

Answering Questions Relating to Cultural Diversity

Q. How have you have promoted multiculturalism in your music classroom?

A. As a tenth grade choral studies teacher, it is important that I use the knowledge of cultural diversity within the student population. The needs of all learners must be addressed while fostering a sense of community and respect among students. Singing choral works, which support cultural diversity, is essential to student learning. The educational goal of using learning activities and materials, which honor students' ethnic background is important because American education has an obligation to represent the diversity of its student population. Teachers must be sensitive to the demographics of local communities.

One strategy I would use to accomplish this goal would be to use music of various cultures on concert programs. One such song I might use would be the four-part choral arrangement of the folksong Guantanamera. I would prepare the classroom by first decorating the room with photographs of well-know Hispanic vocalists such as Christina Aguilera and Ricky Martin. After vocalizing the chorus in their sections, I would then model proper diction in the Spanish language by illustrating the correct pronunciation of the vowels and consonants with my own voice. In addition, I would then explain, through direct instruction, that the syncopated rhythms in the piece are characteristic of Hispanic music. Furthermore, I would also use interdisciplinary direct instruction to point out that the structure of the work combines a traditional Cuban melody of the 1930's and a verse of poetry written by Jose Marti, a Cuban poet and revolutionary of the nineteenth century. I would assess the students' work by videotaping the concert performance and by having

students write up their reflections in a journal I would play back the video to the entire chorus and open the floor to suggestions for future concerts. I would also work collaboratively with the special education colleague to determine any modifications needed to address the learning needs of all students.

Programming Guantanamera on the spring concert would be effective in achieving the educational goal because, as the best-known Cuban song of all time, parents, relatives, and friends will know that my school is a place in which students can be proud of their ethnic heritage. Singing choral pieces which relates to a student's culture promotes teamwork, academic discipline, and the freedom to express oneself. In addition, research studies indicate that participation in high school music programs is associated with greater academic achievement in general.

Another strategy I would use to accomplish this goal would be to form cooperative learning groups to study the song We Shall Overcome, arranged for mixed choir. We Shall Overcome was the theme song of the civil rights movement and still acts today as a symbol of African-American unity. First, I would ask the class if they knew about any of the social and political events of the 1960's. After transitioning the discussion to public events of that period I would ask if they knew any songs that might have been sung at demonstration and prayer vigils. After the students became familiar with their individual vocal lines of the song, I would divide the students up into mixed voice octets (two sopranos, two altos, two tenors, and two basses). Each group would be provided with a tape recorder. I would then have the groups disperse to different parts of the chorus room and form circles into which they would sing. After the groups had faced the challenge of maintaining a consistent tempo, intonation, and blend in the circle, I

would direct them to take their usual places in their SATB sections. With the chorus now grouped as a whole, I would play back the students' tapes and pose critical thinking questions to them such as "Could hear your own voice on the recording? Did it seem too soft, too loud, or just right?"

This strategy is effective because it encourages the students to listen to each other to achieve a harmonious blend of their voices. When students learn how to listen to each other's voices in chorus class, they may be able to truly hear the voices of others in day-to-day living. The process of singing songs which promote ethnic tolerance helps teenagers mature.

Again, honoring and respecting people from diverse cultural backgrounds is an important goal because American educators have an obligation to represent the diversity of their student populations. Using the music of diverse cultures on concert programs and forming cooperative learning groups are both excellent ways to achieve this goal in a tenth-grade choral studies class.