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Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Disengagement in the Choral Classroom: What Can We Learn from the Students?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify and compare eight students' and one teacher's perceptions of engagement/disengagement in a pluralistic choral classroom. Eight racially diverse 7th grade choir students and their teacher were interviewed to determine their perceptions of supporting conditions and behaviors that signaled engagement or disengagement. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014, 2017, 2021, 2022) served as a theoretical model through which teacher-enacted choral pedagogy and students' responses were analyzed. The students identified the strong, positive, mutually reciprocated relationship with their choir teacher as foundational to deep engagement. However, pedagogical moves made by their teacher sometimes resulted in cognitive and behavioral disengagement. Students' perceptions of classroom pedagogy aligned strongly with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, notably in the areas of teachers' conceptions of self/others, conceptions of social relationships, and conceptions of knowledge. Resulting implications include the need for teachers who can provide Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, supporting high levels of student learning autonomy, situated in a context of strong teacher-student and student-student relationships.

Keywords: *Culturally relevant pedagogy, engagement theory, disengagement, music education, pluralistic classrooms, choir*

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Introduction

In any space where humans interact, their stories and experiences influence how they interpret dialogue, behaviors, facial expressions, and body comportment. These interpretations, in part, determine how a person might choose to engage in a conversation or activity (Deakin Crick, 2012). Positive connections, feelings of efficacy, interesting events, feelings of belonging, and positive interactions, all individually interpreted, tend to result in choices to engage more deeply in the activity at hand and move further into the physical or emotional space. Contrarily, feelings of rejection, boredom, and fear tend to result in choices to withdraw, or disengage, from a space both physically and/or emotionally (Fredricks, 2011).

The school music classroom serves as a space where humans regularly interact with each other over extended periods of time. Activities in the music classroom center around music-making, music-listening, music-creating, music-moving, and music-studying. Events and interactions in the music classroom are filtered through the students' and teacher's life lenses, and result in interpretations leading to behavioral choices along the spectrum between engagement and disengagement (Irvine, 2001). During high school, music classes are mainly elective, and statistical demographics demonstrate that BIPOC[2] students choose to enroll in elective high school music classes less often than their White counterparts.[3] If humans choose to disengage when they experience an environment as exclusionary, uninteresting, and unaffirming, the question arises: what about the school music classroom might be experienced as exclusionary? If music classrooms should be inclusive, then why and how are BIPOC students underserved by school music programs in the United States?

Scholarship has illuminated historical reasons. In the music education field, teachers are 90% White (Matthews & Koner, 2017) and nonreflective of the general student population in public schools.[4] As White teachers grapple with whiteness as a culture historically entrenched and invested in upholding oppressive societal structures based on race (Bell, 1992/2018; Bradley, 2006; DiAngelo, 2018; Hess, 2015; Koza, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998), music teachers and music teacher educators may remain unaware of their role in creating (usually unintentionally) spaces that some students experience as exclusionary (Abril, 2009; McCall, 2017; Talbot, 2017).

Research on the enrollment and retention of BIPOC students in music classrooms has been mainly quantitative in nature. Previous studies have identified teacher effectiveness,

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[2] Black, Indigenous, People of Color. This term is meant to signal racialized groups who have experienced oppression in the United States, but can be problematic as groupings of this nature can hide distinction.

[3] Elpus and Abril (2019) found that the demographics of music students in high schools in the United States (42% BIPOC/58% White students in 2009-2013) do not represent the general population of high school students (48% BIPOC/52% White students in 2009-2013). While there is no good way to categorize the construct of race, and race only alludes to one facet of human identity, I hope that by sharing these categorized demographics (which also include persons who identify in multiple categories) the imbalance within high school music is illuminated.

[4] According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) website, nces.ed.gov, the student enrollment in elementary and secondary public schools during the fall of 2018 was 47% White. Music teachers, as a population in the United States, are even less representative than the general teaching population, which is 79% White (NCES, 2021).

instruction, and classroom climate as factors that influence students' choices to enroll in music (Butler et al., 2007; Lind, 1999; Lind & Butler, 2005; McKoy, 2013; Stewart, 1991; Walker & Hamann, 1995; Watts & Doane, 1995). However, fewer studies (Abril, 2009; Bond, 2014, 2017; Shaw, 2012, 2016; Spradley, 2013) have explored the experiences of students and their perceptions of teacher-enacted pedagogy in music classrooms.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) provides a "way to think about how things work so then we better understand how things work" (Ladson-Billings, 2020b). Ladson-Billings' seminal scholarship on CRP (1995a, 1995b, 2022) described six tenets of effective teachers of African American students in general classrooms. She identified three pedagogical tenets: cultural competence, sociopolitical consciousness, and student learning. She also identified three ideological tenets, the key beliefs that each of the effective teachers held: *conceptions of relationships, conceptions of self and others,* and *conceptions of knowledge.* In each Culturally Relevant (CR) teachers' practice, the six tenets of CRP manifested clearly but differently based on contextual and personal factors (Ladson-Billings, 2020a).

Ladson-Billings' seminal works (1994, 1995a, 1995b) laid out CRP as a generative theory, providing a viable springboard for extensions and critiques in our evolving landscape. Scholars have subsequently built upon and extended her work. As a "remix" of her theory (Ladson-Billings, 2014), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy has offered a "respectful and generative loving critique" of CRP and other asset-based pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 4). Ladson-Billings herself has contributed toward these efforts, expanding upon her original writings. For example, Ladson-Billings (2015, p. 417) expanded upon her tenet of cultural competence, invoking James Baldwin when she stated that teachers must tap into youth culture, empowering them to ask questions, examine society and work to change it for the better—agentic engagement. However, Ladson-Billings also noted that the term "culturally relevant pedagogy" has been used as a ubiquitous label describing practices that "rarely represent the practice [she] described when [she] had the opportunity to spend three years with eight outstanding teachers" (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 142).

Positing that "the central pieces of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy help us understand what possibilities exist in teaching and learning for all students" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 13), I grounded this study with CRP as the theoretical lens, while also embracing expansions that reflect the social and cultural landscape of today. As Django Paris (2021) wrote:

> One of the remarkable things about Ladson-Billings' career is the way she continues to lead the field through both her past and current work at the same time. She is in many ways a visionary who has, through her writings in culturally relevant pedagogy, critical race theory, and beyond, continually helped chart our path forward in education and society. This has never been more evident than during the unrelenting years of 2020 and 2021. (p. vii)

Paris argued that current, continued, and blatant racist acts of violence, inequitable outcomes in education, and the over-incarceration of BIPOC in the United States give further evidence of an obvious need for steps forward in societal equity. Understanding students' experiences, interpretations, and responses to music pedagogy and how they manifest in the music classroom is critical to identifying hidden ideologies that may perpetuate inequitable pedagogy. In this article, I present the connections between the student participants' perspectives on music classroom pedagogy and the beliefs, or ideologies, of their teacher, Ms. Beckman, framing them with Ladson-Billings' foundational scholarship as well as the writings forming the "remix." To situate discussion on how the beliefs of the teacher often inform their pedagogical practices, I focus specifically on Ladson-Billings' three ideological tenets.[5]

Engagement Theory

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy served as the foundational framework for this analysis; however, as the data collection and analysis developed over the course of one school year, a second theoretical perspective became salient. When the student participants experienced musical events in their choral classroom, their affects displayed evidence of engagement or disengagement. Engagement Theory in a classroom, as theorized by Deakin Crick (2012) and Reeve and Tseng (2011), suggests that student engagement levels flow along a continuum, intertwining behavioral, cognitive, and emotional manifestations of the phenomenon. Viewing behavioral engagement as a signal of cognitive engagement levels offered me an important lens when analyzing classroom events and perspectives. In a recurring event in this classroom, Ms. Beckman asked the students to all sing with feeling, but many students did not comply with that request to her satisfaction. As I interviewed the students, they made it clear that they did not choose a disengaged behavior as a defiant, negative response to her request, but rather as a signal of cognitive disengagement. Their reasoning was: if they did not feel like singing enthusiastically, why would they exhibit that dishonest behavior?

As a general phenomenon, engagement takes place in various social settings. In these settings, the person who is deeply engaged is "an intentional participant in a social process which is taking place over time" (Deakin Crick, 2012, p. 678). Students may choose to engage in church-related, community-related, family-related, or school-related activities. In the school arena, students may engage in a variety of curricular and extracurricular pursuits. Within the classroom, students engage with the teacher, their peers, and the curriculum, both hidden and overt (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, p. 23). The literature on student engagement has documented ways in which the system or context of the classroom—the learner with their identity and values, the social setting, the learning facilitator, and the

[5] The pedagogical tenets (student learning, sociopolitical consciousness, and cultural competence) are described in detail in general classrooms by Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2022).

school setting—influenced students' levels of engagement (Deakin Crick, 2012). Positive engagement typically increased when the student perceived warmth and care from their teacher (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012), when the environment felt comfortable, when tasks were structured to be understandable, and when there was support for autonomy (Fredricks et al., 2004).

As autonomy increased, students began to act purposefully within the classroom environment, engaging agentically (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). Agentic engagement is a "process in which students intentionally and somewhat proactively try to personalize and otherwise enrich both what is to be learned and the conditions and circumstances under which it is to be learned" (p. 258). Students did not react to classroom materials and contexts as passive subjects, but sought to "act on them—modifying, enriching them (e.g. transforming them into something more interesting, personable, or optimally challenging) and even creating or requesting them in the first place, rather than reacting to them as a given" (p. 258). In classrooms where students played "an active role in constructing knowledge, as opposed to merely reproducing knowledge" student engagement was higher (Fredricks, 2011, p. 332). In these classrooms, teachers took on the role of a guide or facilitator rather than a disseminator of knowledge (Deakin Crick, 2012).

Student engagement is a state that is malleable, influenced by the learner's identity, relationships in the learning environment, setting, and learning tasks. By its nature, engagement is not a characteristic of an individual, but a state that can vary from learner to learner and therefore can be influenced by both the teacher and the students in an educational context. In contrast to deficit thinking about students, which assumes certain students possess negative cultural traits that prevent them from achieving academically, both Engagement Theory and CRP acknowledge that all learners possess the energy, will, and ability to engage in the classroom, and that educational contexts surrounding the learner can be altered to better foster deep engagement.[6] In this study, the student participants displayed behaviors and shared ideas that signaled their desire to contribute to the music classroom in a way that generated more satisfying, challenging, and interesting learning options for themselves, aligning strongly with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Music Education

In choral music education scholarship, empirical research studies focusing on culturally responsive pedagogies[7] in pluralistic classrooms are few (Bond, 2017). Spradley (2013) studied effective teaching in culturally diverse secondary choral classrooms and linked ef-

[6] See Valencia (1997) for a discussion of the roots of deficit thinking.

[7] I distinguish culturally responsive pedagogies from Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as theorized by Ladson-Billings. Culturally responsive pedagogies, as an umbrella term, encompass pedagogy that seeks to respond to underrepresented students' learning goals, ways of knowing and cultural preferences in order to foster connections and enhance student learning. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy does fall under this category, but is distinguished by its six interweaving tenets.

fectiveness to student engagement, an affirming teaching and learning community, cultural awareness, and pace of teaching and learning. Shaw (2016) followed a teacher and three of his students in a culturally responsive choral classroom and found that the teacher's willingness to support his students as they discovered new choral repertoire and the appropriate vocal styles for performance supported the growth of cultural competence and inter-connectivity between home and school musical environments. Shaw noted that as teachers enact culturally responsive pedagogy, some musical experiences "will likely be validating for some students, while expanding the cultural horizons of others" (p. 62). The complexity of supporting musical learning in pedagogical styles that might be unfamiliar to a teacher opens a path to the unknown, requiring a courageous teacher who embraces moments of not knowing.

In music pedagogies that emphasize the teacher as the knower and the students as the unknowing, a teacher's self-efficacy can become based on the ability to error detect and correct but also the ability to know "more" than their students at any point in time. In this vein of knowledge perpetuation, the teacher may subconsciously tend towards musical repertoire and arrangements as well as classroom interactions and pedagogical practices that are well-known (Harry & Salvador, 2021). Covalle (2022) studied the pedagogy of Gospel music in schools and concluded that for the predominantly White music teaching population, prerequisites to cultural responsiveness in the classroom included a) overcoming a fear of talking about race and racism, but also b) a willingness to learn, through much study, an unfamiliar musical style and its pedagogies.

Scholars have demonstrated that teachers who sought to understand the home discourses of students and created a learning environment that incorporated congruence between home and school music and interactional styles were perceived as more effective by students (Allsup & Sheih, 2012; Boon, 2014; DeLorenzo, 2012; Fitzpatrick, 2012; Hoffman, 2012; Shaw, 2012, 2016). To develop such understanding, teachers invested time and energy in learning to know their students over time (Bond, 2014). As no music exists outside of humans and their times and places, situating music within its historical, social and political contexts infuses meaning and fosters connection. Equally important is the opportunity for students to share and hear diverse perspectives on such contexts, interpreting music through their experiences (Bradley, 2012; Hess, 2015; Lind & McKoy, 2016). To add to this scholarship, this study offers implications that can potentially assist music teachers in forming ideologies leading to more equitable and inclusive pedagogical practice in music classrooms.

Methodology

To explore students' perspectives in a pluralistic choral classroom, I searched for a music classroom that was diverse racially and ethnically, with demographics reflecting that of the school district. I reasoned that in a classroom with proportionate demographics, I would find a classroom where students had not elected to drop out of school music. I wanted to interview these students, learn about their experiences, and why they continued to enroll.

Ms. Alicia Beckman's 7th-grade choir class at Clark Middle School, situated in the large Lake City School District, was an ideal site.[8] According to the school's records, the 34 students in this class were 54% African American, 30% White, 11% Latinx, and 5% Asian, demographics that approximated the district's. All of Ms. Beckman's 7th-grade students had elected to enroll in choir, after completing a year of choir in 6th grade.

Ms. Beckman was a 37-year-old White woman with a music education degree from a private music conservatory in the midwestern United States. Before settling with her young family in Lake City, she spent time teaching on the East and West coasts. She had been teaching at Clark Middle for nine years at the time of data collection. The 7th-grade choir class from which the participants were drawn met twice a week for 50 minutes and once each week with the other 7th-grade section of choir at Clark.

I chose to interview eight students from the classroom who represented five different racialized categories. The students self-identified as African American/Black (Gregory, Mila, Jacobi), White (John), Latinx (Ángel and Alice), Asian American (Blossom) and Native American and White (Estephanie). The students and teacher elected to participate in the study; the caregivers also signed consent forms, with the ability to withdraw at any time. I spent two days in the classroom each week over the course of a full school year, conducted two or three individual interviews with each of the eight students and Ms. Beckman, and facilitated two focus groups with the student participants. I videotaped and transcribed every class period I observed and used the video and transcriptions as stimuli for student and teacher interviews, field observations, and comparisons throughout the analysis process.

To navigate the hundreds of pages of transcriptions and field notes, I found the tools of open coding, axial coding, and memoing (Saldaña, 2021; Vanover et al., 2022) to be useful when identifying salient themes that mattered to the participants. Over the course of the school year during which I conducted the research, the processes of constant comparison of data (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), going back for more data, and comparisons within the research literature assisted me in being self-reflexive during the analysis processes.

As a White woman, a music teacher, and a researcher, I acknowledge my situatedness in those areas. Even the concept of race is not without its roots in racism (Ladson-Billings, 2003), and my participation in whiteness cannot be avoided or understated. I am the product of a set of assumptions and experiences which influences even my interpretations of what counts as data. The choices I made when labeling categories and organizing themes arose from the interpretations I made of data rather than from the data as an object. To heighten trustworthiness, I asked the students and teacher if they agreed with the categories I was identifying and the analysis I was forming. Each participant was given access to any analytical writing I was drafting. Any conversations, questions, or ideas they presented

[8] All student participants' names are pseudonyms chosen by them, and all identifiers (racial, ethnic, etc.) used throughout this article are those that the participants chose and preferred. The names of the district, school, and teacher participant are also pseudonyms.

became part of the data and were interwoven into the analysis.

Individual interviews with students took place immediately following a class period in which they participated and I observed. In my field notes, I wrote down open-ended questions to encourage a conversation about the events during the class period. I hoped to identify events that were salient to the students' experiences in the classroom (positive or negative) and how those events linked to their engagement or disengagement. As we talked, I listened to the students and asked clarifying questions to invite further discussion. At times, I would ask a question with the assumption that a particular classroom event held meaning for them, but they would describe a different meaningful event, and we would discuss that event instead.

Each of the two focus group sessions was thirty minutes long. Four participants attended each semi-structured session. I prepared a description of several classroom events that had emerged as meaningful to students during individual interviews as well as cuing videos of those events. I also located several additional videos of music classrooms to provide stimuli for discussions. In designing and facilitating both individual interviews and focus groups with students, I sought to present material for initial discussion. I then worked to pay attention to student comments, hoping to step back as much as possible to allow for student conversation to dominate.

Findings and Discussion

In this portion of the article, I embed the implications from the data into three sections, connecting them to the findings related to Ladson-Billings' three ideological tenets. I will first describe the findings connected to students' perspectives on relationships, linking the implications to conceptions of relationships. Next, I describe students' perspectives on music repertoire in this choir classroom, relating the implications to conceptions of knowledge. Finally, I describe the effects of disengagement in this classroom and connect the implications to conceptions of self and others.

Student perspectives on relationships

The students in Ms. Beckman's classroom had chosen to take her class again after enrolling in 6th-grade choir the year before. During initial interviews, it became clear that the eight student participants had chosen to enroll in 7th-grade choir for two predominant reasons: they loved singing and they loved singing with her. Within Ms. Beckman's choral classrooms, the students recognized and appreciated her efforts to connect with each student (Gurgel, 2016), not just students who were compliant behaviorally or demonstrated White-normed musical traits such as still body comportment (Gustafson, 2008; Standifer, 1980) or expertise in bel canto style singing (Lundquist & Sims, 1996; Sidran, 1971). She invited them to share their experiences and life goals with her, including written questions on concert reflections such as "What should I know about you? What do you want to tell me about?" The students often eagerly answered these questions, and Ms. Beckman responded

individually to their answers on paper. Her students knew that she enjoyed teaching them and would rather be with them than in any other school or class. When I asked Estephanie about her experiences in middle school, she named Ms. Beckman as a teacher who purposefully strove to form positive teacher-student relationships, even outside of the classroom doors. "Ms. Beckman is the teacher I have who can do that [make connections]. One time I saw her in the hallway, and she said, 'Good job today.' And me and my friend Jason were like, 'That's because we were sitting with people we could sing around.' She makes sure that you feel comfortable."

Culturally Relevant teachers consciously create interactions that support equitable and reciprocal relationships between teacher and students and amongst peers (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Ladson-Billings described such relationships under the tenet of *conceptions of social relationships*. First, CR teachers believe that, as an equitable and reciprocal relationship, the teacher-student relationship extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community. Teachers might spend time attending their students' sporting or church events, visiting with caregivers, or interacting at community happenings. Within the classroom, CR teachers purposefully invite the students to act as teachers as they share knowledge and skills gained through individual and community experiences. Second, students are expected to mentor and support each other during classroom tasks as a community of learners, rather than compete in an individualized setting. CR teachers solidify relationships among peers by encouraging collaborative, reciprocal relationships that invite students to be responsible for each other. Third, the teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students, rather than forming strong connections with only students who are most like themselves.

While Ms. Beckman provided support for students to view each other as valuable, and to celebrate the individual contributions of students to the group, sometimes the choral setting itself presented barriers to deep and positive peer relationships. Due to the large class size, while Ms. Beckman did weave in experiences designed to help students know each other, opportunities for small-group, project-based collaborations were not the norm. Mila wanted to "just be friends with every single kid in the class. And we can get along together and talk with each other outside of class….and sing. Just sit by each other and sing." However, the size and nature of the class (ensemble singing) did not support strong, positive peer relationships. Multiple students I interviewed felt they did not know each other's stories: their backgrounds, life experiences, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses (Gurgel, 2016).

Implications. The findings in this study related to peer relationships suggest that collaborative and equitable relationships among peers are just as important for effective learning in music classrooms as a strong teacher-student relationship. Ms. Beckman believed she was primarily responsible for building and maintaining positive classroom relationships, aligning with this tenet of CRP. As Ms. Beckman demonstrated when she shared her story with students, educators wishing to make their instruction more Culturally Relevant could view their experiences and values as culturally situated, instead of the "norm." Further, educators can approach the classroom with both humility and confidence, assuming they

have a set of skills and experiences to be shared in the classroom, but also that their students have valuable experiences and knowledge to contribute as they co-create the classroom environment.

As in Ms. Beckman's large ensemble class, the size of the class can present special obstacles that music educators must work to overcome if they hope to form a community of learners. Strategies will necessarily be different based on the school community, but the students in this study clearly stated their desire for a classroom culture that celebrated diverse strengths, provided support for multiple learning and interactional styles, and made room for sharing personal stories. Ms. Beckman demonstrated vulnerability as she shared parts of her own story throughout the school year, a strategy that her students admired. She positioned herself as a learner, established patterns of student leadership, and created habits of gathering student feedback. Her students gently requested more collaborative work in their classroom, implying the importance of instructional strategies that include varying sizes of collaborative groups, support for students as they work together to learn and teach, and creative methods of showcasing students' strengths in leadership roles.

Student Perspectives on Musical Repertoire

For the students in this study, repertoire choice played an important role in cognitive engagement. The eight students confirmed that if they did not like a song in choir class, they would most likely choose not to sing during rehearsals. Instead, they might sit quietly, "goof off" with friends, talk to others, or close their eyes and go into their own thoughts. At times, they might sing during a song they did not like solely because their beloved teacher, Ms. Beckman, asked them to do their best and sing.

Importantly, familiarity with a popular song was not the only path to "liking" a song. In this study, the students confirmed that an initial emotional condition for engagement was met when a teacher selected a song they already liked to sing. Estephanie stated that she even joined choir specifically because she heard that they sang songs that were current and popular. However, the students also confirmed throughout this study that if other musical and instructional conditions were not met, the initial emotional connection was not sufficient to sustain their affective and cognitive engagement, leading instead to behavioral disengagement, or not singing.

Three musical conditions worked together to support students' positive engagement, especially during initial instructional sequences, while one instructional condition, challenging and interesting instruction, sustained students' engagement during subsequent class sessions. The first musical condition was a knowledge and understanding of the context and meaning of the song. During my observations at Clark, I witnessed a powerful example of how learning and understanding the historical, social and political contexts surrounding a song influenced and positively affected students' engagement levels. Ms. Beckman had noticed behavioral disengagement from the students during rehearsals on John Lennon's (1971) song "Imagine," and prepared a slide presentation focusing on the contexts sur-

rounding the song. She shared information about John Lennon and Yoko Ono, newspaper clippings that described initial reactions of the public to the song, and live recordings from the time. Jacobi, Gregory, Blossom, and Estephanie all described how Ms. Beckman's efforts produced a much stronger connection to the song, increasing their desire to sing during rehearsals.

The lyrics of a song were the second musical condition that fostered either cognitive engagement or disengagement for the students. The students used the terms *sad, romantic* and *babyish* to describe undesirable lyrics. John stated, "We're up here in 7th grade, and we [shouldn't be] singing those songs we sang in kindergarten music class." Contrarily, lyrics that were meaningful and relatable to them supported engagement, creating a desire to sing.

The final musical condition influencing students' engagement was the groove of an arrangement. In their interviews, the students never used the term groove to describe a song they enjoyed singing. They used terms such as *jumpy, upbeat, techno, having attitude in it, exciting* and *crazy.* By contrast, the students described songs they did not enjoy as *dull, slow, tiring*, or *quiet*. As these terms emerged as descriptions of songs the students did not enjoy, I first wondered if the students preferred songs with a fast tempo since they described undesirable songs as *slow*. However, the two unanimously favorite choir songs that year were "He Still Loves Me" from the movie *The Fighting Temptations* (Jam et al., 2003) and "Man in the Mirror" by Michael Jackson (1987). Both of these songs had slower tempos than the rest of their repertoire. Blossom connected the concepts in one of our interviews:

Ruth: All right, let's talk about the concert. So, on your sheet, you put your favorite part was "He Still Loves Me." Can you tell me why?

Blossom: I think because when everybody was singing it, everybody got louder than the other songs, because it was more crazy…it was more techno, I guess, or something. So, it's like the music that we listen to right now. And not too slow or anything. So then everybody could just start being themselves about it.

Ruth: Would you guess—like on these sheets—would you guess that most kids wrote "He Still Loves Me" as their favorite song out of the concert?

Blossom: Yeah.

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Ruth: And do you know why? Can you guess why?

Blossom: It's a song that you can dance to. Like Ms. Beckman told us—like, we just wanted to start singing, just start moving around, so then more people would want to just be their selves.

Janata et al. (2011) studied attributes of groove in music and young adults' affinity and attraction to songs that grooved, finding that groove was related to the "contrast of interplay of rhythmic patterns across different instruments/drum sounds" (p. 57). For young people in this study, a piece of music grooved when it made them want to move and produced a positive emotional state while playing or listening. Janata et al. identified factors that did not necessarily influence the groove including tempo, familiarity of the music, and the lyrics. Most often, the genre of music that produced a strong sense of groove was R & B or soul, but groove could also be found in jazz, rock, and folk genres. Western European classical music was not tested.

Blossom asked Ms. Beckman during one choir class session if they could collaborate with the band so that they could have more instruments playing, "instead of changing up a lot of things." Other students requested drums, tambourines, and guitar to be added to their version of "He Still Loves Me" which included only the piano accompaniment. For the eight student participants in my study, I concluded that their request for more instruments was a desire for an arrangement that grooved. Especially when a song grooved in its original iteration, students felt a sense of loss when the arrangement was pared down to a piano accompaniment, losing some of the rhythmic elements that created the groove. In the performance of "He Still Loves Me," Ms. Beckman, a skilled pianist, used the technical capabilities of her keyboard to add drums and her own improvisations that supported the groove of the piece. When learning "He Still Loves Me", students engaged agentically when they described their desire to include Beyonce Knowles' solo in their arrangement, a solo not present in the commercial arrangement Ms. Beckman was using. Ms. Beckman worked with her students to incorporate the solo, selecting two unanimously chosen singers from her choir as the soloists. John (a non-dancer by his description) stated that the performance of this song "felt so good that I wanted to start dancing on the risers."

Ms. Beckman's inclusion of the students' requests for the solo demonstrated a powerful manifestation of a tenet of CRP, *conceptions of knowledge*. Ms. Beckman demonstrated her view that knowledge can be co-constructed when, rather than holding fast to the commercial arrangement, she reworked it with her students to create something new that reflected their desires, standards, and strengths. Ms. Beckman demonstrated that she was willing to learn from her students, incorporating their experiences, ideas, and ways of knowing and learning into the classroom. The humility and openness Ms. Beckman exhibited during these sequences of instruction demonstrated what Ladson-Billings (1995b) described as the willingness of a teacher to "be passionate about knowledge and learning… [believing that] knowledge is shared, recycled, and constructed" (p. 481). Ms. Beckman supported the soloists' expertise and celebrated, along with her students, how their singing elevated the performance experience for all of them.

Implications. While repertoire selection is important, Ms. Beckman's students teach us that singing a loved, popular song in school choir is not the key to student engagement or CRP. Student disengagement can occur when teachers select sterile arrangements that

ignore key elements that make the song "good," such as groove. Instead, teachers can work with students to create or locate arrangements of popular songs that maintain rhythmic interplay and other key elements of the original groove. As the students co-produce performances and instruction, teachers can demonstrate CRP in the area of *conceptions of knowledge* by inviting new and creative musical outcomes and modes of learning that are personalized for students at that time and place. In doing so, teachers will not just "dangle hip hop, but *be* hip hop" by encouraging creative resourcefulness, sampling and mixing, resulting in a fresh, never-been-done-before musical product (Ladson-Billings, 2017).

Traditional school ensemble learning modes often employ a pedagogy of correction (Bull, 2022). In a pedagogy of correction, the teacher is trained to hear errors and provide efficient and accurate correction to improve the performance. This pedagogy supports the idea that music must be learned through repetition over time with the goal of a technically perfect performance. However, focusing on perfecting a few pieces over an extended period of time can contribute to over-familiarity and disengagement. Instead, teachers can learn new instructional methods for teaching current popular songs more efficiently. For example, teachers can help students learn the song by identifying and memorizing the form, analyzing the trajectory or arc of the emotion in the lyrics and how that emotion is supported by the arrangement, even interviewing the performer or writer of the song for insight into the composition. Teachers can also identify, with the insight of their students, additional and more frequent outlets for performances, both at the school and in the community. Doing so allows for a higher turnover of repertoire, keeping over-familiarity at bay.

Engagement Theory posits that students who are agentically engaged will demonstrate behaviors that seek to personalize and adjust the learning to be more meaningful for them. CRP posits that, while every student has the desire to agentically engage in their learning environments, it is up to the teacher to facilitate an environment in which student agency is prioritized and supported. When creating instructional plans and facilitating the learning environment, teachers need not assume that students only want to learn current, familiar songs. Ladson-Billings (2017) found that her students demonstrated preferences for Beethoven (his 5th Symphony definitely grooved, according to them), current popular music, and everything in between. The students in my study declared their desire to learn music from all eras and places in choir class, hoping their teacher would instruct them in ways that brought the music to life for them. Following Ladson-Billings' lead to "be" hip hop, teachers can serve as a conduit through which students are invited to explore the historical contexts surrounding a composer or piece of music, analyze performance practices from the place and time of creation, locate and interview culture bearers, study the meaning or lyrics, listen to multiple recordings, and anything else that assists them in enhancing the learning. The students can serve as co-creators of knowledge, resulting in a unique, musical, collaborative classroom outcome.

Effects of Disengagement, Misunderstanding, and "Behavior Talk"

Classroom cycles of disengagement are devastating to student learning (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks, 2014). This proved to be the case in Ms. Beckman's classroom as instruction typically halted during times of disengagement. In these moments, Ms. Beckman selected an intervention meant to regain engagement, usually a discussion on appropriate behavior, or what I have termed *behavior talk*. Behavior talk was a segment of classroom talk given by Ms. Beckman to the students following her observation of class-wide disengagement behaviors. This was a flexible strategy that Ms. Beckman employed, meant to draw students' attention to the undesired behaviors and reverse those behaviors. Behavior talk was directed at the class as a whole, and usually included indirect language such as, "Some of you…(are getting us off track, have not been singing, are distracting others, etc.)." Sometimes, brief reminders to focus and participate had the desired effect and classroom engagement increased. More often, however, the segments of behavior talk contributed to the conditions producing disengagement and the disengaged behaviors increased. The following is an example of Ms. Beckman's behavior talk:

> I'm wasting time waiting for you. The one thing that is standing in your way right now is your lack of self-control and your lack of discipline. Because when I was watching you, some of you just really, really didn't cut it. You were up there talking, making faces, distracting other people, laughing…how is that fair?

Behavior talk affected students in different ways. Ms. Beckman assumed that when she used the phrase "some of you," each student in her class would easily understand whether or not she was talking to them since they were either exhibiting the undesired behaviors or not. The students I interviewed did place themselves into the group that was either lacking or exhibiting self-control, according to this behavior talk, but not in the way Ms. Beckman intended. Students such as John and Estephanie, who hid their disengagement by singing on autopilot, assumed they were exhibiting self-control and that other students who were "talking, making faces, etc." were "delinquents" (John's term), did not want to be there, or did not want to sing. Some students, such as Ángel, who (by my observation) were talking and making faces at classmates during this segment of instruction, also excluded themselves from the "some of you." Ángel told me that he chose not to sing because he was "tired and bored," not because he was being "bad or unfair." He had constructed himself as outside of the "some of you" who were being unfair to the rest of the class, even though he admitted to the same behaviors.

The cycle of disengagement in this classroom appeared to produce lowered musical achievement, further disengagement, and fractured group relationships. Students assumed that their classmates and teacher were either judging them as "bad," or were purposefully derailing the forward momentum of the group. As my interviews with the students continued over the course of the year and they began to see how their own experience with

boredom in the classroom resulted in disengagement behaviors, they did begin to reason that perhaps their classmates were experiencing the same phenomenon and that it was the teacher's job to adjust the classroom culture.

As Ms. Beckman puzzled over moments of disengagement in her classroom, she sometimes felt that the students' behaviors prohibited her from delivering effective instruction as the class was halted and she inserted behavior talk. In these moments, she felt that the technical nature of "doing her job" was prevented by students' behaviors. A puzzle such as this can invite teachers to lean into the creative and generative aspects of their conceptions of themselves as teachers. If a teacher believes that they co-create the classroom environment and trajectory with their students, a manifestation of Ladson-Billings conceptions of relationships, they can also simultaneously believe that they are ultimately responsible for facilitating an inclusive space, a facet of their conceptions of self and others.

Ladson-Billings described conceptions of self and others as manifesting in four ways (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Ladson-Billings, 2022). First, teachers in her study believed that teaching their students was important and their work as a teacher was a calling, not just a technical job. Second, they saw their work as a teacher as an art form, a creative endeavor that was different each day. Next, her teacher participants did not define themselves as less worthy teachers if they worked in an economically depressed area. They considered each of their students as intrinsically valuable. Additionally, the teachers often remained in a school and community for many years, viewing themselves as part of the community with a desire to give to the community, purposing students to do the same (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 478). Finally, the teachers believed that each of their students could succeed and achieve, employing the Freirian (Freire, 2018) concept of teaching as "mining" or pulling knowledge out of students.

Ms. Beckman was a long-time member of her school community. She had been teaching at Clark Middle School for nine years at the time of data collection. Ms. Beckman demonstrated her alignment with CR conceptions of self and others by stating, "Middle school? Yes, I prefer middle school. I understand them…I like them so much, I really do. They're normal kids out there, looking for guidance…They just want to be happy." Ms. Beckman's students also recognized that she enjoyed being with them and being their teacher. Jacobi stated that he felt Ms. Beckman would choose her job all over again if she could. For Ms. Beckman, it was painful and confusing when her students seemed to disregard her requests to comply with her instructions to engage behaviorally.

Implications. These findings imply that when an educator senses a negative swing in their class's engagement pendulum, they can be ready with (a) a new assumption, and (b) a new plan to reestablish engagement. First, instead of assuming that the reason for disengagement lies with the students, an educator can begin with the assumption that their own instruction or environment is most likely the root. Then, they might plan to select a new course of action to reestablish engagement. Instead of addressing the class with behavior talk, they could admit the issue might lie with the teacher's choice of instructional mode

or a shift in the environment. For example, the teacher could say, "I sense our engagement is lagging. This usually means something about the instruction is causing boredom or frustration. Can someone confirm or deny this idea for me?" As the conversation with the students progresses, the teacher can ask clarifying questions such as, "Can you tell me more about this?" or "Can someone add to what I'm hearing?" Finally, the teacher can invite the students to share their ideas for solutions, asking, "What might help us regain engagement today?" Or, "I'm going to think about how I can better meet your learning needs, do you have any ideas for me to consider as I do this?" Following this discussion, the teacher can immediately apply what they learned from their students to adjust their pedagogy to be more effective, establishing a collaborative, CRP-based learning environment built on trust.

Conclusion: Striving toward Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

For Ms. Beckman, as for many teachers, understanding why one period of instruction can produce high levels of engagement while another seemingly similar period of instruction (focusing on the same song, perhaps) produces disengagement can be very confusing and disheartening. In the choir class at Clark Middle School, conditions supporting disengagement led to disrupted flow of instruction in the classroom, frustration on the part of both teacher and students, instructional interventions inserted by the teacher, negative affective engagement on the part of both teacher and students, fractured group relationships and, typically, continued disengagement.

The students in this study offered data that clearly suggested they would not engage in music class based solely on compliance to even a beloved teacher's request. They engaged when the music-making was interesting and challenging, and when their teacher connected the musical learning to their lives. In each music classroom, the contexts, resources, and the humans involved will be different, but the ideologies for teachers theorized by Ladson-Billings provide an important road map to understanding the students' perspectives on inclusive music classrooms. Importantly, it is not enough for a teacher to be warm and caring, the teacher must foster a sense of purpose in musical activities resulting in musical achievement and excellence (Antrop-Gonzalez & DeJesus, 2006; Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2022; Toshalis, 2012). For the student participants in this study, purpose and challenge supported deep engagement and formed the foundation for increased student learning, agentic engagement, affective engagement, and group unity.

As I interviewed Ms. Beckman and the eight students in this study, I explored how students' experiences at home, in school, and with music intersected in the 7th-grade choir. I also looked across their perspectives to find commonalities that suggest important focal points for engaging in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in music classrooms. My analysis does not provide a way to generalize "best practices" for instruction of students in racialized groups. However, as the students described their perspectives, they highlighted links between engaging musical pedagogy and CRP that suggest effective approaches for music classrooms. Future research can continue to explore the connections between the six tenets

of CRP and effective music teaching. Research is needed in school music settings where teachers practice all six tenets of CRP, resulting in strong levels of engagement and musical achievement among pluralistic student groups. This research can provide more examples of how CRP manifests in the music classroom. Future research can also seek to understand how pluralistic student groups perceive school music pedagogy in settings other than the choir classroom, comparing the students' perceptions to CRP. If music educators seek to provide conditions that support a sense of belonging coupled with achievement, then listening to and incorporating students' perspectives holds promise for both K-12 classroom pedagogy and music teacher preparation.

As a teacher with CR conceptions of knowledge invites students' insights into the classroom, a collaborative and innovative learning environment emerges. When a teacher's conceptions of relationships prioritize equity, students can celebrate group accomplishments and individual strengths, knowing that each of them has unique and valuable contributions to make. In line with Ladson-Billings' conceptions of self and others, when a teacher believes that teaching is an art form, they see their work as a dance between the strengths and interests of the students, the teacher's skill in facilitating agentic musical learning, and the vibrancy of the community. In the introduction to this article, I suggested that students may choose to disengage from school music when they experience the environment as exclusionary. Ms. Beckman and her students have generously shared their perspectives on what makes a musical classroom space engaging, inclusive, and affirming. Now it is our turn to implement their thoughts and move forward with their vision for innovative, unique, inclusive, and collaborative music classrooms that teachers co-create with their students.

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Barbershop Harmony Society Judge Perceptions of Expressive Performances and Contest Adjudication

Christopher S Loftin[1]

Abstract

The purpose of this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to analyze Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) judge perceptions of vocal and visual expression and what elements make up expressive performances. A secondary purpose was to explore how BHS judges perceived and utilized information gleaned from training. I interviewed ten current BHS judges from around the United States and Canada through a semi-structured interview process. There were four emergent themes: (a) authentic, believable communication, (b) relationship between vocal and visual expression, (c) first impressions, and (d) the continuous BHS judge training program. Each participant noted the importance of the BHS judge training program and its value in recognizing and evaluating vocal and visual expression. While not generalizable, this study starts to fill in some of the missing literature by providing insight into what vocal and visual expression are from the judge's perspective. Additionally, the role of vocal and visual expression, the development of musical line, and the intentional nature of expression may be useful findings for other vocal genres. Consistent storytelling and musicianship throughout each rehearsal may help singers feel more comfortable expressing themselves through song and may potentially translate to more impactful performances. Finally, for BHS judges, directors, and singers, the findings in this study may help clarify what BHS judges look for in vocally and visually expressive performances. This study potentially provides a road map for implementing expression in the rehearsal, concert, and contest stages. Judges across all three BHS scoring categories experienced vocally and visually expressive performances similarly but through the lens of their category's rubric.

Keywords: expression, barbershop, adjudication, qualitative

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Expression is an essential portion of the aesthetic experience of music (Juslin, 2010). Few scholars would argue against emotion as a key value of listening to music. According to Juslin (2010), vocal and visual expression enhance and clarify intended messages. However, isolating and defining vocal and visual expression can be a challenge due to the personal nature of expression, both from the audience and performer standpoints.

Clarity of vocal tone, diction, and intonation, when accompanied by authentic expression, can potentially create life-changing performances (Seighman, 2015). Additionally, scholars found when singers practice expression in the rehearsal, singers may become more comfortable expressing themselves in their daily lives and on stage (Beery, 2012; Jost, 2011; Seighman, 2015). Pan et al. (2019) showed when visual storytelling matches the aural message and musicality conveyed, the audience's experience and emotional satisfaction increase. Pan et al. further mentioned, "an interference effect was found on the music-induced emotion when the auditory and visual emotional information were incongruent" (p.16). So, there is a need to explore what is known about visual expression and how to visually convey the song's lyrical and musical message.

Due to the individual nature of expression, adjudicating vocally and visually expressive performances proved difficult in previous studies. Additionally, as scholars have noted, reliability and validity issues have occurred due to lack of adjudicator training or unclear definitions of assessment criteria (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007). While there have been studies on instrumental music adjudication (Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018), there was a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the training of adjudicators to evaluate elements of the aesthetic experience of vocal performances. This study partially addressed the gap by exploring the scoring and judge training for a specific art form, barbershop singing.

The barbershop singing style arose in the late 1800s in the Southern United States as a mostly oral tradition-based singing style (Abbott, 1992). Initially, barbershop simply promoted the enjoyment of singing with friends and storytelling, not for awards or placement. The first official barbershop singing contest did not occur until the 1930s (Abbott, 1992). Therefore, the adjudication of these performances is not even 100 years old. Since barbershop is still developing as a vocal music style, there is less extant literature about the adjudication of barbershop performances.

Adjudication

Almost 150 years ago, Hungerford penned the famous quote, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" (1878, chap 12). Musicians have striven to create art, yet contests require rankings, ratings, and placements (Fiske Jr., 1975). This dichotomy asked music adjudicators not only to see the technical aspects of the performance but also to experience the beauty and aesthetics of the performance as well. Judging systems and performers ideally asked adjudicators to arrive at the most appropriate rating or score for the performance based on the prescribed rubric (Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018).

Currently, the choral adjudicator, in many instances, may or may not have had sufficient training or opportunities for adjudication content discussions and practice (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Norris & Borst, 2007). This scenario could have led to adjudicator reliability issues, as noted by Norris and Borst (2007), who found adjudicators admitted there was a discrepancy of understanding among judges. These discrepancies may have been related to the individual adjudicator's interpretation of judging criteria. Other scholars found large choruses scored higher than small choruses on a consistent basis but did not conclude whether this phenomenon was an adjudicator bias or just a coincidence (Bergee & Platt, 2016). The authors further noted a need for more training and discussion of specific adjudication criteria (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Norris & Borst, 2007).

Scholars researched the role of formants, vibrato, and other elements of vocal expression based on evaluator training, singing occupation, and experience (Kisenwether & Prosek, 2014). These scholars found differences in evaluating the same vocal characteristics based on their job, experience, and occupation. Other researchers acknowledged challenges in evaluating vocal expression alone, noting that it would be easier to understand vocal inflection and intent if there was a visual stimulus to combine with the vocal stimulus (Green & Eigsti, 2017). Therefore, there is a need for continued research on vocal expression, what constitutes vocal expression, and how to recognize and evaluate vocal expression.

Due to the concerns of consistency in the evaluation of vocal and visual expression, this study explored the adjudication techniques of the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS), which had an extensive judge training program and a specific category that focuses on visual expression within performances. By investigating the mechanisms of evaluating BHS vocal and visual expression, a foundational understanding of criteria for both performers and adjudicators can be further developed and applied in other vocal ensembles.

BHS Judging

Barbershop singing is a lyrically driven American art form that has promoted easy-to-understand lyrics, in-tune chords, and consonant, mostly homophonic textures (Abbott, 1992). The barbershop style has heavily focused on communication, textual delivery, and vocal and visual expression. BHS judges, who have had years of experience adjudicating vocally and visually expressive performances, may have been able to provide insight as to what vocally and visually expressive performances look and sound like in the barbershop setting. Additionally, these judges may provide insight as to how their training helped them recognize and evaluate these performances. While this study would not be generalizable to all vocal music settings, some findings may provide useful implications.

BHS, formerly known as the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America, is the largest barbershop singing organization in the world. Founded in 1938, BHS restricted its membership and contests to men until 2014. Now all genders and all combinations of voices can compete (Society Contest and Judging Committee [SCJC], 2020).

BHS solicited applications for potential judges every three years (SCJC, 2020). An interested prospective judge must have completed an application, have two judges and five other current BHS members vet them, and have their district's chairperson recommend them. Once a judge applicant, they completed multiple scoring tests, practice videos, and content knowledge tests. If successful, they transitioned to candidate judge status, where they spent two years practice scoring, evaluating contests, and coaching competitors in live contests. If successful, the candidate received an invite to a seminal candidate school, where the candidate earned the right to be a certified scoring judge. The Society for Contest and Judging Committee (SCJC), overseeing body for judging in BHS, has expected judges to compete regularly as a performer, adjudicated two to three contests every year, and recertified every three years (SCJC, 2020). This rigor has been extensive, thereby potentially increasing consistency.

One can view the barbershop genre through a lens of technical and artistic elements. Due to this paradigm, BHS created a system with multiple categories, with each scoring judge adjudicating the performance through their trained lens. The judges' scores counted equally and averaged to a composite percentage score.

The three BHS judging categories were Singing, Music, and Performance. Singing judges evaluated the degree to which the performer delivers "…in-tune, quality vocalizations accomplished with a high degree of unity, ensemble consistency, and artistry" (SCJC, 2022, p. 4-3). In recent years, the Singing category has been redefined to also include a focus on vocal expression. Music judges evaluated song suitability to the style and the performer and "…the performer's musicianship in bringing the song and arrangement to life" (SCJC, 2022, p. 4-3). Finally, "The performance judge evaluates entertainment in the barbershop style" (SCJC, 2022, p. 6-1). Further, they determined the total effect of the performer's vocal and visual expression through genuine, believable storytelling.

At the time of this study, there was a need for the survey of barbershop adjudicator mindsets of vocally and visually expressive performances for multiple reasons. There was minimal literature about barbershop adjudication practices, so this study started to complete some of the knowledge gaps. Moreover, judges may have been able to provide more consistency in adjudication if they were aware of their preferences, biases, and what components made up expressive or non-expressive performances (Fiske, Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). Further, if judges had been more aware of new performance, choral, and entertainment trends, adjudicators may have been able to provide performers various comments about going deeper into vocal and visual expression while increasing the overall entertainment value (Neuen, 2020). Additionally, if chorus directors gained insight into the adjudicator mindset, singers and directors may have been able to better understand judge feedback (Fiske, Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). Finally, more conversations may have arisen about creating contest rubrics that reflected the kinds of musical entertainment that barbershop audiences valued regarding vocally and visually expressive performances, which could translate to other vocal genres.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze BHS judge perceptions of vocal and visual expression and what elements make up expressive performances. A secondary purpose was to explore how BHS judges perceived and utilized information gleaned from training. Understanding what BHS adjudicators view as important elements of vocal and visual expression may inform future qualitative and quantitative surveys, focus groups, and semi-structured interview studies of barbershop and choral adjudicators. In addition, this research may start to fill in the literature gap as to how some adjudicators use their training to evaluate the aesthetic experience of other vocal genres. Also, BHS judges, directors, and singers may potentially be able to use the findings from this study to enhance their rehearsals, concerts, and contests. Finally, by knowing what BHS judges find vocally and visually expressive, directors and singers may have a clearer path to connecting with audiences.

The research questions were:

1. According to BHS judge participants, what elements create vocally and visually expressive performances?

2. What are BHS judge participants' perceptions of the BHS judge training system?

3. How did BHS judge training help participants' ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances?

Method

I chose a basic qualitative study paradigm for this research, as outlined in Merriam and Tisdell (2016). This was considered a basic qualitative study because it did not fit within a specific type of qualitative research such as ethnography, phenomenology, or case study. One of the core tenets of a basic qualitative study is constructivism, where participant meaning is constructed through interpretation of experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, participant meaning came from their experiences as BHS judges and performers.

Participants

I used purposive criteria sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) to gather the widest variety of years of experience, countries of origin, and categories while maintaining a homogeneous participant pool. Participants were all BHS scoring judges, who I found via the public judge roster on the BHS official website. Participants included choral music educators, barbershop chorus directors, district quartet champions, choreographers, actors, professional singers, and a radio disc jockey. I chose this diversity of backgrounds to help achieve the

greatest range of data possible and to see what commonalities occurred among a diverse sample. Since there were so few BHS judges around the world, approximately 140, it was virtually impossible to anonymize the study entirely. Therefore, I asked each participant if they would consent to waive anonymity or if they would like a pseudonym created. All participants consented to have their names, location of residence, certification category, and years as a BHS judge disseminated. Therefore, all names and demographics are real. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Table 1.
Participant Demographics Table

Name	Location	Years as BHS Judge	BHS Judge Category
Jay D.	USA (Midwest)	5	Music
Brent G	USA (Southwest)	24	Music
Kevin K.	USA (Midwest)	24	Music
Marty L.	Canada (BC)	35	Performance
Shawn M.	USA (Southwest)	8	Performance
Gary S.	USA (Southwest)	16	Performance
Theresa W.	Canada/USA	2	Performance
Jay B.	USA (Midwest)	5	Singing
Steve S.	USA (Southeast)	5	Singing
Jordan T.	Canada (Ontario)	8	Singing

Among the ten participants, nine identified themselves as male and one as female. There were seven from the United States, two from Canada, and one with dual United States and Canadian citizenship. The average number of years served as a BHS judge at the time of the interview was 13.2 years. Since there is a three-year certification process, the average time served within their category for each participant was over 16 years. Of the 10 participants, three were from the singing category, three from the music category, and four from the performance category. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Procedures

Based on extant literature and my research goals, I created research questions and interview questions. I created a basic qualitative interview protocol following interview procedures (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019). I then developed and implemented a university institutional review board (IRB) approved protocol, containing a recruitment protocol, information letter, interview protocol, and member checking protocol. I sent the interview protocol to two academic peers, one in music and one outside of music, to check for validity and clarity of questions. I then created a list of desired participant attributes and created a spreadsheet of potential participants based on guidance from qualitative research scholars (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019). The desired participant demographics were BHS judging category, number of years as a judge, gender, and location. I looked at the BHS judge roster on the official BHS website to determine which judges fit these criteria. Next, I selected and emailed potential participants and sent the IRB-approved information letter. If participants consented to participate, I scheduled a Zoom interview and asked if they wanted their real names disclosed or a pseudonym created. Finally, before starting official interviews, I piloted the interview protocol with two BHS judges who were not participants to check for question clarity.

Following qualitative protocols outlined in Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Tracy (2019), I conducted in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting between 1.25 and 1.75 hours per interview. I conducted all interviews electronically via Zoom and audio and video recorded the conversation so that I could create a verbatim transcription. All participants consented to this interview and recording method. I asked participants the same ten questions, asking clarifying or prompting questions as needed. To understand how BHS judges evaluated which elements help create vocally and visually expressive performances, I asked participants about their background as a BHS judge and what performers can do to enhance their performances vocally or visually. I further interviewed them about how their training as BHS adjudicators helped their ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances.

I then verbatim transcribed each interview and iteratively analyzed them, using Atlas TI 9, to discover emerging ideas, trends, and patterns (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019). I studied each participant's interview individually, reading each transcript multiple times and making exploratory notes. I then coded and categorized the data further, which also included memoing as outlined in Ravitch and Carl (2016). Memoing helped me create meaning from each transcript while preparing for the following interview, not to stall the research process. I emailed participants for member checking to see if the quotes were their true and accurate words and intention. A few participants had minor typographical, accuracy, and intent corrections in the quotes. I proceeded to the next analysis phase once I received all ten participant approvals from member checking,

I sent all research questions, codes, definitions, themes, and descriptions to two academic peers, one current music educator and one non-music educator for a peer-audit. The

non-music educator had been a barbershop singer for ten years and has experience coaching visual communication techniques. These peer auditors provided unbiased analysis and feedback about this project, giving clarity, focus, and syntax information. These auditors helped promote dependability and confirmability of the results and interpretation of findings.

Reflexivity

Throughout the entire research process, I took several steps to promote researcher trustworthiness and data validity. In the planning phase, I created a series of research questions and supporting questions that aligned with the overarching questions. These steps led to the creation of my interview protocol. I used data triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019) by piloting the interview with barbershop judges who were not participants to check for clarity of questions. These peer auditors also helped revise the interview protocol to increase clarity and potentially aid in more consistent interpretation. Analysis of interview transcripts and subsequent participant member checking helped triangulation. Several participants clarified wording and intent from the original quotations, which helped promote their true and honest views.

Throughout the interview process, I bracketed my personal views of expressive performances so that I could fully learn from the participants. Additionally, I used journaling to help process what I felt versus what I heard and saw. I watched each interview video multiple times and completed multiple rounds of coding through the iterative, recursive process to further clarify codes and themes. The goal of these measures was conformability, getting as close as possible to an objective reality within the confines of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Tracy, 2019).

Positionality

At the time of this study, I was a barbershop singer and choral music educator with experience scoring contests in both paradigms. This experience was part of why I chose to study how BHS judges perceive vocal and visual expression in barbershop performances. In addition, due to the rigorous and lengthy certification process, I endeavored to explore if BHS judge training helped BHS judges' abilities to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances.

While I was not a certified BHS judge, I applied twice and have been an applicant and a candidate pending. I participated in judge meetings discussing adjudication topics, trial scored several contests, and conducted practice coaching evaluation sessions. To maintain trustworthiness and mitigate undue bias, I used a journal to process my thoughts that were extraneous to what I saw in the interview, recording, or transcript. In addition, I conducted follow-up interviews and email correspondences with participants to check for the accuracy and intent of quotations. Further, I sought judges from all three adjudication categories to gain maximum insight and diverse opinions. These steps helped to describe only what the

participants said, did, and felt.

Findings

In this qualitative interview process, the ten BHS participants revealed several themes which highlighted their perceptions of vocally and visually expressive performances. Further, participants detailed how the BHS adjudicator training process helped their ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances. See Table 2 for themes and descriptions.

Table 2.
Themes and Descriptions

Group Experiential Theme	Description
Theme 1: Authentic, Believable Communication	According to participants, what elements contribute to vocally and visually expressive barbershop performances?
Theme 2: Relationship between Vocal and Visual Expression	According to participants, what is vocal and visual expression in barbershop performances? How does vocal and visual expression relate to each other during a barbershop performance?
Theme 3: First Impressions	How does a performer's first impressions set them up to provide vocally and visually expressive barbershop performances?
Theme 4: Continuous BHS Judge Training	How does knowledge of one's preferences and biases help judges evaluate elements of vocally and visually expressive barbershop performances? How does BHS's judge training helped judge ability to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances?

Theme 1: Authentic, Believable Communication

The first emergent theme in this study was authentic, believable communication. Participants consistently noted that vocally and visually expressive performances consisted of honest singing and storytelling, making use of the song's musical nuances to further highlight the lyrical and contextual meaning of the song. Theresa noted, "I really appreciate when a performer is quite comfortable and confident and believes what they're communicating, so that the belief system is really evident." Brent, Kevin, and Jay D. mentioned that the best ensembles take what the arranger or composer gives in terms of dynamics, musicality

markings, and chord structures to express themselves. They further divulged the belief that life-changing performances have vocal and visual expression congruent with the composer's intent.

Another aspect of expressive communication was the consistency of a performer's message. Gary revealed his thoughts on consistent message: "There are many groups who sing technically perfect but who do not make it to our hearts. It is those groups who both share their message through song and sing well who touch us." Marty mentioned he enjoyed performances where the ensemble looked like they were having a great time on stage because he felt like he was given permission to also enjoy the performance. Several participants expressed that vocal, mental, and visual preparation in the rehearsal allows performers the opportunity to think about communicating on stage with the audience instead of focusing on technique, nerves, or other factors. Brent expressed, "When everyone is a performer every time in rehearsal, the magic usually translates on stage." Marty, Theresa, and Shawn echoed this sentiment, stating when ensembles were so confident in their storytelling and technical abilities, the audience connects more and engages more.

Theme 2: Relationship between Vocal and Visual Expression

The second emerging theme centered around the judges' perceptions of the elements of vocal and visual expression and the relationship between them. For both visual and vocal expression, participants identified elements that enhanced their enjoyment of the performance. Moreover, participants noted an intentional nature of expression, where performers make choices that contributed to the overall product. Finally, participants noted the relationship between vocal and visual expression and how performers could utilize elements of both to enhance the overall performance, entertainment value, and audience connection.

Vocal Expression

Jordan responded to the question of, "What is vocal expression, and what does it look like?" with a question of his own. "So how do you utilize different vocal techniques to express the song that you're singing? That's vocal expression." According to the participants, vocal expression could consist of dynamics, dynamic contrast, tone color, more or less air, more or less emphasis, lyrical word stress, more or less resonance, or consonants. However, all participants noted the importance of using these techniques for artistic purposes, not merely to please a judge or director. Jay D. noted, "Vocally expressive performers treat musical nuances with intent and purpose. Their goal is to deliver the song's musical and emotional elements as clearly as possible." Jay B. and Kevin noted that for an ensemble to become masters of vocal expression, singers must know how the vocal instrument works and perform songs that build skills before progressing to more challenging techniques or songs. Jay B. and Kevin both cited a need for directors and singers to continuously learn about vocal pedagogy and singing practices to become more adept at being vocally expressive.

Visual Expression

According to participants, visual expression is the intentional, honest, and believable outer representation of internal storytelling (Shawn, Theresa, Gary, Marty). Everything the audience sees makes up the visual message, whether it is a clear or obscure message (Shawn, Theresa, Gary, Marty). Visual expression can include facial engagement, body language, staging, scenery, lighting, movement, and other elements that support the song's lyrical or musical message (all participants). Jordan highlighted the importance of unity and consistency of visual expression and singer engagement: "When some singers are fully present and engaged in storytelling and others are not, it is distracting. It breaks the unity of the performance. The audience wants a consistent message because it is easier to follow and connect to." Gary related this concept to a grand marquis sign that is considered beautiful until one notices the singular bulb that is out. Several participants noted all singers are naturally expressive as part of human nature. Therefore, the participants advocated the importance of consistent visual practice through lyrical, contextual, and style study to inform visual expression.

Relationship

All participants discussed the relationship between vocal and visual expression in life-changing performances. Jay B. and Jay D. described these life-changing performances as artistic moments, where visual expression enhances the vocal product instead of hindering it. Jordan noted, "Performers can do a lot of vocal things without being visually engaging. One enhances the other, and so my belief is that both things need to happen to give a really believable, phenomenal performance." Marty, however, described an example of what can happen when the visual presentation does not mirror the vocal product. "Okay, it appears that you put all your eggs in the basket of this incredible choreography plan, but what didn't come across was the audience connection. So how about if you did 'XYZ' with your singing to match it?" Jay B. referenced Franz Schubert's *Erlking* to sum his thoughts:

> The Erlking, when he sings, you can hear fear, and you can hear the racing heartbeat in everything he does. Why wouldn't singers do that? I mean why would we waste the opportunity? It's like watching black and white TV when you can watch color.

Another aspect of the relationship between vocal and visual expression is contrast. Participants consistently noted that simply having dynamics, appropriate tone, and facial expression is not enough to create life-changing experiences. However, vocal and visual expression, echoing the song's musical and lyrical development creates heightened levels of believability and audience rapport (all participants). Gary described his optimal situation:

> We've been in those situations where there is just so much beautiful music taking us on an emotional path with a musical and emotional development that has us feeling like that was the best or the most fulfilling experience we could have had. Those are the performances I remember.

When singers and directors started with simply being facially engaged, that was the first step (Jordan). The next step was to dive into the lyrics and musical elements to drive vocal and visual expression (all participants).

Theme 3: First Impressions

All participants discussed the importance of first impressions and their role in vocally and visually expressive performances. First impressions set the scene and tone for the performance, demonstrate a performer's level of preparation, and allow the performer the initial chance to make a connection with the audience (all participants). Every participant mentioned the first thing they noticed when a performer walked on stage was their confidence level. Jordan specifically mentioned,

> A performer's confidence makes the judges perceive that they are confident and competent because that makes us nice and relaxed. I know when a group comes on stage, and they act like they own the stage-not through arrogance but from a storytelling perspective.

Kevin noted the importance of how a group walks on stage and what their body language communicates:

> So as an ensemble walks on stage-the curtain opens, and I see a chorus. I instantly can assess what I think probably I'm going to hear just based upon their savvy walking on the stage. You know, just the way that they dress, the way they walk, the way they accept applause, you get a sense of who they are very, very quickly.

Participants mentioned how the ensemble, once onstage, engages the audience in storytelling affects their enjoyment. Shawn noted, "Before the song starts, I'm looking for the ensemble to tell me visually what the meaning of the song is." All participants noted the importance of setting the mood prior to singing so the audience could follow along. Each participant also mentioned setting the scene prior to the song shows another level of audience rapport.

Theme 4: Continuous BHS Judge Training

The continuous BHS judge training program influenced the participants' abilities to recognize and evaluate vocally and visually expressive performances. All participants men-

tioned that they brought a lifetime of musical, life-changing experiences to the table when judging. However, some participants said that they could not always quantify or qualify what made a performance engaging or compelling until they received more training and education. When the participants initially certified as BHS judges, the challenge was how to bring this lifetime of experiences and use the extensive training received to follow their category's values and the judging rubric. One strategy Kevin mentioned was, "It's not a judge's job to like something or dislike something. It's a judge's job to evaluate the performer's objectives…and evaluate how well they executed those objectives on stage." Regarding judge biases, Marty said, "I think if people say, 'I have no biases or I have no personal preferences or I'm whatever,' I think to myself, 'You'll be the first I've met.'" Brent said about biases, "Embrace your biases, preferences, and experiences because that is your expertise, but still judge based on the scoresheet."

A common phrase among the BHS judge participants was hot-button issue. According to Kevin, "A hot-button issue is a phrase commonly used in the barbershop judging community to refer to personal musical, emotional, staging, or content preferences or opinions about how a performance or song 'should be done.'" These notions could unduly tempt a judge to shift their score or rating up or down or merely distract a judge from being fully present in the performance (Kevin). An example of a hot-button issue in BHS culture could be a preference for formal attire over informal attire. Another hot-button issue could be an affinity for a certain composer or arranger's music or ballads versus uptunes (Gary, Theresa, Brent). Hot-button issues are natural extensions of these lifetimes of experiences, according to participants. However, they can potentially affect a judge's reaction to a performance. As Gary said,

I agree that a hot-button can be either positive or negative. I know that I have an affinity for comedy, and though I am unaware if I have a hot button in a positive way for comedy, it is possible that I am more alert or receptive for a comedic performance and that could be a lot like a hot button. I will say, however, that my reaction to a comedic performance can be as equally negative as it could be positive depending on the quality of the comedic entertainment value.

Theresa said that a challenge with a hot button issue could be,

> You can stay on something all the time and never really get engaged holistically, and that can be a problem for a judge, because then you're not scoring to the level that they deserve, and you keep hammering, and for one thing, you're not taking into consideration all the great things the performers are doing.

Theresa elaborated that the continuous BHS judge training program helped her become aware of her biases and clarified what she should focus on as an adjudicator.

Every participant found value in BHS training discussions of contemporary trends in adjudication, music, and culture, whether it was awareness of current societal norms, trends,

and values or entertainment trends. Many participants advocated for watching multiple examples of entertainment across genres and assigning a score based on the prescribed rubrics. Shawn stated, "It's just learning, not to be distracted and learning, not to overreact, and then, it will be true to yourself." This was part of Shawn's philosophy about recognizing one's preferences for certain types of music, arrangers, and lyrical messages and focusing on what the performer presents and the extent to which they are successful.

Several participants noted strategies from their training that have helped them while judging vocally and visually expressive performances. Jay D. and Jordan recommended doing breathing exercises or standing up and walking around between every performance to reset mentally … with a goal of goal remaining fresh and giving each performance its unique viewing. Brent advocated for staying focused on each song as its own entity and own unique performance, "The temptation is to compare one song or performer to another. That always leads to disaster as a judge because if you compare, your biases are more likely to influence as opposed to if you take each song as a separate performance." According to Brent, judges must remember that they are to rate the success of a performance based on the prescribed rubric. Therefore, a judge can have an opinion of one song or performance, but when it is time for the next song to start, it is an entirely different performance. As Brent discussed, "What our training has done is allowed us to say, 'Okay, I'm going to have this visceral reaction to these kinds of performances or these kinds of quartets or this kind of music and integrate that into our score.'"

Discussion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to analyze BHS judge perceptions of vocal and visual expression and what elements make up expressive performances. A secondary purpose was to explore how BHS judges perceived and utilized information gleaned from training. These findings within this study may provide clarity to BHS judges, directors, and singers as to what current BHS judges find vocally and visually expressive. Additionally, the findings in this study suggest support for an extensive adjudicator certification and continuous improvement model. The findings presented should reinforce adjudication practices within BHS. Although the findings cannot be generalized past this study, some of the findings could be useful for other vocal music genres.

The participants' views that authentic human emotion on stage had a significant audience impression echoes Juslin's (2010, 2013) framework of musical responses. Jurgens et al. (2011) noted acting expressively, while effective, was not as effective in garnering responses or reactions as authentic expression. Brunetti (2006) described the phenomenon of being truthful on stage as "real living within imaginary circumstances" (p.1). Therefore, what participants looked for most was for performers to be their most authentic selves on stage while conveying the lyrical and emotional message of the piece. Since some singers are naturally more outwardly expressive than others, some singers may need to utilize characterization or acting techniques to help provide a cohesive performance. As Jurgens et al. (2011) not-

ed, acting can be authentic. Therefore, if the song is about joy, finding something joyful in a singer's life may help them more outwardly express the music. This is still considered a truthful expression, according to Brunetti (2006) and Carnelia (2021), because it reflects the singer's true emotion, even if not necessarily the exact lyrical message.

Participants outlined different ways to incorporate vocal and visual expression by first intentionally engaging the body and mind then diving into the score to determine the important musical and lyrical elements. Therefore, the optimal combination, as outlined by these participants, is great technique supported by genuine, believable storytelling that is congruent with the song and arrangement's intent. The participants' expressed beliefs echo previously mentioned scholarship (Carnelia, 2021; Jost, 2011; Juslin, 2013).

The performance has many details, from the musical product, the visual product, the lighting, and the staging. Every person plays a direct role in that balance. The findings here indicate an opportunity for barbershop directors and singers to look at all aspects of their individual performance and see what can be more effective, which reflects Jost (2011) and Carnelia (2021), who mentioned the importance of the emotional goals of music being more important than merely singing notes and words. Echoing Jost and Carnelia, many judge participants stated the emotional character development and musical plan development occurs in the rehearsal, and through consistent practice and reinforcement, singers can become excellent performers. Brent advocated that every person in the rehearsal, the conductor, and the ensemble, should be a performer in every rehearsal, so they create and maintain a higher level of singing, performing, and musicianship. Jay D. advocated a rehearsal mindset where singers and directors consistently ask themselves how they can be more vocally and visually artistic and expressive. Therefore, participants recognized vocally and visually expressive performances partially by evidence of consistent vocal, visual, and emotional education, awareness, and mindset in rehearsal, which translated to performances.

Participants overwhelmingly lauded the BHS model, which requires a minimum of three years of training, constantly watching and scoring practice contests and other playlists, and actively collaborating with competitors (SCJC, 2020). In three years, BHS judges will have viewed and scored several hundred contest videos. This experience with collaboration, reflection, and application of skills provided the participants an adjudication framework, which helped them feel comfortable recognizing and evaluating vocally and visually expressive performances. Having a training framework through listening and identifying common singing and performance behaviors and patterns may help alleviate some of the validity and reliability concerns noted in previous literature (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007). Future research would be useful in other areas of vocal and choral music to learn about various adjudication training programs and to what extent judges felt prepared to evaluate vocally and visually expressive performance.

Several similarities and differences become apparent when reviewing the literature on adjudication structures for choirs, bands, and barbershop choruses. The National Associa-

tion for Music Education (NAfME) and the SCJC oversee standards which make up state Large Group Performance Assessment (LGPA) rubrics and BHS judging sheets (NAfME, 2014; SCJC, 2022). However, each state has the power to create its own LGPA rubric, whereas BHS has a consistent system across all its member districts. In addition, training requirements among traditional adjudicators vary among states, which may lead to adjudicator and director concerns about the reliability of contest results (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007; Springer & Bradley, 2018). According to scholars, the BHS may provide greater opportunities for validity and reliability in the BHS system because all judges train and use the same rubrics, no matter where the contest takes place (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Hash, 2012; Norris & Borst, 2007).

Another similarity between the traditional music and barbershop adjudication systems is the lack of a definition for visual expression. In 2020, the BHS singing category added "visual expression" as a portion of their rubric; however, the term was not completely defined until 2022 (SCJC, 2022). According to scholars, a persistent effort to clarify specific terms used in criteria may help adjudicators provide more accurate feedback (Bergee & Platt, 2016; Fiske Jr., 1975; Hash, 2012; Springer & Bradley, 2018). For example, the BHS handbook positions the concepts of pronunciation and enunciation in its description that "lyrics should be heard and understood" (SCJC, 2022, p. 5-8). Therefore, BHS and traditional music judges may consider striving for more consistency and clarity of rubrics, especially when incorporating vocal and visual expression.

The reason I selected the barbershop genre was due to its extensive judge training program. The participants selected each trained for three years before judge certification, actively completed judging homework assignments quarterly, judged two to three contests annually, and recertified every three years (SCJC, 2020). As Kevin mentioned, this training taught him to be aware of his own biases, lifetime of experiences, and opinions. This awareness, stemming from training and reinforcement, led Kevin to become consistent as an adjudicator, coach, and mentor.

While this study is not generalizable, it may provide useful findings or implications for other areas of vocal music. Therefore, it does start to address some of the literature gap on what vocal and visual expression are and best practices for recognizing and evaluating them. In addition, the role of vocal and visual expression, the development of musical line, and the intentional nature of expression may be useful areas of emphasis for other vocal genres. Finally, consistent practice of expression throughout each rehearsal may help singers feel more comfortable expressing themselves through song and may potentially translate to more expression on the stage.

For the BHS community, there are several implications from this study. I purposefully selected BHS judges across all three judging categories. Participants across categories cited very similar experiences regarding vocal and visual expression, from their own unique judging lens. For example, performers conveying a sense of authentic joy manifested, according to judges, a more in-tune performance, a more believable performance, and a more musi-

cal performance. Another example was the importance placed by judges on a song's unity, development, and contrast. Some judges from the music category discussed the importance of singers using the arrangement's musical nuances, yet judges from the singing category noted the role of dynamic contrast, tone, and diction. For BHS singers and directors, these examples may provide clarity as they implement strategies to promote more vocally and visually expressive rehearsals, concerts, and contests.

For the BHS judging community, the findings in this study provide support for the current model of extensive pre-certification training and evaluation and continuous improvement post-certification. All participants lauded the current model, even though it is time-consuming. Participants noted the value of consistent category meetings to discuss current trends in entertainment, scoring calibration, and camaraderie. Several participants also noted that having judge accountability safeguards in place helped motivate active and prospective judges to continuously improve and strive to maintain consistency and validity in their scores.

Future studies might include repeating this study to incorporate other barbershop judges and/or replicating this study with choral music adjudicators to assess potential transferability of findings and interpretations. Future studies might also include Sweet Adelines International judges to survey primarily female, trans men, trans women, and non-binary barbershop judge perspectives. Furthermore, music researchers may consider investigating choral music adjudication training methods to continue to increase consistency and awareness of adjudicator experiences, biases, contemporary trends in choral music, and current trends in performance. Finally, a survey of choral adjudicators' perceptions of vocal and visual expression would be beneficial to compare findings across other vocal genres.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. This interview will ask about your experiences as a Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) judge, your perceptions about objectivity as a judge, and the role that biases may or may not impact judging. You were selected because of your experience as a BHS judge, your reputation, and your history of excellence as a Barbershop singer.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. Remember that you may withdraw your participation or modify the extent to which you participate at any time, with no repercussions. This interview will be audio and video recorded for transparency and researcher ability to create a verbatim transcription. The interview will consist of about ten open-ended questions. You have seen the questions ahead of this interview so that you know what to expect. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then, with your permission, we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions, allowing for clarification or probing if needed:

1) Describe your experience as a Barbershop singer and a BHS judge.

2) What are the first things you notice when a chorus or quartet takes the stage?

3) What can an ensemble do visually to enhance or detract from their performance?

4) What can an ensemble do vocally to enhance or detract from their performance?

5) What role does the conductor play on stage?

6) What potential biases or "hot button" issues can a judge have?

7) Are these biases implicit (subconscious) or explicit (conscious)?

8) How do participants minimize their own personal values, preferences, or biases to maximize the accuracy of the assessment?

9) Do you have any recommendations for judges about how to minimize the role that the visual presentation has on the vocal product and vice versa in order to truly isolate the two?

10) Before we conclude, is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank the participant for their time and expertise.

Article

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Disrupting the Choral Class System: A Journey of One High School Choral Program

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Abstract

This case study sought to investigate one educator's attempt to disrupt "the choral class system" within their public high school choral program. The following questions guided this research: (a) How does one teacher restructure a choral program to increase student access? (b) What meanings do student participants ascribe to participation? (c) What do the choral teacher, singers, and administrators cite as benefits and limitations of the choral program? Over four months, we conducted observations and gathered interviews from the choral teacher, administrators, and 43 student participants. Two waves of data collection and analysis illuminated findings reported as five significant program structures. Findings highlighted the teacher's approach, such as non-auditioned curricular ensembles, deep relationships built among participants, and individual growth and leadership opportunities. Findings also exposed continuing operations of power and a struggle to break free from choral class systems. Suggestions for further investigation include gaining additional insights and understanding into students' needs, and continuing critical examination of the choral curricula and hierarchy within choral music education.

Keywords: choral music education, school choir, auditions, case study

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In late 2016, Mr. A, a teacher from an upper-middle class suburb of a large city began to publicly voice his opinions on what he termed a "choral class system." Different than constructs of social class, Mr. A defined a "choral class system" as one where teachers classify singers through assignment into different groups as "upper, middle, and lower class" based on teacher-perceived talent, with little hope to move between classes. Through publishing blogs, appearing on podcasts, and posting on social media, Mr. A aimed to abolish the "choral class system" and create more inclusive singing environments. He wrote about choral programs that featured "the best" rather than "the rest" — programs that highlighted some students and created dichotomous systems where those who were not labeled elite singers had no option other than to settle an ensemble perceived as "lesser" or discontinue participation altogether. Mr. A also questioned competitions and festivals as measurements of perceived success. Finally, Mr. A encouraged the development of independent musicianship and placed the responsibility on students and the teacher working collectively to help everyone find their place in the choral setting.

This case study sought to investigate one teacher's attempt to disrupt "the choral class system" within their public high school choral program. The following questions guided our research: (a) How does one teacher restructure a choral program to increase student access? (b) What meanings do student participants ascribe to their participation? (c) What do the choral teacher, students, and administrator cite as benefits and limitations of the choral program?

Related Literature

Scholars have found that high school students commonly enroll in school choirs as an elective (Elpus & Abril 2019), and that students join choir to sing with others, to express themselves, and to locate balance in a full academic schedule (Adderley et al., 2003; Freer, 2009). Scholars also have illuminated several predictors that influenced students' high school music participation, including positive musical self-concept, peer influence, and family musical engagement (Demorest et al., 2017; Siebenaler, 2006) and have identified benefits of choir participation, consisting of musical growth, joy, and a sense of belonging and shared experience with others (Bartolome, 2013; Mills, 2010; Parker, 2010, 2014). In Parker (2014), "being chosen" in auditioned contexts fostered adolescent development of positive social identity, defined as the experience of belonging to a social group. However, when singers do not gain entry to their preferred ensemble or reside in what they perceive as "middle-level groups," their attitudes about participation and perspectives about their ensemble may be negatively impacted (Gauthier, 2005). Furthermore, the compounded stressor of SATB ensembles at the top of the choral hierarchy and an abundance of treble-voiced singers increases competition for some participants, and brings a continued need for positive image-building in treble ensembles, even those that rival their SATB counterparts (Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998, 2005; Wilson, 2012).

Often characterized by performance and competition (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010),

scholars have called for reform of traditional ensembles to envision school music education for all students (Allsup & Benedict, 2008; Morrison, 2001), which has led teachers to look critically at ensemble structures. As such, teachers have attempted to heighten engagement by offering alternatives to a mostly Western Classical repertoire base (Hess, 2015), vocal production (Good-Perkins, 2020), and vocal timbre (Shaw, 2020). Additionally, scholars have identified that the perceived value of school music declines for many students when they enter adolescence (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; Simpkins et al., 2010) and poor self-concept influences a student's decision to participate in an ensemble (Demorest et al., 2017; Sichivista, 2004). Accordingly, some educators have removed auditions, built non-auditioned ensembles to increase participation, and sought to combat negative self-perceptions of singing ability highlighted by auditions (Abril, 2007; Bartolome, 2013).

Some choral teachers have changed the classroom structure, varied ensemble foci, and invested more time toward process versus product (Dakon & Major, 2017; Hess, 2012; O'Toole, 1994, 2005). Dakon and Major (2017) suggested that choral teachers ensure ensembles have distinct identity features such as unique names and differing performance opportunities. O'Toole (1994, 2005) proposed altering classroom structure from students seated together with the choral teacher set apart to small group arrangements scattered throughout a room. Hess (2012) recommended re-envisioning the "final performance model" to accommodate more process-based music-making. Even with these proposals, O'Toole (1994, 2005) observed that individuals must be aware of constantly changing power relations, relations that reflect the specific setting where they are produced. Noting that traditions fight to be preserved, individuals have continued to reproduce prescribed norms (Garnett, 2005; Hess, 2012; O'Toole, 2005). While extant research supports that some choral teachers have mitigated negative student perceptions (Dakon & Major, 2017), efforts to change the structures of their programs do not always change student perceptions, and students may continue to rank ensembles and strive to become part of their self-labeled "top-level" ensemble (Dakon & Major, 2017; Major & Dakon, 2016). Researchers recommend diffusing power structures in choral classrooms by empowering student voice in repertoire selection and making musical decisions, singing without a conductor, and engaging in group creativity (Dakon & Major, 2017; Hess, 2012; O'Toole, 1994, 2005). With this study, we investigated one educator's efforts to alter the structure of his choral program by abolishing auditioned curricular ensembles and sharing power with his students.

Method

We used a case study approach to more fully understand a complex context bound by time and physical structure (Stake, 1995). Specifically, we engaged in an intrinsic case study as we purposefully selected an information-rich music setting that was both unique and

[3] All names used in this study are pseudonyms

common (Stake, 2005, 2010). The case was common in that the school, Eisenhower High School,[3] reflected other mid-sized, upper-middle class, suburban high schools (see Table 1 for CCD data). The case was unique in how the choral teacher created and publicized his desire to disrupt a "choral class system." To bind the case, we limited discussion to the choral program and analyzed data together in one unit. Believing in the "power of the particular" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006, p. 28), we closely engaged in data collection with various constituents of the school choral program including the choral teacher, choral students, and administrators.

Table 1

Eisenhower High School Demographics

School	Geographic Location	School Enrollment	Racial Demographics	Free/Reduced Lunch
Eisenhower High School	Large Suburb	1554	71% White, non-Hispanic, 23% Asian/Pacific Islander 5% Hispanic < 1% American Indian/ Alaska Native, Black non-Hispanic, and two or more races	6.5% eligible

Source. CCD public school data 2019-2020 school year

After Institutional Review Board approval, we visited Eisenhower High School to introduce the study and hand out consent forms with all members of the choral program, the choral teacher, building principal, and arts administrator. Approximately two weeks later, we returned to the school and began our data collection, which lasted four months. Data collection was completed before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants included the choral teacher, the building principal, the arts administrator, and 43 choral students who chose to be a part of the study (see Table 2).

Table 2

Student Participant Data

Pseudonym	Grade	Current Choir Enrollment	Acappella involvement	Data Wave	Type of Interview
Angela	9	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Eliza	9	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Lucia	9	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Jacqueline	9	Treble	No	First	Focus group

continued on the next page

Noah	9	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Olive	9	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Veronica	9	Mixed	No	First	Focus group
Annabelle	10	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Caryn	10	Treble	Yes	Second	Individual
Catherine	10	Treble	No	Second	Individual
Christopher	10	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Francesca	10	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Hannah	10	Treble	Yes	First	Focus group
Jacob	10	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Katelynn	10	Treble	Yes	First	Focus group
Lilianna	10	Treble	Yes	Second	Individual
Maggie	10	Treble	No	First	Focus group
Robert	10	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Suni	10	Treble	Yes	First	Focus group
Claudia	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Emily	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
James	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Jenna	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Liam	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Lorraine	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Luna	11	Mixed	Yes	Second	Individual
Maria	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Individual
Mason	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Michael	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Zoe	11	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Amara	12	Mixed	Yes	Second	Individual
Angelique	12	Mixed and Treble	Yes	First	Focus group
Danielle	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Individual
Eleni	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Individual
Ellie	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Jane	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Individual
Joseph	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Myra	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Individual
Nessa	12	Mixed	Yes	Second	Individual
Nikki	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group
Oliver	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Individual
Robyn	12	Mixed	Yes	Second	Individual
Rose	12	Mixed	Yes	First	Focus group

Our first wave of data collection included 60-80 minute, semi-structured individual interviews with the choral teacher, Mr. A; Principal S of Eisenhower High; and the fine arts coordinator for the school district, Pat. We also conducted five student-participant focus group interviews lasting 40-50 minutes each with a variety of students enrolled in grades 9-12 and six individual student-participant interviews of 30-40 minutes each. We transcribed and open coded the data separately using topic, descriptive, and pattern codes (Saldaña, 2021) and engaged in weekly analysis meetings to discuss what the data revealed. We then amended the interview protocol to probe emerging categories and went back into the field.

Our second wave of data collection included individual interviews with seven student participants lasting 30-40 minutes and a second interview with Mr. A for 60 minutes. To assist in triangulation, we added to the data corpus field notes from five full days of choral observations and a choral concert, and supporting documents (blogs, parent letters, and website materials). We coded data separately and repeated the same process with emerging categories to add a level of verification to our findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As categories emerged, we noted their alignment with Mr. A's choral program structure and organized accordingly. In addition to the rigor of data analysis, varied data sources, supporting documents, and interview transcripts strengthened the trustworthiness of our findings. In crafting the study's findings, we drew from a variety of data sources to verify and illuminate the analysis.

As choral educators and teacher educators, we brought personal subjectivities to this research. To heighten our awareness, we regularly unpacked with one another, through weekly meetings and keeping a research journal, our reasons for conducting this research, our perspectives, and our aim, to understand how one teacher sought to transform his choral program. In addition to analyzing the data separately and then engaging in regular discussions, which provided a platform with which to challenge one another's interpretations, we often compared together student, administrator, and teacher interview transcripts with field notes and support documents to ask questions of one another and uncover subjectivities.

Case Profile

Located in an upper-middle class suburb of a large city and enrolling approximately 1500 students, Dwight Eisenhower is a four-year, co-educational high school with a music program including bands, orchestra, and choirs. Mr. A began in the school district in 2000 and worked with a second choral teacher. Upon his colleague's retirement, the school district eliminated the second position and Mr. A became the sole choral teacher. As Mr. A began leading the program, he noticed balance issues with fewer lower voices and many upper voices in the freshmen choir. He also wondered why there was what he called "triple-dipping" in the mixed, chamber, and jazz choirs as several students participated in the same three groups. Mr. A experimented with a few different choral configurations and in

2004, he changed the focus which currently remains (see Table 3). During the time of our study, the mixed choir enrolled 72 singers and the treble choir enrolled 41 singers. Mr. A said he made changes to both curricular and extracurricular groups to "get rid of the extra things that I'm doing, the teacher-driven things, [so the] students would be empowered to start finding their own opportunities that I could help them foster but not be in charge of."

Table 3
Choral Offerings Before and After Mr. A Restructured the Program

2000 Choral Offerings (Before Mr. A)	2004 Choral Offerings (Mr. A restructured)
Pull-Out Lesson Program	Pull-Out Lesson Program
Non-auditioned Freshmen Choir	Non-auditioned Treble Choir (grades 9-10)
Non-auditioned Mixed Choir	Non-auditioned Mixed Choir (lower voices grades 9-12 and
Auditioned Curricular Chamber Singers	upper voices grades 11-12)
Auditioned Extracurricular Vocal Jazz	Extracurricular Student-Run Acappella Program

Mr. A strove to facilitate the growth of each student through a pull-out lesson program where he focused on musical literacy and solo-style singing to develop his ideal of choral excellence. Typically involving fewer than four students, each choir student had a dedicated small group voice lesson during one period in their day each week. In a blog post, Mr. A stated that he "pioneered a philosophy that every student is a soloist," and in our first interview, he said his goals were to teach students, "so they are singing like soloists but all listening, that they can read, that they're self-sufficient, and that if I'm absent, the group would still function." Mr. A also used pull-out lessons as a way to help address different levels of singing ability, and developed a flexible curriculum to address varied needs, saying, "We set the bottom line of what you should be attaining. But we do not set a top line. So a senior who's going off to music school still wants to come to me and learn whenever they can." During these pull-out lessons, Mr. A focused on developing sight reading ability, solo singing of classical repertoire, and asking students to provide feedback for one another. One aim of the pull-out lesson program was for students to participate in solo and ensemble adjudications and integrate feedback from judges into their practice. Mr. A shared that external feedback was important to confirm student progress; he also indicated that the majority of choir students received top ratings each year.

Mr. A created an extensive student leadership structure with executive and non-executive leadership positions. An example of executive leadership included president of the choral program or alto section leader, whereas a non-executive position might include room decorator or photographer. The application process for these roles involved submitting a form and resume, speaking in front of the choir, and interviewing with Mr. A and current offi-

cers. Mr. A stated the students took pride in these positions because "they realized if they get a position they earned it and they're going to have respect from their peers and from me and that they're really going to do something."

To further encourage student voice and leadership, Mr. A started a student-run acappella program. At the time of study, eight student-run acappella groups rehearsed once weekly in students' homes and performed in biannual acappella concerts. A distinguishing feature of the acappella program was that current students auditioned aspiring singers three times a year to fill their rosters. Though singers and Mr. A encouraged acappella students to participate in curricular choirs, and a majority enrolled in choral classes, singers could participate in acappella groups without becoming part of the curricular program.

Findings

Our findings focused on the perspectives of Mr. A, choral students, and administrators in realizing and understanding Mr. A's aim to disrupt "the choral class system." Findings also illuminated the support and complexity of fulfilling Mr. A's aim for varied stakeholders. Our data analysis revealed five salient program structures, including (a) non-auditioned curricular choirs, (b) the pull-out lesson program, (c) student leadership roles, (d) social events, and (e) the student-run acappella program.

Non-Auditioned Curricular Choirs

Mr. A removed choral auditions to provide more opportunities and lessen barriers for students to join the curricular choral program. Mr. A's policy aligned with the school's open-enrollment policy, permitting students to enroll in any course, as long as they fulfilled the prerequisite, if one existed. The Fine Arts Coordinator Pat supported Mr. A's policy stating his appreciation, "he doesn't turn kids away."

Student participants framed the benefits of a non-auditioned curricular program by stating what might prevent a student from auditioning, such as fear or feeling called out. Tenth grader Hannah said, "People might be nervous to join or people might think that they're going to have to sing in front of everybody, and think that they're going to have to be put on the spot, but it's not like that." Other student participants stated a non-auditioned policy fostered a space where everyone worked together to improve. Ninth grader Jacqueline said, "It gives everybody a chance to be a part of this so it's not just the best of the best, it's everybody; we all work together to be the best." Several participants described that a non-auditioned program encouraged the choir to become a family because individuals were not competing with one another.

Student participants also shared several realities of the choral program. Even though students could easily sign up for choir without audition, participants discussed other factors prohibiting their participation. For example, participants suggested that guidance counselors dissuaded them from enrolling to focus on college readiness courses. Tenth grader

Robert said, "They'll [guidance counselors] discourage it and I know also a lot of parents are like, 'Well, do you want to do music or take more science electives?'...they don't understand it's more than just singing." Though courses were designated technically as open enrollment, ninth and tenth grade treble singers were assigned to Treble Choir. Several participants described their excitement to "move up" to what they perceived was a more advanced Mixed Choir when they entered eleventh grade.

Even without auditioned entry, several participants highlighted that becoming a choir family involved prioritizing stronger musicians, particularly around performances. For example, when participants felt they could not sing a phrase of music accurately after several attempts, many stated they would "self-select" (using this exact term) and not sing the phrase, allowing others to perform the music successfully. Once the choir performed the phrase, participants would join back in with the choir. Participants also discussed the concert standing order, where Mr. A would place leaders and strongest singers in the front few rows of the ensemble. Rather than viewing self-selection or standing order as negative, participants expressed Mr. A's choices benefitted the choir program as a whole.

During one focus group, student participants highlighted the challenges around addressing every singer's growth in a non-auditioned choir program. For example, sophomore Annabelle suggested that she would enjoy a choral program which featured non-select and select groups for students who were more serious about choir saying, "It would be nice if we had non-select plus a select chamber group, not acappella because that's all pop, but a classical choir." Though participants described increased musicianship and confidence, some participants appeared to question what might be possible if Mr. A structured the program differently.

The Pull-Out Lesson Program

Mr. A sought to establish an environment of respect for what each student brought to the program, and a belief that everyone held the capacity to improve. Student participants likened Mr. A's beliefs to the simple phrase "everyone can sing" (Oliver, 12th grade) and everyone should have a place to grow their skills. Additionally, student participants noted that they experienced personal growth and tied their growth to Mr. A's beliefs. Eleventh grader Michael explained, "He talks a lot about how you grow...it's not just like I'm here to be in choir, it's a personal experience [and] you're gaining something from it."

Student participants indicated that their growth occurred through two central aims of the pull-out lesson curriculum—learning solo repertoire and practicing sightreading. Madison mentioned, "Like for me, it's helping for college because I'm learning the music." Jessica said, "We do a lot of solo repertoire and I can only say like my confidence from when I first started here has gone up so much, but not only in music, like in everything." Student participants also recognized that their growth happened over time. Eleventh grader Zoe said, "Stick with it for four years, or even if you join a couple years in, you'll 100% see growth in the end."

Ninth- through eleventh-grade students described preparing for lessons by practicing solo repertoire and completing Smart Music assignments. They also exhibited pride in reporting their superior scores from solo performance and ensemble competition. Luna said, "So like we have the lessons to work on the songs and then from January to the second or third week in May we're all on solo repertoire and getting our songs ready to get the best possible grade [score] we can." When students became seniors, Mr. A tasked them with mentoring younger singers rather than developing their solo work in pull-out lessons. Mentoring younger singers intersected with officer roles, such as sightreading leader. Senior Myra, a sightreading officer, said, "Right now I'm only working on teaching kids sight reading, so I'm not really learning...I wish I had time on a solo piece or something that's maybe not even a piece but some college work."

Student Leadership Roles

Our field notes described student leaders giving announcements, taking attendance, facilitating ticket sales for an upcoming concert, and suggesting corrections to others in their voice part during rehearsal. Mr. A expressed the importance of mentoring young leaders, and met with the executive board weekly to discuss upcoming events and address needs of the program. Student participants described the usefulness of leaders, particularly musical leaders, who could organize a sectional and sing out when they encountered challenging music. Student participants also discussed how leadership opportunities encouraged confidence and personal growth. Tenth grader Maggie said, "It's taught me a lot about responsibility and being a good role model." Senior Eleni expressed a similar sentiment that having so many leaders "exudes confidence across the whole program; it kind of trickles down." Student participants who began in non-executive positions described their desire to ascend or their ascent to executive positions over years of choir involvement.

Mr. A described empowering students to make decisions, which the principal and arts administrator cited as beneficial and challenging. As beneficial, the principal noted the importance of Mr. A upholding boundaries while guiding students, saying:

> It's important that even though he is empowering them there still has to be somebody that oversees it, because we are talking about students and it is a school setting, and in order for them to learn somebody has to tell them when they're doing something right or wrong or could be better and giving them feedback. So, he does provide that; he does give that to them, but he is also teaching them to be able to teach others.

Similarly, Pat, the Fine Arts Coordinator commended Mr. A for building a program where students lead effectively. He relayed a story:

> We [Mr. A and I] were actually once speaking on a totally unrelated topic and his

> class started and without prompting all of a sudden, we just heard singing, and two or three of the seniors had just gotten up and started to do the warm-ups and started to just lead the class until we were ready. There were no behavioral issues or things like that. Now from an administrative point of view I don't just see five minutes of a kid that's leading a class; I see five minutes of a kid leading a class but I know that took months to build up; that took a routine and a structure that had to be established, not only over the course of a couple of months, but a couple of years.

With regard to challenges, the principal noted that Mr. A had difficulty with what he termed "blurred lines" around the extracurricular acappella program and social events located off of school grounds. He mentioned that while Mr. A was busy with the varied expectations within the choral program, his students sometimes ran extracurricular performances and social events without him and he received feedback about Mr. A's lack of response to some student decisions and activities. Student participants appreciated the opportunity to gain leadership experience, yet a few of the oldest students also expressed challenges with having more responsibility than they wished, such as Myra, who said, "As a choir, I think he definitely tries to run on students and rely on them."

Social Events

Mr. A and choir participants facilitated social activities and events meant to encourage bonding within the curricular choirs. Some of these were lighthearted social activities like going to a pumpkin patch or end-of-the-year semi-formal dinner at a local hotel, while other events developed into traditions that solidified the choral program and how the singers felt bonded to one another.

One particular social event that almost every interviewee mentioned was a "candle night," held in the choral room on a late-winter weekend evening with Mixed Choir members. Student participants filled their responses about the night with descriptors such as "really special" and "a great experience" (Nessa, Angelique, Maria). The principal commented on how close the event made students feel, and how Mr. A believed in providing a space where students could come together and develop trust in one another. Though student participants did not offer the exact program of what occurred, they noted the event included lit candles, stories, awards, and a code of silence. They described "candle night" as a space to share personal aspects of themselves they might not ordinarily discuss in school, such as sharing about their home life. The awards focused on senior appreciation and student participants shared that they had the opportunity to tell seniors how much they meant to them. Mr. A acknowledged his role as a mandatory reporter in a few cases, but also explained that "candle night" helped students connect in different ways and brought the choir closer together.

Student participants who had not experienced "candle night" described feeling antic-

ipation for their turn when they became members of Mixed Choir and talked about the legend it held in the reputation of the choirs (Caryn, 10th grade). Events like "candle night" and the overall closeness the students felt in the program prompted several participants to discuss perceptions of "the choir as a cult" from their peers who did not participate in the choral program. They likened the cult metaphor to the closeness of the group; a few described that the closeness of choir students might be a detractor to others perceiving the choral program as open for all to join.

The Student-Run Acappella Program

Student participants explained that the acappella program had similar benefits to the curricular program, including student empowerment, vocal and musical development, and social elements. Though most student participants held membership in an acappella group, a few participants described auditioning multiple times to gain entry, and others had multiple auditions without success. A conversation with twelfth grader Amara shed light on the audition process:

> Amara: I auditioned for the mixed groups every chance I could and I never got in. I mean it's a growing experience because my friends and I would talk after each audition and I was like [telling myself], "You got better from that and you got better from last time." So even though I didn't get in it was still a growing experience.
>
> Elizabeth: So, do you think at some point you would [audition again]? Maybe now?
>
> Amara: Well, I definitely feel like at the end of that previous January audition I was like it's my last audition; if they only let me in they'll only have to deal with me for four months. But it was never like "Oh I'm going to get in," like "I know it."
>
> Elizabeth: Do you get feedback about why [you don't get in]?
>
> Amara: I don't really ask why because they kind of scare me, even though they're my friends…it's like awkward, like, "Hey why didn't you guys let me in?"
>
> Elizabeth: Yeah, but that's not part of the process, I guess, is what I'm asking. Is it?
>
> Amara: Yes.
>
> Elizabeth: Meaning if it is not this time, kind of feedback, and then they don't follow up, then there is no feedback?
>
> Amara: Yeah, there is no feedback, yeah.

Some student participants stated they continued to re-apply with the hope they would be chosen and were told by student leaders to keep trying.

Acappella students were not required to become part of the choral program, but once individuals joined acappella groups, student participants described encouragement from peers to join curricular choirs. Tenth grade Caryn said, "I got into the group, and they basically said, like, you've got to join choir, like it's just something you do." At the time of study, all acappella leaders sang in curricular choirs as did most student participants.

In addition to holding auditions, openly competitive behavior between acappella groups did not align with Mr. A's aim to disrupt "the choral class system." For example, student participants described competition between groups. Eleventh grade Luna said, "There is definitely competition in between the groups and I don't even know if it has anything to do with it, but I just feel judged if I say something or I get really nervous." Student participants also described singers in acappella as those who take music seriously and plan a future in music. Tenth grade Catherine said, "Most of these people are looking to major in music or music education...these kids are dedicated; they go to each other's houses to rehearse; Mr. A is not involved...our acappella groups are completely on their own."

Discussion

Mr. A began his tenure at Eisenhower High School with an aim to open possibilities for more students to sing. In his 20 years at the high school, he and his students removed auditions to curricular choral participation and instituted a thriving acappella program. In particular, we noted that Mr. A built a sense of positive social identity across the high school choral program, reflecting extant research on youth choral programs' interpersonal benefits (Bartolome, 2013; Dakon & Major, 2017; Parker, 2014). Data revealed the positive social bonds that student participants formed with others, a perceived openness within the non-auditioned curricular program, and unique opportunities for leadership. Our data also uncovered considerable district funding to provide pull-out lessons for every student and issues such as self-selection, concert standing order, and student leadership roles. We observed that student participants created structures within the acappella program that continued to fuel competition and "choral class systems." In this discussion, we note the benefits and tensions we discovered and offer further considerations for music teachers and teacher educators as they strive to address choral class systems in their choral programs.

Mr. A focused on individuals within his program. He spent the majority of his time on sight-singing instruction and pull-out lessons, in contrast to extant research which asserts a teacher's focus on the group (Parker, 2016). School district resources made possible Mr. A's individual focus as part of his full-time position and simultaneously presented several challenges to enacting Mr. A's aim to break down choral class systems. For example, financial resources gave Mr. A the agency to offer non-auditioned ensembles and individualize student growth, yet, the pull-out lesson program culminated in a statewide adjudication

process, which ranked student performances. Though Mr. A discussed the critical importance of narrative feedback from judges, which supported individual growth, he also cited continued superior ratings year after year, which reinforced and emphasized competition between students.

Even with Mr. A's focus on individual growth, not all students described feeling supported. More-experienced students in the program described limits to their vocal progress because of the focus on supporting less-experienced students in the pull-out lesson program. More-experienced students knew the value of their supportive roles, but they would have felt more challenged if they had the opportunity to enroll in a smaller ensemble with other advanced singers. Thus, even without the small group lesson structure, one implication of our study for music teachers would be to locate varied ways to present musical challenges for all students even if they hold dual roles supporting other singers.

While Mr. A's development of leadership positions strengthened student voice, student involvement, feelings of agency, and hierarchical relationships visible in the structure of executive and non-executive positions challenged his aim to include all. Executive officers enjoyed more facetime with Mr. A and more decision-making power within the choir. Non-executive officers strove to become executive officers and take on more leadership in the program. We also observed that the presence of so many leaders appeared to diffuse Mr. A's leadership and sense of direction with the curricular choirs. Numerous non-musical leadership positions may have shifted participants' focus away from their musical growth to social events that had little to do with the music-making itself. As a result of student participants feeling less musical direction in their curricular program, they created hierarchies of their own, similar to Abril (2013), and built identities around leadership positions and social events. Sometimes participants overtly recognized elements of the choral class system, such as acknowledging how they held auditions within the acappella program; other times, participants did not recognize, but described choral class systems. For example, participants spoke about how they would self-select not to sing passages of music, or how Mr. A placed certain singers in the front row during performances to achieve the best overall choral sound. These findings offer insights that music educators might heed, especially how students interpret a teacher's decisions, such as standing order, and solicit student feedback about the competition they may feel with one another in their ensembles. Another implication of this study is that music educators might construct leadership positions with students that provide direction and reflect shared musical values of the choral program.

After a few interviews, we observed that several student participants answered questions in a script-like way, which made us wonder how participants' choral identity may have been built from their teacher's narrative more than their own. Our findings reflect Mills (2010), who found that when participants explained their choral experiences, they appeared to repeat words they may have heard from their conductor. Findings also resonate with Hess' (2012) conceptions of the "docile chorister" who learned to govern themselves according to the expectations of those more powerful. The rich complexities of what Mr. A sought to achieve, that of developing each student's voice alongside power imbalances between

teacher and student, certainly became evident in this study. Student participants described a feeling of empowerment within their leadership roles but did not question their standing order during concerts or how afterschool activities relied on audition-only entry within a larger non-auditioned structure.

We noted that students in Mr. A's program described meaningful experiences, but program offerings did not address their desires to "move up" to more advanced ensembles (Abril, 2013; Dakon & Major, 2017; Major & Dakon, 2016). Several Treble Choir participants, a group enrolling ninth and tenth graders, stated their excitement to ascend to Mixed Choir or to gain entry into an acappella group. While Mr. A explained the choral voicing in a pragmatic way of not having enough lower voices to fill two choirs, his choice to include only upper-class treble singers in the mixed ensemble reflects common practices to situate SATB choirs at the top of the choral hierarchy (O'Toole, 1998, 2005). Simultaneously, students appeared to experience greater group identity in the auditioned, acappella groups reflecting Parker's (2014) positive social identity emphasis on "being chosen." This led us to wonder if group identity necessitated non-auditioned ensembles or ensembles at all levels with unique and distinct identities (Dakon & Major, 2017), even if that might include auditioned elements.

Beyond group identity, our data analysis highlighted another issue – striving to abolish choral class systems may not be an answer to combat out-group perceptions of choral programs. Researchers proposed that secondary school music can be seen as only for the talented (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010), and that even when teachers valued effort, students believed effort was not enough (Covington, 1984). In the case of Eisenhower High School, Mr. A took painstaking measures to rid his program of these perceptions. He strove to communicate that every student had a place in the program and that all students could improve musically from wherever they started. But researchers argue that making one's choir open to every student may have little to do with perceptions of singing ability (Demorest et al., 2017; Sichivista, 2004). Thus even without enrollment barriers, non-musical leadership positions, and the promise of self-growth, Mr. A's program drew less than 10% of the high school population. If a non-auditioned curricular program is meant to boost enrollment and make choir more accessible, our findings indicate that auditions may have little role in determining the attractiveness of a program. We therefore wonder what might happen if Mr. A flipped the program to build a curricular non-auditioned acappella model. Acappella programs, based on informal music practices, may represent one place where Mr. A, with his students, could facilitate deeper understandings of music-making as a space to connect, create, perform, and respond (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). Furthermore, acappella programs offered as curricular ensembles might build student agency as musical learners, value multiple creativities, and encourage differentiated instruction, further challenging traditional choral models.

As with other single case studies, we note limitations in generalizing one teacher's program to all teachers who might be looking to implement new approaches as a means to

help students develop identity, attract more students to participate in the program, or give students more agency over their learning outcomes. We acknowledge the considerable financial resources used to support each student's musicianship and racial homogeneity of the school, which limit the transferability of this case study to other contexts. Even with these limitations, we hope the case of Eisenhower High School may stimulate a number of questions and considerations. First, even though the literature suggests that a collaborative approach can diffuse power and remove hierarchies (Bres & Raufflet, 2013; Raelin, 2016), our data indicated that perhaps Mr. A put too much responsibility on his singers and needed to take different steps to empower their voice. Second, moving away from choral class systems brings power relationships to the surface and traditions that fight to be preserved (O'Toole, 1994). Students within Mr. A's program looked for musical advancement in the curricular choirs, and when they could not find advancement, they shaped the acappella program to fit their needs. Constant questioning and heightened awareness of reproducing hierarchies in choral music remain critical to transforming traditional choral spaces. Finally, while teachers would do well to focus on individual progress in choral programs, such as Mr. A, they must also consider the progress of the group to build strong social identity rooted in music-making interactions.

In conclusion, in studying Eisenhower High School, we reflected on the inevitability of choral class systems. In the United States, choral music publishers often prioritize SATB voicing in their catalogs and national associations emphasize auditioned choirs in conference offerings. Even with these established norms, Mr. A worked to disrupt choral class systems and influence his students to think differently about choral music and its possibilities. We wondered, if Mr. A and his students sought examples outside of their program to support their aims, what might they have found? These complexities signaled to us that abolishing a choral class system is not possible as long as prominent ensembles and national organizations continue to embrace this model.

We acknowledge that programs embracing choral class systems may also foster tensions within music classrooms. Music teachers must study and listen critically to student perspectives to address issues of power and facilitate places where all feel welcome to connect, create, perform, and respond. We recommend further study looking at choral teachers that mediate students' motivations to "move up" to the next ensemble with choral offerings that include and resonantly address students' needs. We also encourage further exploration into the overall role that choral class systems play in defining choral spaces and institutions.

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