

Working With 7th-Grade Male Singers – A “Hands-On” Approach

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Embedded Theme: The Importance and the Power of Affirmation

Part I: Six Common Problems For 7th Grade Male Singers

(Preparation: If needed, find a way to gain a bit of privacy.)

1. The “Non-Supporter”
 - a. Prompt the student with a pitch. Be wise when prompting.
 - b. Find something to affirm.
 - c. Teacher matches the student pitch, and prompts again.
 - d. Find a way to make the pitches match, then affirm.
 - e. Go up a whole step, but warn the student that it will need to be louder.
 - f. Affirm every attempt.
 - g. Make a wise decision on how far to push and when to stop.
 - h. Reward the student with a final affirmation, and move to the next guy.

2. The Octave Higher Guy
 - a. Prompt the student with a pitch. Be wise when prompting.
 - b. Find something to affirm.
 - c. Teacher matches the student pitch, and prompts again.
 - d. Find a way to make the pitches match, then affirm.
 - e. Once pitch matching has occurred, proceed down diatonically.
 - f. Affirm every attempt.
 - g. When descending, encourage the student to sing softer each time.
 - h. Be mindful that there may be a changed voice hidden in there.
 - i. Reward the student with a final affirmation, and move to the next guy.

3. The Guy with the “Bad Aim”
 - a. Prompt the student with a pitch. Be wise when prompting.
 - b. Find something to affirm.
 - c. Try the next prompt with advice on singing softer or louder.
 - d. If bad aim continues, try a three-note prompt with the middle note up a step.
 - e. Find a way to end with success and move on to the next guy.

4. The “Brief” Singer
 - a. Prompt the student with a pitch. Be wise when prompting.
 - b. Find something to affirm.
 - c. Ask the student to hold for a count of 4 or 5, demonstrating first.
 - d. Find a way to end with success and move on to the next guy

5. The “Nervous” Guy
 - a. Prompt the student with a pitch. Be wise when prompting.
 - b. If no attempt comes, go to another guy. Tell the nervous guy you’ll be back.
 - c. Repeat as necessary. You can probably outlast him.
 - d. Affirm any reasonable attempt, and move on to the next guy.

6. The “Super Bass”
 - a. Prompt the student with a pitch. Be wise when prompting.
 - b. Find something to affirm.
 - c. Match his pitch (at pitch or an octave or two higher)
 - d. Repeat until the pitches are matched. Affirm.
 - e. Go up a step. Ask the boy to sing louder each time. Affirm each time.
 - f. Keep track of the “record high” notes. Give up at a wise time.
 - g. End with affirmation of the new “record.”

Things to ignore temporarily:

- Bad Vowels
- Odd Timbre
- Using the Wrong Register
- Inappropriate Volume
- Scooping

Part II: Using Your Voice to Demonstrate Vocal Elements to Beginning Male Singers

1. Open Mouth – Practice demonstrating “before” and “after”
2. Support – Practice demonstrating “before” and “after”
3. Placement – Learn to demonstrate from “one” to “five”
4. Singing “On The Breath” – Practice demonstrating “before” and “after”
5. The “Lifted Soft Palate” – Practice demonstrating “before” and “after”
6. Changing Your “Intensity” – Learn to demonstrate “low” and “high” intensity
7. The Head Voice and Falsetto – Be able to demonstrate both. (males only)
 - a. Videos available online: Google search: Dan Davison Head Voice
8. Singing With Agility – Be able to demonstrate “melismas”
9. Be able to demonstrate in all styles: Jazz, classical, country, chant, warm.
10. Be able to demonstrate a good “schwa” vowel

Part III: Some Very Practical Tips For Working With Middle-Level Choirs

1. Greet every student warmly every day. Teach them to respond warmly.
 - a. You may want to use a fist bump or an “elbow” handshake.
 - b. Use their name every day if you can.
2. Always have a seating chart - - especially on the first day of school.
3. Use grades to your advantage.
 - a. Give regular grades for rehearsal skills:
 - i. Readiness, focus, cooperation, transitions
 - b. Give regular grades for musical skills:
 - i. Singing effort, posture, expression, reading music.
4. Only when absolutely necessary, use extrinsic motivators.
 - a. My favorite: Points (0-3) are given for three criteria, then multiplied.
 - b. A reward is given when the class accrues 250 or 350 points.
5. Use a “comfy chair” as a reward.
 - a. “The best sight-singer will get to use the “comfy chair all day tomorrow.”
6. For classes with beginning boys, keep the tempos and music appealing.
 - a. (See handout on recommended literature at dandavisonmusic.com)
7. Don’t forget to include rhythmic dictation.
 - a. Kids see it as a game, and it results in great learning.

8. If you possible can, use a microphone. (sparingly)
 - a. A calm voice on a microphone contributes to a calm atmosphere.
9. Use affirmation throughout the class.
 - a. "In that last song, I saw three people who were very expressive. They are..."
 - b. The best sight-singer can sit in the "comfy chair" the rest of the period.
10. Use sitting down is a reward.
 - a. "I will let the class sit down if not even one person talks. OK. Try it."
11. Use "proximity" to your advantage.
 - a. Get out from behind the piano.
 - b. Use the entire front of the room as your territory. "Walk" your territory.
 - c. If needed, work a section on a passage from the oppisite side of the room.
12. Marginalize your "less enthusiastic" students.
 - a. You have four "corner positions of your seating chart." Use them.
 - b. Let the "more enthusiastic" students join forces in the center of the section.
13. Automate your class. (A student for every job)
 - a. Select a student to answer the phone.
 - b. Select a student to handle displays and Powerpoints.
 - c. Select a student to handle microphones.
 - d. (Maybe) select a student to take a preliminary stab at taking roll.
 - e. (Maybe) have a student assigned to bathroom passes.
 - f. Have a student assigned to "lost music."
14. Get your students into "right brain" as early in the period as possible.
 - a. Perhaps use an opening song that is expressive.
 - b. If you can, get every student "acting" when the bell rings.
 - c. Two "affirmations" per day will usually do the trick.
15. If you can, take roll when they are not looking.
 - a. "Everyone please do hand signals on Lesson 2-C" (Then do roll)
16. Make 7-8 portions to your lesson plan every day. (And DO written lesson plans!)
 - a. Opening song
 - b. Vocal exercises for tuning, range, agility (melismas) tone, vocal registers, etc.
 - c. Sight-singing
 - d. Music theory, note taking, flash cards, tests.
 - e. Ear Training
 - f. Music listening (always with ratings - - kids notice more when they rate.)
 - g. Rhythm work - rhythmic dictation or clapping or counting.
 - h. Solo tryouts. (If you can, find songs with 4 or more solos.)
 - i. First piece of literature: Start with a problem spot.
 - j. Second piece of literature: Less detail than the first piece. More run-through.
 - k. Working especially on stage presence. Assign a "watcher" to pick the best kids.
 - l. The "dessert" literature. End with the favorite. Not much stopping.
 - m. Ending routines: Chairs straighten. Garbage up. Folders away.
 - n. You get to go early if you answer correctly: "What is the capital of Idaho?"
 - i. Keeping their attention all the way to the bell.

For handouts go to:

dandavisonmusic.com
> ACDA Notes