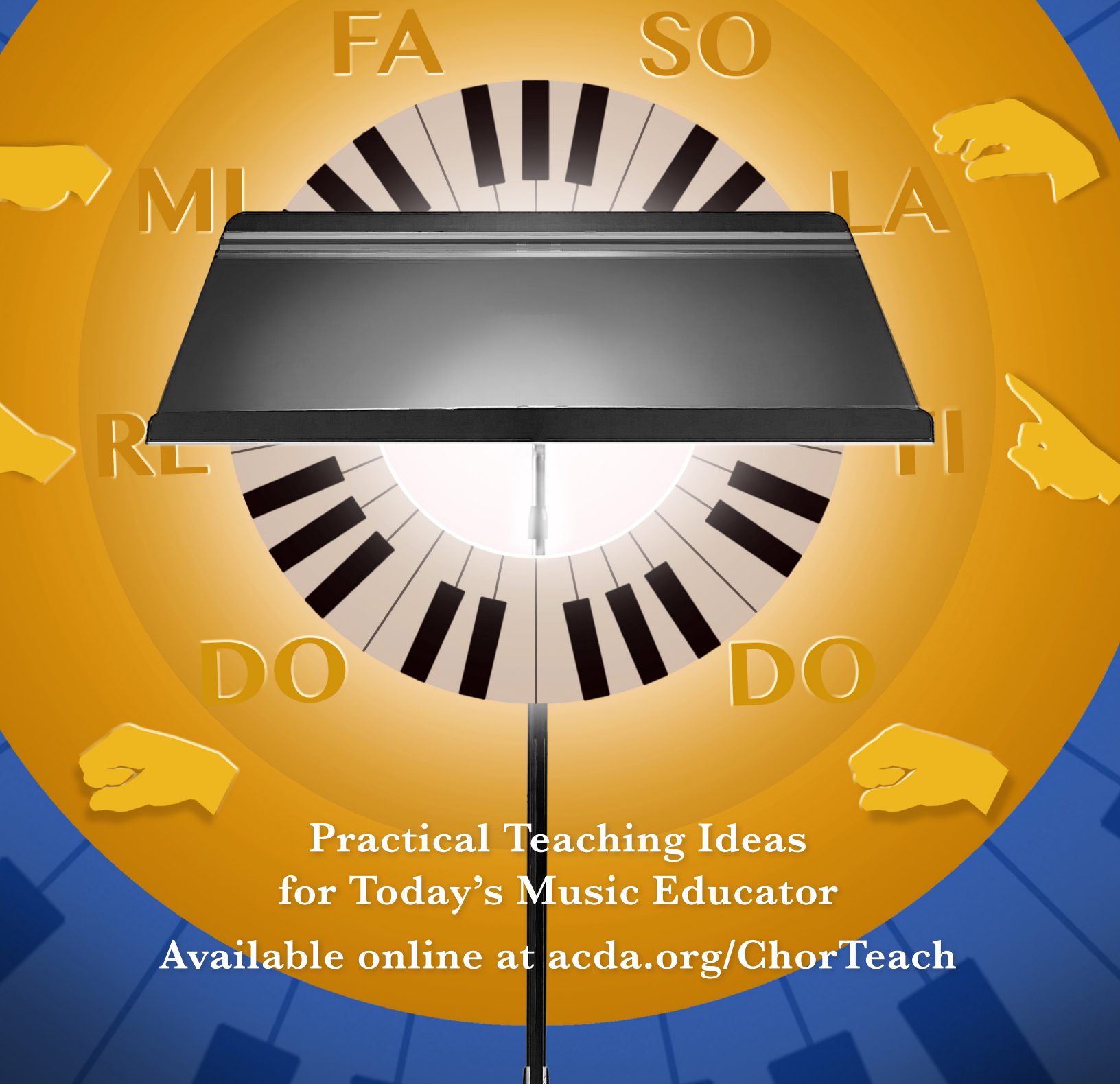


CHORTEACH



Volume 15 Issue 4

Summer 2023



Practical Teaching Ideas
for Today's Music Educator

Available online at acda.org/ChorTeach

From the Editor



Welcome to the summer issue of *ChorTeach*. This issue contains a variety of practical articles and resources, including “Ask a Conductor” Question #7: *What do you do with those students who don’t often sing in your class? They say they enjoy being in choir, but I don’t see evidence of this in their class performance, and their behavior during class is negatively impacting the group.*

In “Remixing the Algorithm: TikTok for Choirs,” Colleen McNickle shares strategies for utilizing the social media platform TikTok in the classroom. She includes a checklist for videos, examples of TikTok lessons, and a suggested list of creators to follow.

Christopher Loftin breaks down vocal and visual expression into five strategies that “streamline instruction and allow students the opportunity to create expressive decisions for themselves in a healthy manner.” Next, you will find Part 2 of an article printed in the spring issue by Elizabeth Weismehl on cultivating positivity and gratitude in the classroom, specifically with younger singers. Finally, we are reprinting a short article from *Choral Journal* 1978, which shares statements from secondary school students about what makes a great choral music teacher.



Amanda Bumgarner

As we continue to expand and enhance *ChorTeach* for our ACDA membership, I invite you to consider contributing an article to a future issue. Find updated submission guidelines at acda.org. Click “ChorTeach” from the Publications dropdown menu and view the PDF link to Submission Guidelines.

If you are interested in contributing to a future “Ask a Conductor” section, visit <https://forms.gle/oVcamzqp4KwXfo5M9> or email chorteach@acda.org. We are looking for people to submit questions, along with people interested in answering questions.





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Ask a Conductor

Question 7

What do you do with those students who don't often sing in your class? They say they enjoy being in choir, but I don't see evidence of this in their class performance, and their behavior during class is negatively impacting the group.

Welcome to the “Ask a Conductor” section of *ChorTeach*. In this reader-generated Q&A format, readers submit questions related to teaching, conducting, rehearsing with, or singing with K-12 students. Educators who either currently work in K-12 or who have past experience in K-12 will answer the question, with a new question appearing in each issue. Our goal is for this to be a very practical section that applies directly to current concerns in the choral classroom. Readers can submit questions via the link in this Google form (<https://forms.gle/oVcamzqp4KwXfo5M9>) or by visiting the QR code below.

Ask a Conductor Submission Form



Question: What do you do with those students who don't often sing in your class? They say they enjoy being in choir, but I don't see evidence of this in their class performance, and their behavior during class is negatively impacting the group.



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In my experience, lack of participation or negative behavior stems from lack of expectation, lack of positive relationship(s), lack of engaging rehearsals, or some combination of the three. Most of my advice is given with middle grades in mind, but I have found the following ideas to be transferable to all ages.

1) *Expectations*

Students will only rise to the level of expectation we set for them. Expectations need to be addressed explicitly in the first week and revisited periodically, preferably *before* something has gone wrong. I have found it crucial to include expectations in my Choir Handbook, which is given out and explained in the first rehearsal and also summarized to parents in our first parent meeting. The handbook includes all performance dates, assessment dates, advocacy strategies for parents, and more. It is also important to have consequences clearly laid out in the handbook, and that consequences are utilized appropriately. I use student conferences, parent contact,



educational assignments, and even removal from the program as potential discipline steps in accordance with our school-wide discipline plan. If singing is an expectation of the class, either the student is meeting the expectation, or they are not. If they are not, then I would examine the next two areas before moving into disciplinary action.

2) *Relationships*

When considering my relationship to the students, they will care about my program as much as I care about them. I intentionally try to be visible and conversational with students outside of rehearsal during the school day. I think of relationships like a bank: if I want to get something out of it, then I need to put something into it. For me, lunch duty has been a perfect time to work on building relationships with students.

Then I like to examine the culture in the classroom between the students. Are they seated in a manner that promotes friendship without sliding off task? Are students conversing with each other and laughing before or after class? Smiles between students are what I look for in these transitions. I also try to pinpoint students who do not seem to be socially inclined, and I make an attempt to help facilitate relationships between them and other choir members. It is important to prioritize a proper supportive culture in rehearsals. My students regularly say, “Choir is a family,” and that dynamic takes guidance in order to achieve it.

3) *Engagement*

Students need stability, consistency, and economy of language for rehearsals and instruction. These can be achieved through routine, consistency in holding to procedure and relationships, and concise clarity of instruction. I heard pastor say many times, “I hope to be finished speaking before you’re finished listening,” and I try to maintain that mindset when introducing a piece, making adjustments, and teaching every single day. Economy of language ensures that my words will have weight and maximizes the opportunity for retention. Beyond that, I try to make sure students are physically engaged in the rehearsal and in music making. Music is movement.

While there is no such thing as a “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching choir, when asked about a student’s lack of engagement, I would first search for deficiencies in these three areas. Good luck to everyone with your next school year!



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There are many factors that influence singing. The deep emotional roots of singing can be freeing and deeply satisfying, but in some cases can bring up less positive feelings as well. As a community choir director, it was rare for someone to come into my choir and not sing. I have had young children come into the choir who didn’t sing initially or sang so softly that it seemed they weren’t singing, but this was usually temporary. A middle school boy who hadn’t sung in a choir before coming to us told me he just loved being in the middle of the sound. I was eventually able to convince him that it was more fun to be part of that sound!

If a chorister says they enjoy choir, they have a reason for being there, and it is our responsibility as directors to help them find their place. My first step is to meet separately with a non-singer or shy singer. I start by asking a few questions about their experience in class.

Do they like the music?

What do they like about being in choir?

Would they feel more comfortable on a different part?

Is the issue vocal?

Going through a voice check may uncover changes that make the singer feel awkward in their current place.

Is the issue social?

Are they uncomfortable around their peers? Would they be better placed in a different section or next to a different person? Are they afraid of making mistakes or just not sure of their abilities? Would it help to have a choir buddy system to connect kids who aren’t already connected?

Is the issue emotional?

Does singing bring up personal feelings that are difficult to share? They don’t have to share the details unless they wish to, but the acknowledgement is important.



Above all, it's important to let the singer know that you care about them and are willing to work with them. This may take time but is well worth the effort.



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How to address this problem depends on the specifics of the situation. First, make sure you diagnose the problem accurately and are not contributing to it. How do the students see the situation? Are your expectations clear to everyone involved? Does your teaching encourage engagement? You can address these matters directly with your students. You may also have to consider how the culture of the school as a whole influences the problem.

Try to see through the students' eyes. Ask them why they joined choir and what they like about it. Then you can begin to address the problem in a useful way. In high school, I joined choir because the teacher noticed my interest in music in eighth grade and nurtured it. In middle school, I ended up in chorus because a friend dragged me with him. In elementary school, the teacher drafted me into choir along with most of my classmates with no real explanation. Getting students engaged in these scenarios requires very different approaches.

Make certain your expectations for participation align with school policy and that you have the support of your administration. Communicate your expectations to students and parents from the beginning and follow them consistently. In your day-to-day teaching, make eye contact, wait for attention, and persist in requiring participation. If necessary, rearrange seating to break up troublesome groups or place students who need extra supervision close to you.

Use teaching techniques that encourage participation. Keep instruction fast paced but organized. Include a balance of challenging and easier tasks in each rehearsal. Use a variety of student groupings and types of activity in each class. Avoid speaking more than thirty seconds at a time.

You may want to record a rehearsal to see how you do at these things or have a trusted person observe you.

The problem is more difficult if it stems from systemic factors or school culture. Dealing with this takes time and support from others. You will need to consider the following: How do counselors, administration, and parents view the role of the ensemble in the curriculum and the life of the school and community? Is there pressure to perform? Is there real support for high standards? What are your goals for the group?

In one school I served, counselors routinely placed students who needed an easy elective in beginning choir whether or not they had any interest in singing. It was hard to provide a good choral experience for those who wanted it while managing those who did not. I suggested starting a general music class for students who needed an elective but did not want to perform and promised to adapt the class to whomever signed up. Eventually (when it solved a problem of theirs) the counselors and curriculum coordinator agreed to add the class. From that point, I could help my administration, meet the needs of a wider range of students, and turn beginning choir into a productive training ground for freshmen who loved to sing. **CT**

Remixing the Algorithm: TikTok for Choirs

Colleen McNickle



Colleen McNickle is assistant professor of music education at Arkansas State University. Dr. McNickle is the founder and author of “Inspired Choir,” a blog for choir leaders, singers, and enthusiasts. For more lesson and video ideas, a beginner’s guide to TikTok and Reels, and the full TikTok accounts to follow spreadsheet, visit inspiredchoir.com/social-media-for-choir/

Author’s note: This article is adapted from “TikTok and Choir: An Unexpected Pairing,” presented by the author at the 2023 ACDA National Conference.

When you think of the social media application TikTok, it is likely your mind goes to the dance trends we see our students trying in our choir rooms during lunch time—or silly dog videos, cooking videos, makeup tutorials, or any number of similar short videos. This is certainly how I had classified TikTok in my mind, and this is why I stayed off the app for the longest time. However, in the summer of 2021, friends and family started sending me almost daily TikTok videos to watch, forcing me to download the app in order to keep up with their references and feedback requests. At this point, I came to find that while there *were* quite a few silly cat videos and dancing trends, my friends and family were sending me far more videos of choir rehearsals, voice les-

sons, student performances, and choir performances. This was how I discovered #choirtiktok.

What is Choir TikTok?

TikTok, the short-form video-sharing app that draws the attention of hundreds of millions of users (including many of our choir members and audiences), allows users to create and share short videos on any topic. *Choir TikTok* is the collection of videos for and by the community of choir TikTok-ers. It includes videos from a variety of elementary and secondary music teachers, and professional and amateur musicians and choirs. Additionally, it showcases student and teacher rehearsals and performances, teaching tips, recruitment videos, and trends.

Search “choir” in the app, and your screen will be populated with dozens of elementary, middle, high school, college & university, community, and professional choirs. You might also come across small vocal ensembles, composers, choir singers, voice therapists, voice teachers, and producers and performers of all kinds. Broaden your search to “music teachers,” and you will find band and orchestra teachers, K-12 teachers, piano teachers, music therapists, theater companies, music historians, music theorists, sound engineers, and more.

TikTok and Music Education

TikTok and similar video-based social media have the potential to not only serve as a tool of professional development for teachers, but also as a window into musical worlds beyond our classrooms for our students. Students today live in a tech-saturated world. Most of our students interact with social media on a daily basis, if not an hourly basis. One report shared that nearly half of adolescents visit social networking sites on a daily basis and spend an average of one hour dedicated to social media use and networking.¹ This seems like an underestimation in my experience working with adolescents. Recently, I suggested that a student Google something, and they said, “I’ll just look on TikTok.” If our students are already utilizing apps like TikTok as search engines, why shouldn’t we harness their search power for our good in the music room?

Music education researchers have suggested that social media can serve as an extension to classroom instruction.² Through the use of social media, students create connections to people and resources online and off that have the potential to enrich learning.³ Because many students view social media as an integral part of their lives, the use of apps like TikTok and Instagram within classroom instruction may lead to increased engagement, relevancy of the classroom, and differentiated learning.⁴

Videos Ideas Checklist

Want to post some videos on TikTok but don’t know where to start? Here are a few easy video ideas to try individually or with your students:

- Share a favorite warm-up and explain why you like it
- Demonstrate a vocal technique and describe how it works
- Share a sneak peek video of an upcoming performance
- Try a “guess the singer” video (all singers mouth the words while one singer sings)
- Share the history or cultural context of a piece you love
- Show off your singers’ sight reading skills
- Ask a question or pose a problem for audience response

Recent research on student response to TikTok in a variety of teaching contexts in the past three years revealed additional benefits. Teachers have reported gaining perspective into students’ lives, cultures, and worldviews through TikTok.⁵ Students who have used TikTok in educational settings report that learning is more fun when using the app.⁶ As they engage with social media, these students displayed higher levels of attention, interest, and understanding. Additionally, higher education students who interacted with TikTok in an educational setting appreciated the opportunity to develop digital skills.⁷ As navigation of a variety of technological applications is now a necessary skill set for many jobs, these students saw activities utilizing TikTok as an opportunity to develop technological skills.

Although social media can certainly have its downfalls (many of us have seen the reports on social isolation, cyberbullying, misinformation, and safety concerns), apps like TikTok are central to how many of our students are building their worldview. In the classroom, we have the opportunity to model healthy use of social media for learning and sharing. Through the use of social media apps like TikTok, our students have access to some of the best teachers and musicians in the world. Singers may explore a variety of musics, techniques, and styles. Students can share information with one another and dig into musical knowledge that interests them. Additionally, teachers have an extension of their instruction through social media, opening themselves up to improved interactions with students, teachers, families, and community members. Although social media cannot and should not replace traditional instruction, it can extend and supplement student interaction with music in a variety of ways.

How Do Choir Teachers Use TikTok?

One does not need to be a TikTok star to effectively use TikTok in their classrooms. Spend some time on the app, and you will find that choir teachers are using TikTok in a variety of ways. First, teachers are using TikTok videos as a teaching aide in and out of class, teaching notes, rhythms, melodies, music theory, musical concepts, musicianship skills, etc. Second, many music teachers, especially the casual TikTok browsers like me, watch TikTok videos to learn about or get refreshers on things like classroom management, teaching techniques, or classroom hacks. Third, music leaders are using TikTok as a recruitment tool, reaching out to all of the singers on TikTok. Fourth, choir teachers

are using TikTok to show off their students' work while also giving behind-the-scenes looks at their classroom management, conducting, instruction, and daily life. Additionally, we have choir teachers using TikTok as a coping tool and space for critique—sharing their struggles and receiving support from within the music education community. And finally, some choir teachers are simply using TikTok as a fun and silly space.

Examples: TikTok Lessons for Choir

Here are a few lessons to help ease you into using TikTok with your ensembles of any age. These lessons work best if you are able to project the prompts along with a QR code or post in your virtual classroom (Google Classroom, Moodle, Facebook Group, etc.) for students to complete online. When enacting any of these lessons, it is important to set boundaries with students regarding their use of social media during the lesson and beyond. If a student does not have access to or is not permitted to use social media apps, either pair them up with another student, or encourage them to complete a similar exercise using YouTube. As you read these examples, I encourage you to consider how you might be able to adapt them to your singers' needs and/or incorporate videos you have seen on a variety of social media platforms.

Bell Ringer Listening

Scan the QR code to watch the excerpt of “Waloyo Yamoni” by Christopher Tin with soloist Jimmer Bolden, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Angel City Chorale. Address the following prompts:



- Describe the tone and timbre of the choir.
- What expressive techniques did the soloist and ensembles utilize?
- How would you describe the overall effect of the performance?

Music Theory Challenge

Scan the QR code to watch the video “How to read music in one minute” and address the following prompts:



- What do you call a note in the second space?
- What do you call a note on the third line?
- What do you call a note on the space above the staff?
- What do you call a note on the space below the staff?

Search and Share

In groups of 3-4, find examples of the following on TikTok. Be prepared to share with the class.

- *Vocal Technique*: Find a tip on singing technique from a voice teacher, speech pathologist, or professional vocalist
- *Performance*: Find a performance of a song we are working on together. Use Instagram or YouTube if no pieces are on TikTok yet.
- *Behind the Scenes*: Find a behind-the-scenes look at a profession in music: performer, producer, arranger, composer, conductor, songwriter; sound mixer, etc.

Partner Warm-Up List Creation

Voice teacher Cheryl Porter shares warm-ups for vocalists on TikTok like the one linked in the QR code. With a partner, do one of the following:



- Create a warm-up routine of 5-7 vocal warm-ups from TikTok. Be prepared to share the list with your choir colleagues.
- Make a Warm-Up TikTok for others. (You do not need to post publicly—download and submit for credit.)

Group Parody Project

Parody is an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect. TikTok is full of parodies by amateur and professional musicians alike. In groups of 3-4, complete the following:

- Find a parody of a popular tune on TikTok. What did the singer(s) change about the piece to make it a parody?

Remixing the Algorithm: TikTok for Choirs

- Choose a piece of music for you and your small group to parody (at least 30 seconds).
- Although you do not have to post on TikTok, you will be asked to submit to the teacher for a class viewing.
- Create a duet providing commentary or responding to an already existing TikTok video.
- Propose a similar assignment that appeals to you more.

Duet Creation Activity

Duet is a function on TikTok that allows you to record alongside an existing video. Follow one of the following prompts to create your own duet:

- Create a duet singing with yourself.
- Create a duet or trio singing with 1 or 2 of your classmates.
- Create a duet singing alongside an already existing TikTok video.

Frequently Asked Questions

As I have presented on Music Teacher TikTok and Choir TikTok at state and national conferences, I have encountered several repeated concerns from music teachers, which I address below.

Is TikTok Safe?

TikTok is just about as safe as any other social media platform. Best practices for social media safety include being selective about the information that you include on your profile and within your videos. Examine your videos for location data. Are you unintentionally sharing your

Creators to Follow

There are so many creators to follow who contribute to Choir TikTok. Here are just a few active creators to follow if you are looking to populate your feed with choral creators:

Name	Handle	Follow For...
Myles Finn	@itsmrfinn	Warm-ups using pop music; performances
Yesenia Navarro Garcia	@yeseniathat1musicteacher	Everyday choir experiences; trends
Coty Raven Morris	@cotyraven	Car thoughts; BTS Choir Professor
Chanticleer	@chanticleersf	BTS the professional choral ensemble
Emily Morris	@emilykristenmorris	Warm-ups; voice teacher reactions; performing on Broadway
Cheryl Porter	@cherylporterdiva	Warm-ups; Exercises; Voice Builders; Voice Lesson BTS
Eric Whitacre	@ericwhitacreofficial	Daily life as a composer; Insight to his work
Biko's Manna	@bikosmanna	Young musicians
Kevin Woosley	@kevinwoosleypiano	Music Theory; Piano
Page to Stage	@pagetostagemusic	Ear Training; Pitch Memory Activities

school name, street name, house number, etc.? In addition, be careful about who you allow to direct message you. TikTok's privacy settings allow you to choose who can follow you, comment on your videos, duet and stitch your videos, etc. I also encourage you to utilize the digital well-being features in the app and on your phone, setting a timer to help limit your use of the app.

Am I Allowed to Post Videos of My Students?

Especially if you teach minors, check with your administration to see if your school's media release includes videos on social media. In a university, community, or professional setting, it is always courteous to ask permission of your ensemble members. Once you have the necessary permissions, film strategically to avoid showing those who elect to not be a part of videos. If you are posting on a personal account, it is best practice to not show students' faces. Showing singers' faces is more widely accepted if you are posting on an ensemble account.

What if I don't have anything new to add to the TikTok or Reels Dialogue?

Even if what you are saying or singing might not be unique, your voice or the voices of your ensemble will be. Add your voices to the dialogue!

Am I allowed to copy what another choir did?

Yes! So much of TikTok and Reels is imitation. Just make sure to give them credit in your caption.

Do I have to do trends?

No, you do not! If your goal is audience growth, they will help you. If your goal is to have fun and share your or your singers' work, trends are not necessary.

Conclusion

If you are considering utilizing TikTok with your ensembles, I encourage you to start simple and share short videos with students in order to start conversations or begin exploring techniques. Allow students to flex their searching skills and find examples of musical techniques or performances for the ensemble. This has the bonus effect of remixing their algorithms within the app, including choir in their scrolling more often. Develop professionally via TikTok by learning, asking for help, or sharing your expertise. There are teachers out there who want to learn from

your experience! When you are ready to go a bit deeper, ask students to create videos for the class, engaging the arts standards of create, perform, respond, connect. And finally, if you are so inclined, please do show off your students' hard work! Even if you don't post publicly, you can share with your community via email or in a private social media group.

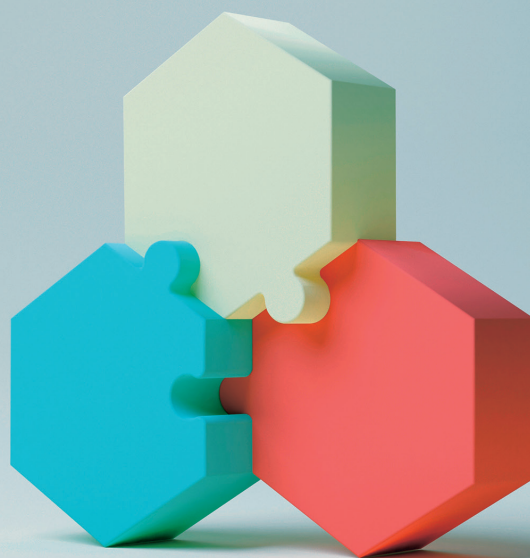
Through the use of apps like TikTok, we have the opportunity to engage and challenge our choir students in new and exciting ways. Through the app, we have the opportunity to virtually bring high-caliber musicians, teachers, choirs, and so on into our classrooms to teach our students. We also have the chance to empower our students with the technological skills to learn from and interact with musicians around the world via social media.

NOTES

- ¹ Christina Bucknell Bossen and Rita Kottasz, "Uses and gratifications sought by pre-adolescent and adolescent TikTok consumers" *Young Consumers*, 21(4), (2020): 463-478. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/YC-07-2020-1186>
- ² Daniel J. Albert, "Social Media in Music Education: Extending Learning to Where Students 'Live.'" *Music Educators Journal*, 102(2), (2015): 31-38.
- ³ Robin Giebelhausen, "What the Tech Is Going On? Social Media and Your Music Classroom," *General Music Today*, 28(2), (2015): 39-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1048371314552523>
- ⁴ Sum Yi Lei, Dickson K. W. Chiu, Mavis Man-wai Lung, and Cheuk Ting Chan, "Exploring the aids of social media for musical instrument education," *International Journal of Music Education*, 39(2), (2021): 187-201. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0255761420986217>
- ⁵ Ioana Literat, "'Teachers act like We're robots': TikTok as a window into youth experiences of online learning during COVID-19." *AERA Open*, 7 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584219955>
- ⁶ Audrey Valeria Bernard, et al., "Expanding ESL students' vocabulary through TikTok videos" *Lensa (Semarang Online)*, 11(2), (2021): 171-184. <https://doi.org/10.26714/lensa.11.2.2021.171-184>
- ⁷ Paloma Escamilla-Fajardo, Mario Alguacil, and Samuel López-Carril, "Incorporating TikTok in higher education: Pedagogical perspectives from a corporal expression sport sciences course," *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*, 28 (2021). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2021.100302>

Translating Emotion to Expression: Five Strategies to Try

CHRISTOPHER LOFTIN



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Students are constantly looking for positive ways to express themselves. They want to feel valued, heard, and understood. Due to tragic events in schools every day, more research and attention are on social-emotional learning, trauma-informed pedagogy, and culturally responsive pedagogy. All these philosophies put the whole student and the whole singer at the forefront of learning. Each day, students bring their experiences, traumas, expertise, and assets to our classrooms. This is a great opportunity for choir directors to allow students the chance to channel their emotions in a healthy way that impacts audiences. The challenge for choir directors is how to engage students in the process of translating their emotions in a way that ultimately reaches the audience. Translating internal emotion to external expression in a way that is unified, free from vocal or visual distractions, and congruent to the song's lyrical, musical, and contextual intent is a tall but exciting task.

This article breaks down vocal and visual expression into five “rules” or principles that streamline instruction and allow students the opportunity to create expressive decisions for themselves in a healthy manner. I constantly

refine these rules: adding, removing, and clarifying principles, so the rehearsal is more impactful for students and myself. There are many more strategies available, so it is vital for the director to decide what works best for their ensembles. The strategies in this article are not meant to “technique” emotion or expression. Instead, the purpose of this article is to provide a simplification of the many individual tasks we ask our students to do on a regular basis into categories they understand.

As directors, everything we say and do matters because it creates a response from our ensembles. This applies to us as coaches as well. Research suggests that 93% of what the audience receives is nonverbal communication, which is why conducting clarity is so important.¹ However, this makes the 7% verbal communication that much more important. How many times have we said to our chorus, “Lift that phrase ending,” “Stronger ‘c’ on the word ‘can,’” or “get louder here?”

Choir directors can easily fall into the trap of spending too much time talking about individual spots in music, as opposed to teaching bigger “rules” or patterns. Therefore, about five years ago, my co-director, Jason Martin, and I created a system of five basic rules of articulation, which helped our choruses take more ownership of their learning and increased their retention. After practicing



these principles, I would simply say “Rule 4” instead of “Stronger ending consonant on the word ‘love’” or “Rule 1” instead of “These four notes all sound the same. Crescendo through this phrase instead of having everything having equal weight or importance.” These rules helped us streamline rehearsal and maximize singers singing instead of the directors talking. As I introduce these concepts with my students, I start with singing a simple song or round without paying any attention to the concepts. Then, I introduce and reinforce each concept with that simple song.

Rule 1: No Two Consecutive Notes Can Sound the Same

Monotony and direct repetition are the enemies of artistic, expressive singing. Therefore, our first “rule” is that “no two consecutive notes can sound the same.” There should always be a difference in dynamic, color, articulation, mood, emotion, or something else because the lyric, pitch, or meaning shifts. To make the phrase interesting for singers and audiences, each note should be given its value and importance. This is like lyrical development, where there are natural stresses and releases built into the poetry.

Rule 2: Long Notes Must Go Somewhere

Any rhythmic duration longer than one beat in a piece must have life, dynamic contrast, twang change, or another modification. For instance, when a quarter note gets the beat in a piece, any duration longer than a quarter note must grow or decay in terms of dynamics, tone color, or excitement. This rule partners with rule one because long notes that are simply held increase a feeling of monotony or “flat lining.” Monotony and “flat lining” are not musical choices. Instead, think of notes as always growing toward a destination or coming back from that destination. Additionally, think of the lyric and which words within the phrase are more important. Emphasize the most important words and de-emphasize the less important words.

Rule 3: Unified Target Vowels/Matched Resonances

Vowels provide art and beauty to words. Unifying the vowel increases the opportunity for lock and ring. In the extremes of our range, singers oftentimes must modify the

vowel for tone clarity and beauty. It is important, therefore, to match resonances even when the pure vowel is not necessarily 100% aligned. When teaching this rule, your ensemble must know exactly what vowel choice you want from them. Either using basic International Phonetic Alphabet symbols or simply spelling out the vowel choice is vital. For example, the word “sing” could either be sung as [i] or [I] or as “seeng” or “sihng.” Vowel work is tedious, but unifying vowels helps provide clarity of lyric and tone beauty.

Rule 4: Every Consonant Must be Observed, Technically and Emotionally

While vowels provide art and beauty to language, consonants provide drama, excitement, and clarity to words. In barbershop, we are a lyrically driven, vernacular art form, where we often refer to spoken language to inform how we pronounce sung text. This rule focuses not only on precise consonants but emotionally driven consonants that propel the musical and lyrical message. The first step is making sure that the audience understands your text. However, the greater objective is a human connection through lyrical and musical delivery.

Another consideration for consonant and vowel clarity is stylistic considerations. For example, directors may have different value sets for spiritual consonants and vowels as opposed to Brahms. Instead of “proper diction,” a value might be “lyrics, performed in a stylistic appropriate manner, should be heard and understood by the audience.” This definition might provide more clarity for singers as opposed to simply “proper diction.” It is important for directors and singers to know the genre-specific values and incorporate them into these expression “rules.”

Rule 5: End the Phrase in Preparation for the Next One

Musical and lyrical phrases are sequential; they build off each other. How we end a phrase can connect the phrases or temporarily break this connection. If the dynamic level at the end of a phrase is dramatically different from the start of the next phrase, the audience gets confused, unless there is a purposeful reason. Additionally, the ensemble should sing the end of a phrase, with the intent to highlight the next lyrical or emotional point in the story. Emotional shifts occur in the breath between phrases, but the line and




musical development are in both phrases to connect the two. This rule is one of the more challenging, high-level skills listed, but it can easily provide the most impact.

Conclusion

These five rules serve my ensembles well, both in the choral and barbershop realm. I consistently evolve the terminology of the rules to better convey my messages. Singers thrive on structure and clear director communication. They need to know exactly what we want them to do. By teaching simple, overarching principles, singers have fewer things to remember, and these tasks become habitual quicker. The goal is for singers to sing more and for directors to talk less. Having consistent expectations and terminologies helps achieve this goal.

Emotion is internal, but expression is external.² Oftentimes when we engage in conversation, there are misunderstandings or miscommunications. This translates to our communication as singers. Students and directors spent many months locked up at home and rehearsing via Zoom and are looking for ways to express themselves. Audiences come to concerts for entertainment. By creating systems where students feel like they have the opportunity and permission to have fun while singing and express that fun, it creates a system where everyone wins. Ultimately, singing is fun. If we, as choir directors, can harness what our students already do so well and increase the joy and expression factor, students get to express themselves in healthy ways, technical issues may improve, and audiences get the gift of a passionate ensemble.

For future reference, there are two sources that provide constant inspiration as I strive for more impactful, musically driven performances: James Jordan's book,³ *The Choral Warm-up*, and a Youtube video⁴ by the Barbershop Harmony Society, "HU Online: Directors...STOP TALKING with Don Campbell and Kirk Young." Both resources focus on technique through artistry and musicianship in an approach that is predominantly singers singing, not directors talking. 

NOTES

- ¹ John Stoker, *Overcoming Fake Talk: How to Hold Real Conversations that Create Respect, Build Relationships, and get Results* (McGraw Hill Education, 2013).
- ² Christopher Loftin, *Visual and Vocal Expression in Traditional Choirs: An Explanatory-Sequential, Mixed Methods Design* (Dissertation, Auburn University, 2023). Proquest.
- ³ James Jordan, *The Choral Warm-up: Methods, Procedures, Planning, and Core Vocal Exercises* (Chicago: Gia Publications, Inc., 2005).
- ⁴ Don Campbell and Kirk Young, "HU Online: Directors... STOP TALKING with Don Campbell and Kirk Young," Barbershop Harmony Society, streamed live on April 10, 2023, YouTube video, 1:23:24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQMp2jK99NY>.

Go and Shine!

Part 2: Eight Strategies for Cultivating a Positive Rehearsal Space

ELIZABETH WEISMEHL

Elizabeth Weismehl teaches general music and choir to grades K-5 at Avoca West School in Avoca District 37 in Glenview, Illinois, and is the director of Voices Rising at the Midwest Young Artists Conservatory in Highwood, Illinois.

Author's Note: I was asking students for celebratory words, and "Go and Shine" was a third grader's response. I was inspired to use it as the title for this article, as this is my hope for your students.

The strategies included in this two-part article are influenced by my work with Dr. Matthew Arau, author of Upbeat! Mindset, Mindfulness, and Leadership in Music Education and Beyond, associate professor of music, chair of music education and associate director of bands at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. He is also president, founder, and CEO of Upbeat Global.
www.upbeatglobal.com.

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Focusing on joy and gratitude can cultivate a positive music room culture, creating space for kindness, connection, and trust. The purpose of this two-part article is to provide strategies for finding joy by practicing gratitude and positivity. As I shared in part one, mindfulness practice helps us to be comfortable with what is out of our control. This can help us to remain calm and think more clearly in

stressful situations and inspire our students also. Part one explored practicing mindfulness and gratitude for our own benefit. Here in part two, I will share strategies for use with students.

Introduction

My Concert Choir was singing on the high school spring concert, an opportunity that would take their choral experience to the next level. Outwardly I appeared excited and confident; inwardly, I was apprehensive. The choir had the potential to be good, even great, in a few years when they had been singing together for a while.

Before the pandemic, the choir consisted of advanced musicians in third through fifth grades. As I rebuild the choral program, the ensemble starts in first grade. The choir had not sung for an audience since the freshmen who were singing with us were in fifth grade. Before the concert started, we needed to practice standing on risers and get a sense of singing in a large space with others. I had spent time tuning the ensemble for balance and blend in a five-row formation to fit in the music room. That night, we shifted to three rows. I had no idea what impact this would have on the ensemble.

As we warmed up, my worries dissipated. The sound was glorious, and the students exuded a confidence beyond their years. Students noticed that I was emotional and asked if I needed an emergency group hug. In that moment of vulnerability, we became more deeply connected. I could not have anticipated how much heart, beauty, and confidence they would sing with that night. I believe part of what allowed the magic to happen are mindfulness and gratitude practices that are integrated into each class and rehearsal.

My goal in this article is to offer eight strategies for cultivating a positive rehearsal space. The following strategies can be modified for any teaching situation. Begin with positivity to create an environment favorable for learning, and give students agency to create a culture of collaboration.

Strategy #1: Good Vibes!

The fourth graders created a chain of kindness activity called Good Vibes Compliment Tag. It is a fun way to kick off the year or whenever the group energy feels off to help students make connections and feel valued.¹

It is important to discuss what a compliment is and sounds like. As students get to know each other, I encourage compliments about character. Play a “good vibes” song, maybe even something you are rehearsing or planning to teach, as students move musically around the room. When you pause the music, a student (chosen ahead of time) gives a compliment to someone nearby. The next time the music stops, both of these students compliment other students. Continue the activity until everyone is giving and receiving compliments. Take a moment to soak up the good vibes!

Strategy #2: Happy Dances, Heart Keepers, and Partner Connections

Every student in my class has their own class number. Throughout the year, I choose students randomly for different needs by using a small box filled with numbered wooden hearts. The “Happy Hearts Treasure Chest,” as I call it, keeps the environment childlike and playful. I introduce it by sharing that each one of us is a treasure to be valued and that I treasure our time together.² Using hearts is a symbolic way to remind students that they matter and are cared for.

First graders suggested a Happy Dance to ensure the hearts are well mixed, and a Heart Keeper to be in charge

of the dance and choosing hearts. The dance is a fun opportunity to let everyone, including me, cut loose, generating smiles, laughter, and connections. Students are adept at dancing with great spirit and energy and being still when a dramatic musical cutoff is given. Such joy!

Using the treasure chest to choose partners ensures all students feel included. When two hearts are selected, the students ask “<Name>, will you be my partner, please?” They respond with, “I would be grateful to be your partner” or “Yes, thank you.” Sometimes they add a personal touch. As long as the communication is done in a welcoming way, including facial expression, body language, and tone of voice, anything goes. Children need opportunities to practice what kindness looks, sounds, and feels like.

Strategy #3: Connecting through Joy and Gratitude

Another way of creating positivity and connection is to have students write down something or someone that they are grateful for or makes them happy. The possibilities for sharing their joys and gratitudes are limitless! Students give their note to the person or place them in our Joy and Gratitude Jar. We look at responses or add to the jar whenever we need a lift.

You could create class, grade level, or individual containers or envelopes. One year our Gratitude Wall was in the hallway. Students can write on sticky notes, bulletin board paper, or create a paper chain.

Practicing gratitude is positively impacting the music room culture. One morning I noticed writing on the dry erase board and wondered why it had not been cleaned. My frustration turned to deep appreciation when I realized these were messages from fourth- and fifth-grade band students thanking me for the use of the room. As I expressed my gratitude, I could tell they felt a sense of pride.

Strategy #4: Breathing In, Breathing Out

When students show up for class or rehearsal, they may be emotionally unavailable. Breathing is integral to singing technique and instrumental in regulating emotions. If one’s breathing is calm and relaxed, it will positively impact one’s state of mind and ability to focus and the music room environment.³ To encourage this, we say the mantra “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile”⁴ as students enter.

Focus Breath

We then practice mindful breathing, sometimes called the Focus Breath.⁵ Have students sit tall. If comfortable they can close their eyes or invite them to find a space to focus their gaze, perhaps outside if there are windows. Inhale and exhale through the nose for four counts each. Do this at least three times. You will likely notice a settling of the energy. Breathe with the students and use it as a moment to recharge.

Renew and Release Breath

After vacations, I like to introduce students to the Renew and Release Breath.⁶ Inhale through the nose for four counts while thinking “renew” to rejuvenate. Exhale for six counts and think “release” to let worries go. Stay in this breathing space as long as you need.

Musical Scarf Breathing

A kindergarten class entered the room in chaos. Unable to garner their attention, I was on the verge of reacting from an emotional place. I turned on a placid piece of music as I slowly passed out colorful scarves, giving myself time to breathe and think. By the time every student had a scarf, I had a plan.

I invited the class to inhale and exhale as we moved the scarves in an arc to musical phrases. They quieted down and were soon creating their own scarf breaths. Their creativity was boundless! I moved from exasperation to joy. One of my favorites is the Flower Blossom. Squeeze the scarf in your hands as you inhale. As you exhale let your fingers come apart slowly. It really does look like a flower opening! Scarf breathing quickly became a requested activity in many grade levels.

Visual and Aural Cues

Students may benefit from a visual and/or aural signal to help them to pay attention to their breath. This is what Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh refers to as “a bell of mindfulness.”⁷

• *Breathing Ball*

There are breathing balls and animated visuals online. I like the Hoberman Sphere, which I also use to help students learn breathing for singing as well as for musical articulations such as crescendo and decrescendo. Mine glows in the dark, creating light on dreary days.

• *Sounds*

In Plum Village in France, which Hanh founded, there is a clock that plays music every fifteen minutes. Everyone stops to focus on the music and their breath.⁸ I play chimes to gather attention. Sometimes I use an ocean drum (Ocean Breath) or a rainstick (Rain Breath). What sounds can you find in your room?

Students enjoy being leaders of the breathing ball and instruments.

Strategy #5: Silence, Awareness, and Dancing Leaves

Sometimes a change of scenery is needed to reset. Students walk silently and pay attention to their surroundings. When we return to the classroom, we have a discussion about their observations, including the power of silence and its significance in music.

We may walk inside the building looking for things that bring us joy or peace so that students can come back to this on their own. I show them my favorite spot in the school—a hallway with windows that look out onto a beautiful garden and courtyard. How often do you walk in the hallway and pay attention to your surroundings?

Other times we go outside to find inspiration in nature. During the pandemic, I took a class outside. As we listened to Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*, the wind picked up and leaves started falling off the trees. A first grader called out, “The leaves are dancing!” Indeed, they looked like they were dancing in the wind and sunlight. It was an unexpected moment of joy that would have been missed if the student had not been paying attention. The superintendent, who happened upon our class, witnessed this, and I was grateful to share the moment.

The dancing leaves became an integral part of lessons. I brought leaves into the room to use as a visual for leaf breathing and musical movement. Bringing nature inside helped the students to recall the beauty we experienced that day. What is an unplanned teaching moment that turned into magic for you and your students?

Teaching students to become aware of what is happening around them is an important part of developing empathy and living life in the present moment.

Strategy #6: Listen In

Active listening is at the heart of being a good musician, ensemble, audience member, and communicator. Think of the game Telephone. Participants need to pay close attention if the last person is to receive the original message.

To practice this skill, we do an activity I call Listen In.⁹ This is a great way to start the year to help students get to know one another or any time you want to practice listening skills. It can be integrated into your music curriculum by focusing on music concepts.

Everyone has a partner and is given the same question. It can be as simple as sharing a favorite song or might require a more thoughtful response, such as what kindness looks or feels like. You might also play a piece of music and ask students to think about what the time signature is and why.

The speaker has a set amount of time to respond, usually twenty to thirty seconds. The listener does not talk even if it seems as if the speaker is finished. This can be challenging, even for adults, but is important, as it gives the speaker time to think and the listener time to practice not responding or reacting too quickly. Students switch roles and then share their partner's response with the whole class. As students share, ask the class to discuss what went well and where there is room for improvement.

Strategy #7: Choose Happy

As choral educators, we are fortunate. For many of our students, singing is often what gets them moving, and may even be the best part of their day. I have had parents tell me that their child is typically not a morning person, but on choir days they jump out of bed. Yes!

When a student seems stuck in that "I'm tired" or "I don't want to do this" frame of mind, I encourage them to think of something that they are grateful for or looking forward to. Research shows focusing on this for at least seventeen seconds will positively impact their day and ultimately, the climate of the music room.¹⁰ I have the number seventeen posted in my room as a reminder to focus on happy thoughts and gratitude.

Strategy #8: Looking Forward with Joy

Returning to school after a long break is an opportunity for all of us to begin again. This is a part of a mindfulness practice. When we realize we are distracted, we reset and begin again.

I used to ask students to share what they did during vacation. Now, I invite students to think of something "that brings you joy, gratitude, comfort, or something you are looking forward to."¹¹ My shift in teaching with an intentional focus on joy, gratitude, and positivity has deepened my connection to students and is creating a calmer and happier community of musicians. This does not mean that we will always be happy. But if we choose to focus on finding things to be happy about, it will improve the quality of our lives and those around us.

As we prepare for a new school year, I wish you and your students joy and many magical moments. I hope these ideas inspire you and your students to "Go and Shine!"

NOTES

¹ Inspired by Dr. Arau's "principle of value" and Positive Bumper Cars. Matthew Arau, *Upbeat! Mindset, Mindfulness, and Leadership in Music Education and Beyond* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2021), 314-317.

² Ibid., 64.

³ Ibid., 79.

⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 23.

⁵ Matthew Arau, *Upbeat!*, 80.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 33.

⁸ Thich Naht Hanh, "Telephone Meditation," *Buddhism Now*, May 3, 2014. <https://buddhismnow.com/2014/05/03/telephone-meditation-by-thich-nhat-hanh/>,

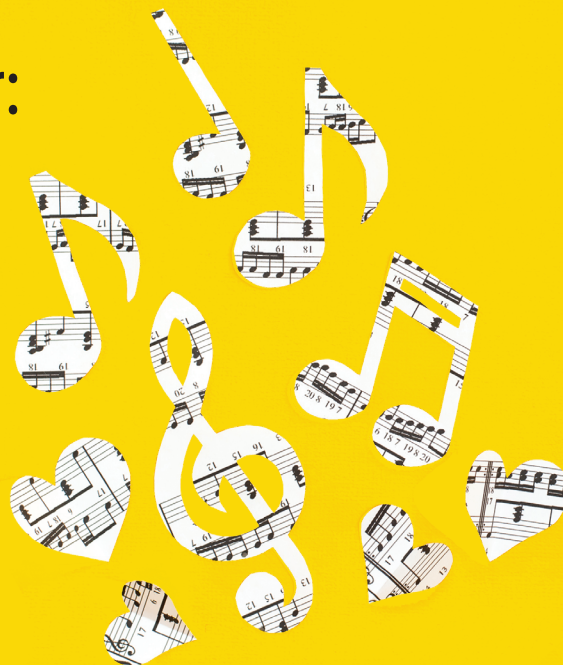
⁹ Matthew Arau, *Upbeat!*, 306-308. Inspired by Dr. Arau's description of Tim Lautzenheiser's Communication Circles.

¹⁰ Esther Hicks and Jerry Hicks, *Ask and It Is Given: Learning to Manifest Your Desires* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc., 2004), 109.

¹¹ Matthew Arau, *Upbeat!*, 76.

The Ideal Choral Music Teacher: A Student Description

by Lloyd P. Campbell



*This article is a reprint from Choral Journal, December 1978.
View the original article online at acda.org/choraljournal.*

Lloyd P. Campbell has ten years' experience as a teacher in the public school system. He was also associate professor of secondary education at North Texas State University.

Describe an outstanding teacher. Not a particular teacher you have known, but the ideal teacher, the one you wish all student teachers could become.

While most prospective teachers want to know what makes an outstanding teacher, the lecture method is possibly the least effective means of telling them. It is far better to permit the learner to inquire, discover, and transfer into their own setting those teacher characteristics which they view as important.

Toward this end, I assigned a class of pre-service secondary school choral music teachers the job of interviewing students in the choral departments of several secondary schools. The teachers in each school had been identified by their colleagues and supervisors as outstanding teachers. The results of this assignment were dramatic! The following is only a partial listing of statements by

these secondary school students about their teachers:

One of the most exciting things about Mr. _____'s class is the bulletin board reserved for 'Very Important Persons.' Each student's picture appears there at least once during the semester with a profile of their past and present major achievements, and aspirations for the future. Being the VIP is a source of pride for each student.

All semester Mrs. _____ has made effective use of the tape recorder and video tape player. She has taped each of our performances and some of our rehearsals, then played them back for us six or eight weeks later. It really makes us proud to hear how much improvement we have made. Even then, Mrs. _____ is open to suggestions and ideas of how we can show even more improvement.

Mrs. _____ had us provide her with information about ourselves. This included our leisure time activities, job experience, achievements, etc. She is interested in what we are doing other than just being a member of her class. I work harder for a teacher who takes a personal interest in me.



Mr. _____ must have realized how many of us were afraid of solo work. But the way he eased us into it in a gradual manner made it not so frightening. He started us out as a large choir, then we performed in small groups, and then we sang in duets. By that time I really felt ready for my first solo and I can truthfully say I enjoyed the experience.

Mrs. _____ is a positive kind of person. She is constantly encouraging us in the classroom, in rehearsals, and in informal contests. I work best in this kind of classroom where there is encouragement coupled with constructive criticism.

It is nice to have a teacher who knows that something exists besides their own class. Mrs. _____ keeps up with what we are doing and she often expresses an interest and comments on my involvement in tennis, Thespians, and other school activities in which I participate.

I will never forget Mr. _____'s choral music class. When I began the new semester my voice had started to change and I was worried what might happen and what everyone would think. But on the first day of class, Mr. _____ explained to all the students how we were going through rapid physical changes, which included change in the vocal range. After that I didn't feel as embarrassed or self-conscious about what might happen because I knew he and the rest of the class understood.

I particularly liked the way Miss _____ used designated students as teacher assistants within the classroom. It was helpful to me to be able to seek help from a classmate as well as the teacher in some of the skills we were expected to learn.

The last Friday in each month is something special in Miss _____'s class. We have a regularly scheduled chorus talent show, during which time students present their own talent and music. Students can perform both individually or in groups. Some of the interesting presentations have seen students singing as part of a folkdance, dramatize

an opera, play an accompanying instrument, etc. One thing is for sure, it is fun and yet everyone works to present their talent in the best possible way.

Since my voice had not yet taken on a masculine quality, my biggest concern about singing in choir was a fear that I would be placed in the girl's section. Mr. _____ explained to me that there was nothing abnormal about my apprehension, and explained how he would place me on the end of the boy's section closest to the girl's section in which my voice would best blend. Then as my voice began to change I would be positioned accordingly. Frankly, I would not have stayed in choir except for Mr. _____ being so understanding.

From the first few days of class I knew I would like Mr. _____. He learned everyone's name within a few days, and that makes a difference in my attitude toward the teacher and the class.

The significance of the statements by the secondary school students is obvious. Those teachers identified as outstanding combined three elements essential for successful teaching: 1) a knowledge of subject matter, 2) innovative and creative learning activities, and 3) skills in human relations.

As a result of this assignment, the pre-service teachers who conducted these interviews now understand the attributes of outstanding secondary school choral music teachers more thoroughly than if they had merely heard a lecture. An opportunity to interview public school students who are themselves the product of superior instruction in choral music helped these pre-service teachers learn those traits embodied in the best teachers. **CT**



Rhythmic Integrity in the Choral Rehearsal: A Bag of Tricks and More

THOMAS WINE

Thomas Wine is professor of music education and director of WU Choir and Shocker Choir at Wichita State University. He is a former director of choral activities at Spartanburg High School.

Robert Shaw, the legendary conductor, was tenacious in his pursuit of precise rhythm in every ensemble he conducted. From attacks and releases to the placement of diphthongs and consonants, Shaw instilled a sense of rhythmic integrity with all of the musicians under his direction. I believe one of the keys to his great success was his belief that choirs shouldn't merely feel the rhythm; they needed to think carefully about what defined the various rhythmic components of any work. The use of count-singing became an important tool for developing group musicianship in any Robert Shaw chorus.

Count-singing is the practice of rehearsing a choral work on counts rather than singing the text. Singers use a number on every beat containing a pitch, thus engaging the singer for the entire length of long notes. When subdividing rhythms for eighth-note patterns in duple time, singers should sing 1 & 2 &, etc. Shaw replaced the number "three" with the syllable "tee" to make the tongue move faster and not slow the rhythm on that beat. For greater rhythmic definition, singers should count sixteenth notes as 1 ee & ah, 2 ee & ah, 3 ee & ah, etc. To perform a cut-off more accurately, singers should place the appropriate consonant

on the rest following the last pitch, for example, 1 & 2 & 3 & "t," if the rest is on 4 and the concluding consonant is "t." Variations on this method should also be utilized for all compound meters.

Understanding and having a method for solving counting problems is vital to the musical health of an ensemble.

Rushing or Dragging Tempi

- Accent "ee"
- Metronome
- Get physical
- Telegraph
- Recording
- Slow down
- Fewer beats
- Count 8

Accent "ee." Start with count-singing. By accenting the second sixteenth note in a beat group, stress is taken away

from the down beat in any beat group. Singers are forced to think about the forward motion of the music.

Metronome. If singers are having difficulty internalizing a steady beat, impose an external beat. An amplified metronome can make them aware of when the tempo starts to pull ahead or fall behind.

Get physical. An ensemble often rushes a tempo because singers have not internalized the steady beat. Marching in place can be a way to use large body movement to internalize beats. A variation is to stand in a circle and face the center. Instead of marching in place (left-right left-right), step sideways (left foot to the left, then right foot moves to touch left foot, repeat same motion) so that the circle rotates in a clockwise motion to the beat.

Telegraph. Have singers place their right hand on the shoulder of the person beside them. Gently use the forefinger of the right hand to tap the beat on the shoulder of that person. This can also be done in a circle with consistent effect so that singers get both kinesthetic and visual reinforcement as they sing. When the ensemble has had success telegraphing the beat to other members, then internalize the beat by tapping their fingers on their own chests.

Recording. Record your rehearsal. Often, singers are not aware they are having tempo problems until they hear a recording. Don't wait for the concert! Record rehearsals and let the singers listen. Then, they are more likely to work on techniques that lead to good rhythmic singing.

Slow down. When a group rushes the tempo, the singers may need to focus more on the subdivision of beats. Changing the tempo, slowing it down, and forcing singers to internalize sixteenth notes instead of eighth notes will allow them to concentrate on placement of the downbeats.

Fewer Beats. When tempos are dragging, try conducting the music in two instead of four beats to a bar. With triple meter, try conducting in one. The visual change for the singers will lead to a different feeling about the phrase and help pull the tempo forward. This is preferable to your conducting the same pattern even larger. A bigger-looking four pattern takes longer to execute than a simple two pattern and can actually contribute to the tempo problem.

Count 8. Give a down beat to the ensemble and stop conducting. Tell singers to keep the beat in their heads and when they reach the number eight, shout it out. See how much variation there is in the placement of the end of the phrase. As the group gets better at internalizing eight counts, try sixteen counts.

“Slushy” Articulation

- Isolate
- Speak-sing
- Alternate text and numbers
- Softer
- Begin somewhere else in the score
- Get visual
- Where's the consonant?
- Diphthongs

Isolate. Eliminate some of the confounding variables present when singing. Singers have a plate full of components with which to deal—pitch, rhythm, text, tone color, etc. By isolating a single element, the singers are more likely to achieve success. Gradually add the other elements into the mix.

Speak-sing Speak the rhythm on a neutral syllable with a percussive attack. “Tah” and “dah” work better than “la” because of a faster tongue. Also, sing the rhythm patterns on one pitch. For variety, have the ensemble sing on a chord that defines the tonality of the music, e.g., the I chord. Then sing the written notes on a neutral syllable. Try the same sequence using the text. Speak the text in rhythm, sing the text on a single note, and finally try the text with the written pitches.

Alternate text and numbers. To reinforce rhythm, have one section of the ensemble sing on the text and the other sections countsing (see above). There are many combinations, most of which can promote clear, accurate articulation.

Editor's Note: This article continues with more on articulation and a section on solutions for common counting problems. Read the full article in the Spring 2009 issue of *ChorTeach* at acda.org/chorteach.



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