

Music: Singing and Humility

What if singing in unison were about humility and interdependence?

Susan wanted to use her music lesson to help her class understand humility and interdependence. She was teaching singing in unison, which required students not to make their individual voices stand out, but to work with others to create one sound.

"I brought in a variety of fruit, and as we tasted some (I checked for allergies first), I asked the students to say what the different tastes and colors were. We then tasted some smoothies made from the varieties of fruit, and noted how they tasted different from the individual fruit. We used this as an analogy for singing in unison, and how our voices sound different independently, but can blend together to make one sound.

"To sing in unison we have to be humble enough not to draw attention to ourselves. We need to work with others to create the sound. I gave the students fruit labels in groups (some had strawberry labels, others had apples or oranges, etc.) and we sang 'When the Saints Go Marching In' together. With the help of a sound checker, who listened for a blend, it took us several tries to get the sound properly blended. If one voice was too loud, the sound checker would say something like, 'I can still taste strawberries.' This did not single out a particular child, but referred to a group of students.

"We talked at the end of the lesson about being individuals, but creating something good by working with others. If we were too focused on making ourselves heard as individuals, we had to change our attitude and not seek to draw attention to ourselves."

What's going on here?

Susan saw her music lesson as a way of nurturing interdependence and humility.

She engaged students in experiencing singing together and then reflecting on the experience together and its connection to values.

She reshaped her practice by using focus words and objects to set a new context for the lesson (fruit activity); changing her introduction; by making explicit connections between

singing, humility, and interdependence; by guiding the class to interact in a specific way (singing together and working at harmony); and by planning a discussion of the key idea.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Humility is an act of faith: if I don't draw attention to myself, will anyone notice me? We have to trust that others will encourage us if we don't blow our own trumpet. Humility is essential for working together. It is not self-abasement; rather, it is being realistic about ourselves and honoring the significance of others. Humility is the opposite of pride and boasting. Christian fellowship is built on interdependence: each person is important and has different gifts to use for the good of the whole. The Bible likens this to a body, in which all parts are needed and work together (1 Corinthians 12:12).

What difference does it make?

Susan's class still learned the same singing skills, but they learned a lot more about working with others along the way, and saw that singing is connected to character. This is an example of doing the same thing differently to place it in a different context.

Where could we go from here?

Susan could use these concepts in various parts of the music curriculum — for example, when learning about the orchestra. There are times when an instrument plays solo or its sound needs to be identified, and there are times when it needs to blend with others to make a group sound.

Digging deeper

Faith grows in an interdependent community and is practiced in community. Christ is the head of the community, and all are dependent on him. (1 Corinthians 12:22; Ephesians 1:22). The Apostle Paul uses the image of a body, with all the parts working together and

all depending on the head ([1 Corinthians 12:12](#)). Modern societies tend to stress the individual, and although this has brought a certain type of freedom, it can be exaggerated to the point that people find it difficult to depend on each other, work together, and feel a sense of belonging.

True humility is a generous attitude of mind that values others and sees oneself realistically. Jesus modeled humility throughout his life.

Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self. Charles Spurgeon

Humility makes us teachable ([James 1:21](#)). This is why St. Augustine, when asked what he thought were the three greatest virtues, replied, "Humility, humility, and then humility."

You wish to be great, begin from the least. You are thinking to construct some mighty fabric in height; first think of the foundation of humility. St. Augustine



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