

Report on experimentations

Inclusive Choral Experimentations Developed by Feniarco and SWAN European Partners



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SWAN Guidelines for experimentations (based on collected data by Feniarco)

1. Start from what each person can already do

All testimonies emphasise this: build on existing abilities (voice, rhythm, movement, listening) without forcing skills that are not accessible yet.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

Data show higher engagement when participants can choose *how* to contribute: singing, moving, using gestures or simple instruments, or active listening.

3. Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable

Groups in different regions reported that predictability reduces anxiety: fixed routines, short steps, and transitions supported by visual or sound cues.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

The experiences confirm that small groups or pairs (including peer tutoring) increase security, focus, and quality of interaction.

5. Combine voice and body

Questionnaire results highlight the effectiveness of practices that integrate singing, breathing, movement, and rhythmic games: they support inclusion, concentration, and emotional regulation.

6. Adapt the environment

Teachers frequently noted that lights, noise, or cluttered spaces create barriers. Simple, well-organised, visually readable spaces support everyone.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

One of the strongest recurring requests: short, direct instructions, supported by a gesture or model. One task at a time, without long explanations.

8. Reduce performance pressure

Testimonies converge on this point: complex performances or rigid roles often exclude. Prefer short sharing, sound games, or simple pieces.

9. Collaborate with those who know the participant

Success increases when the choir leader, classroom teacher, support teacher and family share a few essential insights (what helps, what doesn't, what the person enjoys).

10. Observe changes in well-being

Collected data show that the real indicators of impact are not "singing well" but:

- increased participation
- more initiative
- better self-regulation
- more positive interactions



SWAN questions for experimentations (based on guidelines)

1. Which of the 10 principles does your choir apply?
2. For the principles that you selected:
 - How does your choir apply these principles in practice?
 - What effects or changes have you observed in participation, wellbeing or other factors?
3. Is there anything else your choir does that supports accessibility or inclusion?

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Introduction

These experimentations were collected within the SWAN project as concrete examples of how inclusive singing and choral practice can be implemented in real-life contexts. The materials originate from diverse environments — schools, community choirs, health-related initiatives, youth choirs, and social or therapeutic settings — and reflect a wide range of additional needs, including autism, visual impairment, hearing impairment, mobility limitations, complex health conditions, and post-medical voice changes. Despite the diversity of profiles and organisational models, the experimentations share a common understanding: inclusion becomes effective when it is embedded in everyday practice rather than declared in principle.

Alongside several case studies developed in our own national context (Italy), experimentations were also carried out in other countries, particularly within the territories of the project partners, but not exclusively. This transnational dimension has enriched the process significantly. It has allowed different educational cultures, choral traditions, and social frameworks to confront similar challenges through context-sensitive solutions. While the settings differ — from mainstream school choirs to specialised community ensembles — the underlying intention remains consistent: to create environments where participation is accessible, meaningful, and sustainable.

Based on the data collected through these experiences, the partners of the SWAN project developed ten guiding principles for experimentations. These principles translate core values such as accessibility, belonging, and participation into practical rehearsal choices: starting from existing abilities; offering multiple ways to take part; structuring activities in predictable ways; working in small groups; integrating voice and body; adapting the environment; giving clear, single-step instructions; reducing performance pressure; collaborating with those who know the participants well; and observing well-being as a primary indicator of impact. Across the cases presented here, success is not primarily defined by musical accuracy, but by changes such as increased participation, stronger initiative, improved self-regulation, and more positive peer interactions.

The experimentations were gathered through different formats. Some contributors responded directly to the ten principles, others worked through three guiding questions (which principles are applied; how they are applied and with what effects; and what additional methods support accessibility and inclusion), while others provided narrative accounts rooted in their daily practice. This diversity of formats reflects the organic and context-based nature of the project, where inclusive practice is shaped by local realities rather than imposed templates.

Beyond the individual stories, the importance of this process lies in its methodological value. The experimentations were not conceived as isolated “success cases,” but as reflective practices. Choir leaders and educators observed, adapted, adjusted, and evaluated their approaches over time. Inclusion emerged as a dynamic process requiring flexibility, collaboration, and continuous learning. The act of documenting these practices has itself been transformative, encouraging practitioners to articulate implicit strategies, identify impact indicators, and recognise well-being as a central outcome.

Taken together, these experiences demonstrate that inclusive choral practice is not limited to specialised institutions. Meaningful participation can be fostered in mainstream settings when choir leaders and educators intentionally invest in flexibility, clarity, and relational safety — often through small but deliberate adjustments that reduce barriers. The experimentations also highlight the importance of shared responsibility: inclusion is strengthened when it is carried collectively by conductors, educators, peers, families, and partner organisations.

This collection therefore aims not only to present examples, but to support a broader cultural shift: from seeing inclusion as an additional effort to recognising it as an integral dimension of artistic and educational practice. It offers both inspiration and practical orientation for those who wish to develop choral environments in which every participant can belong, contribute, and thrive.

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BEST PRACTICES

Italian Experimentations

1. Coro della Scuola Secondaria di I° Grado “Bonazzi Lilli” - Perugia (Italy)

Respondent: Vladimiro Vagnetti

1. Start from what each person can already do

Our school choir is open and non-selective, so we always begin from the reality that students arrive with very different musical, linguistic, cultural and cognitive backgrounds. Instead of expecting prior skills (reading music, vocal technique, or “choral behaviour”), we take time to notice what each student can already do and what helps them feel safe and capable. In a socially fragile area where some students are at risk of disengagement from school, this first step is essential: we aim to create quick experiences of success. For students with disabilities (such as visual impairment, autism, or intellectual disabilities) this principle becomes even more concrete. We personalise goals and roles so that participation grows out of strengths (for example, auditory memory, rhythmic stability, imitation, or expressive gesture) rather than out of deficits. In practice, our arrangements and rehearsal plans are built to offer different levels of complexity, so no one is pushed into skills that are not accessible yet, and everyone can feel that their contribution is real and valued. In case of student with special needs, we personalise participation starting from students’ strengths: a pupil with autism who struggles with eye contact may excel in rhythmic precision; a visually impaired student may have heightened auditory memory; a student with intellectual disability may respond very positively to repetition and gesture-based learning.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

In our choir, there is not just one “right” way to participate. In a lower secondary school like ours, students have very different abilities, levels of confidence, and language skills, so we organise activities in ways that allow everyone to take part in a practical way. Some students sing the main melody, others repeat short and simple patterns, speak parts of the text rhythmically, or support the group with body percussion. Sometimes movement or simple gestures help students stay focused and involved, especially if they struggle to sing continuously. There are also moments when a student may not feel ready to sing, for example due to anxiety, tiredness, or sensory overload. In these cases, we allow them to stay involved through attentive listening with a clear task, such as following the rhythm, observing entrances, or preparing to rejoin. This helps avoid exclusion and prevents small difficulties from becoming reasons to withdraw completely. We adapt materials in simple but concrete ways: enlarged fonts, clear layouts, visual cues, and when necessary, CAA tools. Some students participate more through gesture than voice, and this is accepted as a valid contribution. This practical flexibility helps us keep students engaged and makes it easier for each of them to find a role that feels manageable within the group.

3. Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable

Predictability is one of the main conditions for participation in our rehearsals. Many students, (especially those with autism, anxiety, or challenging life circumstances) benefit from knowing what will happen, in what order, and what is expected of them. For this reason, we keep activities short, clearly framed, and structured in repeatable routines. Rehearsals follow a recognisable sequence (arrival, warm-up, focused work, collective singing, closing), and the internal steps are broken down into manageable units.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

Although the choir has a strong collective identity, we often work in small groups because small-group settings make inclusion practical and not only “declared.” In a non-auditioned choir, students can differ greatly in confidence, concentration, language competence, and social readiness. Working in pairs or small groups helps quieter or more fragile students participate with less pressure and more support, while also giving space for peer tutoring to emerge naturally.

This is particularly valuable in a multicultural environment, where peer relationships can become bridges across languages and social groups. For students with disabilities, small groups allow us to personalise instruction without isolating them: the group becomes a protective frame in which everyone can take part at their own pace. Over time, this strengthens security, improves interaction quality, and builds a culture of mutual care.

5. Combine voice and body

In our context, integrating voice and body is not an “extra,” but one of the strongest inclusion strategies we have. Many students who struggle with purely verbal or abstract learning respond immediately to movement, rhythm, and embodied imitation. We use breathing, posture, grounded body awareness, rhythmic games, and simple movement patterns to support vocal production and musical understanding. Gesture-based participation is also important: it allows students to remain fully involved even when singing is difficult, and it supports meaning-making in multilingual repertoire where the text may not be fully understood by everyone. Voice-and-body work also helps emotional regulation, which is crucial in a school environment where some students carry stress, trauma, or instability outside school.

6. Adapt the environment

Environmental choices can dramatically influence participation and wellbeing. In many school settings, especially in peripheral contexts, spaces are not ideal: noise, clutter, crowded rooms, or poor acoustics can quickly become barriers. We therefore aim for simple, practical adaptations that increase accessibility for everyone. We organise the space so that students can see one another and the conductor clearly, reduce unnecessary visual distraction, and pay attention to volume and background noise. For students with visual impairment, spatial clarity and consistent positioning help orientation and confidence; for students with sensory sensitivity, managing light and sound reduces overload; for students with attention difficulties, a readable space makes focus more achievable.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

Our rehearsal communication is intentionally simple. In a group where students differ in language proficiency, learning needs, and attention span, long explanations often create exclusion. We therefore prefer single-step instructions, given clearly and supported by modelling, gesture, or brief vocal demonstration. We often teach through imitation, using short fragments of music that are repeated and then gradually combined into larger sections. This method is especially effective for students who cannot read notation, for students with intellectual disabilities who need clarity and repetition, and for autistic students who benefit from direct, unambiguous cues. Whenever possible, these imitative parts are first demonstrated not only by the conductor but also by classmates. Students who feel more secure are invited to model short phrases or rhythmic patterns for their peers. This encourages forms of peer education and cooperative learning, strengthens attention and responsibility, and helps create a supportive group dynamic. At the same time, involving peers in the teaching process reinforces inclusion in a very concrete way: learning becomes a shared task rather than something transmitted only from teacher to student.

8. Reduce performance pressure

Because our choir has a social and inclusive mission, we actively reduce performance pressure. In contexts marked by social vulnerability, a high-stakes performance model can easily exclude students who may avoid rehearsals when they feel judged, and rigid roles can marginalise those who need flexibility. We therefore focus on the process and on short, supportive sharing moments rather than on complex productions. When we perform, we choose repertoire that allows differentiated participation and does not require everyone to do the same thing in the same way. We avoid forcing solo exposure and we allow students to participate through gesture or simplified parts when needed. The goal is for students to experience public moments as safe and celebratory, not as tests of adequacy.

9. Collaborate with those who know the participant

In a school choir that includes students with disabilities and students in socially fragile situations, collaboration is essential. We work in dialogue with classroom teachers, support teachers, and when appropriate families, to understand



a few key things: what helps the student participate, what creates difficulty, what motivates them, and how we can support regulation. This exchange does not need to be heavy or bureaucratic; even small, practical insights can make the difference between inclusion and exclusion. Collaboration also helps us align the choir experience with the student's broader educational plan and with the school's inclusion culture. For example, this year three students with autism are part of the choir, one of whom presents a very significant level of support needs. In order to make their participation possible and meaningful, the support teachers voluntarily attend choir rehearsals outside their official working hours. Their presence provides continuity, reassurance, and mediation when needed. At the same time, they collaborate closely with the families to ensure that these students can be consistently present, both at rehearsals and at concerts. This shared commitment between choir director, support teachers, and families allows the students not only to attend, but to genuinely belong to the group.

10. Observe changes in well-being

In our choir, the most meaningful outcomes are often not strictly musical. We look for signs such as increased participation, more initiative, better self-regulation, and more positive peer interactions. In a context where some students are at risk of school disengagement, these indicators matter deeply: a student who attends regularly, who takes a small initiative, who manages frustration better, or who forms a supportive bond with a peer is already experiencing a form of success that goes beyond singing. We observe these changes informally through rehearsal life, through teacher feedback, and through the students' own behaviour and engagement over time.

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2. La Fabbrica del Divertimento - Ercolano (Italy)

Respondent: Paola Del Giudice

Context: Inclusion of a 10-year-old child with an autism diagnosis in a non-rehabilitation summer camp setting with large groups (20 children per group), wide spaces, and potentially overstimulating conditions compared to the smaller groups (7–8 children) of the regular annual courses.

1. Start from what each person can already do

The inclusion process was grounded in careful observation of the child's development over the course of a year. The educational team intentionally avoided applying a fixed or standardised model and instead assessed his current abilities, emotional regulation, social readiness, and autonomy. Participation was built upon his existing strengths, recognising his individual rhythm of growth and respecting his unique profile. This personalised approach reaffirmed the principle that each child requires tailored strategies rather than predefined solutions.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

The child's participation was structured through calibrated entry into activities and group dynamics. Activities were selected and introduced progressively, allowing him to engage at a level consistent with his comfort and capacity for regulation. This flexible approach ensured that participation was not binary (in or out), but gradual and adaptable. The possibility to enter activities step by step supported confidence and enabled meaningful engagement within a larger and more dynamic group setting.

3. Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable

Although the summer camp operated with extended schedules and sustained daily rhythms, the internal organisation of activities supported clarity and predictability. The child was helped to orient himself within the daily structure, recognising recurring moments and transitions. This clear framing of time and expectations reduced uncertainty and supported emotional stability, making participation in a more complex environment manageable.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

Despite the overall size of the camp groups, participation was facilitated through calibrated subgroup experiences. Smaller group interactions allowed the child to experience moments of reduced stimulation and greater relational safety. These contained settings supported concentration, encouraged interaction with peers, and enabled gradual integration into the larger group context without overwhelming pressure.

5. Combine voice and body

Camp activities involved embodied participation, including movement, shared play, and expressive group dynamics. The integration of physical presence and action supported regulation and engagement. Through active, body-based involvement, the child was able to connect with the group in concrete and accessible ways, strengthening both participation and emotional balance.

6. Adapt the environment

The educational team recognised that the summer camp environment could be highly stimulating due to larger spaces, more numerous peers, and extended activity timing. Rather than modifying the physical structure of the camp, adaptations were implemented at the pedagogical and organisational level. Group composition, pacing of activities, and participation formats were carefully managed to prevent overload and to create supportive conditions within a non-clinical setting. This demonstrated that meaningful inclusion can be achieved even without specialised rehabilitation structures.



7. Give simple, single-step instructions

Communication was structured, clear, and concise. Instructions were delivered in manageable steps, allowing the child to process information effectively and participate without confusion. This clarity reduced cognitive load and supported autonomy, enabling him to follow group activities within a dynamic and fast-paced environment.

8. Reduce performance pressure

The focus of the camp was on shared experience rather than achievement. The child was not required to meet predefined performance standards but was encouraged to participate according to his own pace and readiness. This reduced anxiety and eliminated unnecessary pressure, creating a climate of trust and psychological safety that supported authentic involvement.

9. Collaborate with those who know the participant

The inclusion pathway was developed in close dialogue with the family. The decision to evaluate the necessity of a dedicated mediation figure was based on shared observation, trust, and careful assessment of the child's progress. This collaboration ensured coherence between home and camp expectations, strengthened mutual confidence, and prevented an unnecessary financial burden for the family while maintaining the child's wellbeing as the primary priority.

10. Observe changes in well-being

The success of the inclusion was measured through observable improvements in participation, autonomy, and emotional regulation. The child's ability to engage successfully in the summer camp without the need for a dedicated support figure represented a significant developmental step. The positive outcome confirmed that flexible, individualised educational processes can foster meaningful growth and reinforce both independence and social belonging.

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3. Scuola di Musica Scintilla - Napoli (Italy)

Respondent: Luciana Mazzone

Context: Inclusion of a 15-year-old boy with DYRK1A syndrome (cognitive disability, microcephaly and facial dysmorphisms) within a children's choir, originally connected to a health-service-led inclusion project focused exclusively on children with disabilities.

1. Start from what each person can already do

The inclusion of Vittorio began with recognising his potential rather than focusing on his diagnosis. Instead of defining his participation by cognitive limitations, the choir built his pathway around concrete musical experiences. He learned to recognise the tuning fork as a musical tool to find and align his voice, progressively developing musical awareness and vocal autonomy. His participation was shaped by his abilities and interests, allowing growth through real and achievable musical tasks.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

Vittorio's inclusion was not limited to passive presence. He engaged actively in singing, rehearsal routines, and concerts alongside his peers. Participation included vocal work, social interaction, and shared rehearsal rituals. The choir environment allowed him to contribute musically while also participating relationally, greeting classmates, sharing words and physical gestures such as hugs, and experiencing belonging in a natural and spontaneous way.

3. Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable

Rehearsals followed structured choral routines, offering clarity and predictability. Through repetition of songs and consistent rehearsal practices, Vittorio was able to internalise musical material and expectations. The regular structure of choir sessions supported his learning process and strengthened his confidence over time.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

Although the choir functioned as a collective ensemble, the inclusion process was supported by the presence of an additional educational figure. This professional provided individualised mediation during rehearsals, facilitating smoother interaction within the larger group. This structure ensured that Vittorio could integrate progressively while feeling supported and secure.

5. Combine voice and body

Choral practice inherently integrates posture, breathing, vocal production, and embodied musical expression. Through singing, Vittorio engaged physically and vocally with the group. The embodied nature of choral work supported his regulation, attention, and sense of shared musical experience.

6. Adapt the environment

The choir environment was intentionally adapted through the introduction of an additional educational professional. This figure supported Vittorio's entrance into the ensemble and mediated peer relationships when needed. Rather than isolating him in a separate setting, the adaptation occurred within the mainstream choir structure, ensuring authentic inclusion in a natural peer context.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

Musical learning in the choir was delivered through clear and structured guidance. Rehearsal instructions were accessible and concrete, enabling Vittorio to follow musical tasks step by step. This clarity supported his independence and allowed him to participate actively in rehearsals and performances.



8. Reduce performance pressure

Participation in concerts and choral festivals was approached as a shared experience rather than a test of ability. Vittorio performed alongside his peers in a responsible and collaborative spirit, without being singled out or exposed to unnecessary pressure. The emphasis on collective performance fostered confidence and a positive self-image.

9. Collaborate with those who know the participant

The inclusion process was built on a strong educational alliance between the choir director, the additional educational professional, and Vittorio's mother. This collaboration ensured continuity between family and choir life, strengthened mutual trust, and created a supportive network around the young singer. The success of the experience also inspired other families, expanding the culture of inclusion within the community.

10. Observe changes in well-being

Vittorio's development within the choir is evident in multiple dimensions. He learned the names of all his peers, actively seeks social contact, waits for classmates before rehearsals, and participates responsibly in concerts. His growth reflects increased autonomy, social integration, musical competence, and emotional confidence. The visible transformation generated hope for other families and demonstrated that inclusive choral practice can create genuine, sustainable belonging.

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European Experimentations

4. Coro Inclusivo Cantatutti - Zaragoza (Spain)

Respondent: Borja Juan Moreira

1. Start from what each person can already do

Cantatutti begins its work with each participant through a careful initial assessment of their strengths and personal characteristics. We seek to understand what each person can already do, what makes them unique, and what motivates them: whether they have previous vocal experience, a strong sense of rhythm, ease of movement, active listening skills, musical sensitivity, or even non-musical talents that enrich the group. This knowledge allows us to nurture and develop each choir member's potential and has guided our work since the project's foundation in September 2017.

Based on this approach, we create adapted musical arrangements that allow participation at different levels of complexity. This ensures that everyone can actively make music regardless of their abilities, without being pushed into skills that are not yet within reach. Starting from what each person can already do fosters confidence, a sense of belonging and long-term engagement in the choir.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

Each person has something valuable to contribute, and participation in Cantatutti does not follow a single, fixed or hierarchical model. While some people sing with ease, others may experience vocal difficulties but demonstrate strong rhythmic skills; some express themselves primarily through movement, while others contribute through attentive and focused listening.

This understanding is central to our practice. We use vocal expression, body expression and sign language as complementary forms of artistic communication, enabling a wider range of people to participate meaningfully. Within the diversity of profiles we work with, different forms of participation are encouraged according to individual capacities. For example, some participants with visual impairment do not use sign language, while participants with reduced mobility may not be able to perform certain body movements.

This flexibility has led to a significant increase in regular attendance. Even participants with greater difficulties feel that they have an important and valued role in the group, that their presence matters and that they are necessary to the collective process.

3. Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable

From its inception, Cantatutti has ensured that body language, visual communication and verbal explanations are adapted to different abilities so that they can be understood by all participants. In the case of participants with visual impairment, situations, actions and proposals are clearly described verbally.

Our sessions always follow a clear and recognisable structure: we begin with a brief warm-up, continue with rehearsal work divided by voice groups, and always conclude with a collective choral activity involving all members. This repeated structure creates a predictable pattern that provides security, reduces anticipatory anxiety and allows participants to focus on emotional and musical connection rather than uncertainty.

In concerts, we contextualise the repertoire for the audience and participants before performing. Visual and sound cues are used to mark transitions between activities, treating transitions as meaningful moments. Innovative technical resources, such as LED panels that visually represent rhythm, intensity and other musical parameters through lights and colours, also serve as clear signals of change.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

We have observed that group size has a significant impact on the quality of support we can offer each person and on participants' perception of being valued. For this reason, whenever possible, we divide sessions into smaller subgroups.

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We also encourage peer-support work, where participants who feel more confident can support others, fostering mutual learning relationships.

Vocal sections (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) function as small support groups within the larger choir structure. In addition to the full ensemble, each voice section has its own WhatsApp group, which facilitates communication and helps resolve questions related to repertoire, schedules, clothing or other practical matters.

5. Combine voice and body

Cantatutti's expressive approach is multimodal, combining voice, body and sign language. Movement is incorporated into all songs through body expression, spatial movement and activities that connect voice and body.

The use of sign language expands the expressive, cognitive and aesthetic potential of the choir, enabling deeper and clearer communication of emotions and meanings within the repertoire. The inclusion of sign language and body expression not only enhances accessibility, but also intensifies artistic communication, offering a richer experience for both participants and audiences.

Rehearsals begin with breathing and body relaxation exercises that establish a physical and emotional foundation for choral activity. Rhythmic games that integrate body percussion and vocal expression follow, supporting a holistic experience of music through body, voice and movement. Concentration during singing improves because the body plays an active role, and movement facilitates participation for those with specific vocal difficulties, ensuring that everyone can remain involved.

6. Adapt the environment

Cantatutti includes participants with hearing disabilities, and silence during rehearsals is an essential condition for them to follow the conductor's instructions. Rehearsal spaces are fully accessible for people with reduced mobility, and chairs are arranged in a semicircle so that everyone can see the conductor and one another, enhancing group cohesion, interaction and a sense of belonging. Obstacles are minimised to facilitate safe movement for blind participants.

When performing our repertoire, accessibility for all participants is a non-negotiable requirement. In concerts, we use technical and technological resources to enable a multimodal, multisensory and accessible musical interpretation. These include vibrating backpacks that allow Deaf participants to feel musical vibrations, FM systems for people with hearing impairment, LED panels that visually represent rhythm and other musical parameters, and, in some concerts, multisensory boxes containing elements that provide smells, tastes and tactile sensations, inviting audiences and participants to experience music through all their senses.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

Imitation is the primary method used to learn repertoire in Cantatutti. Musical material is introduced in short, carefully selected fragments to ensure accessibility and comprehension for the entire group. This approach is systematically supported by visual aids, such as body movements, gestures and adapted visual materials, which reinforce understanding, memory and musical anticipation.

For blind and visually impaired participants, these visual supports are translated into clear and structured verbal descriptions of movements and gestures, often with peer assistance. This ensures equitable access to musical and bodily information and promotes active participation and genuine inclusion.

Our Virtual Learning Environment functions not only as a content repository, but also as a tool for reinforcement and ongoing support. Clear, accessible instructions expressed in simple language allow participants to understand tasks and objectives without unnecessary pressure. Materials can be reviewed as many times as needed, supporting autonomous and flexible learning rhythms and respecting individual differences in abilities and learning styles.

8. Reduce performance pressure

At Cantatutti, each participant's personal situation is respected, acknowledging different life rhythms and circumstances. Participants are not required to perform every piece and may choose their level of involvement according to what they feel able to assume at a given moment. This flexibility reduces anxiety, supports wellbeing and encourages sustained participation over time.

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9. Collaborate with those who know the participant

Cantatutti collaborates closely with the associations and organisations to which participants belong, establishing continuous and fluid communication channels that enable constant, bidirectional information exchange. This coordination allows for a deeper understanding of participants' characteristics, interests, needs and potential, and promotes coherence between educational, therapeutic and family contexts.

When necessary, closer relationships with families are also developed, recognising their fundamental role as active agents in the process. This collaboration supports personalised and respectful accompaniment, strengthens emotional security, enhances a sense of belonging and ensures continuity between experiences inside and outside the choir.

10. Observe changes in well-being

For Cantatutti, true indicators of success are those related to participants' wellbeing and to the appropriate development of activities. Particular attention is paid to levels of participation, personal initiative, improvements in emotional self-regulation and the emergence of more positive, connected and meaningful interactions among group members.

From this perspective, Cantatutti is understood as a socio-educational intervention tool that contributes to attention to diversity, social cohesion and inclusion. It promotes the development of personal and social competencies and priorities participants' overall wellbeing over strictly musical achievements.

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5. My Sight Notts - Nottinghamshire (United Kingdom)

Respondent: Emma Lucas

Principle 1

Start from which each person can already do

How we apply this principle

We accept anyone into our choir regardless of ability. The choir is for people to enjoy singing – we are not competitive with other choirs.

Outcomes

Increases in confidence and self-esteem, reduced loneliness and isolation.

Principle 3

Keep activities short, clear and repeatable

How we apply this principle

We practice at the same place and same time every two weeks at a time that suits the majority of people. This is always during the day as people with sight loss may struggle in the dark. Any additional events are communicated in good time and arrangements sorted well within time to avoid distress. New songs are given a long lead in time before they are made part of an event programme so that participants have time to learn and become confident in singing them.

Outcomes

Increase in confidence and participation

Principle 6

Adapt the environment

How we apply this principle

Lyrics are provided in different formats – audio, Braille, large print etc. Choir practice is held in a building purpose built for people with sight loss. Lighting, contrasting colours and trained staff to help guide people around the space,

Outcomes

Increases in confidence and inclusion

Principle 8

Reduce performance pressure

How we apply this principle

Practice is in a building purpose built for people with sight loss and is a welcoming and comfortable space. Songs for events are learned within the practice space with plenty of lead in time. Songs are in folders, either paper or digital, and in order so that people can follow easily. Events are talked about well in advance and we do not accept last minute ones unless the choir is comfortable to do these. We always scope out event spaces to ensure accessibility.

Outcomes

Increased confidence, increased participation, increased skills

Principle 9

Collaborate with those who know the participant

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How we apply this principle

The choir is a service within My Sight Notts – a charity dedicated to supporting people living with sight loss. The majority of choir participants are well known to us and have accessed many of our services. When someone is first referred to My Sight Notts we carry out an assessment to ensure that we are able to support or refer to additional support.

Outcomes

Increases in confidence, self-esteem, reduced isolation, better mental health and wellbeing

Principle 10

Observe changes in wellbeing

How we apply this principle

We collect data through ladder outcomes including:

- Increased community and belonging
- Increased confidence
- Increased skills
- Increased independence
- Reduced loneliness and isolation
- Increased awareness of visual impairments

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6. Cor Respira Bellvitge - Barcelona (Spain)

Respondent: Gloria Fernandes

Principle 1

Their illness means that they are not always the same in rehearsal, and I always suggest that they listen to how they are and where their limits are that day, and that they are welcome to do what they can without forcing themselves, listening to themselves at all times. This makes them get into the habit of listening to themselves, respecting themselves and helps them to know themselves better.

Principle 3

We tend to do the activity in a similar order, with some parts and some exercises that are always the same and this makes them feel safer and allows them to be calmer.

Principle 5

Body movement accompanies the expression of the voice, facilitates its emission, expression of emotions and increases their well-being.

Principle 8

The fact of working through simple pieces that allow them to play, means that they do not take the activity as something that pressures them, but as a place of enjoyment.

Principle 10

They are conducting a study of the impact of choral singing on their lives

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7. Jazzberry Tunes - Ankara (Turkey)

Respondent: Pelin Küçükeroğan

Which of the ten principles does your choir apply?

Our choir actively applies the following SWAN principles:

- Start from what each person can already do
- Offer multiple ways to take part
- Keep activities short, clear and repeatable
- Use small groups whenever possible
- Combine voice and body
- Adapt the environment
- Give simple, single-step instructions
- Reduce performance pressure
- Observe changes in well-being

How does your choir apply these principles in practice?

1. Start from what each person can already do

In our choir, we welcome singers without expecting prior solfège or sight-reading experience. Instead, we focus on listening to one another, developing ensemble awareness, and building vocal skills through fundamental singing techniques. We intentionally avoid overly advanced exercises, prioritizing musical cohesion and harmonic balance. This approach values individual learning and personal development regardless of each singer's musical or choral background. As a result, each person gains confidence quickly, the repertoire becomes accessible, and rehearsals remain motivating-encouraging everyone to participate with enthusiasm and commitment.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

In some pieces, we incorporate elements such as gestures, clapping, percussion, or body movement whenever notated as part of the musical expression. When these elements are not explicitly assigned to a specific voice group in the score, we invite singers who are eager and motivated to step forward and take on these roles. Solo passages are approached in the same way, with parts being assigned based on individual interest and voluntary participation rather than obligation. This approach allows us to channel the enthusiasm of singers who wish to contribute in diverse ways, ensuring their motivation is used constructively for the benefit of the choir as a whole. As a result, this approach strengthens both each singer's sense of belonging and the overall musicality of the choir.

3. Keep activities short, clear and repeatable

We hold our rehearsals on the same day and at the same time every week. We do the body warm-up, breathing, and vocal warm-up exercises in the same order and at approximately the same time intervals. We prefer short but effective range-specific exercises to warm up the voice without straining it and to be ready for rehearsal on time. In this way, chorists come to rehearsals prepared because they know what to expect and what is expected of them. They can easily make use of these routines outside of choir practice as well. Based on the clean vocals and comfort of the choir members during rehearsals and performances, we can say that this approach has been effective.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

We assign a "buddy" from experienced chorists to each new choir member to accompany them for the first few weeks. We make sure to choose buddies from the same voice group and with some common interests so that they can lead the new members both musically and socially. This allows the new chorists to get used to the choir and learn the process quickly. We see that this tradition strengthens the sense of belonging for everyone in the choir. In addition, we pay close attention to vocal group rehearsals (as sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses) so that each vocal group can strengthen its own internal dynamics. As a result, we see more confident and focused choir members in quartet practices.

5. Combine voice and body

We tend to lean forward during pianos or decrescendos and expand backward during fortes or crescendos to mimic the sound. During rehearsals, our conductor uses hand, arm, and body motions to complement our singing. We actively use our bodies throughout our exercises. This results in improved emotional regulation and makes the act of singing more concrete and accessible. It enhances our body awareness and helps us harmonize with one another more easily.

6. Adapt the environment

We try to ensure that our rehearsal space is at a comfortable temperature and free from distracting scents or external noises. However, since finding suitable rehearsal spaces is difficult, these conditions are rarely fully met. We observe much better focus and overall satisfaction whenever we are able to work in a space that meets these conditions.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

When working on songs, our conductor progresses one step at a time. The strategy varies; sometimes we hum using sounds like z, m, or n before layering in the lyrics. At other times, we fit the lyrics to the rhythm first without the melody, then add the notes later. The conductor always announces exactly which measure we are working on and gives everyone their starting notes individually. Because of this, no one feels left out, everyone is able to follow along, and we learn the material more effectively.

8. Reduce performance pressure

We strive to distribute solos equally and prioritize enjoyment to ensure choristers do not feel stressed. We often discuss how the process of refining the songs is more important than the final result. On performance days, we set aside time for rest and focus before going on stage. Some members even lead us in meditation, where we visualize ourselves on stage to help us relax. As a result, members feel they are part of a supportive community atmosphere.

9. Observe changes in well-being

We already monitor the chorists' singing performance through individual voice recording procedures on each piece. In addition, there is a team that follows up on chorists' overall well-being. This team oversees the choir members' rehearsal attendance, how frequently they send their voice recordings, and their general progress over time. When choir members experience motivational or situational difficulties, this team (also composed of choir members) shows the necessary tolerance and provides one-on-one support. Apart from that, we receive feedback from the choir periodically through a form they fill out. Based on this feedback, we plan activities that will increase the motivation of the choir members, improve their interaction with each other, and enhance their enjoyment. It is easy for choir members to observe both their own development and the choir's overall progress, as we archive all choir-related materials and provide the members with a performance report at the end of each term.

What effects or changes have you observed in participation, wellbeing or other factors?

- Increased confidence and faster integration of new members
- Stronger sense of belonging and mutual support within the choir
- High rehearsal attendance and sustained motivation
- Improved vocal comfort and technical consistency
- Reduced anxiety around performances
- Greater emotional regulation and enjoyment during rehearsals
- Overall, choir members report feeling safe, valued, and engaged, both musically and socially.

Is there anything else your choir does that supports accessibility or inclusion?

Yes. Our choir emphasizes peer support, voluntary participation, and transparency. All choir materials are archived and shared, allowing members to track their own progress. End-of-term performance reports make development visible and meaningful. Importantly, responsibility for inclusion and well-being is shared collectively, fostering a culture where accessibility is not an exception but a core value of the choir.

8. Rezonans - Ankara (Turkey)

Respondent: Pelin Küçükerođan

1. Which principles do we apply?

We actively practice seven of the principles: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10.

2. How do we apply these principles in practice and what are the effects?

Principle 3 (Predictability)

To prevent anxiety and help our singers manage their schedules, we prioritize predictability. Our standard rehearsals are fixed for Sundays from 12:00 to 16:00, and any extra sessions are added to the calendar in advance. This routine allows everyone to focus solely on the music.

Principle 4 (Small groups)

We frequently work in sectionals or small peer groups rather than just full-choir rehearsals. This increases the quality of interaction and helps singers feel more secure while improving their focus.

Principle 5 (Voice and body)

We place great importance on the warm-up process. Before using our voices, we warm up and stretch our bodies through various exercises. Integrating physical activation before singing supports both our technique and creates a brief comfort from the stress of the day.

Principle 6 (Environment)

We are very attentive to the physical layout of our rehearsal hall. We arrange chairs in a proper order and ensure music stands are ready for those who need them. A clean, organized, and "readable" space directly boosts our concentration.

Principle 7 (Clear instructions)

To be efficient, we avoid long lectures and focus directly on the task. If there is a minor issue in a piece, we isolate that part and use short, direct instructions to resolve it through focused repetition.

Principle 9 (Method sharing)

Our conductors constantly share professional methods to help us improve, such as breathing techniques, mental imagery, and posture guidance. This collaboration between the conductor and the singers strengthens our collective performance.

Principle 10 (Well-being)

We view our choir as a community of support. We do our best to help singers complete any technical gaps and offer support if a member is facing personal difficulties. This increases self-regulation and fosters positive interactions within the group.

3. Other efforts for inclusion and accessibility

To facilitate the integration of new members, we use a "Buddy System." Each newcomer is assigned a buddy who helps them navigate both the musical and social aspects of our choir, ensuring a smooth transition and a strong sense of belonging from day one.

9. Voces Polyhum - Canary Islands (Spain)

Respondent: Sergio Lopez Figueroa

1. Which principles do we apply?

Our choir applies the following : 1, 4, 5 (strong one) 7, 8, 9, 10.

The main change is the sense of community and belonging.

Overcoming fear of performing, improving skills and wellbeing at all levels (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual).

2 (we encourage to take part in all activities at the level they are but encourage singing at whatever level they are).

3. We have a structure for our rehearsals with breaks, but they keep the same structure (We meet once a week for three hours divided by blocks).

6. We have a single space for rehearsals at a music classroom from a local school.

New ones

- We encourage musical creativity from each member our goal is every member of the choir is treated as a “composer” in residence
- Our repertoire is new and experimental based on the connection with emotions and exploring the sound possibilities of the human voice
- We also explore existing repertoire, and our purpose is to being able to improvise freely and to develop a fine skills or polyphonic ear training
- To overcome the fear of performing we go out in the style of flashmob and perform in hospitals, public spaces and to engage audiences to sing with us
- We promote creative skills and will incorporate vocal coaching to get better at finding their natural voices and improving their technique to allow expression
- We promote vocal vibration or humming as part of my own methodology (Polyhum) applied to self-regulation and expression
- We promote digital inclusion and training by organizing the learning material online using Google drive etc..
- We have the concept of open work (no pressure to read music but a musical piece that evolves over time and breaks the anxiety of perfection and judgement
- We measure the impact with regular monthly surveys and three-monthly deep ones in order to evaluate the impact and listen to members to evolve accordingly

10. Sirene Choir - Istanbul (Turkey)

Respondent: Volkan Akkoç

Which of the ten principles does your choir apply?

Sirene Choir applies the following principles from the SWAN Guidelines:

Start from what each person can already do

- Offer multiple ways to take part
- Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable
- Use small groups whenever possible
- Combine voice and body
- Adapt the environment
- Give simple, single-step instructions
- Collaborate with those who know the participant
- Observe changes in well-being

How does your choir apply these principles in practice?

1. Start from what each person can already do

Sirene Choir adapts its working methods to different musical backgrounds and abilities. For members who do not read music, MIDI files are prepared for each part so they can learn by listening. For a choir member with visual impairment, dedicated guide recordings are created (again using MIDI-based materials), ensuring equal access to the repertoire.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

Members can engage with the music through reading scores, listening to MIDI files, using guide recordings, or learning through repetition in rehearsal. This flexibility allows everyone to participate according to their strengths and needs.

3. Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable

Sirene Choir follows a clear and consistent rehearsal routine. Each rehearsal begins with vocal and movement warm-ups. When working on repertoire, the process is structured as follows: first a sight-reading rehearsal, then individual practice supported by recordings, and finally detailed musical work. This predictable structure supports learning and reduces anxiety.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

In addition to full choir rehearsals, Sirene organises sectional rehearsals when needed, as well as quartet rehearsals. Individual feedback sessions are offered twice a year, allowing members to work in a more focused and supportive setting.

5. Combine voice and body

Rehearsals include physical warm-ups and, when required by the repertoire, body percussion and movement-based exercises. This integration supports musical understanding, coordination, and embodied learning.

6. Adapt the environment

Rehearsal practices and materials are adapted to the needs of the choir members, including accessible learning formats (audio-based materials) and supportive rehearsal conditions.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

Communication during rehearsals is clear and direct. Instructions are given briefly, supported by facial expressions, gestures, and concise verbal cues, ensuring shared understanding.



8. Collaborate with those who know the participant

Sirene Choir collects emergency contact information and maintains open communication channels, allowing for responsible and informed support when needed.

9. Observe changes in well-being

The choir observes increased continuity and commitment among its members. Singers tend to remain in the choir for longer periods, indicating sustained engagement, a sense of belonging, and positive effects on well-being.

Is there anything else your choir does that supports accessibility or inclusion?

To further strengthen inclusion, Sirene established *Akademi Sirene*. This parallel choir and training programme is designed for women who wish to make music but do not yet meet the technical level required for Sirene Choir. Akademi Sirene provides structured musical education, including vocal training, music theory, ear training, and solfège. In addition, body work is carried out with the support of a physiotherapist. The academy also plans to offer open workshops and works with a larger, more diverse group, creating an inclusive pathway into choral singing.

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11. Shout at cancer - United Kingdom and Belgium

Respondent: Thomas Moors

We are a choir of people who sing without a voice box. Most members have undergone total laryngectomy following head and neck cancer and have rebuilt communication through alaryngeal speech. What might appear as a contradiction - singing after the loss of the larynx - is in fact the starting point of our practice. Rather than restoring a lost voice, we explore new forms of vocal expression, working with breath, resonance, rhythm, and collective sound. The choir provides a space where altered voices are not hidden or corrected but celebrated, where participants transform experiences of illness, silence, and recovery into shared artistic creation. Through co-created lyrics, structured workshops, and supported performance, the group cultivates confidence, social connection, and renewed ownership of voice and identity.

1. Start from what each person can already do

All testimonies emphasise the importance of building on existing abilities — voice, rhythm, movement, and listening — without forcing skills that are not yet accessible. In our practice, this includes singing after the loss of the voice box as an exploration of tonal range, breath control, and vocal projection. Rather than aiming for “normal” singing, we work from what each participant can already produce and gradually extend these capacities.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

Data show higher engagement when participants can choose how to contribute: singing, moving, using gestures or simple instruments, or active listening. In our choir, participants have a say in repertoire. We co-create our own lyrics that express the psychosocial impact of laryngectomy and the battle with cancer. We place less emphasis on movement, although warm-ups may include it. This shared authorship increases ownership and motivation.

3. Keep activities structured, but varied

Across groups, predictability and clear structure reduce anxiety. In our workshops, there is a recognisable routine, but we intentionally include variety to sustain interest and motivation. We also place responsibility with more experienced laryngectomy speakers, inviting them to support others. Peer tutoring by someone with lived experience benefits both sides: it strengthens confidence, creates meaning, and builds group cohesion.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

Small groups create intimacy, trust, and focus, and they make facilitation easier. In our experience, a minimum of six participants works best, balancing group energy with personal attention.

5. Combine voice and body

Practices that integrate singing, breathing, rhythmic games, and simple movement support inclusion, concentration, and emotional regulation. They create a shared group feeling, introduce achievable challenges, and offer visible or tangible experiences of progress. Warm-ups often build rhythmic or timing patterns that later reappear in repertoire, supporting learning through embodiment.

6. Adapt the environment

A calm, well-organised, and visually readable space reduces barriers and supports participation.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

Short, direct instructions supported by demonstration are effective. We keep explanations concise but may rephrase an exercise in different ways to accommodate diverse learning styles. Breaks between exercises allow informal conversation, humour, and participant input, and we sometimes offer choices between exercises to support autonomy.

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8. Reduce performance pressure

Performance pressure is reduced through multiple strategies: combining poetry with song, limiting demanding vocal repertoire, and focusing on shared expression rather than technical perfection. This lowers strain on the voice during preparation and performance while preserving a sense of artistic purpose.

9. Collaborate with trusted professionals

We regularly work with professional musicians and a backing choir that has accompanied the group for years. This continuity builds trust. The professional framework provides structure and recognition; participants feel honoured, protected, and carried by the group. They enjoy “hiding” within a larger collective sound — the experience remains exciting and full of adrenaline, but within a controlled and supportive environment.

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12. Blindsingers - Basel (Switzerland)

Respondent: Wanda Tinner

1. Start from what each person can already do

The choir members practice the songs at home before rehearsal using audio recordings that we provide them with. This allows us to build on what they already know during rehearsals.

2. Offer multiple ways to take part

The active members sing in the choir.

3. Keep activities short, clear, and repeatable

We structure the rehearsals in a similar way and make sure there are enough breaks.

4. Use small groups whenever possible

We sometimes rehearse with individual voice ranges (only soprano and alto or only tenor and bass).

5. Combine voice and body

We also do physical exercises during warm-ups. However, when singing, it is difficult to give blind people additional instructions on movements.

6. Adapt the environment

We rehearse in locations that are suitable for blind and visually impaired people.

7. Give simple, single-step instructions

We make sure to give clear instructions and speak clearly.

8. Reduce performance pressure

We want to create a good atmosphere and avoid pressure to perform during rehearsals. The focus is on enjoyment.

9. Collaborate with those who know the participant

We regularly collect feedback.

10. Observe changes in well-being

Yes, we observe the positive influence of singing on the well-being of choir members.

13. Turkish State Youth Choir

Respondent: Pelin Küçükerođan

How does your choir apply these principles in practice?

In our choir, I really feel that everything starts from what each person can already do. There's no pressure to do something you're not ready for. Even on days when I don't feel like singing, I can still take part by moving, keeping a rhythm, using gestures, or just listening. That makes it much easier to feel comfortable and included.

Rehearsals usually follow a familiar structure, and that helps a lot. Knowing what's coming next makes me feel calmer. We work in short activities and repeat things when needed. When we work in small groups or pairs, I feel more relaxed and focused, and it's easier to connect with others. Voice work is often mixed with breathing and movement, so it's not just about singing, but about being aware of the body too.

Instructions are usually very simple and given one step at a time, often shown rather than explained too much. There's very little pressure to perform or be perfect. Instead, we focus on exploring sounds, sharing music, and enjoying the process. It also helps to know that the choir leader talks with teachers and families when needed, so everyone understands what supports each person best.

What effects or changes have you observed in participation, wellbeing or other factors?

For me, the biggest change is how much more people want to take part. I've seen people who were very quiet at the beginning become more confident and involved over time. I feel more comfortable taking initiative myself too. The atmosphere feels calmer, more supportive, and less judgmental.

In terms of wellbeing, I feel more relaxed during rehearsals and less anxious. It's easier to regulate emotions and stay focused. The goal isn't to sing "well" in a technical sense, but to be present and connected. For me, the choir has become more than just a music activity — it feels like a safe space where I can relax, express myself, and really connect with others.

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