alternative notations become bridges to fluent and confident listening, reading, and writing with conventional notation. Bridge notations offer learner-friendly ways for preschool through adult ages to read, write, and understand their own and others' scores.

② Blended Notations

Combining variations of bridge and conventional notations offers simple, logical ways to transition from singing and hearing to notating. (Samples 3, 5 and 6). These alternative notations facilitate skills for reading, writing, and

understanding conventional notations and provide open-ended study and skill development.

In *SongWorks* pedagogy, songs with rich texts and enticing musical content are not treated as being too difficult for young children. Wide ranges of melodic and tonal patterns, triple and duple rhythm patterns, and language-rich lyrics are all embraced as repertoire for all ages.

When aspirations of *SongWorks* pedagogy are met, children playfully problem-solve with their classmates in meaningful ways. They read and write what they hear, sing, and embody. They witness their capabilities to sing, read, write, and compose in ways that boost their confidence, knowledge, and musicianship.

"The musicality that is critical to music performance is just as important in music study."

(Principle #2, teaching and learning music)

Teaching Samples Using Alternative Notations

The following pages show examples of alternative notations. Bridge and Blended notations provide excellent opportunities to share scores with others, give evidence of skill levels, and focus on particular facets of a song. For



expediency and overview, the samples on the following pages focus on teacher-created scores that students read rather than scores children have created. The samples are not necessarily in order of curricular sequence, but are “samplings” of score study, showing ways of “blending” alternative notation with conventional music symbols.

Before studying the notations, students internalize the song as they joyfully sing and play the game, in this case, *Rig a Jig Jig*.



Rig a Jig Jig Singing Game

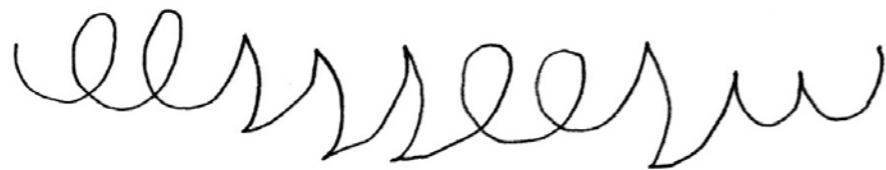
The musical score is presented in five staves. The first staff contains the first line of the verse: 'a friend of mine I hap-pened to meet, hi ho, hi ho, hi ho. ____'. The second staff is labeled 'Chorus' and contains the first line of the chorus: 'A' - rig - a - jig - jig and a - way we go, a - way we go, a - way we go.'. The third staff contains the second line of the verse: 'a friend of mine I hap-pened to meet, hi ho, hi ho, hi ho. ____'. The fourth staff is labeled 'Chorus' and contains the second line of the chorus: 'A' - rig - a - jig - jig and a - way we go, a - way we go, a - way we go.'. The fifth staff contains the final line of the chorus: 'A' - rig - a - jig - jig and a - way we go, hi ho, hi ho, hi ho. ____'. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature.

Sing and play *Rig a Jig Jig* as a spirited circle game with one person walking along the inside circle and stopping to shake hands during the cadence “Hi ho hi ho hi ho.” Encourage imagination, playfulness, and social interactions by suggesting the student in the center show an attitude or mood: hurrying, frightened, tired, carrying a heavy backpack, etc. When the students find a friend, all is well and happy as they skip around the circle for “away we go,” pausing to “rig a jig,” then skipping to the end of the song.

Sample 1:

Line Map

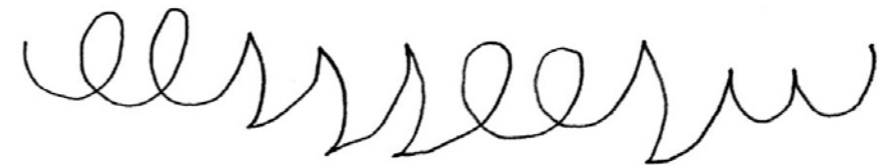
Sing the chorus of *Rig a Jig Jig*, then show children the map and invite them to trace the map in the air (or at their desks if each has a copy) as we sing the chorus. If they have trouble, encourage them to try again while singing. It may take several times before they have solved this challenge. Discuss which parts are more difficult than others. Invite them to watch their neighbor for ideas on how to follow. Encourage them to consider what makes following the map with the music get easier.



Sample 2:

Finding Cadence Cluster on Map

Show Children the following map and invite them to notice what is different from map 1. (The addition of words at the end.) The words “hi ho, hi ho, hi ho” come at the cadence of the song. Challenge the children to trace this map while audiating (singing silently). But when they get to the cadence, sing aloud. Allow several times for mastery.

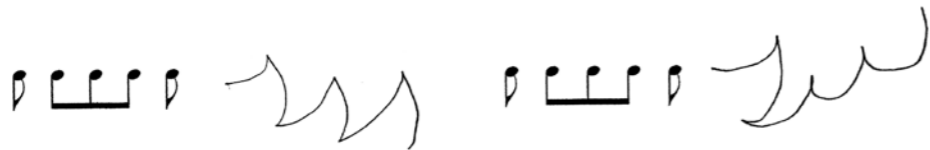


Hi ho hi ho hi ho

Sample 3:

Blending Map with Standard Rhythm Notation

Sing the chorus of *Rig a Jig Jig* and then show children a copy of the score below. Invite children to share what they notice. Try tapping the note heads and following the map as it all fits in the song. Discuss what works, what is more difficult. Repeat as often as children need for success. Try singing aloud while tapping the dots and audiating the map parts. Reverse.



Sample 4:

Ideograph Score

Sing verse 1 of the song and then show the score. Give children time to think how this might fit verse 1. Try singing while pointing to the pictures. Invite children to discuss why these pictures are used for this part of the song. Some may notice that the arrows are pointing when we sing “down,” and that we sing down three times. Some children may notice that the first and third times “down” is sung, the pitch is higher than the second time. Enjoy the exploration. Allow different children to take turns leading the class through the ideograph.



Sample 5:

Blending Rhythm Notation with Ideographs

Invite children to audiate the verse while solving the puzzle of reading the score. Then sing aloud while touching the ideographs at the appropriate places and tapping the note heads in the rhythm notation. As children are successful, suggest they read again but add rhythm syllables as they tap the note heads. (du di du- du di du- du di du-)



Sample 6:

Map, Solfege and Rhythm symbols

Invite class to sing the chorus while following the map and the pitches, again touching note heads with the music. Try singing the map parts silently inside your head, then sing the rest of the song aloud. Sing again and add solfege syllables while singing and pointing.



Sample 7:

Song Dotting

Sing the verse of *Rig a Jig Jig* while following the dots. Practice tapping every dot. You may want to sing it slower to get every dot. Invite a child to sing while demonstrating his “reading” of the dots. Other children may want a turn. Consider inviting two children to antiphon as they follow the song dot score. Decide who will begin. Then watch carefully so you won’t miss a note. Enjoy the play.

.....

Sample 8:

Blending Song Dotting with Solfege

Sing the verse of *Rig a Jig Jig* then show the score. Invite children to discuss which symbol systems are seen in this score. Invite class to tap as they sing the dots and the letters. Sing again and add the solfege syllables and hand signs as they read and sing. Discuss a tempo that would work for the children and encourage different children to take turns leading the class in the singing and reading.

.....LS_M S_MR LS_M.....DTTTLTD

When Peggy and I began putting the materials together for SongWorks, I do not think we imagined what in fact has happened. Our first self-published book, *SongWorks: Valuing Singing in Education* (1992), grew into two volumes by 1994, which in turn were picked up by *Wadsworth Publishing* and published as *SongWorks 1: Singing in the Education of Children* (1997) and *SongWorks 2: Singing from Sound to Symbol* (1999). The rights for these two books were returned to us and are now published by *SongWorks Press*, Bozeman, MT.

The vital and vibrant membership of SongWorks Educators Association continues to draw inspiration from and to explore new materials within the open-ended model that the SongWorks principles provide. What a journey this has been and what an inspiration Peggy has been, and continues to be, for so many teachers.

- *Douglas Bartholomew*

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Cover design by: Daniel Long

Professor Emerita of Music Education at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, **PEGGY D. BENNETT** has spent over 40 years studying the processes of learning and living. Certifications in mediation and personal coaching further stimulated interest in how we can, day-by-day, make choices that contribute to engaged learning and healthy relationships.

Author and co-author of 7 books and over 50 pedagogical and research articles, Dr. Bennett holds degrees from Ball State University (BS, MA) and the University of North Texas (PhD). She has presented her unique brand of teacher education in nearly every state, four provinces, and four continents.

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