THE PROCESS OF TEACHING VOCAL TECHNIQUES IN THE CHORAL REHEARSAL

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by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the importance of Vocal Pedagogy in the Choral Rehearsal

Directors continue to strive for effective ways to improve the vocal techniques of singers through the rehearsing of choral music. Kenneth E. Miller states:

Few secondary school students have a clear idea of the fundamental ideas and techniques they should use in their singing. Many young people sing primarily because of the enjoyment they derive from it, and that is a good beginning. But, relatively few of them have also acquired the skills and knowledge necessary for knowing how to use their voices well (Miller, 118).

There are multiple solutions to the improvement of singing. However, it is often very difficult to communicate to students how to sing properly if they are not previously familiar with efficient vocal techniques. John B. Hylton states in his book Comprehensive Choral Music Education that “Diagnosing and correcting choral problems is a critical ability for the choral music educator.”(Hylton, 70) While these exercises are often done in private voice lessons, including them in a choral setting is a challenge. Students are typically at different levels as vocalists, and educators must adjust these exercises to fit a particular group’s needs. Kenneth H. Phillips states, “Singing is a learned behavior. Most people are not natural singers, and most choral students are going to require vocal instruction to reach their singing potential.” (Phillips, 333)
By providing students with proper vocal techniques as an initial basis through warm ups, vocalists will learn to sing without damaging their voices and will progress through literature without straining their vocal chords. If they apply these techniques, it will make singing difficult literature more feasible. These elements include posture, breathing, phonation, tone production, and diction. For the focus of this thesis, I have chosen two specific elements. They include posture and breathing. Through my research I have found that the most important element of proper vocal techniques is breathing. Without correct posture one cannot breathe properly. Good posture and accurate breathing influence the elements of phonation, tone production, and diction.

It is highly important to know how to teach vocal techniques as a warm up, and how to apply the use of correct vocal techniques within the rehearsal. Addressing the importance of vocal techniques in the warm ups is not enough for the students because they often do not know how to apply them to the literature. In addition, the teacher must also provide guidance pertaining directly to the literature throughout rehearsal.

A great deal of literature has been published by vocal music educators regarding recommended methods to teach vocal techniques. Some educators know many methods for teaching vocal techniques but have not applied them in teaching. It is important that educators not only read about the established methods but learn how to use them in the classroom as well.

McCoy stated, “Give a man a fish and you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish and you have fed him for a lifetime.” (McCoy, 2011) Just as the quote says, there
is a difference between telling students to do something and teaching them how to do it. When the students are taught, they can later apply it themselves.

Many of the authors reviewed in this thesis did not give suggestions about how to include techniques in the rehearsal, or they were very vague. It seems that there is an overall expectation that educators will simply know how to include techniques in rehearsals and warm-ups when this is indeed not always the case. During a phone interview with Dr. Kenneth Phillips, a highly respected choral music educator, he said that when he would speak to music educators who knew of his work and his method, they understood the method but they did not always know how to apply it in the classroom. (K. Phillips, Personal Communication, August 10, 2011) He went on to say that without a strong knowledge of the exercises, the teachers could not properly use the methodology in the rehearsal. Educators have difficulty applying the method to the literature as well. It appears that while the content of methodology is taught, the application of methodology does not always transfer to the classroom.

Like a puzzle, some educators hold all of the pieces but may not know how to organize them to create the perfect picture. Music educators must avail themselves of resources to learn how and when to apply specific techniques in rehearsals and warm-ups. Vocal techniques can be efficiently taught in the choral rehearsal through the process of exercises, careful preparation, assessment, and providing feedback.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the review of literature, there are various examples of exercises that instructors can implement into warm-ups and rehearsals in order to teach proper pedagogical techniques to students in the choral rehearsal. In *Teaching Kids to Sing*, author Kenneth Phillips presents a method that he states has developed from research. Various other choral music educators have shared their knowledge of teaching techniques in the choral rehearsal as well. There are solutions for including the teaching of posture, breathing, phonation, tone production, and diction into the rehearsal. The focus of this review of literature is on posture and breathing. It is important to include that authors agree that there is value in looking for possible technical problems while preparing a score, assessing techniques on a regular basis, and providing students with consistent feedback and additional resources.
CHAPTER III

POSTURE

Posture is one of the most important elements to teach singers. Correct posture allows for all of the other elements of vocal techniques to fall into place. “Obviously, correct breathing is more important, but maintenance of good posture is the first and most important step toward correct breathing in singing and will tend to induce it.” (Roe 66) Without correct posture, one’s body cannot properly function in order to produce a healthy sound when singing. James C. McKinney states that, “Good Posture allows the skeletal framework and the muscular components of the body to fulfill their basic functions efficiently, without any undue expenditure of energy.” (McKinney 33) With correct posture, the body can properly function as designed.

Music educators should include the teaching of desired posture in the planning of their rehearsals. Adolescents and children must receive training in the elements of correct posture. (Phillips 148) When students develop poor posture, it is much harder to teach them correct posture. Through the teaching and constant reminder of proper posture, students will enhance their ability to produce a quality choral sound.

In order to achieve perfect posture it is important to stretch. This allows the students to be fully relaxed. If the muscles are tense, the students are not fully capable of producing the posture that is required. In The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults, McKinney, the author says to begin with various stretching exercises before singing. First, a singer should reach his arms up and touch his toes followed by gently rolling the
head around clockwise. Hold the head freely and do not be forced in either direction. The singer should roll the shoulders backwards and forwards, followed by gently shaking out his arms at his sides. Simple jaw movements can then the done to free any jaw tension such as pretending to chew large bites of food. The singers can then end by slowly stretching forward to the toes and rising upward to standing position vertebrae by vertebrae. (McKinney 35-36) Various other professional choral directors promote stretching before singing to enhance proper posture, such as John B Hylton and Charles R Hoffer. Kenneth Phillips created a set of exercises called Muscle Movers. (Phillips 153) These exercises include a spinal stretch where students interlock their fingers in front of them and stretch them outward while slightly bending at the hips to stretch the spine. Phillips also includes rolling of the shoulders and head, flexing the knees, and stretching from side to side. (Phillips 153-164) Phillips provides exercises for stretching the torso, limbering the shoulders and neck, and stretching the legs and feet. In the text *Teaching Kids to Sing*, Phillips gives detailed descriptions of each of these exercises as well as pictures demonstrating what the students should look like. The author also suggests that is it important to rotate these exercises when warming up a group of singers in order to keep things fresh and avoid the possibility of the students becoming bored. (Phillips 171)

Various elements make up correct posture. While the experts generally agree on each of these elements, there are slight variations throughout the literature. Each of the elements is listed from each source as seen in the literature. In Kenneth Miller’s *Vocal Music Education, Teaching in the Secondary School* on pages 120-121, he lists not only the elements of standing posture but also those of sitting posture.
Posture While Standing
1. The singer should stand tall
2. The feet should be placed slightly apart, and one foot should be placed somewhat forward of the other.
3. The singer’s weight should be centered slightly forward.
4. The knees should be slightly bent; they should never be rigidly locked.
5. The hips should have a tendency to be forward, and the singer’s weight should be distributed evenly.
6. The spine should have a feeling of being slightly stretched upward.
7. The chest should be high, and the shoulders should be back, free, and loose, and the neck should be as straight as is comfortable.
8. The arms should be dropped easily and loosely at the sides and the arms should be slightly bent at the elbows.
9. The head should be held high.
10. There should be no feeling of flabbiness. The body should have a feeling of total support and of being in line.

Posture While Sitting
1. The feet should be places on the floor as firmly as possible.
2. The hips should be placed toward the back of the chair, and the weight of the body should be forward, away from the back of the chair.
3. The back and shoulders should be inclined forward, away from the back of the chair.
4. The spine should have a feeling of being stretched upward.
5. The chest should be held high; the shoulders should be back; the lower ribs should be comfortably expanded; and the neck should be straight.
6. The head should be held high. (Miller 120-121)

In the book The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults, James C. McKinney says that good posture can be described as being alert, balanced, erect, flexible, buoyant, happy, free-to-move, vibrant, and poised. (McKinney 36) McKinney says that the feet should be slightly apart and one should be slightly in front of the other. Which foot goes in front does not matter as long as there is a firm foundation and the placement feels and looks natural. The legs cannot feel very relaxed because they are supporting your body
but they should not be ridged or locked. The legs should always be free of tension, flexible, and ready to move at any time. The hips and buttocks should be close to the vertical line drawn from the feet to the head. The buttocks should be tucked under and forward as if straightening the small of the back and neither hip should stick out farther than the other. (McKinney 37) The lower abdomen should be slightly held in but should not create unneeded tension. The upper abdomen should be free to move at all times. Pulling in too much in this area is to be avoided. The back should feel as if it is being stretched up as tall as possible. There should be a feeling of lifting or stretching extending upward on the spinal column. The chest is to be high at all times but feel comfortable. The chest should stay relatively still throughout the process of singing. The shoulders should settle into a socket by being rolled back gently and dropped. They should not move forward when breathing but instead should remain back and down. The arms and the hands should hang freely at the side of the body. The fingers should also be relaxed and should not move while singing. The head should be in line with the body and centered on the shoulders. The head should not hang forward or fall backwards. The head and eyes should remain level when singing. (McKinney 35-39)

Kenneth Phillips says that the seven requirements for accurate singing posture are as follows,

1. feet on the floor, one foot slightly ahead of the other
2. knees slightly relaxed
3. spine lifted up and out of the hips
4. shoulders slightly back and down
5. sternum up throughout the act of singing
6. head level and held high
Many exercises have been developed to give students the opportunity to experience what proper posture should feel like. Roe gives an example of a story he often tells his choirs in order to give them a better understanding of the importance of proper posture. He says that,

The body is an instrument. It is the only instrument that is player and instrument combined. It is essential that this personal instrument be kept in good shape and free from dents so the tone will not deteriorate. If this personal instrument were a trumpet, what would happen to the tone quality if you took hold of the mouthpiece and bent the neck of the instrument over to a 45-degree angle? You know what kind of sound would come out of the trumpet, but you expect to be able to jut your jaw out of position, cross your legs, slump in your seat, and have beautiful sounds come out of your personal instrument. (Roe 67)

Roe also gives additional tips to help correct posture. One of the exercises that he lists is to have the students pretend there are hooks pulling the tops of the backs of their heads. He also says to have them reach for a high bar and then reach a little more, mentally touch the bottom of the ribs and then gently drop the arms down but not the ribs. (Roe 69) Other conductors suggest that students look at themselves in the mirror in order to see how they are standing. (McKinney 35)
Karen Miyamoto gives a few posture tips that can be easily understood by any group of students. She gives an analogy by asking the students what happens when a garden hose is bent. She then tells them, that the same thing happens when there is poor posture and the air is not able to go through the body to the vocal chords to produce sound. She provides another tip for children who slouch a lot. She says to have them pretend to be as straight as a yardstick and clasp their hands behind their backs. This motion will bring the chest up and in place for proper singing. Then she then asks them to release their hands, keeping their chests in this position. (Miyamoto, 26)

Continually reminding the students to stand or sit with proper posture is important. The students can be assessed throughout the rehearsal by simply observing their posture. A director can walk among the students to see who is assuming correct posture as well. (Hoffer 104) The director can develop some sort of hand motion that reminds the students to stand with proper posture. Another way to teach posture and to remind the students about proper posture during rehearsal is the posture rap by Kenneth Phillips.

THE POSTURE RAP
Kenneth Phillips
Feet on the floor, one slightly ahead,
Relax those knees, don’t lock them dead!
Hips rolled under, stretch your spine so tall,
   Sternum up, don’t let it fall!
Shoulders should be back and down,
   Head is high, don’t wear a frown!
Keep your hands down at your sides,
   Let the seam lines be your guide!
   This is how you stand to sing,
If you want your voice to ring (185)!
Once this rap is learned, the students will know how to properly stand when singing. Hanging a copy of the rap on the wall is another great reminder for the students. Kenneth Phillips suggests that once the students know the rap, and have warmed up their muscles with some stretching exercises there are other varied exercises that can be done to help the students have a better understanding of the posture elements. (185)

How to hold the music should also be addressed when teaching proper posture to students. If the students are not holding their music correctly, it can cause them to add tension to their necks. When students are told to hold the music at eye level of the conductor, they should be able to align their bodies according to the elements of proper posture. Without this instruction, students often hold their music to their bodies and no longer have proper posture.

The Alexander Technique is another effective technique that can be used to establish appropriate singing posture. The Alexander Technique, as described by Ailsa Masterton in The Alexander Technique, a Step by Step Guide, says that the Alexander Technique is a one-on-one lesson that improves the mental and physical well-being of a person by helping to reduce muscular tension. This mental and physical improvement is accomplished by focusing on the proper placement and alignment of the head, back and neck. This technique is much more complex than many of the basic methods and ideas previously mentioned. If educators have a better understanding of the Alexander Technique they may be able develop a better understanding of correct posture as well as how to include it in the classroom. Through the Alexander Technique, “A person can learn to control their body through reason and not through feeling, a conscious control of
individual self.” (Enervold 63) To have a better understanding of this technique educators must experience it for themselves and cannot simply read about it. Classes on the Alexander Technique can be taken in order to learn more about the detailed technique. After taking these classes, educators could then grow more aware of their own bodies and know what feels comfortable or uncomfortable. (Enervold 64) Once educators have this knowledge it is important to think of words such as freedom, balance, and ease when referring to posture for themselves as singers and for their students. The placement of the head may be different when using this more in depth technique then it would be for a more natural everyday posture. This technique focuses on a strong understanding of one’s self and the proper alignment of the spine. The correct placement allows for the students to properly align their spines. “Healthy singing involves the whole body, and singers and choral directors should know the myriad body parts and how movement and interaction of these parts should feel when singing correctly.” (Enervold 64)
CHAPTER IV

BREATHING

Breathing, more than any of the other techniques, is the most important. Without a good air supply, the vocal chords will not be able to properly function. While breathing is a natural process, it must be thought about differently when singing. “The essential difference between breathing to live and breathing to sing lies in the amount of conscious control exerted.” (McKinney, 46) The process of breathing is clearly described in the book, *In Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults*. The air enters the body due to a difference in the atmospheric pressure that is inside and outside of the body. The diaphragm muscle creates the pressure then the diaphragm separates the chest from the abdominals. Since the lungs are not muscles, they must depend on the diaphragm for expansion and contraction during respiration. This is why many voice instructors say to breathe with the diaphragm. The diaphragm is supporting the expansion and the contraction of the air inside the lungs.

When educating students it is important for them to understand why breathing from the diaphragm, rather than chest or clavicular breathing is so valuable. Gordon H. Lamb gives the following reasons:

1. A singer can take the necessary amount of air without tightening muscles in the throat.
2. A singer can get more air by breathing from the diaphragm.
3. A singer can control the air once it is inhaled. The air must be released in a continuous supply for sustained singing (Lamb 48).
In addition to understanding the importance of diaphragmatic breathing, students must be taught how to accomplish proper breathing. The poor habit of chest or clavicular breathing must be changed and replaced with proper diaphragmatic breathing through continual practice.

Before students can learn how to breathe to sing, they must first learn the appropriate motion for inhaling and exhaling (Phillips 195). “Inhalation: The diaphragm descends (contracts) and the lower ribs expand outward, with a corresponding enlargement of the body around the waistline. Exhalation: The diaphragm ascends (relaxes) and the lower ribs contract inward, with a corresponding contraction of the body around the waistline (Phillips 195).” Students should be asked to take in a deep breath upon inhalation. Breathing in this manner must be taught to students and continually reinforced. Otherwise, the students will quickly revert to their former bad breathing habits.

Kenneth Phillips has multiple exercises designed to help students have a better understanding of how to inhale and exhale when breathing for singing. The following exercises are specifically for inhaling and exhaling practice. They include Horizontal Breathing, The Balloon, The Slow Sip, Eagle Spread, The Gasp, Deep Yawn, Breath Suspension, Inhalation, Suspension, Exhalation, Locomotion, Silent Rowing, Counting 1-2, The Tired Dog, Quiet Breathing, The Hot Dog, and finally The Evaluation (Phillips 200-208). These exercises are grouped into levels based on the ability and previous knowledge of the choir that a teacher may be working with, and allow students to gradually learn when the teacher selects a few at a time to work on during the rehearsal.
Many of these exercises are similar to those of other authors that have been reviewed in this paper. Listed below are two examples and descriptions of these exercises.

“The Gasp. Using the same positions as for the “eagle spread,” bend at the waist and exhale. Stand without inhaling; this will cause a tightening in the abdominal area. Hold this position for a few moments and then release (relax) the abdominal area with a gasp, as the air rushes into the lower lungs.

Deep Yawn. Direct students to yawn deeply while maintaining the standing position of the eagle spread (sternum elevated), which will cause a contraction of the diaphragm and a rushing of air into the lower lungs. Repeat several times. (Phillips, 202)”

Both of the exercises listed above come from Level 2 of deep breathing. As students progress through each level they can then move to a new exercise in a higher level. A full description of each of these exercises can be found in Teaching Kids to Sing, by Kenneth Phillips.

Once the students have learned about inhaling and exhaling Phillips continues with exercises that teach the students to manage their breathing. The exercises help students learn how to control the inhaling and exhaling that they now know how to do. They are taught through exercises how to use the abdominal muscles, external and internal oblique and transverse abdominals to better control their breath.
Breath control is the act that permits the slow emission of the energized air column at the vocal-fold level. The major muscles of control is the diaphragm, which, when relaxed, slowly counteracts the internal pressure created by the contraction of the abdominal muscles (Phillips 209).

The author goes on to describe his own experiences with controlling his own breathing techniques as well as the various muscles that are included in the process. He says that while there is a slight movement of the ribcage when properly breathing, it is important to not mention this to students who are just learning how to breathe with the abdominal-diaphragmatic-costal interaction. If the rib-cage movement is mentioned, it may confuse the student and cause them to resort back to the chest breathing habits that they had before (Phillips 211). The goal stated before the breath-management exercises is as follows,

“The student will develop the technique of breath management through exercises involving the support (energized air column) and control (slow emission of air) of the exhaled air when applied to vocal production. (Phillips 211)

These exercises should be practiced on a regular basis until the students become accustomed to them. (Phillips 211) As the last set of exercise, these too are divided into levels and have extensive descriptions in Teaching Kids to Sing. The exercises are Isometric Exercise, The Lift, The Cycle, The Foul Shot, Ball and Pipe, Pinwheels, Mini-
thrust, Maxi-thrust, Mini-bump, Maxi-bump, Extended Pulse, Echo Pulse, Slow Leak, and Lip Trill. These exercises are utilizing the abdominal lift, breath stream, breath articulation, breath pulse, breath extension, and costal control. (Phillips 212-217) The Isometric Exercise, The Lift, and The Cycle are designed to “help sensitize students to the role of the abdominal muscles in the support process and encourage the lifting-up thought for singing.” (Phillips 212) The Foul Shot, Ball and Pipe, and Pinwheels are designed as, “Initial exercises for teaching students to lift (support) the air stream up and out of the body from the diaphragm.” (Phillips 212) The exercises that are designed to strengthen the abdominal muscles more to assist with breath support when exhaling are the Mini-thrust, Maxi-thrust, Mini-bump, and Maxi-bump. (Phillips, 214-215) The Extended Pulse and Echo Pulse are to assist in a continuous stream of air and to monitor the pulsing of the abdominal area. Slowly letting out air from the air column is practiced in the Slow Leak, Lip Trill. As stated above, once the students learn these exercises and steps to proper breathing techniques they can then move on to the next level.

When speaking to Kenneth Phillips in a telephone interview he made the point that it is very important that educators not only know what these various exercises are but also how to do them and how to use them in the classroom. Reading them is simply not enough. Educators should be able to do them and know the appropriate time to remind students of these exercises throughout a rehearsal. Apply these exercises in the warm-up section of rehearsals, and refer to them during rehearsals as reminders to the students.
Chest breathing is often what students resort to before they learn accurate breathing techniques for singing. Kenneth E. Miller says that, “Breathing in this manner will almost certainly insure that the singer will have some tension in the neck as the shoulders are lifted. (Miller 123) Miller continues to say that diaphragmatic-costal breathing will allow the singer to produce the best results. Singers should feel an expansion around the waist and in the middle part of the body. Miller says that the, “Physical expansion with this type of breathing should be felt as follows: 1. there should be some expansion in the upper chest. 2. There should be some expansion at the sides and front around the waist.” (Miller 124) Miller then gives a simple way for singers to check to make sure they are breathing correctly. First, the singers should place their hands on their waist with their palms facing in. They should slide their hands in until their fingers are touching. When breathing, is done correctly the fingers should move apart and no longer be touching when the singer inhales. (Miller 124)

Multiple exercises can be used in the classroom to help improve breathing techniques. Showing older students a diagram of the body in order to create a better understanding of what is happening in their bodies can also be helpful. Gordon H. Lamb gives three exercises that can be used in the classroom,

Ask the students to pant very rapidly and, as they do so, to place one hand on the abdomen, just below the rib cage.
After this is done a few times, ask them to gradually slow the panting down to about one breath (one inhalation and exhalation) per second.
A second exercise asks the students to bend over at the waist with the hands on the bottom of the rib cage, fingers spread apart. Have the students inhale deeply. The singers will breathe from the diaphragm because that is the only way one can breathe in that position. After taking the breath, have the students stand erect, hands still on the rib cage and blow the air out in a steady stream, making a hissing sound. The ribs should come in slowly as this occurs. This hiss can later be changed to a singing tone.

(Lamb 49)

Lamb continues by explaining one more exercise that should only be used with more advanced choirs and not beginners. The third exercise is to have the students sing staccato notes with an “h” in front of the pitch with various rhythms to strengthen the rib cage. (Lamb 49)

John B. Hylton states that there are three steps to breathing. In addition to inhaling and exhaling, there is a moment of suspension. He says that a common mistake is for singers to omit the step of suspension. He gives a common exercise to help ensure that students can develop all three steps when breathing. The students should first inhale for four counts, hold the breath for four counts, and then exhale for four counts. Once the students are comfortable with four counts the exercise can be done with eight and sixteen counts as well in the same manner. (Hylton 12)
McKinney also says that there are three stages in the breathing process and gives specific exercises for each step as Kenneth Phillips did in *Teaching Kids to Sing*. For inhalation he says to have the students pretend to smell a flower and for the breath to enter the body slowly and easily without a conscious effort. (McKinney 48-49) Then have the students pretend to yawn and notice how the jaw drops, the deep feeling in the throat, and how deep the breath goes without even trying. The other exercise that he gives is to pretend you are raising a glass of water to your mouth and notice how the jaw naturally opens to a nice singing position. (McKinney 49) Most of the authors reviewed for this paper made a point to say that the singer should first exhibit proper posture before inhaling.

McKinney states an overview of the steps to breathing that he illustrates in the book.

1. Good posture precedes good breathing.
2. Breathe in as if smelling a rose.
3. Breathe in as if beginning a yawn.
4. In-down-out around the middle.
5. Comfortably up-comfortably in-free to move.
6. Inhalation, suspension, controlled exhalation, recovery.
7. Breathe in as if drinking a glass of water.
8. Breathing is effortless and noiseless.
9. For a catch breath, drop the jaw and breathe as if surprised.
10. The chest is comfortable high before, during, and after taking the breath. (McKinney 55-56)

He follows with a list of incorrect methods of breathing and why upper chest breathing is not desirable.
1. It limits (inhibits) the downward travel of the diaphragm.
2. It is visually distracting to the audience.
3. It wastes energy and is physically tiring because of the effort expended in raising the chest.
4. It often is associated with poor posture.
5. Tension in the muscles of the chest and shoulders may be transmitted to the neck area and the vocal mechanism itself.
6. It is inefficient, tending to be shallow. (McKinney 57)

McKinney provides additional breathing faults that are often observed in a beginning singer discusses they are not appropriate for the production of proper breathing. All of these descriptions can be found in *The Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults*.

Karen A. Miyamoto also gives some tips for teaching students deep breathing. She says to have the students sip through a straw and create the image of a balloon in comparison to the expansion of their lungs. She explains that teachers can show students the expansion by turning to the side and showing the student how the body expands when breathing. Have the students clasp their hands behind their backs so they cannot lift their shoulders as easily, and have them feel the cold air on the roof of their mouths when they breathe in. She suggests using a lot of imagery such as filling an inner tube around the waist as the student inhales, take a breath in as if you saw a ghost, breath as if about to yawn, stretch the lower ribs when singing, pant like a dog, and saying “ho, ho, ho!” like Santa Claus does. (Miyamoto 26)

Other authors who have included exercises for learning breathing techniques are Kenneth E. Miller in *Vocal Music Education*, Paul E. Roe in *Choral Music Education*, and Wilhelm Ehmann with Frauke Haasemann in *Voice Building for Choirs*. Each author
has a slightly different way of going about teaching these breathing techniques. Some use exercises that are very similar to those that Kenneth Phillips used, such as the slow leak. This exercise along with many others are presented in many published sources, but they are not always placed into a series of exercises that are designated in levels that have established step-by-step goals for the students. Educators must find the method that works best for a particular group of students. A collection of good exercises can be used often in the classroom with regular assessment and feedback to develop student understanding and skills.
TEACHING FOR UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

Once the proper vocal techniques have been taught there are many other steps that must be taken to ensure that the students understand how to use the techniques while singing and how to apply them to the music they are working on. These steps include: (1) preparation by the educator in applying them to the musical score; (2) assessing the students understanding of the techniques through demonstration and performance improvement; (3) providing the students with feedback for areas that need improvement, and additional assistance when it is needed.

The following sections expand on each element that must be addressed to make sure that all of the students have a strong understanding of the vocal techniques and how to use them in the rehearsal. Once these steps are taken, the group can gradually grow to be stronger and more well-rounded vocalists.
CHAPTER VI
SEARCHING FOR VOCAL PEDAGOGY PROBLEMS IN SCORE PREPARATION

Teaching students vocal techniques in warm-ups is typically not difficult for most directors. However, it sometimes becomes more of a side thought when preparing and rehearsing the literature. For this reason, paying close attention to possible vocal problems in a particular piece of literature is very important when preparing a score for rehearsal. If educators can identify vocal techniques challenges in the music they can prepare ways to approach these problems if they occur as predicted. This may include but is not limited to long phrases, pitches that require a strong ear or special placement, and words that are particularly hard to pronounce or may sound like something else when pronounced incorrectly.

Regarding breathing, for example, when inserting breath marks, directors can keep in mind that long phrases may be an issue for the students. In this case, be sure to incorporate breath phrasing exercises into the warm-up. Conductors can also give little gestures that relate to the exercise when they come to this section during the rehearsal. The teacher can tell the students that they will be working on long phrases later in the rehearsal so be sure to pay close attention to the effort it takes in order to hold long phrases during the warm-up. However, when the students begin rehearsing the literature they should not have to redo the warm-up exercise while rehearsing the song. (K.Phillips 2011)
Another example involves vocal range. Educators can study the range of a piece and focus on placement for higher and lower passages during the warm-ups. They can also incorporate intonation exercises in the correct key. Possible problems related to diction and articulation can also be addressed during the warm-ups. If there is a particular vowel formation that the educator would like the students to use this can be taught during the warm-up and then applied to the song with a simple reminder of the warm up.

Applying all of these examples used in the warm-ups to the literature covered in rehearsal is not difficult if the educator takes the time to study the score, and then share with the students why they are practicing a particular exercise. When the students know why and how to connect the content of the warm-up exercises to the particular piece being sung, the rehearsal becomes much more relevant to them. They will be better prepared to listen to the conductor, affect the requested improvements, and carry this into the next rehearsal.
CHAPTER VIII

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is an essential part of successful teaching and plays a special role in teaching vocal pedagogy in the choral rehearsal. While directors can hear an overall sound from an ensemble, it is sometimes difficult to hear the quality of individual voices well enough to assess their individual vocal technique.

However, there are some elements of vocal technique that can be assessed by observing during the rehearsal. The easiest and most obvious technique that can be assessed is posture. If students are consistently reminded of posture and know that they may be graded on their personal posture at any time, they are more likely to demonstrate the proper posture. Another way to assess the overall technique of the ensemble is to simple listen closely. Diction and vowel formations will be obvious to the listener if they are not being done uniformly. If directors can hear this and make corrections quickly and efficiently, rehearsal time will be conserved. Another way to hear individual students during rehearsal is to walk around and listen to each student while the group is singing. The students could be holding cards so the teacher can take the card and, write down notes for the student. This also provides notes for the teacher to review for the next rehearsal.

While in-class assessment is much more convenient than taking time out of class to assess individual students, it is often very necessary to assess student performance on an individual basis. To enhance choral performance students should be individually
assessed. In this way, every student has an equal understanding of proper
techniques and each is able to produce a quality vocal sound. When there is one educator
to a large number of students in a choral ensemble individual assessment becomes very
time consuming. This can sometimes take as long as a week depending on the number of
students in the ensemble. Despite the time that it takes, it is well worth it in the end to
have a better understanding of the student’s individual progress. (K. Phillips, 2011)

One way to assess students outside of rehearsal time is to allow students to sign
up for testing slots during study halls, lunch periods, before school, or after school.
Students can also come in and record themselves singing on their outside time during
study hall, before school, or after school. Recordings can be submitted to a choir web-
site or recorded in the choir room and then submitted to the choral director.

Student self-assessment is also recommended. This is very important with vocal
technique because it is a way to avoid student discomfort or tension created by singing in
front of others. Self-assessment through personal reflection allows the student to express
himself on his own. One way to accomplish this is through journaling. Such a journal can
go back and forth between the student and the choral director, and even from student to
student if the student chooses to do so. Students can be asked to write a short reflection
on either warm-ups, the rehearsal, or an at home assignment. The educator can choose to
provide designated questions or simply allow students to reflect upon the activity. This
can be done as often as the students and educator find time to do so. Having students
reflect once every month or every grading period, could benefit both the students and the
teachers.
Dr. Kenneth Phillips recommended that another way to save rehearsal time is to establish student leaders. On days that the choral directors are assessing students, a student leader can help lead the rehearsal. If this student has the knowledge, this can be either a group or sectional rehearsal.

Another unique assessment tool is for the director to record himself conducting a warm-up prior to the rehearsal and then play the video for the students during warm-ups. The recording can consist of the day’s warm-ups. During the video, the director can walk through the ensemble and better observe what each student is doing. This can also be fun for the students if the director records himself in a unique location.

Individual oral and visual assessments are not the only way to ensure that students have a thorough understanding of musical concepts and vocal technique. Written assignments or quizzes are another effective form of assessment. These written assessments can be done either during class time or outside of class as a small homework assignment. Students can be asked to explain proper singing posture and breathing techniques in their own words. This type of question can be answered either as part of a quiz or a small homework assignment. Even if the students look up answers online or in their notes, they are still reading and reiterating what the proper techniques are. This ensures that even if the students cannot yet demonstrate the techniques they at least have an understanding of what they are to do. Students can be directed to put breath marks and no breath markings in a short section of a piece. They can also label sections of the vocal chords, circle a drawing that is showing correct posture and explain why other posture pictures are incorrect. Students can be asked to show which parts of the body should be
expanding when inhaling using a diagram of the human body. Many questions can be asked to ensure that the students have a clear understanding of concepts. In order to save time these can be done either while individual assessments are taking place, in place of a regular rehearsal, or as a take home assignment.

During the individual assessment, there are a number of specific elements that should be evaluated. Dr. Kenneth Phillips’s, in his book *Teaching Kids to Sing*, provides a sample rubric for individual assessment purposes. His rubric is based on the method that he outlines in his book, and includes an evaluation of many of the exercises included in his method. It is worth studying as a sample of how to structure a rubric to include specific goals and objectives. Music educators need to create their own formative assessment rubrics that will assess the learning outcomes of their rehearsals. They should be sure to include a place to record posture, breathing, phonation, tone production, and diction. If a particular exercise applied during warm-up and was then applied to the literature during rehearsal the director should listen to the student demonstrate with both the warm-up and the section of the music in which it occurs. If students take low breaths to begin with but do not continue to maintain proper breath support throughout a phrase, there should be a way to easily document this on an established rubric. A properly structured formative assessment tool will identify the characteristics of specific elements of good singing by establishing benchmarks that define excellence, and various stages of improvement on a continuum leading to excellence. This provides each student with a defined path to self-improvement. Most importantly, since the goal of a formative assessment is to promote improvement during a specified learning period, the rubric must
provide positive feedback which lists specific ways to improve, easily understood by the student. Good feedback plays a defining role in the process of assessment.

Providing students with detailed feedback is important for continued success in learning vocal techniques. Often if students are not told that they should change the way that they are singing, standing, breathing, or expressing the music, they will never know that there is something they should improve. Once we have assessed the students, it is the music educator’s responsibility to share with the students the assessment in order to provide the student with the opportunity to grow. This should not be done in a way that could discourage students, but instead with an understanding mindset and a willingness to help students who need additional assistance in learning vocal techniques.

Once students are provided with this feedback, they then have the opportunity to continue improving their vocal technique. Despite the fact that most choral directors cannot give each student a private voice lesson, they can provide the student with constructive feedback and guidance towards improvement. How many times this is done throughout the year would be based on the structure that the educator chooses to use. If the students are evaluated once a year then they would only receive feedback once a year. If they are journaling about their voice once a month or once a grading period then they should receive feedback as often as they are being assessed.
CHAPTER IX

PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

One very important element of any classroom is providing students with multiple ways to learn in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Educators can offer voice workshops that meet once or twice a month for an hour. These workshops can be required as part of the grade or optional for those students who have a desire to improve. Another option could be to assign accomplished singers to teach those who are struggling. Many times music programs have students who have studied long enough to be ready to teach beginners at the secondary level. This can create a true bond between students and ensembles. However, a student working with another student should not be a required activity but instead an optional one if the struggling student so desires the assistance. These instances should also be supervised. A list of local private teachers can be provided for the students to give them the option to study privately as well.

Students grow through experience and practice. Therefore, providing them with additional performing opportunities is a great way to help the students develop vocally. Students can participate in the state professional organization’s adjudicated events through solo and small ensemble performances. Here they receive feedback from another adjudicator-educator. Hearing comments from another choral educator often helps to emphasize skills that need improvement. Some schools work together to host festivals where students may perform solos or ensembles in a less stressful environment. Students can also perform in smaller ensembles for community events, as volunteers, or during
special concerts. Any additional singing allows students to exhibit their skills and provides goals, which promote individual practice. For vocal techniques to develop students must practice regularly. Educators can give students a CD with recordings of vocal warm-ups that can assist the student in the particular areas in which they are struggling. These warm-ups can be the same as the ones done in class with some kind of comments that help to give additional suggestions to the students while they are practicing. Videos that pertain to what the students are specifically doing in their classrooms can be made in order to give students another way to review a lesson or practice on their own. These videos can be as simple as just a recording of the warm-up section of the rehearsal. These options give the students through which they can work more on their own at home. In fact, homework activities requiring students to evaluate videos of their own choral rehearsals often work in very positive ways.

Many freely accessed videos on YouTube provide instruction for students. While sending students to YouTube without some specific guidance could be very risky, when the proper research is done and specific videos are found that are helpful, they could be very valuable for the students. These videos can be posted on the educator’s classroom website for students to find. Either they can then have this resource simply as an extra way to learn things or it can be made into a classroom requirement. Students can watch these videos and then either record themselves working on the exercises or journal about what they have learned and experienced. The instructor can provide assessment tools for the students to evaluate the assigned video clips. Using the technology that is available to
educators is very important. This is a valuable tool when there is a possibility of students who may not have a strong understanding but desire to learn more.

Another technology resource for students to work with is Smart Music. This program does cost money but it provides recorded accompaniments of hundreds of songs. This can serve as an effective way for students to practice singing with the accompaniment without the teacher having to be there. Through this program, singers can make recordings of their performances with or without accompaniment. In addition, the program indicates when pitches are correctly or incorrectly sung. This promotes the development of error detection skills.
CHAPTER X
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Successful teaching of vocal ensembles requires students to become independent vocalists who have knowledge of proper vocal techniques. The choral director is responsible for providing quality instruction in choral rehearsals that includes preparation through score study, the identification of clear teaching objectives, well-structured warm-up sessions reflecting rehearsal objectives, various means of formative assessment, and consistent positive and structured feedback that promotes improvement. The warm-ups should be specifically designed to not only warm-up the voices for singing but also to teach proper vocal techniques. These techniques should derive from careful score preparation, score study, and planning. Techniques applied in warm up should be emphasized within the choral rehearsal itself. The students should be assessed formatively throughout the process of learning and application, and should receive the personal feedback crucial to their vocal development. Provide the students with frequent opportunities to perform as well as more resources where they can receive additional training. This process requires serious planning and a truly committed educator.

I feel that as a new teacher this research has given me the tools to approach instructing my first choral ensemble with confidence. I have multiple sources that I can look to when seeking different ways to teach techniques. I already have an organized foundation of knowledge to help my students become successful vocalists and choral
members. I have found that one large key to success is having a plan. Every step of this plan requires that the director knows what is to be accomplished, has established well-defined goals, has identified the behavioral outcomes desired, knows how to appropriately sequence the pedagogical procedures, and is able to provide the students with the knowledge that they need to be successful. Through healthy singing, students will be able to continue to sing and create music throughout their lives. It is my mission as an educator to instill in my students a lifelong desire to learn and create music.
REFERENCES


