

SINGING SONS II: *Inspiring Middle School Boys to Sing Where They Ring*

Dan LeJeune, Middle School Choral Director, The Blake School, Hopkins, Minnesota
Handout and resources online at mrlj.com

"Be affirming for a boy that his vulnerability is human and acceptable. Once you understand that to be human is to be vulnerable, whether you are a boy or a girl, then you can go on and be brave, confident, and productive from a solid foundation. You don't have to hide your vulnerability from yourself, and so you are not deeply afraid or fragile".

From "Raising Cain" by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson

A. Nurturing Boys Voices from Six to Sixteen

1. Steps to Success

- Listen often to singers alone.
- Identify range and tessitura of your singers.
- Choose repertoire that fits singers' strengths.
- Encourage students to sing where they ring.
- Mask a choir's challenges by considering all voicings and styles.
- Develop artistry & musicianship with singers sharing different roles and parts.

2. Goals

- Boost boys' confidence through singing.
- Choose music that helps boys sing where they ring.
- Identify strategies for creating an environment in which boys feel empowered to sing.
- Extract & adapt parts within a score if you need to custom fit a boys voice to the music.

3. It's all about Community!

- Every voice change is unique and frustration is common no matter what stage.
- Everything we do should be filtered through a lens of inclusion.
- How can we tap in to the unique strengths of every student?
- Model respectful interaction and feedback that includes the boys.

4. Strategies for Working with Male Changing Voices

- Place boys with changing voices near you.
- Let boys sing alone and unaccompanied.
- Be prepared to transpose at any time.
- Avoid associating gender with parts.
- Group 2 or more boys singing similar parts together.
- Assure boys that voice change is normal and indicates they are maturing.

5. Hold Them Accountable!

- Do tune ups-in class, outside of class.
- Encourage tuning buddies-let them work during warm-ups
- Provide opportunities for small groups or solos.
- Give feedback in person or virtually/in writing.
- Challenge their intellect (see Critical Response Protocol-Perpich Center)

6. Helpful Musical Elements in Repertoire for Changing Male Voices

- Limited range within some parts (6th)
- Melodies that can be doubled in octaves
- Closed chord harmonies
- Repetitive/ostinato patterns within contrapuntal harmony
- Melodies shared by more than one part
- Motives that are easy to hear, sing, and remember.
- Phrases with descending minor thirds
- Staggered entrances
- Paired parts-SA/TB or ST/AB

Common Octave Naming System

Stages of male voice change (Cooksey)

Scientific	C-1	C0	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9
Helmholtz	C,,	C,,	C,	C	c	c'	c''	c'''	c''''	c'''''	c''''''
Organ	64 Foot	32 Foot	16 Foot	8 Foot	4 Foot	2 Foot	1 Foot	3 Line	4 Line	5 Line	6 Line
Name	Dbl Contra	Sub Contra	Contra	Great	Small	1 Line	2 Line	3 Line	4 Line	5 Line	6 Line
Midi	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
Midi Note	0	12	24	36	48	60	72	84	96	108	120

B. Repertoire Considerations for 5/6 Mixed Treble in Schools (Stage 1 only)

- Unison to 4-part music
- Ranges of A3-F5, with C#4-A#4 tessitura
- Able to sing SA parts with wide range
- Music with equal voicing possible.
- If unison, be sure there are sections for voices in transition to sing.
- If two parts, make sure one stays approximately between B3 and F5 and the other between A3 and D5 for those who may start the voice change.

Repertoire Considerations for 5/6 Mixed Treble in Schools (Stage 1 AND 2)

- Choose music with some parts below C5.
- Include music with narrow range melodies (5-7 notes)
- Simple or repetitive lower harmonies help boys develop confidence in new range.
- Find music which features the lower part singing the melody.
- Look for music with melodies or parts that can be sung in octaves.

C. Repertoire Considerations for 7/8 Boys Only Choir in Middle School (Stages 1-4)

If unison, consider one section for upper, one for lower voices
If two parts, consider those with parts that can be doubled at the octave
If three parts, consider one that stays between C4-C5, one that is between F3-F5,
Avoid baritone notes much below C3-D3.
Carefully assess SAB & 3 part mixed voicing. 4-part SATB music usually works better.
Avoid part writing that requires boys to sing awkward leaps. Stepwise is best.
Closed position harmonies can be quite effective and give the choir a fuller sound.

D. Repertoire Considerations for 7/8 Boys Only Choir in Middle School (Stages 1-4)

Pitch range D3-F#4, tessitura F#3-D4 but realistically, best range is F3-C4.
Part assignment requires creativity and sometimes incorporates multiple parts.
Voicing should have four distinct ranges that allows a boy to pivot from part to part if needed. Stages 1-5 possible.
Pieces with closed chord harmonies work well.
Balance contrapuntal/homophonic
Emphasize world cultures and get them out of themselves and thinking about others.
Choose music that allows vocal rest within the music. They should not be expected to sing every note of their parts. Their voices are different each day!
Carefully vocalize the falsetto within warm-ups, but realize boys begin to be proud of this new sound so they will use it if you request it!
Choose music that alternates SA with TB or pairs ST/AB.
Avoid parts with many sustained pitches for an extended period of time.
Look for ways a part can be shared between T/B or S/A.
Breath control is an issue as boys learn how to support their new range.

E. Repertoire Considerations for 7/8 Boys Mixed Gender Choir (Stages 1-5)

Seek SATB or TTB music now due to wide variety of male changing voices.
SAB or 3 part mixed music is often too high for baritones and too low for tenors.
Voices beginning to regain some flexibility and can sing more complex lines.
Improved balance with treble voices begins to return.
Voices still require rest within a part. Remind boys they may not have every note of every part yet in their range but they can sing what feels comfortable.
Avoid bass parts below A2 or tenor parts below F3.
While there are glimmers of an emerging SATB sound, they are not ready for high school level repertoire due to limited range and endurance.

F. Final Thoughts

Vulnerability enhances connection, connection enhances learning, and learning enhances development. Dr. Brené Brown,

However much we stumble, it is a teacher's burden always to hope, that with learning, a boy's character might be changed, and so, the destiny of a man. From *The Emperor's Club*, Beacon Communications, LLC 2002

Thanks for attending today! Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. See mrlj.com
Dan LeJeune, <dlejeune@blakeschool.org>, 952-988-3639