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ARRANGEMENT SEQUENCING AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL FOR TEACHING COLLECTIVE SINGING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract: This paper is an experience report on teaching collective singing using the creation of sequenced arrangements according to possibilities of singing in parts for the development of musical skills and knowledge. The objective of the research was to analyze the benefits of this approach based on the contributions of the authors Houlahan and Tacka (2023), Leck and Jordan (2009) and Fragoso (2018). The study was carried out in a public school in the city of Fortaleza (CE) over a period of four months in weekly classes of two and a half hours with students aged 13 and 14. A field diary was used as a tool for data collection and reflections on the process. Although limited by some factors, the development of singing and listening in parts, rhythmic skills and, later and to a lesser extent, melodic skills, apprehension and articulation of musical vocabulary and vocal technique, attention, flow and perception of cycles, and socialization and disinhibition were observed.

Keywords: Creation; Arrangements; Collective Singing; Sequencing.

INTRODUCTION

This work is a report of an experience of teaching collective singing through a sequencing of arrangements created for the development of musical skills and knowledge according to possibilities of singing in parts.¹ The study was conducted through teaching activities in the Pedagogical Residency Project of the Music course at ``*Universidade Federal do Ceará*`` in a municipal public school located in the Jardim Guanabara neighborhood, in the city of Fortaleza, Ceará.

The meetings, lasting two and a half hours, took place weekly for a period of four months with 13 and 14-year-old students in the 8th grade of elementary school. Participation in the workshops was free and classes took place

in the opposite shift.

In this sense, it is important to understand a little about the contextualization of this proposal, and for this we highlight that singing is, in contemporary times, the main tool for teaching music in public schools due to the unavailability of instruments, in most cases. Among the music pedagogues of the 20th century, Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) stood out for structuring his proposal on the use of the voice. According to Choksy (1974), Kodály placed singing as the main means of teaching music, using folk songs and believing not only in the presence of music classes in schools, but also in the belief in the need to sequence musical knowledge and skills considering the child's stage of physical and mental development.

Among the current authors who use the principles of Kodály's pedagogy (1974) in their work with choral singing are: Leck and Jordan (2009) and Houlahan and Tacka (2023). In their books, the authors provide a series of fundamental musical knowledge and skills for the progressive development and musical independence of students, while exploring possibilities of singing in parts that range from unison to the various perspectives of two-part singing and beyond.

In this sense, the context of public education has several challenges regarding this approach. Students do not have access to continuous and sequential music education, despite the existence of Law number 11,769.² (BRAZIL, 2008). In the process of practicing collective singing, therefore, in addition to knowledge of vocal technique and repertoire, the music teacher must also carry out musicalization work. Even so, the existence of students' informal previous musical knowledge and experiences cannot be ignored, and their recognition and appreciation are

1. The term 'part-singing' refers to singing in more than one voice, that is, more than one part (part-singing, in English).

2. Law number 11,769 of 2008 amended the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education (LDB) and made music teaching mandatory in elementary and secondary education.

necessary. Therefore, the progression of skills and knowledge is better applied as a flexible pedagogical organization of the concepts to be developed than as a strict teaching order.

Other difficulties are exposed by Fragoso (2018), such as the scarcity of arrangements aimed at children and young people and which, when available, are unsuitable for their application. The solution presented by her is the creation of arrangements by the teacher, who, knowing their reality and using their knowledge, can directly meet the demands of their students and the context, using the arrangement as a pedagogical tool.

Therefore, the research in question is justified by presenting a didactic proposal that aims to improve the teaching and learning process, seeking to develop musical, educational and social aspects. The objective is to verify the effectiveness of a collective singing teaching approach through the creation of sequenced arrangements according to possibilities of singing in parts for the development of musical knowledge and skills. At the same time, its application takes into account the characteristics of the reality of the public-school context, such as the absence of prior and sequential musical education, but also the presence of informal musical knowledge and experiences of the students, which need to be recognized and valued.

To this end, the research in question has five parts, namely: Introduction, where we present the general aspects of the research; Literature review, where we will address the foundation of musical skills, in addition to sequencing and possibilities of creating arrangements as a pedagogical and aesthetic tool; Methodology, where the research will be outlined as a qualitative case study, will present the collection tools used, in addition to information on the procedures of the classes; Results and Discussion, where we

will discuss the arrangements used and the difficulties and achievements of the students in each of them; and Final Considerations, where the developments perceived and difficulties encountered during the workshop are highlighted, in addition to the effectiveness of the arrangement sequencing approach used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

FUNDAMENTAL MUSICAL SKILLS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PART-SINGING

Based on Kodály's pedagogy (1974), authors Houlahan and Tacka (2023) point out basic rhythmic and melodic skills that are fundamental for the development of singing and listening in parts. According to them:

Part-singing is the ability to sing music with many parts; part-listening is the ability to listen to other vocal parts while you sing your part. Both are acquired skills. (HOULAHAN and TACKA, 2023, xiii, our translation).

The musical skills in question are simple, almost rudimentary, but they are still fundamentally important for the development of other, more complex knowledge and skills in the future.

Examples of rhythmic skills are: being able to move according to the pulse, being able to accentuate the first and/or any other specific pulse (by clapping, for example), being able to articulate its subdivisions and being able to follow the pulse through a visual reference. These skills ensure that there is a physicality of the pulse and the perception of the difference in intensity between different tempos, which allow the student to identify entries, measures and cycles, making it possible, for example, to perform an arrangement with ostinatos and canons.

Examples of melodic skills are: being able to sing notes played on a musical instrument

or sung by other people, being able to sing different intervals, singing using a pedal point and the opening of voices at the beginning or end of phrases. These skills enable not only the development of more precise tuning, but also musical perception, since melodies are much more mental than physical activities, compared to rhythm. They also ensure that polyphony is achieved constructively through listening in parts, in which one voice can provide melodic support to another, for example.

Thus, we can recognize the importance of developing these rudimentary skills and knowledge, which are fundamental to the development of listening, as well as the possibilities of singing in parts, which will be expressed in the organization of arrangements, the subject of the next subtopic.

ARRANGEMENT SEQUENCING

As a choir develops, the range of possible arrangements expands and vice versa. Leck and Jordan (2009) and Houlahan and Tacka (2023) propose a progression of singing in parts appropriate to the skill level of a choir.

Leck and Jordan (2009) suggest that beginner choirs must work on unison songs, with two-voice ostinatos, descants and suspended notes, in that order. When the choir reaches a beginner-intermediate level, two- and three-voice canons, quodlibets, are explored.³ and homophonies, in that order.

Houlahan and Tacka (2023) also describe the gradual application of voice opening from unison, moving on to ostinatos, descants, suspended notes, canons and quodlibets explored in different ways, including the mixing of these possibilities, such as canons sung with a rhythmic ostinato accompaniment.

This way, the authors outline a sequence of arrangement possibilities considering the

3. **Quodlibets:** pieces that “(...) bring together, in a single song, themes or melodic excerpts (or even entire melodies) from distinct and independent songs that are superimposed, but which correspond to each other in relation to their harmonic structure (FRAGOSO, 2018, p.159).

appropriate level of repertoire for a choral group. Bringing to light the locus of the research, the public school, and, in particular, the previous informal musical background and procedural development of the singers during the workshop, an additional aspect of the application of this idea in this research is the flexibility of this progression. Starting from unison, in agreement with the authors' recommendation, we observed the process of acquisition of knowledge and skills by the students to experiment with 'leaps' in some of these arrangement possibilities, as will be explained in Results and Discussion.

Further considerations on the reality of applying this approach will be discussed in the next subtopic, from the perspective of availability and creation of arrangements.

ARRANGEMENT AS A PEDAGOGICAL AND AESTHETIC TOOL

One of the biggest problems faced in working with children's and youth singing is the lack of arrangements suitable for this audience. Gaborim-Moreira (2015) points out some causes for this shortage, such as:

[...] the lack of discussions in the area; the lack of effective public policies for music education; the lack of investment in research and technical-pedagogical training of conductors; the lack of events specifically aimed at children's and youth choirs (such as workshops, congresses, workshops, symposiums, festivals) and the current lack of interest of publishers in publications of this nature (GABORIM-MOREIRA, 2015, p. 38).

Furthermore, these ready-made arrangements, when available, may not be suited to the students' performance level, and their range and texture, as well as the number and arrangement of the sections, may vary drastically.

In view of this, the possibility of creating arrangements offers a solution that allows for the articulation of aesthetic and pedagogical intentions. The teacher, through his/her knowledge and experience with the choir in question, can also act as an arranger in order to directly meet the demands and challenges of his/her context.

As Fragoso (2018) states:

(...)in other words, knowing my choir, what its musical difficulties are, what its singers are capable of doing, what are the challenges I intend to propose and overcome, I write considering these issues as well, and not just the aesthetic result (FRAGOSO, 2018, p. 142).

In addition to meeting the difficulties of availability of suitable arrangements, this idea also encompasses the flexibility of their progression, as indicated in the previous subtopic. The arrangement is thus understood as a strategic pedagogical tool to be used by the teacher-arranger, balancing the challenges to be overcome with the skills to be achieved, articulating them with aesthetic elements.

In the following topic, we will discuss the research methodology, its type, quality, the collection instruments used and the procedures of the meetings.

METHODOLOGY

This experience report is a qualitative study that used constructed arrangements (with one exception) and a field diary as a tool for data collection.

According to Godoy (1995), qualitative research allows a phenomenon to be better understood in the context in which it occurs and of which it is a part through an analysis from an integrated perspective, seeking to capture it from the perspective of the people involved and considering all points of view and data relevant to understanding the dynamics of the phenomenon. This subjectivity is an important aspect of qualitative research in the

area of education and humanities.

The field diary is a collection instrument that, according to Weber (2009), allows the recording and documentation of experiences and essential information for the analysis of the research, such as the materials, tools, methodologies used and the entire research process, giving more credibility to the results obtained, in addition to promoting a critical reflection of the research and a self-analysis of the researcher. In this study, observations were made about the students' vocal range, texture, characteristics and difficulties, verification of the students' understanding and articulation of learned musical concepts, notes on the most difficult parts of the repertoire and observations about their progress in musical development. These notes allowed a procedural evaluation of the limits and possibilities of the proposed activities and the approach to sequencing arrangements.

Among the arrangements used in the workshop are: "Anunciação" (1983) by Alceu Valença in unison and with opening voices at the end of phrases, "Deixe-me Ir" (2016) by the group 1Kilo with ostinato, "Prelúdio" (1979) by Raul Seixas in canon, "Amarelo, Azul e Branco" (2021) by Ana Vitória with unison, alternating singing and small excerpts for two voices, and "Maria, Maria" (1978) by Milton Nascimento with arrangement for two voices.

The classes were held weekly for a period of four months, lasting two and a half hours. We always started with a relaxation moment and then a vocal warm-up, totaling twenty minutes. If there was any theoretical musical content to be presented that was not integrated into the arrangement and/or the song worked on that day, the corresponding activities were done before these two moments with variable time, always using playful games so that the students could experience and experiment with the concept before it was presented theoretically.

The songs worked on were always suggested in the previous class for listening at home, but a listening moment of approximately ten minutes was also proposed due to its lack of commitment. We talked a little about the song, its history, year of release, the artist, and made observations about vocal aesthetic and arrangement choices.

After that, we began to sing, learning the main melody together. Then, we divided the class into two fixed groups based on the students' vocal ranges. This second group learned its melodic line and, little by little, we gradually joined the two parts, always observing the precision and melodic relationship between the voices.

During this learning process, there were interventions to talk about the students' voices and to apply individual exercises if there was any persistent difficulty, such as which adjustment to use to achieve a certain note. These last activities took place during the remaining class time. For homework, in addition to indicating that they listen to the songs, we made recordings of the parts of the arrangements studied with the students' voices.

When we started the workshop, we explained the idea of sequencing in a simple way and restricted the repertoire to Brazilian music, alternating songs chosen by the teachers and the students, a way of recognizing and valuing their musical tastes. They selected the songs "Deixe-Me Ir" (2016) by the group 1Kilo and "Amarelo, Azul e Branco" (2021) by Ana Vitória. The two songs were chosen through discussions and votes in class.

In the next topic, we will discuss more about the arrangements used and the difficulties and achievements of the students in each of them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first song used in the workshop was the song "Anúnciação" by Alceu Valença in unison. With it, we performed an initial analysis of the students' voices and introduced practices related to vocal technique. From a certain point on, we also tried to perform simple voice openings at the end of the chorus phrases, in order to investigate whether it was possible to explore two-voice organizations.

With the success of these first openings, we took the song "Deixe-me Ir" by the group 1Kilo, chosen by the students, and arranged it by adding a melodic ostinato. We divided the room into two groups that sometimes sang in unison and sometimes divided between rap/melody and ostinato, which alternated. We noticed better tuning, expression and engagement in the performance compared to the previous song. Familiarity with the melody favored intonation and the use of the students' repertoire proved to be very beneficial for the learning process.

By having verified the apprehension of cycles in the execution of the ostinato and seeking to develop listening in parts, we chose an arrangement in canon as the next step. To this end, we conducted research into a song that suited the proposal of the arrangement. The song "Prelúdio" by Raul Seixas was chosen because it is short, repetitive and also because of its lyrical content. A second voice was created based on the harmony and lyrics of the song. In this arrangement, in particular, the development of listening in parts was perceived through the melodic support that the voices provided, observed in the tuning of the interval contained in the bars with diminished chords.

The next song chosen by the students was "Amarelo, Azul e Branco" by Ana Vitória. The original arrangement of the song was used because it presented a similar level of execution to the repertoire already performed by the

Figure 1 shows a musical score for the song "Deixe-Me Ir". It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the accompaniment is on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "Noi-tes em cla - ro ten-tan-do não me'en-vol - ver". The second system continues the melody and accompaniment with the lyrics: "Se - ja'o que Deus qui - ser Dei - xe - me ir". The key signature changes to one sharp (F#) and the time signature remains 4/4. The lyrics are: "Se - ja'o que Deus qui - ser Dei - xe - me ir".

Figure 1: Excerpt from the arrangement of “*Deixe-Me Ir*”.

Source: Personal Archive, 2023.

Figure 2 shows a musical score for the song "Prelúdio". It consists of three systems of music. The first system has a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the accompaniment is on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "So-nho que se so-nha só, é só um so-nho que se so-nha só, mas". The second system continues the melody and accompaniment with the lyrics: "so - nho que se so - nha jun - to é re - a - li - da - de". The third system continues the melody and accompaniment with the lyrics: "So - nho, so - nho só So - nho, so - nho só". The fourth system continues the melody and accompaniment with the lyrics: "Ah! ah! é re - a - li - da - de". The key signature remains three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab) and the time signature remains 3/4.

Figure 2: Excerpt from the arrangement of the song “*Prelúdio*”.

Source: Personal Archive, 2023.

Figure 3: Excerpt taken from the arrangement of the song “Maria, Maria”.

Source: Personal Archive, 2023.

students, with parts in unison, alternating singing and short excerpts in two voices.

With this issue, it was possible to work on aspects of question and answer without necessarily having to do with an echo of a melody, while at the same time listening to parts was sharpened, also requiring a greater state of readiness and attention to the responses of the second voice. It was also possible to take the first steps towards the possibility of singing in two independent voices.

After having verified the success of performing these excerpts in two independent voices, an arrangement along these lines was proposed using the song “Maria, Maria” by

4. **Isorhythmic**: refers to a rhythmic pattern characterized by the repetition of the same rhythmic figure at different musical pitches (REESE, 1940).

5. **D4**: D of the fourth octave (Brazilian notation).

Milton Nascimento. The second voice of this arrangement is isorhythmic,⁴ and it is a unique melody that, unlike the original melody, is repeated in the two main parts of the song, changing only the lyrics.

This was the last arrangement worked on due to the various vocal problems encountered and other extra-musical factors that affected the progress of the workshop over time. It was noted, especially in the second voice, that there was difficulty in achieving the D4⁵ (bar 5), with the presence of constriction, out of tune and excessive horizontality that did not favor the necessary adjustment for its execution. There was also the difficulty of maintaining

one's own voice, octave of the melody after the ritornellos and mixing of vocal registers.

In the final topic, the developments perceived and difficulties encountered during the workshop will be highlighted, in addition to the effectiveness of the approach to sequencing the created arrangements used.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through this research, it was possible to analyze the impacts of teaching group singing using an approach of creating sequenced arrangements according to possibilities of singing in parts for the development of musical skills. Positive results were achieved, despite some limiting factors.

Unfortunately, the work on vocal problems identified in the workshop was limited by time. Not only the overall duration of the workshop, but also the duration of the classes and the incidence of holidays and school shutdowns. Another limiting factor was dropout, both due to the clash of classes with other extracurricular activities, which are always prioritized, and also due to the fear of an imminent recital at the end of the workshop. Finally, the lack of regular study and commitment to the proposed activities also hindered the students' potential for advancement. In discussions with teachers of other disciplines and through our work in regular classes, it was possible to perceive that this is a symptom of a culture of widespread lack of study. We can interpret this apathy as a symptom of the devaluation of teaching and, in particular, music teaching.

Despite this, we had several positive results. The use of arrangements was successful in developing singing and listening in parts. From unison, it was possible to work on

some possibilities of singing in parts through sequenced arrangements, including ostinato, canon, alternating singing and independent voices, observing the importance of listening between voices to ensure greater stability and precision in the execution of the repertoire. At the same time, this process also developed the perception of cycles, attention and flow, necessary for the execution of these arrangements.

Rhythmic skills were well developed, as were melodic ones, although to a lesser degree and later, and it was possible to see that more time would be needed for better melodic development. We observed the apprehension and articulation of musical vocabulary and vocal technique, and the students' musical and cultural repertoire was recognized, valued and expanded through the songs used. Finally, we can recognize the work of socialization, disinhibition and protagonism that singing promotes.

Thus, it is concluded that the didactic approach proposed in this report is an interesting possibility for teaching collective singing in public schools, encompassing the cognitive development of students in a progression of musical complexity that takes into consideration, their learning moment, while recognizing the challenges and needs, and valuing the students' previous knowledge and experiences. It presents musical and extra musical benefits that contribute to the human development of students through music and that will be useful to them throughout their lives.

However, its application requires due time, student dedication and appreciation of music teaching so that these benefits can be achieved in a satisfactory and effective way.

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