Summary

Tonal and Rhythm Syllable Systems
- Tonal and rhythm syllables serve as the vital link between sound and symbol
- Because a variety of syllable systems exist for both tonal and rhythm information, a decision must be made regarding which of these are appropriate and effective

Criteria for Selecting Effective Syllable Systems
- When asked to identify why they selecting the system they use, the highest response rate was, they believe it is the best system, that’s what they learned in college, it was the system they learned in school, or it was recommended by others
- All systems have advantages and disadvantages, and these must be weighed from the perspective of the instructional philosophy and methodology
- Tonal and rhythm systems must serve the needs of the learning approach used by the teacher
- Learner should easily link syllables to patterns before encountering notation
- Syllables must eventually link to musical symbols and be appropriate for all ages.
- Tonal syllables should promote quality singing, facilitate the generalization of identical patterns from one pitch level to another, assist in the aural identification, labeling, and accurate performance of each mode (Dorian, etc.)
- Rhythm syllables should promote extremely well-articulated rhythmic accuracy, facilitate the generalization of identical patterns from one meter to another, assist in the aural identification, labeling, and accurate performance of different meters

Tonal Systems
- Sound- based systems are commonly referred to as relative solmization systems
- Fixed solmization is symbol-based
- The concept of relative solmization pre-dates fixed solmization by several centuries
- Sound-based (relative) solmization systems are better suited for instructional approaches
Symbol-Based (Fixed) Tonal Syllable Systems

Letter Names and Fixed-Do

- Students sing the letter name of each note as they read from notation
- For accidentals, ignore the accidental and sing the letter only, or sing two syllables
- Fixed-Do evolved from the original Guidonian syllables
- German version of the system does include single-syllable sounds for altered notes, but these do not correlate with the English terms “flat” and “sharp” in any obvious way
- Each of these syllables is permanently assigned to a specific pitch
- Currently practiced by many
- Letter Names and Fixed-Do are essentially identical systems
- Students do not and can not learn to associate a specific syllable pattern with even the most common functional tonal pattern
- Students must learn to sing the tonic triad in a major tonality fifteen different ways
- Many proponents of fixed solmization systems prefer the original seven-syllable version
- Different quality triads use the exact same syllable patterns
- Students will need to use chromatic syllables immediately or they must sing inaccurate note names via the letter-only approach
- Letter names actually serve no purpose at all in terms of the ability to transform notation into sound
- Learners are denied the benefit of using tonality as a framework for classifying, storing, and recalling tonal patterns
- Modified Fixed-Do and Letter-Names systems help develop perfect pitch and facilitate the reading of highly chromatic and atonal music
- Unsuitable for use with a sound-based approach

Intervals

- Students learn the names of all intervals and apply this information when reading
- Students identify the interval between each pair of notes, sing that interval on a neutral syllable
- Because no syllables are used, the Interval system does not link labels to common patterns
- The Interval system would seem to interfere with the development of chunking
- This symbol-based process is not suitable for a sound-first approach because students are required to memorize letter names, accidentals, key signatures, and interval names before they can even begin to connect symbols to sounds
Sound-Based (Relative) Tonal Syllable Systems

Numbers

- A relative solmization system that uses the numbers 1 through 7 to label the scale degrees
- Tonic is always labeled “1"
- This is a significant improvement over the symbol-based systems because students can learn tonal patterns
- Lack of labels for notes with accidentals
- Students use the same numbers to sing all scales
- As a result, the tonic triads in a major tonality and a minor tonality are both sung “1 3 5”
- Some proponents add accidental names to the number, resulting in “1 3-flat 5” for a minor tonic triad
- This correlates poorly with notation
- The minor scale would then be sung “6 7 1 2 3 4 5 6” but the tonic in minor is certainly not the sixth degree of the minor scale

Movable-Do

- Movable-Do is a relative solmization system that utilizes the same syllables as Modified Fixed-Do, the crucial difference being that do can now be assigned to any pitch
- A syllable system that is responsive to changes in tonality and tonic pitch level, thereby facilitating the consistent labeling of patterns in the context of tonality
- Same melody is performed using the same syllable pattern regardless of pitch level
- Students can develop a vocabulary of common tonal patterns
- Two distinct versions of Movable-Do exist: these are commonly referred to as Do-Minor and La-Minor
- Do-Minor implies, do serves as the tonic for minor and for all modes using the chromatic syllables me, le, and te to indicate the scale degrees that are lowered
- In La-Minor la serves as tonic in minor, resulting in the use of only diatonic syllables for the natural minor scale
- A different syllable serves as the resting tone for each different mode when applying La-Minor
- Each scale is sung using diatonic syllables only, while chromatic syllables are reserved for raised leading tones
- The strength of Do-Minor is that do is always associated with the tonic, do-so is preserved across all modes
- In la- minor all new aural patterns are associated with the familiar syllables of the major scale
• Introduction of si, the first chromatic syllable suggests that something new will need to appear in notation (accidental)
• In do- minor notes without accidentals call for the chromatic syllables me, le, and te
• La-Minor has the distinct advantage of relating to both sound and notation more intuitively for beginners than does Do- Minor even for advanced tonal information
• Using La-Minor, the scales of all seven modes are introduced to the students via diatonic syllables
• The notated structure of modes as they relate to their parallel major is learned better in do- minor, but not the aural patterns
• A student trained to use Do-Minor and La-Minor must always first decide what note is do
• To determine if a melody is in major or minor, the prerequisite amount of theoretical knowledge is quite different
• For the La-Minor student it is simple and direct to locate do given any key signature
• Music reading has been the primary focus for this comparative discussion of Do-Minor and La-Minor
• La-Minor is notably superior for notation
• As for a formal modulation that includes a change in key signature, those using Do-Minor face the same challenge as their La-Minor counterparts: identifying the new location of do. Of course, La- Minor students can quickly determine this via the key signature alone and continue reading in tempo, while those using Do-Minor will need to engage in some time-consuming analysis
• Do-Minor values the more theoretical perspective, La-Minor values the more pragmatic perspective

Selecting a Tonal-Syllable System

• Relative-solmization system is required to fulfill the needs of Sound Connections
• Movable Do La-Minor is superior to Do-Minor and is the tonal system of choice for Sound Connections
• La-Minor much more appropriate for use with young children and more effective with students of all ages

Rhythm Systems

• Rhythm-syllable systems can be conceived and designed to correlate most directly with either sounds or symbols
• French Time-Names, evolved through versions that included both sound- and symbol-based traits; as a result, it serves as the seed from which most all other systems have grown over the past 200 years
**Time-Value Names and the French Time-Name System**

- Each musical note has a proper name associated with it; these are typically referred to as time-value names
- A problem is two distinct sounds are being produced to represent a single note
- Complications involved with using time-value names for dotted notes
- The knowledge of time-value names is irrelevant to reading ability
- This information is helpful when *talking about* music notation but not when *translating* music notation
- French Time-Names system originally used words that correlated directly with the symbols \( \frown = \textit{noir} \) (black), \( \downarrow = \textit{blanch} \) (white), \( \frown\updownarrow = \textit{cro-che} \), \( \frown\frown\updownarrow = \textit{double cro-che} \)
- Each syllable is still attached to a specific symbol regardless of metric context
- Eighth notes do not always come in pairs

**The Simplified French Time-Names System**

- This version is clearly beat-oriented, and therefore more sound-based, in that it recognizes the beat as the fundamental unit: the syllable *ta* is used to chant the beat regardless of meter
- The syllables infer that compound meter is an *extension* of simple meter rather than a completely unique meter
- The common syllable sounds naturally encourage the students to articulate notes at the exact same time when these notes should actually occur at different times
- Two different syllables *should* be stated at the exact same time, this is clearly at odds with a sound-first approach

**Kodály Syllables**

- Kodály required a pattern-based rhythm-syllable system
- This resulted in strongly notation-based syllables
- The quarter note is *always* chanted the same (*ta*) whether it represents the beat in 2/4, the beat division in 2/2, or two-thirds of a beat in common compound meters
- The eighth note is chanted *ti* in both simple and compound meters, regardless of its placement in the beat
- The beat ends up being chanted with a wide variety of syllables depending on the *notated* meter
- Verbalizing two sounds for a single note, and it infers that the beat is always longer in compound meter than in simple
- Kodály, an ardent proponent of sound-first pedagogy, settled on a rhythm-syllable system that is so unambiguously notation-based
Counting and the McHose & Tibbs System

- The use of time-value names became popular, and the ‘1 e and a’ time-keeping device was employed
- The “1 e & a” approach, commonly referred to simply as Counting, is used extensively throughout the United States
- It is fundamentally measure-based and beat-oriented: each beat is numbered based on its placement in the measure, and the syllables “e & a” are applied to notes based on their placement inside the simple-meter beat
- Students must always see notation to use the system and is explicitly notation-based
- It is designed for use with simple-meter patterns only
- Because the Counting system does not provide for compound-meter syllables, teachers commonly treat the division of the beat as the beat and count “1 2 3 4 5 6”, or count the three equal divisions using the syllables “1 & a 2 & a”
  - In the first situation the meter is now experienced as simple because there are no longer three divisions of the beat
  - Eastman system still measure-based as a result of the inclusion of beat numbers, but a significant improvement over the Counting system
- Students can now chant unique syllable combinations for any rhythmic patterns involving beat divisions in simple and compound meter but some very common patterns employ the same syllables
  - One of the ta vocalizations in the compound beat will line up with the te in the simple beat
- McHose & Tibbs syllables is the rapid enunciation of subdivided patterns in simple meter
  - All syllables begin with a t
  - Counting systems such as McHose and Tibbs require the presence and formal understanding of meter before the syllables can be applied, thus limiting application in aural contexts

Gordon Syllables

- He changing the initial consonants of divisions in both simple and compound meter to “n”
- Simple-meter subdivisions are chanted “1 ta ne ta” and compound subdivisions are chanted “1 ta na ta ni ta”
- Gordon proposed additional syllables for use with what he labels “unusual meter”
  - He substituted the syllable “du” for the beat number, resulting in patterns such as “du be du ba bi”
  - Since the initial publication of his system, Gordon dropped beat numbers altogether: all beats are now chanted using the syllable “du”
- As long as the underlying macrobeats and microbeats are being audiated and
chanted with correct syllables, duplication in the use of syllables for divisions and divisions of divisions of microbeats causes no confusion and, in fact, simplifies their use

- Recognizing the importance of syllable applications in variable-beat meters

**Takadimi Syllables**

- It is fundamentally beat-oriented, with any attack on the beat chanted as “ta”
- Other syllables are linked to patterns based on the metric function internal to the beat
- It features unique syllables for simple and compound meter
- No subdivision syllables are the same, even between simple and compound meter
- A coordinated mid-point in both simple and compound meter labeled with the syllable “di”
- Takadimi also has an additional syllable to encourage the accurate performance of quintuplets and septuplets: adding “ti” to the end of the simple and compound subdivision patterns
- A sound vocabulary must come first

**Selecting a Rhythm-Syllable System**

- Any approach to music literacy instruction that is truly sound-first must utilize a rhythm-syllable system that is beat-oriented and sound-based
- Because students encounter the beat aurally first, it is imperative to assign a specific syllable to the beat
- Assigning syllables to specific notation symbols, as in the Kodály system, obstructs a sound-to-symbol strategy
- Takadimi is a system that is applicable “from womb to tomb”
- Because each and every beat is chanted “ta” regardless of meter, replacing “ta” with the number of the beat makes for an extremely simple transition
- Takadimi has all the advantages and none of the disadvantages of the Counting system
- Takadimi syllables meet all of the criteria delineated at the beginning of the chapter
- Takadimi system was designed to lead the students from sound to symbol via the sound-syllable association of echo-translation and the complementary syllable-symbol link

**Conclusion**

- Tonal and rhythm syllables serve as the vital link between sound and symbol, providing the essential connection that facilitates transforming both notation into sound (reading) and sound into notation (notating)
- Each system has unique traits that serve different pedagogical masters
- It is imperative that this instruction be consistent and well-sequenced
Selected systems must first be child-friendly, but they must also be robust enough to serve learning needs throughout the elementary, middle, and high school years – and ideally beyond.

Movable-Do/La-Minor and Takadimi fulfill this lofty requirement and needs of Sound Connections.

Reflection

There are many tonal and rhythmic syllable systems. I need to philosophically and methodically weigh the advantages and disadvantages before choosing one. I need to choose a system that serves the need of the learning approach used by the teacher. The syllables must be appropriate for all ages. Sound bases systems are better.

Fixed tonal systems have a problem with singing because you either ignore the accidentals while singing, or sing the wrong rhythm. The German system has single syllables sounds, but they do not coordinate with flat or sharp. These syllables are permanently assigned to a specific pitch. Students cannot learn specific syllable patterns because the tonic triad can be sung 15 different ways. Students also will have to learn many syllables at one time, and tonality cannot be used to help classify and store the syllable patterns. This system can be used to help develop perfect pitch, but this is not a skill student’s need.

Another approach is where students apply the intervals between each note when singing. No syllables are used, so this system does not link labels to patterns. This is also not suitable for a sound first approach, because there are too many things students have to memorize before being able to connect.

The number system labels the scale degrees, 1 through 7, with the tonic always being 1. This allows students to learn tonal patterns, but the problem is there are no numbers for the accidentals. The major and minor triad is ‘1 3 5.’ This correlates poorly for notation.

The system I will use it Moveable-Do. This system is responsive to changes in tonality and tonic pitch. This means the patterns labeled will be consistent, so regardless of changing keys, the melody will be sung on the same syllables. This helps students develop a vocabulary. Do-Minor can be used in some situations, but by introducing minor right away, the students would have to learn a few chromatic syllables. The chromatic syllables will also happen naturally, or without accidentals in notation. It is good when teaching in a theoretical perspective. In La-Minor, which I will mainly use, la serves as the tonic and students will only use the diatonic syllables with the occasional si leading tone. When reading patterns in La-Minor, si will appear different in notation with an accidental. This is why it is better for notation.

For rhythm systems, time-value names mean a musical note is associated
with a proper name. A problem that frequently occurs is 2 sounds are made to represent one note, and dotted notes are hard to name. It is helpful when talking about music notation, but not when translating music. The French Time-Names were a little better, but problems still occur with translating complicated rhythms. The Simplified French Time-Names are better about being sound based, because the beat is recognized as the fundamental unit by chanting ta. The problem with this system is that it infers compound meter is an extension of simple meter.

Kodály system is a more notation based. This system is commonly used. Chanted ta & ti are the same for both simple and compound, so the beat can be chanted with many different syllables depending on what is seen. This also has the problem of saying two sound for one note, and compound beat is always longer than simple beat.

Counting is very popular in the US. This is a system that is measure based. Where the beats are oriented in the measure decides what syllable to say. Students will always have to see notation to use this system. Another problem with counting, is that it was designed for simple meter only. In compound you can either treat the division of the beat as the beat, or count 3 equal divisions on the same syllables as simple even though they are not aligned. For counting to happen students must understand meter.

Gordon syllables help solve the problem of unusual measures. He used du for beat numbers and other syllables for the divisions of the beat. There are duplications in the use of syllables for divisions but this should no cause confusion, but help simplify.

What I would choose as a teacher is takadimi syllables. It is beat-oriented with every beat always being ta. This is very important for the students when first encountering beat. There are also unique syllables for simple and compound meters, not even the subdivisions overlap except for the midpoint in both meters, labeled di. Unusual measures have additional syllables to help with translation. For takadimi the sound vocabulary has to come first. You can also replace ta with the number of the beat to help ensembles perform together.