

The Elementary Choral Program

The Nature of Singing

Producing, practising and performing music through singing is a way of making music; a way of sharing music; a way of understanding music; a way of enjoying music. (Rao, 1987.)

Producing, practising and performing music through singing involves the senses, perception, creativity and imagination – qualities basic to human development – and the ability to think, to feel, to speak, and to act. In-tune, thoughtfully produced vocal tone enables the student to re-create the expressive qualities of music in all forms and styles. Through singing, the music can be “felt” as well as understood. The ability to perceive and respond musically requires the kinesthetic, muscular sensations of singing accompanied by the thoughtful and revealing experiences of great music. The ability to understand and respond musically comes with the ability to successfully produce, practise, and perform music thorough the singing voice. (Rao, 1987).

Choral Performance

Choral ensemble performance provides the opportunity for interested students to develop and refine the art of choral singing and to improve understanding of the elements and styles of music. Such a group experience is central to music education, and allows for a fusion of theoretical aspects and practice. As such, the Elementary Choral Program is an integral component of the school music program.

Through engagement in developmentally appropriate and challenging experiences, children develop the ability to perform music with skill and understanding (Rao, 1992). By providing opportunities for choral education at the elementary level, students establish a foundation for continued involvement and success in choral ensemble performance.

In addition to the musical benefits of choral performance, choir experience can provide a building block for life-long learning by developing social skills, encouraging community involvement and enhancing social and academic skills in general. Success of a choral ensemble requires the cooperation, unified focus and effort, and self-discipline of each individual member. Learning outcomes are realized with others and the success of the ensemble is dependent on the cooperative effort of each individual member. Consequently, members of an ensemble must learn to work together and respond appropriately as individuals within the group, in order for the ensemble experience to be musically and personally rewarding and successful.

The sense of community within the ensemble also reaches and affects those in the school and the greater community, who share in the musical experience as listeners and receivers.

Participation

The opportunity for choral ensemble experience should be available for those interested and willing to cooperate in a large ensemble. Students who are willing and able to respect the behavioural expectations of the ensemble and participate in a cooperative and positive manner, are able to benefit individually from such a choral ensemble experience and contribute to the musical development of others. A choral ensemble requires the united effort of the entire group in order to achieve the musical and social outcomes expected of participation in such a group. Elective participation by students encourages this united effort and the responsibility necessary to contribute to the group in a positive manner.

Class Size

Music classes, like other areas in the school curriculum, require an appropriate learning environment for instruction. Class size is as critical an issue in music education as it is in other subject areas. The choral ensemble is a component of the music program and scheduling should be organized so that such groups are of a reasonable size to allow for effective instruction. Large groups may need to be divided into two classes to allow for an effective learning environment.

Specific Curriculum Outcomes for the Elementary Choral Class

The elementary choral experience supports and reinforces the learning outcomes for the elementary classroom music program, found under the six organizers: rhythm/meter, melody/pitch, harmony, form, expression and contexts. Through choral performance, students will also develop musical skills and understandings related to the art of choral singing.

Students will be expected to

1. develop an appreciation for and understanding of choral music as an art form
2. develop musicianship skills and vocal techniques as related to choral singing – vocal range, posture, breathing, tone, blend, balance, diction, and vowel formation
3. perform and respond to the expressive qualities found in the choral repertoire
4. contribute to the musical experience of the ensemble

Outcomes	Suggestions for Teaching and Learning
<p><i>Students will be expected to</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. develop an appreciation for and an understanding of choral music as an art form 2. develop musicianship skills and vocal techniques as related to choral singing – vocal range, posture, breathing, tone, blend, balance, diction, and vowel formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with strategies found in the classroom program to develop literacy skills and interpret the music being studied. Read rhythms, sing in solfa, sing in parts, identify form, interpret terms and signs, and relate to contexts. • Sing a variety of repertoire that reflects their own and other cultures and time periods. Include selections that are learned from the aural tradition (Let Your Voice Be Heard! and songs of our own culture). Take the opportunity to place the selections studied in a cultural context. • Include movement activities where appropriate, to develop musical understandings and enhance learning. • Include selections that incorporate the use of classroom instruments, dramatization and movement. • Use warm-ups and appropriate vocalises during each class to focus on the techniques of choral singing. Use a variety of warm-ups throughout the school year. • Vocal technique as related to good choral singing should be continually referenced in every class. Relate to and draw learnings from the repertoire being studied. Use appropriate terminology. • Show the video (Vocal Techniques for the Young Singer) to highlight vocal technique and aspects of good choral singing. • Play a recording of a musical selection, but performed by two different children's choirs. Lead a discussion comparing and contrasting the two, focusing on choral elements and interpretation. Ask students to decide which version they prefer and why. This may be extended to a short written response. • Model good vocal tone. As well, play recordings of children's choirs and discuss vocal tone and vocal techniques. • Discuss phrasing and "singing through the phrase" and apply to the repertoire being studied. Reinforce with a recording. • Perform selections in unison as well as in parts. Unison singing provides the opportunity to focus on a centred supported tone, good phrasing and unity of the ensemble. • Sing rounds and canons in each class to develop part-singing skills.

Suggestions for Assessment

See page 335.

Resources/Notes

See page 335.

Outcomes	Suggestions for Teaching and Learning
3. perform and respond to the expressive qualities found in the choral repertoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pose questions related to the feeling and mood being expressed in the musical selection. What musical elements are contributing to the feeling/mood of the piece? • Provide opportunities for students to respond to musical works through verbal response and short written reflections. • In each class include reference to expressive singing. Use questioning to direct students to the factors that contribute to expressive singing. • Use the video to focus on vocal techniques. Draw attention to such things as vocal tone, posture, breathing, facial expression and how they relate to expressive singing. • Record the group and play back. Follow with a discussion on the performance. Pose questions which will prompt students to analyze their performance in terms of blend, balance, vocal tone, expressiveness, etc. Students may also respond through a short reflection. Vary this by completing the Group Singing Reflection (Reproducibles) with the class.
4. contribute to the musical experience of the ensemble	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and reinforce the role of the individual in the choral ensemble. Focus on the group outcomes that are affected by the individual contribution of each member. • Highlight appropriate behaviors in the choral class that contribute to the group outcome – being prepared for class, being focused and attentive, participating fully, watching the conductor. • If possible video-tape a class rehearsal or performance. Use the video to highlight individual focus, attention to the director, and expressiveness. Use questioning. For example, are all students breathing together to begin the selection? Discuss the importance of each student in the ensemble being engaged and focused in order to produce an expressive musical product. • Provide opportunities for students to participate in choral workshops and to hear other groups perform. Use these experiences for discussion in the class setting and reflection. • Two or three students observe the ensemble performing a musical selection. The students share their observations with the class, noting such things as attentiveness to the conductor, expressiveness, energy, correct breathing, etc.

Suggestions for Assessment	Resources/Notes
<p>Observe and note individual attendance, preparedness, participation, effort, and verbal responses during class time.</p> <p>Observe and note attendance, focus, effort, facial expression, and attention to the conductor, during performance.</p> <p>Students write a short written response to a question related to a specific choral technique.</p> <p>Students write a response to a specific question related to the group's recent performance. See Appendix A and Reproducibles for sample questions.</p> <p>Record a selection during a performance. Students write a response to a specific question analyzing an element of the performance – blend, balance, diction, etc.</p> <p>Provide opportunities during every class for small groups to sing a phrase or verse of a selection. Make it a regular occurrence so that it becomes an accepted practice. Observe and note individual performance. Extend also to canon singing. Note and record performance.</p> <p>Grouping Singing Reflection (Reproducibles).</p>	<p>Mike Brewer's Warm Ups! Use each class</p> <p>150 Rounds for Singing</p> <p>Grab Another Partner! (partner songs)</p> <p>Shared Harmony Canons and Ostinato Songs for Beginning Part Singing</p> <p>Let Your Voice Be Heard! Songs in parts (includes movement)</p> <p>Songs of Newfoundland and Labrador</p> <p>Musicplay 6 See Choral listings</p> <p>Songs of Peace</p> <p>An Orff Mosaic from Canada Selections in parts, with instrumental accompaniment, recorders, movement, dramatization</p> <p>Teaching Towards Musical Understanding</p> <p>Video: Vocal Techniques for the Young Singer</p> <p>Other:</p> <p><i>Sing the Sea</i> (Newfoundland and Labrador part-songs)</p> <p><i>Twelve Songs of Newfoundland</i> (unison)</p> <p><i>Songs of Joy</i> (Cassils Choral Collection - Themes & Variations)</p> <p><i>Seasons</i> (Cassils Choral Collection - Themes & Variations)</p>

