

## Preparing a High School Choral Program

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for graduation  
in the Honors Program  
Liberty University  
Spring 2011

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the  
Honors Program of Liberty University.

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### Abstract

Although many different methodologies exist within the realm of music education, the synthesis of those ideas is crucial when preparing for a profession in secondary music education. Teaching musical concepts through performance in choir is essential in developing well-rounded students as well as furthering students' musical knowledge. By establishing a philosophy of music education, developing a syllabus, and outlining the process in preparing a choral program, other aspiring music educators will comprehend the work required of them in a more concrete manner as well as promote educators to demand more from their choral ensembles.

### Preparing a High School Choral Program

Ever since Lowell Mason introduced music courses to the public education system of Boston in 1837, music curriculum has slowly gained a position in American public and private schools (Keene, 1982). Legislators have passed laws for decades to support the arts in public education; however, not until recently with the passage of *No Child Left Behind* (2002) had the arts been designated as core academic subjects. Because of such laws, music educators must ensure that music is properly taught and evaluated. Planning a choral music program takes effort and prudent judgment; however, careful preparation makes music learning more enjoyable, rewarding, and productive for both students and teachers.

### **The Need for a Philosophy of Music Education**

Because of limited funding for public schools, administrators have had to reduce the amount of resources given to teachers (Khadaroo, 2010). It is during these fiscally uncertain times that music educators must identify their own philosophy of music education in order to argue for the inclusion of music within their school. In addition, a solid philosophy of music education allows educators to teach more effectively and systematically. If music teachers feel strongly about keeping music in the schools and teaching competently, they must argue the developmental role of music in teaching related educational skills, the experiential role of music, the artistic value of music, and the inspirational role of music.

### **Developmental Role of Music**

In advocating for music in the schools, music educators often differentiate between aesthetic and utilitarian motives for music education (Westerlund, 2008). While

music as an art form is independently valued, it also offers other social and educational benefits. Music promotes greater self-esteem, self-discipline, and awareness of the social implications of music-making (Reimer, 1993). While a utilitarian rationale does not explain the overall necessity for music education, it does give added weight to the importance of keeping music in the school curriculum.

Additional support can be gathered by advocating the value music plays in strengthening knowledge in other subjects, such as mathematics (Westerlund, 2008). Although music can improve other life skills, using a utilitarian argument may lead to keeping music in schools solely to facilitate learning in other academic subjects. Therefore, music educators must also understand music's intrinsic qualities otherwise music education merely becomes a means to an end. Music does contain extrinsic, utilitarian importance; yet that should only be a marginal element in advocating for music education.

### **Experiential Role of Music**

According to Thomas Regelski (2006), professor of music at the University of Helsinki; music has functioned in religious, political, ceremonial, entertaining, and even mundane ways throughout human history. Music plays an experiential role in instances such as a young child banging pots and pans together or a young lover serenading his sweetheart. Through experiencing music firsthand, a greater understanding of, and respect for music is produced. Stressing the fact that music has such a profound impact on everyday life is beneficial to music advocacy.

The famous thinker, Confucius, believed that music brought about social change and brought cultures together. Without experiencing and experimenting with music, the

many varieties in cultures of the world would be lessened. In order for cultures to grow and thrive, music must expand along with the culture (Regelski, 2006). Without music education, the appreciation for music would dwindle along with the appreciation for people's cultural heritage. Even the educational progressive, John Dewey (1934), acknowledged the need for everyone to experience music first-hand to develop a love for music and country.

Because music is used in many occupations, such as advertising, business, and human relations, a greater knowledge of music through guided experience is useful in advancing society. Although not necessarily extrinsic or intrinsic, the experiential role of music greatly impacts society (Regelski, 2006). Without proper musical guidance by qualified educators, musical experiences are less effective and influential on people's lives.

### **Aesthetic Role of Music**

In the United States, aesthetics was the foundational philosophy guiding music education for several decades. During the 1960s, aesthetics, or studying music for music sake, dominated the philosophical debates at conferences and seminars that focused on music education. Some people, such as Abraham Schwadron, argued that an aesthetic approach was unsatisfactory in explaining the inclusion of music in the school curriculum (Goble & McCarthy, 2002). Nevertheless, aesthetic reasoning continues to be a realistic method to advocate the inclusion of music in the classroom.

Although there are many differing opinions within the philosophy of musical aesthetics, the leading advocate for this philosophy, Bennett Reimer (1993), believes that "the meaning of a given musical work is primarily internal to that work" and "the

expressive emotional meanings evoked by the music are independent from extrinsic sources” (p. 11). In creating an emotional response, music does not draw extrinsic value to create such a reaction. Music merely exists and presents itself as it is. Students certainly will experience the extrinsic value of music, but that does not detract from the aesthetic value it already has.

Other subjects in schools, such as English, draw on an aesthetic philosophy as well. Poetry contains much extrinsic value; however, most people enjoy poetry for its aesthetic value, or poetry for poetry’s sake. English teachers instruct children to write poetry, understand poetry, and read poetry to gain greater appreciation for it. Music educators focus their attention much the same way to have students appreciate music more completely. To separate the aesthetic value of music from the educational process detaches the very life force from the music. The philosophy of musical aesthetics, although heavily debated, is a valuable tool in advocating for music education.

### **Inspirational Role of Music**

*Wordsworth Dictionary of Musical Quotations* attributed the following quote to the Greek philosopher Plato:

Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, gaiety and life to everything; it is the essence of order and lends to all that is good, just, and beautiful (1991, p. 45).

Music inspires individuals to accomplish goals otherwise unobtainable and brings vigor to life. Music is able to give students the “freedom to communicate with their inner being” (Boonshaft, 2002, p.142). It is the music educator’s job to tap into this knowledge and inspire students to express their innermost thoughts and desires.

Music is unlike any other discipline; music is transient. Produced for only a moment and then gone, music lingers only within the mind of the listener. The beauty of music exists in its power to inspire through fleeting moments. Men such as Zoltán Kodaly, Paul Hindemith, and Carl Orff understood this concept and felt that music must be present in every person's education and life (Boonshaft, 2002). Future music educators have a duty to inspire their students through music's passing moments and teach how music expresses more than words ever could.

### **Overall Role of Music**

Bennett Reimer (1993) wrote, "...the arts in education are both unique and essential for all children" (p. 10). This is what music advocacy strives to make known to parents, administrators, and elected officials. Music is vitally important to everyday life; without music our existence would be dull and unexciting. Only taking one approach to advocacy, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, would be detrimental to music education. In order to promote music education and teach effectively, a balanced combination of philosophies must be used.

Overall, educators must be concerned with excellence in music in order to have lasting impact on their students (Boonshaft, 2002). Intrinsic values, such as expressing emotions and inspiring dreams, as well as extrinsic values, such as developing skills and advancing society, work together to make music a unique art form worthy of study.

American historian, James Truslow Adams (1929), made the point that there are "two educations: One should teach us how to make a living and the other how to live" (p. 169). It is the latter that defines the very heart of music education; music teaches mankind how to live.



### **A Well-Developed Syllabus**

In order for administrators, parents, and students to understand the academic value and evaluative techniques of the music program, a well-developed syllabus must be constructed. Also, teachers will learn to articulate their teaching objectives and methods as well as implement them more effectively through the creation of a course syllabus. Because music ensembles are sometimes viewed as graded solely on attendance, it is imperative that music educators dispel this fallacy and prove that quality formative and summative assessment occurs. By outlining aims and objectives, relating objectives to content, arranging a course calendar, and explaining methods of assessment, music educators can develop a syllabus that improves learning among their students (Woolcock, 2006).

#### **Outlining Aims and Objectives**

First, the syllabus must contain aims and objectives that coincide not only with the teacher's core philosophy but also the state, national, and institutional standards. This can be a challenging task which takes considerable planning to synthesize these goals. By understanding the difference between overall aims and specific objectives, the instructor can effectively develop a music course that meets the proper criteria.

**Identifying overall course aims.** Dr. Michael Woolcock (2006), senior lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, described aims as "broad statements identifying the general educational outcomes you want a graduate of your course to be able to display" (p. 12). These aims can be defined through a section of the syllabus called *course rationale*. In this portion of the syllabus, general statements should be made to let people know the overall purpose for the class.

Depending on one's thought process, it may be best to develop the course rationale before formulating the rest of the course. This provides a framework in which to develop proper instruction. The following statement, taken from the sample syllabus in Appendix A, is an example of a course rationale: "Concert Choir provides an opportunity for students to sing music in a variety of genres alongside their peers. This course will develop students' musical abilities and performance skills while inspiring and fostering teamwork through ensemble unity. Students will also develop critical listening skills to facilitate life-long learning." These few broad statements, or aims, should reflect the teacher's overall philosophy while providing the ground to develop specific objectives.

**Identifying specific course objectives.** Because "objectives are the concrete measures by which [aims] will be realized" (Woolcock, 2006, p .12), objectives logically flow from the course rationale. Specific objectives also should be in accordance to national and state standards, which are used in standardized student assessment. In 1994, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) provided exemplary voluntary national arts standards to the United States Department of Education (MENC, n.d). These standards give music educators flexibility in developing their own objectives according to their personal philosophy; however, the standards also provide a framework for standard assessment practices. Using these standards as a basis, music educators must create objectives that accurately reflect the learning that will take place in their classrooms.

In developing objectives, educators must use language that allows for observable learning outcomes. Using verbs such as: demonstrate, explain, identify, or sing, allow for

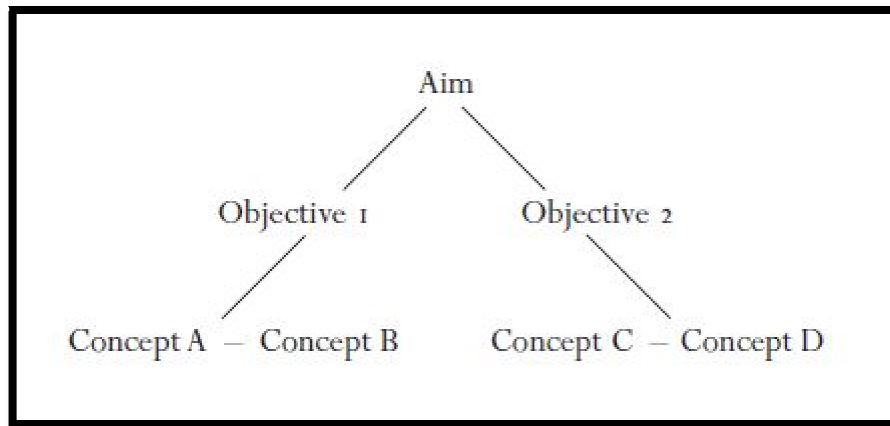
such observable assessment to occur (Woolcock, 2006). If unobservable functions are used such as appreciate, respect, or feel; the assessment then becomes subjective and more ineffective. Although music should and can be appreciated by all students, teachers cannot accurately evaluate students in this manner. Therefore, observable objectives must be implemented to ensure impartial assessment.

Because state and national music standards are important to the unity of music instruction across the nation, using and modifying these standards as course objectives is recommended. Notice that each of the following objectives contains an observable task that can be accurately assessed. The following seven objectives support the aforementioned example course rationale and consequently should be used to develop specific concepts.

1. Students will sing proficiently, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music that is of an average difficulty level.
2. Students will compose or arrange short passages of music within specified guidelines.
3. Students will work in unity to produce a cohesive choral sound.
4. Students will be able to read and notate music given in class.
5. Students will listen to, analyze, and describe music using proper musical terminology.
6. Students will be able to articulate the relationship between music and other disciplines.
7. Students will describe music in relation to history and culture.

### Relating Objectives to Content

While aims lead to more specific objectives, objectives lead to the specific lesson concepts that are evaluated to measure the course objectives (see figure 1). Each concept



*Figure 1.* Graph illustrating the hierarchy of assessment. (Woolcock, 2006, p.13).

must be carefully sequenced and presented in order to create a rational flow of ideas (Woolcock, 2006). For example, in choral ensembles, one cannot introduce major chords without first explaining how scales and intervals function. Relating objectives to detailed course content allows instructors to choose proper course materials, such as sight-singing exercises or repertoire, and develops a sequential course outline.

### Arranging a Course Calendar

Music ensembles are contingent upon the director organizing a detailed rehearsal schedule. However, the students only need to know the essentials such as when quizzes, exams, concert dates, and other after school activities are scheduled. Because every member of the chorus is essential for creating a cohesive choral sound, having the concert dates and other choral functions confirmed at the beginning of the year is paramount. Because concerts and festivals are normally scheduled after school hours, they must be approved by the administration. Music educators also must consider other activities that

may conflict with the concert, such as sporting events or pep rallies, and schedule accordingly.

Certain justifications for missing functions may be allowed; however, the choral director must expressly delineate these reasons in the syllabus and assign certain make-up assignments for excused absences. These reasons may include death of a family member, illness, or family emergencies; and make-up assignments should be decided upon between the student and teacher that reflect the course objectives.

### **Methods of Assessment**

Another important step in constructing a syllabus is adequately outlining how the teacher will assess the students. Depending on administrative regulations on course structure, music teachers may need to modify their methods of assessment accordingly. Nevertheless, it is important to include written assignments, diverse methods of assessment, and the allocation of assignment weights (Woolcock, 2006).

**Inclusion of written assignments.** Because more importance is given to the performance portion of the class, many choral ensembles do not include a written assessment portion. Written quizzes on theory, solfège, musical terminology, or composers whose pieces are being sung all would be useful in assessing students' knowledge. A research paper or composition assignment would also facilitate students' learning in music, create interest, and allow another means to evaluate learning. Overall, written assignments allow teachers a different medium in which to evaluate students' progress apart from performances.

**Inclusion of diverse assessment methods.** Although written assignments are beneficial to assessment, other assessment means should be employed as well

(Woolcock, 2006). The most notable methods are participation in the classroom and attendance at performances. These can be practical ways to evaluate certain objectives, yet some objectives are best evaluated through other means. MENC standard number three discusses the importance of improvising music; this can only be done through individual or small group performances (MENC, n.d.). Finding innovative approaches to assess students' progress helps students learn in different ways that may be previously unfamiliar to them.

**Allocation of assignment weights.** Dr. Woolcock made an important point by stating "that the weighting allocate[d] to each item of assessment should reflect its importance as stated in [the] course objectives" (p. 19). If musical performance is the most important function, then more weight should be placed upon performance attendance and participation. If music theory and comprehension are more important, then more weight should be placed upon the evaluation of these areas. This should be based upon the philosophy and objectives the teacher has constructed.

Most schools have their own grading scale which should be included in the syllabus. In addition, the breakdown of assignments and their values should be articulated here. Referring to the objectives and aims is imperative in order to weight the assignments properly. If the instructor wishes to promote historical learning through music but does not include an assignment that evaluates that goal, the objective becomes meaningless.

### **Incorporating other Items in the Syllabus**

**Course materials.** Course content will dictate which criteria to judge books and music upon and what materials the students will need to have in the classroom. Certain

materials such as pencils, choral folders, concert attire, and music selections are always necessary. Some schools may require students to bring their own folders and concert attire; however, many provide these materials free of charge. It is the music teacher's responsibility to check with administrators as to what the school is able to provide. If the school does provide materials, the educator should assign numbers to each item, note the condition it was given, and record these in a list or electronic database. That way, if a student loses or damages the items; it will be recorded, and the student will be responsible for replacing the item. The syllabus should clearly express this policy to eliminate misunderstanding.

**Classroom rules and procedures.** Outlining the classroom rules and procedures beforehand will allow students to know the teacher's disciplinary style and alert students to the requirements of the class before signing up for it. Whether one is authoritarian, laissez-faire, authoritative, or indifferent, classroom rules must be firmly established and implemented (Moore, 2002). One helpful technique is to also have these rules clearly posted in the classroom.

Some schools may have a defined corrective plan for students. However, some school rules may not be acceptable in a choral classroom. For example, gum may be allowed in the school, but gum should not be tolerated in a choral class because of the risks of choking. If the school does not have definitive rules, the educator must construct and implement them consistently in order to establish classroom control. Dr. Marvelene C. Moore, professor of music education at the University of Tennessee, cited a model intervention plan that has been shown to work effectively [See Table 1]. Overall,

Table 1. FIVE-STEP INTERVENTION PLAN		
Step	Procedure	Example
1	Non-verbal cue	Raised index finger
2	Verbal cue	"Steve, please follow our class-room rules and our plans for creating an enjoyable music classroom."
3	Indicate choice student is making.	"Steve, if you continue to talk while I am talking, you will be choosing to go to the back of the room to develop a plan."
4	Student moves to a designated area to develop a plan for behaving appropriately.	"Steve, you have chosen to go to the back of the room to develop a plan."
5	Student is required to go somewhere else to develop a plan for behaving appropriately.	"Steve, because you are choosing not to be responsible, you will have to see Mrs. Johnson to develop your plan."

*Table 1.* Five-step intervention plan. (Moore, 2002, p. 10).

educators should evaluate their rules in accordance with the school's rules in order to create a productive learning environment.

**Student Officers.** Finally, establishing student officer positions not only train students in leadership abilities and involve them in the musical process but also help choral directors with more mundane tasks. Electing a class president, vice-president, treasurer, and section leaders benefit the group and should be included in the syllabus as well (Miller, 1988). Duties should be based upon the teacher's needs in the classroom and given careful thought.

One common mistake is to create a position that serves no function. If the group does not raise funds, a treasurer is unnecessary; if the group is too small to warrant a secretary, it would be injudicious to elect one. Requiring leadership from students will



make them appreciate music even more, and student leaders will garner respect from the other members of the ensemble.

### **Preparing for Rehearsals.**

The philosophical rationale and the class structure are the foundations leading to the most substantial component of organizing a choral ensemble: a rehearsal plan. While there are many aspects of the rehearsal process, the primary goal is to lead the choir members from the very basic note-reading stage to a more creative, artistic stage in every piece of music (Hugo, personal communication, 2009). This can only happen if the conductor studies the score intensely and notes the problems that could arise before they even occur in his rehearsal.

### **Preparing Warm-ups and Vocal Exercises**

Through meticulous study of the score, the choral director must carefully schedule each rehearsal and plan accordingly for the difficulties that may arise. Each day's vocal exercises should be modified to reflect the demands of whatever music will be sung that day (Kemp, 2009). For example, if the sopranos and tenors must sing higher than usual that day, a vocal exercise that expands the higher range would be beneficial. In addition, the director should provide at least one short sight-singing example using solfège each day to help foster tonality and pitch (Boyd, 1975; Roe, 1983). Modification of the sight-singing and aural examples to fit the music being sung would be ideal, perhaps by introducing a I-IV-V progression that is found in many selections. Warm-ups should focus on preparing not only the physical aspect, vocal cords and breathing, but also the mental aspect in producing quality music.

During the warm-up, the instructor may also choose to introduce the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) vowel symbols to the ensemble and use specific vocal warm-ups to foster correct vowel pronunciation and aid in intonation. Discussing the difference between vowels and their placement is essential to producing a unified choral sound (Neuen, 2002). In addition, if instructors demonstrate how the mouth should look while producing vowel sounds, students will be more likely to produce a fuller choral sound (Roe, 1983). Finally, it is essential that music educators consistently reinforce correct singing posture in order to preserve students' vocal health as well as to generate a more cohesive choir (Heffernan, 1982). These pedagogical techniques promote healthy singing and resolve intonation pitfalls to produce a collective choral sound.

### **Identifying Conducting and Vocal Problems**

In preparing for each rehearsal, the main concerns for the director are correcting vocal problems and conducting in a clear and definite manner. Throughout the rehearsal plan, each day's agenda should focus on the vocal problems that may arise. By personally singing through each voice part, the educator can better learn the difficulties of the vocal parts and identify ways to correct them (Miller, 1988). Subsequently, instructors should take adequate preparation for problems in conducting. According to Dr. John Hugo (Personal communication, 2009), conductors should mark the score for changes in tempi or meter, irregular rhythms, and cutoffs that could cause problems. Before each musical selection is introduced to the choir; the director must mark the score for dynamics, phrasing, diction, intonation problems, interval difficulties, and rhythmic challenges that may occur (Hoffer, 2001). Preparing in this manner is time-consuming;

however, doing so will make rehearsals run more efficiently and allow maximum musical learning (Garretson, 1998).

### **Understanding each Section's Vocal Qualities and Issues**

Men and women are physically different; therefore, their vocal timbres are characteristic to each gender. More specifically, lower sounding bass and alto voices will sound completely different from higher voices such as sopranos and tenors. Learning how to work with each voice type and fix their distinctive characteristics will make for a more unified and musical choral sound.

**Characteristics of soprano voices.** Dr. Donald Neuen (2002) described the soprano voice as “the frosting on a rich cake,” a light layer of sweetness over a rich choral sound (time stamp 06:29). Sopranos must be taught to sing with a lyrical, sweet sound by utilizing less vibrato. About ninety-eight percent of all vibrato problems stem from the sopranos singing too forcibly. Using imagery, such as a tranquil lake or cloudless sky, will help the ladies sing with purer tone which aids in proper intonation. Finally, when singing above the staff, the tendency is to sing louder and drown out the remainder of the choir. Teaching sopranos to sing *mezzoforte* or softer while modifying vowels to *ah* the further the note is above the staff will create beautiful, lyric sound rather than a harsh, ear-ringing sound (Neuen, 2002).

**Characteristics of alto voices.** The droning, harmonic tendencies of alto lines conceivably make it the most uninteresting voice part. However, the rich color of the alto voice makes it necessary for a full choral blend. Because of the monotonous lines, altos tend to sing less beautifully (Neuen, 2002). This can be combated by teaching them to sing into the line of the text and grow phrases through *crescendos* and *diminuendos*.

Another major problem for choral unity occurs when altos sing too forcibly in their chest voice. Teaching ladies how to use their breath support while maintaining their head voice in the lower register may help resolve this issue. Dr. Neuen (2002) described a continuum of voice that naturally decreases in volume the lower the notes are. Although this may seem counterproductive in wanting the fullest sound, the natural timbre of the alto voice comes through as a result.

**Characteristics of tenor voices.** Tenor voices are the most “fragile of all musical instruments” and can easily become damaged at the high school level (Neuen, 2002, time stamp 12:07). Care must be taken to ensure that no undue stress is placed upon these voices; having some altos join the tenors on the higher notes will help support the tenor section. Teaching tenors that energy and vitality should be substituted for volume will also protect their voices (Neuen, 2002). Proper breath support is vital as well as use of falsetto when the need arises. The timbre of the falsetto tenor voice, just like the alto voice, naturally blends well with the other vocal parts (Neuen, 2002).

**Characteristics of bass voices.** Many times a piece’s tonal center relies heavily upon the bass line, and as such, the line can become mechanical rather than lyrical. Teaching the basses to sing lyrically, “like a French horn or trombone rather than a tuba,” will produce a sonorous, expressive tone (Neuen, 2002, time stamp 14:42). However, if that approach does not work, the instructor should teach the men how to place sound more forward than toward the back of the throat. Because the bass section provides the foundation for the rest of the choir, basses must be secure with their parts while not overpowering the middle voices.

**Other characteristics of high school voices.** Because time matures the voice, high school choristers should not try to manipulate their voices to sound older. Good vocal technique is based upon foundations of correct breath support, sound placement, posture, and aural skills. Instructors who teach high school students to sing properly with these foundations will have superior choirs that sound unified and musical.

### **Using Sectional Rehearsals**

Depending on the severity of problems or disjointedness of a vocal section, a break from the group into sectionals may be necessary. It becomes the conductor's responsibility to instruct each section leader with problems that must be addressed within their section, such as floating tone for sopranos or resonant tone for basses (Garretson, 1998). Therefore, guidelines must be written out, and the instructor must hold each section accountable by monitoring their progress and adding support when needed. Many schools have several rooms with pianos that can be utilized for this process; some may even have practice rooms. By dividing the group into sections, the teacher can personally assist the group needing the most help. Sectionals can be a great tool in correcting issues that may otherwise go unnoticed in a large ensemble setting (Garretson, 1998).

### **Creating Energy in the Rehearsal**

By the end of rehearsal, students feel drained and become uninterested. Even at the beginning of rehearsal; students can be uninterested, lethargic, or disorderly. Music educators must always be the source of energy for their classes at all times. Because a large percentage of good tone is based upon the amount of energy put into singing, having an animated demeanor will stimulate the choir into proper singing. Starting off

each rehearsal with an energy creating exercise greatly improves choral performance.

Additionally, these exercises may need to be interspersed throughout the rehearsal.

One good exercise to try is conducting a small beat pattern in four while having the choir sing *forte*; however, gradually increase the size of the beat pattern while instructing the students to sing softer with the same intensity. This exercise also proves beneficial to creating forward motion in slow, soft passages (Neuen, 2002).

Experimenting with various energy building exercises will greatly enhance the quality of the output from the choir.

### **The Centrality of Choosing Musical Literature**

Upon evaluating one's philosophy of music, objectives, assessment practices, and steps for creating a rehearsal plan; the selection of musical literature can begin. Selecting music can be a daunting task. However, there are several steps that can help narrow the plentiful selections of music to just a few. Naturally, song selection first must be in accordance to the course learning objectives set forth in the syllabus. Also, by analyzing the difficulty level, genre, vocal ranges, continuity, and length of the selections; the teacher will be able to choose the best pieces available (Miller, 1988). Variety and interest are crucial in creating a cohesive program that the audience members and students enjoy (Hoffer, 2001).

### **Rationale for a Prospective Program**

In creating a choral program, the instructor must have rationale for the pieces he or she chooses as well as create a logical flow to the selections. The rationale must be based upon the course aims and objectives; and the song order should be organized in a reasonable way, such as historically, regionally, or thematically (Hugo, personal

communication, 2009). The following song selections and rationale provide a guide in how to develop a unified choral program.

**Opening program set.** Since the opening song is the audience's first impression of the choir, the song selected should grasp the audience's interest and provide the tone for the rest of the program (Hoffer, 2001). This model program opens with the song "Come to the Music" by Joseph M. Martin because it is vibrant, upbeat, and contains a strong message that "music is our common language" (Martin, 2001, mm. 65-66). The piece uses alternating compound and duple meter throughout and is set in E Dorian mode. This allows the instructor to introduce modal music as well as tie this into a historical setting. In addition, rolling crescendos (mm. 75-78), several key changes (mm. 61, 87), and contrasting staccato and legato passages (mm. 21-32) make this piece great not only for performance but also for teaching these musical concepts (Martin, 2001).

This program takes a basic historical approach in the first section of the concert with the next song being "Sicut Cervus" by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina. Although this polyphonic motet can seem intimidating to a choir, the melodic lines are fairly straightforward and extremely diatonic. The director can use this diatonicism to explain the concept of *musica ficta* and why it was used during the Renaissance. The use of Latin, polyphony, and accented rhythms (e.g. mm. 26) allow for teaching these musical concepts (Palestrina & Hufstader, 1946). Also, this piece makes students focus on being strong and independent in their own parts while having to intently listen to the other parts for balance and tuning (Abrahams et. al, 2005). Finally, the performance practice of the Renaissance made meter unimportant while stressing the words (Garretson, 1998). Therefore, students must emphasize words that may not necessarily fall on strong beats

(Abrahams, Armstrong, Flummerfelt, Morton, Noble, 2005). All these aspects make “Sicut Cervus” a prime selection that has also stood the test of time.

Following in the historical pattern, “Cantate Domino” contrasts nicely while giving unity to the program. This piece by Hans Leo Hassler is primarily a homophonic motet with some mild polyphonic passages. The brisk tempo, melismatic passages (mm 8-11), and changes in meter (mm. 14 & 23) provide contrast to the preceding piece and also allow for musical learning of new concepts (Hassler, 1999). Although different in rhythmic texture, “Cantate Domino” follows the same style of “Sicut Cervus” as a renaissance motet. As such, the continuity of the program is maintained while providing a musical contrast.

After singing a modern modal piece and two Renaissance period selections, this example program presents a masterwork of the classical era. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s “Ave Verum Corpus” is another mostly homophonic work, yet it offers a contrast to the renaissance motet of Hassler. The slower tempo, more fluid passages, and increased melodic texture give this piece a more serene, ethereal quality. To make this work sound majestic, the choir should sing as one voice, *sotto voce*, as Mozart indicated (Mozart & Collins, 1981). Breath support can be challenging, especially for the sopranos. However, correct representation of the melodic line will enhance intonation (Abrahams et. al, 2005). The use of string and organ accompaniment gives added texture that also provides aural interest to the audience. Selecting at least one masterwork that has stood the test of time is essential to a balanced choral program (Hoffer, 2001).

The final selection of the first part of the concert should leave the audience wanting more. Many times spirituals are able to accomplish this with their uplifting



message and strong rhythms. “Hush! Somebody’s Callin’ my Name,” a traditional spiritual arranged by Brazeal W. Dennard (1986), meets this criteria as well as features a soloist and dynamic interest. The English language offers not only the audience’s understanding of the text but also provides opportunities for students to learn how to sing correct English diction. The consonants must be crisp and clean; whereas, the vowels must be more vertical than usual because of the spiritual sound that is desired. Opportunities to teach syncopated rhythms and varied dynamics abound throughout the entire piece. Overall, incorporating a spiritual into the program allows showcasing of another culture and encourages the audience.

**Middle program set.** After the fifteen minute opening set, it may be prudent to allow the choristers a break from standing and singing. If the school has a show choir about to compete, or a drama program with an upcoming production, this is the place to showcase their talents. This would be beneficial not only to these groups but also to the entire arts department. The group would be able to publicize their event, and the arts department would gain more recognition. The conductor should allow several minutes before and after the showcase to arrange the choir members accordingly. A seven to ten minute interlude would bring a much needed break to the audience, choristers, and the conductor.

**Final program set.** Some newer music and arrangements should be featured as well, although, care must be taken to ensure that they are quality selections that promote learning objectives and musicality (Garretson, 1998). “Northern Lights” by Ola Gjeilo has an ethereal and picturesque quality to it. Sustained tones, dynamic swells, and modern chord progressions make this piece a delight to listen to and perform (Gjeilo,

2008). Breath support and textual interpretation are items to focus on during rehearsals. The almost constant changes in meter make this piece a challenge to conduct, yet the students will learn to concentrate on watching the conductor. Close harmonies and chromatic alterations also present challenges to students, especially with regards to intonation. Focusing on consistent line in individual voices as well as between parts and listening actively to all vocal parts will help remedy these problems.

Since the previous song is slow and flowing, the contrast of a faster song would be wise. The traditional Hebrew folksong “Hevenu Shalom Aleichem,” arranged by David Eddleman, moves quickly and provides examples of the characteristic qualities of Jewish music, such as augmented seconds (Eddleman, 2010, mm.4 & 28). Use of accelerandos, driving accompaniment, minor key, and antiphonal sections allow students more varied learning of musical concepts. This selection also allows the instructor to introduce cultural and historical variety to classroom instruction and the concert.

Finally, the last song should summarize the theme of the concert and leave the audience uplifted, yet contemplative. “When I Hear the Music” by Michael G. Martin contains a strong message that music brings hope, love, and beauty to all (M. Martin, 2003). Suspensions, soaring melodies, and emotive text are evident in this work. This piece teaches students and audience members that music is an exemplary way to express one’s feelings. The mostly diatonic progressions and subtle key change (mm. 36) make this a reasonably simple piece to learn while still teaching expression and importance of dynamic contrast (M. Martin, 2003).

**Overview of the proposed program.** This program acts a whole unit teaching the value and importance of music through musical selections from various eras and

cultures. The variety in style, tempo, mood, and difficulty among the selections provides ample learning opportunities and serves to capture the interest of the audience. In addition, the accompanied selections give students the security of tonal structure while the acapella pieces challenge them to listen to other members for tuning, focus more intently on the conductor, and foster aural skills. Overall, this program serves as an example to future music educators as a reference when creating their own choral programs.

### **The Value in Scheduling Rehearsals.**

Once the philosophy is developed, rationale is constructed, and content is selected; music educators must schedule each rehearsal. Since music-making is a process that depends on the gradual development of the choir, it can be difficult to anticipate and schedule rehearsal time effectively. In addition, time spent transitioning and preparing for rehearsal is lost. The following section outlines one approach to scheduling an overall unit plan and creating detailed rehearsal plans.

### **Scheduling the Unit Plan**

By taking time to plan an entire unit, the educator gains a general sense of how the subsequent weeks will progress and ensures that he or she does not plan too much. Before beginning, the teacher must determine the difficulty of each piece and the length of time each selection takes to perform. The difficulty should be based upon a scale of one to six with one being the easiest and six being the highest (see Table 2, cells B9:B16). While the difficulty level should have been considered during the selection process, the unit plan requires that relative numeric values be assigned to the difficulty and time (Chiarizzio, personal communication, fall 2009). Next, multiply each piece's

Table 2. Nine Week Unit Plan (developed by Dr. Kevin Chiarizzio, Liberty University)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	<b>Nine week rehearsal plan</b>						
2	8 weeks (+1 to use as needed)						
3	x 5 rehearsals	Rehearsals		35			
4	40 total rehearsals (-5 for in service)	Rehearsal Time		40 min			
5	at 40 minutes each (55 - 15 for administrative/warm-ups)			1400	Total Minutes		
6							
7							
8	Compositions	Difficulty Level (Scale of 1- 6)	Perf. Time	Number	Multiply by Number		Reh. Minutes
9	Come to the Music (J. Martin)	3	2.75	8.25	1.01%	8%	116
10	Sicut Cervus (Palestrina)	4	2.25	9	1.01%	9%	127
11	Cantate Domino (Hassler)	4	2	8	1.01%	8%	113
12	Ave Verum Corpus (Mozart)	4	3.25	13	1.01%	13%	183
13	Hush! Somebody's Calling my Name (arr. Dennard)	3.5	3.5	12.25	1.01%	12%	172
14	Northern Lights (Gjeilo)	5	4.5	22.5	1.01%	23%	317
15	Hevenu Shalom Aleichem (arr. Eddleman)	3.5	3	10.5	1.01%	11%	148
16	When I Hear the Music (M. Martin)	4	4	16	1.01%	16%	225
18		Total minutes=	25.25	99.5		100%	
19				100%/ total # =	1.01%		

difficulty by the time to show the relative time needed for rehearsing each piece (see Table 2, cells D9:D17). The total time, or one hundred percent, divided by the total of these amounts (cell D18) equals the percentage of time needed for each piece. The total rehearsal time (cell D5) multiplied by each percent equals the amount of time allocated

for each piece (column G). Although this approach is meticulous, it is necessary for accurately representing the amount of time each piece will take to perfect.

After planning how much time each piece will take across all rehearsals, the instructor should plan how much time to devote to each piece every day of the unit. Considerations should be made not to schedule too many pieces per day and plan enough time to make progress on each work. Planning to rehearse three selections a day in fifteen to twenty minute blocks of time is a good rule to follow. In addition, instructors should plan that no more than five rehearsals pass without rehearsing each selection at least once. This ensures that the piece stays fresh and musical learning is not lost (Chiarizzio, personal communication, fall 2009). Unit planning takes careful consideration. However, as a result, rehearsals will go more smoothly and efficiently.

#### **Detailed Rehearsal Plan.**

Upon completing the overall unit plan, each day's rehearsal should be planned. The vocal warm-ups and exercises should be decided upon beforehand as well as what musical concepts should be taught. Educators should introduce and reinforce concepts in each rehearsal that stem from the course objectives. Appendix B gives a detailed account of what an educator may wish to include in a daily rehearsal plan. Inclusion of measure numbers, timing, and discussion questions will help teachers in the classroom stay on track without losing time. As the teacher becomes comfortable in teaching from a lesson plan, less detailed information will need to be included; however, one should always know what must be accomplished before stepping into the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

Creating a choral program is difficult, exhausting work; yet the benefit of teaching students the value of music and teamwork is well worth the effort. After developing a philosophy of music, a syllabus, preparatory techniques, a concert program, and a rehearsal plan, the music teacher is ready to get into the classroom and teach. Joseph Martin's (2001) song says, "Music is our common language, music is the song of love" (mm. 65-66). Music educators have an amazing opportunity to express their love for their students in a way no other teacher can: through song.

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## APPENDIX A: Sample Course Syllabus

Lynchburg Public High School  
Department of Fine Arts: Concert Choir  
Instructor: Mr. Jonathan Granger

Course Syllabus  
Fall 2011  
E-mail: [jegranger@liberty.edu](mailto:jegranger@liberty.edu)

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**I. Course Rationale**

Concert Choir provides an opportunity for students to sing quality music in a variety of genres alongside their peers. This course will develop students' musical abilities and performance skills while inspiring and fostering teamwork through ensemble unity. Students will also develop critical listening skills to facilitate life-long learning.

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**II. Course Objectives**

- A. Students will sing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music that is of an average difficulty level.
  - B. Students will compose or arrange short passages of music within specified guidelines.
  - C. Students will work in unity to produce a cohesive choral sound.
  - D. Students will be able to read and notate music given in class.
  - E. Students will listen to, analyze, and describe music using proper musical terminology.
  - F. Students will be able to articulate the relationship between music and other disciplines.
  - G. Students will describe music in relation to history and culture.
- 

**III. Course Materials**

Each student will be provided a choral folder, music selections, and concert attire which must be kept in the condition it was given. If any materials provided by the school are lost, stolen, or damaged; it will be that student's responsibility to replace the item.

In addition, the student must bring to class each day two pencils with erasers.

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#### IV. Course Grading Breakdown

The grading policy for this course is as follows:

91-100: **A**      81-90: **B**      71-80: **C**      61-70: **D**      0-60: **F**

The course assignments and their weights are as follows:

Class Participation and Attitude      **25%**

- Students must attend each class in order to receive full participation credit.
- Choral unity is important and attitude must be one of harmony not dissention.
- Five points each day will be given for participation and attitude; if warnings are given for poor attitude, the grade will be reduced.

Quizzes      **15%**

- There will be one quiz each week based upon the music and concepts studied in class.
- The quizzes will be both written and sung.

Homework      **10%**

- Homework will be given at least once a week and worth varying points depending on difficulty.
- Assignments may include: listening to music and evaluating it, composing a short melody, practicing at home, or describing relationships between music and other art forms.

Self-Evaluation      **5%**

- After each concert, a self-evaluation must be completed assessing the performance. Written guidelines will be provided the week before each concert.

Music Appreciation Project      **15%**

- Three weeks into the semester, a topic must be chosen for a music appreciation project. More detailed information will be given the first week of class.
- Choices may include the following: composing a piece of music, completing a research paper on a prolific composer or performer (before 1950), or watching an opera and writing a detailed report on it.
- The project will be due three weeks before classes end.

Concert Performances      **30%**

- There will be two performances per semester worth fifteen percent each.
- Because one main focus of the course is singing in an ensemble, any person's absence from the concert will result in a zero.

-If there is an excusable absence (death in the family, severe illness, or family emergency) it must appear in writing from the parent of the absent student.

-If the student is excused, the instructor and the student will decide upon a suitable make-up assignment to replace the grade.

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## **V. Classroom Rules**

All students are expected to abide by the school's policies. In addition, the following policies will be enforced in the choral room:

- 1) No gum, food, or drink allowed in the room. The only exception is non-carbonated water.
  - 2) When the music stops, talking stops! No talking is permitted between breaks in music unless asking a music related question to the instructor or other students.
  - 3) Warm-ups start exactly when the bell rings. If you enter after warm-ups begin, you are tardy. Three tardies total one absence and points will be deducted according to school policy.
- 

## **VI. Course Calendar**

Please mark these important dates.

**September 12, 2011** – Music Appreciation Project topic is due.

**October 24, 2011 at 4:30 PM** – Dress Rehearsal for Fall Concert in the LHS Auditorium; concert attire must be worn.

**October 25, 2011 at 7:00 PM** – Fall Concert in the LHS Auditorium

**November 28, 2011** – Music Appreciation Project is due.

**December 14, 2011 at 4:30 PM** – Dress Rehearsal for Winter Concert in the LHS Auditorium; concert attire must be worn.

**December 15, 2011 at 7:00 PM** – Winter Concert in the LHS Auditorium

## APPENDIX B: Sample Rehearsal Plan

2:00 PM	<b>Call to Order/Announcements</b> Welcome students to choir; briefly review classroom rules and syllabus.	
2:05 PM (10 min)	Warm up exercises	<p>Stress the importance of posture (standing and sitting). No slouching, chest raised, shoulders slightly back, feet aligned with the shoulders. Institute the <i>angelwing</i> procedure and explain that good breath begins with the diaphragm not the lungs. (3 min)</p> <p>Begin on E and tell students to “ha” five times on that pitch while using the diaphragm for support. Go up by half steps and back down to E. (2 min)</p> <p>Sing down a major scale alternating <i>yoo</i> and <i>yah</i>. Go up or down by half steps. (1 min)</p> <p>To foster interval training start on C and go up to D and back to C. Do this starting on C for every note in the C major scale. (2 min)</p> <p>On the syllable <i>pa</i>, do a descending major arpeggio. This will tend to open up the vocal range as well as utilize diaphragmatic breathing technique (2 min)</p>
	<b>Works</b>	<b>Rehearsal Procedures</b>
2:15 PM (15 min)	<p>Come to the Music (J. Martin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce Piece</li> <li>• Work mm. 5-28</li> <li>• Focus on pitch, rhythm, and accents.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Introduce Selection:</i> Ask students what they notice in the piece. Possible answers may include changes in meter, use of accents, unison at the beginning, key changes, dorian mode. Explain what is meant by 6/8 + 2/4 in the time signature. Review the text, what does it mean/convey, take notice of mm. 57-69. (4 min)</p> <p><i>Singing:</i> Instruct all students to sing the ladies melody from mm. 5-20. Play along at first; add accompaniment by m. 13. Address problems that may have occurred such as the C#'s being flat or incorrect pitches in mm.12 and 20. (2 min)</p> <p>Tell students to pay attention to the accents written and any time “clap your hands” is sung, make the notes somewhat staccato. Have students sing mm.12-20 again, a cappella in order to listen to problems and improvement. 2 min)</p>

		<p>Introduce the men's part mm.13-20. Play along with the men if needed. Tell students to sing this more legato than the previous section and to stress the dotted half notes. Have all students sing their parts mm.13-20. (3 min)</p> <p>Have women sing mm.21-28. Play mm21-24 and drop out at mm.25 to listen for pitch/rhythm errors. (1 minute)</p> <p>Have men sing their parts mm.21-28. Notice rhythm errors especially in syncopated measures. Review these measures so that the men are comfortable with pitches/rhythms (2 minutes)</p> <p>Sing through the piece a cappella through m. 28. (1 minute)</p>
2:30 PM (15 min)	<p>Ave Verum Corpus (W.A. Mozart)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce piece</li> <li>• Work mm.3-18</li> <li>• Focus on pitches, rhythm, unified choral sound.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Introduce selection:</i> Ask students what they notice about the piece. Answers may include five part accompaniment, accidentals, homophonic texture, Latin text, written by Mozart, four voice parts. Explain what <i>sotto voce</i> means and how that relates to the singing style. (4 min)</p> <p><i>Singing:</i> Speak through the Latin in mm. 3-10 having students repeat the text. Have sopranos sing mm. 3-10. Be aware of problems such as leaps in m. 3, chromaticism in m.4, and incorrect phrasing. Add altos after sopranos have sung through twice. Add basses next as well as tenors. The main concern now is correct pitches. Play accompaniment for a few measures while dropping out to listen to the ensemble. Reiterate the importance of using <i>sotto voce</i>, or one voice. This will be helped if the vowels are uniform and no one is over-singing. (5 min)</p> <p>Repeat the above steps for mm. 11-18. Pay special attention to accidentals (modulation to A major adds G#; bass E# of the vii<sup>o7</sup>/vi chord in m.14) and the sustained D in the soprano, m.15). (5 min)</p> <p>Have students sing through mm. 3-18; start with accompaniment, drop out after a few measures, add</p>

		chords when needed. Point out errors in pitch/rhythm or cutoffs. (1 min)
2:45 PM (10 min)	<p>When I Hear the Music (M. Martin)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce piece</li> <li>• Work mm.4-19</li> <li>• Focus on pitches, rhythms, and legato.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Introduce selection:</i> Ask students why they chose choir as an elective. Ask “How does music impact your life?” “Why do we love music? What is it about music that moves us?” Discuss the themes of love, beauty, hope, and passion in this selection. (4 minutes)</p> <p><i>Singing:</i> Have all students sing the soprano melody (mm. 4-11). Introduce the alto harmony while the sopranos sing the melody. Pay attention to pitches in m. 5 and 10. Have tenors and basses sing alone their parts. Add all parts together playing the accompaniment if needed. Focus on pitches and dotted rhythms. (4 minutes)</p> <p>Sing through mm. 12-19. Ask students what they notice about this portion (same except for sopranos in m. 17 and ATB in m.19). Sing through mm.4-19 one last time. (2 minutes)</p>
2:55 PM	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Dismissal</i></b></p> <p>No homework is assigned except that the syllabus must be signed by both student and parent/legal guardian.</p>	