THE VOLUNTEER CHOIR: PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF SIGHT-READING

IN THE CHURCH CHOIR SETTING

THESIS

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

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While much research exists in the area of choral sight-reading, little specifically targets

sight-reading in the volunteer choir setting. This paper will also detail, based on a review

of secondary literature, the strategies for improving sight-reading abilities in a volunteer

choir setting, and will provide choral directors with pedagogical tools to improve choir

members' sight-reading skills through the infusion of music theory and choral singing

Furthermore, this paper will present the data collected during an experimental period with

a specific church choir. During that period, choir members were introduced to basics of

music theory and aural skills, and strategies for improving sight-reading were emphasized A pre-test and a post test, combined with surveys of the choir members, provided information on the abilities of an average church choir The surveys specifically captured the self-perception of sight-reading abilities by the choir members and how a self-critical perception increased during the experimental period of instruction Data collected from surveys and questionnaires sent to church choirs throughout the state of Texas will also give the reader insight into the choir members' own perception of their sight-reading abilities and further establish relevance for this study.

INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this research, the volunteer choir is defined as any group of at least

eight singers whose primary goal is to make music with little or no financial reward In

addition, their participation in this ensemble is based primarily on intrinsic motivation, as

no external factors affect their choice to participate[1]. Based on this definition, one might

question the pursuit of research in an area in which there is no academic or monetary

impetus, however, while choir members who participate in these volunteer ensembles

generally do not receive graded assessments on their performance (as one would in

school settings) or payment for their services (as in professional ensembles), their

purposes remain the same as those of their externally-driven counterparts to publicly

proclaim a communal statement through song These statements can affect the listener's

attitudes, ideals, and even morals when effectively executed. Therefore, continued

research in the area of volunteer choirs is equally – if not more – essential for the growth

and development of choral music as a recognized branch of fine and performing arts.

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[1] One could argue that spiritual motivation would be considered an extrinsic motivator, however, the issue of spirituality will not be discussed, and, for the purpose of this research, will remain excluded from the intrinsic vs extrinsic discussion

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Before one can look at the many facets of teaching and learning in any environment, the environment itself must first be examined. In any ensemble, talent and the collective musical background often determines the level of a group's performance and sight-reading abilities. An ensemble's purpose, however, should not affect the end-goal of these choral ensembles. Church choirs, for example, minister to a congregation by proclaiming the Written Word through song. Again, their purposes are intrinsic in nature, as they mainly participate for self-gratification. Public school choirs (elementary through college) serve the immediate local population by telling both sacred and secular stories through song with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Professional choirs also tell both sacred and secular stories, but to a larger population and with more extrinsic motivation than that of the public school choirs. Regardless of purpose, a choral ensemble is "only as good as its weakest member," as my first college choir director often said.

While the three ensembles share the same fundamental goal, choral music educators often neglect the volunteer choir and, even more specifically, the church choir. The reason for this neglect may not be intentional, however, this research will provide evidence that their inclusion in the choral methods courses is of great importance and can be incorporated alongside public school instruction.

CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

1.1. The Piano Debate in the Choral Rehearsal

When faced with the decision to either utilize a piano for aiding in pitch learning in the choral rehearsal or to rely completely upon the aural awareness of both the conductor and the choristers, many directors would admit that their first response would be to run in the direction of the nearest piano! However, Guelker-Cone (Guelker-Cone 1998) shouts: "run the other way!" In this short, yet edifying article, she urges her audience to consider building music reading abilities by forcing the members of the ensemble to embrace a different system of musical learning without the excessive use of the piano.

Guelker-Cone's premise that choral rehearsals without piano can improve a choir's overall sight-reading abilities is based upon a quad-fold method of execution: (1) choosing a sight-reading system, (2) utilizing unaccompanied vocalises for warm-ups, (3) choosing appropriate choral literature, and (4) rehearsing the ensemble without a piano as often as possible Of these four steps, it is the fourth that leaves the choral director uneasy. However, this article addresses both the positive and negative outcomes of removing the piano from the rehearsal, of which, in Guelker-Cone's experience, the former certainly outweighs the latter.

When choosing a sight-reading system, more specifically a syllable system, the author highlights the most commonly used systems. a Kodály-based moveable *do* system, a fixed *do* system, and a number system. Guelker-Cone reminds the reader to be consistent in their choice and further compares the advantages and disadvantages of each system against one another Of the three syllable systems, the moveable *do*, *la*-based minor system is favored by Guelker-Cone and is referred to throughout the course of suggestions for piano-less rehearsals[2]

Guelker-Cone continues her discussion by suggesting that the conductor use their own singing voice to model during the warm-ups, instead of using the piano These vocalises demonstrated by the conductor will not only force the choir members to learn to tune independently of the piano, but will also serve as a better model for proper singing technique, which is often overlooked when a director is distracted by the keys of the piano Again, the moveable-*do*, *la*-based minor system is praised for these aural exercises, as the singer is developing an awareness of syllable relationships and functions of harmony (i.e., raising the leading tone or tuning the third of a chord)

The importance of selecting appropriate music is also addressed in this article, a topic that certainly bears importance in the University Interscholastic League (UIL), the overseeing authority of competitive music programs within the state of Texas[3], including the sight-reading portion of the Concert and Sight-Reading Contest held every spring semester throughout the state Guelker-Cone recommends that choirs at any level must begin singing actual music as soon as possible in order to begin the sight-reading process effectively While each choir will have their own reading level, she suggests beginning

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[2] The author did not compare this system with that of the *do*-based minor system
[3] http //www uil.texas org (12 January 2009)

simply with unison singing and then introducing two-part music While some more advanced choirs may easily begin singing four-part music, it is necessary to spend a significant amount of time singing diatonic music before introducing pieces marked heavily with accidentals or – even greater in difficulty – modulations. The author notes that choirs who spend more time *without* the aid of a piano while sight-reading typically sing with better intonation and learn music much more quickly than those who rehearse *with* a piano

The final method of increasing sight-reading abilities is addressed in the last section of the article. removing the piano from the rehearsal entirely. While choirs of all levels will likely experience a loss of control without the piano in its initial abandonment, Guelker-Cone encourages the choir director to work through the difficult first rehearsals, while expecting a quick turn-around in the students' accountability for learning their music. As students notice that the piano will no longer be their sole source for aiding in sight-reading music in the classroom, they will begin taking the initiative to practice at home more frequently, thus improving the entire choir's overall performance.

Finally, Guelker-Cone provides an annotated list[4] of currently available sight-singing materials designed primarily for middle school through high school choral programs. These materials were reviewed by Guelker-Cone and are recommended for use in collaboration with the author's suggested piano-less choral rehearsal method This article also serves as a fairly recent publication addressing an ongoing problem in choral rehearsals throughout the United States. While ten years have passed since its initial

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[4] Guelker-Cone's list includes *The Folk Song Sight-Singing Series*, Books 1-10, edited by Crowe, Lawton, and Whittaker (1961), *333 Elementary Exercises in Sight Singing* by Kodály (1963), *Songs for Sight-Singing*, Vols 1 and 2, compiled by Henry and Jones (1996), and *Successful Sight Singing*, Books 1 and 2, by Telfer (1992 and 1993)

publication date, it is possible that Guelker-Cone's premise could raise the standards of sight-reading, as students – and their conductors – begin depending upon their own precious instruments (their brain, ears, and voice) as opposed to the shiny black-and-white keyed one that currently governs them.

1 2. The Factors that Predict Sight-Reading Abilities

As much research is conducted and reported on in the area of sight-reading as a general discipline, Daniels (1986) suggests that research in the area of *choral* sight-reading is greatly overlooked. The research conducted by public school music teacher Rose Dwiggins Daniels is an examination of the sight-reading abilities of high school mixed choirs in relation to four isolated external influences most commonly affecting those abilities: (1) the school, (2) the music curriculum, (3) the chorus teacher, and (4) the individual characteristics of students in the choirs Based on the conclusions drawn from Daniels's study, the factors that most accurately predict sight-reading abilities are the ethnicity of the students, the availability of a piano at the students' homes, the size and location of a school, minimal use of rote learning, the participation rate of students in an all-state chorus, the ratio of students who played an instrument, and a choir director who places great emphasis on sight-reading in the high school chorus.

In Daniels's study, a sample group of 20 senior high school advanced mixed choirs (approximately 800 singers) from South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee were evaluated in the area of sight-reading performance and personal responses to student / teacher questionnaires The questionnaires served as a means to provide demographic information as well as insight into each school's music curriculum

and the level of emphasis on sight-reading in those schools. Each choir's sight-reading abilities were tested by administering a three-part practical exam, of which the third part was recorded and later graded by a panel of experienced choral directors The first two parts of the exam consisted of Daniels's own short excerpts, which were intended to help familiarize the students with the testing procedure to be used in the third part of the exam For the recorded portion of the exam, Daniels selected a newly published work (Schulz & Rotermund, 1985) in order to ensure that each group would be seeing the piece for the first time. The graded portion of the study followed the prescribed state and regional choral guidelines for the states of North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Maryland. No talking, humming, or singing (unless asked to do so) was allowed during the testing period

Data collected from the survey proved to be beneficial in identifying the many variables within the four main areas that aid in predicting sight-reading abilities among choral groups. Among the four areas, factors pertaining to the school, each choir member's individual background, and the teacher's methods on teaching sight-reading were of greater importance than those pertaining to the choral curriculum itself. Daniels is careful, however, to urge the reader to not discount the curriculum's role in the classroom, but, rather, to continue placing importance on the need for teaching sight-reading. In fact, more so than the curriculum itself, it is the teacher who seemed to influence the students' recorded outcomes and much emphasis is placed upon the teacher's role in implementing sight-reading techniques and methods While this research was conducted more than 20 years ago, it serves as further proof that such techniques and

methods are still in need of improvement before they can aid in predicting the students'

sight-reading abilities

1.3 Sight-Singing Instructional Practices of Choral Directors

In a follow-up study conducted by Daniels (1988), the author expounds upon her

previous findings in the area of choral sight-reading instruction, but this time, with the

director in mind. Surveying 20 directors from a five-state region of the Southeast, Daniels

searched for the types of sight-reading instruction that were taught in high school choirs

Her predetermined premise was that "there are actually only two basic *approaches* to

sight-reading pedagogy used in the high school chorus. They are: (1) teaching sight-

reading directly out of the choral literature being learned, and (2) teaching sight-reading

apart from the choral literature." (Daniels 1988, 22). According to Daniels's findings, of

the eighteen who responded to this question, all of them indicated that they used a

combination of these two approaches, although favoring one over another. In fact, half of

the directors reported that a large percentage of sight-reading instruction took place

during the teaching of choral literature while six of the directors relied more heavily on

teaching sight-reading separate from literature. The other three reported using both

approaches equally.

In another portion of the questionnaire designed to show which teaching

procedures were used when introducing new choral music to singers, Daniels discovered

that all of the directors relied heavily upon using repetitive drill, including eight directors

who frequently allowed their students to hear the music before actually attempting to sing

it. Oddly enough, the eight teachers who responded that they prefer to teach sight-reading

using appropriate choral literature stated that they either sometimes or frequently allowed their students to hear the music before singing it Teachers who reported using specific published sight-reading materials (less than half of those surveyed) mentioned *The Independent Singer* by Edstrom (1977) – reported by three teachers. The Kodály method was also mentioned by two teachers, along with *Learning Sequences in Music* by Gordon (1980)[5], which was mentioned by one teacher.

Another part of the questionnaire was designed to examine how often the twenty surveyed directors used certain sight-reading pedagogical procedures which included singing with solfège syllables, clapping rhythms, sight-singing in unison, sight-singing in harmony, melodic dictation, and rhythmic dictation. Of these, the two most frequently reported methods were clapping rhythms and sight-singing in unison. Also included in the questionnaire was a section regarding the type of basic music fundamentals that were taught in the choir classroom. Of these fundamentals, time values, musical marks of expression, and half- and whole-steps were covered by all of the directors Although eight teachers reported including instruction of the I, IV, and V chords in the select choir and one teacher taught the chords in the preparatory chorus, only seven reported teaching chord qualities, six of which taught them in the select choir.

In closing, Daniels states that there is no substantial evidence that other musical factors contribute to the success of individual sight-singing performance, which is later discredited by Demorest and May (Demorest and May 1995, 163). The author also concludes that the single-most important way to increase the sight-reading abilities of the

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[5] While the 1980 edition was recorded as being used by one teacher in this study, it is important to note that the latest edition (2003) has many differences from the earlier publication and had not been published at the time of this study

overall group is to focus on the individual choir members and to foster their abilities with frequent individualized assessments

1.4 Positive Learning Environment Creating Music Advocates

Kernersville Middle School choir director Tom Shelton is spotlighted in an informative article by Andrea Keating (2005) Keating successfully attempts to capture the positive energy that Shelton exudes in his choir classroom. Beginning with a brief description of Shelton's classroom, she points out the encouraging words from a banner posted over the door and the functional posters that serve more than just as decoration. It is clear that Shelton's organized classroom is evidence of his excellent classroom management, which is, then, reflected in the students' behavior

Whether Shelton is leading a warm-up or a song rehearsal, his positive attitude in the classroom helps to keep his students focused on singing without unnecessary stress on either party. His focus is not on what the students cannot or should not do, but is centered on what they *can* and *should* do This type of positive reinforcement creates a learning environment where students can effectively learn without negative factors contributing to the rehearsal His primary objective for each rehearsal is to develop the individual choir members' awareness of sound vocal technique and aural skills without the use of rote teaching. With constant reminders to the students to check their vocal shapes, Shelton does not ignore dynamics and articulations within the music, which, as Keating mentions, helps to develop each student's level of musicianship.

Keating also points out that Shelton's rehearsals rely mainly on the student's abilities to hear pitches with little use of the piano. His piano-less rehearsals aid the

students in adjusting to human reproductions of sound with regard to blend and intonation. When teaching sight-reading, Shelton requires the students to be accountable for their singing, and he does not sing their pitches for them. The excerpts used in sight-reading are not self-created, but rather excerpted from actual pieces that the students will encounter in their current choir repertoire. This method for sight-reading aids not only the student, but the teacher as well, as the task of pitch learning is now the individual student's responsibility.

In Keating's interview with the seasoned middle school director, Shelton's final quote is telling of his personal end-goal for his middle school choir students. " They may not all be music majors, but they can all be music advocates" (ibid , 53). With many public school districts considering the idea of cutting funding for music programs, it is even more important that music advocacy be spread – especially within such a vital age group that could greatly influence the continuation of music in future generations.

1 5. Making Sight-Reading a Priority

In the collegiate portion of *Teaching Music*, another argument for the importance of sight-reading is provided. Coppola (2008) notes that while sight-reading is often a task feared by young and seasoned musicians alike, it is one that must be strengthened. This article is centered on the extensive research in sight-reading conducted by Jennifer Mishra, a music educator professor at the University of Houston[6]. In Mishra's experience, it was not the method itself that dictated the student's improvement in sight-reading, but, rather, the amount of time spent developing this much-needed musical skill

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[6] This article does not reference a specific research study conducted by Mishra, but, rather, is founded upon Mishra's background as a music educator

How, then, should this time be spent when teaching sight-reading? Coppola

supports the three techniques recommended by Mishra: (1) teaching students to

constantly look beyond individual notes or rhythms, (2) teaching rhythms and notes in

patterns versus individually, and (3) teaching sight-reading at a faster tempo with a

steady audible beat (such as claps or a metronome) While the first two methods are

commonly used in the music classroom, it is the third that is challenged by many

teachers According to Mishra's research (as described in Coppola 2008), most teachers

conduct sight-reading exercises at a slow tempo to allow students more time to correctly

identify pitches and rhythms, however, her research supports that students who sight-read

at a faster tempo will improve their overall sight-reading abilities. While Mishra's

research does not define what causes students to sight-read better at a faster tempo, it

does suggest that perhaps teachers should encourage students to sight-read at both slow

and fast speeds.

1.6. Individual Sight-Singing Achievement in the Choral Ensemble

A preliminary study conducted by Henry and Demorest (1994) began a series of

investigations by the authors – both collectively and separately – regarding the individual

sight-reading performance of singers within Texas high school choirs showing group

success in sight-reading. For this study, two outstanding Texas high school choirs, one of

which used the moveable-*do* system[7] while the other used the fixed-*do* system, were

assessed on their individual performances based on (1) which syllable system they most

commonly used, (2) how often they received individual testing in the area of sight-

reading, and (3) what musical background variables might affect individual performance

The study reported that there was no significant difference in individual sight-singing performance between the two types of solfège training (moveable-*do* versus fixed-*do*) and showed an average of 66% accuracy when singers were scored individually In addition, the only factor significantly contributing to sight-reading success was private piano study. Henry and Demorest reported that although choirs may achieve overall outstanding group success in sight-reading, such group success does not serve as a valid display of individual sight-singing achievement and, further, recommended that choral directors feature more individual testing in their sight-reading instruction

Because many questions pertaining to factors related to individual success in sight-reading were proposed upon completion of this study, further research was conducted by Demorest and May in 1995 (see 1.6.2) – and later in 1998 (see 1.6.3.) – and also by Killian and Henry in 2005 (see 1.6.4.) in order to support these preliminary findings Henry and Demorest raised three questions of particular interest (1) How would individuals with less sight-singing training than those of top choirs perform? (2) Would varying degrees of difficulty within a melody affect students' performances? (3) Are there any other factors besides piano study that might be related to individual sight-singing performance? These questions would serve as the basis for future research conducted separately by Henry and Demorest.

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[7] The authors did not specify which minor syllable system was used

1 6 1 Factors Related to Individual Performance in Sight-Singing

In an extension of Henry and Demorest's previous research (1994), Demorest and May (1995), provide evidence to support the need for individualized sight-reading instruction in the choral classroom In this study, four areas were examined in relation to choir members' individual sight-singing skills. (1) their private musical training, (2) their choral experience, (3) the difficulty of the melodic material, and (4) the system used for group sight-singing instruction The subjects consisted of choir members performing in the top two mixed choirs within four Texas high schools and were divided into two categories (1) schools that used the fixed-*do* system versus (2) schools that used the moveable-*do* system (*la*-based minor)

Of the four areas examined, the total number of years of choral experience was the most significant contributor to the quality of performance in sight-reading, followed closely by private piano instruction. In this study, the results indicated that the moveable-*do*, *la*-based minor system produced slightly higher performance in students who sight-read using this method versus the fixed-*do* system; however, Demorest and May were not satisfied with this finding. Their re-evaluation of their previous findings brought them to the hypothesis that the higher-scoring students in the 1995 study group were more successful because of their previous exposure to individual sight-singing skill drills. Like Coppola's conclusion (2008), Demorest and May's findings confirm yet again that time spent devoted to sight-reading practice will contribute greatly to the increase in sight-reading abilities

1 6 2 The Effect of Individual Testing in Choral Sight-Reading

A continuation of their previous study conducted in 1995, this study (Demorest and May 1998) tested a new prediction that students who receive individual testing in sight-singing, in addition to group instruction, will achieve higher success than those solely receiving group instruction Students were asked to take home two sight-reading melodies, one in major and one in minor (using *la*-based minor) After one week, the students were asked to individually record their performance of two new melodies (similar to the one they had practiced), one in major and one in minor, in a practice room. Results of the study showed a significant gain in performance for the experimental group over the control group, the latter of which had no individual practice prior to the recording. While the previous studies conducted showed a difference in sight-reading syllable systems used, none of the 306 choir members used the fixed-*do* method in their choral classrooms and, therefore, this part of the study was left inconclusive.

1.6.3. Successful and Unsuccessful Strategies for Individual Sight-Singing

In a study conducted by Killian and Henry (2005), 198 volunteer high school singers from two Texas all-state choir camps helped the investigators to answer three questions relating to sight-reading strategies used within the state: (1) Is there a significant difference in overall sight-singing scores when singers do or do not have a 30-second practice period? (2) Does the 30-second practice period benefit any particular level of sight-singers (low-, medium-, or high-accuracy singers)? (3) Are there specific observable practice or performance strategies used by singers in different accuracy groups? For this study, two eight-measure melodies, similar in nature to the ones used in

the Texas All-State Choir audition process, were created, both written in 4/4 meter, in major keys that began on the tonic pitch

All participants sang both melodies, one melody with a 30-second study period and one without the study period While students were scored based on how many targeted pitch and rhythm tasks were successfully executed, the main source of this study was the observed behaviors occurring during the study periods and performances. Behaviors recorded include: pitch strategies (establishing the key through singing the tonic triad), the use of Curwen hand signs, use of solfège or number syllables, rhythm strategies (keeping a steady beat with the body), and overall strategies (tempo, starting over, isolating trouble spots). Participants were scored only a 'yes' or 'no' on each behavior, based on whether or not the behavior was exhibited, not upon the accuracy of their strategies.

Overall results of the study showed that the 30-second study period significantly increased the sight-reading performance of the high-accuracy and medium-accuracy groups; however, the low-accuracy group did not benefit from the 30-second study period. Furthermore, in the high-accuracy and medium-accuracy groups, the observed strategies differed very little, while those of the low-accuracy group showed grave differences compared to the high- and medium-accuracy groups Of the observed behaviors, three were among the most successful strategies for sight-reading performance: (1) the use of Curwen hand signs, (2) physically keeping the beat, and (3) beginning and ending with a steady tempo. Students who abandoned a steady beat, took their eyes off of the music, did not complete the exercise, and / or shifted their body, performed significantly worse than those who exhibited successful behaviors The results

of this study, according to the authors, indicate that singers who repetitively practice the successful sight-singing strategies may help increase their individual performance, regardless of their ability level

1 7 Successful Sight-Singing Strategies in Kentucky Choral Ensembles

In a study by Floyd and Bradley (2006), 24 choral directors were surveyed on their methods used when teaching sight-reading in the choral classroom The targeted population for this study was choral directors who participated in Kentucky Music Education Association (KMEA) district choral performance evaluations, and, in particular, the ones who received a distinguished score in the sight-singing evaluation of 2004 These 24 directors (out of 46 total who were asked to participate) had to answer 16 questions about their sight-reading instruction during a phone interview The areas of significant findings include. (1) the type of materials used during sight-reading instruction, (2) where sight-reading is placed during the class period, (3) which pitch (solfège) system was used, and (4) whether or not individual sight-reading performance tests were given

Of the responses related to materials used for sight-singing, 50% of the directors used a combination of self-made exercises and method books during instruction, while the others used solely one single method or none at all. Responses also indicated that 83% of the directors placed sight-reading at the beginning of their rehearsals. 75% of the directors reported using (1) moveable-*do*, while the others used (2) numbers or (3) letter names or (4) a combination of all four systems None of the directors reported using the fixed-*do* system In addition, 79 17% of the directors reported giving individual sight-

singing performance tests. The authors also found that the development of musical

literacy is helpful to the choral director in creating efficient rehearsals and improvements

in intonation

1.8. Sight-Singing Methods Compared

Among the ten articles discussed above, a single plea can be extracted. continued study in

the area of choral sight-reading is a necessity and must be explored in order to increase

the sight-reading abilities of singers in public schools. In addition, this plea can be

transferred into the realm of the volunteer choir, where the members are also students

who are eager to learn without extrinsic motivators. The various authors whose published

research on sight-reading in the choral setting provided the following findings for

increasing sight-reading abilities·

Guelker-Cone (1998)

    a. Rehearse without use of piano.

    b Moveable-*do*, *la*-based minor is the preferred syllable system.

Daniels (1986)

    a The sight-reading ability of students is determined by school

       demographics, individual background, and teacher methods.

    b Teachers should teach sight-reading.

Daniels (1988)

    a   Teachers should place great emphasis on sight-reading, including using

        melodic and rhythmic dictation exercises to improve sight-reading abilities

        instead of rote learning

    b.   Teachers should frequently evaluate their choir members individually

Keating (2005)

    a.   A positive learning environment helps students to focus

    b   Building musicianship while sight-reading is important

    c   Good vowel sounds should never be compromised

    d.   Rehearse without use of piano

    e.   Teaches in a student-centered classroom

Coppola (2008)

    a.   Teaching students to look ahead in music is more important than teaching

        individual notes.

    b   Sight-reading at faster tempos can be beneficial.

    c   Teaching patterns instead of individual notes can be helpful

Henry and Demorest (1994)

    a   Private piano study may help determine sight-reading abilities of students

    b.   Individual sight-reading testing is necessary to increase choir members'

        abilities

Demorest and May (1995)

    a   The total number of years in choir, combined with private piano

        instruction, help determine sight-reading abilities of students

    b. Moveable-do is the preferred syllable system [8]

    c   Individual sight-reading skill drills can be beneficial to students

Demorest and May (1998)

    a. Reinforces the results of the 1995 study that individual practice can

        increase the students' sight-reading abilities

Killian and Henry (2005)

    a   30-second study period prior to sight-reading all-state designed exercises

        will increase the students' performance abilities

    b. Successful sight-reading strategies versus unsuccessful strategies were

        identified:

          i.   Successful strategies: using Curwen hand signs, physically keeping

             the beat, and beginning and ending with a steady tempo

          ii. Unsuccessful strategies: abandoning a steady beat, taking the eyes

             off of the music, shifting the body

Floyd and Bradley (2006)

    a   Discusses sight-reading methods used by choral directors, but does not

        rate their effectiveness.

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[8] The authors did not specify the preferred minor solfège system

b   Methods include

      i   Using a combination of self-created resources and methods books

     ii.   Placing sight-reading instruction at the beginning of the class

           period

    iii   Using some type of pitch syllable system (moveable do, numbers,

           letter names, or any combination of systems)

    iv.   Giving individual sight-reading performance assessments in

           addition to group instruction in the classroom

CHAPTER 2

PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF SIGHT-READING IN THE VOLUNTEER CHOIR

2 1 Previous Observations and Teaching Experiences

After having taught a course in the fundamentals of music theory and basic sight-reading skills in a college classroom setting and having taught similar materials in a high school choral setting during the course of one semester, I noticed a marked difference between the two, mainly in their types of motivation Both settings can also be compared with my previous teaching experience in the elementary public school music classroom as well as in the church choir setting.

In the college setting, the students enrolled in, and paid for, the fundamentals course, which met three days a week for fifty minutes Throughout the semester, these students were introduced to many new musical concepts and were expected to complete written homework along with in-class assignments based primarily on participation. These students were motivated to complete assignments and to participate in class mainly because of the pressure placed upon students (both by the student and the teacher) to receive grades, an inevitable occurrence in the academic world. For some, completion of the course was mandated by another external factor their parents, who were paying for the course For the entire class, their grade would determine whether or not they would be

able to continue in the theory and aural course track as prescribed by their degree plan in music

The high school students that I taught met on a varied schedule of 'A' and 'B' days, known as "block scheduling " Because choir classes were not "double-blocked," I only saw each class every other day, with some exceptions due to the rotating 'A' and 'B' Friday schedules. Unlike the fifty-minute class period in the college setting, theory and sight-reading in high school was a thirty-minute lesson incorporated into the eighty-five minute choir class period Most students were enrolled in choir because they genuinely enjoyed singing, while school counselors placed a small minority of students in choir in order to fulfill a fine arts requirement mandated by the state

Throughout the semester, these students learned basic concepts of music theory and sight-reading through several different approaches to sight-reading skills, which included a combination of common public school method books and my own self-created materials. Choir students were given brief daily written assignments to be completed during a ten-minute period following a short lecture covering a particular topic Homework was generally not assigned, because the head choir director did not allow it, unless a student needed more time to complete the daily written assignment Like the college students, the high school students received grades based on participation and written work These students were less motivated to participate in the music theory / sight-reading portion of the class and always treated it as a means to get to their "actual music" rehearsal. In addition, the students who were forced by their counselors to enroll in choir generally made little or no effort to participate in any portion of the class, and, as a result, their grade suffered. Furthermore, because the head choir director did not place

any importance on music theory in the classroom (other than hiring someone to teach it), the students were even less motivated to participate – a significant factor contributing to sight-reading performance as noted by Daniels (1988) (see Chapter 1 2)

Based on my recent teaching experiences, it became clear that, in both the college and high school settings, there appeared to be a connection between the students' type of motivation and their participation / quality of performance I was, then, struck by these three questions· (1) If the college students had not been graded on their performance, would they still turn in their homework and participate in in-class activities? (2) Would the high school choir students focus on sight-reading and music theory lessons if they did not have choir music to sing following the lesson? (3) How, then, does the type of motivation affect the *church choir* setting when teaching similar musical concepts?

While the answers to the first two questions could probably be answered through further research of extrinsic motivators and their implications, the answer to the third question became an integral part of this thesis. Because typical church choir members are intrinsically motivated (as expounded upon in Chapters 3.2. and 3.3), different kinds of issues arise. As a former church choir director, with experience directing small (ten members or less) and large (thirty or more members) choirs, I have noticed that there is often a struggle to keep members' interests peaked and to maintain stability in attendance for weekly choir rehearsals (or even Sunday morning attendance, for that matter,) aside from special productions such as Easter or Christmas musicals.

Since there is no outward "reward" for attending rehearsals and / or Sundays (other than praise from the director or friends within the church), choir members have no real obligation to attend and could miss for any reason with little or no notice We might

spend one week learning a song during a regular choir rehearsal with ten people and then perform it the following Sunday with eight or maybe fifteen people. However, in my experience, when choir members *do* attend, public school teachers likely covet their participation level. Even if the choir members are not singing in "perfect harmony," their eagerness to learn new musical concepts is exceptional and often similar to that of a first grade music classroom: high energy dispersed throughout the room, with each face showing how focused and willing they are to learn – and with a similar attention span

Finally, it is exceedingly important to clarify that (1) it is not my intention to discount the participation of those who *do* attend choir rehearsals and Sunday services regularly, for it is because of these reliable members that church choirs continue to thrive, and, also that (2) no choir member should be taken for granted, as they are all equally vital to the sustainment of the church choir altogether – no matter how often they attend While music retention is obviously better if the members attend rehearsals consistently, a director cannot require a volunteer singer to attend every rehearsal. It is the *director's* responsibility to ensure that each singer is kept up-to-date with the group's expectations and progress throughout the course of the year.

2.2 Experiences with the Experimental Choir

In an eight-week study conducted by the investigator at a local church, twenty minutes of each weekly church choir rehearsal was devoted to the learning of fundamental music theory and aural concepts in an informal choral setting. The choir members (N=20) of varying levels of musical abilities formed the S(S)ATB ensemble, with the strongest music readers in the alto section The aural-based lesson objectives for each week were

devised using Karpinski's list of suggested areas that he states are necessary to the

development of good sight-reading performance pulse, meter, hypermeter, rhythm /

rhythm syllables, rhythmic dictation, pitch, pitch matching, pitch memory, memory of

pitch collections, inference of tonic, melodic contour, identification of scale degrees /

resolution of tendency tones, identification of intervals, identification of scale types,

solmization systems, absolute pitch (Karpinski 2000, 19-61). Of these areas, rhythmic

dictation and absolute pitch were excluded from this study.

Alongside aural concepts, vocal production was also taught. Throughout the

course of instruction, choir members were constantly reminded not to sacrifice good

sound production when attempting any new exercises Good sound production is defined

based upon two fundamental vocal techniques: (1) what the mouth does and (2) what the

breath does. Table 1 displays the five basic vowel shapes used in singing Vocal warm-

ups designed for good sound production and those that were used for this study are also

located below (see Figure 1).

Table 1: Five Basic Vowel Shapes

IPA	Phonetic	Familiar Word
[a]	Ah	"father"
[ɛ]	Eh	"egg"
[i]	Ee	"eat"
[o]	Oh	"open"
[u]	Oo	"oops"
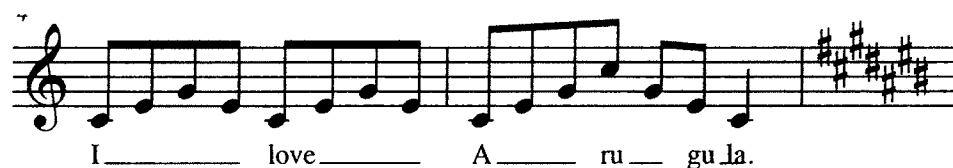
Figure 1: Vocal Warm-Ups Used with Experimental Choir

2.3. Pre-Test Procedure

Following the completion of the Volunteer Choir Member and Director surveys (see

Chapter 3), a pre-test was administered to establish the choir members' sight-reading

abilities. The pre-test consisted of a Grade 3 UIL-classified piece that the church choir

members had never seen before[9]. The investigator reviewed the entire testing procedure

with the group prior to the group testing. All portions of the pre-test were video-recorded

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[9] "Gloria in excelsis" from *Gloria in D Major*, RV 589 by Antonio Vivaldi was used (47 measures of actual singing with piano reduction accompaniment) Although it was later made known to the investigator that some of the members had *heard* the piece prior to this study, it is unlikely that it enhanced their sight-reading performance

The choir members stood in their usual singing arrangement in the choir room

(see Figure 2) and were given a copy of the music faced-down The choir members were

signaled by the investigator to turn the music over, once everyone had received a copy

The director was instructed to follow guidelines similar to the Texas University

Interscholastic League (UIL) contest procedure for choral sight-reading (see Figure 3)

Back row	Tenors	Basses	1st Sopranos
Front row		Altos	2nd Sopranos

Figure 2: Choir Seating Chart

Prior to the director's initial instructional period, the investigator asked the choir

members to identify six musical concepts found in the piece: (1) clefs, (2) meter

signature, (3) opening key, (4) difficult rhythmic passages by measure numbers, (5)

difficult melodic passages by measure numbers, and (6) tonal center shifts and / or

modulations. The investigator allowed a brief open discussion, with a maximum of 45

seconds per question, in which the choir members answered the six questions aloud (See

Chapter 2 4.).

After the investigator-led discussion, the director was allowed seven minutes to

give a general explanation of the piece, but was not required to use the entire time

allotment. Four modifications were made to the UIL guidelines for this study: (1) neither

the director nor the choir members were allowed to chant or tap rhythms aloud prior to

the first sight-reading attempt, (2) choir members were not allowed to ask and / or answer

any questions once the first instructional period began, (3) the tonic chord was only

allowed to be sounded immediately prior to first sight-reading attempt, and, (4) because

the piece required an instrumental accompaniment (string orchestra and basso continuo),

a piano reduction was played by the investigator for both sight-reading attempts

Adhering to the modified UIL guidelines, the choir members and their director were not

allowed to audibly reproduce the music in any way during the first instructional period

Following this period, the choir was given two attempts to perform the selected piece.

The first attempt would provide the investigator with a general sense of the choir

members' sight-reading abilities, while the second attempt would serve as an indication

of whether or not the choir members could quickly recognize and correct their mistakes

The investigator established the key by playing a D-major chord in open position. In

addition, the starting pitches were rolled slowly from bass to soprano (the same chord

given to establish the key) The director established the tempo by conducting two silent

measures, and then the accompaniment began. Singers began their first entrance at m. 17,

beat 3

    After the first attempt, the director was given two minutes to address any

obstacles that the choir encountered and was then allowed to sing or speak any melodic

or rhythmic passages The choir members were, again, not allowed to audibly reproduce

the music. At the end of the two minutes, the choir members began their second attempt

Because the pre-test was not designed to assess their overall performance, but rather their

own personal perception of their individual performance within the group, no detailed

rating system was devised; however, their overall performance was recorded as either

generally successful or generally unsuccessful, based on an informal poll of the members

and an assessment made by both the choir director and the investigator following the pre-

test Upon completion of the sight-reading performance, the choir members were given a

five-minute break, which was then followed by the lesson for Week One

---

(1) *Time*. A director of a choral group will be given six minutes to study the score and instruct the organization. EXCEPTION: Sub-non varsity choirs may extend the study and instruction period by one minute.

(2) *Instructions*. At any time during the instruction period the tonic chord may be played once in broken chord style. It may not be reproduced by the students. The director may instruct the group by tapping out rhythms and talking about any passage of music but may not hum, sing any part, or allow it to be played on the piano. Students may chant rhythms and/or text and tap or clap the rhythms. But they may not reproduce the music tonally. Students may ask questions and make comments, according to the director's wishes.

(3) *Marking Music*. Neither the director nor the students may mark on the sightreading music unless instructed to do so by a judge.

(4) *First Reading*. At the completion of the instruction period, choral groups will be given the tonic chord, in broken chord style. At that time, the students may reproduce the tonic chord, utilizing their preferred method of sightreading (numbers, syllables, etc.). The accompanist will then give the starting pitches, which each section may sing, again utilizing their preferred method. The director may sing the starting pitch with each section. After the choir has sung its starting pitches no further warmup or musical instruction of any kind is permitted by the director, including the use of verbal counting to initiate the reading. The selection will then be sung without piano accompaniment and using the group's preferred method of sightreading. The director may choose to read the piece in the printed key or any other key suitable for the group.

(5) *Second Instruction Period*. Following the first reading, the director will have two minutes for instruction. The procedures described in (2) will apply.

(6) *Second Reading*. The procedures in (4) will apply. The selection will then be sung a cappella. All groups may continue to use their preferred method of sightreading or may sing the words printed in the score. The director's decision to use text or not will have no bearing on the final rating. Both readings will be judged.

Figure 3: UIL Procedures for Choral Sight-Reading Competition[10]

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[10] These rules can be accessed in Section 1111 of *The Constitution and Contest Rules* on the Texas UIL website http //www uil utexas edu/policy/constitution This publication is not copyrighted and can be freely distributed and copied

Figure 4: Excerpt from *Gloria in D Major*

2 4. Six Preliminary Questions: Pre-Test

When the choir members were asked to identify the six musical concepts presented by the investigator before the Pre-Test, the following collective responses were recorded:

Investigator (I): Identify the all clefs present.

Choir members (CM): Treble clef   bass clef

I: Identify the meter signature.

CM: Cut time   common time   4/4

I: Identify the opening key.

CM: Two sharps   D (with a sense of uncertainty) ... Yes, definitely the key of D.

I: Identify difficult rhythmic passages, using measure numbers.

CM: mm. 17-18   m. 50   mm. 38-39   m.18   mm. 62-64, m. 68.

I: Identify difficult melodic passages, using measure numbers.

CM: mm. 33   mm. 31-32 for the altos and tenors   mm. 41-43 for the altos   m. 47.

I: Identify any tonal center shifts or modulations.

CM: mm. 41-42   m. 28   none

During the seven-minute instructional period, the director highlighted the following areas in the piece

1. *Dotted-eighth-sixteenth rhythm in mm. 17-20 and mm. 28-30*

2. *Longer notes in mm. 28-31*

3. *Sound carries across barline from m. 34 to m. 35*

4. *Rhythm in m. 38, compared to m. 28*

5. *Long chain of long notes in mm. 38-41*

6 *Harmony changing and new rhythm pattern starting in m. 50*

7. *Mixture of rhythms in m. 68*

The director was careful not reproduce rhythm patterns, but guided the choir members to these notable passages by describing the note values in terms of fast or slow velocities. He also instructed the choir members to put a finger on the measure(s) that he highlighted to ensure that everyone focused on the same information. The director spent the full seven minutes mainly addressing areas related to rhythm, while briefly mentioning the new harmonic material in m. 50.

2 5 Discussion of the Pre-Test

While a Grade 3 UIL piece is considered "medium" in difficulty, for the purposes of this study, "medium" was rather difficult Not only were the pitches difficult for the singers to sing, but also their entrances were very tentative Many of the singers appeared to be confused and may not have actually known where they were in the music The piece was entirely too long, and there was never a moment at which any section (SATB) appeared to be confident in their singing At the end of their sight-reading attempt, it was clear that the choir members felt less than competent in their attempt, and it was necessary to sincerely praise them for their efforts Thankfully, they worked incredibly hard for me and wanted to be successful in their performance However, their poor sight-reading performance was indeed helpful to this study in gaining a better awareness of what a choir of their level should actually be capable of sight-reading.

Based on the responses given to the six preliminary questions, it was obvious that the choir as a whole seemed to be familiar with some of the fundamental musical concepts, including clefs and key signatures. However, the choir members' ability to identify tonal shifts and / or modulations left room for improvement. In fact, no one in the group was able to correctly identify the passages where a modulation or tonal shift occurred; rather, some singers pointed out passages that contained accidentals. This, at least, shows some signs of knowledge of tonal shifts and / or modulations, but does not prove that they know how to fully identify these more advanced concepts.

Another interesting response from the choir members was that regarding the meter signature question. The first person to answer the question confused the "common time" symbol with the "cut time" symbol and a few others also shared the same response.

The rest of the group responded correctly with "common time" or "4/4 time " The

director spent the majority of his time pointing out rhythmic features of the piece

(possibly meaning that he tends to focus on rhythmic aspects of music over melodic

features), but the singers could not answer the question 100% correctly

I wanted to allow time to point out any trouble spots from the reading, but there

were so many trouble spots in the Vivaldi that it was impossible to discuss all of them in

the time allotted to me. Instead, I led the singers on a guided tour of the piece, addressing

some difficult harmonic passages and basic counting errors. The feedback from the choir

members was much to be expected· "didn't expect it to be so hard," "couldn't find my

starting pitch," "didn't know when to make a certain entrance," and "wanted the piano to

help me find my notes "

In the informal verbal poll taken after both sight-reading attempts, nine of the

twenty members felt that the piece was way above their current reading abilities, while

the other twelve members felt that, with more time, they could have successfully "sight-

read" [sic] the piece. All twenty members verbally reported that they considered their

performance to be unsuccessful.

2 6. Lesson Plans

Provided below are detailed lesson plans for each week of the eight-week study

conducted with the experimental church choir Each weekly plan includes. the concepts

to be covered, the teaching methods and materials used, and assessments. In conjunction

with the choral anthems selected by their music director, the repertoire used during this

study was taken from two collections of choral gospel and contemporary anthem books[11]

All other materials used were a combination of self-created exercises and commonly used

methods, based on my previous teaching experiences, as well as new methods developed

for the purpose of this study[12] Another feature of the lesson plans includes the

implementation of the National Standards for Music Education[13] (see Figure 5) with

suggestions for use in the church choir setting

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1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

2 Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

3 Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.

4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines

5. Reading and notating music

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

7 Evaluating music and music performances

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Figure 5: National Standards for Music Education

[11] 2006 *Top Anthems, Volume 1* Brentwood Benson
2006 *Top Anthems: Southern Gospel, Volume 1* Brentwood Benson
[12] Curwen hand signs, Kodály methods, and Gordon syllable systems are clear exceptions to the self-created materials used in this study and are credited as they appear in the lesson plans as well as in the bibliography
[13] http //www menc org/resources/view/national-standards-for-music-education

Week One

Objectives

- The choir members will learn

    o   about the importance of good sound production.

    o   how to recognize clefs, lines and spaces of the staff.

    o   a rhythm syllable system (Gordon) and its differences from a counting

    system

National Standards

- 1   Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

- 5. Reading and notating music

- 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

Materials

- Each choir member and teacher will need.

    o   Printed sheet music (Vivaldi's Gloria in D major)

    o   A pencil

- In addition, a piano, a recording of "Gloria," and / or a CD player are

  recommended.

Procedures

1. Have choir members stand for warm-ups. While leading the group in a mirrored

physical warm-up (see Figure 6), explain to them that they will engage in healthy vocal

and / or physical warm-ups every week in order to promote good sound production

2 While continuing the mirrored physical warm-up, demonstrate undesired sound production by producing a flat, overly forward [æ] vowel, as in 'hat' Have choir members imitate the undesired sound. Repeat Step 2

3 While still warming up, demonstrate good sound production by producing a cool, easy-sounding [u] vowel, as in 'hoot' Be careful not to overly darken the vowel Have choir members imitate the good sound Repeat Step 3

4 Stop the physical warm-up slowly by calmly counting down from five to one Then, immediately begin a simple vocal warm-up[14] (see Figure 7). Today's goal for the vocal warm-up is producing a cool [u] vowel.

5. Instruct choir members to take out a pencil and their copy of the Vivaldi[15] and be seated

6. Begin the lecture-style lesson by reminding them of the two sounds that you / they made earlier. how the sounds were different and how they were labeled. Now, briefly mention the other lesson objectives for today (clefs, lines and spaces, and Gordon syllables)

7. Instruct choir members to look at the very first measure of the piece. Explain the order of the symbols that appear: clef, key signature, and time signature. Have them write 'CKT' at the top of their music. Point out that these symbols always occur in this order, alphabetically. (Tell them that they will learn about key signatures in another lesson.)

8 Point out the treble clef in m. 1 and have them circle it in their music. Show them how the tail inside the clef encircles a specific line. (Don't name it.) Now, do the same with

---

[14] Since this week's lesson involves very little singing, only one vocal warm-up will be used
[15] While the choir members gathered their materials at this point in the lesson, I began describing their previous sight-reading attempt of this piece

the bass clef in m. 1 Show them how the two dots appear on either side of a specific line

(Again, don't name the line)

9 Ask the choir members how many lines they see on the treble clef staff and the bass

clef staff Starting with the treble clef staff, begin naming the lines from bottom to top, E-

G-B-D-F Teach them a mnemonic device to help them memorize the lines: "Every Good

Boy Does Fine" is a popular one that they might already know. Now do the same for the

bass clef staff, G-B-D-F-A "Good Boys Do Fine Always" is a popular bass clef

mnemonic device

Instruct the choir members to follow your body movements Because church choirs tend to have older members (ages 50+), be careful to use simple movements that will not cause excessive physical stress The following movements can be done in any order and should cause little, if any, physical stress to the choir members

Shoulder rolls Slowly roll your shoulders back, at least six times, and then forward the same number of repetitions
Arm stretches Slowly stretch arms upward (one at a time), with the wrists just slightly bent backward and the palms of the hands facing upward Hold each stretched arm at least four seconds, then alternate arms Stretch each arm at least three times
Knee bends Slowly bend both knees together and then slowly return to a completely upright position Do this at least three times
Walk in place Lightly lift each foot alternately at a comfortable walking speed Do this for at least ten seconds
Neck rolls Because of the dangers associated with rolling the neck improperly, I do not recommend using this physical warm-up

While engaging in physical warm-ups in a choir setting, I would strongly recommend incorporating some type of simultaneous vocal activity, such as a vocal warm-up or an aural singing exercise For this study, every lesson included simultaneous warm-up activities

Figure 6: Mirrored Physical Warm-up

Figure 7: Simple Vocal Warm-Up with "Cool [u]"

10 Now ask the choir members how many spaces they see between the lines. Starting

with the treble clef, begin naming the spaces from bottom to top, F-A-C-E, which spells

the word "face " Do the same thing for the bass clef, A-C-E-G, which looks like "ace"

plus "g " Encourage the choir members to use their own mnemonic devices to learn the

lines and the spaces if they need them

11. Explain the purpose of ledger lines and the extension of the staff Have choir

members identify the first two eighth notes in both clefs for the first measure

12. Now go to m. 16 and have the choir members circle the octave-treble clef in the tenor

voice Many tenors in church choirs will not be used to reading this clef as their part is

usually combined with the bass line in the bass clef. Explain that they will not usually

read in this clef, but show them how it is the same as treble clef, just sounding an octave

below You may need to use a piano to demonstrate or just leave it as a simple

explanation. (Do not spend too much time trying to explain this. If you see confused

looks from the choir, move on to something else more easily grasped.)

13. Before moving on to Gordon syllables, be sure to quickly review the clefs, lines and

spaces. Quick Assessment: Ask the choir members which line the treble clef's inner tail

encircles, Ask which line the two dots of the bass clef border.

14 Have choir members put their materials away and begin tapping a steady beat no faster than 80 beats per minute Instruct choir members to mirror you (They will likely rush the tempo, so remind them to stay with your tempo) Explain that you are beating big beats[16]

15 While continuing to beat big beats, label this big beat as 'Du' and ask the choir members to chant this with you

16 Now, instruct the choir members to continue to chant the big beats while you add something new: 'Du-De.' Do this for about 15-20 seconds, then switch chants with the choir members: you chant big beats while the choir members chant the smaller beats Do this until everyone is confidently chanting 'Du-De' at a steady tempo with you, then, switch chants again.

17 Now play the first 15 measures of the Vivaldi "Gloria" (either on the piano or a recording) and have the choir members chant only the big beat ('Du'). Then, go back to the beginning and add the subdivision ('Du-De'). Quick Assessment: Ask the choir members to identify the time signature by the patterns of big beats that they hear. ("How many big beats do you hear in each measure?") Even though they have already seen the music and probably remember that the answer is 4/4 or common time, they should begin to relate the *feel* of a time signature to the notated symbol in the music.

18. To close the lesson, briefly summarize the concepts discussed today. Optional assessment: "Which clefs did we see today?" "Name the lines and spaces in treble clef." "Describe the characteristics of a good sound." "Which rhythm syllable do we chant for the big beat?"

---

[16] The terms relating to beats in Gordon's system are referred to as "macro-" and "microbeats "

Assessment

Choir members easily grasped clefs, lines and spaces For most of them (well over the

majority), this was considered an unnecessary review proven by a show of hands

The choir members were hesitant at first and did not understand the need for a rhythm

syllable system. However, when I explained that there were several other rhythm systems

that we would not be learning, they were happy to just have the one. They began to

understand the purposes of Gordon syllables and were willing to try to use them in the

context of actual music. The singers were also assessed on their ability to create good

sound production throughout the course of the lesson to ensure healthy singing.

Week Two

Objectives

- The choir members will learn

    o   the difference between Gordon syllables and

    o   a traditional number counting system

National Standards

- 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

- 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

Materials

- Each choir member will need

    o   Printed sheet music ("When We All Get to Heaven")

    o   A pencil

- In addition, an audio recording of "When We All Get to Heaven" is recommended

Procedures

1 Have choir members stand for warm-ups While leading the group in a mirrored physical warm-up (see Figure 6), explain to the choir members that today's lesson will require very little actual singing They will be singing on one-note patterns using a neutral syllable

2. Lead choir members in a rhythm warm-up (see Figure 9). The teacher is Part 1 and the choir member is Part 2 Start at a medium tempo and maintain a steady beat throughout Do not let the singers rush. The teacher can alter the tempo as necessary Once the drill is familiar, practice switching roles (approximately 2-3 minutes).

3. Use Gordon syllables in the chorus section of "When We All Get to Heaven " Do not sing actual printed notes. Choose a comfortable speaking tone such as G4 for women and G3 for men (see Figure 8)

Because the emphasis of this lesson is on rhythm patterns isolated from pitch, it is not necessary to sing the Gordon syllables on the actual printed pitches.

4. Now write the note values from Rhythm Warm-up #1 on the board in the form of a "tree" beginning with a single whole note at the top and ending with 16 sixteenth notes on the bottom, thus showing the subdivision of each previous note value (see Figure 10).
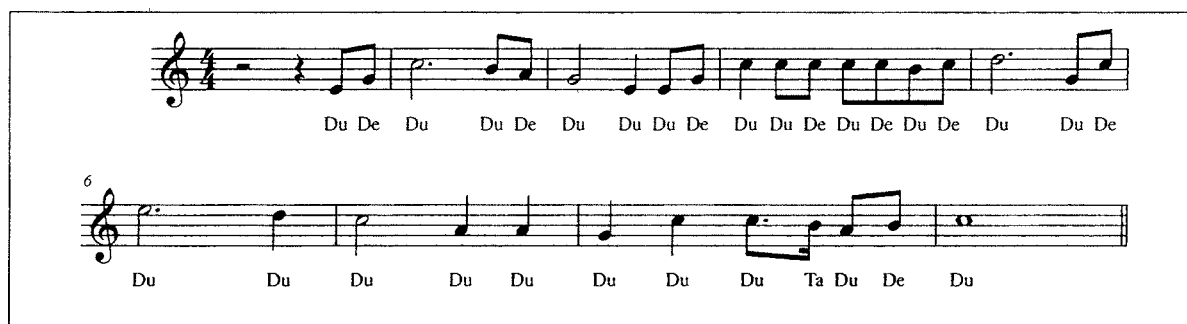
Figure 8: Using Gordon Syllables in Melody of

"When We All Get to Heaven" Chorus

5 Explain each note value individually, using Gordon syllables and working in 4/4 time

for consistency. As you go down the tree, be sure to explain the subdivisions using

Gordon syllables.

6. Go back to the top of the tree and assign numbers to each note value. As you go down

the tree, be sure to explain the divisions of two using a number counting system (see

Figure 11)

7. Return to Rhythm Warm-Up #1 and use a number counting system. Do not show the

choir members the warm-up sheet They should be able to do this aurally.

8. Now, return to "When We All Get to Heaven" and sing the excerpt on numbers, still

using a neutral pitch.

9. Aural assessment: Play the recording of "When We All Get to Heaven" and have the

choir members identify "Du" for the first few measures. Then, slowly add other

subdivisions. When the first chorus section begins, have the choir members chant the

rhythm with the recording using Gordon syllables Repeat the assessment using numbers

Assessment

This lesson was very successful The choir members were able to apply Gordon syllables

to the chorus section of "When We All Get to Heaven " Members seemed pleased with

their accomplishment and were heavily praised for their work There was some minor

confusion, mainly from oldest members of the group, with regard to the syllables –

especially when subdividing to the sixteenth-note level. The singers who have had little

or no music background grasped the concepts and later thanked me for explaining rhythm

to them as it had not been addressed in depth in their past church choir experience When

the singers were chanting using numbers, a visual connection was made between the two

systems (Gordon and number counting system); however, it was important to point out

that the two systems are not meant to be translated between one another, as the Gordon

syllable system is not a counting system

Figure 9: Rhythm Warm-up #1

Figure 10: Note Value Tree Using Gordon Syllables in 4/4 Time
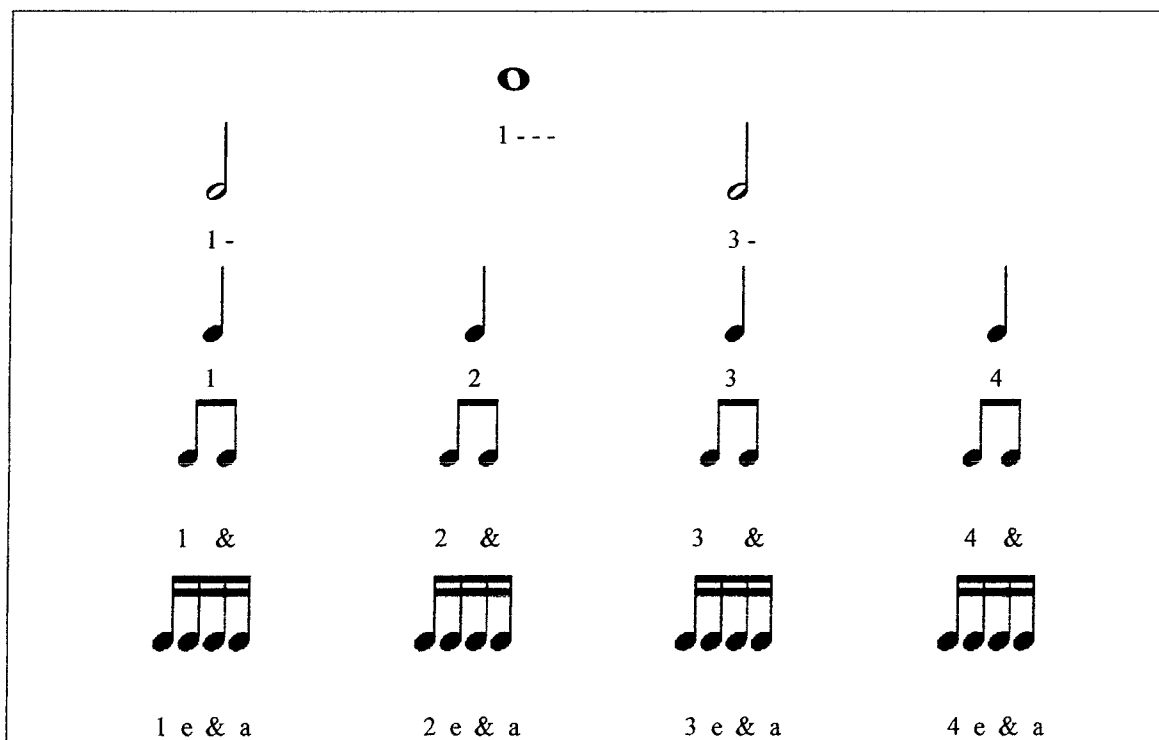
Figure 11: Note Value Tree Using Numbers in 4/4 Time

Week Three

Objectives

The choir members will learn

- How to sing using solfège (moveable-*do* system in major tonality only)

- How to use Curwen hand signs when singing using solfège

- How to apply solfège to major triads

National Standards

- 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

Materials

- There are no required materials for this lesson, however, a piano may be useful

  for the teacher.

Procedures

1. Have choir members stand for warm-ups. Begin with the physical warm-ups, and then

proceed to vocal warm-ups. During the physical warm-ups, explain to the choir members

that they will be learning solfège syllables, like the ones used in the movie *The Sound of*

Music.

2. Have the choir members sit following all warm-ups and begin introducing solfège

syllables with their respective Curwen hand signs. (See Figure 12 for hand signs) You

can use a chart to display the hand signs, or use your own hands as a visual aid

(preferred).

3. Relate solfège syllable system to *The Sound of Music* movie. Play a C-major scale and

assign each pitch a solfège syllable. (Explain the spelling of sol versus the actual

pronunciation when singing. [sol] versus [so].) Always use Curwen hand signs when

demonstrating solfège. This helps the kinesthetic learners; however, do not write the syllables on the board.

4. Utilize echo drills using a modified Kodály approach[17]: the choir members repeat a set of syllables after vocal demonstration without the use of a piano (4-minute assessment). Remind the singers to use the Curwen hand signs.

5. Acquaint the choir members with the sound of the piano versus the sound of the human voice. Play a C-major triad and tell them it is a C triad (they will learn what type of triad it is later).

do[|]

ti

la

sol

fa

mi

re

do[|]
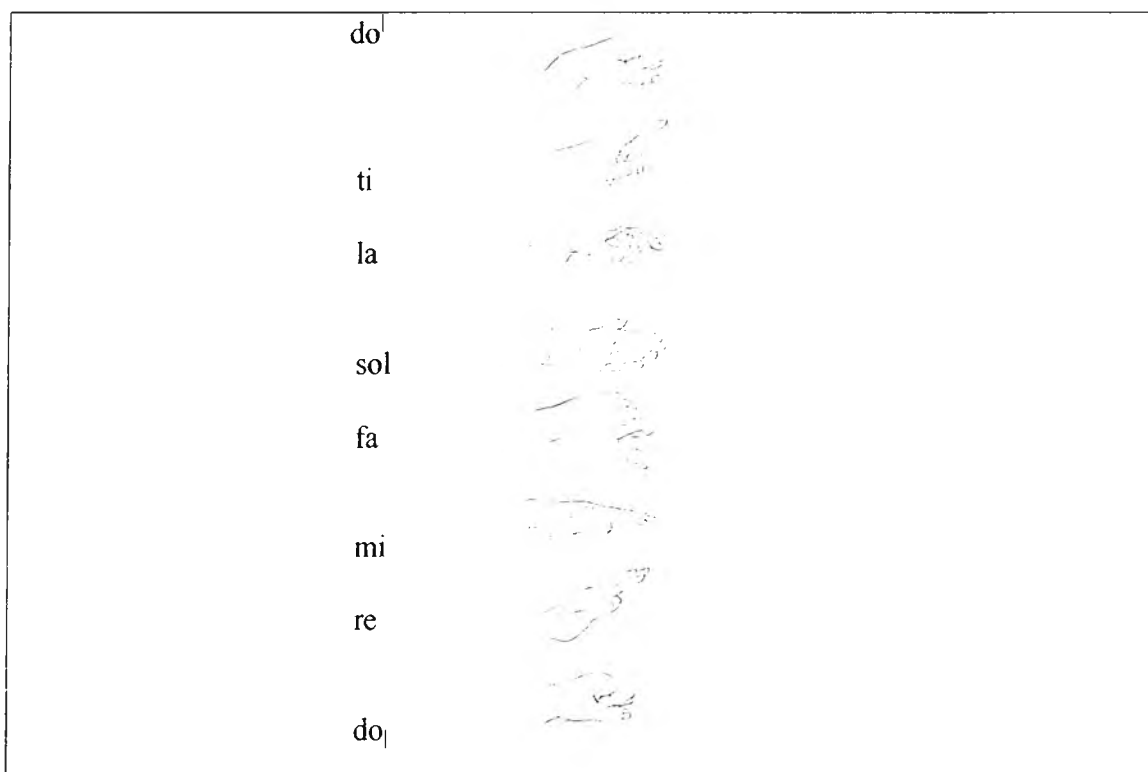
Figure 12: Curwen Hand Signs[18]

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[17] The Kodály approach introduces new solfege syllables slowly beginning with the sol-mi interval; however, it is my belief that adults who have already been exposed to the solfege system – no matter how briefly – only need a short review with this step-by-step approach.

6 Then, arpeggiate the triad telling the members that it is still a C triad, just broken up

7 Now label each member of the triad as do, mi and sol.

8 Finally, play other major triads, in root position (making sure they are within the comfortable singing range for everyone)

9. Assessment see how many times the group can successfully sing back the syllables do, mi, and sol without help from the teacher. Remind the singers to use the Curwen hand signs

This lesson will require a freer structure than the previous lessons. Depending upon how fast the singers learn each solfège syllable pattern, you may need to spend more time drilling certain patterns with hand signs

Assessment

After drilling solfège patterns and hearing the C major scale, members successfully sang a scale without the aid of a piano or myself singing along. This could be due to the fact that *all* of the members have been exposed to solfège through the movie/musical *The Sound of Music*, which was referenced several times throughout this lesson I was so pleased that the singers were able to identify the correct solfège syllables throughout the drills. The biggest challenge was convincing the group to use hand signs throughout the lesson Occasionally, I had to remind them of how to sign "sol" and "re," but the others were more easily remembered. With regards to "sol," I had to constantly remind them not to raise the thumb in this position as it created a different hand sign that we would not be learning ("si") At the close of this lesson, I polled the group about their perception of solfège. Amazingly, only one person said that they did not find solfège useful, while

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[18] http //www kodaly org au

every other member agreed that they needed more time to grasp the concept before they could properly form a decision That one person typically has not liked trying any of the new concepts throughout these lessons, so I was not surprised that they did not find it useful, however, I *was* surprised that no one else objected

Week 4

Objectives

The choir members will·

- practice their solfège skills without the use of the piano

- apply solfège to songs without the use of sheet music

- focus on aural skills

National Standards

- 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

- 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

Materials

- There are no required materials for this lesson, however, a dry erase board (or similar board) is recommended.

Procedure

1. Have choir stand for vocal warm-ups (No physical warm-up for this lesson.) Singers may be seated after vocal warm-ups. Remember to address desired vowel sounds throughout. Do not move on to the lesson until they have been warm-up properly.

2. Review major scale using solfège, teach "Solfège Song" (Figure 13) for added help in memorization.

3 Teach Part 1 of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" two-part arrangement without sheet music (see Figure 14) Although I generally frown upon rote learning, the quickest way to teach this short arrangement is by having the choir repeat small phrases after demonstration This lesson is about developing aural skills, therefore, it is important to avoid giving the choir any sheet music during this time

4 After Part 1 is successfully learned, teach Part 2 Then, assign Part 1 to one half of the group and Part 2 to the other

5 Once both parts are successfully learned, try performing them both together Assessment Have the groups switch parts and perform the song again. Do this until it is successful. Do not play any portion of this on the piano and remember not to show the singers the printed music.

6. Practice: "Follow the hand drill" Have choir members sing back to you the syllable that you show with your hand Always encourage the singers to use hand signs when they sing on solfège. Assessment Have choir members sing back to you the following syllables with hand signs. do_1 to mi, do_1 to sol, do_1 to do^1, sol to mi, and sol to do_1 / do^1 This drill will serve as a good indication of which syllables your singers know best, and which need more attention.

Assessment
The group remembered the major scale and also did well "following the hand" when shown a solfège hand sign. The "My Country 'Tis of Thee" melody (Part 1) was successfully learned with hand signs and solfège without the aid of sheet music or other written syllable guide. Part 2 was also learned without the need for a visual aid, however,

when both parts were put together, the Part 2 group was easily persuaded by Part 1, and

they were eventually singing the melody by the end and were completely confused about

which syllable they were supposed to be singing and which hand sign to use After a few

more attempts, I decided to write the syllables only to Part 1 on the dry erase board and

reviewed Part 2 They then sang the two parts together successfully. They were also able

to switch parts and successfully sing the song I eventually erased the syllables on the dry

erase board and the groups performed the arrangement successfully. The "follow the

hand" drill assessment was also successful, however, the singers had the most difficulty

singing do$_|$ up to sol and do$_|$ up to do$^|$ in tune. We drilled these two sets of intervals

several times until the singers sang them in tune.

(Note This exact same lesson was presented by me at San Marcos High School with the

Junior Varsity Women's Chorus, Varsity Women's Chorus, and Varsity Men's Chorus

with almost identical results in each choir)

Figure 13: Solfège Song[19]

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[19] Composed by Cecilia Kittley in 2008 for use in this study

Figure 14: "My Country 'Tis of Thee" Two-Part Arrangement

Week 5

Objectives

The choir members will

- Practice creating good sound production vs undesired sound production

- Learn basic choral music reading skills while preserving musicality

National Standards

- 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

- 5. Reading and notating music.

- 6 Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

- 9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Materials

Each choir member and teacher will need

- A pencil

- Printed sheet music – any anthem will do

Procedures

(This is a 30-minute lesson)

1. Have choir members stand for physical and vocal warm-ups. During physical warm-ups, explain to choir members that they will be practicing creating good vocal sounds like the ones learned in Week One. The singers will be exploring more than just pitches and rhythms; they will be looking for musical moments, not just fragments of sound Use the exercises in Figure 17 in addition to any other chosen vocal warm-ups. The purpose of the exercises in Figure 17 is for the singers to learn to hear good sounds and not to dwell on undesired ones. It is important for the teacher to always demonstrate good sounds, especially when singers are expected to imitate the teacher. Assess their ability to reproduce good sounds throughout each exercise.

2. Have singers be seated, and begin reviewing concepts learned thus far by doing a guided walk-through of an upcoming choral anthem (see Figure 15) Because every choir sings different repertoire, I have not included the anthem title in this lesson. However, the musical principles apply to all genres.

3. New concept. introduce solfège related to keys (see Figure 16). Use Figure 16 to explain how solfège can be related to the key(s) / tonal center(s) of a piece. It is not necessary to have the singers sing all pitches using solfège syllables, but the singers should recognize that the key of the piece is the tonal center ("do").

4 Explain the need for musicality even in the sight-reading process Musicality during sight-reading saves rehearsal time so that you can have more time to rehearse other songs or spend more time socializing and / or praying Explain how musicianship cannot be taught, as it comes from within, however, musicality can be taught and can affect your level of musicianship (i e , the "Carnegie Hall musician" versus an amateur musician)

The following are statements and questions that should be answered for each piece learned in the church music repertoire While most of these issues can be addressed quickly, some are often neglected when reading a piece of music for the first time

1 Check the publication date and the composer(s) / arranger(s) These are factors that can often determine the style of a composition

2 Address any tempo markings or articulations printed at the beginning of the score above the top most staff This creates the character of the dynamics, articulation, and tone

3 Check the clefs Are the sopranos and altos on their own staves or are they on a shared staff? Is the tenor part written in bass clef or in the octave-treble clef? Are the parts scored in open score? Is there accompaniment? These are all questions that should quickly be answered

4 Where does the starting pitch come from in each voice? This is just as important to the teacher as it is to the singers

5 Is there an introduction? If so, how long is it and when should I begin breathing?

6 Who has the melody initially? Most commonly it is the sopranos, however, another voice part can always contain the melody

7 Who starts the piece? Are the women's parts combined? Is there a "men only" entrance?

8 What is the initial dynamic marking?

Figure 15: Steps for the Guided Walk-Through

9 Is the text in English? While a true "anthem" is defined by the use of English text, many sacred works appear most commonly in Latin If the text is in another language, consider learning the pitches and rhythms first on a neutral syllable Then, go back and teach the text slowly without pitches Finally, sing the text on the printed pitches

10 Leaving the initial statements of the piece, what is the dynamic structure? Is there text painting? Are there any specific articulations marked or assumed?

11 Now who has the melody? Does it move between parts? Is there a conversation between parts?

12 Are there any rhythmically challenging passages? Most often the teacher will have to point out these moments, but try to give time for the singers to familiarize themselves with these passages

13 Are there any melodically challenging passages?

14 Are there any repeat signs? What is the "road map" of the piece? Is it strophic or through-composed?

14 By now, less than 10 minutes have gone by and the singers should be familiar with the "ins and outs" of the piece It is now time to begin the first read-through of the piece Pick a comfortable tempo and stay with it The singers should sing through as much of it as they can before stopping to address issues It is too early to "fix" anything, however, listen for passages that need definite attention, including any that you may have already planned for

15 After the first read-through, it is important to isolate sections that you want to rehearse Singing through a piece two or three times and moving on to another song will not lead to musical retention

16 Upon completion of rehearsing isolating sections, ask the singers if they have any major issues that need to be resolved, but remind them that they will have more time the following week (or Sunday morning) to address them

17 Keep a calm, never hurried, mood when walking through the piece Be sure to look up from the music constantly to ensure that the choir members are still following you Praise them when they identify parts of the score and encourage questions throughout the walk-through This will ensure a positive learning environment for the singers

18 Always end a new piece on section that the singers feel comfortable with, even if it is only a few measures This helps to build confidence in the singers

Figure 15 Continued

Principle	*Example*
If Do = Key,	If Do = Key,
and the Key = X,	and the Key = C,
then Do = X	then Do = C.

Figure 16: Solfège Related to Keys

For Exercises 1 and 2, to replace overly forward sounds in m. 1, use the more closed

sounds in m. 2 Exercise 3 is designed to start overly forward to help singers transition to

a forward [a] sound which should help to avoid an overly dark [a] vowel

Exercise 1

Cat Sat Bat Pat   Caught Sought Bought Pot

Exercise 2

Tee   Hee   Tee   Hee   Tick ___   Tock

Exercise 3

[i]___   [u]___   [u]___   [a]___

Figure 17: Vocal Warm-ups Addressing Good Sounds vs. Undesirable Sounds

It is not my intention to avoid the [ɪ] vowel altogether, but rather to approach it from an opposite extreme in hopes to correct an overly strident sound which is typical of this group of singers (the experimental choir) It is also important to refer to "good" sounds as "desired" sounds and "bad" sounds as "undesired" sounds for the genre In singing, there are no truly bad sounds, as each is used differently depending upon the genre There are, however, unhealthy sounds, which are often caused by poor singing technique These are the sounds, in particular, that you will want to avoid. Characteristics of these unhealthy sounds include (but are not limited to) extremely breathy tones, harsh or strident tones, gritty noise, overly nasal tones, overly darkened tones, and / or harsh onsets of sound

Assessment

When reproducing desired sounds versus undesired sounds, compared to the lesson assessment from Week 1, the singers are able to more quickly identify which sounds are correctly formed Exercise Three was the most difficult exercise to achieve the ideal sound, while Exercises 1 and 2 were more successful for the singers. When verbally polled, the members felt confident that this study is helping them to become better readers and they can successfully identify features when prompted including clefs, dynamics, articulations, and even difficult rhythmic passages during the guided walk-through

As we approached repeated material in the anthem, when members were asked what should be observed in these measures, they immediately responded correctly by applying what we did in a previous, similar section. I gave them the analogy that they should always perceive themselves as "Carnegie Hall" musicians. "What would a

'Carnegie Hall' musician do?" which seemed to build morale We looked at the text in "When We All Get to Heaven" and addressed why we shouldn't take gasping breaths between phrases This was addressed before we sang a single note in the piece This is considered an advanced concept, however, it is my belief that it should be addressed along with rhythm, pitches, and other basic music reading fundamentals. It should also be considered just as important to tackle early on when sight-reading or studying a piece of music

We also talked about phrase contour and the relationship between the piano and the SATB choruses. The members, and especially their normal director, expressed their thanks for explaining this reading process, as they had never addressed music in this fashion before Following my lesson, the director continued teaching the same song and tried to apply many of my instructions. He expressed to me afterwards that he sincerely enjoyed learning from me and particularly enjoyed this lesson. He also expressed that he has found my research useful thus far and is looking forward to the following weeks to come

Week 6

Objectives

The choir members will learn.

- To hear and feel melodic and rhythmic contour (up versus down; disjunct versus smooth) while recognizing duple versus triple meter
- How to conduct basic patterns (2/4, 3/4, and 4/4)

National Standards

- 1 Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

- 6 Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

Materials

The director will need recordings of the following musical examples or other similar

examples

- Mozart, *Symphony No. 40 in g minor*, 1st movement (division of 2s)

- Amazing Grace, hymn-tune (division of 3s)

- Dvorak, New World Symphony, 2nd movement (division of 4s)

Procedure

1. Have choir members stand for physical warm-ups. (Vocal warm-ups are not necessary,

but may be used to continue emphasis on good sound production.) Spend more time

doing these warm-ups especially for the arms Explain to the singers that they will be

using their bodies to express the music instead of their vocal cords.

2. Have choir members remain standing and begin teaching basic conducting patterns

(divisions of 2s, 3s, and 4s). Visual tips for patterns: 2/4 looks like a backwards "J" when

done correctly; 3/4 is commonly coached as "down, out, up"; 4/4 is commonly coached

as "floor, door, window, ceiling" or "down, in, out, up."

2. If necessary, have choir members sit for the listening portion of this lesson; however,

the group should stand when conducting to ensure proper posture. Play familiar music

and show with body movement the melodic contour without conducting pattern first, then

later with the appropriate pattern.

- Mozart, *Symphony No 40 in g minor*, 1st movement (division of 2s)

- Amazing Grace, hymn-tune (division of 3s)

- Dvorak, *New World Symphony*, 2nd movement (division of 4s)

To find the beat, have the singers move around the room to feel the beat Do not tell them what the meter is, let them discover it. Spend about three to five minutes per song, no more than 15 minutes total In the Mozart example, the singers are more likely to name the meter as 4/4 instead of a function of 2 due to the tempo and phrase structure You can use this example to point out that feature

3 To identify phrase contour, use the Mozart example and a common parody of the familiar tune "It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a Mozart!" Explain how each small phrase is similar to the chain of phrases in the parody text and how they function to create one larger phrase It is not necessary to assign phrase letters; it is more important that the singers learn to hear how the phrases are broken up, but ultimately create one larger structure.

4. Assessment: close the lesson by playing a hymn or other familiar song and see how well the singers identify the meter (Familiar hymns in 4/4: "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "Because He Lives"; in 3/4 "I Come to the Garden" and "The Summons", in 2/4 "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross "

Assessment

This lesson created a very animated learning environment and was extremely fun. The singers were bouncing all around the room and did not want to sit for the remainder of the rehearsal The group seemed like they not only enjoyed the activity, but learned from

it as well While the conducting patterns were not exactly correct (i e some members reversed the motions for beats two and three in the 4-pattern), each member was able to identify the meter signatures and successfully find the appropriate pattern Above all, the group was exposed to two new pieces that they considered to be "elevator" music and actually enjoyed learning from these pieces. While 2/4 and 4/4 are often confused by the listener, the main objective for the lesson is for the singers to be able to recognize a duple meter versus a triple meter During this lesson, there was not enough time to further assess the singers' ability to recognize the meters of other familiar hymns The singers were able, however, to correctly identify the meters for "Amazing Grace" and the "Largo" movement They also identified the Mozart recording as an example of duple meter, but almost unanimously labeled it as 4/4

Week 7

Objectives

The choir members will learn.

- How to identify basic intervals using solfège including common ascending diatonic intervals - Major 2nd, Major 3rd, Perfect Fourth, Perfect Fifth, and the Perfect Octave

National Standards

- 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

- 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

Materials

The teacher will need·

- a dry erase board (or similar board) and

- a piano

Procedure

1 Have choir stand for physical and vocal warm-ups During the physical warm-up, explain to the choir members that they will be learning about intervals and some helpful tools for recognizing them without the help of a Part CD or a piano Remember to address good sounds throughout the vocal warm-ups.

2 Write the solfège syllables (or abbreviations) on the board from low do to high do.

3 Teach the "Interval Song" (see Figure 18). Highlight the intervals that you will focus on for this lesson (M2, M3, P4, P5, and P8). Sing these parts of the songs in repetition with the choir members Feel free to point to the solfège syllables that you previously wrote on the board This will help to engage the visual learners. Optional Assessment· Do the singers remember the "Solfège Song" from Week 4? Have them sing it and then identify the ascending intervals that are being focused on for this week.

4 Demonstrate with repetition the "helpful hints" found in Figure 19, especially the hints for the Perfect Fourth. Again, identify the ascending interval patterns.

5. Assessment. interval identification with piano: play two pitches (M2, M3, P4, P5, and P8 ascending only). This should only serve as a brief assessment of their absorption of this lesson. In reality, it will take many weeks for the singers to confidently identify these intervals. This lesson is only an introduction to intervallic singing

Assessment

This lesson was one of the more difficult ones for the experimental choir. While the choir members were able to identify and sing the requested intervals, the singers were not as willing to participate in this lesson. This could be due to nature of the lesson, but no single reason was given for their poor attention during this lesson. The most difficult interval for the singers to aurally identify was the Perfect Fourth, even after singing helpful hints such as "Here comes the bride " and "The eyes of Texas " It is possible that these singers will require much more time to learn to identify these intervals more quickly It is also possible that the choir members will not be as willing to participate in the following week's lesson because it contains slightly more difficult interval recognition This lesson is only meant to serve as an introduction to intervals using solfège We did not have time to complete the Optional Assessment due to the repetition needed to correctly identify certain intervals.

Figure 18: The Interval Song

Intervals	Familiar Fragment from a Song
mi-re-do	"Three blind mice"
do-fa	"Here comes the bride" and "The eyes of Texas.."
sol-do	"Oompa Loompa Song" from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and The Theme from *Jeopardy*

Figure 19: Helpful Hints for Recognizing Intervals

Week 8

Objectives

The choir members will learn

- How to identify advanced intervals using solfège including more difficult

  intervals· M6/m6, M7/m7

National Standards

- Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

- 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

Materials

The teacher will need.

- A dry erase board (or similar board) and

- A piano

Procedures

1 Have the choir members stand for vocal warm-ups. Remember to address good sounds

throughout The choir members may be seated for the rest of the lesson.

2 Have the choir members sing the "Interval Song" that they learned in the previous week Highlight the intervals that you will focus on for this lesson (M2, M3, P4, P5, and P8) Sing these parts of the songs in repetition with the choir members You may need to write the syllables on the board again, which is highly recommended especially for the visual learners

3 Demonstrate with repetition the "helpful hints" found in Figure 20, especially the hints for the M6 Again, reinforce the ascending interval patterns A helpful hint for the M7 interval is to play a major triad and add a M7 on top to create a "jazzy" sounding chord In my experience, this seems to work the most effectively

4 Assessment: interval identification with piano. play two pitches (M6, m6, M7, and m7 ascending only) This should only serve as a brief assessment of their absorption of this lesson. In reality, it will take many weeks for the singers to confidently identify these intervals This lesson is only an introduction to advanced intervallic singing

Intervals	Familiar Fragment from a Song
Low sol-mi	"My Bon. ." from "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean"
High do-mi	Theme from Love Story
Low sol-High fa	"There's a…" from "There's a Place Somewhere"

Figure 20: Helpful Hints for Recognizing Advanced Intervals

Assessment

More time was definitely needed to teach these intervals. The major 6^{ths} and minor 6^{ths}

were frequently confused when I played them on the piano; however, the major 7th was

identified with 100% recognition by the singers It was really helpful to associate the

interval with the music of jazz. The singers commonly identified the minor 7th as some

type of 6th. The "Helpful Hints" did not seem to be as helpful in this lesson Part of this

was due to the distraction of the singers during the learning process. It is possible that

eight weeks might be too long for a group of this nature to focus on concepts such as

these This lesson was by far the most difficult to teach, and for future reference, will

likely not be included in my future teaching unless the group is more advanced than the

current experimental choir.

Other Lessons

The post-test was administered one month following the eight-week study Weeks 9

through 12 were originally conceived as part of a twelve-week study, which was

unfortunately reduced to eight weeks due to the busy Christmas rehearsal schedule. They

are included as suggested concepts to follow the previous eight weeks of study.

Week 9 PROPOSED

Concepts: rhythm drills with introduction to more meters

Week 10 PROPOSED

Concepts aural concepts transferred to written music

Week 11 PROPOSED

Concepts aural concepts transferred to written music

Week 12 PROPOSED

Concepts Review of all concepts presented through twelve weeks

2 7 Post-Test Procedure

The post-test consisted of a Grade 3 UIL-classified piece[20] similar to the one used in the

pre-test The rhythms and melodic / phrase contour of this piece were highly comparable

to that of the piece used in the pre-test, however, the tenor part in the post-test was now

on a shared staff written in bass clef unlike the pre-test in which the tenor part resided on

its own line with an octave treble-clef[21] The testing procedure was exactly the same as

the one used in the pre-test (see Chapter 2.3) with one exception: the text was not used

because the choir members were not familiar with it in its entirety. Instead of text, [du], a

neutral syllable was used

2.8. Six Preliminary Questions Post-Test

When the choir members were asked to identify the six musical concepts presented by the

investigator, the following collective responses were recorded:

Investigator (I): Identify the all clefs present.

Choir members (CM): (boldly) Treble and bass.

I: Identify the meter signature.

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[20] The selected piece for the post-test was the "Gloria" from *Heiligmesse* (Mass no 10 in Bb Major) by
Franz Joseph Haydn, edited by John Leavitt This edition was transposed to G major by the editor to lower
the ranges for all voices

CM: 4'4   (with certainty) common time

I· Identify the opening key.

CM: Umm   it's a flat key   I know it's not F   maybe B.

I· Identify difficult rhythmic passages using measure numbers.

CM. mm. 3, 5, 6   anywhere you see those sixteenth notes   that's it, though.

I· Identify difficult melodic passages using measure numbers.

CM: Between mm. 7 and 8 in the soprano. That's a big jump. mm. 9-11 look

difficult in the soprano. mm. 17-18 in the alto.

I: Identify any tonal center shifts or modulations.

CM: None   m. 17 or m. 18 I think. Well, maybe right before the end

As in the pre-test, the choir director was careful not to reproduce any rhythm patterns or

sung pitches; however, he only used six of the remaining minutes to discuss difficult

rhythm patterns instead of the seven that he previously used in the pre-test The director

also showed the tenors and basses how their parts were on a shared a staff, unlike the

Vivaldi "Gloria" that was sung for the pre-test.

2 9. Post-Test Discussion

While the first attempt of singing the Haydn piece was not nearly as unsettling to the

singers (and the director) as the Vivaldi piece was, it certainly had its own difficult

moments Overall, however, this reading was much more confident than that of the pre-

test. Both adjudicators felt that the choir members knew what to expect from a piece of

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[21] This factor may have contributed to the significantly greater performance by the tenors and basses, but cannot be fully investigated at this time

this nature and that the singers were able to quickly identify trouble spots before the first reading Different from the pre-test comments, these were a few of the statements made "it was much easier to find my part " "didn't need to rely on piano as much " "I knew where I was almost the whole time'" "Still not the best read-through, but much better than that Vivaldi'" If nothing else, the singers were smiling after their second attempt and felt that they had made significant improvement in their individual sight-reading abilities A few weeks following the post-test, the singers were asked to complete an exit survey, which would serve as a point of comparison for the pre-test

2 10 Self-Reflection on Experiences with Experimental Choir

If I had the opportunity to repeat this experiment with another group, I would, first of all, be thankful for the chance to help another group gain confidence in the area of sight-reading and knowledge in basic music concepts Secondly, I would make sure that the study period was no longer than eight-weeks and that it was scheduled *after* Christmas or Easter or during the summer The proposed 12-week study would have been too long for a group of volunteer singers to stay focused Eight weeks was enough of a struggle However, the lesson activities were refreshing in the church choir setting, and certainly not something the singers were accustomed to. The variety of activities helped keep the choir members engaged

The most difficult challenge during this study was to keep the singers and the director interested in the lessons, especially immediately before preparations for the Christmas program began This also probably affected the poor return rate of the surveys Out of the 50 that I mailed out, only 11 returned them completed. A few others sent back

the envelope with a note stating that they did not have time to fill out the survey, even though it only took about 10 to 15 minutes to fill out One choir director even mentioned that they did not have time to look for pencils to fill out the surveys, so they filled them out in pen That was a shocking discovery I thought all choirs used pencils in rehearsals *Apparently not.*

I also learned that not every one is interested in teaching music theory and / or aural skills in the church choir setting In fact, when reading some of the responses to the director surveys (see Chapter 3.5), I was surprised to see the number of directors who advocated the use of rehearsal CDs, also known as "part CDs" or tapes. These recordings are usually made by the director or pianist, and they will typically include either a sung or played line highlighting a single voice part, sometimes including a separate track with the accompaniment only for individual practice While I will admit that I have used these in the past, I have learned that the singers who use them generally rely on their neighbors within their section to guide them to the correct pitches. They cannot serve as a substitute for actually teaching someone how to read or music or how to sing a line correctly Part CDs may help in the short term learning process, but in the long run, the singers will retain more if they are taught how to hear these melodies with constant reinforcement in the rehearsal.

CHAPTER 3

EVALUATION OF EXPERIMENTAL DATA

3.1 Survey Background

Two surveys were designed and distributed during the Fall 2008 semester One was given

to the experimental group, which consisted of questions pertaining to their self-perception

of their musical abilities in addition to questions that identified personal information such

as income, gender, and ethnicity (see Figure 21) The same survey was also mailed to 50

randomly selected churches representing as many denominations as possible This

mailing also included an additional survey for the director of the church choir, which

consisted of a few short answer questions pertaining to methodology and demographic

information (see Figure 22) The director of the experimental choir also completed the

director survey. Those results have been combined with the other directors' responses A

third survey was also given at the end of the eight-week study for the experimental choir.

This survey would help to provide a comparison of the self-perceived ability levels

before and after the study period.

The surveys appeared as follows·

Survey: For the Volunteer Choir

Rating System
1 excellent. 2 above average 3 average. 4 poor. 5 very poor

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your current abilities as a singer in general·
a 1   b 2   c 3   d 4   e 5

2 *Sightreading* is defined as the ability to perform music from a score without having seen it previously On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your current level of sightreading as a singer:
a 1   b 2   c 3   d 4   e 5

3. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your familiarity with basic music theory concepts (notation, key signatures, scales, intervals):
a 1   b 2   c 3   d 4   e 5

4. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your familiarity with advanced music theory concepts (chords, harmonic progressions, musical forms, counterpoint):
a 1   b 2   c 3   d 4   e 5

5. Select the age group that pertains to you:
a 18-22   b 23-29   c 30-39   d 40-49   e 50+

6. If you answered 'e' in the previous question, please select the age group that pertains to you:
a 50-54   b 55-59   c 60-64   d 65-69   e 70+

7. What is your gender?
a Female b Male

8. What is your ethnicity?
a Caucasian b Hispanic c African-American d Asian e Other

9. What is your average family income?
a Less than $10,000 for singles / less than $20,000 for couples
b $10,000 - $20,000 for singles / $20,000 - $40,000 for couples
c $20,000 - $30,000 for singles / $40,000 - $60,000 for couples
d $30,000 - $40,000 for singles / $60,000 - $80,000 for couples
e More than $40,000 for singles / More than $80,000 for couples

10. What kind of music instruction did you receive? Check all that apply.
a Private   b Elementary and / or Middle school   c High school   d College   e None

11. What was the highest level of formal college music instruction you attained? Check all that apply. Skip this question if you did not take any college music courses.
a College undergraduate music degree   b Some undergraduate music courses (non-degree)   c College graduate music degree
d Some graduate music courses (non-degree) e Music minor (undergraduate or graduate)

12. Of the following types of ensembles, which have you participated in (excluding this choir)? Check all that apply.
a Orchestra and / or classical chamber music ensemble   b Band (marching or concert)   c Vocal ensemble   d Country / folk / ethnic / jazz / rock / pop / rap Band   e None

13. What type of voice instruction have you had?
a One-on-one voice lessons   b Group voice lessons   c Self-taught and / or with electronic tools/media   e None

14. If you have played an instrument, which of the following groups does it belong to? Check only one, referring to your primary instrument; do not answer if you have not played an instrument.
a Fretted string instrument   b Non-fretted string instrument   c Wind instrument d Percussion (not including keyboard instruments)   e Keyboard instrument

15. If you answered the previous question (if you have played an instrument), please rate your skill level from 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor):
a 1   b 2   c 3   d 4   e 5

Figure 21: Survey For the Volunteer Choir

16. Which rhythm syllable system have you used primarily? Check only <u>one</u>. Skip this question if you have not used a rhythm syllable system.

a Gordon   b Kodaly   c Orff   d Traditional beat-based   e Other

17. Which solfege system / pitch syllable system have you used primarily? Check only <u>one</u>. Skip this question if you have not used a solfege system.
a Fixed Do   b Moveable Do, Do-based minor   c Moveable Do, La-based minor
d Numbers   e Other

18. Is your reason for participating in this ensemble based on intrinsic (coming from within you) or extrinsic (coming from outside) motivation?
a Intrinsic b Extrinsic

Figure 21 Continued

Survey: For the Director of the Volunteer Choir

Rating System
1 excellent, 2 above average, 3 average, 4 poor, 5 very poor

1. *Sight-reading* is defined as the ability to perform music from a score without having seen it previously. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your current level of sight-reading as a singer:
a 1   b 2   c 3   d 4   e 5

2. How do you rate your choir's sight-reading abilities?
a 1   b 2   c 3   d 4   e 5

3. Do you find it necessary to increase the sight-reading abilities of your choir members?
a Yes b No

Why?
_____
_____

4. What types of resources and strategies do you use in order to increase sight-reading skills in your singers? Be as specific as possible.
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Figure 22: Survey for the Director of the Volunteer Choir

5. When teaching rhythm, specifically in passages of a choral piece, which of the following teaching aids do you find particularly helpful? Check all that apply.
a Rhythm solfege system (rhythm syllable system)   b Number system   c Visual representations (chalkboard, dry erase board)
d Technology (SmartMusic, Finale, or other)   e None of the above

6. Referring to the previous question, please describe, in as much detail as possible, your method(s) of teaching rhythms within the context of a choral piece.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Which rhythm syllable system have you used primarily in your choir(s)? Check only one. Skip this question if you have not used a rhythm syllable system with your choir(s).
a Gordon   b Kodaly   c Orff   d Traditional beat-based   e Other

8. Which solfege system (pitch syllable system) have you used primarily in your choir(s)? Check only one.
a Fixed Do   b Moveable Do, Do-based minor   c Moveable Do, La-based minor
d No system   e Other

9. If you do not use a solfege system, what methods do you employ when teaching the individual voice parts of a choral piece? (i.e., primarily through the use of repetition, rely heavily on pianist or your own piano skills, part CDs, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. What kind of music instruction did you receive?
a Private   b Elementary and / or Middle school   c High school   d College   e None

11. What was the highest level of formal college music instruction you received? Check all that apply.
a College undergraduate music degree   b Some undergraduate courses taken in music   c College graduate music degree
d Some graduate courses taken in music
e None

12. Select the age group that pertains to you:
a 18-22   b 23-29   c 30-39   d 40-49   e 50+

13. What is the ethnicity of your choir members?
a Caucasian   b Hispanic   c African-American   d Asian   e Other

14. What is, in your estimation, the average family income of your choir members?
a. Less than $10,000 for singles / less than $20,000 for couples
b $10,000 - $20,000 for singles / $20,000 - $40,000 for couples
c $20,000 - $30,000 for singles / $40,000 - $60,000 for couples
d $30,000 - $40,000 for singles / $60,000 - $80,000 for couples
e More than $40,000 for singles / More than $80,000 for couples

Figure 22 Continued

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                        Exit Survey: For the Volunteer Choir                    │
│                                                                                │
│                                  Rating System                                 │
│                    1 excellent, 2 above average. 3 average. 4 poor, 5 very poor │
│                                                                                │
│ 1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your current abilities as a singer in general· │
│                                                                                │
│ a 1        b 2        c 3        d 4        e 5                                 │
│                                                                                │
│ 2. Sightreading is defined as the ability to perform music from a score without having seen it previously. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 │
│ being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your current level of sightreading as a singer: │
│                                                                                │
│ a 1        b 2        c 3        d 4        e 5                                 │
│                                                                                │
│ 3. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your familiarity with basic music theory concepts (notation, │
│ key signatures, scales, intervals):                                            │
│                                                                                │
│ a 1        b 2        c 3        d 4        e 5                                 │
│                                                                                │
│ 4. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being excellent, 5 being very poor), rate your familiarity with advanced music theory concepts │
│ (chords, harmonic progressions, musical forms, counterpoint):                  │
│                                                                                │
│ a 1        b 2        c 3        d 4        e 5                                 │
│                                                                                │
│ 5. Did you think the lessons enhanced your sight-reading ability?              │
│                                                                                │
│ a Yes     b No                                                                 │
│                                                                                │
│ 6. Did you think the lessons increased your overall awareness of basic music theory concepts (notation, key signatures, scales, │
│ intervals)?                                                                    │
│                                                                                │
│ a Yes     b No                                                                 │
│                                                                                │
│ 7. Did you think the lesson increased your overall awareness of advanced music theory concepts (chords, harmonic │
│ progressions, musical forms, counterpoint)?                                    │
│                                                                                │
│ a Yes     b No                                                                 │
│                                                                                │
│ 8. Do you think it is important to learn about music theory in a church choir setting? │
│                                                                                │
│ a Yes     b No                                                                 │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 23: Exit Survey Questions

Of the 50 selected churches, only 11 returned their responses for analysis 104 choir

members represent these 11 churches in addition to the 19 choir members in the

experimental group, equaling a total of 123 singers in which the analytical data is based

upon. The data below is organized into several tables including basic statistical data

gathered. From the 19 questions contained in the survey, the three most significant

findings are also highlighted below: (1) data sorted by ethnicity (Caucasian or non-

Caucasian), (2) data sorted by gender (Female or Male), and (3) data sorted by age (18-22, 40-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, and 70+) In the choir member surveys, the questions with multiple answers (Questions 11, 12, and 13) were not used for the purposes of this research, as it would not have been practical to create comparisons by hand for each survey

3 2 Data Sorted by Ethnicity (Caucasian or non-Caucasian)

The two tables below show the musical ability levels as ranked by choir members of both the experimental group and the randomly selected group in the choir member survey There were 107 Caucasian and 12 non-Caucasian participants, 123 total

Table 2: Caucasian Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	9 3%	23.4%	57.0%	8 4%	1.9%	100%	0 0%
2	9.3%	21.5%	33.6%	24 3%	11.2%	100%	0 0%
3	15.0%	23.4%	29.0%	20.6%	12.1%	100%	0 0%
4	4.7%	14.0%	21 5%	27.1%	32.7%	100%	0 0%

According to the data in Table 2 shown above, the Caucasians who reported answers for Questions 1 through 4 pertaining to their singing and music reading abilities more frequently ranked themselves in the 'Average' category, with Question 4 being the one exception by a small margin. When compared to Table 3 below, the Non-Caucasian population most frequently ranked themselves in the 'Average' category as well, without exception

Table 3: Non-Caucasian Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	25 0%	33 3%	41 7%	0 0%	0 0%	100%	0 0%
2	25 0%	16 7%	16 7%	16 7%	25.0%	100%	0 0%
3	25 0%	25.0%	25.0%	8 3%	16 7%	100%	0 0%
4	16 7%	8 3%	16 7%	8 3%	50.0%	100 0%	0 0%

However, the Non-Caucasian population more frequently ranked themselves as 'Excellent' overall than the Caucasian population. Also notable in Table 3, when asked to rank their singing abilities in Question 1, no one in the Non-Caucasian population marked 'Poor' or 'Very Poor,' while 8.4% of the Caucasian population marked 'Poor' and 1.9% marked 'Very Poor.' Overall, this data shows that the singers in the Caucasian population generally ranked themselves lower than those singers in the Non-Caucasian population.

3.2.1. Data Sorted by Gender (Female or Male)

In the tables below, self-perception of the musical abilities based on gender is recorded 82 participants were female, while 41 were male. This proportion shows that almost 67% of the participants in these 11 churches are females, with just over 33% being males. It is no surprise that the larger percentage of participants were female; however, it is interesting to point out the differences in the ranking of abilities shown in the two tables below For example, the female population more frequently marked 'Excellent' to

describe their musical abilities, with one exception in Question 1 pertaining to their singing abilities

Table 4: Female Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	9 8%	26 8%	58 5%	3 7%	1.2%	100%	0 0%
2	11 0%	19.5%	31 7%	19.5%	18.3%	100%	0 0%
3	15.9%	26 8%	30 5%	14 6%	12.2%	100%	0 0%
4	6 1%	11.0%	19.5%	25.6%	37.8%	100%	0 0%

Table 5: Male Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	12 2%	22.0%	46.3%	14.6%	4.9%	100%	0 0%
2	9 8%	22.0%	31 7%	29.3%	7.3%	100%	0 0%
3	14.6%	19.5%	24 4%	26.8%	14.6%	100%	0 0%
4	4.9%	17 1%	22 0%	26.8%	29.3%	100%	0 0%

In Questions 1 and 2, both males and females marked 'Average' most frequently in the tables above; however, in Question 3, more females marked 'Average' most frequently while the males rated themselves more frequently in the 'Poor' category In Question 4, though, both females and males most frequently chose the 'Very Poor' category, denoting their lack of familiarity with advanced music theory concepts

3 2.2 Data Sorted by Age (18-22, 40-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, and 70+)

The following tables display the self-perception of musical abilities of seven age groups

The age group representing choir members ages 23-39 only included three singers and,

therefore, there was not enough information to include them in data below

Table 6: Ages 18-22 Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	41.7%	25 0%	25 0%	8 3%	0.0%	100%	0 0%
2	16.7%	58 3%	16 7%	8 3%	0 0%	100%	0 0%
3	50.0%	25.0%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%	100%	0 0%
4	8.3%	33.3%	41 7%	8 3%	8.3%	100 0%	0 0%

Table 7: Ages 40-49 Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	5.3%	52.6%	42.1%	0.0%	0.0%	100%	0.0%
2	15 8%	10.5%	42.1%	21 1%	10.5%	100%	0 0%
3	15.8%	26.3%	31.6%	15 8%	10.5%	100%	0 0%
4	0.0%	10.5%	31.6%	21.1%	36.8%	100 0%	0 0%

Table 8: Ages 50-54 Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	9.1%	22 7%	54 5%	13 6%	0.0%	100%	0 0%
2	4.5%	22 7%	36 4%	13 6%	22 7%	100%	0 0%
3	9 1%	22 7%	27.3%	22 7%	18.2%	100%	0 0%
4	4 5%	18 2%	9 1%	27.3%	40.9%	100 0%	0 0%

Table 9: Ages 55-59 Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	10.5%	21.1%	68.4%	0 0%	0 0%	100%	0 0%
2	10.5%%	31 6%	21 1%	21.1%	15.8%	100%	0 0%
3	15.8%	26.3%	31.6%	21 1%	5.3%	100%	0 0%
4	15.8%	15.8%	10.5%	36.8%	21 1%	100 0%	0 0%

Table 10: Ages 60-64 Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	7.1%	14.3%	57.1%	7.1%	14.3%	100%	0 0%
2	7.1%	7 1%	50.0%	28.6%	7.1%	100%	0 0%
3	7.1%	21.4%	21.4%	21.4%	28.6%	100%	0 0%
4	7.1%	14 3%	21.4%	14.3%	42.9%	100 0%	0 0%

Table 11: Ages 65-69 Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing)
1	7 7%	15 4%	53 8%	15 4%	7.7%	100%	0 0%
2	7 7%	23 1%	30 8%	23 1%	15.4%	100%	0 0%
3	15 4%	15 4%	46.2%	15 4%	7 7%	100%	0 0%
4	7.7%	0 0%	15.4%	38.5%	38.5%	100 0%	0 0%

Table 12: Ages 70+ Self-Perception of Musical Abilities in Percentages

Q	'Excellent'	'Above Average'	'Average'	'Poor'	'Very Poor'	% Total	% Missing
1	4.8%	19.0%	66.7%	9.5%	0.0%	100%	0 0%
2	4.8%	9 5%	23.8%	38 1%	23 8%	100%	0 0%
3	4.8%	28.6%	19.0%	28 6%	19.0%	100%	0 0%
4	0.0%	4.8%	14.3%	23.8%	57.1%	100 0%	0 0%

An interesting observation can be made from the tables above pertaining to the self-perception of musical abilities sorted by age groups: as the singers get older, they are more apt to be more critical of their abilities. For example, in Question 1, singers in the 18-22 age group most frequently marked 'Excellent,' while the singers in the 40-49 age group marked 'Above Average' for the same question. In addition, singers who are between 50 and 70+ in age marked 'Average' for Question 1, showing a downward slope from the 18-22 age group.

A similar downward slope also applies to Question 2, beginning with the 'Above Average' category and ending with 'Poor,' with one minor exception in the 55-59 age group Furthermore, with regard to Question 4, the older singers were less familiar with the basic music theory concepts and the advanced music theory concepts than the younger singers, however, the older singers were, overall, more familiar with the basic music theory concepts than the advanced concepts

3.3. Volunteer Choir Member Survey Results

Table 13 shows the mean values and standard deviation rates which pertain to the initial choir member survey given to 104 participants. In general, there is a slightly higher variability of dispersion within the 'Other Group' when compared to the 'Experimental Group ' This shows that the singers in the 'Other Group' generally did not mark the same answer choices as other singers within the same group. The standard deviation for the singers in the 'Experimental Group' was much closer to the same answer choices within its members, most likely because these singers represent one small, tight-knit community while the 'Other Group' represents different populations throughout the state of Texas

Table 13: Mean Values and Standard Deviation Rates of Choir Member Survey

	Exp Group Mean Value	Exp Group Std Deviation	Other Group Mean Value	Other Group Std Deviation
1	2 68	582	2 65	901
2	3 21	1 357	3 09	1 175
3	2 95	1.129	2 88	1 279
4	4.05	1.177	3.65	1 237
5	4.63	761	4.29	1 324
6	3 00	1.617	2 89	1.512
7	1.21	.419	1.36	481
8	1.06	.236	1 26	.833
9	3 58	1.379	4.11	1.285
10	3.50	.905	3.53	1 193
11	3.17	2.041	2.16	1 143
12	3 80	1.135	3 52	1.276
13	3 24	1 251	2.95	1 667
14	3.42	1 311	4.03	1 293
15	3.69	1 251	3.31	1 161
16	4 00	000	3.89	1.085
17	4 00	2.000	2.41	1 352
18	1 00	.000	1 15	.460

3.4. Volunteer Choir Member Exit Survey Results

The graph in Figure 24 shows the results of the choir members' perceptions of their sight-reading abilities before and after the eight-week study. This baffling chart shows that there was no actual increase in the choir members' sight-reading abilities, however, when this chart is compared with that of Figure 25, the singers reported to have felt an increase in their abilities What could have caused this? In actuality, the singers probably did grow in their awareness of musical concepts and in their knowledge of aural skills, which may have caused this false sense of an increase. In addition, as this knowledge grew, their self-assessment became more critical as the singers' rated themselves much lower than before the eight-week study.
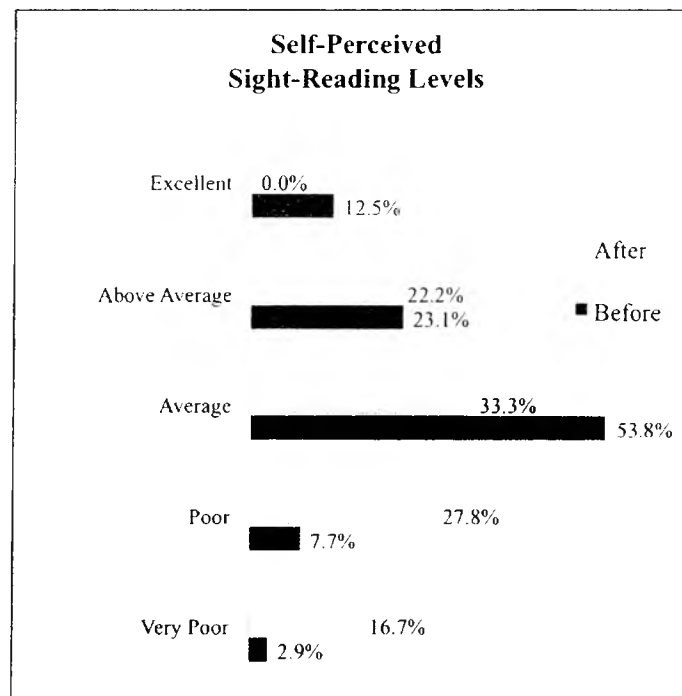
Figure 24: Self-Perceived Sight-Reading Levels, Before and After Study
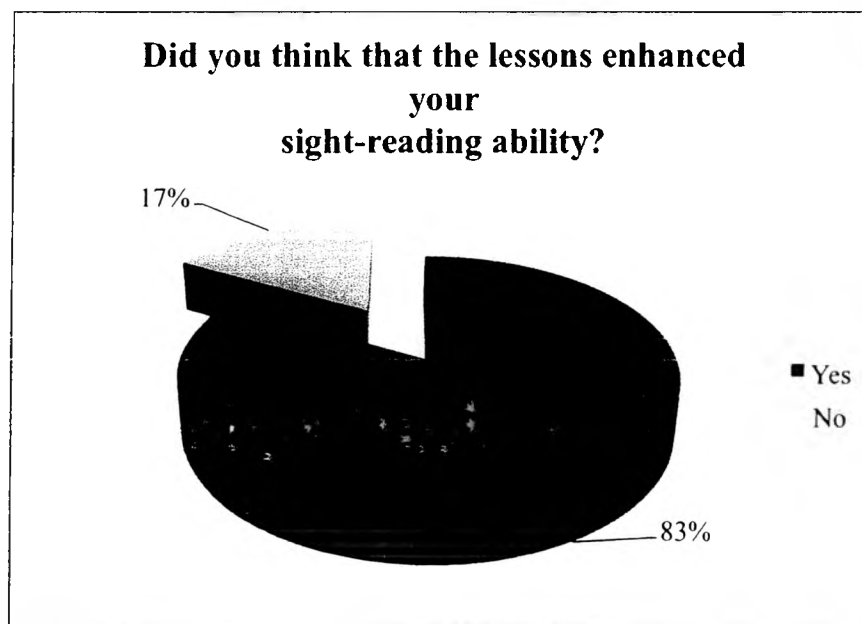
Figure 25: Response to Exit Survey Question 5

The response displayed in Figure 25 shows that a large majority of the singers felt an improvement in their sight-reading abilities over the course of eight weeks, while a smaller minority did not notice an increase. These percentages are similar to the ones in Figure 26. Further research may indicate whether or not the same singers who believed that it is necessary to learn music theory in a church setting also believed that the lessons enhanced their sight-reading abilities.

Is it important to learn about music theory in a church setting?

12%

■ Yes

No
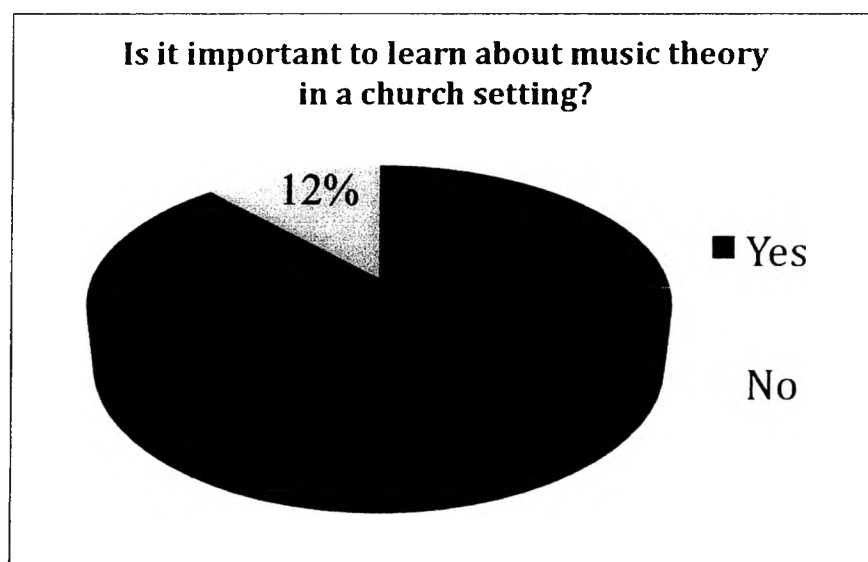
Figure 26: Response to Exit Survey Question 8

Figure 26 above shows that more than the majority of the singers in the experimental group feel that it is important to learn about music theory in a church choir setting. This information may be helpful to those who would like to consider using a music theory / aural skills program in their church choir rehearsals. While it may not be practical to include aural skills and music theory training in each rehearsal, a 6- to 8-week period

between Christmas and Easter (or in the summer) might offer singers a chance to learn

something new and to gain the skills necessary for successfully reading and interpreting

music

3.5 Volunteer Choir Director Survey Results

The main purpose of the Volunteer Choir Director Survey was to collect a list of

currently used methods for teaching aural skills in the church choir setting. The first two

questions of the survey allow the director to rate his own level of sight-reading choral

music and then the level of their choir. Table 14 compares the sight-reading abilities of

the director with the abilities of their respective choirs. 10 of the 11 directors ranked their

sight-reading ability as higher than their choir members, while one ranked themselves as

a poorer sight-reader. This table shows that while a director may be an excellent sight-

reader, the choir is often not as skilled as their director.

Table 14: Sight-Reading Abilities Compared in Rank

(1 being 'excellent', 5 being 'very poor')

	Dir 1	Dir 2	Dir 3	Dir 4	Dir 5	Dir 6	Dir 7	Dir 8	Dir 9	Dir 10	Dir 11
Q1	1	1	1	2	4	2	3	1	1	1	2
Q2	3	2	3	4	2	4	3	3	5	3	3

The table above shows that the choir directors who participated in the director survey

generally felt that their singing abilities (Question 1) were 'Excellent' or 'Above

Average.' When compared to their sight-reading abilities (Question 2), however, no one

marked 'Excellent' and only two directors marked 'Above Average ' In addition, only one director ranked their sight-reading skills higher than their singing abilities This table may prove that the average choir director is a fairly good singer, but does not possess strong sight-reading skills

When asked if the directors thought it was necessary to increase the sight-reading abilities of their choirs, eight responded 'yes ' These responses were collected as reasons for their answers·

(1) Music literacy is always my priority and everyone deserves to know how to read music. (2) To be able to work on more difficult music and to be able to rehearse a greater amount of music

(3) To shorten time needed to learn music and to increase understanding of dynamics, rhythm, etc.

(4) Sightreading improves them as musicians.

(5) Some sight-read very well; others minimally, which increase learning time

(6) Increasing the choir's sight-reading allows us to get through music faster, and the choir members would be better prepared if they auditioned for a higher level choir.

(7) Sightreading is a skill that always needs attention and improvement

(8) The introduction of a new piece would be made so much easier if the group could sing through the music initially with the level of confidence from good sightreading

The three directors who responded 'no,' to this question wrote the following explanations for their answers:

(1) Their sight-reading ability is equal to their vocal abilities

(2) Most of them can read a small amount. Due to time limitations and the amount of music we need to learn, I've found that they retain more by ROTE (Note-pounding)

(3) Not a top priority for this group at this time and I have enough good readers to help the group

When asked which types of resources and strategies that directors use in order to increase sight-reading skills in their church choirs, the following responses were collected

(1) I frequently ask my church choir to read along with voice parts other than their own, both to increase their reading skills, and support the voice part in question We use the United Methodist Hymnal as a simple resource to sing through hymns in parts

(2) Isolation of individual voice parts works best and switching to a neutral syllable instead of words work very well

(3) I teach music reading through music preparation. I will use specific pieces to teach specific musical concepts or skills I also will take time out of rehearsal to teach rhythms and rhythmic concepts I have used some books, but most are not so useful for the volunteer choir.

(4) Aural learning

(5) Flash cards, dry erase board, pointing out similar rhythms and patterns in music

(6) Usually sightreading new music

(7) I write solfège syllables in difficult songs. I found when teaching young children that the articulation of the syllable during the learning process increased pitch awareness and interval accuracy

(8) We cover a lot of music in an hour of rehearsal and stop only to fix specific problems

(9) We work with rhythm in new pieces by tapping and speaking the text No real effort

is made to teach solfège or other methods

(10) During the year I just touch on some rhythm patterns, note values, and musical road

signs. In the summer, when we don't rehearse I offer a music reading 101 class The text

would be something similar to *Pattern and Sounds* or a 6th through 8th grade sightreading

book

(11) No teaching by rote When working on individual parts, have the whole choir sing

each part Discuss topics of music theory during rehearsal. Incorporate aural and theory

training as part of warm up

Question 6 refers to the teaching methods employed by the church choir directors

when teaching rhythm in a choral piece The following responses were recorded·

(1) Members sing their parts, singing on numbered beats. Sometimes we clap the rhythm

Using a vowel and with both of the above is sometimes necessary and helpful

(2) "Robert Shaw" count-singing technique, preparatory exercises or visual discussion on

board.

(3) I use a mixture of ideas, i.e., I will have them put numbers under their notes for dotted

rhythms I might have them say "Tamm-ti-ta" or "Jump the fence." Sometimes I have

them repeat the words after me and / or speak the rhythms.

(4) Speaking text in rhythm while tapping beat.

(5) Repetition.

(6) Either "1 e & a" or "1 2 & " Sometimes even "ta-ti-ti." Have singers subdivide

counting and pulses Use of syllables before words

(7) I demonstrate on the board, then have them clap the rhythm or "tah" the rhythm

(8) Describe pattern, clap pattern, have choir clap pattern, say pattern then sing rhythm

(9) In general, my singers can read the simple rhythms used in our pieces For awkward and challenging rhythms, we chant, occasionally use number system and use tapping or clapping

(10) I will isolate the rhythmic issue, write it on the board, work it in context of the piece I will also warm up the choir on a rhythm when possible or necessary writing the passage on the board with the rhythm in question in context.

(11) Numbers work because they become aware of all the beats in a measure and numbers are a good reference that everyone can comprehend.

In Question 9, the directors were asked to list the methods used, other than solfège, when teaching the individual voice parts of a choral piece. Three directors did not respond to this question. The following are the eight responses collected.

(1) Singing on neutral syllables, using keyboard to double parts during the learning process

(2) For voice parts, repetition, parts on CD, and pianist

(3) use of repetition, pianist, part CDs

(4) Mostly repetition, with piano, then a cappella. Occasional use of part CDs for major works and events.

(5) Repetition – looping difficult passages, 3-5 times is very effective. We often hesitate to do this with adults but it works as well with them as kids. Piano and CDs.

(6) Pianist, repetition, CDs if available.

(7) Repetition, pianist, part CDs have helped greatly.

(8) Repetition, part CDs, sectionals, I have not yet employed solfège, but have wanted to
use fixed *do* and teach intervals (shaped note system). Fixed *do* will not work so I've
decided to try moveable like the shaped note system

3.6 Final Experimental Data Conclusions

Of the entire data collected, some of the most valuable findings lie in the choir director
survey results Because the directors were allowed to write freely in a short answer
format, many of them were able to comment, in detail, about their practices when
teaching new music in the church choir setting While initially shocking, the use of
rehearsal CDs or "part tapes" seems to be common practice in the church setting,
especially for use in special events such as Christmas or Easter musical presentations
While some of the directors did not see a need to strengthen their choir members' sight-
reading abilities, it is my hope that more programs will seize the opportunity to teach
basic music fundamentals which may increase their singers' overall awareness of these
concepts.

In addition, between the initial choir member survey and the exit survey, it was
fascinating to see how the singers' perceptions of their own sight-reading abilities
dropped immensely in rank While it cannot be proven, it is quite possible that the cause
for this drop was the fact that these singers were gaining knowledge in the these
fundamental areas of music theory and aural skills and the more they knew about these
concepts, the more they realized that they were not aware of all of the areas that are
commonly associated with sight-reading

Furthermore, while the surveys conducted provided a large portion of information for this research, they held their own limitations In the choir member survey, any question that allowed for multiple answers would cause an enormous amount of time to analyze and organize effectively. Also, both the initial choir member survey and the exit survey could not actually measure the increase (or decrease) of the experimental choir's sight-reading abilities. It would be incredibly difficult to measure such an increase due to the nature of music composition. Finding two pieces that were identical in difficulty levels is nearly impossible and finding a measuring scale to identify such outputs would also prove to be difficult

Finally, it was deeply satisfying to learn that a large majority of the singers were interested in learning about music theory in the church choir setting While the lessons were mainly focused on acquiring strength in aural skills, learning these fundamentals helped the singers to feel more secure in their sight-reading, whether or not they actual increased in their individual abilities. If nothing else, the data shows that this eight-week study gave the choir members an opportunity to learn something new and a sense of confidence that they might not have had prior to these lessons.

CHAPTER 4

FINAL REMARKS

There are many aspects involved in teaching music in the church choir setting, not to mention the larger task of teaching the skills necessary for developing good sight-reading habits After having taught this eight-week program with the experimental choir, I have learned that keeping a positive attitude above all else was the main thread that weaved through the lessons. No matter what I was teaching, the focus was always on helping the singers to achieve success with as little stress as possible

The moment that I remember the most vividly was when I was teaching the Gordon syllables for the first time with the experimental group. Their expressions were mixed – some were eager to learn, some were mildly pleased, while others looked at me as though I was speaking a completely foreign language. Breaking down that "language" barrier always seems to be the first task when teaching any new concept. How can we say what we need to say so that it can be deciphered by all of the different types of learners? This was a fun challenge throughout the study, and the answer is one that is easier said than done: know at least three different ways to teach something and hope that one of those methods works This, of course, relies upon the teacher to prepare, prepare, and *prepare* before teaching

anything and is certainly a recommendation I would have for others who pursue teaching in any capacity

Another piece of wisdom I would like to pass on is something that I learned as an undergraduate student in community college and was reminded of throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies vocal warm-ups aren't just vocal warm-ups While the title sounds self-explanatory, this crucial time before singing must not be looked at as a quick clashing together of the vocal cords When used effectively, these vocalises can help correct poor technique and teach musical concepts concurrently; when hurried through, these warm-ups can cause damage to the singer's vocal cords and then become a considerable waste of time

In my experience, many choral directors in the church setting overlook this valuable time and consider it nothing more than a literal vocal warm-up In this case, a director could consider singing in the shower on Sunday morning a proper warm-up for the Sunday morning service But, how would the choir director know if that shower singing was in tune or sung using good sound production? Why not take the few extra minutes to build the quality of the singers by engaging in practical and prepared vocal warm-ups that are monitored by the director to ensure vocal health?

Additionally, it is important to mention some recommendations for those who plan to use the methods listed in Chapter 2 when teaching music theory aural skills in the church choir setting. Upon evaluation of my lesson plans after the study, it became clear to me that I had geared my lessons toward the aural and tactile / kinesthetic learners, with very little help for the visual learner Looking back on my experiences with the experimental choir, many of those singers were visual learners and repeatedly asked me

to write concepts on the dry erase board I, of course, objected politely, reminding the singers that they should be learning by listening If I teach this type of course again, I will certainly find a way to include more written activities and assessments that will engage these visual learners, as they seemed to struggle the most throughout the eight weeks More written emphasis may have been helpful especially for Weeks 7 and 8

Lastly, further research in the area of teaching music fundamentals in the church choir setting could be conducted with regard to the National Standards for Music Education While I chose to include the ones that naturally fit into the church choir setting, a future investigator could choose to create a separate list of standards for use in church choirs that might serve to increase the standards by which church choirs currently function. I am careful in making this statement, however, as some may insinuate that I believe that all choirs should sound as flawless as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. While that would be a pleasure for anyone to hear, it is not my intention in any way to undercut any church's musical talents and offerings. It is my hope that every choir director will want to increase his or her choir's performing potential, even if it means teaching a few new musical concepts.

APPENDIX

SCORES USED FOR PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

The following pages include the musical scores used for the pre-test and post-test. The score for "Gloria in excelsis Deo" from *Heiligmesse* by Haydn included herein is the public domain version available at www.cpdl.org The actual score used for the post-test was arranged by John Leavitt and was lowered from the original key of Bb to G major.

Gloria in D-major

for mixed chorus (SATB with optional baritone) and Piano reduction

I. Gloria

Antonio Vivaldi*
(1678-1731)

* Adapted for changing voice choirs by Drew Collins

2. Gloria

Haydn - Heiligmesse 2

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111

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Cecilia Kittley was born on November 22, 1983, in Pusan, Korea Two years later, her family moved to Texas where she now affectionately refers to as "home" Cecilia began singing in the children's choir at her church at the age of five, began accompanying and singing in the adult choir at age 12, and soon after graduating high school, became a choir director at a local church Cecilia attended junior college at San Jacinto College – Central Campus in Pasadena, Texas before transferring to Texas State University – San Marcos to complete her Bachelor degree in Music Performance – Voice Emphasis. The following fall, Cecilia began her Master's degree in Choral Conducting After some much needed soul searching, she decided to re-focus her studies and changed her major to Music Theory

While at Texas State, Cecilia performed with the Texas State University Chorale, VocaLibre, and the Symphony Orchestra In addition, she also served as the Assistant Director of the Women's Chorus and taught Essential Musicianship, a course in music theory fundamentals In January of 2009, Cecilia became a member of the professional chamber chorus, *Conspirare: A Company of Voices* and hopes to continue her career as a singer, teacher, and church accompanist.

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117