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Dissertation

THE TEACHING OF CHORAL SIGHT SINGING: ANALYZING AND UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCED CHORAL DIRECTORS' PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of secondary choral music sight singing or sight reading. A focus group of eight highly successful college, high school and middle school choral music educators addressed seven questions. The investigation gathered qualitative data that covered the purposes of teaching sight singing, the positive or negative attributes of movable Do, fixed Do and numbers, and a review of sight-singing curricula. Further, the investigation gathered data on the effect, if any, of an instrumental student's sight-singing ability and the use and effectiveness of Curwen or Kodály hand signs and sight-singing assessment for students. Additional data was gathered concerning how secondary music educators were evaluated. Results suggested that the focus group's purpose in teaching sight singing was to produce

independent, self-reliant musicians. Individual sight-singing assessment was deemed important and should focus on how singers progressed. Music composed specifically for sight-singing contests or festivals should contain challenging notes and rhythms, dynamic changes, phrase markings and at least one tempo or meter change. Further, music teacher evaluations were discussed, coded and analyzed. Twenty-nine recommendations are offered that are designed to make sight singing more efficient and more effective in today's choral music classrooms. While there are some very good sight-singing materials in print, music publishers who contemplate printing new instructional material should offer a holistic approach to musicianship. Adjudicators for choral sight-singing festivals and contests should be trained. Choirs entering a sight-singing performance should be adjudicated on musical elements such as meter changes, correct tempi, phrasing, tone, articulation and dynamics, not merely on performing the correct notes and rhythms. Many more recommendations were offered to secondary and college choir teachers, supervisors, contest chairmen, adjudicators, composers, music publishers and students. The investigation was not intended to determine a recommended method for sight-singing instruction nor assessment. The purpose of this study was to understand and analyze experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs concerning sight singing on secondary campuses.

Table of Contents

Chapter I

Introduction

Many people enjoy singing as a pastime for personal pleasure and for others, formal singing as an art form may take years of study to master. According to Grunwald (2009), an estimated 32.5 million adults and 10.1 million children in the United States participate in some form of ensemble singing on a regular basis. As the nation has extended this interest in singing into public education, music educators have sought the most effective means for educating young singers in the art of singing.

MENC, the Music Educators National Conference (now known as The National Association for Music Education [NAfME]) published nine specific musical skills that each state should adopt in their standard curricula (MENC, 1994). These guidelines, known as the K–12 National Music Standards, recommended each state to teach students to:

1. Sing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
2. Perform on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music;
3. Improvise melodies, variations, and accompaniments;
4. Compose and arrange music within specified guidelines;
5. Read and notate music;
6. Listen to, analyze, and describe music;

7. Evaluate music and music performances;
8. Understand relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts; and
9. Understand music in relation to history and culture (MENC 1994).

In 2014, the NAfME replaced the 1994 standards with what are now called the National Core Music Standards (NAfME, 2014). These new standards of music education reflect a more technology-enhanced learning environment and develop an arts-advocacy sense of awareness. Further, the new standards focus attention upon musical literacy - that is, the ability for a student to convey music as well as to understand artistic concepts and ideas conveyed by others. The new standards also place a new focus on college and career readiness and place a greater emphasis upon student assessment in the classroom (Shuler, Norgaard & Blakeslee, 2014).

The new standards focus upon three artistic processes: creating, performing and responding (NAfME, 2014). According to the new standards, the notion of performing includes "realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation" (NAfME, 2014). Further, the new standards place an emphasis upon the development and refining of artistic techniques for presentation which include that skill of singing at sight (NAfME, 2014). The present study considered the fifth element

of the 1994 MENC standards and focused on the Common Anchor #5 - the process of performing music in the 2014 standards.

Given the importance of sight singing in choral music education, it was surprising that, according to Demorest (2004, 1998), no single method of teaching sight singing was overwhelmingly preferred by choral directors (Demorest 2004, 1998; Kuehne 2003; May 1993).

Demorest (2004) found that 70% of choral directors who responded to his survey included sight-singing instruction as a regular part of their curriculum. Casarow (2002) reviewed a body of literature on the subject of sight-singing instruction and found that the teaching and learning of sight singing was important to secondary choral directors across the United States. For example, in 1992, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) mandated choral sight singing in secondary schools (TEA, 1992). Textbooks were adopted and curricula were written to promote a climate of sight singing in the state. Secondary choral directors were formally expected to teach sight singing in Texas public schools. This expectation to teach singing at sight in the secondary level generated discussions among choral directors concerning the nature of sight singing itself, its purpose, methodologies, materials, perceived benefits, how students who have played a musical instrument may be more adept at sight singing, student assessment, and administrative expectations.

For example, for what purpose was sight singing taught? Were

there goals or rubrics that enabled a teacher to achieve levels of success? Also, what contributions could successful choral directors offer that would assist in explaining how different reading systems can produce successful student outcomes? Further, what were the inherent intrinsic qualities in each of the melody reading systems - fixed Do, movable Do, and Numbers? How were they different? How were they the same? How were they viewed and what were the perceived contributions they each made in choral music classrooms?

Along these lines, was it possible for two or more methods of instruction to exist simultaneously where they satisfy the sight-singing component of teaching and learning and remain mutually effective? Were there ancillary materials published that were viewed as more advantageous to student learning than others? What were the relative attributes of each of these instructional materials?

Concerning students' backgrounds in music, was there a benefit that increases a student's ability to learn to sing at sight if he or she has previous instrumental experience. In other words: do instrumentalists make better sight singers (Parker, 2007; Potts, 2009)? Further, there was no small disagreement whether singers who sight read using Curwen hand signs were able to read music at sight with greater accuracy than those who do not use hand signs (Durocher, 2006;

McClung, 2008, 2001). What professional experiences have shaped this mindset?

Additionally, how does one assess a student who had been taught how to sing at sight? Why have some choral music educators believed that group assessment would more accurately ascertain a student's skill level than with individual assessment? Finally, what were the expectations and musical values concerning sight singing (Battersby 1994)? How did directors prioritize the teaching and learning of sight singing? How have these priorities been formed? What was a director's level of expectation regarding sight singing? What contributions and insights could experienced choral directors offer concerning these issues?

To address these kinds of questions and issues, and to answer Kuehne's (2003), Smith's (1998), and Demorest's (1998) calls for further research concerning sight singing, this study explored choral director's practices, perceptions and beliefs about the teaching and learning of sight singing.

Purpose of the study.

The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight

singing. Using the narrative research method that included qualitative focus group interviews (Creswell, 2013) data were gathered and analyzed in order to address the following research questions:

1. A. What are the purposes in teaching sight singing?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
2. A. What are the positive or negative attributes of movable Do, fixed Do and numbers?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
3. A. What are the relative attributes of these selected sight singing materials?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
4. A. Is there a discernible advantage in singing at sight when a student is proficient in playing a musical instrument?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
5. A. Are there discernible advantages in sight-singing proficiency when a singer actively uses Curwen hand signs?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
6. A. How important is it to assess students' sight singing abilities?
   B. Describe effective procedures in sight-singing assessment.

7. A. How much weight do Fine Arts administrators and/or principals place in your students' sight singing abilities?

   B. Is there a documented or implied expectation that outlines this expectation?

Rationale for the study.

The Music Educators National Conference (MENC) called sight singing, a "specialized component of music literacy whereby singers were given the paper music and expected to perform the correct notes and rhythms with relative accuracy in the first reading (McClung, 2008; MENC, 1994). The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing. It was generally acknowledged that, although some rote learning activities should be incorporated in the choral rehearsal, students should become fluent sight singers (Hayward & Gromko, 2009). Experienced choral directors often had a rich background and knowledge of the teaching and learning of sight singing.

This study focused on the extensive knowledge possessed by experienced secondary and collegiate choral music educators. After all, the wisdom and depth of professional knowledge of choral directors, as well as other music educators, should be recognized, understood, and even honored. There were numerous studies concerning effective sight-

singing methods (Folkerts, 1998; Goss, 2010; Kuehne, 2003; May, 1993; McClung, 2008; Munn, 1990; Norris, 2004; Smith, 1998; Snider, 2007; White, 2009). Yet, apparently there was little current data on experienced choral director's beliefs and practices concerning sight-singing methods and teaching materials. Demorest (1998) listed the Oxford Series as popular but only a limited group of sight-singing materials were offered to respondents for evaluation. Hylton (1983) conducted a survey of choral education research but his dates of research were limited to 1972 – 1981. May (1993) investigated instructional materials that have changed over the years. Materials that were evaluated in May are now outdated and do not reflect current practices or methodologies of sight-singing instruction.

May's research had some methodological limitations. Each respondent was given equal weight among all respondents. A teacher, for example, with one year experience was weighted the same as a teacher with twenty or more years experience. Responses from teachers with more experience should be given a greater weight than teachers with little or no experience. Further, May's (1993) instrument was mailed to 927 teachers [N=927]; however, only 192, just over 20%, had qualified responses. This low response rate limits the ability to generalize to a larger population. Further, this data will respond to Council's (2000) call for a

> qualitative study to examine the overall choral music teaching methods of choral directors whose choirs have experienced success at music festivals. The findings could be presented in an effort to help prospective choral music educators as they train for a career in choral music teaching. (p. 59)

Finally, Demorest suggested "more studies … could be done using a variety of qualitative research methods to record in detail what good sightsinging teachers do and believe, the school and communities in which they flourish and how their students respond" (Demorest, 1998, p. 11).

Methodology

Based on the purpose of this study and the stated research questions, a series of questions were developed and a pilot study was undertaken in order to refine and improve discussion questions. For this pilot study, a focus group, consisting of two highly qualified choral music educators, was tasked with reviewing the discussion questions for appropriate wording, meaning and the degree to which the questions can successfully direct conversations that could provide sufficient and appropriate content for the study. The focus group was also asked to

determine the extent of the alignment between the discussion questions and the research questions in this study. After the pilot study was completed, study participants (N=8) consisted of experienced choral directors. The eight study participants were interviewed together in a manner that would evoke discussion, interaction and content for analysis.

Focus group interviews were an effective way to gather qualitative data. Criteria for Clark (1998) were set for the focus group, and the discussion was recorded, transcribed and analyzed by topic and pre-coded interview questions. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the interviewees would respond to questions that reveal how they "experience the world" (p. 2), thus, for this study, how they experience the nature of teaching singing at sight.

It was my intent to take full advantage of the extensive backgrounds and rich experience of each of these choral music professionals. Several criteria were established that narrowed the qualification of participants exclusively to those who had a long record of achievement and success in sight-singing instruction documented by sight-singing contest scores and choral achievement awards. A purposeful sample of one university choral music professor, three high school choral directors, three junior high choral directors and one teacher who taught in a high school and middle school daily were

selected for this study. Numerous stories, backgrounds and narratives were told during the interviews. Data were categorized according to the research questions and coded into sub-categories based upon recurring patterns that accurately characterize the data (Merriam 2009).

Delimitations.

This study investigated the perceived nature of the teaching and learning of sight singing in secondary public schools from a purposeful sample of experienced choral professionals. The study also discussed experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing. The following delimitations assisted the researcher to purposefully narrow the topics of discussion so questions could be treated clearly and equitably. These delimitations placed appropriate parameters on the discussion questions, which allowed for a more focused discussion and subsequent evaluation.

1. The study convened eight experienced choral music professionals.
2. The research inquiry was limited the sight-singing methods to fixed Do, movable Do and numbers. Due to its relative archaic nature and usage mostly in

congregational singing, shaped note singing was not discussed.

3. Inquiry was made of published sight-singing instructional materials; however, no consensus was offered that ascertained the most effective sight-singing materials. An attempt to find the most effective sight-singing books and materials available was beyond the scope of this study.
4. Sight singing approaches of teachers in K–5 music programs were not discussed.
5. Private and home schools, their teaching methods, materials and teacher perceptions were not covered in the discussion questions.
6. The discussion was not intended to determine a recommended method for sight-singing instruction nor assessment. The purpose of this study was to understand and analyze experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs concerning sight singing on secondary campuses.

Importance of the study.

A thorough analysis of research literature found no contemporary framework existed that explored the perceptions and beliefs attributed to

the teaching and learning of sight singing in secondary choral music classrooms from highly successful teachers. Responding to Demorest's (1998) suggestion for future research, this study's qualitative descriptions should reflect a more complete picture of successful secondary choral music programs. Further, Demorest's (1998) call for future research supported this study in that "more studies should be done using a variety of qualitative research methods to record in detail what good sight-singing teachers do and believe" (p. 11).

The common use of hand signs through the history of music education is multifaceted. Originally, teachers would guide the notes of a melody using hand signs as students were learning music notation skills. Using a kinesthetic and visual gesture, teachers and students would benefit from the use of hand signs in a classroom setting. Some teachers; however, mandate that singers use them as an aid in sight singing. Further research is needed to address the efficacy of hand signs in the classroom used as an aid in singing at sight. McClung (2008) suggested further research should be conducted concerning the use of Curwen hand signs and whether teachers should require students to sing at sight using hand signs, or whether teachers believed students could achieve success in sight singing without the use of hand signs.

Goss (2010) suggested further research concerning whether student assessment was best achieved using group or individual

assessment. Finally, Demorest (1998) also suggested that middle school choral directors should be included in future sight-singing studies. This researcher followed Demorest's suggestion by including input from experienced middle school choral directors and will thus expand the body of knowledge of sight-singing pedagogy by offering insight, perspective, perceptions and beliefs by experienced and successful choral directors.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing. To this end, this chapter presents an analysis and discussion of research studies, dissertations, theses, and refereed journal articles relevant to the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing.

The first section discussed the history of sight singing, its origins, sources and values. The second section presented research about sight singing in general. Studies that offer general outcomes based upon statistical data were presented. Section three of this review of literature was specifically oriented toward sight-singing assessment in music education. Overall, this section reviews studies on how students were measured, graded and assessed as to their sight-singing accuracy. Finally, the forth section deals specifically with sight singing in choral music education which may further set a background for this research.

Sight singing history in the United States.

The written history of sight singing in the United States can trace its ancestry back to the Middle Ages when Guido of Arezzo invented a method of singing in which singers attached a name to each of the notes

of a musical scale (Hughes & Gerson, 2014). His method went through many modifications and adaptations (Jander 2014). According to Bernarr (2014), Pierre Galin (1786–1822), Aimé and Nanine Paris (1798–1866, 1800–1868 respectively) and Nanine's husband Emile Chevé (1804–1864) made some improvements on Rousseau's method. Called the *Galin-Paris-Chevé* method, each tone was given a numeric value. The Chevé method was published in 1844 and became popular in Switzerland, the Netherlands and in Russia.

Justine Ward (1879–1975) devised a method of sight singing that improved upon Chevé. Her method enhanced the aural training of students who recognized and accurately reproduced musical pitches without prior aural stimulation. The Ward method successfully instructed nuns in catholic churches to give instruction in the Ward method. Justine Ward's sight-singing system was recognized and extensively used in the Roman Catholic Church schools from the 1920s up until the 1950s. Its popularity and use was recognized in numerous European countries as well (Bunbury, 2001).

In 1839, Sarah Ann Glover (1786–1867), a music teacher in Norwich, England, developed and published a small instructional book designed to teach singing in churches. Part of the instructions included a series of hand gestures that acquainted the singers with each note of the diatonic scale. As the students read the notes of the given key

according to their scale degree they would also adjust their hands according to the signs allowing the human ear to develop a relative sense of pitch based upon the tonic note and the note given on the page (Bennett, 1984). In 1841 John Curwen read about Glover's system and recognized the strength of Glover's innovations. Curwen made further improvement to the Glover system and published his *Lessons on Singing* in 1842. Now called the *Tonic Sol-Fa* method, Glover's system was widely used in England (Rainbow & McGuire, 2001).

Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) made further enhancements and utilized much of Glover's work in his Kodály singing method. Variations of the Kodály method have been used and were currently being used in today's classrooms. In 1913, Kodály collected a vast number of folk songs indigenous to his Hungarian heritage in a volume titled *A Project for a New Universal Collection of Folksongs* (Ősze, n.d.).

In his role as an educator, Kodály concerned himself with a sense of purpose for music education and offered reasons why music in education was important. He felt that music belonged to every child. He also argued that music must be experienced, not in the sense of merely listening but by including student participation as well. Kodály also proposed the notion that the human voice was a natural instrument and should be fostered and nurtured in all children. He also wanted children

to experience music on a daily basis and taught by teachers who were trained in music. These key components were the impetus for Kodály's approach to music education.

According to Fassone (n.d.), Carl Orff (1895–1982) began his musical training early in life and enjoyed improvising melodies as a child. Orff had similar beliefs similar to Kodály concerning how music should be incorporated in the lives of children. Orff emphasized that music was for children of all ages and abilities. A child, Orff felt, whether talented or untalented in music, should still receive training in music. Orff believed that meaningful experiences in music were gained through participation, not merely listening to music albeit music from the great composers (Fassone). Carl Orff felt that children's music education should be a collective experience of play, speech, song, improvisation, kinetic movement and the playing of instruments. Combining these elements Orff published an integrated children's manual of music education in five volumes of *Musik für Kinder* from 1950 to 1954 (Fassone), which developed into what we now know as Orff-Schulwerk (Shamrock, 1997). Orff understood that a dynamic relationship could have a beneficial element when young people play together in harmony and in a collective, well-rehearsed performance-type experience (Stone, 1971).

Sight singing research.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate a correlation, real or perceived, to the notion that singers who use Curwen hand-signs will perform more notes correctly while singing a piece of music for the first time than singers who do not use them. These studies have sparked a series of research studies that have questioned the efficacy of the use of Curwen hand signs as an aid in sight singing. Was there empirical evidence that suggested singers who used hand signs achieved a greater number of correct notes than students who did not use them?

Autry (1975) studied the effectiveness of sight singing with and without the use of Curwen hand signs. Two groups of fifth graders, a control group and a treatment group were given a pre-test, treatment and post-test. Other than the use of hand signs, every effort was made to keep the instruction parallel between the groups. Data indicated that there did not appear to be a consistent pattern of correlation attributed to either the control group or treatment group that signified any improvement or singing advantage when using Curwen hand signs (Autry, 1975). While hand signs have been quite popular, their efficacy in pitch and rhythmic accuracy while singing at sight has yet to be established empirically.

Hales (1961) sought to identify sight-singing practices and methods in Utah, Colorado, Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Research

inquiries included questions concerning existing types, sizes and numbers of high school choruses, time allotted for sight singing, materials used, experience of the directors, and methods to evaluate effectiveness of sight-singing instruction. Of the 727 high schools in these states, each state was assigned a proportion of 62%. In total, 485 schools were selected to participate by school size of 100 students or more. Of the 485 questionnaires mailed to the school directors, 242 were returned [N=242].

Hales noted that 57 schools offered a mixed chorus during regular school hours while in 24 other schools a treble chorus was the only choir program available indicating 81 choir programs were offered in 242 schools (33%). In the schools with 500 or more students (n=104), 75% used a music reading system in mixed choirs was implemented as a class activity. In schools with an enrollment of under 500 students (n=21), 80% of the schools used a music reading system as a class activity. Concerning the sight singing methods directors used in Hales, respondents reported 1. scanning a song before it is sung, 2. concentration on chord structure, 3. clapping rhythms, 4. use hands to indicate high and low pitch (reported by one director), 5. drill in half steps, 6. sing scales and intervals to all sorts of rhythms, 7. students create songs and write them on the chalkboard, 8. give written dictation.

Movable Do came into vogue after Hales and has been widely

accepted (Casarow, 2002; McClung, 2008) whereby students were given the tonic pitch and the tonic triad in the assigned key. This method allowed students to retain the intervallic connectivity that existed between all intervals of the diatonic scale. For example, the interval of a perfect forth, when played on the piano or other instrument, essentially sounds similar and was identifiable in all keys. In most common-practice music, students who used movable Do could be relatively competent in all keys regardless of how complex the key may be (figure 1).

Figure 1

Movable Do in the key of C

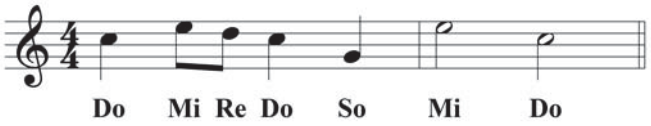
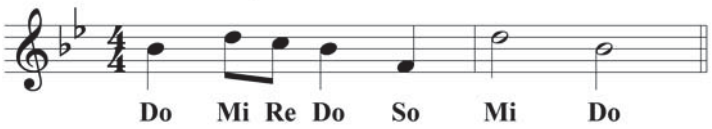


Figure 2 displays the same music in a different key. All the scale relationships remain the same when using movable Do (figure 2).

Figure 2

Moveable Do in the key of Bb

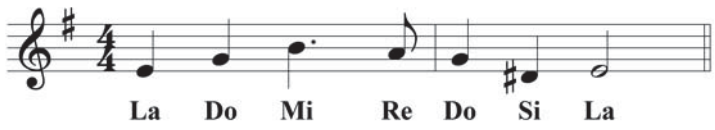


Also, in a minor key, students could easily use the sixth scale degree as the relative minor where a tonic chord in a minor key was performed La Do Mi instead of moving the tonic pitch Do to the note A in

the key of C. The sixth scale degree becomes the tonic pitch or the home key and the solfège names remain the same (figure 3). This was often called movable Do with a minor La.

Figure 3

Key of E minor (La minor in the relative major key of G)



Demorest (2004), Henry (1999), Johnson (1987), McClung (2008), Pembrook & Riggens (1990), Taggart & Taggart (1994) collected and evaluated the sight-singing systems and their accompanying literature used in the United States since the early twentieth century (Casarow, 2002). Each concluded that the most prevalent method to teach sight singing was solfège using movable Do followed by the numbers method.

Two research studies were conducted that involved directors' opinions on sight singing. These studies allowed researchers to argue for or against a particular method, treatment or approach to sight singing. White (2009) and Von Kampen (2003) investigated directors' opinions concerning sight-singing methodologies. White questioned forty-four [N=44] teachers in the mid-United States and asserted several factors contributed to student success in sight singing including (a) instrumental experience, (b) natural ability, and (c) a developed tonal concept. White also listed directors' thoughts as to why students were

unsuccessful at sight singing. These were (a) lack of confidence, (b) lack of sight-singing experience, and (c) lack of interest in sight singing. Concerning music teacher opinion, White concluded that most teachers (n=30, 68.18%) "agree[d] with the inclusion of a sight-singing component of the in the [sic] district/all-state choir audition" (p. 73) as it contributed to the motivation of student leaning. White's results also suggested that a majority (61.36%) of the respondents employed the use of Curwen hand signs. White further asserted that further research should be conducted with secondary choral directors to investigate reasons and motivations behind their methodologies (White 2009).

Von Kampen (2003) queried 278 Nebraska high school choral directors concerning their opinions on methodologies. Research questions revolved around which particular sight-singing system was being used in the classroom and attitudinal descriptions of directors' opinions concerning sight singing in general. Over half of the respondents reported they did not use any method for teaching sight singing. Those who responded positively (38%) indicated they used octavos, hymn books, or songbooks. The second area of investigation was directors' positive or negative responses to the concept of sight singing in general. The results suggested that choral directors in Nebraska have neither a positive or negative attitude toward teaching sight singing. Von Kampen believed this may be due to the fact that

directors have little or no motivation to include teaching sight singing as there was no statewide requirement to include sight singing in secondary choral music education. There has been no research to date that focuses on directors' beliefs and perceptions concerning how these directors acquired these beliefs and perceptions.

Scott (1996) sought to develop a holistic, criterion-referenced sight-singing test based on the voluntary national standards for music education. Using a stratified, random sample of 120 students from eight Illinois high schools, Scott incorporated musical elements of melody, rhythm, harmony and tonality to create a test that was used to accurately measure the sight singing abilities in students. Scott claimed the test was valid as test results scored, among other things, a significant difference in first year, versus forth-year students who were more adept at sight singing.

Inzenga (1999) studied the sight-singing habits of two volunteer cooperative teams of 45 ninth grade females. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected over a six-month period to investigate how cooperative teams of students learned to read music. Half of the girls were novice sight singers and the other half were students who were identified as having previous musical training. Students who possessed greater sight-singing skills offered assistance to those who had less musical training. The Iowa Tests of Music Literacy – LEVEL 1 were given

in a pre-test and post-test after six months of sight-singing training using cooperative learning. Results showed a clear improvement in sight-singing abilities in the novice students over the six-month period. At the beginning of the year the girls with no musical training were not able to read music. After the six month testing period was complete, the group, as a while was getting to the point of transferring the skills from the sight-singing work-sheets to the music they were preparing for an upcoming performance (Inzenga, 1999).

Inzenga (1999) concluded cooperative learning was an effective alternative for teaching chorus students to read music. It should be noted, however, that there lies a question of validity in this six-month study concerning maturation. It was likely that the novice students who were at the beginning of the process of learning sight singing would generally become more adept in sight-singing accuracy whether or not they benefited from other choir members in the same six-month period. Inzenga's research would have been aided had a control group been implemented.

Scripp (1995) investigated the acquisition of sight-singing abilities of incoming college-age students. More to the point, he addressed the question of methodologies as to how students acquired their music reading skills. He found that most students entering a college music program or conservatory were unable to sing music at first sight without

an instrument to detect errors in simple melodies. They were also unable to articulate much about their own sight-singing processes, despite years of training. Scripp's longitudinal study that indicated changes in music reading skills suggested new levels in cognitive development when indicated by the ability to sing music at sight without an instrument, accompanied by a reflective understanding of the music reading processes as a problem-solving skill.

Farenga (2013) investigated high school choral sight-singing practices in Arizona. Choral music classrooms were not required to teach sight singing, however in 2008, the Arizona Choral Educators association voted overwhelmingly to include a sight-singing component to their state-wide adjudication process at the state American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) fall festival. Unfortunately, according to Farenga, this move did not equate to a major change in classrooms as a majority of directors do not elect to participate in the state's ACDA festival process. Jones (1979) studied six Michigan high school choir classes consisting of 166 students and found that of the high school singers who participated in this study, a majority of students had little difficulty in aurally differentiating three-note, four-note, and five-note tonal patterns but experienced far greater difficulty in singing those same patterns.

Other factors Jones (1979) investigated included gender, age, voice

parts and previous musical experience. He/she found that although gender did not play a significant role in sight singing ability, the other factors were important to students' sight singing successes. Jones also noted that descending tonal patterns were easier to sing than ascending patterns, and that the beginning note, leap and direction of the first interval were highly influential in determining the level of difficulty in a sight-singing exercise.

Choral directors tended to be dependent on individual student success to build a team of effective musicians. Potts (2009) constructed an aural-based music literacy test for secondary choirs to determine if individual sight-singing abilities were different using a non-aural-based method. The sight-singing abilities of students who have had previous instrumental experience, voice lessons and/or church choir participation were compared to students with no prior musical experience.

Potts (2009) assigned beginning students from five high schools to either the control group, a non-aural-based sight-singing method, or the experimental group (those who learned sight singing using Potts' curriculum). While all classes improved their individual sight-singing scores, students in the experimental group showed larger percentage pre- to post-test gains in musical accuracy in reproducing pitches, suggesting Potts test was successful in teaching students to read music at sight.

In a quantitative study, Myers (2008) discovered that college or university-level teacher preparation, methodological practices and student assessments were related to the instruction of sight singing in a choral rehearsal. A group of 414 collegiate choral conductors who were members of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) in eleven states were asked 39 questions concerning their involvement directly with sight singing in their collegiate ensembles. Of the total population, 152 responses were returned (36.71%).

Directors were asked to identify frequency of sight-singing instruction, attitudes concerning sight singing, methods of sight singing and opinions concerning sight-singing assessment. Most respondents (83.9%) taught in a four-year college or university. Results showed that 93.4% of the respondents agreed that a collegiate choral ensemble should receive sight-singing instruction during rehearsal. Interestingly, only 64.5% of the respondents included such instruction in their normal rehearsals. According to the survey, the main reason given for not including sight-singing instruction was the greater need to prepare for an upcoming concert or performance (Myers, 2008).

Kuehne (2007) and Lucas (1991) investigated the status of sight-singing instruction in middle school choral programs in Florida and correlated the results regarding choral director's methods, sight-singing abilities, preferred size, location, and at-risk status of schools. There

was a 40% response rate lending credibility to the study. Kuehne concluded that middle school choir directors believed sight singing had significant educational value and should be taught on a consistent basis but did not inquire as to how directors acquired their perceptions and beliefs on sight singing. Kuehne's questionnaire was sent out to 152 Florida middle school choral directors. Survey results indicated 78.29% of the respondents used solfège syllables during classroom instruction, 65.13% used Kodály hand signs and 69.74% used solfège syllables during warm-up activities. Further, 49.39% of the respondents indicated they taught sight singing on a daily basis. A slightly lower percentage of teachers, 42.76%, indicated they taught sight singing from between five to ten minutes daily.

Kuehne's (2007) research indicated that a majority of the respondents, 83%, strongly agreed that choral teachers should teach sight singing at the middle school level. Almost 82% indicated that they strongly agreed middle school choral teachers should teach sight-singing even if it was not required by a state or local agency. This suggests that directors believed that there was an inherent value for a student to learn to sight sing.

Lucas (1991) studied how harmonic context affects the accuracy of singing at sight. Fifty-nine middle school choir students in one school in Florida were given a pre-test, treatment and post-test, using different

aural harmonic contexts while singing common melodies at sight. Lucas found that students displayed their best sight-singing accuracy when tested with melodies that were isolated from a direct harmonic context.

Horton (1974) tested the relative effectiveness of three different systems of sight-singing instruction, the song-flute, shape notes, and solfège syllables in developing sight-singing abilities in 291 sixth-graders. A pre-test was administered to all subjects and scored by two judges. Following a four-month treatment period, three separate classes of students were taught sight singing using the three different methods. In post-tests, the control group made no significant gains in sight singing as they received no training in sight-singing. The three separate experimental groups made significant gains in sight-singing scores suggesting the three different methods of teaching sight singing can all be effective tools to teach sight singing.

May (1993) found that a greater number of high school choral directors prefer a sight-singing system over teaching students to sing music by rote. May's research instrument was sent via United States Postal Service to 927 teachers; however, 192, just over 20%, had qualified responses on which the findings were based. Many more materials have been published and were currently in use since May's research in 1993. This study, as well as others mentioned, confirms the need for further research to understand experienced choral directors'

perceptions and beliefs on the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing.

Sight singing assessment.

A number of studies have been conducted that utilized experimental and control groups in an attempt to improve sight-singing methods in singers among various populations. Melodic patterns that were performed either correctly or incorrectly were fairly easy to detect and were therefore readily available to manage and graph. Henry (1999) was the first to develop a Vocal Sight-Reading Inventory (VSRI) that was designed to assess skill in pitch reading in major key. The Vocal Sight-Reading Inventory was designed with several key factors in mind. First, a test would be created that would evaluate a person's ability to sing accurate notes at sight without interference from another individual, as in a choir setting, who may be standing near the person tested. Termed criterion-referenced testing, singers would be evaluated alone without the aid of a group setting allowing consistent evaluation of the singer's individual ability.

Second, Henry (1999) designed VSRI musical examples to remain consistent with a common-practice tonal palette. There were no sight-singing examples that used altered scale degrees. The samples consisted of thought out, constructed melodies closely related to the tonic pitch

that were logically approached and resolved which allowed the ear to hear and maintain relativity to the tonic pitch. Third, Henry constructed melodies that focused on assessing a singer's pitch reading ability. Moderate to difficult rhythms or unusual syncopations were avoided. Simplified rhythms were used in order to better assess the pitch-reading abilities of the subject, rather than attempting to test the rhythmic reading abilities of the subjects. Scoring for accuracy in rhythm was not measured or assessed in any way.

Forth, the melodies used in the VSRI were constructed exclusively using major scales. Henry (1999) asserted that accurate measuring of a singer's abilities to sing at sight could best be measured if there were no unusual or awkward melodic leaps, modulations, minor keys or any other unusual intervallic relationships. Finally, the VSRI would employ methods for scoring a student's performance that would be efficient and reliable. Only the individual pitches identified as part of one of the listed component skills would be considered, measured and scored. Singers were allowed to perform using any verbal designation, neutral syllable or vowel. Student scores were not given a higher or lower score based upon the usage of any particular sight singing method.

The use of solfège, numbers, or a neutral syllable did not affect the final score. As the study progressed, Henry revised the Vocal Sight-Reading Inventory that led to a complete dual application of the test. The

first test allowed students to be assessed based upon order of difficulty and separated into three sections containing three melodies each. The second revised test contained six melodies, each with five component pitch skills in ascending order of difficulty. Other researchers have successfully replicated or otherwise used Henry to affirm the ability to assess a singer's musical accuracy in pitch reading.

While the goal of Henry was to develop an instrument that enables music teachers to measure skills in sight singing assessed by the human ear, Graves (1980) and Ewers (2004) sought to develop objective sight-singing achievement tests using an electronic measuring device. Graves recorded thirty volunteers from the music department of the University of Richmond, Virginia as they performed music at sight. He developed an electronic device to measure the accuracy of the printed music as performed by a singer. The recorded sight-singing exercise was scored both by machine and human.

Both Graves (1980) and Ewers (2004) concluded that using an electronic, data-gathering device for measuring sight-singing achievement test was an accurate, reliable method for measuring sight-singing accuracy. The methodology used by Graves; however, involved tape recorders, a Polymorphic 8813 Microcomputer and a Compaq Presario computer - items now considered archaic in today's technological terms. Ewers attempted to use *Smart Music*® but found

compatibility problems with the 2260. Rapid advances in computer and information technology would continue to create current programs and applications but, like computer technology, they would likely soon be outdated measuring devices.

Fullen (1993) investigated the extent to which the Advanced Measures of Music Audiation (AMMA) was a valid test of music aptitude for secondary students. Fullen found that students who audiated were correctly measured when given the AMMA test. For a subject to successfully audiate he/she must have relied on their understanding of the intervallic relationship between each note in the diatonic scale. This internalization of the scale degrees and the ability to reproduce each scale degree from sight was not quickly acquired. This inferred that the instructional method of audiation was gaining, or had gained, by 1993, significant popularity and credibility among choral directors. The thirty-one singers who used computer-based training in addition to the regular sight-singing training scored significantly higher than students who did not have access to computer-assisted sight-singing training.

Durocher (2006), McClung (2008), Stevenson (2010) and Killian and Henry (2005) questioned the effects, if any, specific rehearsal strategies, techniques, and methodologies had upon students who were somewhat skilled in sight singing. Stevenson studied forty-one high school singers from Illinois and thirty-two singers from Iowa (N=73) and

found when students were already quite adept at sight singing, specific teaching strategies, helps, and methodologies may be largely unnecessary. Similarly, Durocher performed an investigation on 108 students who attended four different high schools in Phoenix, Arizona who already scored high on musical aptitude. He found that adding a kinesthetic activity to a solfège-based sight-singing program had no significant effect on the scores of those who used a kinesthetic activity and those who did not (the control group).

McClung (2008) investigated the use of hand signs of high school singers who have extensive training in sight singing to see if these kinesthetic techniques helped students achieve a higher degree of accurate pitches as opposed reading music at sight without using hand signs. McClung found that singers (N=76) with instrumental experience scored significantly higher with the use of hand signs than did students without instrumental experience. Interestingly, students without instrumental experience scored significantly higher when not using hand signs. Further, the use of hand signs with experienced singers had little effect upon the accuracy of the pitches. These studies affirm the notion that students already adept in reading music at first sight were not dependent upon an external kinetic exercise in order to achieve accuracy. This research can be very useful in the field as it relates to teaching and learning in secondary choral music classrooms.

Similarly, Antinone (2000) found no significant difference existed in sight-singing abilities between teaching movable Do and fixed Do. However, this methodology comes into question as students who were pre-tested on a simple musical exercise in the key of C using movable Do who later performed the same musical exercise transposed to a different key. Students were not singing new music but music they had already sung, only transposed into a different key. This method of repetition may have contributed to the students' successful singing of the notes the second time as they may have recognized and replicated intervals and rhythms.

Using qualitative methods of interviews and recordings, Bolton (2009) investigated the effectiveness of current vocal sight-singing practices when taught to singers with no previous instrumental instruction. Bolton observed twenty-nine teachers selected by a stratified random sampling of Nebraska music educators. Bolton concluded that since there was no significant state-wide emphasis on sight-singing competition, most Nebraskan music educators focused on performance and listening rather than teaching students to read music at sight. Scofield (1980) attempted to develop a reliable and valid method to measure sight-singing abilities. Fifty-four high school and college students were tested using pitch recitation only as opposed to traditional sight-singing studies that combine accuracy of pitch with accuracy of

rhythm. Scofield concluded that his instrument(s) to measure the singers did not use the same order of pitches for each singer. Admittedly, some of the selections were more difficult than others allowing for a greater degree of difficulty that could skew the ratings.

Sunderland (1994) studied the sight-singing characteristics of three award-winning sight-singing ensembles and three non-award winning sight-singing ensembles in Ohio. The schools with better sight-reading choirs were located in communities with different sizes of populations. Schools with better sight-reading choirs had a lower student enrollment. Schools that scored higher and thus had better reading ensembles were contained in school districts that stressed and developed elementary general music programs. A questionnaire was developed that measured students' perceptions about various rehearsal strategies, practices and behaviors pertaining to sight singing. Similar to this study, a teacher questionnaire was also developed that measured biographical data, repertoire, teaching techniques and school districts' curricular emphases. Results of the study suggest that ensembles that were more proficient in sight singing perform a larger and more varied repertoire. All directors relied heavily on rote teaching techniques to teach rhythms and pitches.

"It was shown in this study that the best sightreading ensembles have a higher percentage of students who have instrumental experience"

(Sunderland, 1994, p 213). According to Sunderland, some non-pedagogical and/or attitudinal factors such as whether a piano existed in the home, whether schools were in a low-income setting, the ethnic make-up of the school, whether the school was considered a large high school or not, and whether a choir director believed that sight singing was an important learning objective all contributed to the overall success of the choir's sight-singing abilities.

Sunderland's (1994) research suggested a correlation between administrative pressures, selection of repertoire, time spent in sight singing and the skill levels of sight singing in high school choirs. One of the major problems of Sunderland's study was the final adjudication was from three judges who use subjective methods for issuing a final score. One judge wrote, "[In the choral performance, I heard] no phrasing, no male sound, and no musicianship - everything was inconsistent." The subjective nature of this kind of evaluation cannot be entirely relied upon as an empirical research method. More research is needed, however that describes specific approaches to the teaching and learning of sight singing in the music classroom as well as how directors acquired their own beliefs and perceptions concerning the teaching and learning of sight singing.

Sight singing in choral music education.

In a descriptive study of secondary choral directors in Nebraska, Johnson (1987) found that relatively little time was devoted to teaching sight-singing skills in their ensembles. High schools in the Northwest division of the American Choral Directors Association were among the population surveyed. Of the 271 choral directors who responded, 91 (34%) used intervals to teach sight singing, 84 (31%) used numbers, 72 (26%) used movable Do, and 24 (9%) used fixed Do.

In 2010, McDonald investigated the effects the inclusion of an aural jazz-based method to sight-singing instruction on 47 randomly selected high school students in Massachusetts. Using a methodology that included a pre-test, a control group and a post-test, McDonald found that students receiving vocal jazz aural instruction did not improve in sight singing as much as did students receiving repetition of previous instruction. It may be important to understand, however, that the experimental group only received 10–15 minute lessons of instruction in thirty-five lessons. The little amount of extra rehearsal time for the experimental group may not have been long enough to produce significant and/or different results.

Smith (1998) and Snider (2007) investigated relationships between choral director's preparation, experience, pedagogical practices, and methodologies. Smith's population was 683 Florida choral music

educators. Of the total population, a sample of 202 teachers returned qualified responses (29.57 %). A majority of teachers indicated their training in sight-singing instruction was not adequate and 80% would have liked to have had more training in the pedagogy of sight singing. Teachers in this study taught three days per week in sight singing instruction, spent five to fifteen minutes of time during the rehearsal and used movable Do with La minor.

Like Smith (1998), Snider (2007) investigated choral instruction methodologies and found that the director's expectations of the students influenced the understanding of sight singing as a major objective in Kansas's high schools. The survey was sent via electronic mail to fifty high school choral directors in Kansas. Forty-three respondents, an 86% response rate, indicated movable Do was used most widely while other teachers used the number method to teach intervallic relationships. Respondents indicated a majority of directors incorporate sight-singing instruction for one to nine minutes at the beginning of their rehearsals. Thirty-three percent indicated they only taught sight singing when it was convenient or when they can relate the sight singing to the literature being rehearsed for performance.

Ferrante (2010) investigated the effects of extensive exercise in melodic dictation on the sight singing accuracy of high school choral singers. Using a convenience sample of seventy high school singers in

two different choirs, Ferrante administered a pre-test, treatment on an experimental group, and post-test on all subjects. His experimental group was given extensive melodic dictation exercises four out of five days a week for nine weeks. After the nine-week period, all students were given a melody to sing at sight that was different than the pre-test melody. Ferrante concluded that extensive training in melodic dictation tasks did not play a significant role in student skills for sight singing.

Benton (2002) and Parker (2007) combined students grouped as partners to investigate the effectiveness of different methodologies. Using a treatment group and a control group of middle school students, Benton sought to promote metacognition in sight singing by combining three strategies: think-aloud activities; self-assessment activities; and students' self-reflections on their learning. Separated in seventh grade and eighth grade sub-groups, seventy-five students were given a pre-test followed by forty lessons in sight-singing instruction. The testing concluded with an identical post-test. Students were then asked to respond to an attitudinal questionnaire after ten lessons then another questionnaire after the final lesson. In response to the statement: "It is important for singers in a chorus to have knowledge and skill in sight singing," 7th grade treatment group members scored 23% higher in their post-test while the 7th grade control group decreased by 34%. Responses of the 8th grade treatment group increased by 36% while the 8th grade

control group increased by 13%.

Because the research was conducted using a partner approach, the research using the "think aloud activity with a learning partner" (Benton, 2002, p. 46) method was too dynamic to affirm. There was no clear indication that the selection of partners was more random rather than consistent or balanced.

Parker's (2007) mixed-method approach found that a learning approach based on a team effort was a viable method to improve sight-singing abilities. Twenty-nine students with little to no training in sight singing were chosen to take place in the study. The group was divided into five sub-groups then placed into another group with trained singers. Lessons in sight singing were given to these students.

A questionnaire was given to the teachers and students and found that a team-based approach improved the sight-singing abilities of students at a faster pace than those who were grouped in an ensemble with members who did not have extensive training in sight singing.

It may be argued that a random pairing of individuals in these two studies could have skewed the test results. For example, data were not gathered on each individual that would make for a logical pairing. The data could have been more trustworthy had students' musical backgrounds been ascertained. Partners, for example, who were more adept at sight singing or partners with previous instrumental

background could have aided their partners more than students who were less adept in sight singing.

Using an ethnographic method, Morgan (1992) observed the behaviors and habits of a highly effective choir with a history of superior or excellent ratings in state choral competitions to observe the habits, traits and methodologies of the director to attempt to ascertain patterns in the directors' teaching. The study also considered the behaviors, reactions, observations and interviews of the students involved in the choral ensemble. An investigation was made into the background of the teacher, the student population, and locale of the school, the geographic and demographic make-up of the school as well as many other inquiries. Strategies used by the researcher were specific to the needs of gathering the necessary data for analysis. Positive outcomes were divided into two categories: musical and social.

The teacher and students reported positive musical outcomes were achieved when the choir functions as a team and works together to achieve a common goal. Students reported positive outcomes were achieved when asked about their love for singing and performing with their friends in the same choir. Most all respective dynamics reported by the students revolve around the perceived integrity and beauty of singing together and working together (Morgan, 1992). Using ethnographic methods, Morgan could have used an identical methodology on, say,

three or four directors similar in nature and their ensembles in a different locale in order to compile more reliable cross-cultural data that would remove any question of reliability.

Barnes (1960) investigated the effectiveness of group drill in singing certain intervals at sight. Barnes also sought to determine the correlation, if any, between this ability to perform intervals and the ability to sing melodies composed of these intervals. Results showed significant improvement in the ability of the experimental group to sing a melody at sight as the apparent result of ten and one half hours of drill in sight singing intervals. Barnes' population, however, was exclusively freshmen music majors. This sample population suggested the students may have been adept at sight singing prior to the research study.

Egbert (1990), investigated the effectiveness of a systematic approach to rhythm reading instruction, compared to rote-practice, on forty-four high school choral members. The experimental group received instruction in melodic sight-singing and in rhythm reading, while the control group received instruction only in melodic sight singing and accommodated rhythmic problems through rote, or imitative practice. Prior to any treatment, a pre-test was administered to all singers. Through a series of twenty-two sessions, instructional treatments were then administered to both groups. Upon completion of the treatment sessions, each group was assessed with an ensemble post-test and each

student was assessed with an individual post-test. The experimental groups scored significantly better in the element of rhythm as compared to pitch reading suggesting that mere imitative practices in teaching rhythm were far less valuable than a systematic approach.

Summary of the review of literature.

From the innovations of Guido of Arezzo to Kodály, music educators through time and across continents continue to re-invent and further refine several methodologies of singing at sight. Systems currently used in secondary choral music education were movable Do, numbers, which is a form of movable Do, and rote teaching. The main advantage of movable Do was that singers could reference any tonic pitch and replicate the printed notes provided the music remains relative to the tonic pitch. The primary disadvantage of movable Do occurred when music became more actively chromatic causing loss of reference to the tonic pitch. Proponents of fixed Do believe their method allowed singers to become more oriented with all the twelve chromatic tones which could allow an adept singer to perform music much more chromatic in nature, that is, music that loses its fidelity to a tonic pitch. Also, those who used fixed Do believed their singers could develop a high sensitivity to relative pitch. Directors also used rote singing that allows singers to hear a series of notes and simply repeat the notes back. By definition, rote

singing did not fall into a category of method of sight singing.

My aim was to discover how successful directors came to understand their preferred method of sight singing. When and where did they learn their preferred method and how have they refined their beliefs and opinions since their first experience as a singer? After reviewing the literature concerning the history of sight singing and its use in music education, there was a gap in the research literature that does not comprehensively address how successful directors have arrived at their methods, ideas and methodologies concerning sight singing. Further qualitative research is needed that would investigate successful directors' attitudes, beliefs and practices concerning singing at sight.

The purpose of this study was to examine, investigate and evaluate the perceptions and beliefs of experienced secondary choral music directors who have been identified over an extended period of time as experts in the field of music education, specifically in the area of sight singing. It was expected that choir directors who were looking for ways to improve their sight-singing instruction in their classroom would value this research. Further, this research may be valued by college and university professors who teach undergraduate choral methodology courses across the United States and abroad as well as textbook publishers who desire to include some of the data gathered in this research. Finally, there was no research to date that emphasizes these

research questions using qualitative data from highly successful middle school, high school and college-level directors which investigates director's opinions and beliefs concerning sight singing.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing. A focus group comprised of university and secondary choral directors was selected and met to discuss a broad array of topics centered on the nature of singing at sight. This study investigated and analyzed responses to the following research questions:

1. A. What are the purposes in teaching sight singing?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
2. A. What are the positive or negative attributes of movable Do, fixed Do and numbers?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
3. A. What are the relative attributes of these sight-singing materials?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
4. A. Is there a discernible advantage in singing at sight when a student is proficient in playing a musical instrument?
   B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.
5. A. Are there discernible advantages in sight-singing proficiency when a singer actively uses Curwen hand signs?

B. Describe observations that have shaped this belief.

6. A. How important is it to assess students' sight singing abilities?

B. Describe effective procedures in sight-singing assessment.

7. A. How much weight do fine Arts administrators and/or principals place in students' sight singing abilities?

B. Is there a documented or implied expectation that outlines this expectation?

Overview and identification of research design.

This study used the narrative research method that included qualitative focus group interviews designed to elicit responses from highly qualified teachers as to their perceptions and beliefs concerning the teaching and learning of sight singing in secondary choral music education. Criteria were developed that allowed the researcher to qualify subjects who have had significant experience and were recognized as successful in the teaching and learning of sight singing. The researcher gave instructions to conduct and record the interview and presented the interview questions.

During the interviews, predetermined guidelines and parameters of the conversation between the interviewer and subject(s) were introduced and covered. Occasionally a respondent offered a viewpoint that led to a new idea or topic. This new thought process was allowed to be entered into the record and treated as a viable path of discussion. Areas of

dialogue outside the research questions were welcomed and, depending on their validity, led to a redirection of the conversation. I was concerned with obtaining substantive data collection but also allowed the participants to interpret and develop information as it emerged in the interview in relation to the topic covered. The term *active interview* referred to an interpretive practice of gathering qualitative data from people, whether individually or in a group setting, by which the interviewer and respondent participate in a framed, yet open dialogue (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

The narrative consisted of an improvisational dialogue between the investigator and the respondents. During the course of the discussion, a number of various opinions, emotions, and backgrounds began to emerge. As the focus group members spoke, I considered the content of their dialogue and during the process decided to pursue a topic that began to emerge. This interview style allowed me to have interpretive input during the focus group discussion.

According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), there were two natures of responses in an active interview, substantive and relational. A substantive response was more information oriented: places, dates, times, people who were present at a given event were examples of substantive responses. These kinds of data were vital in that they offered certainty to a given event or conversation. When more than one

person was named in a given account, substantive responses allowed triangulation to verify content data.

The other kind of response in an active interview was a relational response. This kind of response was driven by how the respondents saw the world as an eyewitness in relation to others in the narrative. A participant, for example, may have offered factual data as a surgeon, but later in the interview attest to the fact that she recently lost a parent to lung cancer. A careful investigator may desire to request substantive data from the respondent while, at the same time, realizing this individual had a deep relational tie to the subject matter. The active interviewer would then engage in further data collection in a more sensitive manner.

An important benefit of using active interview protocols was the interaction between respondents. Concerning the teaching and learning of sight singing, there was often more than one opinion on methodology. Some participants were more opinionated than others. The more interaction that emerged from the focus group conversation allowed for more inquiry and data for analysis.

Identifying the subjects.

A purposeful sample was appropriate for this study given the researcher could uncover previously hidden data directly from the

source, in this case a group of qualified music teaching professionals (Merriam, 2009). A purposeful sample of two university choral music professors, four high school choral directors and four junior high or middle school choral directors who met the following criteria were invited to participate in this study: 1. Each individual must have served as a choral music teacher for eight years or more; and 2. The choir(s) under the secondary choral director's instruction must have had a history of at least four years of earned superior or excellent ratings in sight singing in accordance with their district or state festivals or contests. These criteria insure a highly qualified and select group of music teachers.

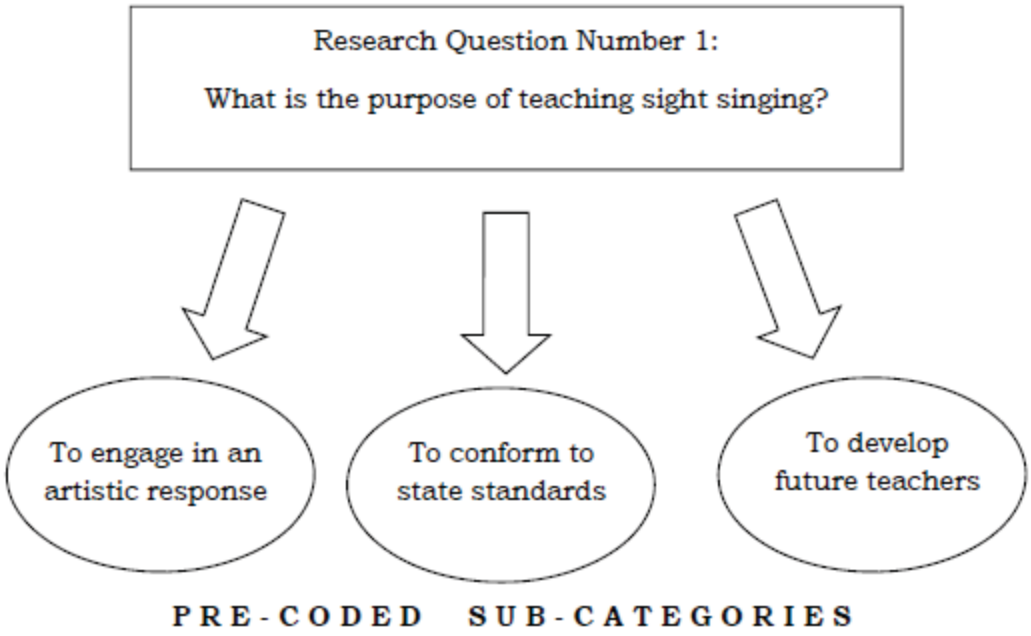
Each participant possessed the needed background and experience that covers middle school through college-level training in sight singing. As recommended by Merriam (2009), the study participants were interviewed together.

According to the qualitative methods of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the focus group responded to questions that revealed how they experienced the world, thus, for this study, they were asked how they experienced the nature of teaching singing at sight. For each question, data were gathered and categorized then coded into sub-categories based upon recurring patterns, themes or topics that accurately characterize the data (Merriam, 2009). The researcher anticipated possible areas of conversation and attempt to pre-code the conversation. Question

number one dealt with the purpose for teaching students to sing at sight (Figure 4). It was anticipated that there could be several factors that motivate teachers to teach sight-singing skills to their choirs. Focus group members may decide there is a universal appeal for students to become artists or eventually consumers of art. Further, state standards may require teachers to give instruction in sight singing. Plus, some teachers may desire to enlist their students to become future music teachers.

Figure 4

Pre-Coded Subcategories for Research Question Number 1

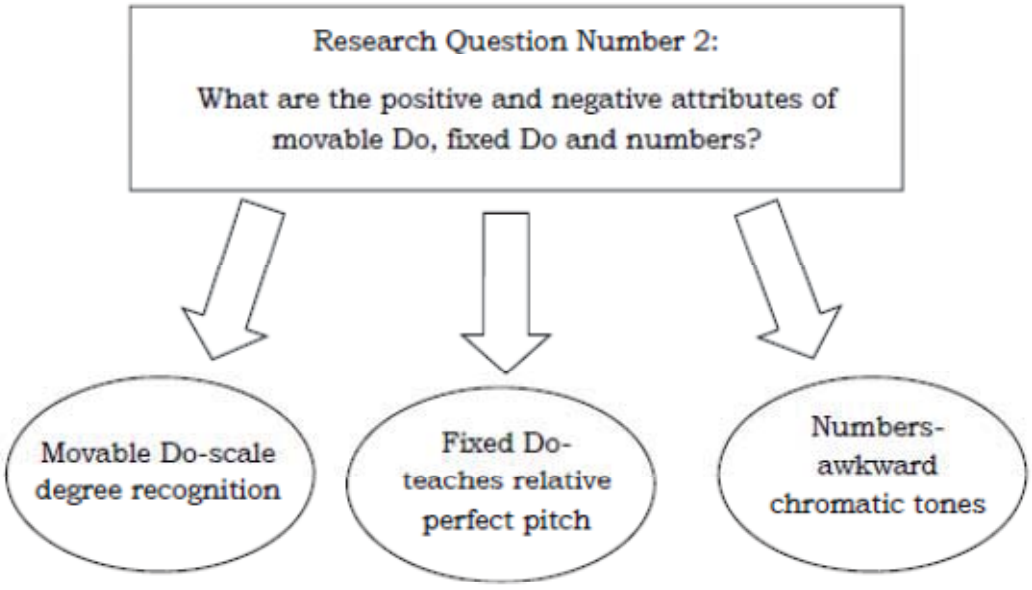


Question number two dealt with preferred methods of teaching sight singing (Figure 5). Moveable Do, fixed Do and the numbers system

would likely be the three most popular methods. It was not anticipated that shaped-note singing, popular in congregational singing style churches, would be relevant in secondary choral music education.

Figure 5

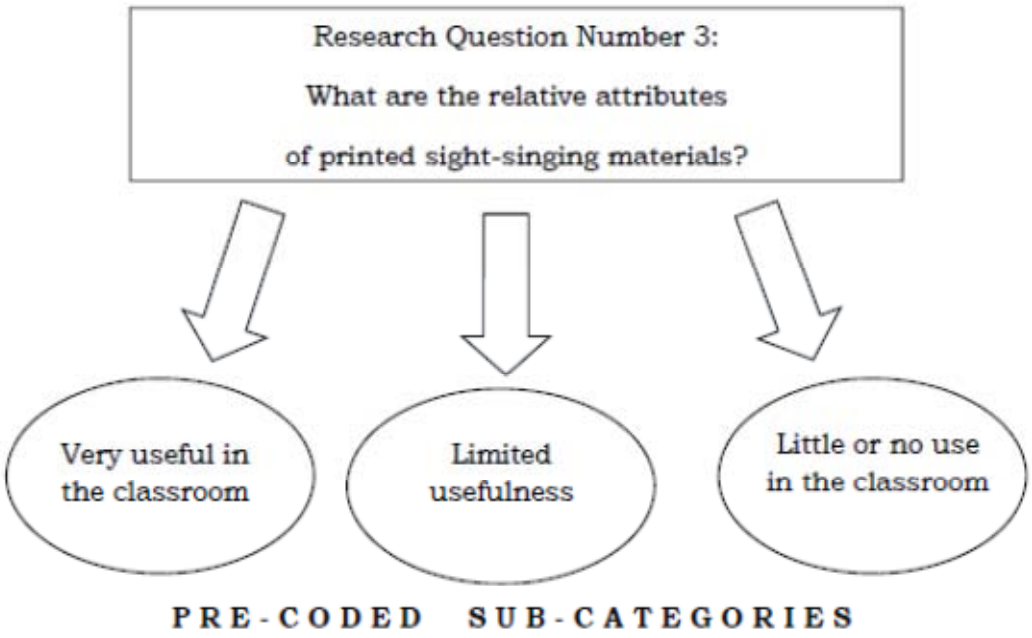
Pre-Coded Subcategories for Research Question Number 2



Question number three dealt with printed materials used in the classroom to teach sight singing. The focus group would be asked to evaluate and comment on the efficacy of the materials (Figure 6). Materials would be gathered and brought to the focus group meetings for evaluation and commentary. It was anticipated that directors would find some materials to be very useful in the classroom setting. Others may find materials to be not useful or perhaps useful in limited settings.

Figure 6

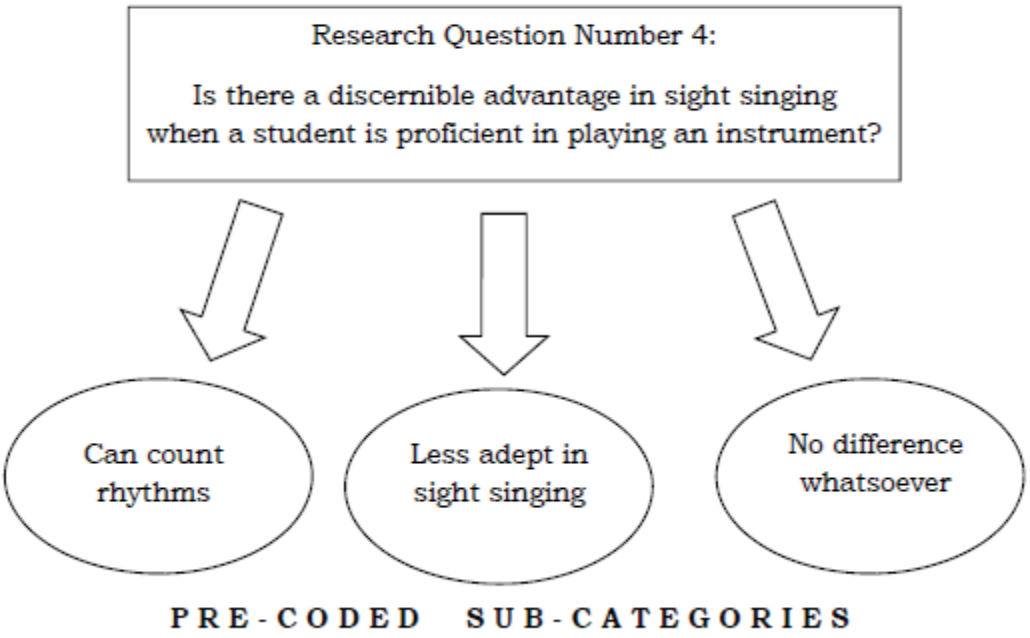
Pre-Coded Subcategories for Research Question Number 3



The topic of question number four dealt with the perceived sight-singing abilities of students who have had an instrumental background (Figure 7). Singers who have played the piano, or perhaps performed in the band or orchestra may be able to count rhythms more accurately than students without a similar instrumental background. Some directors may believe that instrumentalists who sing do not have an advantage or perhaps may be at a slight disadvantage to singing choral music at sight.

Figure 7

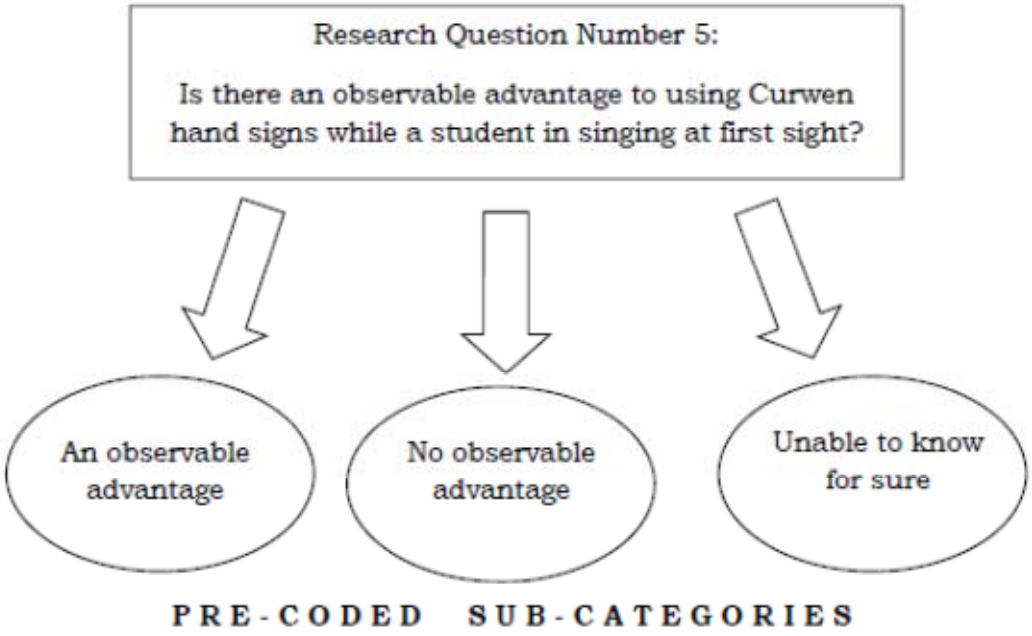
Pre-Coded Subcategories for Research Question Number 4



The use of Curwen hand signs was the topic of question number five (Figure 8). Pre-coded subcategorizes were believed to be rather simple. Anticipated answers would affirm that there is a measureable effectiveness in using Curwen handsigns, or that there was no advantage. One other possibility is that there may not be an easy way to tell whether an advantage exists or not.

Figure 8

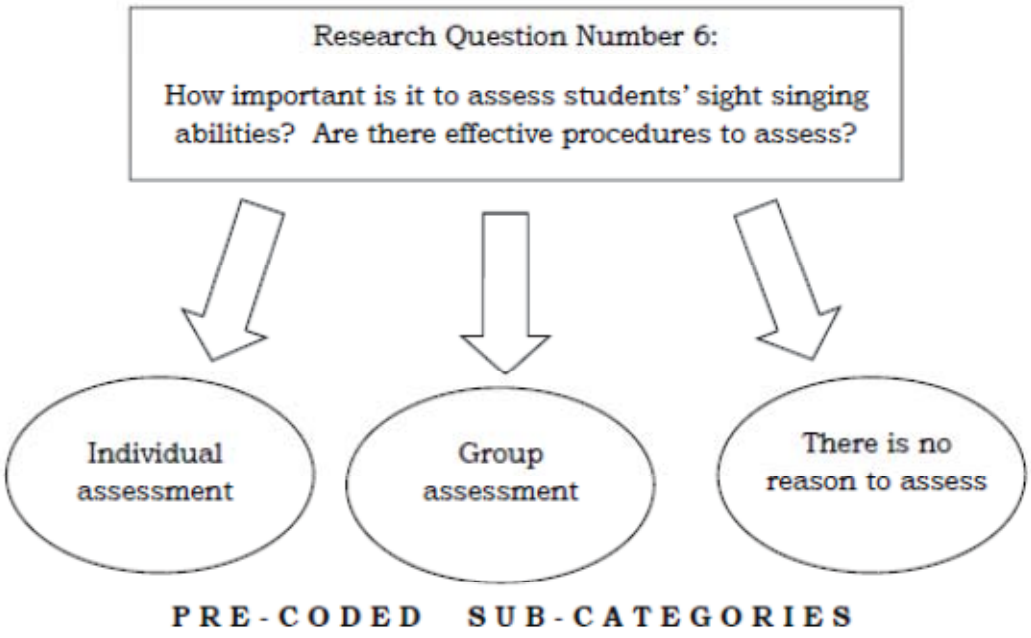
Pre-Coded Subcategories for Research Question Number 5



Question six dealt with procedures designed to assess sight-singing accuracy.

Figure 9

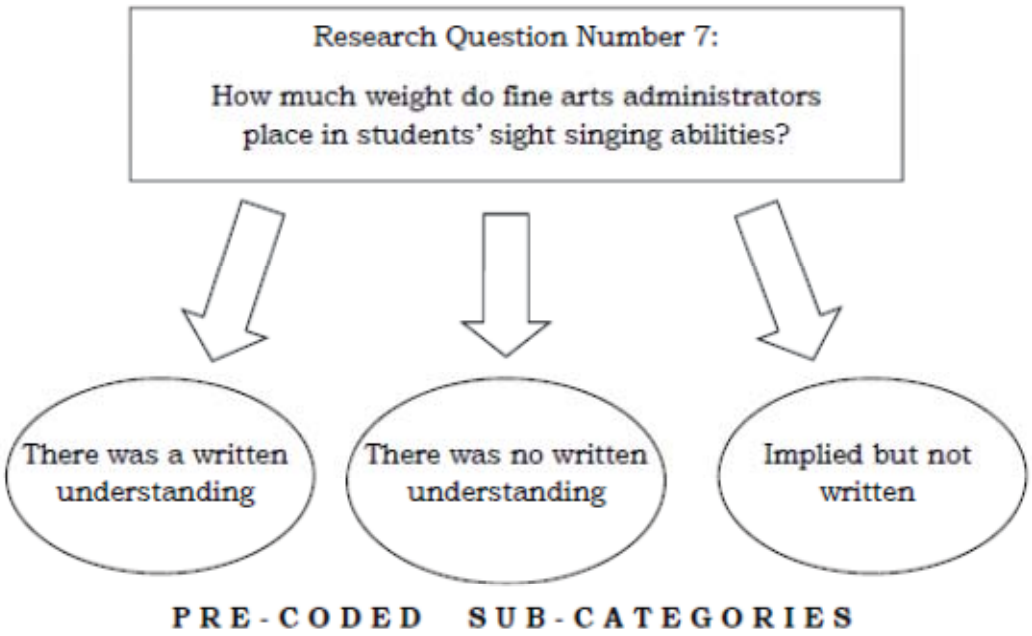
Pre-Coded Subcategories for Research Question Number 6



Question number seven dealt with performance expectations from administrators, principals and/or supervisors.

Figure 10

Pre-Coded Subcategories for Research Question Number 7



Research procedure.

Pilot study.

Following the application and subsequent approval from the Institutional Review Board, a pilot study was conducted for review and analysis. Two participants who met the same criteria of the focus group invitees assisted in a preliminary pilot study to develop and refine the research questions and allowed the researcher to undertake and rehearse the process of conducting an active interview. This panel for the pilot study was also be tasked with reviewing the discussion questions for appropriate wording, meaning and the degree to which the

questions could successfully direct conversations that would provide sufficient content for the study.

Regarding the issue of validity, the panel was also asked to evaluate the degree to which the planned interview questions accurately reflected the research questions and purpose of this study. Once preliminary information from these participants was gathered and the pilot study was conducted, changes were made that clarified and otherwise made the research questions more lucid. After the pilot study was completed, study participants [N=8] who meet the criteria for inclusion in the focus group were invited to participate in the study. All eight subjects were given the opportunity to sign an informed consent document signifying their willingness to participate in this study. Following IRB protocol, the informed consent form included the purpose of the study, all potential risks involved, elements of confidentiality, the time needed for the research and the consent of the individual to be recorded.

Enlisting the subjects.

Concerning the selection of the number of participants needed for the focus group interview, the researcher noted several studies in the review of literature (Clark, 1998; Inzenga, 1999; Morgan, 1992). Morgan, for example, gathered data from one study participant from whom an orientation interview, informal conversation and a final interview was

conducted. The final interview consisted of inquiries involving teacher philosophies, perceptions and strategies that had been collected as part of the research investigation. Inzenga observed and recorded the teaching methodology of one teacher who taught 45 singers from a rural New England high school. The teacher divided the students into two groups based upon their previous experience in sight singing. Interviews and observations followed.

Clark (1998) used a qualitative focus group interview methodology to investigate medically oriented opinions and perceptions concerning a minor surgical procedure. The researcher held focus group interviews with 20 subjects at the same time. The researcher moderated all focus group interviews. Data was analyzed using descriptive words and phrases and categorized by frequency or importance. There was no general consensus to affirm any optimum number of participants (Lichtman, 2006). The decision was made to invite two university choral music educators, four high school choral directors and four middle school choral directors. The researcher received commitments from ten qualified individuals. Two, however, were unable to participate. Eight focus group members consisting of one university professor, three high school directors, three middle school directors, and one teacher who taught in a high school and middle school setting completed the study investigation. The make-up of this focus group allowed for meaningful

discussion that led the researcher to ascertain their perceptions and beliefs.

Assurance of confidentiality.

Participants were given a consent form that informed them of the possible risks and how the study maintained confidentiality. A pseudonym was created and assigned to each participant that kept his/her identity confidential. Any comment that could possibly be interpreted as an identifying comment (i.e., "I teach at Anderson Middle School") was redacted from the final document. They were not published or released. It was the purpose of this researcher to keep all identities confidential for the safety of the participants and to maintain the fidelity of the IRB approval process. With that in mind, it was not possible to guaranty what other participants may do or say after the research sessions were completed.

Interview approach.

In a quantitative survey, subjects were sometimes limited to respond to pre-conceived answers or Likert-type scales. Two individuals responding to a quantitative study may have answered "strongly disagree" to a particular question. Within the rigid boundaries of "strongly disagree," however, there may have been a multiplicity of reasons respondents had for choosing that particular response. In contrast, this study used an *action/reaction* qualitative interview process.

The researcher prepared a general framework of questions to begin the investigation. When responses from a participant during the course of the investigation showed promise to open the dialogue into new areas, the new topic was validated by follow-up questions and used to further the dialogue between the investigator and respondents. Similar to an interactive conversation between two individuals in which dialogue was disclosed and exchanged in order to refine the discussion, the action/reaction interview process allowed for the validation of dialogue from a respondent into a meaningful, albeit previously undefined, category or topic (Douglass, 1985).

Responses from all subjects in an action/reaction interview were placed into two categories: substantive and relational (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Dialogue that resulted in data-driven responses such as dates, times, ratings, scores, years of service, teaching methodologies were some forms of substantive responses. Substantive responses leaned toward more empirical content and less on emotional or anecdotal responses. Relational dialogue referred to responses that were made from different perspectives, roles or offices held by a participant. A respondent, for example, may have said, "As a teacher I would (do this), but as a parent, I would (do this differently), but when I was a student, I certainly (did this differently)." The participant may have seen one's personal world from different viewpoints and spoke with authority from

his or her different roles or offices.

Also, when dealing with people, the researcher realized that emotions may affect a participant's responses. The action/reaction interviewer carefully assessed the content of the responses and decided whether or not those comments should be validated with further lines of inquiry or dialogue. This kind of conversational approach to the interview process respected the opinions and emotions of the participant's experience and attempted to connect the differing aspects of all respondents into a meaningful, relevant dialogue. The strength of the action/reaction interview was based on the notion that a conversational dialogue, complete with banter, interpretation, imagery, inquiry, humor and other human communicative characteristics were essential to the complete involvement of the participant. This allowed for an unencumbered flow of information that was useful for analysis and study.

Interview process.

Each participant was invited to a comfortable, spacious Embassy Suites meeting room with adequate lighting for the interview. A light snack was offered prior to the beginning of the research investigation. The focus group interview was divided into seven subject-specific areas corresponding to the seven research questions. To assist in keeping the discussion focused, a PowerPoint presentation projected the discussion

questions on the screen in plain view. A pad of paper and a pencil was given to each focus group member to aid them in remembering comments or to jot down notes for themselves as they prepared to present a response.

Using the action/reaction interview process, it was occasionally determined that a significant topic surfaced in the discussion that was not found within the parameters of the seven research questions. The focus group was asked to commit to two, three-hour interviews over two days.

Recording the interview.

A Zoom® H2N audio recording device and secondary back up device was set up to record the interview. This type of recording device was optimal due to its unique ability to record a conversation in a 360º pattern. A tracking function was utilized that allowed the recorder to assign tracks during the discussion every ten minutes. This allowed easier access to the recorded data by ten minute intervals rather than one long track of three hours of recorded dialogue. After the discussions concluded, the interview was transcribed. Non-essential utterances such as coughs, and “um” and “uh” and excess verbiage such as this were not included in the transcription.

Interview questions.

According to Flinders and Richardson (2002), the collector of the data, this researcher, may assume one of two different roles: non-participant or participant-observer. The non-participant researcher creates and monitors the conversation but offered very little, if any, input; whereas the participant-observer was the principal organizer who selected topics, directed topics, interpreted topics and engaged in the dialogue. As a secondary teacher who taught sight-singing on a daily basis, this principal investigator assumed of the role of participant-observer. The investigator assisted in directing the conversation as needed to keep the conversation on task and allowed discussion to broaden into areas deemed worthy of further study. As recommended by Merriam (2009), interview questions were be open-ended allowing for discussion-oriented answers, as opposed to simple yes or no answers. Phillips (2008) adds that a qualitative study "is recognized by its reliance on *words* (italics in the original) for data" (p. 83). Data, as in a quantitative study, was collected from reliable sources, organized, sorted and analyzed for meaning.

The more data collected from reliable sources the more a researcher had in which to mine the data for meaning. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggested the interviewer find creative ways to draw information from the respondents that activate the narrative. If the

interviewer sensed a respondent that wanted to say more, or needs to say more, he or she was asked a follow-up question that elicited more conversation, and thus more data. The interviewer did not answer for the respondent nor give prompts that assumed a position, but engaged the interviewee by suggesting possible positions or sources that elicited more data.

Interview analysis.

According to Merriam (2009) all data used in qualitative research would either be inductive and comparative. Researchers may use inductive reasoning to observe small bits of data and placed reoccurring patterns of thought into larger categories from which more aggregate inferences were made. This investigator drew upon the data collected by the interviews and found distinctive thought patterns from which to begin categorizing data into concepts.

Anticipated categories of data fell into three categories:

1. Teacher perceptions: why teachers believe what they believed about sight singing.

2. Teacher goals: what teachers desired to accomplish in a normal school year concerning sight singing.

3. Teacher real world experiences: how teachers came to understand his or her concepts of singing at sight.

As patterns of thought emerged from the narratives, broader

categories were constructed to facilitate placement of the data.

Comparative data analysis was relevant in that each small piece of data, whether an idea, a theory a comment or particular view, could be compared to other small bits of data. Trends in the smaller bits of data emerged into larger sub-categories. As the interview was under way, the interviewer made notations that were useful later. Each item was then compared to each other resulting in even larger, broader categories. The goal of data analysis was to address the research questions. Each question had sub-categories from the inception but was altered or adapted as needed. These lines of thought, which emerged from the discussions that were not anticipated by the researcher, were given a new category and organized into the process prior to a complete analysis of the data.

Following the interview and working with a verified transcription, the resulting interview transcript was analyzed for content and coded into categories representing recurring topics or themes separated by each of the research questions. After data from the interview were identified and coded into these categories, more data was drawn from the interview that informed these initial categories. More categories were formed as needed. All data was studied to reveal meaningful content that was eventually taken into consideration for the final analysis. Responses were compared to data from other parts of the interview and recurring

themes or key words were identified and treated in the analysis of all data.

Interesting and important thematic patterns of data, lines of thought, and traces of salient conversation continued to emerge and were also included in the data analysis. The final analysis and connections informed the research questions. The participants were deemed credible and the resultant data collected was deemed reliable.

A narrative research method was selected to reveal the subsequent data analysis in a story-like manner. According to Creswell (2013) narrative researchers "collect stories from individuals about individuals' lived and told experiences" (p. 71). Narrative research may be understood as an account given of a person's personal experiences (Czarniawska, 2004). Because the interview was conducted in an informal, conversation-like manner, the panel members were free to offer their perceptions and beliefs concerning the teaching and learning of sight singing. The knowledge and experience of these individuals was successfully brought out and organized into useful bits of information. Current and pre-service choral teachers can benefit from their knowledge and wisdom as they prepare for their school year.

Summary.

Using the active interview process in a focus group interview was an eye-opening process that led to several surprises. The conversation

was captivating as the research questions were addressed by the panel members. As a teacher of sight singing, I had one perspective of sight singing. After the interview process, I found many more perspectives that were equally grounded in good pedagogy. During the interview process, panel members were welcomed into a friendly, comfortable forum to discuss their beliefs on the topic of sight singing. Data were gathered, information was analyzed. This led to some very interesting results. The perceptions and beliefs of these teachers added to the body of knowledge in that others may benefit from these teachers' years of experience, knowledge and wisdom.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing. To accomplish this goal, eight choral music educators were interviewed regarding such issues as the reasons for teaching sight singing, materials and methods as well as expectations from administrators concerning sight singing. I recorded and transcribed the six hours of interviews. The transcript provided the active dialogue between the participants and covered the responses of the participants to a variety of issues flowing from the stated research questions.

A purposeful sample of one university professor, three high school choral directors, three middle school choral directors and one director who taught at a high school and middle school were invited to participate in this research study. The directors met and discussed various topics concerning sight singing on September 16, and 23, 2013. A narrative coding method (Saldaña, 2013) was used to explore participant's beliefs, experiences and attitudes concerning the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing. This coding method allowed the investigator to use elements from the social sciences and literature to conceptualize the data in a story-like fashion (Daiute, 2014).

Focus Group Members.

Wilson Bradley was the youngest of this group of eight choral music educators. He had nine years of experience as a middle school choral director. With an unassuming manner, he spoke with a quiet, relaxed voice. Wilson was of average height and always dressed in a professional manner. Wilson grew up listening to a wide variety of musical styles in the home. Wilson began his journey as a musician in the band while in middle school. He remembered a band director handing him an alto saxophone and said, "You're going to play this." Sight reading, Wilson recalled, was a natural expectation of learning an instrument. Prior to the interviews, Wilson told me on more than one occasion that he would feel out of place in a group of experienced teachers because of his young age and because, in his eyes, he did not have the richness of experience of many more mature choral directors.

Wilson revealed that he would be nervous about offering anything substantive to the discussion because he felt that he had not achieved the level of professionalism enjoyed by the other directors on the focus group. I assured him that the discussion would be about the nature of sight singing and how he, as a student and as a teacher, learned about sight singing and how sight singing was taught in his classroom.

As our focus group gathered for our first of two meetings, Wilson sat quietly. While Wilson was eager to respond to direct questions, he

often sat waiting for others to finish before offering his input on the topic under discussion. Wilson also admitted he learned a lot from the discussions that took place.

When Wilson started teaching, he faced the challenges of his new profession head on. He remembered how he had to start teaching basic notes and rhythms with his beginner choirs. Because of his background in instrumental music, Wilson enjoyed having new singers join his ensembles who had previous experience playing a musical instrument. Wilson found that he often does not need to teach rhythms to these former instrumental students - they already knew how to count. Wilson also noticed that the students who came from an instrumental background sometimes did not understand how it was possible that, in his words, "choir members cannot count."

Now, as a choir director in a successful middle school program, he sometimes came across singers who have to be convinced that sight singing was important. Wilson Bradley was a humble man who had earned the respect of choral directors in his school district. I was drawn to Mr. Bradley's sense of excellence and his devotion to his students. He was a compassionate and caring individual who used the tools afforded to him to teach his singers to sing at sight.

Kayla Vincent came to the table with a vast history of successful teaching in secondary choral music education. Having taught for 29

years, she was eager to participate in the focus group. She also taught Advanced Placement music theory in her high school. The combination of her knowledge in music theory along with her successful sight-singing teaching career made her a suitable candidate for the focus group. Kayla walked with grace and could charm a room with her sensitive and personal interactions. She arrived at the event discussion dressed in a sparkled taupe blouse with a matching skirt and shoes. Her necklace, earrings and bracelets were slightly on the glitzy side, but did not draw too much attention away from her face. Kayla had a quiet passion for education, particularly in the fine arts. She was always ready to help a new teacher and often gave of her time whenever needed.

Kayla taught choral music in a middle school for half a day then drove to a high school campus for the second half of her day. She was a kind, light-hearted individual who was always ready to make a wise-crack about life or her storied teaching career. Every now and then as the school calendar drew to a close, she hinted at retiring. For the last several years, if I recall, she had alluded to the fact that "this was going to be my last year." That elusive "last year," however, keeps moving further and further every August. She brought a sense of joy to the table. When the tone of our discussions became serious, she was the one who would interject a quip or quote that would lighten the mood of the room.

The focus group discussed the use of Curwen hand signs. Kayla employed hand signs while teaching her class to sing at sight. She believed it kept them on task and helped to focus on the beat that helped keep the ensemble together. Kayla was a highly respected music educator. Her years of experience brought a sense of confidence and purpose to the focus group. When Kayla spoke, it was as if one were hearing from an old sage or guru who was sharing life experiences and meditations with her younger disciples.

Mason Levine had forty-one years experience as a secondary choral music educator. Mason was also heading toward retirement age but was adamant that he had no intentions of retiring anytime soon. Mason had children in a university and his position as head choir director was helping to pay their tuition. Mason had seen a lot of changes in his years as a choral director. He retold the story of when he first heard a choir in a festival contest use solfège in the early 70's. He thought it was a different language. He remembered that at that time, no choir director he knew was using hand signs or solfège syllables while sight singing.

Over the years he observed more and more choir directors using hand signs and solfège and was a bit skeptical until he tried it with his own choirs. He found that his singer's ears became better equipped to sing the different notes and rhythms when using a movable Do method

because it related all the pitches of the diatonic scale to the tonic key. He has been using solfège since the 1980's.

Mason Levine dressed modestly. He wore saggy, faded blue jeans that had seen better days and probably several hundred washes. But his mind had not faded one bit; I was impressed with his bright wit and intelligence. His ability to impart his craft of teaching vocal music to his students and new choral teachers was amazing. Mason shared his understanding of the choral music classroom with kindness and compassion. I believed the thousands of students who have walked through his classroom doors would feel his impact in choral music education. Also, I sense he has had a strong impact on future music educators to whom he had offered advice, counsel and a listening ear. Mason was a kind southern gentleman. He had a soft-spoken manner in which he conveyed information with the heart of a teacher; he never talked down to anyone or in a manner of a know-it-all. Mason's wisdom and experience in choral music education, I believe, made him an excellent person to serve on this focus group.

Lora Makinic was the jokester of the group. She had been a choral director for eight years in a highly successful middle school choral program in a suburban school district. Lora had a radiant glow about her and almost always sported a contagious smile. She thinks fast and talks just as fast as her mind can formulate her thoughts. She retained

the youthful college-student look about her. For the first day of discussion she wore dress slacks and an unassuming long-sleeve dress shirt with a handsome collar proudly sporting the blue and gold school colors along with the name and logo of her school "Home of the Fighting Lions" no doubt striking fear in the heart of any would-be rival. Lora seemed to be friends with everyone.

Lora had a full head of flowing blond hair with tinges of highlights that dropped down just above her shoulder. She had taught in two schools in her eight years as a choral director. During the discussions, I observed her making careful notes on a pad of paper before she gave her input. Once she talked though, her words were fast and sounded extemporaneous. She glanced at her notes every now and then, but her input was more conversational than scripted. When she offered insight into the discussion, her vocabulary was replete with imaginative phrases "We're not teaching French fries, we're teaching people" was my favorite quote. I imagined Lora's students reacted with positive enthusiasm when they observed Lora's high-octane energy in her classroom.

Her excitement in the classroom however, was sometimes met with disappointments in the front office. Her immediate supervisor was often very direct, business-like and occasionally came off as strong as a drill-sergeant. Lora had noticed a self-serving trend in some of the administration. During the focus group discussions, Lora relayed a

situation where her administrator exhibited characteristics of competitiveness laced with elements of narcissism.

Despite her sometimes-difficult administration, Lora loves to have fun no matter the setting. Even in a somewhat serious research study, her effervescent personality softened the academic theories and qualitative inquiries. If her teaching style was anything like her personality, I can imagine her students would likely be highly devoted to her. Lora Makinic was young as far as her age but she was also young at heart. If she is to be teaching twenty years from now, I imagine she would still allow her singers to have fun in the classroom.

Barbara Anderson taught choral music education in one of the largest and most respected high schools in her area. Barbara often provided wisdom and advice that she had earned by her twenty plus years of teaching. She was forty-seven-years old and the light touches of gray in her hair reflected the brightest and not-so-brightest days in her teaching profession. Barbara did not have a mean bone in her body. Barbara was unmarried and lived with her father in a sprawling seventeen acre ranch. Barbara was direct but very reserved when it comes to difficult conversations. She was assertive, but never to the point where I felt dismissed. The award-winning middle schools that fed into her high school program assured a near endless supply of highly qualified freshman singers. Many of Barbara's students that have come

through her program were refined, balanced and sang with artistic beauty and a wonderful sense of musical phrasing.

Barbara began her music instruction as a saxophone player in her high school band. Barbara then joined the choir in her senior year of high school to try something different, musically. In the choir, Barbara found a true enjoyment of singing adding to her other musical interests. Later in college, she decided to become a choir director and focused her studies on vocal technique and choral literature. Barbara Anderson impressed me as a seasoned professional musician and artist. She had high expectations from her choirs and the two assistants that worked for her. When it came to Barbara's philosophy concerning the purpose in teaching sight singing, she simply believed that if she was an effective music teacher, her students would no longer need her instruction but would become independent music readers. She tells me her normal workweek could be anywhere from 50–65 hours of work. I saw a devoted music educator happily engaged in choral singing.

Angela Mack grew up in the upper Midwest part of the United States. She studied music in college in her hometown and married her husband the same year she graduated from college. She was offered a job over the phone and the newly wedded couple packed up everything they owned, which incidentally fit into a small U-Haul, and drove to San Antonio, Texas. They have lived, loved, laughed and cried in the Alamo

City ever since. She had an effervescent personality and was friends with or would soon become friends with practically everyone she meets. She had nineteen years experience as a middle school music educator and her school had to add more shelves to accommodate the large numbers of trophies she had earned.

In Angela, I saw a youthful spirit in heart, mind and body. Apart from her school duties, she was also involved with her church choir. Each week, she was either leading the youth choir, sang in the adult choir or led the praise band in worship. She trained in a nearby gym at least two to three times a week. Her husband served as an administrator and worked in the same school district as Angela. She met the challenges of any given day just as any other teacher. I believe her professionalism with teachers and her students shone through even in the worst days. She was well liked among her peers and was almost always the first one who volunteered to help out the younger teachers in her school or new teachers to the area. Angela brought her experience and expertise to this focus group in a way that enlightened my understanding of successful sight-singing in the choral music classroom.

Dolores Peadmont was the chair of the music department at one of the major universities in Texas. She brought a refined demeanor to the table. She was a published composer and in her college years she spent time in England and Ireland to study choral music education. Her

vocabulary and knowledge of music was impressive. During one of the breaks in our discussions, Dolores lightheartedly embarked on a discussion about the differences between mean tuning and equal temperament with several of the middle and high school choir directors. I could not help notice that the other directors were listening to every word she was saying. They seemed very interested in the content of the topic as well as the sophistication in which she delivered the information.

Dolores was trained and certified by the Royal School of Church Music, an organization devoted to excellence in music using "practical and applied programmes of education and training" (RSCM 2015). She was easily approachable, never aloof and was always ready to assist a colleague. Dolores brought a wealth of insight to our discussions and was the one to whom everyone looked when a difficult question arose, or a question that involved the history of sight singing. She was quiet in her demeanor, but she never came across as stuffy or snobbish. I noticed at the end of each focus group discussion, she was peppered with questions by several of the focus group members. Also, several of the secondary teachers in the group asked Dolores to come to their schools in order to assist them and their choirs in concert preparations.

Elise Whitenhauser had lived her entire life in Texas. With her twenty-seven years of teaching as a secondary choral music educator, she had much to contribute to our focus group discussions. Elise was

soft-spoken and never interrupted anyone for any reason. Elise was slender of build and wore her auburn hair neatly trimmed. Elise dressed in a professional manner, usually in a variety of modest, warm colors that reflected the warmth of her personality. Elise was also modest in her style of communication. She rarely used any manner of exaggeration and successfully highlighted her thoughts and ideas with reason and intelligence. Her journey in music began as a violinist.

As a child, she began studying the violin. In high school she joined the choir and observed many similar musical elements that overlapped from the orchestra to the choir. When it came to singing the right notes, she realized she would often guess at the correct pitch based upon whether the notes went up or down. Singing the correct notes was not as easy as finding the correct notes on her instrument. To perform the correct pitch while singing, she recalls, demanded an entirely different way to read music. It was in college when she learned how each note of the diatonic scale was related to the tonic pitch. She realized that singers next to her who sang with solfège had the tools to maintain accurate pitch reading. Elise brought refinement to the table. Her experience and sense of purpose made her a useful individual for this study.

Research question number one.

What are the purposes in teaching sight singing? Describe observations that have shaped this belief. The purpose of this question was to investigate the motivations behind teachers' efforts to teach singing at sight to students. The second half of the question was designed to elicit personal life-stories about the journey each teacher had taken that informed their pedagogy. The group of teachers responded to these two questions from several different angles.

Creating self-reliant singers.

Barbara Anderson was the first to give her input. She believed her purpose as a teacher was to enable her students to read music independently from the classroom setting so that they were no longer dependent upon her instruction. Angela Mack chimed in and agreed that reading music notation was similar to reading a book or learning another language. Once a new language was taught, learned then mastered, the students were capable of independent study without prompts from the teacher.

Barbara: I always tell my kids succinctly that I teach them to read music at first sight *so that* they will eventually no longer need me (emphasis in the inflection of her voice). They'll become independent music readers.

> Angela: The end process was like [reading] a book. They could pick up a book [today] and read it - so it is with reading music. They should be able to pick up a piece of music and read it.

Several other teachers agreed with this sentiment. These initial responses point to the notion that teachers should create self-reliant singers. Elise Whitenhauser added that when her students developed good sight-singing habits, those skills overlapped as they learned new music. If, for example, they were reading a Bach motet, she was in the habit of giving the tonic triad in the major or minor key and the students who were adept at singing at sight performed mostly the correct notes and rhythms from the first reading.

Dolores Peadmont relayed a similar example. She stated that learning solfège and thus, learning to sing at sight was similar to the process of learning how to read. A student was given the letters and the student learned how to phonetically replicate the sound that had been previously learned. When he or she replicated several consonants and vowels together they could read a word. When a teacher duplicated this in a classroom setting and the students were reading the words together, there was a beautiful unison.

Mason Levine also taught music literacy in the same manner as reading. He found that when his students were well trained in music

reading at sight, they learned confidence and increased in their skills in the new language. Mason also tried to make sight singing fun. He often told the choir that sight singing was like a puzzle. Singers achieved success when they can readily figure out the various codes of notes and rhythms. Lora Makinic believed her purpose in teaching sight singing extends far beyond the rehearsal hall and influences other real-life situations as well. Lora's long-term goals, just like the other directors, were to teach the basics of pitch, rhythm and meter, but disagreed with the self-serving notion of successful singers as single entities. Lora forwarded the idea that her purpose was to create success as a choir similar to a team sport. When her singers were a part of a successful team effort their confidence could be brought higher. This sense of confidence in one's abilities, in this case, sight singing, could transfer into other classes as well.

She used the example of several of her former students who struggled in some of the academic classes such as pre-algebra or some of the science classes. Some of these students have found difficulty earning a passing grade but when they came to the choir rehearsal they did very well. Although, this is a highly subjective assertion, Lora claimed that some of her students' grades improved in other classes because their self-confidence was elevated in her choir class. Certainly more research was needed to corroborate this assertion.

Kayla Vincent taught in a middle and high school setting. She teaches sixth graders up to seniors in high school every day. She knew the skills needed for success in high school choral music education and started the learning process in her middle school choir classes so they could become successful in her high school choirs. She began by teaching music as a second language. She believed that the relationship between the diatonic scale and the tonic pitch was the basis for learning the musical vocabulary. For her singers to be literate, well-rounded musicians she believed they must learn how to count, how to sing musically, and how to decipher music notation.

> Elise: I believe that sight singing is the foundation [of learning music]. If [I] can teach those fundamentals early on [then] learning [music] literature becomes so much faster. You don't always have to pound out notes or teach by rote. I do try to develop the aural training, [but] because I am not a pianist and having them develop and train their ear, it's better for me not to be at the piano and [because of this] it develops their sight-singing [and ear-training] skills.
>
> Dolores: Sight singing is the alphabet for the music major - by the time they get to my level [college level] sight singing is a tool from getting from the letters into

words, into music into a performance - it has to be that quick - one read through - then you perform it, at least in the professional world. Having them learn the language of music - solfège - intervallic reading - builds an independent and professional musician.

Mason: Music teachers work on musical literacy - we want our kids to be musically literate in whatever level [they are participating]. Also, I like to build their own self confidence in their abilities. Sight singing can really create anxiety for singers. They [can sometimes] fold under that pressure but if they're given the tools to work through it they don't have to. I try to let them be successful as best they can without adding that sense of anxiety. I also want them to have fun. That's a big thing.

Lora: The whole goal is long-term - I do it every day - I want to teach… basic rhythm skills and basic intervallic skills, and pitch [to my students]. I feel it makes learning a song more exact. There is some sense of glory in being precise - and the more precise they can make a song [may help to] build their confidence. In my case I have some really strong, smart kids that are

in [accelerated academic programs] and then I have [other] kids at the bottom of the barrel who can sometimes barely struggle to make a 70 in all their other classes. When these students [who have daily failures] come into my classroom and they can sight sing successfully, when they start to perfect the skills of sight singing - even basic quarter notes - they feel a part of something and their daily failures become daily successes. Sadly, [their success at sight singing] might be the *only* success they may have all day long (pauses briefly as it appears she is getting emotional). I want to have a successful choir [made up of] well-rounded, confident musicians. As they get better and better every day as a team thing. And I want to send confident, precise educated musicians to the high school so they'll have bigger and better performing opportunities, not just reading notes and rhythms but making music, which speaks to everyone's soul.

Principal Investigator: You mentioned that you want them to feel confident - do you think that sense of confidence can transfer into classes other than music?

Lora: Once their confidence starts to grow in my class - then they go into their next class - and because of that confidence they can be more confident in other classes - I feel it really spreads out and develops the kid as a whole.

Principal Investigator: So would you say your purpose to teach sight singing extends beyond the choir room?

Lora: Everything we do builds the whole human being - we're not teaching French fries here - we're teaching people - so we have to [try to] build them all up.

Kayla: I teach music as a second language - with music being a universal language. When we teach sight singing, [I say], "This is your secret musical language." Many of our students come into my school as newbies. They have to learn the relationship between pitches and chords… and the vocabulary of the musical language. [Eventually], I want them to be musically literate.

Confirming self-reliant singers.

As the focus group relayed their purposes of teaching sight singing in the choral music classroom, the desire to develop self-reliant singers

stood out among the focus group as a dominant factor. Several times in the discussions, teachers compared the skills needed to sing at sight to the skills needed to read. In reading there was a phonetic alphabet where sounds were made according to the notation. Similarly, in music reading, there was a musical alphabet where sounds were discerned according to music notation. Once a student had mastered a certain level of reading, whether it be words or music, the student was no longer in need of a teacher.

Elementary reading exercises, for example, are no longer needed when a student is reading at the eleventh grade level. In music, the focus group members agreed that the goal of the choral music educator was to give students the necessary tools that allowed them to achieve a graded level of sight-singing proficiency. Ultimately, when a student acquired a proficient level of success in sight singing, tools used to teach sight singing for beginners for that student is no longer needed.

A secondary topic that also stood out was the comfort and affirmation teachers sometimes received from their pupils after they left the high school setting and used the sight singing techniques they learned in high school in their college-level music classes.

Barbara: I have found success with this teaching philosophy [of producing self-reliant singers]. I recently received an email from a former student who is attending a

major music school who scored highest (in accuracy) in her class. She wrote and told me "Thank you for teaching me to sight sing."

Angela: I have also heard from many of my former students who have become music majors that their experiences with me have helped them greatly in college.

Mason: I also have a student who emailed me not too long ago and told me she had auditioned for 'x' number of choirs. "I not only was given music to sight sing but *hard* music. Apparently I did pretty good because after my audition I was ordered to write my high school music teacher and tell him 'thank you for teaching me to sight read so well.' " So I printed off [her email] and read it to my other choir classes.

Kayla: I heard from a former student of mine who is attending Berkeley College of Music, who texted me and said "Thank you for teaching me solfège. I never knew how valuable it would be after high school."

Cultivating self-reliant musicians.

Developing a musical ear.

When thinking about the long-term effects of how the skill of sight singing would benefit a student in his or her middle school and high school and college years, the notion of singing after one completed formal education was brought up. Dolores Peadmont expressed the thought that there was a need to know how to sing at sight long after singers have a college degree in their hands. Some singers continued to perform in community choirs or local religious choral organizations.

The need to know how to sight sing was vital to these volunteer organizations. Several of the focus group members expressed the thought that our singers' musical ears must be highly refined by the time they left our classrooms and walked into the world of community, church or professional choral organizations.

Dolores: Sight singing is the alphabet for the music major.

> By the time they get to my level [the college level] sight singing is a tool from getting from the letters into words, words into music and ultimately into a performance - it has to be that quick - one read through - then you perform it, at least [that is what is expected] in the professional world. The musical ear has to be *that* refined. Having them learn the

language of music - solfège - intervallic reading - builds that independent and professional musician.

Wilson: There is an ultimate goal - we want our kids to learn to sight read anything we put in front of them.

Mason: Music teachers work on musical literacy - we want our kids to be musically literate in whatever level they choose to pursue.

Developing a confident musician.

As the discussion of the importance of sight singing continued, several of the focus group members forwarded the notion that there was another goal that students may want to achieve. This secondary or tertiary goal extended beyond middle school, high school and college-level music classes and into other real-life situations. When a student achieved a level of proficiency as a chorister, he or she may want to sing in community or church choir. This confidence in singing had a deep connectivity with the ability to sing at sight. It was a normal expectation of instrumentalists, commented Wilson, to be able to read the notes and rhythms and the dynamics the first time a piece of music was attempted. The better an ensemble was at sight singing the better they would be when it comes time for a performance.

Also, when a group of musicians were adept at sight singing, more

difficult music could be attempted. Finally, Kayla proposed an even greater good as to the purpose of teaching sight singing. She expressed her desire for her students to be a part of "that universal language of music."

> Wilson: [Sight singing] is a natural expression of learning your instrument. If vocalists were considered [to be] a musicians they must believe that just like any other instrumentalist would. Ultimately a musician should be able to pick up something and be able to learn it.
>
> Kayla: When [my students] leave my classroom, I want them to feel they have been a part - and *are* a part - of that universal language of music.

Research question number two.

What are the positive or negative attributes of movable Do, fixed Do and numbers? Describe observations that have shaped this belief. The purpose of the latter question was to investigate the perceptions held by each participant concerning the three systems of sight singing cited in this study. Specifically, each teacher expressed his or her understanding of the benefits, limitations, difficulties of these three sight singing systems and voiced his/her rationale as to why he/she taught a certain method. Interestingly, with time, several teachers confessed that they

have changed their minds on occasion as to the efficacy of a certain method and have changed their pedagogy accordingly.

The question regarding each teacher's observations was designed to elicit personal narratives that may tell a story of the journey each educator had taken that contributed to his/her reasons as to why they offer instruction in these sight singing systems. Participants responded to this question in two basic categories: 1. the benefits and 2. limitations or difficulties with each system.

Moveable Do - ***understanding its benefits and limitations.***

Most directors on the focus group believed Moveable Do was the most efficient way to teach singing at sight at the secondary level. The notion of keeping the singer's ear attuned to a tonic pitch or center of tonality was mentioned fourteen times, far more than any other phrase or word grouping during the discussion making it an important topic of discussion. Movable Do, according to Elise, afforded a better sense of tonality when working with major keys and with relative minor keys. Elise used the La minor method of teaching sight singing in minor keys. The La minor method established La-Do-Mi as the tonic triad instead of lowering the third scale degree: Do-Meh-So.

Angela Mack said movable Do was most accessible to her middle school choirs. She felt that establishing a tonal center early in a student's ear was integral to learning how the diatonic notes related to

the tonic pitch. Barbara Anderson had only used and taught movable Do in her years as a professional music educator. Barbara claimed it was highly successful for her and her students. Kayla Vincent also used movable Do and the La minor method to teach relative minor keys. Wilson Bradley favored movable Do due to its ease of use. He reported his students responded well to his instruction and gave feedback on the positive attributes of moveable Do.

Lora Makinic had an early background with movable Do. In every major key, she asserts, students could learn the relationship between the key center and other notes of the scale. Lora used Curwen hand signs and she instructed her students to move their hands higher and lower depending on the notes they were singing. When her students were learning a song it was much easier for them to learn it using solfège in movable Do.

Mason Levine also prefers movable Do. Mason gave a lesson to his choirs at the beginning of the year informing them how each of the major sight singing systems work. He then proceeded to instruct them of the benefits of movable Do and allowed them the option of learning more about the other systems. The practice of using movable Do was limited, he claimed, when dealing with music outside the common practice period.

Mason asserted that when music became more chromatic or began

to fall outside of the tonic pitch it became systematically more difficult for a singer to keep a tonal center in their minds. Barbara Anderson agreed. She asserted that learning more chromatic music using an intervallic method was more time-efficient than trying to re-name all of the altered syllables using movable Do. Barbara claimed that while a contemporary piece that goes beyond a few accidentals was being learned or the key center moves around to a different note, using movable Do was less effective.

Mason also felt that it was best for singers to use La minor when learning songs written in a minor key. Dolores believed movable Do was great for tonal music. At the college level, she used it to complement a student's first year in aural training and in choir classes. But the negative, she claims, was that in non-tonal music, movable Do produced a sense of musical clumsiness especially when singing early music.

Angela: I think movable Do is the most accessible way [to teach sight singing] to my middle school choirs - because you can establish that tonal center that can help ingrain a melodic pattern - that home tone - it helps melodic line - interval patterns, muscle memory - in all keys a Do to Mi sounds different than Do to Fa. And then [with] my kids, we talk about - how a certain skip feels within muscle memory - and of course

always being able to maintain a tonal center. Even if you take it to a minor-based tonal center. It teaches them to recognize and feel and eventually internally hear without me having play what those intervals sound like.

Barbara: I have only used and taught movable Do, it just makes sense. My sense of tonality will shift depending on the key. My first experience with solfège was from [the Broadway Musical] *The Sound of Music*. In college when I heard about movable Do I remember thinking, "oh [solfège] this is real; it's not something invented by Hollywood!

Kayla: I start with the basic skill [of movable Do] and teach the basic chord functions that associate [the note] Do and the common tonal center. I have found that with movable Do there is an easier connection for the students - they get it a lot faster. I feel I can relate sight singing quicker [by] using movable Do and it takes them to a higher level of musical thinking.

Wilson: Movable Do makes more sense to me because the major scale will always be whole-whole half, whole-whole-whole half - and listening to each of our stories

here - that most of us have had some instrumental backgrounds and now we're teaching vocal music - I think choral musicians are the most confused. When you pick up an instrument - a C major scale will always the same [but as for the human voice] we don't have fingerings! I have recently picked up the bass guitar, and it's so easy because when I'm given a key to play, the relationship of where the fingers fit on a fret board is proportional to the key. Negatively for movable Do, there is often a long learning curve for the ear to develop the relationship of each note of the scale to the tonic pitch.

Lora: With movable Do - in any key - there is an aspect of muscle memory where a student can learn the relationships of all the scale degrees to the tonic pitch. We use the Curwen hand signs and I'm real big about where they place their hands. When the notes go higher the kids should place their hand signs higher or lower depending on the direction of the notes. For example, there is a song we're learning that is in the key of Eb. In the B section, the tonal center changes to F major but the key signature remains in three flats.

So as we began to learn this piece we tried to use all the altered pitches, but I quickly realized the tonal center of this section changed so the students could not hear how the pitches related to the new tonic pitch. So I told them to sing this section as if you were in the key of F major. While it took them a while to become comfortable with it - once they had it - they sight read [the music] essentially note perfect - because they could relate all the pitches of the [new home key] of F. So when they're singing a song, it's much easier for them to learn it, to solfège it, in movable Do than it is for any other system.

Barbara: Trying to use movable Do with more contemporary pieces doesn't work. As a singer, if I'm learning something more contemporary - and movable Do isn't working - I sing using intervals.

Dolores: Movable Do is great for tonal music, great for teaching fundamentals, to compliment a student's first year classes in music. It's great for introducing chromatics. The negative, however, is that in non-tonal music, it produces clumsiness, as if the kids are singing on their backs. It's also very hard to sing in

> absolute value depending on the key you're in - that is - no matter what key you're in, the absolute value of the interval remains the same. It can work very well or it can work very badly depending on the choir you're in.

Fixed Do - ***understanding its benefits and difficulties.***

Most of the focus group members approached the discussion of fixed Do with some amount of hesitation or reservation. As the principal investigator I wanted to find out if any of the focus group members used fixed Do on a regular basis. Elise became aware of fixed Do in college. She remembered that fixed Do trained her ear. Angela remarked that she thought using fixed Do "made her brain hurt."

She remembered that fixed Do was covered in her aural skills class in college. She remembered it was very hard to maintain a tonal center using fixed Do coming from a movable Do background. She was hesitant to support fixed Do because she never thought that fixed Do would retain a tonal center, but admitted she had never taught it. She also felt that fixed Do would be greatly beneficial in establishing a true, more perfect pitch muscle memory system, not necessarily related to the key center.

Barbara remarked that a singer who was established in fixed Do would more readily remember the pitch of any exact note in relation to

the staff, not necessarily to the tonal center of the piece. Lora was exposed to fixed Do and remembered her first reaction was that there were too many notes to learn accurately.

Mason Levine said that he knows some teachers in the past that used fixed Do exclusively. He believed a benefit of using fixed Do was that it developed a sense of relative pitch. He also remarked that he thought more colleges used the fixed Do method because they perform harder, often more chromatic music. Moveable Do, he claims, did have its limitations especially when dealing with contemporary and chromatic music. Dolores believed that that fixed Do does a better job to train relative pitch. Singers under her tutelage have had success at singing at sight using fixed Do. She believes fixed Do also helped teach the precision of whole steps and half steps.

Lora: For our kids to try to use fixed Do would be too much for them. I think fixed Do has too many options.

Elise: In college I used fixed Do and that does train the ear.

Angela: Fixed Do I think it would make my brain hurt - I never think you maintain that tonal center. Maybe because I've never taught it, but I always teach that Do is the key center. But I can see how fixed Do can achieve a true, more perfect pitch muscle memory - but not relative to the key.

Barbara: When I think of what could be the positives of fixed Do, they learn and establish exactly what that syllable is to the exact note on the staff - so I can see where there is a certain degree of mastery of each note.

Lora: I have been exposed to fixed Do and my first reaction was - there are too many altered tones to learn, accurately. I had a background in movable Do, so I could easily sing Do to Fa - but if you were to ask me to sing - Le Te Fi - I would not be able to do that. For our [middle school] kids to try to use fixed Do would be too much for them. I think fixed Do has too many options.

Mason: I have known some teachers who have used fixed Do exclusively, and you could put anything in front of them and they could read it perfectly. I do think fixed Do does develop a sense of relative pitch - but I think the key is - that nowadays - we teach some system. We have evolved into using some system - years ago - there was no system.

Dolores: For fixed Do - it does train relative pitch in an excellent manner. It also fine tunes the teaching of the precision of teaching whole steps and half steps. I

used fixed Do for teaching modes. Some students come to me and say 'This piece is in the key of G' and I say, 'No it's in mixolydian.' So they come in trying to sing it as if it were tonal, and therefore when they sing it the tuning is wrong. And I'm not talking about just tuning, just tuning is actually incorrect. And so that's one of the issues I have - I do a lot of early music and 'which system works well' I have found that movable Do does not work well with modes, it gives you a false reading, but fixed Do works great for modes. Now my college, I have [about 3 out of every 4 students] who have used a fixed Do system. It's a great starting point for students who use it. I teach them movable Do and then I go back to fixed Do and we do early music and see how it goes - so actually I work through all three systems.

Principal Investigator: When you say, 'it trains the relative pitch in the modes' are you talking about the difference between singing using equal temperament and mean tuning?

Dolores: Yes. When you tune some of those six-part or eight-part tonalities - when you have a singer who is

steadfastly clinging to a Do Mi in movable Do - it's not the same - your ear actually hears it and you sing it differently - so it gives a very odd sound.

Barbara: What do you mean 'it's not the same?'

Mason: (asking) It's off by cents?

Dolores: Yes, it's off by cents.

Barbara: Between what?

Dolores: If you're in Dorian, for example, and someone is singing a D and someone is singing an F natural, a minor third, however they sing it, let's say: Do-Me, it should tune ok - however, if another singer sings the same interval as: Re-Fa, it's off, the singer is actually going to tune it differently. If I give them the Do, the tonic pitch, they actually sit on it - they grip the Do - it's a very fat sound. But if you give them Re, that's a very unsettling place to be and it makes them listen more. So in early music, fixed Do works great.

Angela: (Sarcastically) I'm going to start using that tomorrow on my sixth graders.

Numbers - ***understanding its benefits and limitations.***

Elise Whitenhauser was first to give her input. Her understanding of the Numbers system was that it worked well for those who were

inexperienced in sight singing. There was no need, she claimed, for a student to have any prior musical background, or even know what a staff was, let alone identify the names of the notes. Singing by Numbers was simply a restating of the scale degrees as long as there was an understanding of the center of tonality established in the singers' ears.

The difficulty with Numbers was in figuring out how to perform tones not found in the diatonic scale. Elise stated, "[Altered tones] do not work well with Numbers." In college, Elise used Numbers and remembered the difficulty in singing the number seven because it had two syllables. Also, she expressed her dissatisfaction with Numbers when altered tones were part of the music. She recalled that it was difficult to sing "four-sharp" or "seven-flat" on a single note.

Angela Mack offered a contrasting point of view. Angela thought singing by numbers "was crazy." She had never used it as a teacher and agreed with Elise concerning the difficulty in learning to perform an altered tone outside the diatonic scale. Barbara Anderson had never used the Numbers sight-singing method but felt that a singer who was unfamiliar with singing could achieve good results provided a solid tonal center was maintained. Lora Makinic and Wilson Bradley had no experience with Numbers so they did not offer any opinion.

Elise: Numbers works well for those that are inexperienced -
if singers don't have any musical background at all its

good - but then you have to deal with altered tone -and that doesn't work well with numbers.

Angela: I guess I can see how numbers works but I've never used it as a teacher - nor have I used it as a singer. I can't see how an altered pitch, say a raised fifth scale degree, would be performed. I just don't get it.

Barbara: I've never used numbers but I can certainly see where a kid can establish the key center with numbers.

While fixed Do and numbers remain in use, these directors tended to agree that movable Do had worked best for their choirs.

Research question number three.

What are the relative attributes of these selected sight-singing materials? Describe observations that have shaped this belief. Published materials used in this study were selected in two different ways. First, I selected some of the materials based upon what I have seen in music education shelves and in choir libraries over the years.

Secondly, I asked each focus group member to bring printed sight-singing materials they have used with their choirs. Some of the older materials were not reviewed due to the fact that they were currently out of print or otherwise unavailable. The principal investigator passed out

sight-singing materials from a variety of publishers to the focus group. Each selected sight-singing booklet was handed out one at a time.

All directors focused on one set of materials at a time. When the discussion concluded on one, they were collected and another single set of materials was distributed. Each director was asked to review the materials and offer insights as to their effectiveness in the classroom. Their evaluations of these materials fell into the realm of four perspectives: strengths, weaknesses, usefulness and efficacy.

1. Sing at Sight, W. Appleby, Oxford University Press, 1960.

The discussion began as the teachers passed around the Appleby sight-singing materials. Lora Makinic immediately recognized the Appleby and began the discussion. She used the Appleby regularly each summer as she taught private voice lessons. She commented that the sight-singing lessons began in the keys of C, F and G. She liked the fact that the lessons were sequential, that is, they start off rather easy and became progressively more difficult in scope. She liked that the lessons were short, and fairly quick in order to keep the student active in the learning process. She commented that when a student sings an exercise too many times, it no longer became singing at sight.

Dolores Peadmont asserted that the Appleby was used as a textbook in her music fundamentals class at her University. Once her class became adept with the Appleby, she gave her class more difficult

material. All of her choir members were required to sing through the Appleby book by the time they finished the aural skills class.

Elise Whitenhauser believed that the Appleby was a good unison singing book for the beginning of the school year but thought that it did not seem to be a resource she would use. "[The Appleby book] was not a book for someone who does not have a musical background. They're not going to know how to identify a key. It just doesn't seem that there was enough [of an] introduction for someone who was just starting out."

Dolores countered and felt that the order of keys in the Appleby was very helpful to her students. She claimed that most of her non-music students were able to understand the concept and sang mostly the correct notes and rhythms within a few months of instruction. On the other hand, Elise Whitenhauser felt that the Appleby was not a book for someone who does not have a music background. She did not see enough instruction for the beginner as to how to find the proper note as Do in the keys of F and G. Appleby clearly identifies the key centers of F and G on differing pages, not all at once.

Barbara Anderson disagreed with Elise and said she believed [the Appleby] was a good resource for the beginning singer. The singing exercises were well laid out and there was enough repetition in the exercises for student to be successful.

Dolores Peadmont was careful to notice that certain exercises in

the Appleby repeated previous pitches. So often, she claims, non-music students assumed that notes must change and the repetition of notes is an anomaly. The Appleby taught them to read the pitches whether they change or not. On the negative side, Dolores noted that it was published in the treble clef only, thus limiting its use in a mixed choir. She added that Appleby's exercises were written for treble boys that made the tessitura very high for young developing altos.

> Dolores: [The Appleby] is the sight reading book they use at St. Paul's Cathedral and York Minister [in England]. This is what the eight year old singing students have to sing before they are allowed to sing in the cathedral.
>
> Wilson: I have never seen the spelling of some of these vowels before Do - spelled DOH and LA - spelled LAH - I think this is a great way to teach vowels.
>
> Dolores: I find the order of the keys to be really helpful for the students. Particularly in my choirs made up mostly of non-[music] majors or minors because they feel [a sense of accomplishment] that when they finish the first three keys, C, F and G major, they feel empowered. When a student can see a key signature and recognize, say F major that she can recognize and find F as the tonic pitch and begin reading it.

Elise: [The Appleby] is not a book thought for someone who doesn't have a music background. They're not going to know how to identify a key; it just doesn't' seem that there is enough introduction for someone who is just starting out.

Barbara: Actually I believe this is a good book for beginners because there is so much step-wise movement [in the melody] patterns - repetition is here, as long as you give them the basic vocabulary they need - this would be very good with our kids who just need a lot of work.

Dolores: I like the exercises 14 – 20 [in the Appleby]. When I have a non-singer come into choir, these are fantastic because they often don't know how to repeat notes, because they assume that music always must move to another pitch. So training them to relax and actually teach them to read the notes, whether it changes or not is important.

Kayla: I like how it introduces high Do - [the book shows] the scale down.

Lora: Sometimes in my class I get so anxious to say the most basic of instructions - I like at the beginning the

instructions say, “When the notes go up, you go up (page 2).” Sometimes I forget to say that.

Angela: (Continues that thought) “when the notes stay still, you stay still.”

Dolores: There are also familiar tunes in here that I will use as a reward. So if you look at number 72, this is the reward they are given after they can sing numbers 1 – 20.

Mason: If I remember there is also an Appleby publication that uses four-part songs, not sight singing per se, but about 15 – 20 songs. I haven’t used it in a while, but I do remember this as an excellent source. It has some delightful choral music in it.

Dolores: There is [a four-part version] published by the Royal School of Church Music that has that.

2. Songs for Sight Singing, M. Henry, Southern Music Company, 1981.

Elise Whitenhauser began the discussion by stating she used the *Songs for Sight Singing.* Numerous composers made up this collection of contributions, each commissioned for use in sight-singing competitions and festivals. They were therefore useful in preparing students for the

same kinds of competitive contests. The University Interscholastic League, who governed many of the music contests in Texas, was authorized to make changes in the criteria or level of difficulty. Because of this, Mason Levine observed that the criteria for some competitions had changed and some of the older compositions were more out of date with the current criteria.

Dolores Peadmont was struck by what she calls "the poor choice of texts" allowed by the publisher on many of these compositions. She also noted that because of the nature of their composition, they were not "*real music* (italics added) and generally not worth my time." She further remarked that no junior high school boy was going to want to sing about "lazy floating balloons in the summer sky" (DeWitt, 1993).

Angela Mack used this collection as a resource in her classroom in teaching form and structure. Elise questioned the probable longevity of *Songs for Sight Singing* and added that once a sight singing piece was read in the classroom, it no longer became useful. "Once you've sung through them, it's not really sight singing anymore." Mason Levine commented that the cover artwork did not seem as if it had been chosen with much thought.

Mason: [The cover art] showed ugly, scary people singing.

Angela: Our kids just couldn't get past those devil faces [on the cover]. My students would say, "those things are

scary."

Mason: I asked Southern to please change the picture - but they never would. They have just a horrible picture on the front of some eighteenth century artist that was just awful - and it was on every cover.

Dolores: Again for me - it's the texts - I can't see why we have to have such terrible texts, even if we sing in solfège.

Elise: Jim Leininger is a good composer, he actually writes good [sight singing] music that I have used in my concerts.

Angela: I don't think I've ever looked at the texts [while competing in a contest or festival].

Dolores: …but the students will.

Barbara: Is it a copyright issue that determines the text they use?

PI: The composer can make more royalties if he or she authors the text or the text is [available for fair use] in the public domain.

Barbara: Maybe that's why some of the texts are so stinky, because they have to find poetry that's in the public domain.

Lora: They don't just make up stuff on their own?

Kayla: I think [the composer] Laura Farnell writes a lot of her own [lyrics for her compositions].

3. University Interscholastic League Sight Singing Pieces, Various composers, RBC Music, 2011.

There were several respected methodologies for teaching students to sing at sight. RBC Music in San Antonio, Texas published another set of materials each year. Barbara Anderson purchased some of these resources each year as her students progressed from basic intervals to more extended and harder sight-singing exercises. Barbara believed that if she taught fundamental musicianship and basic sight singing techniques, her students would be successful in competitive sight-singing festivals and competitions. Using the sight singing materials provided by RBC gave her students an extra sense of confidence because these were actual contest pieces issued during previous years.

Wilson Bradley believed that competing in a sight-singing festival allowed the students to experience performance aspects of how a piece of new music was learned. He felt that his students could learn a piece of new music, which included the right notes and rhythms, correct dynamics, balance, along with a beautiful tone then his singers would be successful. Angela Mack agreed.

Barbara: I always purchase these compositions after they are made available to the public because - as someone earlier said - [our students need to] get used to how it looks. RBC is going to publish it…and you know how it's going to look. You begin to recognize certain patterns and features. I really live by the belief that if I teach my students to read [music] well - if I teach them basics - and good fundamentals then the [competition scores] will be what they should be. But because it is a competition, to have them practice with previous years' sight singing materials gives them that added level of comfort and confidence that makes the process more familiar. So when they go into the sight-singing room, the less that surprises them the better. Holding this music in their hand helps alleviate some of the unknown - the more you can make the unknown known - the better for the kids.

Wilson: We're in the business of teaching them how to perform as well as teaching them how to sing at sight. The sight-singing contest is a performance - and the more we can make our sight singing experience a

> performance as well as a competition the better musicians we can make of our kids.

4. InSight-Singing - Volume I & II, D.R. Eaton, J. Juneau, and S. Schott, Carl Fischer Music, 2013.

Using a different marketing approach than some of the other published materials, this relatively new sight singing aid was received highly by the focus group. There were two books available, one in major keys and one in minor keys. The minor key identified the relative minor key as LA.

Barbara Anderson enjoyed the general layout of *Insight Singing*. She recalled that in some of the older sight singing books the notes tend to look compacted together, making it difficult to read. She also liked the fact that there was a systematic approach to the teaching and learning of minor scales. Mason Levine enjoyed the layout and commented that there were essentially just notes. He disliked other sight-singing materials that have lots of pictures or the notes were just too big.

Elise Whitenhauser found the *InSight Singing* books published by Alliance Music very useful. "I love these books; I've used them for several years. They are great for ear training, drills, chord progressions and there's a book in all the minor keys - harmonic, melodic. [They are] very well thought out books."

Elise: The fundamental drills are repetitive in different keys - so that does help with interval training.

Kayla: I like the challenging stuff - the kids look forward to being challenged.

Barbara: I will say that when we took our kids to a higher level of skill individually… this book did take them to [a higher] level of skill and proficiency.

Elise: *Insight Singing* reads well, I liked the layout, it's easy to look at and it doesn't look scary. In some of those older books, the notes are too crushed together - makes it hard to teach.

Barbara: I like how the minor book is a systematic approach to teaching the minor scales. [It shows the students] what to expect - raised or altered tones, and comparing it to understanding minor scales. This book is not the "end all" but it has served us well. Observing the sight-singing skills of my students - I noticed a definite improvement after they used *Insight Singing*. However, for my beginners, this was a tough book. I don't use it first with my beginners. There are other materials that would be a better step before this [such as the *Patterns of Sound*].

Angela: I like the layout of *Insight Singing*.

PI: Do any of you not like *Insight Singing*? (No one responded). Other directors replied in general if they have not used it, but they will definitely consider using this resource.

Mason: *Insight Singing* is something not just to [put on the market] and make money with - it's a useful product. I just want sight singing music - that's it. I need the notes!

Barbara: *Insight Singing* is useful because [the authors] are trying to approach sight singing using the visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning domains. They have a picture of the keyboard - I, IV and V chords and a variety of exercises. Some are in 6/8, 2/4, 4/4. So [this method] stretches their rhythm skills.

Kayla: I like [*Insight Singing*] - it added more syncopations too.

Barbara: *Insight Singing* will stretch your students' skills. It's not an easy first-year study.

Elise: *Insight Singing* was useful for the more advanced high school singers - it's not easy. I tried it on my

beginners and they struggled. It's good but you have to target it for your advanced groups.

Barbara: Our advanced singers learn to read altered tones. They have gotten so comfortable with altered tones because of the *Insight Singing* Volume II book [in minor]. Altered tones and raised scale degree don't scare them anymore. The authors base the scale off of LA minor. There are very carefully tiered levels of difficulty.

5. Keys to Sight Singing Success, J. Hemmingway, AMC Publications, 1991.

Angela Mack commented on her daily routine. She stated that she drills sight-singing skills on a daily basis. Often her teaching methods involved basic intervals and repetitive musical exercises. She used *Keys to Sight Singing Success* with her combined middle school sectional rehearsals. She could place the guys and girls in the same room. This book was useful for that. Dolores, when looking at the layout, mentioned that the rhythms were too simple, lot of repetitive quarter notes on the same pitch.

Barbara Anderson agreed but noted that she used this resource in her classroom for her beginning groups. Mason Levine added that while

it's an older book that more experienced teachers may be familiar with, when teachers find that they like it - it was still very functional. Kayla Vincent noted that the author, J. Hemmingway, was working as a middle school choir director when he completed the book. This would lead one to think that he had a keen insight into the needs of a middle school choir. Dolores Peadmont felt the two-part exercises were geared for more advanced readers.

Angela: I use this book with my combined middle school sectionals - I can have guys and girls practice sight singing drills in the same room. It's just interval practice - a lot of these exercises are very repetitive.

Barbara: Agreed. These rhythms are somewhat simplistic - I use them for my beginning groups - and it's a very useful tool.

Barbara: *Keys to Sight Singing Success* would be good as you move along - as it does introduce the dotted rhythms.

Dolores: These two-part exercises are difficult. I don't use them for my first year college singers. [These exercises] are just too hard.

6. The Folk Song Sight Singing Series, Grade I–IV, E. Crowe, A. Lawton and W.G. Whittaker, Oxford University Press, 1933.

Because of the experience of our focus group members, most of our directors were familiar with most of the sight-singing materials used in this study. Occasionally a director would state that he or she had not seen or reviewed a particular book or material. However, all of the directors in the focus group had heard of the *Folk Song Sight Singing Series* published by Oxford in 1933. This resource had been around for a long time. Concerning the exercises, there was a sense from the focus group that this resource fell on the more challenging side of the difficulty spectrum.

Dolores Peadmont mentioned, because of the level of difficulty, she would never give this resource to a beginning singer. Kayla Vincent liked the books because they were singable songs and not manufactured sight-singing exercises.

Elise Whitenhauser owned copies of the *Folk Song Sight Singing Series* but did not use them in her classroom instruction. Mason added a unique perspective from his years of choral teaching. He said that when he first started as a choral director [the Oxford] was all he had therefore he had to use this book in high school.

Dolores Peadmont added that she used this book in her college aural studies classes as well. She also sharply criticized the authors of

sight-singing music in general. She believed that so much of the printed sight-singing music was geared for a soprano or tenor. When sight-singing music was printed without regard to the alto and bass, the editors, according to Dolores, were not addressing the needs of two of the four sections of a choir. She felt that the alto lines were too high and they were never low enough to emulate what an alto would normally be asked to sing. "They're written for a soprano" says Peadmont. Further, Dolores observed that so many sight singing exercises paid little or no attention to the bass section. The music, in her opinion, did not cater specifically to the basses - the range is either too high or not low enough. She claims the basses should be able to sing a low F. Peadmont reported that she never saw sight singing book that has a low F for the basses.

More music should be composed that separates sight-singing music into categories of music written for singers in general with no consideration for voice part and music written with all four parts considered. When Dolores Peadmont offered a criticism of any of the published materials, most of the focus group members listened carefully. Some jotted a few notes down on the pad of paper as if he or she were back in college on the receiving end of an interesting lecture from a knowledgeable faculty member.

Dolores: I do use the Oxford, but only after my students have been through the Appleby book. I would never give

this to a beginning singer - there's simply too much information.

Kayla Vincent: I like the *Folk Song Sight Singing Series* because they're singable tunes - that's always good.

PI: They're real tunes, real songs.

Elise: I have never really used these Oxford books - I mean I have them in my library - I let my kids check them out - but I don't use these in my class. The notes are too small.

Mason: When I started teaching years ago this was all we used. And in high school that's what I used. But there's so much better stuff now written by people who better understand what our needs are - especially for the middle school choirs. When I started, there wasn't anything specifically for middle school. Now we have so many choices.

Dolores: I use the Oxford in my college classes as well, (commenting on printed sight reading music in general) but I'm still waiting to find music that is written for all four parts. The general lack of bass clef - and alto music in sight singing is severe. We have two parts that [I believe] are never catered to. The alto

lines are generally too high, and never low enough to emulate what they will be asked to sing in real choral music.

7. Music Reading Unlimited, V. Munn, Southern Music Company, 1997.

The focus group had positive things to say about *Music Reading Unlimited* and about Munn. Several felt the music reading exercises were well thought out for middle school and high school choirs. *Music Reading Unlimited* had realistic rhythmic elements found in most choral music, not simply strands of quarter notes and an occasional dotted figure. This book was written with the full four-part choir in mind not just lots of soprano lines. While Southern Music Company had gone out of business, this resource was still on the shelves of many secondary choral directors.

Elise: This is so good because there were a lot of drills. The second level [of exercises] has Do to Do, perfect prime. That's really good for ear training.

Kayla: [The author] goes from the I chord to the IV to V - exactly what we need to start off with.

Lora: It's very accessible to middle school choirs.

Dolores: I like the rhythmic elements - that's something that is missing from a lot of other sight singing materials - the rhythm is kind of assumed that they can do it.

Barbara: I like the Munn.

Angela: It moves quickly and I like that it has [music written in] bass clef.

8. Patterns of Sound, Volumes I & II, E. Crocker and J. Eilers, Hal Leonard, 1998.

Angela Mack who used these volumes extensively reviewed this resource. She liked *Patterns of Sound* for her 6th grade singers. She commented that the authors created the exercises in sequential patterns. The first exercises began with rhythmic patterns designed to involve clapping or chanting the rhythm. Once a series of rhythms was learned, music exercises started in the key of C. After the students have mastered the key of C more exercises were written in the closely related keys of F and G. Toward the end of each section there was a musical composition that incorporates the patterns and intervals previously taught. The author then gradually introduced the concept of rests in music. Further, two and three-part singing was included. Angela Mack highly recommended this resource.

9. Music Literacy for Singers, Volumes I – IV, P. DeWitt, Patti DeWitt Inc., 1998.

Lora Makinic was the first focus group member to review *Music Literacy for Singers*. She liked the level I melodies. The exercises were all straightforward and all unison to help the young ear tune with the other choir members. *Music Literacy for Singers'* first pages of exercises began in the keys of F and G and C with four-measure exercises then progressed to eight measure exercises. After a few weeks, the author placed some easy songs in the lesson plan that offered a young singer a chance to practice the intervals in an actual piece of music.

Angela commented that there were some good rhythmic examples as well. The exercise began with repetitive quarter notes and eighth notes then introduced the dotted quarter to eighth note pattern. This resource also introduced rests in an appropriate manner. Barbara had used it at one time but felt there was too much repetition to be useful. Once something had been taught and mastered, she claims, a teacher should feel free to move on to another skill set. Barbara reminded us that other resources have been published since *Music Literacy for Singers*.

10. Ninety Days to Sight-Singing Success, A Singers' Resource for Competitive Sightsinging Volumes I & II, Stan McGill & Morris Stevens, Alliance Publications, Inc., 1991.

Lora Makinic talked about her experience with the *Ninety Days* to Sight Singing Success book. She observed quite concisely that she used both editions and they were very good resources, especially the exercises printed in the minor keys. Barbara Anderson gave this resource to students for homework. She claimed it can be very beneficial for home study. Mason Levine pointed out that *Ninety Day to Sight Singing Success* was best used on an individual basis and not in a classroom setting. A choir that was adept at sight singing was made up of individual singers who were adept at sight singing.

Ninety Day to Sight Singing Success was specifically formatted for the individual. It came with a partner recording that allowed a student to hear the tonic pitch played on a piano then gave thirty seconds of silence. After the thirty seconds of silence, the exercise was performed so the singer could hear and check for pitch accuracy. Mason would not use this in the classroom. He also felt this resource would help individuals grow and learn at their own pace.

11. Rhythmic Training, R. Starer, Hal Leonard, 1985.

Dolores Peadmont commented that for sight singing music to work, it was assumed that beginning singers had a working knowledge of clefs, time signatures, meter signatures and barlines. Dolores noted that *Rhythmic Training* began with very basic exercises that slowly introduced meter and rhythm, which made it a very valuable resource for teaching sight singing to singers with no music training. *Rhythmic Training* printed the rhythms and placed a visual marker (a quarter note) below the rhythm that indicated each pulse or a beat. This resource used all the meters, not just 4/4.

Wilson Bradley reviewed *Rhythmic Training* and felt it a bit too elementary for use in his middle school choir. By the time he introduced printed literature in the classroom he ensured his students had basic instruction in pitch, rhythm, meter and time signatures.

12. Sight Singing, S. Adler, W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Dolores Peadmont commented that she used *Sight Singing* in her college-level sight-singing class as a supplement to *Sing at Sight* by Appleby. *Sight Singing*, said Peadmont, introduced singing through a series of exercises and reviewed intervallic steps. It clearly outlined the difference between minor and major second intervals. Dolores felt the rhythmic exercises were well laid out. She especially liked the fact that

there were real choral literature works that used the interval that was in the lesson. Elise Whitenhauser was not familiar with *Sight Singing* but looked at it carefully. She liked the notion of visual cues that aligned with the beat patterns but felt that, without barlines, students may get lost. Elise did not think she would ever use *Sight Singing.*

13. Voice for Life, P.D. Marks, Royal School of Church Music, 2012.

Dolores Peadmont used the *Voice for Life* curricula on a regular basis. She reported that the materials were divided into eight levels of difficulty. The *Choral Trainers Book*, which was part of the curricula of *Voice for Life* had targeted sight-singing tests that assessed each singer's skills and abilities. The student would then be given more difficult music to sing. By the end of the chapter the singer would be tested on an individual basis.

When a singer had successfully completed the coursework and had passed the test at the end of the chapter, he or she would be awarded a medal signifying completion of that section. In social circles, it was an honor to wear these medals in a concert setting. For years, the *Voice for Life* had been available only in the United Kingdom, and only distributed through licensed teachers. Fortunately, the curricula were now available to anyone. However, only those licensed by the Royal School of Church

Music were allowed to administer the sight-singing exam. Dolores then passed out the final exam to the focus group. As a licensed examiner for the Royal School of Church Music she said she would pass a student only when all of the musical elements were heard by the examiner.

The rest of the focus group reviewed *Voice for Life*. Angela Mack's eyes opened widely when she first saw the tests at the ends of the chapters. Her surprise was at the high level difficulty needed to successfully complete the exercise. The test contained a choral work for which a singer would be adjudicated. Students, claimed Peadmont, were expected to sing the example with a proper vocal tone, correct notes, rhythms, correct text, correct dynamics, tempo, phrasing, syncopations and mixed meters.

Mason Levine remarked at the arduous level of difficulty and wished some of the sight-singing music performed in his state would be just as difficult. Lora Makinic noted that these curricula were available in North America through GIA publications.

Research question number four.

Is there a discernible advantage in singing at sight when a student is proficient in playing a musical instrument? Describe observations that have shaped this belief. When this question was revealed to the focus group for the first time, reactions were immediate and decisive. The

teachers began to praise the attributes of students who had come into their choir organization with one or more years of instrumental experience. One of the first attributes mentioned most often was the ability of the band students to count rhythms correctly at sight.

All focus group members agreed that if a student was proficient in deciphering a rhythmic pattern, figuring out the notes became less of a challenge. Consequently individual singers and within a group setting would naturally become more adept at singing at sight. The focus group's discussion may be categorized into three sub-topics:

1. Instrumentalists who came into a choir program are musically self-reliant and self-disciplined.
2. Choir members on the other hand, tended to be dependent on conductors' gestures for entrances, dynamic contrasts and cutoffs.
3. How can choir members attain the favorable attributes of instrumentalists?

Kayla Vincent reflected about her experience with instrumentalists who enrolled in her choir. Most needed extra training in how to sing in tune and listen to the ensemble while singing. As far as reading the music they were adept at singing the correct rhythms the first time they read the music. Barbara Anderson said that most choir members with

prior band experience were also adept in reading the music notation at sight. They had difficulty utilizing hand signs but essentially already knew how to read music.

Mason Levine criticized choral singers for their inability, in his opinion, to focus on the entire musical material due to the fact they focused almost exclusively on performing the correct notes and rhythms. Mason relayed his experience with one particular individual who was in the marching band who later took a choir class. "[This student] read everything on the page," said Levine, "He [not only] read the correct notes and rhythms but correctly performed dynamic changes, accents and phrase markings.

This student made me ask myself, "Why is it that choir directors have to give the dynamics to our choirs? Have we not equipped them with the knowledge and vocabulary that when the music is marked *piano* then it should be sung soft?" Why, then were instrumentalists generally adept at sight reading all the musical elements in their music while choir members tended to focus on the notes and rhythms?

Secondly, what could choir directors learn so they could teach their choir members to become more adept at reading the whole score? Focus group members came to a general consensus that having a student with instrumental experience who became enrolled in a choral classroom setting who was adept at singing at sight was a valuable asset.

What were the positive attributes of these students? Were choir students expected to read the whole score at sight? There seems to be a gap in research that distinguishes teaching methodologies between vocal and instrumental music.

With this criticism clearly noted, the focus group members began talking amongst themselves, nodding in tacit agreement. There were certain qualities identified among instrumentalists that were attractive to choral music educators. Band students tended not to talk or cause a group distraction during rehearsal breaks. During sight-singing rehearsal, band members tended to read the entire musical score: notes, rhythms, dynamics, phrasing and articulations. Lora Makinic summed up the discussion by reflecting, "What are we doing wrong as choir directors? Why can't our [singers] sing [the notes, rhythms, dynamics and articulations]?"

Dolores Peadmont reported that her orchestra students tended to be successful in choir. She noticed that they treated the entire choral rehearsal as singing at sight. That indicated that their retention was very poor. "After all," Peadmont said, "they played in an orchestra. [Orchestra members] were accustomed to rehearsing then playing." Choirs often needed weeks of practice. Orchestra members, however, were often such good sight readers they generally did not need as much rehearsal time as a choir. Consequently, when an orchestra member

came into one of her choirs, says Peadmont, they did not retain the music, per se; rather, they read the correct notes and rhythms relying less on memory.

Choir members were often asked to memorize their music. This required a deeper level of commitment to the music than a clarinet player who could sight read his or her part without much rehearsal. Angela Mack observed that the directors of her middle school band and orchestra sometimes asked their instrumentalists to solfège their music then actually sing their part. The directors claimed it helped the voice stay in tune, which helped the instrument and ensemble stay in tune. She observed that this was a great way to demonstrate how vocal and instrumental musicians strove to create an overall good musician. Angela believed that choirs and bands were sometimes in conflict with one another. She felt that it need not be that way.

Dolores chimed in and said that her university orchestra director also asked his orchestra to sing their parts using solfège syllables. Wilson Bradley agreed with the other focus group members and made a significant observation. He told the focus group that the first thing he realized was that he did not have to teach rhythms to incoming band students. He noted that on more than one occasion, the orchestra or band student who could read musical rhythms could not understand how it was that choir members could not read rhythms. He also noted

that band students in a choir setting were more likely to have a better self-disciplined classroom management. They were used to a more rigorous rehearsal atmosphere, where a choir setting tended to be more socially dynamic, which hindered a more regimented rehearsal.

Elise Whitenhauser agreed. Her choir members with an instrumental background did not have any problems with counting rhythms. They tended to catch on very fast. It was always an asset when students who had an instrumental background participated in her choirs. Barbara Anderson observed that her choir members with an instrumental background tended to work on their music outside of class. Band members often take their instruments home with them so they can practice. Lora Makinic liked the fact that in her experience, the instrumentalists tend to whine a lot less.

> Kayla: [Instrumentalists who enroll in choir] have a real hard time transferring instrument fingering to rhythms and with tuning. I have observed that they pick up sight reading very quickly, however.
>
> Barbara: Pretty much every band kid I've had - they've picked up on the sight reading pretty quickly - but they may not pick up the hand signs but they already understand how to read music.

Dolores: I've had orchestra students who do quite well. However I've noticed that they treat everything as 'singing at sight' and their retention is very poor. They are orchestras - you rehearse, you play.

Angela: Our middle school band and orchestra directors are having their kids sing solfège. It helps their ear and tuning. It's a great demonstration of how our worlds don't need to be in conflict but are actually so very similar as we strive to create the overall musician.

Dolores: Our pit band director at the university level is also teaching solfège to their students.

Wilson: I've had several transfer students and the first thing I realize is that I do not need to teach them rhythms. They are already good sight readers. Their rhythms are always right.

Elise: The ones I've had always count -they don't have any problems with rhythms. They also catch on really fast so it's always an asset when you have them in your group.

Dolores: Sometimes when we sight read, I give them grades based on the singer's ability to follow the markings.

Lora: Sometimes I have students who have been in band or orchestra and they want to sing on letter names.

Mason: The other thing, as instrumentalists, they always read everything on the page - where choral people don't have a clue. If [instrumentalists] come across a crescendo they get louder! We don't - we teach our kids and they never do it - they just don't see it. [The instrumentalists] will sometimes react, 'Why isn't everyone else doing this crescendo? It's marked right here.'

Research question number five.

Are there discernible advantages in sight-singing proficiency when a singer actively uses Curwen hand signs? Describe observations that have shaped this belief.

The use of hand signs that corresponded to each note of the diatonic scale was referred to as Curwen hand signs. The hand signs were an effective tool that allowed a singer to relate a kinetic arm motion and hand configuration to each pitch of the scale. Once a student sang the correct notes and rhythms at first sight readily and without error, the hand signs became less useful and may have even been considered a hindrance.

Advantage using hand signs - intentional.

Training a singer's ear using movable Do required an aural focus on the tonic pitch. Music teachers must invent creative ways to do this. Requiring singers to use Curwen hand signs gave students two distinct advantages. First, the student developed a kinetic reference point to the tonic pitch or Do. Elise Whitenhauser said that the usefulness of the hand signs depended upon the skill level of the choir members. Singers under her leadership who have become adept at singing at sight read music very well. However, she enforced the use of hand signs in her singers who were new to singing and reading music.

Mason Levine commented that there was an effective use of hand signs when he taught larger than normal skips in a melodic line. When a student's hand was raised above his or her head there was a keen sense that each note should sound higher. Mason claimed that the use of the raised hand made a connection with their voices. Lora Makinic felt that the use of hand signs helped keep the pitch in tune and hand signs helped with chromatic altered tones.

Wilson Bradley believed that the use of hand signs benefited the learner in several ways. He used hand signs to teach proper vowel placement. Mason Levine, who had taught choral music for over forty years, noted that the use of hand signs had made a huge improvement in his choral pedagogy. He had personally seen a teaching transformation

in the ability of students to sing at sight. Dolores Peadmont mentioned that her college level choir students who came from a program where Curwen hand signs had been used were more often than not adept at singing at sight.

According to the focus group, newer singers tended to struggle at first with the hand signs. As their skills progressed, the directors claimed that it became easier for them to incorporate the hand signs on a daily basis. Interestingly, a few focus group members believed that after a singer had become adept in singing at sight, the hand signs served little use. Elise Whitenhauser went as far to say that her advanced singers would not sing incorrect pitches if they did not use the hand signs.

Barbara Anderson agreed. She believed the hand signs were a good and useful tool to allow her singers to get to the point where they no longer need to use them. Wilson Bradley chimed in with an insightful commentary on his view of the ultimate use of Curwen hand signs. He believed the ultimate goal as a teacher was to get his singers to the point where they no longer need to use the hand signs. When they can sight read without using the Curwen hand signs, then he believed he had successfully achieved his goal as a music educator.

Advantage using hand signs - unintentional.

Directors reported that the use of Curwen hand signs in the classroom tended to have distinct advantages that did not have anything to do with singing the correct pitch or interval. Elise Whitenhauser and Mason Levine agreed that using hand signs helped to create an inner pulse that could be felt and seen by others in the choir that created an inner sense of rhythmic pulse for the whole choir. This physical motion would help keep the pulse of the choir in tempo by forcing the students to beat time in the air.

When a singer in the alto section, for example, beat the quarter note in the air and signals the correct hand sign for each note, two distinct things were happening. The singer configured her hand into the correct position and raised or lowered her hand depending on the tessitura of the melody. Secondly, the tempo of the quarter note was signaled to the singers standing on her left and on her right. This visual image, which was observed in the peripheral vision of the adjacent singers, allowed the entire choir to visualize the same tempo and therefore keep a steady tempo.

Another unintentional advantage in using Curwen hand signs was how a teacher assessed the choir's ability to sing at sight. Mason Levine commented that he had a distinct advantage as a teacher to assess and observe how students were doing while using hand signs during a sight

reading exercise. Dolores Peadmont had an advantage as a teacher of aural skills and choir as she could observe the skill levels of the students who were efficient in the use of Curwen hand signs. Barbara Anderson disagreed with the notion that the use of Curwen hand signs was always beneficial.

There have been times when a beginner student was placed into a choir where all the singers were proficient using hand signs. It may be expected that this singer would have had moderate difficulty using hand signs while sight singing in this choir. Barbara did not expect this student to be proficient overnight. This was one case where forcing hand signs on all students may have done more harm than good.

> Elise: [The effectiveness of Curwen hand signs] depends on their level. My beginning guys [have trouble trying to] multitask. With my girls, they're used to that. I think it does give them an advantage. It helps give an inner pulse.
>
> Lora: For middle school for my groups, I usually have tons of new kids. I ask them to memorize the solfège within two weeks. We spend time showing where the hand is placed - that is - the sign So is about as high as their chin, whereas Do is near your belt-buckle

Angela: [There is a] kinetic memory - mind, body and voice - as they start to understand they remember what it feels like when their hands are placed in different places. It's not easy for the new kids. But I encourage them to not give up. It does take time, but it's important.

Elise: Some of my advanced kids use [the Curwen hand signs] with the words - that helps.

Mason: One difficulty in using hand signs is teaching skips. When the hand rises or lowers in larger skips, it helps teach the kids skips. I think it makes a connection with their voice and with their hands. I also think the pulse of the beat helps keep everyone together.

Barbara: One example of when [the Curwen hand signs] might be disadvantageous is when I have a newer student [who is placed] in an advanced group. They can be thrown in to a situation where they get lost. But as long as they persevere [the hand signs] become a useful tool.

Mason: I've had a clarinetist who, while singing at sight, moves her hands as if she's [playing] her instrument to play the correct notes - I believe this helps her.

Barbara: I don't think that the lack of hand signs would cause them to sing wrong notes. Once they reach a certain level it won't hold them back - but it's a great tool to teach solfège. But it's a good useful tool to allow them to get to that point where they don't need it.

Mason: Having them use hand signs allows us, as teachers, to assess and observe how they're doing while sight reading. There is a pedagogical advantage.

Lora: [Using] hand signs help keep the pitch in tune - it also helps with the altered tones.

Wilson: There is an ultimate goal - and we want our kids to learn to sight read anything we put in front of them - and hand signs are a useful tool to get them toward that goal. Once they're at that level though, the hand signs are probably not as advantageous as when students were first learning solfège.

Barbara: [The hand signs are] a useful tool, but singing with hand signs is not the only tool.

Dolores: In music theory and sight singing in music theory we use hand signs to teach sight singing to non-singers. In choir however, for those who are adept using hand signs and are doing well, they're fine. But

for those who don't know how to solfège, [they] actually sing better without [hand signs]. Our music is often so chromatic that the singers are giving up [using solfège and hand signs] and I'm allowing them to do so.

Wilson: I feel that hand signs benefit the learner - even the vowels can be sung and taught - using long, tall, round vowels. But once the learner no longer needs [the hand signs] they're not as effective.

Mason: [Sight singing with hand signs] has made a huge improvement in choral pedagogy. I've taught music in Texas for forty years, and I have seen the transformation of music teaching and the ability of students to sing at sight has grown exponentially. It's amazing to see the [improvement] in the strength and the depth of our choirs' sight singing abilities.

Dolores: My students who have gone through a high school program [that uses hand signs] are really doing very well.

Elise: I think if a student is audiating - you really do have to use the hand signs.

Barbara: I agree - when we audiate it reinforces the pitch inside their head.

Mason: In Texas, we push sight singing so hard because it is required for our festivals and contests, but there is a greater advantage for the students to learn how to sight sing effectively - and that is to make them better music readers. I had one student recently who contacted me after his first semester in a major music school in the northeast who said he was the only one in his sight-singing class who knew solfège.

Auditation.

The practice of audiation came up in the discussion and I made a determination to include more discussion of audiation into the record. The word *audiation*, the practice of hearing the correct notes in one's mind without aurally reproducing the pitches, was coined by music researcher and educator Edwin Gordon (Gordon, 1980).

Gordon developed a test that attempted to discover a child's musical aptitude. One of the major criteria of the test was the ability of a child to hear music without aural stimulation. For a child to understand musical melodies or chord progressions, for example, one assumed the child has had previous musical listening experiences. Therefore, when a child heard new music, the child compared the new music to what had

been previously heard. Something as simple as the first three notes to *Three Blind Mice* may be recognizable only when a child had previously cognized these notes.

Audiation, a term coined by Edwin Gordon (1979), is the concept of remembering a tonic pitch and the relationships of the other notes in the scale. Further, audiation infers a student can accurately reproduce other notes in the scale provided the tonic pitch has been established (Colwell, 2014). Some directors chose to employ audiation in the classroom as an aid in sight singing hoping that students would memorize the sounds of scale degrees as the relate to a tonic pitch. Students who were adept at sight singing could become proficient in audiation while singers who were new to sight singing would likely have difficulty. Not all focus group members agreed.

Audiation required an advanced understanding of tonal centers and a keen aural ability to sing any of the correct notes and rhythms without any aural prompt other than a tonic chord that outlines the tonic pitch. Some of the focus group members introduced audiation earlier than others but all felt that audiation can be a useful resource. Barbara Anderson perhaps said it best when she commented that she had to get the sound of the diatonic scale “in their ears” before they were able to audiate. She does not begin teaching audiation until she felt the choir is advanced enough to sing without the whole group singing.

Audiation tends to be a very private, individualized practice. A choir of fifty singers may have fifty different skill levels. The effectiveness of audiation would depend upon how well individual singers were able to perform the correct notes to pitches.

PI: Audiation has come up and I think it's important to get some input from you guys. Do you feel audiation helps you in teaching sight singing and do you use it?

Kayla: I don't use it as much as I should - frankly I'm a little nervous to use it during contests, but I use it sparingly. When I use it I feel I lose the kids, I sometimes see them daydreaming.

Wilson: I do use it, but I lose some of them too, but I can see who understands, and who does not. It helps me find students who need further instruction.

Lora: During the first nine weeks I do not use audiation, but after the first nine weeks I introduce it - very slowly. The further into the school year I use it more and more. I swear by it and I think it's great.

Mason: A number of years ago while judging a contest, I heard several choirs who audiated a brand new piece of music and they were able to read through the chosen music quite well. What I like about it, is that

you can see the ears working or the ears not working in your choir. So I make sure my students learn the relationship of each note in the scale and how it relates to tonic. We do it starting the first day.

Dolores: I've never used it - but I've always audiated - in my days as a chorister you have so little rehearsal time from when you received a new piece of music to a performance of the work that you have to sing it to yourself and know it almost at the point of the first rehearsal. You circle the most difficult spots and work on them later but in my situations you were forced to be an excellent sight reader.

Elise: (Audiation) is the best way to hear a song in your head - our thoughts are always floating around in your head - and singing the notes in your head is so helpful for the singers.

Angela: Yes we audiate - I call it different things to different choirs. If we're learning a new piece I give them 30 seconds to "silent sing." I often use audiation in the context of common chord progressions. This way they know (how) the common tendency tones like Fa-Mi or Ti-Do can resolve more intelligently than just cold

without hearing how the notes fall into a fuller chord structure.

Barbara: Yes, I use audiation. When I teach beginning groups we have to get the sound in their ears before you can audiate. With my more advanced groups it's very useful. I was an instrumentalist first, so for me to look at a church hymn I would have to have a piano to play it so I could learn it - that's just what you did. But, after learning solfège and how each note is related to the tonic pitch, I can now open an unfamiliar hymn or any song really and sight read it essentially note perfect because I hear it in my head. In other words I audiate the melody. As a choir teacher I teach that same skill to my singers.

PI: Would you [directors] use audiation if there were no pressure to achieve superior ratings in contests and festivals?

All directors: Yes

Lora: The better the ear gets the easier it is to teach new music - so yes I would use it as a tool to teach sight singing.

Research question number six.

How important is it to assess students' sight singing abilities? Describe effective procedures in sight-singing assessment? The focus group agreed that assessing a choir's ability to sing at sight was important. Their methods, however, differed dramatically. Each focus group member gave input as to whether or not he or she believed in the importance of sight singing assessment. Each focus group member also related how they performed any such assessments in their classroom. The focus group brought up individual assessment, group assessment and individual assessment within the larger group as methods used to assess singers.

Assessment - individually.

Singing alone in front of a group of peers was an intimidating task. When a teacher desired to assess an individual singer, what was the most effective method to hear each voice while keeping the rest of the choir on task? Some of the focus group members asked the singers to come to the front of the classroom to perform a four to eight measure exercise for a grade.

Assessing students on an individual basis was perhaps the easiest way to find out the skill levels of the choir members. However, as noted below in the discussion, this process could take an inordinate amount of time. While it may accurately demonstrate a student's ability to read the

notes and rhythms, it certainly had a few negative aspects. Kayla Vincent told the focus group that she did not have time for individual assessment. She appointed section leaders to help other students. She mentioned though that she constantly assesses her singers, but never on an individual basis.

Barbara Anderson gave an individual sight singing final exam at the end of each semester. She benefited from hearing each singer individually for future placement in her other choirs or sections. Lora Makinic reported that she used to assess singers on an individual basis but it took four days out of her work week just to conduct the assessment. She was then able to successfully assess singers in a group setting.

Assessment - in a group setting.

This type of assessment was preferred by some of the focus group members. This method allowed a teacher to observe and hear singers within a section or group of singers in order to assess the group as a whole. When language in the discussion referred to the sight singing abilities of the soprano section, for example, the group was assessed as a whole. One strength about this method of assessment was that singers were not given an individual assessment. That is, students were assessed as far as they were performing within a group setting. Those in the group were assessed as a whole entity, not as individuals within the

entity. All the tenors, for example received the same grade.

However, it could be noted that while a group was assessed, not all singers within the group were making an equitable contribution with their voices. For example, in a section of ten basses, if there were four very good voices adept at sight singing, should the other six singers be given the same grade even though they were not contributing equally to the overall sound?

Angela felt strongly that she could assess her singers individually and as a whole. She was careful, however, to never embarrass a young singer who might not feel comfortable singing in front of the entire class. To help ease any perceived embarrassment, Angela would ask three students to come up to the piano for a sight singing assessment while the rest of the class stayed busy working on a music theory assignment. Using this combined method of multiple and individual assessment, she was able to effectively evaluate the sight singing abilities of all three singers in front of her.

Assessment - individually within a group setting.

This method of assessment was used by a majority of the choral teachers in the focus group. It described the ability of a teacher to observe and listen to individuals within the choir and make an educated assessment as to the sight singing ability of each student. Several of the

focus group members have gone through a growing process by which they used this method after using either the individual or group assessment in previous years. Several teachers used this method of assessment due to its time-saving aspect.

Mason Levine noted that he simply did not have time to listen to every student on an individual basis for the singular purpose of reporting one grade. He said he was able to tell who was more adept at sight singing and who needed more help by observing their reactions and sounds. He also added a profound commentary about the nature of sight singing assessments; he believed that the progress of a student's sight-singing ability far outweighed the number of correct notes and rhythms a student may perform on a sight-singing quiz.

Concerning the assessment of sight singing, teachers should be more concerned about the growth of a student's abilities. For teachers to grade based simply on the number of correct notes did not give a student or parent any indication of how well the student had progressed. There was a general consensus from the focus group that charting a student's skill level as it progresses from easy music reading into more challenging music reading was far more beneficial than a one-time grade.

Mason: I think that we have to teach our students to love to sight sing - we don't have to teach them to love to sing. A lot of our kids come to us, perhaps not wanting to

sight sing, they don't want to do the work, they want to have the fun. But to me for the advanced student, who is really motivated it's not a problem, but for the newer students, it's important for us to motivate them to want to learn the craft, or the art of music - not just that music is fun. When I first started teaching, I would give an assessment almost weekly, but it was so much work - and later I realized I just didn't have enough time to effectively assess using this manner. Today, I don't do individual assessment. I am able to assess individuals while they are sight singing as a group - are they on task, are they singing the correct notes or using the proper hand signs, are they keeping a pulse? So within the group - I believe I am able to accurately record in my brain who is sight singing effectively and who isn't.

Angela: I do assess my students a couple times a month. I choose three students at a time. They come to the piano and they sing something for me while the other students work on another assignment, which is usually a theory assignment.

Lora: I tried to assess individually - but it took four days out of my week and my concert date was looming. [This led me to] not assess individually but as a group. I am able to see who is working and singing the right notes. So yes, I do think it's important to assess my student's sight reading abilities.

Wilson: I have never individually assessed sight singing, but when my students are audiating, I do assess them as a group.

Kayla: I don't have time for individual assessment. My section leaders are so good at helping other students. Now I am constantly assessing [within their sections] but individually no.

Elise: I sometimes make my kids sing in front of the choir, it allows me to assess them. But mostly, I assess as a group. I can generally see and hear who's getting it and who's not just by looking and hearing.

Barbara: I give a final exam at the end of each semester and I pull them in one at a time, but that's my chance to hear them sight-sing individually. We sight read every day - and several times a week I ask students to

volunteer to read the given exercise in front of the class.

Mason: Assessments in music to me are kind of funny - but for sight singing we need to be very accurate as to their development. I sometimes question the validity of giving grades for sight singing as an individual assessment.

Directors began to talk about audiation, which was the ability to hear a pitch or series of notes in one's mind with no aural stimulation. Audiation was a highly advanced musical skill that can be learned from years of study. However, with the exception of sight-singing contests and festival rules, there was no reason I could think of that explains why audiation should be taught or learned.

When one learns to sight-sing one was learning what the notes sound like in the proper order in which they appear on the musical page. There was no need to teach audiation separately from teaching sight singing. The ability to hear a note in one's mind may be thought of as a natural and expected outcome of learning to sing properly at sight.

Assignment - individual placement in graded choirs.

The discussion then turned to the teacher's methods of assigning individual singers to a particular choir. Several teachers taught three distinct levels of music: beginners, intermediate and advanced choirs.

The focus group addressed how each of the teachers selected singers and placed them into their own different choirs. For the middle school teachers who teach sixth through eighth grades, all of the sixth graders were placed into two separate choirs divided by voice part. Sopranos and altos were in one choir while the tenors and basses were in another choir class. Most of the seventh graders were placed into an intermediate choir and the eighth graders generally earned a chair in the advanced choirs. The difficulty of the literature of each choir was determined by grade and ability.

The sixth graders were mostly given unison and two-part music while the intermediate and advanced groups were split into two, three or sometimes four parts. The high school teachers were not so quick to place a singer in a particular ensemble simply by grade. Teachers used different methods and auditions to assign singers in various choirs by skill level. I asked: What criteria do you use for placing students in your choirs?

Barbara Anderson offered students the opportunity to audition for a chair in the advanced choir to students who wanted to join. Using an audition form she created, she gave an eight measure sight-singing example and a four measure rhythm exercise. She also gave the student a series of notes to test for tonal memory then gave a musical hearing test. She played three notes on the piano and asks a student to hear

and sing either the bottom note, middle or top note. She also assessed the quality of the voice. This short audition allowed Barbara to make a reasonable guess as to which choir a student should be placed. If a student scored low on sight singing but had a beautiful voice, she was able to make a determination based upon the musical ability of the student and not by the grade of the individual.

Angela Mack noted that she used an audition form that sounded very similar to Barbara's. This form came in very handy when a parent had questions about her student's audition. The parent felt that her daughter should have been enrolled into a more advanced choir. Angela pulled out the sheet and was able to show to the parent that her daughter scored low on sight reading but high on her quality of voice. The sheet served as a useful tool for the teacher to determine a student's singing abilities but was also a way to document her decisions. Dolores Peadmont used the Royal School of Church Music as an audition and assessment tool for her university choirs.

PI: I asked by what criteria have you used for placing students in your choirs?

Barbara: They had to sight read an eight measure example and count a four measure rhythm example. I also had students sing tonal memory tests where I play chords and they are asked sing certain notes out of the chords.

I had a grading system where I described the voice from one to five. I can just circle quickly the [quality] of the voice.

Lora: That kind of document was very useful for a student or parent who questions why a student did not qualify in a certain choir. She can immediately pull out that sheet and let the parent know what the student needs to work on.

PI: Do any of you have similar sheets useful for placing students in various choirs?

Mason: Mine had descriptors of voice qualities, so when I heard them I can just circle how they sound.

PI: On the college level did you use such a form?

Dolores: Yes, I use the RCM (Royal Church Music) progressions. They can test out every three weeks. [For] most of them it took about three tries and it's a part of their grade. They must take a sight-singing exam twice every semester as a minimum, but they can test out every three weeks.

Research question number seven.

How much weight does your fine arts administrator and/or principal place in your students' sight singing abilities? Is there a documented or implied expectation that outlines this?

In the discussions concerning the sight singing expectations of secondary choral music educators there emerged two separate individuals who occupy two separate offices with two distinct titles that should be given some form of clarification and/or definition.

The term *administrator* was given to the individual who served in a direct supervisory role above the choir teacher on a more daily basis. The administrator was the person who leads faculty meetings or who gave direction on calendar issues. This administrator was notified if any conflicts between faculty members needed to be addressed. He or she also served as a liaison between the principal and the faculty. In some schools the principal was the administrator, however in some larger schools, there may be an assistant principal. The term *administrator* was reserved for the person in a supervisory role that had a more day-to-day communication with the choir teacher. An *evaluator*, however was given the task to administer a more official evaluation. Once a year, the evaluator had the duty to observe and document the performance of a teacher. This evaluation became a permanent part of a teacher's record and could help or hinder a teacher's career. For this research document,

an administrator was a person who had a direct supervisory role over a teacher while an evaluator was the person who was responsible for a one-time in-class observation of a teacher. As this question was introduced for the first time to the focus group members, the room was filled with moans and a few sighs that signaled discontentment. I knew I had stumbled upon a topic that was sure to elicit a good conversation.

When the focus group members offered their perspectives, the job duties of their administrator and the evaluator became immediately lucid. Barbara Anderson stated that her administrator was a former band director. This gave her an added sense of security knowing that an administrator trained as a music educator would more likely understand the day to day struggles and successes of her choir program. Her principal, on the other hand, served as her evaluator. He would walk into her choir room once a year for his annual forty-five minute evaluation. He would not speak a word and would walk out. She expressed frustration at the fact that she had never received any high marks for higher thinking skills. She suspected that he had no idea what sight singing was, nor understood the value of what she was trying to accomplish. She added, "When it comes to principals (evaluators), very rarely do they ever understand what we're doing."

Kayla Vincent was fortunate to have a very supportive evaluator and administrator both of whom knew the importance of a quality music

education. They both gave the music faculty their appreciation and were often very encouraging. Angela Mack had a fine arts administrator who was also a former band director. Her principal, on the other hand had an expectation that the choir was to achieve superior ratings in her contests and festivals. Angela believed that contest scores should not be the goal but she agreed that there was an implied expectation to achieve high scores.

Wilson Bradley also had a fine arts administrator who was a former band director. When everyone was doing well in their contests and festival scores there was little discussion other than recognition of the scores. However, when a school was not performing well, the teacher was usually called in for a meeting with the principal. Wilson Bradley said his administrator and his evaluator was the same person: a former choir teacher. Wilson was fortunate to have someone who understood the mission of a music educator.

Elise Whitenhauser had a multitude of supervisors. She had a fine arts supervisor and a department head. She also had a principal, an administrator and an evaluator. Her fine arts supervisor did not concern herself with her classroom as long as she had superior scores in her contests and festivals. Elise had served at her current school for four years and her fine arts supervisor had never attended one of her concerts. Her department chair, who taught at her school, attended her

concerts regularly.

Lora Makinic had the most heart-wrenching story. In her district, she had a very supportive fine arts director, but her principal was, according to Lora, extremely self-centered and narcissistic. She believed that in almost every conversation she had ever had with him the topic always turned to himself - not the school, not the choir, but himself. As long as she "flew under the radar," she would not be called into his office. Because Lora described her principal as competition-minded, he wanted his school to win everything. Athletics, theater, speech and debate and all music classes must have been the best in the district in order for him to be pleased. She recalled one conversation with him that further revealed his motivations.

Lora recalled when her principal told her that if her programs were to receive any more funding, she would have to have the highest number of students in the auditioned district honor choir. She believed there were no written expectations to excel in her job description, but teachers in her district who fell into levels of mediocrity were sure to be reassigned or fired.

Mason Levine agreed with Lora Makinic that most of the administrators did not know what music education entailed or what directors were trying to achieve. Mason had served at his school for the last nine years and he had seen three head band directors in his time.

The second band director had significantly low scores in his previous years in contests and festivals and his contract was not renewed after two years of service.

Mason had heard administrators say they would not judge a director by their scores in contests and festivals; however, there was circumstantial evidence that pointed to the opposite, asserted Mason. Lora Makinic wished that school districts would write out expectations for music teachers. She believed a set of guidelines that detailed her district's expectations would be a great asset to her job description.

Barbara: My fine arts administrator is a band guy - so I think he understands what we do and I don't have any issues with him. My principal and the administrator who does my evaluation will come into my room for the required forty-five minutes and we will sight read. They don't even know how to evaluate it let alone understand it. As far as expectations, at my school we're expected to do our best. When it comes to principals, very rarely do they ever understand what we're doing and what we're trying to accomplish.

Kayla: Fortunately I have a very supportive principal and administrators who know music and are very supportive. They're so supportive and know we're

going to do the best we can. They do give us their appreciation and are very encouraging.

Barbara: There is an implied expectation for our choirs in our district to excel. Sometimes a director who receives consistently low scores in our contests and festivals will be put on a growth plan and in a few years they'll be gone. There is nothing written, that I know of, in our district about expectations in our contests and festivals, but I have seen directors who do not score well come and go.

Kayla: There's nothing written, but it is certainly implied that our schools will do our best.

Angela: Our fine arts director is a band guy and he's doing a good job. My principal and our school has an expectation that we are to bring back superior ratings in our contests and festivals which drives me crazy because I agree, our excellent contest scores are not the goal. I will say that we have implied expectations - it's not in writing but they are definitely there.

Wilson: We have a very supportive fine arts administrator, he's a band guy. When we have discussions in our district it's when a school is not doing well in his or

her contest scores. As far as our campus administration, my administrator was in the band and our principal was in choir. Even then, however, I don't believe they understand the value of what our students do on a day-to-day basis.

Elise: We have a fine arts supervisor and we have a department head. Our fine arts supervisor I don't think he is concerned as long as you do well. He doesn't know what I'm doing.

Lora: We have a very supportive fine arts director - but my principal is not supportive at all of our music programs and he makes no qualms about it. He doesn't see the value [of how our programs can] build the confidence or building an overall all around responsible student at all. He doesn't care if we sing *Old MacDonald* every day or not but he will take it out on our evaluations. He doesn't understand what we do he doesn't understand how we teach higher level thinking skills… he wants us to win everything - and it really comes down to fine arts and academic scores - he told me 'Last year at region choir you had the second highest number of students who made region

choir. If you want more money for your budget, you'll have to have the highest number this year.' When I heard that my jaw hit the floor - I left my office and I cried so hard I was so angry. He just doesn't understand. I don't think he cares what I do as long as we beat our rival schools. There are no written expectations but you better be sure to follow those unwritten expectations or else you'll be fired - for sure.

Mason: I agree that my administrators do not know what we do. They really don't care and I really don't get any pressure about my contest ratings at all. I think the band directors get judged [by the public at football games] every year. I've taught in my [current] high school for nine years and I've been through three head band directors. One of the reasons is that the second one received low scores at contest. They say "you won't be judged by your scores" but they are. Our district is very sincere when they say they want a well-rounded, well educated kid that is absolutely challenged academically. So I don't get any pressure from my administrators about my contest scores.

Lora: I wish they would write out the expectations - give us some guidelines that are expected of us as directors.

Dolores: Our University has a dean of arts and sciences and then we have a chair of arts and social sciences. The Department chair is a non-arts person, so he's very supportive but has no knowledge of what we do. The dean does have some experience. There is documentation of what is expected in the syllabus. But there are no contests we attend that earn any kind of score.

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary.

The purpose of this study was to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing in secondary schools. The focus group stated that the purpose of sight-singing education centered on the notion that choral students should become independent, self-reliant musicians. Similar to how a new language can be taught and learned phonetically, the skill of sight singing may be learned by students who understood and mastered the acquired skills needed to be proficient. Once learned, the need for a teacher became unnecessary. The notion of becoming independent musicians does not stop at the point when a student performed the correct notes and rhythms. Singers should be able to read the correct notes and rhythms plus all the articulations and dynamic markings as directed by the composer.

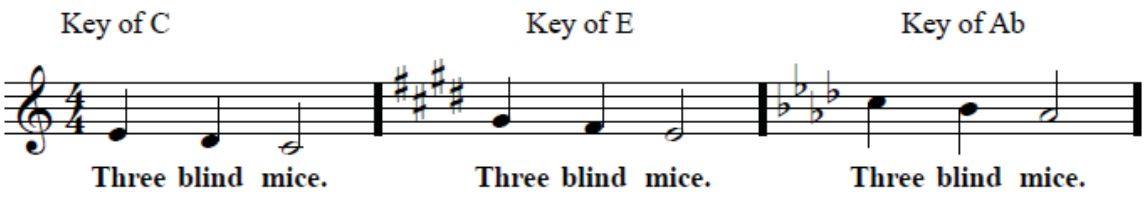
Further, students should understand how a phrase was to be performed as well as be competent in tempo and meter changes. Compositions specifically written for use in sight-singing contests and festivals should not be too predictable harmonically or rhythmically.

Choirs and their directors who received high scores should be adjudicated for:

1. Correct Tempo as directed by the music
2. Correct performance of tempo changes
3. Meter changes
4. Dynamics
5. Articulations
6. Proper performance of phrase shapes
7. Tone

The preferred method for teaching sight singing was movable Do. A majority of the teachers on the focus group tended to agree that movable Do was highly advantageous for students to learn how a scale pitch was related aurally to the tonic pitch. The three consecutive descending pitches, for example: Mi, Re, Do always sounded like *Three Blind Mice* in any key (figure 10).

Figure 10



The concept of keeping the tonic pitch as the home key was the deciding factor for teachers as they chose a sight-singing system. It was noted that movable Do became less relevant and more difficult when the

tonal centers were ephemeral and/or the harmonic language became too chromatic.

The other accepted sight-singing methods discussed were numbers and fixed Do. The scope of the discussion was not to attempt to arrive at a conclusion as to which sight-singing system was the most efficient, but to try to understand director's perceptions and beliefs as to how they arrived at their choice of a reading method. It was understood that directors had options in the sight-singing method they prefer.

I think it is important, though, that a teacher employ a method, *any* method. Teachers who use the rote method as their daily course of action, which is more attune to guessing the correct and rhythms, is a less efficient way to teach vocal music. Students who guessed at the notes while listening to a piano that played their notes did not develop a musician's ear for intervallic identification and vocal recreation.

As the directors looked through sight-singing method books, much discussion took place concerning the efficacy and usefulness of each method. There was no printed resource or sight-singing methodology upon which all directors agreed was the best. There was much debate and frank discussion concerning all the resources. Several focus group members liked and used one source while others said they used it but did not use it anymore for various reasons.

The resource *In-Sight Singing* (Eaton, 2013) was perhaps the

resource most directors believed was useful for their non-beginner singers. Focus group members were asked to evaluate each source for the content but also for the layout. Some publishers placed too much music on one page while others printed the music in large notes. The teachers liked how *In-Sight Singing*, like many others, addressed concepts slowly then proceeded to make the exercises more challenging as they progressed through the book.

The focus group also believed that the Oxford *Folk Song Sight Singing Series, Grades I–IV* (Crowe, 1933) was a useful resource that had stood the test of time. What was especially notable was the fact that the exercises included in the *Folk Song Sight Singing Series* were actual compositions. These exercises were not composed in order to be utilized as sight-singing material but rather they were a "collection of folk tunes of many countries … with phrasing and expression marks (Crowe, Lawton & Whittaker, 1933)."

Another topic that arose from our discussions was the extra-ordinary music reading abilities demonstrated by students who came into a choir program with previous instrumental training. Each focus group member who had an experienced instrumentalist who joined the choir program more often than not exhibited above average skills at music reading than singers who joined the choir with no instrumental background.

Another important distinction gleaned from the discussion was the observation that choir members with an instrumental background were more likely to read the entire score. They read dynamics, phrases and articulations, along with the notes and rhythms. Singers without an instrumental background tended to focus primarily on performing the correct notes and rhythms while singing music at first sight. The leading question may be understood to be "Are instrumentalists better music readers?"

Another question that was posed to the focus group was the efficacy of sight singing while students used Curwen hand signs (Bennett, 1984). Singers, unlike instrumentalists, had to hear their tone internally just prior to the aural performance of their note. Singers who used Moveable Do or the Numbers system remembered the tonic pitch as the home key. The use of the Curwen hand signs employed a hand motion that signified the note of the scale and the tempo of the piece. This kinetic movement was not dissimilar to an instrumentalist's hand position on his/her instrument. Singers could remember a series of notes aided by the use of the hand signs. This kinetic movement provided a valuable point of reference to the singer as to the distance between the note they are singing and the tonic pitch.

A hand raised high in the air, for example, signified a pitch higher than the starting tonic pitch. The focus group members who used

movable Do tended to favor the use of hand signs while singing at sight. The perceived value of using hand signs gave students a kinetic motion that assisted in relating notes to the tonic pitch.

There was a secondary added value while incorporating hand signs that was observed by the focus group members. Directors have observed that choirs who used hand signs tended to keep a steadier beat when they sang at sight. Focus group members also stated that the use of hand signs became less important when students became more proficient in sight singing.

Audiation was discussed with no real consensus concerning its efficacy, reliability or usefulness. Some directors maintained that audiation is great for teaching sight singing because when the choir attends a sight singing contest or festival, students can hear their parts inaudibly making the read-through more accurate for the judges. Several felt that audiation is too difficult to assess. How does one know what pitch are being heard in a student's head if a teacher cannot hear them? While no real consensus was sought, audiation remains useful to some and not all. It can be assumed that audiation is a high level skill with no real usefulness for sight singing outside of a sight singing contest or festival.

Another topic that was addressed during the focus group discussions was the importance, perceived or real, of assessing students'

ability to sing at sight. Similar to Myers's (2008) quantitative study of university-level teachers, there is a perceived need to assess the sight-singing abilities of high school singers. The focus group members in this study supported the idea of student assessment in order for teachers to observe whether their teaching methodologies were effective. As a result of the outcome of the discussions, three methods of assessment were largely supported by the focus group:

1. Individual assessment
2. Group assessment
3. Individual assessment within a group setting

Individual assessment occurred when teachers listened to the singer individually as he or she attempted to read a selection of music. Several of the teachers have used this method in an office or practice room where a recording device could be used to record the exercise. A group assessment was a more broad method of student assessment. Teachers assessed students as they sang as a member of the vocal section or group of singers. This method allowed teachers to maintain order and kept all the students on task. This could be done while all four sections were singing or cold be broken down to any size group or section.

The third method of student assessment was performed

individually while a student was singing within a small group of singers. It should be noted that one of the focus group members felt the level of assessment should be based upon a students' progress as opposed to simply how well a singer could sight sing on quiz. This focus group member felt strongly that that charting a student's progress was far more productive and informative in a student's sight-singing evaluation than simply counting how many notes a singer performed correctly or incorrectly.

As the discussion turned to music teacher evaluations, the body language and countenance of the focus group changed significantly. Audible moans and groans combined with one "Oh, dear Lord" plus several teachers leaning back in their chairs informed me I had struck a chord of resentment to some in the focus group. All public school teachers were required to have at least one evaluation per school year. The problem was that these evaluators often knew very little, if anything, about music education. The evaluations were an important component to a teacher's professional portfolio because teacher evaluations became a permanent record. Teacher evaluations could help or hinder a teacher's career depending on the assessment of the evaluator.

The focus group believed that evaluators need specialized training and instruction on the methodological differences of music educators and other areas of instruction such as mathematics, English, or the

sciences. Several in the focus group were keenly aware that, while no written parameters existed, scores and judges ratings in competitive contests and festivals were often a major consideration in a music director's evaluation.

Interestingly, I was struck by a topic that was not discussed by the focus group. As they answered the research questions there was no dialog that addressed ways teachers could assist individual students who were struggling with pitch matching, rhythm reading or other skills needed for reading music at sight. It is possible that these focus group members defined their role as sight singing instructors in terms of group dynamics or processes [i.e. large choirs] and did not allocate time to assist individual students after school or in private lessons dedicated to sight singing.

Conclusions.

This research, which used a similar methodology as Von Kampen (2003), revealed significant information concerning the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing in secondary schools. Eight choral music educators shared their life-stories that informed their opinions, beliefs and perceptions about sight singing. The discussions revealed to me that an untapped wealth of information often lies dormant within the experiences and stories of music educators whose lives were dedicated to the teaching profession. Upon intake of the data and subsequent

analysis of the seven research questions and content derived from extra-discussion brought up by the focus group, the following conclusions may be made concerning this research:

1. The goal of teaching sight singing in secondary music education should be to create independent, self-reliant musicians.

Several elements within this goal may need to be elucidated. This primary goal was centered upon student. This benefit should not include benefits for the teacher, a school, a principal, contests, festivals, competitions or any other underlying achievement. The reason to teach sight singing in secondary choral music education should be to create independent, self-reliant musicians. Further, the notion of *independent* confers the thought that after high school, a student should no longer be dependent on a teacher or section leader in order to be proficient in sight singing.

If students continued singing in a choral organization post-high school, they would be proficient enough to read most of the correct notes most of the time. Also, students should exhibit an understanding of all musical elements found within the score. In other words, simply singing the correct notes and rhythms was only the beginning; for students to be proficient they must also be able to perform the articulations, phrasing, dynamics and tempo while sight singing.

2. School districts, and/or fine arts administrators should require choral teachers to use a melody ready system and make melody singing a priority, whether or not a choir attends a contest or festival where sight singing will be adjudicated. If a school district and/or fine arts administrator desires to specify which sight singing system to use, I suggest they use movable Do, using the minor La.

Based upon teacher's education, experience and professional judgment, they should have the freedom to select which sight-reading system they prefer to use in the classroom. A mandate from a school district or fine arts administrator to use a specific method would not be well received if the director had no experience in that particular melody reading system. A sight-singing system that incorporated the skill of relating all scale pitches to the tonic pitch should be used. Similar to McClung (2008) and Casarow (2002) the most prevalent sight-singing system in this study is movable Do. While understanding the advantages of the fixed Do method, movable Do should be the method of choice.

3. While very good sight-singing materials are in print, music publishers who contemplate printing newer materials should offer sight-singing instruction that offer a more holistic approach to musicianship.

Music publishers are in the business to earn a profit while offering a

marketable product. Music publishers depend upon the sale of their materials to stay in business. Concerning the teaching and learning of sight singing in secondary choral music education, sight-singing materials use a variety of methods to address problems associated with teaching rhythms and notes.

However, there was a lack of printed sight-singing books that fully addressed more advanced musical materials than simply notes and rhythms. All future published sight-singing materials should address other important musical elements such as the proper performance of phrase shapes, articulations and dynamic changes. Singers, like instrumentalists, should learn to adapt to tempo changes and meter changes at sight as well. Too often, directors felt a sense of accomplishment when students could sing correct notes and rhythms at sight with no regard to dynamics, phrases or articulations or tone.

4. Students enrolled in secondary choral music education did not exhibit the same skill set in rhythmic accuracy as their counterparts who are enrolled in an instrumental class.

It was unknown why there was a disparity in the rhythmic accuracy between choral students and band students. Band literature was often more challenging rhythmically. A meter change from 4/4 to 3/4 was elementary for band and choral students. However, a mixed meter change from 2/4 to 6/8 to 3/4 may be more difficult for a choir student

but relatively common for a band student. Similar to White (2009) and Von Kampen (2003) students with previous instrumental experience tend to have a significant advantage in accurately reproducing rhythmic patterns over those without an instrumental background.

Further research should be conducted which helps to explain why there was such a discrepancy in the abilities of choral students to accurately perform difficult rhythms at sight. This research should generate a method for choral music rhythmic instruction that emulates the teaching and pedagogy of instrumental instruction.

5. Secondary choral music educators should employ Curwen hand signs up until the point where they are no longer effective as a tool for accuracy in sight singing.

When reading a series of musical pitches, singers as well as some instrumentalists are required to comprehend the intervallic note prior to singing it accurately. Instrumentalists more often combine a specific finger position often with an embouchure to produce the correct note. The use of Curwen hand signs in the classroom of beginning singers may assist in the learning and memorization of the correct notes as they relate to the tonic pitch by stimulating a kinetic point of reference of the notes of the diatonic scale to the tonic pitch. The use of hand signs should start on the tonic pitch approximately waist-high.

During sight-singing instruction, the singer's hand must be raised

or lowered vertically simulating the distance of the pitch as it relates to the tonic pitch. Similar to the findings in Durocher (2006), McClung (2008), Stevenson (2010) and Killian & Henry (2005), students who have mastered the art of singing at sight, however, may find the use of Curwen hand signs more of a hindrance than an aid in performing the correct notes and rhythms and therefore should not be obligated to use them.

6. Audiation is not a necessary skill needed for success in teaching sight-singing skills.

Several of the directors in the focus group used Relative Auditory Relationships (R.A.R.) to assist students in the memorization of the scale degrees and how they relate to the tonic pitch. Teachers have reported they spend untold hours, sometime year-round in an effort to teach audiation. In a choir performance setting, I cannot imagine a time when singers would be asked to sing silently (an oxymoron). However, students go to extraordinary lengths to make sure students learn this inner hearing skill for the exclusive purpose of preparing for a contest or festival.

It was important to note that the researcher believes R.A.R. is a useful tool. The skill of hearing one's pitch was clearly an important objective in learning to sight sing; however, elevating audiation as a major part of choral curricula solely to increase a group's score during a contest or festival does not seem worth the time needed to make

audiation valuable.

Sight-singing competition rules across the Unites States differ in how choirs are scored. Rules often stipulate there could be no aural stimuli during the learning process of a piece. The solution that many choir directors have found was to instruct the choir to sing *silently* during this time. However, it may take an entire year to teach this skill. The price was simply too high to expect students to master a skill that would benefit them *only* in high school for one or two contest ratings per year. Time would be better spent on teaching quality literature or using R.A.R. techniques that would enable a student to audibly sing the correct notes and rhythms.

7. Teachers should assess students' progress in sight singing rather than assess their ability to sing by simply counting correct notes and rhythms.

Performing an accurate student assessment in any subject can be difficult. In typing, one learns the keystrokes and which finger presses which keys. The expectation would be that one would learn to press letters slowly over a period of time. A student would never be expected to type without errors the first week. The expectation of a successful typist would be tempered, however, when one understood the student should achieve better results over time as they practiced.

In a similar way, the skill of learning how to sight sing was also

understood to be a skill learned and mastered over time. Instructors naturally expect students to learn and progress in their abilities. For this reason any rubric for assessing a student in sight singing should place more value on the progress of a student's abilities. It was unproductive to assess a student's sight-singing ability based on simply counting the number of correct notes and rhythms.

8. Music teachers may experience stress and tension in their annual evaluations when they perceive their supervising principal or administrator has no understanding, background or comprehension of musical learning objectives, outcomes or teaching methodologies.

Teacher assessments in the fine arts should not be similar to assessments in other subjects. Teacher stress may be alleviated if there is an evaluation process or document that would assist evaluators with evaluations of fine arts teachers (Hirokawa, 2013). I was fortunate to uncover and receive permission to print a music teacher appraisal procedure designed to be used by principals and/or evaluators with no musical background. This document was written by J.A. May who serves as the Executive Fine Arts Director in the San Antonio Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A.

The Fine Arts/Secondary Music Appraisal Procedures (Appendix E) was borne out of a need to convince a local school board to approve an

increase in stipends paid to many fine arts teachers. Acronyms found on the document, such as TBA, TCDA, TODA, UIL, and TMEA are local and state music affiliated organizations. This appraisal process gives principals with no musical background tools needed to accurately evaluate fine arts teachers using eighty-three criteria under eleven domains. I hope school districts around the country and across the Atlantic will grasp a need to create similar teacher appraisal systems that offer tools to principals and evaluators who have no musical training.

Recommendations.

The task of this research was to listen, record, coalesce and analyze a large amount of data. Streams of thoughts emerged from the data that have implications in the field of music education. After hearing the focus group members address their thoughts, experiences and concerns in the area of sight singing, I have narrowed and considered the following recommendations for our industry.

Hopefully these recommendations will be analyzed, reviewed and examined by music educators world-wide. I believe the teaching and learning of sight singing can be enhanced if music educators would consider and adopt the following recommendations.

Secondary choral music teachers.

Consistent with the focus group interviews and the data collected, the goal of choral music educators should be to create of self-reliant, independent musicians. In an effort to create self-reliant, independent musicians, teachers should include training in Relative Auditory Relationships (R.A.R.) to their curriculum. This should be conducted on a daily basis whether or not a choir is required to compete in a sight-singing contest or festival. Teachers should consider utilizing a sight-singing methodology that incorporates R.A.R. Prior to singing at first sight, students may be given a broken tonic triad chord. During daily classroom instruction students are to memorize how the different scale degrees relate to the tonic pitch. Movable Do would facilitate R.A.R.

College and university choral music educators.

1. In an effort to create self-reliant, independent musicians, college professors should include these three methods of assessment in their music education classes: individual assessment, assessment within a group, individual assessment within a small group.

2. College professors should place no emphasis upon audiation as a tool for success in a choral competition but place more emphasis on teaching Relative Auditory Relationships (R.A.R.) in order for the students to become better readers of music.

Public school principals and fine arts administrators.

3. School districts should publish complete expectations for music teachers including whether or not participation in an adjudicated sight-singing contest and/or festival is required or optional. Further, districts should clearly spell out expectations concerning a teacher's score, rank and/or rating from an adjudicated contest or festival.

Teachers arriving on a new campus position may experience a bit of nervousness during the first year. Stress levels can be decreased when teachers meet or exceed expectations. A teacher can also experience a higher level of anxiety when he or she is informed that expectations have not been met. What can make matters worse is when a teacher is unaware of an expectation for which he or she would be professionally evaluated. For this reason, school districts should ensure music teachers clearly understand performance and sight singing expectations.

To that end, principals and fine arts administrators should consider utilizing a tool specifically designed to guide the music teacher appraisal process by administrators who are not trained in music education (Appendix 5). As of the date of this publication, there is no extant document that incorporates the unique idiosyncrasies of music education into an appraisal process for any administrator or principal - especially one not educated in music.

This process was created by J.A. May, fine arts executive director for the San Antonio (Texas, USA) Independent School District. As documented in this research, there is a great need for an appraisal method designed for music educators. Band, choir and orchestra directors can now be professionally appraised using appropriate measures standard in music education. This unique appraisal process is much needed in the public school setting.

4. When designing a new building or structure for music include multiple rehearsal rooms for individual or sectional rehearsals. Include digital recording devices with microphones placed in the ceiling and a digitally based recording device in each large ensemble rehearsal room.

High school sight-singing contest boards of governors.

5. Those that establish rules concerning sight-singing contests and festivals should be more discriminating when selecting compositions used to reflect a more comprehensive musical expression as found in other choral music. Adjudication rubrics of sight-singing contests and festivals should include dynamic changes, phrase shapes, meter changes, tempo markings, proper tone and articulations. The highest scores, awards and trophies should be reserved for choirs who accurately perform a musical piece at sight using all these musical elements.

6. Boards of directors should institute regulations for tempo markings according to the governing music educators' associations. A

recommended rule would require tempo markings to be set by the governing board for use in sight-singing compositions. These guidelines would assist composers as they write music for the contests. Choirs would be adjudicated in part by how accurately the director and choir performed the sight-singing piece at the correct tempo.

The goal for music education is to create self-reliant, independent musicians. Students should be adept in singing all the musical elements stated above as well as performing the correct the notes and rhythms.

7. Choirs should receive a blind adjudication while performing their concert selections and sight singing. The judges should not know the name of the school being adjudicated, the name of the director, nor the name of the school district. All choirs being adjudicated should be given an anonymous number that matches a judge's scoring sheet which included pertinent information about the choir: beginning middle school boys, or advanced SATB choir, for example. The choir director on-stage should stand behind a screen or in some other way not be visible to the judges.

Adjudicators of choral sight-singing contests.

8. When a sight-singing contest is being judged by more than one adjudicator, adjudicators should not confer with one another concerning the scores of a contest until after the last choir has performed. Judges are selected because of their experience and success in the teaching of

choral music. Judges may sometimes be curious about how the other judges are scoring. The need for judges to compare scores with one another, however, cannot be justified until after all the choirs have performed and have been adjudicated. If judges know the scores of choirs early in the contest they may compare them to their own scores.

A problem occurs when the judge may feel his scores are too harsh or conversely, too kind. If there are a successive number of scores that differ, the judge with a set of scores out of range of the others may be tempted to change his or her own scoring rubric for choirs who perform later in the contest thus skewing scores given to previous choirs. This is not fair to students and their directors.

For example, a choral group that scores a superior rating by two judges may get an average rating by a third judge. If the third judge in this vignette sees the other two judges are scoring higher, he or she may alter future scores of choir who perform later in the contest. I contend that it is perfectly acceptable for more than one judge to give scores not too close to each other. The notion that all three judges, in this example, should make an attempt to score similarly creates a disparity in judging accuracy. The reason there are three judges in this example, is for the benefit of the choirs. The mathematics and averages of the scores will take care of themselves. Judges should never be made aware of the

scores given by the other judges until after all the ratings have been given.

Composers of sight-singing music.

9. Guidelines, rubrics and rules used for music written specifically for sight-singing contests and festivals should never compromise artistic craftsmanship or musical integrity. The music should reflect a sense of *cantabile*. Melodies should be singable and should reflect a sense of antecedent/consequent or rise and fall of a musical phrase. The harmonic language and part writing rules should conform to those found in the common-practice period.

10. Composers should avoid an awkward interval or unusual leap designed to test the skill of a choir's sight-singing abilities. Inserting an awkward interval for this reason negates a composer's skill and craftsmanship. Composers are urged to create more resources for sight-singing festivals that could easily be used in the concert hall. This includes careful consideration of the text. Lyrics that are repetitive and have little meaning are not worthy of the skills of a serious composer. Sight-singing festivals should require high quality choral literature, not music that is only targeted and written for a sight-singing contest.

Publishers of sight-singing materials for classroom use.

11. Choral music sight-singing training should include more advanced rhythmic instruction.

12. Choral sight-singing instructional materials should include more musical elements than just notes and rhythms. Materials for classroom use should add lessons in tempo markings and meter changes. Further, these materials should always notate articulations and dynamics for all parts. Vocal ensembles must learn to sing the printed notes within a certain dynamic range as well as the articulations in the score as they perform their notes and rhythms at sight. Finally, choirs should be instructed how to sing musically with a beautiful tone while giving proper attention to the shape of the phrase as directed by the composer.

13. Music publishers should offer all sight-singing materials either on paper and/or on an Internet-based retrieval system in order to facilitate the use of technology in the classroom. Teachers now have the option to use projection devices along with printed musical books. All materials should be available to the teacher with the option of purchasing paper copies or digitally stored copies for use with projection systems. Paper music may soon be replaced with choir members holding electronic screens with their music. Music publishers should make sight-singing music available for such tablets and make the music immediately transposable. The music should be easy to manipulate by a director desires to transpose music then broadcast the music to the classroom in the new key.

14. Music used for choral sight-singing training scored for SATB voices should be written with the alto and bass ranges in mind that more closely emulate the approximate vocal range and tessitura found in choral music. There are far too many examples of SATB sight-singing music that have the altos and basses singing music that is unison with the tenors and sopranos or does not even include a part in bass clef.

Publishers, perhaps unwittingly, tend to write sight-singing music that specifically befits the soprano section. Publishers should more carefully cater to the alto and bass parts with music that emulates their traditional tessitura in the common practice period. Further, the alto lines are generally too high, and never low enough to replicate music they will be asked to sing in real choral music. In real choral music, altos are expected to sing a low G. Unfortunately, there is too little sight-singing music practically written for altos in this low range. On the high end, music written for altos in sight-singing method books is about a third too high. Most sight-singing books will take altos up to a high F and few rarely take them below a middle C. Altos should be able to sing a high F, but altos are not expected to sing a high F in most music.

Composers should consider sight-singing music written for the men's section. Sight-singing music written for young tenors may contain a low C or D. This can be too low. Many of the starting keys naturally are written in the keys of C, F or G. Young tenors can easily manage a

high G but so little sight-singing music is written with this in mind. For the basses, there tends to be a lack of sight-singing music written in the bass clef. This is perhaps another example of how publishers can sometimes cater to the soprano section without consideration for the other vocal parts.

High school basses, for example, must sing a low G and even a low F. Too few examples of this necessary range for the bass section is evident in today's published sight-singing method books. Further, music written for the bass section must be in bass clef and must not go too far out of their accepted range. The tessitura should not center around a high D or Eb.

15. Publishers of sight-singing music should include more four-part music. Teachers and students need less eye-catching graphics and more music.

16. Publishers of vocal sight-singing music should no longer use the term: *sight reading* but should use the phrase: *sight singing.* The origin of the meaning of *sight reading* comes from instrumental music.

Publishers of sight-singing music for contests and festivals.

17. Publishers should pay careful attention to the lyrics. The lyrics must make sense and should not be meaningless or trite.

Publishers should remind composers that they must write music that a choral director would consider programming in a concert setting.

Remind composers that more royalties will be generated when more directors choose their music for the concert hall. Sight-singing music should be written with the understanding that the piece should generate sales after the contest.

18. Publishers should use cover art that is attractive and welcomes the singer to open the music.

19. Publishers should mandate that sight-singing music contain dynamic changes, meter changes, phrasing, articulations and other musical elements, not simply notes and rhythms for a contest.

20. Publishers should remove any unusual intervals or awkward leaps intended to test the sight-singing skills during competitive contests and festivals. The music must be *real* music not music with unusual melodic twists.

Students.

21. All students enrolled in K–12 education should enroll in at least one year of instrumental music. Learning how to play a recorder, clarinet or flute will allow choral students to see the instrumental side of sight reading. As an added plus, they will be forced to improve their rhythmic counting skills as band and orchestral music can be more challenging than sight-singing music offered in choral classes.

22. Consequently, band students should consider enrolling in at least one semester of choir during high school. This will give them the

opportunity to make music vocally and not depend on fingers or embouchures to perform the correct notes.

Future research.

23. Given that this study revealed beliefs and perceptions from professional educators who teach at the college level, high school level and middle school level, a replication of May (1993) would be warranted which could identify the efficacy of sight-singing materials currently used and how much time is spent weekly on sight-singing instruction. Middle school choral directors should not be excluded from this research. With the use of an on-line, data collection process, and a more stratified random sample population, May's study could also be improved in a replication.

24. Directors in our focus group had little information on fixed Do. It is my understanding that those adept in fixed Do learn relative pitch and can sing chromatic music with little trouble, unlike those adept in moveable Do who find it unreliable during difficult chromatic passages. Future qualitative researchers may also want to consider research in high school choral instructors who use fixed Do exclusively in their classrooms. It is my understanding that Trinity High School in the Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District near Dallas, Texas has a long tradition of success using fixed Do.

25. Ewers (2004) demonstrated a significant increase to student [N=31] sight singing scores when given an extra fifteen minutes of instruction using a computer-based software program in sight singing training. Future researchers may be undertaken to review and possibly replicate Ewers. Suggestions for improving Ewers's research include involving more than 31 participants and perhaps conducting the study in three or four other geographic or socio-economic areas. It is recommended that middle school choir students should be included in any replication of Ewers's research.

26. Focus group members' responses to research question four were decisive. Students who enroll in a choir program with previous training in orchestra or band are generally more adept in accurately performing rhythms that those without previous training. The question that arose from the focus group discussions was "why?"

Further longitudinal research should be conducted that will investigate the differences between the teaching methods of band and orchestra directors and how they differ from those methods used by secondary choral directors. It should not be assumed, however, that a mere change in pedagogy will automatically produce singers who can count like band students. The vocal instrument and instruments such as a clarinet, trumpet or violin involve different, albeit sometimes similar teaching strategies.

From the focus group discussions, however, it cannot be escaped that there is an observed tendency for band and orchestra students to display a more advanced ability to accurately count musical rhythms at first sight. It would be most interesting to examine the sight-singing methods in band and orchestra classes. How are they the same and how do they differ from choral music sight singing methods?

27. Further research is also needed that will replicate this study using a focus group comprised only of middle school choral directors. Comparisons may be made and differences in pedagogy may suggest different levels of expectations exist between high school and middle school programs.

28. More research is also needed to find out how many states require their public school choir programs to compete in a contest or festival that includes adjudication in sight singing. Also, an inquiry should be made as to how often participation in a contest or festival is required or if participation is voluntary without retribution.

29. Future researchers may want to conduct a quantitative study using students in a band or orchestra setting who enroll in a choir program in order to investigate student's rhythmic accuracy after one or more years of instrumental training.

30. It is recommended that future researchers utilize the focus group approach in examining the teaching of sight singing specifically at the elementary level.

Final thoughts.

In a world where competition can sometimes be the impetus behind who gets what and who goes where (Rittenhouse, 1989), let me state why teachers should prioritize sight-singing music education.

Sight singing should be taught so that our students can become part of the artistic process. Hopefully they will learn to be life-long students of fine art and consumers of art. Ultimately, it is my wish they can pick up a musical score and discern the musical symbols and sing the correct notes, rhythms, and musical markings; so they can experience art; so they can create art; so their future may be filled with the ability to participate in art; so their ability to understand humanity may be enlarged and their ability to comprehend beautiful things may become more acute.

Choral music teachers are the only qualified instructors in a school trained to teach vocal music sight singing. With the proper tools and supervision, their students can possess and utilize the tools to read music anytime and anywhere without a musical instrument. Choral music teachers should continue to have high expectations of their students and make the teaching and learning of sight singing a daily

effort and a high priority. The voice of the choral music teacher must always be heard. Unfortunately, there are times when the voice of the teacher is missing or ignored.

The voice of the teacher, in this case, the voice of the experienced and successful teacher, is at the core of the choral teaching profession. Throughout this research process, the voices of individual choral directors were heard and organized for meaningful analysis. This study satisfies a quest for knowledge - a quest for understanding teachers and how they can become better craftsmen in the field. Teachers should have a thirst for knowledge and a thirst for an understanding of education and the understanding of what it takes to be a good teacher and what it takes to be a great teacher. This study, I hope, will help satisfy the thirst of someone who desires to excel in the profession.

Appendix A

IRB Approval

Boston University Charles River Campus Institutional Review Board

25 Buick Street
Room 157
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
T 617-358-6115
www.bu.edu/irb

Notification of IRB Approval: Initial Review

August 2, 2013

Ronald Sanders
Doctoral Candidate
College of Fine Arts
Department of Music Education

Mailing Address:
118 Summertime
San Antonio, TX 78216

Protocol Title:	The Teaching of Choral Sight Singing: Analyzing and Understanding Experienced Choral Directors' Perceptions and Beliefs
Protocol #:	3265E
Funding Agencies:	n/a
IRB Review Type:	Expedited (6) and (7)

Dear Mr. Sanders:

On 8/2/13, after review of your initial application received on 7/10/13 and your response to subsequent modification requests, the IRB has approved the above-referenced protocol in accordance with 45 CFR 46.111. Approval for this study is effective from 8/2/13 to 8/1/14.

This approval includes the following:

1. IRB Application – approval to enroll 10 subjects
2. One Informed Consent Form
3. Two Recruitment emails
4. One Interview Guide

This approval is valid for one year, and will expire on **8/1/14.** Please submit a Progress Report, which is located on our website (http://www.bu.edu/irb/), six weeks prior to the expiration of your study.

As the Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring that studies are conducted in accordance with federal regulations, state laws, and institutional policies.

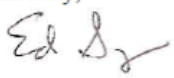
Please note:

- No subjects may be involved in study procedures prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.

- All unanticipated problems or serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
- All protocol modifications must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation unless they are necessary to eliminate immediate hazard to subjects.
- All protocol deviations must be reported to the IRB.
- All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to use.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 617-358-6117.

Sincerely,



Ed Szkutak
Senior IRB Analyst
Charles River Campus IRB

cc: Professor Manny Brand, CFA

Enclosures

Appendix B

First Contact Letter

August 16, 2013

Name
Address
Address

Dear (name),

I am nearing completion of my Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Boston University. I would like to visit with you concerning your possible participation in a research study that will discuss sight singing in secondary choral music education.

If this is something you would consider, I will contact you by telephone at a time convenient to you. If, however, you would rather not be contacted you may decline participation prior to my phone call by calling me at: 210-843-2609.

All the best,

Ronnie Sanders

Appendix C

Follow Up Electronic Mail

Follow up email:

Dear (name)
Thank you for agreeing to help with this research project that will assist me in the completion of my doctor of musical arts. If you agree, you would commit to participate in **two** focus group events:

1. Monday, September 16, 2013 from 6:30 – 9:30 PM, and
2. Monday, September 23, 2013 from 6:30 – 9:30 PM.

Both events will take place in the WILLOW CONFERENCE ROOM at the Embassy Suites Hotel AIRPORT location (please click here for the address [Link Attached]).

There will be water service provided. **Please open and read the attached Informed Consent Letter.** You will be asked to sign a copy at our first meeting. Would you kindly confirm your participation by replying to this email with a yes or no?

With deepest appreciation,

Ronnie Sanders
118 Summertime Drive
San Antonio, TX 78216
My cell: 210-843-2609

Appendix D

Informed Consent

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Protocol Title: **The Teaching of Choral Sight Singing: Analyzing and Understanding Experienced Choral Directors' Perceptions and Beliefs**
Principal Investigator: Ronald Sanders, rsanders@ronniesanders.net
Description of Subject Population: Ten Choral Music Educators for Focus Group Discussion
Version Date: August 1, 2013

Introduction

Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about taking part in a research study. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let us know. If you decide to take part in this research study we will ask you to sign this form. We will give you a copy of the signed form.

The person in charge of this study is Ronnie Sanders. The faculty advisor is: Dr. Manny Brand. Mr. Sanders can be reached at (210) 843-2609. Dr. Brand can be reached at: mannyinbali@gmail.com.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to analyze and understand experienced choral directors' perceptions and beliefs on a variety of topics surrounding the teaching and learning of choral music sight singing. We are asking you to take part in this study because of your expertise in choral music education.

How long will I take part in this research study?

We ask that you commit to TWO evening sessions from 6:30 - 9:30PM. The dates and locations will be set after seeking input from all ten participants.

Study Title: The Teaching of Choral Sight Singing: Analyzing and Understanding Experienced Choral Directors' Perceptions and Beliefs
IRB Protocol Number: 3265E
Consent Form Valid Date: 8/2/13
Study Expiration Date: 8/1/14

What will happen if I take part in this research study?
You will be asked to participate in a focus group. We will discuss seven research questions concerning the nature of sight singing in secondary choral music education. The topics to be covered will deal with the nature and purposes of sight singing in secondary choral music education. We will also talk about your thoughts on the relative effectiveness of the various methods of sight singing, and using hand-signs. Also, we will cover the nature of assessment of sight singing and expectations from fine arts administrators and or principals. You will meet in a room with nine other choral music professionals and me. We will have water, soft drinks and light snacks to make the time more comfortable. Your commitment to this research will be a total of two evenings, each lasting three hours.

Confidentiality
It is important that we keep identities of the participants confidential. However, you may know some of the other participants. Your names will not appear anywhere in the research document. I will assign an anonymous designation that will serve as your identifier. Also, any identifying comments, such as, "I teach at Anderson High School" will not be reported, published or released. It is the purpose of this researcher to keep all identities confidential. With that in mind, it is not possible to guaranty what other participants may do or say after the research sessions are completed.

What will happen during the two sessions?
You will be one of ten participants who will take part in this research study. We will meet in a room and discuss seven different elements of choral music education, specifically the nature of sight singing. The researcher will present one topic at a time and each participant is welcomed to offer his or her point of view. The discussion will continue in a conversation-like manner.

In any conversation, there is likely to be areas of agreement and disagreement. It is not the purpose of this study to neither find "common-ground" nor to attempt to offer a majority decision - rather, it is the purpose of the study to find alternate and various opinions on the topics given.

Audio Recording/Confidentiality
For further analysis, we would like to record the conversation. In order to protect your confidentiality, any recording made will only be available to the researcher, approved study staff, and Boston University's IRB. On the recording, it may be possible to identify your voice. In an effort to keep your comments confidential, I

Study Title: The Teaching of Choral Sight Singing: Analyzing and Understanding Experienced Choral Directors' Perceptions and Beliefs
IRB Protocol Number: 3265E
Consent Form Valid Date: 8/2/13
Study Expiration Date: 8/1/14

will store the recording in a locked cabinet and only approved study staff will be able listen to the recording. Do you agree to let us record your voice during this study?

_____YES _____NO _____INITIALS

How Will You Keep My Study Records Confidential?

We will keep the recorded audio of this study for one year after the research document is published. After that, the audio will be destroyed or erased.

Study Participation and Early Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential.

Alternatives: The alternative to this study is not to participate.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?

Loss of Confidentiality

The main risk of allowing us to use and store your information for research is a potential loss of privacy. We will protect your privacy by labeling your information with a code and keeping the key to the code in a password-protected computer.

Focus Groups

The researcher will ask you and the other people in the group to use only first names during the discussion. He will also ask you not to tell anyone outside the group what any particular person said in the group. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that everyone will keep the discussions private.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

There are no benefits to you from taking part in this research. Other choral music educators may benefit in the future from the information that is learned in this study. You may choose not to take part in this research study.

What will it cost me to take part in this research study?

There are no costs to you for taking part in this research study.

Study Title: The Teaching of Choral Sight Singing: Analyzing and Understanding Experienced Choral Directors' Perceptions and Beliefs
IRB Protocol Number: 3265E
Consent Form Valid Date: 8/2/13
Study Expiration Date: 8/1/14

IRB Contact Information:
If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University IRB directly at 617-358-6115.

Statement of Consent
I have read the information in this consent form including risks and possible benefits. I have been given the chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in the study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Name of Subject

_____ _____
Signature of Subject Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

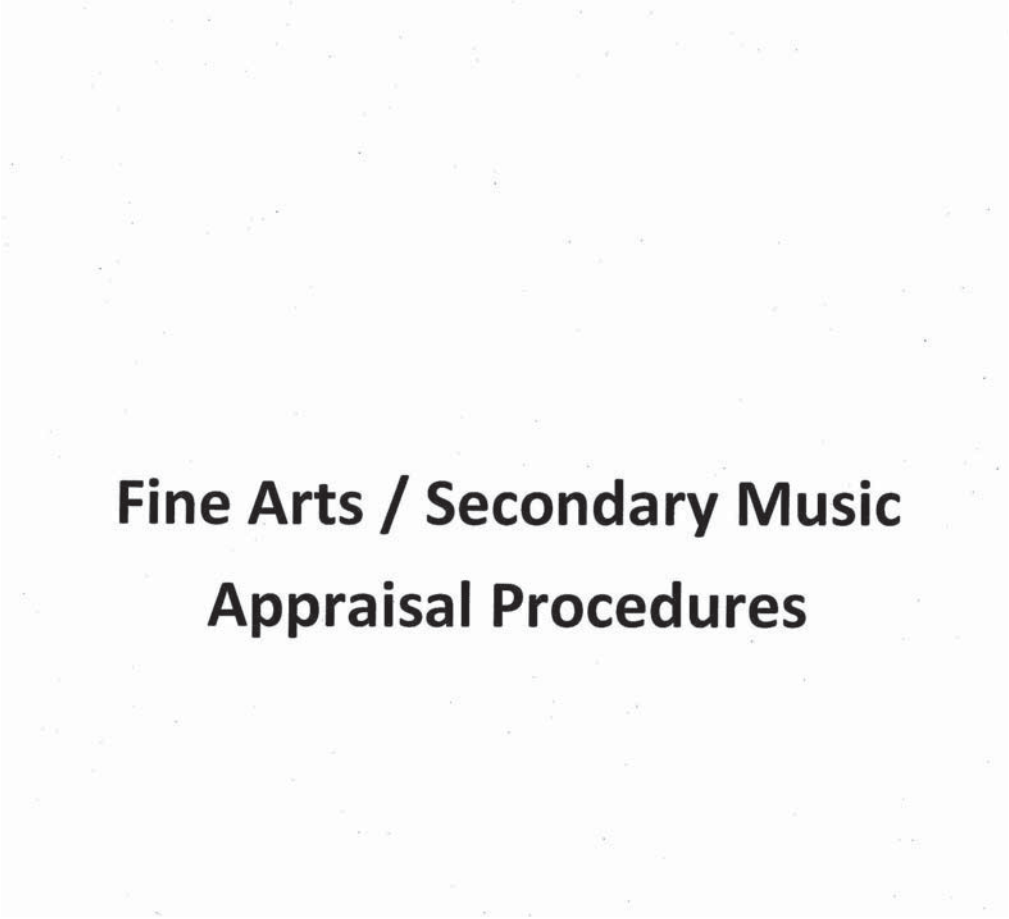
_____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

Study Title: The Teaching of Choral Sight Singing: Analyzing and Understanding Experienced Choral Directors' Perceptions and Beliefs
IRB Protocol Number: 3265E
Consent Form Valid Date: 8/2/13
Study Expiration Date: 8/1/14

Appendix E

Fine Arts Staff Appraisal Procedures



SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
FINE ARTS STAFF
APPRAISAL PROCEDURES

1. The campus principal and campus fine arts department chair will meet at the beginning of each school year to set goals and objectives for the campus fine arts department. Strengths and areas in need of improvement in all fine arts programs will be identified and discussed. Any fine arts staff member may be asked to attend this meeting in order to provide detailed information about his/her program.

2. At the beginning of each school year, the fine arts department chair will meet with all campus fine arts staff members to establish expectations for the fine arts programs.

3. Calendars with all scheduled fine arts events will be provided to the principals. Additionally, the fine arts staff is responsible for maintaining regular communications with the principal and providing him/her information concerning competitions, auditions, exhibits, and campus and community performances.

4. The Fine Arts Evaluation Record (FAER) consists of eighty-three (83) criteria organized into eleven (11) Domains. This document will be used to evaluate a fine arts staff member's performance in a comprehensive manner. Domains evaluated will include: Planning and Preparation, Organization and Routine, Instructional Strategies and Activities, Active Engagement in Classes and Rehearsals, Learning Environment, Instructional Goals, Varied Methods of Assessment, Equipment and Instruments, Communications, Personal Conduct, and Participation. The FAER is completed separately from the teacher appraisal.

5. The FAER is to be completed by the principal with the exception of Domain VI (Instructional Goals) which will be completed by the fine arts department staff. The FAER should be completed after the last concert, show, or performance event of the school year. However, the document may be completed in advance of the designated appraisal period if a fine arts staff member's performance does not meet expectations as defined by the Fine Arts Department, campus administration, or the standards established in the FAER. Evaluations completed prior to the end of the school year may be re-opened and revised to reflect pertinent changes in the staff member's performance. In this event, the fine arts staff member will receive a signed copy of the adjusted FAER.

6. Performance criteria will be rated on a 3-point scale using the following standards: *Proficient, Needs Improvement, and Unsatisfactory*. A rating of *Not Applicable* will be considered when any criterion does not apply.

7. A copy of the signed FAER will be given to the fine arts staff member during a private conference. The original will be retained by the Fine Arts Department, with a copy sent to the Human Resources Department.

8. Recommendations for improvement must be provided whenever a fine arts staff member's performance is rated as *Needs Improvement* or *Unsatisfactory* in any area.

9. Ratings of *Needs Improvement* or *Unsatisfactory* must be supported with appropriate documentation. Documentation should be developed prior to the completion of the FAER and per cumulative data rules as defined by the **San Antonio Independent School District Teacher Appraisal System**. Justification for ratings of *Needs Improvement* or *Unsatisfactory* must be provided in the *Comments* section on the FAER.

10. Fine arts staff members will receive training on the FAER instrument and appraisal process at the beginning of each school year and as changes are made. New fine arts staff members will receive training as soon as possible upon hiring.

11. The Fine Arts Department is available to assist fine arts staff members with the appraisal process as needed.

12. Fine arts staff members who disagree with their appraisal may submit a written response to the principal with a copy to the fine arts department no later than ten (10) working days after receiving the FAER. If submitted, responses become part of and attached to the appraisal document.

Fine Arts / Secondary Music Performance Descriptors

PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTORS FOR FINE ARTS/ SECONDARY MUSIC

Performance descriptors are intended to serve as an example of performance expectations for secondary music teachers. This list is by no means exhaustive. Additional criteria may apply.

DOMAIN I. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Criterion 1: Self-explanatory

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

Criterion 4: Each lesson is designed to review and reinforce previously learned concepts, knowledge, and skills, before introducing new concepts, knowledge, and skills. Lessons are sequential in nature, becoming progressively more advanced.

DOMAIN II. ORGANIZATION AND ROUTINE

Criterion 1: Students should move into the room without loitering, get their instruments and music and go to their chairs. A warm-up period is used to prepare the students for the lessons of the day. This is followed by technical work in method books (MS instrumental) and/or sight reading exercises. Next is work on the concert/contest literature. Students are accustomed to this format, and move between the activities without excess talking or other disruption.

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: Self explanatory

Criterion 4: The director(s) are constantly monitoring the students to ensure that they have correct posture, are breathing deeply and supporting the breath, are using correct embouchure (wind players), are using correct vowel shape (vocalists), and have correct instrument position. These fundamental techniques directly affect the quality of the students' tone and intonation.

Criterion 5: Self-explanatory

Criterion 6: Rehearsals are held by "section," meaning groups of similar instruments or voices. For example, only trumpets, only sopranos, etc., would rehearse together in this format.

Criterion 7: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN III. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Criterion 1: Self-explanatory

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

Criterion 4: The teacher uses the correct names for musical terms, and not the "nicknames." For example, the term "fermata" is used instead of "bird's eye."

Criterion 5: Self-explanatory

Criterion 6: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN IV. ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN CLASSES & REHEARSALS

Criterion 1: Self-explanatory

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

Criterion 4: Self-explanatory

Criterion 5: The teacher may use a tuner to establish pitch and/or a metronome to set tempo. The teacher may record the group in rehearsal and play it back so that they may evaluate their performance for additional needed improvements. Additionally, the teacher may use a notation program (such as Finale or Sibelius) to write/re-write parts for the group.

Criterion 6: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN V. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Criterion 1: Chairs and/or stands, tuner & metronome, and piano may remain in the rehearsal room. However, music should be stored in a folder cabinet, and instruments should be stored in the appropriate racks or cages. There should be no books, jackets, or other personal items cluttering the room when ~~no~~ students are present.

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

Criterion 4: Self-explanatory

Criterion 5: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN VI. INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

To be completed by Fine Arts Staff.

DOMAIN VII. VARIED METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

Criterion 1: Self-explanatory

Criterion 2: Music checklists and rubrics include items such as, but not limited to, correct rhythms, precision, pitch accuracy, intonation, tone quality, etc.

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

Criterion 4: Self-explanatory

Criterion 5: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN VIII. EQUIPMENT AND INSTRUMENTS

Criterion 1: In the event that any furniture and equipment is beyond repair, a work order should be initiated in a timely manner through the campus office for the removal of said item(s). The item(s) should be sent to the warehouse for auction and removed from the program/campus inventory.

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: When not in use, all musical instruments should be stored in their cases and placed in the appropriate racks or cages. Instruments should always be treated with care. Instruments in need of repair or adjustment should be taken promptly to the SAISD Band Instrument Repair Lab, located in the Milam Building.

Criterion 4: Self-explanatory

Criterion 5: Self-explanatory

Criterion 6: Self-explanatory

Criterion 7: Self-explanatory

Criterion 8: Self-explanatory

Criterion 9: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN IX. COMMUNICATIONS

Criterion 1: Self-explanatory

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN X. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Criterion 1: Self-explanatory

Criterion 2: Self-explanatory

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

Criterion 4: Self-explanatory

Criterion 5: Self-explanatory

Criterion 6: Students should be allowed/encouraged to take more than one fine arts course if there is space in his/her schedule, and if he/she has the time to do the necessary work. Concert uniforms (formal dresses and tuxedos) are shared equally by Band, Choir, and Orchestra. A mutually agreeable system should be established between the directors involved for (1) checking them out, (2) checking them in, and (3) if necessary, transferring them between programs during the school year. Performance spaces such as the school auditorium are to be shared by all of the performing groups equally.

Criterion 7: Self-explanatory

DOMAIN XI. PARTICPATION

Criterion 1: Self-explanatory

Criterion 2: This event may be held in a variety of venues, including, but not limited to, a concert stage, a rehearsal room, or a cafeteria. The event may be held on or off campus. The audience may include parents, students, and/or members of the community.

Criterion 3: Self-explanatory

Criterion 4: Self-explanatory

Fine Arts / Secondary Music
Evaluation Record

SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
FINE ARTS EVALUATION RECORD / SECONDARY MUSIC

EMPLOYEE NAME_____ **CAMPUS**_____

EMPLOYEE ID # _____

POSITION_____ **DATE**_____

P = PROFICIENT; NI = NEEDS IMPROVEMENT; U = UNACCEPTABLE; N/A = NOT APPLICABLE

I. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. Implements SAISD Curriculum Guide according to 9 week grading period and sequential dates.				
2. Writes weekly lesson plans prior to class.				
3. Lesson Plans reflect alignment with TEKS.				
4. Lessons are developmentally appropriate, and are used to improve instruction.				

Comments: _____

_____

_____

II. ORGANIZATION AND ROUTINE

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. A regular rehearsal routine and format have been established. Students are familiar with the procedures and transition easily between activities.				
2. Daily agenda, goals, objectives and other pertinent items are posted and explained.				
3. A warm-up period is used to activate prior knowledge and skills, and prepare the students mentally and physically for rehearsal.				
4. Materials are prepared and ready for quick dissemination.				
5. Fundamentals of musicianship are taught/reinforced on a regular basis. These include posture, breathing, instrument position (instrumental), tone production and quality, and ear training.				
6. Method books (instrumental) and/or sight reading strategies (choral) are used to develop techniques on a frequent and consistent basis.				
7. Rehearsals of 45-60 minutes each are held no less than four days each week. These extra rehearsals may be held before and/or after school.				
8. Rehearsal schedule is posted and discussed.				
9. Extra rehearsals (section rehearsals, marching practice, etc.) begin and end on time.				
10. Yearly Calendar is updated as needed and upcoming events are discussed.				

Comments:

III. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. Instructional strategies and activities are tied to SAISD Curriculum Guide.				
2. Instructional strategies and activities are developmentally age appropriate.				
3. A variety of instructional strategies are used to accommodate different learning styles.				
4. The teacher uses correct musical vocabulary, and incorporates the correct terminology into the rehearsals and lessons.				
5. The teacher utilizes open-ended, higher order questions that require reasoning and detailed explanation.				
6. Lesson concepts and skills are related to other subjects and disciplines.				

Comments:

IV. ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN CLASSES & REHEARSALS

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. Lessons promote the improvement of musical technique and development of skills.				
2. All possible class time is used for the rehearsal, which lasts from "bell to bell," with minimal time allotted to make announcements and to put away instruments and equipment.				
3. The rehearsal is well-paced, making efficient and effective use of rehearsal time.				
4. Students are attentive and remain actively engaged in learning throughout the period.				
5. Available technology is used to enhance student learning.				
6. Students are given clear direction for future practice and means of improvement.				

Comments:

V. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. The classroom, practice rooms, and rehearsal rooms are free of excess clutter, debris, and hazardous materials.				
2. The teacher actively promotes and models respect for the diverse ideas, skills, heritage, and experiences of all students.				
3. Appropriate visual displays are made in the classroom. These may include learning aids, performance pictures, letters, performance critiques, and achievements.				

	P	NI	U	N/A
4. A variety of information is readily available to the students, including music theory, history, repertoire, college information, enrichment activities, summer programs, and career choices.				
5. A set of class rules is established and a discipline management system is used fairly and consistently.				

Comments: _____

_____

_____

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS (Instrumental Music)

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. Correct playing posture				
2. Correct instrument position				
3. Appropriate warm-up exercises				
4. Accurate intonation				
5. Accurate and precise rhythms				
6. Correct embouchures				
7. Correct stylistic interpretation according to musical period				
8. Appropriate dynamics				
9. Appropriate articulations (tonguing, slurring, etc. according to notation)				
10. Appropriate musical phrasing				
11. Characteristic tone qualities				

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS (Vocal Music)

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. Appropriate singing posture				
2. Appropriate Solfege hand signs				
3. Singing in-tune and with correct register				
4. Targeted warm-up exercises/vocalises				
5. Accurate intonation				
6. Rhythmic accuracy and precision				
7. Long, round, tall (LRT) vowels				
8. Clearly articulated consonants				
9. Correct stylistic interpretation according to musical period				

	P	NI	U	N/A
10. Appropriate dynamics				
11. Appropriate musical phrasing/"text painting"				
12. Characteristic tone quality				

Comments: _____

_____

_____

VII. VARIED METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. Dialogue (question/response) is used as a means of assessment.				
2. Checklists and rubrics are used as means of assessment.				
3. Performance (individually and in small groups) is used as a means of assessment.				
4. Tests and quizzes (written and/or oral) are used as means of assessment.				
5. Observation and feedback is used as a means of assessment.				

Comments: _____

_____

_____

VIII. EQUIPMENT AND INSTRUMENTS

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. Furniture and equipment (including but not limited to) chairs, stands, storage racks, cabinets, and risers are clean and in good working condition.				
2. Acoustic pianos (choral) are kept in good working order, and are tuned a minimum of twice each year.				
3. Band, orchestra, and mariachi instruments are properly stored in their cases, kept repaired, and are in good playing condition.				
4. All uniforms (marching, concert formals/tuxes, and mariachi trajes) are kept clean, properly organized, and stored on the campus.				
5. The instrument/equipment inventory is updated at the end of each semester and the summer. It is sent via e-mail attachment to the Band Repair Lab with a copy to the Instrumental Music Coordinator in the Fine Arts Department.				
6. The instrument/equipment checkout documentation and records are updated at the end of each semester and the end of the summer. Missing instruments are reported to the campus authorities.				
7. All uniform inventories (marching, concert formals/tuxes, and mariachi trajes) are checked and updated at the end of each semester.				
8. Equipment, instruments and uniforms are kept in secure areas, and when not in use, all rooms and the building (High School only) are kept locked.				

	P	NI	U	N/A
9. School owned instruments and uniforms are to be used exclusively for district activities and events.				

Comments: _____

IX. COMMUNICATIONS

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. The teacher maintains regular communications with the Campus and Fine Arts Department. E-mails, phone messages, and faxes are answered in a timely manner.				
2. The teacher establishes and maintains regular and open lines of communication with parents and students. Yearly event and performance calendars will be reviewed by the Fine Arts Department. Teachers will distribute yearly calendars to the teachers, parents, and students before Labor Day.				
3. Copies of the campus band/choir/orchestra/mariachi handbooks will be reviewed by the Fine Arts Department, and distributed (and explained) to the students, parents, and principal at the beginning of each year. Handbook receipts are kept on file by the director.				

Comments: _____

X. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. The teacher dresses in an appropriate manner whenever at school or at a school function.				
2. The director attends all events both on and off campus, where his/her students are participating. The director stays with students until all have secured a ride home after the event.				
3. The director works cooperatively with other teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels to develop a coordinated, comprehensive, and vertically aligned music program. High school directors travel to middle schools a minimum of two times a week, as listed in his/her schedule.				
4. The head director works collaboratively with the assistant director to meet the needs of the students and organize the program. The head director assigns duties and delegates responsibility to the assistant director.				
5. The assistant director works collaboratively with the head director to meet the needs of the students and organize the program. The assistant director carries out the duties and responsibilities delegated by the head director.				
6. The director demonstrates a willingness to share students and facilities with other Fine Arts programs in a cooperative manner.				
7. The director understands and follows all rules and regulations set forth by all governing agencies (including but not exclusive to) the University Interscholastic League (UIL), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA), the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), the Fine Arts Department, and the Campus.				

Comments: _____

_____

_____

XI. PARTICIPATION

	P	NI	U	N/A
1. The teacher organizes the students for participation in all musical activities for which they are eligible. This includes all Pre-University Interscholastic League (Pre-UIL), University Interscholastic League (UIL), Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA), and SAISD District events.				
2. The teacher directs the students in a minimum of one public Curriculum Concert during each nine-week period.				
3. The teacher attends all district Fine Arts meetings and district staff development sessions.				
4. The teacher attends the TMEA fall and spring meetings.				
5. The teacher attends professional conferences appropriate to his/her discipline, including (but not limited to) Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA), Texas Bandmasters Association (TBA), Texas Choral Directors Association (TCDA), Texas Orchestra Directors Association (TODA), etc. Organizational memberships are funded by the SAISD Fine Arts Department.				

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____ I have read this performance review and I agree with its content.

_____ I have read this performance review and I do not agree with its content.

_____ Response will follow within 10 working days.

Employee:_____ **Date:**_____

Principal:_____ **Date:**_____

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Ronnie Sanders made his Carnegie Hall conducting debut in June of 2005. He served on the Board of Directors for the Texas Choral Directors Association from 2002–2004. In May of 2010, he was one of five educators serving on the music faculty when his school was awarded a Grammy Signature Award for excellence in music education. He has conducted numerous regional choirs and is in demand as clinician and adjudicator.

In 2011, Texas governor Rick Perry appointed Mr. Sanders to serve on the Texas Commission on the Arts. Commissioner Sanders holds degrees from Charter Oak State College, the University of Houston and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Boston University.

Sanders' highly imaginative curriculum *Sight Singing Made EZ* and choral rehearsal techniques are published by Bel Cantare Music and Alfred Music Company. He has numerous reviews of choral music published in the Choral Journal, the official publication of the American Choral Director's Association. Sanders' entry on British composer Tarik O'Regan, is published in the New Grove Online Dictionary of Music and Musicians.