



2018-19 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 both 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 rely 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 a few Beatles' songs (*Octopus Garden*, *Hello Goodbye*, and *Here Comes the Sun* for starters). We included songs as diverse as the '60s Spiderman animated series' theme and 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.

Along the way we selected their favorites to be shared at Winter Assembly and the children picked the gospel *This Little Light Of Mine*, by Harry Dixon, *Hello Goodbye* by Lennon-McCartney, and *Kindness Is Everywhere* by Pam Donkin. Every year we also add in the inspiring *One Small Voice* by Jack Hartmann.

In Kindergarten, the Mexican Fiesta at the end of the year allowed us to savor singing in a foreign language through the folk songs from Latin America: the counting song *Diez Deditos*, the poetic celebration of colors *De Colores*, and the lullaby *Los Pollitos*.

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 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 foreign language, loosely inspired by the aboriginal Haka, comprised of only two words "chaka" and "hu" that allowed everybody to "speak" simple rhythm pattern composed of eight and quarter notes (chakas and hus). 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 a 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* or *An Elephant With A Trunk* by Elizabeth Gilpatrick, provided us with a few early attempts to sing rounds. Both Ben and Celia's and Marea and Sara's groups liked the Palestinian/Israeli dance song *Debka Hora* so much that we had to include it in our winter assembly presentation.

The groups also sung songs more geared to convey a meaning such as a 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 spring conference week and their end of year play, we also touched on songs like the *Spiderman* theme and the '60s classic *Georgie Girl*, by The Seekers.

Meanwhile, instrumental skills are refined by building an accompaniment for a song on xylophones and glockenspiels. "Chunks" of the song are turned into repetitive parts (the musical term is "ostinato" which means "stubborn" in Italian) that can be layered so as to provide a rhythmic and harmonic background to the melody at hand. The final product could be seen at winter assembly's performances of *December Winds*, and *Hide Not Your Talents* where the students alternate the singing of the song with the playing of instrumental part making it a more comprehensive wholesome 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 solfège. 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 Roma *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.

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 simple songs like *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* by The Tokens.

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.

Singing followed closely with melodies that grew in length and complexity, and allowed the group to experience round singing. Both groups worked wonderfully on the song *Light A Candle For Peace*, by Shelley Murley, where the two main motives of the tune eventually overlap creating a true two part song. The instrumental and the singing experience come eventually together when the students begin to sing and accompany themselves on Orff instruments as seen in the performance of *Welcome To This House* and *Song of the Seasons* 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. All these concepts come alive when we tackle 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 see the boomwhackers (pvc pipes tuned to individual pitches much like a bell choir) joining in with the recorders, xylophones, and glockenspiels. Everyone explored each instrument and tried each part before they could eventually express a preference on which section they wanted to be part of in 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 Rich 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!).

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 ensemble, where they experienced a more formal choir setting, or to an instrumental one, where they experienced an orchestral woodwind instrument, flute or clarinet, and a brass instrument, the trumpet. 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). In the general music class we began the year posing an overarching question: what constitutes a musical phrase? We proceeded then to answer it in a “emergent curriculum” fashion.

With Louis and Jeri’s group, our work was closely tied to their overall curricular theme of exploring Japanese culture. We started then to sort out what makes a melody sound less “western” and more “exotic” to our ears using the Japanese folk song Sakura as a term of comparison, and we discovered the Japanese pentatonic scale. Restricted to that pool of notes, the students were tasked to find short four beat melodies on our xylophones and glockenspiels that would sound “unfamiliar” and yet pleasing to their ears. These phrases were eventually put together into a larger composition carefully arranged according to the notion of “Ma” (space), so ubiquitous in Japanese esthetics, and it was presented at winter assembly.

With Diane and Sarah’s group, the notion of phrase was explored through an unlikely instrument: the “thumb piano” - the African kalimba. Kalimbas have their notes arranged differently than most instruments with the low notes at the center and the high notes symmetrically moving out to the edges. Such layout forced us to “see” our musical phrases differently as we could not rely on a “left to right” roadmap, and all of their small compositions on kalimba were to eventually overlap into one single piece of music. Because everyone agreed that kalimbas look awfully close to a handheld device (smartphone or tablet) we proceeded to stage a performance for winter assembly that could be seen as a social satire of a more and more isolating digital world, our “*Texting Extravaganza!*”

Fifth and sixth grade are also the age in which the final transition to “adult” instruments is made. In the general music portion of the course, the students are introduced to keyboard instruments, focusing on basic technique and fingering. The many students in the group who are already proficient on piano were encouraged to share how they began the instrument and coach their

peers in self-managed lessons. After a few lessons on the instrument, all this knowledge has been transferred to computers in a series of classes in which the students could document their melodic and rhythmic ideas using online sequencing software. 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 getting familiar --clarinet, flute, trumpet, and keyboard-- it felt fair to eventually add a third guideline: “Can I play it?”

In the weekly instrumental ensemble the students had an introduction to woodwind and brass technique. 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 *Mary Lost Her Little Lamb*, where the flutes harmonized with the clarinets, and the trumpets had a counter melody.

Meanwhile, in the vocal ensemble, the group embarked on a journey of ear training that involved sight singing via tonal solfège and Curwen hand signs, classical canons, and pop songs! For Winter Assembly the group performed *Sounds Of The Singing School* by Charles Clinton Case (1843 - 1918) juxtaposed to USA for Africa’s *We Are The World*, but we also indulged in a few works of the Beatles, as well as singing the South African national anthem *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika* in two of the three part original harmony.

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 treasured memories and self discovery, inspiring the whole world to make a difference, or just singing about singing!

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 *In My Life*, by The Beatles, and *Circle Game*, by Joni Mitchell, with both songs being a wonderful celebration of memories and the appreciation of one’s past.

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. A very emotional moment for our graduates that this year was delivered beautifully.