

High School Observation Report

1. Prepare some interview questions in advance of the field visit and report on the interview. Review the suggested questions on p.33 for the middle school teacher and p. 98 for the high school teacher. (BT 2-2/ 6-5 p.33/ p.98)

How do you deal with the variety of levels and groups?

He made sure to treat each group as his top group, making sure that he set incredibly high expectations no matter what level of students he was working with. In the first group, he made sure to reveal to us how many of them were first year students and did not have prior music experience, and yet, the level they had achieved by this time of year was astounding.

What is the best way to interact with high school students?

He mentioned being very direct the students, even making sure to talk “too much” with them. He was very talkative during the rehearsal, but each word used was very efficient and gave them something to think about as a singer. He was friendly with the students, but still held a status of “teacher” in the classroom.

2. Observe warm-ups used by the teacher and notate them. Analyze the apparent objective for each exercise and if you think it is achieved. Include what worked and why, and what you might do differently. (BT 3-3/ 7-2 p.50/ 112)

Bubbling “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee”

- Work on moving the air
- Has them hold the top pitch
- Repeats song up a half step, and then another whole step up
- This warm-up forces the group to sing using a relaxed tone, as it is practically impossible to achieve the lip bubble without being relaxed
- Ends with bubbling a siren

Bubbling scale of thirds going up and down

- Has them do long slow breaths, works on breath control and preparation for good tone
- Goes up a half-step in repetitions
- Has the voice parts sing in canon, going up starts with altos and then sopranos, going down starts with sopranos and then altos
 - This allowed the group to be listening to themselves as well as each other, working on creating a good sound and harmony
- Has them move to using “loo”
- Moves back to bubbling to work on “pitch to pitch”
 - Talks about “doorbelling” it, or making sure to land right on the correct pitch

Bubbling a vocalise

- Moves down a half-step on repetitions
- Moves to “loo” vocable
 - Talks about doing the “oo” face before starting, make sure to always breath with mouth already prepared to sing the first syllable
 - Helps students to produce the correct syllable and sound with minimal lip movement
- Encourages student to produce big sound
 - Students actually do produce a bigger sound

“Belle donna”

Bel-le bel-le bel-le bel-le don-na, bel-le bel-le bel-le bel-le don-na, bel-le bel-le bel-le bel-le do-on - na.

- Has them snort to get resonance and raise the soft palate
- Very resonant and round sound produced by the choir

“D-d-d-d-deet”

D - d - d - d-deet, d - d - d - d-deet, d - d - d - d-deet, d - d - d - d-deet.

- Has them work on focusing and cornering the sound
- Also focus on having the correct number of repetitions
- Repetitions go up a minor third
- Has them knock with index finger on the hard bony area right above their lip while singing
 - Gets them to knock through the hard palate and get that core sound

3. Observe the choral rehearsal to analyze the overall plan and learning objectives, as well as steps to achieve each of the objective and its assessment. (BT 5-5 p.84)

For the first group of beginning women’s chorus, before singing the first song, the teacher has the group sing the scale that the key is in, allowing them focus their minds on the tonal center of the piece. Noticing that the sound is too dark for the song, he has them sing in the darkest tone that they have, and then the brightest. He then moves to working on some rhythms, and points to a chart on the board that has breakfast food items aligned with certain rhythmic patterns; each pattern is in the piece at some point. This makes the rhythm learning a bit less tedious, and also allows the teacher to go quickly from one rhythm to the next simply by pointing at the specific word on the board. He also asks the students to identify where in the piece these rhythms appear.

The teacher then has the students sing through a phrase using solfege, and then has them do it through audiation. He has them sing it again, and it is considerably better. He also has

students raise their hands to mention where they made a mistake, which is a helpful way to identify places that the students were struggling with and also a way for the teacher to assess a student's participation and personal progress. It is then revealed that these students were actually going through this piece for the first time, and through the techniques that they've learned in the year, they were able to achieve a wonderful sound even on the first day.

In the second class (advanced chamber choir), the teacher mainly ran through a series of pieces that were being prepared for an upcoming concert. Little comments were made, and it was easy to tell how much preparation and focus the group had placed on the program. Pitches were accurate right from the first sound, and the choir was capable of creating a plethora of colors through their voices.

The teacher talked a bit to us about the arrangement of the pieces in the program, and how he wanted to make sure there was a variety of pieces and performance styles. He also talked of the practicality of making sure keys were somewhat aligned with one another, and there were several pieces that started without any sort of starting pitch, so students had to be able to memorize the note from the previous piece and apply that to the first pitch of the next song.

4. Any other observations.

The teacher talked about the meanings of conscious/unconscious incompetence and conscious/unconscious competence, and about how he was trying to work with the students to eventually attain a higher level of unconscious competence. I thought this was a very helpful concept that would help students in their own personal journey of finding the best sound they can produce, along with the reasons that they are able to produce it.