

Frequencies and kinds of inaccuracies in children's sightreading.

David Sell

NEMP (Music) – University of Canterbury Research Consultancy

December 1998

Introduction.

When notes are mostly correct, though not always, in sightreading tasks, in what respects are they most often wrong?

This study has sought to identify some types of sightreading inaccuracies, at both Year 4 and Year 8 levels, as revealed through the following tasks:

Sing Song	1/48/O	
Keyboard	3/48/O	Sightreading tasks

Both sets of tasks involved the children attempting to sing, or to play on a keyboard, a number of tunes that they heard sung or played twice, and for which they had the notation before them.

The small amount of overlap in this focus with the work of Sue Braatvedt in her study of *The role of singing in the NEMP tests* submitted as Focus 1 is more apparent than real, but reference is occasionally made to the findings of Sue Braatvedt, where any aspects of her study are particularly relevant to this study. There are a number of respects in which this study deals with some aspects of Sue Braatvedt's work in finer detail, as in the breaking down of tessitura inaccuracy into flat and sharp. Conversely, Sue Braatvedt studies each of the individual tasks of Sing Song and Vocal Sizzle with respect to first note accuracy, and it can be helpful to consider these in relation to findings of this focus.

In the NEMP assessments the Sing Song tasks were marked as -
mostly or fully in tune
mostly or fully in time
not attempted.

The Keyboard sightreading tasks were marked in the NEMP assessments as -
notes mostly/always accurate
timing moderately/very accurate
not attempted.

After viewing a number of the tapes, the following factors were identified as being worth more detailed study:

In Sing Song 1/48/O:

- Pitch correct
- Pitch sharp

- Pitch flat
- Pitch correct, but with some wrong notes
- Pitch unrecognisable, or spoken
- Rhythm correct
- Rhythm nearly correct
- Rhythm wrong, but with a recognisable pattern
- Rhythm unrecognisable

For one group of 43 Year 8 tapes, the pitch category of Sing Song was further broken down to include:

- Pitch differences evened, ie. highs were flattened & lows sharpened
- Isolated wrong pitch(es)
- Mismatched note(s) that put out subsequent pitching

The Keyboard 3/48/O (Sightreading) tasks were less productive, mainly because, being optional, relatively few attempted them. However, the following factor was noted (Other information relating to pitch and rhythm patterning was obtained, this being included in Focus 6.):

- Awareness of pitch direction

When the original sample of 54 Year 4 tapes was found to provide insufficient useful information, another sample of 46 tapes was obtained (Of these 2 didn't contain the sightreading exercises, so the number was effectively 44). From this sample, a piece of additional information was gained:

- Attempts at using two hands together in tasks 2, 3 and 4

Finally, although it was not strictly a part of this focus, it was decided to pick up an aspect of the abandoned focus 2, and study the four pitch exercises in Keyboard - 3/48/O with respect to direction and pitch accuracy. This is included as a supplementary section.