

INSPIRE!
Middle School Choral Music
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I nstigate
Nudge
Stimulate
Prompt/Promote
Induce
Rouse
Encourage

We can only take our students as far as they believe they can, and are willing to, go. Thus, the most important part of our job is to INSPIRE our students to want to learn more, experience more, and become better musicians than they ever thought they could.

First: Your students will only go as far as you believe they can.

Second: You have to make them believe they can.

Third: You can only take them as far as your knowledge allows.

“Inside every great teacher, there is an even greater one waiting to come out.” –Harry Wong

Learning Styles:

Cooperative learning and Partnering

You think like a musician, they do not!

Get into their minds, “How did you get that answer?”

Multi-Modal Approach to learning:

Visual

Auditory

Kinesthetic

They will learn more if:

They are emotionally involved

They are personally involved in the decision-making and evaluative process

Give them the process by which to figure out the answer.

Then, walk them through the process each time.

Always follow the process!

Musicianship:

You must be musical first!

Who are you as a musician?

How can I get rid of the fear? Fear is tension and you cannot sing with tension.

Teach them to laugh at themselves (You must be willing to show the students your ability to laugh at yourself).

Movement Activity (Development of inner pulse)

Build community: They have to know that they can take risks in front of other middle school students.
“Every day, we should be challenged to create an environment that is conducive to risk *and failure* so each student will be safe and secure in the learning process, rather than retreating to a comfort zone where survival becomes a higher priority than personal growth.” (Lautzenheiser, 1993)

In order to get my students to the place that I want them with a musical concept (diction, dynamics, vowel formation, etc) I generally have to take them to the extreme. At first, they will feel like they are going overboard. You have to teach them that if they feel like it is too much it is probably just about right.

Building the Singing Voice:

Singers Posture:

Solid like the trunk of an oak tree, not like a sapling (feet together), which is easily blown over.

The Breath: I can tell what the first note of a song will sound like simply by watching my students prepare their first note.

Proper breathing

Breathing makes you fatter not taller

Deer caught in headlights

Body builder lifting weights

Geo-sphere

Tummy Tucks

Energy in the breath

Bounce the breath

The pitcher's wind-up

Sustaining tone on the breath

The slow arched pitch (how far can you throw the ball)

Pin wheels:

Engage the muscles: Speed (Watch that students are taking low deep breaths on this one)

Sustaining the airflow: Length of Time

THE CHANT VOICE!!!

Snobby British Voice, Mrs. Doubtfire, Dame Edna

Your head voice is not a girl's voice! It is a singing voice.

Play examples of male pop artists who use their head voice.

We do not speak the way we sing, and we do not sing the way we speak.

Light and sweet, developed from the top down.

Students must however learn to differentiate between registers and negotiate the passaggio:

Roller Coaster (up and down through the passaggio), Drop the bomb

MY, MY, MY, MY, MY (54321) vigorously point finger, continue pattern down through the register change

Vowels:

The use of embouchure

Fish lips

OK fingers

Super model cheeks

Kiss, kiss

“SHHH”

One inch rule: thumb and forefinger on the corners of your lips should not be more than 1” apart

Rubber band

Hamburger/Hot Dogs
Opening the inside of the mouth:
Jaw Breakers
Hershey's Kisses

Movement frees the voice:

How can I add movement to my warm-ups, and music?
Snee, Snaw (154321)

Diction:

Use of the chant voice

Phrasing:

Take off/Landing
Make every note move.

Rubber bands

Geo-sphere

Yarn

I, IV, V Chords (Tie this into your sight-reading)

Pitch Accuracy:

Use of rubber bands like target practice
Better breath

Incorporate the idea of bouncing the breath like a ball from the waist to the floor

Get to know your students voices: Walk around during warm-ups and while singing.

Get your kids thinking like a composer!

Why did the composer change keys?

Why did the composer write this in a minor key?

Why might the notes have gone up/down at this point?

The uncertain singer in the middle school:

Will all be welcome in your choir? Ken Phillips to the rescue!

Differentiate register changes

Work on engaging the breath and breathing with energy

Sing directly into the non-singers ear as well as using a "phonics phone." (Curved PVC pipe from mouth to ear)

Work with the non-singer individually.

Continuous feedback (This is why it is important for the teacher to be constantly moving around the room)

Be honest with your students, but not unkind. "Can you make that more beautiful?" is a positive way to convey to the students that it was not their best.

Dig deep down to their emotional side...they really do have one! Share yours with them.

Listening:

Provide students with great examples of children, boys, young adult, and adult choirs. Include a variety of music.

SQUILT (Super Quiet Uninterrupted Listening Time). This is also a great time to teach your students to evaluate what they hear

Record your students and have them evaluate their own performance.

Self-evaluations

Develop the individual:

"Open Microphone" Friday

Repertoire:

Students typically will learn to love music they sing well. The music will sell itself. Do not lower your standards in order to attract students. Attract students because they want to be apart of something great. Your students are your best sales people.

Developing Reading Skills:

Time must be spent in rehearsal teaching reading skills.

One-subject notebooks: Listening activities, ear training activities, evaluation activities, etc.

Music theory packets (skill practice):

NOTE NAMES (unimportant but serves a purpose and must be second nature to a musician: like knowing the alphabet), Key Signatures, Naming the rhythmic notes and rests, Rhythmic Counting, etc.

Give students copies of the music so they can write freely in the music.

Write in Solfege

Circle dynamics

Name and define music symbols

Make the students analyze their music.

Analysis page/Who, What, Where, Why, When (I use colored pages to help separate the copied music)

Find like phrases etc.

Reading the notes:

Get rid of the words!!! I have found that when students think they are reading music what they really are reading is the words.

Use of a document camera/overhead so that you can point things out on the page and model what you are asking them to do.

Prior to singing a song: map out their music using their hand staff (5 fingers parallel to floor).

This can give them a tactile reference for notes moving up, down, and staying the same.

Describe what you see:

Step up, jump down

Scale patterns and choral patterns.

Teach your students to read by phrases rather than note by note.

On what note does the phrase begin and end?

Where should we breathe? Don't let me hear the bar lines.

Dynamics?

Is this a melody or harmony part?

Solfege sets the tonality for the ear. I prefer movable "Do" and "la" minor.

Tracking (pointing at the notes during singing as a new reader points to the words when reading)

Use of Curwen hand signs.

Accuracy improves; do not ask me why, I have not figured this one out yet.

Make sure every student has a pencil and teach them how to mark their music.

Write in the Solfege. Sing your music in three parts using Solfege.

Some rote teaching is still appropriate.

You do not want the process to become bogged down and be a chore.

So, use your rote teaching to work their ears and tonal memory.

Have them analyzing what they hear: "Was that phrase the same or different from the first phrase I sang?"

Tie the reading skills you are teaching them into the music you are rehearsing by writing your own sight-reading exercise incorporating something from the music.

Let your classroom walls speak for you. Do you have teachable information on your walls?

Five-minute silent study

Partnering students for success:

Write in the Solfege and then sing the first phrase with your partner.

Vary your groups. Do not always have the more advanced helping the less advanced.

Sing straight through a song before you work on it.

Use of I, IV, V chords and cadences.

How does this note relate to “Do” and/or to my chord.

Audiation: Do not just sing, THINK! Barney says “Stop, look, listen” ...I say “Stop, THINK, sing!” Then NO ONE gets run over by the music!

Motivating the student/Discipline:

If you are unable to successfully manage your classroom, you will never be free to teach music!

Find out what you love about the age students you are working with!

Set up your expectations from day one.

You are teaching HUMAN BEINGS! Why are they misbehaving?

“They won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Address your students and their attitudes as they are entering your classroom. Calm them, smile at them, acknowledge they are having a bad day, etc.

A WELL ORGANIZED CLASSROOM with everything you need at your fingertips.

Time spent passing things out creates time for discipline problems.

How can I organize my classroom so that I do not have to:

Pass out/Collect papers

Deal with lost or missing folders

Deal with tardy students

Take attendance

Answer the phone

What can I do to keep my students engaged at all times?

Start warm-ups before the bell.

The softer you speak the more attention they will give to you.

If you lose your temper, you lose!

Do not argue with a student, you lose when they waste your time in a power play.

Best advice:

Remain teachable:

“Those who dare to teach must never cease to learn.” (Glavac, 2006)

Always surround yourself with people who know more and are better than you are.

Read!!! You do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Always ask yourself, “How can I speak less and teach more?”

“To be an artist is not the privilege of a few, but the necessity of us all.” Shaw

‘There are no bad choirs, only bad choir directors.’ (Not the exact comment from Shaw, but close)

The longer I teach, the more I realize the truth in this statement.

Suggested Reading:

Bartle, J. (2004). *Sound advice: Becoming a better children’s choir director*. New York: Oxford University Press

Glavac, M. (n.d.). *Summary of major concepts covered by Harry K. Wong*. <http://glavac.com/harrywong.htm>

Lautzenheiser, T. (1993). *The joy of inspired teaching*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.

Phillips, K. (1996). *Teaching kids to sing*. Belmont, CA: Shirmer

Rao, D. (1993). *We will sing*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes

Videos:

Armstrong, A., Thomas, A. *Body, mind, spirit, voice*.

Blackstone, J. *Working with Male Voices: Developing vocal techniques within the choral rehearsal.*

Leck, H. *The boy's changing voice: Take the high road.*

Leck, H. *Vocal techniques for the young singer.*