

Initial Field Session: Assessment of Ensemble

Vocal Technique

- **Posture/Breathing:** The teacher I observed did breathing exercises in the warm-up with the students, and this benefitted their performance throughout the rehearsal. Their breathing was done well, and it is obvious that she works on that with them. Their posture wasn't bad starting off, but then some of the students starting slouching and being a little lackadaisical while standing. I believe just reinforcing the fact of not slouching while singing would be beneficial to student's posture, and constantly making students aware of how they are standing to sing.
- **Phonation:** The students show knowledge of their head and chest voices while singing, and are able to do the transition between the two very well. The ranges of the pieces stay in their tessitura, which is comfortable for them, but also means they don't have to switch as drastically. They show great potential for having wonderful phonation with the teacher and will progress through the year to have a great sound.
- **Resonance:** The students have great resonance while singing with a focused sound and more mature tone. There isn't much of a breathy tone in their sound, which is great for this high school ensemble. The students have worked on their resonance and have developed a sound that is full and sounds strong. There is a constant effort to get the vowels sounding unified and appropriate for the word that the students are learning about what vowels to sing when they are in their ensemble.
- **Diction:** The diction seems to come without much effort. I was able to understand many of the words sung and thought that the students were unified on the pronunciation of the words being sung. This was a stronger part of their singing.
- **Expression:** Expression is being performed in the repertoire, but at a small level. There are many dynamics that could be performed in these pieces, and they are not being addressed as strongly. This is one area that could be addressed more than others to help students get into the music and portray what the piece is trying to say. Any exercises with dynamics and "swelling" of the sound would help the students understand how to sing with expression.

Music Literacy

- **Rhythmic Reading**
Takadimi is used for rhythm reading
They are on level 4 rhythm echoing and echo translating.
- **Pitch reading**
Solfege syllables are used for pitch reading, specifically movable/La-minor
They are on level 4 pitch reading as well.

They are completely familiar with hand signs, and many of the students know them and make the gestures when the teacher does.

Students are comfortable with many different patterns especially ta-ka-- and ta--mi. They are also very comfortable with ascending intervals, but aren't as comfortable with descending intervals.

I was told to start on level 4 rhythm and tonal echoing and echo translating, at the level they are.

Working on descending intervals would be helpful to their progression through the levels of pitch reading.

Literature Preparation

- *Riversong*: This piece has appropriate ranges for the students, especially the men feel comfortable where they are. This piece is at the most appropriate difficulty for the students being a little difficult, but also being encouraging in not being too hard. This piece seems the most worked-on and solid of all of the pieces they are singing.
- *There is Sweet Music Here*: The ranges are appropriate for this piece as well. This piece is a little more difficult for the choir, but they are making progress through it. It seems that the choir needs a lot more rehearsal time with this piece than a few of the others. In one portion of this piece, the tenor had to sing up the octave because it was too low. This was a compromise and worked out well.
- *Give Us Hope*: The ranges are appropriate for this piece. This piece seems to be at an appropriate difficulty level for the students, being a little on the harder side because of some of the rhythms they have to sing. They are showing great progress though, and it is sounding good.
- *Java Jive*: This piece has appropriate ranges for the students, and seems difficult because there is a great deal of chromaticism in it, but I will see once I observe them rehearsing whether or not it is too difficult for this choir or not. Looking at this piece, I think there should be more focus on learning it and working on chromaticism so the students can be confident and master the piece.
- Concepts that are being taught are dynamics, crescendo and decrescendo, rubato, vowels, and accelerando. Some that could be taught are key changes, partner songs/small snippets of other popular pieces in their piece *Riversong*, ritardando and a tempo, and super triplet.

Motivation and Management

The instructional environment is focused and engaging to the students. All of the members are singing and working hard to do what the teacher asks of them. They are all on task and there is complete control over them always. Some of the challenges that exist are that the students need to listen a little more across the ensemble to listen to each other and blend. The teacher is addressing vowels and unifying the sound of the ensemble, which will help with this listening skill. I feel this is a strong approach, but I also feel that it is necessary to say to the ensemble, listen more. It is important to teach the students to listen, so a little more instruction on this aspect would be beneficial.