Teaching Recorder with Movable-Do in Thailand

Twatchai Narkwong

In 1989, while I was in a Kodaly Teacher Training program at Roundtop, Austin, Texas, I met a Hungarian-born American woman whose name I do not now remember. This woman had the ability to read music in one key and play the piano in any key, which surprised every one. She told us that she had studied movable-do in the Kodaly method in Hungary when she had been young. At that moment, I made up my mind that I must use movable-do to teach music in Thailand.

In 1990-1997, I conducted an experiment in using the Kodaly method to teach elementary children (grades 1-6) at the Laboratory School of Kasetsart University, Bangkok (Twatchai Nakwong, 1996). I used movable-do to teach singing and playing recorder. The result showed that movable-do was good for singing. When confronted with many sharps and flats, students agreed that instead of to keep singing middle C as do, then having a problem of not being able to sing out notes because of many sharps and flats that followed, it was easier to accept a new tonic and begin singing sol-fa as do-re-mi... at new registers. But movable-do caused a problem with playing recorder because of the changing of fingerings. In singing with movable-do, students change only register of a new "do" to be higher or lower than the old one. But, in playing recorder with movable-do the fingerings of do-do' change in every key. When to this problem is added the fact that people in Thailand have been familiar with fixed-do for a long time, it is difficult to encourage students to change their way of learning, even if they know that they will receive a better standard if they change it. Because this fingering problem caused my lessons to be uneasy, I complied with students' desire and let them use movable-do with singing, and fixed-do with playing recorder (for the time being.)

Dr. Twatchai Narkwong Associate Professor Dept. of Communication Arts

What was the real problem with playing recorder with movable-do which I confronted ? I began the recorder with my students in grade 3 because they had long enough fingers to cover all holes. In grade 3, students had already learned movable-do in C and F pentatons. Therefore, I started my recorder lesson with sol-mi at C'-A of "Snail, Snail."[1] For this song, students use only their left hands.These fingerings are the easiest when starting the recorder since student can hold the recorder firmly.
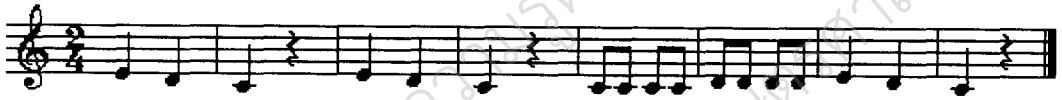


Then I added mi-re-do at A-G-F from "Hot Cross Bun."



Students started using their right hands for the first time with the note F. Then I added new notes for the right hand with sol-mi at G-E of "Snail, Snail."



Again, with "Hot Cross Bun" using mi-re-do at E-D-C led students to cover all the recorder holes.



Afterwards, I let students use fixed-do to play tunes in C pentaton for one year, then brought them back to play with movable-do in F and G pentatons in grade 4. In the second semester of grade 4, they also played in C, F, and G major keys after they had learned fa and ti.

This way of teaching recorder produced a satisfying results. Students learned music enjoyably by starting singing in C and F pentatons, and playing recorder in C pentaton. Later on, they played with movable-do in C, F, G, D and B-flat major keys without much trouble. (There was still some trouble because students were still familiar with C as "do", which is common in Thailand.)
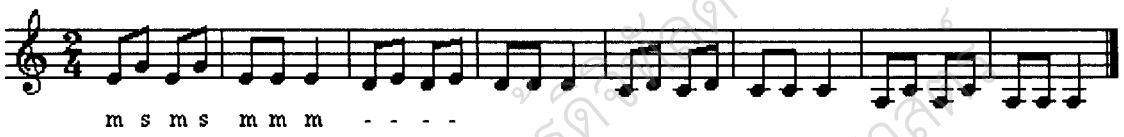
[1] *Most of the songs in this article can be found in Lois Choksy,* ***The Kodaly Context.***

In the year 2000, I started my research again at Wat Laksi School, a municipal school belonging to the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. This time I intended to teach recorder in F pentaton first before, and teach in C pentaton after. The reason I did this was because I did not want the students to stick themselves to the note C as "do." Therefore, when this group of students reached grade 3 in 2002, I started them with fingering of sol-mi at C'-A from "Snail, Snail," and la-so-mi at D'-C'-A from "Bounce High, Bounce Low."

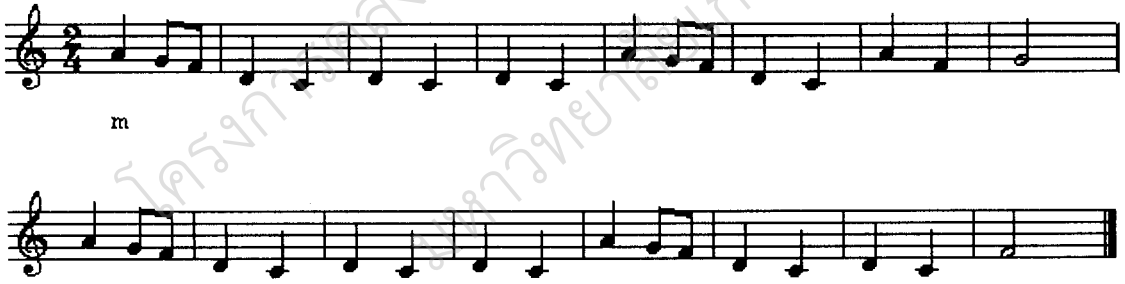


Next, I did not go to keys other than the F pentaton; I introduced the following three notes as mi-re-do at A-G-F from "Hot Cross Bun." Because students in grade 3 had already learned low-la and low-so, I led them to use the note D from Thai traditional tune named "Java" (meaning Indonesia, in a.), and the note C from "Hey Betty Martin" (in b.)
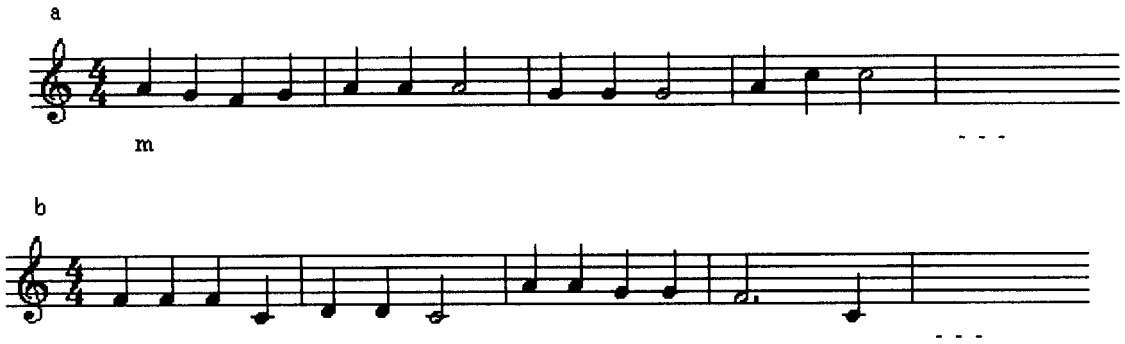
a



b



After students knew all fingerings of F pentaton, I let them play some other tunes in F pentaton such as "Mary Had A Little Lamb" and "Old McDonald Had A Farm," etc., to reinforce F pentaton.



The result came out that I spent quite a lot of time to teach students to play tunes in F pentaton. All this is due to the fact that I was faithful to my resolve never to call middle-C "do" (close every finger on recorder,) but low-so instead. I assumed that students would not confuse it with "do" in C key, since I never used it. But I discovered later that students conceived middle C as "do" all the time because after I had finished teaching F pentaton for recorder, and brought students to learn tunes in C pentaton and played middle C as "do", they could play them with ease, enjoyment, and fluency, while they had not cooperated very much when they had play middle C as low-so in F pentaton, and the lessons had proceeded very slowly. This may be because what I tried to teach students opposes to what they had in their minds. (They conceived middle C as do while I tried to change it to be low-so.) Some students might even think that I was teaching them something wrong to them.

From teaching two groups of students, I have a solution in my mind (I cannot call it a conclusion now) that in a school that students are familiar with fixed-do, the teaching of recorder might start with C pentaton. Then, move to F and G pentatons, and more difficult keys later. But in singing, movable-do is good for every key.

I do not intend to write this article as a formal research study although there is a comparison of groups achievement. I had to accept the two groups of students, as they were because they came to me as jobs. Of course, there were some differences between the two groups and I had to use my personal judgement based on my 25-years teaching experience to compare their achievements, and make my observations. What I would like to do here is to share my experience here. There may be some who have been successful in teaching recorder with movable-do in countries where people are accustomed to fixed-do, who might want to share their experience with me.

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