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**WHO'S REALLY READING?**  
**AN APPROACH TO DEVELOPING MUSIC READING SKILLS IN THE**  
**ORCHESTRA CLASS**

Teaching reading skills to young instrumentalists – and particularly ensemble sight-reading skills – is a fundamental, and sometimes daunting, responsibility of any string teacher. Recent developments in music psychology and learning theory – along with common sense and traditional common practice – provide important insights into this process. In this session, these findings will be discussed, and an instructional framework will be presented that moves students effectively from 'rote-to-note' while accurately assessing students' reading skills. New materials and strategies will be explored and shared that address common note-reading problems.

**How do Johnny and Janie learn to read?**

- Parent reads → Image/verbal association → Symbolic association → Phonetic association → Phonetic construction/analysis → Constructed meaning
- Common approaches to reading provide a parallel to a successful music reading sequence.

**Framework for reading as an extension of memory -- Dr. Donald Hodges, University of North Carolina-Greensboro**

- Three principles of memory development (Hodges):
  1. Repetition
  2. Lack of interference
  3. Establishment/creation of meaning
- Used as a metaphor or parallel for learning/reading

**Audiation/Music Learning Theory – Principles from Dr. Edwin E. Gordon**

- Audiation – cognitive process by which the brain gives meaning to musical sounds; the musical equivalent of thinking in language
- Occurs when we hear and comprehend music for which the sound is no longer or may never have been present
- Takes place when we assimilate and comprehend music in our minds that we have just heard, or have heard in the past, or that we are reading in notation/improvising/composing
- Gordon differentiates five stages of audiation: Momentary retention → Conscious prediction of patterns
- Eight non-hierarchical types of audiation (some types depend on others for readiness): listening, reading, writing, 2 types of recalling/performing, 3 types of creating/improvising
- Differences between audiation, aural perception, musical imagery
- "Sound becomes music only through audiation."
- Reading or writing music may take place without audiation as *decoding of information*.
- Audiation of the musical syntax associated with the notation is critical for comprehension.

**Suggested Music Reading Strategies/Habits:**

- Teaching songs and instrumental melodies by rote, with emphasis on teacher modeling
- Sequence for teaching reading, combined with sequential introduction of physical/technical skills:
  1. Recognition/association of note values and rhythmic patterns (floating notes)
  2. Recognition of pitches, pitch memory – audiation of pitches (singing, floating notes)
  3. Use of counting systems and rhythm identification ("1-and-2," Gordon, McHose)
  4. Identification of musical and non-musical cues (reading checklist, stylistic awareness)
  5. Identification of broad musical patterns, extension of view (patterning)
  6. Reading ahead (eye-to-hand memory)
- Combination of unison exercises and independence (mixed-part ensembles)

### **Identification of Reading Problems at the Basic and Intermediate Levels**

- Problems identified by sampling of recognized string teachers:
  1. Dotted quarters/eighth rhythms;
  2. Long notes followed by notes of varied lengths;
  3. Rhythmic subdivision
  4. Rests of varied lengths
  5. Ties;
  6. Note values (long-to-short, short-to-long);
  7. Conjunct (stepwise) interval and note patterns;
  8. Disjunct (leaps) interval and note patterns;
  9. accidentals and key changes
  10. Ledger lines (E-string and C-string)
  11. “road maps” and related symbols
  12. accompaniment patterns
  13. dynamics
  14. following meter changes and conducting patterns
  15. articulations and accents

### **An Approach to Address Music Reading Problems**

- Assumes student has been introduced to fundamental reading skills – as developed through ongoing daily instruction
  - Pre-test that allows teacher to assess general or specific problems
  - Subsequent exercises that isolate problems within specific musical contexts – repetition to develop pattern recognition
  - Post-test that allows teacher to assess progress and mastery, or continued problems
  - Opportunities to assess and address reading issues not necessarily related to notes/rhythms
  - Simple ensemble opportunities that places the problem into a realistic musical context, an opportunity for students to “put it all together” and for the teacher to assess progress

### **Other Ongoing Strategies for Strengthening and Assessing Reading Skills**

- Following scores/overheads – with teacher guidance – while listening to recordings (association)
- Use of flash cards – read and associate, sing, and play
- Following parts – “pointing along” – while listening to recordings (association); stopping to identify “where are we now?” to promote accountability
- Following parts with a peer – one points to notes while the other plays
- “Fill in the Blanks” – teacher plays while others follow; teacher stops and individual student (or group) continues
- Reading ahead – working in pairs, one student covers the notes being played with a card, the other plays (being required to “read ahead”); covered notes extend from one beat ahead → two beats → one measure → multiple measures.
- Reorder the measures – teacher re-orders the measures in a familiar melody; students place in order correctly
- Predict the ending – teacher plays an antecedent phrase, individual student chooses from a menu of possible consequent phrases (best when preceded by improvisational rote version of same).

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