

# *The ABCs of MLT:*

## *A Music Therapist's Introduction to Music Learning Theory*

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**Handouts available at: <http://wp.me/P2c22o-50>**

### **What is Music Learning Theory (MLT)?**

“**Music Learning Theory** is an explanation of how we learn when we learn music. Based on an extensive body of research and practical field testing by Edwin E. Gordon and others, Music Learning Theory is a comprehensive method for teaching *audiation*, Gordon’s term for the ability to think music in the mind *with understanding*. Music Learning Theory principles guide music teachers of all stripes—early childhood, elementary general, instrumental, vocal, the private studio—in establishing sequential curricular goals in accord with their own teaching styles and beliefs. The primary objective is development of students’ tonal and rhythm audiation. Through audiation students are able to draw greater meaning from the music they listen to, perform, improvise, and compose.” ([www.giml.org](http://www.giml.org))

### **Recommended Resources:**

- Bolton, B. M., Taggart, C. C., Reynolds, A. M., Valerio, W. H., & Gordon, E. E. (2001). *Jump right in: The music curriculum*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications.
- Gordon Institute for Music Learning. Available at <http://giml.org>.
- Gordon, E. E. (2003). *A music learning theory for newborn and young children*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications.
- Gordon, E. E., Bolton, B. M., Hicks, W. K., & Taggart, C. C. (1993). *Experimental songs and chants*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications.
- Valerio, W. H., Reynolds, A. M., Bolton, B. M., Taggart, C. C., & Gordon, E. E. (1998). *Music play: The early childhood music curriculum guide for parents, teachers, and caregivers*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc.

## Preparatory Audiation

### Acculturation

Birth to age 2-4  
Participates with little consciousness of the environment.

1. Absorption  
Hears and aurally collects the sounds of music in the environment
2. Random response  
Moves and babbles in response to, but without relation to, the sounds of music in the environment
3. Purposeful response  
Tries to relate movement and babble to the sounds of music in the environment

### Imitation

Ages 2-4 to 3-5  
Participates with conscious thought focused primarily on the environment.

1. Shedding Egocentricity  
Recognizes that movement and babble do not match the sounds of music in the environment
2. Breaking the Code  
Imitates with some precision the sounds of music in the environment, specifically tonal patterns and rhythm patterns

### Assimilation

Ages 3-5 to 4-6  
Participates with conscious thought focused primarily on the self.

1. Introspection  
Recognizes the lack of coordination between singing, chanting, breathing and movement
2. Coordination  
Coordinates singing and chanting with breathing and movement

### Skill Learning Sequence

#### Discrimination Learning

- 1) Aural/Oral
- 2) Verbal Association
- 3) Partial Synthesis
- 4) Symbolic Association
- 5) Composite Synthesis

#### Inference Learning

- 1) Generalization
- 2) Creativity/Improvisation
- 3) Theoretical Understanding

**GIML website:**  
**[www.giml.org](http://www.giml.org)**