

Removing Barriers from Choral Singing

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Choral singing is a collaborative activity which educates singers so as to make them more competitive in today's world.

People often judge or assess a choir by the way they sing, based on whether they like their voice or not. Rarely do they focus on the many other ways a member can contribute to the choir, as a whole.

In this regard, Kodály said that “*Music is for everyone*”, and during primary education music classes are usually focused on singing popular and traditional repertoires, since these songs are the ones closest to the singers. In this way, teachers ensure that music reaches all children.

Different questions arise in relation to current practice in primary classrooms:

- Can we musically educate children and teenagers by simply singing in a choir?
- What would it take for the school system to see choral activity as the most accessible, equitable and affordable way to carry out musical education?
- How could we approach an inclusive and non-elitist classroom, in which all students have a sense of belonging in team work collaboration?
- Does the musical learning of the conductor guarantee good results for the choir?
- Shouldn't conductors of choral music be well prepared trainers with good communication skills and able to bring innovative ideas into the program?

These questions and many others lead us to think about rigor; and requirements, and also to consider a new methodology in relation to effectiveness.

At this point, we contemplate the idea of replacing music lessons and teaching music through a choir activity, consisting in the creation of a choral classroom that works on contents through singing. In particular, the topic is focused on the general primary education setting, for children from 6 to 12 years old; in the context of Catalonia, Spain.

### **Choral Singing in Formal Education**

Choral singing is a collaborative activity which educates singers so as to make them more competent.

Singing in a choir can help everyone in different areas: studies, professional careers, as well as the development of social abilities and artistic capacities. The singing experience can also generate mood changes and help anyone to achieve a competent and creative mind set.

### **Choral Singing and Multiple Intelligences**

In order to make all these aspects possible, a strong educational model is needed.

This could be a model that includes multiple intelligences, as proposed by H. Gardner, (1983). The eight intelligences proposed are:

- Linguistic: used to read books, write texts, understand words, and use everyday language.
- Logical: used to solve mathematical problems, and in many tasks that require the use of propositional logic or inference.
- Musical: used to sing a song, compose a sonata, play a musical instrument, and appreciate the beauty and structure of a musical composition.
- Visual: used to make trips or move around a city, into a building, to understand a map, etc.
- Kinesthetic: used in sports, dancing and generally in those activities in which body control is essential for good practice.
- Interpersonal: it applies to the relationship with other people, to understand their reasons, desires, emotions and behaviors.
- Intrapersonal: it is the ability to understand feelings and emotions of one self and use them to guide behavior.
- Naturalistic: it allows us to recognize and categorize objects related to nature, such as plants, animals and other elements of the natural environment.

Each of these intelligences is relevant for learning, but mainly linguistic and logical intelligences are important in school lessons based on literacy and numeracy.

This research thus seeks to go further and identify other intellectual minds, like the musical one, which are not often taken into account, even though they are relevant in school activity.

### **Choral Singing and General Skills**

In Catalonia, the National Curriculum does not use the concept of multiple intelligences in a specific way, and is based, instead, on eight general skills. Nevertheless, a clear relationship can be observed between the different intelligences and these general skills which are divided into the following fields:

-Communicative and linguistic skill

-Mathematics skill

-Artistic and cultural skill

-Social skill and citizenship

-Personal autonomy and initiative skill

-Interaction with the real world skill

-Digital and information skill

-Learning to learn skill

### **Relation Between Skills and Intelligences**

Intelligence is a potential that someone has to develop, while competence is the evidence that an intelligence has been developed.

According to N. Alart, (2009), people have a potential for multiple intelligences, but they need to awaken them and work on different neural systems.

Moreover, if multiple intelligences and skills are compared, each skill can be identified with the intelligence.

	Communicative and linguistic	Mathematics	Artistic and cultural	Social and citizenship
<b>LOGICAL</b>				
<b>LINGUISTIC</b>				
<b>MUSICAL</b>				
<b>KINESTHETIC</b>				
<b>VISUAL</b>				
<b>INTERPERSONAL</b>				
<b>INTRAPERSONAL</b>				
<b>NATURALISTIC</b>				

	Personal autonomy and initiative	Interaction with the real world	Digital	Learning to learn
<b>LOGICAL</b>				
<b>LINGUISTIC</b>				
<b>MUSICAL</b>				
<b>KINESTHETIC</b>				
<b>VISUAL</b>				
<b>INTERPERSONAL</b>				
<b>INTRAPERSONAL</b>				
<b>NATURALISTIC</b>				

For example, linguistic intelligence refers to the communicative (linguistic and audiovisual) competence. And focusing on musical intelligence, the cultural and artistic competence is worked on.

Some of the competences develop skills which are related to several intelligences, so it can be said that they are inclusive. For example, nowadays, society is immersed in the digital era and permanently surrounded by new technologies.

**Linguistic skill**

Choral singing can reinforce the development of linguistic intelligence. For this reason; it is very important to work in depth with the text of the song. Students have to grasp the meaning of every song. This work helps to improve the performance of the song and makes learners conscious that there is a message to be conveyed. It also helps to develop sensitivity, a better understanding, and consciousness; in short, it is a good way of improving

expressive skills, not only when singing a song, but in a general sense in relation to everyday work.

### **Logical skill**

Music is mathematics and has a structure, it has an inner organization and order, and it is constant with a regular development. It also helps to expand all the aspects quoted above as well as scientific and neurological features.

### **Musical and Kinesthetic**

Choir singing practice can develop cultural and artistic skills and reinforce the relationship between music and movement. This is why it can be said that music is culture, art and life. As *Alfred von Beckerath* said, "Without music there is no life, and there is no life without music!"

### **Social and Citizenship**

Musical group activities, such as choir singing, encourage collaborative work under the idea that all members take profit from the progress of others. Also, the social and cultural task has a high value for the entire community: improving integration, cohesion and social inclusion.

### **Autonomy and personal initiative**

Choir singing directly supports the construction of personal values. Value-based education is constantly present while teaching music. This also blends with personal development and the acquisition of working habits and making decisions.

### **Interaction with the real world**

The content of song lyrics, images, sounds and frequencies, allows educators to work on the environment and many physical concepts, thus supporting values related to preservation.

### **Digital**

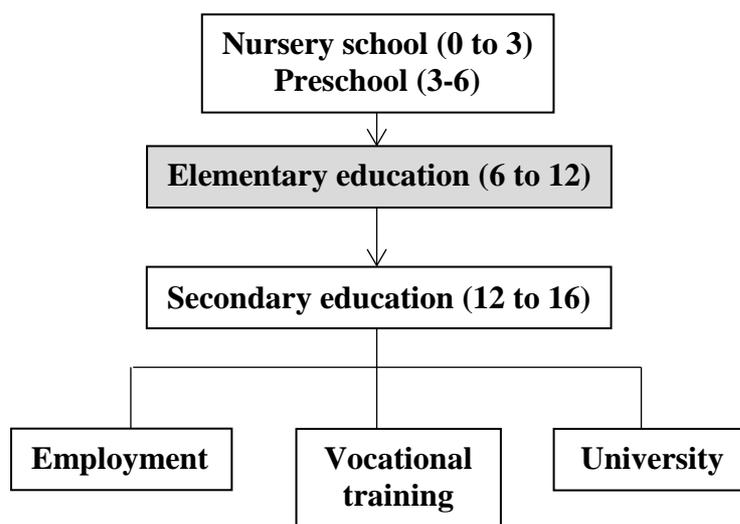
Music, as a universal language, lets people approach different cultures and facilitates the sharing, extending and creating of information for different destinations at the same time. New technologies allow students to listen to and experience music as receivers, trainers, composers and artists. New tools are also emerging giving technical support to music education through different electronic devices in the digital age.

### **Learning how to learn**

Teaching and learning are both a passion. Any experience in life is related to music in some way: some kind of sound, movement, rhythm, harmony... Music and choir practice also become opportunities for deriving pleasure from and gaining enthusiasm in learning. All these goals need, at the same time, effort, rigor and discipline; qualities which are also needed in any effective educational process.

### **Structure of the Catalan Education System**

The obligatory period of schooling in the Catalan Education system is between 3 and 16 years old. However, this proposal is focused on Elementary education, between 6 and 12 years old.



### **Education Model in Catalonia**

The most important characteristic of a Catalan classroom is cultural and linguistic diversity. For this reason, Catalan schools follow an inclusive model of education. An inclusive school aims to foster school organization based on two principals: social justice and the recognition of all students as equal.

### **Relation Between the Inclusive Model of Education and Choirs**

On the one hand, the objectives of an inclusive classroom refer to the four postulates of the Delors Report: learn to learn, learn to make, learn to be, learn to live together. On the other hand, sing in a choir contributes to intellectual, personal, social and cultural development.

Clear relations exist between the former and the latter. Learning to learn is related to intellectual development. Learning to make also refers to intellectual and personal development. Learning to be improves personal, social and cultural development, and learning to live together is clearly related to social and cultural development.

In conclusion, working as a choir helps to attain the objectives of an inclusive classroom.

### **Values and Habits of Choral Singing**

A considerable number of values and habits are transmitted through choir work. Which habits are worked on in a choral group? Ones such as listening, paying attention, collaboration, organization, and discipline: all of which are very important for personal and social education.

The graph below shows the results of a study carried out with 61 choirs, who were asked the following question: Which values do you think are the most important in choral singing?

<b>SINGERS</b>		<b>CONDUCTORS</b>	
1	Friendship	1	Respect
2	Respect	2	Communication
3	Communication	3	Effort
4	Spontaneity	4	Friendship
5	Effort	5	Spontaneity

In first position, conductors said that respect is the most important aspect; respect in all senses: respect between conductor and singer, respect between singers, respect for the work, respect for the public, for the diversity of singers... Singers, however, placed this value in third position.

In first position, singers chose the value of friendship. Singing in a choir gives their members a very strong personal relation. Relationships are established between the members; and, for this reason, singers evaluated as “positive” the friendship that appears in this activity. On the other hand, for conductors the term “friendship” is in fourth position.

Communication is also an outstanding value. For conductors, communication is very important; they communicate by the means of words, gestures, eye-contact, breathing, facial expressions, and feeling in order to reach the artistic and personal desired result. The singer answers this communication initiated by the conductor and, in turn, communicates with the other singers, with the music, and with the audience who listens to them. Thus, communication, which is a very important value in our society, is also present in choral singing.

On fourth and fifth place we find the values of effort and spontaneity. On the one hand, effort is more important for conductors than singers. Effort is an intrinsic value of learning, and the fact that pupils value it lower shows us that this value is on the decline. On the other hand, there is the value of spontaneity related to attitudes to work.

To conclude, choral singing brings very important values and habits to personal and social education.

**Music Skills**

In every music classroom there are some skills that have to be worked on. When pupils are singing in a choir, they are improving their musical skills. The most important music skills worked on choral singing are: rhythm, tuning, musicality, expression, body attitude, phrasing, articulation, dynamics and harmony.

**Proposal**

A new working model exists that can be proposed for music lessons. The model takes into account the needs of students in order to achieve quality education, with the main goal being to promote musically competent children.

At this point, the research is focused on the idea of replacing music lessons and teaching music by choir singing to meet all students' needs and to help them become musically competent. This idea consists in creating a choir in the classroom and working on all contents through singing.

A Choral Classroom is a place where music can be sensed as well as understood: that means that it enables the student to re-create the expressive qualities of music in all its forms and styles, producing, practicing and performing music through singing. It is a way of making music; a way of sharing music; a way of understanding music; and a way of enjoying music.

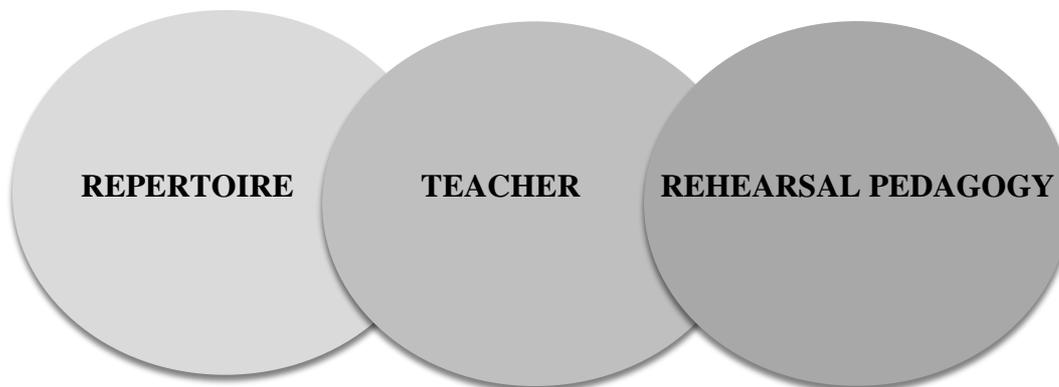
Moreover, on the one hand, theoretical and practical aspects can be worked on together, to improve understanding of the elements and music styles. On the other hand, choir experience can provide a building block for life-long learning by developing social skills, encouraging community involvement and enhancing social and academic skills in general.

Furthermore, a choral ensemble requires the united effort of the entire group in order to achieve the musical and social outcomes expected. However, these groups should be of a reasonable size to be effective.

There are many benefits associated with singing:

PHYSICALLY	EMOTIONALLY	SOCIALLY
-Students' posture improves. -They can become more mentally alert. -It can help reduce anger and anxiety. -It can improve their sleep.	-It increases self-esteem and a feeling of wellbeing. -It increases positive feelings. -It encourages creativity. -It increases understanding and empathy among cultures.	-It is a forum for sharing -It brings people together. -It offers opportunities to give and receive positive feedback -It provides a safe environment to try new skills.

To succeed in this proposal, there are three main pillars to take into account:



Repertoire

11. Margarideta

Trad. catalana  
Harm. O. Martorell

*Alegre*  
*Tots*

Mar - ga - ri - de - ta lle - va't "de - ma - ti" que n'és

tard de ma - ti - na - da, Mar - ga - ri - de - ta lle - va't "de - ma - ti" quen'és tard del "de - ma - ti". Prou me'n lle - va - ri - a

*Solo*

jo { 1. si mit - ge - tes en } te - ni - a, prou me'n lle - va - ri - a  
 { 2. si sa - ba - tes en }

*Tots*

jo { prò mit - ge - tes no en tinc no } Pe - re va a la  
 { prò sa - ba - tes no en tinc no }

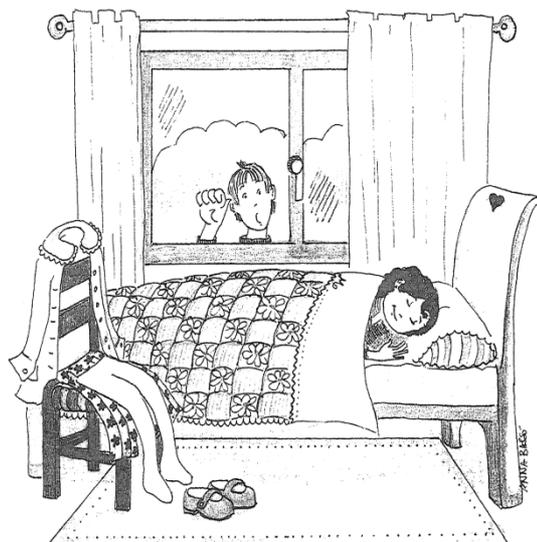
pla - ça, Pe - re ja n'hi com - pra, Pe - re ja se'n tor - na, Pe - re ja és a -

Fotocopiar els llibres és il·legal

quí! Mar - ga - ri - de - ta lle - va't "de - ma - ti".

3. si faldilles en...  
prò faldilles no en tinc no...

4. si soneta no en...  
prò soneta en tinc jo...



This is a Catalan folk song found within the traditional children's repertoire, entitled "La Margarideta". At a first stage of analysis, we can ascertain the minor tonality, some fast rhythms and some phonemes with a Latin root which are related to the rhythm and melody of the song.

Related to the message of the song and its meaning, without knowing the language people cannot understand what it is about. However, in music, sometimes this is not the most important thing.

The mother tongue obviously attempts to convey a message. Nonetheless, it is not always about the meaning of the text. The cultural and internal emotions are evident in the act of singing or listening to singing in people's own language. It is here when rhythm, melody and language come together and the song obtains its full meaning.

This is the charm of popular songs, and this close relationship between language and music can help the children in a school choir to feel folk music and to ensure it is kept alive through singing.

It is for this reason that, it is very important to build a repertoire from folk songs and to introduce songs from other countries and traditions later on.

As stated by the Arts Education Curriculum in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador: "It is very important to sing a variety of repertoire that reflects their own and other cultures and time periods. Include selections that are learned from the aural tradition and songs of our culture".

In Catalonia, teachers also support this pedagogical line. All children, whatever their ethnicity or culture, try to approach and move towards what is closest to them: their mother tongue. Therefore, in the initial stages, it is logical that if we want to obtain a good teaching tool for transmitting music and songs, teachers cannot forget to mention the emotional factor of rapprochement between educator and children. The first condition is to

nourish children with songs that are based on their own language and possible, to accompany them with rhythms, melodic phrases and movements close to their own culture.

In the case of Catalan culture, there is a clear diatonic Mediterranean tradition, with deep roots. On the one hand, the Romanic ecclesiastical modes from Greek culture and, on the other hand, melodies and rhythms born among villagers, farmers and herders who have managed to keep them alive, perhaps as a result of their solitude and isolation, which remain fresh and well-preserved thanks to oral transmission.

In conclusion, when a child is able to repeat a song it means that it is part of his/her cultural heritage. Moreover, lyrics and music will be the stars of the long construction process of their language, of their ear, and of their basic artistic expression.

### **Teachers' Role**

The conductor must be the teacher of the music class. However, it is very important to highlight the good quality of their specific musical training. On the one hand, the conductor should be able to motivate children and transmit all the values mentioned in a dynamic and natural way. On the other hand, the conductor must also have the appropriate music knowledge to develop musical skills in an accurate and clear way.

There is no doubt; that the conductor must have basic knowledge in vocal training, hearing, rhythm, musical form, and many aspects; from songs, hearing the rhythm, dance, and in general building the new musical language which is a communication path to the integral education of the person or the child.

Meanwhile, the conductor must control gesture and maintain good communication skills with children. It is not an easy task, but the effort involved deserves the recognition and respect that all teacher should have.

Therefore, first of all, the conductor must be an educator, and secondly, a well-trained musical person, able to teach sensitivity and beauty. Ultimately, the conductor has to be a leader!

### **Rehearsal Pedagogy**

Each class must be a rehearsal and every public intervention a concert. For this reason, organization is essential. A class cannot be understood without any planning before the rehearsal and a rehearsal cannot be accepted without any organization.

Order and organization are very important aspects to be taken into account in every rehearsal in order to consider body posture, and to work on hearing and attention while listening to music.

The conductor must provide different guidelines and must aim to surprise in every rehearsal with an activity that the singers are not expecting. Moreover, a choice of a good repertoire is essential. The process of singing a well-tuned song, which is rhythmically fair and well-expressed, is very important. Every song and vocal work has to be able to capture attention, communicate and excite.

All the work done at each rehearsal must be addressed to the singers and must be well designed to attain the level that the conductor aims for, with continuous improvements to aim higher and achieve new goals.

### **Conclusion**

Singing in a choir can musically educate children and teenagers. Therefore, teachers have to provide suitable resources and materials for their students, in order to ensure good music education.

On the one hand, students have to be members of the classroom choir, developing all their skills. And on the other hand, they have to act as a whole, promoting collaborative work. For this reason, it is very important to have well-prepared teachers who can assume the role of “Conductor”.

In view of the arguments discussed here, we conclude that replacing music classrooms with a choral activity can help to reinforce all stages of music education.

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