

# ***SOUND PLACEMENT***

*Warm-ups,  
Vowel Formation,  
And  
Tone Production  
For Children's Choir*

*Indiana Music Educator's Association  
Conference 2011  
Fort Wayne, IN*

*Joshua Pedde  
Stonegate Elementary  
Indianapolis Children's Choir  
[jpedde@zcs.k12.in.us](mailto:jpedde@zcs.k12.in.us)  
317-517-2181*

# *Sound Placement: A Guide to Choral Tone*

By Joshua Pedde

## **Tone Production**

### **Where do you start?**

#### *The Basic 5:*

- 1) Breath
  - a. The foundation of singing. It is the fuel that powers our instruments. We want to use efficient and even breaths.
- 2) Soft Palette
  - a. We must maximize the space in our mouths by creating lift!
- 3) Tongue
  - a. We must relax this muscle to eliminate tension.
- 4) Placement
  - a. Forward placement will help keep the tone pure and maximize resonance.
- 5) Lips
  - a. This creates vowel unification. A choir sounds its best when each singer's vowel shape is the same!

#### *Beginners vs. Advanced*

First impressions are important! “Good technique is Good technique.”

### **Finding Your Sounds**

#### *Where do you look?*

- 1) Your Organization or School Corp.
- 2) Other Organizations- Recordings / Workshops
- 3) Personal Experimentation

#### *Finding a “Great” Sound*

The description of a great choral sound will vary according to your personal viewpoint, musical experience, and the stylistic elements of the music. Elements that go into this sound include:

- Breath support
- Placement
- Intonation
- Resonance
- Vowel Shapes
- Rhythmic unity
- Expression
- Facial Expression

## **Warm-ups Basics**

### **Why do we warm-up?**

- To find focus and the “inner singer” or the singer’s “spirit”
- To prepare our body, mind, and instrument for singing
- To teach healthy vocal technique
- To build skills as an ensemble
- To prepare musical concepts
- To set the tone of the rehearsal

### **What to do when...**

- Physical / Mental
- Breath
- Tone / Vowels
- Range / Flexibility
- Tuning
- Others- Diction / Phrasing

### **But wait there’s more!**

- They build a safe environment
- It gives a time for feedback

## **Teaching Elements of Warm-ups**

### **Kinesthetic Movement**

- Singers understand and retain musical concepts better when they actively experience them. Instead of talking about a musical concept, try doing a motion and experiencing the music in a new way!
- Examples of movements:
  - Circles with fingers going forward= forward placement
  - Large circles around chest = support
  - Tapping fingers on palm of hand = short
  - Throwing a frisbee = support and energy
  - A flick = short and bright
  - Pointing index fingers and moving forward = forward placement and phrasing

### **Singing Voice**

- Modeling using your voice is one of the most powerful and efficient ways to communicate a musical idea. Rather than talking about what you want, sing it!
- Try modeling Bad vs. Good or A vs. B
- Call and Response

### **Chanting Voice**

- If you are not confident in your singing voice or your voice is tired from a long rehearsal, use your chanting voice as a wonderful alternative. The chant voice is the head voice dominated way of speaking. Speaking in this register replicates many of the sensations of singing and enables singers to experience new vocal techniques in a healthy way.
- Some of the benefits of using the chant voice are:
  - Balanced weight in the voice
  - Unified vowels
  - Phrasing
  - Connecting the breath and sound
  - Eliminating vocal tension

### **Imagery / Metaphors**

*The following areas were developed by Henry Leck and the Indianapolis Children's Choir*

- Choirs benefit from the use of weight and color
  - Light vs. Heavy
  - Bright vs. Dark
- Use a combination of these elements by adding them into a picture
  - Sing that phrase a bright yellow
  - Sing the opening as if you were carrying two heavy bags of groceries.
  - Sing this as if it were a light white cloud
- Use a choral sound that the choirs have heard
  - Sing like you are 23
  - Sound like the best \_\_\_\_\_ choir in the state

### **Warm-ups Examples**

#### **Physical:**

- Lift arms over head to expand ribcage
- Stretching: Arms, Shoulders, Neck, Torso, Etc.
- Backrubs (depending on age)
- Drop forward at the waist and hang limp, like a marionette; then lift up slowly one vertebra at a time until tall, aligned posture is achieved.
- Pull string from the top of your head
- Do Tai Chi or Yoga moves
- Mix it up!

#### **Mental:**

- Be my mirror...
- Yes / No game
- Rhythmic Canon
- Memory Game- Solfege or Rhythmic
- Body percussion

**Breath:**

- Raise arms and push air out on “Shhh”
- Breathe in for four and out on “Shh” or “Sss”
- Breathe for four and then out on a rhythmic pattern
- Consonant pattern: Rap / K / Sh / B

**Vowels:**

- Five note scale on each vowel
  - OO / EE / EH / OH / AH
  - Order done because of tongue

**Range:**

- Find great warm-ups that don't let you go on auto pilot!

**Phrasing:**

- Remember to work on the phrase during all of the warm-up!
- Don't just do a warm-up for the phrase.
- Rounds work well for this!

**Tuning:**

- Build a chord
- Start in unison and move in half steps
- Use solfege

**Diction:**

- Words are at the heart of what we do!
- Use the words not just as syllables
- Focus on the consonants to help the vowels

**Other:**

- Sirens and sighing
- The art of the echo!
  - Start simple with 5 notes
  - Build and make complex
  - Change the length
  - Move tonality

**How to transfer to music...**

## **Things to Think About...**

### **The Choir**

- Great sound starts at the beginning of the rehearsal
- Warm yourself up
- Have the sound you want in your ear before the choir sings.
- The choir is a vocal reflection of YOU!
- What we hear is not what they hear!
- Invite the students to lead and listen
- Know your space from rehearsal room to performance hall
- Teach them everything. Don't dumb it down!
- Beginners vs. Advanced
- Do warm-ups a capella
- Only model for the choir, don't sing with them. This is the time when your ears need to be open!
- Give the singers ownership of the product!

## **Take it to the next level**

### **What can I do next?**

- Work outside your comfort zone! Try new things. It is ok to fail! If you never try, you will never know!
- Take voice lessons. There is always something new to learn.
- Study your scores and see what your singers are going to need from you. How can you prepare them better?
- Invite a guest in that can model great sound. Invite wonderful conductors or singers. This will help expand the choir's sound library and give you more points of reference.
- Take time to self reflect. Keep evaluating your strengths and weaknesses.
- Be positive and happy!

*Don't forget to play with your singers!  
You are doing this because you enjoy it!*