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Student Teaching Portfolio

Grand Ledge High School Choirs

SATB Madrigal Choir - Grades 10-12, 41 Students

70 minute classes, 4 times a week

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materials available at danielgdade.com

Improvisation Through Circle Singing Introduction

This creative musicianship project was created in order for my students to explore improvisation through the context of circle singing. In these three lessons, my students began to understand the concept of circle singing by identifying the elements of a circle song in previous arrangements that they have already performed and turning the context they were familiar with into an improvisational playground for creativity. This first step into improvisation serves as a stepping stone into arranging through improv, though I'm not able to delve that deep into the concept for this project, the students learned a great deal about creative musicianship through these three lessons.

The portfolio class for this project is the Madrigal Choir at my student teaching internship at Grand Ledge High School. This class is made up of 41 auditioned students in 10th-12th grade. The choir is an SATB choir that mostly performs unaccompanied music, challenging pieces like *J'entends le moulin* arranged by Donald Patriquin, *Loch Lomond* arranged by Jonathan Quick, or *Witness* arranged by Jack Halloran. This ensemble has previously performed at the Michigan Music Conference in 2020 and the excellence of the singers in the ensemble is proven by their incredible musical ears and heart for singing. Due to the unfortunate circumstances of COVID-19 this choir was only able to meet for four days a week split into two groups for the first half of the trimester. Sopranos and altos meeting Mondays and Wednesdays and tenors and basses meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 60 minutes each. The students began a hybrid schedule for the last month of the trimester, allowing for the choir to meet four days a week in person for 70 minutes a day.

I had introduced the concept of circle singing to the students by having them sing one that I had improvised in front of them before starting this project. I wanted the students to experience what a circle song is like a few times before actually having them create their own in small groups. The goal of these lessons was to facilitate the creativity of my individual students through a medium they haven't created in before. Each student would understand the elements that build a circle song, unfold their own process of creating one with the help of a checklist, and teach their songs to each other to perform as a group. Working to keep students engaged in this process took more adaptation throughout the planning process, as it became difficult for me to conceptualize how the online students would collaborate with their in person colleagues, but after revisiting the plan for lesson two after teaching lesson one, I rewrote my lesson plan thinking mainly about the online students and their participation in the project to keep them engaged.

Note: I will include the original lesson plans as well as the revised lesson plans with notes of why I changed what I did.

Student Teaching Project (Overview)

Objective:

- Teaching students how to improvise using circle singing.
- Teaching students how to record into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) (Soundtrap).

Assessment:

- In the end, students will either perform their piece in class, teaching the parts to the full group of students and performing as a class (in person) *OR* share their recording via zoom with already added percussion.

Materials:

- Terminology Sheet
- Computer
- Headphones
- Soundtrap Account (or other DAW if they have a preference)

National Standards:

- Create
 - **MU:Cr2.1C.Ia:** Assemble and organize sounds or short musical ideas to create initial expressions of selected experiences, moods, images, or storylines.
- Perform
 - **MU:Cr3.2.C.IIa:** Share music through the use of notation, solo or group performance, or technology, and demonstrate and describe how the elements of music and compositional techniques have been employed to realize expressive intent.

Prior Knowledge:

- The students have had previous experience with ear training using intervals on solfege. The concept of circle singing has been introduced and practiced but not in a formal setting.

Lessons:

1. Identifying elements in songs. Finding the motor, interlock, and contrast in pop a cappella music
2. Creating circle songs in small groups. Work asynchronously to record songs.
3. Perform or play songs for the class. Students will provide feedback

Students will work in small groups to create circle songs. Each student in the group will be responsible for a different texture in the song.

Lesson 1: Identifying Elements in Context

Date: 3.11.2021

Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate their understanding of the elements of an improvised circle song through the context of a cappella arrangements they have previously performed. (A)

Assessment:

- Students will complete an assignment on their asynchronous day (hybrid model) identifying the motor, interlock, and contrast in excerpts of a cappella arrangements.

Materials:

- Improvising through Circle Singing Terminology Sheet
- Arrangements of “Electric Love” and “Put Your Head on My Shoulder” for in-class analysis
- Computer
- TV for displaying scores
- Pencils
- Piano
- Analysis Assignment (Google Classroom for online students / paper for in person students)

Grouping:

- Full Group Instruction (Split into two groups)

Procedure:

1. At the end of warm ups, start the students on a circle singing exercise, explaining the different elements (motor, interlock, and contrast) as we create the song.
 - a. Teach by rote: I sing, You sing model
2. After singing through our circle song, hand out the terminology sheet (available in the google classroom for students who are virtual) and ask students to take out their singing valentines songs (Electric Love [SSAA] and Put Your Head on My Shoulder [T'TBB]).
3. Display scores onto the TV while talking about the elements of a circle song.
 - a. Ask students to identify the **motor** in each arrangement. (Play / sing the motor)
 - i. How did you find that?
 - b. Ask students to identify the **interlock** in each arrangement. (play / sing the interlock)
 - i. How did you find that? How does it differ from the motor?
 - c. Ask students to identify the **contrast** in each arrangement. (play / sing the contrast)
 - i. How did you find that? Are there harmonies?
4. Students will complete an analysis assignment in class, identifying these elements in a cappella arrangements. (On Google Classroom for students online)

Lesson One Analysis

“We do music in context here, Mr. Dade.” - Student

I was met with this statement from one of my students when I had asked if they wanted to experiment with creating their own parts for a circle song exercise at the end of warm ups. Though he said it jokingly, it really inspired me for this project. I wanted to take the students out of their comfort zone and get them to start creating their own music, even if it was just a looping two measure idea, it's a huge step towards creating larger original ideas.

For this project, I really wanted the students to conceptualize how they can create music using a strategy called circle singing. The students learned about the different elements that a circle song contains in this lesson. The motor, which creates space and drives the song forward, the interlock, which weaves through the motor using syncopation to create polyrhythm, and finally the contrast, a melodic phrase that contrasts both the motor and interlock. The students learned how to identify these elements in the context of music that they have already performed, then began to venture out into identifying the elements in arrangements they have not seen before. Many of this lesson was led by asking questions, because I feel like the students need to communicate the ideas for the concept to stick with them. I don't love just talking to students, from my personal experience, they just zone out and don't retain any of the important information. It feels like a waste of my time, but more importantly, their time.

After handing out the terminology sheet and assessment sheet, I started the lesson by having the kids stand and sing a circle song with me, giving them the information and purpose of each element on the terminology sheet while also reassuring them that there isn't just one way of doing something. Instead of giving the motor to the basses for the first group, I gave the motor to the tenor 2's, and allowed the baritones and basses to experience the two contrasts, which doesn't often happen. I did the same with the Soprano 2's in the second group, and I had the alto 1's and 2's experience the two contrasts. I allowed them to experience what their end product would be before we even started analyzing things we've done in the past. To make sure that I was able to accommodate my students that are online or learn better through reading I created a terminology for the students to look back on in case they felt like they had forgotten something. I knew the concept of improvisation was foreign to these students, but I knew how much fun they were having with these circle singing exercises I had them sing.

While planning this lesson, I couldn't get that quote that my student said out of my head,

“We do music in context here, Mr. Dade.”

I figured the best way to go about making this new uncomfortable context less foreign for the students was to take the context that they've already known these elements to be in and apply it to a new context, and improvisational context. Luckily, my mentor teacher had asked me to arrange some short Singing Valentines pieces for them, and they wanted it to be a cappella (my specialty). Using these materials (Electric Love [SSAA] and Put Your Head on my Shoulder [TTBB]), I led a discussion with both sections (Group 1: Tenors and Basses / Group 2: Sopranos and Altos) helping them identify the elements of circle songs shown on their terminology sheets in the music that they have already done. Once identified, I had the section sing that part, or element, in the song to experience what that element feels like (motor, interlock, contrast). This

step was extremely important in the development of understanding the type of motifs they would be looking for in the next step of the process.

Since we have an Apple TV in the classroom I figured it would be a great idea to use that to display the materials needed for this lesson on the TV screen. While I did have some technical difficulties with displaying the score for the sopranos and altos, I quickly adapted and had extra hard copies of the arrangement on hand for the students to view and a copy uploaded to the Google Classroom for my online students to follow along with. During the assessment portion, I asked the students the question that we were focusing on and had them answer, either as a group or an individual. I gave the students informal feedback in the form of discussion led by me. I also allowed the students to make comments on what they had thought was the correct answer. If the student seemed to be heading in the wrong direction of what element we were looking for, I tried to help guide them to the correct answer by acknowledging their thought process and reviewing the terminology sheet on what exactly was a motor, interlock, or contrast.

I thought this lesson went extremely well, but if I were to change anything, I would like to change the way I approach the subject to accommodate and acknowledge my online students more. It is so easy to get caught up with the students that are physically in front of you it almost feels like I forget that there are students on the computer screen. I feel like I could have led more of the discussion starting with the focus to my online students so they would feel more included, normalized, and comfortable in this weird environment that is hybrid learning.

Lesson 2: Creating Our Own Circle Songs

Date: 3.15.2021

Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate their understanding of the elements of a circle song through the context of improvisation. (P)
- Students will be able to create a circle song using improvisation on the motor, interlock, and contrast (or elements of a circle song). (C)
- Students will be able to record into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW)

Assessment:

- Students will submit demo recordings of their circle song for feedback. Students will then update their recordings based on feedback.

Materials:

- Terminology Sheet
- Computer
- Soundtrap Account
- Headphones

Grouping:

- Small Groups
- Individual (if the student prefers to work alone)

Procedure:

0. Create a video explaining how to create a soundtrap account and how to record into soundtrap.
1. After Warm-ups ask students if they would like to try to create their own motor, interlock, and contrast as a full group.
 - a. A Volunteer from each section creates an idea to teach to their section.
 - i. Basses - Motor
 - ii. Tenors - Interlock
 - iii. Altos - Contrast
 - iv. Soprano - Contrast Harmony
 - b. Build song from Basses first. Allow tenors to react to bass motor, altos to react to tenor interlock, sopranos to react to alto contrast.
 - i. Assist students who aren't comfortable with their idea.
2. Explain the assignment (creating a circle song), allow students to choose groups (up to 5 people, one group of 6, depending on if a student(s) wants to work alone).
3. Give students time to work on circle songs. Assist groups with their ideas and answer questions.

Edited Lesson Plan Notes:

After teaching the first lesson, I realized that I didn't do much to accommodate my students who were learning virtually at the time. I also wanted to include a checklist to benefit my students to help the understand what they were being graded on. I decided on a checklist instead of a rubric or criteria sheet because I feel that those options allow the students to do the bare minimum and get away with it, but the checklist encourages them to complete as much as they can.

I changed the grouping from small groups and individuals to just small groups because I felt like the collaborative process for this context would be easier to do together so the students could help foster creativity in each other.

Lesson 2: Creating Our Own Circle Songs (REVISED)

Date: 3.16.2021

Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate their understanding of the elements of a circle song through the context of improvisation. (P)
- Students will be able to create a circle song using improvisation on the motor, interlock, and contrast (or elements of a circle song). (C)
- Students will be able to record into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW)

Assessment:

- Students will submit demo recordings of their circle songs on soundtrap for feedback. Students will then update their recordings based on feedback for lesson 3.

Materials:

- Terminology Sheet
- Computer(s) for online students to collaborate with their in person peers in breakout rooms.
- Soundtrap Account
- Headphones
- Circle Song Checklist

Grouping:

- Small Groups

Procedure:

0. Create a video explaining how to create a soundtrap account and how to record into soundtrap.
1. Split the large group into their small groups (evens and odds [groups 1-8]).
2. Explain the assignment (creating a circle song)
 - a. Each student in the group is responsible for creating one (1) element of the circle song
 - b. Follow the checklist to make sure you have all of the required elements covered and to look into more possibilities to what they could add.
3. Give students time to work on circle songs. (25 minutes)
 - a. Walk around and assist groups with their ideas and answer questions. (6 minutes with each group)
 - b. Students with online peers will have a laptop to zoom with their online peers.
4. Bring all of the groups back together and talk about soundtrap for the last 5 minutes.
 - a. How to record, what to expect when recording, how to collaborate via soundtrap
 - b. Answer any questions.
5. Switch between Group A (evens) and Group B (odds). Repeat steps 2-4.

Lesson Two Analysis

While preparing for lesson two, I actually changed my lesson plan quite a bit. Originally the lesson was more interactive between me and the students. I would start by having a volunteer from each section create an element/idea of the circle song to teach to their section and we would perform the circle song as a group. Then I would explain the assignment and give them time to work on their circle songs. Reading through this lesson plan, it is really solid for my in person students but I definitely lacked accommodations for my online students (we are in a hybrid model). When I came up with my redesigned lesson plan, I focused more on how my online students would interact with their in-person counterparts. This allowed me to create a lesson that facilitated the collaboration that I feel we have been missing all year. I borrowed computers from the school and put the students who were online into different breakout rooms and let the in-person students log onto zoom with those computers and sent them to the breakout rooms with their group members. The students then spread around the auditorium and began working on their circle songs.

Fostering an environment that encouraged the online students to unmute and participate with their in-person group members took quite a bit of preparation to make sure things went smoothly, but the outcome was great. The auditorium became this noisy soundscape with students singing the ideas that just came to them. While most students were able to get their foot in the door with improvisation, others seemed to be struggling. I walked around the room to check in with each group to see how they were doing in the process, for the students who were struggling, we talked through the process of writing an essay. English teachers will always have you write a rough draft first, then to revise it, thinking about how meaningful or important the words on the page are and if they take away from the subject or add to it. I had told the students that when I write essays now, I will usually just “word-vomit” into my notes app and write down anything that comes to mind, then go back through it and find what I like to expand on. It was nice to see that this relation between writing and improving helped the students who felt stuck or lost start to get into an idea and began to create music. If the students didn’t like the idea, they would start to think of a new idea. If they liked the idea, they would keep it. If they weren’t sure, they would call me from across the auditorium to ask for help. All of a sudden, the students who were stuck were now throwing out ideas left and right and deciding whether or not to include a specific idea in their unique circle song.

Another thing I added as a way for the kids to understand what they were being graded on was a checklist. Originally I had crafted up a criteria sheet, but that was looking more like a rubric the closer I was getting to finishing it. The checklist served as a way for the kids to know what they were required to have in their circle song, while also giving them ideas of what they could add. I think this addition to the materials needed for this lesson helped the students immensely with creating ideas to make their circle song more unique to them.

I thought the lesson plan seemed pretty sound and would give them enough time to create their songs but quickly realized that 25 minutes to experiment with improvisation with a goal for the first time ever is pretty difficult. This lesson ended up turning into a two day lesson, with the second day giving the students the entire 70 minutes to work on and begin recording their circle songs. Adding a second day to work on their circle songs really helped the students and their confidence with creating more ideas and solidifying their circle songs.

Lesson 3: Performing and Teaching Our Circle Songs

Date: 3.18.2021

Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate their understanding of the elements of a circle song by teaching the parts to their song to the class. (A)
- Students will demonstrate the ability to perform their circle songs as a class. (P)
- Online students will play their circle songs for the class via Zoom. (P)

Assessment:

- Students will teach and perform their circle song with the entire class.
- Students will submit an mp3 recording of their groups circle song via Google Classroom

Materials:

- Piano
- Computer
- TV (for online students to share circle songs)

Grouping:

- Small Groups
- Full Group Instruction

Procedure:

1. At the end of warm ups, allow students time to refresh and practice their circle song in groups.
2. After allotted time, bring students back together and instruct them how to teach circle songs.
 - a. Use the rote teaching method along with the looping method.
 - i. Demonstrate by teaching my own circle song to the class
3. Ask for groups to volunteer to teach and perform their circle songs with the full group.
 - a. Sit at the piano to give students starting pitches.
4. Repeat for each group.

Edited Lesson Plan Notes:

I wanted to show my students that this step is the first step into arranging through improv so I incorporated a circle song led by me in the beginning of this lesson. This had also helped me talk about the process of teaching a circle song to other people. Setting an example by establishing tempo first with snaps and teaching parts going on from there.

Lesson 3: Performing and Teaching Our Circle Songs

Date: 3.22.2021

Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate their understanding of the elements of a circle song by teaching the parts to their song to the class. (A)
- Students will demonstrate the ability to perform their circle songs as a class. (P)
 - Differentiation: Online students will teach me their part to relay to the class, (P)
- Students will provide informal feedback to each other about what they enjoyed in each circle song.

Assessment:

- Students will teach and perform their circle song with the entire class.
- Students will submit an mp3 recording of their groups circle song via Google Classroom.
- Students will complete a reflection on the experience of their process to create a circle song.

Materials:

- Piano
- Computer
- TV (for online students to share circle songs)

Grouping:

- Small Groups
- Full Group Instruction

Procedure:

1. At the end of warm ups, begin teaching a circle song to the students. (Rote Teaching Method)
 - a. Sucker - Jonas Brothers
 - i. Motor - Basses, Interlock (rhythmic) - Baritones, Interlock - Tenor 2s, Interlock Harmony - Tenor 1s, Contrast - Altos, Contrast Harmony - Sopranos
 - b. Explain to students that this is the first step into arranging through improv, as proven by the circle song we just sang.
2. Give students time to refresh circle songs in groups. (10 Minutes)
3. After allotted time, bring students back together and instruct them how to teach circle songs.
 - a. Use the rote teaching method along with the looping method.
 - i. Demonstrated earlier by teaching my own circle song.
4. Ask for groups to volunteer to teach and perform their circle songs with the full group.
 - a. Be available as a resource to help students decide who will sing what element and sing with the students teaching the group.
5. Repeat number four (4) for each group.

Lesson 3 Analysis

Students took on the challenge of teaching their circle songs to the full ensemble in this lesson. This created a different kind of performance that the students have not done much of before, a performance of their own work. The students had chosen which part to give to each section, many chose the motor for the basses, and they acted as leaders to the choir. They would sing their part one at a time building the song until all five (or six) parts are being sung, this can be seen in the video). While working with the students during lesson two, some had expressed concern for having to teach their songs. I forgot how nerve racking and difficult this concept is when you're doing it for the first time. I decided that it would be best for me to help the students out by acting as a resource for them. Instead of making them sing and teach on their own, I would sing with them and be there for any questions they would have while singing their song.

I realized, looking at my lesson plans once again, that I needed to revisit the lesson plan to include my online students more than just "play their circle song." This wouldn't have worked for many reasons, the biggest reason being that this series of lessons was redesigned to encourage the collaboration between students online and students in person. The question I had to ask myself was "How?"

How will these students stay engaged?

How will they help teach their circle songs to the full group?

This lesson was the most difficult to incorporate the online students and have them participate in the teaching of their part in the circle song. I decided that since I was going to be used as a resource anyway, the students could sing their part to me and I would relay it to the section that was assigned for that specific element. Originally, this was something that I didn't think I would need to do, but teaching is all about thinking on your feet. My original plan for the scaffolding of these lessons was that students would require less and less help from me as we moved through this process. This may have been true with the scaffolding between the first and second lesson, but when I got to lesson 3, I was more involved in the teaching process with the students.

Overall, the students learned a lot about the vulnerability of creating music and enjoyed the process (frustration and all) of collaborating with their peers. I felt like the way that I incorporated the online students in this lesson got them participating at least a little bit in order to teach at least one person (me) their part to their group's circle song.

Video Form

Video Segment 1:

- Lesson #1 - Identifying Elements in Context - 3.11.21
 - Students learned about the elements of circle songs and then identified those elements in context of arrangements they have already learned and performed. Once comfortable with identifying those elements in a context they know, students will identify these elements in arrangements they have not seen before.

Video Segment 2:

- Lesson #2 - Creating Our Own Circle Songs - 3.16.21
 - Students review the elements of circle songs and talk about the process of creating circle songs. Each student will be responsible for creating and singing one element of the circle song.

Video Segment 3:

- Lesson #3 - Teaching and Performing Our Circle Songs - 3.22.21
 - Students teach their circle songs to the full ensemble and perform as a group. Students then reflect on their process of creating and teaching songs.

Improvisation Through Circle Singing : A Reflection on Teaching and Learning

Addressing the three different artistic processes within these lessons was fairly easy for me. I wanted the students to experience the performing aspect of singing a circle song and to assess what circle singing is through the first lesson, identifying the elements. I created a different facet of learning for all the students to experience to try to accommodate all of the different types of learners. The creating process was addressed in lesson two, where students would work together to create their own unique versions of each element of a circle song. Though I would only really give the students four different parts when teaching them a circle song (one for each section), I challenged the students to create a fifth element by putting them in groups of five (and one group of six). The students learned about the performing aspect in two different ways. Performing circle songs that I taught them in lesson one and three, and teaching their own circle songs and performing them as a full ensemble in lesson three.

I used many of the skills that I have gained over the years through my own musicianship. In the first lesson, I was able to use arrangements that I wrote for these students as a way to get their foot into the door of understanding the terminology I used throughout the three lessons. This also helped them understand what each element sounds and looks like for future reference in the latter part of this first lesson and moving forward for lesson two and three. Examples of this can be seen in the video for lesson one. Throughout the two days for lesson two, when the students were creating their own circle songs, I used prior knowledge and skill sets that I've gained from composing, improvising, and arranging to help students discuss their ideas and develop their ideas further to help them create a tonal landscape to explore. The students were very willing to step outside of their comfort zone and try something different and create something new. This is not an easy thing for anyone to do and these students worked hard to create something they were proud of.

The classroom was split into two small groups for the first lesson so I was able to use the technology in the choir room. I mainly used the Apple TV to stream scores and youtube videos for all of the students to view. To accommodate my online students in this lesson, all of the information, forms, and links were available on the Google Classroom page. You can see the use of technology in the video for lesson one. I also had access to a piano in my classroom, but I try to teach mainly without a piano. Most of my use for a piano is to either give starting pitches, or have the students hear something together without having to sing the parts together. For lessons two and three, my class took place in the auditorium, which allowed me to give the students their own spaces to work in and bounce ideas back and forth without singing over another group. This also allowed me to walk around the space and talk with each group about their processes and give them advice on how to move forward or help groups that were struggling with any part of the process.

Originally I thought these lessons would work great in a hybrid format, but I found myself editing my lesson plans before teaching the next lesson to try to accommodate my students in every which way. Even though this format of teaching isn't "normal," it is our current normal and I think it is important that we create and adapt our lessons to include those students who are also online. These lessons really taught me about what it is like to lesson plan for a whole unit and visually showed me how ever-changing teaching can be. For the most part, proven by my students' reflections in lesson three, the information that I wanted them to learn was learned, but I know I can always find better ways to teach information to my students. These

lessons show promise for future teaching and I would like to expand more into arranging through improvisation with students if I had more time.