



2017-18 Music Curriculum Report

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The music program here at Miquon strives to achieve two main goals at the very minimum: to provide students with music literacy and to give them what they need to express themselves through music. The requirements of music literacy that I embrace have been well represented by the National Standards for Music Education, as devised by the National Association for Music Education, and envision a music program in which all students are exposed to:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Developmentally-appropriate activities for each age group guarantee that all students receive the fullest musical experience possible. Students will work their way up through their musical skills in a spiral curriculum where all of the nine standards will be met over and over at different levels of depth.

In addition to the mere technical aspects of music making, my personal emphasis will always be on music as a team effort, a group experience. The message I want to convey to my students is that ensemble music is the larger outcome of a myriad of smaller components in which everybody participates and to which everyone is responsible.

Nursery and Kindergarten

Nursery met for music class once a week for a half hour, while Kindergarten met once a week for 40 minutes, and both of them come the music room in half groups. In addition, I visit them once a week for 15-20 minutes for a sing together where we build up a repertoire of songs that will accompany them through the years.

Almost all of the music activities experienced by these groups in music class relies heavily on imagery and pretend play. In each class period, we always have to "go" somewhere, meet people or animals, open doors or cook meals on a fire, travel by air or sea, climb mountains. Any suggestions from their fervid imaginations were used as a motivational tool and turned into a vocal or instrumental activity. Free movement done by walking, running, hopping, swaying, spinning, stomping, and clapping is channeled into more structured round dances as well as into a coordinated percussive gesture, to be applied to both drums and xylophones.

Singing at this age takes a huge portion of the music class. We began and ended each class with a "hello" and a "goodbye" song, and we devoted time to songs with words in our weekly sing with the joint group of both Nursery and Kindergarten. Here, in order to build a shared repertoire of songs, we touched on many genres: traditional "campfire" short rounds, children's songs by the likes of Malvina Reynolds and Elizabeth Gilpatrick, and even a few Beatles' (*Octopus Garden*, *Hello Goodbye*, and *Here Comes the Sun* for starters).

Along the way we selected their favorites yet to be shared at Winter Assembly and the children picked the traditional *I Love the Mountains*, *Make New Friends* by Rachel Rambach, *Pretty Planet* by John Forster & Tom Chapin. Every year we also add in the inspiring *One Small Voice* by Jack Hartmann.

Kindergarten

In Kindergarten, the West African Market Day at the end of the year allowed us to explore singing in a foreign language through African folk songs such as *Funga Alafia*, a Yoruba welcome song, the Ghanaian game songs *Sansa Kroma*, *Kye Kye Kule*, and *Obwasimisa*, and the Zimbabwean hand game song *Sorida*. Though not strictly West African, the experience was crowned with the performance of the South African national anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, which became famous as a symbol of independence and resistance to apartheid, eventually raising to the status of pan-African anthem.

Most of the vocal work at this age, however, is done with melodies without words, or better yet sung in what music teachers call "neutral syllable." Associating these melodies with movement or props, from scarves and bean bags to hand drums and finger cymbals, allows for isolating specific intervals and thus for good ear training. A Halloween favorite activity, for instance, saw us ringing at the doorbell of the witch's house by singing a minor third interval (*i.e.*, So-Mi) and knocking on the door on the resting tone (Do). On the instrumental level, we worked on rhythmic echo and imitation by both chanting and using a variety of unpitched percussions. In addition, the students were exposed to the concept of "instrumental section" and took turns using various families of instruments.

By the end of the year, kindergarten students are also introduced to tonal and rhythm solfege. Through pretend play we approached rhythm solfege with a made up "frog" language comprised of both "ribbit" and "croak" that allowed everybody to "speak" simple rhythm pattern composed of eight and quarter notes (ribbits and croaks). Tonal solfege also makes its first appearance as

a “foreign language,” the language of music, through the introduction of the first five tonal syllables Do, Re, Mi, Fa, and So in simple melodies.

First & Second Grade

First and Second Grade met for music class twice a week for 45 minutes, once in half groups and once as whole group.

In these groups singing is still the big component of any music activity accompanied by the use of imagery and pretend play as a motivational tool. In addition, at this age, we can try to translate the music experienced through listening, moving, singing and chanting into concepts such as high and low pitch, melody contour, long and short rhythm values. Throughout the year, short melodies like the British *To Stop The Train*, the German *Oh, How Lovely is the Evening* and *Coffee*, *The First Snow* by Elizabeth Gilpatrick, provided us with a few early attempts to sing rounds.

The groups also sung songs more geared to convey a meaning through few of the child-oriented folk songs of Malvina Reynolds like *Let it Be*, a song about how to enjoy nature without damaging it, *You Can't Make a Turtle Come Out*, a song about how to handle friendships, and the most famous *Magic Penny* where love is interestingly seen as a form of currency and should therefore be treated as an investment. Stemming from both the fall and the spring conference week, which I spend with both first and second grade groups in succession, we also touched on songs with a more classic pop flavor lining up a few Beatles, John Lennon, Bob Marley, and Bob Dylan.

Leading up to Winter Assembly, the group worked more on integrating the singing with a basic accompaniment on xylophones and glockenspiels. Songs and instrumental arrangements, again by Elizabeth Gilpatrick, would provide an early “orchestral” experience.

As the school year progressed the students are introduced to John Curwen's hand signs and the tonal syllables (Do, Re, Mi, etc.) as a form of visual solfege. Such a powerful tool allowed the students to analyze known familiar melodies and figure out what notes needed to be played. As they rendered the music on the xylophones, the notes became a visible sequence and matched the aural memory of the given melody.

As far as rhythm is concerned, students were exposed to the Kodaly rhythm notation. Here the spoken rhythm learned in Nursery and Kindergarten was experienced through movement in ways that channel more coordination and awareness. We first walked rhythm by matching our movement to “run run” and “step” values (eighth and quarter notes), an activity that fosters coordination and encourages students to echo and improvise rhythm patterns.

Subsequently, each student was given the opportunity to “write down” the rhythm patterns in Kodaly notation using wooden sticks first, and on paper and whiteboard afterwards. Such work on the awareness of movement also allowed the group to easily dive into line and round dances, from the always fun Farandole (spiral dance) to the gipsy *Hassapo Servico* by the

French musical group Bratsch, through the staple of Orff-trained teachers' *Seven Jumps*. By the end of the year we were making up our own line dance Virginia Reel style.

For Winter Assembly, the students put all this work on rhythm and coordination into playing rhythmic "inserts," as in the instrumental "play along" to Amilcare Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours*, and tonal "ostinato," (that is, "repetitive,") parts as the elemental accompaniment to the simple song by Gilpatrick, *Books Fall Open*.

By the end of the school year this age group was able to have a more autonomous "orchestral" experience by exploring different pentatonic patterns on xylophones (C, F, and G pentatonic). This allowed us to approach harmony and the concept of "arranging" our music, and enabled the students to accompany themselves to few simple songs of the British nursery rhyme tradition, such as *Tinker Tailor*, *Wee Willie Winkie*, and *Bobby Shaftoe*.

Third & Fourth Grade

Third and Fourth Grade met for music class twice a week for 45 minutes, mostly in half groups and as whole groups when needed.

This is the age where ensemble music becomes possible. The use of instruments is more prominent, and the students' increasing familiarity with rhythm notation and tonal syllables (Do, Re, Mi, etc.) is layered with the introduction of note letter names for absolute pitches. This joining allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between singing and performing on instruments.

The recorder was also introduced at this age as a way to approach a more strict instrumental technique and fingering, and as a way to pursue more complexity in the arrangements. The recorder pieces were then rearranged to include xylophones and drums allowing for the introduction of the concept of orchestration as the ensemble eventually includes pitched and unpitched percussion as well as wind instruments.

With a full complement of Orff instruments and recorders, these groups could present arrangements of Native American music at Winter Assembly. In the second half of the year our "orchestral" experience explored more the concept of "section" and "part." The children learned what section plays what, what is the role of the melody, what is the role of the bass, what is the role of the notes between the melody and the bass.

Medieval, simple dance music helped us gel together before we tackled the big end of year project of performing an instrumental arrangement of the school anthem *Miquon in Our Hearts*. The arrangement actually changes every year and this year third and fourth graders were thrilled to have keyboards guitars and snare drums joining in with the recorders on the melody. Everyone explored each instrument and tried each part before they could eventually express a preference on which section they wanted to be part of for the final performance. They all worked with such drive and motivation, but it was a "super group" of all fourth graders from both Wendy

and Sara and Rachel and Marie that eventually performed live at the graduation ceremony on the last day of school (the third graders are looking forward to their moment to shine next year!).

Singing was approached through the continuous use of the same short songs also experienced by first and second graders. With third and fourth graders, however, we were able to really stress the round singing of these traditional and modern canons. Melodies such as these provide the best ear training experience for the students as they can really focus on the melodic content without the distraction of having to remember too many lyrics! In addition, to link music to their Social Studies curriculum, we explored Native American melodies and how they differ from “western music.” We sang *Cradle Song*, an Odahwah lullaby in its original lyrics and an adaptation of an instrumental native flute piece with english lyrics, *Mother Earth*, both eventually presented at Winter Assembly.

Fifth and Sixth Grade

Fifth and Sixth Graders met for music class twice a week for forty-five minutes each. One class is the general music portion of the program which they attend in half groups. For the second class of the week the students were rearranged in two whole groups that were assigned to either a vocal class, where they experienced a more formal choir setting, or to an instrumental one, where they experienced an orchestral woodwind instrument like flute or clarinet. The two groups switched halfway through the year so that all students were exposed to both experiences.

In this age group, more than the others, the spiral nature of the curriculum is very evident. Students of this age are still involved in ensemble music on the Orff instruments (*i.e.*, xylophones, glockenspiels, recorders and small percussions). We deepened our ongoing exploration into the concept of orchestration. Specifically, we explored the elements of a musical piece besides a main melody.

Leading to Winter Assembly, we undertook an “Orff” arrangement of John Williams’ *Imperial March* of Star Wars’ fame. As the students recognized and made their own the building blocks of the iconic Darth vader’s theme, they also seemed to appreciate the irony of rendering such supposedly intimidating music with glockenspiels and tone chimes. To double down on our light hearted approach to refined music, we introduced the piece by an arrangement of the main melody on “boomwhackers” (pvc pipes tuned to pitch that make their sound when banged together), and the students had a grand time choreographing it as to look like a lightsaber fight! Eventually, the message that we wanted to come across is that music is defined by what we do -- not by what we use.

This is also the age in which the final transition to “adult” instruments is made. In the weekly instrumental ensemble the students had an introduction to a woodwind instrument, a choice between clarinet and flute. We tackled the basics of embouchure and sound production and we worked our way to a pool of six notes on each instrument. It was enough to play simple melodies and to provide them with a little harmony, as heard in Winter Assembly’s performance

of *Hot, Quite Cross, Buns*, where the flutes harmonized the clarinets and then traded places.

In the general music portion of the course the students are introduced to guitar and keyboard instruments, focusing on basic technique and fingering. On guitar and keyboard especially, the many students in the group who are already proficient were encouraged to share how they began the instrument and coach their peers in self-managed lessons.

After working with each instrument, all this knowledge has been transferred to computers in a series of classes in which the students could document using online sequencing software, their melodic and rhythmic ideas. This immediately translated into a “composer’s workshop” where each student was allowed full creative freedom on their original music, provided each could answer the overarching questions that guided the whole experience: “Can I sing it?” And, “Can I remember it?” Given the variety of instruments with which we were now familiar--clarinet, flute, guitar, and keyboard-- it felt fair to eventually add a third guideline: “Can I play it?”

Meanwhile, in the vocal ensemble, the group embarked in a journey of ear training that involved sight singing via tonal solfege and Curwen hand signs, classical canons, and pop songs! For Winter Assembly the group performed *Like a Bird* by Luigi Cherubini (1760 - 1842) with modern lyrics by Edward Bolkovac juxtaposed to Pharrell Williams’ *Happy*, but we also indulged in the a cappella version of *Since U Been Gone* by Kelly Clarkson, or the classic pop of Cyndi Lauper’s *True Colors*, and a few works of the Beatles.

Finding Meaning

We devoted some time to also focus on the meaning of each song trying to remind ourselves that when we sing we tell a story and we need to know whether we are singing about a break up, an exhilarating feeling of happiness, or self discovery and validation.

The focus on meaning was eventually transferred, by the end of the year, to the song choices the sixth graders made as a group for their graduation performance. They analyzed and compared the lyrics of a few songs of their liking so as to find the “perfect” graduation song, a song that could speak of closure, belonging, new challenges, memories. The graduating class chose *A Million Dreams* from the movie *The Greatest Showman*, and *Seasons of Love* from the Broadway hit *Rent*, songs about an open ended future full of possibilities, and a celebration of memories and the appreciation of one’s past, respectively.

Of course the apotheosis of their singing path here at Miquon is the final performance on graduation day of the elegant counterpoint of the school anthem, *Miquon in Our Hearts* by Tony Hughes--the sixth graders’ “secret melody,” *Fields of Childhood* by John Krumm. Though this group felt so emotional during the whole ceremony that it might be remembered as the “choked up” Class of 2018!