

Russell Woodruff
Music 4822
Jr. High Observations

Wednesday December 6, 2006 8-11 a.m.
Mrs. Wallbrook, Copperstown Jr. High

I arrived early and the teacher had not arrived yet, so I had a chance to look around the room. The choir and orchestra share the same room. The white board had a space designated for all the classes on which the teachers had written the schedule for the day and various other things, such as term definitions, missing music, etc. On the sides of the classroom there were lockers for string instruments. On both sides of the whiteboard there were slots for music folders to go in. As I sat in the class students walked in and out of class. They were putting away instruments and just hanging out. They seemed to be very comfortable in the classroom. The teacher didn't arrive until about five minutes before class started. I was nervous that she wouldn't show up, but she walked in and didn't seem flustered or like she was in a hurry.

Glad to see you are paying attention to the physical characteristics of the room.

MEN'S CHORUS

The bell rang and announcements started over the intercom. The boys listened to the announcements pretty well. The teacher had to remind them just a couple of times to be quiet and listen. It was announced that Mrs. Wallbrook's class had come in third place for the Sub for Santa competition. All the boys were excited about that. After the announcements, Mrs. Wallbrook collects money for the Sub for Santa competition instead of waiting for the student body officers to come around with the collection envelope. I thought this was an effective classroom management technique. She can then get class started and minimize the distraction when the officers come.

Mrs. Wallbrook played a chord and most students immediately stand up. The teacher didn't have to explain any of the warm-ups the students just knew the order and how they went. I was extremely impressed with that. I would like to see how she starts her classes at the beginning of the year. It was very obvious right from the beginning of the class that she has a routine she expects the students to follow and I would love to see how she lets them know about it. During the warm-ups, two students sat at the front of the class and took roll. They knew who was absent because the boys were in a seating arrangement. There were no chairs, but they were sitting on the raisers in a specific order.

The teacher uses nonverbal cues (musical cues in this case) to give students directions. The teacher has clearly communicated behavioral expectations.

After warm-ups Mrs. Wallbrook checked which students they had marked absent and made sure it was correct. One boy they had marked absent was actually there, but sitting in the wrong spot. She asked the boy to move to his correct spot and the boys corrected the roll. **The teacher gives responsibilities to the students**

After the roll, the teacher put on a portable microphone. I think that is a great thing to have. Then she doesn't have to worry about trying to talk over the students or strain her voice. It also became useful while they were singing. She could sing a part that was struggling and they could hear it and follow

better. I too think this amplification system can be very useful as long as it isn't abused. I've been in some classes where it is so loud and the volume of the students keeps rising and so the teacher keeps turning it up. Personally, I couldn't stand that.

The students had started talking while the teacher was hooking up her microphone, the teacher said "123, Eyes on me" It would be interesting to see them practice this earlier in the year. and the students stopped talking very quickly. They were preparing for their concert the next day so the teacher needed to give them some instructions about the dress rehearsal and concert. The boys kept asking questions and wouldn't let the teacher explain. Finally, Mrs. Wallbrook got the boys to stop talking and listen as she explained about what would happen the next day. She then let the boys ask any questions they still had.

The collectors for the Sub for Santa then came in and Mrs. Wallbrook gave them the money they had already collected. The boys got excited about that and were talking a lot. Mrs. Wallbrook stood at the front and waited for them to get quiet. As they were quieting down, one student raised his hand and started to ask a question. The teacher interrupted him saying, "Raising your hand does not give you permission to talk." The boy stopped talking and raised his hand and then the teacher called on him. I thought this was a good example of correcting behavior because it lets the student know what is inappropriate and gives them the opportunity to correct the behavior.

The teacher had a student accompanist from this choir. I think it is so important to give the students an opportunity to develop that skill. I agree. Effective education allows students to become independent learners and musically independent. So many schools now are hiring accompanists and eliminating the chance for students to develop that skill. I feel very strongly about this because it was in junior high that I really started to accompany. When I got into high school there was a marked difference between those at my school who had already had an opportunity to accompany and those from the other school who had not. So, I was really excited that Mrs. Wallbrook was using a student accompanist.

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen: After a section with long, sustained notes, the teacher asked the students to describe how to stagger breath. They gave various responses to which she gave comments, such as "good try", "you're on the right track", or "that's almost there". After getting the correct response, she demonstrated how to fade in and out so their entrances and exits couldn't be heard.

Other repertoire: Light the Candles of Freedom and Sleigh Ride. Candles seemed to be the theme for this concert. I think this is a terrific theme because you could incorporate so many different cultural themes from the Northern Hemisphere: Solistice, Divali, Advent, Hanukkah, & Kwanazaa. Many of the other choirs had songs about candles as well. I think it is nice to have themes for the concert. It gives it some continuity throughout.

The teacher has a rule about no gum. During the rehearsal if she noticed that someone was chewing it, all she had to do was point at the student, say gum and he immediately went to spit it out. Again, I was very impressed that the students knew all the class rules and the teacher only had to give them cues to get them back into line.

The teacher has some sort of point system that the students were pretty excited about. They received points for rehearsing God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen well and all the boys rejoiced. I noticed later that all the classes had a number by their class name and this was the number of points. It was written on the white board where everyone could see and they seemed to be in competition for something.

CONCERT CHOIR

As soon as the bell rang, Mrs. Wallbrook was ready to get started. She reminded some girls that they weren't supposed to sit on the stacked chairs in the back of the class. Again the students were sitting on the floor on the risers in a seating arrangement and two students were at the front taking roll. She starts again with explaining the schedule for the next day.

For warm-ups she does the same routine and all the students knew exactly what to do. During warm-ups some of the students were talking. The teacher said, "I hear a lot of chit-chatting and not enough singing." She also asks for more sound and then modifies that to "good sound" when some boys start yelling.

They spent a lot of time in this class getting the standing arrangement organized. The teacher went row by row and helped everyone find their windows. She reminded them how to find their windows on their own by remembering whom they were in front of. I think it's more effective to have them look at the people in front of them because then they don't have to turn around.

Repertoire: Be a Candle of Hope, Baby it's Cold Outside, Hallelujah Chorus, By Candle Light.

For this class a hired accompanist came. She played the intro to the first song, and then some of the kids started singing, but the teacher didn't start conducting and the pianist followed her. The teacher did this to emphasize the importance of watching the director. She told the students that she would not start until all eyes were on her, no one was talking and they all had correct posture. I think it's important to emphasize posture. It's so important to singing and a lot of times it's gets looked over.

For Baby it's Cold Outside they moved to a new arrangement. The teacher counted down from ten to help them move quickly. They reviewed the choreography and discussed how it might have to be a little different when they get into the auditorium for the performance. I was impressed that she was successful at getting junior high boys to not only dance, but to touch girls as well. She seemed to treat these kids almost like a high school choir in what she expected of them and the results were great. I was curious if you noticed ways the choreography described or interpreted various musical events.

In the Hallelujah chorus, they sang the first phrase and Mrs. Wallbrook stopped them. She asked them what happened to make her stop. They were emphasizing the "jah" instead of the "lu". I like how she encouraged them to evaluate their own performance before guiding them to what needed to be changed. Effective teachers have students involved in the evaluation of their own progress. I think that is important in developing good musicians. During this song, one student was playing with her cell phone. The teacher walked up and stuck out her hand and the phone was given to her. This was another example of the teacher not having to explain what the rules were, but just cue them to bring them back into line. Nonverbal cue

At the beginning of By Candlelight, the piano has a fairly long introduction. The accompanist started and there was a lot of talking. Mrs. Wallbrook stopped everyone and reminded them that the intro was the piano solo and it is rude to talk during someone's solo. She also talked about taking time to get into the mood of the piece and prepare to sing.

They ended the last song about two minutes before the bell rang. Instead of just letting the students mess around for two minutes, she said quiz time and asked questions about when and where they were supposed to be for their dress rehearsal and concert the next day. I thought this was great because she didn't lose control of the class and was able to reiterate important information.

CHORALAIRES/CHAMBER CHOIR

This choir apparently had a big performance all day the day before. The teacher acknowledged how well they did and that she understood that they were tired, but they still needed to rehearse a few things that day. She again explained the rehearsal schedule for the next day. She talked about how this choir, because it is the “elite” choir needed to be an example for the other groups. She warned against thinking they were “hot shots” because they were in this choir and that the rules about attendance and paying attention still applied to them. They also talked about costumes and other props they needed to bring. I think it is important that the teacher address the issue of kids thinking they are better than others because of which performing ensemble they belong to. I think this occurs in every school, but it is hardly ever acknowledged by the teacher. I think if the teacher does acknowledge it and emphasizes that it is not appropriate the students may be less apt to act this way.

For warm-ups the teacher started the same way that she did in both the other classes. When they began about half the students were participating. The teacher said, “54321, let’s go” and started again. This time everyone was with her.

Repertoire: 12 Groovy Days of Christmas, Believe, Bid i Bom, Reindeer Rock, Sisters, Breath of Heaven, Hallelujah.

Because they had a big performance the day before and one coming up the next day, this rehearsal was spent doing a lot of talking through things or rehearsing short sections. This was good because it gave the student’s voices a chance to relax and not be overworked.

On a few of the songs they are doing choreography. The teacher talked about certain movements and asked the students to please be appropriate in all the movements. She even went to the extent of pointing out a few individuals and asked them to be careful in the movements they make. I was so glad that she would do this. I think kids, especially this age group, will test limits and see how far they can go. When teachers or parents don’t set up and tell them when things are inappropriate they will go on doing them and test the limits further. If you think about it, testing our environment is why we have survived as species for millions of years. We’re constantly testing our environments and it is how we learn to survive and hopefully thrive. I think at this age you have a better chance of getting them to listen and change their behavior than if it escalates into high school.

On Reindeer Rock the girls were having a hard time with the words. They sang through phrases multiple times to get familiar with them and Mrs. Wallbrook came up with different pictures they could think about to remember the words i.e. A reindeer dancing as he played the guitar for “dancer on lead guitar”. She also defined a few words to help them be able to picture what they were singing about. Teacher uses metaphors

There was a lot of talking all through the rehearsal, Mrs. Wallbrook threatened a few times to take a point away and finally took two points away because they kept talking. This quieted them down for quite a while. I wasn’t able to ask her what the points were for, but it was quite an effective method to help with classroom management.

On Breath of Heaven they ran through a few sections. Mrs. Wallbrook demonstrated what she didn’t want to hear by breathing every 2 measures. She then asked what needed to be fixed and the students all knew the answer. This was another good way to help them develop listening and evaluating skills they can use to improve their own singing.

They were singing through the Hallelujah chorus as the bell rang. Mrs. Wallbrook said, "I'd like to finish this", but everyone was clearly ready to leave and walking towards the door. She then said, "Give me one more page". The students continued singing, but were waiting at the door ready to leave. At the end of the page, she stopped them and they immediately ran out the door. I was impressed that they would stay there even if they were hovered at the door.

SUMMARY:

I really enjoyed observing these classes. I was most impressed with her classroom management and got some good ideas that I would like to incorporate into my own classroom, like a predictable set of warm-ups and having students take roll. I also was very impressed with the size and sound of her classes. First of all, just in the three choirs I observed she had 50-70 kids in each. And she had two other classes that I did not see. *And they sounded pretty good as well. In the men's chorus she had to work a lot with getting the right pitches, but on the songs that they had those pitches down, it was a nice, clear, even tone.* In the other two choirs, they sounded like they could be high school choirs. I like that she didn't teach down to them. It was great to observe this program.

I recently was listening to another middle school choir and I was struck by how much more mature the girls were than the boys. The girls could sing better in tune than the boys and were so much more physically coordinated, and I started thinking how typical this was. The issue of changing voices of course is very real, but I asked myself why did we evolve this way? Why is it that boys were struggling with singing and moving yet the girls generally seem more developed. And I thought that this is also an evolutionary advantage. If you read the article "Virtual Panel of Experts," one of the experts suggests that music is a logical precursor to language in that it helps humans develop social bonds. This is why lullabies are so prevalent. Therefore we could guess that our survival as a species is attributed to creating a social bond between mother and infant and it is (or was) essential that upon reaching child-bearing age, girls had to sing in order for their infants to survive.

50 points for this assignment