

EDITED BY

FRANK

ABRAHAMMS

PAUL D.

HEAD



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
CHORAL PEDAGOGY

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

CHORAL
PEDAGOGY

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PEDAGOGY

Edited by

FRANK ABRAHAMS

and

PAUL D. HEAD

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To the loving memory of Robert Page (1927–2016), who was influential in the development of many choral conductors and whose support and sound advice was consistent for many years.

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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

CHORAL
PEDAGOGY

INTRODUCTION

FRANK ABRAHAMS AND PAUL D. HEAD

As we, the editors and contributing authors of this volume, set off in an effort to engage our colleagues as potential contributors to a compendium on the topic of choral pedagogy, a common response was that of curiosity and intrigue.

“What do you mean, *exactly*, when you speak about the idea of choral pedagogy? Is this about teaching? About the voice? Or are you looking for scholarly research related to pressing issues such as individualized instruction, trends in standardized testing, or the perils of maintaining a choral program under the inherent burden of curriculum design in the age of the Common Core?”

A quick keyword search of the Oxford University Press database will identify over fifty volumes that are in some way related to the subject of music, with more than a half-dozen of these dedicated specifically to thoughts on teaching or making music, such as the two volumes of *The Oxford Handbook of Music Education* (McPherson & Welsh, 2012), or volumes with a broader scope such as entitled *The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Musical Cultures* (Campbell & Wiggins, 2013), as well as very specific collections of essays like that defined with titles like *The Oxford Handbook of Computer Music* (Dean, 2011).

But back to the question at hand; what exactly is choral pedagogy? Is this a study of musical practice grounded in the plethora of conducting books that have been accumulating on the shelves of our conservatories and universities since World War II, or should this be a research-based endeavor where the author is charged with establishing a hierarchy of philosophical and sociological constructs that take place within the choral ensemble. If you consider recent trends in self-publication, it would be impossible to present an exhaustive survey of recent publications in even a single genre. Consider, for example the myriad of choral methods books that typically limit themselves to the more perfunctory and organizational elements of the choral program: basics in vocal production, rehearsal technique, planning tours, and dealing with administration. While these texts may dedicate a chapter or two to philosophical foundations and sociological trends, substantive discussion of such issues are beyond the scope and intent of what often become the principal resources for “training young conductors.”

For those preparing to become conductors of school choirs, there are typically courses in choral methods with comprehensive curricula pertaining to establishing and maintaining a choral program, where there are multiple choirs and students earn grades and graduation credits for participation. Some of our colleagues learned to be a conductor by *participating* in a choir and mimicking the mannerisms of a particular conductor they admired. Some serve in apprentice roles to conductors of church and school choirs where they help with the routine managerial tasks as well as assist with the conducting. Perhaps they will be fortunate enough to enjoy an internship in a church as an assistant minister of music, or as a choral scholar in a community group, or at least realize their talents in the fleeting weeks of college when they student teach. At the graduate level, there exists a field of study where one can earn a master's or doctoral degree. Often these programs include opportunities where candidates combine coursework with practical experience in various types of graduate assistantships, though it is particularly noteworthy that at the graduate level, the academy makes a clear distinction between those who will become researchers, those who will focus on pedagogy, and those who will become practitioners or performers. The curricula of graduate programs have become so carefully defined that the music education student may scarcely have an opportunity to sing in a choir, while the conducting student may be completely lacking in skills related to research and publication. But are they not *all* students of choral pedagogy?

Several authors in this volume cite Patricia O'Toole's landmark article, "I Sing in a Choir But I Have 'No Voice'" (O'Toole, 2005) renowned as one of the first formal challenges to teacher-centered instruction, examining the time-honored tradition of the authoritarian, all-knowing conductor whose charge was to "train" the choir while disseminating wisdom as related to all things interpretive. But as the times have changed, and as the notion that "children should be seen and not heard" has given way in the wake more Socratic and constructivist paradigms that lend themselves to increasingly diverse populations, there have been more complex and challenging questions related to issues such as gender bias, elitism, or even basic survival skills in the age of assessment at a time when many "choral pedagogues" feel completely adrift when asked to provide evidence of achievement or measurable progress that aligns to current trends in student and teacher accountability.

In this light, choral pedagogy is an interdisciplinary field of study that includes all of the aforementioned experiences—coursework, participation in choirs as a singer, and serving as an apprentice to an established conductor. An important distinction, however, is that choral pedagogy focuses on singers and conductors who work together in a community of practice called "the choir." The field considers sociotransformative constructivist ideologies, critical pedagogies, voice pedagogy, voice science, psychology, sociology, and philosophy filtered through a lens of teaching and learning, or perhaps even more importantly, how they relate to one another in the ever-evolving realm of choral music education.

The choral landscape is changing. The traditional school, church, and community choirs that replicate works of the western canon, including new compositions by living composers, are only part of the picture. In the United States, the popularity of television

shows such as *GLEE*, *The Voice*, and *The Sing-Off* have challenged traditionally time-honored concepts of choral tone, repertoire, and identity, while at the same time placing an emphasis on the attainment of musical experience devoid of a traditional instructor or mentor. Virtual choirs sing on the Internet and the singers never meet the conductor or each other synchronously face-to-face. Frequently, the choral performance seeks to appease the visual senses beyond the traditional auditory event, which requires many choir members to possess more than just a beautiful singing voice, but be able to move, dance, and act as well. In many venues, costumes, lighting, and stage sets are an integral part of the final performance in an attempt to reach overstimulated audiences in the age of multimedia. YouTube provides accessibility for all to see and hear multiple performances by choirs and their conductors singing in live, unedited performances of varied repertoires where even the most remote middle school choir can gain an international reputation—flattering or otherwise—almost overnight. On the technological front, the ability of an engineer to autotune sound has shaped a consumer's expectation of what is acceptable tone quality and has opened dialogue about what a choral sound should be. Conducting and teaching world music means learning to produce tone in different ways in order to be authentic when performing music that was isolated within the bounds of sustained oral traditions as recently as a generation ago.

As this volume has evolved, we are reminded again and again of the perceived chasm between the contrasting ideologies represented by our leading practitioners and our most prolific academic researchers, and the ongoing disparity within our professional organizations that suggest a lack of understanding between one camp and the other. How frequently do we encounter a graduate student who has a sudden epiphany in an educational foundations course: "I've done that for years, but I had no idea I was doing something of any pedagogical or philosophical significance. In fact, I was just doing what I remembered from high school!" What fuels this perception that musicians don't have time to give careful consideration to process, while "academics" isolate themselves from making music?

In these pages, you will find a broad spectrum of perspectives from the contributing authors. Some are renowned for their ability to internalize—or even memorize—a lengthy and complex musical score, where an intense sense of musicianship becomes the springboard to creating a highly effective educational environment. Conversely, we also have authors who have spent much of their lives focused on a single attribute of the way students learn, the way communities are formed, and the way humans disseminate information to create a transformative experience. And, of course, a few contributors live with one foot in each world, embracing a mission to close the gap between philosophy, research, and practice. Or more concisely, they are driven by the desire to create a holistic approach to choral pedagogy grounded in sound philosophical foundations that leads to heightened aesthetic experiences.

In the end, we believe it is the disparity defined by these distinctly varied approaches to scholarship that makes this volume so unique, resulting in something of a dialogue between those who see the process from the outside in, and those who approach the process inside out! Some chapters are clearly steeped in research, with numerous references

related to a plethora of readings that will lead the scholar to further study, while other contributors provide historical, sociological, and contextual insights that document what will be revelatory to some, but common knowledge to others. And finally, a few other chapters unfold in the form of longitudinal or qualitative studies, providing valuable insights as to how we have arrived where we are today. This book finds its voice in amalgamation of all three perspectives.

A final thought on this topic recalls the landmark volume entitled *Choral Conducting: A Symposium* (Decker & Herford, 1973) by Harold Decker and Julius Herford; a smaller, but highly regarded collection of essays on the state of the Choral Art as it was observed in 1973. Of particular intrigue in that volume was a chapter by Howard Swan who sought to define the five schools of choral singing in America, implying a geographical organization of approaches to the choral instrument—in terms of vocal production, interpretation, and even the essence of the various choral communities. This elicits two reactions from the editors of this book, the first being that while there have been many books in recent years that have collected essays dealing mainly with methodology, we are not aware of anyone since Decker and Herford who has attempted to document the broader pedagogical state of the choral art.

But even more striking is the realization that much has changed since *Choral Conducting: A Symposium* was written, largely driven by technology that allows us to transcend previously impenetrable barriers in the search for repertoire, recordings, and even live video of choirs from all over the world with a few clicks of the mouse. Some suggest the unintended consequence of this phenomenon has been a sense of conformity as pedagogical approaches have become increasingly—if not generically—uniform, due to this global body of shared knowledge and information.

Acknowledging that all things pedagogical are also in perpetual transition, we hope this volume might serve as bookmark in the evolutionary timeline of choral artistry, which may well be of greater intrigue to future generations as an artifact of the state of the choral art in 2015, just as chapters in Decker and Herford's volume provide an invaluable glimpse into the minds of the leading pedagogues of their era.

ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

Determining organizational divisions within this handbook is reflective of the complexity of defining choral pedagogy itself. Is the primary theme in the study of choral pedagogy theory or practice? The obvious answer to that question is a resounding . . . “Yes!”

It bears repeating at this juncture that even those chapters grounded in philosophical ideals find their full realization in the actuality of making music. While the essence of a volume dedicated to the philosophy of music education may well be rooted in foundational principles detached from practice, the pedagogical nature of this compendium finds commonality in the sense that all roads lead to what ultimately happens in the rehearsal room—that is, theory and practice are inextricably linked!

Acknowledging that the headings of “Theory” and “Practice” are largely arbitrary, the reader will find the chapters in the first half of the book grounded in philosophical or historical foundations that either represent the evolution of Choral Artistry as we know it today, or alternatively, challenge the paradigms of tradition in the rehearsal room. Ward-Steinman’s chapter documenting the proliferation of popular choral music inspired by media productions such as *The Sing Off* and *GLEE* shakes the very foundations of choral programs built on the canon of Western European classical repertoire, but in the end, the author is forthright in the acknowledgment that while she doesn’t “much care for contemporary rock music . . . [she admits that] there is no doubt that some of the contemporary commercial and a cappella music is excellent and appropriate for young singers, and therefore, deserves our attention as choral directors.”

Several authors in this section present challenges to traditional rehearsal paradigms, from the pragmatic and logistical in Abraham’s chapter on “Going Green” documenting that resources are transitioning from paper and pencil to iPads and Smartboards, to Head’s chapter that documents the gradual transition of the authoritarian model of conductor as a benevolent dictator, to more recent phenomena such as those delineated by Ward-Steinman, where learning is student-centric, from the genesis of composition to the end product of competitive performance.

In the second subsection under Theory, several authors examine the role of personal identity within the context of the choral endeavor. These chapters are well represented in a quote from Garnett’s chapter, “Choral leaders manage and guide the processes by which individuals are constituted as singers and by which groups of singers are constituted into ensembles, but the methods are only effective through the active complicity of those individuals.” How often have we heard the adage, “Oh, you teach music! Well at least your students want to be there.” The discussion of meaning and identity strips away the simplistic assumptions of such a statement to reveal the implicit complexities of the choral community. Additional chapters address the unique implications of working with ensembles organized on gender-based criteria, and the explicit and implicit ramifications of such decisions. Here again, we hope the reader will wrestle with the pragmatic traditions in the greater context of the underlying sociological and philosophical foundations.

The first half of the book concludes with four chapters that seek to integrate theory with cultural and historical perspective. Stone and Lakschevitz’s two chapters provide fresh insights on the choral traditions of South Africa and Brazil, while Durrant and Ramroth’s chapters provide a sociological context to elucidate the ever-evolving choral traditions of Western Europe. Given that many trace the genesis of most choral traditions back to the emergence of polyphony in Europe, these authors reexamine these traditions as they exist today.

While many of the authors in the first half of the handbook are active practitioners as well, the second half of this volume shifts the focus from underlying philosophical and sociological perspectives that might be best defined as “the view from the podium,” or more concisely, attempts to document the state of the Choral Art in this second decade of the 21st century, as portrayed by those charged with the organization and artistic direction of ensembles on a daily basis.

On the pragmatic end of the spectrum, several authors discuss recent perspectives on repertoire, programming, and perceptions of vocal production and choral tone—all timely topics in an era where globalization has had a vast impact on choral traditions the world over. Today’s young conductor can hardly comprehend the notion of multicultural music, but instead, has come to expect an intermingling of musical tradition where a Balinese folk song may be paired with an opera chorus, or a “new world motet” from Latin America. In the age of the iPod shuffle feature, the idea of distinct genres and ethnicities has large disappeared.

Finally, the nucleus of this section of the book consists of a collection of chapters authored by conductors with established reputations in their respective fields, ranging from college glee clubs, to professional choirs, to ensembles closely aligned with creating communities for fellowship and moral support. To this end, Charles Beale “unpacks” (his vernacular) the growing tradition of LBGTQ (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer) choirs, while Arreon Harley uses his program in an urban community choir as a paradigm for initiatives that provide a safe haven and a social support system for disadvantaged youth who are seeking opportunities for a better future—by singing in the choir!

CONCLUSIONS

At the risk of redundancy, the editors wish to remind the reader that the principal aim of this endeavor is to establish a point of departure in the discourse—if not the definition—of the discipline we have come to identify as choral pedagogy. As this handbook has taken shape, we are intrigued with the dance that takes place between time honored traditions that have informed the way experts rehearse their choirs, and the ongoing research related to all things philosophical, psychological, and sociological, acknowledging that the “successful choral rehearsal” is most frequently defined in terms of personal investment and engagement on the part of the participants. We want to believe that music making is life changing, and anecdotal evidence—in particular, ensemble participants coming back day after day, week after week—suggests that indeed, this is true. This volume is intended to pursue the investigation of cause and effect, practice and outcome, intended objectives and realized performance. We hope the reader will move beyond the arbitrary classification of each individual chapter and instead, embark on a journey of thoughtful contemplation when considering those chapters that grapple with the construction of identity in immediate succession to those that turn theory into practice.

Finally, we would like to reiterate that this volume is far from exhaustive or conclusive, nor should it be, nor could it be. There is much work to be done in the field of scholarly research on world perspectives; a tradition that is more often than not defined by oral tradition outside the western hemisphere. Furthermore, with broad educational reforms sweeping through communities all over the globe, discourse related to

“traditional paradigms” and “identity and meaning” represents a much broader discussion pertaining to the rapid evolution of social and philosophical norms in today’s global community. In the last place, we hope this handbook will encourage, inspire, or even provoke a desire for additional inquiry in the ongoing quest to define and refine the study of choral pedagogy.

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THEORY

PART I

CHALLENGING
TRADITIONAL
PARADIGMS

CHAPTER 1

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AS CHORAL PEDAGOGY

FRANK ABRAHAMS

THE organization of the typical chorus is conductor centered. The conductor often has the autonomy to select and program repertoire, select the singers, hire the accompanist, and design the scaffolds, sequence, schema, or strategies to teach the music. During prerehearsal preparation and study, the conductor formulates an interpretation of the music and communicates that to the members of the choir throughout the rehearsal process. Critics often judge the quality of the performance on how authoritative the conductor's interpretation was and how well the singers operationalized the conductor's gestures, transforming the signals into sound.

College students learning to be conductors master the catalog of gestures and learn the skills necessary to communicate musical ideas to the singers. Nonetheless, once these are mastered, the novice conductor often replicates or reproduces the affect, warm-up exercises, and rehearsal schema they remember from their time in the choir with a conductor whom they particularly admired. Sometimes, those familiar with the novice conductor's teacher will say that the young conductor is a carbon copy of the teacher.

A survey of conducting textbooks confirms that little has changed in the ways that conductors learn their craft. That is, student conductors learn through a traditional mentor-apprentice model either in a conducting class or privately. Students preparing to be music teachers in schools or choirmasters in church often learn on the job, but find that the choirs they have are not like those they had when they were in college. The singers do not have the skills and lack the discipline to produce the quality they remember from their own background. Many beginning conductors do not handle the power that the position of conductor warrants well and the choral experience becomes about rules and procedures rather than a journey that the conductor and singers take together toward the acquisition of choral agency.

In this chapter, I posit a model that confronts traditional approaches to choral pedagogy and particularly the relationship between conductor and singer. As a prescription to combat the marginalization of singers, the pressures of politics, and the misguided and

inappropriate uses and abuses of power, I suggest conductors use the tenets of critical pedagogy to inform their decisions. Best practices would include using reciprocal teaching and rehearsal strategies that focus on opportunities for conductors and singers to collaborate in ways that enable constructivist practice, singer and conductor agency, and each individual in the group, including the conductor, acquiring a critical consciousness.

ORIGINS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy is a perspective on teaching and learning that emerged from a post-modern philosophy called critical theory. This ideology originated in Germany during the 1920s at the New School for Social Research in Frankfurt. There, Fromm, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Lowenthal, Pollack, and Weber developed theories that challenged the accepted sources and solutions to the ills of contemporary society (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 2003). As a group, they were influenced by the writings of Marx on social transformation and Kant on personal critique, as well as Hegel's philosophical perspective relative to the emergence of spirit. The theorists also considered the work of Freud in psychology and socialist suppositions (Abrahams, 2004).

In the 1960s, Paulo Freire (1970) applied the principles of critical theory to education when he began teaching the illiterate of Brazil to read. He believed that students came to learning experiences with knowledge they gleaned from their own life experiences. Freire used that knowledge as a bridge to new learning. Most significantly, he shifted from the traditional paradigm of teacher as the only source of knowledge and information, whose responsibility it was to fill the *tabula rasa* of the student, to one where teacher and student worked together to co-construct new knowledge. This was quite controversial in Brazil.

While Freire may or may not have known of Dewey's work in the United States in the early part of the 20th century or Vygotsky's theories applied in Russia during the 1930s and 1940s, his ideas were consistent with constructivist strategies (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), use of generative themes (Bruner, 1966), and democratic practice (Dewey, 1916/2005). Freire's students learned from each other, and the teacher learned from the students as well.

Freirean pedagogy has been applied to many learning domains. There are examples in language literacy (Billmeyer, 2003; Palincsar & Brown, 1984), in mathematics (Gutstein, 2005) in theatre (Boal, 1993) as well as other disciplines. There are five tenets in critical pedagogy for music education (Abrahams, 2005):

1. Education is a conversation where students and their teachers pose and solve problems together. Teaching from the principles of critical pedagogy includes dialogue, discussion, and conversation. While this is sometimes problematic in choir, as students want to sing in rehearsal and do not wish to talk, it is possible to have such conversations in an online discussion board outside the rehearsal.

Sometimes these conversations are better outside the rehearsal because students have time to be thoughtful in responding. In addition, every single member of the choir has an equal opportunity to respond. Within the confines of the rehearsal period, only a few may be recognized to offer a response. Vodicka (2009) confirmed that students were interested in having a dialogue and not just singing. He found that in his high school choir

students were eager to renegotiate the roles of student and teacher in the classroom, preferring to have a more active role in the creation of knowledge. They articulated a need for teachers to honor students' worlds, basing classroom materials and activities in students' actual lives in order to stimulate interest and create meaning. This was carried out most often through dialogue, which . . . was also effective in teaching musical skills. (p. viii)

2. Education broadens the student's view of reality. For critical pedagogy, the goal of teaching and learning is to change the way that both students and their teachers perceive the world. Sometimes this happens as students acquire agency. For Dewey (1916/2005) an agentive person was "one who is "bound up with what is going on: its outcome makes a difference to him or her" . . . [and] implies interest and ownership of the outcomes; people who act with personal agency act with concern, interest, aims, purpose, intent and motivation (Dewey, pp. 124–125, as cited in Blair, 2009, p. 179). Freire (1973), although he did not use the term "agency," called this the acquisition of a critical consciousness. This connects to the next critical pedagogy tenet.
3. Education is empowering. Such empowerment comes when singers are able to construct meaning on their own and can navigate the scaffolds and schema that are part of the conductor's rehearsal planning. As mentioned above, this fosters the acquisition of a critical consciousness or agency.
4. Education is transformative. For conductors using a critical pedagogy approach, learning takes place when both the conductors and the students can acknowledge a change in perception. It is this change or transformation that teachers can assess. For the choir, this happens during the rehearsal process and in the moments of the performance. In 2009, Vodicka studied the efficacy of choral pedagogy as the pedagogical framework for his high school choral program. He discovered that as students became more agentive and could self-identify their own musical strengths and weaknesses, their "perceptions of the group improved dramatically and the group dynamic as a whole greatly changed for the better" (p. vii). In Silvey's (2005) study on the types of knowledge gained through learning Benjamin Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, high school students found that by interacting meaningfully with this piece of music a transformation occurred. They began to see themselves as interacting with the score (connecting word to world) and becoming personally a part of its performance.
5. Education is political. There are issues of power and control inside the classroom, the rehearsal hall, inside the school building, and inside the community. Those in power make decisions about what is taught, how often choirs meet, how much

money is allocated to each school subject or program, and so forth. Those who teach the critical pedagogy model resist the constraints that those in power place on them. They do this first in their own classrooms and rehearsals by acknowledging that children come to class with knowledge they gain from the outside world, which knowledge needs to be honored and valued.

ISSUES OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Issues of marginalization and “othering”

High on the agenda of critical pedagogues is a concern for the equity of sexes and the unfair treatment of minorities. That inequality and unfair treatment results in marginalizing specialized groups and othering, or excluding, those that are not part of the dominant group, which is the one in power. Issues of conductors privileging men over women or repertoire by men over women are discussed in the literature (see O'Toole 1993–1994, 1998). One clear example is the assumption that all students celebrate Christmas and therefore repertoire that represents other religious practices is not present on December holiday concerts (Abrahams, 2009). As a high school teacher, I clearly remember having the ability to send an unlimited number of young men to audition for specialized festival choirs, but restricted to a small number of sopranos and altos, usually young women. Thus it was not unusual for a young man of limited talent and potential to be selected for such groups when young women of considerably more ability were not even allowed to audition. O'Toole (1998) found that the national average for girls to boys auditioning for honor choirs is 4 to 1. O'Toole's research exposed these inequities, noting a bias in the way male conductors cause young women to doubt their self-worth by enacting choral policies that sort students inequitably. Many of us know instances if the number of singers exceeds the space on stage, it is often the sopranos and altos who are eliminated or “excused” from the performance. Such examples of hegemonic practice among choral directors are common. While such situations are not obvious issues of pedagogy, they contribute to an unspoken hidden curriculum that favors one sex over another and one voice part over another. When these practices influence decisions by conductors relative to who sings and who does not and who composes the literature to be studied, they are indeed issues of pedagogy and specifically critical pedagogy.

Males feel just as marginalized, but often by their peers who tease them and challenge their masculinity (Abrahams, 2012). Demorest (2000) investigated male participation in chorus and found that boys did not like the repertoire choices and did not have experience listening to male choral singers. Mullaney (2011) and Freer (2007) studied the theory of possible selves as a remedy for the missing males. Missing males, in particular, was the topic of research by Koza (1993). Others (Siebenaler, 2006) looked at the need males have for positive support. Seminal studies by Adler (2002, 2005), Harrison (2001, 2003), and Harrison, Welch and Adler (2012) provide a wealth of research on the topic.

Issues of power

Power is the ability to control or influence others in a particular way. It may result in causing or preventing a particular action. Regelski (2005) suggested that accepting authority without questioning is a natural desire of the human psyche. In fact, when the dominant class controls, shapes and manipulates the beliefs of subordinate groups to ensure that dominant views become common-sense and taken for granted it is known as hegemony.

The choral rehearsal presents a unique set of problems as the choral experience is usually focused on repertoire rather than a specific skill set. Since each piece the choir sings presents its own unique challenges, no one size fits all. For some ensemble conductors, the performance is the be all and end all of the choral experience. Learn the notes, sing the rhythms, unify the vowels, tune the chords, and spin the phrase. For those conductors, typical or traditional routines and procedures work well.

Those who advocate critical pedagogy are concerned with those issues, too, but also have a concern for the ways in which the choral experience adds value to the singer's life. Allsup (2003) pointed out that the issues of power become especially apparent when determining which music to sing and warns conductors not to impose the dominance of one culture over another. Shor (1992) criticized traditional educators for presenting a canon of works not as historical choices of the privileged, but as "universal, excellent, and neutral" (p. 32). Vodicka (2009) suggested that it was in critically analyzing, by the conductor, of the systems of political power inherent in the structure of school and in the texts choir members were singing that critical pedagogy was engaged.

Writing about the ways conductors abuse their power, Patricia O'Toole crafted several thought provoking articles (1993–1994, 1998) that examined the role of the male conductor from a feminist perspective. In "I Sing in a Choir but I Have 'No Voice'" (1993–1994), she discussed the unpleasant experiences she had as a member of a chorus where the conductor believed he was the all-knowing leader and used intimidation to motivate the female singers, who he thought to be intellectually challenged. She criticized the traditional notion that it was the mixed choir of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass that was the preferred model, especially in schools, and argued for the choir of female voices to replace that paradigm. She abhorred the practice of privileging the male singers, because they were fewer in number, to ensure a high-quality performance. Citing Foucault as her philosophical framework, she unpacked the traditional model of conductor and chorister in thought-provoking ways.

Vodicka (2009) noted, "In public school performance-based ensembles, education is usually limited to skill-building and rote learning a limited number of selections for a concert with very little critical thinking ever taking place" (p. 2). Authoritarian conductors, albeit unintentionally, may inhibit a singer's ability to think critically. Vodicka wrote:

School-age musicians have little reason to think critically; often, they blindly follow the artistic intentions and motives of a director who unknowingly brings their own

biases to the process. Because critical thinking is not taking place, true learning that goes beyond rote learning is not taking place. Further, because student interaction is so severely limited, students are not able to construct meaning as part of a social structure. (p. 2)

In September of 2011, Aaron Peisner, an undergraduate at Wesleyan University, organized a group of 22 volunteers to sing in a choir as part of his senior honors thesis. His goal was to investigate the efficacy of critical pedagogy by changing the traditional power structures of conductor and singer and establishing a spirit of democracy and dialogue. He hoped to give each member of the ensemble an equal opportunity to contribute to the musical decisions that would influence the preparation and performance of the repertoire. In his own reflection after the concert he wrote:

Before singing through a new piece of music, I would ask the singers to scan the music and discuss sections that looked tricky with the people standing next to them. After first reading through a new piece of music, I would tell the singers to find a space with their sections to work on their notes. Sometimes after running through a song, I would ask the singers to take a few minutes to go over their mistakes with the people next to them, and surely enough, they often sang their parts correctly the next time. The group learned the music quickly and sounded fantastic. Throughout the rehearsal process, I made sure to ask the singers questions about how they thought we sounded, or people had suggestions for solving particular problems. Inviting them to share their opinions established a rehearsal environment that was open to dialogue.

Listening to the recording of the show a few weeks later, I was struck by how wonderful the choir sounded. . . . I was proud, as were all the singers in the group. Being able to contribute to the rehearsal process led to a sense of ownership of the music and camaraderie among the singers. Many of the singers in the group tell me that singing in my thesis choir was one of their greatest musical experiences at Wesleyan, and I am convinced that . . . the collaborative rehearsal process played a crucial role in enhancing the overall experience. (Peisner, 2011, pp. 11–21)

The Orpheus Chamber Ensemble is one of the few professional ensembles—except for groups like the King’s Singers or instrumental trios, quartets, and groups of similar size—that applies the ideas of critical pedagogy, and particularly that of shifting power and applying democratic practice. Founded in 1972 by cellist Julian Fifer, the goal of the Orpheus Chamber Ensemble is to bring democracy, personal involvement, and mutual respect into an orchestral setting. As Fifer said, “In order for everyone to be able to communicate more effectively, it seemed necessary to do without a conductor” (Seifter, 2001, ¶3). In place of a conductor, Orpheus applies a system of collaborative leadership that provides opportunity for each member to participate in decision making and management.

Instead of focusing solely on perfecting his or her own approach to performance, each musician takes a personal interest in perfecting the performances of their colleagues and the overall sound of the orchestra. It is therefore not uncommon for a violinist

to comment on the playing of a flutist or the timpani player to comment on a cellist's approach to phrasing or bowing. In an orchestra with a regular conductor, not only would such crossing of organizational lines be unwelcome, it would be unthinkable. As cellist Eric Bartlett stated:

When there's an important concert, everybody feels it, and everybody goes into it doing their absolute best work, giving it their utmost concentration, playing off of each other, and making sparks fly. For the most part, in a conducted orchestra, you play a more passive role. Not only is less expected *of* you, but less is expected *from* you. You have to play extremely well, but you're not playing off of your colleagues—you're playing off of that one person in front of the orchestra holding the baton. I don't see that people in regular orchestras are emotionally involved in the same way. Everybody plays well, they do a very good job, but the level of individual emotional involvement isn't there. (Seifter, 2001, ¶ 7)

Seifter (2001) concludes:

With no conductor to act as a filter to the *what* and the *why* behind the group's decisions, the members of Orpheus are uncommonly energized and responsive to the needs of the organization and to the desires of its leaders. Turnover is extremely low, and employee loyalty is extremely high. The result is a better product, increased customer satisfaction, and a healthier bottom line. (¶ 8)

Issues of politics

The issues of politics become apparent in choosing literature. Allsup (2003) suggested that while the music of diverse cultures might be worthy of study, he cautioned that such a decision must be made by carefully considering the political ramifications of privileging one culture over another. Including high art in the curriculum can be either an effort to control culture or an effort to “uplift and transform” depending on the analysis of power that supports it (Allsup, 2003, p. 8).

To provide support for conductors, Ryan John and I (2015) provided a template for building collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication into rehearsals by engaging choral singers in many aspects of the artistic processes of creating, performing, and responding. Included were many sample objectives choral teachers might consider when designing their curriculum so that they could balance the criteria of their own evaluation with the goals for their students that a critical pedagogy approach would advocate (see Abrahams & John, 2015).

To consider the issue of politics from a different angle, in recent years the evaluation of teachers has been a high priority of schools in the United States. In many states, teachers, including school choral teachers, must set objectives that measure student growth and learning. A primary condition of a teacher's continued employment is that students meet those objectives. While there are different models of teacher evaluation among

states (Danielson, 2013; Marzano & Toth, 2013), teachers are held accountable for the performance of their students. This causes concern for advocates of critical pedagogy and alarm for the conductors of school choirs. Many fear that if they share their power as conductor with the singers by collaborating on issues of musical interpretation, or empowering them to learn things on their own or construct their own meanings, there is a chance that the students may not meet the preset objective, thus affecting the ability of the conductor to receive a positive evaluation. If the authorities that assess the conductor's work do not support the tenets of critical pedagogy, that could significantly disadvantage the conductor. Thus the conductor is faced with an ethical dilemma.

Issues of agency

Apfelstadt (1989) stated that if the teacher is always the one responsible for making decisions in the choral rehearsal, the students become like mindless drones that have no reason to utilize independent thought or critical thinking. It is important that students not only make decisions in the rehearsal, but that they realize they are involved and acting critically. Students need, Apfelstadt believed, a chance to make decisions on their own and to take ownership for their own music making. That, she claimed, would foster their becoming self-sufficient or agentic musicians. One way to develop these traits in student-musicians is through collaborative work. This collaboration can take place on many levels, but probably the most important for critical pedagogy is between the singers and the conductor.

While a comprehensive review of textbooks on conducting and rehearsal technique is beyond the scope of this chapter, most of the historical textbooks (e.g., Rudolf, 1950) and iconic textbooks (e.g., Green, 1961) focus on the conductor's gestures and comment on musicianship, leadership, and motivational skills. Unfortunately, most do not address collaboration with the ensemble members in ways that this chapter suggests. However, Rudolf did acknowledge the role of conductor as teacher when he wrote:

If education is the art of opening people's minds, then the conductor's function in rehearsal must be called educational, not in the sense of formal teaching but of bringing to the fore all the best qualities latent in his musicians. To accomplish this he must be regarded by his group as *primus inter pares* [first among equals]. (Rudolf, 1950, p. 392)

Lisk (2006) developed Rudolf's statement further. In his conducting text, he discussed the importance of the musical mind and suggested a method of teaching that encouraged students to "ask thoughtful questions and make responsible decisions" (p. 19). He quoted Frank Wilson, a neurologist, who wrote:

Your training in music must from the very beginning deliberately guide you toward the goal of making your own independent judgments about the quality of your

playing. There is a serious threat to your growth if this does not occur because if someone with greater knowledge must always approve your interpretation, your music ultimately can only be imitative. If this happens, you've missed the boat! (p. 18)

While Lisk is not a critical pedagogue, he did recognize the importance of students constructing meaning on their own and discussed the importance of conductors providing opportunities for them to make their own musical decisions, believing that such decision making nurtured musical independence.

One of the most prolific writers in choral music is James Jordan (2007, 2008; Holt & Jordan, 2008). An analysis reveals that the texts are a compendium of prescriptions to solve various vocal or choral issues as they manifest themselves in the rehearsal process. Most are written from the perspective of the conductor and what he or she might do to provide a remedy when such problems or musical situations when they appear.

However, in his two-volume text on the choral rehearsal (2007, 2008), he invited colleagues to author several chapters. Eugene Migliaro Corporon is one author who contributed to Jordan's text *The Choral Rehearsal: Volume 2—Inward Bound*. In a chapter titled "The Quantum Conductor" he wrote:

The simplified goal of the rehearsal is to "transfer ownership" from you to your singers. The idealized goal of the rehearsal is to discover how a piece works—the goal is not to fix problems. The discovery process will expose problems, which in truth, can only be solved by the singers. You can facilitate that process by offering solutions. Your singers must take the action to implement the change that is the only way to improve. It is important to understand that the rehearsal is the place to do the work together that cannot be done alone. (Corporon in Jordan, 2008, p. 189)

While it is doubtful Corporon identifies himself as a critical pedagogue, the desires to transfer ownership, to problematize the issues in the music, and to find solutions through dialogue and discourse with the singers are consistent with the tenets of critical pedagogy. However, this is rare. The authors of most texts discuss techniques such as engaging the singers by using various motivational techniques, pacing the rehearsal so that singers remain focused and connected, and adopting a charismatic aura (see Boonshaft, 2002, 2006, 2009 as typical examples).

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE REHEARSAL

I have found that several rehearsal strategies, adapted from the literature on language literacy have been effective pedagogical tools with adolescents singing in school choirs. These strategies empower students to contribute to the rehearsal as individuals and in groups and are consistent with the principles of critical pedagogy. In short, they become agentic and able to use their agency to foster their own musical learning.

Reciprocal teaching

With the overall goal of fostering agency and the acquisition of a critical consciousness among singers, I developed several strategies to engage students in the decision making and construction of meaning inside the choral rehearsal. One involved adapting the strategies of reciprocal teaching. Palincsar and Brown (1986) developed the strategies at the University of Michigan to assist teachers as they help children find meaning in the literature they were reading. The strategies are predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. It is reciprocal in that both teachers and students apply the strategies. Both ask questions of each other. Sometimes students provide the clarifying explanations or answers and sometimes students engage in the summarizing.

In music education, Daniel Abrahams (F. Abrahams & D. Abrahams, 2012) used reciprocal teaching to help his high school band students find the musical meanings in the scores they were playing. As a result, he added connecting to the list of strategies. Consistent with the research, he found that the strategies of reciprocal teaching promoted the characteristics of critical consciousness and promoted critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication—components of “21st Century Skills” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, n.d.).

With Daniel Abrahams (F. Abrahams & D. Abrahams, 2012), I used reciprocal teaching to help students in choir and band construct meaning of the musical line and form in the compositions they were singing and playing. By engaging the ensemble members in conversations that included predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and connecting, we both found that our students gained a deep understanding of the inherent artistic processes embedded in the music, and that brought about a more sophisticated performance. Such a deep understanding is a critical element of what Freire (1973) described as a critical consciousness. For those who advocate critical pedagogy, the acquisition of a critical consciousness is a goal of education.

In 2010, I applied reciprocal teaching in a high school honors choir I was conducting in the community music school affiliated with my college. To better prepare the students to sing *Three Russian Folksongs* by Rachmaninoff with the Community Orchestra, I developed ways to engage the students in the five elements of the reciprocal process. Throughout the rehearsal period, I used many of the rehearsal strategies above as we posed and solved musical problems together. This was consistent with Freire (1970) who wrote, “Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (p. 81). Knowledge is therefore not kept theoretical or objective but made real and consequential through problem-posing education.

Sometimes the singers called attention to the challenges inherent in the music, and at other times I asked clarifying questions or requested students to summarize what we had learned together at the end of each rehearsal. When dealing with musical issues—which included intonation, Russian diction, rhythmic precision, and so forth—they suggested solutions and contributed ideas based on their own knowledge of singing and of choral technique, and I suggested prescriptive measures based on mine. For example,

singers discussed what the tempo should be on the middle section. Each student offered an idea of what it should be and why. In the end, it was clear that most felt a brisk tempo would work best. On their own, students investigated Rachmaninoff and listened to his symphonies, concertos, solo piano works, and other choral works, most notably *The Bells*, to acquire a sense of his compositional style and to find consistencies in his style across his compositional output. This is an example of how students constructed new knowledge, and they shared that information on individual blog entries they posted on a choir discussion board online. I read each posting and made a comment, asked for clarification, or posed a question. In the end, I found that, like Daniel Abrahams, students knew the work more thoroughly than other pieces we prepared; there was a level of critical consciousness demonstrated in the vocabulary students used in their blogs and when discussing various issues in rehearsal. In addition, I found that the strategies of reciprocal teaching engaged students in creating, performing, responding, and connecting (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014), although they had not been developed at the time of the study. Looking now at the benchmarks and rubrics for those standards, the Rachmaninoff project, rich with reciprocal teaching, would have enabled singers in the choir to meet the rubrics and assessments that are embedded in the National Core Arts Standards document.

From the perspective of critical pedagogy, the Rachmaninoff project addressed all the tenets of critical pedagogy. The experience empowered musicianship (tenet 3). It broadened students' view of reality (tenet 2) in that through the reciprocal teaching strategies they came to understand the piece in the context of Rachmaninoff's compositional output and the social conditions in Russia described in the texts of the three folk songs. Since the texts dealt with infidelity and spousal abuse, there were opportunities for discussions that centered on how we all felt about such issues as the subject of an artistic statement by a recognized and respected composer. We talked about whether the texts made the pieces inappropriate choices for the choir to sing (tenet 4). Issues of politics (tenet 5) within the context of the songs and within the context of our own performing them became topics that evoked impassioned dialogue, discussion, and responses from the students (tenet 1). Should we be singing about such things in choir?

General rehearsal strategies

What Would You Do? While preparing college students or members of a community choir to perform the choral finale of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, the conductor might ask singers to consider the order of the sections in the final movement. She or he might pose the question, "Would the piece be stronger if Beethoven had ended with the fugue, instead of the material he chose?" Using audio editing software, interested singers might reorder the sections and consider the impact. In the end, I suspect they will decide that Beethoven made the right choice, but perhaps not. Engaging singers in this type of problem solving and discourse is typical of activities one finds in rehearsals informed by the ideas from critical pedagogy.

Circle All Around. In this strategy, the chairs in each section are arranged in two circles—one outer and one inner—so that students in each circle face each other. This forms a partnership of two. Together, and informally, each set of partners scans the music to identify rehearsal or performance challenges and brainstorms a solution together. They predict those issues they may encounter that might hinder the group's performance. The conductor then asks representatives of the group to clarify their issues and summarize the solutions. Asking probing questions, the conductor helps the group to connect the issue, the solution, and the music. Then, when the group sings the music, students check their predictions against the reality of what happens. A brief discussion follows. In some instances, there is need for refocusing, refining, and remediating, which the conductor moderates. The Circle All Around strategy empowers musicianship and allows each singer to accept ownership and responsibility for ensuring that musical challenges are identified and conquered. Sometimes the conductor also identifies challenges, but after presenting the challenge, calls on students to suggest remedies. Individuals are often asked what they will do specifically to make something better. The strategy engages problem posing, problem solving, and dialoguing, which are key strategies in a critical pedagogy environment.

That's Me. I use this strategy whenever there is a musical theme that moves from one part to another. When a section of singers have the theme, they stand to sing. Sometimes I will have the accompanist play the choral parts and singers jump up when they have the theme and proclaim, "That's me!" This engages critical listening and helps singers see the form and texture of the piece. At times, I use a recording for students to listen to. From a lens of critical pedagogy, it fosters musical independence or empowerment.

Catch Me Being Good. This is a strategy for motivation and encourages student input. As the choir sings, I walk through the rows of singers and find the "best" singer in each section. They collaborate with the conductor to judge an activity called *So You Think You Can Sing*. This strategy compliments students, showing them that they are valued as individuals and not merely members of a larger group. Honoring the individuality of singers is a principle of critical pedagogy philosophy.

So You Think You Can Sing. I select four judges from the choir to listen with the conductor as the entire choir, or a particular section of the choir, sings. Each judge must give a positive and a negative criticism and suggest a remedy to make the negative into a positive. This engages critical listening and higher order thinking. This strategy fosters singer agency and engages critical consciousness. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the acquisition of a critical consciousness was a goal Freire (1973) identified as significant in the development of his students.

In 2009 Vodicka, as part of a study about using critical pedagogy as the curricular framework, taught his high school choir to sing Schubert's *Mass in G major*. Throughout the process, he asked students to keep a personal journal that included their own goals for rehearsals, processed their feelings, self-assessed their progress, and analyzed their daily performance. Instead of teaching the notes by rote, his usual practice, he required them to learn the notes independently. They had to find ways to do that. The students

decided to organize themselves into four teams to help each other with the challenges of mastering the pitches and rhythms. Vodicka wrote,

It was surprising to me to see the level of musicianship displayed by each of the four groups. The intelligent musical conversation occurring within each group was like nothing I had ever seen from these students. I was unaware that they were capable of working in this way. Pounding out notes on the piano year after year had not allowed the students to engage in higher-level thinking. Working in that manner had not allowed me to assess what the students comprehended about the music. My initial reaction was frustration. Why had these musically intelligent students not been using all of their knowledge and talent in every rehearsal? I quickly realized that it was because I had simply never asked them to. (p. 59)

Because of the study, Vodicka (2009) found that applying critical pedagogy as the curricular framework to be a positive experience. He noted that the choir's overall musicianship improved, that students were more motivated and connected with the Schubert mass in ways that suggested musical agency, and they acquired a critical consciousness. This also fostered the abilities of the choir members to meet the expectations of the 21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, n.d.) of collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. Vodicka attributes the application of the tenets of critical pedagogy to his success and the successes of his singers.

CONCLUSION

Critical pedagogy is a perspective that informs the ways conductors think about the choral rehearsal and school choral program. To implement the perspective, conductors must be willing to release from their routine practice many of the time-honored and traditional paradigms that have long been associated with the responsibilities of the conductor and the expectations both conductors and singers have for each other. The conductor needs considerable confidence in his or her musicianship and a belief in the potentials of the singers to be able to do this. Research shows, however, that adopting critical pedagogy as the framework for decision making yields positive results. These include the acquisition of a critical consciousness, the ability to create meaningful teaching and learning experiences, and the attainment of agency.

Critical pedagogy is sometimes called radical pedagogy and a pedagogy of resistance. When it frames the choral pedagogy, it opens choral experiences to the opportunities of transformative teaching and sensitizes everyone to the negative issues of power, marginalization, hegemonic practice, and political issues that constrain the artistic processes of creating, performing, and responding and inhibit the artistic spirit from reaping the benefits of choral singing at their fullest. What follows is a template to aid conductors when they plan a rehearsal.

Ensemble Rehearsal Plan

Title of Piece: _____

Conductor's name: _____ Ensemble name: _____

Composer/arranger: _____ Grade of Piece: _____

Learning Goals

What Learners will . . .

Be able to do (behavioral):

Understand (cognitive):

Encounter (experiential):

Construct meaning (constructivist):

Technical Skills (intonation, posture, breath, phonation, balance, bowing for strings, stick-ing for percussion, diction for singers)

Musical Concepts (*melody, rhythm, harmony, form, timbre, texture*)

Empowering Musicianship (*historical perspective, stylistic integrity, musical artistry*)

Ensemble Rehearsal Plans

Process

Partner: (Differentiate instruction by collaborating with ensemble members predicting the performance challenges. Pose problems and brainstorm solutions together. Encourage students to respond.)

Present: (*Sequence of the rehearsal steps. Present the steps to scaffold and allow time for students to practice independently on their own. Differentiate instruction through questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and connecting.*)

Personalize: (Make the learning personal to the students. Provide opportunities for ensemble members and their conductor to collaborate as musicians to create a musical experience and “add value” to their lives.)

Perform: (Demonstrate teaching music when students perform.)

Assessment

Formative

Summative

Integrative

From: Abrahams, F., & John R. (2015). *Planning instruction in music: Writing objectives, assessments, and lesson plans to engage artistic processes*. Chicago, GIA (pp. 182–183).

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CHAPTER 2

CHORAL PEDAGOGY RESPONDS TO THE MEDIA

American Idol, Glee, The Voice, The Sing-Off, *and* . . .

PATRICE MADURA WARD-STEINMAN

POP choral music has changed during the 21st century due to the enormous popularity of commercial network TV shows such as *American Idol*, *Glee*, *The Voice*, *The Sing-Off*, and the *Clash of the Choirs*. Our choir students watch these shows and are influenced by them in terms of vocal tone, repertoire, showmanship, and competitive spirit. As a teacher, how might I respond? Should the media shape/influence choral pedagogy, or should traditional pedagogy develop the pop-influenced singer? This chapter will address these questions and will include viewpoints of competition-winning show choir directors and leaders in the field of choral music who have witnessed the effects of these media on choral interest, enrollment, attitudes, and achievement in school choral programs.

Although each of these shows has a somewhat different musical focus, such as solo versus choral singing, or fictional versus reality show, the common denominator is the genre of vocal popular music. And while popular music does have its place in school music programs, choral music teachers have been trained to provide a balance of musical styles in the school curriculum. With the impressive popularity of these TV shows, students are increasingly joining school choirs but with the expectation that school music will mirror what they observe on TV. Certainly the boost in motivation to participate in choral music programs is one that no music teacher would disparage, and there is evidence that real changes are occurring in the numbers of young people drawn to enroll in choir as a result of their enthusiasm for these shows. The multiple-award winning TV series, *Glee*, in particular, has made show choir appear to be the “cool” place to be, even for teenage misfits (Kidder, 2013). However, cognitive dissonance is to be expected when throngs of new choral “Gleeks” find that preparation for an outstanding musical performance requires hard work and time commitment, rather than what may appear on TV to be practically spontaneous. This unrealistic understanding of what it takes to be successful in music has been a common concern of experienced choral teachers who work

with these media-influenced students seeking the *Glee* experience. On the other hand, some teachers find the harsh criticism of the TV judges to be detrimental to the average singer, who may never participate in choir because of these judgments.

Criticism by many choral teachers revolves around the “quality” of the music produced in these TV shows, and the emphasis on entertainment over educational value. Due to increasingly sophisticated choreography, pop choral arrangements are now often simpler than those written for concert choirs from earlier decades, although some advanced show choirs do perform complex choral arrangements (Weaver & Hart, 2011). Steve Zegree (2012) emphasized that when he auditioned singers for *Clash of the Choirs*, strong singing and musical ability were the primary criteria, and after the singers were selected they were taught to dance, and were the eventual champions of the competition. Regarding the uneven quality of music performed on commercial network TV, it stands to reason that entertainment for as wide a general audience as possible is its goal.

Another potential misunderstanding of media-influenced students is what constitutes a good, healthy choral sound. The *Glee* singers are not actually teenagers although they play them on TV, and our students will want to emulate their more mature, professional, and sound-engineered (and autotuned!) voices (Amerind, [http://www.facebook.com/groups, ACDA](http://www.facebook.com/groups_ACDA)). A number of pop stars with vocal injuries necessitating surgery can be used as examples of reasons to learn to sing in a healthy manner. “Cross-training” (Eilers, [http://www.facebook.com/groups, ACDA](http://www.facebook.com/groups_ACDA)) can help students realize aspects such as vowel modification and registration for different styles of singing and ultimately make them more marketable (Amerind, [http://www.facebook.com/groups, ACDA](http://www.facebook.com/groups_ACDA)).

The *Choral Director* magazine surveyed hundreds of choral directors and found that 77% of them watched these shows, and they perceived that the vast majority of their students did too (www.choraldirectormag.com/1620/articles/survey/glee). These shows have both benefits and drawbacks. The largest benefit seems to be the publicity for choral music and the resulting influx of students into choral programs where we have the precious opportunity to teach them how to broaden their knowledge and skill of beautiful, healthy choral singing. Choral directors may need to exercise a delicate balancing act between motivating through encouragement, enthusiasm, and open-mindedness and teaching about healthy singing, pedagogically-appropriate repertoire, and realistic approaches to achievement and competition.

CHALLENGES THAT CHORAL DIRECTORS FACE

In preparation for writing this chapter, I asked members of the ACDA Facebook Group to respond to the following prompt: “Tell me what you think about how choral pedagogy should respond to the influence of *Glee*, *The Voice*, *The Choir*, and *American Idol*.”

A lively and assertive discussion ensued from October 15th through 21st, 2013. The first topic focused on healthy singing, with comments ranging from blatant opposition to belting (e.g., “The only quality of a belt is the quality of the doctor you need for the vocal problems it caused”) to an open-minded view (e.g., “You need to pair up with a voice teacher who is familiar with that approach to singing . . . there are different versions of healthy singing. There are distinct differences when it comes to the pharyngeal voice (see blogs.voices.com), in registration, vowel modification, and vocal closed phase in classical vs non-classical singing.”

The use of microphones also sparked debate, with comments ranging from, “When the mikes take over the stage, you can kiss good singing good-bye,” to “Using microphones actually helps the singers. They are able to sell the quality of a belt while being able to use a high mixed voice with a longer closed phase in the vocal folds.”

The second hot topic was regarding popular music, with comments such as, “Years ago ACDA was throwing too much weight behind the swing choir/show choir movement; great music should always be at the forefront before the fluff,” contrasted with “Don’t disregard popular music. There’s garbage classical music as well as excellent contemporary pop,” and “Young people aren’t going to stop participating in programs that provide them with opportunities to sing popular styles of music. We can either decide to step in and be involved, thereby ensuring that the singing is done in a healthy, supported manner, or we can let others do it without that).”

One topic that generated unanimous agreement among ACDA members was the unrealistic nature of *Glee*. Concerns included the “harmful” aspect of high school students wanting to emulate the more mature voices featured on *Glee*, as well as the unrealistic notion that perfect sight-reading and choreography happen spontaneously.

I posed the same question to the Vocal Jazz Educators Facebook page on the same date which resulted in a different tone of responses, as might be expected from directors whose focus is on popular singing style. The prompt: “Please tell me what you think choral pedagogy’s response to *Glee*, *The Voice*, and *American Idol* should be” yielded positive comments, suggesting 1) that these shows stimulate interest in choir; 2) that *Pitch Perfect* and *The Sing-Off* portray the “chemistry of real-world groups and how people work together;” 3) that *The Sing-Off* and *Pitch Perfect* encourage participation in contemporary a cappella groups that focus on songs that students know and are excited about, while allowing the director to teach good vocal habits and how to write their own arrangements (see acatribe.com); 4) that “*The Voice* uses a blind audition process, so that the judges are focusing on the voice, and not on the way the contestants look. I think that’s another important takeaway for students;” 5) the opportunity to converse with the students about the healthy use of the voice, using good and bad vocal models from these shows; and finally, 6) that because our teacher training doesn’t include how to work with popular music styles with the same depth as classical styles, music educators are naturally resistant to it, but they shouldn’t be. Teachers need “research-based, pedagogically sound methods.”

IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA-DRIVEN MUSIC SHOWS

The impact of these popular vocal music TV shows and movies staggers the mind of the traditionally-trained choral music director. The earliest of these, *American Idol*, was an interactive talent show which arrived in the summer of 2002 as a reality show on the Fox TV network. It was the top-watched show for people aged 18–49 from season three to season ten (see www.realitytvworld.com/news/american-idol/sixth-season-finale-averages-pver-30-million-viewers-5225.php), and was the most watched TV series by all American viewers, averaging 27 million (see today.msnbc.msn.com/id/16563051).

The next interactive reality talent contest on NBC TV was the *Clash of the Choirs*, which was short-lived, only running for one season (four episodes) in 2007. It featured five 20-voice choirs from different cities, each directed by a different celebrity, and the public voted online and by phone. One of the four episodes of *Clash* had a viewership of 8 million, mostly adults, aged 18–49. Two other interactive singing competitions followed; first, *The Sing-Off*, which premiered in 2009, and *The Voice* in 2011, both on NBC. *The Sing-Off* featured a cappella groups and ran for four seasons, while *The Voice* continues as of this writing. All of these US TV shows feature pop music, pop star judges, public voting, and grand prizes that range from cash (to the contestant or to a charity) to a recording contract (en.wikipedia.org). A theatrical release in 2012, *Pitch Perfect*, which now has a sequel, focused on the contemporary a cappella movement, and became the second highest grossing musical comedy film of all time.

The teen comedy-drama, *Glee*, which focuses on the show choir concept, began airing on the Fox TV network in May of 2009 and ran through 2015. It was strategically scheduled to air after *American Idol*, which provided a ready audience for it, attracting more than 14 million viewers. The featured popular tunes were available for downloading after each hour-long show, resulting in more than 16 million downloaded songs and 25 *Billboard* Hot 100 hits. The *Glee* Facebook page has more than 15 million fans and continues to grow (Weaver & Hart, 2011).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POP VOCAL GROUPS

Billboard magazine, founded in 1894, has been influential in preserving the history of pop singing groups. *Billboard* published records of best-selling sheet music and records, as well as most-played music in juke boxes and by disc jockeys, in lists like “Top 100” and “Hot 100.” Jay Warner (2000), in his book, *The Da Capo Book of American Singing Groups*, cites *Billboard* lists in his documentation of the history of vocal harmony groups as applied to popular song back to the mid-19th century, including minstrel show vocal groups, glee clubs, and barbershop quartets. By the early 1890s, vocal harmony groups