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## THE INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN THE UNITED STATES : 1900-1949 MUSIC FOR ECONOMICAL INDEPENDENCE

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*THE INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC*

*FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN THE UNITED STATES :1900-1949*

*MUSIC FOR ECONOMICAL INDEPENDENCE*

by  
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Paris in 1784, Valentine Hauy (1745-1822) opened the first blind school for children to teach more dignified way of earning a living than performing as jesters and beggars on the streets of Paris. At the school, the children learned writing and reading in embossed print, vocational skill, and music. Hauy's success of teaching those children gave an opportunity, not only for other European countries but also for the United States, to establish residential schools for blind children by the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Boston in 1832, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe began the first private residential school, the Perkins School for the Blind. Dr. Howe included music in the school curriculum, and invited Lowell Mason to teach music. While Mason stayed at the Perkins School between 1832 and 1836, he established a strong foundation of music program based on singing and piano, which inspired the other residential schools such as the New York School for the Blind and the American Asylum for the Deaf in Hartford, to include music in their curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

After Mason left the Perkins to teach at the public school in 1837, the music program continued to grow. By the mid-1870's, the private instruction in piano, organ, flute, clarinet, brass instrument, voice, harmony, and music history were given by twelve teaching staffs. Training to become a piano tuner became a leading feature of the program besides a organist

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<sup>1</sup>William L. Heward and Michael D. Orlansky, *Exceptional Children*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990, p.341.

<sup>2</sup>George N. Heller, "Ideas, Initiatives, and Implementations: Music Therapy in America, 1789-1848", *Journal of Music Therapy*, 24 (1) pp.41-42.

and a teacher.<sup>3</sup> By this time, most states opened public residential schools for visually-impaired children. Including music in the curriculum of a blind institution began to have a value of training the professional musicians. M. Maurice de la Sizeranne suggested in 1891 that musical training would remain as best professional training if the training was given by really competent masters with suitable appliance in a musical atmosphere and under competent management.<sup>4</sup> Receiving music training opened the way to the economic independence for the blind children. Apparently, music educators had taken a primary responsibility for the future of the visually-impaired children.

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of music instruction for the blind children in the United States between 1900 and 1949. The research will focus on the music curriculum, kindergarten through twelfth grade, in the residential schools with respect to educational philosophy, and instructional materials.

At the time of the founding the first residential schools for the blind children in both Europe and the United States was based on the philosophy of isolationism. The schools for sighted children were not yet developed to accommodate and adjust to individual differences among the children. Therefore, separate educational facilities were the only solution to educate blind children.<sup>5</sup>

Chicago in 1900, the first visually-impaired children were admitted to the public schools, which became to be known as the "Chicago Plan". The program consisted of homeroom for the visually-impaired children and regular classes for the majority of their instruction. This plan was followed by Cincinnati, and Racine in Wisconsin. Cleveland began to accept the low vision children in 1909, and the first itinerant teaching program for the blind children in the regular classes started in Oakland, California in 1938.<sup>6</sup> Those significant program development was the successful result of the residential school education. The purposes of this plan were to test the blind children's readiness for more complete integration into the general school program and to provide opportunities for the blind children to associate directly with sighted children in learning activities. Moreover, the result of the Chicago Plan encouraged the residential school to send the children regularly to some classes in nearby local public schools.<sup>7</sup>

However, a noticeable difference between residential and public schools existed in music instruction. By 1928, forty out of the forty-eight states had begun state residential schools for the visually-impaired children, and all states but two had offered music program. Unfortunately, the public school, based on Chicago Plan, offered very little music instruction.

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<sup>3</sup>Alice-Ann Darrow, Alicia Clair Gibbons and George N. Heller, "Music Therapy in *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 1853-1880: A Reflection of the Times" *Music Education for the Handicapped Bulletin*, 2 (Fall, 1986) pp.31-32.

<sup>4</sup>Fred G. Kersten, *An Analysis of Music Education Methods and Materials for the Visually Impaired Synthesized from Documents Written Between 1891 and 1978*, Ph.D. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1979, p.72.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.4.

<sup>6</sup>Heward and Michael, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup>Kersten, pp.4-7.

The blind children learned the school songs and took part in regular music class. Even though the public school admitted the importance of individual music instruction, small number of the enrollment and lack of financial support did not allow to give special attention to blind children. One of purposes of the Chicago Plan was to prepare children to take their place among sighted children ; therefore, the idea of group instruction became the direct contrast to emphasis on individual instruction in the residential schools. Because of the philosophical differences, the residential schools continuously supplied the practical needs of the blind children, music as an economic independence.<sup>8</sup>

The firmly established music curriculum steadily provided the high quality of music education at the residential schools. According to Master's thesis research by Sanderson in 1933, one-third of all the teachers in thirty residential schools were music teachers, and thirty-two percent of this third were blind teachers.<sup>9</sup> The school administrators considered that both sighted and unsighted teachers were necessary for the music training of the blind children. A high percentage (88%) of all music teachers had special training in music method. Schools for the blind did not require the bachelor's degree. The standard for selecting music teachers in residential schools was based on the ability or capacity of music teaching to blind children rather than the higher degree.<sup>10</sup>

More residential school graduate earned a living through piano tuning than through other music professions such as church organist; however, teaching was believed by the largest number of instructors to be one of the best professions for the blind. Ten of the thirty residential schools offered a normal training course in music. The Oklahoma School for the Blind even required the blind students to teach sighted students for two years. The music program at the residential school were efficient enough to train the future music educators and professions. Eighty percent of the thirty residential schools offered piano tuning course. As the rudimental courses, harmony, ear training, music history and music appreciation were offered as well as braille dictation and staff notation. Several schools required all music students to study braille diction to enable to record music in braille, due to lackness of braille materials available in market. Staff notation was not essential for the blind students to learn, but it was important for future music educator to learn for teaching the sighted children. Beside the music theory courses, variety of private lessons were open to the students. Twenty-eight schools offered the free private lesson in piano, voice, violin, organ and other instrument while very little class instruction in musical instrument was offered. All thirty residential schools offered mixed chorus, and ninety percent had either a band, an orchestra, or both. The student who enrolled the orchestra received private instruction in orchestra parts before rehearsing together, since it was necessary for them to

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<sup>8</sup>Alice Sanderson, *The Status of Music Instruction in Schools for the Blind in the United States*, unpublished master's thesis, 1933.

<sup>9</sup>Master's thesis by Sanderson might be the first historical research on improvement of music instruction in schools of the blinds. He analyzed the music instruction in thirty residential schools out of fifty-eight private and public residential schools, and twelve public schools out of eighteen schools which provided the day school program based on Chicago Plan.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp.9-15.

memorize the music. Preparation for enrolling to the regular classes seemed very important to give best opportunity to take part in music program of blind children. More than one-half of the thirty residential schools opened one or more music preparatory courses for piano, braille music notation, elementary theory and harmony, and rote singing in the lower grades. Interestingly, three schools reported to have harmonica bands.<sup>11</sup>

The students' activities were not limited within school classroom. Twenty-four schools included assembly singing in the music program to perform either in Chapel or in some other meeting at least once a week. The school engaged positive attitude to participate in music activities with sighted. The school also invited outside music performers either regularly or occasionally for the enjoyment of their students.

It was important fact that teaching method in music were very similar to sighted students. However, braille notation was very important for blind children to learn. In twenty-five (or 83.3%) of the thirty residential schools for the blind, the children were required to learn the literary braille before the musical braille. Twenty-four (or 82.7%) of the twenty-nine residential schools required all the blind music students to learn the musical braille, the semi-sighted students sometimes being exempt. One school required all the blind students except a few chorus members to learn the musical braille; while another school required only the students studying piano or organ to learn this system. Three schools did not require the braille notation. Thus ninety percent of the thirty residential schools required all or some of the students to learn the literary braille before the musical braille.

In the older braille scores, the words were written in paragraph form and followed by the notes on a separate part of the page or on another page. This meant that notes and words had to be read and memorized separately. Later the practice was to break the piece into divisions alternating phrases of words and notes. Rodenberg had invented the "sight method" which advances a step further by breaking the song into separate words and notes so that each word was followed by its note or notes. In 1925, a test of the method was successfully made at the Illinois School for the Blind. The Virginia School for the Blind was introducing this as "sight method" in the teaching of voice.

In instrumental music the "bar over bar" style, which means the right-hand part written over the left-hand part as in the staff, was designed by Rodenberg and is the method which prevails in the United States. The other hand, alternating measures in the same line, prevails in England but is still used some in the United States. In describing the use of braille in teaching piano, music is read from the Braille and memorized as read, then practiced. In teaching braille, a student reads one phrase with the right hand and memorizes it, next she/he reads the left hand part and memorizes it, finally puts both hands together.<sup>12</sup>

Brille music is not always available, in which case the teacher may dictate the printed music to the blind student who records in braille so the student will have a copy which later he/she can read and memorize. Pieces not available from publishers must be brailled by the student from the teacher's dictation ; All music is memorized either from braille

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp.23-43.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp.16-19.

copies, or from print music which has been dictated to the student, who takes it down in braille. The students were not allowed to learn music by ear. Six residential school stated definitely that in piano teaching and usually in all instrumental teaching, the ear method is either forbidden or discouraged. In the teaching of piano, braille music is as important to the blind as printed music is to the sighted. This statement is supported by the fact that all of the twenty-eight residential schools responding in piano teaching method use braille reading. Fourteen of this number used braille reading as the only method of teaching piano, while the other half combine it with one or two other teaching methods. Brille reading is used much more than any other in teaching all instruments, including orchestra, but not in teaching voice. This means that there is much more agreement concerning teaching methods among instructions in piano in the residential schools than among instructors in all other instruments and voice.<sup>13</sup>

L. W. Rodenberg (1929), in an article "Method of Teaching Primary Braille Music, Vocal and Instrumental", outlines a program that indicate perspective as to the place of music reading. The first year, rote singing was used; the second year, the children sang in braille tonic sol-fa and later in the year in music braille, using quarters, halves and wholes; the third year, more sol-fa and more music braille was taught striving for greater fluency and accuracy; the fourth year, the sight method was greatly emphasized with music braille lesrning, and some talented students were given private lesson.<sup>14</sup>

At Perkins, the rote method is used until the middle of the second year. After that, notation method are employed. Whether in 1910 or 1970, the rote method is highly supported as a means for teaching primary level children. As the chronological age of the student increases, however, and musical complexity of the piece increases, the student is advised to perssue means of learning through braille notation. Both reading and rote learning have their place in the instruction of the visually impaired. Both methods are used at the elementary level, in elementary class music and also in private instruction. Rote method is recommended in the instruction of musical activities at the primary levels. Instruction in braille music reading usually begins at grade three level in residential schools.<sup>15</sup>

Analysis of the instructional pedagogy between 1900 and 1949 provided the aid for both future music teachers for the visually impaired and music educators who have already been in the field of blind education. The role of music education for the blind children has changed through the 20th century. Music curriculum started to establish the economic independency for the children gradually changed the way to use music or music activities as therapeutic tool after 1950, along with the flourish research on music therapy.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 127-133.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-134.

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