

Finding the Conductor's Voice: A Curricular Framework for Teaching Choral Conducting at the Undergraduate Level

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Teaching undergraduate choral conducting is challenging for the college instructor. The challenge does not come from a lack of resources; a myriad of textbooks, videotapes, articles, and dissertations exist. The challenge comes, rather, from selecting and prioritizing the material to be presented, meeting the needs of any given class,¹ and structuring the class with a logical flow.

Learning to conduct is complex because conducting is a synthesis of so many facets of musical activity. In order to successfully and artistically translate music from written page to performance, the conductor must master an intricate set of skills. Thus, the undergraduate conducting instructor's responsibility of preparing each of his students for success is formidable.

Instructors of undergraduate conducting courses often focus on technical issues, such as beat patterns, starting and stopping, left-hand independence, and cues. Conductors who emerge from these courses lack the capability to truly make music. These inexperienced conductors are happy if they can avoid disaster. They lack the training to make appropriate decisions about the shape of a piece and to find its true musical meaning.

Conducting students confront additional difficulties when they first face an actual ensemble and attempt to get the ensemble to respond to their gesture. Most musical gestures have little meaning in front of a choir not trained to respond. Students wonder, "How do I get them to watch?" The tendency is often to sacrifice musicality and resort to overly large or otherwise unmusical gestures.

This paper represents an attempt to organize the elements that the author sees as critical for choral conducting students. It represents the author's viewpoint of a framework for teaching undergraduate choral conducting that empowers student conductors to go beyond technical issues, to train the choir to respond to their conducting, and to create music. "Finding the Conductor's Voice" is a process by which a student conductor discovers how to intelligently create music with her own ensemble and make the appropriate and necessary musical decisions that will allow her to find her own expressiveness as a conductor.

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Parameters

The curricular framework discussed below is designed for Choral Conducting, the second semester of a two-semester undergraduate conducting sequence that follows Introductory Conducting. In Introductory Conducting, students learn technical issues such as how to start and stop, conduct beat patterns, and utilize the left hand correctly. The purview of Choral Conducting does not include choral techniques. Consequently this curriculum framework excludes voice classification, choral organization, psychological issues of leadership, achieving blend and balance, and literature selection. Likewise this course does not address the prerequisite skills and knowledge learned in private lessons, ensembles, or courses (ear training, sight singing, dictation, piano, music theory, and music history). Consequently, it is assumed that this course will be taken during the junior year.

This curricular framework also does not address the processes of error detection, vowel formation, and reaction to what one hears during the rehearsal process. To do so would be difficult given the fact that the *ensemble* that each student conducts consists strictly of other students also enrolled in the course. Therefore, students gain minimal experience in shaping phrases, achieving desired nuance, and making on-the-spot corrections based upon what they hear. Without an ensemble to conduct, students do not have the opportunity to change or correct, or to learn techniques of drilling ensemble members until the desired result is obtained. A course designed to follow this course in Choral Conducting, ideally taught in conjunction with a laboratory choral ensemble, would be the appropriate place to address these issues that are problematic for student conductors.

Finally, this curricular framework is not a lesson plan that includes daily outlines. The instructor must develop the exact scope, sequence, and methodology that includes the concepts developed below.

The Purpose of Conducting

To plan an approach for teaching undergraduate choral conducting, the instructor must first examine the purpose of conducting and the role of the conductor. Most certainly the purpose of conducting in the modern day continues to evolve, as it has since the early nineteenth century when conductors began to use batons and "the need for a central figure visually in charge of the ensemble became widely accepted (Botstein, n.d.)."

In 2002, Boonshaft wrote in *Teaching Music with Passion* that "...the purpose of conducting is to *emulate sound in motion* (p. 40)." This definition significantly enhances the definition of conducting found in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* that states that conducting is "the direction of a musical performance by means of visible gestures designed to secure unanimity both of execution and of interpretation. It is one of the most difficult and most rewarding of all musical activities (Westrup, 1980, vol. 4, p. 641)."

An additional dimension of the role of the conductor appears in *The Complete Conductor* by Demaree and Moses (1995), who tell the conductor the following:

Your task is not to exhibit the music but to clarify it. The greatest conductors sometimes can find in the most complex and opaque forms the simplest answers—the essence of "meaning" in these works (p. 405).

In the video recording *The Art of Conducting*, Gardiner (1994) defines conducting music as being similar to conducting electricity when he states that conducting is "...a current being actually passed from one sphere to another, from one element to another."

Achieving this Purpose

How does the instructor prepare the student to achieve the purposes discussed above? Figure 1 attempts to answer this question by providing a framework for organizing Choral Conducting. Each of the elements in the diagram is critical and important.²

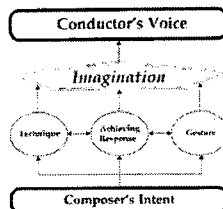


Figure 1. A visual framework for organizing an undergraduate choral conducting course.

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The Composer's Intent

The conductor's voice cannot legitimately be found without a thorough knowledge of the composer's intent. All interpretive decisions must be secondary to the original work of the composer. Indeed, the composer's intent must be the foundation of the conductor's craft:

In writing the score the composer has used symbols to set forth his ideas. Within the limits of his ability he has left a written record of his inspiration. The score is the only clue the composer has on how the music should sound and it is up to him to ferret it out by every means at his disposal. ...In studying the score the conductor is communing with the mind of the composer and, after all, the composer is the one who has created the music and has indicated what is to be done with it (Green & Malko, 1985, p. 21).

Score analysis for discovery of the composer's intent is introduced in the Choral Conducting course. The student must study the score in depth, using all of the musical skills and knowledge at her disposal, in order to lay the foundation for knowledgeably developing a sense of what the music will be. The student uses the written notation to develop an informed picture of the sound, and must also recognize the following:

...knowing the notes and the instrumentation is not enough. The conductor must understand the content of the music. This includes the style, the emotional character, the structural peculiarities (of form, phrasing, harmony, and of the technique of the individual instruments), plus the recognition of the problems that must be dealt with in the rehearsal (Green & Malko, 1985, p. 13).

A procedure designed to assist the undergraduate student to begin to learn this process follows.

Score

1. Sing each melodic line with the dynamics and articulation indicated.

2. Play parts together on the piano to discover harmonic relationships.³
3. Know the meaning of every single symbol on the page and every musical term (Dennis Keene, personal communication, August 2003).
4. Know everything there is to know about the *forces* used. Know the instruments and their transpositions. What is the tessitura of each instrument? Is there a horn entrance, for example, that starts at an extreme range? (Keene, personal communication, August 2003). Consult an instrumentation book such as Kennan's *The Technique of Orchestration* (1970) for this information.
5. Analyze the architecture of the piece or the form or shape of the piece of music. How many measures are devoted to which musical ideas? Which musical material is primary? What is the overall structure of the work? The form may be one with which we are familiar, for example, binary, tertiary, sonata/allegro, rondo, or through-composed.
6. Ascertain which key or keys the composer has chosen. How do these change throughout the piece, and how do these reflect the overall structure? If the piece is a multi-movement work, what are the keys of each movement? How do they relate to one another?
7. Use knowledge of music theory to prioritize what is important about the overall melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre of a piece of music. Is one of these used as a main organizational element? Is the piece based primarily upon melody, harmony, rhythm, or timbre, or a combination of these?
8. Note the compositional techniques the composer employs, again using knowledge from music theory courses. Is the piece primarily polyphonic, imitative, canonic, homophonic, or monophonic? Does the texture change? If so, where, and what might make this significant? If the work is imitative, trace all points of imitation.
9. Perform an event analysis to note and group each discrete musical fragment of the score. The groupings may be very short, and may define a new motif, phrase, and so forth. A new phrase can be "the beginning of a new melody, the entrance of a new group of instruments, new rhythmic patterns, vital dynamic changes, harmonic sequences, and so on (Green & Malko, 1985, p. 37)." Green and Malko call this process "phrasal analysis (p. 37)." Analyzing discrete events in a score can be quite useful, especially in choral and orchestra works.
10. Use music theory knowledge to analyze the melodic and harmonic relationships. Perform a detailed melodic and harmonic analysis of the piece, or important sections of the piece, to see what procedures are being used.

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11. Ascertain how the dynamics affect the shape of the piece. Is the climax of the piece achieved dynamically? Are dynamics explicitly indicated? If not, what must be added?

Text

1. Find the source of the text. Are there multiple sources? If the poet is known, when did she live? Choral music is driven by text.
2. If the piece is not in English, know the language being used. How reliable is the translation? Is the translation word-for-word or poetic? How accurate is the translation? What liberties did the translator take and were they appropriate?
3. Know the exact pronunciation. The conductor must be knowledgeable in the rules of diction of the piece being studied, including the English language, as gleaned from vocal diction courses. See also Resources for books by Marshall (1953), Wall (1989), Cox (1990 & 1996), Moriarty (1975), and May (1987).
4. Analyze the structure of the text. How is the structure of the music related to the structure of the text? Did the composer alter the text in any way? Count syllables, determine the poetic metre, and find the rhyme scheme. Is the text setting primarily melismatic or syllabic?
5. Find the places where the composer found drama. These exist in every piece of choral music. Did the composer use word painting or symbolism?
6. Discover who is speaking. Is the same person speaking throughout? Is the poem a dialogue? Is there a subtext in the story? Unlock the poetic imagery.

Style

1. Research the composer's life. Find out the birth and death dates, where the composer lived, and where the composer worked. Learn the types of works the composer wrote and for what forces. Did the composer write for the church or the concert hall? Draw upon knowledge of music history to determine as much information as possible.
2. Discover the place of the work in question in the composer's entire output. Was this piece written early, middle, or late in the composer's life? What other works were written in the same period?
3. Find out other pertinent facts about the work. For example, was the work commissioned? Did the composer have a particular performance in mind?

Perhaps the piece was, for example, a cantata written for a particular Sunday of the church year.

4. Recalling music history courses, consider the style of the composer to discover how this impacts the performance of the piece. Musical style includes articulation, phrasing, and ornamentation. Rudolph (1995) states that "musical style can be defined as the sum total of elements that are inherent in a composition (p. 383)."
5. Know what forces the composer originally used in the performance, as well as the probable venue the composer used.
6. See also resources for style analysis including LaRue (1992).

Performance Practice

1. Discover the historical context. What symbols are inferred? What are the unspoken constraints? What did the composer do because of tradition that is not written in the score? For example, in the classic period, some note values were routinely shortened.
2. Become aware of the performance practice of given composers and time periods. See Robinson and Winold (1976) for a good introduction.
3. Research the avenues of dynamic expression available to the composer. If the piece was written prior to the nineteenth century, these may not be immediately apparent.

Score Marking

A number of conducting texts warn against the use of score marking because it is often used as a substitute for actually learning the score. If the student conductor is not careful, score marking can lead to confusion rather than clarification.⁴ Green and Malko (1985) recommend marking cues above the score:

I have made it a practice to mark the abbreviation for the cued instrument directly above the entry beat in the top margin of the score. ...Black pencil is used. ...When two or more instruments enter at the same time, customarily the one having the greatest musical importance (such as the main theme) is placed highest in the margin, with the others following either in order of musical

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importance or in score order below it. In this way the eye catches instantly the entrance and the relationship of the several instruments. The need to search down through the score is eliminated (p. 41).

Green and Malko (1985) advise circling *fortes* in red and *pianos* in blue. *Crescendos* are underlined in red and *decrescendos* are underlined in blue. When sequential entrances occur in several instruments, each occurrence is bracketed. Their chapter on marking the score is useful reading (pp. 30-76).

Each student conductor must find a procedure for marking a score that works for her, but must observe the tenets of keeping the score clean and not using markings to make up for failure to learn the score.

Technique

The student must be grounded in solid technique. This foundation begins in Introductory Conducting, but continues in Choral Conducting. Technique is a lifelong pursuit, and key concepts not covered in Introductory Conducting are presented in Choral Conducting.

For the purpose of this conducting pedagogy framework, technique is distinct from gesture. Although the two are closely interrelated, gesture in this course framework becomes a highly specialized area (see Gesture below). Technique includes beat patterns, cues and cutoffs (starting and stopping), fermatas, use of the left hand, subdivision, and use of the baton. It also includes facial expression, as well as preparatory gestures, beats, and breath. Technique is the equivalent of scales and fingering for the pianist, that is, the means to achieving the desired end. Technique also includes avoidance of bad habits that all too often present themselves to both the aspiring and seasoned conductor. In many conducting textbooks, and in a myriad of conducting classes, technique is all that is taught. Since there are plenty of textbooks that cover conducting technique in depth, this section will focus on the critical elements necessary for providing a solid grounding in technique.

Conducting from the core: the necessary physical component

The groundwork for successful conducting begins with posture, carriage, relaxation, and alignment of the body, all of which are of paramount importance for the student

conductor. Significantly, Jordan (1996) states that "the study of conducting will require you to understand how to release your muscles in order for the limbs to be free and able to respond to the body's inner rhythmic impulses (p. 17)." The following points must be consistently addressed:

- The student conductor is centred and communicates musicality from his core. The Core is the literal centre of the conductor's body rather than outlying extremities. The conductor is grounded solidly on two feet and avoids reaching and leaning forward.
- When the student is centred and communicates from her core, she non-verbally communicates "come to me," not "I'm coming to you."
- The conductor is always representing her own vision of how the music should sound. The conductor has a clear concept of all aspects of the music, and it is her job to show her picture of the composer's musical intent.
- Physical gestures must not communicate to the ensemble that the conductor is fearful or worried. If the gesture says "I don't think you'll get this," then the ensemble will not.
- The conductor can be outrageously non-traditional in gesture, if done with centeredness (Dennis Keene, personal communication, April, 2004).

The choral conducting student must have a keen sense of body awareness. While some students such as athletes and dancers have a natural ability in this area, other students may struggle with developing awareness of their bodies. Jordan (1996, p. 22) refers students to study of the Alexander Technique in order to advance their conducting study.

Eliminating bad habits

The student may begin to develop bad habits early in her study of conducting. One of the primary functions of the instructor of choral conducting is to make the student aware of these. Bad habits often begin because the student does not know what else to do to make the ensemble follow. The student needs to develop awareness of ways of conditioning the ensemble to follow his gesture. This will be addressed in the discussion of Achieving Response.

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While many attributes listed below can be effective at times, they should be avoided when they become habitual. The student should consistently be reminded and given feedback about the following concepts:

- Avoid excess movement of the head or upper torso. Stay centered, stay in the core. Avoid slumping and other misalignment of the spine. Alexander Technique addresses misalignment of the body.
- Do not consistently mouth the words with the ensemble.
- Use hands independently. Do not consistently mirror the right and left hand.
- Breathe with the ensemble.
- Maintain a steady tempo. Avoid rushing or slowing down unless musically desirable.
- Avoid gestures that go outside of the horizontal or vertical plane of conducting:

Ordinarily, the conducting area extends from the top of the head to the waist (approximately the height to which a conductor's stand is generally raised) for vertical strokes, and the full reach of the arms to either side for horizontal strokes. ...The vertical beat patterns should be in front of the body slightly to the right of center for the right hand (approximately in front of the right shoulder) and slightly to the left of center for the left hand (again in front of the shoulder area) (Hunsberger & Ernst, 1992, p. 4).

The location of the horizontal plane can vary. Rudolph (1995) says that the horizontal plane is located "about midway between the shoulder and waist levels (p. 308)."

- The elbows should be at the 4:00 and 8:00 o'clock positions as viewed from the back (Hunsberger & Ernst, 1992, p. 4).
- To avoid bad habits, student conductors must carefully select gestures when practicing alone with the score. All gestures should be constantly reevaluated; all humans are creatures of habit, and bad habit can easily become part of the gesture. A gesture which achieves a desired result may or may not appear elegant to performer and listener. A further discussion of the selection of gesture can be found below.

Eye contact and facial expression

Conductor and composer Knussen says that virtually every conductor "...will tell you that half of what you do is done with your eyes (Klorman *et al.*, 1994)." Demaree and Moses (1995) state:

[Eye contact] is crucially important to your performers. *Lost eye contact is awful for them.* They sense that you are intimidated by them or not interested in them, or—worst of all—that you do not know the music. They feel alone. Their attention wavers, and then leaves you. (You may have difficulty getting it back.) You should be looking through your beat patterns at the performers. If you are doing so, you are maintaining good eye contact, and you are keeping your patterns in the proper position (p. 22).⁵

In order to make adequate eye contact with the ensemble, the conductor must know the score before commencing rehearsals. Score marking and other ways of learning the score (such as playing parts on the keyboard) are critical skills for the conductor.

Being one's own critic

The student conductor must become accustomed to watching her own performance on video tape. As uncomfortable as it can be, there is no better way for the student to evaluate her own conducting. A video camera should be positioned from the point of view of the ensemble. Student conductors should develop the habit of soliciting honest, constructive criticism from peers and teachers.

Available Resources

A number of conducting textbooks exist that address technique as well as other aspects of choral conducting. Several of these are noteworthy. In addition to *The Art of Conducting* (Hunsberger & Ernst, 1992) mentioned above, the author recommends *The Complete Conductor* (Demaree & Moses, 1995), *The Modern Conductor* (Green, 1997), *Conducting Technique* (McElheran, 1989), and *The Grammar of Conducting* (Rudolph, 1995). Demaree and Moses (1995) also has excellent chapters on style and performance for vocal music in the Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic periods; an

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appendix entitled "Guidelines for Style and Performance Practice;" good chapters on conducting technique; and chapters on non-conducting issues such as leadership, choral fundamentals, instrumental fundamentals, planning, and rehearsal process. *The Modern Conductor* (Green, 1997) is written more from an instrumentalist's perspective, which can be very useful for choral conductors. *Conducting Technique* (McElheran, 1989) is easy to read and has invaluable tips useful to the conductor. Finally, *The Grammar of Conducting* (Rudolph, 1995) is a comprehensive, almost encyclopaedic, reference for the conductor.

Achieving response

Achieving response is the discovery of ways the ensemble can be trained to respond to the conductor. The conductor possessing good technique does not succeed in front of a choral ensemble, especially an amateur or school ensemble, unless she has created sensitivity and response to her technique. Student conductors frequently forsake good technique when the ensemble does not respond the way they expect, exaggerating beat patterns and losing musicality.

Novice choral conductors often find themselves in front of an ensemble, perhaps after one year of conducting training in an undergraduate university, ready to conduct beautifully, only to discover that their gestures have little or no effect upon the ensemble. This is almost to be expected. The ensemble is probably inexperienced, as is any school ensemble at the beginning of the year, or at least unfamiliar with their new conductor. How will the conductor respond? Too many desperate conductors respond by exaggerating or radically altering their previously musical gestures. The student conductor must be prepared for this inevitability and have a better solution in her arsenal.

The student conductor must be prepared to condition the ensemble to respond to her non-verbal gestures. Two elements are necessary: how to get the ensemble to watch their conductor at all and how to condition the ensemble to respond to what the conductor does.

The student conductor must listen and react to the ensemble. The success of achieving response and gesture depend upon the conductor's frequent reaction to the responsiveness of the ensemble, based upon what she hears.

Training the Ensemble to Watch

The untrained ensemble will not automatically watch the conductor. The conducting student must consider the following:

1. The conductor must avoid giving aural cues to the ensemble at all costs, even in early stages of learning a new piece. While counting aloud or snapping the beat may be effective for getting the ensemble to feel the pulse together, this is not an effective way to train the ensemble to watch the conductor. The conductor must give the ensemble a *visual* stimulus from the beginning, even while the ensemble is in initial stages of learning.
2. Conductors must conduct musically from the beginning of the rehearsal process. Conductors must address musical effects as their ensemble learns the piece and *not* after they learn the notes.
3. Conductors are tempted to over-exaggerate their non-verbal gestures when choristers are in the early stages of music learning. When the ensemble does not watch, the conductor's first impulse is to conduct with a much larger gesture so they will watch. Conductors must avoid this impulse, and instead give brief verbal instructions such as "eyes," "watch," "try this," "not like that, like this," and "try singing that phrase this way." Conductors can and should conduct at a normal size even in the beginning. The most effective *verbal* instruction is a reminder to *watch*. Conductors should frequently, regularly, and verbally *insist* that the ensemble watch from the *beginning* of the rehearsal process.
4. Choristers will obviously make many mistakes in the beginning. The correction of any mistake should not be an unmusical gesture. A big cue for a missed entrance is to be avoided.
5. The conductor must make frequent eye contact with the ensemble from the beginning.

Boonshaft (2002) dedicates an entire chapter in his book *Teaching Music With Passion* to "How Do I Get Them to Watch?" The following ideas are his:

1. Look directly at the ensemble with an attitude that what is being done matters immensely. If choristers see the conductor looking directly at them every time they look up, they will realize that watching *does* matter.

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2. "The process of getting an ensemble to watch is a slow one (p. 93)." Conductors should not give up if the ensemble does not watch immediately.
3. The conductor should verbally offer positive reinforcement to choristers for watching.
4. The conductor can also reinforce choristers negatively for not watching, such as staring at them until they do watch, or pointing in their direction, although this should be used with discretion.
5. The conductor should cue often, especially in the early stages of learning. These cues may not be as necessary later, but they do give the ensemble a reason to watch.
6. Obstacles to watching should be eliminated. The rehearsal environment should be carefully planned in such a way that stands, chairs, pianos, and chaotic arrangements of other objects do not prevent the ensemble from easily watching the conductor. The conductor should make certain that his/her stand is low and out of the way.
7. When the ensemble comes in at a different tempo than the tempo set by the conductor, the conductor should insist that the correct tempo is taken rather than adjusting her tempo to that of the singers.
8. The conductor should purposely conduct sporadically from time to time. "Try to fool them (pp. 89-108)."

Conditioning the Ensemble to Respond

Once the ensemble begins to watch, it is important to condition them to *respond* to the non-verbal signals being given. A variety of procedures can be used.

1. The conductor should avoid being predictable. If the singers always see the same visual stimuli, they will stop responding. In order for the music to stay fresh, conductors must vary their stimuli from time to time.
2. A passage should not always be rehearsed at the same tempo, but should be varied. Joan Conlon frequently reminds singers not to memorize the tempo (personal communication, 1997).
3. The conductor should *always* be certain to show the singers something musical, and never conduct non-musically. The conductor should insist that the singers emulate the musicality being shown (Lawrence Kaptein, personal communication, 1998).

4. No part of the choral rehearsal should be routine. Choral warm-ups, for example, might be conducted with a variety of tempi, articulation, and dynamics, rather than performing all warm-ups identically in each rehearsal.
5. Singers should learn to correlate their own sense of internal tempo to the tempo of the conductor. Shaw (1991) uses "count-singing" to accomplish this; singers count in a subdivided beat as he conducts.

Gesture

The aspiring conductor discovers ways in which gesture can go beyond technique. This specific area, the topic of a great deal of recent research, expands on beat patterns, cues, and other conducting technique to include non-verbal communication with the ensemble. This aspect of study will focus on specific gestures that have an immediate impact on the ensemble's sound, tone, phrasing, and other musical elements.

Research by Eichenberger (1994) has demonstrated that small changes in non-verbal gesture by conductors can have a radical impact on an ensemble's sound. His work in *What They See Is What You Get* (1994) shows that the shape and placement of a conductor's gesture can immediately impact the sound of any choir, no matter what level of age or experience.

The natural human propensity to use body movement to emphasize ideas and to send clear and specific messages...is explored and clearly demonstrated.... The tape includes some of the most common 'mixed' or 'blurred' messages that conductors can unintentionally send (from video cover)."

In *Enhancing Musicality through Movement*, Eichenberger (2001) deals with conditioning the choir by having them perform physical movement along with the conductor. He has the ensembles clap, for example, emphasizing strong beats with down claps and weak beats with up claps. He combines these into patterns that emulate the piece of music being performed, as the conductor does the same clapping pattern. The conductor then *conducts* in a way that is similar to the clapping pattern, and the chorus achieves a similar result. They are conditioned to the conductor's pending gesture by physically performing a movement which closely emulates it. Eichenberger uses other hand gestures for *crescendos* and has students participate in the activity to internalize expressiveness.

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Eichenberger's research radiates with importance for the conductor by demonstrating new ways for conductors to change aspects of performance while minimizing rehearsal time. Simply performing these gestures has an immediate impact upon the ensemble.

Imagination

The conductor must use imagination to complete the process. The conductor must determine phrasing, the overall shape of the piece, and other ways of making the piece intriguing and interesting to the listener. Imagination is most successfully applied when the underlying building blocks—composer's intent, technique, achieving response, and gesture—are in place.

With a solid grounding in knowing the composer's intent, a solid foundation in technique, and thorough preparation in achieving response and gesture, the student conductor has at last arrived at a place where she can bring imagination to the process. She now has the tools to imaginatively transform the composer's score into sound. Green (1997) states:

When the ear takes over our existence, musically, for a space of time, the imagination quickens and unpredictable things can happen. An unimaginative performance is a dead performance—a thing of skin, bones, cold notes, and ossified rhythms (pp. 152-153).

The student conductor *must* be prepared to apply Imagination to every performance. Recall the definition of conducting from Demaree and Moses (1995) stated above:

Your task is not to exhibit the music but to clarify it. The greatest conductors sometimes can find in the most complex and opaque forms the simplest answers—the essence of "meaning" in these works (p. 405).

At this point the student begins to find appropriate self-expression as a conductor. To be authentic, self-expression must be informed by the foundations of composer's intent and technique before imagination is applied.

Applying Imagination to the Composer's Intent

The student conductor should first look in the music to find out what is *not there* that can be emphasized. Green (1997) says to avoid "monotony...by variety in texture and emphasis (p. 152)." Meaning in the text might be emphasized with accents and text-driven articulation or by bringing certain voices to prominence in the texture. The conductor looks for subtext, word painting, subtle distinctions created by changes in texture, or the pinnacles of dynamic phrases. The conductor determines phrasing, locating cadences, text distribution, and other musical events that shape discrete entities. Because much music has no phrasing indicated by phrase markings, the conductor must determine the shapes of individual phrases and the overall shape of every composition that she conducts.

Imagination can be applied to technique in a number of ways. Student conductors should rigorously practice away from the ensemble, devising ways of executing patterns, cues, and cutoffs imaginatively. Green (1997) says "no two mature conductors conduct exactly alike (p. 152)" and conductors should develop their own virtuoso technique. The successful Choral Conducting course sets the stage for this to occur in the future.

Green (1997) suggests that creative conductors should find variety in the following:

1. shape of beats
2. size of gestures
3. style of gestures (legato, staccato, etc.)
4. speed of gesture-motion
5. position in space
6. melding (combining time-beating gestures) (p. 152)

Imagination can be used to condition the ensemble to respond to the conductor. Every opportunity in front of an ensemble is an opportunity for the ensemble to watch the conductor. The conductor can create opportunities for the choir to watch when the choir is not learning new music. Each rehearsal should include a period of time when the ensemble is forced to watch the conductor, for example, to sing a small segment of a newly learned piece from memory. The conductor *should* experiment with ways of achieving various desired responses. Regular eye contact will help this process.

Imagination can be brought to gesture as well. Eichenberger's (1994, 2001) techniques can be used with any ensemble. When the choir is singing a warmup

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exercise, a conductor may try small changes in gesture, and the conductor should observe which gesture shapes are the most effective for achieving desired vowel sounds and tone colours. In this case, conducting technique can sometimes be *left behind*; the conductor should avoid the tendency to always have to beat time.

Should student conductors listen to recordings? Recordings of works being performed can be valuable tools for the student conductor. The purpose of a recording is not to copy another conductor's interpretation, but to listen to other conductors to find out what they do to *clarify* the music. What makes recordings by certain conductors exciting? Tempi? Articulation? Beauty of sound? Dynamic expressiveness? Clarity of text? Clarity of phrases? Variety of phrases? What can the conductor do to produce similar excitement in his own ensemble? The conductor also should evaluate recordings to judge which interpretations are true to the composer's intent and why.

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The outcome of these elements, as depicted in Figure 1 above, is the discovery of the conductor's voice, the culmination of the course. Many conducting students, and in fact many conductors, often do not discover their own voice as conductors, their own ability to express music with their ensembles. Demaree and Moses (1995) express it as follows:

Sometimes conductors study carefully some piece of music, and then go on to a performance of it without first putting "everything back together" mentally into a consummate concept of the work. Having torn the music up into smaller and smaller pieces, they conduct from problem to problem (or from solution to solution), thus getting through the technical difficulties more-or-less successfully, without ever restoring in their minds, in the minds of the musicians, and thus, inevitably, in the minds of their listeners the whole shape, direction, and momentum of the work (p. 408).

This culmination represents a lifelong pursuit of all conductors at every stage of experience and training; every conductor strives to find his voice. The successful conducting course lays the groundwork for this process. As stated, finding the conductor's voice is the process by which a student conductor discovers how to intelligently create music with her own ensemble and make the appropriate and

necessary musical decisions that will allow her to find her own expressiveness as a conductor.

The student conductor can “dance a free dance (Boonshaft, 2002, p. 65)” now that the correct foundation is laid. The joy of conducting exists when the conductor is free to find her own voice. Unfortunately, many undergraduate conducting courses miss the mark when it comes to preparing student conductors to get to this level. Hopefully, this curricular framework can provide a means to move student conductors in this direction.

The composer’s intent is not a constraint; rather, it can set the conductor free. The ability to know everything that the composer wants enables the conductor to become interpreter in an appropriate way. The conductor’s technique is not a constraint either, for with proper technique the conductor becomes free to allow music to occur. Ultimately, the music does not exist without the performance; the conductor creates the performance, which becomes both an awesome joy and an awesome responsibility.

The process of educating the student conductor is the process of laying a foundation for eventual development as a mature artist. Great conductors are those who have successfully assimilated the composer’s intent with technique, achieving response, and gesture; added a healthy dose of their own imagination; and found their own voice—they can be used as models for conducting students.

The student conductor must have courage and must act without fear. Teaching students all of these aspects of the craft of conducting will allow them to find their voice and to lay a foundation for lifelong success.

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Endnotes

1. Students in choral conducting courses not only come from diverse backgrounds, but have disparate career goals, such as public school teaching, conducting church choirs, or attending graduate school.
2. The diagram may infer a linear or compartmentalised process. It should be noted that the process of learning to conduct is organic and interactive, and that all of these elements should be presented throughout the Choral Conducting course.
3. Keep in mind, however, that the piano cannot replicate crescendos and decrescendos.
4. See also Julius Herford's very helpful discussion regarding score preparation (Decker & Herford, 1973, pp. 177-230). Also, Kaplan (1985, pp. 12-15) describes a score preparation process in which the most important melodic line is traced throughout the composition.
5. Note that "looking through your beat patterns at the performers" infers a higher horizontal plane than others recommend. As mentioned earlier, Rudolph (1995) says that the horizontal plane should be about half way between the shoulders and the waist (p. 308).