The Role of Choral Activity in the Harmonious Development of Children: Educational and Psychological Perspectives

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Abstract: *The present study starts from the premise that an activity which should be so naturally integrated into children's lives – accompanying them and supporting their beautiful growth – comes to be perceived as unnatural and uncomfortable for young adults. It should be emphasized that the formation of vocal culture is a continuous, long-term process, beginning with the understanding of the vocal mechanism and leading to its conscious assimilation through the gradual development of vocal technique skills.*
Choral activity represents an attractive means through which young people are offered the opportunity to develop and express their artistic potential.

Key-words: *choral singing, exercises for the development of musical abilities, the child's holistic development, digital tools*

1. Introduction. The Importance of Music Education

Music education is the instructional-educational process of forming abilities and skills for perceiving and understanding reality through sound images, by means of the semantic decoding of musical language embedded in the written text of the score and/or received through auditory perception (Oarcea 2024, 47).

The **purpose of music** as a **school subject** is to contribute to the holistic development of students alongside other school subjects (general aim), and, respectively, to contribute to students' aesthetic education together with the other arts studied in school (specific aim) (Şerfezi 1967, 17).

Music develops a series of psycho-intellectual processes, skills, and abilities such as logical thinking, memory, divided attention, creativity, a sense of order and discipline, punctuality, willpower, and emotional sensitivity.

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Moreover, the study of music makes a significant contribution to **the development of intellectual qualities** engaged during musical learning and practice – analysis, differentiation of sound qualities, rhythmic structures, rhythmic-melodic structures, active listening, synthesis, comparison, association or dissociation, abstraction, generalization and awareness, as well as aesthetic judgment (Lupu 2020, 27).

With regard to musical activity, one of the main challenges faced by the music education teacher is undoubtedly the observation of **children's unequal ability to sing** – some can easily differentiate and reproduce the sounds of a melody, while others fail to do so, which often leads to their marginalization and labeling as tone-deaf, voiceless, or lacking musical hearing. Furthermore, it can be noted that many students in the latter category achieve good or very good results in other subjects, with music being the only discipline they can approach, at best, theoretically. Lacking the artistic practice necessary for forming an emotional attachment, they develop a hostile attitude toward music. For this reason, the teacher has the obligation to find psychological, pedagogical, and musical solutions to attract these children to music (Lupu 2020, 10).

What should be emphasized is that musical aptitude is a universal phenomenon, present in every individual at least in a primary, incipient form. Therefore, it can be developed through instruction and education. Numerous educators and specialists have firmly expressed their views regarding the importance of children's music education and support the universality of musical aptitudes, advocating access to music education for all children – see Liviu Comes (1918–2004), George Breazul (1887-1961), Magdalena Ursu, Grigore Panţâru (1905-1981), Jean Lupu (b. 1940), Dan Voiculescu (1940-2009), Ana Motora-Ionescu, Ion Şerfezi (1913-1992), among others.

If greater attention were given to singing during the first seven years of life, learning music would no longer be so difficult. The more this concern is delayed, the more a child's musical education and vocal development are neglected, and children arrive at school with an underdeveloped voice. In such situations, some of them claim that they do not have a voice. In reality, they experience a fear of appearing inferior to classmates who can sing. As a result of such traumatic experiences, the child becomes insecure, inhibited, and withdrawn, **deliberately avoiding singing** – an attitude that leads to the disappearance of musical aptitudes, even when these were initially evident, due to the prolonged interruption of practice.

In the case of children who do not display pronounced musical aptitudes, who have not benefited from favorable family conditions, and for whom musicality

seems absent, appropriate music education can prove that it is merely hidden; it emerges in communities where music is cultivated, sometimes even reaching high artistic levels (Munteanu 2013, 55).

Therefore, the child must be encouraged and motivated; the teacher must show patience and goodwill, win the child over with ingenuity, create a pleasant atmosphere, conduct engaging lessons or rehearsals, and, of course, express confidence in the child's future development.

It is important to emphasize an essential aspect: if the child takes pleasure in singing, deficiencies will be remedied. Beyond an individual's technical capacity and knowledge, **the success of education** depends on personal, voluntary engagement in the respective activity. Thus, the work of *affective recovery* – reconnecting the child emotionally with music – precedes and conditions success in their *musical development and remediation* (Lupu 2020, 65).

2. Conducting experience and the complexity of choral activity in children and young people

As a conductor, the experience I have gained through direct work with children (approximately ages 3 to 12), as well as with adolescents and university students[2], over more than 10 years of activity (2014–present), has opened up a new perspective for me and helped me understand and find solutions to make this musical activity enjoyable, interesting, invigorating, energizing, or relaxing. It should be noted, however, that choral activity remains complex because it involves cultivating the voice, developing rhythmic skills, enhancing divided attention, improving musical hearing, memorization, coordination with other choir members, alignment with the conductor's intentions, discipline and organization of the ensemble for concerts, stage presence, emotional control, and more.

Between December 2017 and December 2024, the children's choir performed approximately 35 concerts and shows, either as the sole organizer of the event or in collaboration with other choirs, artistic groups, or educational institutions. These included thematic Christmas and holiday concerts (*Christmas Story*, initiating the series *Waiting for Santa Claus*, *The Nativity of the Lord*, *Lighting the Lights* in various locations in Brașov and nearby towns) or concerts with diverse themes (*In the World of Cartoons*, *All You Need Is Love*), meditative religious music concerts (*Magnificat*), charity events (*Winter Charity Fair*, Reduta Cultural Center,

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Brașov), festival participations (*Musica Coronensis Festival*, *Jazz & Blues Festival*, *AFECT Festival*), and choral competitions (with the performance group of the choir, we participated in *Art Brașov Estival*). It is important to highlight that choral activity was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a significant interruption. As an adaptation measure, we organized two online concerts (2020, 2021) and one concert without a live audience (2022); 2023 marked a period of relaxation of restrictions and a gradual return to normality; however, only from 2024 were we able to carry out complex activities and consolidate external collaborations.

The educational context of 2025 continues to shape cultural activity, imposing significant constraints on the organization of artistic events. In particular, changes and challenges in the education system have limited the time and resources available for choral activities, affecting both concert planning and collaboration opportunities. As a conductor, it is crucial to identify ongoing solutions that ensure the continuity of activity and maintain, at least partially, a sense of normality. Engagement and commitment to the coordinated group are essential factors in finding and implementing these solutions. In this regard, projects of considerable scope are currently under development and are planned to be realized in the near future.

3. Development of vocal and aural skills in the pre-choral performance stage

Conducting a musical activity requires participants to develop specific skills, such as voice development, musical ear, musical memory, and sense of rhythm. Accordingly, some of the activities implemented with children are designed to target these aspects.

The first activity focuses on **breathing exercises** and **vocal training (vocalizations).** Since these exercises should be integrated as a fundamental component of rehearsal, a preparatory routine was established. Without proper breathing and adequate vocal warm-up, singing performance is likely to be compromised from the outset.

Common breathing deficiencies are taken into consideration, including shallow breathing, inhaling mid-word, exhaling before singing begins, singing with a clenched jaw, and nasal or guttural vocalization. Following an explanation of how to address these issues and a theoretical overview of the physical mechanisms involved in achieving correct breathing, a series of practical demonstrations is conducted. These include prolonged exhalation on the consonant „s" or double „s", mimicking the act of smelling flowers, inflating a balloon, imitating a car horn,

exercises for producing long and short tones[3], and adapting breathing to the structure of musical phrases[4] (Șerfezi 1967, 116).

It should be emphasized that proper **breathing exercises** foster dynamic automatism during singing. Generally, inhalation is associated with the sensation of „yawning", whereas exhalation corresponds with the vocal placement required for tone production.

Given that **breathing** must be adapted to the physiological and aesthetic requirements of the musical work, particularly regarding controlled inhalation and exhalation[5] (Șerfezi 1967, 113), **exercises** targeting **breathing** must be accorded particular significance.

Furthermore, **breathing exercises** contribute to maintaining physiological and psychological equilibrium in stressful or emotionally charged situations, such as concerts or examinations. They can also be employed for psychological relaxation and tension release, progressively mitigating factors of a psychological nature (e.g., shyness, inhibition) or temperamental characteristics (e.g., hyperactivity, passivity).

Regarding **vocal training exercises (vocalizations)**, their purpose is to prepare the vocal apparatus for actual performance. These exercises are conducted at the beginning of the singing activity, and their duration may range from 10 to 15 minutes, depending on the challenges encountered and the time available.

The exercises can involve scales, arpeggios, scale fragments, or melodic-rhythmic patterns sung on the vowels *a, e, i, o, u*, on the syllables *ma, me, mi, mo, mu* or on specific words with varied sonorities (Șerfezi 1967, 117). They may also include deep-breathing exercises, preparatory melodic exercises performed with a specific context (e.g., imitating instruments, mimicking the voices of various animals, or representing daily activities through onomatopoeic sounds), as well as the performance of short melodies within a predetermined framework.

Vocal technique exercises should be conducted in a manner that does not strain children's voices or cause fatigue, while addressing various technical aspects; they should also aim to expand the vocal range.

Since **the ear** and **the voice** are the most important elements in achieving the specific educational objectives of music as a subject, **the second activity** focuses on **the development of the ear** and **the melodic sense.**

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[3] The purpose is to train students in controlled exhalation according to the duration of musical notes; for instance, by singing a scale with note lengths specified by the conductor.

[4] The diversity of phrasing presented in these examples offers an opportunity for students to adjust their breathing to a range of concrete musical situations.

[5] Influenced by the longer duration of sung notes compared to spoken ones, as well as by the structure of the musical phrase, the indicated tempo, and other factors.

Musical hearing acuity can be developed through specialized exercises (listening sessions, musical games), designed according to the age and skill level of the participants (Lupu, 2020, 86). These exercises involve both *perception* and *reproduction*.

Auditory recognition exercises include identifying and intoning pitches, reproducing a melodic line that proceeds stepwise or by leaps, performing the C Major and A minor scales, and carrying out various exercises based on the structure of these two scales.

Regarding **melodic exercises**, they involve determining pitch (high, medium, and low tones), specifying pitch using musical syllables (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do2), establishing the direction of melodic movement (ascending, descending, horizontal, or mixed motion), exercises in stepwise intonation, ascending and descending scale practice, sustaining certain notes before continuing the scale in its original direction, repeating notes before continuing the scale, pausing the scale intonation and then resuming it, reversing ascending and descending motion, resuming scale intonation after reaching a particular degree, exercises in arpeggiated succession, simultaneous pitch intonation, and singing in canon (Șerfezi 1967, 158–170). Throughout these exercises, emphasis should be placed on producing clear voices and achieving high-quality sound.

It is recommended that **voice development exercises** focus primarily on notes in the middle register, from which the singer can then progress to the lower and upper registers. In the middle register, notes are sung naturally, without effort, as this is the register used in speech. Following the middle register, it is advisable to approach the lower register, which is less demanding than the upper register; the latter becomes more accessible thanks to the vocal training previously established through exercises in the middle and lower registers.

The third activity targets the execution of **rhythmic exercises**. These are necessary for developing the skills to *perceive, intone, and perform note durations*, and they focus on rhythmic reading of the studied songs, as well as conducting song-based games (the teacher selects pieces that inspire specific movements).

The next **activity** involves learning a repertoire of songs, with the ultimate goal of performing a concert or a series of concerts aligned with the chosen theme. Depending on the group's abilities and needs, the teacher may adopt a segmented learning approach, correcting intonation errors, achieving accurate and then expressive intonation of the melody, and memorizing both the melodic line and the lyrics.

Since the supreme quality of a voice is not volume but *musicality*, children are instructed not to shout or strain their voices while singing. On the contrary,

they are encouraged to sing more quietly so that they can better monitor their performance and, importantly, protect their vocal organs. These aspects are essential for producing a clean and accurate sound, and such an approach is actively encouraged when working with children.

Regarding the **criteria for selecting songs**, they should possess aesthetic and educational value and be accessible to the students (Șerfezi 1967, 54).

Equally important are the educational discussions surrounding the song – an essential moment within the process of learning a piece. Beyond fostering children's observational skills, the wealth of ideas and information contained in songs enriches their knowledge and develops their vocabulary (Lupu 2020, 33).

Furthermore, learning songs with lyrics highlights another aspect requiring attention, namely **diction**. This is one of the means of conveying the poetic content specific to a vocal work (Șerfezi 1967, 121). The clarity of **diction** in singing should be comparable to that in speech. It is particularly important to clearly separate successive words in a song and to pay special attention to the syllables at the beginning and end of each word.

Diction exercises can be integrated at the start of rehearsal or accompany the process of learning a new song. They focus on two main aspects: pronouncing words as in regular speech (to achieve ordinary diction), and pronouncing words according to the rhythm of the musical work (to achieve singing-specific diction) (Șerfezi 1967, 122).

Properly executed phrasing, with clear articulation of consonants and vowels in each word, ensures fluency and expressiveness in musical discourse[6].

Finally, the teacher may incorporate **body movement**, he can use **rhythmic accompaniment** (maracas, tambourine, claves) or **rhythmico-melodic accompaniment** (piano, guitar) to enhance the overall process. Suggesting complementary interpretive methods contributes to supporting, directing, correcting, and stimulating the group's expressive affectivity (Oarcea 2024, 70).

4. Choral activity as a vehicle for artistic development and educational motivation

The primary benefits of choral activity concern, first and foremost, **musical aspects**: it develops the ear, strengthens the voice through the wider vocal range of the repertoire performed, and forms and consolidates musical skills such as singing

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[6] It should be noted that the correct and expressive use of spoken language can have socially persuasive effects across various fields of activity, including oratory, diplomacy, education, theatre, cinema, and politics (Oarcea 2024, 71).

works for two or three voices, performing alternately, and singing in canon. It also broadens students' cultural and musical horizons through the interpretation of more complex works with richer content.

From a **psychological perspective**, choral singing presents another set of advantages: it influences the affectivity, intellect, and will of group members through the emotions evoked by an organized choir and by correct performance, through the confidence possessed by each member, the control demonstrated when executing the melodic line, and the unified sound achieved at the group level.

Furthermore, from an **educational perspective**, choral activity has a positive impact by fostering an understanding of the necessity to combine efforts for the best possible performance, respecting other group members while listening or during a pause, and demonstrating wise submission to the conductor-teacher who directs the entire ensemble (Șerfezi 1967, 317).

Another quality inherent to choral activity is the **disciplining** of participants. Rehearsals themselves represent a challenge – there are often pauses, both during the learning of individual parts and during the performance of the work as a whole (Șerfezi 1967, 111). Participants must demonstrate patience and understanding during these moments, while remaining attentive to observations made for other group members and to the methods of work employed. When resuming the musical material, the performance should show clear improvements and align with the conductor's interpretive vision. **Discipline** also relates to the *homogeneity*[7] and *flexibility*[8] of the choir. These are skills acquired through musical activity and form the foundation for behavior that students will adopt in other school or extracurricular activities, as well as in daily life.

Moreover, children who participate in a choir or perform as vocal soloists benefit from clear diction, accurate phrasing, nuanced speech, and greater expressiveness. They are advantaged in the long term with respect to communication skills, control, and coordination, write correctly from an orthographic standpoint, and can more easily acquire a foreign language. Additionally, they become more sociable and generous as a result of collective work, develop an appreciation for beauty and quality, and gain confidence both in others and in themselves (Lupu 2020, 24–25).

Similar to sports projects, artistic activities can serve as **a powerful motivational factor in preventing disengagement and school dropout**. They

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[7] It is based on accurate intonation, a unified vocal timbre, synchronized of sound attack, and the harmonization of dynamics within the ensemble.

[8] The ability of the ensemble or individual to adapt easily to various aspects of tempo and dynamics during performance.

provide a safe environment in which children are accepted and supported in self-discovery and the development of their abilities. They are encouraged to express themselves within an affective space of communion and understanding.

5. The role of digital instruments in developing children's musical skills: benefits and challenges

Technological advancements have enabled children to access a variety of applications and platforms that support the individual and highly flexible development of musical skills. These tools allow practice to take place without being constrained by a strict schedule, fixed time slots, or a formal space, as exercises can be completed in the comfort of one's home. Furthermore, aligned with the habits of the current generation – where video games and online activities are a „norm" (which can, in fact, become addictive) – these applications can motivate children to practice by providing levels to achieve and awarding points or badges as rewards.

Concrete examples of such applications include:
1. **Music theory and aural skills development** – identifying intervals, chords and tonalities, as well as rhythmic and rhythmico-melodic dictation. Examples: *EarMaster, Functional Ear Training, Teoria.com*, etc.
2. **Vocal or instrumental performance** – offering real-time feedback on pitch accuracy, as well as guidance on breathing, sound control, and vocal or instrumental technique, karaoke applications – see *SingTrue, Yousician, Vanido, Vocal Pitch Monitor, Smule.*
3. **Rhythmic skills development** – exercises in reading, writing, and performing rhythms, alongside tools that facilitate mastering different tempos. Examples: *Rhythm Trainer, Complete Rhythm Trainer, Groove Scribe, Metronome Beats, Pro Metronome, Tempo Advance, Soundbrenner*.
4. **Diction** – focusing on clarity of pronunciation and articulation. Examples: *Voice Analyst, Speech Tutor, Vox Tools, Warm Me Up! Vocal Warm Me Up.*

There are also platforms and applications that offer a broader range of learning opportunities. For example, *Yousician* provides lessons for guitar, piano, ukulele, and vocal performance. Other platforms allow users to discover artists and musical works, create personalized playlists, stay informed about the latest updates regarding these artists, or access playlists curated by artists or other users, as is the case with *Smart Music*.

For those who wish to create music themselves, there are various software versions suitable for different skill levels – from beginners to intermediates and professionals – such as *GarageBand*, *BandLab*, *Reaper*, *Logic Pro*, *Studio One*, *FL Studio*, *Pro Tools*, *Cubase*, and *Nuendo*.

Equally, thanks to technological advancements, composers and music producers can utilize music libraries that explore the possibilities of the human voice, such as choir or solo voice plugins. Examples include *Eric Whitacre Choir – Spitfire Audio*, *8Dio Requiem Professional*, *Performance Samples – Oceania*, *Studio Vienna Choir*, as well as *8Dio Solo Voices*, *VSL Studio Solo Voices (Vienna Symphonic Library)*, *Soundiron Solo Vocal Collection*, among others.

Notably, and somewhat controversially, the *Suno AI* music generator allows for the creation of melodies, arrangements, accompaniments, lyrics, and even realistic vocal parts. The user simply provides a textual description of their idea and does not need to possess advanced musical knowledge.

Regarding the integration of these technological standards into the routine of a musician, aspiring musician, or a child passionate about music (perceived as a hobby), two important aspects must be considered.

The use of these applications and platforms **can be beneficial** for individuals who have no prior musical training but show interest in this art form, as well as for beginners who wish to study further and develop their skills. A significant advantage is that most platforms allow progress tracking and, importantly, can be highly accessible, including some that are available free of charge.

The disadvantages include technical limitations (the quality of the device used for recording – microphone, phone, headphones with microphone, ambient noise, and latency issues), a high risk of developing incorrect vocal technique (voice strain, lack of correction in breathing, posture, or muscle tension), lack of expressiveness (as these tools focus primarily on technical accuracy), and absence of human interaction (lack of personalized pedagogical feedback tailored to the individual needs and personality of each child, absence of live demonstration).

Ultimately, these are merely technical exercises that cannot replace the teacher-student relationship (without disregarding the importance of peer interaction, inclusion, and group belonging), do not provide additional cultural, stylistic, or aesthetic information that facilitates understanding or mastering particular nuances that enhance quality performance, and, most importantly, cannot capture the emotion experienced in a live artistic act. On the contrary, they suppress emotional engagement, concentrating solely on accuracy of execution. Yet, musical experience is, above all, about emotion, affect, and intense feeling. It entails creativity, liberation, discovering one's voice, and empowering it.

Equally, however, **the use of technology is essential** for those who wish to pursue a musical career or who are already professional musicians. There are music software programs and libraries that a composer or artist must be familiar with and able to use in order to provide a musical experience aligned with contemporary standards. Yet, once again, the manner in which these technologies are applied and integrated into the creation of high-quality music depends on the user's extremely solid musical foundation, their talent, the experience accumulated over time, and the knowledge and skills developed in fully utilizing all the possibilities offered by these programs and technologies.

6. Conclusion

The human voice varies so greatly from one individual to another, and children respond and behave in such diverse ways, with personalities that are highly nuanced, that a musical approach can only be personalized, adaptive, creative, and flexible, tailored to the specific needs and capabilities of each voice. At this point, only the teacher or specialist in the field can intervene, and what matters most are their training, accumulated experience, as well as the patience, curiosity, and adaptability they demonstrate. They are the only ones capable of designing a well-structured, individualized program that helps the performer develop their musical skills.

If the teacher succeeds in establishing a channel of communication with the child, the correction of intonation issues (where applicable) can be developed through specific and systematically conducted vocal-aural exercises, while the cultivation of the voice in general can be achieved under the most optimal conditions.

It is important to remember that *practicing* this art form has affective effects, shaping the emotions and feelings of the adult-to-be. It also impacts the intellectual sphere, personality, and character, enhancing self-esteem and confidence, influencing important decisions and the achievement of goals, and affecting the sensitivity and positive attitude of any individual.

7. References

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