SIGHT READING THROUGH
KEYBOARD EXPERIENCE

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Marianne Harken
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Marianne Harken

Approved by Committee:

[Signatures]

Dean of the Graduate Division

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It was the purpose of this study to determine the theories and proposals of music educators today regarding the usefulness and adaptability of the piano as a means of developing the musical growth of pupils.

The inability of public school students to read music has been of great concern to many music educators. One of the reasons for this lack of reading ability may result from the methods of teaching used today. Perhaps through illustrations and experiences at the piano keyboard, music symbols may become more meaningful. Immediate keyboard application of structural principles, may be a solution for the child's understanding of pitch, intervals, keys, and rhythms.

As used here, the term, "keyboard experience," means "gaining knowledge and enjoyment of music through the use of the keyboard by seeing, hearing and feeling."¹

In this study an attempt was made to relate the experiences of leading music educators regarding their theories and methods used, and to make application of techniques. A subjective evaluation of classroom techniques and procedures

involved has been made as to the effectiveness of teaching music in the classroom.
CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND FOR DEVELOPING

THE PROPOSED TECHNIQUE

There is the desire on the part of music educators to provide as a basic part of the musical education of the child, an experience that enables the child to enjoy, understand, and participate in music throughout life. What have been the opinions regarding the value of providing this experience through means of the keyboard?

I. SURVEYS

A survey, sponsored jointly by the Music Educators National Conference Project Committee on Basic Music Instruction Through Piano Classes and the Class Piano Instruction Committee of the National Piano Manufacturers Association of America, Inc., was completed during 1948 by the firm of Foote, Cone, and Belding. One phase of the survey was to determine the national attitude regarding music education in the schools, and the other was a mail investigation on piano instruction among school systems.

As a part of the survey to ascertain the national attitude regarding music instruction in the schools, research investigators personally interviewed qualified family representatives in all parts of the country. In answer to the
question, "Should musical instrument instruction be included in the school curricula?", eighty-two per cent of the respondents believed that it should be a part of the school curricula. Fifty-four per cent of this group expressed a desire to have piano instruction made available to the children.¹

Further evidence of public opinion in this regard is found in the conclusions reached by A. S. Bennett Associates in their national survey of public interest in music made for the American Music Conference in 1948. They found that "over four-fifths of the people believed that class instruction on musical instruments should be offered in the schools."²

It is important to give primary consideration to the matter of public opinion. Many school administrators believe that piano instruction should be included in the curriculum, but they have hesitated to promote it because of the feeling that tradition in the community would be against its adoption. One school leader expressed the opinion held by many when he wrote:

² Ibid.
The traditional belief (up to now) that piano instruction must be individualized and is therefore too expensive to be justified in public schools is the chief obstacle to the establishment and promotion of piano study in our schools.¹

II. CONCEPT: MUSIC EDUCATORS
NATIONAL CONFERENCE

It is difficult to conceive of a well-balanced program of music education that would not include some type of piano instruction. As early as 1947, the Music Educators National Conference published the following:

Since the piano is an instrument which combines the three elements of music—melody, harmony, and rhythm, it becomes a basic instrument on which to present the fundamentals of music, thus building a solid foundation for music in any line.²

John C. Kendel, president of the Music Educators National Conference from 1944-1946 and presently executive vice-president of the American Music Conference, has assisted in conducting a survey to determine the type of instruction most effective for the preparation of young students for the study of band and orchestral instruments.

Of approximately 2,000 questionnaires mailed to a selected list of instrumental music teachers over the

¹Ibid.
Two of the questions and their results were as follows:

What musical knowledge would you like your students to have as a preparation for the instrumental program?

658 expressed a wish for general fundamentals, solfeggio, names of notes, knowledge of key signatures, etc., and emphasized rhythms.

343 specifically mentioned piano as a means of teaching these fundamentals, many labeling it as keyboard experience.

Do you find that on the whole a student who has had some piano experience before entering your instrumental instruction class learns more rapidly than students who have not had such experience?

929 Yes. 21 No. 41 Indefinite.¹

Answers to the questions are self-explanatory. Convincing conclusions are apparent in the collective response to the second question.

The answers offer strong evidence that our instructors and leaders of instrumental music are firmly convinced that knowledge of the piano keyboard by the young student is of great aid in developing instrumental players. The fact that 929 replies (92.7 per cent of the opinions received) stated this indicates, we firmly believe, that there should be a place in the school music program for what we have designated as 'keyboard experience.'²


² Ibid., p. 42.
Assuming the validity of the conclusions of Kendel, it appears that this is additional evidence as to the importance of giving all students the opportunity of keyboard experience by incorporating it into the regular music class.

Rather than teach the students to play the piano exclusively, the objectives of keyboard experience are best exemplified as Marion S. Egbert stated in his book, Seeing What We Sing,¹ which is further discussed in Chapter III of this report.

¹Marion S. Egbert, Seeing What We Sing, (Boston, Massachusetts: C. C. Birchard and Company, 1954), p. 5.
CHAPTER III

CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED IN DEVELOPING

PROPOSED TECHNIQUE

What is keyboard experience? How does it fit into the music education program? It would seem that a clarification of terminology is important to distinguish keyboard experience from piano classes of class piano teaching.

It is not the philosophy nor the purpose of keyboard experience to train each child in the techniques of piano playing. The philosophy of experience, according to Webster, is 'that which is learned by seeing, hearing, or feeling in contrast with that which is learned by thinking.' Keyboard experience, as we use the term, means gaining knowledge and enjoyment of music through the use of the keyboard or the classroom piano by 'seeing, hearing and feeling.'

Marion Egbert defines it as, "Using the piano keyboard as a visual aid to better understand music fundamentals that are discussed as a result of the singing program."  

Picture a classroom of thirty third or fourth grade children, during singing activities, with individual cardboard keyboards before them at all times. Whenever some discussion arises that may be illustrated more clearly by

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means of the keyboard, they make reference to it. It might be the discussion of intervals, the structure of a scale upon which a song is built, or the building of chords for harmonization.

Keyboard experience may be another means by which children are helped to sing "in tune," understand scale structure, understand intervals, develop a sense of harmony, and know the piano keyboard. The ability to do these things will help to develop his music reading skill.

Although keyboard experience has not been universally adopted, it has become an experimental project of many music educators. However, since the methods used in presenting keyboard experiences appear to be psychologically and educationally sound, more schools can be expected to include them in the music curriculum.

I. ROBERT PACE: PIANO FOR CLASSROOM MUSIC

At the Music Educators National Conference Convention in St. Louis, 1956, the National Piano Committee conducted a panel discussion on keyboard experiences, at which emphasis on the keyboard activities was placed, not only on the classroom music program, but also on the great help it is to the classroom teacher. It was stated that the classroom teacher who has had acquaintance with the keyboard experience program
teaches music with more confidence and efficiency. She is able to use the plan as a resource instrument rather than merely as one for accompanying songs. This is illustrated in Pace's moving picture of a third grade classroom in Scarsdale, New York, which he presented at this convention. The film demonstrated the use of the piano in the classroom, along with rhythm instruments, melody bells, and autoharp. A clear understanding of the nature of keyboard experience and of the materials and procedures involved was evident. The film shows how keyboard experience related to the total music program of the elementary school. Pace further demonstrated how the silent keyboard gave the children sensory experiences with fundamentals of music; such as rhythm, harmony, key signatures, half and whole steps, chords and the like.

The keyboard was used with a familiar song, after which the same tune was transposed to a new key. As many as four students played simultaneously using different octaves on a single piano, while the remainder of the class used silent keyboards. The tune used was, "Whistle, Daughter, Whistle." With their thumbs on F, the children played the first five tones of the "home key," and discovered that the song began on the third of the "home key." Soon the children placed their thumbs on a "new home key," D, and transposed the melody.
Another part of the film showed the students using the piano keyboard to accompany a dance song. The children were shown how to move their fingers from the tonic chord to the dominant chord. Choice of chords was determined by listening and then the chord numbers were written below the words. As some provided the accompaniment on the keyboard and autoharp, others played the melody on the bells, while still others sang and danced.

Pace said the keyboard basis of the regular music program should include rhythm, reading, sight, touch, and learning, which he so well demonstrated. ¹

The method which Pace has used is further related in his book, Piano for Classroom Music. ²

This text starts by having students learn to play eight simple tunes from diagrams of the melodic line, indicated by finger numbers and arrows, and of hands and keyboard. They learn by (1) singing words and raising and lowering their hands in the air with the pitch; (2) singing numbers and 'playing' them in the air; (3) placing their fingers on the keys indicated in the diagram, and (4) singing the melody as they play it on the piano, using the finger numbers in the melodic line as a guide.

Students play on easy-to-find black keys, 'transpose' by moving to white. (This avoids any mental block later about playing sharps and flats.)


Having mastered finger patterns in the basic tunes, the students learn about the grand staff and key signatures. They play scales from charts of one octave in each key, using keyboard diagrams numbered for four notes in each hand. Then they play the basic tunes from notation and transpose them into several keys, before starting with the I and V7 chords on new songs, new facts, and new skills.

The text uses 87 songs including nursery rhymes, folk songs, dance tunes, sea chanteys, 'action' songs, traditional songs and patriotic songs, marches and themes from 'Peter and the Wolf' and 'Hansel and Gretel.' It is chiefly songs—only a few lines of explanation and direction precede each song.¹

II. MARION S. EGBERT: SEEING WHAT WE SING

Another music educator, Marion S. Egbert, has contributed greatly to our knowledge of keyboard experience and its relation to the classroom. A monthly column, "Keyboard Experience News," has been prepared by him for The School Musician. In one of his articles, Mr. Egbert suggests that keyboard experience is a way to give "vitamins" to your entire music program. He further states that in a recent summer workshop which he conducted, some conclusions reached were:

1. Keyboard experience doesn't call for additional time for music in an already busy schedule.

2. Rather than complicating the teaching of music, it simplifies it.

3. It stimulates new interest for the whole class, especially on the part of students who had been slow to respond before.¹

Psychologically, the approach appears to be remarkably effective. Not only does it make music attractive and easy to grasp, but it may affect the children's entire attitude toward school. "Children are able to 'taste' success and achievement in the music class, and it provides them with the necessary psychological 'vitamins.'"²

Egbert's method is well established in Seeing What We Sing. The publishers stated:

The objective of Seeing What We Sing is not to teach children to play the piano, but to give them a 'speaking acquaintance' with the piano keyboard which will help them to understand the fundamental structure of the songs they sing in their class period.³

Egbert stated that his book is a procedure to help children to:

1. Sing on pitch.
2. Understand the construction of key signatures.
3. Understand whole and half step intervals.
4. Locate the starting tone of songs.


³C. C. Birchard and Company, Seeing What We Sing, (Boston, Massachusetts, 1954), p. 3.
5. Become familiar with the keyboard.
6. Acquire a feeling for harmony.
7. Understand how an accompaniment enhances a melody.
8. Make use of the tonic, subdominant and dominant chords with songs children sing.

The book is divided into the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Getting Acquainted with the Keyboard
3. The Black Keys as Sharps
4. The Key Signature
5. The Use of the Black Keys As Flats
6. The Hand Position At the Keyboard
7. The Left Hand
8. The Triad
9. Using Both Hands--pre-Class Piano
10. Additional Suggestions
11. References to Songs in Four Basal Series
12. Chords for Songs from Four Basal Series

In teaching an understanding of intervals, Egbert has students determine a note in relation to the tonic. Supposing that a song began on "E" above "Middle C." The class located this note in relationship to "Middle C." When asked if this note is above or below "Middle C," they find it is above, and can count the lines and spaces to find out how many degrees above. Finding the note to be the third degree from "Middle C," the students count the three white keys from "Middle C," and come to the proper location on the keyboard. In the sequence of the alphabet, they also find this

1 Marion S. Egbert, Seeing What We Sing, (Boston, Massachusetts: C. C. Birchard and Company, 1954), p. 5.
Egbert stated that no drill is involved in teaching this, but that it is merely the repetition of the procedure of locating the starting notes of songs as they are introduced.

III. ROBERT E. NYE AND BJORNAR BERGETHON:

BASIC MUSIC FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

In the book, Basic Music for Classroom Teachers, Robert E. Nye and Bjornar Bergethon included the piano as the musical instrument that follows the musical experience encountered.

The book is divided into the following:

1. Singing and Playing
2. Rhythm and Its Symbols
3. The Major Scale and Chording
4. Adding Chants to Songs
5. Three-Chord Melodies
6. Singing and Playing in Minor Keys
7. An Accent on Music Reading
8. Creating Your Own Songs
9. Singing In Parts
10. Review and Summary

In the chapter, "An Accent on Music Reading," special attention was given to music reading as a separate activity in terms of musical growth. It is stated:

-------thus far we have been more interested in 'making music' than in studying the music notation itself. We have relied upon 'rote-learning' to a considerable extent in the acquisition of musical skills and our general ap-

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\[1\] Ibid., p. 9.
proach to the musical notation has been: 'This is what it looks like when it sounds that way!' We shall reverse this process and concentrate on finding out 'how music sounds when it looks that way!' In other words we shall try to acquire the skill of reading music vocally, by sight, without the aid of an instrument.

The result for which the authors aim was chiefly that of sight-reading ability. The method employed is by use of the song bells, autoharp, and piano keyboard, but does not rely as specifically on the instruments mentioned, as those of Pace and Egbert. The use of these instruments by Nye and Bergethon appears to be more incidental, and how notes sound and look are not learned as a unit, but rather as separate steps.

Egbert's book, Seeing What We Sing, appears very comparable to that of Pace. However, Egbert has not included the teaching of rhythm in his book.

IV. OLIVER COOK

In a "Research Experiment in Class Piano," Oliver Cook relates the method of employing cardboard keyboards as a visual tool for teaching music fundamentals to the fourth grade at Charlotte, North Carolina, and extending it through sixth grade. Thus every child who finished elementary school

was "exposed" to the keyboard for a period of three years. Progress in reading and music-understanding was immediately apparent. Cook said:

As a music-educator, I can see no justification for teaching everything from bassoon to piccolo in the music program and ignoring the basic instrument. So much of our time is spent in the classroom with the mechanics of music: rhythm, phrasing, articulation, fingering, etc. The keyboard approach gives us the tactile sense as well as the visual and aural. In choral work the matter of music-reading is usually the most difficult and painful subject that the teacher has to deal with. A vocal approach to music-reading is one of the most difficult ones, since it is highly abstract. To approach this through the idiom of the keyboard would save many hours of classroom time, and much effort on the part of the teacher.2

According to Lottie Parks Hess, music supervisor of the Crane Elementary School, Yuma, Arizona,

Keyboard experience has provided an effective method of teaching music reading. In my opinion, it is difficult to teach a child to read music through singing alone since his voice is too uncertain.3

An attempt was made to implement the use of the piano keyboard in the third grades at the Parkersburg Community School, Parkersburg, Iowa. The third grade level was chosen for several reasons: (1) to begin the program at a level where it could be followed through to its greatest develop-

1 Oliver Cook, "A Research Experiment in Class-Piano," The School Musician, XXVII (November, 1955), 14.


ment, (2) to reach the child while he is eager and ready to learn, and (3) to begin the program where few, if any, students had begun private piano lessons. However, those students in third grade who had had private instruction, were "helpers" for the class. Many times they assisted by helping those students who were slow to respond. At other times, the "helpers" provided harmonization for a melody the class played.

The third grade music classes of approximately twenty-five pupils per class, met twice weekly for a period of thirty minutes each. Every student was equipped with a cardboard keyboard, music book, and book-stand. Keyboards were at the desks for ready reference throughout a class period. Although an entire song was played on occasion, it was more likely that starting tones were found, melodic patterns within a song were played, or various intervals within a new song were located. Many times a familiar song was written on the chalk board, or individual copies provided. The children would be given only the starting tone and would then sing the melody with letter names. If the song had not been identified prior to the sight reading, the children would eagerly respond with the name of the tune.

As a guide to learning the values of notes, the word, "hold," was used for notes that were described as "long" notes. For example, as a song was sung with letter names
and the class discovered "E" as a half note, it was sung as "E, hold;" a dotted-half note became "E, hold-hold;" and a whole note, "E, hold-hold-hold."

After an awareness of fast and slow notes became more apparent, the children were taught to observe time signatures and counting began. It then became necessary to implement the use of the word, "and," for the counting of eighth notes as they were introduced as such. Sixteenth notes were not used.

The procedure for singing a new reading song, included the singing of numerals, letter names and counting. At all times, some used their silent keyboards, while others played the piano or the melody bells.

The keyboard experience program was employed throughout the second semester. With only one piano available, satisfactory progress has been made. Song bells were used also, but no autoharp was available. All attention to music as it "looks when it sounds this way, or sounds when it looks this way," was completely foreign to the students when this new experience was begun. After six weeks of keyboard experiences, members of the classes, voiced the following accomplishments:

1. An increased interest in music class—music had become more meaningful.

2. An awareness of musical notation in all songs.
3. The ability to sight-read simple melodies.

4. Many students had begun private piano lessons.

5. The sharing of talents through performance resulting in an appreciative audience.

As the classes' understanding progressed, the playing of chords was begun on the piano. Songs were chosen that needed only the tonic and dominant chords. At this point, an autoharp would have been very valuable. Some of the children could not play an inverted chord because their hands were too small. In such a case, two students would assist; in root positions, one would play the tonic chord, another the dominant chord.

Some study was undertaken in transposition. The children learned through the pattern of the notes that a song could be transposed easily from one key to another. As the program continued, an attempt was made to foster the interest in other instruments as they were related to transposition.

The children obtained an awareness of music in their daily lives. It was not unusual for them to bring songs that they found in children's magazines, asking to play and sing them in class.

Thus far, the keen interest and development of the student's understanding of music has been a most gratifying by-product of keyboard experiences.
CHAPTER IV

APPLICATION TO THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Many educators are interested in the child to the extent that they are concerned about making the child a well-rounded individual; that he may take his place in society with an understanding of much more than the three "R's." Educators strive to accomplish this understanding through interest and participation.

The keyboard experience route to music follows the principle that children learn best when the subject matter is made a part of group activity, when it is interesting and when they can readily feel they are making progress. It seems to be a lively, effective way for the youngster's introduction to music.

Administrators, parents, and music teachers, as well as students, are proud of organizations within the music department that are capable of fine performance. This can be accomplished only through proper instruction. It is not enough to hope to find a situation where the children can sight read; they must be taught in the elementary school.

Misfortunes of music educators may result from the failure to have a plan of instruction that captivates the interest of the children in their music classes. They must know how and what they wish to accomplish.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

As an aid to make music symbols more meaningful, music educators are conducting experimental projects with the use of keyboard experience. Application of structural principles discussed in the regular music class is made on the piano keyboard to help the child understand such things as pitch, intervals, keys, and rhythms and thus develop his music reading skill.

(I. SUMMARY)

The piano keyboard is used like the blackboard—to clarify and help the class visualize those things being learned. It not only simplifies the explanation of music structure, but helps make the ear more acute to the beauties of music in harmony.

Sometimes there are those who have difficulty in singing "in tune" with others. The piano, because it is a pitch instrument, offers an easy way of acquainting children with pitch and tonal relationships. Singing and playing tones develop a "listening ear" which helps the "out-of-tune" child to sing on pitch.

In addition to being helpful in students' singing, it helps them to become more intelligent listeners to music.
To carry reading skills farther, and to develop a harmonic consciousness, the piano keyboard has become an integral part of the classroom music activities in many places. Not only does it teach children to see, hear and feel intervals and chords in relation to the singing activities, it also provides basic harmonies for initial part-singing activities.

An instrumental approach to the sight-singing problem has been shown to be extremely helpful, for it is known that, by-and-large, students who are playing in the band or orchestra have greater reading facility in their singing activities than those who are not instrumentalists.

Fay Templeton Frisch said,

Keyboard experiences used by the classroom teacher, as a means to teach pitch, rhythm and music reading, paves the way for the instrumental and vocal specialists to develop special skills.¹

II. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS

The music teacher can treat piano instruction as the classroom teacher does her reading or language work. A child can speak his native tongue when he enters school. He hears

it and it has meaning for him. If he hears simple musical phrases with familiar words, the musical thought may have meaning for him. While he plays the melody on the keyboard and sings the words, he will have the thrill of making music. In other words, teaching should begin from the known with young students and should gradually develop their vocabulary and reading knowledge.

Phrasewise reading, harmonic recognition, grasp of general melodic shape, recognition of sequence, repetition, and contrast are commonly known to be fundamental to good reading. There is no activity of the elementary school music curriculum in which these fundamentals may be developed as easily and successfully as in the keyboard approach to music, according to those who have had experience with this approach.

Children are now having a much greater opportunity in music through keyboard experience activities. In due time, educators shall learn of the results of experiments in classroom keyboard experiences now being made in places such as Cumberland, Maryland; Jackson, Tennessee; Salt Lake City, Utah; Charlotte, North Carolina, and Malden, Massachusetts. Perhaps the results, when surveyed, may be entered as substantial evidence to indicate that the music program will be improved and interest in music will be stimulated by installing keyboard experience as a part of every elementary
school program.

Keyboard experiences are a valuable aid that should be used if music educators are to make good their slogan: "Music for every child—every child for music."
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