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Male Recruitment Strategies for Middle School Chorus

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by

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the answers given by the K-12 choral directors of District 14 in Georgia about their stories, approaches, and strategies for maintaining and recruiting males into the chorus classes. The instrument used for this study was a survey sent to the participants asking about the successes, failures, thoughts, and approaches to recruiting males in the chorus classes and keeping them enrolled year after year. An analysis of the responses found that recruiting males in the classroom was inspired by their love for music, similar friends or peers signing up for the classes, school requirements, and celebrated masculinity. Approaches that sought to combine sports and music education helped make the classes more competitive, engaging, and fun for both males and females. Schools that maintained a balance of males and students' interests. The results from the study will provide choral music educators with a better understanding of how to bring males into the chorus classroom. After achieving this goal, educators will also have an extensive list of approaches that will help them keep students enrolled in their classes, learn how to navigate their development as singers, and overcome their initial limitations. This qualitative study hopes to help music educators remove any existing gender stereotypes in a performing ensemble or instrumentation and encourage male students to engage in whatever activity interests them.

Keywords: Males in Chorus, Recruitment and Retention, Gender Stereotypes, and Adolescent Voices

Dedication/Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to those who without whom this would be possible. First, I would like to thank Jesus for keeping me focused and giving me the patience to pursue this degree. My dedicated and encouraging wife, Kayli Rante who kept me pushing forward even when times were hard and kept me laughing and smiling throughout the whole process. Finally, my parents who have cheered me on for my entire life, Theresa and Joseph Rante.

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Abbreviations

GMEA: Georgia Music Educators Association

IRB: Institutional Review Board

SATB: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

SAB: Soprano, Alto, Baritone

Chapter 1: Introduction

Music is an activity that every student has experienced at some point during their schooling years. The three main areas of school music are band, chorus, and orchestra. One area of music relies heavily on a balance of males and females and this area is chorus. Male and female voices differ greatly in their quality, timbre, overall sound, and pitch. Just as there are different instruments in band and orchestra, the human voice is divided into four “main instrumentations.” The four main instrumentations are soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Within these instrumentations are different subsections such as soprano 1s and 2s, tenor 1s and 2s, etc. Choral directors have long been challenged by the lack of male participation in the chorus classroom, specifically in middle school and high school. The intent of this thesis is to analyze the societal and psychological reasons behind males choosing to or choosing not to join chorus at the middle school level. Results from this study will give choral teachers a list of techniques and mindsets to help recruit and retain males in middle school chorus to help balance the male and female ration in school choirs.

Overview

This thesis explores the possible factors that may influence a boy’s decision to join a chorus-performing ensemble class at the middle school level. Gender stereotypes influence performance ensembles through instrument choice and overall participation in a performance group. There are many benefits to joining a performing ensemble such as increased brain activity, better grades, etc. David J. Elliott wrote that “for some students, a space of protection and refuge is much needed, and for many, the music ensembles and music classrooms are

‘homes’ for their growing sense of individuality and intersubjectivity.”¹ Results from educator surveys outline success stories and strategies that attract males into the choral ensemble. An analysis conducted from the results shows the possible influences on male registration in chorus classes and how to better recruit students into the chorus classroom. After considering the responses, the researcher utilized these approaches in the upcoming sixth-grade class hoping to find an increase in male student registration into the chorus class.

Background

Gender stereotypes affect ensembles because perception is everything for middle school students. Students are less likely to participate in an activity if they feel it threatens their social status. The stereotype of femininity in the choral ensemble is present because there seems to be a lack of male role models participating in a chorus group. Steven M. Demorest helps readers understand masculinity by “using the definition of ‘masculine’ might be pertaining to things men do,’ one may appeal directly to boys gender identity in a more natural way—by providing them with opportunities to interact with other boys and men who are active in singing.”² The researcher connects directly to this topic due to his experience as a male in the chorus ensemble. Registration numbers in his classroom have increased since his presence at the school and this may be due to students having a male role model in the classroom. The number of male students joining the chorus class increased before implementing recruitment strategies which may correlate to the increase being due to the presence of a male teacher. After receiving the results from the teacher surveys a comparison between male teacher classroom numbers will be

¹ David J. Elliot and Marissa Silverman, *Music Matters: A Philosophy of Music Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 214.

² Steven M. Demorest, “Encouraging Male Participation in Chorus,” *Music Educators Journal* 86, no. 4 (Jan. 2000): 38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3399604>.

compared to that of female teacher classroom numbers to see if there is a correlation to the number of male students registered in the chorus class.

Other aspects that affect a boy's decision to join the chorus classroom pertain to the feeling of welcome the student may or may not feel. Providing a welcoming environment can help students feel more comfortable being a part of a group. David J. Elliott wrote that "for some students, a space of protection and refuge is much needed, and for many, the music ensembles and music classrooms are 'homes' for their growing sense of individuality and intersubjectivity."³ A classroom centered on providing a welcoming environment may attract more students to join the class. Understanding the different approaches to creating a safe and positive environment for students will help directors lay the foundation for males to feel included and welcomed after joining the performance group. This positive learning environment will be vital in keeping students enrolled in music ensembles.

The intent of this thesis is to help readers understand the male adolescent voice and how to choose repertoire that is comfortable for these students to sing. Many males in the chorus feel singled out because males often sing a female intended part in a lower octave, which can feed into the stereotype of chorus being a feminine activity. Research has been conducted on how to choose repertoire that fits adolescent voices, however drawing a connection between the repertoire and recruitment strategies has yet to be conducted. There is a slight misunderstanding of the male voice and the need for more attention in undergraduate classes for working with the male voice is eminent for future and current choral directors. Phillip Stockton writes in his journal article that "for proper music to be selected and performed, the boys must be classified

³ Elliott and Silverman, *Music Matters*, 214.

into the proper stage of the voice change.”⁴ An understanding of the male voice can help students feel more comfortable discovering and advancing their voices. From the researcher’s personal experiences staying in chorus, having fun and comfortable music in the chorus classroom keeps students enrolled in the class as well as having a teacher that created a positive and welcoming learning environment.

Statement of the Problem

Recruiting male singers into a choral ensemble is crucial because it can be necessary to achieve a balanced sound in the group. From the researcher’s experience and according to Tavious Peterkin, “there is a continued problem that choral music educators face with a decline in the number of boys who choose to sing in their school choral ensembles.”⁵ Many female singers may feel overwhelmed during a rehearsal when not enough male singers are present because the sopranos or altos may have to sing quietly to accommodate the unbalanced male section. Having more males in the chorus classes may solve the problem of female students needing to sing at a lower dynamic because of a group unbalance. There are many reasons boys do not want to participate in chorus and “among the many reasons why young men are sometimes turned off to singing in choirs are that singing is considered feminine and there is a lack of repertoire for young men whose voices are changing.”⁶

⁴ Phillip Stockton, “Classifying Adolescent Male Voices,” *The Choral Journal* 55, no. 3 (October 2014): 85, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24335815>.

⁵ Tavious Peterkin, “Recruitment and Retention of Males in Public School Choir Programs” (Master thesis, Bethune-Cookman University, Daytona Beach, 2011), 11, ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global.

⁶ Mark Lucas, “Real Men Sing...Choral Repertoire,” *The Choral Journal* 52, no. 9 (April 2012): 45, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23560702>.

The feeling of isolation that males may feel in the chorus classes due to a lack of repertoire may create the feminine stereotype found in the chorus classes. The stereotype of femininity in the choral ensemble is present because there seems to be a lack of male role models participating in a chorus group. Steven M. Demorest wrote that “using the definition of ‘masculine might be pertaining to things men do,’ one may appeal directly to boys’ gender identity in a much more natural way—by providing them with opportunities to interact with other boys and men who are active in singing.”⁷ From the researcher’s previous experiences, it seems that the males in middle school tend to gravitate towards activities that are more centralized on competition such as Physical Education classes and team sports. There are not many competitions available in the classroom for middle school students in performing ensembles, so this may attribute to a predominately feminine stereotype in chorus. Katherine Sinsabaugh mentions that “participation in music is linked to how adolescents interpret success and failure in music.”⁸ With Sinsabaugh’s quote in mind, the shortage of males in the chorus classroom may correlate to males seeing no competition in music ensembles and therefore seeing no chances for success or failure in them.

Band and Orchestra teachers should also be interested in this topic because many gender stereotypes also apply to instruments. For example, many people may consider the flute a feminine instrument or the stand-up bass a masculine instrument. These gender stereotypes can be addressed and potentially broken if instructors encourage the opposite gender to play a specific instrument. In a study conducted on instrumental choices of students, “Mawbey (1973)

⁷ Demorest, “Encouraging Male Participation in Chorus,” 38.

⁸ Katherine Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students Who Cross Over Gender Stereotypes in Musical Instrument Selection” (EdD diss., Columbia University, New York, 2015), 32, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

found more girls than boys began taking instrumental lessons and concluded ‘it would seem...that the playing of an instrument is seen by children in preadolescence as more of a feminine than a masculine accomplishment.’”⁹ The lack of male participation is more apparent in the chorus classes, however, band and orchestra programs are also affected by a potential stereotype in playing an instrument.

Finally, because of the mystery present regarding the changing male voice, future choral directors may feel underprepared for dealing with male adolescents. If future teachers receive more attention regarding voicing male and female students, the students will benefit because teachers will correctly place them in healthy singing ranges during their time in choir. The male voice can be a mystery for upcoming teachers, and proper training in handling their adolescent years can avoid losing boys due to embarrassment or choosing incorrect repertoire for their vocal range.

Statement of the Purpose

By using a qualitative methodology with a case study approach, this study will attempt to fill a gap in the existing literature to help the male singers build a stronger foundation of techniques and literacy at a younger age rather than beginning their musical understanding at the high school level. John W. Creswell wrote that “in a qualitative project, the author will describe a research problem that can be best understood by exploring a concept or phenomenon.”¹⁰ The study will explore the phenomenon of gender stereotypes in performing ensembles and attempt to solve the problem by embracing the masculine definition during recruiting and retention

⁹ Chris E. Haire, “Motivation for Males to Participate in Private Middle School and High School Choruses” (PhD diss., The University of North Carolina, Greensboro, 2015), 16, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁰ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018), 104.

strategies. In this case study, the researcher will utilize different approaches to recruit future fifth-grade students into the chorus program. The data gathered from the recruitment attempts will be compared to previous years' enrollment numbers and help compile a list of strategies to help recruit boys into the chorus classes. The study will attempt to explain the best approaches for recruiting male students through the narrative of other teachers in the researcher's surrounding district and personal stories of different attempts to help grow the choral program at the researcher's school.

Existing literature pertains to recruitment strategies for high school students: however, this study will seek to identify the reasons males often choose not to participate in choral activities. From the gathered reasons, the goal is to share stories of the attempts to recruit male students and how these attempts either increased, decreased, or maintained enrollment rates. An analysis of the existing literature will help the researcher utilize certain approaches to help build the choral program at the researcher's school. This will give a firsthand account of how the approaches mentioned in the existing literature either helped, were neutral or negatively affected the enrollment numbers for male students into chorus. The findings of this study will hopefully give current and future choral educators an extensive list of approaches that help increase male participation in the chorus classroom.

The initial research will begin long before the writing of the thesis to successfully plan for any potential events that may occur during the year. Leading up to the meetings with fifth-grade students in November of 2022, the researcher will have a plan for reaching the fifth-grade students to encourage them, especially the males, to join the chorus during their sixth-grade year. This qualitative case study will hopefully enhance the school chorus program by recruiting more male students to the music programs at the researcher's school. The opportunities created for the

boys in chorus and the events used to recruit these boys will hopefully help future teachers lay a foundation for high male enrollment in chorus.

Significance of the Study

Middle school is an essential time for students to be involved in a performance ensemble because, as in the researcher's district, middle school is when students can participate in these ensembles. Instrumental programs usually have a larger student enrollment, and the chorus program tends to have less than the combined total of instrumental courses.¹¹ The low numbers in chorus compared to instrumental classes may be due to the reality of having more instrumental classes offered (e.g., band, orchestra, guitar, keyboard, etc.) in schools. A study by Alenamie Alegrado and Adam Winsler in 2020 did a registration analysis on 31,332 students in Miami and found that "of those students in Middle School, 22.5% registered for a music class with 19.5% participating in an instrumental ensemble and only 4% participating in chorus."¹² Among the many reasons males decide to opt out of the chorus class in middle school, it seems that societal gender stereotyping may be the issue in having fewer males in the chorus ensembles. According to Nicholas McBride, "We label acts as masculine or feminine and perform gender in ways that our friends, family, and society as a whole find comfortable. If our behavior contradicts these 'normal' gender performances, we may be perceived as gay."¹³ This study seeks to find successful approaches to help recruit and retain male students in chorus classes.

¹¹ Alenamie Alegrado, "Predictors of Taking Elective Music Courses in Middle School Among Low-SES, Ethnically Diverse Students in Miami," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 68, No. 1 (April 2020): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429420908282>.

¹² Ibid, 13.

¹³ Nicholas McBride, "Sissies and Sexual Identity: How LGBTQ Choral Directors Negotiate Gender Discourse," *Music Educators Journal* 102, no. 4 (June 2016): 37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24755679>.

Research Question and Sub Questions

The findings in this research may show that embracing masculinity while trying to recruit students into chorus helped increase the registration of male students. The research questions will address two issues: recruitment and retention. An additional aspect that will be addressed is how to better understand the changing male adolescent voice.

Choral directors may find strategies to help encourage male students to join choir; however, it is also important for those students to stay in the class year after year. The level of engagement that these male students have in the classroom should also be considered when conducting this study. If male students sign up for the class during their first year in middle school and afterward drop out of the class the following year, this is not considered a win for the music education community. Recruitment and retention must be considered because it is important to get a student to sign up for the class, but their experience in music must continue past their first year.

Understanding how to voice males and help them navigate their vocal development from middle school to high school will help directors make better-informed decisions when choosing songs for the students to perform. Because of the directors' lack of understanding of the male voice, the need for more attention in undergraduate classes for working with the male voice is eminent. If future teachers receive more attention regarding voicing male and female students, the students will benefit because teachers can correctly place them into healthy singing ranges during their time in the chorus class. If incorrect repertoire is constantly chosen for males, then those students may be less inclined to remain in the classroom. For this reason, each educator must understand the male adolescent voice.

RQ1: What approaches can choral directors use to recruit and retain male singers in the chorus classroom successfully?

RQ2: What causes a male student to enroll in chorus classes?

RQ3: How does the classroom and rehearsal environment affect male retention/confidence in the choral classroom?

Anticipated Research Findings

This section intends to discuss the anticipated results of the research. The main purpose of this study is to better understand why males either desire or refuse to take chorus at the middle school level. The researcher believes that one of the common denominators for the recruitment strategies will be a focus on masculinity or the competitive nature of the male students.

Recruitment may begin by visiting feeder elementary schools, hosting events, or speaking to students individually about joining chorus. Another aspect of recruitment that the researcher believes will surface is the attendance of chorus teachers at school-related sporting events. The researcher anticipates that school visits, intentional conversation, and sporting event attendance will be some of the many approaches that choral directors can use to recruit and retain male singers in the choral classroom.

The anticipated answers from the second research question of this study, what causes male students to join chorus, will be connected to sibling involvement, media influence, parental encouragement, or social connectedness. The researcher believes that one of the main reasons male students choose to be a part of chorus is highly influenced by their immediate circle of friends, sibling involvement in the chorus class, pressure from parents to join chorus, and the perception of male singers from the media. The findings from this question will hopefully reveal some of the top ways to encourage males to join chorus at the middle school level.

The anticipated answers from the third research question, how does the classroom and rehearsal environment affect retention/confidence in the choral classroom, are that an environment that encourages competition, personal accomplishment, and positivity will greatly influence a male singer's desire to stay in chorus. The researcher believes that meeting the desire for male singers to compete with others and to have a manly presence in the classroom is important for male retention. One of the approaches that the researcher takes to help encourage the male singers to sing out is to place them at the front of the classroom. Having male singers in the front of the classroom prevents the female singers from hearing any major voice breaks that may cause embarrassment towards singing. The teacher has a large influence on whether or not the males in the classroom will choose to stay or not, and the hope is to receive many positive answers regarding the climate and atmosphere of the classroom.

Definition of Terms

Comprehension of this study requires the understanding of the following terms.

Competition: refers to activities in the classroom that divides the classroom into teams against each other or displays a running number of points for students to see.

District 14: refers to fifteen counties in the state of Georgia: Banks, Barrow, Clarke, Elbert, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Jackson, Madison, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Rabun, Stephens, Walton.¹⁴

GMEA: an abbreviation for the organization titled Georgia Music Educators Association.

Instrumental: refers to classes that involve students playing instruments (guitar, trumpet, violin, etc.).

¹⁴ "GMEA," District Information, <https://www.gmea.org/district-information/>.

Masculinity: “pertaining to things men do.”¹⁵

NAfME: an abbreviation for the organization titled National Association for Music Educators

Recruiting: “to fill up the number of new members.”¹⁶

Repertoire: “the complete list or supply of dramas, operas, or musical works available for performance.”¹⁷

Stereotype: “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern.”¹⁸

Summary

Being a part of a performing ensemble is a wonderful opportunity for students to express different emotions, be a part of a supporting group, and experience music at school. Gender stereotypes in performance ensembles may at times dissuade certain gender groups from participating in specific ensembles. Male students may be hesitant towards joining chorus because of the femininity of the choral ensemble, females may be wary of playing the tuba for the fear of playing a masculine instrument, etc. Choral directors have experienced many challenges in recruiting males into the classroom and this is apparent when the ratio of female to male students is often skewed. Embracing masculinity and creating a sense of competition and camaraderie in the choral classroom helps encourage males to sign up for the chorus classes. Males often feel a sense of accomplishment when competing with others or feeling camaraderie with other males. Every student, including males, are more inclined to join a class where they

¹⁵ Demorest, “Encouraging Male Participation in Chorus,” 38.

¹⁶ “Recruiting” Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/recruiting>.

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster, “Repertoire.”

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster, “Stereotype.”

feel welcomed and supported, so focusing on having a positive learning environment will help with recruiting students.

Encouraging males to join the chorus classes helps choral directors achieve vocal balance in the classroom. Choral repertoire often needs tenor, baritone, or bass voices to achieve a balanced sound, so when those voices are missing, the performance of these pieces becomes a challenge. Female voices are often forced to sing at lower dynamics to help achieve a balanced sound with an unbalanced group. Choral directors will benefit from embracing and featuring masculine qualities in chorus classes to help attract males into the classroom. Other factors that help bring males into the classroom include going to sporting events, creating male-only ensembles, allowing students to interact with male role models, and adding competitive aspects to the classroom. This study identifies different approaches to recruiting and retaining males in chorus classes and helps readers understand how to handle the male adolescent voice.

This study hopes to equip educators with strategies, approaches, and tools to utilize when trying to get males to join the chorus classroom. Identifying existing gender stereotypes helps educators understand why they exist and how to best prevent gender stereotypes from preventing students from playing an instrument or being a part of an ensemble. What factors are involved when males sign up for chorus? What should be analyzed when choosing repertoire? And what approaches can a teacher take to recruit and retain male students? The hope in this study is that these questions are answered and educators are equipped to handle the stress of growing a music program.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Urie Bronfenbrenner's experimental ecology of education is connected to societal pressures/stereotypes of males in chorus throughout this chapter. Bronfenbrenner's experimental ecology of education model guided this research as well as a review of the literature about male recruitment and retention in middle school chorus classes. Existing literature clarifies how the perception of masculinity may influence a male middle school student to join chorus or not and how a positive classroom atmosphere can help encourage students to remain in the choral classroom. This literature review hopes to reveal the perceived differences in achievement between males and females in the classroom, and how athletics/competition can encourage male participation in chorus. In addition, the literature discussed will help readers understand the benefits of participating in music at the secondary level and why students should begin in middle school. Throughout the study middle school choral teachers will be equipped with different approaches to recruiting male students in the choral classroom through teacher narratives, personal stories, and data to support recruitment and retention.

Theoretical Framework

Existing literature of chorus classes exposes the difficulties faced by directors to recruit and maintain male students in the choral ensemble. Jonathan Reed, Suzanne Callahan, and other authors describe countless strategies to recruit and maintain boys in chorus at the high school level. However, there are not as many sources that assist middle school choral directors in the field of recruitment and retention. Much of the issues faced by males joining the chorus classes are linked to peer influence, a negative self-perception, a lack of male role models, fear of ridicule, and existing gender stereotypes. These issues are connected to Bronfenbrenner's theory

of ecological systems because of the external factors that influence the individual. When considering different approaches to recruit and retain boys in middle school chorus, it is important to consider their environment and external factors that could potentially inhibit boys from joining a chorus class.

Recruitment and Retention

As defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, recruiting is to “fill up the number of new members.”¹⁹ Educators that teach classes in which students must choose, strive to find strategies and approaches that help increase the number of students in their classes. Recruitment strategies could be to host an event, talk to a child, visit a school, send a letter out, etc. The importance of recruiting students for a music class is important because it will ensure that the specific class exists for the following school year. When a teacher is unable to recruit new members into their specific class, they will have no members in the group. When no members exist in a group, then the group ceases to exist.

Recruitment is a continuous battle that presents itself year-after-year. The middle school teacher must visit the elementary school to explain what programs are available, the high school teacher must visit the middle school to promote his or her classes, colleges or universities host visitations and fairs to highlight what is available, jobs go to colleges to share their opportunities, etc. Steven Demorest highlights the importance of having older boys interact with younger boys because “by providing them with opportunities to interact with other boys and men who are active in singing allows them to see a variety of male role models, some of whom may be like them, some different, but all showing an interest in singing.”²⁰ David W. Kinney writes in his

¹⁹ Merriam-Webster, “Recruiting.”

²⁰ Demorest, “Encouraging Male Participation in Chorus,” 38.

article “Recruiting and retaining students for ensembles and classes can be a challenge,” that “You need to have a plan for your sixth graders when they’re in fifth grade. Planning for recruitment is a yearlong process and involves knowing the class selection timeline.”²¹

The specific battle that many choral teachers face is the task of recruiting boys to join their chorus class. Boys are necessary for the chorus because their presence allows teachers to expand their choice in repertoire. While it is possible to have a chorus group made entirely of sopranos and altos, the repertoire choices are limited when the male voice is absent. Johnathan Reed helps choral directors understand the benefits of having same-gender ensembles by writing that “gender aside, one of the most successful vehicles for recruiting is the same gender ensemble because [they] allow adolescents to work in an atmosphere that is uniquely male or female.”²²

Choral teachers can choose soprano, alto, and baritone pieces (SAB), soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone pieces (SATB), and a myriad of combinations when the chorus class has a good balance of each voice. High school teachers must also recruit males into their chorus class because most of the high school repertoire is SATB. The challenge in recruitment creates an imbalance of males and females in the chorus class. From an outside perspective, this challenge makes the chorus class seem unattractive to the male student body. Having recruitment strategies that are focused on gaining the attention of the males in elementary school and middle school can begin to help with the imbalance of males and females.

²¹ Andrew S. Berman, “Recruiting and retaining students for ensembles and classes can be a challenge: What can a music educator do?,” *Teaching Music* (August 2016): 40, NAFME.org.

²² Jonathan Reed, “The Importance of Same-Gender Ensembles in the Recruiting Game,” *The Choral Journal*, 45, no. 2 (September 2004): 64, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23555360>.

Now, once the male students have joined the chorus class, it is important to keep or retain them year-after-year. The need for retention ensures that students' progress in their abilities as a singer continues. A good retention rate means that students remain in the group or activity year-after-year and do not choose to leave the group or stop the activity. Feeder schools, meaning schools that pass along their students to another school once graduated, must focus on their students continuing to be a part of a group or activity so the future teachers' classes may continue.

Music teachers must worry about retaining their students because at any point throughout the year, a student may decide to leave or drop the specific music class. At the middle school level, students' opinions are continually changing. A specific unit in a music class may make students feel that they are meant to be musicians, while the next week, those same students may hate every activity in the classroom. This constant change in perceptions threatens the retention rate for music classes. Johnathan M. Hamiel, the multicultural awareness chair of the North Caroline Music Educators Association reminds music educators that "our job as professionals is to notice our preferences and step outside our comfort zones to learn about the diverse musical genres and styles of others' cultures."²³ Teachers must be constantly aware of the changing perceptions of students towards lesson plans and repertoire to keep the learning fresh in the classroom. Jamey Kelley, a professor of music education at Florida International University in Miami suggests that teachers, "select repertoire appropriately so the students sound good and feel good."²⁴ When students are engaged while learning musical concepts in the classroom and while performing, students may be more likely to stay in the performing ensemble.

²³ Johnathan M. Hamiel, "Including the Music of Your Students in Your Curriculum: Every child has a song to sing. Is your bias silencing your classroom?," *Teaching Music* (April 2019): 20, NafME.org.

²⁴ Berman, "Recruiting and Retaining," 41.

If a student joins the chorus during their sixth-grade year and chooses not to continue the class the following year, then the teacher will not be able to continue to teach that student. One of the goals of a chorus middle school teachers is to encourage students to continue singing at the high school level. Just as middle schools rely on elementary schools to lay the foundation for learning, high schools rely on middle school music programs to lay the musical foundations for higher level performing. Retaining students in the choral classroom ensures that the students will be prepared for singing at the high school level. Students that decide to begin their choral singing experience at the high school level may be at a disadvantage because they will not have learned musical foundations at the middle school level. The musical concepts that these students may lack are reading music, vocal production, breathing techniques, blending with others, etc.

Psychology

The main psychological effect on recruiting and retaining males in the middle school choir is the perception of femininity in choral singing. Scott Harrison completed a study in 2007 “in which singing was rated the third most feminine instrument after the flute and clarinet. Harrison, who has written extensively on issues of gender, masculinity, and music participation, argues that several factors influence boys’ choices about singing, including ‘gender role rigidity, homophobia, and the avoidance of femininity.’”²⁵ Being in a chorus class has traditionally been viewed as a feminine activity. One of the main hurdles that males in middle school may face when choosing to join a chorus group is the social stigma behind choosing to participate in a feminine activity. Sinsabaugh writes that “males will become involved in singing if their masculinity is appealed to and that boys/men are concerned about the danger of losing their

²⁵ Joshua Palkki, “Gender Trouble: Males, Adolescence, and Masculinity in the Choral Context,” *The Choral Journal* 56, no. 4 (November 2015): 28, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24769318>.

masculinity when involved in singing groups.”²⁶ Stereotypically many males are drawn to more competitive classes such as physical education or team sports, while females are traditionally drawn to classes such as family and consumer science or music. The competitive mindset of males may be a reason why they are not drawn to choral singing at the middle school level; There seems to be an absence of competition in the classroom.

Psychologically, males must battle with the societal perception and how their peers view them for joining a feminine activity. Peer pressure tends to increase during middle school “and in the eyes of an adolescent boy, choir may not have the prestige of other activities.”²⁷ It is important for the teacher to be involved with their students, and when trying to recruit males, “choral conductor-teachers must trust and encourage their students as they construct their own unique male identities.”²⁸ A possible solution to this psychological hurdle is the presence of a male role model or teacher. When males have someone to model or follow, they are more likely to join that activity. The presence of males in the classroom or as a teacher can help the males feel a sense of belonging in the group. By applying these concepts to the classroom, male students may feel more inclined to join the choral classroom. A male teacher may help male students feel that this is a normal activity for males or something that should be encouraged. While participating in the choral classroom the male student may face their own psychological battle of trying to establish their own identity as a male. Students that are in middle school are consistently trying to find their place in the societal ladder. A counter-stereotype may help in bringing more males into the classroom and “achieving greater numbers of male involvement

²⁶ Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students Who Cross Over,” 13.

²⁷ Demorest, “Encouraging Male Participation in Chorus,” *Music Educators Journal*, 38.

²⁸ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 33.

with boys who are popular, well liked and enjoy high status can assist in overcoming the negative aspect of stereotyping.”²⁹ The seeking of belonging in the school culture is something that Bronfenbrenner writes in his experimental ecology.

Bronfenbrenner

Urie Bronfenbrenner research focuses on his experimental ecology of education and how this affects the child’s sphere of influence. His ecological systems theory has established that relationships related to a child do not happen in a vacuum. Society has benefited from Bronfenbrenner’s theory by gaining a more holistic understanding of human development. To help understand Bronfenbrenner’s theory it is best to visualize a series of circles; The inner-most circle is the individual, and as you reach the outer rim of each circle the more spheres of influence you will encounter. Bronfenbrenner explains that “the school is in the best position of all the U.S. institutions to initiate and strengthen links that support children and adolescents.”³⁰ The school system is a sphere of influence that has a large effect on a child’s psychology and identity. Joshua Palkki writes that schools are especially important sites for generalizations surrounding gender roles in that schools may teach negative lessons like patriarchy but can also challenge gender stereotypes.”³¹ It is within the school system that students may learn many social behaviors.

From ages 12-15, students experience a time of establishing their identity. Sinsabaugh writes that “children form their identities between the ages of 11 and 16, at this time, they

²⁹ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 29.

³⁰ Urie Bronfenbrenner, “Alienation and the Four Worlds of Childhood,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 67, no. 6 (February 1986): 435, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20387679>.

³¹ Ibid, 26.

experiment with choosing to associate with different situations and events to discover better who they are.”³² Males and females seek activities and friends that enhance their masculinity or femininity or share like mindsets and hobbies. Palkki reminds chorus teachers that “breaking down stereotypes and releasing students from their gender straightjackets is one critical way in which [choral conductors] can open up space for all students who define themselves as outside of the mainstream to find support and to be valued for who they are and not for what society tells them to be.”³³

Different cliques and groups begin to form as students mature out of their childhood years. If the spheres of influence closest to the individual emphasize the importance or benefit of participating in the arts, then the individual will be more inclined to participate in the fine arts. Sinsabaugh’s study informs readers that during middle school, “students’ musical identity moves from their parental influence to their own choices.”³⁴ Often, the spheres of influence closest to the male student emphasize sports and competition. The emphasis in these areas drive a male student to seek sports and competition instead of the performing arts. Many male students that participate in the arts have some sort of connection to the fine arts through their spheres of influence. The male students may have a sibling or a relative who is a singer or a parent who encourages singing in the household. The recent rise in singing competitions found in the media may encourage males to discover their voice and seek activities that better their vocal production. Another sphere of influence for the male student is their involvement in other choirs or musical groups outside of school such as church choir or community theaters.

³² Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students,” 14.

³³ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 27.

³⁴ Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students,” 14.

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are things that highly influence someone's decision to join chorus or not. Prior to a rising influence from the media, singing in the chorus was seen as something that is a feminine activity. Steven Demorest, professor of music education at the Bienen School of Music, "suggested that male singing is viewed as unmanly in American culture, and studies in Australia echoed similar themes."³⁵ Males often do not see choral singing as something that is masculine. Those that do participate in choir might experience "daily social interactions [that] may be arduous for these students who choose activities that do not fit neatly into the gender binary (binary meaning activities known as masculine defined in opposition to those coded as feminine)."³⁶ Middle school males often seek to find their masculinity and their place as a man through their friend groups, reputation, and sports. In addition, middle school is often a time that students can participate in team sports. Club sports are available to kids as young as young as four to five years old, however middle school seems to be a time when students begin to develop their competitive edge. Gender stereotypes are often seen through friend groups and activities that certain genders participate in. In fact, "young boys learn lessons about how to become the male prototype (or how they will never live up to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity) in schools every day."³⁷ Many conversations amongst males involve some sort of team sport while many conversations with females involve T.V. shows or social issues.

The difficulty that males may face when deciding to join chorus is to choose to go against a gender stereotype. Katherine Sinsabaugh's study mentions that "two boy flute players bother

³⁵ Palkki, "Gender Trouble," 29.

³⁶ Ibid, 29.

³⁷ Ibid, 26.

reported being harassed because they played the flute.”³⁸ Judith Buter, a gender theorist and professor at the University of California, Berkley, writes that “we label...acts as masculine or feminine and perform gender in ways that friends, family, and society as a whole find comfortable. If behavior contradicts these ‘normal’ gender performances, it may be perceived as gay.”³⁹ Going against gender stereotypes may risk labeling an individual something that they may not feel comfortable with. Palkki also writes that “the fact that adolescents grapple with emerging gender and sexual identities further compounds the gender socialization process.”⁴⁰ Often, those that go against a gender stereotype, depending on the activity, tend to disregard the opinions of others and instead focus on their enjoyment of an activity. Something to help with these perceptions would be to ensure “your men’s ensemble appears active, vital and fun to the rest of the student body.”⁴¹ Many gender stereotypes are perceived by society and are imparted to middle school students through social media, word of mouth, or the media. Sinsabaugh writes that “current research reports that boys are often harassed by their peers if they show they like things that are considered female-gendered,”⁴² such as chorus. It seems that a recent rise in vocal competitions and shows on prime-time television are normalizing male singers. The rise in music groups with male singers is also helping prevent a negative male stereotype connected to singing.

³⁸ Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students,” 3.

³⁹ McBride, “Singing, Sissies, and Sexual Identity,” 38.

⁴⁰ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 27.

⁴¹ Jonathan Reed, “Repertoire & Standards Committee Reports: Just Start One: Strategies for Implementing a Male Chorus in Your Choral Program,” *The Choral Journal* 4, no. 7 (February 2004): 63, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/repertoire-standards-committee-reports-just-start/docview/1032491/se-2>.

⁴² Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students,” 2.

The more common these television shows and competitions are, the more likely a male would feel comfortable joining a singing group.

The presence of gender stereotypes seems to be at the forefront of student thinking at the middle school level because, at this age group, students are trying to find their identity and place in the social ladder. Students form perceptions of which gender should participate in activity because “activities are defined based on conceptions of the distinctions between masculinity and femininity (e.g., basketball as masculine vs. cheerleading as feminine).”⁴³ If the chorus group in the school is seen as an unpopular activity, the students who are trying to rise in the social ladder may choose to avoid that activity. How a student perceives an activity often dictate whether a student participates in an activity or not. With choral singing appearing to be a primarily female driven art form, male students may not see singing as cool and will instead avoid participating. The gender stereotype does not seem to exist at the elementary level because each student is often required to take the music class. Since every student at the elementary level must take a music class, the absence of males is not very prevalent.

Adolescence

Another issue that middle school males may struggle with when deciding to join chorus is their own adolescent journey. According to author David Friddle, “adolescence is defined as that period of time in an individual’s life when he/she leaves childhood and enter maturity. Psychologically and emotionally for some individuals that is a period of several years.”⁴⁴ One of the main struggles through an adolescent journey is puberty. According to Joshua Palkki

⁴³ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 27.

⁴⁴ David Friddle, “Changing Bodies Changing Voices: A Brief Survey of the Literature and Methods of Working with Adolescent Changing Voice,” *The Choral Journal* 46, no. 6 (December 2005): 37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23556260>.

regarding a student's struggle in middle school, "Adolescence can be a challenging time for students as they navigate puberty, choices, about social groups, and the power differential between themselves."⁴⁵ When children go through puberty, their bodies go through various visible and non-visible changes. One of the main changes that makes a male apprehensive to joining chorus is the changing of their voice. As their voice changes, their voice transitions from a treble, or higher sounding voice to a traditional tenor or bass voice. This rapid transition makes it difficult for males to confidently sing out during this vocal change. Males may feel ashamed of this transition and will therefore be less likely to join the chorus.

When comparing vocal changes for adolescents, female voice change is something that is not as noticeable as the male voice change. At the peak of its transition the male voice may experience consistent "breaks" or "cracks" in their voice. "Breaks" or "cracks" in the voice is the vocal cords not having enough strength to maintain a consistent tone. When a male voice "breaks" or "cracks" it is often accompanied by some laughter from his peers. Being laughed at is something that may prevent a male student from joining chorus. One of the best ways to prevent the embarrassment of a voice crack or break is to normalize the occurrence. Because the human voices do not fully mature until the ages 30-35, vocal cracks are more normal than perceived. Middle school males may feel that they are not as common could be that this is the first occurrence of a voice crack or break. The presence of a male teacher or male role model in the classroom can help the male students feel more comfortable with their vocal transition. Placing male students in the front of the classroom may help develop their own confidence in their voice because the teacher is the main person hearing their vocal cracks or breaks.

⁴⁵ Joshua Palkki, "Gender Trouble," 27.

Choral Ensemble

Another factor behind male involvement in the chorus classroom could be the composition of the choral ensemble. If a male student feels alone or feels to be the only male singer in the room, they will be more likely to leave the chorus class. A recent study by Kenneth Elpus “revealed that for the past thirty years the male/female balance in high school choral programs nationally has remained constant at 70 percent female and 30 percent male.”⁴⁶ Teachers must do their best to ensure that their students do not feel alone or singled out in the classroom. The placement of students in the classroom is an important consideration when trying to recruit or retain singers in the group. The most obvious placement in the classroom could be whether the student is sitting next to their friends or not. Another placement consideration in the classroom is what row they are sitting in.

When middle school students are in the sixth grade, their voices are very similar. Towards the end of the year, there may be more male students that are beginning to experience register changes in their voices. When these register changes begin to happen, it is important to place male students in a part of the classroom where they feel less exposed or vulnerable to being heard. The front of the classroom has the advantage of their voices only being heard by the teacher; however, a disadvantage is that they are more seen by the other classmates. There is always comfort in numbers, so if the males can sit together, then they will feel less singled out or alone in the ensemble. A teacher can also focus on including class “strategies that focus on a team-oriented ‘masculine’ atmosphere in rehearsal: exposure to and/or participation in single-gender/all-male ensembles; and providing images of strong male role models using sports

⁴⁶ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 29

analogies and/or the inclusion of athletic boys in choir.”⁴⁷ The ensemble can also develop a closeness that welcomes vocal discovery in the classroom. If students feel more comfortable singing out and having their voices change around each other, then the students will feel more comfortable as they transition through their vocal change.

The choice of music is something that should be considered as well. “Choral conductor-teachers can strive to provide balance in repertoire selection. A good mixture of repertoire includes variety in aspects such as language, tempo, historical period, mode, and voicing.”⁴⁸ If the ensemble has primarily treble voices, it is important to pick pieces of music that are arranged specifically for treble voices. Forcing a student to sing a part that doesn’t fit their voice to accommodate for a lack of tenor or baritones in a group could potentially damage their voice. Phillip Stockton helps directors understand that “in order for proper music to be selected and performed, the boys must be classified into the proper stage of the voice change. Irvin Cooper often said that voices should not be classified individually but rather as a group.”⁴⁹ Another factor that is important to consider is which part gets the melody. If the female voices primarily get the melody, the male students may feel left out of the group and will want to leave the group. The ensemble is important in retaining male students and can be helpful in recruiting other males if the ensemble sings male heavy pieces or feature the males in the singing group. Many books and articles “discussing male choirs mention the importance of choosing repertoire that will appeal to boys’ masculinity.”⁵⁰ Something to be wary of when picking male focused repertoire,

⁴⁷ McBride, “Singing, Sissies, and Sexual Identity,” 37.

⁴⁸ Palkki, “Gender Trouble, 30.

⁴⁹ Stockton, “Classifying Adolescent Male Voices,” 85.

⁵⁰ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 30.

“however, should not be overly represented in the curriculum for male choirs, for they may reinforce stereotypical masculinity”⁵¹ The environment that the director creates in the choral ensemble is one that can influence a student to join a class or decide to leave a class.

Rehearsal Strategies

Rehearsal strategies is characterized by The University of Kansas as “the repeated practice of information to learn [something], for example, when a student is presented with specific information to be learned, such as a list, often he will attempt to memorize the information by repeating it over and over.”⁵² Another way to define rehearsal strategies is the process used to convey information to students. Music teachers often label their day-to-day teaching as rehearsal. Using this information, rehearsal strategies are the different approaches that music teachers choose to use to help students learn musical concepts and the chosen repertoire. Rehearsal strategies will help students engage with the content because “teachers...help students explore problems rather than memorize and recall learning that is forced because of its inertness and consequent inability to move students’ interests.”⁵³ The reason rehearsal strategies are important for recruitment and retention is that the strategies that teachers choose to use in the classroom set the tone for how students learn.

The more seamless the learning is in a classroom, the more appealing it will be for a student to join the class. Students may enjoy a class more if their learning is effortless. When picking music, “many composers now are writing specifically for adolescent male students using

⁵¹ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 30.

⁵² “Rehearsal Strategies,” The University of Kansas, https://specialconnections.ku.edu/instruction/cognitive_strategies/teacher_tools/rehearsal_strategies#:~:text=What%20is%20a%20rehearsal%20strategy,repeating%20it%20over%20and%20over.

⁵³ David J. Elliott, *Praxial Music Education: Reflections and Dialogues*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 228.

texts that they can understand and to which they may easily relate.”⁵⁴ The more efficiently a teacher can teach the basics of music, the easier it will be for students to apply their knowledge of musical concepts to their independent learning. One teaching strategy that some teachers may choose to use is to teach students by rote. When students are taught by rote, there is little challenge that is required by the students. Rote teaching is effective when trying to sing many pieces because it just requires students to repeat something that is either played over or sang over them. This is effective for singing a lot of pieces, because the students learn through repetition and modeling. The disadvantage to this approach is that it does not teach a student how to read music or think critically about musical choices. The other approach is to teach music theory and sight-singing. When teaching music theory or sight-singing, the focus is on learning how to read music and identify intervals on the music staff. This approach is one that does not yield immediate results right away; For this reason, this approach is not recommended for teachers wanting to have their students sing a lot of pieces. This rehearsal strategy is meant for the teachers that wish to impart the ability of independent learning to their students. One rehearsal strategy, rote teaching, is focused on the short run and the other approach, music theory, is focused on the long run. It may be beneficial to teach students using both approaches.

If a teacher chooses to only teach by rote then the students will enjoy singing a variety of music. Rote teaching is an approach to music performance that is taught primarily through aural repetition. In the beginning stages of rote teaching, the teacher may choose to let the class listen to the piece of music that they will be performing. After listening to the piece of music and following along in the music, the teacher will then play the notes that each section needs to sing from the piano, other instrument, or the voice. During the playing of notes from the instructor,

⁵⁴ Palkki, “Gender Trouble,” 32.

the students are listening to the played notes and repeat what they hear to remember what was being played for them. This process continues until the students have memorized what the teacher has played or sung over them. With rote teaching, “the music needs to be challenging enough to hold the boys’ interest but easy enough to prepare and polish in a relatively short time period.”⁵⁵ The disadvantage to this approach is that the students are not really learning how to read music and instead are becoming better at repeating what is modeled after them. With rote singing, If the musicianship skills that support any musical praxis are also approached this way...the results for students are as inauthentic and disempowering as those of any other disciplines students are obliged to study.”⁵⁶ Vocal technique, breathing, and vowel formation is something that can be taught by rote without sacrificing the quality of learning that the students experience. If the desire of the teacher is to show students how to read music, then he or she must focus on teaching music theory. Teachers may feel hesitant to teach music theory to a group of young singers because the subject can be unappealing to students. When teaching music theory, it is important to teach concepts slowly and through the repertoire that the students are learning. David Elliott, “continually uses musical examples from a variety of cultures and ethnicities in an attempt to include a variety of new identities in music education.”⁵⁷ If the teacher wants to have students understand how to read quarter notes and eighth notes, the teacher can have the students speak the text of a piece that contains only quarter notes and eighth notes in rhythm. For David Elliott, “music lives as something people do. It’s basic reality is not works nor the composition of works but music making.”⁵⁸ When trying to teach students how to sing

⁵⁵ Demorest, “Encouraging Male Participation,” 39.

⁵⁶ Elliott, *Praxial Music Education*, 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 300.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 104.

specific intervals, the teacher can try to select of piece of music that has simple intervals that are scalar or skipping within a major arpeggio. The music theory approach is one that is difficult at first but will provide many benefits to the students in the long run.

When trying to recruit and retain male students in the classroom, a teacher might use rote teaching to teach popular songs that appeal to the students in the choral ensemble. After the students have learned to appreciate singing in a choral group, have built a rapport with the teacher, and has begun to feel comfortable with their own voice, then the student can begin to learn music theory. The teacher can bounce between rote teaching and music theory until the male students begin to feel more accomplished in music theory. In Elliott's book *Praxial Music Education*, he says that "as educators, we often 'read' our students' body language to glean a sense of how they feel, or whether they understand us. Body language can inform us silently and unconsciously; it can help us draw conclusions about students' experiences."⁵⁹ This accomplishment will hopefully lead the male students to desire to learn more about reading music and applying their knowledge. The sense of accomplishment is something that is important to every student regardless of their gender. If a student can feel accomplished in a classroom, he or she will feel more compelled to stay in that classroom. A teacher that uses rehearsal strategies that help a student feel accomplished is one that can feel confident recruiting students and retaining these students year-after-year.

Positive Learning Environment

The next factor that influences recruitment and retention is a positive learning environment in the choral classroom. David Holdhusen, chairman of the music department and

⁵⁹ Elliott, *Praxial Music Education*, 112.

director of choral activities at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion has his group participate in activities that help bond the singing group. Some of Holdhusen's activities "range from students tossing a ball of yarn around a circle and revealing something about themselves or answering questions such as whether they like the movie or book version of a story better. These are questions that get people out of their shell, things that have nothing to do with music because they need to get comfortable with each other before the music can become important."⁶⁰ A positive learning environment is one that is created through the teacher-student relationship. From Bronfenbrenner's article, he says that "we don't make much use of mentors in U.S. society, and we don't give much recognition or encouragement to individuals who play this important role,"⁶¹ especially the teacher-student mentor relationship. Choral conductor-teachers "may be especially influential in middle and high school when students remain enrolled in a music program over a number of years, during which time strong relationships can be cultivated."⁶² The teacher creates a climate that is welcoming and safe to the students and one that welcomes discovery in the subject. A study conducted by Katherine Sinsabaugh concluded that "a supportive, musically-aware family environment as well as positive teacher interaction helped students stay motivated, and further helped students feel better able to cross over gender barriers in instrument selection."⁶³ This climate should not be limited to the classroom only,

⁶⁰ Cathy Applefield Olson, "We are Family: Creating and Sustaining Bonds in Performing Ensembles," *Teaching Music* (October 2016): 40, NAFME.org.

⁶¹ Bronfenbrenner, "Alienation and the Four Worlds of Childhood," 435.

⁶² Palkki, "Gender Trouble," 30.

⁶³ Sinsabaugh, "Understanding Students," 3.

“choral conductor-teachers should take responsibility for creating safe space for *all* of their students, both in and out of the music classroom.”⁶⁴

The opposite of a positive learning environment is a hostile or unwelcoming environment. In the hostile learning environment, the teacher-student relationship is skewed, and the students do not feel comfortable or safe take risks when trying to learn something new. A hostile learning environment is one that can be created if the teacher expects too much from their students, does not praise or compliment their students, or puts students to shame if a mistake is made. The opposite is true, a positive learning environment can be created when a teacher shows their care for the students, praises, and critiques students constructively, and allows students to make mistakes in the classroom without shame or guilt.

The positive learning environment is one that should be a goal for all classrooms within a school, however, because of the vulnerable nature of classroom singing, a positive learning environment is essential for student growth. Because of the “positive musical-emotional experiences music listening and music making can arouse and express, music—taught educatively—can make major artistic, social, cultural, ethical, economic, and political differences in peoples’ lives.”⁶⁵ David Elliott emphasizes that “early childhood musical experiences should occur in a context of acceptance, and of playful, positive exploration in which appropriate adult intervention involves guiding children rather than training them.”⁶⁶ Choral singing is a vulnerable activity because it requires students to sing out and trust that other students will sing out as well. The risk in this activity is that students must sing out enough to be

⁶⁴ Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students,” 30.

⁶⁵ Elliott, *Music Matters*, 48.

⁶⁶ Elliott, *Praxial Music Education*, 255.

heard by other students. If a student does not feel comfortable with their voice, they may feel that the other students may ridicule or make fun of their voice. It is important to know students as people and to help the students understand the beauty of differing voices while combining them with other voices make the group better. Elliott writes that “knowing and understanding your students as individual human beings is central to being an educative and ethical teacher.”⁶⁷

If a hostile learning environment is in place within the choral classroom, then the students will feel negative towards the vulnerable nature of singing. When students sing out, they may fear being ridiculed or will unfortunately be made fun of because of sounding different from others. A positive classroom environment will help ease the nervousness that accompanies the vulnerable nature of singing. When a student sings out, they can trust that the others will celebrate or embrace the different voices instead of making fun of any voice.

When recruiting students in the classroom, it is important that a positive learning environment is already in place. If a positive learning environment is not in place, then the teacher can either reflect on their own teaching, ask a peer to observe his or her teaching, or ask the students for their opinions on how the classroom environment can be improved. When a positive learning environment is in place, students will feel more comfortable joining that classroom because they will feel a sense of belonging, trust, and companionship with the other singers. If the positive learning environment is maintained throughout the teaching, then retention will not be a primary worry of the teacher. When a student experiences a positive learning environment and feels that they belong to the group, they are more likely to stay in the group. All students regardless of gender are always seeking for a place to belong and feel welcomed. The vulnerable nature of choral singing encourages teachers to create a positive

⁶⁷ Elliott, *Music Matters*, 11.

learning environment to ensure that students feel a sense of security when they walk into the classroom and a sense of accomplishment or belonging when they leave the classroom. If a choral classroom has a positive learning environment it becomes easier to recruit males into the classroom and makes the task of keeping those males in the classroom easier as well.

Praxialism

Praxialism, also known as Musicing by David Elliott, is a philosophy of music that emphasizes practical approaches to music. The other two differing philosophies are the Utilitarian approach and the Aesthetic approach. The Aesthetic philosophy is the most opposite of the praxial approach. David J. Elliott writes that “an aesthetic philosophy would focus on music as a form of fine art and provide music educators with a more respectable basis for explaining the nature value, and uniqueness of their subject in the school curriculum”⁶⁸ The Aesthetic philosophy focuses on the quality and emotion felt during music and the praxial philosophy focuses on the making of music. In Elliott’s introductory chapter of *Praxial Music Education* he writes that “the praxial curriculum immerses students in music-making projects that require them to draw upon the musical standards, traditions, lore, landmark achievements, symbol systems, gestures, and creative strategies of the musical practices of which their projects are a part.”⁶⁹ The praxial approach seems to be one that would be more appealing to the male audience because it focuses on the doing of music. Elliott advocates for music making by writing that “music making is valuable and significant in itself because it propels the self to higher levels of complexity.”⁷⁰ Aesthetic teachers spend their time discussing and listening to music rather

⁶⁸ Elliott, *Praxial Music Education*, 20.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁷⁰ Elliott, *Music*, 380.

than making music and praxial teachers spend their time understanding how to practice and make music. Male students may enjoy the “hands on” approach of making music while the female students may enjoy the discussion part of music. These are general stereotypes, however, balancing both in the classroom would be the best approach because it ensures that not one learner is left out.

In the praxial philosophy, students are taught the value of practice and making music. The goal in this type of classroom is to understand how to read music and ultimately perform music. This philosophy is very performance driven. Focusing on the music making rather than the discussion will help students feel a sense of accomplishment when trying to produce music. Music making is “a unique and major source of self-growth, self-knowledge (or constructive knowledge).”⁷¹ The difficulty that choral teachers may face is the lack of tactile application to their instrument. There is not a specific scale that can be mastered through different fingerings, rather, choral training relies on aural training. Some praxial approaches, such as the Kodaly approach should be implemented into the classroom. Kodaly focuses on the physicality of music and moving with the music. The use of hand signs and clapping during rhythms is something that can provide the physical feeling of making music in the choral classroom.

Another aspect that can be added to the choral classroom to help attract more students is the use of games and competition. Providing something fun for the students to do while learning a concept can help the students enjoy learning in the classroom rather than dreading it. The competitive aspect should also be added because it can help appeal to the competitive nature of the male students in the classroom. A simple tally of points from one class to another can help add the competitive edge to a musical concept being taught that week. Next, a teacher can choose

⁷¹ Elliott, Music, 380.

music that involves choreography or motion during the song. The addition of movement during songs will help engage the students that need to move during class and make the songs memorable and fun for the students. These additions can help students feel engaged and excited to come to the classroom because they know that there is some sort of accomplishment that will be felt after completing a lesson.

When recruiting for the choral classes a performance featuring movements will help attract other students. Performing songs that are popular to the students or are catchy and fun can help recruit students as well. With praxialism, performing is the goal for the students, so providing more opportunities for the students to perform for groups will help advertise for the choral program at the school. Another consideration that would help boost the choral program is to have students perform in musicals at the school. Musical theater seems to be making a rise in the student population and including a show in the year's program will attract other students to join. Also, choosing a show that can feature the male section in the chorus will help male students better identify with the male singers and help increase their desire to sing in the chorus group. Praxialism also focuses on teaching students how to learn independently and how to read music, so teaching these skills to the chorus class will aid in giving students a goal to work towards.

Male Voice

The male voice is one that is often misunderstood or deemed difficult to deal with. There are three main stages to the male voice: the treble voice, the adolescent voice, and the matured voice. Irvin Cooper, a leading researcher in the adolescent voice change in the mid-twentieth century similarly "divided the voice-change process into three groups: unchanged voice, *cambiata* (from *cambiata nota*, which means "changing note"), and changed voice. Cooper

discovered that boys' voices changed gradually and by singing through the voice change, boys could be successful in the choral ensemble."⁷² Each stage presents its' challenges in their own special way. Irvin Cooper founded an approach called the Cambiata approach, "this highly popular method developed in the 1960s, espouses four types of boys' voices existing in grades 4-12; boys unchanged (treble), boys in the first stage of mutation (cambiata), boys in second mutational stage (baritone), and boys completed vocal mutation (basses). Tenors do not exist in these years since mature tenor voices do not emerge until the mid to late twenties."⁷³ During the treble voice stage, males may struggle with speaking confidently due to their voices being at the same pitch as their female counterparts. It can also be difficult to classify the male voice in the treble range because they can sing in the soprano range or the alto range, and those classifications can change day by day. The treble voices are a perfect time for female teachers to coach their voices because they have the same vocal range and tessitura as other female students and teachers. Many elementary and sixth grade students do not feel indifferent about singing in choir because there is not too much of a distinction between their voices and the female voices, in fact, their voices might be stronger than their female peers because of the nature of their vocal cord's formation at the treble stage.

The most embarrassing and awkward time during the development of the male voice is the adolescent voice. "Researchers associated adolescent male voice change with various topics, including participation in choir, attrition and retention of males in choir, male gender identity, and the theory of possible selves."⁷⁴ During this stage the male voice is transitioning between the

⁷² Stockton, "Classifying Adolescent Male Voices," 85.

⁷³ Friddle, "Changing Bodies Changing Voices," 35.

⁷⁴ Bridget Sweet, "The Adolescent Female Changing Voice: A Phenomenological Investigation," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 63, no. 1 (April 2015): 72, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43900280>.

treble stage and the matured stage. This transition is often accompanied by the infamous voice crack or break. Some “negative emotions include feeling insecure, frustrated and/or embarrassed and impacted some singers long term: memories seem so painful for some subjects that they react emotionally while simply relating the incident years after.”⁷⁵ The confident male voice in the treble stage may begin to resist singing out because the male students now have an abundance of vocal breaks or cracks during their singing. This is something that also occurs in the female voice; however, it is not as present because the transition from their younger voice to their mature voice is not as drastic. According to Sweet, “adolescent female singers frequently experience excessive breathiness in tone, vocal unpredictability, and transition difficulties between registers because vocal bands have outgrown the surrounding muscles and are unable to close properly.”⁷⁶ The female transition from their younger voice to a more mature voice is characterized by a warmer and fuller tone while the male transition from their treble voice to their mature voice is warmer, fuller, and an octave lower. Because the transition from younger voice to a more mature voice is drastic for the male voice, it would make sense that the vocal breaks or cracks are more drastic for male voices than the female voices. During the adolescent stage of the male voice, it can be more beneficial for these students to be taught by male teachers because they can empathize and help those students deal with their vocal breaks through a shared experience. This is also a time when the male teachers can create a camaraderie amongst the male students as they transition through their adolescent voices. It is important during this time to allow the transition from adolescent voice to their adult voice naturally and not forced. Having male students force their voices to be lower will create bad habits that will most likely continue

⁷⁵ Sweet, “The Adolescent Female Changing Voice,” 73.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 73.

throughout their singing journey. Another important milestone for this stage in the male vocal journey is to develop confidence in their voice despite the embarrassing nature because it will help strengthen their vocal cords as they mature. The goal “is to be able to deal with some of the technical and musical issues of training the changing voice rather than focusing on part learning.”⁷⁷

The final stage of the male vocal journey is their adult or matured voice. There are many subsections of the final stage of the males’ voice, however the general category for the males’ final voice is their adult voice. “As a boy enters adolescence, he begins to lose the ability to sing in his pure upper register, c1 to c2, as his range in the lower register begins to expand downward. However, boys should continue to exercise the head voice daily through sirens and downward scalar patterns with active breath support and good posture.”⁷⁸ The struggle during this stage is to properly learn healthy singing habits and use of breath. These two skills are required for the other stages of the male voice, however, honing these skills will strengthen their final vocal stage and help create a full and strong voice created without tension or injury. The general classifications for the final male voice are tenors, baritones, or basses. The tenor voice is classified by a higher register, the bass is the lowest register, and the baritone voice is in the middle of the tenor and bass classification. Many male voices are a mix of tenor-baritone and bass-baritone voices. The true tenor and bass voices are much rarer than the baritone voices. Navigating the adult voice often requires instruction from a vocal coach because it is often tempting to over sing during this stage because of their newly acquired strength and fullness.

⁷⁷ Demorest, “Encouraging Male Participation in Chorus,” 39.

⁷⁸ Friddle, “Changing Bodies Changing Voices,” 41.

Overall, the male vocal journey is simple, however, the climax of the male voice is their adolescence. The treble voice is identified by a higher male voice that often matches the pitch and range as their female counterparts. The adolescent voice is riddled with vocal cracks or breaks and is often the most embarrassing part of the male vocal journey. The adult voice is where the male voice will rest for most of their lives. It is at this final stage that males are characterized as tenors, basses, or baritones. Understanding how the male voice works and how each stage is challenging will help teachers keep the confidence high for the male students and keep them singing in the choral classroom. Finally, placing the male students, during each stage of their vocal journey, in correct sections is vitally important so each male student may thrive and grow in their section.

Vocal Placement

Vocal placement is an important part of a student's singing journey because it allows a student to better understand their range and vocal ability. Correct vocal placement may be one of the most crucial aspects of a student's vocal development because an incorrect placement will force a student to sing in a range that is either out of their reach or is not challenging to them. The result of an incorrect vocal placement is a student that does not reach their potential as a singer due to their poor habits that are created from either reaching too high in their range or forcing their low notes. The stated reasons emphasize the importance of being placed in one's correct vocal placement.

When singers are at the elementary level, most of their singing is focused on unison singing or two-part singing. Unison singing is when all singers are singing the same part or same notes. When you divide the song into different voices or parts, the part number of the music classification increases, for example, a piece of music divided into three separate voice parts is

considered three-part music. Music can also be classified by the type of voice parts that sing in the piece of music, for example, a piece including only sopranos, altos and baritones would be SAB music (always starting with the highest voice part), a piece including two soprano parts and one alto part would be SSA music, a piece including only sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses would be SATB music, etc. When singers reach their middle school years and above, there are more opportunities for singing songs with various voicing. The most common at the middle school classification of music is two-part music, three-part mixed, and SAB music and the most common in high school and above is some variation of SATB music such as SSATTB, SATTB, SAATB, etc.

A problem that many grade 6-12 chorus teachers face is not having enough voices to sing a certain piece of music with a specific voice classification; An example of this would be a middle school teacher that has 30 girls and only three boys. In the previous example, the teacher may want to perform SAB music, but only has three boys to work with, creating an imbalance of parts. The teacher would have to require his or her boys to either sing louder than is healthy, or have the girls sing quieter than is beneficial for their vocal growth. When a teacher asks singers to sing too loud or sing too quiet because there is a deficiency of parts or other voices, they are not allowing the students to develop their voices fully because they are not teaching correct vocal practices. Teaching students to have correct vocal practices or technique, begins with correctly placing each student in the correct part.

There are certain ranges to consider when voicing students. First, teachers must decide what their process should entail when voicing students, do they consider previous parts they sang, do they allow the students to choose, do they audition, do they sing a short song, etc. Most teachers will choose to have the students sing a short song and afterwards the teacher may test

the student's low range and high range. When considering the different voice parts that teachers commonly classify students in (soprano, alto, tenor, bass, and their sub sections), the New Harvard Dictionary of music has defined a general range for each voice part. Each voice part has a specific range of notes that he or she can sing, and it is normally assessed using notes on a piano. Musicians use a number system to specify which note is being played on the piano. Generally, a good reference when discussing piano notes is middle C or C4. Each octave, or set of eight letter name notes, either increases or decreases the number following the note, for example, an octave lower than C4 would be C3 and an octave higher than C4 would be C5. Based on an 88-key piano, the range for that instrument would be from A0-C8. Each voice has a different vocal range, however the human voice, generally, can span from about F2-F6. There are anomalies within this range so, some people can sing lower than the listed range or higher. According to the New Harvard Dictionary of Music, "the range for higher voices is C4-A5 for Sopranos and B2-G4 for tenors, the range for medium voices is A3-F5 for mezzo sopranos and G2-E4 for baritones, and the range for low voices is F3-D5 for altos and E2-C4 for basses."⁷⁹ Teachers must assess the comfortable chest voice when assessing the range of the students because some techniques such as falsetto, head voice, mixed voice, whistle tone, vocal fry, etc. may extend the range of an individual but does not correctly identify what their natural voice is capable of.

Summary

Choral directors-teachers have long struggled with recruiting males in the choral classroom. The above literature reflects the need for males to be present in the choral classroom.

⁷⁹ "The New Harvard Dictionary of Music," Yale University Library, <https://web.library.yale.edu/cataloging/music/vocal-ranges>.

The specific challenge that choral directors face with recruiting and retaining males in the middle school chorus classroom is the potential stigma of femininity in the subject. Middle school students are attempting to find their place in society and the school structure, so having males participate in feminine activities may label him as different or other in the eyes of his peers. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes the idea that the environment that a student is in is one that shapes his or her identity. Males may be more inclined to participate in activities that are more masculine centered, such as sports, physical education, the trumpet, etcetera. These problems make the recruitment and retention of male students difficult. Having more males in the chorus group helps balance the choir because the teacher can choose repertoire that includes three or more differing voice parts. When trying to recruit males into the classroom, having a single gender chorus group may help the male students see the potential of the male voice and have a sense of camaraderie with the other singers. Other approaches include connecting with the male students at a younger age, this can be achieved by visiting feeder elementary schools and featuring different singing groups.

Males may also enjoy a more praxial approach, as described by David Elliott. The praxial approach emphasizes the process of making music rather than primarily discussing or listening to music. The “hands-on” approach of music making may appeal to male students because of the nature of learning a skill and achieving a goal because of the attained skill. Other approaches attempt to the more male centered gender stereotypes. Some of these include a more competitive approach in the rehearsal strategies. Competitive approaches may involve games or activities that put individuals or groups against one another with the same musical goal. Teachers can also help male students recognize the pursuit of excellence or achievement that may not be obvious to the students in the choral group.

The supporting literature also highlights the major differences between the male and female voice. Some of the differences include a different laryngeal structure, differing ranges, and a more prominent vocal change with the male voice. More prominent vocal changes in the male voice may cause male students to feel ashamed of their own voice. Teachers can help prevent the feeling of shame in the choral classroom by creating a positive learning environment, one that welcomes mistakes and encourages growth in the subject. A positive learning environment will attract any student to join a class, especially a music class, because the classroom climate is one that is welcoming and fun to be a part of. Other aspects that may influence the classroom climate is the placement of different voices in the choral classroom. If a male student feels isolated in the room, he may not be willing to continue to be in the chorus class. Teachers can focus on putting male students around other males and making sure they feel comfortable with their vocal struggles.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The psychological and societal reasons behind choral singing being classified as a feminine activity will help readers of this study understand why recruitment and retention of males is a challenge for middle school directors. Gender stereotypes associated with singing at the middle school level creates an unbalanced ratio of male to female in the choral classroom. Results from this study were gathered and compiled to create a practical approach to addressing the unbalanced ratio of male to female in chorus. Benefits of this study, outside of the various approaches to fixing the male to female ratio include filling a gap in literature and giving each level of choral instruction (primary, secondary, and collegiate) a better understanding of the male to female ratio in the classroom.

Males being absent or lacking in the choral classroom has long dreaded choral directors. Having a balance of males and females in a chorus group allows the instructor to explore more vocal instrumentations such as the popular SATB (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) or SAB (Soprano, Alto, and Baritone). When there is a shortage of males in the choral classroom, the enrolled males may feel isolated or feel the need to over sing to achieve a balanced sound. Recruitment and retention for males in the middle school chorus classroom was the primary intention of this study. The researcher investigated different methods to make the choral classroom more attractive to male students.

The study analyzed the psychological factors that could potentially influence a male student's decision to join chorus and their decision to stay enrolled in the class. Researched literature helps music educators, specifically choral, understand the societal effects of gender stereotypes, how the media can have a positive influence on males joining chorus, and how a

positive learning environment can help make a class more appealing to the student body. The chorus class is often viewed as a feminine activity. For this reason, males may feel hesitant to participate in the chorus class. Sinsabaugh writes that “current research reports that boys are often harassed by their peers if they show they like things that are considered female-gendered,”⁸⁰ The anticipated stigma that males feel they will receive prevents them from joining chorus. Psychologically, males look for ways to fit into their desired social group and be accepted by their peers, especially during adolescence. The final influence that may affect a male student’s decision to join the group is the positive or negative environment that the teacher creates in the classroom. A male student may decide to join the group but after experiencing a hostile or isolated learning environment, he may decide to leave the class.

Design

The study was conducted as a reflection of the researchers past experiences, an analysis of existing literature regarding males in chorus or gender stereotyped activities, and through a 25-question survey that was sent to educators in Georgia’s District 14. Using a survey, by definition, seems to classify this research as a quantitative study because “survey research provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population.”⁸¹ However, the approach of this research is more qualitative because the researcher is used as the primary instrument. John W. Creswell writes in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, that “qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or

⁸⁰ Sinsabaugh, “Understanding Students,” 2.

⁸¹ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 12.

interviewing participants.”⁸² The survey questions that were asked were formatted as an interview and the answers that were gathered from the surveys were analyzed and compiled to help the researcher understand the different methods that middle school teachers use when recruiting males in middle school chorus.

Reflexivity or how the researcher reflects on his background for the study makes this research a qualitative design. Creswell writes that “in qualitative research, inquirers reflect about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations.”⁸³ The researchers personal experience with recruitment and retention of males in the middle school chorus guided the interpretation of the articles, journals, dissertations, and survey responses.

The final qualitative characteristic of this study is the holistic account of the problem statement. Qualitative researchers “try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under the study, reporting multiple perspectives and identifying the many factors involved in a situation.”⁸⁴ The multiple factors that were studied in this research were the gender stereotypes, how a positive learning environment affects recruitment issues, adolescence, the male voice, and other factors mentioned in chapter two.

Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What approaches can choral directors use to recruit and retain male singers in the chorus classroom successfully?

⁸² Creswell and Creswell, *Research*, 180.

⁸³ Ibid, 182.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 182.

Prior to the study, the researcher approached recruitment of male students by trying to appeal to the stereotypical characteristics of a male student. Including sport related lessons, athleticism, active warmups, and competitions in the curriculum were some approaches that the researcher took to appeal to male students. Competitive approaches helped bring a different level of excitement to the curriculum being taught to the middle school students. The researcher believes that trying to have a balance of both feminine and masculine characteristics in the choral classroom helps appeal to both males and females for recruitment and retention in the choral classroom.

RQ2: What causes a male student to enroll in chorus classes?

Prior to researching the problem statement, the researcher believed that two main reasons were behind males joining the choral classroom, the presence of friends and family pressure. When male students learn that their peers are present in the chorus classroom, these students will be more inclined to join the class as well. This factor affects both males and females equally because students enjoy being in classes that their friends are present in. Next, described by Bronfenbrenner's sphere of influence model, the family circle has an almost direct influence on the behavior and choices of individuals. If a male student's family is involved in music or singing, then the student will be more likely to join a fine arts class such as band or chorus, regardless of any gender stereotypes that exist in the classes.

RQ3: How does the classroom and rehearsal environment affect male retention/confidence in the choral classroom?

Classroom retention is an important factor in building a choral program because a positive retention rate allows a teacher to invest in the musical education of his or her students. When a teacher focuses on maintaining a positive learning environment that is challenging and

encourages his or her students to take risks and learn, they are more likely to stay in the chorus class. At the middle school level, chorus is a class that must be chosen by students to take. Because chorus is an optional course that students can take, there is always a risk of students not wanting to take the class. Compared to the elementary level, music is taken by each student at the school. The hypothesis for this question is that a positive learning environment and carefully selected repertoire affect a student's decision to stay enrolled in the chorus class.

Participants

The participants in this study were selected from Georgia's District 14 of music educators. Participants in this study were required to either be a middle school chorus teacher or have had experience teaching middle school chorus for at least two years. The focus of this study was to see what factors affected a male student's decision to join chorus. With middle school chorus being the focus, it was imperative that the survey questions were answered by those teachers that either have or are teaching middle school chorus. New teachers were not asked to participate in the study because the questions were geared towards comparing the previous year's male participation to the current number of male students. The participants were not compensated for this study and were asked to answer 27 questions from a digital survey.

Setting

The setting for this study was intended to emulate qualitative natural setting. The data collected from the digital survey were geared towards the classroom environment and choices that were made by teachers to help recruit and retain male students. Teachers that answered the questions in the study were sent the surveys after registration numbers for the future school year have been collected. Teachers needed to have an idea of what approaches were taken to attract males to the chorus classroom. The choral classroom was the focus in this study because there

seems to only be a disparity of male students in the choral classroom as compared to the orchestra or band classroom.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation used in this study was a digital survey sent to the chosen participants within District 14. The questions for the digital survey were designed to serve as a personal interview for each of the participating teachers. SurveyMonkey was used to create the survey and the same website was used to gather the data and send the survey out to the participants. SurveyMonkey was used because of the security that was included in the survey design. Participants were informed that the answers given in the survey were to remain anonymous and would not be linked to any identifiers. SurveyMonkey helped the researcher collect the data from the survey and remind participants to take the survey after a few weeks of not opening the survey. Notifications were emailed to the researcher whenever new answers were collected from the participants.

Procedures

Research was conducted through articles, journals, dissertations, and books. Once the data was gathered from internet and books, the data was used to form a problem statement. The problem statement was formed by connecting the conducted research to the researcher's personal experience participating in music. The researcher experienced a deficit of male students in the choral classroom and even experienced negative treatment for being in the chorus class at the middle school level.

After research was gathered the researcher sent emails out to The Liberty University music faculty asking for their permission to join the study as either an advisor or a reader. Dr. Samantha Miller agreed to join the researcher's team as the advisor and Dr. Stanley Harris

agreed to join the team as the reader for the research. Once the team was secured, the researcher sent his problem statement and introduction for approval. Upon receiving approval, the researcher was able to continue writing the thesis. Throughout the thesis process, Dr. Samantha Miller provided direction on how to improve the writing and what other viewpoints should be taken to help answer the problem statement. Dr. Stanley Harris approved the chapters as they were written to help the researcher prepare for his defense.

Once the first chapter of the thesis had been completed, per Liberty University requirements, the researcher submitted his proposal, research design, and survey questions to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). After submitting the research design to the IRB, the researcher received an exemption because the research design and survey questions did not directly involve children and did not impose any direct risk to those participating in the study. Once approval was attained from the IRB, the researcher sent out the survey to middle school chorus teachers in Georgia's District 14 via SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey was advised to be used to send out the surveys from the IRB because of its ability to maintain privacy and not have any trace to the participants.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data from the surveys confirmed the hypotheses that were made by the researcher. The overall theme of the survey answers was that male students average about 10% of the population of each grade's chorus group. The males that were involved in the chorus classes were mainly in the classroom because they enjoyed singing or they wanted to go on a trip that the chorus class had to offer. The research questions that were asked each received a positive answer that helped enhance the study.

RQ1: What approaches can choral directors use to recruit and retain male singers in the chorus classroom successfully?

The choral directors involved in the study emphasized the need to make the classroom a fun environment and one that helps the students feel they are a part of a family or close-knit group. A positive learning environment was an important factor in retaining the male students in the chorus group. Each of the participants mentioned that they wished there was more contact with the elementary feeder schools and those that did, mentioned the positive effects of visiting the schools to talk about the middle school chorus group. One final common theme that choral directors took to appeal to the males in the chorus group was to keep the whole group active and participating in making music constantly.

RQ2: What causes a male student to enroll in chorus classes?

Some of the questions asked in the survey pointed towards family involvement being the reason for males to join the chorus and some questions focused on the enjoyment of singing as a reason for males to join chorus. Both enjoyment and family influence were factors that caused males to join the chorus class. Other factors that encouraged male students to join the chorus class were being around their peers, females, or for participating in class trips. Whichever reason the male students joined the chorus group, it seemed that the numbers remained the same from sixth grade to eighth grade. The retention rate seems to be connected to the positive learning environment and closeness that students felt to the teacher.

RQ3: How does the classroom and rehearsal environment affect male retention/confidence in the choral classroom?

Each participant in the study mentioned the importance of having a positive learning environment in the chorus classroom. The chorus groups in each of the participants schools were

described as having a close family bond and feeling that each of the students enjoyed. When the participants were asked about how they dealt with the male singer's vocal change and voice cracks, each responded positively by emphasizing supporting and encouraging male students to sing through their vocal change and to not be ashamed of their voice change. The educators also wrote about making the male students feel welcomed and to be celebrated whenever the male students would sing out.

The overall theme of the answers collected from the survey was that the male students joined the chorus group because they either enjoyed singing or they had a friend that was also involved. In the group. While there was a presence of the feminine stigma behind the chorus group, the answers from the survey seemed to conclude that the male students did not concern themselves with the femininity of the chorus class once they experienced the fun they felt by participating with the group. Other factors such as the gender of the teacher or the attendance to sporting events seemed to have little effect on the male students choosing to join the chorus group. Instead, a positive environment, supportive teaching, and encouraging males to participate in the choral group resulted in a higher recruitment and retention of these students.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

Because the purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive list of approaches to recruiting and retaining males in the middle school chorus classes, this study analyzed the leading causes of feminine stereotyping in the chorus classroom from the perspective of middle school chorus teachers. Chapter four presents the results from the research. Sections throughout contain information regarding participant's demographic data, findings related to the research questions listed above, and a summary of the results. This study addressed the following questions: The first question is: What approaches can choral directors use to recruit and retain male singers in the chorus classroom successfully? The sub questions are:

1. What causes a male student to enroll in chorus classes?
2. How does the classroom and rehearsal environment affect male retention/confidence in the choral classroom?

The perceived effects of gender stereotypes on students' decisions to participate in certain activities and what approaches to take to encourage more participation in music classes, specifically for the male students were analyzed from survey responses.

Demographic Data

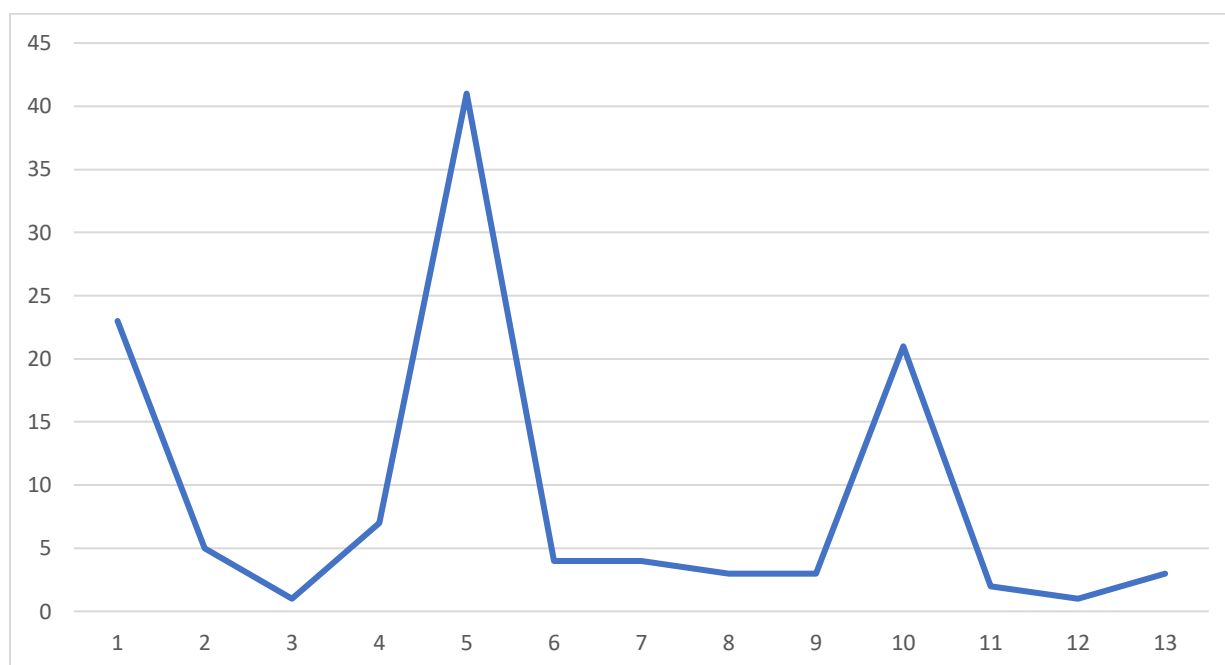
The study was conducted via an online generated survey created by the researcher. Participant survey was created on the online survey platform SurveyMonkey to comply with the Liberty University Institutional Review Board's (IRB) suggestions for anonymity and data security. The survey was administered to the Georgia Music Educators Association (GMEA) District 14 middle school chorus teachers. The total amount of middle school chorus teachers in

GMEA's District 14 is 35 certified choral directors. Of the 35 choral directors, 13 teachers responded to the anonymous survey, totaling a 37% participation rate from middle school chorus teachers within the district. Of the teachers that responded, 2 were males (15%) and 11 (85%) were female.

Years of Experience

The following graph (**Figure 1**) shows the participants responses to the number of years each educator has been teaching.

Figure 1. Participant's Years of Teaching Experience



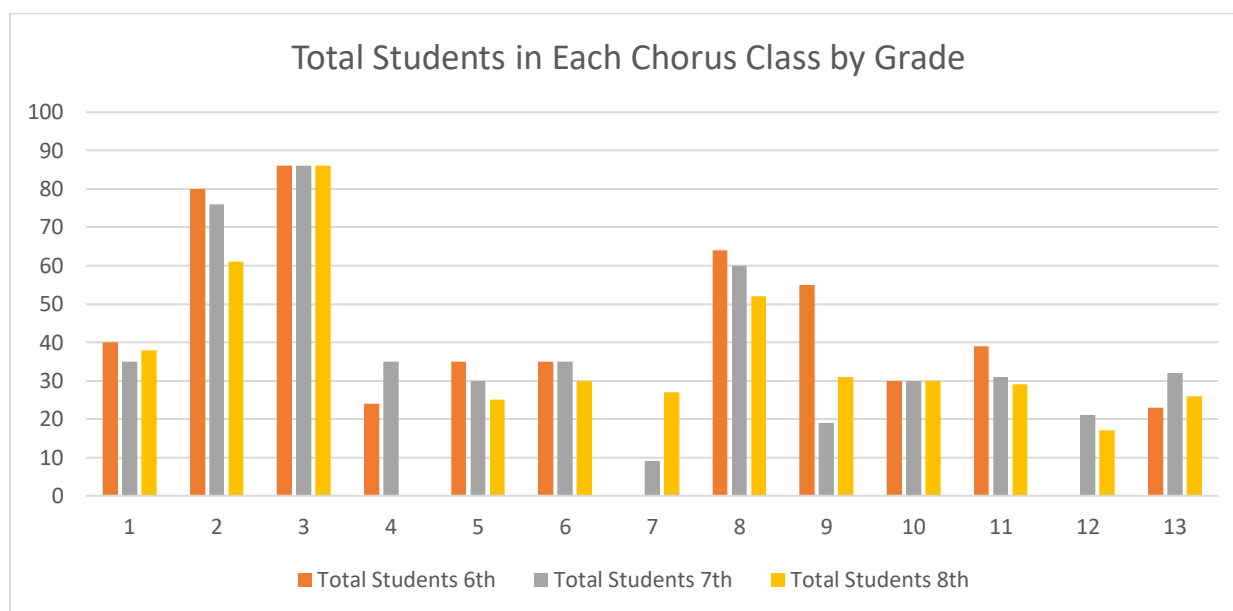
The average number of years that each teacher has taught in GMEA's district 14 is 9 years. Most of the responders were in the 1-5 years of experience category and showed a higher level of interest in learning how to recruit for males in the middle school chorus. Teachers that responded as having more than twenty years of experience offered more advice on how to recruit males into the chorus class. Experience teaching chorus at the middle school level is important for this study because it helps provide validity for the research participants. As teachers

experience hardships, both in the chorus classroom, and in general, they must utilize different strategies to overcome challenges. At times, certain approaches may not solve the problem, worsen the problem, or solve the problem. Approaches that a certain teacher takes to help their classroom may be perfect for their classroom environment and horrendous for another teacher. Experience in front of students and in the classroom yields a larger list of “tried-and-true” approaches that can solve problems or help ease classroom/student challenges. With GMEA’s district 14 averaging 9 years of classroom experience, the responses that were collected were based off experience in the classroom versus researched methods that may or may not work for certain challenges.

Total Students in Each Grade

The following graph (**Figure 2**) shows how many total students are in each participant’s grade level chorus class. Each grade level (6-8) combined every chorus class within that grade level.

Figure 2. Total Number of Students in Each Grade’s Chorus Class



District 14's 6th grade chorus classes averaged 46 students total, 7th grade chorus classes averaged 38 total, and 8th grade classes averaged 37 total. Assuming the chorus classes follows the six classes format (six classes all year) versus the block schedule (four classes per semester, eight classes total) format, each grade level's chorus classes are split into two separate periods. With the six classes format in mind, each grade's total number of students in the chorus classes on average is 20 students per class period. Total number of students within a classroom is important for this study because it can affect the way a student feels in the classroom. If there are more students in the classroom, a single student may feel that the attention is not entirely on them and instead is spread to a larger sum of students. When there is a smaller number of students in the classroom, attention is less spread. The benefits of a smaller classroom outweigh the negative because the teacher can spend more time with each student, however, in the case of male recruitment and retention, smaller numbers can be negative. Using numbers from **figure 3**, each class will on average have 3 males in the chorus classroom. If the male students are outnumbered significantly, more isolation may be felt by the group and increased isolation will likely result in students wanting to withdraw from the classroom. The results from the surveys showed that the more students that were in the chorus classroom total, often the more males there were as well.

Total Number of Males in Each Grade

The following graph (**Figure 3**) shows how many male students are enrolled in each of the participants grade level chorus class.

Figure 3. Total Number of Males Enrolled in Each Grade's Chorus Class

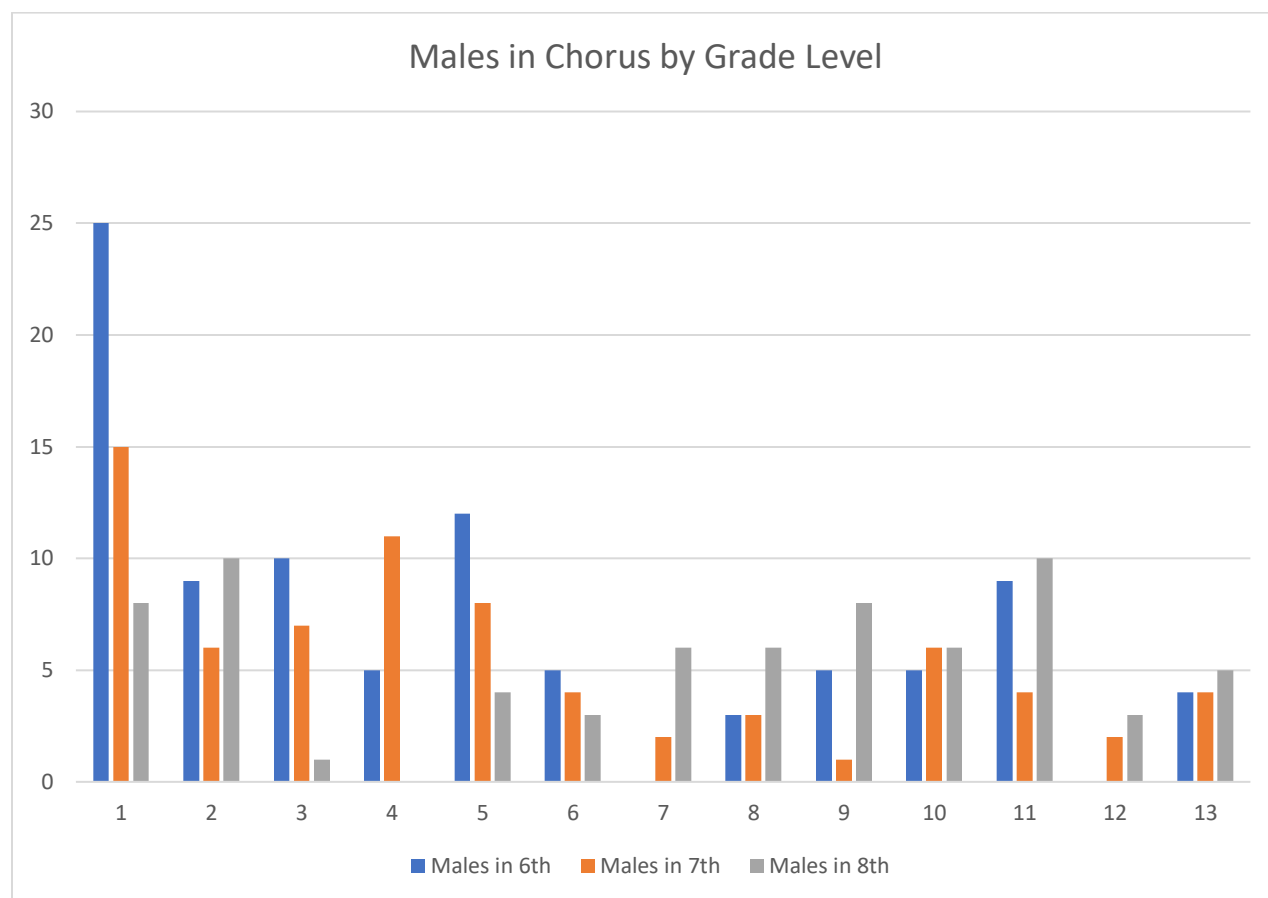


Figure 3 confirms the problem that chorus directors face when trying to balance their ensemble.

On average, only 16% of the chorus classroom consists of male students. If the classroom total number of students is high, feelings of isolation may not be a problem; however, the feeling of isolation increases as the total number of students decreases. Another factor to consider when analyzing these numbers is how well the group of males get along with each other. If the male students do not get along well with one another, one or all the members may decide to not be a part of the class because it is an optional course to take. The imbalanced ratio of male to female can hinder the ability for directors to have a balanced blend of voices when singing repertoire, which often results in female students singing too quiet or male students singing too loud to overcompensate for the ratio. The number of males in the chorus classroom seems to decrease

most from 6th grade to 7th grade. Although most males decide to stay in the chorus classroom from 7th grade to 8th grade. From these numbers, most retention efforts need to be focused on the transition from grade 6 to grade 7.

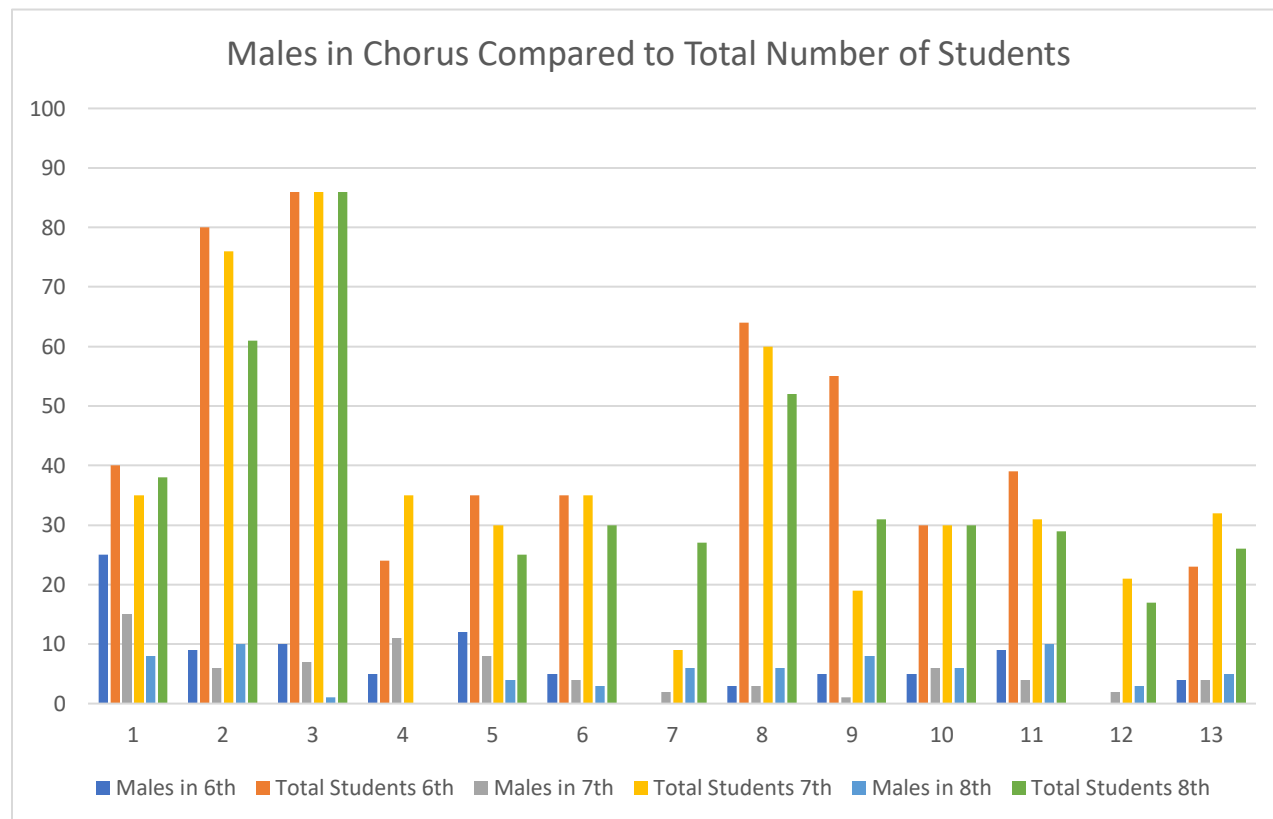
Findings

The following section presents the data collected from the survey and connect the results to the research questions. Most of the answers in the survey were open ended, so these questions will have the top answers listed.

Number of Males vs. Number of Students

Figure 4 shows how many males are enrolled in the chorus class as compared to the number of students enrolled.

Figure 4. Number of Males Compared to Total Number of Students in Chorus



From the graph, the findings show that on average 16% of the chorus classes consisted of males. In the 6th grade 18% of students were males, 7th grade classes consisted 15% of males, and 8th grade classes were 15% male. Data reveals a trend in both total number of students and total number of males; the number of students and males in the chorus, in general, decreased as the students moved from 6th grade to 8th grade. Percentages of students leaving chorus is at its highest from 6th grade to 7th grade and decreases significantly from 7th to 8th grade. These percentages are consistent with males leaving chorus as well. Analyzing the total number of students, from 6th to 7th grade 17% of students leave the chorus class and from 7th to 8th grade only 2% of the students leave the chorus class. Male participation models these percentages as well, from 6th to 7th grade 37.5% of males leave the chorus class and from 7th to 8th grade 3% of males leave the chorus class.

Gender Specific Classes

Participants were asked if there were any gender specific classes that the school offered its' students. Most of the answers from the participants were that no gender specific classes were offered at the middle school level. Two participants, however, had male-specific classes that either met during school or after school. These participants also showed a higher enrollment of males in their chorus classes and a higher retention rate of males in the class. No female specific classes were noted in the survey responses. One other response from the survey was having a treble choir that included both male and female voices. The treble choir is another name for a group of students with treble voice (Soprano or Alto) and can consist of both males and females. Treble choirs are common in middle school and are mainly made up of 6th and 7th females and unchanged male voices.

Effect of Teacher's Gender

Jana Grace William's dissertation on "Male Participation in Middle School Chorus" suggested that the "lack of male enrollment and negative attitude toward singing is that vocal music suggests femininity to boys since their grade teachers are generally women and the materials are too often effeminate, or at least so construed by the hearty male mind."⁸⁵ Most answers on the survey noted no perceived effect on teaching gender affecting the male enrollment in the chorus classes. Responses ranged from simple no's to emphasizing the appeal of the class itself encouraging students to sign up for the chorus class. Those that responded yes to the question were male participants and showed a higher enrollment of male students and retention year-after-year. The difference between the number of males enrolled in the male classroom versus the female classroom was not significant at only a 4% difference.

Elementary School Visits

Visiting feeder elementary schools can be one of the best recruitment tools for music classes because it allows teachers to form a connection with younger students. Andrew Berman's research on the challenge of recruiting and retaining students in music classes wrote that,

You need to have a plan for your sixth graders when they're in fifth grade. Planning for recruitment is a yearlong process and involves knowing the class selection timeline. Schedule trips to feeder schools, joint concerts where younger kids perform with older kids, and other opportunities for face time with potential music students. The more that younger students engage with older students, the more they'll see music as part of their future.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Jana Grace Williams, "Male Participation and Male Recruitment Issues in Middle and High School Chorus" (DMA diss., Boston University College of Fine Arts, Boston, 2011), 42, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁸⁶ Berman, "Recruiting and Retaining Students," 39.

This research emphasizes the need for middle school teachers to visit elementary feeder schools to establish a good relationship with the future music students. Each of the participants in the survey responded positively with the question “how often do you visit the elementary schools?” having an average of 2 times per year visiting the elementary schools. One participant noted the elementary school was in the same building as the middle school and the teacher emphasized their ability to perform joint concerts consistently. Having a combined elementary and middle school building yielded high results for males in the chorus classroom, with 25 male students in the 6th grade out of 40 total students (62.5% of the class being male). The percentage of male to females in the chorus class were 46% higher when 4 or more visits were made to the elementary school.

Field Trips and Extracurriculars

Many questions were asked about field trips and extracurricular activities. Participants were asked how many games per month they attended, whether they take their groups on field trips, whether they host a musical, and how many student-centered events the participants attend outside of school. Each of the participants responded positively towards bringing their students on a field trip. Participants wrote that at least twice a year the students attend a field trip, whether it involved an overnight stay at a theme park, singing at a sporting event, or attending honor chorus or All-State chorus (GMEA related events). Each of the participants host a musical, as an extracurricular activity, once per year as well. Extracurricular activities are events, groups, athletics, or activities that happen outside of the normal school day and are not required by the class. The only correlation found between the number of males in the classroom and the answers from the participants was on the number of sporting events, school related or outside of school, that the teacher attended per month. On average, each participant attended 2 games per month,

some depending on the season (football, basketball, soccer, etc.). Chorus teachers that attended more than 4 games per month showed 74% more male students in the chorus class than those that attended 0-3 games per month. The biggest correlation to the number of male students in the class seems to be based on how much the students feel supported outside of the classroom, especially the males.

Classroom Procedures/Environment

Questions related to classroom procedures were mostly related to competitive aspects of the classroom, specific placement in the classroom for male students, and keeping males together in one class for each grade. The competitive aspects of the chorus classroom that were included among the answers were solos and sight singing exercises (excerpts of music that is studied, practiced, and performed without any prior knowledge) as the most popular answers (more than 50% of participant answers). Each of the participants answered regarding male placement in the classroom as needing to place them where their voices fit best, and their specific needs are met. 100% of the participants answered with mixing the male students amongst the whole class until their voices change, then placing them together in the middle of the classroom. The final procedure taken by 54% of participants, with a caveat, was placing males together in the same class period. The caveat to these responses was that males were only placed together in classes if there were only a couple male students total and were instead spread to other classes if there were more than 10 males enrolled total.

The classroom environment questions were about how to encourage males to sing out and how teachers responded to vocal breaks. Each of the responses were directly related and were unanimous. Males were encouraged to sing out by helping them feel comfortable and supported by both the teacher and his peers. This was established by the teachers through the family setting

of the classroom and how each of the students encouraged and supported each other. The final classroom environment that each teacher made a priority to establish was how each teacher responded to vocal breaks. Each teacher noted that vocal breaks were a necessary part of vocal growth and was either celebrated by the teacher and peers or simply ignored because of the normalcy established behind vocal breaks.

Reasons To or Not to Join Chorus

Over 90% of participants listed the reasons for joining chorus to be because the male students enjoy singing or enjoyed being in the music class. 54% of male students were enrolled in the chorus class because a sibling was also enrolled in the classroom (this may or may not have been the primary reason for joining the class, there was no question that indicated this). Other reasons that were answered was that parents encouraged male students to join, the students enjoyed being with their friends, they liked the teacher, or the male students enjoyed being with the female students.

There were four main reasons that were answered when asked “why do you think males do not join chorus?”. The main reasons were recorded if more than 50% of the participants answered with similar answers. The first reason males were *discouraged* from joining the chorus class was because it was seen as a feminine activity. Chapter 2 confirms the feminine view of the chorus class, and this is one of the main preventors for males joining chorus, especially when the male students are trying to establish their masculinity. The second reason males either do not join or feel uncomfortable being in the class is because they are fearful about being made fun of by their peers. Another reason the male students do not feel they should join the chorus class is because they were ignorant, or not aware about how much fun they could be having in the

classroom. Finally, specifically for males that are concerned about how they are perceived, the chorus class might be considered a class that is not “cool”.

Summary

Insights about recruitment and retention strategies for males in middle school chorus was provided from 37% of middle school chorus teachers within GMEA’s district. With an average of 9 years of teaching chorus from the participants, the answers were given from classroom experience instead of research or lessons from their undergraduate degree. Each of the grade levels averaged 72 students total per grade level (6-8) and each grade level averaged 9 male students enrolled in the class, only 12% of students being male. Regarding retention, the problem of losing students seems to center around the transition from 6th grade to 7th grade, with an average of 37.5% of males leaving. Although, only 3% of males leave from 7th to 8th grade, meaning most of the males were enrolled in chorus and remained in chorus because they liked the class with their and/or the teacher.

Recruitment strategies were also recorded from the anonymous survey. The top two listed strategies to recruit males into the chorus class was to visit the elementary school more than four times per year and to attend afterschool or out of school sporting events that the students were involved in. Visiting the elementary schools allowed the teacher to establish a connection with the future music students and allowed elementary students to interact or befriend their future chorus peers. Another approach that teachers took was to have joint-concerts with elementary schools to give students an opportunity to perform with one another. Teachers that attended more than four sporting events per month showed 74% more male students enrolled in the chorus class because they felt supported by their teacher both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

Finally, male students were listed as joining the chorus classroom because they enjoyed being a part of the activity. The male students that were involved in the chorus class, according to their teachers wanted to be in the class and enjoyed the family-like and encouraging environment created by the teacher. The main reasons that male students did not choose to be a part of the chorus class was because it was seen as a feminine or “not-cool” activity, students were afraid to be made fun of by their peers, or the male students were closed minded and did not realize how much fun they could be having in the chorus class. To amend these problems, teachers shared the need to reach out to male students, have them sit in class, perform to the school, and have other male students recruit their friends into the classroom. Overall, the answers showed various approaches to recruiting and retaining males in the chorus classroom and will help chorus teachers understand how to start recruiting and retaining more males in the middle school chorus classes.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Male participation in the middle school chorus class continues to be a challenge for choral educators, but understanding how to connect with students and build a positive learning environment can help balance the boy to girl ratio in the classroom. Practical procedures for recruiting male students include elementary school visitations, student-to-student recruitment, and most importantly after school/extracurricular attendance. Efforts retaining males in the middle school chorus classroom should be focused on the 6th grade classes because the results revealed a higher percentage of students leaving the chorus class from 6th grade to 7th grade. The procedures to help retain students in the classroom include creating a positive and supportive learning environment and including activities that keep students moving and competing with one another.

Summary of Study

Recruitment and retention of males in choral classes has been a continuous struggle for middle and high school choral educators. Supported by Steven Demorest's article, "teachers and writers of choral methods books have agonized over the "missing males" and have offered many strategies for recruiting and retaining male singers."⁸⁷ Research was conducted on the psychological factors that students experience during adolescence. The main psychological influence during a child's adolescence is Bronfenbrenner's spheres of influence. Bronfenbrenner explains how different persons and surroundings affect an individual's life. Early in an individual's life, one of the most direct spheres of influence is the school. Bronfenbrenner stated that "the school is in the best position of all U.S. institutions to initiate and strengthen links that support children and adolescents."⁸⁸ The most direct influence for students in the schools is the teachers of the students. Classroom environment, procedures, and teacher personality directly affects the child's enjoyment and experience in the classroom. These factors were researched to see which best approaches would urge a middle school male student to join the chorus class. Research pointed towards David Elliot's praxial approach to teaching music and competitive activities as a recommended way to retain males in the choral classroom. The praxial approach focuses on the making of music and active involvement in the music making process and the competitive activities appeal to a male student's search for masculinity.

Most journals and articles researched for this study focused on high school enrollment and college level coursework. To help fill a gap in literature, middle school chorus classes were the focus for this study because the researcher believes that middle school is an essential time for

⁸⁷ Demorest, "Male Participation in Chorus," 38.

⁸⁸ Bronfenbrenner, "Alienation and the Four Worlds of Childhood," 435.

students to learn musical foundations. During a student's middle school years, they experience the most change in their social lives, identity, and vocal development. These experiences are most dramatically seen in the male student body, specifically in vocal development. Middle school students begin to transition into adolescence where the students experience bodily changes and change in vocal registers. Male students begin to experience a transition from their younger soprano/alto voices into their early baritone/bass voices. The study sought to target the adolescent years of male students and begin to understand how societal stereotypes, classroom environment, and teacher choices affect students' decision to join the chorus class.

This study sought to find the best approaches to recruit and retain male students in chorus classes. Through a confidential survey sent to middle school teachers in GMEA's District 14, thirteen middle school teachers provided their perspective on recruiting and retaining male students in their choral classes. The survey compiled answers that asked about teachers' years of experience in the classroom, perceptions of gender stereotypes, demographic information about chorus class enrollment, proactive choices towards recruiting males, and classroom strategies used to retain males. After collecting all the answers from the educators, this study was able to find three recruitment approaches that help get males into the chorus classroom and two retention strategies that keep the males in the chorus class.

Summary of Findings and Prior Research

The thirteen respondents from GMEA's District 14 made up 37% of the middle school teachers. The average years of teaching of the responses were 9 years. The average of 9 years teaching experience strengthen the responses because the teachers have had experience dealing with the male shortages in choral classrooms. Survey questions were separated into three main categories: demographic data, recruitment approaches, and retention strategies. Demographic

data included the total number of students enrolled in respondents' choral classes, number of males, and the presence or absence of gender specific classes or extracurricular activities. The average number of participants in the choral classroom was 40 students. The average number of males in the chorus classroom was 6 students. An average of 16% of choral classes were males which helped expose the uneven ratio of male to females. Another important data point that was found from the survey responses was the percentage of students that left the chorus class from one grade to the other. From the 6th grade to the 7th grade 17% of students left the class and 37.5% of males left the class. From the 7th grade to 8th grade 2% of students left and 3% of males left the class. From these percentages, most of the students in the chorus class left from 6th grade to 7th grade, most students remain in the class from 7th grade to 8th grade, including males. This data emphasized the need to focus retention strategies for students transitioning from 6th grade to 7th grade.

The best retention strategies were organized based on the frequency of the responses; because there were only 13 responses, if an answer was given more than once, then the answer was labeled as a common and effective approach. Three answers were listed as top approaches: Visiting elementary schools, having the students recruit friends, and attending/supporting students' outside or extracurricular activities. Choral educators must consider how many times they visit the elementary schools and what is done during the visits to help with male recruitment. When a teacher visits the elementary or feeder school, they are beginning to build a relationship or familiarity with potential future students. Elementary students can ask questions about their future in a music program, meet potential peers, and listen to what they could sound like if/when they join the chorus class. Elementary school students, in the state of Georgia, are automatically enrolled in a music class and it is not until they enter the middle school level that

they must choose to join a music class. For this reason, it is important to make connections with elementary students to help excite them for being a part of a music class at the secondary level.

The second approach, having students recruit friends, is something that can be encouraged by the teacher. One of the top answers for why students join the chorus class is because their friends are in the same classroom. If a teacher encourages the students to recruit their friends into the classroom, they are more likely to join because the invite is coming from one of their peers. Finally, teachers must support students' endeavors/interests outside of the choral classroom. When participants were asked "how many games do you attend, on average, per month?" the average answer was 1 game. However, teachers that reported attending more than four games per month also had more males in the classroom than the other participants. The teachers who reported a high attendance of extracurricular activities had over 90% more males in the classroom than those that either did not attend games or only attended one per month. This statistic enforced that the most important approach that choral educators can take when recruiting males into the classroom is supporting activities of students outside of the classroom.

Retention strategies were gathered by asking questions related to positive learning environments, classroom strategies, and overall perceived reasons for joining/staying in the chorus class. Teachers must strive to create a positive learning environment in the classroom. This can be achieved by focusing on connecting the people within the group. Cathy Applefield Olson suggests group bonding activities such as "tossing a ball of yarn around a circle and revealing something about themselves to get people out of their shell, things that have nothing to do with music."⁸⁹ The goal with these activities is to get the group comfortable with each other before the music becomes important. Teachers can also emphasize that "the goal is to create a

⁸⁹ Olson, "We Are Family," 40.

superior sound together while also treating each member of the group with respect.”⁹⁰ The top response from the survey regarding positive learning environments is to make the classroom a family environment where they feel comfortable being themselves by treating everyone with respect and helping every student feel valued. The classroom strategies that was most mentioned in the survey was to include competitive activities and to keep students moving rather than sitting down the whole class. Students want to do something that is not like their other classes, so varying the activities and having students move around will help the class be more engaging. Finally, emphasizing the reasons for staying in chorus classes through modeling or activities will encourage students to stay in the class. The top answer from the survey was to allow students to have organized fun while making a great sound. This can be achieved by learning what the group considers fun and creating a rehearsal space that mixes fun with musical excellence.

Previous research conducted on this study was focused on embracing the masculinity of male students. Many middle school boys aspire to make it into the NFL or the NBA. Suzanne Callahan recommends teachers to “recruit a jock or two, visit with the coach and ask for his or her help in promoting the chorus class.”⁹¹ Callahan mentions that if you make your program an “us against them” situation, you will lose. From the previous research it is evident that embracing masculinity is important because “junior high school boys’ reasons for participating in choir found that the most compelling reasons for joining choir were related not to vocal or musical concerns, but to male identity.”⁹² Students are often looking to establish their identity in the middle school and the feminine stereotype behind the chorus class prevents males from

⁹⁰ Ibid, 40.

⁹¹ Suzanne Callahan, “Mission Impossible? (How to Recruit and Retain Junior High Male Chorus Members),” *The Choral Journal* 56, no. 10 (May 2016): 97, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43916890>.

⁹² Demorest, “Male Participation in Chorus,” 39.

joining. Top answers from the conducted survey for reasons why males decide not to join chorus include the class being feminine, being made fun of, and being seen as not cool. Each of the top responses correlate to the previous research on the overall identity of the student is one of the challenges that middle school chorus teachers face when trying to recruit male students.

Limitations

Limitations for this study were mainly found when collecting data through the anonymous survey. The researcher chose to survey GMEA's District 14 because of his access to teacher emails, however this limitation made it only possible to survey a maximum of 35 middle school teachers. Increasing the amount of possible survey recipients could have influenced the possible answers collected for the study. The surveys were also given out only once which could possibly affect the demographic data collected during the study. Data for student enrollment was only focused on the school year that the study was conducted (2022-2023) and each participants anticipated future enrollment. Further analysis over the course of multiple years could show a better trend in enrollment numbers because some years could yield more male enrollment than others.

Participants in the study were given the survey close to the end of the year and well into the beginning of their summer break. This limited the collection of responses because most teachers are either wrapping up their year and ready to vacation or are not checking their emails frequently. The timing of the survey distribution could have attributed to the small number of responses collected for the study. Another limitation to consider for the data collection could be the structure of programs for each school. An example pulled from the responses collected during the study is the unavailability of a specific grade level chorus class from one school to another. Some schools did not have a 6th grade chorus class or an 8th grade chorus class. This

affected the average number of students enrolled in each grade level because their total number of students was recorded as zero. Also, with school structure, some schools had all grades in the same building or more than three (6-8) grades within the same building. Having more than three grades in the same building may have affected the school culture or expectation of music in these schools and therefore affected the demographic data collected from these participants.

One final limitation to consider is the possibility of what is known as the Hawthorne effect, “often mentioned as a possible explanation for positive results in intervention studies.”⁹³ This anticipated phenomenon is best explained as participants answering questions in a more positive manner knowing they are a part of a research study. The Hawthorne effect could have influenced participants to answer questions regarding recruitment and retention strategies in a more positive light. Also, towards the negative side, teachers who may have been in a negative mood may have answered questions negatively than they would in a better mood. These considerations may have affected the questions regarding why males decide to join or leave the chorus classes. Overall, these limitations could have skewed the answers collected from the survey, however, the answers that were listed as top responses aligned with researched material and were carefully considered when included in the study.

Recommendations for Future Study

Future research regarding the recruitment and retention of male students in middle school chorus can be increased to a larger scale by allowing middle school teachers state-wide to participate in the study. Having more participate in the study would help alleviate some of the limitations such as sample size and differing school structures because most responses would

⁹³ Gustav Wickstrom, “The ‘Hawthorne effect’—What Did the Original Hawthorne Studies Actually Show?,” *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 26, no. 4, (August, 2000): 363, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40967074>.

have a traditional 6th-8th grade middle school structure with each grade having chorus as an option for students. Another consideration would be to include educators outside of middle school as well to increase the number of strategies collected for recruiting and retaining males in chorus. The requirements to participate in the study were outlined as needing more than one year of experience in the chorus classroom and currently teaching middle school chorus. If the survey was opened to elementary, high school, and college level educators, the responses could help reveal the overall effect of gender stereotypes within the entirety of the choral field. Finally, including students in the study would provide a different perspective into recruitment and retention strategies because the data would be coming directly from the study affected. Asking the male students why they joined the chorus class or why they are deciding to leave may help future researchers understand the reasons behind certain decisions during a student's middle school years. The data collected for this study was limited to educator responses per IRB recommendations and guidelines, however, having students respond will provide a different perspective on which methods are effective for recruiting and retaining male students in the chorus class.

During the study the researcher wrote on the effects of gender stereotypes when joining the chorus class. This scope could be expanded to all performing ensembles and analyzing the effect of gender stereotypes with regards to instrument selection. For example, the flute might be considered a feminine instrument while the tuba might be considered a masculine instrument. Researching the effects on instrument selection as well as class participation would reveal a larger scope of how gender stereotypes affect the decisions that middle school students make. Gender stereotypes are prevalent in most areas of life and focusing on all performing ensembles

will help raise awareness for all performing arts educators and provide various approaches for handling these stereotypes.

Implications for Practice

The overall goal of this study was to provide a tangible list of approaches to aid in the recruitment and retention of males in the middle school chorus. From the gathered data and research, three effective approaches for recruitment were collected and two strategies were collected for retention.

Recruiting males is essential for choral directors because it helps balance the overall sound of the choir and allows students to avoid over or under singing to compensate for unbalanced ratios of males to females. The first practical approach for recruiting males is to visit the elementary schools to talk about the music programs available at the middle school level. Elementary school students are automatically enrolled in music classes and are therefore not thinking about the possibility of not being in a music class when they enter the middle school. Establishing a connection with future music students, allowing them to connect with future peers, and having their questions answered about registration and performance opportunities will help increase the number of students in the 6th grade chorus classes. Visiting the elementary schools also allows middle school students to perform and “show off” their sound to inspire students to join the chorus class. Deciding to feature males while visiting the elementary schools is an essential part for male recruitment because it allows the male students at the elementary schools to see their peers performing.

The second approach to recruiting males into the middle school chorus class is to have students invite other students. Students always hear from their teachers and sometimes hearing from their peers has more effectiveness in the decisions that students make. A student is more

likely to accept an invite to join a class if it is from their peers. During elementary school visits or day-to-day rehearsals, if students are talking to others about the fun they are having and the improvement they are hearing in their own abilities, more students will want to join the group. The final approach to recruiting males is to attend extracurricular sporting events. A choral educator should not underestimate the power of a student or parent seeing a teacher cheer for them or support their extra-curricular events. From the study, the participants who noted attending more than two games per month had more males enrolled in their chorus class. Choral educators should also form a good relationship with the coaches as well to ensure the athletes can participate in the chorus class without many scheduling conflicts. Often students may list conflicts with games and performances as their reason for not joining something, so, aligning rehearsals and performances around the schedules of the sporting events will help alleviate the stress of participating in the chorus class.

Summary

The results of this study indicate three main approaches for recruitment and two approaches for retention. Middle school choral directors should implement these approaches year-after-year to increase the number of males in the chorus classes. Choral directors must plan on visiting feeder elementary schools to establish an initial relationship with the students and answer questions about their potential future in the chorus class. The participants who noted visiting the elementary schools more than one time a year also noted having more students in their 6th grade classes and more boys. Visiting elementary schools give choral students an opportunity to perform for future students and allow elementary students to connect with future peers. Teachers must also look to the students to invite students to sign up for the chorus classes. Peer-to-peer interaction is more likely to encourage students to sign up than a teacher inviting a

student in the hallway. Finally, the most effective recruitment approach is to show the support of his or her students during extracurricular activities/sports. When parents and student athletes feel supported and encouraged on the field or that their sports schedule will not be impeded by a performing ensemble, the males are more likely to consider joining the chorus class.

With retention strategies, teachers must focus on developing a positive learning environment within the classroom. From the data gathered with the survey, male retention efforts must be focused on the 6th grade chorus classes. The percentage of male students leaving the chorus class is higher from 6th grade to 7th grade with 37.5% of male students leaving the chorus class than 7th grade to 8th grade with only 3% of male students leaving the chorus class. The positive learning environment can be established by allowing students to get to know each other through activities not related to music making. Building a team/family dynamic is an essential part to allowing students to feel confident making errors or discovering their voices in the classroom. Ultimately, the tone of the classroom is set by the teacher and the more welcoming and encouraging the teacher is, the easier it is to establish a positive learning environment. Finally, teachers should keep their classes active and fun for all students in the chorus class. The more engaged teachers can keep the students in the chorus class, the more likely they are to stay in the class.

Three research questions were asked during this study. The first research question: What approaches can choral directors use to recruit and retain male singers in the chorus classroom successfully, can be answered through the three recruitment strategies and two retention strategies; Visit elementary schools, have students recruit other students, attend extracurricular activities, create a positive learning environment, and utilize fun and active activities in the classroom. The second research question: What causes a male student to enroll in chorus classes,

was discovered through the data gathered from the survey; male students join the chorus classes for many reasons, most notably, they join because they enjoy singing, their friends are in the class, or they enjoy being in the teacher's classroom. Finally, the third research questions: How does the classroom and rehearsal environment affect male retention/confidence in the choral classroom, can be answered by looking at the responses from the survey. Students are more likely to stay in the chorus class when they are involved in a positive learning environment and one that they feel supported and encouraged in. When students are in a classroom where they do not feel at risk of being ridiculed for making mistakes and celebrated when accomplishments are made, they are more willing to discover their own voices.

Middle school choral directors can take these five approaches to help aid their recruitment and retention efforts. The hope in this research study was to provide practical approaches to recruiting and retaining males in choral classes and raising awareness to how societal and psychological gender stereotypes affect a male student's decision to join chorus or not. The five approaches/practices focus on creating a positive connection with male students before they enter the classroom and encouraging/celebrating those students when they are in the classroom. Classroom activities should consider the students in the classroom and keep them moving and active while learning how to create beautiful music together. The ratio of male to female is unbalanced because of the feminine stigma behind choral singing, however, through continuous efforts to reach out, establish connections, and support students at the middle school level will help encourage male students to become a part of the fun and inviting chorus class.

Recruitment and retention are issues that each educator, with an optional class, are challenged with. The male-to-female ratio has long been an issue for choral educators but can be solved through consistent effort to make connections early in a student's school-life, showing

support and encouragement for the activities that students enjoy outside of school, creating a positive environment for students to learn and discover musical techniques, and keeping the curriculum new and exciting for children. Children are more likely to stay in a class when they enjoy themselves so, helping middle school boys understand the benefits and excitement of learning how to sing with a group is one of many choral educators' challenges. Choral educators must be patient, understand that each class is different, and continue to support and encourage the lives of each student day-after-day while helping them make beautiful music.

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Appendix A

Study Description

The following letter was sent alongside the survey questions sent to the choral directors in Georgia's District 14:

Dear District 14 middle school choral colleagues,

My name is Bryan Rante, and I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am asking you to participate in my thesis research study. The study involves collecting data on recruitment and retention strategies for middle school males in chorus. I am asking you to add your valuable input by completing a short research questionnaire.

The information that will be collected will be used to gather data on successful approaches used by middle school choral directors to recruit males for their chorus classes and how to keep them singing year-after-year. The information collected will remain anonymous and will only be used to benefit the choral community.

Thank you for taking a moment to consider this opportunity. Below you will find a link to the survey. When you are finished completing the survey, please share the document to the email below.

Best regards,
Bryan C. Rante
DME Candidate-Music Education, Liberty University
brante@liberty.edu

Appendix B

Survey Questions

The following questions were sent to the choral directors in Georgia's District 14:

General Information

1. How many years have you been teaching at your school?
2. How many males do you have in each of your grade-level choirs? (Please separate for each grade)
3. How many students do you have in total in each grade's chorus?
4. How many male students do you have in your group that also have siblings involved in chorus?
5. Do you have a gender-specific chorus class or club at your school? If yes, please specify the class or club.

Teacher Information

6. Do you think your gender as a teacher encourages male students to join your chorus group? If so, how?
7. Do you think your gender as a teacher discourages male students to join your chorus group? If so, how?
8. How often, if applicable, do you visit elementary schools to talk about their singing opportunities?
9. On average, per month, how many school-related games do you personally attend?
10. On average, per month, how many non-school-related games do you personally attend?

Extra-curricular Involvement/Presence

11. Do any of your groups have an annual field trip that students look forward to?
12. Does your group perform for any extra-curricular events? (Baseball games, football games, community events?)
13. Do you host a school musical at your school?

Appendix B (Continued)

Classroom Atmosphere

14. Where do you place your male students in your classroom? (Row, side, etc?)
15. Do you keep all males in the same class?
16. Do you have any competitive aspects to your classroom instruction?
17. How do you help your male students transition during their vocal change?
18. How do you encourage males to sing out when they are dealing with their voice change?
19. What is your reaction, if any, to vocal breaks during rehearsal or warmups?

Repertoire

20. When singing 2-Part music, do you have your male singers sing Part-1 or Part-2? Why do you choose to do this?
21. Are there any specific pieces that you choose or have chosen that feature your male singers?

Recruitment Strategies

22. Do you have any strategies that specifically recruit males into your choir?
23. Why do you believe male students choose to join chorus?
24. Why do you believe male students choose **not** to join chorus?
25. Are there any other strategies that you believe other middle school teachers should use to recruit male students into your chorus?

Appendix C

IRB Required Materials

Consent

Title of the Project: Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Males in Middle School Chorus

Principal Investigator: Bryan Rante, Student Doctoral Candidate, Music Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a full-time choral director at the middle school level in Georgia's District 14. Participants must also have at least an undergraduate degree in music education.. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to gather various approaches to recruiting and retaining males in middle school chorus.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Take the attached survey and submit your answers via Survey Monkey. (10 minutes)

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing a practical list of successful approaches to recruiting and retaining males in middle school chorus.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private.

Liberty University
IRB-FY22-23-1482
Approved on 5-23-2023

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

Dear District 14 middle school choral colleagues,

My name is Bryan Rante, and I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am asking you to participate in my thesis research study. The study involves collecting data on recruitment and retention strategies for middle school males in chorus. I am asking you to add your valuable input by completing a short research questionnaire.

Participants must be full-time choral directors at the middle school level in Georgia's District 14. Participants must have at least an undergraduate degree in music education. Participant, if willing will be asked to complete an online survey (10 minutes). The information that will be collected will be used to gather data on successful approaches used by middle school choral directors to recruit males for their chorus classes and how to keep them singing year-after-year. The information collected will remain anonymous and will only be used to benefit the choral community.

Thank you for taking a moment to consider this opportunity. Below you will find a link to the survey. When you are finished completing the survey, please share the document to the email below.

Best regards,
Bryan C. Rante
DME Candidate-Music Education, Liberty University
brante@liberty.edu
Survey Link

Appendix E

IRB Exemption Letter

May 23, 2023

Bryan Rante

Samantha Miller

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1482 Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Males in Middle School Chorus

Dear Bryan Rante, Samantha Miller,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office