

**The Value Of Utilizing Curwen Hand Signs For Melodic Dictations In The
Elementary General Music Classroom**

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ABSTRACT

The Value Of Utilizing Curwen Hand Signs For Melodic Dictations In The Elementary General Music Classroom

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the value of utilizing Curwen hand signs as an aid when completing melodic dictations. Two classes of 4th grade students at Bridle Path Elementary participated in this study over the course of eight weeks. One class received solfege instruction utilizing the hand signs. They were be asked to incorporate these hand signs when completing melodic dictations. The other class received instruction without hand signs and was asked to complete the dictations utilizing only aural skills. Results were measured by two benchmark tests as well as a final dictation exam at the end of the eight-week period. The study incorporated aspects of many modes of inquiry: historical, philosophical (whether or not utilizing hand signs produces more accurate results), and empirical (evaluating the results of the two classes).

Rationale

As a musician educator it is imperative to me to present music learning strategies that are proven to be effective. Providing students with these strategies at a young age sets a foundation that can be built upon at the secondary level. The AP Music Theory Exam features a section that includes melodic dictation (College Board).

This study will compare the results of two classes. Both classes were taught the same content. This included sight-singing exercises as well as melodic dictations. One class sang the solfege exercises utilizing the hand signs. When they began melodic dictations, they incorporated the hand signs as a strategy to dictate the given example. The other class relied solely on the solfege syllables as well as their aural skills to complete the dictations. The purpose of this study is to examine the benefit of utilizing Curwen hand signs when assessing melodic dictation skills.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a young student studying guitar and piano, I had a great interest in ear training. However, I never received formal training in this area. In school, general music class was limited to a teacher on a cart and classes were spent singing along to pop songs on CDs. I also received weekly piano instruction starting in first grade. My teacher, while a skilled musician, never stressed the importance of music reading. I began to figure out melodies, harmonies, and chord progressions by ear. As I began to study jazz in high school, this approach benefitted me greatly when transcribing solos. I enjoyed the challenge of listening to a soloist live or on a recording and trying to figure out the melodies they were playing aurally. When attending my undergraduate studies at Duquesne University, we were tested weekly in ear training. These tests included recognition of intervals, sight-singing, and melodic dictations using solfege. Since my general music instruction in elementary school was somewhat limited, I was not exposed to solfege until college. I became immediately interested in its benefits. As a musician-educator, I wanted to find the most effective ways to allow my students to develop their ability to hear melodies. It wasn't until my first year of teaching elementary general music in the North Penn School District, that I began to see the benefits of solfege as well as the Curwen hand signs. Since my first year of teaching, I've made it a point to spend some time every few classes working on melodic dictations. Even with students as young as first grade, I have seen how utilizing simple sol-mi patterns can develop their understanding of melody. At a higher level, I've watched sixth grade students who

love the challenge of utilizing a full major scale along with varying rhythms. My goal has been for students to see melodic dictations as a way to allow them to grow as musicians, helping them in their performance capacity. Dictations improve a child's ear, reading ability, and the process strengthens their confidence. This study is a result of my interest in finding the most effective ways for students to develop the ability to dictate melodic patterns.

Within the North Penn School District there is often a question of how to align music curriculum from kindergarten through senior year of high school. Part of my reason for this study stemmed from a curiosity of how I could teach solfege and melodic dictations in a way that will have a lasting impact on students. North Penn High School offers a course in AP Music Theory. Through a conversation with the instructor of the course, I was informed that students are expected to sight-sing and complete melodic dictations when taking the AP Music Theory test. As an elementary vocal instructor, I felt that I needed to begin planting the seeds of this process at a young age. The AP Music Theory Exam is divided into two sections. Section one consists of 75 multiple-choice questions of aural stimulus and non-aural stimulus. Section II consists of a written portion as well as a sight-singing portion. In the written portion, students are expected to have knowledge of melodic dictation, harmonic dictation, part-writing from figured bass, part-writing from Roman numerals, and composition of a bass line. There is also a sight-singing portion in which students have to sing and record two brief excerpts. Students have the option of completing these sight-singing examples in solfege ([Collegeboard.com](https://collegeboard.org/apcentral/courses/ap-music-theory)). Having an understanding of what is expected at the AP level in high school, I wanted to see

what affect the use of Curwen hand signs would have for elementary students who are just beginning to learn the basics of melodic dictation.

Chapter 2: Background

Tonic solfege and Curwen hand signs are both elements of the Kodaly method of music education. Solfege, also called solfa, is seen as a method of ear training “without equal” since it “focuses the attention initially not on isolated pitches but on pitch relationships and pitch functions within a tonal system” (Chosky, “Teaching Music In The Twenty-First Century” 85). Solfege began with Guido d’Arezzo in the 11th century who sought to find a way that would allow monks to read chant notation more effectively. “The advantages of this (solfege) for teaching vocal music sight-reading should be obvious. The basic tune of the minor third *sol-mi* is the same in any key. Thus when a child knows only these two notes he can already read them in any placement on the staff” (Chosky, “The Kodaly Method: Comprehensive Music Education From Infant To Adult” 20-21).

While solfege allows students to deepen their tonal memory, the hand signs are an aid that makes “tonal memory both more quickly accomplished and more secure.” John Curwen originally developed the hand signs in 1870. Curwen was interested in “teaching children to read and ‘cipher’.” Curwen’s work explains what he called the ‘great principles...the thought before the name’ and the simple before the complex. Before the pupil starts to learn to read pitch notation, he or she is already very familiar with the sounds of the tones.” Hand signs serve as an aid for students to develop their sense of inner hearing. Curwen’s belief was that these signs would not only make clear to the student the different melodic tones but also show the “affect” of the tone:

“thus, *Do* was shown by a fist to represent ‘strong, firm’; *re*, slanting upwards, stood for ‘rousing or hopeful.’ *Mi* was indicated by a horizontal hand, palm down, representing ‘steady, calm’. *Fa*, pointing downward, was ‘desolate’ or ‘awe-inspiring.’ *Sol*, with the palm facing the teacher, fingers close together, indicated ‘grand’ or ‘bright’; and *la*, with its drooping hand gesture, was ‘sad’ or ‘weeping’. *Ti*, pointing upwards, was ‘piercing’ or ‘sensitive’.”

Curwen wanted the hand signs to “individualize the syllables, to give each tone a distinct personality in relationship to the tonic”. It is of note that Curwen did not consider these hand signs to be “definitive or exact”. He felt that teachers could interpret the tones their own way with their own signs. He stated “the important thing was to recognize that each tone has a unique character in relationship to the key tone” (Zinar 46).

In my own teaching, I will often begin class with a series of solfa patterns. The students will echo the patterns while demonstrating the hand signs. Following this, I will demonstrate a pattern using only hand signs but not singing, and the class will sing the pattern and show the corresponding hand signs back to me. While all of these steps relate to developing tonal memory as well as inner hearing, I was interested in the affect the hand signs would have when applied to dictations. When completing dictations, students would need to rely solely on the concepts of tonal memory and inner hearing since they are not physically singing the patterns back to the teacher. The hand signs serve as a physical gesture to show the pattern as the student audiates the notes played.

There has not been a significant amount of research on the effect of Curwen hand signs in aiding melodic dictation. There have been numerous studies regarding the effects of the hand signs when sight-singing. In addition, there have been recent studies examining instruction of melodic dictation in the AP Music Theory class.

Nathan O. Buonviri and Andrew S. Paney completed a survey in which they wanted to “identify pedagogical approaches to melodic dictation employed by AP Music Theory teachers”. 875 music teachers participated in their study. Buonviri and Paney recognized that developing aural skills is “a key component of music theory course work at the high school and college levels” (224). While the 875 teachers that participated were in agreement that aural skills are “important”, there is a wide range of opinions of how to teach these concepts. “Aural skills, such as dictation, sight-reading, and error detection, typically require students to synthesize knowledge and skills efficiently within specified time limits” (225).

Buonviri and Paney confirmed my earlier statement regarding a lack of research in this area. They stated that “determining which strategies to teach for successful dictation and how to teach them are crucial, yet scarcely researched tasks”. Their study made reference to the research of McClung in 2001 (to be examined shortly), which noted that there is a “lack of research on effectiveness of various sight-singing systems and the resultant tendency of teachers to learn and teach in a smattering of various approaches”. The obvious issue with this approach is that the student ends up not showing competency in any particular method. Buonviri and Paney make note that “research on dictation strategies also has been minimal and seems to lack even the tradition of informed historical debate that

sight-singing pedagogy has enjoyed”. While the College Board aids teachers in regards to curriculum development with advice and guidelines, the Board does not specify a specific methodology to prepare the students with the “knowledge and skills necessary for the success on the exam” (Buonviri & Paney 225). This has resulted in “substantial pedagogical variability” across the country. Buonviri and Paney state “greater knowledge of how AP Music Theory teachers plan curriculum, choose instructional resources, and execute instruction could provide valuable information to current and future teachers and students of music theory. Melodic dictation instruction seems to lack a consistent pedagogical tradition overall. Therefore, current information about AP music theory teachers’ approaches to melodic dictation could be especially beneficial for high school and college music theory instructors and students” (225). In their research, the authors believe that “instructors may be teaching a variety of strategies without full awareness of their effectiveness” (226). This particular statement struck at the core of what I wanted to find out at the elementary level. Is teaching melodic dictations with the aid of hand signs an effective strategy?

Buonviri and Paney discovered through their survey that moveable *do* was the most common pitch system used for sight-singing. (This was also the system that both classes participating in my study utilized). They also found that while teachers differ on “particular methods”, teachers “believe that using a pitch system that reinforces degree function is helpful for developing aural skills” (228). Also of particular interest was the fact that “most participants reported that sight-singing and dictation followed generally parallel paths in the curriculum (52%), while 45%

said that the two shared at least some things in common” (229). When preparing students for melodic dictation teachers discussed the importance of making “pitch predictions.” This meant, “using a process of elimination regarding pitch (44%).” The study also asked teachers to list words that described “strong dictation students and words to describe weak dictation students” (231). “Describing strong students, participants most frequently reported backgrounds as singers (18%), instrumentalists (18%), and pianists (17%). In describing weak dictation students, participants reported backgrounds of general lack of music experience (14%), and singers (11%).” Weak students were also described as “unfocused (25%) and overwhelmed (11%) and anxious (10%)”. This response interested me because a kinesthetic activity such as using hand signs may help aid the student who is considered unfocused. Teachers clearly see strong results in the students who have a musical background (singers, instrumentalists, and pianists). However, as Buonviri and Paney state, “singers were also listed in the weak description, suggesting that vocal training may carry both perceived advantages for dictation and skill development”. If there are disadvantages, as stated, it would be imperative for a vocal music teacher such as myself to understand what exactly this would mean. The authors also mention their belief that “increased student focus might also increase confidence and reduce tendency of students to be overwhelmed and anxious” (232). If hand signs could improve focus in certain types of learners, then it’s possible that they could also aid in reducing feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious.

Alan C. McClung provided research in which he studied the sight-singing score of high school choir members with “extensive training in movable solfege syllables and Curwen hand signs.” In this study, high school choristers with “extensive training in solfege syllables and Curwen hand signs (n=38) were asked to sight-sing two melodies, one while using Curwen hand signs and the other without. Out of a perfect score of 16, the mean score with hand signs was 10.37, and without hand signs, 10.84. A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference” (254). McClung notes the fact that in order for a student to sight-sing a passage correctly there must be:

“a variety of simultaneous responses from the student: (a) an aural response – to listen, audiate, identify, and label pitches with specific solfege syllables; (b) a visual response – to identify and connect specific solfege syllables to modeled hand shapes or notated pitches; (c) a kinesthetic response – to create the physical hand shapes for the various solfege syllables while using the same hand to relate the intervallic rise and fall of pitches to the appropriate thoracic region; and (d) an oral response – to match with the singing voice a specific pitch using a specific solfege syllable” (265).

McClung cites a 1986 Apfelstadt study that found that when children are learning melodic patterns “the kinesthetic and visual modalities could be used to reinforce the auditory.” However, he also mentions a 1988 study by Pautz that “examined the influence of matching instructional techniques to children identified as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or mixed modality learners.” Pautz found that the

“results indicated a positive effect tendency but no significant differences” (256).

McClung believes, however, that tapping into a student’s kinesthetic learning mode is an important pedagogical feature of Curwen hand signs”. The use of Curwen hand signs is a link between “kinesthetic learning modality” and “musical pitch acuity”.

McClung examined five previous similar studies in his research. Of important note is a 1993 study of Frederickson, which examined eight 4th and 5th grade classrooms. The students were instructed to either use solfege syllables with no hand signs, solfege syllables with hand signs, or floating their hands in an up and down motion “to reflect the intervallic rise and fall of pitch movement. Posttest results indicated that participants using hand levels (relating the hand to the intervallic rise and fall of pitches) performed significantly better than the other two groups” (257).

McClung found in his results the same pattern of the five previous similar studies he examined: “the effects of using Curwen hand signs resulted in no significant differences” (262). He also found that students using hand signs with an instrumental background performed “significantly better” than those without such a background. Following the testing period, McClung asked students to share their opinions of hand signs in aiding sight singing. Those who did not utilize the signs stated that they felt they did “best when responding solely to the challenges of pitch and rhythm.” Those who preferred gestures “supported the findings of Frederickson’s (1993) study, in which students performed best when pitch responses included the intervallic rise and fall of the hand.” McClung concludes that while “some students may benefit from the use of hand signs, their use may put

others at a disadvantage. To meet student needs, a calculated strategy may produce the most satisfying results. Students who learn to sight-sing using moveable solfege syllables should be exposed to the potential benefits of Curwen hand signs. After a reasonable instructional period, the teacher may choose to allow students to decide the extent to which they incorporate the use of hand signs" (264).

A study by Beverly A. Martin "investigated the contributions of tonal syllables, hand signs, and letter representations of tonal syllables, as well as high and low levels of tonal aptitude and school readiness, to the development of verbal and symbolic syllable skills of first-grade students" (161). Martin notes that "little is known as to the individual importance of interrelatedness of hand signs, tonal syllables, and letter representations of tonal syllables in the acquisition of verbal and symbolic tonal skill. Because hand signs and letter representations of tonal syllables are used in conjunction with tonal syllable learning/singing, the contributions each makes remain undetermined" (162). In her study, Group 1 echoed patterns only with tonal syllables, and Groups 2 and 3 echoed with tonal syllables as well as visual aids such as hand signs. Students were tested in the beginning of the year and asked to complete the same test at the end of the year. Martin found the results of the training and test sessions to be "disappointing and essentially the same". She found that the tasks of the first graders "were not more ably handled at the conclusion of a year's training". She concluded that "the students focused on tonal syllables to the extent that pitch acuity was hindered; in some cases, they possibly were seldom performing what they perceived aurally or might have perceived had their attention not been divided" (167). In such a case, an aid

such as hand signs became a hindrance. Martin observed that there was no difference in results between the students only echoing tonal syllables and those who learned through the use of hand signs. She even went as far to suggest that if aids such as hand signs are “introduced prematurely, they may cause confusion, and impede growth” (168). Martin also makes note that “in many Piagetian studies (Christ, 1983/84; Pflederer & Sechrest, 1968; Williams, 1977; Young 1982), researchers have found that young children tend to give attention to a dominant aspect of an event but are not able to give equivalent attention to simultaneous events. This contrasts with studies (Boardman, 1964; Ortmass, 1933) that suggested that students may retain the control of a pattern while missing individual pitches. I concluded that centering on tonal syllables cause inaccurate memory of contour of pitches” (168).

Finally, a study completed by Susan Cousins and Diane Cummings Persellin of Trinity University examined the effect of Curwen hand signs in regards to matching pitch with two first grade classes (Cousins & Persellin “The Effect Of Curwen Hand Signs On Vocal Accuracy of Young Children). Over the course of a ten-week period, students were instructed in solfege with one class utilizing hand signs in addition to solfege and the other class only using solfege. The classes completed a pre-test and a post-test. While the group using the hand signs did see a larger growth over the ten weeks the difference in results was not greatly significant. The group using hand signs saw a growth in the mean of test results from 7.8 to 9.0 on a 10-point scale. The group only using solfege saw a group from 6.7 to 7.6 (Cousins & Persellin 17-19).

The research made me realize it was very possible I may see no real difference between my two classes during testing. It also demonstrated the wide range of beliefs and practices when it came to teaching melodic dictation. The research reinforced my understanding that every student learns differently, and teaching a variety of methods may yield the best results.

Chapter 3: Method

The subjects of this study were 40 fourth grade students in a suburban elementary school in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. One class was comprised 19 girls and boys. A second class was comprised of 21 girls and boys. All students attended general music class once every four school days for 45 total minutes over a period of 8 weeks. Both classes received the same amount of instruction time during this study.

During the 4 weeks leading up to the testing, both classes spent time preparing for the dictations. Five minutes of class was spent singing solfege patterns that I demonstrated and were then echoed by the class. The patterns sung were all from the F major pentatonic scale. The only difference was one class was instructed to echo using solfege syllables while showing hand signs and the other class was instructed only to use solfege syllables. Students also used white boards to practice writing various solfege patterns that were sung on the musical staff as well as labeling the syllable below each note head. During this time, verbal feedback was given. Students practiced recognition of leaps in melodic patterns. For example, both classes practiced singing, identifying, and writing *do* to *re*, *do* to *mi*, and *do* to *sol*. The class utilizing hand signs were taught to show a space between these signs symbolizing larger intervallic leaps. The preparation period ensured for me that each student knew the solfege syllables we would be working with (*do*, *re*, *mi*, *sol*, and *la*), that the first class knew the corresponding hand signs, and that each

student could write the notes of the pentatonic scale correctly on a musical staff prior to taking any of the tests.

Both classes completed a set of three tests over the course of a 4-week period. Each test was comprised of five dictations that were demonstrated three times by the teacher on the piano. Both classes received the same tests. Each test became progressively more challenging in regards to the intervallic jumps and skips between notes. The students listened to the given pattern and completed their answer on a musical staff. All patterns were derived from the F major pentatonic scale. One class was instructed to use their knowledge of solfege patterns as well as the hand signs as an aid to complete the dictations. The other class relied solely on auditory skills and their knowledge of solfege patterns to find their answers. No verbal feedback or assistance was given to the students during the testing. The students were told the starting note prior to the pattern being played. Each pattern consisted of four total notes. The pattern was played one time at a slow tempo. Following this, a period of 30 seconds of silence was given. In this time, students were able to audiate, quietly hum, write, and check their answers. Following that time, the pattern was played a second time followed by 30 seconds of silence. Finally, the pattern was played a third time followed by another period of 30 seconds. The tests were completed individually.

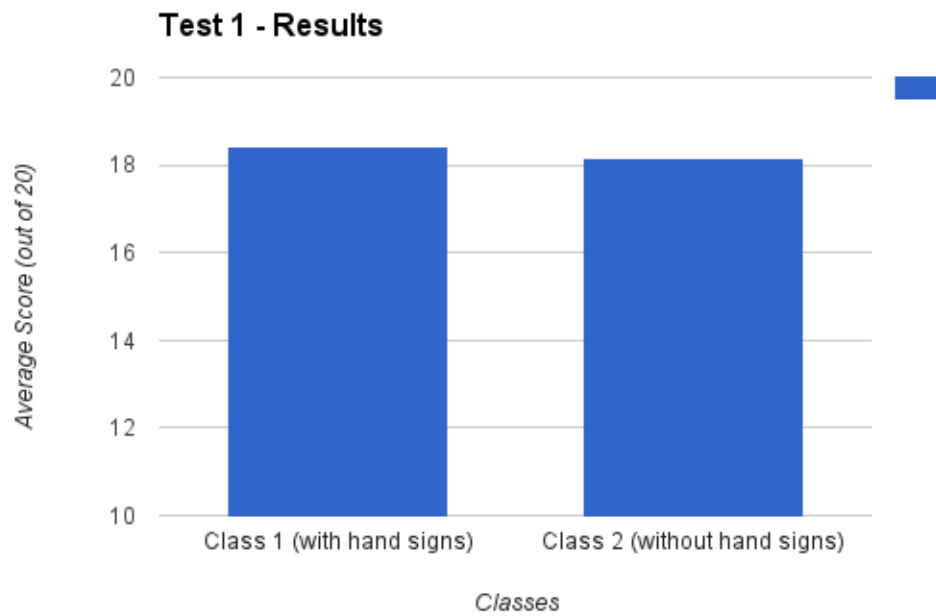
When grading the tests, a total of 20 points could be achieved. One correct note equaled one point. This was done to prevent a student who may have missed one note (for example, hearing *re* at the end of a dictation rather than *mi*) from

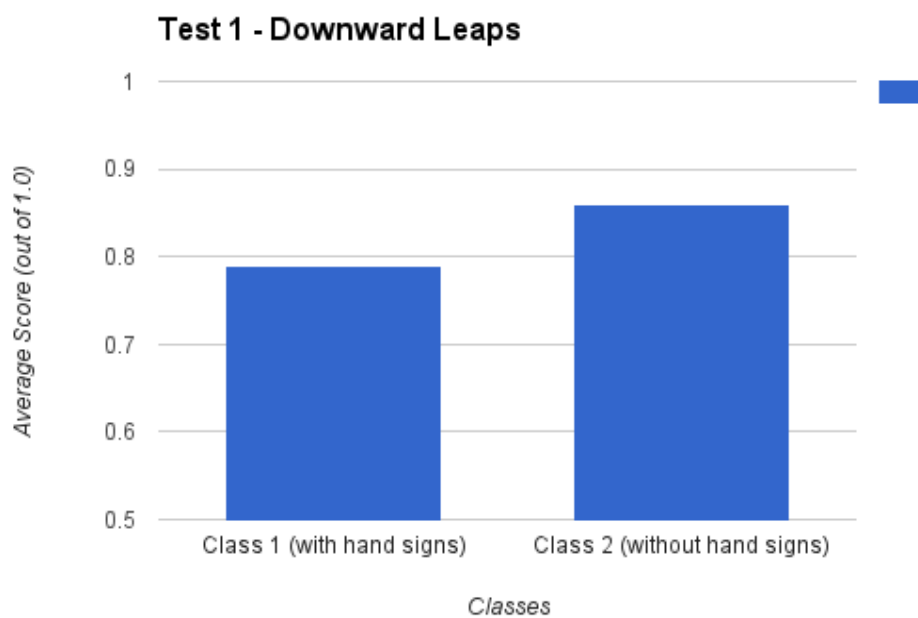
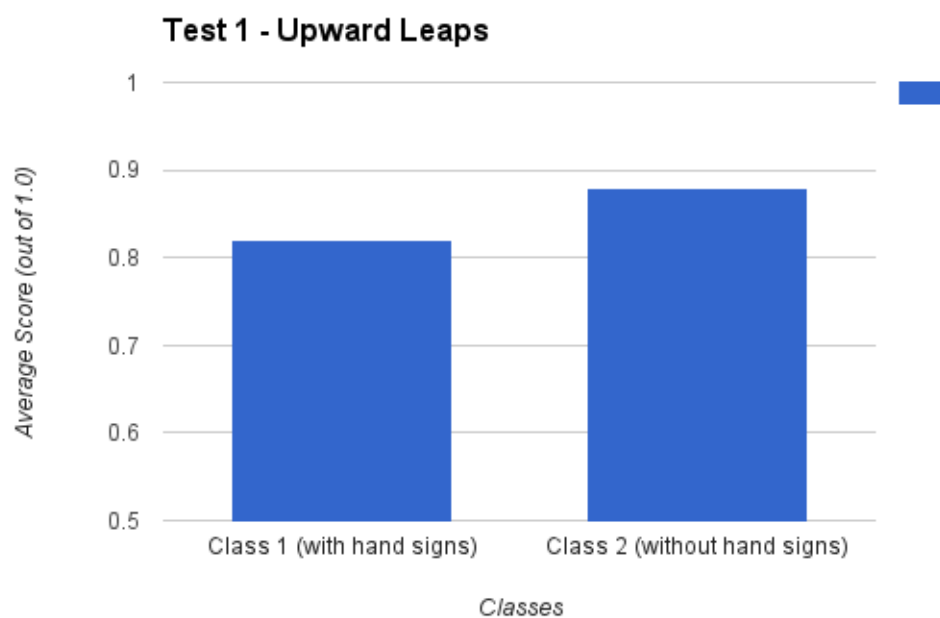
receiving the same score as a student who may have missed two or three notes within an example.

The first test utilized only the tones *do*, *re*, *mi*, and *sol*. *La* was not included until the second test. I encouraged the class utilizing hand signs to use the following sequence when listening. To show the hand sign for the first note before I even began playing (this note was told to them). Then, they were to use their hands to first show the direction of the notes. For example, if the pattern started on *do*, they would show a small rise of the hand if the next note was *re* or a large jump if the pattern went to *sol*. After hearing the direction of the notes, they were to use the “silent time” to begin filling in specific syllables. Once they completed a rough idea of what they thought the pattern to be, they could use the Curwen hand signs for the next time I played the same dictation to check their answers. As previously stated, the class not using hand signs simply relied solely on auditory skills to complete the dictation process.

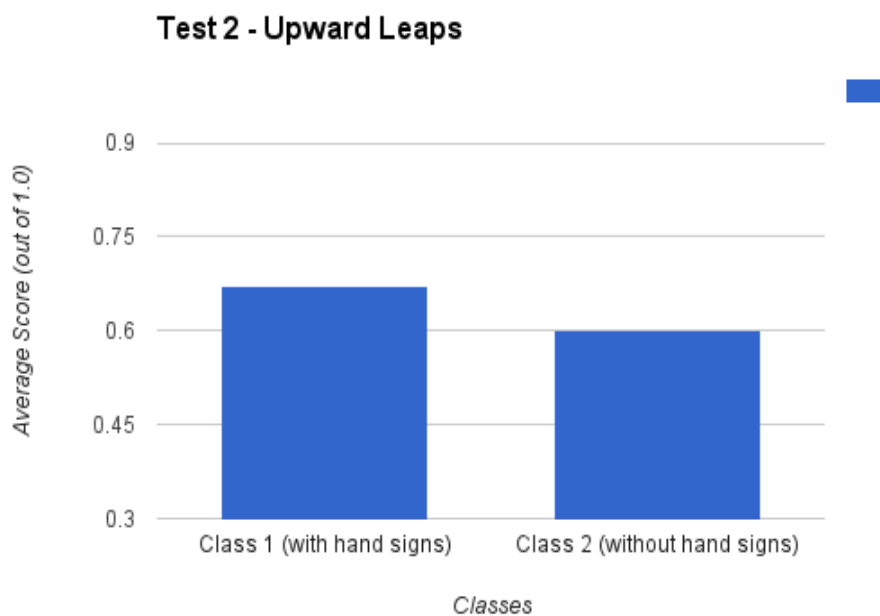
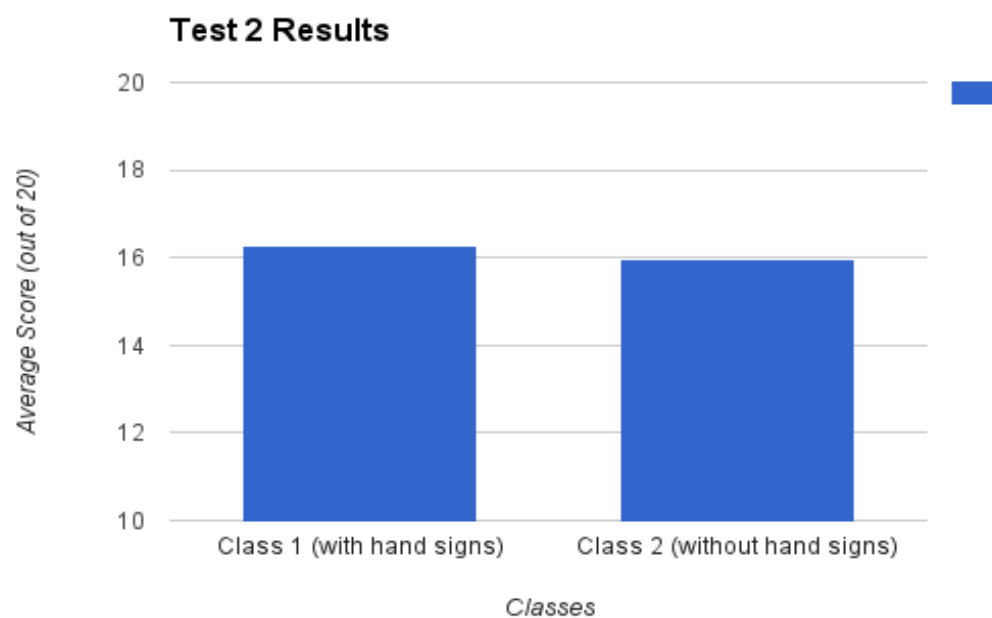
Test 1 featured three patterns beginning on *do* and two patterns beginning on *sol*. There were also two specific patterns containing upward leaps: one pattern from *do* to *mi* and another from *do* to *sol*. The two patterns starting on *sol* featured downward leaps: one pattern from *sol* to *do* and the other from *sol* to *mi*. I was interested to see the benefit of hand signs in regards to the leaps. The mean score of Group 1 (utilizing hand signs) was 18.42 out of 20. Group 2 (solfege only) averaged a 18.14 out of 20. The results examining upward leaps showed that Group 1 scored an average of .82 while Group 2 scored an average of .88. These results were calculated based on the answers of the first two notes of these specific dictations. In

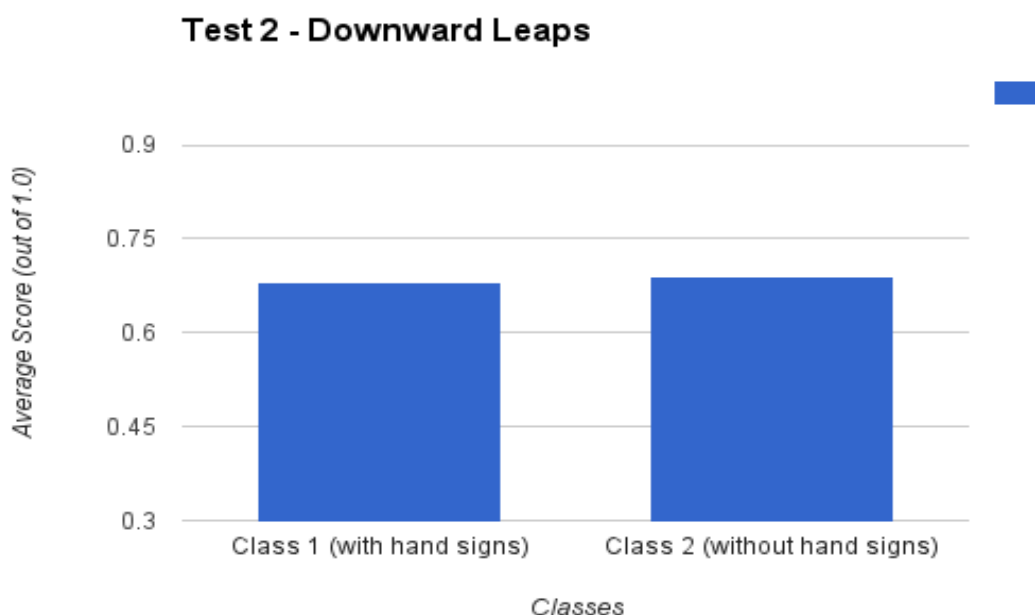
regards to the patterns featuring downward leaps Group 1 scored an average of .79 and Group 2 scored an average of .86.





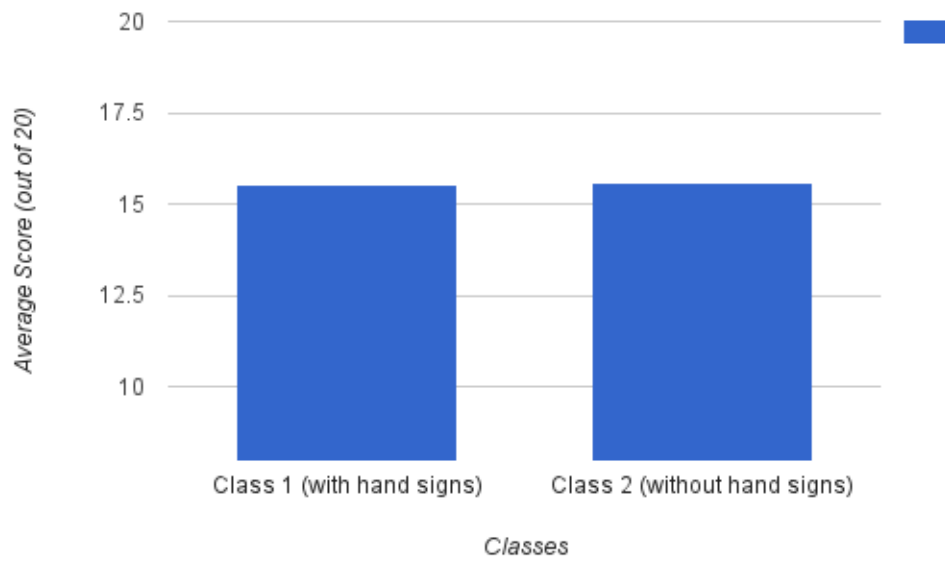
Test 2 focused more on the concept of intervallic leaps. Prior to taking this test, both classes were given instruction about intervallic leaps. Both classes practiced singing and audiating all of the leaps that would be heard on the test. Group 1 used the hand signs while practicing these leaps. There were two patterns that began on *do*. Two patterns featured a jump from *do* to *mi* and the other from *do* to *sol*. The last two patterns again featured a downward leap from *sol* to *mi* and *sol* to *do*. However, unlike Test 1, these patterns occurred at the end of the dictation rather than the beginning. The mean score for Group 1 for Test 1 was 16.26 out of 20. The mean score for Group 2 was 15.95. When examining intervallic leaps for this test, I analyzed the three upward leaps (two featuring *do* to *mi* and one featuring *do* to *sol*) as well as the two downward leaps (*sol* to *mi* and *sol* to *do* at the end of the final two patterns). Group 1 scored an average of .67 when dictating upward leaps on this test. Group 2 scored an average of .60. In regards to downward leaps, Group 1 scored an average of .68 and Group 2 scored an average of .69.



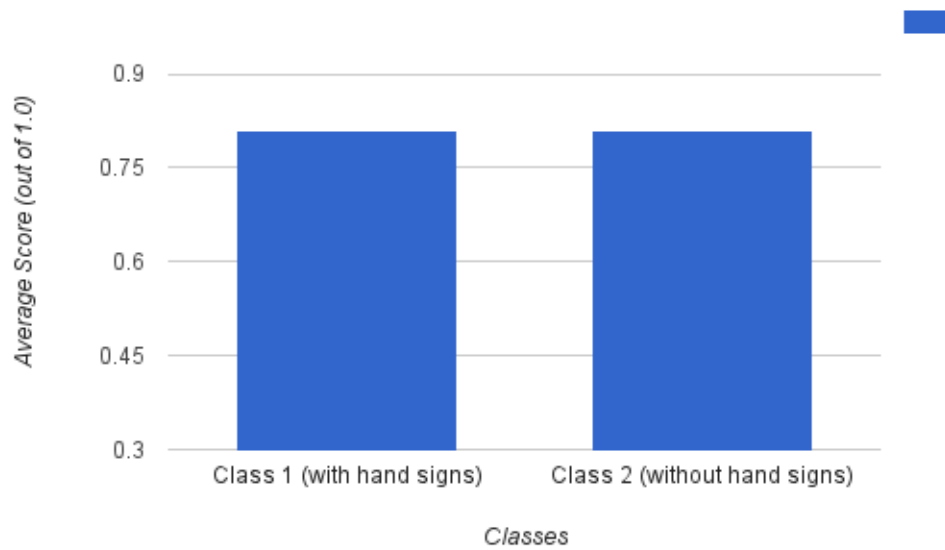


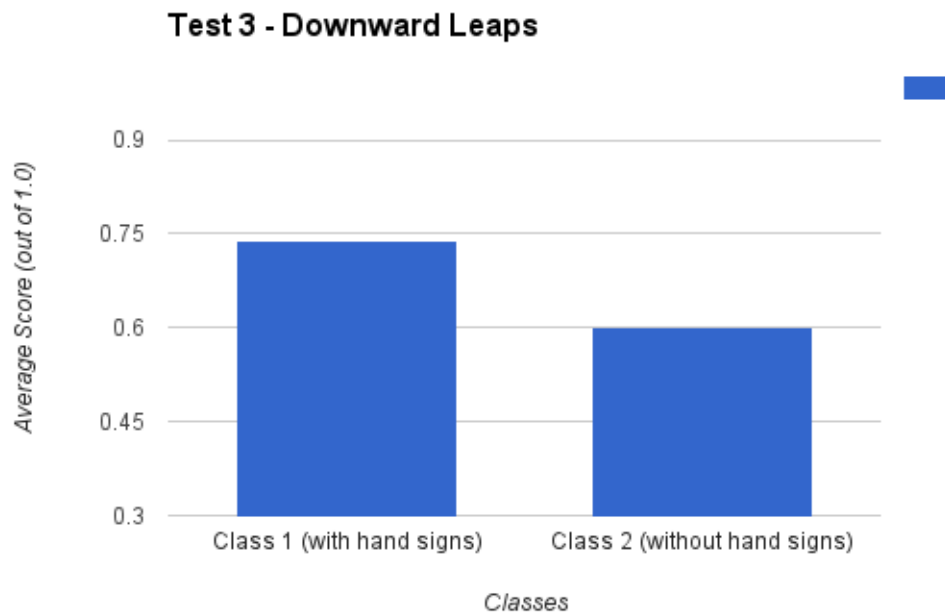
Test 3 featured many similar concepts as the first two tests. The first three patterns featured intervals of *do* to *re*, *do* to *mi*, and *do* to *sol* respectively. The final two patterns began on *sol*. One pattern had a downward leap from *sol* to *mi* and the other began on *sol* and went upwards to *la*. On Test 3, Group One scored an average of 15.52 out of 20. Group 2 scored a mean of 15.57. When analyzing leaps for this particular test, I looked at the first 3 questions to see how many students recognized *do* to *re*, *do* to *mi*, and *do* to *sol* correctly. Second, I analyzed the final two questions to see if the hand signs would aid students in hearing the difference between *sol* to *mi* or *sol* to *la*. In the upward patterns of Test 3, Group One scored an average of .81 and Group Two also scored a .81. In terms of the patterns starting on *sol* and going to *la* and *mi*, Group One scored an average of .74 and Group Two scored an average of .60.

Test 3 - Results



Test 3 - Upward Leaps





As I concluded the tests, I found that there didn't seem to be a significant difference between the two classes. Contrasting my initial hypothesis, the hand signs didn't seem to make a difference even when dictating large intervallic jumps upwards and downwards. As I continued to analyze the research, it seemed to reinforce many of the previous studies mentioned in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Through the research, testing, and analysis I knew I would be able to solidify methods of teaching that would challenge me and help me to learn more as a musician-educator. I initially expected the class using hand signs to perform significantly better than the other class. While never learning the hand signs at that age, I have seen a difference in the level of engagement from students using the hand signs. I wasn't sure, however, how this would translate to melodic dictations. As I began researching, I saw how studies consistently confirmed that hand signs didn't make a significant difference in scores when used for sight-singing and dictations. As a result of analyzing my own data, I feel compelled to agree with this assessment. In regards to this study, there isn't a significant difference between the scores of Class 1 and Class 2 throughout the three tests. Class 1 scored marginally higher on the first two tests, and Class 2 scored slightly higher on the third test. I did think that analyzing the melodic leaps upwards and downwards would yield some results in favor of the hand signs. I thought by isolating these particular patterns I would be able to notice a trend in favor of hand signs. This is due to the special recognition demanded through the use of hand signs in these examples. The results, however, seemed to indicate that there wasn't a significant difference. In certain cases, Class 2 scored better on the leaps without the aid of hand signs.

There are a few recommendations I would make for future research on this subject matter. To start, the subjects for this study were ordinary 4th grade elementary students. I did not divide the classes up by ability or prior musical

knowledge. A future study may yield more accurate results if the researcher knows about student abilities prior to testing. For instance, students who take private music lessons such as piano or violin are more likely to test higher regardless of hand signs. In addition, students with perfect pitch will be able to complete the dictations without any kinesthetic aid. Performing this same study with groups divided by similar ability levels may result in different conclusions.

What can one gather from all of this information to help find a method going forward to teach melodic dictations? Even after all of the research and testing I would still advocate for the use of Curwen hand signs in class at the onset. I would like students to understand from the start, however, that this is not a definite method and may not be helpful to everyone. In addition, I would probably present this information differently in the future. McClung stated in his study that students who floated their hands in an up and down motion reflecting the melody scored better than students who did not use hand signs and students using Curwen hand signs (257). I think at the elementary level this can give us tremendous insight into a good place to start students on melodic dictations. Rather than have them focus on each individual note and sign, simply allowing them to show the contour of the melody would provide a good starting point. In the future, when I tell the students the starting pitch I will have them show the hand sign for that particular pitch (do for example) and then simply move their hands up and down based on the melody I am playing. They can use that starting pitch as a baseline for the rest of the melody. This would also begin to prepare students for an important strategy discussed by teachers of AP Music Theory – pitch predictions (Buonviri and Paney

231). A common trend I noticed was the inability of students to recognize the final note of a melodic passage. I feel that spending more time on the idea of pitch prediction would be a beneficial remedy to this problem. When students begin to understand that a melody ending on *re* will sound unresolved and incomplete they are more likely to make a pitch prediction that melody ended on *do* or *mi*.

Overall, I found that I agree with the ideas that McClung presented in his research. Students should be exposed to the idea of Curwen hand signs. They should learn the benefits of this method and continue to learn them for a “reasonable instructional period.” As students learn how they best respond to music, they should make a decision as to how the hand signs can benefit them to grow musically (264).

This study poses questions as we continue to learn more about the most effective methods to teach music and the benefits of kinesthetic movement. The use of hand signs showing the rise and fall of intervallic movement seems to be greatly beneficial. If nothing else, I hope this study allows music educators to examine their methods of teaching. We should continually challenge ourselves to find new ways to present information, realizing that we need to constantly adapt and change our methods based on specific classroom situations. It is well known and understood that education should not be one size fits all. The same applies to the way that we present skills in music class. My hope is that this research will allow music educators to look for ways to find the most appropriate methods of ear training for their individual students.

APPENDIX A: TEST 1

Test 1

1

DO RE MI DO DO MI SOL SOL

3

3

DO SOL RE MI SOL MI MI DO

4

5

5

SOL DO RE MI

APPENDIX B: TEST 2

Test 2

1

2

DO MI SOL SOL DO SOL LA MI

3

4

DO MI SOL LA SOL LA SOL MI

5

5

SOL LA SOL DO

APPENDIX C: TEST 3

Test 3

1 2

DO RE MI SOL DO MI RE SOL

3 4

DO SOL LA SOL SOL MI MI DO

5

SOL LA DO MI

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