



Feierabend Association for Music Education

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FAME Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee: Proposed Criteria and Committee Recommendations

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee of the Feierabend Association for Music Education (FAME) strongly believes in the importance of singing traditional folk songs from American and world cultures with young children in music education settings. Traditional songs, rhymes, and games from oral/aural traditions are threads that link generations and cultural communities. So much of this music is easily accessed by the developing voice and contains rich and imaginative lyrics and melodies.

This Committee also believes music for children should include repertoire from varied cultures in order to appropriately reflect the diversity of children in today's elementary school classrooms, our communities, and the world. To build human understanding and respect, the Committee maintains that we must promote children's awareness of songs as belonging to the places and cultures from which they have originated.

Folk songs are a fundamental part of human history and represent diverse people of different times, however imperfect those times have been. Folk songs may also carry perspectives that deserve examination for their appropriateness with young children. For this reason, when considering folk songs for the elementary school classroom, the DEI Committee advises that songs be carefully scrutinized for the messages they carry and communicate.

Publishers and educators should continually evaluate musical literature as standards evolve and as new information is discovered about songs and their histories. To the extent possible, they should evaluate songs to determine the intent of the lyrics, their histories, cultural meanings, and the original context in which the songs were performed. The goal is to determine whether songs may be incorporated into curricular programs without being harmful, derogatory, or disrespectful. The Committee understands that effective resources are needed for practitioners to help determine whether or not repertoire is appropriate for use with young learners. In addition, teachers must understand that songs may carry multiple layers of meaning (both colloquial and cultural) and thus exercise great care in selecting songs.

The DEI Committee offers the following criteria for evaluating repertoire for use in elementary school music classrooms. The Committee recommends removing songs that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The song has known racist roots and/or history.
- There are reputable sources that point to a definitive racist past that is linked to the song.
- The song portrays disrespect, minimization, or dehumanization.
- The song contains derogatory terms related to race.
- The song is known to be sung by those associated with blackface and/or other misappropriated caricature (for example, minstrel performances) and has no significant life outside of the misappropriated caricature.
- The song was composed by someone who promotes or promoted racist beliefs.

Examples of folk songs meeting at least one of the above criteria are *Johnny on the Woodpile*, *Three Little Monkeys*, and *Do Your Ears Hang Low*.

In addition, the Committee recommends that practitioners be mindful when choosing folk songs that contain adult themes, such as substance use, violence, cruelty, or any of the following, as they are not inclusive of all students: binary gender terms, ableism, sexism, religious prejudice, sexual innuendo, and stereotyping.

Examples of folk songs relating to at least one of the above themes are *Sea Lion* (sexual innuendo), *Épo I Tai Tai E* (sexual innuendo), and *Grandma Grunts* (binary gender terms).

By nature, folk songs can take on new or different meanings as they travel through time, meanings which are then embedded in the knowledge base of subsequent generations. The Committee therefore recommends that publishers establish online resources that can be regularly updated as new research-based information becomes available concerning the history of the repertoire in their publications and collections so educators can obtain up-to-date information to make informed decisions about repertoire.

Further, the Committee recommends that authors and publishers cite known sources for folk songs included in their publications when possible, either in the publication itself or via an associated web page, to allow educators to connect their students to the culture of origin and context of the songs.

Finally, the Committee recommends that publishers encourage scholars and educators to provide feedback about specific songs for evaluation. In turn, educators should use this feedback and any other reliable resources to employ ongoing, thoughtful, and reflective processes when choosing repertoire for their students.

As music educators, we must do our best for our students and communities. In the words of Zoltán Kodály, “Only the best is good enough for a child.”

Committee Members:

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