

**Cross Over with Confidence
(Band to Choir)**

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Thoughts for the Day

- Staying fresh as a Teacher—colleagues are important.
- Working together within a District: Communication is Key.
 - Set up collegial relationships
 - Repair damaged relationships—it's only personal when both parties have taken it personally. Talk-don't assume. Ask-don't be a victim.
 - Make the First Move.
- Perform combined pieces regularly. Change conductors each year. What a great message for your students—each of their teachers has something musical to say!
- Don't forget that you love kids and music or you wouldn't be here.
- Don't forget that your students watch and see you playing in the sand box with others. Expect no less of you and your colleagues than you do of your students.

This session will discuss strategies of success for:

- Band or Orchestra directors faced with teaching or rehearsing a choir.
- Choir directors faced with teaching or rehearsing instrumentalists.

You want me to teach *WHAT?*!

- Choir is just a band with fewer sections but more instruments in each section.
 - Are there instruments in the band that you don't play?
 - How do you make them sound better?
- Assume that you have something valid to say. You know more than you think you do.
 - If you don't like the sound, ask for something different. If it works, keep it. If not, ask for something else.
 - When it works, ask THE STUDENTS what was different about it. This will help THEM understand the process of creating quality sound.

Teach with the end in sight—what skills do you want your students to develop?

Think both in terms of YOUR grade or grade level and also in terms of the child. Build the skills they will need to be creative musicians—just like you would in band. What do these include? (WFR—create a list)

- Singing
- Writing and reading rhythm
- Writing and reading pitch
- Critical or Creative Thinking
- Learning the basics of creating music rather than simply the tools to recreate music.

Engaging Students: Our version of “They can’t play with a horn in their mouth.”

- Begin with something musical that catches and focuses their attention. If you have to begin by taking roll or prefer to talk with them as they gather, fine. When you are ready to begin teaching, start with something musical.
- Let’s try a couple of things:
 - T, K, P, S—quarters, eighths, sixteenths, triplets
 - Unison pitch—build a chord.
 - Do What I Do Game—I do a bar/you do a bar/you do while I do the next
 - Clap WHEN I clap

Developing the Instrument in all of us—the body, the brain, and the voice:

How do we determine what to teach? Teach with the end in mind.

What creates intelligent young singer/musicians?

- Posture
 - Once they have the concept use reminders vs. reprimands (Mac)
 - Vary the form of the reminder
 - Sit ready to learn (Your learning posture)
 - Stand Tall
 - Stand Down
 - Expand Ribs
 - Light on your feet
 - Belly Button Check
- Consistent and Engaged Breathing is important to creating an interesting sound.
How do you think about breathing? What do you teach your students about it?
 - Describe a good *musical* breath. You may use only one or two words. Go around the class. No one can repeat a word. (Assessment form)
 - Pinky in belly button; thumb on tip of sternum. Create space.
 - Place 3 fingers in solar plexus, then hiss. What happened? That is the feeling of support.
 - Sip air in; Hiss air out. In 4/Out 4; 6/6; 8/8; 1/8
 - This is intended to engage the muscles of support.
 - Another possibility is to have the students lift their chair while hissing. The muscles that lift are the muscles that support NOT the muscles that protect (getting hit in the belly).
 - Move from 1/8 to Su, Su, Su exercise. Keep your kids in the loop as to WHY you are doing each of these exercises. FEEL THIS, DO THAT.
- Vocal Production
 - What is a healthy singing tone? People disagree about correct but everyone knows UGLY:
 - Tall Vowel Shapes—standing up vs. laying down in mouth
 - Taller vowel shapes equal purer vowel sounds.
 - Energized (hissing) with air
 - Consistent across the range (top to bottom vs. bottom to top)
 - Consistent among the vowel shapes
 - Where do they learn tone?
 - Imitation—play honor recordings of ensembles like theirs.

- Model for them—this can be dangerous.
 - Have a student model—can be dangerous unless you are willing and able to pass around the love. (Weston Noble)
 - Sing it correctly, Sing it incorrectly, Sing it correctly. ASK THEM how the two differ.
- Vocal and Rhythmic Diction:
 - Vowels: e, i, a, o, u; ae, E, I,), ^, U
 - Diphthongs: au, ai, Ei, oi, iu
 - Primary—singing vowel. The sustained vowel. For Beauty.
 - Vanish—last rhythmic moment. For Understanding.
 - Percussive Consonants (double consonants)
 - Consonant placement is important.
 - Elision vs. Separation
 - Rhythmic placement
 - Meaning of a rest
 - Do vs. Don't
 - Take a breath
 - Place a consonant
 - Gather energy
 - Release energy
 - Anything but DON'T SING OR PLAY
- Reading/Literacy Skills
 - Writing and Reading rhythms. Have the class perform one exercise each day as part of their gathering time. Ask each student to write a 2 or 4-bar exercise that he or she can perform. This is called homework. Begin using those as your morning exercise. The students will notice.
 - Writing and reading pitch—teach and use syllables with hand signs or numbers consistently. These are the 'fingerings' for our instrument.
- Error Detection Skills
 - Rhythm—we are an art of time rather than sound. MOST problems in tuning and pitch are the result of approximate or inaccurate rhythm.
 - Pitch—exact or approximate
 - Production or Technique—Breathing, Vowel Shape, etc
 - Ensemble issues

Specific Voice Building Ideas:

- Flexibility of pitch—pitch matching.
 - Develop the understanding that there is a difference between students' speaking voices and their singing voices.
 - Follow the ball of sound—Nolker
 - Winding kids up and down to pitch—Cardwell
 - Sirens and Wheelies—be sure to remind students of function here.
 - Begin with one group high and one group low; ask them to meet and match somewhere in the middle.

- Developing inner hearing, and creating independent singers
 - Most choirs have incorporated the sound of a piano into the concept of “their sound”. How did this happen?
 - When vocalizing don’t play each note. Change to play only chords and changes, then only changes, then only chords. See what it does to their independence.
 - Sing vocal exercises to them on syllables, have them sing them back on syllables, then add words if you like.
 - Working without piano is an important to help singers develop a concept of their corporate and individual sound. Piano provides correct pitch. It will, however, also disguise incorrect notes in the choir. This also happens if we sing to them all the time. We can’t hear as well if we are singing or playing. Neither will their ears learn to discriminate if they aren’t allowed to hear themselves unobstructed.
 - Noisy Conducting can also keep us from hearing well in an ensemble.
 - Constantly Giving Pitches and Playing Parts on the piano will not help your students develop any personal sense of pitch. Carry a pitch pipe or simply check to see if they remember the first pitch.
 - When they do—Praise them.
 - When they don’t—complement their effort and give them the correct one.
 - There is nothing wrong with being incorrect. There is everything wrong with not trying to remember pitch.

Keep trying new stuff. Keep listening to choirs for you and for them. Don’t let your discomfort limit your students.

Robert L. Sinclair has served VanderCook College of Music as Director of Choral Activities since 2001. Dr. Sinclair has ten years of public school teaching experience and continues to work as an active choral clinician and adjudicator for junior high and high school students from across the nation and abroad, having recently served as clinician and guest conductor for an honor choir for the Kantos Plains Association of Secondary School Principals in Tokyo, Japan. He is an active member of ACDA, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Music Fraternity, Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honors Fraternity, and the Music Educators National Convention. He served ACDA as the Program Chair for the 2006 Divisional Convention.