What is Quality Repertoire for My Middle School Choir

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What is This?
Music educators—both researchers and skilled practitioners—affirm the importance of student-centered classrooms, where students are engaged in collaborative hands-on activities and where problem solving is a valued tool in curriculum design. (The “Some Works by Key Leaders” sidebar lists a few publications by educational leaders who discuss this concept.)

Music education has a long-standing history of providing students with opportunities for hands-on musical experiences: our students play, sing, create, listen, and move to music. However, there are many different kinds of hands-on experiences that can be a part of music learning situations. Two areas of consideration are the mindful engagement of students within that experience and the opportunity for students to contribute to the musical experience. There is a difference between doing activities that only require students to join in and activities that engage students in experiences that require them to think musically, solving musical problems.1 There is a difference between activities where the teacher makes all the musical decisions and those in which student collaborations and contributions enable learner ownership of the musical process and product. Many of the practices that have found their way into general music classrooms are activities where students are “doing” things, and while that doing may occur when music is happening, the ways in which students are engaged in these experiences allow little space for thinking musically.

In addition, the process often fails to invite and encourage student contributions to the process of making music.

Consider this scenario. In a fourth-grade general music classroom, students are creating their own arrangement of the song “Che Che Koolay.” A series of problem-solving lessons has enabled them to reach a certain level of understanding about the music, and they are now working to apply that understanding by collaboratively creating their own arrangement of the music. The students first learned the song through an iconic representation of the melody. After describing the call and response, they performed the piece in class with singing, hand drums, and African rattles, taking turns as groups in leading the call and response. Next, they listened to the recorded example and, as a group, created a texture chart on the board, visually representing the layers of the music. Later, the students—again using the iconic representation (or standard notation, if able)—figured out the note names and, with partners, were able to play the call and response on Orff instruments or recorders. As a whole class, they regrouped and again performed “Che Che Koolay.” Finally, students created their own classroom arrangement by rearranging the order and combination of the layers, determining the number of times each part is to be played, and deciding if and when singers join or when there might be an instrumental introduction, interlude, or coda. As

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the students are doing music, but not functioning for themselves in musically creative ways. When students are simply “doing” things—playing or singing through mimicking a teacher or recording, participating in an ensemble without knowing or realizing how their part fits within the musical whole—they are acting without understanding and are engaged in what I call uninformed doing. Students may be doing something, and it may be fun and sound good, but if students participate without constructing or expanding their own musical understanding, the experience remains just something to do, without generating understanding that could be applied to new musical situations.

Informed doing, on the other hand, results when students are personally engaged with music, solving musical problems. Rather than merely following directions, students are being musical—growing as musicians. In learning situations, what students do informs their thinking, and what students think about informs their doing. Because of this important give-and-take relationship between doing and thinking, educators must find ways for our students’ interaction with music to be meaningful and challenging, stimulating musical growth. Instead of consistently being told exactly how to perform a piece of music, students need to be actively engaged with the music, making performance decisions that inform their understanding of the music. Rather than regularly being told how or what to listen for in a piece of music, students are challenged to figure out musical listening problems for themselves. When composing, students must be engaged in whole and authentic composing projects, not limited to creating music with a specific number of notes or measures. They must be enabled to compose music by creating and organizing musical sound with more open-ended parameters. When stu-
students own the doing and thinking—the informing of self musically—they are enabled to further their own musical understanding.

Rethinking Musical Ideas

In another scenario, older students are creating a “remix.” Popular musicians frequently remix “oldies” with sounds from current musical forms, leaving students to wonder how their parents know all the words to a top-40 hit! Students also hear remixes of the released radio version of a popular song, noting differences from the video or concert rendition. This phenomenon represents an appropriate musical problem for young musicians to solve—how do musicians take a song and remix it to reflect new or personal musical ideas, yet retain some of the music’s original character? Or, instead of rearranging an entire piece, how do musicians vary or develop a single musical idea or theme and repeat it, yet make the repetitions varied enough to make the music interesting and expressive?

To enable student success with such a project, students might study examples of music with repeated melodies that are varied. Students may listen to “In the Hall of the Mountain King” and figure out how Grieg varies each repetition of the theme to create tension and suspense. In further exploration of how composers vary a melodic theme to create interest, students might listen to a piece by the Blue Man Group or to the finale of Stravinsky’s Firebird. Another example to consider might be the soundtrack version and the “NSYNC remix of “Trashing the Camp” from Tarzan. A problem-solving listening lesson might include students working with partners or in small groups to come up with a list of ways to alter melodic material, then sharing their ideas (after multiple listenings of each selection) with their peers to create a master list of ways composers manipulate sound, creating variety with repeated musical ideas. Once this is accomplished, students may be better enabled to use this information, constructed through solving musical problems while listening, to create their own remix of a tune.

The experience of listening to and describing musical examples with a specific goal in mind—figuring out how to vary themes or redesign a whole piece to eventually accomplish this themselves—provides groundwork to enable student success. By engaging in the processes of listening and creating, students are working with all the musical elements, such as tempo, timbre, dynamics, melody, and articulation. Instead of being told about how the elements are used in these examples or answering questions that have only one correct answer, as is typical in a teacher-centered approach, students are actively thinking and doing, figuring out how these elements work together to create unique musical wholes. Finally, as students choose a tune that they are capable of playing and singing, they apply these ideas to a new musical situation, creating a set of variations on a central theme or new arrangement of an entire piece.

Stepping Aside

While the teacher is still the coordinator and designer of classroom musical experiences, the teacher does not need to direct every activity every moment. The teacher’s role is important, but it changes to shift the focus of classroom instruction from what the teacher will do to what the students will figure out. This includes carefully crafting lessons that allow for and—in order to be successful—necessitate that students be creatively engaged with the music. Such lesson design requires finding ways that allow students to be composers, listeners, or performers—to express new musical ideas through composing, to find broad and specific musical ideas when listening, to interpret music when performing. This “allowing for” is quite intentional, and requires that the teacher step back and no longer be the center of the musical experience, responsible for all the thinking and doing and musical decision making. It requires the teacher to trust and enable the students’ budding musicianship, rather than requiring students to mimic their teacher’s musicianship.

The role of the teacher, then, is to design ways for students to be the center of classroom activity, interacting with the music and with each other. A red flag for guarding against a teacher-centered approach might be to ask ourselves: to whom/what are the students responding?

If students are primarily responding to the teacher, waiting and watching for cues as to how to interact within an activity, then something is amiss. However, when students are engaged with the music, solving musical problems, and interacting with others (including the teacher as a member of the learning community), then we can trust that these learners are interacting with the music and, by doing so, informing their own musical understanding. Uninformed doing results when students respond to teachers in musical ways that are directed to them. The opposite, informed doing,
becomes something even more—a transformative musical experience enabling students to be more fully musical and, because of increased ownership in the process, become more confident in their developing musicianship.

It is common for us as teachers to think that our role is to “pass along” our knowledge of music or that being enthusiastic about music will “inspire” our students to share our love of music. But we cannot do this for our students. To have transformative musical experiences and to value music and grow in their love for it, students must engage with it in personal ways. It is only then that music will become an important part of their lives. We certainly do not want to create clones of ourselves or to have our students depend on us for every musical idea. What we want for our students is what they want for themselves—to be creative, imaginative, and independent musicians who are responsible for the thinking and doing and musical decision making within a teacher-supported learning environment.

NOTES


3. The concept of reflection while engaged in experiential learning through the solving of problems is central to the work of John Dewey. See the following items:


4. Other remix examples include the following:

   - Beatles’ remixes of “Please, Mr. Postman” (Marvelettes, 1961) and “You Really Got a Hold on Me” (Miracles, 1962)
   - Kenny G’s remix of Leroy Anderson’s “Sleigh Ride”
   - Mannheim Steamroller’s “Faeries” remix of Tchaikovsky’s “Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy”
   - For older students, consider the two versions of “Crazy” by Gnarls Barkley and Nelly Furtado, or “Linus and Lucy” by Vince Guaraldi compared with the Wynton Marsalis arrangement.
Planning for Understanding: A Reconceptualized View of the Music Curriculum

Janet R. Barrett

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What is This?
Planning for Understanding: A Reconceptualized View of the Music Curriculum

By Janet R. Barrett

Music teachers, like their colleagues in other fields, are living through a paradoxical time in schools. Currents of change in education and society seem to pull teachers in contradictory directions. Nowhere is this flux more apparent than in curriculum. While teachers are called upon to differentiate teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of students, they are also asked to standardize expectations and provide highly structured content for these very same students. School reform initiatives call for multiple means of documenting student learning, but, at the same time, the reliance on grades and test scores as the primary indicators of progress seems more restrictive than ever. At a time when resources are reappropriated for subjects most susceptible to rigid accountability measures, other subjects—the arts too often among them—struggle to maintain funding.

It seems odd to ask music teachers to rethink their approach to the curriculum when these forces demand their already overburdened attention. In a real and immediate sense, however, times of conflict and challenge often prompt us to reconsider 

A more open-ended approach to curriculum may be a way to foster true musical understanding among today’s students.

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The traditional approaches to curriculum may not be the best way to engage today’s students in music.
regular habits and reassess familiar patterns of organizing the curriculum. Times of widespread change call for creativity and vision as we examine essential questions about teaching and learning and think differently about the curriculum's capability to answer them. The works listed in the Suggested Reading sidebar provide just a sample of some of the current thinking on the subject.

Educational historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban describe some of our familiar traditions and practices as the grammar of schooling. Though we use grammar every day and underlying linguistic rules govern our communication, we rarely stop to examine how these rules influence the form, shape, and purpose of our conversations. Like language, music teaching and learning are governed by a grammar that includes such traditional practices as periodic public performances, festivals, and competitions; required elementary general music; and elective middle and high school ensembles. Even teachers' specialization by discipline and subject is a persistent pattern, framed by traditional categories and labels.

You can test this notion of grammar for yourself by imagining what you consider the quintessential roles and responsibilities of a band director, choral director, orchestra director, or general music teacher. The generalizations you cite will likely be examples of our taken-for-granted assumptions. Many of these assumptions about music teachers' work can, and perhaps should, be reexamined and illuminated through a postmodern lens. For example, we might think differently if we considered students' musical experience as the organizing center of curriculum work.

**Traditional Curriculum**

This focus on student experience contrasts with traditional models of curriculum planning in which teachers and curriculum designers expend much effort in getting the framework right before instruction starts. Considerable attention is paid to the decisions teachers make prior to students' engagement with the curriculum.

Consider, for example, a common diagram of curriculum planning (figure 1). Like a series of actions in a chain reaction, the diagram in figure 1 conveys that curriculum planning is a rational, orderly, and sequential process that culminates in student learning. Students participate in a curriculum that teachers deliver and demonstrate that they have "got it." The assumption is that if we get the front end of the chain right, the rest will follow. If we articulate and describe goals and intentions, organize the materials, and plan a sequence of instruction, the desired outcomes will occur as we implement the curriculum package.

This model sounds very familiar to many of us. We can point with pride to the neatly plotted grids or tables we have designed to chart the scope and sequence of the curriculum, an organized syllabus or handbook, or even an elaborately tabbed and color-coded binder full of standards and objectives arranged by grade level. If we use the common metaphor of curriculum as a journey, these documents resemble the itinerary. They give us a general sense of the major destinations, the time frame in which the journey will occur, and the order in which we will travel from one location to another. Examining the documents can give us a broad answer to the question of what the music curriculum includes and how to organize it.

**Reconceptualized Curriculum**

As any traveler knows, an itinerary is not the journey itself. The overall plan for the curriculum is not the same as the curriculum that students...
and teachers experience. A different model emerges from the more phenomenological view of postmodern thought. In this view, the lived experience of students takes center stage. The ways that students make sense of the school experience and relate it to their lives outside of school become the focal point for creating the curriculum (figure 2).

Times of conflict and challenge often prompt us to reconsider regular habits and reassess familiar patterns of organizing the curriculum.

In figure 2, students' musical understanding is at the center. Understanding is broadly construed as the various ways that students organize knowledge in order to solve musical problems, create new musical ideas, or derive meaning from music. To facilitate this understanding, teachers draw upon what students already know and their particular dispositions toward learning as they encounter new works, processes, and musical ideas. A curriculum centered on meaning provides time for students and teachers to reflect on music and its value, uses an array of instructional strategies to promote inquiry, features varied settings to promote independence, and offers plentiful avenues for exploring diverse musics in school and community settings. Essential questions for teachers to consider include the following: How can classroom experiences directly engage students’ musical thinking? How can the curriculum foster students’ abilities and desires to relate to music as a lasting presence in their lives? What is the essence of a musical experience with this sort of power?

A story of practice will most aptly illustrate this shift from delivering a specific curriculum (the traditional, or positivist, mode) to constructing the curriculum (a more postmodern orientation). As you think about this example, however, keep in mind that reconceptualization is in itself a process that reflects newly transformed beliefs and practices. Rather than leading educators to renounce all familiar habits and traditions, innovations often spring from the reconfiguration of familiar elements toward new ends, as you will see in the following example.

An Example of Changing Teaching Practice

Change often springs from a potent blend of inspiration and dissatisfaction. Nick White, a high school instrumental music teacher in a large suburban district, had been inspired by a mentor to think broadly about “music for all”—the notion that music could engage more students in more meaningful and imaginative ways. He was also inspired by his own growing interest in music technology and the capabilities technology afforded for exploring ideas in sound. He sensed that some students in his rather successful band program were profoundly creative but had few opportunities to pursue their ideas within the traditional rehearsal structure. Moreover, he felt students would be far more likely to remain engaged in music outside school if he could only foster their independent musicianship within the classroom to a greater extent. He realized that he enjoyed making musical decisions, but he felt that his students did not have enough opportunities to make their own choices and form their own judgments about the music they were studying.

These factors led White to reconfigure his high school band curriculum. He recast the typical schedule of five rehearsals per week. The band met in the usual rehearsal setting three days a week, but on Tuesdays and Thursdays students rotated among chamber music groups, a technology-assisted composition class,
and individual or small composition groups. White pulled together whatever hardware he could find and started modestly, but with determination. It was a learning process for all as he and his students discovered together what technology enabled them to do.

In the years that White facilitated this arrangement, his role shifted from primary decision maker to curriculum broker, ready to assist students in carrying out their plans for musical projects they wanted to pursue. Students in chamber music groups selected repertoire from lists White provided, critiquing and coaching one another. Over time, the emphasis on technology became less prominent as students used the software to generate and record their musical ideas in new combinations (for example, flute and guitar duets).

A curriculum centered on meaning provides time for students and teachers to reflect on music and its value.

Although the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday rehearsals continued as they had before the change, students experienced the music curriculum differently. Rather than responding first and foremost to the teacher as the primary authority, they made more confident musical decisions, invented interesting musical problems to solve, and negotiated solutions with others in their chamber groups and composition partnerships. Patterns of social interaction also changed as students began to look to one another for guidance, help, and constructive criticism. When this project was implemented, other teachers frequently asked White how he could give up two rehearsals per week without sacrificing his overall goals for performance. White found that the students’ increased sense of ownership and musical independence enhanced the large-group rehearsal and that his goals for chamber music and composition complemented the large-group components of the overall instrumental program.

Although this capsule summary makes the project sound tidier than it probably was as it unfolded, this brief description of one teacher’s curriculum experience illustrates some of the central ideas of the reconceptualized curriculum. The teacher expanded how he interacted with students, giving up some direct control in order to foster independence. Students learned in more open-ended and collaborative ways mediated by technology and the incorporation of more varied instructional groupings (individual, small group, and whole ensemble). A wider array of musical processes and products were available for critique and assessment of student learning.

This reconfiguration represents in some ways the best of both worlds. The traditional full-ensemble rehearsal existed side by side and in complementary balance with the chamber music and composition curriculum. Although the students who participated in this curriculum were not systematically observed and interviewed once they graduated, we might assume and hope that they have continued their musical engagement beyond high school, because while in school they constructed musical dispositions and understandings that would enable them to perform, create, critique, and respond to music in their lives.

Toward a Reconceptualized View of Curriculum Planning

Many calls for reform build a case for change by juxtaposing traditional practices with innovative perspectives. These dichotomies help us examine and define new ways of thinking about teaching and learning through comparison and contrast, even though they sometimes paint differences with too broad a brush. Through this intellectual exercise, a postmodern stance toward the curriculum becomes clearer. What guides a teacher through the process of reconceptualizing curricular practices so that understanding and meaning making are central? Prescriptive formulas, checklists, training manuals, or rigid methodologies are certainly inappropriate and incongruent with this paradigm, since they draw from a scientific approach to transmitting discrete bodies of knowledge from teachers to students. Clearly, in a postmodern milieu, we need to articulate how shifts in teachers’ conceptions of curriculum planning enable shifts in student understanding.

How can the curriculum foster students’ abilities and desires to relate to music as a lasting presence in their lives?

Postmodern approaches to planning strive to be open-ended and responsive rather than closed and predictive. Instead of predetermining and sequencing all of the elements of the curriculum before students set foot in the classroom, teachers create general frameworks that will evolve and take different shapes as students reveal what they know and what they have yet to understand. This shift suggests that curriculum planning occurs in cycles throughout the educational experience as the teacher responsively modifies and adjusts the curriculum to support and extend students’ thinking in new directions. Unexpected turns of thought give rise to further avenues of exploration.

For example, in a curriculum for a required sixth-grade general music course, a teacher might plot out the
broad scope of a “worlds of music” curriculum, articulating the breadth of cultural traditions and practices that might be explored, given access to resources, people, and materials. The path of exploration through those cultural traditions might be determined based upon the interests and prior knowledge of the students and the musical events occurring in the community during the course.

Postmodern approaches to planning strive to be open-ended and responsive rather than closed and predictive.

The relevance of content takes on particular importance in bridging the world of the classroom and the world outside school. Students’ experience and the teacher’s knowledge become avenues for connecting the curriculum to personal and collective meaning. Attending to the purpose for studying a particular tradition amplifies this relevance, as does choosing depth over breadth and understanding over coverage. A postmodern music curriculum also strives for valid connections as students relate musical ideas and examples to disciplines outside music. In this general music setting, for instance, the curriculum might include studying history, cultural practices and beliefs, and other art forms to enrich and deepen understanding of the music and the people who engage in it.

Instructional strategies provide occasions for students to perform, create, critique, describe, and respond. Inquiry-based strategies are particularly rich, since they develop students’ abilities to name and frame their own problems. For the proposed sixth-grade general music course, students might conduct oral history projects in which they interview and observe community musicians who represent diverse musical styles. They might collaborate with one another in small groups, work individually, or contribute to large-group presentations of their findings. The panoramic ways that students work in music and on their own understanding give teachers many forms of evidence for assessing learning. An important constructivist technique is inviting students to derive criteria by which their work will be judged.

The process of examining long-standing beliefs and practices—the patterns and rules that form the underlying grammar of our classroom work—is challenging, frequently unsettling, and unrelenting. Yet the exhilaration of observing students’ unfolding confidence, competence, and creativity makes loosening the reins of predictability and control worthwhile. Curriculum planning in this reconceptualized mode calls upon teachers to be astute observers of students. Through problem seeking and solving and through greater understanding, students’ questions become insights about the role of the music in their lives and lead to deeper interpretations of music they study and perform.

Notes
1. For more on these paradoxes, see Andy Hargreaves, Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers’ Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994).
4. For an illustration of the differences between the traditional, positivist curriculum and the more postmodern reconceptualized curriculum, see Hanley and Montgomery, “Challenges to Music Education,” 18, figure 1.
5. This case is drawn from Gerald B. Olson, Janet R. Barrett, Anthony Baroni, Nancy Rasmussen, and Janet Jensen, Looking in on Music Teaching (New York: McGraw-Hill/Primis, 2000), and an April 2004 interview with Nick White, who gave permission for his curriculum project to be described.

The following MENC publications offer more information on new approaches to music education, learning, and curriculum. For more information, visit www.menc.org or call 1-800-336-3768.

Music Education at the Tipping Point

John Kratus

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What is This?
Music Education at the Tipping Point

By John Kratus

In his classic comedy Annie Hall, filmmaker Woody Allen remarks that relationships are like sharks: they have to keep moving forward or they die. The same could be said of a number of things, including music education. History shows that American music educators have been most successful and their positions most secure when they satisfied the prevailing musical desires of the public. Singing schools in the late nineteenth century and the band movement in the mid-twentieth century are unmistakable examples of music education fulfilling changing societal needs. Conversely, music education has suffered when it has been perceived as culturally irrelevant and unnecessary. History also tells us that the public’s experience of music does not stand still: it keeps moving forward. For music education to remain relevant and provide value, it too must change with the times or experience the fate of the stationary shark.

To comprehend the changes occurring in music and their impact on music education, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of social change, which is the topic of the influential, best-selling book The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference, by Malcolm Gladwell.1 Gladwell’s thesis is that small changes and events can accumulate and cause rapid, large-scale transformations once a critical mass, or tipping point, has been reached. Gladwell employs his theory to explain such disparate events as the explosive growth of e-mail as a means of communication to the dramatic decrease in New York City’s crime rate in the 1990s.

We are undoubtedly living in a period of rapid cultural and social change. We are also witnessing a dramatic transformation in the ways people experience music and the practices used to educate children. Is music education keeping pace with these changes? Can Gladwell’s thesis be applied constructively to music education?

The Dynamics of Change

Gladwell writes that change begins with a few people, whom he calls mavens, doing something different. These people possess a vision and passion, as did, for example, the early adopters of personal computers.2 The ideas of mavens are spread to a broader group of people by connectors, who are acquainted with both mavens and people outside of the mavens’ community.3 Eventually, salesmen promote the ideas by putting them into contexts that others can understand.4 To ensure mass appeal, some characteristics of the ideas should be memorable or potent enough to have a “stickiness factor” that captures the public’s imagination.5

Music education must find ways to both keep up with the changing musical culture and preserve the best of our musical past.

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At this point, something that once existed in isolation is spread rapidly. This adoption can add something to the culture, as in the widespread acceptance of e-mail as a means of communication, or it can take something away, as in the elimination of Latin as a standard school subject.

The prevailing social and physical climate must be ripe to allow change to occur, and in this context appearances matter. For example, the dramatic drop in crime that New York City experienced in the late 1980s and '90s can be attributed not to changes in demographics or law enforcement, but to a strenuous effort to remove graffiti and other signs of lawlessness from public places. The theory is that the physical signs of disorder invited an epidemic of crime by signaling its permissiveness, and that changing the environment reversed the epidemic. Similarly, Latin was eliminated from most high school curricula when conditions were right and it became “permissible” to do so, because there was little clamor among the general population for continuing Latin as a standard school subject. Latin had for centuries been a part of a classical education. Whatever arguments were once used to support Latin in the curriculum (e.g., learning Latin enhances logical thinking and intellectual discipline) lost credence in a world of rapidly changing priorities.

Perilous Times for Music Education

Now let us look at an example of rapid change in music education. In September 2004, the Music for All Foundation, an advocacy organization, produced a report on the status of music education in California public schools using 1999–2004 data from the California Department of Education. The findings of the report were striking:

- During a period when the total California public school student population increased by 5.8 percent, the percentage of all California public school students involved in music education courses fell by 50 percent.
- This decline represents a loss 512,366 students and was the largest of any academic subject area by a factor of four. (Physical education was second with a decline of 125,000 students, representing a drop of 5.2 percent of the total PE enrollment.)
- There were 1,053 fewer music teachers, a decline of 26.7 percent.

Keep in mind that these changes occurred during just a five-year period. This rapid, dramatic change signifies that a tipping point had been reached for the viability of music education in California’s public schools. It became “permissible” for one district after another to curtail or trim music programs, and the cumulative effect was catastrophic.

The authors of the California study interviewed educators and policy makers to try to understand the underlying causes for the decrease. Those interviewed emphasized the same two root causes: the focus on reading and mathematics of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) resulted in a shift of funding away from subjects such as music, and California’s budget crisis restricted funding to public schools, leading to a reduction in funding for music education.
Yet the report’s authors rejected these explanations. Regarding the NCLB rationale, the authors noted that “music programs have been limited in a manner vastly disproportionate to other curricula. At a minimum, therefore, other forces must have been at work.” The authors similarly argued against blaming the state’s budget crisis. If the budget cuts were the cause of music education’s decline, why were other subjects, including other elective subjects, not equally affected? What were the “other forces” at work?

This brings us to another possible explanation: that during times of fiscal uncertainty, the arts in education is perceived as less valuable than other, more pragmatic subjects that provide skills directly related to the workforce. One can therefore assume that student participation in music would rise again along with an upturn in the economy. Unfortunately, enrollment in California music classes did not improve, even after the 2001–2002 economic downturn ended.

Furthermore, negative public opinion cannot be to blame for cuts in music education, because a large majority of the American public supports arts education, at least in principle. A Harris Poll released in June 2005 found that 93 percent of Americans agree that the arts are vital to providing a well-rounded education for children. Also, 54 percent rated the importance of arts education a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.9

But what kind of arts education does the public support? Turning to the California enrollment data, during the five-year period that participation in school music programs dropped by half, student participation actually increased in art, drama, and dance classes.10 It was not the arts in general that suffered; it was music alone. And students were not leaving music classes to take more pragmatic courses like computer studies; enrollment in computer education in California decreased by 0.7 percent.11

There are signs that music education is at a tipping point elsewhere. The status of music education in Canada is also troubling. A May 2005 report conducted for the Coalition for Music Education in Canada found that 20 percent of the music programs in Quebec and 21 percent of the music programs in Ontario had experienced declining enrollments in the past two to three years.12 Furthermore, funding for music education had decreased during this period in one-third of Canadian high schools. According to the report, many Canadian music educators viewed the situation as a consequence of deteriorating or nonexistent standards for music teachers. Fully one-half of the schools surveyed employed at least one music teacher who did not possess a provincial teaching certificate in music, sapping the professionalism of the teaching profession.

The picture does not brighten with a look toward the future. A recent study by the Council for Basic Education suggests that instructional time for music and the arts will be further squeezed in the coming years.13 Of one thousand principals surveyed in Indiana, Maryland, New Mexico, and New York, one-third anticipated further decreases in instructional time for the arts, while just 7 percent anticipated increases. The situation was worse in schools with large minority populations, in which 42 percent of the principals anticipated that less time would be allocated for the arts in the near future.

What is going on here? Conventional wisdom holds that recent declines in music education are the direct (and simple) result of inadequate school funding and mandatory testing. This view is not supported by the evidence. Furthermore, public support for arts education is quite strong. School funding crises and NCLB have likely contributed to music education’s difficulties, but these factors alone do not explain the disproportionate hit that music has taken when compared to other school subjects. Conditions had to be ripe for economic and political changes to bring music education to this point.

Causes and Effects

Obviously music education has not tipped everywhere. There are thriving music programs in some schools, and these programs can serve as models for the future. But it would be a mistake to ignore the warning signs from the Golden State. These same root causes exist elsewhere, and when something tips, it tips quickly.

The two factors that I believe have brought us to this tipping point are changes in the ways music is experienced and changes in educational practice. In both cases, music education has become disconnected from the prevailing culture. First, let us

MEJ Centennial Series

During 2007, MENC’s hundredth anniversary, each issue of MEJ will feature a special article celebrating the centennial in a series guest-edited by Patrick K. Freer. Each article is intended to help readers reflect on the past one hundred years and consider where we might go from here. The following articles make up this special series:

- “Reflections on Fifty Years of Publishing with MENC” by Bennett Reimer, January 2007
- “Democracy and One Hundred Years of Music Education” by Randall Everett Allsup, May 2007
- “MENC in International Perspective” by Marie McCarthy, September 2007
- “Music Education at the Tipping Point” by John Kratus, November 2007
consider the nature of music experience. Music is undeniably important in the lives of young people. Research suggests that adolescents in the United States listen to music an average two to four hours per day. Music is the soundtrack of their lives, and the relationship between adolescents and their music is potent and deeply personal.

How Music Is Experienced. Rather than develop curricula that complement the ways people actually experience music in their lives, teachers typically base their curricula on their own goals and the way they were taught. One example of this is teaching solfège. How many amateur or professional musicians use solfège outside of school settings? Collegiate music schools are in many cases the most out-of-touch, clinging to an out-moded nineteenth-century model of conservatory training for professional classical performers, even in the preparation of music educators. One wonders whether our profession's resistance to change is a direct result of the limitations in the musicianship we have been taught.

The music made in schools, largely based on classical, folk, and sometimes jazz traditions, represents a small and shrinking slice of the musical pie. Students perform music in school that they rarely, if ever, hear outside of school. More than one-third of the nation's largest one hundred radio markets have no classical music station. Between 1999–2000 and 2003–04, symphony attendance in the United States dropped 13 percent. A recent article by the chair of the American Symphony Orchestra League notes, “The ground beneath us is shifting—has already shifted—in fundamental ways. We are seeing changes in the public perception of culture and taste.” In 2005, classical music accounted for only 2.3 percent of the total number of CDs sold. Some may view this as a cultural calamity, and others may consider it to be a natural evolution of public tastes. Regardless, it is real.

The experience of music is also becoming much more individualized, a world of earbuds and personal digital recording studios. A student's iPod tunes are his or hers alone, and a young composer or performer no longer needs bandmates to create a pop song or a symphony in the basement. By contrast, school music emphasizes large-group performance, in which everyone plays or sings the same piece at the same time.

Technology has forever changed the experience of music. In the twentieth century, the advent of radio and the phonograph made it possible for people to listen to music without being physically present at its performance. Today the digital music revolution has been equally profound. The growing use of MP3 players has made music more portable, more accessible, and more individualistic. The Internet has not only changed the way music is distributed, it has also encouraged the development of communities of music mavens who may live thousands of miles apart. For example, I now have the ability to discover for myself, online, the music of an obscure musician and communicate with others around the world who like his music. I can also upload music I have created to the Web and have others listen to it and provide feedback.

Musical communities can be formed by musical interest rather than acquaintance or physical proximity. A seventh grader in Florida may have musical tastes more in common with an Internet friend in India than with the person sitting next to her in home room. The dream of music serving as a bridge connecting the world's people, the elusive “universal language,” is within our grasp. Yet few schools fully employ the power of technology in the making and sharing of music.

Because of these changing ways of experiencing music, the notion that music performance is best experienced in person has become passé. Live performance is still a vital part of our musical culture, as exemplified by television's popular American Idol program, but physical proximity to live music is not as important as it once was. The generation who attended Woodstock has been replaced by a generation who experienced 2005's Live 8 concerts on AOL. Counter to this trend, music education still places its emphasis on one-shot, auditorium performances of large ensembles.

Instrumental performance media have changed as well. The best-selling instruments in the United States are the electric keyboard and guitar. They are instruments that allow for a lifetime of musical performance and creativity and enable a performer to play alone or with others and to sing while playing. Many keyboard and guitar players even compose their own songs. Rather than eagerly embracing these instruments—which more readily connect to students' own world of music and could help students continue creating music after graduating from school—our school programs still emphasize band and orchestra instruments and standard school repertoire. The oboe is a fine instrument. But considering the small audience for classical oboe music and the enormous amount of effort it takes to get a single good tone from an oboe, is there any wonder that twelve-year-olds are not jumping at the chance to play it?

Changes in Educational Practice. The nature of music in the world and the nature of music in school are, then, quite different things. As illustrated in figure 1, these differences are substantial. These are factors that, I believe, have brought music education to a tipping point. Not only have in-school music experiences become disassociated from out-of-school music experiences, but tried-and-true music education practices have become unmoored from educational practices used in other disciplines. The teaching model most emulated in secondary ensembles is that of the autocratic, professional conductor of a large, classical ensemble. Is that the model of the nature of music in the world and the nature of music in school? 
music making we want for our students? Even our language conveys this intent: people who lead school ensembles are called “directors,” not “teachers.” (Directors direct and teachers teach.) In many cases, the ensemble director selects the music, makes all the artistic decisions regarding interpretation, and shapes the resulting performance through tightly managed rehearsals to match a preconceived notion of the piece, correcting errors along the way. It is an autocratic model of teaching that has no parallel in any other school subject. Of course, not all ensemble teaching is structured this way, but a great deal is.

Other school subjects have come to terms with the cognitive revolution. Children learning to use language, for example, learn to read from authentic sources such as newspapers and books as soon as possible. Elementary children are encouraged to write and publish their own books, fostering communities of independently functioning readers and writers. Language is taught contextually, not as a series of sequential exercises. By contrast, many of our music education practices take students through a step-by-step approach, dominated by the teacher, and leading toward a result that is anything but an independently functioning musician.

I contend that the long-term problems of music education will be fixed neither through improved advocacy for the status quo nor with “music makes you smarter” campaigns. School music has drifted too far from out-of-school music, and music education practices have drifted too far from other contemporary education practices. Perhaps we must just admit that music education did not adequately change with the changing cultures in music or in education.

The situation has been noted by others outside the music education community. In an essay in MENC’s Vision 2020, Warrick Carter, former director of Disney Entertainment Arts, wrote:

When one looks at the study of other disciplines, it is apparent that there is a direct correlation between what is learned as a future adult and its implication and application for adult life ... It is only in the study of music that specific kinds of music are known as “school music,” separate from other music with which students may participate as adults. ... School music experiences have frequently neglected large areas of music making and music expression and have consistently not only failed to validate these but have in many cases relegated them to areas that seem to be less desirable and unimportant.

There is irony in all this. One of the functions of music education is to preserve the best of our musical past and our diverse musical cultures by passing on valued practices and traditions to the next generation. The aim of preservation would appear to run counter to radical curricular change. Music is unlike science, in which contemporary discoveries and theories improve upon and supplant prior ones. In music, Stravinsky is not necessarily better than Beethoven, and R&B is not necessarily better than jazz, even if R&B outsells jazz eight to one.

Perhaps an answer would be for music educators to take a page from colleagues in history education, who also have a responsibility to preserve the past. They reformed the teaching of history away from names, dates, and places of historical events to an understanding of history’s subtexts, causes, and relevance to current events. Music educators, too, can uphold tradition while embracing the future.

Creating a Movement for Change in Music Education

I would like to apply Gladwell’s ideas to positive ends, beginning with the notion that music education needs to become sticky, meaning that it must become potent and irresistible. It must also connect people to music in ways that are both personally fulfilling and educationally valid. There must be mavens to initiate the change, connectors to transmit the change to a broader population, and salesmen (and women) to translate the change into each school’s particular context. Above all, the nature of music education should reflect the cultural and social milieu in which it exists.

So what would this kind of music education look like? It seems to me that the best way to start is by looking at how music is actually used in the world, not the ways it exists in schools. The factors in the first column of figure 1 might lead toward such a starting point. Are there models of using music in schools that are similar to the way music is used in the real world that also fulfill Gladwell’s criterion of being sticky?

One unique example is the popular ukulele movement in New Zealand schools. The ukulele is an instrument that is relatively easy to play, allowing for a quick path to a satisfying musical experience. It can be used to accompany songs; it can be played by an individual student without the need for a teacher and other performers; it can prepare students to play the more difficult guitar; and it can provide a lifetime of enjoyment. A group of students playing ukulele is also funky enough to be a very sticky idea.

In the United States, a perfect example of sticky music education is the Metropolitan Opera Guild’s “Creating Original Opera” program. The program is part of an effort to make opera relevant to elementary and secondary students, accomplished by showing students how to make the music their own. As a result, thousands of young people across the United States have learned to create and produce their own operas. For these students, opera is cool! Is such a program attractive? Newsworthy? Educational? You bet.

Another example of sticky music education is the Vermont MIDI Project. The project uses the Internet to connect student composers in general music classes with professional composers and with collegiate music education and composition majors. The students in Vermont create MIDI files of their original music, which are sent to music majors and professional composers. The students in Vermont receive detailed appraisals of their music in its first draft and throughout the revision process. Here, younger and older musicians form a virtual community of composers, making use of technology to bring people together and pro-
motivating the creativity of individuals.

Other new directions for music education such as ethnic ensembles, popular music ensembles, songwriting classes, and composition classes offer additional means to connect with young people in musically and educationally rewarding ways. None of these ideas would work everywhere. But each of them has worked somewhere and could work elsewhere. To get there, I suggest that we focus on Gladwell’s three criteria for creating a movement that spreads: focus, test, and believe.26

First, focus by identifying the mavens who have the talent and passion to nurture an idea. In each of the examples presented above, a passionate maven, often a single teacher, put into practice an idea that had great power. These people exist everywhere but are often limited by bureaucratic walls. Often enough these mavens persevere and effect change. I think there are more mavens out there, although they are not necessarily education professionals. We need to identify them and put their advice to good use.

People who can be connectors are also necessary. One possible reason for the California tipping point was a lack of effective connectors. In the report on California schools, the authors wrote that the elimination of many fine arts coordinator positions meant that there was no one sitting with administrators to address the needs of music when budgetary decisions were made. We need more music champions, whether they come from the ranks of music educators, parent groups, universities, arts organizations, government agencies, or the music industry. We also need to make greater use of MENC at the state and local levels, where good ideas can be passed along through workshops or even streaming-video demonstrations.

Second, test to refine the idea and decide how to best package it. Any educational reform will have to be tested under a variety of conditions. Almost certainly there will be no single panacea that can be applied everywhere with equal success. Is the ukulele movement in New Zealand transportable to another country? Only testing will reveal the answer. Before jumping into major changes, the product will need to be refined and tested to see how it works in different situations.

Third, believe that change is possible, even under unlikely circumstances. Curricular change is possible, as exemplified by the programs I have described. It never would have occurred to me that the ukulele would be an instrument young people would enjoy playing. The instrument, at least in the United States, is widely considered to be the product of a bygone era, hopelessly corny. I also would never have believed that seventh graders would find opera “cool.” But these “illogical” ideas worked, thanks to the mavens who had the strength of their ideals to promote the causes. By learning to connect better with each other and with others outside our profession, we can spread the word of our most successful practices and reform music education.

None of this will come easily. The future would be so much easier if we could blithely continue teaching as we have been taught, generation after generation. But I do not think we have that option, and time is precious. The bad news is, like the ancient saying, that we are cursed to live in interesting times. The good news is, as Malcolm Gladwell wrote—little things can make a big difference.27

Notes
2. Ibid., 60.
3. Ibid., 38.
4. Ibid., 78.
5. Ibid., 92.
7. Ibid., 5.
8. Ibid., 5.
10. Music for All Foundation, The
11. Sound of Silence, 10.
18. Total CD sales in 2005 were 705.4 million and classical sales were 15.9 million. Data from Nielsen SoundScan, available at www.infoplease.com/ipea/A0921835.html and www.info please.com/ipea/A0921839.html.
22. Neilsen SoundScan. This report shows that 2005 sales of jazz were 17.1 million and sales of R&B were 143.4 million.
23. “About ‘Play It Strange,’” (Play it Strange Trust, September 13, 2006). Read more about the program at www.playitstrange.co.nz
27. Ibid. ▪
Their Own Best Teachers: How We Help and Hinder the Development of Learners' Independence

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It’s next to impossible to learn something deeply if you’re simply following instructions.

Abstract: Skillful teachers have developed the ability to take learners from the first conception of a goal to its accomplishment in shorter and shorter periods of time, with fewer and fewer errors on the learners’ part and with increasing satisfaction and diminishing frustration on the teacher’s. This article deals with the extent to which teachers provide learners assistance in their struggles to accomplish goals. At times, teachers may provide more assistance than is actually required and, in so doing, inadvertently limit learners’ development over the long term.

Keywords: learning, memory, practice, rehearsal, research, teaching

It would imagine that all of us who chose to pursue careers in teaching made our decisions at least in part because we found great satisfaction in helping people, perhaps especially children. It’s a wonderful experience to teach your own child to catch a ball, to ride a bike, to read, and to engage in any number of other adventures associated with parenting through childhood and adolescence. We may not feel quite the same sense of connection with our students that we do with our own children, of course, but the nature of the feeling seems in many ways essentially the same. Young learners want to do things—to stand for the first time, to speak, to make a sound on a trumpet mouthpiece, to sing with a clear tone, to make a more beautiful *ritardando*—and we parents and teachers delight in our ability to help them accomplish what they set out to do.

As we become more skillful as teachers, we become more efficient at the task of helping, and we develop the ability to take learners from the first conception of a goal to its accomplishment in shorter and shorter periods, with less and less error on the learners’ part, and with increasing satisfaction and diminishing frustration on ours. This article is about that very aspect of teaching: the extent to which we as teachers provide learners assistance in
their struggles to accomplish goals. In particular, it’s about the possibility that we at times provide more assistance than is actually required and, in so doing, inadvertently limit learners’ development over the long term.

**What Gets Remembered**

The current conception in psychology of what we think of as now (the psychological present) is an interval of about three seconds’ duration. Thus, a typical waking day may contain as many as 20,000 nows, most of which are entirely forgotten. And it’s a good thing that they are. There would be no advantage to my remembering every car I passed on the way to work in the morning, or to my remembering every car I passed on the way to work in the morning, or to remembering the exact words that a coworker said in greeting me when I arrived at school.

But some things that we experience are committed to memory, and some of our memories seem to us nearly indelible. This raises the question of what in our experiences and our perceptions of them signals the brain to hold on to a memory. What leads to a memory’s persistence?

Several semesters ago, I watched a video recording with one of my graduate students who was teaching a beginning cellist to play “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” for the first time using his bow. Prior to each repetition, my student asked the young cellist to “get ready to play,” whereupon the child placed his bow at some wacky orthogonal angle to the string and smiled at his teacher.

The teacher then moved the child’s bow to the correct position, reminded him to keep his bow straight, and directed him to begin playing, which he did. After the piece ended, my student gave some feedback, which the child listened to with careful attention, and again told the child to “get ready to play,” followed by the wacky angle of the bow on the string. The teacher dutifully moved the bow to the correct position, reminded the student of the importance of a straight bow, and the student played again. I watched this happen at least five or six times, after which I stopped the recording and looked at my student, who was clearly exasperated with her young charge. “What’s wrong with him?” she asked. “I keep putting the bow in the correct place, and he keeps placing it incorrectly.”

Consider the sequence of events:

- **Student places bow incorrectly**
- **Teacher corrects position**
- **Student plays**
- **Teacher gives feedback and directs the student to begin again**
- **Student places bow incorrectly**
- **Teacher corrects position**
- **Student plays**
- **Teacher gives feedback and directs the student to begin again**
- **Student places bow incorrectly**

The answer to my student’s question, “What’s wrong?” is that the student never placed his bow correctly on his own. Instead, he repeatedly placed his bow incorrectly and the teacher “fixed it.” This may seem like too obvious an example to be worth the trouble, but it effectively illustrates the central point of this article, namely, that the more teachers correct students’ errors, the less likely it is that those corrections will become a lasting part of students’ thinking and behavior. Students must have many opportunities to identify and correct their own errors, even though doing so requires more time than would be necessary if their teachers just did all of the correcting for them.

Herein lies one of the great impediments to teaching in a way that gives more time for students to think and figure out and try. It feels slower to the teachers who know they could more “efficiently” simply tell or show what needs to happen and get on with it. The problem with the “tell, show, and fix” strategy is that the learner’s brain is often not busy enough and working hard enough to actually create lasting change in the learner’s memory.

**Learning Is Error Correction**

It’s biologically expensive to change your mind. The old metaphor that brains are like tape recorders (or, now, flash drives) that our experiences are simply written on in real time is colorfully inaccurate. When you’re working at your computer and you decide to save your work and you click the Save command, your computer looks for a blank space on the drive, where it writes what you saved and assigns it an address. Binary switches on the drive flip from 0 to 1 or from 1 to 0 in ways that represent the stuff you saved. The next day, when you click on the file name, your computer simply finds the address and reads off the data attached to it. Barring some electrical malfunction or physical damage to the drive, what is read off is precisely what was written the day before.

Organic brains, including human brains, work nothing like that. First, there are no blank spaces in your brain. There’s a lot of stuff in there already, and what your brain tries to figure out as it forms a new memory is how your ongoing experience is related to what was already in your head—the old stuff with which the new stuff will become associated.

Second, most memories take time to stabilize and become resistant to interference and forgetting, a process called memory consolidation. With the exception of experiences that are tagged with intense emotion—fear, especially—most memories for most experiences begin in a labile state and, over the course of subsequent hours and days, are susceptible to modification and fading. In the ensuing hours following a learning experience, the process of memory consolidation stabilizes memories, rendering them more persistent. Energy is required to accomplish this because memory consolidation involves changes to the physical structure of the brain. Unlike the hard drive, changes in memories stored in an organic brain require changes in the brain’s physical makeup and configuration. We now understand that the consolidation process continues during sleep, when memories of experiences during the waking day...
are further stabilized and, in some cases, enhanced.4

Finally, memories stored in organic brains are ever changing. Everything that we encounter, we perceive and remember somewhat differently than the person next to us, because each of us brings a different set of memories to the moment of shared experience. In other words, memories of the past, which create expectations about the future, influence our perceptions of the present.5 How we experience each now is colored by what we’ve experienced previously, and our memory of a given now is susceptible to modification by what we experience in the future.

All of this is to say that human memory is not a static record of the past, like the memory of a computer’s hard drive. Rather, it is dynamic, changing over time and as a result of experience.6 When your computer is working as it should, storing a new memory has no effect whatsoever on the other memories recorded on the drive. When your brain is working as it should, new experiences often influence the memories that have been stored in the past.

So what would motivate a brain to commit an experience to memory or to modify a memory that’s already stored? The answer is error correction. And by error, I mean a discrepancy between a learner’s intentions (expectations) and actual outcomes. In music, this definition of error extends well beyond wrong notes, wrong rhythms, or mushy diction and includes all of the discrepancies between what a musician intends and what a musician does. To an artist-performer, for example, a note that doesn’t start beautifully and a phrase ending that’s not timed quite right are errors (discrepancies between intention and outcome) in the same way that a missed key signature may seem like an error to a novice.

Learners’ attempts to resolve the dissonance between their expectations and subsequent outcomes create new memories and refine old ones. Being told or shown by a caring teacher how to correct the errors you make is not at all the same as resolving errors on your own, because the teacher can do much of the work for you: locate the error, explain its cause, and provide a prescription for eliminating it. Consider that in order to correct errors on your own, you first have to have an intention, then have to perceive the discrepancy between it and the outcome, and then have to change your behavior to eliminate it, most often over the course of multiple repetitions.

There are excellent models for this kind of advantageously error-filled learning that many of our students experience.
all the time: well-designed video games. We have all known children who are declared intractably “unmotivated” by their teachers and parents, but who will sit in front of an Xbox until their thumbs bleed. What’s up with that? What’s up is that the game in the Xbox is a skillful, strategic, and highly consistent teacher. A great game leads players to develop expectations and intentions relevant to winning the game. Those expectations are often strategically thwarted by the game in ways that require modifications in the players’ thinking and doing. Over repeated attempts, players can shrink the discrepancy to near zero, at which point the game adds a new twist or a more challenging goal that in turn introduces new errors.

I often give a talk titled “Practice Makes Better. Practice Makes Worse. Practice Does Nothing at All.” I like the title because all three of those statements can be true, depending of course on what practice entails. For practice to make better, practicers need to perceive discrepancies between their intentions and the actual sounds coming out of their instruments or their own voices. And for that to happen, they need to actually have an intention about what sounds they are trying to make. I’ve met a lot of students who have no such intentions at all. Their intention is to make sound (off and on) for about thirty minutes, thus completing their practice requirement for beginning band or piano and getting a signature from their parents on their practice forms. I’ve met others for whom errors are only missed notes, missed rhythms, and stopping; they have little mental conception of the sounds they’re trying to produce or the ideas they wish to express to a listener through those sounds. None of these students will gain an optimal benefit from practice. They don’t have a clear auditory image in their minds of what they’re about to do (intention), so there is no way for them to assess the extent of the discrepancy between what they intend to sound like and what they actually sound like.

I think most music teachers subscribe to the idea that repetition is a necessary part of developing and refining music skills. So far, so good. But learners must be able to distinguish one repetition from another, and as they gain in physical skill, there must be commensurate gains in auditory and physical discrimination. Advising young students to play a given passage ten times, for example, is not fruitful if the students can’t hear or feel the difference between one repetition and the next. If they can’t, then it’s not surprising that practicing is viewed as generally unmotivating because, literally, it’s all the same to them.

Practicing an instrument or singing without clear expectations and intentions...
about what’s supposed to happen is like having to play a lousy video game for thirty minutes a day and have your parents sign an affidavit certifying that you did so. Imagine a video game with shapes on the screen that are so dark and obscure that you can’t really see what’s going on, and you’re not entirely sure what the shapes are supposed to do. You’re pushing buttons and shapes are moving around, but you can’t determine precisely what effect your movements are having on the dimly lit stuff on the screen, and you wouldn’t quite know what to make of it even if you could make it out. Wanna keep playing? No way.

Countless children practice music just like that. What they’re trying to accomplish is not entirely clear to them. They know that they’re supposed to repeat what they play, but they have little sense of how each of their repetitions differs from the others or how their physical movements moment to moment affect the sounds they’re making in each repetition. Wanna keep practicing trumpet? No way.

Well, why don’t these students know what they’re supposed to sound like? They’ve been told and they’ve been shown, and when they made mistakes in class or in their lessons, they were told and shown some more. They’ve had well-intentioned teachers correct their errors efficiently, consistently, and ultimately, unfortunately, in ways that limited their own cognitive involvement (and cognitive effort). Not good. Not enough (self-directed) error correction.

**The Value of the Muddle**

Perceiving a discrepancy between an intention and an outcome is often frustrating for a learner. It’s particularly frustrating when the path to resolving the discrepancy is not entirely clear and initial efforts do not lead quickly to discernible improvement. Confusion is a little unsettling. Not being able to do something you’re attempting to do is frustrating. How learners deal with the unsettled feeling and frustration has everything to do with how well they learn and how independent they become.

When our own children, after several attempts to reach a goal, become frustrated by some seemingly insurmountable obstacle, they often look to us for help, which we are often happy to provide. Many of our students behave similarly. *I don’t know where to start. Tell me. I can’t figure this out. Explain it to me. I don’t know how to do this. Show me.* One of my favorite graduate students told me about a student in her class who was trying to figure out a piano fingering as she was standing beside him watching. After several unsuccessful repetitions, he looked to her and said, “If you were a good teacher, you’d tell me how to do this,” whereupon my very astute and skillful grad student replied, “Yes, but because I’m an excellent teacher, I’m going to wait a while longer while you figure it out.” Of course, she said that with the informed confidence that her student could in fact figure it out, which he did after the next few attempts.

Think about what the student learned from that experience, other than the fact that his teacher’s a hardnose. He discovered that *be could figure it out*. His moments in the muddle led to his arriving at an advantageous solution, and all of the errors he made along the way actually strengthened the memory of the solution and the path he took in reaching it. His memory for that fingerling will in all likelihood be more persistent, more understandable, and more generalizable than it would have if the teacher had simply told him what to do.

To understand how human learning functions best, it’s instructive to consider how very young children learn what they learn and to identify the features of their experiences. Consider an infant learning to ambulate. Kids want to move because they want to get somewhere, often with the goal of putting enticing objects into their mouths. All of us who’ve been around a lot of infants in car seats have enjoyed the sight of enormous smiles accompanied by flailing limbs at the sight of some wiggly, noisy toy. The smile reveals the toy’s appeal, and the flailing limbs reveal an inability to control the body to obtain a goal. As the weeks and months pass, children sitting upright on the floor learn that when they tip over in the direction of the object of their desire, the object is closer than it was when they were upright. After landing on their bellies, they learn in the ensuing days and weeks that by moving their arms and legs they can scoot a little closer still. After raising themselves up on hands and knees, they discover that there’s a combination of limb movements that will actually propel them in the direction they want to travel, eventually reaching the precious cat dish, which promptly goes in the mouth.

There are two features of learning experiences like this that are central to their effectiveness. First, the learning is highly goal directed (I can’t wait to find out what that cat dish tastes like!). Second, it’s fraught with error. Infants learning to move have very clear goals that they’re trying to accomplish, and on the way to accomplishing them, they fail a lot. Why does all that failure not lead to their just giving up and deciding that crawling and walking are not really worth it? Two things: the clarity of the goal and the fact that interposed among the many failures are many self-derived successes. Even to us adults, it’s nice when someone shows us how to do something we don’t know how to do. When we figure it out on our own, it’s downright spectacular.

If students’ learning comprises primarily doing things that teachers tell them to do and show them how to do, then it’s not surprising that many children find school unmotivating. What they’re learning is not really mathematics or science or musicianship. What they’re learning is to remember and follow teachers’ instructions. Compliance is a good thing in some ways, but it’s not exactly a path to creative, critical, independent thinking. It’s also an ineffective way to build flexible intellectual and physical skills that can be applied advantageously in situations that have not been explicitly taught. Doing that requires error on the part of learners—failing, figuring out what happened, trying again, failing some
more, figuring out some more, and finally getting it.

I was invited to give a talk at a meeting in Dallas, Texas, a couple of years ago, and one of the other people on the program was a famously successful young high-tech entrepreneur. During his talk, he described the workspace in one of his new Internet companies. Hanging on the wall was a large sign that read FAIL FAST. The message to his employees was not to avoid failure, but to hurry up and fail so you can gain more information about what you’re trying to do. How brilliant is that?

It’s next to impossible to learn anything deeply if you’re simply following instructions. Mistakes are essential in learning, but what renders the mistakes useful is their being corrected by the learner. It’s the repeated attempts in the face of failure that provide the most useful information, hone perception and skill, and develop insight into what the heck it is you’re trying to do. When you fail initially, and someone else does the fixing, you may in fact accomplish the goal you were attempting. But if you do the fixing yourself, you not only succeed; you also understand. And understanding is the key to intellectual and physical independence.

Doing what you’re told won’t get you all that, because it doesn’t sufficiently engage your brain. When you’re in the weeds and unhappy about it, having somebody guide you out is certainly a relief. Finding your own way out combines the feeling of relief with a feeling of intense personal satisfaction, gained as a result of increased understanding. Working through muddles, then, produces intellectual, physical, and emotional positives that are simply not attainable in any other way.

Structuring experiences like this requires much more than throwing kids in the weeds and wishing them luck. Creating unsolvable confusions for learners is just mean. But creating strategic confusions—estimating what learners are independently capable of and then designing tasks that require them to use their capabilities to reach meaningful goals—nurture the development of intellectual and physical skills while setting up personal rewards that are obtained through learners’ own efforts. Truly great teachers do this all the time. So do the authors of Angry Birds. And with some practice, and failure, and more practice, all teachers can learn to do this, too.

**Notes**


7. The entrepreneur at the meeting was Scott Jones. Although I hadn’t heard of Jones before I met him in Dallas, he’d been affecting my life for a number of years. At age twenty-five, Jones sold his first company, a voice mail startup, for $843 million. Patented systems that Jones developed are used in voice mails all over the world. He went on to develop Gracenote, a name you may recognize because it’s emblazoned on the fronts of many CD players. He sold Gracenote to Sony for $260 million. He’s created a number of other companies as well. The employee workspace he told us about was located in what was at the time his newest venture, a company called ChaCha.
Dance All Night: Motivation in Education
Ellen Criss
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What is This?
Dance All Night
Motivation in Education

Abstract: One of the biggest challenges that teachers of adolescents face is the necessity to motivate them. This article begins with an overview of motivational theories and then focuses on process theory and its application in the middle school and high school classrooms. An effective teacher can create motivation in students by forming relationships with them and stimulating the affective domain. Included in the article are suggestions for classroom application.

Keywords: band, high school, middle school, motivation

Running on the treadmill has never been Jennifer’s favorite aerobic activity, but tonight it seems as though there are lead weights on her thighs. Determined to finish her workout, she inwardly groans as she looks at the clock and realizes that she has jogged for only three minutes. As she adjusts the volume in her headphones, a favorite rock song begins. Coincidentally, the driving thump of the bass is the same tempo as her footsteps! Suddenly, Jennifer finds that there are no longer any weights dragging her down. She falls into the rhythm of the song and begins to feel light and energized as she effortlessly jogs and hums along. A connection with the music and the rhythm is a stimulus that provides momentum, and it enables Jennifer to complete her workout more enthusiastically.

Many factors besides a rock song with a strong beat can be used as motivators. Some of Jennifer’s extrinsic rewards might include compliments about the weight she is losing, or the new blue jeans she is promising herself when she is ten pounds lighter. However, she knows that the intrinsic rewards of pride in her achievement and the feeling of physical well-being are longer lasting and ultimately are more powerful motivators. She is also aware of the importance of interpersonal relationships and emotions as motivators. She is reminded of a country dance, in that no matter how physically exhausted the participants are, when the band strikes up a polka, everyone enthusiastically joins in. Social relationships and sharing make the polka an exhilarating celebration rather than an aerobic exercise. Being motivated is like finding a strong beat and a great partner and being able to dance all night.

The ability to create motivation within students is one of the most important and challenging responsibilities of any teacher. In the music room, facilitating the enthusiasm within students to encourage them to take part in singing or playing an instrument is analogous to inviting the students into a partner dance where the music director leads, the rhythm enhances energy, and young musicians willingly follow.

What Is Motivation?

It might not have surprised Jennifer to find out that the word motivation is a derivative of the Latin verb movere, meaning “to move.” Indeed, when people are inspired, they feel the drive to initiate, to continue, or to complete tasks. Motivation requires some form

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of action or motion, whether it is physical or mental. In the music room during rehearsals, the director cannot do the dance alone; he or she must persuade students to become partners and help fill the dance floor. When more people participate, there is more enjoyment, and more learning.

Creating successful social citizens requires that teachers foster the development of students’ potential and help them cultivate their personal qualities. A teacher must be a resource for the nurturing of independence and resiliency. This is not only a huge responsibility, but also an extraordinary opportunity to have a positive impact and long-lasting influence. Although curriculum and methods, new technology, and challenging students are constant priorities for teachers, the capability to inspire and motivate pupils must take precedence for instructors in their classrooms. Without the ability to create motivation, teachers would be ineffective. “Both purpose and direction are essential to convey concepts to students, but without motivation, purpose and direction cannot be effective. Teachers’ motivation provides students with the drive and the will to accomplish the tasks teachers give them,” says Alberta Teaching Association president Frank Brusker. Having the latest technology, the best musical instruments, the brightest and best-equipped classroom, and the most recent musical compositions will mean nothing without the inspiration of a skilled teacher or coach.

In studies of motivation, three categories of research are evident: reinforcement theories, content theories, and process theories. The concept in education has evolved in accordance with these three schools of thought.

Reinforcement Theories

The reinforcement theory, popular until the 1960s, “would have us believe that motivation is not in the person, it is in the environment.” This theory is based on the premise that behavior is determined by its consequences. It suggests that learning can be manipulated by a program of rewards and punishments.

B. F. Skinner developed a complex system called “operant conditioning” in which new behaviors were created step by step to eventually lead to complex sequences. Animal trainers have used these techniques successfully in circuses and aquariums for decades. Skinner’s theories emphasize controlling and manipulating learners, and they attribute learning to external stimuli and extrinsic rewards. A teacher uses the reinforcement theory in the classroom by giving tangible, marketable, or commercially valued prizes, such as stickers or candies for work completed. An incentive is a reward that has no material value, but its purpose for reinforcing or motivating is the same. Incentives might include assigning bonus marks or free time, or making deals with students to earn special privileges. Reinforcement focuses on observable behavior but ignores the emotional or cognitive aspects of the child.

There have been several problems associated with the use of reinforcements as motivators. Research has shown that “when extrinsic rewards are used as payoffs, intrinsic rewards are reduced . . . intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are not independent of each other.” If extrinsic reinforcers are overused, students do not feel in control of their own behavior, and they may feel manipulated. Allocating extrinsic rewards for behavior that had been previously intrinsically rewarding tends to decrease motivation, so it can be counterproductive. For example, if a music teacher promises the band class that she will reward students with a prize if they can play a scale up to a prescribed speed, he or she may have success the first few times. However, the next time that students are expected to play a scale, they will expect a reward again. Furthermore, the teacher may have trouble finding a reward that will effectively motivate everyone in the class. An additional problem he or she may encounter is that the levels of ability among the students may be so different that they are not on a level playing field. Some students work very hard to achieve mediocre results, for example, while others are able to perform without preparation. The fairness and timing of the reward may create difficulties among the students and actually generate an atmosphere of competition, the opposite of what is required in a music class.

Using extrinsic rewards as reinforcers risks demeaning and dehumanizing students, possibly limiting their potential. Using the reinforcement theory on its own ignores the inner state of the individual and “the feelings, attitudes, expectations, and cognitive variables, known to affect behaviour.” According to Stephen R. Covey, “motivation is a fire from within. If someone else tries to light that fire under you, chances are it will burn very briefly.”

Content Theories

Theories of reinforcement concentrate on factors external to the learner and the assumption that changing the extrinsic rewards will change behavior. Content theories focus on human needs and on identifying why people behave in certain ways. The premise of content theories is that people will respond in desirable ways when their needs are met. The assumption is that if a teacher can effectively meet the needs of his or her students, they will learn. Several theorists, most notably Abraham Maslow, Clayton Alderfer, David McClelland, Frederick Herzberg, and John Atkinson, developed ways of identifying and prioritizing human needs.

To motivate a student, Maslow would recommend that the teacher understand the student’s level on the hierarchy or the pyramid of human needs. If a student is not working in class, and his or her homework is incomplete, the insinuation is that one of his or her needs is not being met. Once the teacher identifies the need and takes steps to fulfill it, the student will be motivated to achieve the next level, leading ultimately to self-actualization, which is a “drive to become what one is capable of becoming . . . [and] achieving one’s potential, and self-fulfillment.” Rather than encouraging managers or teachers to be proactive, Maslow’s theories invite teachers to be reactive to needs that are not being met. This negative approach of looking for physiological or psychological deficiencies, with a focus on being
reactive to problems rather than looking for the positive attributes of students, has met with much criticism.

McGee and Herzberg both devised methods of matching personality types and individual needs to work preferences. Again, these theories focus on adjusting a work environment in reaction to a perceived personality type, linking job satisfaction to working conditions. Being satisfied with one’s working environment, however, is not the same as being motivated. Most public school teachers work with students who are in early stages of development, in terms of personality traits. Therefore, one of the problems of applying content theories to teaching is that students' personalities have not stabilized, and their development is incomplete during their middle school or even high school years. Basing motivation techniques on personality types is not the most effective method of finding a stimulus, or of creating that invitation to the dance. Those who work in middle school might contend that there are days when physical needs, driven by hormonal changes in teenagers, are primary needs for their age and maturity. The need for belonging to a social group is another example of an aspect of maturation that is unbalanced until a later age. Content theories seem to apply more directly to adults in the workforce than to young students, as the needs of adolescents are constantly evolving. Teachers who are effective with this age-group can assess these shifting priorities and adapt the dance from a polka one day to a waltz on another.

**Process Theories**

Process theories focus on the cognitive processes that influence behavior. According to Dennis McInerney, process theories contend that motivation lies in the intrinsic desire to improve personally, to solve problems, and to gain understanding. Motivation is less focused on needs and more attentive to mental processes and perception as well as the personal interpretation of experiences. One of the important premises of process theory is that people value self-respect and self-satisfaction more highly than they value material rewards. The implication is that the ability to sing or play a piece of music beautifully, and the self-satisfaction that results, is more valuable than a paycheck or a tangible prize. Human emotional responses are activated when individuals examine the importance of a learning activity and judge their expectations to succeed. They judge the task on the basis of personal relevancy, and because emotion is the strongest force in the brain, overall motivation is affected. The application for education is that if teachers can appeal to the values and the emotional responses of the pupils, motivation is more likely. This is especially relevant to music teachers, whose job is to reach the affective domain in order to create expressive melodies and exciting rhythms. Instructors who are skilled at motivating their students might be expected to make learning personally relevant to the children and to persuade them that their expectations for success should be high. Their students feel motivated if classroom activities encourage their feelings of autonomy and self-direction, and they feel respected and trusted. Music students want to feel a sense of ownership and pride in their performances.

**Process Theory in the Classroom**

Six aspects of process theory are evident in the study of motivational psychology: expectancy, equity, attribution, self-efficacy, goal setting, and autonomy.

**Expectancy**

Part of process theory has to do with people’s expectations about the results of their behaviors. Behavior is affected when people interpret events and develop expectations about intrinsic or extrinsic reinforcement. “What matters is what a person believes will happen in the future, not what has happened in the past.” Expectancy theory concerns the judgments people make about their capabilities to perform successfully and the beliefs they have about why they might engage in a task. For students, this means that expectancy goes beyond their self-perceptions of competence and focuses on the perceived value of academic success. Both the value of a task and the individual's expectation of success or failure are subject to variation and influence by a skilled teacher or coach. For example, a band director might demonstrate the importance of the third trombone part by having students listen to a performance of the score without the crucial third trombone notes in the chord structure, showing the value of the student's task. Then, by focusing on small segments of the music, the teacher can prove to the child that success is possible and expected. If a teacher can encourage students to have constructive self-perceptions of their competence, and optimistic expectancies of success, students will perform better, be more engaged, exert more effort, persist longer, and be more successful. Appealing to the affective domain will yield positive, engaged students. It is important for teachers to help students raise their expectations of themselves. Even reluctant or shy students can be encouraged to take small steps, perhaps to increase their vocal ranges by one semitone at a time, for instance. Atkinson identified two types of students: the high-need achiever, for whom challenge is motivating, and the low-need achiever. Low-need achievers find challenging situations difficult, so they often choose tasks that are too demanding, and therefore, they think that their failure can be excused. “Some students do not know the true boundaries of their competencies because they never test them.” Clever teachers are able to help students match their abilities and expectancies, and help them to choose tasks and criteria for assessment that are right for them, to increase their potential. It is important for young students to play or sing at least some selections that are easily accessible, to develop confidence. In the words of Norman Vincent Peale, “people become really quite remarkable when they start thinking that they can do things. When they believe in themselves, they have the first secret of success.”
Motivating Students in the Classroom

- **Appeal to the values and the emotional responses of the pupils.** Make learning personally relevant. Relate classroom content to their own lives and build connections between curriculum and reality, so that they can apply their own emotions and become engaged personally.

- **Expectancy:**
  - Persuade students that their expectations for success should be high.
  - Help the child to believe that he or she can do well, and success will follow.

- **Equity:**
  - Help students feel respected and trusted.
  - Help students to realize that tasks, and the stress and fear of the unknown, are manageable.
  - Ensure that fair treatment is the model in the classroom.
  - Respect students, ask for permission to help them, listen for feelings beneath the surface, and watch for body language and group dynamics.

- **Self-Efficacy:**
  - Encourage students to have constructive self-perceptions of their competence.
  - Help students match their abilities and expectancies, and help them to choose tasks and criteria for assessment that are right for them.
  - Help students to learn from each other.

- **Goals:**
  - Help students to choose goals that are personally relevant, challenging, clear, and compelling.
  - Teach students that reaching goals is not magic; it takes a series of baby steps.

- **Attribution:**
  - Help students see that their success can be attributed to their skill and their efforts and not to good luck.
  - Help to clarify the relationship between actions and consequences.
  - Encourage students to believe that competence is a controllable aspect of their development and that their abilities will change and expand over time.

- **Autonomy:**
  - Encourage feelings of autonomy and self-direction.
  - Help the child to feel safe enough to take risks in the classroom. Create a nurturing and trusting environment.
  - Teach students that they are in control of the results of their actions and that failure is temporary and instructional.
  - Facilitate the ability for a person to be self-determining and to have a part in decisions and choices that affect him or her.
  - Help students feel empowered, and self-esteem and expectancy will be raised.
  - Invite students to have input into their own assessments, and they will be more willing to accept responsibility.

Pupils should be encouraged to push beyond the boundaries of their previous expectations, to relate classroom content to their own lives and build connections between curriculum and reality so that they can apply their own emotions and become engaged personally. For a child to feel safe enough to take risks in the classroom, and increase expectancy for success, a nurturing and trusting environment is recommended. Music teachers can frequently remind their students that it is acceptable to make mistakes while learning something new. A musician will be unable to correct a mistake if he or she cannot hear it. When administering performance tests, a director may find it useful to allow a student to repeat the test on another day for an improved mark. By allowing the students to acknowledge mistakes and by giving them a chance to practice and improve, a teacher can increase the comfort level in the classroom. Students who are too nervous to try new music will find it very difficult to achieve it. Like shy dancers, they will feel as though they each have “two left feet.” The instructor needs to help students realize that tasks, and the stress and fear of the unknown, are manageable. The first goal when dancing with a new partner is putting that partner at ease and helping him or her relax.

**Equity**

Equity theory is based on the idea that people are motivated by social comparison and that they will act to eliminate any perceived unfairness. People are concerned not with the size of a reward but with the relationship of it to what others receive; and they make judgments as to the perceived input compared to the outcome received by themselves and others. When students or employees believe that a process is fair, then trust and commitment will follow. The inference is that changing the way students are treated may be more motivational than the way they are marked or otherwise rewarded. Teachers must always be aware of the way their actions are perceived to ensure that fair treatment is the model in their classrooms. Encouraging competition between students is not recommended by educators. Most teachers would rather reduce social comparison, avoid public evaluation, and emphasize success in terms of personal improvement comparisons. However, one of the positive aspects of equity theory is the way it can be used for vicarious learning. Students are inclined to “replicate behavior of peers, if behavior is instrumental in achieving goals and they feel like they are modelling competency.”

Instrumental or vocal music classes are often more successful when they are larger. There is strength in numbers. When a few young students playing recorder can demonstrate a correct melody or rhythm, the rest of the class begins to imitate the model. More proficient students are proud to exhibit their skill, and their friends want to rise to the standard presented. No one wants to be the only one on the dance floor, or the only one on the sidelines. Peer influence can be a powerful force, especially in group settings, such as teams or performing organizations. Indeed, students often learn efficiently from each other. Observing a peer often can give students a greater sense of efficacy.
Attribution

Closely related to expectancy theories is the theory of attribution. It deals with the perceived cause of an outcome. When a student receives a grade on an assignment, to what does he or she attribute success or failure? This cognitive theory of motivation is based on the idea that people are rational and that they are motivated to understand and master the environment. Humans are constantly seeking to explain their behaviors or the behaviors of others. For example, a student and his or her teacher will both seek to understand why a performance was a success or why it fell flat. The key question for motivational theorists is, “Why?” Precedence is given to an individual’s beliefs, which may or may not reflect reality accurately. It is the personal belief that influences a student’s motivation, and “accuracy is not necessary for the attribution to have psychological and behavioural consequences.”

Precise and unbiased teacher feedback is critical to “help students link their successes to something they did to contribute to the success . . . to develop self-efficacy and the confidence that they have the power to be successful.” When an orchestra performs beautifully, the director can help the participants understand that their hard work, their focus, and their attention to detail were the reasons for their success. Sometimes students have the mistaken impression that a great performance is due to fate or luck. Students should be encouraged to believe that competence is a controllable aspect of their development and that their abilities will change and expand over time. If a teacher can help students see that their success can be attributed to their skill and their efforts, and not to good luck, then self-efficacy is enhanced.

Young people need to be taught that they are in control of the results of their actions and that failure is temporary and instructional. By debriefing after a concert, the music director can relate strong or weak parts of the presentation to the students’ efforts. Teachers can help to clarify the relationship between actions and consequences by analyzing a recent performance and making a connection between the rehearsal and the end results. When students make these connections, they are motivated to learn and to apply their learning to the next recital or concert.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a perception of performance capability, a belief that one can achieve, and the confidence to respond positively to feedback even if it is negative. This aspect of process theory focuses on “the extent to which individuals believe that they have the resources, ability or power to change a situation, based on past experiences.” Success breeds success. Teacher feedback that is specific is crucial in the building of self-efficacy. If a child believes he or she can do well, then success will follow. If the teacher also believes that a child can succeed, he or she can be an influential motivator. There are many examples of self-fulfilling prophecy, where one’s beliefs influence either accomplishment or failure. “He is able who thinks he is able.” The attitude “I can do that” is a powerful stimulator. A singing teacher once told me that I was a soprano, even though all of my previous singing experience had been in the alto section. He used some clever tricks to improve my breathing, thereby increasing my range by five or six notes. When I had succeeded, even just one time, I developed the positive attitude that I could repeat my newfound soprano voice. A music teacher should try to “catch” the student successfully playing something new, and make a positive comment. Even a “thumbs-up” hand signal can be important to a student trying something he or she has never done before.

Goal Setting

In motivational research, and in process theory, “goals or intentions play a central role. . . One way to influence people is to influence their goals.” The intention to work toward a goal is a major source of motivation. Specific and challenging goals result in better performance, and outcome-oriented goals give focus and energy.

A middle school teacher can have a discussion, even with very young students, about what the finished product will be like. The students can provide visions of what the audience might hear or see, how the musicians will sing or play, and how their parts in the show are important. When goals are public, and when the individual has an active role in developing the goals, they are most likely to be reached. My high school band class hosts a “coffeehouse” every spring. They begin by brainstorming about their intended result, and I find that once they develop a direction, they need very little intervention from me to carry out the entire production. Goal setting is an activity that is especially effective in dealing with groups of students. In an effort to build an effective team, a teacher might gather the participants together and have them all help create team goals. For our annual coffeehouse, students develop a theme together, and then they get excited about decorations, concession, entertainers, lighting, sound, and all other aspects of the show. If all teammates are working with the same goals in mind, success is attainable. This will be more successful if the teacher or coach can help students to choose goals that are personally relevant, challenging, clear, and compelling. Students also need to be taught that reaching goals is not magic, that it takes a series of baby steps to win a gold medal, for example. The director can also remind the musicians that it takes every musician doing his or her best to reach the intended end result. No one can pull off a waltz alone.

Autonomy

The last factor in process theory is the locus of control of an individual, or the ability for a person to be self-determining and to have a part in decisions and choices that affect him or her. Students will feel more motivated if they “have a voice in their own learning and a stake in their own assessment.” Students can be more proactive in their own learning if they feel they have responsibility and selection. If they determine their own goals, they will become more accountable and take ownership of learning activities.

In our school division, there is a focus on “assessment for learning” as opposed to “assessment of learning.” This system promotes the idea that assessment is a part of the learning process rather
than the evaluation of it. One of the recommendations to teachers is that students take part in the evaluative process by creating rubrics, selecting exam material, or providing assessments of each other. Autonomy is the factor that ties everything else together. If students feel empowered, self-esteem and expectancy will be raised, and a sense of accomplishment will be a motivating intrinsic reward. Students mature emotionally as they realize they have the power to make choices in their own learning. Experienced musicians assess their own playing constantly, determining what needs more practice or what rudiments are weak. Students can be taught to monitor their playing by having them create rubrics for assessment, listen to recordings of themselves, and identify techniques or skills that are not up to standard. This can be done formally or informally. I employ a very simple form of self-assessment with my first-year players. I ask them to show me, by holding up their fingers, how well they think they played on a scale of one to five. This technique often results in more focus. Teachers who respect their students, who ask for permission to help them, who watch for body language and group dynamics are teachers who communicate a sense of empowerment to them. Students who are invited to have input into their own assessments are “more willing to accept responsibility and this motivates them to do their best to meet their own goals. . . . They don’t view grades as gifts or punishments.” Teachers who are less controlling may be more effective in that they are able to provide opportunity and a safe and trusting environment for students to experience self-expression and to develop their initiative.

A Respectful Relationship

As one can learn from motivational psychology, many factors play roles in the motivation of students in the classroom. No one technique will work for every teacher, or for every class, every time. However, it seems that recent research leads teachers to the affective domain and to reaching to touch students emotionally. In the music classroom, this is especially true, as students who are able to access their emotions are able to play or sing with more passion. Even on the dance floor, a certain amount of passion and personal connection is necessary to move with energy and commitment. There is a story, frequently told, of an educational psychologist who visited SeaWorld in Orlando, Florida, to watch the trained dolphins perform. He was amazed at the intricate patterns the dolphins were able to achieve, and he approached the trainer to compliment him. Interested in the methods used, he questioned the trainer about reinforcement techniques. “Yes,” the trainer replied, “we use reinforcement. But first, we get in the water with them. They will learn nothing until they know that we mean them no harm.” The same could be said for people. “Instead of asking, ‘How can I motivate students?’ a better question would be, ‘In what ways is the brain naturally motivated from within?’” Students who are willing to display empathy or sentimentality are putting themselves in a position of vulnerability. They need to feel safe in order to expose this inner sensitivity. Humans are creatures of emotion. If they feel respected, valued, and in control, they will be motivated. They need to feel as though they are not alone, that they have a partner who can lead. Teachers are more likely to successfully motivate students if they form a personal relationship with them: invite them to a dance, become a supportive partner, and then “dance all night.”

Notes

8. Ibid.
10. Robbins and Langton, Organizational Behavior, 158.
12. Schermerhorn et al., Organizational Behavior, 105.
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17. Stipek, Motivation to Learn, 40.
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33. Tileston, What Every Teacher, 14.
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The Skin that We Sing: Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education

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The Skin that We Sing
Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education

Abstract: This article describes ways that music education can be made more culturally responsive, or congruent with the orientations of culturally diverse students. Music education in the United States has historically been based on Eurocentric frameworks that may no longer be applicable in an increasingly multicultural society. For the many teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching students from backgrounds other than their own, there is a demonstrated need to develop pedagogical practices that respond to cultural diversity. In response to this need, this article builds on an abundance of literature addressing culturally responsive pedagogy in general education to apply the principles specifically to choral music education. In addition to describing culturally responsive approaches to repertoire selection, rehearsal technique, and curriculum design, the article discusses how choral music education can go beyond a surface treatment of diverse repertoire to one that develops students’ sociopolitical competence and empowers them toward social action.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, curriculum, multicultural music, rehearsal, repertoire

How do our music curricula embrace or exclude our students? What can we as teachers do to widen the circle?

Since language is one of the most intimate expressions of identity, indeed, ‘the skin that we speak,’ then to reject a person’s language can only feel as though we are rejecting him.” Replacing only a few words in author and educator Lisa Delpit’s statement produces a thought-provoking perspective for music teachers to contemplate: since music is one of the most intimate expressions of identity, indeed, “the skin that we sing,” then to reject a person’s music can only feel as though we are rejecting him. American music education has historically been based on Eurocentric frameworks, the relevance and efficacy of which have been questioned as society has become increasingly diverse. Are the truths and methods music educators have long held dear causing some students to feel as though their music, and therefore their very being, is rejected in our classrooms?

This question reflects larger concerns surrounding how to respond to culture in the music classroom. Culture, a difficult concept to define, refers to “a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others.” The conception of culture used here assumes that in addition to being shaped by culture, individuals can serve as agents for shaping culture. The idea that people can influence culture is essential to the belief that teachers and students can effect social change.

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Cultural concerns have become increasingly important to the many teachers charged with the responsibility of teaching students from cultural backgrounds different from their own. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that from 2000–2001 to 2007–2008, the proportion of public school enrollment composed of white students decreased from 61 to 56 percent. However, in 2008, the majority of public school teachers—about 83 percent—were white. These statistics suggest that the diversity represented by public school students is not reflected in the population of teachers, indicating a need to develop pedagogical practices that meet the needs of students from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Frederick Erickson’s observation that everyone is cultural and multicultural suggests that all teachers, not only those who perceive their classrooms to be particularly diverse, have a responsibility to attend to the culturally influenced strengths and needs of the individuals in their classrooms.

Many terms have been used to refer to ways of making classroom instruction more congruent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students, including culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, reflective, mediated, synchronized, and responsive. I will use culturally responsive pedagogy to refer to these ideas, which award-winning author Geneva Gay defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.”

I have selected culturally responsive pedagogy as my term of choice because the inclusion of the word responsive refers to the teacher’s response to children’s cultural backgrounds and resulting strengths and needs, implying a child-centered approach.

Choral music education in particular, with its strong foundation in the Western classical tradition, is often approached from a Eurocentric perspective. While upholding a rich Western classical tradition is an achievement that should be celebrated and continued, educators should also be aware of ways in which choral music education can be prone to ethnocentrism in its practice. Because singing provides an accessible avenue for both validating students’ own cultural backgrounds and teaching about diverse cultures, choral music education has the potential to be at the forefront of making music education as a whole more culturally responsive. This article builds on an abundance of literature addressing culturally responsive pedagogy in general education to apply the principles to choral music education. In addition to describing culturally responsive approaches to repertoire selection, rehearsal technique, and curriculum design, I will discuss how choral educators can go beyond a surface treatment of diverse repertoire to one that develops students’ sociopolitical competence and empowers them toward social action.

Selecting Repertoire from a Culturally Responsive Perspective

Many choral teachers approach curriculum and instruction from a “repertoire-at-the-center” perspective, making repertoire selection a logical point of departure for infusing choral music education with culturally responsive practices. It is contradictory to tout music’s power as universal but then rely heavily or solely on Western classical music in our teaching of the subject. While many educators acknowledge a need to diversify the curriculum by including repertoire representative of many cultures, identifying where to begin can be overwhelming. Culturally responsive teaching, with its student-centered focus, suggests that we begin the repertoire selection process by considering our students rather than by perusing a publisher’s catalogue or reading through a stack of octavos. To guide this process, components of Gay’s definition of culturally responsive teaching might be transformed into questions that inform repertoire choices: What music would build upon my students’ prior experiences? What pieces would capitalize on their cultural knowledge? What selections could my students experience through their preferred learning styles? Which would showcase their culturally informed performance styles? Instead of thinking of culture as something distant and removed, one way that culturally responsive teachers can attend to the culture present in their own classrooms is by including repertoire that honors their own students’ cultural heritage.

Teaching from repertoire that validates students’ cultural backgrounds develops students’ cultural competence, which “refers to the ability of students to grow in understanding and respect for their culture of origin.” Developing cultural competence through music provides students who perceive a disconnect between home and school cultures ways to navigate between those cultures, to be bicultural, and to be bimusical. For example, some African American students equate academic achievement with a loss of their African American identity, viewing doing well in school as “acting White.” Gloria Ladson-Billings indicated that culturally responsive teaching “develops a relevant black personality that allows African American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African American culture.” Music teachers can capitalize upon music’s role in conceptualizing and projecting one’s identity to help all students develop a “relevant personality.”

Several factors complicate the process of determining what music represents students’ cultural heritage. Each individual belongs to multiple social groups defined by variables—such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and religion—that interact in complex ways to make one’s cultural identity highly individualized and personal. Ladson-Billings coined the useful term “culture of reference” to refer to the cultural group (including ethnic and racial characteristics) with which one most identifies. Teachers must consider that students’ cultures of reference may be different from their cultures of origin and that they may identify with multiple cultures. They must also avoid essentializing culture by assuming that all people...
belonging to a social category are culturally similar.15

For example, a music teacher attempting to respond to the needs of his or her Hispanic students might essentialize culture by programming an arrangement of a Mexican folk song, assuming that all Hispanic students identify with Mexican culture.16 Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Cuban students, for instance, might respond differently to various musical traditions, as might individuals within each of these groups. Similarly, a teacher might assume that all Hispanic students will automatically relate to pieces sung in Spanish, failing to recognize that not all Hispanic students speak Spanish. Selecting quality arrangements or performing in a variety of languages might be important first steps, but can fall short of cultural responsiveness when accompanied by assumptions that any single musical tradition is representative of or relevant to all people of a given cultural background.

Given these complexities, how can a music teacher select repertoire that represents students’ cultures of reference? One seemingly obvious answer is to respectfully ask students and parents about their musical backgrounds. Many teachers have students complete questionnaires at the beginning of the school year in order to get acquainted, and including questions about students’ musical experiences outside of school can be informative. When teachers seek parent involvement through booster organizations, back-to-school nights, or volunteer sign-ups, they might inquire about languages in which parents are fluent, assist students to share the role of expert does not mean that teachers relinquish control of their classrooms, but that they model a receptive attitude and lifelong learning by occasionally learning from and alongside students.

Culturally responsive teachers do not limit themselves to addressing only the cultures of those present in the classroom, but address cultural diversity from multiple perspectives. They seek to deepen students’ understanding of, appreciation for, and value of cultures other than their own. In an ethnically and racially mixed classroom, each musical experience might simultaneously validate some students’ cultures while broadening others’ cultural horizons. Therefore, teachers must consider how repertoire functions along two dimensions: its cultural responsiveness and its cultural validity.

The term authenticity has proved problematic due to its multiplicity of definitions, and scholars have questioned whether authenticity can exist when music is re-created in school settings outside of its culture of origin. Responding to this conundrum, professor and scholar Carlos Abril suggested that educators should strive to create “culturally valid” musical experiences, which he defined as being typical and characteristic of the represented culture.17 Several authors have provided insights into how culturally valid repertoire can responsibly be selected and performed.18 While I will not duplicate their efforts, a few ideas follow. Many published “multicultural” choral octavos can be characterized as “arrangements based upon international material,” often created by someone from outside of the culture of origin.19 Teachers should be aware that publication does not guarantee cultural validity or quality. Choral directors should carefully evaluate all published materials and be well advised to seek out unpublished material from primary sources.

The single most important way of ensuring the cultural validity of repertoire, as well as the manner in which it is taught, programmed, and performed, is to consult directly with representatives of each culture. If at all possible, choirs should have an opportunity to work with musicians native to each culture studied. Teachers can draw upon resources present in the community to learn music directly from parents, students, and colleagues. While the best means of consulting is undoubtedly live and in person, technological advances open possibilities for collaboration that might not otherwise be possible. With their permission, a videoconferencing session with an expert can be recorded and shared with multiple classes. Over some years, an impressive collection of resources could be acquired.

Among the most important experts with whom teachers can consult are their own students. Delpit observed that “The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them.”20 Including music from students’ cultures of reference is one way to empower students by allowing them to serve as experts. Teachers could respect and channel students’ expert knowledge by asking them to teach pronunciation of languages in which they are fluent, assist the class by providing information about the music’s cultural context, or take a leadership role in evaluating the cultural validity of the choir’s performances. Allowing students to share the role of expert does not mean that teachers relinquish control of their classrooms, but that they model a receptive attitude and lifelong learning by occasionally learning from and alongside students.

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Rehearsals that Respond to Culture

The cultural responsiveness of even the most responsible repertoire choices can be undermined by rehearsal practices that are not congruent with the orientations of ethnically diverse students. Gay noted that “These discontinuities can interfere with students’ academic achievement, in part because how students are accustomed to engaging in intellectual processing, self-presentation, and task performance is different from the processes used in school.”21 While it is beyond the scope of this article to describe the multitude of strategies teachers might use to accommodate diverse students’ learning
styles in rehearsal settings, some ways of attending to cultural incompatibilities common in choral music education are discussed.

Consider a teacher who selects a gospel piece in response to African American students who have grown up singing gospel at their church, where music is learned aurally. The teacher introduces the piece by handing out scores and asking the choir to sight-read from notation. While the repertoire choice may be responsive, the learning and performance styles emphasized in the rehearsal may not be synchronous with those emphasized in these particular students’ culture of reference. For students who have not previously experienced gospel music, teaching from a score might reduce the cultural validity of the experience. This is not to suggest that students should not learn to read notation, but that repertoire from notated traditions would better serve that purpose. (This hypothetical situation is provided only as an example. Certainly, there are gospel musicians who work with notation.)

The choice of whether to teach music orally or from notation should be determined by two factors: the learning styles of the individuals being taught and the manner in which the music would be taught and learned in its culture of origin. Culturally responsive teachers recognize aural learning as a valid learning style and teach music orally when appropriate, considering the cultural responsiveness and validity of doing so. Teaching orally can provide opportunities for some students to use their preferred learning modality while strengthening the overall musicianship of all singers.

On the other hand, music teachers may be tempted to deemphasize musical notation if it is not particularly valued by students’ cultures of reference. Deloit’s analysis of skills-based versus process-based approaches to language arts instruction offers several interesting parallels to children’s development of fluency with musical notation. Deloit emphasized that the formal conventions of Standard English writing and speaking represent a cultural code that students must learn to succeed in mainstream society. Fluency with musical notation similarly represents a cultural code that could control students’ access to opportunities, positioning teachers as gatekeepers. In denying students access to this code, teachers could prevent students’ entrance into college music programs or limit their participation in certain ensembles. Therefore, teachers should adopt a balanced approach to teaching notation.

Choral music education as commonly practiced in the United States has also emphasized a Western classical style of vocal technique. The success with which students have been taught this tradition is an achievement of which our profession is justifiably proud. However, culturally valid performances of diverse music sometimes require the use of equally diverse vocal timbres (e.g., the extensive use of chest voice featured in some African and African American styles). To perform these styles using traditional Western classical vocal timbre might compromise the cultural validity of the performances and thwart the ideals of culturally responsive teaching by denying some students opportunities to demonstrate their culturally informed performance styles. Deloit argued that “All people have the right to their own language. We cannot constantly correct children and expect them to continue to want to talk like us.” Teachers need to consider whether students will continue to want to “sing like us” if we insist that there is only one valid way to sing.

Some choral educators have expressed concern that singing in styles other than the Western classical tradition will result in vocal damage. Teachers obviously have a responsibility to attend to students’ vocal health regardless of the style or cultural origin of the music being sung. Students can be taught to approach a variety of vocal timbres healthily with attention to matters such as posture, breath support, and appropriate vocal range, and by guarding against physical tension and overuse.

Studies suggest that given opportunities to demonstrate culturally preferred performance styles, students may be more receptive of other styles, including but not limited to traditional Western classical vocal timbre. African American students’ speech style has been shown to diverge more from Standard English in classrooms where their vernacular speech was constantly corrected. A similar relationship has been found between vocal style and cultural mistrust. In Chinn’s (1997) study, African American participants who scored higher on a cultural mistrust survey demonstrated more characteristics of African American singing when asked to sing “America” in the key and style of their choice. Instructing can support mastery of multiple vocal styles, timbres, and techniques without denigrating the performance styles emphasized in students’ cultures of reference. Rather than rejecting these styles outright, making students feel that “the skin they sing” is entirely invalid, teachers can guide students to discover for which musical contexts different vocal styles are appropriate.

Beyond the Repertoire: Developing Sociopolitical Competence

Music teachers cannot be content to focus solely on musical content and avoid potentially controversial issues related to race, ethnicity, and culture, but must be prepared to handle uncomfortable conversations that may arise as long-held beliefs of students are challenged, assumptions are questioned, and stereotypes are confronted. Students should be guided to recognize and challenge systems of oppression, inequality, and social injustice, a process Ladson-Billings called “promoting students’ sociopolitical competence.” For music teachers, this translates into a need to go beyond simple exposure to diverse music and to guide students to discuss, interrogate, and delve deeply into related sociopolitical issues. Approaches to music education that reduce music to its constituent parts allow for the avoidance of social implications and issues. One could teach the South African song “Shosholoza” with attention to its
melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and formal characteristics, but complete avoidance of the song's connection to apartheid. This would result in an incomplete understanding of the song and a misguided attempt at culturally responsive teaching. It is not being suggested that music teachers should transform into social studies teachers, abandoning musical content and concerns. Rather, teachers can attend to students' musical and sociopolitical development as mutually reinforcing ends.

One way that choral teachers can promote students' sociopolitical competence is by selecting repertoire and materials that open dialogue. For example, the song “We Shall Overcome” logically leads to discussion of the civil rights movement, which could lead into discussion of present-day human rights issues. Students can also analyze how social groups are represented (or not represented) in classroom materials or other media. A teacher's first instinct might be to eliminate culturally insensitive materials, but instead, such materials might be brought into the classroom for analysis provided they are carefully selected and developmentally appropriate. Students could analyze stereotypes conveyed through song lyrics or musical clichés, such as a “cha-cha-cha” concluding a piece. By exercising these analytical skills, students can progress toward developing the sociopolitical competence required to recognize and challenge stereotypes, racism, and oppression.

Teachers can also go beyond discussion and analysis of sociopolitical matters by empowering students toward social action. Abril profiled a teacher who did just this when students questioned her decision to program “La Raspa” for an upcoming concert, arguing that the piece portrayed Mexicans stereotypically. When students voiced their concerns, the teacher assigned students the responsibility of deciding whether to perform the piece. To inform their decision, students conducted a poll of parents, friends, and community members. This example models several characteristics of teachers who develop students' sociopolitical competence: they avoid positioning themselves as the only expert, encourage students to take responsibility for deciding appropriate action, and open dialogue that may even extend beyond their own classrooms. Teachers can further empower students by engaging them in the role of social critic through music composition or by having students write program notes, opinion pieces, or blogs from a critical stance.

**Building a Curriculum of Culturally Responsive Musical Experiences**

Music teachers might consider two complementary aims of culturally responsive music education to be validating students' cultures of reference and broadening their cultural horizons. With practical limitations on instructional time, designing curriculum that responds to culture without compromising other aims of musical instruction might be a daunting prospect. Teachers might feel overwhelmed by the seemingly infinite number of cultures they could experience with students and discouraged by the impossibility of being personally expert in all of these forms of musical expression. It might be helpful to approach curriculum design, with repertoire at its core, by envisioning a continuum from familiar to unfamiliar, which world music expert Huib Schippers called the “unfamiliarity index.”

**Repertoire** drawn from students' cultural backgrounds serves as an appropriate starting point for musical instruction, giving students something familiar, relevant, and accessible with which to engage and build confidence. When students perceive the teacher as an “outsider” or “other,” beginning with music from the students' cultural backgrounds can reduce resistance and build rapport and credibility, paving the way to subsequent learning. The unfamiliarity index is highly individualized, and, as previously noted, knowing what music should be considered “very familiar” for particular learners requires sensitivity on the part of the teacher.

Educators should not be satisfied with mere familiarity with previously unfamiliar music as an end result of culturally responsive teaching. Therefore, I propose a continuum model for culturally responsive curriculum design in which teachers plan experiences that provide students with cultural validation, then help students progress toward thoughtfully valuing music that has previously been beyond the realm of their personal experiences (see Figure 1). “Thoughtful valuation,” a term borrowed from John Dewey that refers to mediation and criticism of experience, reflects an ultimate aim of culturally responsive teaching. As Paul Woodford aptly described, **criticism** in this context does not imply negativism but, rather, refers to “breadth and depth of experience coupled with a commitment to careful research, analysis, and judgment about things that matter.” By positioning “thoughtful valuation” as the continuum's endpoint, I mean that students should go beyond mere exposure to, familiarity with, or passive acceptance of music representative of diverse cultures, learning to value it with a sense of social responsibility. Music teachers who desire to help students effect social change should consider John Dewey's notion that thoughtful valuation, rather than art itself, is the true agent of societal transformation.

Musical **experiences** generate the momentum to move students along the continuum. My emphasis of the word **experiences** suggests that culturally responsive teaching refers to repertoire, methods, or knowledge not in isolation but, rather, in synergy with one another, resulting in musical experiences that are more relevant to and effective for culturally diverse students. In a racially and ethnically mixed classroom, students will approach each musical experience from many different positions along the continuum. Fortunately, the academic year affords many opportunities (e.g., multiple musical experiences within a lesson, several pieces performed in each concert, etc.) to connect with individuals at various points between cultural validation and thoughtful valuation.
How can educators select midpoint experiences that move students toward thoughtful valuation of music from diverse cultures? Student interest might drive the decision-making process, or other aims and goals of instruction might make the choice of one experience more logical than another. Decisions might be guided by practical reasons, such as a schoolwide initiative to learn about a specific culture or an opportunity to collaborate with another teacher or department. Serendipitous events (e.g., a doctoral student from Zimbabwe happens to be attending a nearby university, a parent plays erhu, etc.) might provide the impetus for designing an experience. Providing role models from students’ cultures of origin performing in other traditions (such as Wynton Marsalis, Yo-Yo Ma, Gustavo Dudamel, or William Grant Still) might be a possible intermediate step to help students progress from culturally familiar music toward thoughtful valuation of previously unfamiliar music.

Teachers need not feel pressured to “cover” every conceivable culture, an approach that would undoubtedly result only in superficial encounters with the music given limitations on time for instruction and teacher preparation. Instead, teachers could thoughtfully select one or two cultures to study in depth each year. Students could then experience several works from one culture rather than one piece from each of several cultures, resulting in deep, meaningful experiences. Because choral teachers are often privileged to work with students for more than one year, the continuum model could be envisioned as a spiral in which students repeatedly progress from experiences that validate their own cultures toward thoughtfully valuing the music of diverse cultures through a multiyear process (see Figure 2). Teachers can focus their efforts each year and develop a rotation of cultures about which they feel sufficiently knowledgeable and comfortable to teach. Students would amass an impressive repertoire and might come to thoughtfully value the music of several previously unfamiliar cultures upon graduation from a program approached in this manner.

Gay emphasized that culturally responsive pedagogy teaches to and through the strengths of culturally diverse students. Choral music educators can teach to and through these strengths by selecting culturally valid repertoire that responds to students’ needs, adopting a balanced approach to teaching notation, promoting singing with a variety of vocal timbres and techniques, developing students’ socio-political competence, and designing curriculum around musical experiences that lead students to thoughtfully value music representative of diverse cultures.
Because of music’s power as a cultural referent, music teachers are uniquely positioned to improve the quality of students’ educational experiences through culturally responsive practice.

**Notes**


6. Erickson, “Culture in Society.”


8. Ibid., 29.


10. Gloria Ladson-Billings, “‘I Ain’t Writin’ Nuttin’: Permissions to Fail and Demands to Succeed in Urban Classrooms,” in Delpit and Dowdy, *The Skin That We Speak*, 111.


15. Erickson, “Culture in Society.”

16. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that the term Hispanic can be used interchangeably with the term Latino and can be used to refer to people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. See Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones, and Roberto R. Ramirez, “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010” (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 2011), http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf (accessed September 9, 2011).


22. Delpit, *Other People’s Children*.


Challenges of Performing Diverse Cultural Music: Although many ensembles perform multicultural music according to the Western musical system, there are ways to achieve multicultural performances on their own terms.

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What is This?
CHALLENGES OF PERFORMING DIVERSE CULTURAL MUSIC

Although many ensembles perform multicultural music according to the Western musical system, there are ways to achieve multicultural performances on their own terms.

BY MARY GOETZE

It has become the norm to see children’s choirs, all-state bands, and church choirs performing music that comes from such diverse sources as Serbia, Kenya, and Japan. The number of publications for ensembles focused on music from traditions beyond Western art or popular traditions has increased exponentially over the past ten years. At first glance, it appears that we are doing a fine job of addressing the multicultural interests of performance ensembles and meeting Standard 9 (“Understanding music in relation to history and culture”) of the National Standards for Music Education.

However, according to Kazadi Wa Mukuna, “Errors that continue to be committed are those of transcribing music from different cultures into the Western system in order to teach it to Westerners. This practice is one of the most frequent mistakes, perhaps made unwillingly for the sake of convenience, or simply from ignorance. If a multicultural perspective in music is to be successful, new methods must be designed with these dilemmas in mind.” If we are to achieve what I believe to be the true mission of multiculturalism in education—to acknowledge and validate the numerous cultures that are now represented in our school population and to foster tolerance and appreciation of those who differ from ourselves—then we need to do more than sing a song or play a composition based on a non-Western melody or text.

In this article, I will challenge some of the assumptions held by Western-trained musicians that are apparent in

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the way they typically present culturally diverse musical works and direct ensemble performances of these works. I will describe a general picture of performance practices that I have observed and participated in as a conductor, teacher, and arranger. Then, based on a recent exploration of an alternative approach, I will suggest ways in which students can more deeply interact with the music and develop an understanding of the culture from which it comes.

I am going to use the term diverse music to mean music that originates outside the Western art tradition. This term will refer to all music traditions—Western, as well as non-Western—that are not studied in a typical college music history course.

Western Adaptations

First, let’s examine the literature that is performed by ensembles. Many publications of diverse musical works are, in fact, arrangements or compositions by a Western or Western-trained musician and are based on material from non-European sources. Regardless of the voicing of the individual or group that performs the music within the culture, the arrangements are typically written for a standard Western vocal or instrumental ensemble. While in recent years the amount of written documentation about the music has increased in some editions, many existing publications provide only a translation and pronunciation guide, with minimal or no background information about either the music or the culture.

Scores that are based on a transcription of a native performance attempt to be true to the model. However, Western notation focuses on pitch and duration in accordance with the way Westerners conceptualize, organize, and value these elements. The five-line staff was devised to represent subdivisions of an octave into eight pitches. Even the notation of chromatic music looks cumbersome on a staff. Clearly, the staff fails to accommodate the division of the octave into quarter tones and the complexities of Indian, Turkish, or other scales.

Similarly, Western symbolization of duration forces the rhythm into metric groupings of two, three, four, or more, whether the music was originally structured metrically or not. Furthermore, there are numerous essential elements for which there is no musical symbol, such as pulsations, surges, slides and ornaments, movement, or vocal timbre.

Most publications of diverse musical works are, in fact, arrangements or compositions by a Western or Western-trained musician and are based on material from non-European sources.

Typically, the score is presented to the ensemble like other scores in Western notation, according to the conductor’s analysis of the musical structure and the skills needed to perform it. Some conductors meticulously investigate the source of the material and the culture, while others rely on the often sparse information accompanying the score.

Regardless of the vocal technique used in the native style, the choral ensemble will likely use traditional Western choral intonation, tone quality, and blend. Vocal timbres vary widely around the globe. For instance, music from Eastern European styles requires a high instead of a lowered larynx, and some African styles make extensive use of the chest voice instead of the head voice. While only in dire circumstances would we substitute a tenor for a soprano, an oboe for a clarinet, or a women’s chorus for children, we usually adjust vocal timbre to fit the bel canto style in singing and use any available rattle or drum when performing diverse music calling for percussion.

Western vocal pedagogues generally believe that singing in any other way than a European style will threaten students’ singing technique and vocal health. Despite the fact that singers within diverse cultures have enjoyed singing in these styles for centuries, we operate on the assumption that singing in any way other than our own must be unhealthy or impossible.

These observations of Western musical practices led me to ask: Will our students sense the unique character of the music when we alter the style in such fundamental ways? Will they experience the qualities that make the music different from Western music—and make the music expressive and meaningful while learning about its culture of origin? And, lastly, is such an experience consistent with the goals of either music or multicultural education?

I believe the time has come to re-examine our methods and their consistency with our goals—time to update our thinking, to acknowledge the extent to which ethnocentricism underlies our educational and musical practices, and to explore alternatives. While there was a time when learning from notation was the only means by which we could access music of other traditions, this is not true today. Audio and video recordings of native models are available, and there is equipment in our schools to play them for students. We have only begun to explore the capacity of the Internet, distance education, and CD-ROM technology for teaching diverse music. There are also native artists living and performing within our communities who can bring the music and the culture to life for students.

Before making recommendations, let me clarify one point lest I be misinterpreted. I am not suggesting that it is inappropriate to arrange, compose, or perform published works based on diverse material. Such fusions and adaptations are an inevitable and exciting aspect of the global arts scene. However, I am asserting that, because
this music is notated and approached in the same way as Western music, the experience that we provide our students is more of a Western art musical experience than one from a diverse culture.

**Performing Multicultural Music**

The following suggestions spring from an experimental vocal ensemble that I founded four years ago at the Indiana University School of Music. The ensemble’s goal consists of re-creating music from outside the Western art tradition with integrity by learning about the culture and matching as many aspects of the model as possible. While these recommendations are based on a choral ensemble experience, I include some additional suggestions for instrumental ensembles.

- Honor the culture by deferring to the experts—native musicians from that culture. If they are not available to you in person, then seek them out or make a recording—preferably a video recording—that can be presented repeatedly as a model for your students. When you make recordings, be certain to inform the musicians of your plans to use the video and get their permission in advance.

- It is also essential to speak with a native artist or cultural representative to determine the appropriateness of the ensemble learning the music and performing it for others. Too often in our history, we have taken possession of and misused cultural musical treasures without being sensitive to the meaning and function they have for those from whom we have borrowed or claimed the music.

- Learn as much as you can about the culture from written and video resources and share the information with your students. An increasing number of documentaries are available on video from public television sources or libraries. Students can explore the World Wide Web for information and resources. In your study, attempt to discover how the music reflects the culture, how and where music is learned and performed, and if it accompanies extramusical activities.

- If at all possible, invite a native of the culture to meet the ensemble in order to foster a personal connection with the group. In our high-tech world, it might be possible to arrange a satellite linkup with a distant site as a means of connecting your ensemble to a native performer.

- Have the ensemble learn the music aurally—especially if it is transmitted that way within the culture. They will listen more intensely, knowing that they will be reproducing what they hear. (This heightened attention is perhaps the greatest value of oral transmission.) In addition to improving their aural acuity, the process contributes to memory, rhythm, and pitch perception. In vocal music, students are required to discriminate and match vocal timbre, vowel color, and minute differences of consonant production. I recommend listening and imitating the model first, even when you plan to use a score. Then, have the students compare the score to the model that they heard and lead them to recognize what is not symbolized. (For trained musicians, looking at a score first often limits perception; that is, they hear only what they see on the printed page.)

- In leading students to explore unfamiliar methods of vocal production, educate them about their voices, but be sensitive to individual limitations. I have found that with careful conditioning and sensitivity to vocal fatigue, the exploration of multiple vocal styles can be done without risk and may even contribute to vocal facility and endurance.

- Have the students imitate the visual aspects of the performance carefully, especially any movement. Inquire as to the importance of the formation and spatial arrangement of the performers. Notice details such as posture and facial expressions. If possible and appropriate, consider costuming as part of the musical event. (Western musicians consider music to be only sound and thus downplay the visual aspects of a performance even though, in many cultures, dance, dress, and even context and community are inseparable from the sound.)

- For vocal pieces, record a native performer who can pronounce and translate the text. Learning unfamiliar words is aided by viewing the words and translation while listening to the music. Works from languages with characters may also be written in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

- Show your respect for the culture by re-creating the music with integrity; that is, match your performance as nearly as possible to the model. This requires listening to the model repeatedly, especially after the group has learned to perform the music. Upon reviewing the model, you will be amazed at the details that you and your students missed previously.

- Explore performing music without a conductor, if appropriate to the tradition. Students take ownership of the music and benefit from the experience of being responsible for entrances and cues.

- Share information about the music and culture with the audience through program notes or, if possible, spoken comments by the native performer. The video model can be shown, and the learning process can be described. Consider performances as educational sessions that broaden the musical horizons and cultural understanding of parents and the community.

**Instrumental Ensembles**

I realize the challenges that this approach holds for instrumental

*continued on page 48*
Challenges of Performing

continued from page 25

groups. Because of the obvious need for different instruments, accurate re-creation cannot be achieved. However, students can watch or listen to a native group performing the material on which a composed piece is based. If the model is a vocal group performing the melody that inspired the composition, students can learn to sing it and work toward fulfilling Standard 1 ("Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music"). Alternatively, conductors might consider a percussion experience, learned directly from an African or Latin American percussionist. Why couldn't students put down their Western instruments once in a while to drum, clap, sing, and move?

The essence of the approach that I am suggesting consists of (1) learning and performing diverse music the way it is learned and performed in the culture, and (2) developing an understanding of how the music functions within its original cultural context.

Value of Multicultural Music

The oral process of learning the music has educational and musical value for students' musical skill development. Through the experience of accurate re-creation, students can identify with the makers of the music; that is, they can sense the complexities and subtleties of the music and the means by which it is learned. Re-creation based on understanding makes it possible to experience diverse musical expressions on their own terms rather than in a Western context. The insights that students gain into cultures and humanity through making music with integrity and understanding are not attainable through scholarly learning or verbal expression alone. This knowledge is not only the goal of multicultural education, but the ultimate reason for educating our youth in music and in all arts.

Note

Choral Warm-Ups for Changing Adolescent Voices
Patrick K. Freer
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How did you start your last choral rehearsal? Did you begin with the same warm-up procedures you used the day before (and the day before that)? Did you carefully choose the pitches of the vocalises so that each student could be successful, regardless of his or her current stage of vocal development? Did you design vocalises that addressed specific vocal issues found in the repertoire to be rehearsed that day?

During two decades of observing and leading middle school choral rehearsals, I’ve discovered that teachers frequently repeat exactly the warm-ups they present to their young adolescent choirs at every rehearsal. If we know one thing about middle school students, we know that they are constantly changing—physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Why is it that our warm-ups usually don’t reflect these changes?

Think about this: if we start our warm-ups with a unison, descending, five-note, stepwise vocalise (sol, fa, mi, re, do) and then ascend sequentially by half steps for multiple repetitions, whom have we left out? Everyone who can’t sing that pattern on those specific notes. We might say, “Well, that kid can’t match pitch, or he or she can’t do X, Y, or Z.” What if we were wrong? What if we simply hadn’t selected an instructional task that was achievable by everyone in the ensemble? Everyone who can’t sing that pattern on those specific notes.

We might say, “Well, that kid can’t match pitch, or he or she can’t do X, Y, or Z.” What if we were wrong? What if we simply hadn’t selected an instructional task that was achievable by everyone in the ensemble? Over time, the effects on the musical self-confidence of those “marginalized singers” would be devastating, and there would be deleterious effects on the ensemble’s performance. We would have failed to take advantage of what these young singers could do, instead focusing on what they physically couldn’t do.

Consider how young children learn to speak: they begin by babbling combinations of vowels and consonants and gradually refine and combine them to form words. We encourage young children to experiment with vocal sounds on the path toward speech, and we need to similarly encourage young adolescents to explore their new vocal capabilities made possible by the maturation process.

The vocal warm-up processes used in choirs with changing adolescent voices must, in some ways, be different from the warm-up processes used in choirs of either early elementary children or older high school students. This article is an exploration of principles that need to underlie the development of warm-ups that meet the needs of changing voices, encourage even the most reluctant singer, and build toward ever-greater levels of choral success. In a Music Supervisors’ Journal article printed more than 80 years ago, well-regarded pedagogue Charles Farnsworth wrote about the development of vocal technique:

The question is not whether we shall do or not such technical things, but whether if in doing them we constantly keep in mind the ultimate purposes they are to serve, and not let them become ends in themselves; not just breathing exercises to see how long we could hold our breath, but an attempt to develop a clear, beautiful tone, and a perfect and unsupported technique to express the musical ideas of the composer. The voice is a wonderful tool, which we can do much to improve by sound instruction and methodical practice.

Choral Warm-Ups for Changing Adolescent Voices

by Patrick K. Freer

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can keep our lungs filled, and how long it takes to empty them; not dull vocal exercises, harping on the vowel “oo,” and hoping that by some hokus-pokus its intractable vowel sisters will be rightly produced; not exercises that often induce the very thing we don’t want. . . . If my experience is right, where we fail most is not in that we seek to give separate technical drills, but in that we do not unite the drills with their purpose—beautiful expression. We give the pupils the technical drill, but leave the most difficult part of the problem—its practical application—almost unpracticed.¹

If we want our students to sing with efficiency and ease, we must teach them how to achieve those results. Young adolescents come to our classrooms with a variety of vocal habits, some that are helpful and some that are less so. Still others enter our rehearsals lacking the confidence to sing or believing that they cannot sing at all. The choral warm-up process is one of the greatest tools that teachers can possess for leading young adolescents toward singing that is healthful, age appropriate, and musically satisfying.

**Adolescent Changing Voices**

Choral teachers in middle schools are champions of the “music for every child and every child for music” mantra that has guided music education for the past century. Middle school teachers find their choral classes filled with students who represent various stages of vocal change, are experiencing rapid physical and cognitive changes, and, to be honest, are sometimes enrolled in choral classes to fulfill an academic requirement rather than by choice. Still, our goal is to accommodate all of their voices within the choral experience so that each student can participate, learn, and experience musical growth. During the middle school years, both boys and girls will experience a gradual process of voice change, with the male pitch range getting lower and the female vocal timbre becoming fuller and richer. Along the way, boys may experience sudden transitions between stages of vocal development, while girls may find their voices breathy from time to time. Those who teach young adolescent singers need to be familiar with research-based resources about the adolescent voice so that they can incorporate this information in their instruction.²

One of the most important pedagogical implications for teachers of middle school choir concerns the composite unison range of a choir—the pitches that all singers can sing in unison (as opposed to the unique range of each individual singer). The composite unison range of an adolescent vocal ensemble will be about a sixth, roughly from a G up to an E, with students singing in different octaves as appropriate. So, the extended vocalises we learned in college won’t work for these ensembles, especially with multiple repetitions each a half step higher than the one before. Three potential solutions to this dilemma are presented in this article:

- Develop vocalises that are not pitch specific,
- Derive vocalise material directly from the repertoire being prepared, and
- Construct improvisatory activities that teach vocal skills yet leave pitch choice to the students.

Our knowledge of how adolescents learn provides a foundation for the planning of warm-ups for middle schoolers. For instance, we need to invite students to sing rather than demand that they sing. Vocalises need to be pitched so that they can be sung by students. In some cases, for students who are inexperienced singers or who are having difficulty with phonation, vocalises that lead toward pitch matching, rather than those beginning on predetermined pitches, will be needed. In all of these, students need to have some autonomy over the learning process; to have opportunities to process information through brief, purposeful conversation with their friends; and to feel that their contributions are the focus of the warm-up process rather than just “going through the motions.”³

Successful choral warm-up sessions for young adolescents have several key features:

1. **Jazz Circles**

   Introduce the activity by singing a melodic ostinato pattern within the G to E range. Ask students to suggest variations that they could perform; perhaps assist them by providing specific scat syllables or rhythm patterns. Ask for and then practice several more variations. Choose a small group of students to maintain the ostinato pattern while others experiment with variations. Have students determine how to begin and end the “piece.”

   Next, divide the class into several groups that will work together in different locations around the room for approximately five minutes. Each group will have the tasks of

   - creating a vocal improvisation over the specified ostinato;
   - maintaining the ostinato part with at least one group member;
   - involving all group members in a vocal, improvised performance; and
   - planning and performing a beginning and an ending.

   Have the groups perform for each other and follow with focused questions, such as the following:

   - Which group changed the key?
   - Which groups had a coda?
   - Which group used ABA form?

   Depending on your instructions to the students, this activity can be either simple or complex. I’ve had success using 12-bar blues form, but the range of the ostinato (the traditional bass line) is often not possible for young adolescents. In that case, I’ve often played the 12-bar blues chords (key of B-flat) on the piano, while students improvised around my accompaniment. I’ve even used this as a piece on a concert program. I explain the process to the audience, they watch the students perform the improvisation, and then, I ask the audience to join in!
components that reflect these foundations. The first component is a logical sequence that remains constant from day to day. Adolescents need to know that their teachers have structured their learning experiences, but the students also want to have some freedom within that structure. The second component, therefore, is the allowance for some student choice and experimentation with the tasks of the warm-up session. For example, students might begin on the pitch of their choice, be invited to choose vowel and consonant combinations, or be asked to contribute a sports-related or current-events-related image that will be incorporated into the session.

The third key component of a successful warm-up session is the pedagogical relationship between the session and the repertoire to be rehearsed that day. Whenever possible, the warm-up session should be designed to address musical issues that will arise later in the rehearsal, including specific melodic intervals and vowel–consonant combinations found in the repertoire. Students can be asked to identify those items within the rehearsal, which emphasizes that everyone can learn the skills and knowledge required for choral singing.

Finally, choral warm-up sessions for young adolescents should involve a variety of activities and groupings within the classroom space. One strategy might be to have “warm-up stations” to which students are assigned. These could be spaced throughout the room with a set of instructions at each station describing what the opening activity might be. For example, the opening activity might be “Jazz Circles” (see sidebar). As students enter the classroom, they proceed directly to their stations and begin the designated warm-up activity. This allows the teacher to discreetly take attendance, provides a gentle transition from the busy hallway to the rehearsal setting, and gives students the chance to interact in a learning-focused activity.

**Optimal Warm-Up Sessions**

Choral teachers can think of the opening moments of rehearsals as opportunities for group voice building. Group voice building, also called group vocal technique, was strongly advocated by the late Frauke Haasemann, a contralto and voice teacher who developed hundreds of strategies for enhancing the choral skills of amateur singers within large ensembles. Many of the ideas in this article are consistent with her work. Group voice building is a philosophical approach that guides the enhancement of choristers’ vocal skills in an ensemble setting; it provides a rationale for the pedagogical sequence of the specific warm-up. The development of vocal skills is a long-term process encompassing many warm-up sessions, with each session containing multiple activities and vocalises.

A warm-up is a sequence of activities focused on the coordination of vocal skills in preparation for the requirements of a specific rehearsal. Large-ensemble warm-ups can present a challenge for teachers because any given group of young adolescents will contain multiple vocal ranges and tessituras corresponding to different stages of vocal development. The composite unison range of the choir (roughly G to E in octaves) represents only those pitches every student will be able to sing, but very few students will be adequately warmed up if the session is confined to these few pitches. Conversely, forcing all students to sing in unison beyond this limited range will cause discomfort and frustration in some, if not all, of the students.

For these reasons, I advocate the development of nonpitched or non-pitch-specific vocalization exercises. Several examples are described below, but it’s best when the exercises are drawn from the daily experiences of the choir, coupled with your own creativity. You will want to monitor the contributions of your students to these exercises, adjusting the suggested pitch level and vowel–consonant combinations to most accurately meet the students’ needs. You might, for instance, provide instruction about how to sing high pitches but not specify the exact pitches to be sung in the exercises. Instead, ask students to sing “any high, comfortable pitch of your choosing using the techniques we’ve just learned.” I know of many teachers who model activities such as these at the beginning of the year and then gradually allow students to “compose” their own versions. The main goal of this approach is to draw the students into the choral experience by helping them achieve success from the very first moments of the rehearsal.
There are five stages of a sequential warm-up session; these are as follows:

1. **Relaxation**: Students need to be welcomed into the choral rehearsal and begin the process of focusing their bodies and minds on the tasks of the rehearsal. To build a sense of shared purpose while incorporating young adolescents’ need for physical activity, teachers can lead students through series of physical motions as suggested by current events, sports activities (tossing a football, ice skating, weight lifting), or the weather (shoveling snow, raking leaves, walking to school in the rain). Carefully plan the relaxation activities so that they progress from boisterous to calm and from using large movements to using small movements that lead students directly into a healthful physical alignment for singing.

2. **Alignment**: Although many choral teachers refer to physical alignment as simply “posture,” it is important to realize that individual students vary in the postures that are optimal for singing. Teachers should focus on the most favorable alignment of the skeletal structure for singing rather than rely on a list of rules and restrictions about how to sit or stand for rehearsal.

3. **Breathing**: It is especially important for young adolescents to be aware that exhalation precedes inhalation. Drawing attention to inhalation without first allowing for exhalation results in a buildup of residual air in the lungs, which often invites an unwanted elevation of the chest. Intentional exhalation before inhalation also relieves unnecessary air pressure on the underside of the vocal folds.

4. **Phonation**: Exercises need to begin as non-pitch-specific (such as the improvisatory exercises described below) and move toward exercises that are pitch specific, perhaps excerpted from the repertoire. Have students think the pitch as they inhale and then allow the sound to “melt” into the breath stream during exhalation. One technique that works well for this is to hum and chew at the same time while sliding from high to low in pitch. When transitioning to vowel sounds, students should first descend on “ooh” from high to low. This idea should also guide the first sung exercises—they should start at a comfortable middle pitch and then descend with each repetition. Using descending repetitions is contrary to traditional practice, but remember that this is part of a multistep process that should gradually warm up the vocal mechanism. The goal of the phonation stage is to enable an efficient coordination of the vocal musculature so that students can sing healthfully through the vocalises and repertoire to follow.

5. **Vocalization and Sung Exercises**: A vocalise is a complete, miniature musical composition with an implied V–I cadence. The singing of vocalises should gradually involve higher and higher pitches, should lead to louder and louder volumes, should incorporate faster and faster laryngeal movements (faster changes of pitches and wider intervals), and should conclude with the singing of the lowest four or five producible pitches. Given the limited unison range of most middle school choirs, choral teachers may need to incorporate a greater number of improvisational vocal activities where the pitches are not predetermined but where the teacher’s choice of instructions and pedagogical sequence still results in a full warm-up before repertoire is rehearsed.

Middle school choral teachers should consider the warm-up sequence as one of their greatest teaching opportunities. If the warm-up sequence is carefully constructed with the goals of the rehearsal in mind, teachers and students will be able to refer back to the warm-ups for reminders about how to negotiate a difficult vocal passage or sing a melodically challenging phrase. Choral teachers can also place vocalises and physical warm-up activities throughout the rehearsal when they’ll be most effective at preparing for a particular challenge rather than doing them only at the very beginning of the rehearsal.

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**Improvisation as Vocalization**

When a typical middle schooler is asked to define *improvisation*, he or she will probably respond with something like, “to make music up as you go.” But that’s only partially true. Improvisation occurs within a context—a harmonic context that also has some kind of organizational element, often duration. One way to create non-pitch-specific vocal activities is to consider the element of improvisation. Why? For the simple reason that students are highly unlikely to vocally improvise on pitches they cannot sing. Our job as choral teachers, then, is to provide the harmonic and durational context wherein students can feel comfortable improvising on pitches that are easily accessible to them.

For non-pitch-specific warm-up exercises, it is simplest to begin with activities similar to those used when very young children are “finding” their singing voice. These might initially take the form of speech, by experimenting with the elongation of vowels and improvising with different pitches for individual syllables of words. A straightforward way to begin the process of vocal exploration is to ask students to choose their favorite food, sports team, or color. Then, while gently tossing a beach ball to different students, have students speak their words as the ball comes to them. Gradual modification of the instructions could lead students to elongate the vowels; to use high, medium, or low pitches; or to explore different dynamics. It will help if students identify the words they will use before the activity begins so that they don’t “freeze” when their turn comes. Students can also note the word’s vowels and consonants ahead of time so they can plan what vowels will be sustained during their sung improvisation. A variation is to sing the pitches G–B–D (*do, mi, sol*) in octaves as necessary, with different beach balls signifying the different pitches. Students sing the corresponding pitch when they are passed the appropriate ball and sustain that pitch until a new ball comes their way. Variations are virtually limitless, and they should be guided by your assessment of what students need to experience.
vocally during the warm-up activity (see Introductory Vocal Improvisation Exercises for Changing Voices sidebar).

Students often need reminders or jump starts about what kinds of choices they can make when improvising. It is much more inviting for students to hear “sing any combination of do, mi, and sol” than “sing whatever pitches you want.” When expanding musical options for students, teachers might consider making posters for their classroom walls with reminders such as “rhythm, consonants, vowels, high/low, and long/short.” I also use graphic notation to help students decide what they can do, an idea triggered by reading Michael Colgrass’s MEJ article about how he uses graphics when working with middle school band students.9 I post four or five graphics on the wall, discuss them with students, vocally model a corresponding response, and then let students improvise using the graphics as guides.

The harmonic and durational context of improvisation needs to be shared with students so that they know what choices they can make during their vocal explorations. I have found that it helps to introduce the concept of improvisational structure with a demonstration of how individual parts need to interact. I begin by having a group of four or five students create a “silent sculpture” with their bodies, with no pieces of the sculpture connecting (students may not touch one another). Then, from that silent sculpture, they create a “silent machine” by adding some repetitive motion. A “sound machine” results when students add a vocalization of their own choosing. The teacher can finally provide an ostinato over which students can improvise brief musical phrases to create a “music machine.” After several experiences with this process, students will be ready to create Jazz Circles (see sidebar) where individually improvised phrases interact within a specific harmonic and durational context.

Since vocal improvisation is most clearly identified with jazz, encouraging student vocal exploration can involve instruction in scat singing. Students need structured

### Introductory Vocal Improvisation Exercises for Changing Voices

#### Echo Chains: Singing within a Harmonic and Durational Context

Begin by positioning the class into at least four rows and then sing a one-measure unit of solfège to the first row (G to E range—the composite unison range of middle school choirs). The first row turns and sings it to the next row and immediately turns back for a new, overlapping measure of solfège. To end, simply stop supplying new melodies, and the echo will eventually end with the back row. For a variation, incorporate both repetition (literal echo) and variation (improvised response). (This is a variation of an activity developed by Kristen Hansen of Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia.)

#### Modal Mania: Exploring Harmonic Complexity within a Durational Context

Begin by choosing a key. The major scale (starting on do) of that key is the Ionian mode, and the minor scale (starting on la) of that key is the Aeolian mode, and so on. Divide the class into groups and have each group sing a modal “scale” (up then down, or vice versa) so that pairs or trios of modes sound simultaneously. Two of the modes that work well to begin are Phrygian and Ionian, and then, Mixolydian can be added as a third mode. Take care when choosing modes for each group so that students are able to sing the mode that is selected for them. If, in your choir, you have singers who cannot sing an octave beginning on any pitch, then limit the scale to the range of a fifth. As a reminder, these are the typical Western modes in the key of C:

- B–B Lociar
- A–A Aeolian
- G–G Mixolydian
- F–F Lydian
- E–E Phrygian
- D–D Dorian
- C–C Ionian

#### Aleatoric Amalgamation: Vocal Independence within Unfamiliar Contexts

Begin by teaching all students a familiar song with a range no more than a sixth (such as “Friendship Song,” Boosey & Hawkes, OCT6616; changing the key to fit the needs of the changing voices). Then number students from 1 to 5 (or more if desired), where students sing the melody, but instead of the printed rhythm, they sing each pitch for the number of beats corresponding to their assigned number. Sing through twice on words or syllables and conclude by sustaining a hummed do. The overlapping pitches and unexpected harmonies make this a favorite with both students and, when performed during a concert, with audiences. (This is a variation of an activity developed by David Price of the Music Futures Project based in Great Britain.)
vocal exploration to begin exploring scat syllables. Teachers can begin by giving students a line of text, perhaps from a poem, a newspaper article, or from the choral repertoire. Have students read aloud the voiced consonants, vowels, or fricatives, for example, and experiment with elongation of sounds, dynamics, tempi, and so forth. Recording the class examples and then playing them back for comment and analysis can start discussions about how vowels and consonants work together during vocal improvisation. The number of resources for teaching scat singing is rapidly expanding, and middle school choral teachers should consider using methods that employ high-quality recordings with fine vocal models that are pitched appropriately for changing adolescent voices. Many improvisational resources for band students include echo-singing recordings that are excellent for this purpose.

A Choral Future

The vocal improvisation ideas presented in this article are examples of teaching activities that grew from understanding how middle school students learn, understanding what they need during the voice-changing process, and correlating that information with foundations of vocal pedagogy. To effectively work with young adolescents and their changing voices, we need to consider the ABCs of developing optimal rehearsal experiences: Adapt to their changing needs, Build on what they know and toward what they need to know, and Challenge them in ways that match their skill levels. Middle school choral teachers can meet the vocal and developmental needs of young adolescents by adapting traditional choral warm-up techniques to build on student strengths in ways that are challenging and musically satisfying for all involved.

In closing, let’s return to Charles Farnsworth’s 1924 article in which he inquired about the relationship between technical skill and musical satisfaction:

Is it, may I ask, the business of the music teacher to merely act as a starter at the race; to blow his pitch pipe, and let the students go in a contest to see who can get through the tune and sing all the time and pitch intervals correctly? On the contrary, does not the most musical part of the teacher’s work commence after a song can be perfectly sung so far as these mechanical elements go? It is then that training in beautiful expression commences.10

The sound of a choir filled with adolescent changing voices is thrilling to hear because it is the sound of limitless musical and artistic potential. When carefully planned to meet the needs of adolescent singers, the choral warm-up process presents unique opportunities to extend this potential toward a lifetime of choral singing for each young person.

NOTES

10. Farnsworth, “Golden Mean,” 60.
Between Research and Practice: How Choral Music Loses Boys in the "Middle"
Patrick K. Freer

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What is This?
Between Research and Practice: How Choral Music Loses Boys in the “Middle”

By Patrick K. Freer

Almost every secondary choral teacher asks at one time or another, “How do I get boys to join or stay in my choral groups?” Just as I was embarking on my teaching career, the Choral Journal published a series of articles in which Leonard Van Camp explored issues facing choral music education in the United States, including a list of reasons for the continued decline in the number of boys who elected to sing in high school choral ensembles. He commented, “I am convinced that we are, in fact, in the middle of a serious crisis.” Before reading these articles, I had assumed that the reason boys didn’t sing in choirs was because of issues surrounding the voice-change process. Indeed, that was my personal experience—I stopped singing at the onset of puberty when my music teacher told me to mouth the words.

Van Camp earnestly offered a number of familiar recommendations and remedies, such as having separate choirs for boys and girls, encouraging more males to become music teachers, enlisting the support of adult male singers in the community, and providing teachers with information about the changing adolescent voice. Similar recommendations in our professional journals have addressed choral music’s “missing males” problem for at least eighty years without much success.

This is, of course, a generalization, and there are middle school choral programs that attract and retain equal numbers of boys and girls, but girls still vastly outnumber boys in a great majority of our middle school choral programs. This is perhaps most evident during contest season, when adjudicators are handed notes indicating “the guys” will sing the soprano line down an octave because there are too few to sustain their own voice part.

Meeting the Needs of Middle School Boys?

As a profession, we have a problem because we’re collectively not meeting the needs of male adolescent singers. At least part of the difficulty lies in the very nature of the conversations we have about this problem. We have conversations about various issues we suppose to be the causes. These include boys who don’t like to sing, competition with the allure of sports programs, block scheduling, the scheduling of after-school rehearsals, budget cuts, the influence of popular culture, and so forth.

We rarely, if ever, consider the possibility that changes need to take place within our classrooms, within our instruction, and with-
in choral repertoire itself. Something is wrong. The children's choir movement in the United States has been producing remarkable choirs for a quarter century. Choirs of elementary-age children regularly demonstrate high levels of musicianship and artistry, and they attract huge numbers of children. What happens to all those singers when they become middle schoolers? What happens to all those boys who used to be choral musicians?

**Conversations about Boys' Learning**

We need to begin having the conversations that others are having about boys and boys' learning. These conversations have taken place since at least 1695, when John Locke wrote about the failure of boys to concentrate on their Latin studies. But the current dialogue about adolescent boys and their school experiences seems to be at a fever pitch. Newspapers and magazine headlines grab our attention: "Where Have All the Guys Gone? Different Learning Styles Mean Young Men Are Being Left Behind in the Classroom," "Boy Trouble," "The Trouble with Boys," "The Myth About Boys," "The Gender Gap at School," and "The Problem with Boys."

Other forms of media trumpet these concerns through broadcasts like "What It Takes to Be a Man" and documentaries such as *Raising Cain*, which is based on a best-selling book. For about ten years, book authors from many backgrounds have dominated public discussion, including psychologists, religious leaders, pediatricians, scientists, philosophers, parents, and teachers.

People are talking about the ways boys learn differently from girls. While boys have a great deal of disagreement, at least the issues are being discussed. Unfortunately, we are not having these discussions within the choral music community. If the situation is going to change, middle school choral teachers need to become involved at all levels of the conversation and take action.

**From Research to Practice**

Philosophy, theory, and research all contribute to our understanding of effective pedagogical practice. This is clearly evident in the current national conversation about boys and boys' learning. Two distinct groups have embodied the broad discussion: those who are concerned with the etiology and sociological study of masculinity, and those who are concerned with how schools can best prepare boys for the society they will inherit. Late in the twentieth century, the education profession recognized basic inequalities and injustices in the ways girls were educated, leading to research and policy decisions that positively affected the schooling experiences of girls. At the same time, concerns were raised about the learning of boys, though there are no indications that boys were negatively affected by the changes addressing girls' needs.

Recent scientific research has fueled this discussion, yielding interesting information that could influence how middle school music educators address the problems of boys and choral music. For instance, we know that the brain is organized into different structural regions that undergo change during adolescence. Recent research concerning adolescent brain development investigates these changes and their influence on brain function, adolescent behavior, and differences in how boys and girls learn. A sampling of current research findings can be found in the sidebar, "Recent Research on Adolescent Brain Development," and suggested readings on this topic are given in the sidebar, "Suggested Readings on Adolescent Brain Development."
Implications for Practice

On the basis of this scientific research, some influential advocates for boys and boys' learning contend that a gender-neutral view of education is not in the best interests of either boys or girls. While research is rarely conclusive, it may help us improve how we teach young adolescents. When traditions don't seem to be particularly effective, research can suggest actions we can take instead.

Physician Leonard Sax highlights the superior auditory capabilities of girls compared to boys and the widening of this difference during the teenage years.10 This, Sax believes, explains why adolescent girls frequently feel their teachers are yelling at them while boys sit nonchalantly in the back of the room as if nothing is happening. Sitting in the back of the room, coupled with relatively poor hearing capabilities, may encourage boys' seeming indifference. In effective classrooms, boys who are engaged are nearly always sitting close to the teacher.

Research also suggests that stress promotes learning in males, whereas it inhibits learning in females. Thus, competition and timed classroom activities might be more successful with adolescent boys than with adolescent girls, contradicting the conventional idea that all middle schoolers find competition to be an ineffective motivator.11

Many prominent authors who write about boys' learning recommend embracing the high activity level of boys and incorporating physical movement within lessons,12 ranging from sixty-second stretch breaks to providing small objects boys can play with without distracting others. I have found that young adolescents need a change of activity, focus, or location in the room about every twelve or thirteen minutes.13 In general, adolescent boys need a great deal of physical activity and movement while learning; teachers need to channel this propensity into productive learning experiences rather than see it as a behavior problem.

Some research supports the idea that the characteristic differences in the learning styles of girls and boys may be universal. A meta-analysis of educational research concerning adolescent learners in five countries found males to be more kinesthetically and peer oriented than their female counterparts.14 Boys required more teacher intervention and support at the same time that they eschewed direct instruction techniques. Adolescent girls showed greater auditory ability than did adolescent boys.

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Overall, the study indicated that variation among individuals was of far greater importance than variations between sexes. So, there might not yet be enough evidence to support the division of boys and girls into separate schools, classrooms, or musical ensembles.

Still, many choral music educators agree that middle schoolers are best
A developmental “window” exists until the onset of puberty (around age 9) during which the brain accumulates knowledge with extraordinary ease. At the earliest onset of puberty, this ability to accumulate knowledge lessens, and the focus of the brain shifts to strengthening pre-existing knowledge and deleting knowledge that is no longer deemed necessary—the “use it or lose it” principle. Adolescents who stop participating in making music lose many of the musical abilities they gained in childhood and become adults who report they “can’t sing” or “can’t read music.”

The growth of brain cells involved in higher-order thinking normally peaks in males at age 12, exactly the age that boys experience the climax of the voice-change process.

Notes


n. John Cooksey, Working with Adolescent Voices (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999).

Serve by at least some separation, with the ideal being distinct choirs of boys and girls. Such arrangements might facilitate implementation of specific teaching strategies to address the unique needs of boys and girls. When separate ensembles or rehearsals are not possible, teachers might simply move their boys to one side of the risers rather than place them in the middle of the ensemble. Teachers report a decrease in behavior problems when adolescent boys and girls are physically separated.

Accommodating Boys

All boys should become knowledgeable about and comfortable with their changing voices, wherever they are on the continuum of change. Additional concerns would need to be addressed in choirs that use only rigidly voiced literature (SAB, three-part mixed voices) rather than flexible voicings for multiple combinations of voices. In all cases, adolescent boys confront the challenge of their changing voices simultaneously with the presentation of choral music notated in the bass clef. Without advance preparation, a young adolescent boy may assume that all pitches notated at the top of the staff are at the upper reaches of his vocal range, which is not true for bass clef. We need to proactively include bass clef instruction during the upper elementary years.

Choral music teachers may assume that adolescent boys don’t like choral music. The truth is that adolescent boys do sing—just not always in school choral music settings. Much of this music making occurs outside of school, often in a haphazard, inefficient, and vocally unhealthy manner. These experiences are powerfully motivating, but they are not “music education,” except in an extremely limited sense. We should engage these youngsters in school-based music education activities with teachers who are sensitive to the needs of developing adolescents.

Learning music with friends who share a focus on specific goals drives adolescent boys to be successful in music beyond school. This type of informal music learning is exciting and rewarding. Research indicates that developing adolescent brains are generally “wired” to seek intensity, arousal, excitement, and the rush of positive feelings that accompanies success.

Adolescents also seek these qualities in their musical experiences. Middle school choral teachers can use this to great advantage by selecting repertoire that adolescents find relevant, challenging, and satisfying. This does not necessarily mean that we should use only popular music, but neither should we rule it out. Rather, choral teachers should teach musical skills through repertoire that has compositional integrity, vocal lines that are carefully crafted to match the texts they serve, and texts that speak to real-world issues adolescents find
intriguing. See the sidebar on flexible voicing for suggestions concerning repertoire. We should invite our students to discuss how their developing musical skills are influencing their musical lives outside school. And we should be equally eager to hear what musical skills they would yet like to learn ... and then use that information to help guide future instructional decisions.

When rehearsing mixed ensembles, addressing the learning needs of boys can be facilitated through teaching strategies that benefit all students, including opportunities for group work, interactions with peers, and personal support from the teacher. Adolescents need to experience autonomy, to develop independent musical skills, and to receive specific feedback about their progress. They also value knowledge about their changing bodies and their changing vocal physiology. Sharing the anatomical intricacies of the changing male voice—physiology and all—can fascinate boys while providing valuable information about their voices and what they will become.

Between Research and Practice: Philosophy

Few choral music teachers have considered the most efficient ways to provide research-based instruction for adolescent boys. Before teachers can apply research to practice, they first need to be grounded in a philosophical framework that guides their decisions about pedagogical and artistic choices. With the daily responsibilities of teaching, compounded by mandatory participation in contests and festivals, there is little time to consider the developmental needs of their students. Caring for boys who seem to dislike choral music becomes a distant goal. The focus shifts from effectiveness to efficiency, and the students who suffer most are boys.

Some teachers lose their philosophical orientation and emulate the practices of admired choral conductors, replicating the musical product of performance rather than the musical process of rehearsals. Middle school choral rehearsals can then become exactly what young adolescents don't need: undifferentiated, large-group instruction where everyone is arranged in rows and where conformity is highly valued. A boy faced with choral repertoire he doesn't like, a changing voice he doesn't understand, and instruction he finds boring will become a boy who proclaims he hates school music and disengages from choral music. Forever.

Forcing adolescent boys to conform to traditional methods of choral instruction is inconsistent with current knowledge about the neurobiology of adolescence. Some boys will respond to traditional approaches, but most will not. We need to align our methods with our beliefs about what choral music education is, who it is for, why it is essential, what it should encompass, and how it should be practiced in our classrooms. We cannot afford to reinforce the status quo in middle school choral instruction if we hope to meet both the needs of adolescent boys and our own philosophical goals.

If we are to change the decades-old "missing males" problem in choral music, we must focus on three issues: retaining the boys who experience success as elementary choristers, attracting new boys, and maintaining enthusiasm through the middle school years. To do this, middle school choral instruction must, at times, look very different from choral instruction appropriate for singers of other ages. See the sidebar, "A Few Suggestions for Working with Adolescent Boys," for an overview of techniques to help win boys back to choral music.

Suggested Readings on Adolescent Brain Development


Moving Forward

As advocates for adolescent choral singing, we need to seek research-
based teaching practices that will positively affect the experience of all our students, especially our boys. We need to ask adolescent boys what they do and don’t like about choral music. In their responses, we may hear some things that cause us to reexamine what we do, how we do it, and why.

The current unfocused dialogue about choral music instruction at the middle level needs to be supplanted with a conversation that has a dual focus on research-based instruction and the achievement of high artistic standards. Middle school choral teachers can be the change agents who most positively influence the future of choral singing in America through the recruitment and retention of males in choral music. In working with students to explore research-based methods of instruction that meet the needs of both adolescent girls and boys, we can minimize the barriers that keep boys from experiencing success in choral music and build them up to be musicians who can enjoy full participation in the choral art whenever and wherever they choose.

Notes
A Few Suggestions for Working with Adolescent Boys

- Educate boys about their changing voices, both physiologically and musically, and introduce them to the bass clef in the upper elementary years.
- Avoid rigidly voiced literature, and seek out repertoire with flexible voicings for multiple combinations of voices.
- Be aware that boys like intensity, arousal, and excitement in their music, and plan repertoire accordingly. Look for texts that speak to real-world issues.
- Ask boys in the choral program what they like and don’t like about choral music, and use their responses to plan your repertoire and instruction. Ask boys who used to be in choir what would draw them back.
- Accommodate boys’ high activity level and offer multiple opportunities for physical movement during lessons.
- Separate boys from girls when possible, either in distinct choirs, in sectional rehearsals, or by positioning boys to one side rather than in the middle of the choir.
- Take advantage of research suggesting that competition and timed activities promote learning in male students.
- Offer opportunities for group work, interaction with peers, personal support from the teacher, student autonomy, and the development of independent musical skills.


17. Patrick K. Freer, Success for Adolescent Singers: Unlocking the Potential in Middle School Choirs, DVD series (Waitsfield, VT: Choral Excellence, 2005). 

More about Middle School Choral Groups
For more information about working with middle school choral groups, watch for a new edition of Patrick K. Freer’s book, Getting Started with Middle School Chorus, originally published by MENC in 1998. It will be available in spring 2008.
The Young Elementary School Chorus: An Introduction to Choral Singing
Shirley W. Wilson
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http://mej.sagepub.com/content/89/5/32.citation
The Young Elementary School Chorus: An Introduction to Choral Singing
By Shirley W. Wilson

Organizing a third- and fourth-grade chorus can be a rewarding and successful experience that teaches a variety of musical and social skills.

Grade configuration and grade divisions often dictate the structure of school performing groups. Traditionally, elementary schools have served kindergarten through sixth grade, and students in grades five and six have had the opportunity to join the chorus. Sometimes younger children performed with their classes or grade levels in special school programs, but they rarely belonged to an organized chorus.

Today, space and other needs impose changes in the upper elementary grades that can radically split elementary choruses. School systems may place sixth graders in middle schools, either alone or with seventh and eighth graders. In this configuration, elementary chorus membership usually includes fourth and fifth graders. Although this produces some necessary alterations in the chorus curriculum, these changes are not catastrophic.

But what about when schools move fifth graders across town, away from grades K–4? Can the elementary chorus survive in this situation? Can third and fourth graders learn to produce musical sounds that are worth the teacher's effort to organize a chorus? After twenty-four years with third and fourth graders, I have come to believe that this age group can do amazing things in a chorus experience.

Shirley W. Wilson taught vocal music at J. P. Vincent Elementary School in Bloomfield, Connecticut. She now lives in Erie, Pennsylvania.
Organizing the Chorus

Third and fourth graders, while they are very compatible, are at different skill levels. Some schools, for various reasons, will find it necessary to split these grades into separate choral groups. Certainly fourth graders can develop part skills more quickly than third graders, while third graders seem to be less self-conscious and more eager to experiment with new skills. The two grade levels work well together for these reasons. While third graders bring eagerness and enthusiasm to the beginning chorus, fourth graders, especially those in their second year of chorus, have solid singing skills and the ability to hold a harmony part. The combination of these elements brings about a wonderful learning environment for these children, probably better than if the chorus were divided by grade.

Faced with taking on this kind of chorus, teachers need to recognize the decisions that surround having a chorus of any age group. The selection of music, the choral techniques that are used, the impact of social elements, and the performance itself all require conscious, thoughtful planning. With a well-thought-out philosophical base and careful, sequential calculation, the third- and fourth-grade chorus can provide students with an important musical learning opportunity.

Although teachers often stress good singing in music class, the classroom experience alone does not provide the emphasis needed to ensure the total development of accurate, expressive singers. Group singing, in a controlled and directed environment, on the other hand, affords students the opportunity to use their voices in ways that will provide maximum vocal development. A teacher who is serious about incorporating the National Standards for Music Education will know the benefits of chorus for a child this age. See the Beginning Chorus and the National Standards sidebar for information on how choir relates to the Standards.

It is not necessary to exclude those students who still struggle with pitch matching. However, only those students who want to belong to an elementary chorus should be included. Massing all of the third and fourth

Beginning Chorus and the National Standards for Music Education

For students to gain a comprehensive musical education in the elementary school, as defined by the National Standards for Music Education, teachers need to analyze the chorus experience with the Standards in mind.

Content Standard 1—Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music. All of the achievement standards in this content area can be taught effectively through chorus. Although teachers may teach to this standard in all classroom music, there is no place like chorus to specifically target all aspects of singing.

Content Standard 2—Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music. While not as thoroughly addressed in chorus as in music classes, the use of instruments as accompaniments to choral pieces gives children the opportunity to develop independence, blend and match sounds with the singers, and respond to the cues of the conductor.

Content Standard 3—Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments. Improvising rhythms at the beginning of chorus rehearsals helps children focus and concentrate. Sometimes these rhythms can be developed as part of a song that the chorus is learning. Introductions, interludes, and endings improvised by students in performance add excitement to a piece, provided that students have had plenty of experience doing this during rehearsal times.

Content Standard 4—Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines. Students enjoy composing melodies to poetry they have written, which can be performed by the school chorus. Children also benefit from the opportunity to compose instrumental accompaniments to choral songs.

Content Standard 5—Reading and notating music—and Content Standard 6—Listening to, analyzing, and describing music. While students may not write musical notation in chorus, they certainly have many opportunities to read music. These standards are addressed every time that children in chorus are asked to read, discuss, explain, or answer questions about traditional notation.

Content Standard 7—Evaluating music and music performances. Self-assessments can be developed by teachers as an evaluation tool for their beginning choristers. Children can listen to tapes of their own rehearsals and performances, as well as recordings of other choruses, and then record their assessments. They can even help the teacher develop criteria for questionnaires that judge musical performance. Likewise, students can explain their personal preferences for specific music either verbally or in writing.

Content Standard 8—Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts. Children can readily see the relationship between poetry and texts of songs. This enables them to connect what they are learning in language arts and music. They also can be taught to see connections with visual art and dance, particularly when such art forms are combined with chorus material in performance.

Content Standard 9—Understanding music in relation to history and culture. Teachers who use a wide variety of song material from various periods of history and various cultures expose their chorus students to diverse styles and genres beyond those studied in the general music classroom. Performance of such varied material is a solid way to help children value and appreciate song material that is new to them.
graders, including those who would rather not be there, into a singing group will defeat the purposes of giving students a positive first-time chorus experience. Selection of students depends on many factors: space, scheduling, and size and manageability of the group are among the most important. Decisions made here will dictate whether the chorus will be split along grade lines or combined into one group. These decisions must be made on a school-by-school basis, with the music teacher having the strongest influence on the final decision.

Selecting Appropriate Music

Considerations in the selection of music set the stage for year-long planning for the specific needs of the young chorus. Although teachers choose music with performance in mind, this is not the only consideration. Wise music selection affords children a broad appreciation of many types of songs. Over a year’s time, a varied repertoire includes at least one song from several categories.

Largely, teachers should draw from general American folk songs for third and fourth graders. This body of songs is our students’ musical “mother tongue,” as Kodály would say. This music from oral tradition provides a wealth of material for teaching about the history of our country and the day-to-day lives of our ancestors. Not only do folk songs teach valuable lessons about our culture, they are easy to sing because of their limited range. Children can be especially successful at singing pentatonic folk songs accurately and in tune.

For the same reasons that we value general American folk songs, we choose spirituals from the African-American tradition for teaching children. In addition to being another type of folk song, these songs provide opportunities for solo singing, call-and-response experiences, and partnering. The religious heritage of these forebears played an important role in history, and this music should be part of any balanced chorus curriculum.

While songs from various cultures within the U.S. give us a wealth of literature for use with children’s choruses, songs from other countries also provide benefits. These songs broaden the musical and multiethnic education of our children. Often, we can see the similarities between people from other places and people of our own culture. Holiday music from other countries exposes children to others’ songs and celebrations. Children also gain an understanding of musical tonalities and rhythms that may be different from those of Western music. Introduction of world instruments to accompany these songs enhances their performance.

Wise music selection affords children a broad appreciation of many types of songs.

Young children enjoy songs in foreign languages and learn them with surprising ease. Songs often sound best in their original language. Children gain an appreciation of other cultures through this exposure. They feel a special sense of accomplishment when they have mastered a song in another tongue. To provide a complete learning experience, teachers should spend time explaining the meaning of the text and, if appropriate, teaching an English translation of the song.

Chorus is a good place to acquaint children with art songs for the first time. Many great composers wrote pieces that young children can learn. Students benefit from the study of these great texts and melodies. Songs from the Renaissance through contemporary periods greatly enhance the repertoire of the chorus. Elementary classroom teachers often expose their students to poetry and provide opportunities for the students themselves to compose poems. Converting children’s poetry to songs for the chorus to perform extends classroom learning and affords students another creative and musically enriching experience.

Experienced elementary music teachers know the benefits of teaching patriotic songs to their choruses. As we have observed during times of national crisis, nothing brings the country together like patriotic singing. Children often know only parts of commonly sung patriotic songs or have learned them with inaccurate pitch and rhythm, as well as with convoluted pronunciations. Perfecting patriotic songs for a choral performance gives students a natural opportunity to learn these songs well. It is important to note, however, that in order for the children to correctly execute some of these melodies, the teacher must find the most suitable musical keys for them.

Popular songs for elementary chorus must be carefully chosen to reflect high quality. Not all of these songs are musically worth learning. Occasional popular songs, especially those that have endured over time, offer acceptable learning experiences for children. Broadway and movie themes often are good examples of well-written material that is appropriate for children, provided that they are not too difficult to sing well. Teachers, when presenting popular songs, which are usually fun to sing, need to carefully teach this music, as they do all other music for chorus.

When considering the choice of literature, chorus teachers need to select age-appropriate music for their groups. Generally, composers and arrangers of children’s choral music gear their work toward fifth and sixth graders. This makes many selections too difficult for third and fourth graders. However, it is worthwhile for the director of younger choirs to search for printed music that these children can master. There are some very appropriate pieces available. Listed in the Suggested Repertoire sidebar are recommended printed songs that are appropriate for beginning chorus. In addition, classroom music series texts offer a wealth of useful material. Besides these, however, teachers must collect songs for third and fourth graders from a variety of sources and adapt them for chorus use.
**Suggested Repertoire**

### Folk Songs
- Cock-a-Doodle-Doo
- I Had a Little Nut Tree
- Music Alone Shall Live
- Piglets’ Christmas
- Still, Still, Still
- Who Killed Cock Robin?
- Yonder Come Day *

### Songs from Other Cultures
- Birch Tree (Russian)
- Dormi, Dormi (Italian)
- Kookaburra (Australia)
- La Paloma Se Fue (Puerto Rico)
- Three Dominican Folksongs

### Spirituals
- My Lord, What a Morning
- Oh, Freedom
- Plenty Good Room

### Art Music
- Bandicoot
- Blue Song
- How Beautiful Is the Rain
- Mailled-Il
- Marienwurmcchen
- Wind on the Hill

### Pop/Contemporary
- Inch Worm
- Kids Are Music
- Play for Me a Simple Melody
- Side by Side

*The key of this song may have to be adapted for young children.*

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**Age Level and Ability**

In general, eight- and nine-year-old children have a comfortable singing range, from A below middle C to D or E above third-space C. Teachers find that angular and chromatic melodies are usually too difficult for children to sing with tonal accuracy. Children of this age need texts that are easy to understand and short enough to memorize effectively. Obvious love songs are neither interesting nor appropriate for children. When choosing music, teachers need to remember that children of this age deserve to learn legitimate literature, carefully chosen for its textual and musical content, not merely for its entertainment value.

Besides considering the age level of the children in elementary chorus, the music teacher needs to carefully consider the children's ability level and prior musical experiences. Children's voices develop at different rates. Some match pitches well, and others struggle to find their singing voices. Some schools offer general music classes once a week, while others schedule music classes twice or three times a week. Some teachers follow a strictly vocal curriculum, while others teach primarily through the use of instruments or listening activities. These factors greatly influence the vocal ability of children.

If separate grade choruses are planned, the uniqueness of each grade level should be considered. While third graders sing comfortably in unison, they also can handle simple rounds, descants, and countermelodies. If the chorus consists only of fourth graders,
A Balanced Curriculum

Beyond planning how to teach melodies and rhythms correctly, teachers of any age group should develop a chorus curriculum that includes music reading and vocal skills. Whether the children in the elementary chorus have learned to read music in general music class or not, some amount of chorus rehearsal time necessarily offers children practice in reading the whole or parts of songs. Often a teacher can choose a section of the rhythm or melody and isolate it for reading purposes. Reading in chorus gives legitimacy to what children have learned in music class, as well as a sense of musical ownership.

Time restraints often prohibit prolonged sight-reading of literature that the chorus is studying. Usually, elementary choruses meet once a week and perform two or three times a year. Therefore, rote learning becomes the norm for most song learning. This is not necessarily a negative factor in training young singers, however. Children learn much of vocal production, musicality, style, articulation, and diction by imitation. It behooves teachers, therefore, to demonstrate musical qualities they want their students to copy.

Chorus teachers of young children specifically teach correct posture, accurate intonation, proper breath support, enunciation of vowels, and articulation of consonants. Warm-ups focus on skills students will need to correctly execute the music they are learning. Warm-ups and song literature provide examples for the systematic study of pure singing vowels, diphthongs, and interval tuning. A caution here: learning these elements should be more fun than technical.

Successful chorus teachers introduce children in elementary chorus to all kinds of musical notation. They learn their pieces from full notation, not from words only! Printed music provides the opportunity for children to recognize and learn the uses of such things as crescendos, ritards, meter changes, first and second endings, repeat signs, and dynamic markings. These elements fall naturally into the chorus curriculum.

Children learn to follow a conductor in chorus. They can learn to begin and end phrases together, to put ending consonants on together, and to cut off together. They also are able to learn to follow gestures for changes in dynamics and expression.

Chorus affords children the opportunity to develop social responsibility. They learn dedication to a group, school pride, stage manners, and self-discipline in chorus, along with the necessity of good attendance, good behavior, and memorization of music, often memorizing twenty to twenty-five pieces of music a year. At the third- and fourth-grade level, chorus may be the first and only school group in which children develop self-respect and responsibility. They learn that with the privilege of chorus membership comes corresponding responsibility. Children enjoy reflecting on their own development in the chorus. See figure 1 for a tool chorus members may use to assess themselves.

Performance

Music is a performing art. Children need to learn that the nature of music demands that it be shared. An audience adds a new element to the experience of presenting music. There is a “give and take” process between the performer and the audience that greatly excites children and adds to the enjoyment of the music.

Young children enjoy songs in foreign languages and learn them with surprising ease.

Songs with interesting instrumental accompaniment add variety of tone color to chorus material. Children with instrumental abilities enjoy the challenge of playing with the chorus. The use of ethnic instruments with songs from other cultures gives children as authentic a performance experience as possible. Visiting instrumentalists help expose children to a level of performance they have not yet achieved, but that they nevertheless appreciate.

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Figure 1. A Self-Assessment for Beginning Chorus

Level I

(If I answer “yes” to most of these, I am a responsible chorus member and a joy for my teacher.)

1. I am in chorus because I like singing and want to learn as much as I can about it.
2. I am willing to learn music I may not like at first because I believe the teacher knows what is best for my overall learning.
3. I accept whatever part I am assigned and try to enjoy it, because I know that the more parts we sing, the more interesting the music is.
4. I work at singing notes that are high and low because I want to develop my voice to its fullest potential.
5. I am trying to make a habit of good posture.
6. I take all my music home and spend time memorizing and practicing. I know words that other students miss.
7. I always take chorus notices home on the day that I get them, and I bring them back signed right away.
8. I do my best to always be at chorus rehearsals and concerts on time.

Level II

(Too many of these show that I am average or below average in my commitment.)

1. I am in chorus because it is fun.
2. I go along with singing all the songs but not always with my best effort.
3. I sing whatever part I am assigned, but sometimes I don't try very hard if I don't like it.
4. If I think a note is too high or too low, I try it, but I don't work too hard to make it sound good.
5. I try to sit up when the teacher is watching.
6. I try to learn the music, but sometimes I wait until the last minute.
7. I sometimes lose notices, but I eventually get another one and bring it in.
8. I try to be at rehearsals and concerts on time, but I don't always make it.

Level III

(Too many of these and I am likely to be asked to leave chorus.)

1. I am in chorus only because my friends are or because my parents want me to be.
2. I complain about songs I don't like and only half-heartedly participate the way that I should.
3. I complain if I don't like the part I'm given, and sometimes I don't even sing it.
4. If I think notes are too high to too low, I refuse to sing them.
5. I sit the way that feels comfortable to me.
6. I don't always spend time at home on my music. Most of the pieces I learn in chorus.
7. I always seem to lose notices, and sometimes I have forgotten to tell my parents about a concert.
8. I miss rehearsals sometimes, and if I forget to remind my parents, I don't even make it to concerts.

Note. Some of the ideas for this self-assessment were inspired by Kathy Anderson, “Design a Rubric for Your Choirs,” The Choral Journal 36, no. 4 (November 1995): 42–43.
The Performance Pyramid: Building Blocks for a Successful Choral Performance

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here is no substitute for work. Worthwhile things come from hard work and careful planning. I first read this quote by John R. Wooden regarding his Pyramid of Success in 1975. Wooden coached the UCLA Bruins men’s basketball team from 1953 to 1975, winning 81.5 percent of all games played. Under his leadership, the Bruins enjoyed ten NCAA championships, seven consecutive conference titles, and a winning streak of eighty-eight consecutive games. President George W Bush awarded John Wooden the Presidential Medal of Freedom in July 2001 for significant contributions to society. It’s ironic that Coach Wooden’s Pyramid of Success didn’t hang on the wall of our high school gym locker room, but on the wall of our choir room.

As I prepare for another year of conducting choirs and working with young music educators, I realize how much my choir directors, athletic coaches, and family members have influenced my method of teaching. Over the years, my athletic upbringing and artistic schooling have enabled me to develop an effective method for working with choirs. The Performance Pyramid (figure 1) I’ve devised, based on Coach Wooden’s pyramid, combines seven building blocks that can assist you in teaching the basic elements of choral music as you proceed toward a successful performance.

Think back to your first days of directing a choir. I clearly remember my first year of teaching and a scenario that may sound familiar to many music educators. I had just graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where I had performed some of the world’s greatest choral repertoire. I said good-bye to my family and was off to my first teaching job. I prepared for the first meeting with my choir by selecting repertoire, making sure pencils were sharpened, and setting up the room. The students walked in and picked up their folders, and I took them through a vocal warm-up. I then asked them to take out a piece of music that I knew would work: a motet by Heinrich Schütz, “Die mit Tranen saen.” I played the starting unison pitch of E-flat and gave the preparatory gesture. BANG! I was struck by a robust cluster of wrong notes and, at the same time, a realization that “Die mit Tranen saen” was completely wrong for my enthusiastic, but novice, singers. It was a “tranen” wreck! I immediately requested that the students turn the music in. This event, and similar events throughout my first year of teaching, proved to me that if you want proficient singers who will contribute to the advancement of choral music, you have to take complete responsibility for all activities in the choir room. Singers, like athletes, need to be guided through a systematic training process if they are to have any chance for success. The Performance Pyramid outlines the principles needed to prepare, inspire, and encourage singers in an orderly, step-by-step manner. The pyramid has recommended percentages for each step of the process. Not an exact science, these percentages are meant to suggest the level of importance and amount of time you should commit to each particular building block.

Preparation (30%) The most important building block of the Performance Pyramid process involves preparation. As the director, you must prepare every aspect of the rehearsal before your first meeting with the students. It is essential that you understand and have available all materials—such as syllabi, handouts, translations of foreign texts, rehearsal grids, and appropriate repertoire selections—before the first class meeting. Each year, directors must assess students’ current strengths and weaknesses and be prepared to adapt and adjust...
their teaching methods and materials. You can avoid inappropriate repertoire by analyzing music selections thoroughly before assigning them to a specific ensemble.

Each year, choir directors must evaluate the capabilities of their choirs in relation to the songs they want to program. They must analyze each choral piece using the following criteria: length of piece, vocal range and tessitura of each voice, difficulty of language, rhythmic complexities, instrumentation, a cappella versus accompanied, difficulty of piano accompaniment, and divisions of each voice part. Other questions directors should ask themselves when selecting music can be found in the Selecting Repertoire sidebar.

The Rehearsal Grid. After selecting the appropriate repertoire, an effective choir director should organize practices down to the minute, as many successful athletic coaches do. By producing a rehearsal grid, choir directors will have, as Donald Neuen states, “a minute-by-minute plan for each rehearsal and a long-range plan that successfully takes us from the first rehearsal to the concert.” For an example and detailed instructions on how to create a rehearsal grid, please visit the bonus content at http://www.menc.org/journals.

To create a rehearsal grid, take the number of minutes in a single rehearsal, minus warm-ups and announcements, and multiply it by the number of rehearsals. Divide this subtotal by the number of songs to be performed, and adjust the minutes allotted for rehearsing each song by its level of difficulty. Once you have an exact number of minutes per song (MPS) and minutes per rehearsal (MPR), you can then take these calculations and enter them into a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel.

When you plan ahead using a rehearsal grid, you may find, for example, that your MPS reveals you have less than an hour to rehearse a chorus from Libby Larsen’s Seven Ghosts. The remedy for this is to remove a piece or two from the rehearsal grid, recalculate the minutes, and shorten your program. This

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The success of a choir depends upon the teacher’s ability to organize rehearsals and inspire students.
rehearsal grid allows for flexibility when extra minutes are found in the midst of rehearsals, and you can easily reallocate time for rehearsing trouble areas in a piece, exploring singing technique, or inserting a relevant lesson plan that reflects the National Standards. 6

Although you must allow for a certain level of flexibility, it's important to keep the class structured. Let students and staff know your game plan by handing out copies of the rehearsal grid to each singer, displaying a copy outside the choir room, and posting a copy on your school's choral Web page if possible.

In many cases, students volunteer to take choir as an elective class or must take it to meet a graduation requirement. A detailed, minute-by-minute, organized approach will help you retain singers, entice new singers to join, and elevate the artistic level of your ensemble. You should prepare your choir rehearsals as if you are running a successful business. Making yourself accountable for every minute of every rehearsal acts as a contract between you and the singers. You are saying to your choir, "If you show up ready to rehearse, I won't waste your time."

The Daily Rehearsal Plan. An organized and spirited rehearsal can transform a diverse group of students into a team of knowledgeable, committed, and refined singers. Your rehearsal grid will need to be broken down into daily rehearsal plans. Each rehearsal should be organized by the total number of minutes per class meeting. When preparing a daily rehearsal plan, try using the example located on the MENC Web site under bonus content as your guide.

Find a large pad of paper (a yellow legal pad works well). Your main heading will be “Daily Rehearsal Plan.” Then divide the piece of paper into three sections: (1) Preparation, (2) Warm-Ups, and (3) Rehearsing. Your first section, “Preparation,” is where you list materials the students will need for class that day, such as handouts, pencils, biographies on composers, reminder cards, translations, forms, and so forth. Handing out materials eats up your rehearsal time and distracts students from the music-making process. You can save time by putting these materials on the choir members’ chairs before they arrive.

Another way to save time is by producing a detailed seating chart for your choir. Seating charts help you develop the most productive formation for your choir and are also an efficient way to take attendance. Choral formations should reflect the demands of the score (double chorus, division of voices). If a variety of choral formations help your choirs perform better, by all means, move your singers around. Rearranging singers can help with the demands of the score (blend, phrasing, and a unified choral tone) and strengthen your choir.

You may need to change formations several times throughout any given performance. Therefore, students must practice these formations early in the rehearsal process. Changing a seating chart can also solve discipline problems (e.g., talking, inappropriate behavior) that slow down the rehearsal process. Take time to adjust your seating chart with your choir, and the results will surprise you.

The second section of the daily rehearsal plan is titled “Warm-Ups.” Before each rehearsal, write out two or three vocal exercises that will help students with the technical aspects of your choral music selections for that day. These exercises should include motives, themes, and text from songs to be practiced. Your last vocal exercise should relate to the first choral selection you

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**Selecting Repertoire**

When selecting repertoire to fit a specific choir and its needs, a director should consider the following questions:

- Will these selections help my choirs develop better vocal production?
- What modern music am I programming, and is it possible to work with a live composer?
- Do I really have the necessary voices (SATB, etc.) to perform these selections?
- Am I selecting these choral works only because I like them?
- Do I have the rehearsal time to prepare this music?
- Is my accompanist good enough to play this music?
- Is there enough variety, and do these selections fit into the entire school year?
- Is the music appropriate for the occasions in which it will be performed?
- Do these selections have a positive and appropriate message?
rehearse that day, using intervals, dictio-
nation, tonalities, and the key signature
from that selection. Here is a good for-
mula for daily warm-ups: Strictly
adhering to the class starting time,
begin with physical exercises that
improve posture (stretches, massages,
etc.), followed by several breath-control
exercises, and then your prepared vocal
exercises.

The third and final section on the
daily rehearsal plan, “Rehearsing,”
contains the order of the choral selec-
tions to be rehearsed that day. You can
copy the names of these selections
directly from your rehearsal grid. The
order of these choral selections is cru-
cial for a productive rehearsal. Begin
with a choral selection that your
singers can easily comprehend and
that will build their confidence. The
middle of the rehearsal is the best time
to challenge students with the most
difficult material; they will be warmed
up, focused, and at their most produc-
tive during this stage. Conclude the
rehearsal with a selection that students
can sing well and have learned to love,
reinforcing a positive, can-do attitude.
This will lead to gratifying rehearsals
where your singers leave the room
singing, humming, or whistling the
final piece as they walk down the hall-
way.

Practice (20%)

With a game plan intact and imple-
mented, choir directors may now focus
on teaching vocal technique. Most choirs
have problems with rhythm, intona-
tion, dynamics, diction, blend, articula-
tion, and expression because of poor
breath control and vocal technique.
This is why I try to assist my singers
in their vocal development, especially
during the early stages of semester and at
the beginning of every rehearsal.

If you do not have a specific philos-
ophy you follow for teaching voice, it is
important that you develop one. The
Suggested Reading sidebar has a helpful
list of resources to assist you in choos-
ing a philosophy. You should also talk
with voice teachers, take more voice
lessons yourself, and attend voice mas-
ter classes.

Prioritize (10%)

To create a high-quality choral pro-
gram, all the members of the organiza-
tion (singers, staff, patrons, and direc-
tor) must arrange their priorities so that
the needs of the ensemble become an
important element in their weekly rou-
tine. It is also worth pointing out that
this function, prioritizing for the good of
the ensemble, serves as the mortar that
holds the rest of the Performance
Pyramid blocks in place.

There are some simple ways the
director can achieve this challenging
goal. First, make sure your daily
rehearsal plan (in my case, a trusty yel-
low legal pad) is always nearby so that
whenever you have an idea for
rehearsals or remember an announce-
ment that you must make in class, you
can write it down immediately before
you forget. Second, set aside time for
daily score study. As Moses said (that is,
Don V Moses), “make time early in the
day, while you are fresh, to study scores.
Then, for the rest of the day you do not
worry because you have taken care of
the most important part of being a con-
ductor.” For me, the early morning
hours are the best time for score study.
My mind is fresh, the house is quiet,
and I get to experience the beauty of the
sunrise while studying great works of
art.

At the end of each week, review the
progress of each of your ensembles. By
writing daily rehearsal plans for all my
choirs on one yellow legal pad, I have a
detailed record of warm-ups, song
selections, the order in which songs
were rehearsed, and what announce-
ments or pertinent information was dis-
tributed to each group every week.
Before leaving school for the weekend,
prepare your daily rehearsal plans for
the upcoming week. Knowing which
specific choral selections your choirs
need to rehearse for the upcoming week
makes for a great weekend and will
intensify your score studies.

Personalize (15%)

After several weeks of rehearsals,
singers should be comfortable with the
notes, rhythms, and pronunciation of
the text. They should be producing a
solid choral tone and exhibiting control
of the basic music rudiments. This is
when you need to challenge them to
research the true source of the composi-
tion. Encourage their curiosity and help
them develop a personal understanding
of the message in the music. Depending
on the composition, the text may come
from a variety of sources—poetry,
prose, biblical texts, or other writings.
Whenever possible, invite people
from related disciplines, such as litera-
ture, religion, history, and philosophy,
to share their insights with the students
in order to enhance the students’ total
musical experience. Also, have students
research the composer’s life and histori-
cal information surrounding the date of
the composition. Continually ask what
inspired the composer to write the
piece of music. In many cases, the
answer lies in the origin of the text and
how it inspired or affected the compos-
er’s creative process. This is usually an
intense learning time for the students
and director.

Make the music come to life for your
students by relating songs to their per-
sonal experiences and yours. I was
directing a wonderful high school hon-
or choir at a festival recently and
attempting to get them to personalize
Eleanor Daley’s “In Remembrance.” I
was stopped by a student who said
many of the students singing com-
pletely understood the poem of remem-
brance because they had just sung it at
a fellow student’s funeral. Because this student was able to take a moment to tell everyone about her meaningful experience with this song, we were all able to share a personal understanding of the message within the music for the remainder of the festival and during performances.

Publicize (10%)
The publicizing stage of the Performance Pyramid should begin approximately one month before a concert. Singers are your best promoters. They can encourage their friends, teachers, and family members to attend upcoming concerts by discussing the choral selections from a personal point of view. Organize a marketing committee made up of choir members, and map out a marketing plan to get people into the seats. Send the singers out with posters, flyers, and press releases to publicize the concert. In addition to flyers and posters, use your in-school or district mail services to send a reminder postcard to all teachers and staff. Also, produce personalized invitations using a VIP database or list of parents, administrators, patrons, newspapers, radio stations, alumni, and prospective singers.

Doing interviews with newspapers, radio stations, and television talk shows gets the message out that music education is a vital part of the community and that you invite community support. If people in your administration come from nonmusical backgrounds, get them to attend rehearsals early on in the process.

If there is a narrating or speaking part in a song, for example in Howland’s Saul, ask your principal, football coach, or drama teacher to participate in the performance. Be sure to find out how these nonmusical people will react in a performance setting and discuss any of their concerns. Find extra time to work with them before the dress rehearsal so that the experience is a good one for them, the audience, and the singers.

These nonmusical guest artists can bring a new group of people to your concerts.

Project the Message (10%)
To successfully project the message in the music to an audience, the ensemble must give a performance that reflects the intent of the composer’s work. Because of music videos on television, students have become very visually oriented, and videotape can be an effective learning tool in the classroom.

Two to three weeks before a concert, it is helpful to videotape an entire rehearsal. Before you show the video to your choir, preview it yourself. Set up a special student-directed review session with them, and ask section leaders to engage their groups in a ten- to fifteen-minute discussion on ways the choir can improve its performance. Don’t be surprised if your choir members, led by your team of section leaders, become very creative and analytical in discussing posture, tone, facial expressions, dynamics, unified vowels, and other aspects of performance. Collectively, they will be setting standards before they watch the videotape.

All singers should be given a comment or grade sheet similar to the ones used at state solo and ensemble contests for critiquing the videotape of their rehearsal. As they watch, encourage the students to take time to reflect and focus on a specific area of their performance. Make sure you have the students write down their comments. Then, over the next day or two, type up a summary of their comments, distribute copies to the entire class, and spend an entire rehearsal discussing their discoveries. When

☐ Assess students’ vocal abilities and arrange the rehearsal room accordingly.
☐ Prepare syllabi, translations of text, repertoire, and other handouts. Pass these out before each class.
☐ Create and hand out a daily rehearsal grid so that the repertoire and the time allotted to learn the repertoire are public knowledge.
☐ Create daily rehearsal plans to ensure every practice is structured and productive.
☐ Find ways to get singers, staff, and others (including yourself) to make choir a priority. Schedule daily score analysis for yourself.
☐ Ask students to research music selections and share their thoughts. Invite people from related disciplines to contribute.
☐ Make sure students understand your concept of a good performance. Arrange field trips, videos, or demonstrations.
☐ Publicize upcoming concerts: form a marketing committee, send personalized invitations, and spread the word through personal conversations, newspapers, and radio spots.
☐ Set up a videotaped rehearsal and allow students to critique themselves. Set aside a day for constructive criticisms and discussion.
☐ Arrange a small public performance in your community to get the choir comfortable with its repertoire and performance abilities.
☐ Discuss and go over final performance touches, such as attire, folders, walking arrangements, formations, lighting, and other details.
☐ Final concert!

Figure 2. Performance Pyramid Checklist
you make students a part of the process, they learn the art of constructive criticism.

Polish the Product (5%)

Once you finish your video-analysis session, you must work on polishing every aspect of the concert before the performance. During this final step in the Performance Pyramid process, you and your choir need to review, analyze, and perfect every musical aspect (vowels, consonants, cutoffs, facial expressions, phrases, articulations) and technical aspect (attire, folders, walking on and off, setup, lighting) of the performance.

If your choir does not completely understand what a polished performance is, it is your responsibility to provide examples. You can use recordings in class or take the choir out to concerts, festivals, and conferences where they can experience the work of a choral master. Recently, my students had an opportunity to perform side by side with the Dale Warland Singers. This opportunity changed our choral program forever. Students expressed new insights on how to leave their egos out of the choir experience and achieve blend, vowel unification and modification, and phrasing and dynamic contrast.

If you can arrange it, your choir should perform in a small public setting before the final concert. Many people aren’t able to attend concerts, so you can take the concert to them. One week from the concert date, take your choir to a nursing home or assisted-living community. It may be an informal setting, such as a meeting room, cafeteria, or fellowship hall. No matter what the facility, perform your entire concert as planned. If possible, bring old hymnals or songbooks, so students can sing with the residents and spend a little extra time socializing. These experiences can end up being more appreciated and memorable than the final concert. For an example of how the Performance Pyramid’s principles can be listed as a series of events, please see the Performance Pyramid Checklist (figure 2).

Conclusion

A choir, much like an athletic team preparing for a game, must be guided through a systematic learning process before its final event—a concert. The performance is the final destination, not just another step in the process, and it requires a winning team spirit.

Vince Lombardi said it best, “Winning is not a sometime thing; it’s an all the time thing. You don’t win once in a while; you don’t do things right once in a while; you do them right all the time. Winning is a habit. Unfortunately, so is losing.” If you believe winning is a habit, you should never believe that a bad dress rehearsal means a great concert.

By following the seven building blocks of the Performance Pyramid, your singers will not only meet many of the objectives set forth in the National Standards, they will also be able to share their talent and effort with consistency. Hard work, dedication, and a collective understanding of the message in the music leads to sincere singing and great performances. Using the Performance Pyramid will result in choral experiences that have a lasting effect on your singers and their listeners.

Notes

3. A well-organized basketball coach might create a rehearsal grid that assigns fifteen minutes for warm up; fifteen minutes for rebounding drills; twenty minutes for defense drills; twenty minutes for jump-shooting drills; fifteen minutes to break down and walk through offensive plays; thirty minutes for full-court scrimmage, conditioning, and free throws contest; and time adjustments for conditioning if free throws are missed.
7. Don V. Moses, Graduate class for Choral Conducting (University of Illiniois, 1990).
Choral Ensembles for Independent Musicianship
Rick A. Stamer
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What is This?
One of the expected outcomes of choral music instruction is the development of independent musicians who are capable of performing music throughout their lives. Only rarely, however, do music educators facilitate this outcome by teaching the complete performing process to choral students. The complete performing process includes (1) selecting music, (2) analyzing music, (3) interpreting music, (4) rehearsing, evaluating, and refining music, and (5) presenting music in a performance setting. Traditionally, students in choral classes participate in steps 4 and 5, with little or no involvement in steps 1, 2, and 3. The challenge for music educators is to help all students develop the ability to complete each step of the performing process.

When considering teaching the complete performing process in a choral setting, a music teacher is likely to ask the following questions: Will the students be able to select developmentally appropriate repertoire? Is there adequate rehearsal time to prepare all the repertoire? How will students acquire the information and experience required to analyze and interpret the repertoire? Will the students be able to analyze and interpret the music? How can all students become involved in the rehearsing, evaluating, and refining process? Is it possible to have all students offer their insights during the rehearsal process? Are there opportunities for students to perform all of the selected repertoire?

When the teacher considers these questions, two primary challenges become clear. How does the teacher ensure that all students select, rehearse, and perform developmentally appropriate repertoire, and how does the teacher ensure that all students are actively participating in the entire performing process? One way to meet these challenges is to form small choral ensembles, comprised of members from the larger choral class. In large choruses, repertoire selected for performance must usually reflect the great diversity in the members' musical
skills. Carefully selecting the members of small ensembles will ensure that individual members possess similar skills. Then, the small-ensemble members can more easily select, study, and perform developmentally appropriate repertoire. In large choruses, some students might actively participate in the performing process steps, but most singers will simply adhere to the wishes of the teacher or fellow students. In small ensembles, each student must contribute during each step in order for the group to function.

**Forming the Small Ensembles**

It is probably best to develop a small-ensemble program with advanced high school students, because participating in small ensembles requires a certain maturity level. Students must be able to collaborate as a group independent of the teacher throughout the process. Certain questions must be considered before the program begins.

**When to offer small ensembles.**

Decide when in the curriculum is the most appropriate time to create small choral ensembles from a large chorus. The decision is simple if one large choral group is part of the curriculum. For curriculums that include multiple choral groups, the decision depends upon the musical knowledge and performing experience of the students. The best option is to organize small ensembles in an advanced choir. This allows educators to teach beginning students the elements of music. Later, students can apply their knowledge of the musical elements to the analysis step of the performing process.

The teacher must also decide when in the school year to organize small choral ensembles. Small ensembles that meet throughout the year can work on multiple pieces of music culminating in several school and community performances. Another option is to implement a small-ensemble program for a portion of the school year, culminating in a performance at a concert or music festival. Finding interesting performing venues for the students will increase interest in the small-ensemble program.

**How to select students.** Small ensembles numbering six to eight students with two voices per part work best. If one student is absent from a rehearsal, there is another to perform the voice part. Depending on the male to female ratio in the larger chorus, small ensembles may include mixed voices, women’s voices, or men’s voices. Having a small-ensemble tryout during a regularly scheduled class period allows the teacher to hear different combinations of voices and to place students who blend well in the same ensemble.

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**In small ensembles, each student must contribute during each step in order for the group to function.**

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Students in the small ensembles should have similar musical skills so that repertoire selections will be more likely to match the musical needs of all members. Another factor to consider is the maturity level of the students, since they complete much of the ensemble work without teacher supervision. Having at least one responsible student leader in each group will help to ensure that the ensembles are completing the performing process steps. If possible, include at least one person who plays piano in each of the small ensembles. This person may effectively facilitate the music-learning process by helping fellow students learn their parts. If it is impossible to include a pianist in all ensembles, the teacher will need to find a pianist for that group. Though it should not be the primary reason for making decisions, it is helpful to consider student schedules, especially if the small ensembles are to rehearse outside the regular school day.

**When to schedule rehearsals.** If adequate rehearsal space is available, the teacher may wish to use one or two days per week of class time to allow the small ensembles to work together. Another possibility is for a few groups to meet each day during class time while the remainder of the choir works on other repertoire. This schedule is especially effective for teachers who want to provide new rehearsal activities during block-schedule class periods. Small ensembles may also rehearse during a free period, before or after school, or during the noon period. In all cases, if school facilities are being used, the teacher will need to ensure that all groups have a regular rehearsal time and that every student can meet at the appointed time. Small ensembles may also opt to meet at one of the members’ homes if other facilities are unavailable.

**How to prepare students.** Students are seldom involved in selecting, analyzing, and interpreting music or in planning and implementing rehearsals. Consequently, they need to see the teacher model these steps before they undertake them in their small ensembles. As the teacher demonstrates the steps in the larger chorus, students can offer their insights. To ensure student interest, understanding, and participation, this instruction should occur in short learning segments rather than during one entire class session. Suggestions for modeling the steps of the performing process are included in the following sections.

**Selecting Music**

Begin by collecting single copies of music appropriate for the small ensembles. Include repertoire for mixed voices, women’s voices, and/or men’s voices—depending on the makeup of the small ensembles. Choose repertoire from all musical style periods. Include a variety of musical genres—madrigals, chansons, folk songs, spirituals, and others. Suitable repertoire for small ensembles may include madrigals and chansons from all style periods (pieces in which one or two singers perform each voice part); small-scale sacred pieces from the Renaissance, Baroque, and Classi-
Figure 1. Criteria for selecting choral repertoire

I. Voicing
II. Range and Tessitura
   a. Nature of the vocal lines (stepwise, skips, etc.)
III. Level of Difficulty
    a. Accompaniment
    b. Tempo
    c. Rhythm
    d. Tonality
    e. Dynamics
    f. Entrances
IV. Text
    a. Appropriateness
    b. Foreign language
    c. Suitability for students and audiences
V. Musically Interesting
    a. Is there something inherent in the composition that makes it interesting?
    b. A composition is truly outstanding when you can constantly find something new and interesting every time you return to the work. Is this interest a result of the melody, harmony, dynamics, or some other element?
VI. Personal Meaning
    a. Is the composition meaningful because it expresses an idea or emotion that cannot be communicated through language?

Figure 2. Music analysis form

Title______________
Composer/Arranger______________

Possible Characteristics            Ensemble’s Analysis

Text: English, foreign language translation, setting (syllabic, melismatic, strophic, semi-strophic, or through-composed text), text fragmentation and repetition, text painting, mood, meaning

Form: binary, ternary, strophic, or through-composed; unity-variety device; section containing the climax of the piece

Melody: phrase length, range, tessitura, conjunct, disjunct, fragments, legato, staccato, common intervals, repeated themes

Rhythm: tempo, meter, longest and shortest note values, rests, accelerando, ritard, fermata, changing meter, rhythmic motives

Harmony: major, minor, key, modulation, chromatic notes, unison, pairs, chord movement, dissonance

Texture: thick, thin, solo and choir, monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, mixture

Dynamics: variety of markings, crescendo, diminuendo, accent, sforzando, marcato, terraced, light and heavy scoring

Accompaniment or A Cappella: piano, organ, other instruments

Historical Background: style period, circumstances surrounding the composition of the piece

Musical periods; part songs from the Romantic period; and a variety of pieces from the twentieth century. To help students select music, analyze the musical challenges found in each piece and categorize the piece’s complexity level as easy, medium, or difficult. Then, prepare packets filled with single copies of the collected music organized by complexity level. Each packet should contain pieces from a variety of musical style periods and genres. So that all students have sufficient music to peruse, include at least ten pieces in each packet. If recordings of the pieces are available, include them.

To model the “selecting music” step, distribute a copy of criteria for selecting choral repertoire to each student (see figure 1). Using the criteria, review the musical aspects of one piece of music that the whole class is singing. Define and discuss the following pertinent aspects of the piece: voicing; range and tessitura; difficulty of tempo, rhythm, tonality, dynamics, entrances, and accompaniment; text considerations; musical interest; and personal meaning. Focus on the importance of selecting music that matches the vocal maturity and technical development of the singers. To ensure student understanding, repeat this process using other pieces that the whole class is singing. Reviewing pieces not selected for the class is also beneficial. Students can recognize developmentally inappropriate musical challenges by examining the “selecting music” criteria.

After exploring these issues, divide the students into their small ensembles and give each group a packet of music and recordings. Ask students to use the criteria to scrutinize each piece of music. All small ensembles, by group consensus, may then select one piece of music from their packets to study and perform.

The students may share the results of the music selection process in one of two ways. They may prepare a short presentation in which individual members of the ensemble introduce the piece to the class and provide the reasons for their choice. Or members of each ensemble may prepare and present to the teacher a written explanation of the selection process that includes responses to all criteria.
The length of time required to select music will vary with each ensemble. Set a time limit for completing this step, but allow an ensemble to ask for a time extension if necessary. When the music selection process is complete, it is time to model the analyzing music step.

Analyzing Music

The “analyzing music” step encourages students to look at the full score rather than simply focusing on a single voice part. To complete this step, students will make use of previous experience analyzing text, form, melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, and dynamics. The teacher can model analysis techniques by using a piece that the entire choir is studying. As the teacher presents pertinent aspects of the music, the students can write comments on an analysis form (see figure 2).

Initial experiences should be basic and focus on how the composer uses the elements of music to communicate the message of the piece. Work with students to investigate the piece. Read the text and decide what meaning or mood it is revealing. Examine the form of the piece to determine its influence on the text. Explain how an awareness of the structure of the piece can aid rehearsal planning. Explore the melody with students by identifying and performing musical phrases. Inspect and perform rhythm patterns used to deliver the text. Note tempo indications in the score, but communicate how a musician determines the appropriate tempo by studying the notation and text of the music. Perform a portion of the piece using contrasting tempos and determine which one seems most appropriate. Next, ascertain the tonality of the piece. Look for nonharmonic tones and decide how the composer uses them to emphasize important words in the text. Extract, perform, and analyze chords so students can begin to see how to construct them and hear how they progress from one to another. Examine and perform sections of the music to experience how the composer uses texture and dynamics to express the quiet or dramatic qualities of the piece. Then, look at the accompanying text to see how it influences the choral parts. Finally, share composer and historical background information about the piece. The goal of this analysis is not to teach students to minutely examine every aspect of the score, but to show students how composers make use of the musical elements to communicate the music’s message. This process may be repeated with additional pieces of music.

After the teacher-initiated analysis experiences are complete, all students should receive a copy of their music.
selection to analyze. Students will need resource materials to complete the analyzing process. Music theory and history materials, choral music education textbooks, music encyclopedias, and the Internet are useful sources of information (see the Selected Resources sidebar for a list of useful reference materials). Students should use an analysis form to record information. Ensemble members may choose to work as a group to examine each musical element throughout the piece, or they may divide the responsibility by having each member be responsible for one musical element. In either case, all ensemble members are responsible for the information gathered in the analysis process. While analyzing musical elements, students should place breath marks in the score and highlight significant musical events, such as tempo changes and dynamic contrasts.

Once the inquiry is complete, the teacher reviews the analysis forms to determine if the students identified all significant musical characteristics. If any musical attributes are missing, the teacher returns the analysis forms to the students and encourages them to inspect the music in more detail. When the analysis process is complete, the forms become a resource for planning rehearsals.

Even with previous teacher-initiated analysis experience, some students, especially those with limited music-reading skills, will need assistance from the teacher throughout the process. As students discuss the musical characteristics of the repertoire, the teacher can serve as a resource, pointing out important attributes overlooked by the ensemble members. Since this is the students' first effort at analyzing music, the musical characteristics discovered may be relatively simple, but the students have still gained experience with the music analysis process.

An optional activity during the music analysis process is the construction of a flow chart of the internal form of the music. Constructing a flow chart, as suggested by Robert Garafalo in Blueprint for Band, will help students see the interrelationships of the various structural components of the piece. The visual diagram provides a tool for dividing the piece into musical sections. This information helps students organize the music learning and refining process.

Finally, the students should complete a historical study of the piece. Exploring the circumstances surrounding the composition of the piece, the nature of the piece, and the purpose of the piece can provide the students with information they will use when interpreting the music.

Finding interesting performing venues for the students will increase interest in the small-ensemble program.

Interpreting Music

Interpreting music includes re-creating the piece to honor the composer's intentions while developing a personal interpretation. Using a piece of music that the whole class is studying, the teacher models this step by explaining the process and the resources used to interpret a piece of music. For example, in order to interpret a piece from the Renaissance, the teacher could develop and distribute a chart detailing significant musical style characteristics of the period and their performance implications:

- Musical characteristics: (1) text is of great importance; (2) there may be equal voice polyphony, overlapping points of imitation, and contrasting choral passages; (3) music is unmetered, without bar lines and accents; (4) tempo is slower than today and generally should not vary; (5) and the dynamic range used is smaller than that employed in later periods.

- Performance implications: (1) stress and flow of the music is determined by the natural inflection of the text; (2) all musical lines are of equal importance, each entrance of the melody should receive slight emphasis, and there is equal balance in choral passages; (3) the natural accentuation of the text and the rise and fall of the melody lines can be considered when deciding on accentuation; (4) the tempo can be selected by mentally singing through the piece to see what tempo works best and by using the shortest note value as a guide; (5) and appropriate dynamics can be determined by following the nuances of the text.

At this point, all small ensembles should use their rehearsal time to interpret their pieces. Using the same techniques modeled in the teacher-initiated interpreting experience, the students identify the musical characteristics present in the piece and discuss their performance implications. They record this information using the previously introduced format and add it to the material compiled in the "analyzing music" step. Next, students discuss the expressive intent or potential of the piece. Reading the text and discussing its meaning serves as a departure point for this conversation. Students may obtain additional insight by reviewing information about the composition, the composer, and the historical time period. The teacher may assist the students by providing ideas for them to consider. However, since this is a personal interpretation, ensemble members should decide for themselves what the piece is expressing. After completing the analyzing and interpreting steps, the students are ready for the point at which they normally enter the performing process—rehearsing, evaluating, and refining music.

Rehearsing, Evaluating, and Refining Music

Advanced choral students have many hours of rehearsal experience. However, responding to teacher feedback regarding their singing is often
the only involvement they have in the process. When participating in small ensembles, however, the students can become responsible for "rehearsing, evaluating, and refining" the repertoire while the educator serves as a mentor.

To model this step, develop, distribute, and implement a lesson plan for one piece of music that the whole class is studying. Highlight how the information gathered in the previous steps is used in the rehearsal process. For example, if melody is a prominent aspect of the piece, the lesson plan will focus on characteristics of the melodic lines and developing the technical skills necessary to sing them accurately and expressively. Present to the choir the prevalent musical characteristics and performance implications compiled in the interpreting music step. Vocally demonstrate each concept so that the students hear an example of the technique. Then, have the choir members sing a portion of the work to demonstrate their ability to reproduce an appropriate choral sound for each performance implication. Repeat the process as necessary with large-ensemble pieces from other style periods.

After students understand the rehearsal planning and implementation process, they can plan the activities for each small-ensemble rehearsal. Ensemble members can develop, implement, and evaluate written plans detailing the objectives for each rehearsal. If needed, they can seek advice from the teacher concerning sequencing of rehearsal activities to ensure efficient use of rehearsal time.

Initial rehearsals will probably focus on learning voice parts. After learning the pitches and rhythms, the students can begin refining the music using the information compiled in the "analyzing" and "interpreting" music steps. At this point, rehearsals will most likely focus on refining vocal technique (breath support, relaxation, flexibility, and articulation) and choral technique (blend, balance, vowel uniformity, and consonant clarity) as the means of realizing the expressive intent of the music. In addition to immediately critiquing their work, students should tape-record portions of their rehearsals, listen to their performance, and evaluate their work using a performance evaluation form (see figure 3). They can use this form to develop goals for future rehearsals. Students may occasionally ask the teacher to listen to their rehearsals and offer constructive comments. Rather than telling the students how to address the problems, the teacher should ask them for their improvement ideas. Leading the students to the solutions reinforces the fact that they are responsible for making the musical decisions.

The number of rehearsals required to complete this step will depend on the ability level of the students, the complexity of the music, and the length of each rehearsal period. Begin rehearsals far in advance of the projected performance date so that the small ensembles have adequate preparation time. Monitor the progress of the ensembles to make sure that they are using their time efficiently. After rehearsing, evaluating, and refining the music, the students are ready to present their pieces in a public performance.

Presenting Music

The fifth step in the performing process, "presenting music," offers students an opportunity to showcase everything that they have learned. All small ensembles should sing their compositions in a public performance. Possible performance opportunities include a regularly scheduled concert, a special concert featuring the small ensembles, a community event, a music festival, an assembly program, or a mini-concert during the regular class period. The best venue is one in which the students have the opportunity to describe and demonstrate what they have learned about the performing process. Prior to performing, the students can present a brief account of the activities leading to the performance. Ensemble members may also write and present program notes describing their pieces.

If feasible, fellow students may adjudicate the performances using an evaluation form. Share the results of this evaluation with the small-ensemble members. Videotaping the performances is also an excellent way to record, for future review by the students, the "presenting music" step in the performing process.

Evaluation

A supplementary step in the performing process is self-evaluation. Using available information (e.g., audience critiques and/or videotapes), the students can evaluate their performance. In addition to a musical review of the performance, ensemble members can evaluate their stage presentation (figure 4). The students can then submit to the teacher a written evaluation of their performance, as well as musical and performance goals for the future. This concluding step provides ensemble members with the opportunity for a final assessment of their performance, as well as a departure point for their future musical goals.

Students should also write a review of the small-ensemble experience in terms of what they learned. In their reviews, students may discuss small-ensemble organization; scheduling; available repertoire; effectiveness of teacher-modeling techniques; usefulness of the resources available in the selecting, analyzing, interpreting, rehearsing, and presenting music steps; appropriateness of performing venues; and teacher involvement and feedback throughout the experience. Student feedback will help the teacher refine the small-ensemble experience to meet the educational goals associated with teaching the complete performing process.

Benefits of the Small-Ensemble Experience

Using small ensembles to develop independent musicians capable of completing all steps of the performing process has the following benefits:

- Students become decision makers rather than simply responding to the wishes of the teacher. In the process of making academic and musical decisions, they draw upon prior and new knowledge and experience, and they exercise problem-solving skills.

- In a large ensemble setting, when the teacher asks the choir to accomplish a rehearsal goal, students may
Evaluation of Small-ensemble Performance

**Figure 3. Evaluation of small-ensemble performance**

**Technique**

**Breath Support**
- satisfactory; breath taken and used effectively
- needs improvement
- use diaphragm; breathe from below the belt
- posture; stand erect, but not rigid
- relax jaw and shoulders
- support through the end of phrases

**Entrances/Releases**
- well-executed
- not clean because:
  - sections are not responding as one
  - some singers “scooping” as they enter
  - consonants are not crisp, energetic

**Tone Quality**
- full, free, well-placed in all registers
- breathy; staccato vocalises may help
- pinched, thin; strive for vibrato for warmth
- forced
- focus the tone forward, behind upper front teeth
- give attention to breath support
- open mouth for better projection
- keep throat relaxed and open
- work toward brighter vowel colors
- work toward darker vowel colors

**Intonation**
- very good, accurate pitches
- generally good, occasional faulty pitches

**Reasons for Faulty Intonation**
- lack of proper breath support
- lack of unity in vowel purity
- failure to listen carefully
- better mental anticipation needed
- end of phrases suffer; lack of support
- crucial intervals not accurate

**Rhythm**

**Tempo**
- appropriate to the music
- too fast
- too slow

**Rhythm**
- rhythmic values are correct
- rhythm seems sluggish at times
- rapid passages are rushed
- pattern(s) not correctly reproduced

**Balance/Blend**

| __good__ | __SS A T B B__ overbalances other sections |
| __voices stand out in__ __SS A T B B__ sections |
| __SS A T B B__ too weak for good balance |

**Accompaniment**
- sensitive, expressive
- too loud
- too soft
- needs to follow performance more closely:
  - inaccurate__ pitches__ rhythms

**Diction**

**Vowels**
- vowels produced properly, purely
- some vowels too bright
  
  Examples: __
- some vowels too dark
  
  Examples: __

**Diphthongs and Compound Vowels**
- satisfactory
- sing on the pure, first vowel sound—too much attention to the second, vanishing sound

**Consonants**
- distinct, well-articulated
- muffled; make them clearer, crisper
- initial and final consonants need attention

**Interpretation/Musicianship**

**Phrasing**
- satisfactory, artistic
- meaning of the text is broken by breathing in the wrong places
- musical line needs more direction toward the main idea of the text
- music lacks flow; sing through the notes, not note-by-note

**Expression**
- shows emotional maturity and understanding
- shows need for more dynamic contrast
- move dramatically toward and away from the emotional peaks

**Musicianship**
- generally fine musical taste
- interpretation questionable regarding the performance practice/style of the selection
choose not to participate fully because they do not understand the importance of the goal or do not feel capable of attaining it. In the small ensemble, students participate more fully because they realize that the group cannot operate without their contributions.

- Students have the opportunity to explore repertoire composed and arranged especially for small ensembles. They can select repertoire of interest to them. Advanced students may study repertoire that is more vocally challenging than repertoire performed by the larger choir.

- When analyzing music, students develop an understanding of its structural elements. Rather than just learning to sing their voice part, they begin to look at the entire score. They see and hear how the composer creates the melody to suit the text, uses rhythm to realize the metrical flow of the text, uses form as a structural device, uses harmony to create feelings of tension and repose, and incorporates texture and dynamic contrasts to change the mood of the music. As a result, they become more knowledgeable about how composers use the elements of music to communicate the piece’s message.

- As they learn to interpret music, students develop a knowledge of historical and cultural influences on music from various style periods. Rather than accepting the artistic interpretation of the teacher, they develop their own interpretations based on their knowledge of different periods of music history and genres of music.

- Students have the opportunity to participate in musical decisions when rehearsing, evaluating, and refining music. Rather than relying on the teacher, they share ideas and collaborate. This procedure creates more ownership and interest in the music-making operation because students have an investment in the learning process. Students develop leadership skills through planning and leading rehearsals. They learn to work together to solve problems and improve the performance product.

- When performing music, students share their own artistic interpretations. Because they make the musical decisions, the performance reflects student knowledge and perceptions rather than being simply a re-creation of the teacher’s wishes. This experience is highly motivating because students see what they are capable of and realize that they have developed the skills necessary to become independent musicians.

- Students develop the ability to critically listen to music when they critique their performances and the performances of their peers. They determine the quality of the musical and technical aspects associated with the performances. They can transfer this process to other artistic experiences in their daily lives. Rather than accepting the opinions of others, they can make informed personal choices regarding music and musical experiences.

**Summary**

Developing independent musicians is one of the expected outcomes of choral music instruction. In performance ensembles, one way to address this outcome is by teaching the complete performing process. However, designing the experience to involve all students at a developmentally appropriate level is difficult. The use of small choral ensembles is one way to address these difficulties.

Once the students and teacher complete the small-ensemble experience, it may become a regular part of the curriculum. Students will appreciate their newly acquired musical knowledge and performance-skill development. The teacher will enjoy working with students who have refined their vocal and choral techniques in the small ensembles, who have expanded their knowledge about musical elements and style characteristics, and who are capable of accomplishing all the steps involved in the performing process.

**Notes**