Experiential Learning and Expressive Singing

I. **ACTIVELY INVOLVE STUDENTS IN THEIR LEARNING:**

   **Experience, then label.** Consider using techniques from General Music:

   **Kodaly/Solfege:**
   - Sequence: Scale, Round, Canon, in 3rds, tone clusters, etc.
   - Patterns: D DRD DRMRD
   - Inner Singing: clap on Fa, snap on ti; omit mi and la, and layer
   - Echo Chain Game
   - Posture Song
   - DRMF (I’m so tired of this solfa-ing, I don’t know what you’ve been saying)
   - Pentatonic Scale
   - Vocal Chording (I, IV, V to start)

   **Dalcroze**
   - Games with note values in the body
   - Body Notes

II. **Program DEVELOPMENTAL LITERATURE (reflecting the hierarchy).**

   Unison (pitch matching), Ostinato, Partner songs, Descant, Root of chords (Choksy), phrases of a round, rounds, transition pieces, part songs.

III. **ESTABLISH RULES** to guide student decision making in performance.

   - The Rule of the Steady Beat. When singing any note value longer than the steady beat value, singers should crescendo.

   - The Rule of Consonant Releases. Though this rule can be implemented throughout the rehearsal or applied differently to each song, it serves as a guideline for most of the final consonant releases.

   - The Rule of Diphthongs. Beginning singers who do not yet self monitor their vowel sounds can quickly apply this rule. Identifying diphthongs and prescribing a method for performance (e.g., sing the first sound throughout most of the value and then quickly add
the second sound) serves to educate and prevent most errors.

- The Rule of Punctuation. This rule contributes greatly to phrase awareness of beginning singers. It requires a lift or break for every punctuation mark throughout the piece. The reverse is also true: do not break if no punctuation exists. (This rule is extremely effective for correcting phrasing with beginners.) While there is certainly punctuation in text that is ignored for musical reasons, having this rule makes singers aware that a decision must be made and allows the teacher/conductor to teach only rule exceptions.

- The Rule of the Slur (and other articulations). Although most students can explain a slur, a surprising number of singers cannot sing one correctly. This rule requires a tenuto over the first note under the slur, followed by all other notes in the pattern sung without a tenuto marking.

- The Rule of Word Stress. Informing students about singing words as we might speak words addresses the issue of word stress. Singing louder or with slight emphasis on important words or syllables is a simple idea, but not something that automatically occurs with all novice singers. Implementing this one rule can immediately improve musical line and the overall artistry of the performance.

Each example serves to demonstrate a general concept, but every composition programmed also may have specific performance needs that could become a rule for only that selection. Other rules a teacher might opt to use include:

- the Rule of Dissonance (crescendo and resolve);
- the Rule of Dynamic Contrast (for some music, this is the key variable for expressive performance);
- the Rule of Voicing (bring out important motifs from the choral texture); and
- the Rule of Repetition (dynamic scheme for a text or music sequence).

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**Resources**

Abrahams & Head. *Teaching Music through Performance in Middle School Choir.* GIA


Herrington, Judith and Clayton Miller. *Lame Brain Games.* Hal Leonard, 08301578


