

FORZA VITALE!

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More than Just Singing: Reflections on the Sanford Jones MTIPS Workshop

By Rochelle Holmberg

During the summer of 2011, I had the privilege of attending the Summer Institute at the Montessori Teachers Institute for Professional Studies in Northbrook, Illinois. Sanford Jones started off the weeklong institute with a 2-day music workshop organized by the six elements of music: rhythm, pitch, timbre, intensity (dynamics), form, and culture. His presentation was further organized by the ways a young child can experience each of these elements: listening to music, moving and dancing, using one's voice, using percussion instruments, and using music notation.

The music-listening activities, dances, songs, rhythm games, composition lessons, and tidbits of wisdom (both musical and non-musical) are too numerous to list. Of all that he shared, perhaps the most inspiring suggestions dealt with ways to augment the singing that takes place each day in the classroom.

Model the use of and appreciation for notated music. When seated with a group of children awaiting a new or familiar song, have the sheet music with you. Show the children where the notes are on the page, explaining that they let us know what pitches and rhythms to sing. Also show where the lyrics are found on the page. The children are delighted when I say, "Wasn't it nice of Mr. Jones to notate the music and lyrics to Sunflower? I don't think we will ever forget this song."

Walk or march while singing. This can be done in several ways:

- Step with each syllable of a song, letting children know that they are walking to the rhythmic pattern of the music.
- Step with each beat. This is achieved by walking at a steady pace, in-time for the duration of the song.
- Step to the meter of the music. This is very similar to stepping with each beat. However, only step on the strong beats (usually every other or every third beat).
- Walk to the phrasing. With a partner, walk towards one another during the first phrase of a song and away from one another during the second. Repeat this movement for following

phrases.

Act out a familiar song. Sing a phrase of a song, and decide with the children if there is something that could be acted out. Figure out if there are characters in the song and if so, what are they doing? Perhaps some children will need to stand in as animals, or pose as objects. Go phrase by phrase before putting the entire song together with the actions.

Set the pitch before singing a song. Before singing a song with the children, know what pitch it begins on. Either invite a child who knows the pitch names of the bells to ring that particular bell or show any child what bell is to be rung, giving the pitch name. It is amazing how quickly children begin to remember the initial pitches of songs when this practice becomes habit.

Explore and name dynamics. Sing a soft, quiet song. Ask the children to describe how loud the song was. Explain that when they sing, they can use the word *piano* to describe quiet music. The same exercise can be done for a loud song, using the word *forte*. This same type of exercise can be used to elicit creative descriptions of music and to explore other musical terms that describe a particular style or intensity.

Help children use their natural (and lovely) singing voices. Demonstrate and practice singing while standing with good posture. To encourage singing that is strong, have children face the window while singing so they are able to “sing through the window”. To help that strong singing be pleasant to listen to, remind them that it is the breath that makes the voice. Of course, listening to a recording of a children’s choir with your students can be very inspiring.

Compose short songs. With the children, choose a part of a familiar poem or decide on a phrase to use for the song. Determine the rhythm of the poem by holding hands with a child and swinging your arms to the rhythm of the poem so that the child can feel it. Notate the rhythm with the moveable notes that are used with the bells. Keeping the rhythm the same, move the notes to the staff board, placing notes on lines or spaces so that a nice melody might result. Play the composed melody with the bells, sing along, and adjust as necessary.

While singing has always been a lovely activity to share with a group of children, putting these activities and techniques into practice with the children has brought a new energy to singing in the classroom.



About Rochelle Holmberg: Rochelle is currently a Primary Guide at Montessori Children's House. She received her AMI primary diploma in 2005. In her spare time, she plays violin and sews.

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