

## **Sound before symbol!**

The best time to introduce music notation is the moment when the child expresses a need to record his/her musical pieces or collection of sounds.

It is important to note that a 'vast range of experiences in Listening and Responding, Performing and Composing throughout the curriculum can be enjoyed by children without reference to music reading and writing (Teacher Guidelines p89). Indeed, children should be exposed to a wide range of activities and experiences in music before encountering its written forms. The key message is 'Sound before symbol!' As children encounter various music experiences, they will become aware for themselves of the possibilities of recording music in different ways. Building from this need to record their own work in a personal way, they will become aware of the advantages of a common method of recording and may then begin to explore conventional notation.

Music literacy is promoted in the Music curriculum on two levels, both aural/oral and the written or notated form.

Developing musical understanding is a central theme, that is, the ability to work in the currency of music, understanding the value of sounds and how they are inter-related. Experiences in all aspects of the Music curriculum will promote this and it is dealt with, more explicitly, in the Literacy strand unit. This strand unit advocates the development of inner hearing or thinking in sound, stating that 'The ability to internalise sound is an essential aspect of musical development' (Teacher Guidelines p101). Children are encouraged to express sounds by echoing and repeating patterns and melodies and improvising in sound.

The aural/oral aspect is linked to the written aspect and literacy in the context of understanding music reading and writing is developed. As stated in the Teacher Guidelines, (p89), '...knowledge in the rudiments of music literacy permits access to a whole realm of deeper knowledge, skills and understanding'. At the core of this is the ability to represent sounds in symbolic form and more essentially the skill of responding to those representations, through singing or playing instruments. From the level of early literacy (infants), children begin to relate sounds to pictures. From level two onwards, separate aspects of rhythm and pitch are introduced before children experience both aspects together.

The Music curriculum promotes literacy as an integral part of song singing. As children sing songs repeatedly, they gain personal experience of, and internalise the various contours and patterns. These are the building blocks from which lessons in literacy can be drawn. 'The simple tunes learned and practised in junior classes are given new meaning in more senior classes when the child is guided in the discovery of their rhythmic and melodic elements' (Teacher Guidelines p8).

The Music curriculum outlines a number of approaches to teaching music literacy/notation, but does not advocate one above the other. It is up to each school to choose which form. 'Teachers may choose from among these and other methods in developing an approach that

best suits their needs'(Teacher Guidelines p89) and consistency of approach outlined in the school policy, is advocated.

The main approaches mentioned are:

- Graphic notation- this refers to children's own pictures of their ideas and inventions. It may be pictorial or symbolic in form
- Standard notation- standard forms of notation (as outlined below)

Rhythm may be notated using stick notation or staff notation and is represented orally with rhythm syllables (eg. ta; ti-ti) .

Pitch may be taught through tonic solfa (doh, re, mi...) or through using absolute pitch names(C, D, E...) and may be complemented by the use of handsigns.

The use of pentatonic music is advocated and is considered to nurture the development of a 'healthy, discriminating ear'.

As children engage with the other strands and strand units of the Music curriculum, through various activities, they are enabled to develop of a sense of Pulse, Duration and Pitch, which are at the core of music literacy. They may encounter different levels of pitch in songs, move to the beat of a piece of music they are listening to or explore sounds of different duration and pattern in their compositions. Representing these experiences in symbolic form will link with and promote development of music literacy.

(See Teacher Guidelines -Appendices p137/8 for Suggested Sequence in Rhythm and Suggested Sequence in Melody; also p136 Handsigns)