



**WHAT YOU SAY  
MATTERS**

# CONTEXTUAL TEACHING

## WHAT

What do the students know?

## HOW

How did the students learn it?

## WHY

Why do the students know this?

Adapted from Alfie Kohn's journal entry in "American School Board Journal" published 4/11.

**1.**

**“MORE AIR”**

# “MORE AIR”

## Desired outcome of comment:

- Range (general or difficulty in passing from middle to upper register)
- Volume
- Difficulty with intervals
- General catch-all

## Consequence of comment:

- The word ‘more’ only refers to an increase in quantity or intensity.
- Since it’s a blanket statement, it cannot address any specific problem.
- Many students perceive this comment to mean they must ‘blow harder’. This causes tension, issues with air flow, and problems generating air speed.


## Contextual Restatement:

- Issues with range: Air Speed
- Issues with intervals: Vowel change
- Issues with volume: Visual context or “larger air column”

# Small airstream & a high tongue arch for range?

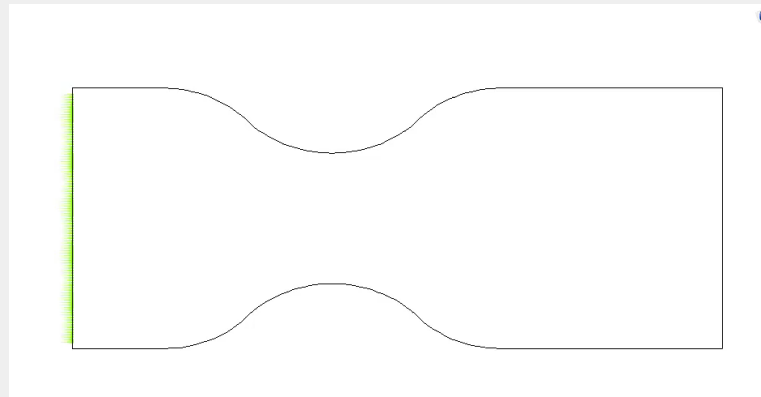


## I promise it is possible!

- The upper range, especially the altissimo range (  and above) takes a small column of air, but it must be as fast as possible and properly compressed. If the air pressure/compression does not equal, the back up of air occurs.

## How?

- Have the students whistle- then change pitch to a higher note. Moving the tongue up **& forward** helps create a 'funnel' that speeds the air up (Similar to clarinet). In fluid dynamics, this is called the Venturi Effect.



**2.**


**“DARKER SOUND/  
TOO BRIGHT”**

# “You’re too bright, darken up!”

## Desired outcome of comment:

- Address tone issues (edgy, thin, etc.)
- Produce a more “symphonic” tone

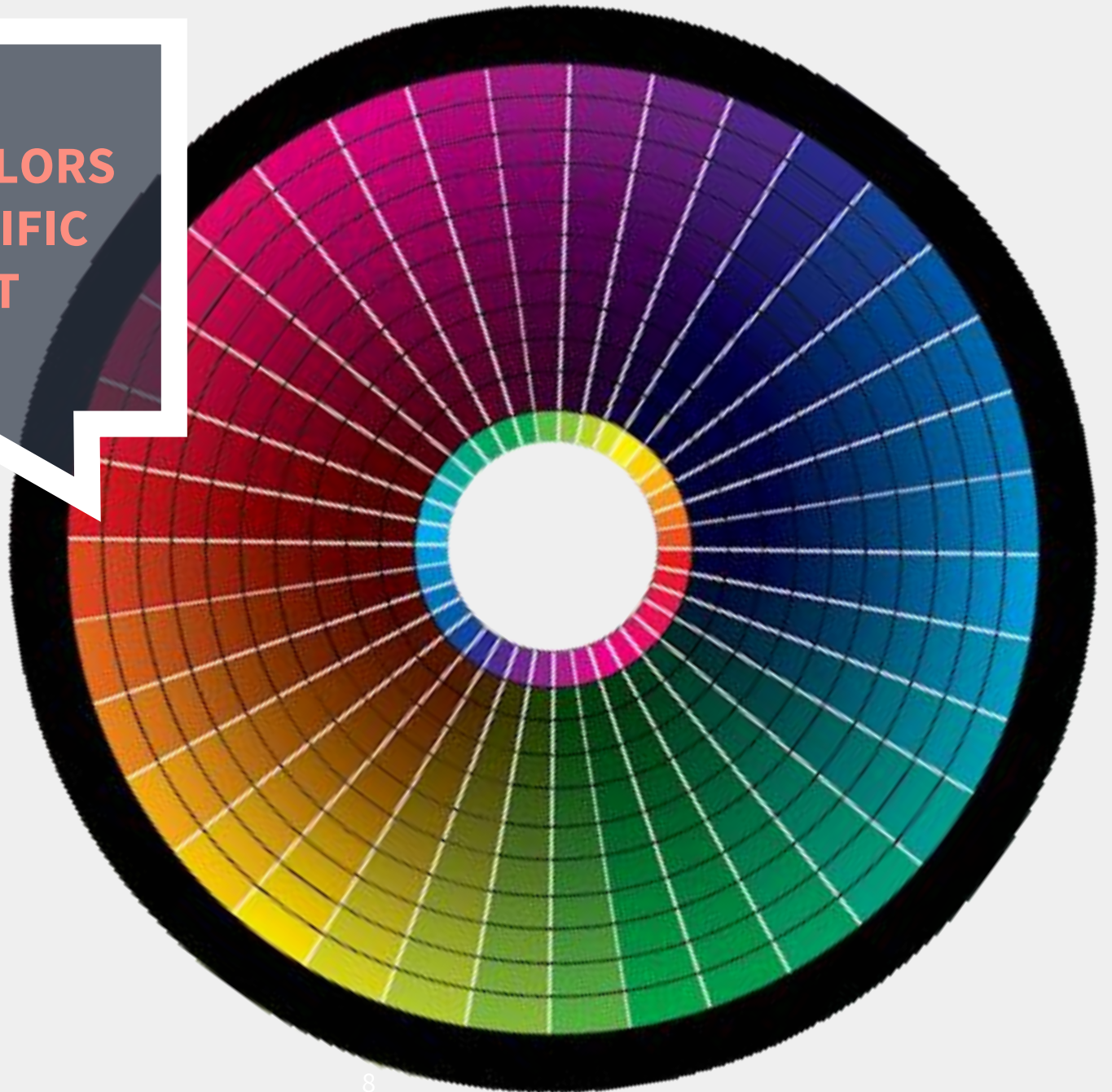
## Consequence of comment:

- What does a “dark sound” mean?
- For a student to broaden their sound, the easiest avenue is to drop, or flatten, their tongue.
- Broad and generalized comments get unfocused results.
- The upper range (or above ) will be very unsupported. For many students this will sound quite flat.

## Contextual Restatement:

- The usual culprit for edgy (or generally undesirable sound) is tension in the throat.
- Have the student/section sing the passage on a neutral syllable (‘ewee’ or ‘uuuu’ work well)
- Give contextual comments: “Your sound in this passage is neon-red, let’s try it again but this time I want you to try to play Crimson-Red.”

**SPECIFIC COLORS  
GIVES SPECIFIC  
CONTEXT**





**3.**

**“BREATHE  
FROM YOUR  
DIAPHRAGM”**

# “Breathe from your diaphragm!”

## Desired outcome of comment:

- Get students to take a full and relaxed breath.
- Remind students to take a ‘low breath’.
- Reinforce student knowledge of diaphragmatic breathing.

## Consequence of comment:

- Typically low retention/understanding.
- Creating tension during the breath.
- “High” breath- or upper 1/3 of lungs inspired.
- Students often end up taking as much air as possible, leading to increased tension and ‘airflow backup’.

## Contextual Restatement:

- “Belly Breath”: expanding the stomach outward while inhaling.
- Focus on the sound of the breath (more hollow sound of inhale):
  - Have students inhale the word ‘home’- this often corrects much of the tension in the inhalation process.
- Have students routinely breathe in time with the music of exercises they are playing. Giving two counts of breath, in coordination with the music, often addresses the issue of poor breathing habits.
- Show what the diaphragm physically does. 10



# Thanks!

## Any questions?

Feel free to get in touch!  
[tperry7@atu.edu](mailto:tperry7@atu.edu)