

# GENERAL MUSIC

DIMENSIONS OF PRACTICE

EDITED BY  
CARLOS R. ABRIL  
BRENT M. GAULT

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*We dedicate this book to all the music teachers who work tirelessly to be more responsive to their students and communities and to spark the musical imaginations of the young people with whom they work each day.*



# Contents

<i>Contributors</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>About the Companion Website</i>	xv

<b>1. Introduction: General Music as Holistic Music Education</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Carlos R. Abril and Brent M. Gault</i>	

## PERFORMING

<b>2. Singing in the Elementary General Music Classroom</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Sarah J. Bartolome</i>	
<b>3. Playing with Orff and Classroom Instruments</b>	<b>38</b>
<i>Amy Beegle</i>	
<b>4. Participatory Music Making with Fretted Instruments</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>Martina Vasil</i>	
<b>5. Pedagogical Approaches in Modern Band</b>	<b>74</b>
<i>Gareth Dylan Smith and Warren Gramm</i>	
<b>6. Teaching and Learning World Music</b>	<b>91</b>
<i>Karen Howard</i>	

## CONNECTING

<b>7. Teaching Music for Human Connections</b>	<b>115</b>
<i>Carlos R. Abril and Loneka W. Battiste</i>	
<b>8. Fostering Historical Empathy Through Music, Art, and Poetry</b>	<b>134</b>
<i>Janet Revell Barrett</i>	
<b>9. Connecting with Repertoire: On the Efficacy of Folksong</b>	<b>152</b>
<i>Jacqueline Kelly-McHale</i>	
<b>10. Toward School and Community Musical Engagements</b>	<b>172</b>
<i>Kari K. Veblen</i>	
<b>11. How Do We Connect? Music Education in Online and Hybrid Learning</b>	<b>192</b>
<i>Nyssa M. Brown</i>	

CREATING

- 12. Frames for Improvising** **215**  
*Una MacGlone*
- 13. New Ways to Think About Composing and Producing** **235**  
*Katherine Strand and Michele Kaschub*
- 14. Demystifying Songwriting** **256**  
*Kat Reinhert*
- 15. Digital Media, Digital Technology, and Participatory Culture** **277**  
*Ann C. Clements*

RESPONDING

- 16. Movement: An Integral Component of General Music** **299**  
*Marja-Leena Juntunen*
- 17. Engaging Learners in Active Music Listening** **322**  
*Brent M. Gault*
- 18. Perceiving and Responding Through Analysis** **335**  
*Andrew S. Paney and Nathan O. Buonviri*

- Index* **353**

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## x Contributors

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## xii Contributors

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## About the Companion Website

A companion website accompanies this book. On the site you will find additional resources that relate to the specific dimensions of practice addressed in the book. Resources include additional suggested readings, links to websites providing further information on specific topics, and sample instructional materials utilized in some chapters.

The website can be accessed at: [www.oup.com/us/generalmusicdimensionsofpractice](http://www.oup.com/us/generalmusicdimensionsofpractice)



# 1

## Introduction

### General Music as Holistic Music Education

*Carlos R. Abril and Brent M. Gault*

Wholeness recognizes the interconnected nature of experience and the multidimensionality of human beings.

—John P. Miller (2019, p. 8)

We should treasure the person who can be a generalist, the conduit for a world of wonder and awe.

—Yo-Yo Ma (quote in Smith, 2018, p. 36)

Historically, general music has been conceived as a form of music education that provides a musical foundation for all students. That foundation has traditionally comprised the development of a wide array of behaviors, ranging from singing and playing music, to analyzing and moving to music. At times, general music has been conceived rather narrowly, with, for example, a highly specialized focus on singing or musical literacy. This chapter (and this book), however, conceives of general music as a music curriculum that is comprehensive and holistic. It is comprehensive in that it attends to a wide range of music learning experiences that fall into one of four dimensions of music practice: performing, creating, responding, and connecting. It is holistic in that it attends to the development of the whole person, as both a music learner and a human being, avoiding specialized curricular foci (e.g., music history alone) and unnecessary fragmentations (e.g., mind and body separation) pervasive in contemporary education (Miller, 2019). Drawing upon four dimensions of music practice while tending to the whole person, teachers can provide rich experiences that open space for students to learn music and construct meaning surrounding music in their lives. The aim of this chapter is to unpack the meaning of a holistic music education and provide a conceptual framework for the book.

Each chapter in this book is a piece of a holistic puzzle that can be used to create a curriculum that is responsive, relevant, and meaningful to students. The authors provide concrete ideas that music teachers and teaching artists, in classrooms and

## 2 Introduction

community centers, in person or virtually, can use to trigger connections between the mind (cognitive), body (kinesthetic), and spirit (affective). As a whole, the ideas in this book can be used by teachers to construct a holistic music education program that is comprehensive and informed by students and communities. It also illustrates just how important each area of music making and learning is to understanding music as a socially transformative, meaningful phenomenon in our lives.

### **Holistic Music Education**

A holistic music education strives to build connections among various dimensions of musical practice: performing, connecting, creating, and responding. These dimensions are discrete and distinct yet mutually dependent. For example, creating original music is distinct from other forms of music practice, yet it depends, to some degree, on having skills in performance, some knowledge of analysis, and the ability to listen deeply. Creating would be further enriched by an understanding of related arts, history, and culture, as guideposts or points of inspiration. A holistic music education recognizes the interconnected and dynamic parts of the music experience and builds upon connections to the self, others, and the world outside the classroom. To be holistic requires teachers to construct educative environments that enable interconnections among the dimensions of music practice that can contribute to the development of the whole person (Miller, 2019).

Unlike a specialized music curriculum, which could include such elective courses as concert band or music theory, holistic music education does not exclusively focus on one dimension of music experience, such as learning to play an instrument or analyze music. Instead, it provides a broad foundation that can serve as a precursor to more specialized forms of music study in or out of school. It is not, however, merely a precursor or prerequisite to music electives in secondary schools. It should be able to stand on its own as a meaningful, musically educative experience (Abril, 2016).

A holistic curriculum also necessitates thinking about and connecting with students and the needs of their communities, as a central point of focus (as illustrated in Figure 1.1). These connections then inform and provide direction to the curriculum planning in other areas of music practice including performing, creating, and responding. By centering human and cultural connections, we hope to transform general music curricula to be more culturally responsive, sustaining, and relevant.

### **The Four Dimensions**

The National Core Arts Standards in Music (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014) were designed to outline the areas that comprise a comprehensive music curriculum. The 11 anchor standards developed in this document focused

on addressing four specific artistic processes: creating music, performing music with understanding and expression, responding to music through multiple channels of engagement, and connecting to the contextual aspects of music. Performing and creating are processes that involve making or producing music. Responding and connecting are processes that deepen our understanding and enrich meaning of music, as well as inform our music performances and creations.

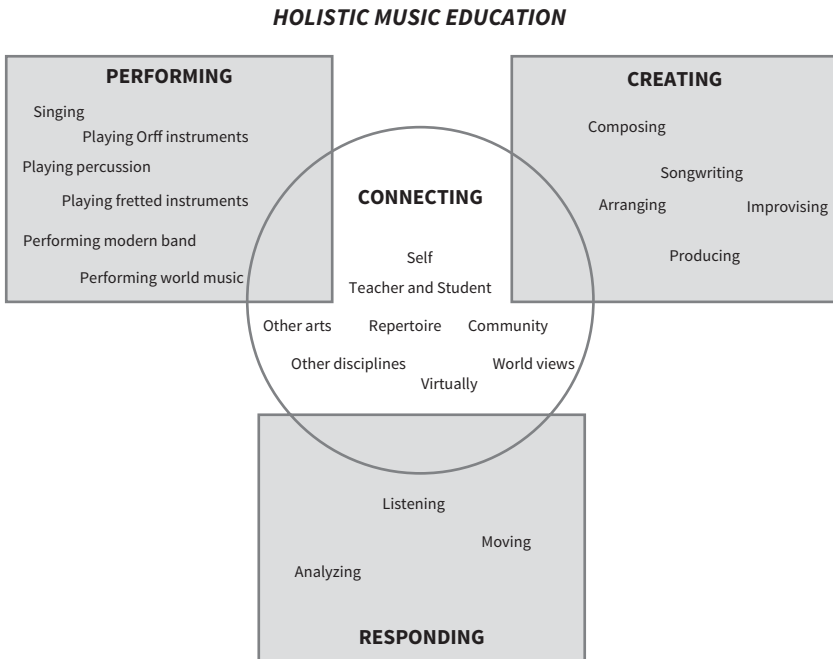
These four artistic processes served a starting place for the conception of this book as they were thought to be comprehensive in scope and reflective of many state and district curricula. While we start with these processes, which we refer to as dimensions of musical practice, we did not limit them to the way that they were initially conceptualized and realized through the anchor standards of the National Standards document (2014). In particular, we felt some of these dimensions needed to be expanded beyond the ways they were initially described and interpreted. The four dimensions, derived from but not identical to the artistic processes, frame the book into four sections: (1) performing, (2) connecting, (3) creating, and (4) responding. In this order, they alternate between the music-making dimensions (performing and creating) and the music-meaning dimensions (connecting and responding) as a way to suggest they must overlap in the curriculum. This ordering, however, is not meant to suggest a particular sequence. In other words, performing and playing does not necessarily happen before creating and producing. In fact, that would be antithetical to a holistic approach, which requires blending and mixing of these parts, often within one lesson. It also requires being cognizant of the relationship of the music experience to students' lives.

These four dimensions serve as a conceptual framework for this book. Residing within are a number of specific areas of music practice. While presented as discreet areas, each can be enacted in the classroom holistically by drawing from other areas within a lesson or multiple lessons. Figure 1.1 includes each area within a given dimension and seeks to represent the fact that these are not sequential or hierarchical and often overlap with one another. Connecting is placed in the center because it reflects the ways we deepen personal meaning and relate to others through the music experience. It shows overlap with other dimensions to reflect its dependency on direct music experiences found within the other three dimensions.

## Performing

For most people, performing is synonymous with music education. It involves systematic instruction in the development of skills and knowledge to realize either through the voice or on an instrument. While performing is the act of making music using the voice or an instrument, it often holds connotations of a polished musical presentation for an audience. This is something ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (2008) refers to as presentational music making. That is, music prepared for and shared with an audience. In music education, a performance often represents the culmination of a period of music study, in a highly visible display of music learning. This might include a 6th grade choir performing in a spring concert or a ukulele club performing for parents

## 4 Introduction



**Figure 1.1** Holistic music education

during a back-to-school event. Of course, teachers know that there is a great deal of instruction, effort, and practice needed to arrive at that point.

Polished performances for an audience are not the only reason for including performance in music education. Informal forms of music making that are accomplished for their own sake, for one's self or with others, are also worth including in a holistic program. It is similar to what Turino (2008) describes as participatory music making, where there is no distinction between performer and audience, where everyone is participating in the music experience for its own sake. Examples in the community might include a hip-hop cypher, a contra dance gathering, or a drum circle in a park. In the music classroom, a music teacher can lead children in playing with their voices (chanting, speaking, singing) or on instruments as a way to reinforce skills or conceptual understanding, for building social connections, and for the sheer enjoyment of making music with others. Participatory music making can include 1st grade children chanting and moving to "Bate Bate Chocolate" in the classroom or 7th graders creating a free improvisation using their voices and bodies. It can be enough to make music for and with each other in the music classroom, rather than needing to share it with an audience.

The voice, or singing, is an area of performing that has been central to the general music curriculum because the voice is the most ubiquitous and readily accessible tool we have for making music. It has been central to or at least included in a number of

general music education approaches, including Kodály (Gault, 2016), Orff-Schulwerk (Beegle & Bond, 2016), World Music Pedagogy (Campbell, 2016), and SongWorks (Bennett, 2016). There are a wide range of vocal styles and song genres to explore in the general music classroom, but a strong foundation is essential. Sarah Bartolome's chapter in this book (Chapter 2) focuses on ways to develop children's singing voices and inspire them to sing throughout their lives. It offers ideas for laying a foundation in singing from which to build upon.

Most children love to play instruments. The question teachers must ask is this: What instrument or instruments can or should be included in the curriculum, and why? Music teachers who apply the Orff approach in their classrooms find value in using the body, the voice, recorders, unpitched percussion, and barred instruments because they are accessible to all age groups and allow for immediate music-making without technique standing in the way. Amy Beegle's chapter (Chapter 3) provides a pedagogical model of play, using Orff and other classroom instruments as a means to music learning and understanding. Fretted instruments are popular among the general populace and of great interest to students. They are relatively affordable and available in varying sizes to accommodate different-aged learners. This might explain the popularity of the ukulele and guitar in elementary and secondary general music programs. In Chapter 4, Martina Vasil builds a case for including the ukulele and/or guitar as part of the general music curriculum and explores ideas for teaching them through participatory and informal approaches.

Some areas of performance are framed by musical genres. Much like the instruments of a concert band (and its pedagogy) are determined by the requirements of wind band literature, the modern band (i.e., popular music) comprises a core group of instruments that include drum set, guitar, bass, keyboards, voice, and electronic instruments. Popular music pedagogies have emerged in recent years to mirror the ways popular musician learn and play (Wright, 2016). In Chapter 5, Gareth Dylan Smith and Warren Gramm describe applications of modern band, applicable to upper elementary and secondary school programs, as a way to make music learning more culturally responsive, engaging, and relevant to students. Another area of performing and playing that warrants consideration in the holistic curriculum is world music, which includes a limitless array of instruments, vocal styles, languages, dances, and traditions. Building on world music pedagogy (Campbell, 2016), Karen Howard's chapter (Chapter 6) delves into the ways music teachers can engage students in playing, performing, and learning about numerous world music cultures and communities in a general music classroom.

## Connecting

Connecting is a dimension of the curriculum that has been infused in music textbooks and addressed by numerous policy documents for decades. It has encompassed everything from relating curriculum to youth culture (Choate, 1968), to connecting to other subject areas (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994), and to contextual aspects of music (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education,

2014). Popular general music textbooks and online resources have responded by including connections between music and other subject areas, as well as to diverse musical cultures. While acknowledged in policy documents and addressed in curriculum resources, “connecting” has often been treated as supplementary rather than fundamental to the study of music.

This dimension of music practice is essential to helping make music study more relevant and meaningful to the lives of children. Ideas for connecting and relating in the music classroom should take a more central role when planning for a holistic music curriculum. In the music classroom, the connections a teacher facilitates can be directly related to music experiences (e.g., listening, producing, singing). Connections might start with the people in the classroom (teachers and students). Creating learning environments where people feel positively connected to one another can benefit both students and teachers (Fedesco et al., 2019; Hulleman et al., 2017). Then we might move outward to build connections with people in surrounding communities or from distant places. This has implications for whose musical cultures we study and experience in the classroom. In Chapter 7, Carlos Abril and Loneka Battiste provide ideas for building deep human connections, beginning with people in the classroom and extending outward to surrounding and remote communities, through culturally responsive and connected approaches to music teaching.

Music is and always has been interconnected with ideas from related arts as well as other disciplines. One example is the music of Augusta Read Thomas, whose work has been inspired by the literary arts. In her piece *Silent Moon*, she takes images from a Rossetti poem and plays with them to create sonic abstractions through music. A richer understanding of the music may require an exploration of the poem and the literary arts. Another example can be found through the song, “We Shall Not Be Moved,” which has been sung by people as a symbol of solidarity and a demand for social justice. An understanding of the song necessitates an understanding of its use and function in the history of the US Civil Rights Movement and as a vehicle for change in government policies.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to teaching music seems a suitable fit for the generalist who has a broad vision of the music curriculum (Barrett, 2016), as well as for those seeking to teach music holistically. Curriculum documents and resources, such as textbooks, have addressed interdisciplinary and contextual connections, yet far too often these connections are topical and rather superficial. In Chapter 8, Janet Barrett explores the ways music teachers might facilitate deep interdisciplinary connections between music and art, poetry, or literature as a way to expand students’ funds of knowledge and honor their curiosities. Jacqueline Kelly-McHale’s chapter (Chapter 9) provides a model designed to guide teachers in examining the historical, political, and cultural context of folk songs, as a springboard for making decisions and developing ideas for teaching.

Historically, attempts have been made to build connections between music programs and local cultural organizations. One example is the Young People’s Concerts, where students were invited to symphony orchestra concerts after having studied

the curricular materials provided to enrich the concert experience. Another is the Contemporary Music Project, which brought the music community into schools by assigning composers to classrooms, helping to make composition real and relevant to students. In Chapter 10, Kari Veblen explores general music as part of an ecosystem that extends into the community and offers ideas for ways general music programs can engage more meaningfully with their surrounding communities.

Teaching music online became a reality for many teachers during the 2020 global pandemic. Building connections with students in a general music classroom has been particularly challenging, given the need to make music together with others, as well as the practical limitations of music-making online. Teaching music online may have been something that the times demanded, but it may also be something that is here to stay, in one way or another (Bauer, 2020). Therefore, we need to consider how to build strong connectivity with students in virtual spaces. Nyssa Brown's chapter (Chapter 11) provides an overview of the types of online learning and how they can serve as a way to building connections while also providing students with meaningful instruction via synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid models of instruction.

## Creating

Creating music, or the creation of new and original artistic ideas and works, has gained much greater attention in music education since the inclusion of composition and improvisation in the National Standards for Music Education (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994) and seminal publications on the topic in music education (e.g., Hickey, 2003). Despite early efforts to center creativity in music education, most notably in the teaching philosophies of Dalcroze and Orff (see Beegle & Bond, 2016; Juntunen, 2016), general music programs in North America were historically more centered around performance and listening. Creating is a dimension of practice that has been neglected in the music curriculum, which may result from teachers feeling underprepared to teach it (Niknafs, 2013; Orman, 2002; Strand, 2006). Some believe that creating music should be relegated to the final stages of a curriculum or perceived to be most suitable for older students, since these tasks are thought to require a great deal of knowledge in music theory and skill in performance. This is not the case, however. Even the youngest of children are able to create and produce their own music, from vocal babbling improvisations in the earliest years of life to writing songs and composing music in childhood (Campbell, 2010; Hickey, 2012).

Creating is a necessary dimension of a holistic music curriculum. It can include composing, arranging, improvising in traditional formats, or producing and mixing using a wide range of media. Music improvisation is a form of creative musical play that is spontaneous and planned in the moment (Nachmanovitch, 1991). This area of music practice might be viewed as a sonic playground for children. While ripe with potential, many music teachers feel underprepared to lead students in improvisation. Una McGlone's chapter (Chapter 12) on improvisation includes a useful pedagogical

model for guiding improvisations in group settings, replete with concrete ideas for use in classrooms. Another area of creating is the process of pre-planning musical ideas by notating them in some way to be performed by someone (self, others) or something (computer). In Chapter 13, Katherine Strand and Michele Kaschub build a rationale for composing and producing in the general music curriculum and provide a number of creative ideas for guiding students as they compose and produce original music. Another area of great potential for the holistic curriculum (one given less attention than it deserves) is songwriting, which melds the literary (lyrics) and the musical. Kat Reinhert's chapter (Chapter 14) includes a pedagogical framework for songwriting that provides music teachers and teaching artists with specific areas for developing students' imaginations and songwriting skills. In Chapter 15, Ann Clements explores the ways digital media can be used as a means for students to find greater meaning and self-expression in the process of creating, producing, and learning music.

### **Responding**

Responding to musical ideas is, in many ways, the most universal dimension of music practice. On a daily basis, we perceive and respond to music material that is a part of our everyday lives. Children listen to music from their headphones and move their bodies, or toddlers attempt to sing along to the words of a familiar tune played on the radio. Sometimes, these initial experiences are ones that motivate us to explore further or seek more in-depth musical explorations. Holistic music education should develop the variety and depth of ways students perceive and respond to music. Music classrooms provide opportunities for learners to refine their abilities to respond to the music they hear, perform, and create via verbal, visual, and kinesthetic channels. This dimension includes both external responses to music (such as movements or dance) as well as internal responses (perceiving and reflecting). These both are essential dimensions to a holistic music experience.

Movement is a natural way that we respond to and externalize what we hear in music. It is also an effective pathway to music learning (Abril, 2011), as well as a way to facilitate embodied musical experiences for students (Juntunen, 2016). Various approaches to teaching music, such as Dalcroze (Juntunen, 2016), Orff (Beegle & Bond, 2016), and Music Learning Theory (Taggart, 2016) incorporate movement as an essential part of the music curriculum for children. Building upon some of the principles of Dalcroze and embodied cognition, Marja-Leena Juntunen's chapter (Chapter 16) explores specific ways teachers can engage students in movement exercises, games, and activities that contribute to the development of the whole child.

Developing the ability to listen deeply to music, perceive the elements within a music selection, and respond to those elements has been a significant component of music classrooms dating back to the turn of the twentieth century (Mark & Gary, 2007). Students' responses to listening can involve movement, singing, creating, verbalizing, or developing visual representations that capture specific aspects of a musical work. Brent Gault's chapter (Chapter 17) explores the way children can perceive

and respond to music, through listening, and provides concrete ideas for engaging students in guided listening experiences in the music classroom.

Analyzing music is usually associated with specialized courses in music theory and ear training, but the ability to analyze music can also be fostered as part of general music. We can engage students in hearing, identifying, and describing specific musical elements or characteristics in music they listen to, create, or perform. In their chapter on music analysis, Andrew Paney and Nathan Buonviri (Chapter 18) explore specific ways to refine students' analytical skills and provide specific strategies that are applicable in for use with elementary and secondary school students.

## The Holistic Music Educator

There are numerous areas within each dimension of music practice that must be drawn upon when creating a lesson or designing a multi-year curriculum that is relevant and meaningful to students. That is the charge of the holistic music educator who is a connector—a person who introduces students to new and diverse ways of engaging or thinking about music. A holistic music educator, or general music teacher, is someone who “is not restricted to any one form of music making and learning or specific style and genre of music” (Abril, 2016, p. 7). Yo-Yo Ma highlighted the importance of generalization in an interview:

It's today's insistence on professionalization and specialisation that has separated those skills. It's the commoditisation of music. We are told stick with what we do well, as opposed to develop the whole individual. But what's valuable is the musician who can do all of those things. Of course, there will be some skills that stand out, but musicians should continue to feed themselves with all aspects of musical life. It's an idea that was cherished by the Enlightenment—that we should treasure the person who can be a generalist, the conduit for a world of wonder and awe. (Smith, 2018, p. 36)

The generalist must be able to draw from a wide array of areas of knowledge and music practice when designing and implementing lessons. Teachers then enact these plans to provide students with numerous educative experiences with music that improve their skills, deepen their understanding, and enable meaningful personal and social connections.

## Planning and Design

Designing holistic lessons and curricula requires careful research and planning to meet the needs of diverse learners in our classrooms. This requires that teachers have a depth of understanding, far greater than might ever need to be presented or discussed

in the general music classroom, that includes musical knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and contextual knowledge that facilitates deeper connections to content. It also requires learning about students, their families, and their communities. Chapters in this book provide models and specific examples of how to select materials, apply particular methods and techniques, and design holistic lessons. They also help to make visible the reasons for including or choosing to do certain things in the curriculum. Lessons and vignettes provide concrete examples of how these ideas might be realized in practice. These are not meant to serve as recipes to apply in any context so much as ideas to inspire or illuminate a particular point.

### Methods, Approaches, and Techniques

Finding the most meaningful way to adapt and apply instruction to a specific setting is imperative in order for music instruction to be made relevant and meaningful to students. To do this, educators rely on an approach, or “a broad framework—theoretical and practical—that organizes knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences for the purpose of guiding practice” (Abril, 2016, p. 17). The book *Teaching General Music: Approaches, Issues, and Viewpoints* examined a wide variety of approaches for teaching general music, attending to their theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, as well as their application (Abril & Gault, 2016). While the current book is not framed by methods or approaches, they are often used, implicitly or explicitly, as the underpinning of a given chapter or lesson idea.

An example of this can be seen in Sarah Bartolome’s chapter on singing with children (Chapter 2). The singing-based instruction she describes is based, in part, on the philosophical approach of singing-based instruction espoused by Kodály (Gault, 2016). Imbedded in the methods for teaching she describes and suggests are also techniques, such as the use of vocal sirens, that facilitate the development of effective singing in a general music setting. The techniques are the “tricks of the trade” and are often quite helpful in achieving particular goals, and should be included in lesson planning. In a similar way, Amy Beegle (Chapter 3) and Marja Leena Juntunen (Chapter 16) ground their lesson ideas in the approaches of Orff and Dalcroze, respectively. These approaches inform their practice and the techniques they use to facilitate performance and movement experiences.

This book also provides a number of different models for how one might implement instruction in a general music setting. These include more traditional concept-centered or skill-based models, in which a specific musical concept (such as ABA form) or skill (holding a ukulele) is the goal of the lesson (see Gault, Chapter 17; Vasil, Chapter 4). They also include project-based, informal models of pedagogy such as those that might be used in a modern band setting or in teaching song writing (see Smith & Gramm, Chapter 5; Reinhert, Chapter 14). Other models focus on humanism, culturally responsive teaching, and social justice, providing examples of how they might inform and be realized in practice (see Abril & Battiste, Chapter 7;

Barrett, Chapter 8; Kelly-McHale Chapter 9). Finally, there are models that focus on the musics and activities of local or distant cultures and communities (see Veblen, Chapter 10; Howard Chapter 6).

## Navigating the Book

Each dimension of practice represents a major section of the book, and each of those dimensions is divided into a number of areas. Of course, there are far more areas than could be addressed in any one volume. We selected areas for each dimension that we believed were most relevant and timely to a holistic music education. Some are part of a long tradition in music education (e.g., singing, composing, or playing Orff instruments); others have been addressed far less frequently in music education texts and methods courses (e.g., songwriting, improvising, or human connection). While each area is distinct, authors draw from other areas as relevant or meaningful. The editors have added cross references to other chapters throughout the book so that readers can see where and how ideas from one chapter overlap with others.

Each chapter in this book includes (a) background and rationale for its inclusion in the curriculum, (b) guidance in planning and preparing for its implementation in the curriculum and in the classroom (e.g., standards, goals, lessons, set up, environment), (c) ideas for engaging and guiding children in learning (e.g., pedagogical approaches, vignettes, examples), and (d) ideas for how to assess growth in this aspect of music (e.g., models, examples). While the focus is on children and youth, many of these ideas can be easily adapted for use with adults in community music learning settings. The short vignettes and model lesson plans target different age ranges, spanning primary to secondary school levels. Authors also consider diverse learning needs and teaching environments (physical, virtual, community, classroom). Some chapters include an online component (see Online Companion) that includes additional resources and materials that teachers can utilize in their classrooms.

We have assembled the foremost experts in each area of practice addressed in this book. This provides multiple perspectives by scholars/practitioners who have studied these areas of music teaching, tested their viability, and applied them in their teaching practices. While each chapter provides some background in the research/theoretical/professional literature, the focus is on practical applications in curriculum design and instruction.

The lesson ideas and vignettes included in each chapter provide illustrations related to how the ideas discussed might be brought to life in the music classroom—a direct connection to practice. For each specific lesson idea or vignette, authors have recommended specific grade levels or grade ranges (e.g., lower elementary = grades K–3; upper elementary = grades 4–6; secondary = grades 7–12). Instead of presenting uniform lesson forms, we sought to retain the lesson planning style of each author. Some are in traditional forms with objectives and procedures; others are short narratives for a project or an exercise.

While the suggested pedagogical ideas can be used as is, our intention is for them to serve as a case in point, or a starting point. We encourage you to adapt, change, or rework them in a way that best suits your students and community. Even better, we hope that they will inspire you to create your own unique lessons, curriculum units, and programs, guided by the models presented.

## Conclusion

Since general music is often the only compulsory form of music education in elementary and secondary schools, we have a responsibility to provide all students with a rich and meaningful experience. Building a holistic program may increase the likelihood of reaching the student who has a greater interest in producing music than in performing it; or the student who is more interested in learning about the historical and political context of music than in moving to music. A holistic curriculum decidedly attends to individuals—their intersecting identities, their interests, and their cultural backgrounds. The responsibility of providing a thorough and rich experience for all students is a great one, but opening doors to the ways learners can engage with music and each other provides the foundation that paves the way for a life-long engagement with music. With this foundation in place, learners can meaningfully explore, examine, understand, and appreciate the many dimensions of practice that color our music landscape.

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**PART I**  
**PERFORMING**



## 2

# Singing in the Elementary General Music Classroom

Sarah J. Bartolome

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### Teaching Vignette 1: *Bella the Butterfly*

*Mr. Hunter's kindergarten students are seated in a rainbow, looking on with rapt attention as today's visitor is revealed: Bella the Butterfly is perched on Mr. Hunter's finger, displaying her beautiful orange and black wings. Paulo raises his hand excitedly, offering, "Mr. Hunter! Bella is a Monarch Butterfly! We are hatching those in our classroom!" Mr. Hunter smiles, acknowledging the connection before saying, "Ok, music friends, let's sing hello to Bella. After me." He sings, "Hello, Bella" in his falsetto on a sol-mi pattern, moving Bella up and down to mirror the pitches. The children echo in their head voices, greeting the finger puppet. He repeats the activity several times, changing the pitches to incorporate sol-la-sol-mi and sol-mi-do patterns. During this activity, Mr. Hunter hears Anya singing well below the pitch level, and he makes a mental note to monitor her pitch-matching.*

*Several large flashcards are perched on a nearby stand, displaying Bella's "flight patterns" for the day. Mr. Hunter points to the first flashcard, a large, inverted U-shape, asking, "Does this flight pattern start with a high voice or a low voice?" Janessa raises her hand and offers, "Low." Mr. Hunter gives her positive feedback and follows up: "Music friends, does this flight pattern end with high or low voices? If you think it ends low, put your hand on your knees. If you think it ends high, put your hands on your head. Show me." All the children immediately clap their hands to their knees. "Good work! This flight patterns starts and ends with our low voices! OK, let's follow Bella on her flight!" As he traces the shape on the flashcard with the finger puppet, the children follow with their voices on an "ooh," sirening from low to high and back again. They repeat this activity with four different flashcards. Each time Mr. Hunter draws their attention to the beginning and end of the flight patterns and each time the children mirror Bella's motion with their voices.*

*Without stopping, Mr. Hunter says, "Let's sing our Butterfly Song together and see where Bella lands! Put your finger out if you would like to sing hello to Bella." The children sing the simple sol-mi-do melody as Mr. Hunter "flies" Bella around the room. The children sit with their pointer fingers stretched out as they sing, waiting to see where Bella will land. As the song ends, Bella is perched on Anya's finger. Mr. Hunter prompts her, singing "Hello, Bella." Anya sings back, about a fourth below the pitch but with an*

*accurate interval. Mr. Hunter prompts again, moving the pitch down slightly to meet her in the lower range and saying, “One more time, just a little bit higher.” This time she matches his pitch level. Mr. Hunter exclaims, “Excellent singing, Anya!” as Bella gives her a gentle “butterfly kiss” on the nose. Anya and the rest of the class giggle. The game repeats several times as Bella moves around the room, giving Mr. Hunter a chance to assess several more students’ pitch-matching ability. As Bella flies away to her spot on the piano, the children sing, “Bye-bye, Bella!” Even Anya is matching pitch this time, having warmed up and found her singing voice. Picking up his guitar, Mr. Hunter marvels again at how effective finger puppet play is at getting the children singing.*

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## **A World of Children’s Vocal Expressions**

The world over, children sing. Children practice their ABCs, sing along with favorite TV shows and movies, make up their own songs, and sing childhood nursery rhymes. In the home, songs may be a joyful part of bedtime rituals, teeth brushing, and getting dressed. As they enter school, singing becomes an important component of education, helping them learn routines, the days of the week, and how to line up or make a circle. Children may sing on the playground, practicing hand-clapping games, joining in jump-rope chants, or belting out theme songs from a favorite movie. All children are musical and singing behaviors naturally emerge across a wide range of children’s singing activities (Campbell, 2010) and across cultures (Campbell & Wiggins, 2013; Marsh, 2009).

Just as singing is a natural part of children’s musical cultures, it is also a central feature of the general music classroom. In the music room, children learn songs, play singing games, participate in musical storytelling, accompany themselves on instruments, perform solos, and sing in parts. While singing behaviors do emerge naturally for children, the music teacher or teaching artist can play a critical role in helping students develop healthy singing habits that may promote positive engagement with singing across the lifespan. This chapter will provide an overview of pertinent literature related to working with young singers, establish the critical importance of developing positive attitudes toward singing in childhood, and outline effective methods for teaching and assessing singing among elementary-aged students.

## **Children’s Vocal Development**

There has been a vast amount of research on the topic of children’s singing voices that can be traced to the early 1900s (see Jersild & Bienstock, 1934), with considerable attention paid to the issue of vocal range (see Goetze et al., 1990). Despite conflicting findings in the literature, scholars largely agree that children’s vocal ranges expand

over time, both as the vocal mechanism matures and as the children gain singing experience. That experience is often in the form of vocal training in the context of the elementary general music classroom. Scholars have suggested that children must first develop the ability to access their singing voice across registers before they can sing with a greater degree of accuracy (Rutkowski, 2015). Young children should therefore be given regular opportunities to differentiate among the different registers, finding and exploring their singing voices during primary schooling.

Experts in vocal pedagogy and general music agree that teachers must consider the vocal capabilities of children as they plan instruction; they have also offered guidelines to help teachers make informed choices to support the vocal needs of students (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2018; Phillips, 1996). The most important considerations are the vocal ranges of the children (the pitches they are typically able to produce) as well as the tessitura of the repertoire (the range within which most of the pitches of a song lie). While children are capable of producing a fairly wide range of pitches, most experts note that singing consistently below middle C is not healthy for children, especially when developing awareness of and comfort with the singing voice in early childhood. Pitching repertoire above middle C also encourages young singers to move into their upper register and out of their more natural “playground” register. Kindergarteners should typically be encouraged to sing within the range of about a fifth (d4–a4), and as they age, the tessitura of song repertoire can be gradually expanded to a full octave or more. Figure 2.1 presents approximate vocal range and tessitura considerations for kindergarten through 5th grade singers.<sup>1</sup>

The suggestions provided here are a good starting point for teachers endeavoring to select repertoire that is well-suited to the nature of children’s developing voices.<sup>2</sup> Since vocal development (like all human development) is incredibly individualistic, it is important that teachers consider these recommendations as helpful guidelines, rather than hard and fast rules.

## Teaching Singing

Scholarship on children’s singing in the classroom has also provided educators with important information about best practices for teaching singing. Research has found that solo and small group singing in the classroom positively influence children’s singing behaviors (Rutkowski, 1996) and should therefore be included as a regular part of the curriculum. Generally, children match pitch better when the pitch and timbre of the vocal presentation is closer to that of the child voice. Child models, female models with limited vibrato, and male falsetto models may encourage more accurate singing among young singers (Green, 1990). Children may also learn song material best when they have the chance to process it immersively over repeated hearings (Klinger et al., 1998), suggesting that teachers should provide students with multiple chances to hear song repertoire before asking them to join in or engage in rote learning.

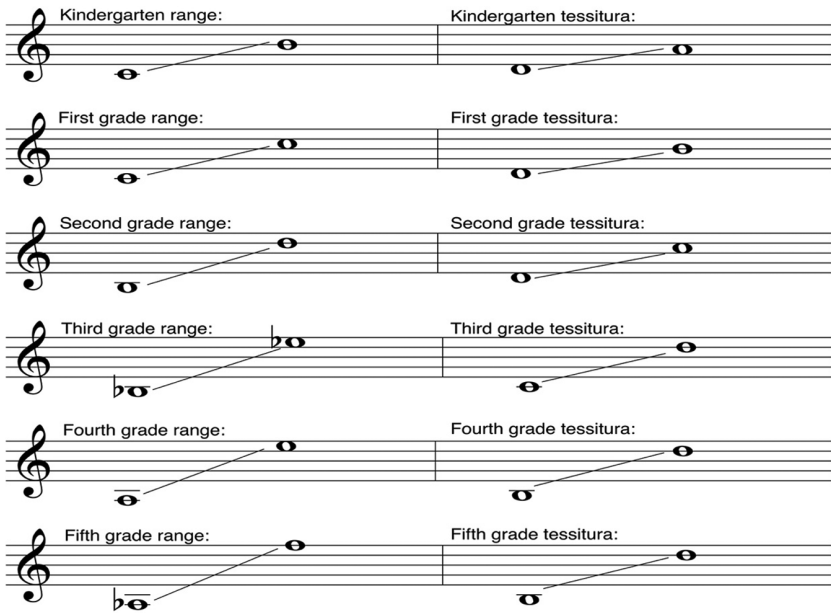


Figure 2.1 Approximate ranges and tessituras for kindergarten through 5th-grade children

Researchers have also determined that singing accuracy increases throughout elementary school years but then begins to decline in adolescence and into adulthood (Demorest & Pfordresher, 2015). This is not a developmental phenomenon; rather, the decline in accuracy among adults relates to non-participation in singing activities. The old adage “use it or lose it” appears to apply to singing skill, as the ability to sing accurately declines with age and as people become less active singers. The foundational singing skill developed in elementary general music encourages young singers to access and use the full range of their singing voices, setting them up to become more accurate singers.<sup>3</sup>

### Attitudes Toward Singing

Researchers have also discovered that attitudes toward singing can be powerful determinants for how people engage with music making across their lifespan (Abril, 2007). In one study of adolescent musicians, musical self-concept was related to participants’ ability to sing accurately, suggesting that singing may be tied to how individuals develop of a sense of themselves as musicians in childhood (Demorest et al., 2017). The same study found that positive attitudes toward music and musical self-concept were strong predictors of continued participation in non-compulsory music instruction in

junior high schools, highlighting how critical the development of the singing voice is during childhood: The emergence of a positive attitude toward music and a strong sense of musical self-concept may lead to further, elective formal musical engagement after elementary school. Further, the attitudes toward singing developed in childhood often manifest into adulthood. Many experience singing anxiety as adults as a result of negative experiences in childhood, often within the context of a school music classroom (Abril, 2007). The messaging children receive about their singing voice is incredibly powerful and can significantly influence a child's desire to participate in singing across their lifespan.

## **Fostering a Culture of Singing**

One of the most important jobs of the general music teacher or teaching artist is to establish a culture of singing within the music classroom. As children move from grade to grade, they will carry habits and attitudes developed in the general music classroom. If music teachers or teaching artists foster joyful participation in singing activities from a young age, students will come to expect such activities, developing comfort and confidence in their voices and understanding singing as “what we do,” even as they move into upper elementary grades and beyond. Positive reinforcement, both verbal and nonverbal, is necessary to encourage consistent participation in singing activities, and teachers should provide frequent and honest feedback. Appropriate repertoire and engaging and fun activities further support a culture of singing.

It is also necessary to monitor the students' responses to singing, carefully discouraging disrespectful behaviors. Firmly reminding students to respect all voices is a critical part of fostering a classroom culture where singing feels safe and where it is okay to make mistakes. It is also necessary to encourage students to always use their best singing voices, making it clear that using silly voices or yelling are not appropriate behaviors during singing activities. By establishing clear guidelines, setting rules around participation and respect, and making solo-singing feel safe, teachers might foster a culture of singing that is welcoming and allows all children to fully explore their range of vocal expressions.

## **Choosing Repertoire**

Choosing repertoire is one of the most important tasks of the general music teacher. Singing is often the foundation of the curriculum and therefore the repertoire inevitably shapes the classroom culture and the course of the learning. The following sections highlight important considerations for teachers as they select repertoire for classroom use.

## Range and Tessitura

One important factor to consider when choosing repertoire is the range and tessitura of the piece. It is essential that the tessitura of every song be compatible with the vocal capabilities of the students. Attempting to sing outside the natural vocal range can be frustrating for students or even cause them to develop poor habits or vocal damage. Figure 2.1 (vocal ranges) is a good reference tool to use while examining repertoire, but it is also important for teachers to remember that children and their voices are all different. Listening in the classroom will help teachers determine the most comfortable and healthy singing ranges for each group of students.

## Text

The text is another important feature to consider when selecting repertoire, and teachers must recognize that different thematic material appeals to different ages of children. Animal songs or simple songs about nature might be appealing to kindergarteners, but fifth graders will likely consider them childish. Fourth and fifth graders might balk at representations of romantic love. When selecting repertoire, teachers must consider the textual theme of every song and how the students will respond to this material. Teachers should also consider the length of the song, the number and complexity of the words, and the number of verses. Smaller children will have difficulty remembering longer songs, multiple verses of text, and vocabulary that is too advanced. Older children will likely enjoy the challenge of alliterative tongue-twister texts, multiple or additive verses, or texts that offer deeper interpretive possibilities. Foreign language repertoire is an excellent addition to the curriculum, but teachers must be prepared to spend additional time learning the accurate pronunciation in order to represent the text and translation appropriately to the children.

## Concepts

Teachers will also want to consider what teachable concepts are represented in the song and how these concepts fit with curricular goals or standards. Sometimes, the curriculum will trigger a search for a particular piece of repertoire (e.g., a song to teach sixteenth notes or call and response). At other times, a song might be identified as a great fit for a particular grade level and then teachable concepts can be extracted from the song itself (e.g., 5th graders will enjoy “Weevily Wheat,” which features a syncopated rhythm).