

Something New: *Activate! Asks*

By Patricia Bourne

Enter the many elementary music classrooms in the United States, and you will experience the rich tapestry of instructional approaches seen, heard, and applied by the thousands of teachers representing our profession. One teacher may embrace a Kodály method, while down the road, another incorporates Orff, and in the classroom up the hall, you might hear and see evidence of Gordon's *Music Learning Theory*. Still another might employ a movement-based curriculum like that of Dalcroze, Weikart, or Gilbert (*Brain-Dance*).

In this volume, we will be launching a new feature article: *Activate! Asks*. Here, we will interview leaders in the variety of instructional pedagogies and methods seen and heard in American music classrooms to share a glimpse inside their instructional choices and classrooms. Rather than advocating one method or approach over another, the outcome is sure to be a celebration of the rich variety of teaching apparent in our classrooms. All of the professionals interviewed are among the first to express the necessity of teacher buy-in and comfort any teaching approach.

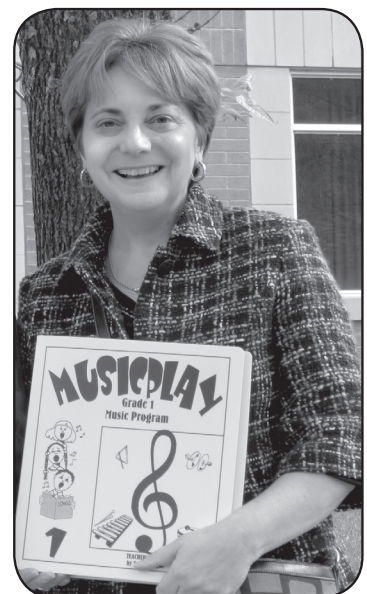
Are you curious about a particular method? Looking for professional literature or professional development within a certain instructional paradigm? Feeling the need to expand your knowledge of instructional possibilities? Want to know the materials, resources, and equipment needed to jump, full throttle into a particular "way" of teaching? Stay tuned as we explore the world of music education through the first-hand experiences of teachers like you.

Activate! Asks

An interview with Denise Gagné conducted by Patricia Bourne

Walk inside a conference room where Denise Gagné is presenting, not only will you have a great time, but you'll come away with songs, games, activities, tips, literature, and repertoire usable on day one or day one-hundred in your elementary music classroom. Her engaging and enthusiastic approach to music teaching and learning is a reflection of her commitment to children, their music-making and learning, and the belief that each and every child is entitled to a music education.

Denise is a valued contributor to *Activate!* with lessons that many of us look forward to using in our own classrooms. A certified Kodály and Orff specialist, Denise is a prolific writer, publisher, workshop clinician, children's choir director, and part-time (semi-retired) elementary music spe-





Photograph by Scott Glasgow

cialist in Alberta, Canada. Her name is recognizable for the quality of resources provided for teachers, both in written form and in multiple workshop sessions offered throughout the U.S. and Canada. What better person to interview for the first *Activate! Asks*?

As it turns out, Denise is one of those people who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Her first classes in elementary music were introductory Orff workshops with iconic Orff method instructors Donna Otto and Jos Wuytak. “Both were amazing teachers.” Eventually, a friend suggested that she take Kodály training, which led her to Lois Choksy at the University of Calgary. (A note to new teachers: Otto, Wuytak, and Choksy are some of the most recognized names in Orff and Kodály methodology.)

A few years later, she completed Levels II and III of Orff with Cindy Hall and Jay Broeker as her instructors, and Denise began to see ways in which instruction in K–6 general music could combine Kodály’s sequencing with the Orff process. In our conversation, Denise explained her approach as follows:

From the Kodály method, students gain the ability to read and write music. From the Orff process, they have enhanced opportunities to create music and movement. In an ideal situation, the students are literate musicians, able to read and write simple songs, and they are encouraged to create their own melodies, accompaniments, movement, and dances.

I think that, although there are still “purists” who choose to use just one way of teaching, most well-trained music teachers try to find a balance between encouraging creativity and helping to develop music literacy. A balanced music class will include many opportunities for students to create, but it will also give the children the skills to notate some of their own creations so that they can share them with others in a written form.

When asked what students are able to do better because the combination of methods, Denise confidently stated, “The students will be better all-around musicians.” In fact, she talked proudly about former students who’d become teachers (ten of her former students are now music teachers!) and who, as parents, enroll their children in her children’s choir. “They’ve made music a part of their lives.”

Denise encourages young teachers to complete at least a Level 1 Kodály and Level 1 Orff certification. In addition, she contends that attending workshops and conferences “keeps teachers current and helps keep them excited and energized. I belong to Kodály chapters and Orff chapters and attend as many workshops as I can.”

A life-long learner, Denise Gagné has woven new technology into the fabric of twenty-first-century general music instruction, encouraging the use of SmartBoards and other tools to help children learn. While she calls movement space and well-stocked instruments “ideal,” she also experienced teaching on a cart for three years in a “tiny reading nook, where the space for movement included steps.” Good teaching can still occur. “A skilled teacher modifies instruction to fit the learners,” as well as the situations encountered.

When asked about her “top 5 guiding principals” for instruction, Denise listed the following:

1. Music should be an integral part of every child’s education. They are entitled.
2. Sound before symbol—a principal in both Kodály and Orff. Children need to experience music before labeling with notes or symbols.
3. Children should have experiences singing, playing, moving, creating, reading, writing, and listening to music.
4. Materials used in instruction are primarily chosen from traditional folk songs or children’s singing games. In today’s classroom, children come from many cultures and traditions, so we include materials to represent that variety.
5. Music education activities should be sequential and appropriate for the age/stage of each student.

Want to learn more? Denise suggests the texts *Kodály Method* by her former teacher, Lois Choksy (published by Prentice Hall, ISBN 0139491651) and *Exploring Orff* by Arvida Steen (published by Schott, ISBN 0930448766). She told me, “Both sit on my desk.”

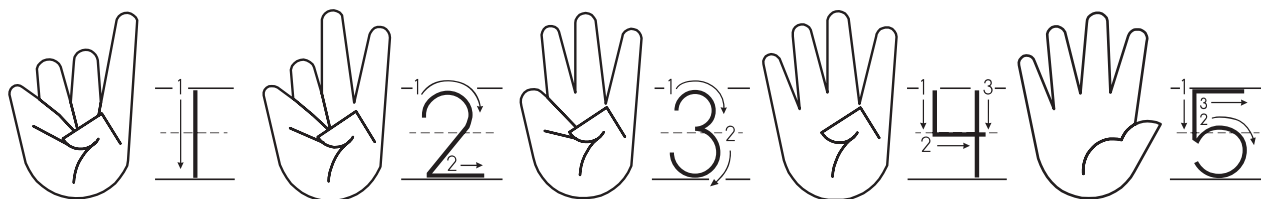
I would imagine hundreds, if not thousands, of music teachers have books with Denise Gagné’s name on their desks. Thanks, Denise, for your many contributions to our profession!





Number Lesson

Lesson Suggestions and Music by Denise Gagné



Suggested Grade Level: Kindergarten

Target Concepts

Melody: Singing a sol-mi song

Rhythm: Dividing a beat

Materials

- *Counting Song* and *Dr. Knickerbocker*, arranged by Denise Gagné
- 4–5 white paper plates
- Numbers written on index cards or plastic numbers purchased at a dollar store or teacher's store
- Bass xylophone
- Non-pitched percussion instruments

Music-Making Activities

Singing with expression

Playing a bordun

Improvising movements and sound effects

National Standards: 1, 2, and 9

Cross-Curricular Focus

Math: Number recognition and counting



Counting Song Performance Track



Dr. Knickerbocker Performance Track



Number Lesson

- *Counting Song* Big Book

Counting Song

Traditional
arr. Denise Gagné

One, two, tie my shoe. Three, four, shut the door.

BX

Five, six, pick up sticks. Sev - en, eight, lay them straight. Nine, ten, a big fat hen.

BX

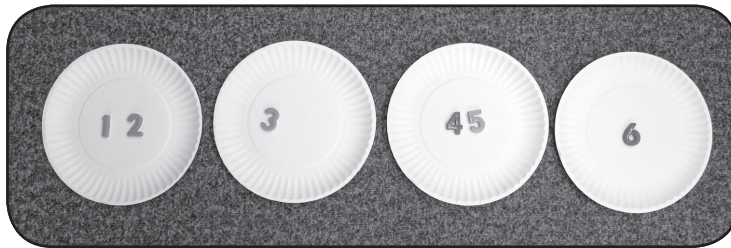
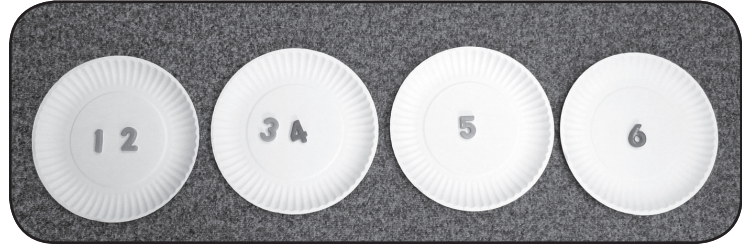
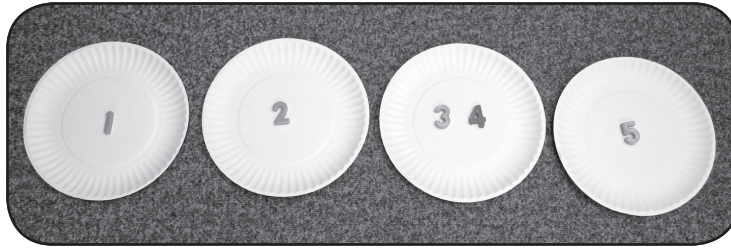
Lyrics	Actions
One, two,	Show one finger, then two fingers.
tie my shoe.	Pantomime tying a shoe.
Three, four,	Show three fingers, then four fingers.
shut the door.	Pantomime shutting the door.
Five, six,	Show five fingers, then six fingers.
pick up sticks.	Pantomime picking up sticks.
Seven, eight,	Show seven fingers, eight fingers.
lay them straight.	Pantomime laying the sticks straight.
Nine, ten,	Show nine fingers, then ten fingers.
a big fat hen.	Make a circle in front of you to show "fat."



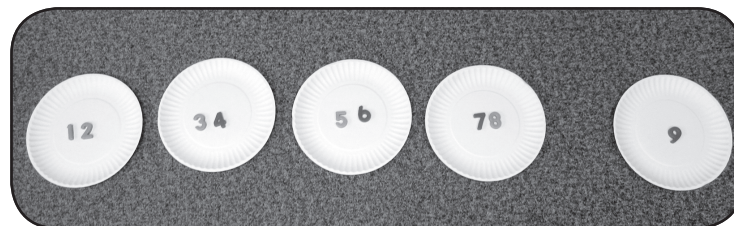
Lesson Suggestions

1. Sing the *Counting Song* to the students and ask them to perform the actions with you. Have the students listen for all of the numbers that they hear in the song. After singing, ask them how many numbers they heard.
2. Sing the song again, asking the students to join you as you sing and move.
3. Ask the students to pat their thighs with you as they sing. Sing the song as you pat the bordun. Tell the students that you are going to play the pattern that they patted on the bass xylophone. Play the bordun while the students pat along with you. If the students are successful, invite a few to try playing the bordun on the bass xylophone.
4. Have the students raise and lower their arms to show how the notes go higher and lower. If you wish to assess whether or not the students are able to do this correctly, instruct them to keep their eyes closed.

5. Place four paper plates on the floor. Each plate will represent one beat. Put one or two numbers on each plate (either hand-drawn numbers on index cards or sticky notes or plastic numbers) to form patterns like the ones depicted below.



6. Have the students read the numbers to you, making sure that they divide the beat when there is more than one number on a plate. Classroom teachers really appreciate it when the specialist teachers reinforce classroom lessons. In this instance, the purpose of reading the numbers is to have the students experience the rhythm of the language. However, this activity will also reinforce number recognition.
7. Have the students create new patterns with the numbers and plates. Read the new patterns, and then transfer the patterns to non-pitched instruments. If you would like, you can create a new composition by singing one or two verses of the *Counting Song* and playing (without chanting) a number pattern that the students have created.
8. To create a smooth transition, end with this number pattern:



Have the students play this pattern on the instruments. Then, tell them that it reminds you of another song that you know.

9. Play the recording of *Dr. Knickerbocker* (Track 2). Encourage the students sing all of the echo parts. When they come to the counting part, have them play the numbers on their non-pitched instruments.

Extension Ideas

Make a class big book of the *Counting Song*. See the folder in the data files on the *Activate!* CD for instructions and a template.