4. As my students used these assessments, they felt more in control of their performance, product, and success, and came to have higher expectations for themselves, for me, and for others. Their education became student-driven, not teacher-driven.

In our rehearsals each day, we have the power to make an impact on the lives of our students. We have the capabilities to help our students become not only better musicians and singers but also better people. Achieving artistry in music making is an ongoing process. Becoming the best person we can possibly be is, likewise, a continual journey. Assessments help teach students responsibility, accountability, self-discipline, goal-setting, problem-solving, teamwork, and many other values that are important for them to succeed in anything they may choose to do. It is these values that will help students continue their work to achieve artistry in their music making, and it is these values that will help them get excited about their own learning. True learning begins with excitement and a desire for knowledge and improvement.

Finally, expressive artistic singing is a marriage of feeding the mind and feeding the soul so the performer, as my students so aptly decided, uses excellent technique but also makes the music come alive by singing with the heart and soul. As the students see their improvement, they take an active rather than passive role in their learning and feel ownership in the musical process and product. We begin to feed the soul and the students begin to make music with the heart when they know there is a support group to assist them and they are supporting others in their learning and improvement. This is when students begin to develop a positive self-concept. The soul becomes open to the beauty and riches of music, and the singers are free to communicate fully this beauty to the listener. When the performer touches the listener's soul, it is then that an artistic level of performance is reached.

Chapter 4

Structuring Success in Beginning Middle School Choral Ensembles
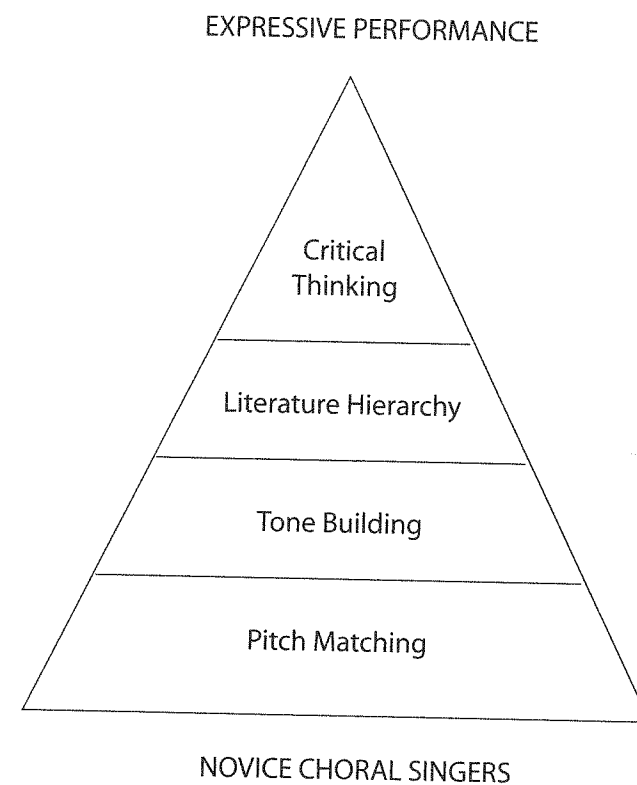
Judy Bowers

Philosophical debate of instructional process versus performance product still exists in middle school music settings. At this educational mid-point (primarily grades 6 through 8), choices are not as clear-cut as teachers might wish. The teachers' general goal is to implement a curriculum that supports quality performance while systematically developing musical independence and critical thinking skills in students. Literature selection becomes incredibly important, then, for it provides a foundation for establishing pitch accuracy, building tone, nurturing independent part singing, and creating expressive performance. Effective teachers further plan for rehearsal environments that encourage student decision-making and self-assessment. Accomplishing all these goals is truly a challenge in any setting, but the task becomes daunting in environments that lack the necessary singers, materials, and/or support for implementing the process necessary for developing novice singers into highly trained choirs.

A sequenced approach to developing singers who can make decisions (self-assess, evaluate, and problem solve) seems imperative if beginning singers are to reach some level of independent musical performance (whether singing alone or in groups). To accomplish this, conductors and teachers must analyze their process and then break it into manageable challenges. Unfortunately, this can be difficult because middle school singers in any given choir can range musically from rank beginner to highly skillful, and as vocalists, both girls and boys can

achieve at all levels between exquisite and horrid. Thus, developing inexperienced singers frequently requires rehearsal instruction that considers the special needs of all middle school singers in the group. Figure 4.1 details a model that establishes a foundation of accurate pitch at the base of the pyramid and moves upward through experiences that support independent decision making for expressive performance. The pyramid serves to create a skeleton to which learning and skill development in any beginning choral ensemble can be attached.

FIGURE 4.1. Moving novice singers from pitch accuracy to expressive performance.

EXPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE

Critical Thinking

Literature Hierarchy

Tone Building

Pitch Matching

NOVICE CHORAL SINGERS

Pitch Matching

As a by-product of voice change, boys frequently experience pitch-matching challenges; some are greatly challenged, while others transition rather easily into the changed voice. For some, pitch-matching inaccuracy is simply a function of having no real experience singing, which is quickly corrected with basic instruction and

individual experimentation. For others, pitch-matching difficulty reflects voice change issues that require diligent practice for an extended time before consistent accuracy is achieved. In beginning choirs where singers learn to adequately match pitch in a short time, the teacher/conductor has the freedom to move forward (or higher up the pyramid, in this case) and address tone production, independent harmony singing, and expressive performance. For those choirs with continued pitch matching challenges, literature selection becomes paramount for improving pitch accuracy. The first step in selecting literature is determining what voice part students can most accurately sing.

Voicing the Choir for Appropriate Range[1]

Group voice testing procedures can be used to quickly assign singers to sections with similar vocal ranges (Bowers, 2006). Below is an adaptation of the Cooper method (Cooper & Kuersteiner, 1965), a tried-and-true approach that takes only a few moments, to informally identify groups. This procedure uses the "Jingle Bells" melody sung in different keys to place boys into three categories; high, middle, and low. High voices include those boys not yet changed or in early stages of vocal development. The low section contains young bass/baritones with low notes, and the middle group includes boys in mid-change, generally singing pitches that surround middle C.

Testing should occur frequently so boys can remain in the section most appropriate for the pitches they currently command. In this process, girls reside in two equal groups that can be randomly created by numbering off, and they rotate singing soprano and alto parts. If the random assignment results in unequal parts, singers can be reassigned to better balance the two parts.

To facilitate the group voice testing procedure, boys form a line facing away from the choir. The teacher walks in front of the line, listens as the boys sing "Jingle Bells" in various keys, and taps all accurate singers on the shoulder. When all singers are heard in an appropriate key (for example, D Major Jingle Bells, for the low voices), the tapped singers are assigned seats as a section. After all accurate

1 Bowers, J. (2008). Building Early Choral Experiences, The Middle School Program. In, Holt, M and Jordan, J. *The School Choral Program: Philosophy, Planning, Organizing, and Teaching,* Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.

boy singers have been placed in high, middle, or low, the inaccurate singers are heard again to determine the best section assignment, regardless of accuracy.

Once boys are assigned voice parts and girls are divided, rote singing can be introduced, using two to four voice parts to meet the range needs of the choir. If singers have some experience singing and can access head voice, it is possible the choir can sing unison and prepare to read music. If some of the boys are new to singing, then limited-range singers may exist in each section, which generally requires multiple parts with small ranges. Intuitively, this seems backwards, as maintaining *fewer* parts with weak singers seems more appropriate. However, if the primary goal is pitch-matching accuracy, then weak singers need three, four, or even five parts stacked tightly on top of each other to accommodate pitch matching by limited-range singers. The challenge, then, is selecting multi-part music that can be sung independently by insecure young male singers.

FIGURE 4.2. Group voice placement.

ADAPTED Group Voice Testing, Irving Cooper

- Short explanation (3 minutes or less) of the process
- Voice categories available for boys: unchanged, cambiata, baritone/bass
- Group singing will be used to classify voices.
- Tapping on shoulder will indicate that boy should stop singing.
- Voice categories available for girls: GIRLS form 2 random groups (1 and 2, blue and green, etc.)

BOYS:
"Jingle Bells" (chorus) or "America"
- D major (beginning on F-sharp)—Tap all boys who choose the low octave and are matching pitch. Seat these boys together (baritone/bass).
  Acknowledge that they are well into the voice change, but still need falsetto.

- A-flat or G major (beginning on C or B)—Tap all boys who choose the high octave and are matching pitch—these are the boy trebles. Seat these boys near a section of girls so they can move between singing treble parts and cambiata boy parts with ease.
  Acknowledge that these boys have begun the voice change but still have high notes and good use of falsetto, which makes singing easier.

- A major (beginning on middle C)—Ask the remaining boys to sing, and tap those who match pitch on middle C—these are the cambiatas. Seat these boys near baritones, as a "tenor" section.
  Acknowledge that these boys are well into the voice change, with some high notes and some low notes. Adjust parts as needed to provide appropriate pitches for them.

- Any remaining voices are challenging because they have not been able to match pitch at any octave level. Bring these boys to the piano and listen to them sing as a group while you sing and play piano with them. Try to find *any* pitch that works, and see if they can sing the melody. (Those who sing the low notes should join the bass/baritone section, and those who sing the middle voice should join the cambiatas; they just won't match pitch too well for a while.
  Acknowledge that these boys are at various stages of the voice change, and make adjustments as needed to accommodate their particular pitches.

For girls, use the same process to place them into two groups (take no suggestions about range—girls are girls at this stage). All girls will work to develop healthy singing using the head tone across an octave and a half. When moving from rote to using music, rotate the girls on soprano and alto so all sing higher notes and all sing lower notes *correctly*.

Accommodating Range

Respecting range by providing multiple parts for inexperienced singers seems a simple concept to understand and implement. However, attempting to have insecure singers maintain three, four, or five parts to accommodate pitch-matching needs can create much greater chaos because singers struggle to maintain those parts.

A common solution to this is SAB voicing. However, a careful study of ranges generally used for SAB music should suggest to middle school teachers that the one group that should *avoid* this voicing is middle school. The higher baritone part can work well if the low boys have just moved down and are comfortable singing in the middle C down to E range. However, many boys sing much lower than this by middle school (unless they have failed to enroll or been auditioned out of choirs), so the most difficult notes they sing are those in the top of their range

(i.e., middle C down to G or F). Further, the alto/tenor boys in mid-change often need a collapsed range to accommodate the loss of their high notes and the delay in getting more low notes. A collapsed alto part is appropriate for these boys, but the girl alto singers are also stuck with that collapsed range, and they should not be singing only a few notes. Girls need to develop at least an octave and a half and stabilize use of the head voice in their tone, so singing a collapsed alto part is counterproductive for young girls. One solution to avoiding SAB voicing is to use SSA or SSAA music and re-voice it for SATB singers.

Some beginning groups benefit from rote singing folk music and world music resources. Since the goal is accuracy and success, many age-appropriate folk songs can structure wonderful teaching moments for pitch matching and developing tone. World music materials, perhaps designed for a general music classroom, also can work well at this stage. Also, added ostinato-like parts are easily created (use solfege as an ostinato) for many world music and traditional folk songs. Resources abound that support pitch matching while advancing performance training and music skills, so teacher preference and appeal to students can guide music selection.

Developing Tone

Working to create healthy, beautiful tone should commence almost simultaneously with choral singing. Though establishing pitch accuracy is frequently the first goal, and sometimes necessitates accepting the right pitch even when created with incorrect or unhealthy tone, correct tone instruction should not be delayed. Allowing novice singers to produce harsh or improper tone is counterproductive to the choral sound and potentially damaging to the singers.

What concepts should be taught to novice singers? And when and how long should they learn them? Many resources exist today (both printed and video) that can answer these questions and provide a blueprint for vocal instruction. New resources appear every year, and some old favorites remain popular with choral teachers. While these publications generally agree on *what* should be addressed, there are many varied techniques for actually imparting the vocal knowledge base to young singers. Open any book and you will see such concepts as posture, breath, body alignment, phonation, bridging the entire vocal range, special techniques, singing vowels and consonants, cautions against vocal abuse or damage,

medical suggestions, etc. However, these publications do not perfectly agree regarding suggested teaching methods for vocal development and warm-up despite their being refereed and published for teacher use. Thus, choral teachers may use a preferred approach provided it makes sense when compared to the core knowledge for healthy vocal production.

Because middle school singers are inexperienced (many do not yet study privately and some will never receive private voice instruction), it is a reasonable assumption that vocal technique will be an ongoing process developed as a daily portion of rehearsal. It is important that these young singers gain instruction and feedback in a group setting much as they would in private study. They need to understand, to experiment, to be heard, to be evaluated, and to be held accountable—they need to develop mentally and physically as a singer. The challenge for the choral director (a/k/a group voice teacher) is to remain current on methods and materials available for vocal instruction and warm-up. Along with state-adopted textbooks used in the middle level, a shelf filled with additional resources is highly desirable. Figure 4.3 provides a selected list of helpful resources for building vocal technique in young voices. A quick Internet search would provide many others.

FIGURE 4.3. Vocal development resources for young singers.

Selected Resources for Vocal Training and Health:
Barham, Terry. *Strategies for Teaching Junior High and Middle School Male Singers*. Santa Barbara Press.
Crocker, Emily. *Voice Builders for Better Choirs*. Hal Leonard.
Ehmann, Wilhelm, and Frauke Haasemann. *Voice Building for Choirs*. Hinshaw.
Jordan, James. *Evoking Sound: The Choral Warm-Up*. GIA Publications, Inc.
Kemp, Helen. *Folk Songs from Around the World: Warm-Up Book*.
McKinney, James C. *Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults*. Genevox Music Group.
Nesheim, Paul, with Weston Noble. *Building Beautiful Voices*. Roger Dean Publishing.
Phillips, Ken. *Teaching Kids to Sing*. Schirmer.
Rao, Doreen. *We Will Sing*. Boosey & Hawkes.
Smith, Brenda, and Robert Sateroff. *Choral Pedagogy*. Singular Publishing.
Stultz, Marie. *Innocent Sounds: Building Choral Tone*. Morningstar Music.

Swears, Linda. *Teaching the Elementary School Chorus.* Parker Publishing.

Telfer, Nancy. *Successful Warm-Ups.* Neil A. Kjos Music Company.

Video Resources:

Adams, Charlotte. *Building Beautiful Voices.*

Jordanoff, Christine, and Robert Page. *Teaching Vocal Production in the Choral Rehearsal.* MENC.

Kemp, Helen. *Sing and Rejoice: Guiding Young Singers.* Concordia.

Leck, Henry. *Vocal Techniques for the Young Singers.* Plymouth Music.

Literature Hierarchy

Developing Independent Part Singing[2]

Structuring successful learning environments has been a prominent topic in for several decades, and Madsen & Kuhn (1994) have long recommended an 80/20 success ratio between achievable and challenging tasks. This ratio implies students should achieve success approximately 80 percent of the time, but 20 percent of the task should represent a challenge. The 80/20 ratio links directly to motivation, because if a student succeeds too often (tasks are too easy) or fails too often (tasks are too challenging), they can lose interest and cease trying. Frequent success paired with occasional failure is one formula for maintaining high student engagement that can aid teachers in establishing a desired rehearsal environment.

Literature selection for beginning middle school singers must be accessible to maintain a reasonable success rate. However, middle school students often reject anything from elementary school that might seem childish or immature, so teachers must work to select age-appropriate singing material, even in the early stages of singing development. However, one elementary teaching strategy should not be omitted with beginning middle school singers who lack training and experience singing—the Independence Hierarchy (Bowers, 1998). To advance skill development and maintain effective classroom management, the "success" goals (80/20 ratio) play an important role (Madsen & Kuhn). Keeping students singing increases their engagement, supports well-paced rehearsal instruction, and serves to motivate when success is accomplished. Voicing the choir and then

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2 Bowers, J. (2008). Building Early Choral Experiences, The Middle School Program. In, Holt, M and Jordan, J. *The School Choral Program: Philosophy, Planning, Organizing, and Teaching,* Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.

moving immediately to *advanced* choral literature could be very counter-productive because it may require extended drilling (banging out the harmony notes "one more time so you really have it") that may still result in students losing the parts when sung together. Thus, literature selected for novice middle level choirs, or developmental groups of all ages, plays a huge role in rehearsal success.

FIGURE **4.4.** Developmental hierarchy

1. Sing a melody. For middle school mixed choirs, find phrases that fit each section. Adapt treble music for SATB singers.

2. Add an ostinato (rhythmic, melodic).

3. Sing partner songs.

4. Add a descant.

5. Sing chord roots (Choksy). Add vocal chording when possible.

6. Sing phrases or sections of a round.

7. Sing a round.

8. Sing transition pieces (music containing 1 to 6 elements).

9. Sing two- to four-part songs.

Step 1—Sing a melody.

What music should be used with students who are not yet skilled and independent? This may depend on the students within the choir, but there is much wonderful choral literature designed for children's choirs that can be sung in unison or adapted. With less-sophisticated singers, a better starting point might be folk music.

A technique that supports pitch matching for unison music is the *phrase method.* While not all unison melodies can be adapted with this approach, many unison songs do work well. Analyze each phrase within a selected melody for range and then classify each phrase by which section is able to sing those pitches. Generally, most

phrases can be successfully sung by soprano, alto, and baritone sections, so finding those phrases that fit the tenor range is the real task. Once the song is learned (since learning the song must also involve the tenors, wrong pitches will probably be sung), assign each phrase to one or more sections, taking care to give tenors only those phrases with appropriate range. This allows a beginning choral group to sing independently, work on vocal tone and expressive singing, and match pitch. This easily expands into a music arranging activity: when students understand range restrictions for each section and can match section range to phrase range, they can then make decisions about what voice parts would sound best on each phrase.

Step 2—Add an ostinato.

If boys have not yet accessed head voice singing, then folk music allows for easy creation of ostinato patterns that fit nicely with the folk melody and deliver pitch accuracy. The cambiata singers (the middle boys) often need a restricted-range ostinato while other voices sing the melody. This technique is found in the many Orff collections that have folk melodies and various ostinati for the instruments. Many of these instrumental parts provide a perfect vocal ostinato (in some octave). At the very least, limited-range singers can use a pattern of *do* and *ti* to create a workable harmony. From this point, they can move through the various steps of the hierarchy to eventually master independent part singing.

Once pitch matching has been established and singers have sung melodies with some accommodation for boys' changing voices (Steps 1 and 2), the choir is ready to address more challenging music.

Step 3—Sing partner songs.

Establishing partner song independence is a natural outgrowth of melody singing (Step 1). At the middle school level, you must avoid childhood songs that pair so nicely ("Row, Row, Row Your Boat," "Three Blind Mice," etc.). However, there are ample folk songs and spirituals that fit together. For example, "My Paddle" and "Land of the Silver Birch," found in round books, can be quickly taught by rote. Other sources include newly composed partner song books (choose carefully to ensure a quality music experience) or available choral publications.

Step 4—Add a descant.

The addition of a descant to a melody functions as another melody, as with partner songs. Though a descant may provide harmony, it is usually easy to maintain because students hear the high part and can internalize the sound more quickly than lower harmony. Crossing voices are much more difficult to maintain.

Step 5—Sing chord roots.

This Kodàly technique is an excellent way to prepare for harmony singing, as well as attune the ear for improvisation work. Any melody with a less complex chord structure (perhaps only I, IV, and V) can be accompanied by a group singing the root of each chord until the chord changes. As skill increases, another excellent technique (Choksy) to build independent singing is vocal chording on solfege. Rather than the root, singers produce *do*, *mi*, and *sol* on the I chord, etc.

Step 6—Sing phrases or sections of a round.

This step structures success by preventing the breakdown that can occur when students begin rounding and are unable to maintain individual parts. Simple rounds may not need this step, but lengthy melodies demand more independence and will benefit from assigning phrases or sections of an extended round to each voice part. Repeat (loop) the opening phrase/section until it is secure, then add the second group and loop that part until secure, and continue until all parts have entered. Alternate the parts for multiple repetitions on multiple days until students are independent.

Step 7—Sing a round.

Once students have sung phrases or sections, have them round the entire melody.

Step 8—Sing transition songs.

The purpose of the literature hierarchy is to use successive approximations to prepare beginning students with limited or no musical training for the challenges of singing part songs where the text and rhythm may be identical and the only difference is the pitch. Steps 1-7 structure singing where the pitch is *not* the only difference between parts. Step 8 provides one last adaptation by using part songs that contain some

element(s) from any of the preceding steps: ostinato sections, partnered melodies, descant sections, canonic entrances or actual canon sections, echo sections, call and response, etc. Though only one or two sections may exhibit these features, students experience success more quickly when attempting transitional music. Hopefully by Step 8, sight-reading instruction has empowered the choir to read and use solfege on the more challenging sections of a transition piece.

Step 9—Sing two- or four-part songs.
By this stage, a teacher/conductor should be confident choosing any preferred music needed for performance or curricular needs based on the voices in the room rather than the students' singing independence.

Critical Thinking
Decision-Making
Training novice singers with little or no musical background can be very tedious or highly rewarding, or somewhere in between. Teacher choices, whether conscious or unconscious, generally determine student outcomes, so it seems important to determine the role of successive approximations toward independent music making versus teacher rote-instruction for every aspect of performance preparation.

It is quite possible that conductors who prefer not to work with middle school and beginning high school groups are actually referencing the *process* of teaching rather than the vocal ability of these young singers. Banging out notes on the piano and drilling individual parts are not particularly rewarding tasks, though many would not object if the reward (the success of students) was adequate. However, this tedious process is often rewarded by having the choir musically crash or simply stop when trying to combine the previously taught parts, which means more hammering of parts is now on the agenda! There is no doubt this process is a recipe for extreme teacher frustration when teaching middle school and beginning high school singers.

The preceding topics (pitch matching accuracy, tone building, developing independent harmony singing) have addressed very basic steps towards successful student performance, and hopefully the inclusion of teaching music skills and vocabulary along with the performance training. At this point, students should be able to sing correct pitches and rhythms of various music literature using healthy, free vocal production. When compared to the starting point of these students,

this is actually a huge accomplishment. When compared to the teacher/conductor desire to step in front of a fine choir of functioning musicians, however, this may still be a choir with rehearsals that seem tedious and unfulfilling. The next challenge, then, is to create independent musicians who can use critical thinking skills to make musical decisions (and social, of course—these are still middle school students!). A prerequisite for critical thinking and creativity in students is a knowledge base—a core of information and understanding that can be used for higher order thinking.

State music curriculum guides define the information and skill sets considered appropriate for middle school singers. For the most part, each state version reflects the National Standards for Music Education provided by the Music Educators National Conference (MENC). A related article published by Abrahams in *Teaching Music through Performance in Choir, Volume 1*, provides an excellent model for connecting the National Standards knowledge base and performance expectations to students performing in high school choirs. Middle school choirs face a similar task. Learning isolated musical concepts and skills in a school music class does not even begin this process of organizing and using the knowledge students have learned. They do need to isolate skills and master them, but the final goal for middle school singers is to *transfer musical learning* across the repertoire and to *play a role in performance decisions.* (This does not refer to group performance decisions that belong to the conductor, but personal music making decisions.) These two goals, when met, produce a middle school choir that any teacher/conductor would enjoy rehearsing—a choir that does not require days of rote teaching and drill, with every musical decision prescribed by the teacher ("crescendo on the word bloom" or "detach these notes, just make them shorter but not staccato," etc.). So how can we accomplish this?

Teaching for transfer requires task analysis by the teacher so prerequisite information can be sequentially delivered and connected to musical behaviors or perhaps the musical score. When learning musical details in one setting, it is imperative that students clearly understand what is being learned or done, and why. Transfer will then likely occur when a new song is introduced. Rather than teach every aspect of the new piece, the teacher helps students find similarities to the previous work, and then the choir applies the same technique or skill or knowledge.

Having students make performance decisions also relates to the transfer process because they must decide as they read or rehearse the piece whether the skills used in previous pieces are appropriate for the current work. Of course, on such things as performance practice guidelines, developing independence is gradual and probably slow (college music majors work to develop this same independence—this is a continuum), but on such things as singing expressively through the use of crescendo and decrescendo, students can begin to make good decisions. These decisions in more advanced choirs are not even acknowledged because we classify this as "being a well-trained musician." If we want our students to reach that status, we must teach for that goal.

Using Musical Rules

Transferring knowledge from one setting to the next is made easier for students when some general principles are established (i.e., rules to guide decisions about the transfers). In beginning middle school music classes, which include students with no musical background, the rules should be very simple and reflective of what is being taught. Interestingly, when beginning students have established accurate performance (correct pitch and rhythm), they often feel their work is done; on a scale from 1 to 10, they perceive themselves as a 10. What they need to conceptualize is that learning pitches and rhythms is a 10 on the goal of pitch matching and singing accuracy, but it is a 0 on the goal of expressive singing. To move forward on this goal, they need to utilize some rules. Since these rules can relate to anything valued by the teacher, there is no right or wrong set of rules, but rather a choice to structure some generalizations in those areas important to the teacher. Further, the rules may need to change with the music (various performance practice rules, certainly), which is fine because it underscores the idea that decision-making (determining if something is an appropriate rule in a new setting) is an important part of critical thinking. As students progress, the need for teacher direction in their personal music making should diminish, which frees the conductor to rehearse, to accomplish performance goals that reflect his or her vision of the piece...in other words, to be a conductor.

Some examples of rules appropriate for beginning middle school singers who have little musical background are detailed below. These serve to clarify the process and should be adapted to meet personal preferences.

- **Rule of the steady beat**
  When singing any note value longer than the steady beat value, singers should crescendo. Establishing a general principle saves rehearsal time and limits frustration by preventing errors with a rule that is applicable for much of the piece. The teacher/conductor must address only those instances when a crescendo is not desired or when the rule was implemented incorrectly.

- **Rule of consonant releases**
  Though this rule can be implemented throughout the rehearsal or applied differently to each song, it serves as a guideline for most of the final consonant releases. The rule might structure using the last full beat, or the last half of the beat, or whatever is appropriate for the song and counting ability of the ensemble. Students assume some responsibility for releases by using the rule, which permits the conductor to address only those unique releases not suitable for rule application.

- **Rule of diphthongs**
  Beginning singers who do not yet self-monitor their vowel sounds can quickly apply this rule. Identifying diphthongs and prescribing a method for performance (e.g., sing the first sound throughout most of the value and then quickly add the second sound) serves to educate and prevent most errors. When the teacher/conductor stops to address incorrect singing, this rule serves to foster student analysis of the problem (listen, identify, analyze, evaluate).

- **Rule of punctuation**
  This rule contributes greatly to phrase awareness of beginning singers. The rule requires a lift or break for every punctuation mark throughout the piece. The reverse is also true: do not break if no punctuation exists. (This rule is extremely effective for correcting phrasing with beginners.) While

there is certainly punctuation in text that is ignored for musical reasons, having this rule makes singers aware that a decision must be made and allows the teacher/conductor to teach only the exceptions to the rule.

- **Rule of the slur (and other articulations)**
  While most students can explain a slur, a surprising number of singers cannot sing one correctly. This rule requires a tenuto over the first note under the slur, followed by all other notes in the pattern sung without a tenuto marking.

There is no magic in any of these sample rules. Rules should reflect those behaviors valued by the teacher and should engage students more in the rehearsal process. Rules provide an opportunity for students to use higher-order thinking skills because when an expectation is established (the rule), the students must determine whether it was met, and if not, why. From the beginning, students develop judgment about applying rules: If something doesn't sound good, what could the choir do (what rule could we apply?) to improve the sound? Rules can be an excellent means to the end of independent musicianship for singers who lack formal training.

Middle school singers join choirs for a variety of reasons, and they come to sing with great variation in talent, training, motivation, and persistence. Providing an appropriate sequence for their learning is quite challenging for directors because musically, vocally, and socially the students differ greatly. Thus, restructuring a rehearsal environment to accommodate the many needs of middle school students creates a more rewarding teaching experience for the teacher and produces students who can match pitch, produce healthy tone, and maintain independence singing part songs as they increase their musicianship and learn to think like musicians.

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