6 x 6: MUSIC ELEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR A BALANCED REHEARSAL

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"It is the richness of musical experiences and of their memories that makes a good musician."
Zoltan Kodaly

I. Introduction
Rhythm, melody, texture, timbre, dynamics, and form provide the basis for solid musical understanding. Singing, playing instruments, moving, listening, reading and writing, and creating are the vehicles through which our musical knowledge is demonstrated. These elements and activities can be incorporated into every children's choir rehearsal to achieve balance and help train consummate musicians!

II. Musical Elements (fundamentals, building blocks)
A. Experiences with Rhythm
   • Rhythm has a steady beat, tempo, meter, and durations of notes and rests (sounds and silences).
   • It has rhythmic patterns that are the same or different, and may employ syncopation.
B. Experiences with Melody
   • A melody is based on a set of pitches that usually form a scale and determine the key, can move by step or skip, has shape, range, and tessitura.
   • It is made up of phrases, or parts of a complete musical sentence. These phrases can be the same or different.
C. Experiences with Texture
   • Musical texture may be monophonic, homophonic or harmonic, or polyphonic.
   • It is thin or thick depending on the number of singers or players performing the piece of music.
D. Experiences with Timbre (tone color)
   • Timbre or tone color varies with the type of material used and the size.
   • Different types of instruments and different types of voices have unique timbres.
E. Experiences with Dynamics
   • Dynamic levels may be soft or loud.
   • Dynamics may get gradually softer or louder (crescendo, decrescendo).

F. Experiences with Form
   • Repeated musical ideas unify compositions and contrasting ideas provide variety.
   • With children, we begin with the shortest musical idea called a motive and branch out to binary, ternary, rondo, contrapuntal, and theme and variation forms.

III. Musical Activities (to increase each child’s competency and confidence)

A. Reasons for Singing
   • Singing is at the heart of the choir experience. For many children, singing is the path they will choose to experience as participants and performers the great joy of music.
   • Much of the singing in grades K-6 should be done without accompaniment. Keyboard accompaniments often confuse children and can hinder them as they try to listen to a tune. It can also prevent them from listening to their own voice and the other voices around them as they sing.

B. Reasons for Listening
   • Because music is based on sound, listening must permeate all musical responses. The most important accomplishment for a musician is to hear patterns of sounds internally when they are no longer audible (audiation=inner hearing).
   • Provide an environment that encourages active, attentive listening.

C. Reasons to Create
   • Children are naturally creative, and their contributions need to be encouraged and affirmed. Musical creativity (improvisation and composition) involves making important discoveries, important choices, and can signify understanding of musical concepts.
   • Provide many opportunities for children to create their own words, rhythms, melodies, or even their own notational symbols.

D. Reasons for Reading Music
   • Musical symbols seem like a foreign language to the person who has not systematically worked on this skill. Children who complete many years in a graded children’s choir program deserve to leave with reasonable skill in reading music.
   • Helping children develop music reading skills requires a commitment from choir directors to do more than teach songs and anthems by rote.
• Part of every rehearsal should be devoted to experiences that lead to musical literacy as the end goal.

E. Reasons for Movement
• Moving is a natural response to music. Children who have experienced a particular musical concept with physical movement have a greater understanding of that concept (they have put it in their bodies – internalized the concept).
• Movement offers a change of pace, encourages active listening, develops imagination, and provides pure joy! Other benefits include improved coordination, self-awareness, socialization, and self-confidence.
• Whether you are using gross or fine-motor movements, locomotor or non-locomotor activities, realize that movement is integral to a child’s music education.

F. Reasons for Playing Instruments
• Instruments are biblically and historically a part of music making in the church. Using instruments can enhance and broaden the entire worship experience for both the children’s choir and the congregation. Children can have immediate success when playing an instrument and they simply love to experiment with new sounds.
• Whether using the body as an instrument, discovering “found sounds” in the classroom or in nature, learning about pitched and unpitched percussion instruments, or using the autoharp, guitar, hand chimes, or piano, careful preparation and management by the children’s choir director is vital for pleasurable experiences for everyone.

IV. Getting Mileage from the Music You Teach
• Time and money are too precious to waste on inferior music and texts
• Try to choose the highest quality music for your group – music that will teach the greatest number of concepts and allow for the most creative and artistic activities in rehearsal and performance
• When you have selected the music for your choir each year, study the music carefully and use a variety of approaches for teaching the music so that it is interesting and exciting for your children
• Tried and True – Seven Songs for the Church Year by Michael Bedford (Choristers Guild – CGA693)

V. Content of Rehearsal
• Instructional Objectives—logical and sequential
• Essential Musical Elements—rhythm, melody, texture, timbre, dynamics, form
• Essential Musical Activities—singing, playing, moving, listening, reading and writing, creating
• Worship Skills—Scriptural Focus
• Prayer—share needs, show Christian concern

VI. Rehearsal Organization and Management
• Efficiency and Effectiveness
• Respect, Rapport, Rules
• Consistency, Fairness
• Behavioral Reinforcement

VII. Evaluation (Assessment)
• Teacher’s Response
• Children’s Response