

Imagination,

Play, &

Metaphor :

The Conductor's Crash Course

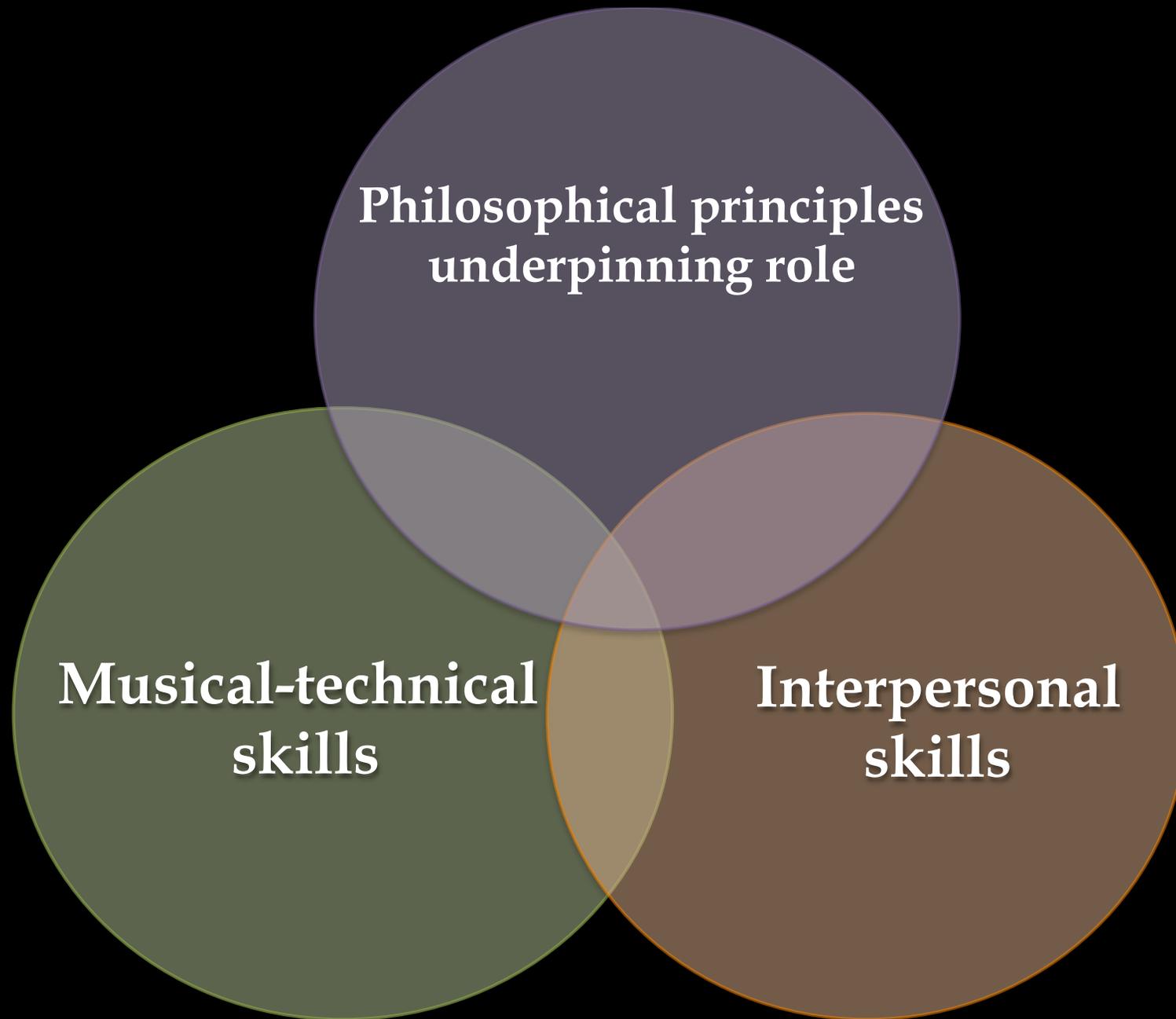
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What this session is NOT:

- **diminishing the importance of technical/pedagogical knowledge**
- **encouraging the “dumbing down” of content knowledge**
- **saying rehearsal = all fun, all the time**

What this session IS:

- **presenting imaginative ways to engage learners**
- **encouraging play in choruses**
- **encouraging singers to engage their own imaginations**
- **sparkling a collaborative relationship between singers & conductor**
- **maximizing “human-compatible” pedagogy**



Durrant, C. (2005). **Shaping Identity Through Choral Activity: Singers' And Conductors' Perceptions.** *Research Studies in Music Education*, 24 (1), 88-98.

Imagination

Imagination

- **engages students beyond just “telling”**
- **requires personal investment in ideas, connection to previous experiences**
- **likely sticks with the singer longer because of brain’s tendency toward recollection of novelty & humor**

Imagination

- **in warmup, with stretches: laundry day on the farm; create your own scenarios**
- **specific non-musical, imagination-stimulating ideas: Poetry Tuesday;**
- **can be highly effective in exploring shades of tone & vocal timbres**







Imagination & Tone

- **Dee dee dee with descriptors**
- **Unicorn horn of power**
- **It is a FA day**



Imagination & Community

- **Song skits (random objects)**
- **Using “family time” to imagine & brainstorm possibilities**
- **Imaginative recruiting strategies**



Imagination & Rehearsal

- **Build ties from imagination to:**
 - **kinesthetic gestures**
 - **objects, creatures, & images that evoke certain musical passages**

What You Gonna Call Your Pretty Little Baby?

- **Rabbits**

TTBB, piano,
Carl Fischer

- **Petting**

- **Scooping**

- **Offering up (“Lion King” style)**



Imagination & Concert

- **Contextualize a work creatively**
 - e.g. **Stravinsky's Rite of Spring 1913 premiere**
- **Include a dramatic reading of the text or a related text from the same era**

From the Narrative of Frederick Douglass, 1845:

“The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance...were particularly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs...they would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out...they would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone”

From the Narrative of Frederick Douglass, 1845:

“I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do. I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without...They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension. They were tones loud, long, and deep;...”

From the Narrative of Frederick Douglass, 1845:

“ They breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. Even now,... while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs, I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery...”

From the Narrative of Frederick Douglass, 1845:

“I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If anyone wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Col. Lloyd’s plantation, and on allowance day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there, let him, in silence, analyze the sounds...and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because there is no flesh in his obdurate heart...”

From the Narrative of Frederick Douglass, 1845:

“I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience...”

From the Narrative of Frederick Douglass, 1845:

“I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy and singing for joy were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion.”



Imagination & Text

- **1941**
 - **Sing through**

1941

There'll be no separation, Son,
Through any day's long endless run
Or while Orion walks the sky,
You will be here, you'll be close by.

And though you stand in jungle mud,
and watch the waters turn to blood,
You will with me wade silver streams,
And find fulfillment of our dreams.

1941

On nights when foxholes are your bed,
When skies are scarred and scratched with red,
This you must know, these things we share,
Each hope for peace, each hour of prayer.

And when you take my hand at last,
When war is horror of the past,
Though years have crumbled in decay,
You will have never been away.



Imagination & Text

- **1941**

- *perspective*
- *feelings*
- *imagined scenarios*
- **Structural considerations: verbal vs. written**
- **Ask questions & let students create meaning**



Imagination & Text

- **Open the “windows” provided by the text, where appropriate**
- **Embrace honesty, even when it requires vulnerability of you**
- **Building “emotionally literate” students**

PIED BEAUTY

TBB, piano, Music by Kurt Knecht

Text by Gerard Manley Hopkins

(Full Hopkins text inserted midway through responses below)

.....

Describe something ordinary or small
that has held beauty or wonder,
or made you curious

**I LOVE LOOKING AT
APPLE BLOSSOMS**

The way people's eyes light up
when you compliment them--
a genuine happy feeling

When girls don't wear makeup.
They are prettier that way.

*The ding of a butter knife when
tapped against something*

Fresh snow on my two dogs
after they come in from outside

*A cat's paw and claws that can
retreat and hide. There is all this
fur, yet these sharp things pop out
of nowhere.*

VEINS ON LEAVES

*The lines created by tides flowing
in different directions-- the small
ruffles between differing currents*

**FRESHLY MOWED
GRASS**

I notice the beautiful bark
patterns on the trunk of a
Douglas fir tree

**THE
SMOOTHNESS
OF A FLOWER
DETAIL**

VEINS ON LEAVES

The chipped ivory keys of my family's piano. Three generations of pianists learned to play on it as well as expressed their emotions through music.

Baking your frozen pizza for just the right amount of time so the crust is the perfect consistency

When trees get rained on enough, they grow layers of moss. The rain can symbolize the toughness that life can throw at you. The moss, a coat of armor, adding a layer of strength to your everyday life

THE SMOOTHNESS OF A FLOWER PETAL

Kumquats--They look like oranges, but taste like...??

I find eyes to be stunning. They are all different and seem to be able to convey feeling and personality

LOW-LEVEL FOG

THE ROOF

ANDREA RAMSEY

When I moved, I had to start high school with no friends. I needed a roof and I found one in choir.

When my father died, I had an uncle who really stepped into his place...

My mom, because I was bullied and she would hug me and just make my day

When my dad had a heart attack, my cross-country team pooled together some money to help pay for the hospital bills

Describe a time when you were a "roof" for someone or someone was a "roof" for you:

I have been a roof for my brother and sister. I always look out for them and take care of them.

I helped a suicidal friend in his time of need. He needed his friends and we were there.

A friend at school is accepting and supportive of me no matter what our differences or what other people think.

A person was considering quitting choir and I helped them reconsider

bills

I've always been in the shadow of my sisters who are talented and successful. Normally this would allow an excuse for resentment, but the support, love, and compassion they show me is more than I could ever ask for.

...there was no toilet paper in the stall, but a stranger rolled me some

My mom protects me and encourages me but not in an overprotective way.

I have a friend at school who I sit with at lunch to make sure he has someone to talk to.

When I was in 8th grade, I desperately wanted to come out to my dad. The only thing stopping me was my church. I

taking a beating to protect my sister

I feel I am the roof for my mom...I try to be a constant light in her life.

My pastor every day was my roof during anxiety and depression

My best friend would stand up for me when I was bullied in elementary school

I was a roof for a friend of mine a few years back when her mother was put into prison. I helped her get through that traumatic situation.

I take care of my sister with Down syndrome when she needs help.

When I was in 8th grade, I desperately wanted to come out to my dad. The only thing stopping me was my church. I think religion is a beautiful thing, but this specific church wasn't. I was shaking so bad the night I finally did it. My dad listened to everything I had to say. He listened and he loved me and that is all I wanted.

My friend was going through some really tough family issues. At one point she called me and told me she was going to end her life. I had to step in and be a roof for her before my friend was gone.

I take care of my sister with Down syndrome when she needs help.

My dad is a roof for our family because he supports us

I support my friends with prayer, listening ears, and kindness.

Being a senior, I think I am a roof for many underclassmen, especially for others in choir who may be struggling.





Imagination

- **Responses to the imaginative in rehearsal:**
 - **Skeptic**
 - **Observer**
 - **Tiptoe/non-committal**
 - **All in**

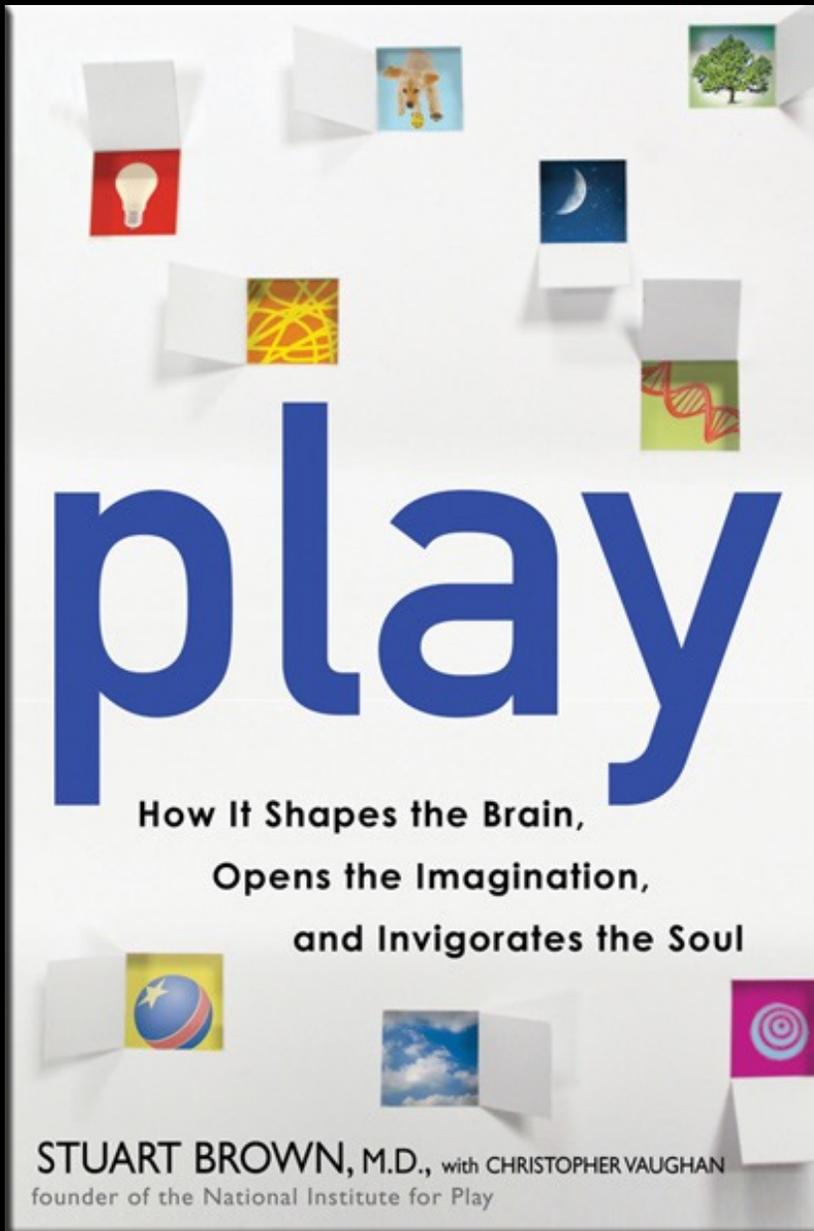
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Imagination

- **Benefits of imagination:**
 - **enjoyable**
 - **can generate fresh ideas**
 - **a developed imagination serves us in most aspects of life**
 - **think in creative/divergent ways**

Play...



Play...

**Hudson
seemed
to be a
very
dead
dog...**



Play?

- **Helps to sculpt the brain**
- **Creates imaginative new cognitive combinations and connections— which then impact our daily living**
- **As a child, play is a huge part of how we develop understanding of the world around us**

Some properties of play...

- **Inherent attraction / fun & makes you feel good**
- **Freedom from time / lose sense of time**
- **Diminished consciousness of self / don't worry about how you look**
- **Often includes potential for improvisation**
- **Continuation desire / you want to keep doing it**

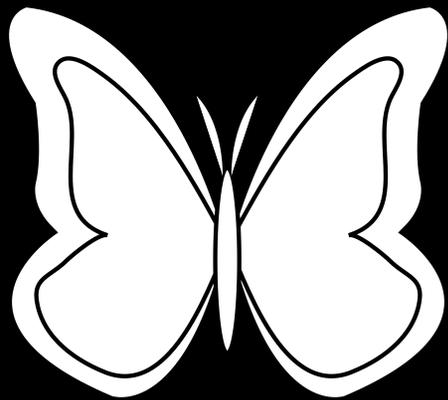
Play in rehearsal...

- **Games & competition**
- **Novelty/randomness**
- **Kinesthetic play**
- **Improvisation, rote songs, soundscape**
- **Soundscape**
- **Play in warmup (parody words of warmups, let students create one, Michigan canon in 7/8)**

Play in concert...

The Moth's Serenade SSA, piano, SBMP

*Porch light! I drink your light like nectar.
Dream of you by day, gaze in your eyes all night.
Porch light! I am your seeking, circling, sighing, love-sick knight.
You are my soul's desire, my prize, my eyes' delight.*



*Porch light! Bright paradise! My shining star!
Keep back, they say. I can't!
Don't touch, they say. I must! Porch light!
Let's clasp, let's kiss, let's marry for a trice!
Let's live for love!
Let's live for light!
Porch light!*

Play in concert...

- **Repertoire:**

- *playful*
- *comical*
- *whimsical*
- *non-sensical*
- *imaginative*

- **Student speakers to read text translations or introduce pieces in their own creative ways**

- **Play via extra-musical skills of your students—
dance, art, thinking outside the box (e.g.
Nutcracker)**

Play...

- **It doesn't matter how old we get...
play still appeals (or should)**
- **mirabai/TCDA**

Play...



Play...



Play...



Play...



Play...



Play...

- **When was the last time you really, truly, played?**
- **What were you doing?**
- **Who were you with?**
- **How did it make you feel?**
- **When was the last time your singers played?**

Metaphor

Metaphor

- **Music IS metaphor; thus musicians are extremely sensitive to metaphorical instruction**
- **Certain parts of the brain are activated both by *thinking* about a concept, such as a warm fire, and by *experiencing that concept thru the senses***
 - **provides double the brain stimulation as you access your memories and you access the concept itself**

*Andrew Crust, Blog, "The Power of Metaphor in Rehearsal"

*Jane Hirschfield, TED-Ed lesson, "The Art of the Metaphor"

*Robert Sapolsky, "This is Your Brain on Metaphors"

Metaphor in rehearsal

- Be fearless, give it a try
- Metaphors and similes are more memorable than run-of-mill instructions
 - Bernstein “*play like one giant dinosaur*” vs. “*use the whole bow*”
- Specificity: aim for specific enough to be interesting or novel, but not so narrowly specified that others can't relate

Metaphor

“Beauty can only be found on the edge of failing.”

- Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Metaphor

- **Requires vulnerability & courage**
- **We often bring out the best in our singers if we are willing to take risks and embarrass ourselves**
- **When one metaphor tanks, most students still appreciate the genuineness of the attempt**

Musical Idea

Possible Metaphor

Legato tone, with
free movement of
breath

wrap the audience in the warmest
softest hug, purely with the tone of
your voice

Fierce, forward tone
with aggressive
consonants

“Angry parent” consonants
(e.g. “[insert full name], you get in
here and clean your room!”)

rhythmic precision
when singing is
indulgent/late

sing the leading edge of the storm

Musical Ideal

Possible Metaphor

Preparing the ending—
achieving a free sound
at *fff* on the last two
chords

Lift a locomotive and
throw it down

Carefree, lilting tone
with strong downbeat

The sound of drinking beer and
remembering your youth

Achieving a focused
piano singing tone with
lots of resonant core

the intensity of the sun in the
space of a ping pong ball

Practicing Metaphor

- **Make a metaphor map; sketch them into your score or use tiny post-it notes**
- **Increase your metaphor skills by regularly reading literature and poetry**
- **Sing through things with your metaphor/activity in mind. Is the voice still free & technically unhindered?**
- **Consider your *gestural metaphor*. ANY gesture with our hands or faces that mimics life experiences is *gestural metaphor*.**

Sanctus

- **Gestural Metaphor in action**
- **Chipmunk (opening theme)**
- **Deer & Wind (subject)**
- **More Deer (countersubject)**
- **Deer party: mass frolicking (tutti)**

Imagination, *Play*, &

Metaphor :

- **Sharing our ideas— do you have a great example of imagination/play/metaphor that has worked for you and your choir?**
- **Do you have a time you tried imagination/metaphor/play and it crashed & burned?**
- **Questions/discussion**

“Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life.

Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge – and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.

-Parker Palmer

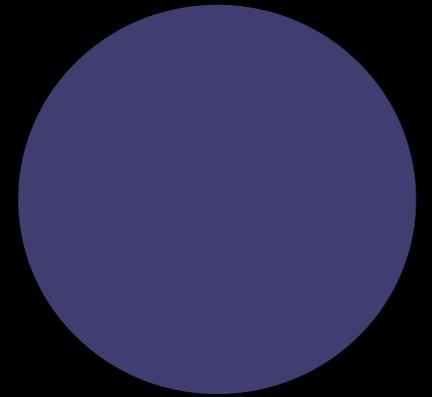
from “The Courage to Teach”

“Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we are supposed to be and embracing who we are:

- cultivating the courage to be imperfect, set boundaries, and allow ourselves to be vulnerable*
- exercising the compassion that comes from knowing we are all made of strength and struggle*
- nurturing the connection and sense of belonging that can only happen when we believe that we are enough*

Brené Brown, The Gifts of Imperfection

reflection

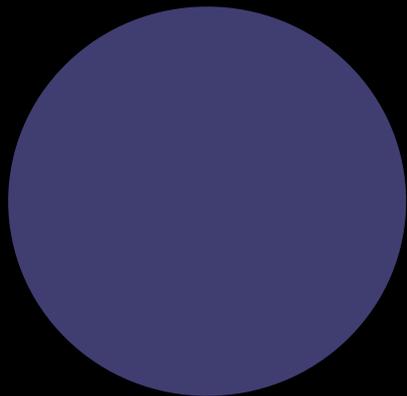


**What characteristics do I desire
in my singers?**

Take a moment to write down your answers

While viewing your list of answers, ask yourself...

Which of these characteristics do I actively model for my singers?



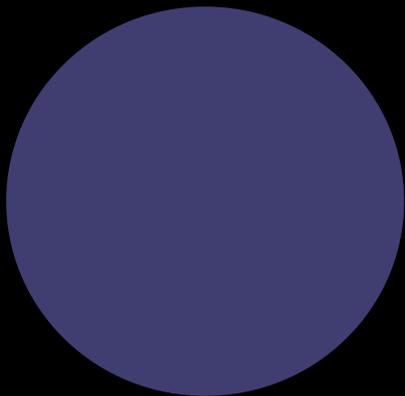
reflection

What do you want this coming year to be:

- for you?
- for your singers?

What is one small thing you can do (or NOT do)
RIGHT NOW to move you toward that goal?

again, small change



reflection

*“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs—
ask yourself what makes you come **alive**,
and then go do it.*

*Because what the world needs
are **people** who have come alive.”
-Howard Thurman*

Thank you

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Questions?

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