

quips and manifestations as annoying pessimism, then we may miss an opportunity to get to the root of the issue and help them hold a more positive view of their singing. If the root of the problem is never discovered, then we may lose these people as singers.

As with my participants, once we discussed their views and the negative manifestations were identified, they allowed themselves to use the exercises to develop their voices while taking on a more positive vocal viewpoint. Sydney, when asked at the culmination of the lessons how she viewed herself as a singer, responded, “My perception of myself has changed because I realize that with a little knowledge and encouragement, I am able to sing! I feel more confident. That makes me relax more. I will definitely continue to sing!”

Beg, Borrow, and Steal: A Survival Guide for the Rural Choral Teacher

Elizabeth Batey
Sawtooth Middle School
Meriden, Idaho
(Used with permission of the
Northwest Division Newsletter)

In my teaching career I’ve had the opportunity to teach in three very distinct, very different school districts in the Northwest. My first school district was urban. My current school district is suburban, and the third district, in which I have spent the majority of my time, was rural. Each position has had certain advantages and challenges depending upon socio-economic status of the students, administrative support, and the content I was required to teach.

Most of our Idaho ACDA members are rural choral directors. The reality of our great state of Idaho, and many states like ours, is that we may be the only music instructor in the district or one of a handful in your district. We live where agriculture abounds and are literally surrounded by it. When I open the back door to my choir room, I can see a pasture of goats.

At my last school, the grounds were surrounded by beet fields. This can be challenging when trying to create a choral program that will be respected and cherished by your school and community. While I am not an expert on the subject, I

have had some success as a rural choral director, and I’d like to share some of my tips and tricks for building and maintaining a choral program in a rural area.

Professional Development

Attend as many choral/musical professional development opportunities as you possibly can. For me, this means attending the annual October ACDA retreat in Sun Valley, Idaho, to work with clinicians from around the country. When you are the only music teacher in your building, the district, the town, or the county, it helps to hone your craft as often as you can. Most of the time I pay for these trips out of my pocket, but I feel it is money well spent.

There are institutions, such as CapEd, who will sponsor teachers to go to conferences. They take a little more work on your part. If conferences won’t work for you, a master’s degree may be an avenue worth exploring. The important thing is to stay on top of your game and hone your craft.

Networking

The teachers you meet while at conferences are invaluable! It is important to write down e-mail addresses and enter numbers into your phone. When you are working on a unit of solfège and remember the gentlemen from Boise who had an amazing lesson on teaching intervals, you can e-mail him and ask for the lesson plans.

Perhaps you are in an area where there are no jazz festivals within 250 miles, but you discover a teacher in a neighboring town who is working on a jazz unit at the same time as you. You could arrange a mini-choir festival where your choir takes a field trip to that school for the day. You then rehearse a combined number, and the other teacher hosts a scat workshop while you work with the combo. Both choirs share a concert that night. The possibilities are limited only by your budget and your imagination.

Share Facilities, Music, and Equipment

One thing I never have enough of is money. If you are a choir teacher who has a surplus, please share your secret! For the rest of us, sharing resources may be the way to go. I love it when my colleagues invite me to raid their music libraries. It’s almost like Christmas! If your choirs cannot fit on your risers, a fantastic problem to have, ask if you could borrow a few sets

from a neighboring school. All it takes is a little sweat and time.

At my current school, I do not have an auditorium. I'm the type of director who refuses to perform in a gym. My choices are to go to a school with an auditorium or to find another acoustically pleasing location. Luckily, the high school I feed into has been gracious enough to host us and provide the equipment we need to have our concerts. You may have to pay a fee to rent a facility, but it is often worth it to help your students feel successful.

A note on borrowing someone else's facilities, music, or equipment: treat the equipment better than you would your own. My mother taught me to leave someone's home in better condition than when I arrived. When things have gone wrong, I have offered to replace or cover the cost of any damage incurred. Also, a token of thanks for their consideration is always appreciated and thoughtful.

Providing Performance Attire

Middle school choir programs may not have the budget or resources to provide the performance attire we would all desire. If you are not a stickler for formal attire, a choir t-shirt can be purchased for under \$10 in most cases. If that is outside your students' economic capabilities, choose a color and ask the students to dress accordingly. For example, our school colors are red and black, so I have asked my students to dress in all black with red accessories. I try not to stress the parents, so I encourage my students to borrow from siblings, parents, friends, or as a last resort, go thrift store shopping.

When it comes to concerts, the last thing I want to think about is whether or not the students have matching outfits. Would I like that? Yes. Will it ever happen at this school? Probably not. If you must have matching attire, consider choir robes. You can find robes on Craig'sList or donated by area churches. It's truly amazing what people will give away to benefit your program if you ask.

Fundraising

This is a delicate subject in many schools and districts. A choir program is an expensive program. I try and fundraise as little as possible. It makes me very uncomfortable to sell products. Even if I encourage the students not to, some go door to door. Instead, I have set up a donation account through my district into which parents can simply donate if they have the funds instead of buying a product where the choir only gets

50%, at best, of the profit.

Another option is to have a benefit concert or recital. I've had students who couldn't afford to go to All-State, so they put on a concert and asked for donations to help them get there. You will be surprised by how much you receive.

A first-year band teacher friend was not familiar with how to budget for the year. He spent his entire allocation before festival. When he realized the mistake, he told the parents that they were short the funds needed to go to festival. He placed a box on the edge of the concert stage and announced that any monies donated would help them get to festival. By the end of the concert, he had collected more money than my kids selling candy bars for a month.

Cross Over to the Dark Side

Get involved with as many programs at your school as you possibly can. When you teach at a smaller school, you may struggle to get students into the choir room. If you make yourself visible, accessible, and approachable, the students will be drawn into the choir. You might coach if you love basketball or help the National Junior Honor Society on its latest project. It takes effort, but the reward is immense.

Advocate for Your Program

Get out into the school and community. Show the students what a valuable asset choir is to the school's culture and their well-being. Sing at retirement homes. Organize a volunteer project for the community or carol during the holidays. Don't forget to serenade the principal and staff members on their birthdays! Offer to provide the entertainment at a faculty party or community event. Sing the National Anthem at the next district board meeting. Your students will help you come up with ideas if you give them the chance. The ideas are endless. If you integrate yourself into the fabric of the community, people will support you.

Technology

It's ironic that I'm talking about technology. I'm technologically illiterate in most cases; however, when we find ourselves struggling for ideas about teaching a concept in a fresh way, needing help with translations, or any number of challenges unique to our profession, technology may be the answer.

I love the internet. When I need to demonstrate the difference between healthy breathing and poor breathing technique, YouTube has hundreds of examples for my students. I can easily Skype my friends at the University of Idaho for help with translations and pronunciation. There are dozens of apps for teaching the elements of music in fun and interactive ways. These days, there is not much that cannot be accomplished through technological means.

Concerts

This seems like a no-brainer, but it is important. We must plan and execute our concerts with our students, administration, and audience in mind. Far too often, I find myself looking through music and wanting to choose music I like. What elements should I teach? What will sound great and cast the students in a positive light? What musical works are most impressive? It is good to think about these questions; however, we must remember that our ears and tastes have been developed through training and a variety of music experiences. That may not translate well for our students.

Here are the questions I ask myself before I decide to teach any work: (1) Does this music teach the concepts my students need to learn? (2) Will it challenge them without being frustrating? (3) Will my administration be appropriately impressed by the cross-curricular nature of the work? (4) Will the parents enjoy sitting through this music? To make it into my concert repertoire, I must have said yes to at least three of the four questions.

Teaching music can be a lonely job in a rural district. Remember, you are making a difference in the lives of your students. There is a way to accomplish your goals. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to e-mail me. I would love to hear what has worked for you. May you have a wonderful and successful year!

Author's Note: These tips and tricks were designed for a middle school choral program and can be modified or adjusted for a high school or elementary choral program.

Choral Zen: How a Healthy Attitude Makes a Better You and a Better Choral Universe

Timothy Glasscock
Bellarmine University
Louisville, Kentucky
(Used with permission of the author)

We've all done it—you see another choral director having a real triumph and suddenly you find yourself engaging in one of the seven deadly sins—probably envy. Does this make you a bad person? Hardly. It does, however, show a common human frailty that, if not dealt with and ultimately overcome, could seriously hamper your ability to enjoy successes and be a positive influence in the world.

We all know both types of musical professionals: the consummate, grounded, nurturing, positive type who we want to be like, and the competitive, jealous, scheming, vicious type we avoid at all costs. Type number one reminds us of all the mentors who brought us through our early years and gave us the inspiration to carry on the musical traditions that we love so dearly. Type number two reminds us of all the human stumbling blocks who might inspire anyone to switch careers as quickly as possible. So how do we become the embodiment of all that is right with our profession and not the embodiment of the old joke “What is the only thing two choral directors can agree on? The ineptitude of another choral director.”

The first step toward being the positive individual we are all capable of being is to deal with the negative voice lurking inside us. Turn it toward the “light.” How do we do that? First, recognize that the voice is there and does not represent our best interest. Now why, you may ask, would we be intrinsically equipped with an inner voice that is not engaged in seeking our best interest?

That is a complicated question that can only be answered through deep study of the human psyche but can be at least brushed upon by stating that the voice IS concerned with our best interest but basically only with our exclusive and selfish best interest—that is, our own good to the *exclusion* of everyone else! Through a combination of nature and nurture, we develop this inner dialogue. Because the dynamic of being reared by responsible parents and caring teachers includes quite a bit of admonition to be kind, fair, and friendly, we