

CSTP Standard #3: Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning

Element 3.4: Utilizing instructional strategies that are appropriate to the subject matter









The choral music teacher that teaches to the state content standards¹ will do much more than simply teach students to sing along to songs. Long-term educational outcomes in the typical choir class should include building *music literacy skills* (reading, interpreting and performing written and aural music), *vocal technique* (support, registration, tone production, articulation, expression) and *choral technique* (harmony, blend, performance skills). In addition to these purely musical skills, the state standards direct music classes to investigate *historical and cultural elements in music* in a manner similar to social studies classes, and develop skills to *critically analyze and evaluate musical works* in a manner similar to literature classes. With all of these educational dimensions and instructional goals, it is important for the music teacher to structure the content and utilize effective strategies to ensure that the required skills and understandings are gradually built over the course of the class.

In practice, however, it is often a challenge for choir teachers to “find the time” to teach any skills or content that are not directly tied into preparing for the next concert. With a singular focus on performance, teachers often neglect musical literacy when they can more quickly teach the songs to their students by rote. Teaching musical literacy in choir is definitely a challenge because of the large amounts of time it takes to build skills and the almost impossible scope of instructional differentiation required due to the wide disparity of skill levels among students. However, I feel that it is absolutely essential. If not in choir, where will most these students ever learn to read music? If they never do learn, how can we say that we prepared them to be proficient communicators in music?

From my research and personal experience, I have learned that the best way to develop musical literacy in vocal students is have a program of regular and targeted instruction in rhythm and pitch rudiments, and regular scaffolded opportunities to practice sight-reading. Rather than lowering the choir’s performance repertoire to their sight-reading level (which would be disastrous) I have created a 5-minute daily program of sight-reading training that starts simple enough for the most beginning choral student, but is novel (and brief) enough to keep the interest of more advanced students. It involves introducing common rhythm and pitch sequences in short groupings on large flashcards that can be learned individually and then combined in different orders (such as they are found in measures in music). In addition, there are rhythm and pitch practice overheads and eventually level-appropriate sight-reading practice songs to ensure the authenticity of their skills.

¹ “Visual and Performing Arts: Music Content Standards,” <<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/muproficient.asp>>, accessed 25 Sep 2011.

Artifact: Practice Rhythms Flashcards and Overhead

Practice Rhythms #2



5

9

13

17

21

25

29

Additional Artifact: Warm-ups

Vocal Warm-ups

1'1'1'1-- 1-3-5-3-1

Ha ha ha ha ha! Ha!

1-3-5-8'8'8'8-5-3-1

Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

Oo-ah ah-oo (1-5 5-1)

Zing, zoo-wee (5-- 554321-)

(try with cresc. or dim.,
varying dynamics and tempi.)

Oo - ah ah - oo Zing, zoo - wee!

Doo bee doo bee detc. (12321232 etc)

(try with cresc/dim of dif. lengths, varying dyn. and tem.)

Doo bee doo bee doo bee doo bee doo bee doo bee doo

Yah ha ha-- (1 3 5--4321)

Yah ha ha