

Sponsoring Committee: Dr. Charlotte Rappe Zales, Moravian College
Dr. Joy Hirokawa, Moravian College
Emily Young, Saucon Valley School District

TO BE ENGAGED OR NOT ENGAGED? THAT IS THE QUESTION...

INCREASING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

IN A HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR CLASSROOM

Jennifer A. Volpato

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Abstract

This qualitative teacher-action research study explored the experiences of students in a high school choral classroom when collaborative learner-centered activities were used to increase student engagement.

Findings from this study indicate a direct connection between the level of student engagement and the level of student participation. Students that participated more in classroom performance activities, progress monitoring, and collaborative group activities were more engaged and more successful.

This study also indicated that in order to increase student engagement, student ownership must also be increased. A culture of learning that encourages open and honest communication between teacher and student, as well as student participation in the planning and design of classroom structure and activities, is essential in order to engage students on an intrinsic level. Students that are actively engaged in their own learning process achieve at higher levels than students that require someone else to motivate them (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Findings from this study clearly indicated that building a culture of learning in the classroom must be addressed first in order to implement student engagement strategies that will develop student ownership of their learning.

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Researcher Stance

My love of learning began at a very early age with the influences of my family and teachers. I was blessed with teachers who were passionate about what they were teaching and demonstrated a love of students, learning, and the classroom. The passion they portrayed was infectious as I began to love school and engage in the excitement of learning new ideas, concepts, and ways of interacting with the world around me. I saw my teachers as magical in the way they crafted their lessons and led students into a world of exploration, discovery, and experience. It was through appreciating the engaging collaborative experiences that my teachers designed for me that I began to develop the individual framework for my teaching.

My quest in the art of teaching has led me along a diverse and interesting path. Early in my learning career, I embraced the impact that a thematic and collaborative approach to teaching and learning had on me as a student. I found myself most confident in the classes during which the teacher helped me understand the connections between the content material of the course and the real world applications, events, and cross-curricular ties that made that content meaningful and personal. I clearly recall those experiences in my education where teachers made content mean something. In reflecting upon those

experiences, it became evident to me that each of those wonderful encounters in my education were related to cooperative and collaborative learning experiences.

Throughout my career as a teacher, I have sought opportunities that promoted collaboration through my interaction and cross-curricular planning with colleagues. My desire to provide meaningful music experiences for my students began in my student teaching position during which time I was invigorated by fellow staff members, who worked with me to create a co-curricular unit on Native American music, history, and dance. My experiences in collaborative teaching and learning continued to expand in my first official teaching position as an elementary vocal music teacher. I continued to collaborate in planning thematic units with the elementary teachers in my building. Upon moving to a new position teaching middle school in my third year of teaching, my real challenge began. Through the influence of a fellow colleague, I began to form the vision and structure with which to create a thematic general curriculum in which all subjects were taught with the integration of music as a theme. The curriculum was called Harmonium. As I pursued developing this program, I was convinced that it would be an effective and rewarding learning experience for students.

Currently, I am in my 19th year of teaching. I have taught vocal/general music and middle school science as part of the thematic program. I am currently teaching vocal/general music in the middle school and am directing the high school choir. I have come to this position after the discontinuation of the thematic

curriculum. The growth that I observed while teaching thematically was tremendous and powerful. The second year of the thematic program, our team of teachers encountered a class of students that was incredibly disengaged; it was through the motivation of music performance and the collaborative methods of teaching and planning that I gained the most insight into how to engage students intrinsically in learning. It was through these experiences that I observed students transformed. Many of these students take the time to visit and share with me memories of their experiences in my classroom and how it was different and more meaningful than their other school experiences

The elimination of our thematic program had a devastating effect on me; there seemed to be no understanding of the impact that the program had on students, no understanding of the growth that every student, special education, general education, or honors, had as a result of the collaborative performance-based approach that we used in our classroom. We all learn from our experiences, and the positive growth and transformation in my teaching and learning that I experienced will remain with me forever.

Through the observations and experiences I recorded during a teacher research mini study when I was still teaching with the Harmonium program, I became even more convinced that in order to fully engage my students, I must directly involve them as an integral part in the learning process. I realized that I must empower them with the elements of choice and collaboration in a learner-

centered environment in order to foster ownership, engagement, and ultimately increased success.

The necessity to engage my students through collaboration became even more evident to me last year while working as the assistant choir director and seeing the students disengaged, disenchanting, and frustrated. I gained an understanding of the negative effect that a non-learner-centered approach can have in a classroom. The learning environment was one of boredom, frustration, and poor behavior. Thus, when I was called to serve in the capacity of the new head director, I knew that I must focus on increasing student engagement.

The primary goal that I have for the 102 vocalists that I teach is for them to become better singers, better leaders, and better people because of their experiences in our classroom. I wish to guide them and support them in expanding their abilities to lead and work with others. At the same time, I wish to empower my students with the ability to feel good about their accomplishments and to enjoy coming to school each morning. I believe, based upon my experiences and my research, that positive engaging learning experiences ignite a desire for students to want more. These experiences create a drive and an outlook that engages students and extends beyond my music classroom and into their other classrooms (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003). It is my goal to invigorate my students and to establish a successful and outstanding choir through well-

planned and innovative learning experiences that utilize a learner-centered approach.

Therefore, my research question is: *What are the observed and reported experiences of students and teacher when the students are engaged through a variety of collaborative learning strategies in the high school choral classroom?*

I have chosen this research question as the framework of my study under which each element of my daily classroom routine and activities will fall. I see myself as the person with the guidance, support, and structure that will allow my students to feel safe and able to venture out in new directions toward our common goal, successful performance. I believe that by implementing learner-centered strategies with the focus of increased student engagement, I can further my students' knowledge and experiences in music, teamwork, and leadership. I hope that by empowering them, all of us can grow together to experience significant change and success throughout the year.

One of the greatest challenges that I face is the ability to establish trustworthy relationships with my students in which they feel they can be honest and involved in working together toward our goal; I see it as my role to help my students become leaders who actively reform the choir. The challenges before me are great as I am only working with these students for one, 90 minute block each day. I never see my entire choir together, since some of the members are

scheduled for even days. In addition, some students I see every day and others only one out of four days due to their involvement in band and/or orchestra. Thus, scheduling and consistency are very significant obstacles. The necessity for effective communication is essential in order to provide the necessary consistency that will ultimately result in team building and engagement among all members of the group.

An additional challenge is that I have been charged with increasing the number of student members in the choir by 10% each year, since the student enrollment has been steadily falling over the past six years. It is my belief that I must change the structure from within and establish a sense of excitement, and then focus on recruitment. I must change the culture of the choir so that outsiders want to be part of it because they see the success and joy that it brings to their peers that are involved (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003).

The outcomes that I anticipated from this study were: increased student engagement in the rehearsal and performance process resulting in better performances; increased leadership and ownership from the students resulting in a more democratic approach in the classroom; and increased engagement in school as a result of starting the day with a successful classroom experience. Throughout this study, I aimed to establish a model of high expectations for students, during which they would be able to find exciting experiences and

success. Throughout the drive toward these goals, I continuously reflected and provided experiences for my students to share and reflect; the feedback that we communicated to each other was essential in establishing the framework and culture change that was necessary for this study to be successful.

Literature Review

Introduction

Research for this study has focused on the areas of student engagement and learner-centered classroom constructs and activities, and was designed using an effect to cause pattern of argumentation (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). The effect to cause pattern shows that a body of evidence from a study defines the effects caused based upon the record of what happened in relation to the research question; the cause is stated and the research question asks what the results were from the cause.

Student Engagement

Researchers, educators, and policymakers are increasingly focused on student engagement as the key to addressing problems of low achievement, student boredom and alienation, and high dropout rates (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The recent focus on high stakes testing has further increased the focus on student achievement (Mora, 2011), and thus necessitates the implementation of new teaching and learning strategies to address this in our schools. The connections between engagement and student achievement have become so apparent that research has converged on the construct that academic engagement is a key factor in students' school success (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kinderman, 2008). Findings have

indicated such a strong connection between engagement and student success that it is believed to predict student's learning, grades, and achievement scores over the short term, as well as patterns of attendance, retention, graduation, and academic resilience over the long term (Connor, 2011; Skinner et al., 2008). The likelihood that disengaged and struggling students will drop out of high school increases dramatically based upon their levels of engagement and success during their elementary and middle school experiences (Finnan & Kombe, 2011). With this large impact on student learning, it is evident that educators must take a serious look at engagement as an important goal of school improvement and address its contribution toward increasing student success (Fredericks, McCloskey, Meli, Montrosse, Mordica, & Mooney, 2011).

Student engagement or learner engagement, as it is often referenced within modern research, is defined as a “psychological process, specifically, the attention, interest, investment, and effort students expend in the work of learning. Defined in this way, engagement implies both affective and behavioral participation in the learning experience” (Marks, 2000, p. 154-155). Skinner et al. (2008) go on to describe engagement as being centered around two major components, behavioral and emotional, both of which have specific indicators and facilitators that contribute to predicting student levels of engagement and resilience. The behavioral dimension of engagement “includes students’ effort, attention, and persistence during the initiation and execution of learning

activities” (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 766). The emotional dimension of engagement “focuses on states that are germane to students’ emotional involvement during learning activities such as enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment” (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 766).

In the study, *Measuring student engagement in upper elementary through high school: A description of 21 instruments*, Fredericks et al. (2011) agree with the model developed by Skinner et al. (2008) in that there are behavioral and emotional dimensions of engagement, but then also goes on to indicate a third dimension referenced as cognitive engagement, which they define as “the student’s level of investment in learning” (p. 2). Cognitive learning includes “being thoughtful and purposeful in the approach to school tasks and being willing to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas or master difficult skills” (p.2).

In addition to the three primary dimensions of engagement, namely emotional, behavioral, and cognitive, there are two additional dimensions of engagement that must be addressed and defined, which are engaged learners and disaffected learners. Disaffection is described as not only the absence of engagement, but also “the occurrence of behaviors and emotions that reflect maladaptive motivational states” (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 767). This indicates both a behavioral and emotional component that causes the student to be passive and withdrawn from participation in learning activities, as well as to display

boredom, anxiety, and frustration in the classroom. Engaged learners demonstrate interest, enthusiasm, and intrinsic motivation for learning in school (Skinner et al., 2008).

Historical perspective. Despite the billions of dollars invested in massive reform projects, like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), three out of ten students drop out of school without a diploma (Johnson, Smith, Smythe, & Varon, 2009). “At the same time, the world has never had a greater urgency in ensuring that our children are equipped to tackle the serious challenges that lay before them” (Johnson et al., 2009, p. 1). As a result, Johnson et al. declare that it is time for us to think differently, time for us to focus our energy not on test scores, but on engaging students in their work.

Early studies have defined student engagement as observable behaviors, often associated with time on task (Brophy, 1983; Natriello, 1984); however, researchers have more recently begun to include emotional or affective aspects into their definition of engagement (Fredericks et al., 2011). Researchers have observed a direct connection between student feelings of belonging, enjoyment, and attachment, and student investment in learning. “Student engagement predicts subsequent achievement and success in school” (Fredericks et al., 2011, p. 1-2).

Student engagement has been shown to decline as students progress through grade levels, indicating an initial decline through the upper elementary

grades and middle school and then a more substantial decline in high school (Marks, 2000). Skinner et al. (2008) indicate that significant drops in student engagement occur between elementary and middle school, where experiences in learning shape student attitude and success. An even more significant drop occurs between middle and high school as a result of the patterns of success or failure in learning having a growing impact on student engagement and achievement (Fredericks et. al., 2011; Marks, 200). Thus, if positive experiences are created from the beginning, students have a much higher rate of remaining engaged throughout their future school experiences (Marks, 200). This extensive drop demonstrates one of the major struggles that schools are facing in complying with NCLB benchmarks at the secondary level. The drop in engagement coincides with the drop in achievement (Marks, 2000). Engagement is an ongoing cyclical process that is a product of cumulative school experience.

Many students begin their school careers motivated to learn; however, their experiences in school dull that motivation or often suppress it entirely (Marks, 2000). Parsons and Harding (2011) indicate that student learning stems from student engagement. Their findings suggest that we must revise how we believe students involve themselves in learning. Parsons and Harding also indicate that there are specific actions that we can take through the use of assessments, student talk, collaboration, building relationships, and effective teaching that will support student connections and involvement in their learning.

Multi-dimensional characteristics of engagement. Skinner et al. (2008)

address the motivational dynamics of classroom engagement and disaffection among elementary and middle school students grades four through seven. The study refers to dynamics as the “internal and external feedback loops that serve to promote or undermine the quality of children’s engagement in school over time” (p. 765) and indicates that the internal dynamics of teacher and student engagement factors contribute to changes in student engagement over the course of time, that is, between grade levels and even over the course of a school year.

The conceptual frameworks that are informed from the Skinner et al. (2008) study indicate that based upon review of similar research studies, there is a connection between motivational dynamics, self-confidence, and teacher involvement that directly correlate with student achievement. These conceptual frameworks are multi-dimensional and are based upon attraction and involvement in school. Not only do these frameworks make connections between engaged and disaffected learners, but they incorporate the concepts of active, goal directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, focused, emotionally positive interactions with the social and physical environments (Skinner, et al. 2008). These interactions take place in the form of teacher support, student involvement, student autonomy, student perceptions of themselves and the learning environment, and preconceived student perceptions of their own learning. They are attributed to the

emotional (affective) and behavioral components of engagement (Green, Neslon, Martin, & Marsh, 2006; Skinner et al., 2008).

The aim of this study was first to “examine some of the dynamics underlying the general decline in motivation during late elementary and early middle school” (Skinner, et al., 2008, p. 769). This observation began through the training and implementation of the self system model of motivational development (SSMMD) motivational program model. Then, the study investigated information collected at the beginning and end of the same school year and examined the dynamics between emotion and behavior that take place inside engagement by implementing a self-system process assessment. The self-system process (SSP) assessment focused on how beliefs about the self can be distinguished from engagement. The SSP questions focused on the areas of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The prediction was that not only would behavior predict changes in emotion, but that emotion would be an even stronger prediction of changes in behavior. Third, the study examined the motivational dynamics that take place outside of engagement, including social context, self-systems, and engagement itself. The prediction was that children’s SSPs would contribute to changes in their engagement over the school year with perceived competence being the biggest predictor of change (Skinner, et al., 2008).

Data were observed from 805 children and 53 teachers who had participated in a 4-year longitudinal study on children's motivation in school. Students were chosen from public elementary and middle schools in a rural-suburban school district in upstate New York, with only 5% of the population indicating that they were non-white. Socio-economic status of the participants was determined by parents' level of education and occupation, and ranged between working to middle class. A subset of 805 children from the overall student population was chosen because they were missing less than 5% of their data from the SSMMD motivational program. The group selected for this study demonstrated significant limitations in its representation of the general population that are considered to be the disaffected students in public schools.

The implementation was performed using two measurement points during fall and spring of year four of the motivational study. Student-completed self-report questionnaires (SSPs) in the fall and the spring were administered by trained interviewers in three 45 minute sessions. Teachers were not present during the administration of student questionnaires, but completed teacher questionnaires in an alternate location. The questions on the SSPs focused on competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and were applied to two focus groups: engaged learners and disaffected learners. The data from the SSPs was then broken down into emotional and behavioral components and then appropriately categorized to coincide with data that identified the student as either engaged or disaffected.

The findings of this study were significant and illustrated a vivid picture of student engagement and the multi-dimensional facets that must be examined. The pattern of results shared that the four indicators of engagement are similar in many ways; however, each component has its own distinctive roles and dynamics of engagement. Behavioral engagement had the biggest internal effects from emotional and disaffection, especially on the factor of boredom (Skinner, et al., 2008).

The multi-faceted nature of engagement is an aspect that is challenging to many researchers studying engagement and possesses a difficult task in reporting findings based upon each component (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) of student engagement.

Predictors of change. Not only are the multi-dimensional components of engagement necessary to observe, but also the predictors of change. There are a variety of predictors, both behavioral and emotional, that researchers have indicated are essential in appropriately observing the behaviors and outcomes associated with student engagement. The first of these predictors is competence. Competence refers to a student's "self-perception in the academic domain" (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 767). Individuals are born with the need to perceive themselves as effective in their interaction with their environment, thus the extent to which they perceive or "feel this sense of mastery is related to the quality of

their engagement” (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 767) in that environment. Thus, self-perception of ability directly correlates with the level of student engagement. The more that students believe they are successful, the more engaged they will be and the more success they will feel, thus referred to as the cyclical process of engagement.

Another predictor of change that is essential in understanding student engagement is autonomy. Autonomy is often referred to as the “self-determination theory” (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 767). This theory indicates that individuals are born with the need to express their genuine preferences and act in congruence with their true selves. Students who are encouraged to apply their own preferences, choices, and ideas in a classroom setting are more likely to become actively engaged in the learning process. Therefore, increased engagement results in better academic outcomes.

The third predictor of change that is essential in student engagement is relatedness. All individuals are born with a natural desire to connect and communicate with others. “The extent to which they feel that they belong in a particular enterprise is associated with quality of their engagement in the activities of that enterprise” (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 768). Therefore, if students are provided opportunities to communicate through cooperative learning and other learner-centered activities it will lead to higher group and individual achievement.

Learner-centered instruction. The conceptual idea of learner-centered instruction as a means of increasing student engagement is a century old idea that originated in the seminal works of Dewey (1902) and Piaget (1983). The idea of the learning environment being focused on the learner, that is learner-centered, versus on the teacher that is teacher-centered, is an integral theory of engagement that has re-emerged in the models of 21st century learning. This new emergence is directly connected to our modern need to increase student achievement by means of increasing student engagement.

The learner-centered model of teaching and learning employs several cognitive and meta-cognitive factors, motivational and emotional influences on learning, and developmental and social factors. These factors include, but are not limited to: nature of the learning process, goals of the learning process, strategic thinking, thinking about thinking, intrinsic motivation, learning and diversity, and standards and assessment (Learner-Centered Work Group of the American Psychological Association's Board of Education Affairs, 1997), all of which exhibit direct correlations with the multi-dimensional components of student engagement.

The learner-centered approach to teaching and learning also directly correlates and is often associated with collaborative or cooperative learning (Williams, 2009). Collaborative learning refers to “an instruction method in

which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal” (Gokhale, 1995, p. 1). Both the learner-centered and cooperative learning approaches shift the focus of the classroom environment away from the teacher and onto the student. Both of these approaches create a culture of learning that employs student participation, student choice, and increased student engagement. This shift of culture has a significant impact on student achievement and has been demonstrated as one of the key factors in designing successful schools (Parsons & Harding, 2011).

Inclusive research on the learner-centered/collaborative approach to teaching and learning has indicated that there are specific actions that inherently increase student engagement:

- challenge-based learning (Johnson et al., 2009)
- constructivism (Broomhead, 2005)
- flexible grouping (Bouton & Garth, 1983; Gokhale, 1995; Specht, King, Servals, Kertoy, & Spencer, 2011)
- formative assessment (Parsons & Harding, 2011)
- language of learning (Parsons & Harding, 2011)
- reflective writing (writing to learn) (Burke, 2009; Daniels & Zemelman, 2004; Grbavac, Piggott, & Rougeux, 2003; Wink, 2005)

- shared leadership between students and peers, as well as students and teachers (Broomhead, 2005; Holliday, 2002; Parsons & Harding, 2011)
- student choice (Burke, 2009; Daniels & Zemelman, 2004)
- student talk (Baker, Lewis, Purzer, Watts, Perkins, Uysal, Wong, Beard, & Lang, 2009; Michaels, O'Connor, Hall, & Resnick, 2010)
- teacher support (Allday, Bush, Ticknor, & Walker, 2011; Jahnke, 2010)
- technology (Horton, Liu, & Olmanson, 2011; Silva, 2009)

These strategies are the essential components of creating an effective learner-centered classroom that is designed to increase student engagement and achievement.

In addition to the aforementioned strategies that define a learner-centered classroom, there are also specific descriptors that are an inherent part of the classroom culture. In Mesibov's *Eight Descriptors of a Learner-Centered Class*, he describes the key components of a learner-centered classroom. First, the classroom itself is comfortable and stimulating, an environment that allows for flexible grouping and an "immersion in the environment" (Mesibov, 2006, p. 1). Second, Mesibov addresses learner behaviors that demonstrate a high level of engagement in which learners' standards for quality work is evident by amount

and caliber. The third descriptor of a learner-centered classroom is that the teacher acts as both a facilitator and a member of the learning environment; a community of learners is established in which the teacher serves as a trainer, as well as a cooperative member of the learning group. The fourth descriptor focuses on the integrated learning approach that is key in a learner-centered classroom. This approach uses a variety of learning modalities such as reading, writing, investigating, problem solving, speaking, listening, and kinesthetic learning. Mesibov goes on in the fifth descriptor to establish that a high quality of work that includes collaboration between teacher, students, peer, and parents is essential. The sixth descriptor emphasizes the reflective nature of a learner-centered classroom culture, which is evident through journaling, formative assessments, and rubrics. The seventh descriptor in Mesibov's work focuses on the sense of collaboration and teamwork that is an on-going part of a learner-centered class. In the last descriptor of a learner-centered classroom Mesibov emphasizes the necessity of technology to be used as a tool to "research, invent, create, tabulate, analyze, and collaborate" (Mesibov, 2006, p. 2) both inside and outside of the classroom, thus extending the community of learners beyond the classroom walls. These eight descriptors illustrate the key components of a learner-centered classroom that effectively encourages student engagement. Designing a learner-centered classroom necessitates a change or shift away from the traditional classroom culture where the teacher is the giver of knowledge and the students are

the recipients. In a learner-centered classroom everyone is engaged in all levels of the learning process and works together towards achieving common goals. This cultural model of teaching and learning directly enhances student learning through increasing student engagement.

Assessment, measurement, and limitations. Due to the multi-dimensional components of student engagement, researchers have indicated significant challenges in accurately measuring student engagement progress and outcomes. A variety of tools have been utilized, most of which are of a reflective and cooperative nature and are administered to both teachers and students involved in the studies. Recommended measurement tools that have demonstrated success include, but are not limited to: questionnaires (Fredericks et al., 2011; Hart, Stewart, & Jimerson, 2011), surveys (Skinner et. al., 2008), teacher and student reports (Fredericks et al., 2011), classroom observations (Baker et al., 2009; Fredericks et al., 2011; Jones, 2009), and reflective teacher/student journals (Baker et al., 2009).

Researchers also indicate that there are significant limitations in measuring student engagement. Some of these limitations are attributed to the psychological and sociological components of student engagement, which inherently make them difficult to measure (Rosen, Glennie, Dalton, Lennon, & Bozick, 2010). Other limitations are related to the multi-dimensional components

of student engagement, and create complexity in the measurement process due to individual factors and their influence on the overall outcome of each study (Skinner et al., 2008). Yet another limitation indicated by researchers is the seemingly narrow demographic that already accomplished studies have incorporated; there seem to be geographically restricted samples that often focus on a small population of students and in most cases from only one locale, thus making it difficult to draw conclusions on overall applicability (Rosen et al., 2010).

Other limitations indicate implementation concerns. One major concern is that most engagement interventions are implemented at the time in a students' education when researchers believe it is already too late (Marks, 2000). If students have never experienced engagement exercises or a learner centered approach until they reach middle and high school when their achievement scores indicate that they are underachieving, then it is already too late. The learner-centered approach to student engagement must be implemented and ingrained as a learning culture in each student prior to the beginning of secondary education.

Critics of student engagement and the learner-centered approach cite cost as a major concern cost of time and budgetary costs are the main concerns expressed (Silva, 2009). Creating a learner-centered classroom model involves extensive planning time in which there are multiple phases: the training phase, in

which monetary cost is involved; the planning phase, in which the cost of time is involved; and the implementation phase, in which an ongoing developmental process is involved. Although most teachers reported that utilizing student engagement strategies has great benefit in their classrooms, many felt constrained by curriculum, time, and training in order to implement the strategies effectively. In schools where student engagement training was a school-wide initiative teachers felt better prepared and more effective at implementing the necessary strategies (Skinner et al., 2008).

Student Engagement in the High School Choral Music Classroom

Increasing student engagement is an important focus in all subject areas in schools today. Research indicates that engaging experiences in music positively impact student achievement (Morrison, 1994). This correlation between success in the arts and success in school has placed increased pressure on music educators to focus on student engagement in their classrooms.

The large majority of students at the high school level are most often engaged in music through their participation in choir, band, or orchestra. Research strongly indicates that students are “intellectually, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and musically nurtured by membership in performing ensembles” (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003, p. 9). Most high schools also offer music education opportunities through elective classes that focus on piano, music

history, music theory, midi technology, and/or song writing and music composition. These elective classes often engage students that may or may not participate in the larger band, orchestra, and choral ensembles as well as students that wish to explore other aspects of music that are not a major part of the performance ensemble curriculum.

Due to the limited access that many high school students have to music opportunities and the positive effect that music has on academic achievement (Morrison, 1994), the choral classroom has become an important venue for increasing student engagement in school. Because of the short amount of rehearsal time that is available for school choral rehearsals, it is essential for music directors to maximize time, student participation, and rehearsal efficiency in order to provide an engaging and motivating experience for all students (Napoles, 2006).

Strategies for increasing student engagement in the music classroom.

A variety of accepted techniques have been studied and proven effective for increasing student engagement and maximizing the use of rehearsal time in order to increase student performance and motivation. The first of these strategies is modeling. Grimland (2005) describes modeling as “demonstrating certain desirable or undesirable performance techniques or behaviors—as a way of facilitating students’ responses to desired musical outcomes. Interspersed with

verbal instructions, imagery, and the nonverbal gestures involved in conducting, teachers purposefully demonstrate such examples to their students” (p. 5).

Napoles (2006) agrees with Grimland’s (2005) indication that modeling increases more effective achievement of musical outcomes. Napoles also indicates that modeling can be an effective means by which to demonstrate musical ideas; it can be a much more effective way through which to achieve the musical outcomes that a teacher desires, without having to give verbal instructions. Napoles also indicates that the use of modeling as a non-traditional communication tool can create an increase in student interest and attentiveness; it can be more effective than teacher talk.

Grimland (2005) goes on to break the concept of modeling into three sub categories: audible models, visible models, and process models. Audible models are described as always being communicated through the teacher in the form of examples that students can hear, such as: speech, chant, rhythms, and pitches. Grimland describes visible models as the examples that students see; they are then divided into physical or facial models. Physical and facial models are used to communicate non-musical ideas of performance, as well as musical ideas. Musical ideas are communicated through conducting gestures. Non-musical ideas are communicated through other gestures that provide visible examples for the students to follow. Process models are described as “demonstrations of the steps involved in completing musical tasks” (p. 10); these include sequential

combinations of acquired musical skills and knowledge aimed to help students solve musical problems.

Napoles (2006) indicates that the “quality of the model is an important variable in predicting performance achievement” (p. 52) and that modeling can improve student performance. Grimland (2005) and Napoles (2006) agree that modeling involves a complexity of cognitive events and teachers with stronger modeling skills produce students who perform better.

Broomhead (2005) offers three solutions for shaping performance in the music classroom. The first of these practical solutions is through the implementation of small group work. Broomhead indicates that “the smaller the number in an ensemble, the greater the level of individual responsibility for all aspects of performance” (p. 4). Broomhead also indicates that the establishment of multiple ensemble leaders creates an opportunity for students to engage in leadership responsibilities. Broomhead cautions that this strategy is a deviation from the traditional performing traditions of most choirs. Broomhead recommends student selection of repertoire, and a plan that finds ways to fit small group work into the curriculum. Broomhead states that small group work has the potential to accelerate individual learning. Broomhead’s additional solutions of formal-phrase shaping practice and informal-phrase shaping practice are helpful suggestions for increasing student responsibility in the rehearsal and offer an

opportunity for students to make expressive decisions in the context of music performance.

Napoles (2006) indicates another area of focus that directly affects student engagement and performance in the music classroom. An area of concern that must be addressed is pacing. Napoles' study of experienced versus novice directors indicates that student attentiveness can be affected by instructor pacing, and that "successful teachers should move students briskly from step to step, but the steps themselves should be kept small" (p. 14); steps should remain easily within the grasps of most students. Napoles illustrates that good teachers use fast and slow pacing in rehearsals where appropriate to the repertoire or musical activity in the classroom, and that good rehearsal models utilize a teaching cycle that follows a "1-2-3 sequence" (p. 20). In order for a cycle to be complete, "there needs to be a task presentation, followed by an opportunity for students to interact with the task, and then the teacher needs to provide feedback regarding the students' performance of the task" (p. 20). Napoles further describes task presentation and sequential patterns as important in self-analysis and the use of effective patterns of instruction to help foster performance achievement in an ensemble.

"Performance achievement appears to be of utmost interest to ensemble directors. While much research conducted in education reflects an attempt

to define effective teaching in an effort to improve the quality of education for students, in music, many times this quality of education is measured in terms of performance achievement. Therefore it is important to examine effective teaching practices in terms of how student performance achievement is affected” (Napoles, p. 3).

Based upon the research indicators, there is a necessity for more research in the area of student engagement. Thus, the more corroborative evidence that can be gathered, analyzed, and applied to the connection between learner-centered classrooms, student engagement, and student achievement, the more beneficial student engagement and learner-centered approaches can be for students in all subject areas. Of greatest importance is that all of our research be “grounded in knowledge about how students learn, and in the best way to put that knowledge to work” (Connor, 2011, p. 1).

Summary

Research overwhelmingly indicates that student engagement is a significant component of effective teaching and learning. Increasing student engagement in the music classroom is not just a one-step method, but rather an ongoing cyclical process that must begin very early in a student’s education. Students that have successful educational experiences early on in their education demonstrate increased engagement throughout the remainder of their educational

career (Marks, 2000); a continuum of successful experiences fosters a continuous increase in student engagement (Fredericks, 2011; Marks, 2000). The more effective that teachers are at educating students in engagement strategies through a learner-centered approach, the more effective students will be at using the strategies, developing a sense of ownership, and increasing intrinsic motivation, ultimately increasing performance achievement. Teachers need to think differently, to begin with an assessment of reality that will then “take root and generate more fresh thinking, and new ways of bringing kids to the knowledge and skills they will need in a dangerously challenging world” (Johnson et al., 2009, p. 2-3).

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to increase student engagement in my choral classroom. As I arrived in my new teaching position this year, it became clearly evident that in order to engage the students in the choir, I needed to find a way to increase communication and collaboration that would encourage a cultural shift toward increased learning and achievement.

Setting

I conducted the research for this study in my high school choral classroom in eastern Pennsylvania. The school is located in a suburban setting, and is one of two high schools in a mostly urban school district. Our school has approximately 2100 students and has a diverse population that represents a variety of ethnic groups as well as free and reduced lunch students and students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Participants

The participants for this study included the members of my high school choir, consisting of 102 students that meet on various days of a six day cycle. There are 21 boys and 81 girls, 26 of whom have IEPs. The participants included 9 African American students, 18 Latino students, and 75 white students. Students demonstrate a wide range of music and academic proficiencies.

Procedures

Prior to the start of the study, I submitted an application to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB). I also sought approval for participation from my building principal and students' parents prior to gathering any data about the study.

Throughout this study, students worked in groups following the design of a learner-centered classroom (Mesibov, 2006). Students completed reflective check-in/check-out communication sheets, as well as collaborative project planning and feedback sheets that encouraged them to be involved in the planning and implementation of daily classroom activities, rehearsals, and performances.

Students participated in collaborative groups that were centered around increasing student engagement in the many facets of the choir organization (Broomhead, 2005); groups included, but were not limited to: choir officers, attendance secretaries, section leaders, student conductors, and student committees. Student committees were designed around key areas of the functional processes of the organization: stage and set design, concert program and tickets, publicity, travel and field trips, policies and procedures, uniforms and attire, fundraising, event planning, and room décor. Students were required to select at least one committee that they wished to participate in. The students met first as student groups to set the goals for each committee for the year, and then met with

me at appropriate intervals to discuss, plan, and execute the projects that we were working on at the time. Student committee sheets (Appendix F) were used to organize and communicate ideas and progress for each committee throughout the study.

Teacher and student modeling (Grimland, 2005; Napoles, 2006) was an integral component of increasing student engagement and communication of musical performance goals and expectations throughout this study; audible, visible, and process models were used at integral points in the study to increase student responsibility and motivation.

The use of student interviews was an extremely important component of this study. Interviews were conducted in an informal setting, sometimes one on one, and at other times in small groups. Specifically, interviews with four key participants served as a significant source of data as well as a gauge of the progress of the study and the growth of the choir organization. Comparisons between student surveys, check in/out responses, field log entries, and student interviews served as important components in the triangulation of data for this study.

Consistent application of observational field log entries, journaling, and reflection exercises was a significant and meaningful part of this study. It was through these exercises that many of the early challenges for the study revealed themselves, and it was through this reflective process that I was able to design and

reorganize activities and implementations so that they remained meaningful and effective in my classroom.

The following sequence of activities and implementations was followed through the course of the study, following a learner-centered approach. This sequence was modified from its original form as a result of reflection upon student feedback, student interviews, participant observations, and field log entries.

Student Engagement Research Implementation Plan

Week #1: Introduction to Study

Fresh Paint Fresh Start Activity (see Appendix A)

Introduce New Structure of Choir: student leaders, section leaders, and student committees

Begin rehearsal of new pieces

Introduce performance goals for the first month

Informal survey: Organizational goals student discussion

Initiate volunteers for Student Directors

Student check-in/check out sheets: Reflection on first class
(see Appendix B)

Welcome Survey (Appendix C)

Student check-in/check out sheets: Goal setting for Week #2
(see Appendix D)

Week #2:

Student check-in/check-out sheets: Reflection on first week (Appendix E)

Audition student directors including peer critique and selection

Begin student director training

Introduction of progress monitoring

First performance at grade level assemblies and student critique

Section Leader sign-ups

Student Interview #1

Student check-in/check-out: Reflection on performance and goal setting

for Week #3

Week #3:

First student committee meeting: Notes and feedback sheets

(see Appendix F)

Student Interview #2

Performance at Open House and student critique

Student check-in/check-out: Reflection on performance and goal setting

for Week #4

Week #4:

Introduction of officer responsibilities and officer nominations

Student Interview #3

Student check-in/check-out: Reflection on performance and goal setting
for Week #5

Group discussion and progress evaluation

Revaluation and restructuring of procedures

Week #5:

Student Officer Meeting

Second Student Committee Meetings – committees meet with teacher

Student Interview #4

Student check-in/check-out: Reflection on performance and goal setting
for Week #6

Progress monitoring and group discussion on restructuring

Week #6:

Section Leader Tryouts

Student Officer Elections

Student Interview #5

Student check-in/check-out: Feedback on performance and goal setting
for Week #7

Progress evaluation based upon field notes, student feedback, and progress
toward the winter concert.

Week #7:

Section Leader training and begin implementation

Performance evaluation #1

Third Student Committee Meeting – Policy and procedures committee
meets with teacher

Choir packet #1 (B Choir) (see Appendix G)

Student performances at Penn State

Student Interviews – informal during travel to and from Penn State

Week #8:

Student Interviews #5 & #6 – Informal teacher student meetings

Choir Packet #1 (C Choir) (see Appendix G)

Choir Packet #2 (A Choir) (see Appendix H)

Engagement and leadership Teacher-Student Meetings

Tony Leach Choral Workshop

Miracle League Service Project

Week #9:

District Chorus auditions – self critique and evaluation

Student check-in/check-out: feedback on progress and goal setting for

Week #10

Week #10:

Choir packet #3 Leadership Profile (see Appendix I)

Section Leader Meeting

Student Interview #7

Student check-in/check-out: feedback on performance and goal setting for

Week #11

Week #11:

Student Meeting - Repertoire selection and progress evaluation

Student check-in/check-out: Feedback on performance and goal setting for

Week #13

Men's Choir Performance

Week #12:

Choir Packet #4 – Engagement (see Appendix J)

Student officer meeting

Student check-in/check-out: Accomplishments (see Appendix K)

Week #13:

Informal Student reflection on concert progress

Week #14:

Student officer meeting

Student Interview #8

Folder Video

Choir Retreat

Performance Recordings

Week #15:

Informal performance recording evaluation

Choir retreat reflection and performance progress- group discussion

Winter Concert Dress Rehearsal

Winter Concert Performance

Week #16

Winter Concert Performance

Student repertoire selection for spring concert

Week #17

Performance at Middle School

Performance critique and evaluation

Week #18

Student check-in/check-out: Reflection on performance progress and goal setting for Week #19

Week #19

Student interviews #9-#12 – Informal closing interviews

Student performance and progress evaluation: Teacher-student engagement meetings

Student committee meetings: Spring concert planning

Data Sources

Field log. Throughout this study, I kept a two-column field log, including: reflective journals, student work samples, observations, student interviews, surveys, check-in/check-out sheets, flexible grouping schedules,

observational notes, collaborative work group observations, and various engagement measurement instruments. All logs, reflective journals, and observational data were kept in a locked cabinet to insure confidentiality.

Student work. Student work served as the primary sources of data within this study in the form of committee worksheets, reflection packets, check-in/check-out sheets, and reflective writings.

Participant Observations. Participant observations were used on a daily basis throughout the study to develop and understanding of the relationship between observable student behaviors and student reflection responses. Observations were used as a guide throughout inquiry process of the study to identify evidence of increased student engagement.

Surveys. Student surveys were used throughout the study to first establish a base line for observations pertaining to levels of student engagement and motivation and then to monitor progress as the study progressed.

Interviews. Student interviews were administered at the beginning of the study and continued at key points throughout the study in relationship to needs identified as a result of the data that I gathered throughout the observation period.

Journals. My use of a teacher journal throughout the course of this study was imperative in maintaining a sense of focus and reflection that allowed me to remain open to my students' ideas, suggestions, observations, and progress.

All data collected throughout the study remained confidential and was organized, analyzed, and evaluated in my field log. The data were assessed based upon the established criteria of increasing student engagement in collaborative work groups and was carefully analyzed to look for trends, patterns, and increased student achievement based upon the implementation of focused engagement strategies in the classroom.

Summary

The level of student engagement in the classroom had a direct and significant impact on student achievement. Due to this direct connection, it was essential for me to examine and implement collaborative engagement strategies in my curriculum designed to encourage student ownership, inquiry, and higher level thinking in order to create a positive and engaging learning experience for my students.

Trustworthiness Statement

In order to ensure that the results of this study were trustworthy and valid, I followed a series of ethical guidelines. First, I obtained written consent and permission from Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) (Appendix L), which indicated that there were a few modifications that needed to be made to my study proposal. As per the request of the HSIRB board, I made the necessary modifications and submitted the changes to be filed (Appendix M). I also obtained written permission to conduct the study from the principal of my school (Appendix N), as well as parental consent from the parents/guardians of students who participated in the study (Appendix O). As per my consent letter to parents and students, I only utilized data from those students who had parental permission and agreed to be part of the study, and students were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Pseudonyms were used to provide anonymity for all students who were part of the study, and all data were kept in a secure location and destroyed at the study's conclusion.

Throughout the study, I was careful to remain attentive to the criteria of validity and credibility illustrated in Hendricks (2009). The methods that I most utilized to establish validity included member checks, triangulation of data sources, and engagement in continuous, ongoing reflective planning (Hendricks,

2009). I utilized frequent member checks with my students in the form of interviews, check-in/check-out sheets, and surveys. Continuous ongoing reflective planning was a vital part of my study and encouraged extensive student input in both the reflection and planning processes. The use of teacher and student written communication proved to be most helpful in establishing a location for documentation and reflection on current and past observations. In order to maintain validity throughout the study, I paid close attention to gathering data through a variety of sources and mediums (written, oral, and observational) in order to establish triangulation and reflective observation of the whole picture of my study from a variety of viewpoints (Hendricks, 2009). My results were based upon case analysis of my data in a variety of frameworks, which included student artifacts, performances, and interviews, as well as observational and inquiry data.

In order to remain ethical throughout my study, I was cautious to maintain anonymity (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). I encouraged the participants to be fully involved in the planning, reflection, and activities throughout the study, during which I provided a safe framework for them to share their individual ideas and viewpoints (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). I took great care throughout the study to build a relationship of trust so that all participants could express their true thoughts and observations, in an effort for all of us to learn and create a more positive experience in the classroom (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten,

2005). One of the most eye opening aspects of my study was in the ability for my participants and me to remain self-reflective (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). By establishing a comfortable process by which we could share observations, impressions, and understandings, we were able to unveil deep rooted elements of our classroom and look at them through a clear lens, thus allowing us to make our classroom experience more meaningful, exciting, and fulfilling.

Disengaged and Disillusioned: Engaging the Disaffected Music Student

My Story

On a hot afternoon, late in the spring of my eighteenth year of teaching, while late in the pregnancy of my second child, I received the news, I was to be the new head director of the high school choir. For many, this news would be the cause of celebration, as the high school director position of any district is supposed to be the epitome of success in the world of public school music education. After so many wonderful years of teaching, the most joyous of those in a thematic performing arts program that integrated music into a woven curriculum with science, history, and language arts, that was ultimately eliminated due to district-wide changes, my heart sank at the news that I was called to transform a failing choir program filled with disengaged students into one of great success. After the initial shock and overwhelming thoughts (see Figure 1), I gathered up the courage and the clarity to begin my journey into the world of engaging the disaffected learners in my new high school choral classroom.

Early Teacher viewpoint	Teacher Journal Remarks
June 17, 2013	<i>Can I do this? Am I qualified? I will have a 3 month old baby! I live 40 min. away.</i>
July 23, 2013	<i>I will need to plan out the first day and first week to clearly show that things will be different. How can I show this kind of significant change?</i>
July 28, 2013	<i>Meeting with former director and principal: there are clearly things from the past that must be kept in place, but I must decide what are the traditional and essential parts of the program and what must be altered to begin to build success for my students; they must begin to see me as their new director and as one that is dedicated and there to improve this program solely for them</i>
August 2, 2013	<i>Meeting with department head: I am grateful that there is someone here to confer with; how will my new ideas be received by students and colleagues?</i>

Figure 1 : Initial Thoughts

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to serve as the assistant director for the choir prior to the start of my director position and the start of this study. One of the best advantages was that I had observed the previous year and had seen the current practices, behaviors, and attitudes of the choir members in action. My role was kept very minimal as the assistant director, but it afforded me the opportunity to gather background information that would later prove to be essential in my quest to increase the engagement among my singers.

As I began in the summer months to prepare for the implementation of my study, I poured over many articles and literature to help me gain insight on how to engage disaffected learners. It was during this time that I put research and theory into the context of what I had observed as an assistant director and learned in my previous years of experience, in order to design a study, and, more importantly, to transform a classroom environment that had succumbed to poor behavior, inappropriate rehearsal practice, lack of motivation, and overall horrible attitude. Thankfully, I had done some cultural surveys to try to help the former director gain understanding of some of the attitudes and behaviors of the students so that we could try to make improvements. Little did I know how valuable these surveys would prove to be in the implementation of my own strategies to increase student engagement.

After much studying and planning over the summer months, I determined that not only did I need to implement a variety of new strategies, but most

importantly that whatever strategies I chose would have to aim at the heart of the class culture. I knew that I needed to create a new learner-centered environment that included high expectations with a high level of support, increased opportunities for performances and showcasing student achievement, and collaboration between students and teacher. I knew that whatever strategic models I chose to implement had to be learner centered in order to develop a sense of ownership and engagement in the group.

Fresh Paint, Fresh Start, . . . Move Forward!

Our first class began with students walking into the room after I greeted them, to find the chairs facing the back wall of the room in order to see what had been a mural on the back wall painted over in white primer with printed paper letters that read, “Fresh Paint, Fresh Start, Move Forward.” (The mural had been painted in the room approximately 15 years or ago and mostly faded, it had read “Patriot Choir, Concert Choir, Les Chanteurs” in yellow flags and had a faded piano and music notes decorating it; the mural was a symbol of what choir in the school was. I chose to paint it over to demonstrate a visual cue that things were going to be different, and a new approach was going to be explored.

On students’ chairs I placed a check-in sheet (Appendix A) that asked them to reflect upon the phrase on the wall and what it meant to them individually, as well as to the choir organization as a whole. Students found the check-in sheet with their name on it and were asked to sit in those seats. This

approach to seating on the first day was intended to accomplish two things: (a) a designated location for each student that was new, and (b) a means for me to take attendance quickly without having to call names. The purpose of this arrangement was to begin to establish a change in culture that would foster students being equal and would diminish the cliques and circles of power that were so evident in my observations from the previous year.

Our first class continued with my model of the new format, which was to eliminate down time and encourage more singing. I began by singing a short tune called “Freedom Is Coming.” Through my repetitive singing and gestures I encouraged different groups to join in singing, repeat sections, or break into parts. The group had not experienced this style of warm-up or opening of class; I began to set a tone of active participation for the group. My lack of talking and use of giving direction through modeling (Grimland, 2005; Napoles, 2006) was also a new concept. After working on the piece in unison and then teaching every harmony part to all members of the choir, the first tone was set: unison – we are all together; we all learn everyone’s parts – no part is more important than any other; and we can all learn from each other. The purpose of this approach was to begin to create a sense of unity. Students were not seated in sections as they had been in the past, but were heterogeneously mixed throughout the room, facing the back wall.

Many of these cues throughout our first class were intended to be subliminal, and I did not make a lot of it obvious; my goal was to model unity and collaboration from the very first class. We continued to fine-tune the piece as I asked for critiques and suggestions from the students on how to improve our performance; the use of student performance critique was also a new experience for the students. Upon receiving student input, we implemented each of the student ideas into our repetition and refinement of the piece.

Upon completion of “Freedom is Coming,” I welcomed the choir to the start of the school year and described the goals and the roles that each of us would have in moving forward and creating an outstanding choir organization. The goals included: performing frequently in school and in the community; working collaboratively through the use of student committees, section leaders, student directors, and a student advisory council; and communicating regularly through the use of check-in/out sheets, surveys, and open discussion. I announced that we would be performing in the first week of school at all of the opening class assemblies and at the parent Open House the following week, upon which there was an aura of excitement as well as apprehension that filled the room. I also invited students to share their input with me at any time and explained that it was up to all of us to make it a great year and a great organization.

One of the core components of my teaching and of this study is to influence students to self-reflect. It is my belief that true intrinsic change and

motivation does not happen without ownership; reflection has been an important part of my ownership over my teaching and learning. I believe self-reflection is an essential component for increasing student engagement and success in my classroom. Due to my own successful experiences with self-reflection in teaching and learning, I chose to make self-reflection a key component of the study. I believed that self-reflection on my part and on the part of my students would be a key component in building a community of learners in our classroom.

The initial check-in reflection activity from the first day provided me with baseline information about each student's approach to new things, view of themselves, and impression of the group. This initial check-in also afforded me the opportunity to begin my own reflective process in the study. I reviewed the responses from our opening activity and I was incredibly pleased with the positive responses and new insights (see Figure 2); I was also surprised by the variety of some of the responses. One thing that I found most insightful was how the responses varied between the students who were new to choir this year and those who had been part of the group previously. When I first read the check in/check out responses (Fresh Paint Fresh Start), I read them with a focus of gaining a baseline impression of student views: their first impressions of the changes in the daily structure that they experienced; what the students viewed as positive from our first class; what are their impressions of how this year will be a different experience for them individually and as a group.



Figure 2: Responses To Opening Day Welcome To Choir Inquiry

In order to stay true to my model of communication and reflection, I began our second class with a reflective check-in /check-out sheet (Appendix B). This student feedback activity focused on the student reactions from our initial class period and was to give me a baseline gauge as to the reactions of my students and their observations of the changes they experienced on the first day. This reflective correspondence gave me initial clues as to how to proceed throughout the study, and became the driving force for many of the choices that I made in my teaching as the study continued (see Table 1). Each of the check-in/check-out sheets throughout this study were also analyzed utilizing Skinner's (2008) elements of student engagement predictors of change (see Table 1).

The insights that I gained from my review of the first check-in/check-out sheet indicated an overall positive response to the new rehearsal strategies that I was implementing; however, they indicated a bit of discomfort with the set-up of the room and the changes in the physical space and locations that singers were placed in for our initial rehearsal.

Choir check-in/check-out #1 Responses

Questions asked: What did you like most about our first class yesterday? What did you like least?

Student Participants: A Choir

Predictor of Change Factors	Student Responses
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>it was surprising and fun</i> - <i>I like the ideas for the year</i> - <i>I thought it was great</i>
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>ability to sing again with other people</i>
Beliefs About Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>we already started to learn a song and performances were already set-up</i>
Classroom Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>the harmony</i> - <i>it's better</i> - <i>new methods of</i> - <i>organization</i> - <i>new set-up</i> - <i>I liked that we kept busy and tried different methods of learning music</i> - <i>I didn't like the seats on the floor</i>
Self-Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>(none indicated in this implementation)</i>

Table 1: Choir check-in/check-out #1 - First day in choir student responses.

The original design of my study included a plan to make the check-in/check-out sheets a part of our regular routine. The check-in/check-out sheets that I used had a place at the top for student names, which allowed me to connect specific reflective responses and progress with each individual student in my class. Based upon my previous experiences and my analysis within this study, I observed that reflective communication between student and teacher was most effective when first established in a non-threatening environment. Early in my experiences with my choir students, I observed that allowing students the freedom to share their observations and opinions anonymously, in the initial reflective communication activities, built a level of trust between us that fostered a sense of honesty and openness in our communication. I also discovered, I had to be open to receiving whatever opinions the students shared, positive or negative, in order for the students to learn that they could trust me, and not be judged because they stated their true opinion. Once the students were able to see how I was going to use the information that they shared to improve our classroom, and that I was open to suggestions and criticism, I began to invite the students to place their name at the top of the paper. I informed students that they would not be assigned grades for any of the check-in/check-out activities.

Through follow up conversations and informal interviews, I observed evidence of growth in the openness with which students were communicating

with me. I noticed that students who formerly had little to write, and very few suggestions for things that needed to be improved upon in choir, began to have very detailed reflections that included very specific suggestions and observations of our progress. Students began to realize that I was paying attention to what they were writing and that I appreciated their feedback, both good and bad. Students shared with me that they noticed that I was “trying to make things better” and that they never had a teacher who actually cared about what they said. One student even shared with me: “this is really weird, teacher’s don’t ask our opinions about anything.” I began to understand that even though the students were uneasy about the openness of our communication that they appreciated it. I also observed that the more honest and open I was about how I was using their suggestions, by giving specific examples of what changes in our classroom came from student reflections, the more the students began to trust me enough to state their true opinions.

In reflecting upon the next check-in/check-out implementation (see Table 2 and Figure 3): What did you like about the first week? (Appendix E), it became obvious to me that although I was trying to view the student responses through their eyes, I was embedding a lot of my own opinion and viewpoint into the analysis of the data. I needed to work even harder to remain open to all suggestions (positive or negative) but I also had to view the student responses differently. I found myself in some cases patting myself on the back, and in other

cases beating myself up over not making it perfect for every student; neither of these scenarios were very beneficial in coming up with an overall analysis of the group and our progress. One thing that was reemphasized in my teaching during this process was that my reflection should not be all about me and my interpretation; in fact very little of it should be about me if I was to get to the truth about what would engage each student.

In my analysis, I found the student responses for the first week check-in/check-out to be very honest and forthright. I noticed that the choir members that had been involved in previous years were much more open in sharing their honest thoughts and that the newer choir members were a bit more reserved. I attributed this difference in open response to the fact that the older choir members had experienced reflective activities in some capacity with me in the prior year under my role as assistant director.

Choir check-in/check-out #2 Responses

Questions asked: What did you like most about our first week in choir? What did you like least? How can we improve this? Please comment below on our class meeting performances.

Student Participants: A, B, and C Choirs

Predictor of Change Factors	Student Responses
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I think the second day went better than the first</i> - <i>I liked it a lot</i> - <i>it was fun just everything was different</i> - <i>I like that we perform more</i> - <i>I like having more performances</i>
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>need to fix the talking on stage</i> - <i>the classes especially my own were quite rude</i> - <i>I didn't like learning and singing everyone else's parts on the songs</i> - <i>I liked how we worked together and respected each other rather than working against each other</i> - <i>the seniors were rude</i> - <i>I loved that we were able to peacefully work together as a group</i>
Beliefs About Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I didn't like performing the first week of school when we only had a week of practice</i> - <i>performances were good for only having 2 rehearsal days</i> - <i>we sounded in tune together</i>
Classroom Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>I liked the new organization methods</i> - <i>I think we should sit by section</i> - <i>different seating is confusing</i> - <i>not gonna lie, I think there's too much change so soon</i> - <i>I like all of the change least</i> - <i>I liked starting new things</i> - <i>I liked how we got a lot done</i>
Self-Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>the first performance was not good</i> - <i>we have to be stronger on our entrances</i> - <i>we need to have more energy</i> - <i>we did pretty well</i>

Table 2: Check-in/check-out #2 - First week in choir student responses.

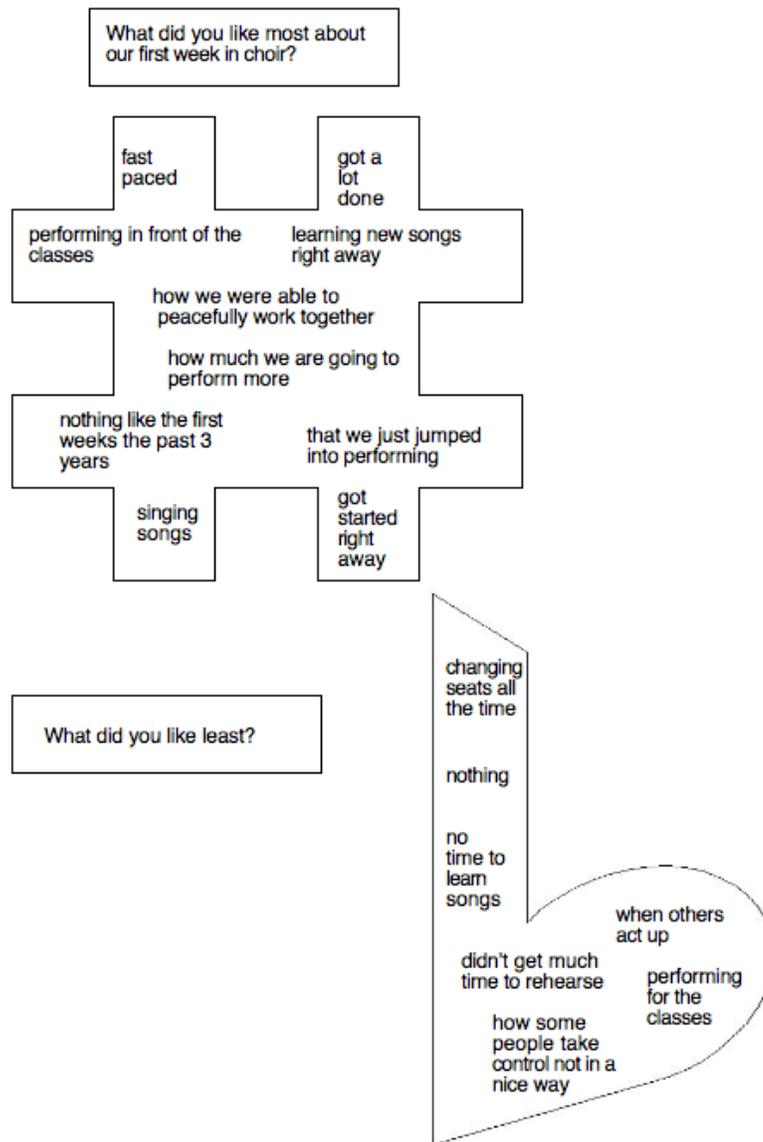


Figure 3: First Week of Choir Responses: positive versus negative comparison

Early in my review and reflection of student feedback sheets I realized that I must read each sheet multiple times and with multiple lenses in order to gain true insight as to how to increase the engagement of every student in my classroom. I read first with a focus on “What did they like? What didn’t they like? What is working in their perception?” I took notes of some overall themes from which to drive the focus of our next class period. Next, I read through them with the student lens on: “What are the students thinking or feeling about these new changes?” Last, I read through the check in/check out sheets to identify and chart the common themes and to determine what the most dominant themes or reactions were, thus what was I doing that was effective and what was I doing that was not effective (see Table 2). I found that in order to engage my students, I needed to address their needs and insights individually as well as the needs of the group as a whole.

The real challenge in reading and analyzing the student responses was to begin to read them as if I were a student in the classroom experiencing all of these changes for the first time. The first week reflection responses (see Table 2) indicated that there was concern over the extensive amount of change in such a short period of time. It was at this point in the study that I tried to put myself in the role of my seniors who had experienced the past culture for three years. An interview with one of my senior students, Pierre, informed me that now in their final year, the seniors expect to just “ get through and not have to deal with new

stuff.” Pierre explained that seniors “have an idea what senior year is supposed to be like; most of the seniors have been in choir all four years and are used to it a certain way; we have lost out and now we just want to get through to graduation and have the best time we can.” My understanding from my interview with Pierre was that the seniors have me as their new director and I am making things different and uncomfortable. Our daily rehearsals are not what they are used to, nor are they what the students expected in their senior year; so, the changes are hard for them to accept or adapt to. I believe the seniors were concerned that their experience in choir would not be what they wanted it to be in their final year, and their uncertainty and apprehension toward the changes I was making was helping to create a general sense of unsettledness among the group as a whole. The younger members were looking to the older members for guidance, and the older members were not comfortable with the changes that I was making. The reflective nature of our activities was bringing to the surface some underlying feelings from the students that I would not have been as aware of had we not completed the check-in/check-out sheets.

I found that one of the most challenging, but significant things that I could do in order to obtain the most insightful information from my implementation strategies was to read through the student responses multiple times, each with a different lens or focus that would guide my observations and thinking in order to improve, then to chart the responses in order to indicate what the trends and

patterns were, as opposed to what I felt were the most significant responses. I found that the charting began to take some of the emotion and frustration out of the way that I viewed the data and allowed me to look at the students in a more strategic, logical, and insightful way.

A Performance Community

Through my reflection on the first set of student feedback activities, several things became apparent to me: (a) the students were excited, but unsettled about some of the changes, (b) they liked the idea of performing and doing more, (c) there needed to be more time devoted to preparation and rehearsal in order to help them feel prepared.

It was during this time, after our first set of performances for class assemblies and for Open House, that I began to contemplate changes in the way I structured my lessons in order to make the most out of the 90 minute block that was our choir rehearsal. I began to realize that I had to find a way to build the community and culture of the group into the musical context of our rehearsals. Student responses on the reflective check-in/check-out sheets (see Table 3) were indicating that there was concern over us not being prepared for the concert.

Choir check-in/check-out #3 and #4 Responses

Questions asked: What do you think we need the most work on? What goals should be included in next week's schedule? What did we do well this week? What should we improve upon next week?

Student Participants: A, B, and C choir

Predictor of Change Factors	Student Responses
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -work together - work on confidence
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - listening and working together as a whole - listening to each other during singing - working together - respecting each other not talking so much
Beliefs About Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working on more music because we will Not be ready for the concert - working to better the choir - improve confidence levels in freshman
Classroom Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - we need to work on being more friendly to each other - working together to change choir for the better - everyone work together - worked well at sharing ideas - we need the most work on cooperating with each other and respect for each other
Self-Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> try harder

Table 3: Choir check-in/check-out #3 and #4 - Progress monitoring student responses.

My reflection on the student concerns noted that the reflective activities were holding us back from preparing for our big event, the Winter Concert. As we were about to begin rehearsing for our winter concert, I knew that I had to be more mindful, than I had been earlier in the study, in creating a lesson plan that supported the reflective process that I was trying to build, but that placed more focus on music production.

At this point in the study I began to reorganize the rehearsal format and seating arrangements (see Table 4) that we had been using throughout the year.

Sample Seating Arrangements for Choir Rehearsals.

Option #1: Sit next to someone that you have never met before

Option #2: Sit with your voice part: sopranos – olive chairs, altos – white chairs; tenors- blue chairs; basses – black chairs

Option #3: Sit next to a friend of your choice

Option #4: Sit in a group of three, including one person you know well and one person you know not so well

Option #5: Sit with your voice part: Sopranos - white chairs, altos - olive chairs, tenors and basses- blue and black chairs

Option #6: Sit in mixed position: you are not to be near anyone that sings your voice part.

Table 4: Rehearsal Seating Arrangement for Choices

Early in the year, I used the various seating arrangements to build a sense of community, as well as develop the overall sound of the choir during our warm-up activities. Students completed their reflective activities while in the seating arrangement for the day, chosen based upon the needs of the choir that were determined by participant observations and check-in/check-out sheets. Chairs were arranged by color groupings to create a visual and spatial association with sections of the classroom, and with voice parts. Seating arrangements were posted on the board for students to view as soon as they entered the room, in order to allow students time to ease into the classroom setting and save time for rehearsal; seating arrangements were changed every other day.

Due to the student concerns over preparedness for the concert, I began to structure my rehearsals and seating with less attention on change and more attention on creating a comfortable, predictable rehearsal structure that would allow us to focus more on music preparation and less on where we sat in the classroom each day. I began to establish a rehearsal seating arrangement for the week that was part of our start of class, warm-up, and end of class repertoire run-through routine. I began to post my rehearsal plan on the board, which noted defined blocks of time for each piece of music, along with the goals for the day for that piece (for example, 8:15 – 8:30 a.m. Hallelujah Chorus: refine parts in mixed position).

The next visual cue to our rehearsal plan for each day was structured using the blackboard on the side of the room and a virtual blackboard on the internet known as a wikispace. Since increasing community, communication, and collaboration were key goals in the study, I thought that it was important for students to have continuous access to events, goals, performances, and music opportunities. I posted goals, events, announcements, music links, and rehearsal plans/schedules both on the board and on the wikispace daily. These postings began to serve as not only an organizational tool for all of us, but also as a means of communication and collaboration in planning, rehearsal ideas, and the overall goals and developments of our organization.

Culture of the Past

As the study progressed, I began to uncover the deep impact of the past culture of the choir on the ability to help or hinder the progress of our choir now. I began to uncover many underlying stigmas that I had not previously been aware of. Through the student check-in/check-out sheets, I began to observe an underlying trend in the responses to the weekly question: “What do you think we need the most work on?” I noticed a pattern of responses that showed an increased concern in how students were treating each other, indicating a feeling of harassment and lack of respect (see Table 3).

As a result of the reflections that I was observing on the check-in/check-

out sheets, I began to investigate some of the implications of past scheduling and experiences on the overall culture of the group, in an effort to uncover some of the underlying stigmas that I seemed to be hearing in conversations and that were then reflected on the check-in/check-out sheets. I began to investigate some of the history and past experiences of the choir members to gain understanding of the roots and hierarchy of the culture that was becoming so apparent and divisive within our group.

The schedule for my choir students is designed on a six-day cycle. Students can be scheduled to be in choir on odd days, even days, or both. Formerly, the students scheduled for choir on odd days (C Choir) were known as the Concert Choir. Their responses and interaction with me frequently left me with the impression that they believed they were somehow elite; however, their behavior and engagement certainly was not that of an elite choir at all. I recalled that my observations of them in the prior year were that of disrespect and disregard for their director, inappropriate rehearsal behavior, and a general aura of entitlement; they were the least engaged students in the choir. Based upon my observations from the previous year as the assistant director, I knew that the C Choir was the group that was going to be my biggest challenge. Due to the alterations that I was able to make in scheduling during the summer, this C Choir was now comprised of a mixed group of former choir members and new

members, but is predominantly former upperclassmen that participated in choir last year.

The group scheduled for choir on the even days was formerly known as the Patriot Choir; it was the underclassmen choir, which had all of the students that in past years were “not good enough” to be part of Concert Choir or were the students that just loved singing and wanted to be in choir every day. This year the participants in this group are primarily under classmen combined with some upperclassmen that signed up to have choir every day or could not get Concert Choir to fit into their schedule.

Each of the choirs had a catchy name that appeared on student schedules and delineated them as separate groups. My goal was to create one unified group that worked collaboratively together and respected each other: the Freedom Choir. Referring to the choirs as A Choir, B Choir, and C choir (based upon the days the students were scheduled) instead of their former names, Patriot and Concert, now began to serve a purpose far beyond just the ability to identify the groups of students that I had with me each day.

I began making obvious my lack of reference to the groups as anything but A choir, B Choir, and C choir, even going to the great extent of encouraging students to come up with names for the groups other than Patriot and Concert choir so that we could distinguish between the odd day group and the even day group. This was a great struggle, as it was very hard to communicate the goals of

each group without referring to the old names that were on their schedules and thus inciting the stigmas that went along with them.

As became apparent through further reflection activities, the freshman students, starting in the choir for the first time this year, were already aware of the old delineation before even entering the room. This delineation created problems throughout the study, in the form of student behavior and engagement. This proved to be yet another culture challenge for me to overcome in order to begin to rebuild the organization and engage the students as a unified community of learners.

I began to look at the make-up of these groups in comparison to the rosters of the groups from last year to see if I could figure out what was causing such conflict in each of the groups. I had convinced last year's director to just allow students to sign-up for either group and not worry about making what was the Concert Choir (now the C choir) an elite group. Students were complaining that they were being put in study halls instead of in choir because it fell on the wrong day for the choir they were selected to be involved in. In the past, this had created a division between the two groups and the stigma that the even day choir, Patriot Choir, was somehow less advanced than the odd day choir, Concert Choir. Little did I know that despite my purposeful lack of reference to either of those groups by their original names of Patriot and Concert, the stigmas that were attached with each were embedded in the culture of the group. The names still appeared on the

student schedules and the hierarchy of importance in the groups and the cliques of students within them was extremely evident. My quest to abolish the distinction between Pate Choir (even days) and Concert Choir (odd days) because of the attached stigma turned out to be much harder than I anticipated. However difficult, I realized that this stigma had to be broken in order to build a cohesive, collaborative, and successful choir organization. This former structure proved to be one of my biggest challenges to overcome in order to engage my students and create a unified organization of singers.

Reflective Process and the Six Day Cycle

As I prepared to move on to the next reflective activity, I began to identify the challenge that would become a continuous struggle throughout the inquiry process: the challenge of keeping my students on track and involved in all aspects of the reflective process. Our choir is scheduled on a six day rotating cycle. I have one group of students on odd days 1,3,5 – the odd day choir and another group of students on the even days 2, 4, 6 – the even day choir. As if that is not complex enough, some of those students I only see on odd or even days, some of them I see every day. In addition, some students go to band (odd days) and to orchestra (even days), which rotate on a 4 day cycle (see Figure 4).

One way that I dealt with the challenge of including all students in each step of the process was through a sorting process which I labeled: students that were with me every day as the “A” choir; students that were with me on even

days as the “B” choir; and students that were with me on the odd days as the “C” choir. Then, within those groups I identified my band/orchestra students (see Figure 4).

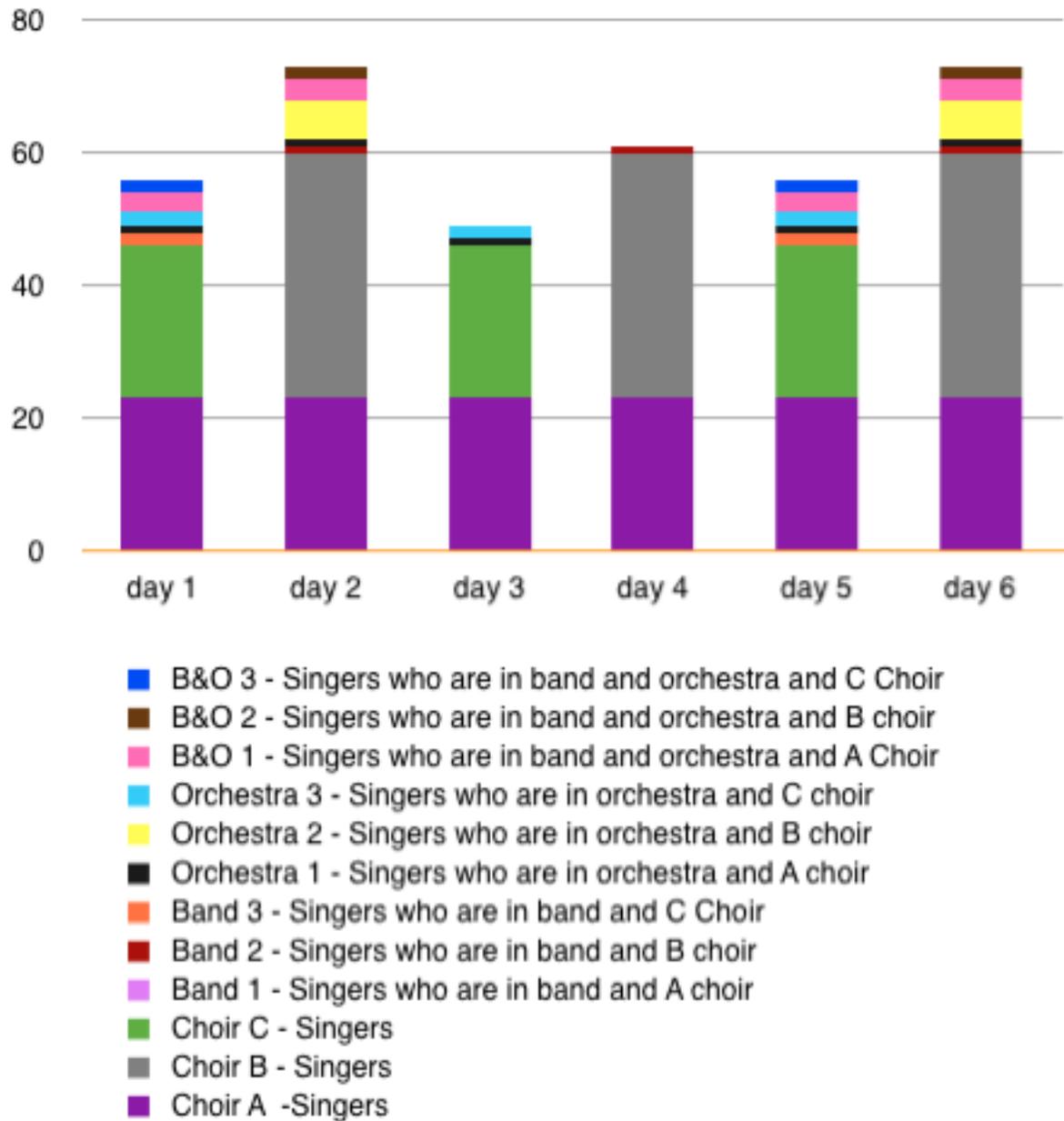


Figure 4: Rotation of Choir Students with Band and Orchestra within the 6 day cycle Indicates the days of the 6 day cycle that each choir student is present in the choir classroom. Note: *Each singer is represented only once and is assigned a color based upon the key above.* Total choir students enrolled = 102 students.

I found that I had to design interim activities for the “A” group that was with me every day so that they were not just sitting idle as the students that were not with me each day completed the reflective and collaborative activities. This became a real challenge as I noticed early on in the student responses on the check-in sheets that the repetition of activities for the students that were with me every day, the A choir, was boring them and thus they were becoming disengaged in the learning process. In some of my personal interviews, students noted that they were bored during that time, and that they did not like feeling as though they had to have busy work. They wanted to be singing, and the repetitive activities, whether reflective or musical, were taking away from that.

This became a struggle for me because the data were definitely illustrating that the open communication with my students on self-reflection was very meaningful and was certainly guiding my daily planning and practice. The challenge was to engage everyone, despite the number of times that I saw them in the week, so that each student had something to look forward to and strive for in each class period. The reflection required everyone’s input in order to attend to the needs of the entire community of learners, but there was now another level of scaffolding that needed to be constructed and required me to design a three-tiered lesson plan for each day: tier 1 - students that were with me every day, tier 2 – students that were with me every other day, and tier 3 – band and orchestra students.

This complicated structure of planning became extremely difficult to manage in the early stages and required consistent communication and feedback with my students. This feedback took place through check-in sheets, informal student interviews and conversations, and brief small group meetings that allowed me to gain student insight on their progress and then enabled me to adjust accordingly. It was through these student feedback sessions that it became clear to me that the students that were with me every day were becoming bored due to so much repetition, and the students that were in band or orchestra that I saw least frequently had no idea what was going on. I had to find a way to keep all students engaged, while at the same time not move so fast that the students that were in the other ensembles were not totally lost and feeling out of place on the days that they were with us.

It was then that the students that were with me every day, the A Choir, and I decided to begin working on a piece of music that featured them; the rest of the group worked on reflective and/or performance activities that were necessary for them to learn for the first time. The A choir group had demonstrated that they were the most engaged from the beginning and had also demonstrated a level of independence; I knew I could trust them to work on their piece in the rehearsal room right behind me while I was working with the remaining students.

As for the band and orchestra students, most of them are strong sightreaders and found it easy to read the music, but were struggling with putting

it in context. It was at this time that I began to further develop the wikispace page to include a link for recordings that the students could listen to and use to rehearse their parts. I began to post links to youtube recordings of our songs that the students could access and listen to from our webpage, as well as links of mp3 files of their individual parts. Thus, the students could link to the recordings and listen to them in context in order to be better prepared in rehearsal. I also began to work with some of the freshman band and orchestra students that were struggling with the repertoire after school every other week to help them with learning their part and applying it in context.

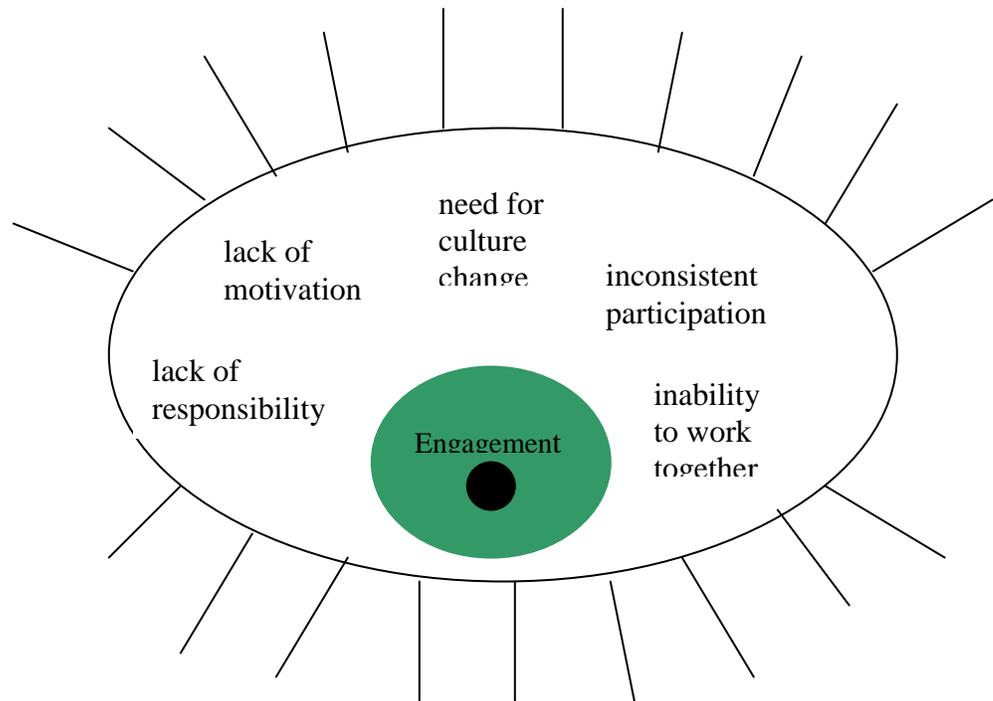
The Complexity of the Culture Challenge

Little did I know that the aforementioned culture issues that defined this group of students were going to be the very things that dictated how I proceeded with increasing engagement in the students in my choir. When I originally crafted and planned this study, I had an extensive and diverse array of strategies that I had wanted to implement throughout the study. It was at this early stage that I began reflecting upon my initial class observations, informal interviews, and the responses from the first two reflections (see Tables 1 & 2) that I realized that absolutely no strategy that I had researched on engagement was going to be effective until I first established a culture of learning and equality within the classroom. There was so much baggage that the students were carrying from previous years that there was no way that I was going to be able to penetrate that

to engage them until we established a framework within in which to operate as an effective organization.

As a result of the cultural issues that I observed, I began to reflect on key information that I derived from the check-in/check-out sheets (see Tables 1 & 2). I had to re-examine the check-in/check-out sheets with a focus on the culture of learning issues; I had to pay close attention to the connections between the student responses regarding feelings of disrespect, inclusiveness, and elitism and I had to analyze this data from the student's viewpoints (see Figure 5). In viewing the data, I focused on negative trends in the comments that would illustrate for me areas that most needed to be changed. I also began to focus on commentary in my field log that I thought paralleled the insights of my students (see Figure 5). I began to reread many of the check-in/check-out sheets that I had previously analyzed, but this time I looked at the responses both from my perspective, challenges frustrations, and from my student's perspectives, what they were thinking and feeling on a day-to-day basis.

Through the eyes of the teacher:



Through the eyes of the students:

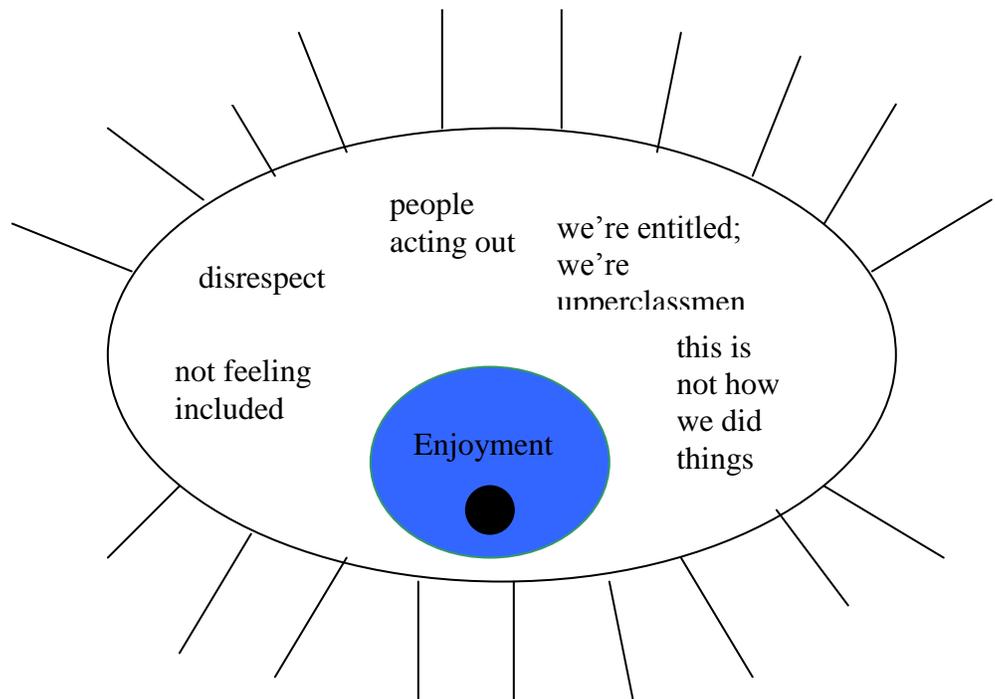


Figure 5: Class culture through the eyes of a teacher and through the eyes of the students

After this reflection, my strategies became: (a) keep them singing, they are here to sing, the more we use our voices the better, the less time they have to be distracted or to talk; (b) keep them on their feet literally and figuratively, get them out of their chairs and moving, and try to make each day different or unique in order to break the past practices of the group; (c) try to maintain a consistent rehearsal format so that there is a comfortable structure for our daily activities; and (d) continue to provide reflective and collaborative experiences through which we can share thoughts and evaluate our progress. Although these strategies ultimately proved to be successful, it was extremely difficult at first due to the past experiences of the students. I had to keep in mind that I was changing a lot of what they were used to and I was making these changes in a short period of time. Even though I had a vision as to how this new direction would lead us to success, the students only had what they knew choir was in the past.

The following excerpt from my journal response to Vygotsky's "Mind in Society," written during the second phase of my study clearly demonstrates the connection between the human ability to respond to and adopt changes in developmental processes, the type of change that I was requiring of my students.

I was very poignantly reminded that the changes in processes that I am instilling in my classroom are a process. I find myself uptight and impatient in that I am not making enough progress, not solely for the course of my study, but more importantly in the culture of learning that I

am trying to establish in my classroom. I am reminded that each time I perceive that my students have “got it” as far as my observations in engagement, leadership, and teamwork, that really they are just starting to develop the skills that I have begun to instill in them. I must remain aware of the process and that there will be ebbs and tides in my students’ development of our culture. If I can remain grounded in this reality, I will be more open to the advancements and progress that they display instead of so critical of what is not yet working.

Turning Point

Using my new understandings and design of the aforementioned four strategies, it became obvious that I needed to align my study plan to reflect the needs of my students. What I had in mind was not going to work, as the resistance that I was getting from students on simple rehearsal procedures and collaborative activities was astonishing. My most senior students remained grounded in the ideas of resisting new experiences because they were uncomfortable and my youngest students remained uncomfortable in their role or place in the group. The most graphic representation of the need for me to focus more directly on changing culture occurred during an unfortunate series of incidents during which I had to be absent from school. The following narrative of the events that took place during my absence are taken from my field log.

October 13, 2013

After 3 ½ weeks of laying the foundation for the new structure in my choral classroom with an emphasis on community, teamwork, leadership by example, and unity, I felt as though I was making a breakthrough in the old culture of the class, which was based upon power struggles, put downs, and chaos. I was greatly surprised and upset when I had to be out of school due to being sick and then my baby girl becoming sick for 3 days. By the 3rd day of having substitutes that demonstrated no leadership in my classroom at all, my students took control in leading rehearsals, or so they thought. Some students tried to step up and help out, but instead resorted to the same model they had been used to. They began screaming and yelling orders at the other students, at which time the students responded with like behavior, and the same chaos and disarray ensued as I had observed the previous year. I was so disappointed and angry, so upset that my leadership and my model had not been enough for them to act differently. I began to question whether I was really changing them at all and whether or not the structure of what I was doing would really make any difference. The reality of this seriousness of the situation became even more evident when I got an e-mail message from my department head questioning my unorthodox practices of building the program. This e-mail was accompanied by a list of “considerations” that I should make in my teaching to prevent this type of behavior, indicating

that my classroom structure was lacking and therefore created this problem in my absence. I wish I had read Freire in the midst of this event as perhaps I would have framed my next step in a less personal, more process oriented response. The reality was that my students were beginning to experience things that are different, but they were not able to act within the context of the new structure when situations similar to those of the past occurred. We had only just begun; I realized that it would take time, practice, and further experiences to shape them so deeply that they can act appropriately in my absence.

Upon returning from my absence, I implemented a reflective activity with the students during which I asked: What would you like to tell me about what happened when I was absent? How did you contribute to it in a good or bad way? Over the years, I have not found it helpful to react to inappropriate behavior of my students in a simply punitive way. I have learned that there is always a story behind the behavior and that I cannot change my students' behavior until I have first heard the story. It is through their stories that I was able to get to the heart of the problem, then reflect upon what I learned and thus deliver the most appropriate instruction, consequences, or necessary restructuring within my classroom (see Table 5).

Choir Teacher Absence Event Survey Responses

Questions asked: What would you like to tell me about what happened when I was absent? How did you contribute to it in a good or bad way?

Student Participants: A, B, and C Choir

Predictor of Change Factors	Student Responses
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>kick out the people who can't behave</i> - <i>people were getting upset and giving attitude to everyone</i> - <i>people wouldn't cooperate</i>
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>there was a large amount of talking and disrespect</i> - <i>everyone was yelling and talking</i> - <i>I took over control of the men as a section leader to help</i> - <i>many people of all grades were talking back</i> - <i>some underclassmen were being very rude</i>
Beliefs About Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>the idea to move forward seemed to completely stop</i>
Classroom Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>overall there was much confusion and chaos</i> - <i>people tried to take over and were rudely controlling</i> - <i>the leaders were really trying to help</i>
Self-Perception	<p><i>(no indications)</i></p>

Table 5: Student reflection upon behaviors during teacher absence.

As I reflected upon this incident and the student responses, I quickly realized that I did not have in my plan a process by which to teach the students how to behave. I found it interesting that the student responses reflected upon what everyone else was doing, but did not reflect upon their individual role in the problems that occurred. There were no responses in the self-perception category. It became evident that I had to redesign my plan to incorporate a building process for teaching the students how to just simply respect each other and me as their leader before I could even begin to tackle increasing their engagement. In reflecting upon the incidents during my absence, a quotation from Napoles (2006) comes to mind,: “What teachers do not spend time teaching is sometimes as important as what they do spend time teaching” (p. 11). Clearly my role in increasing student engagement had to expand beyond the world of teaching students to be engaged and successful in music and encompass teaching them skills that would help them to be successful in simply working together and in identifying their role in that process.

It was already October and the rebuilding process felt painfully slow as it was; all I kept thinking was: “How am I going to address the issue of culture change in my classroom? How will I be able to address the necessary culture change and successfully complete my study?” My original assumption was that simply by my modeling of behaviors, rehearsal practices, and leadership that the students would pick up on my cues and thus begin to shape their own behavior.

The disconnect between my thought process and reality became very evident in my next implementation, during which I asked students to comment on what it means to lead by example or “Be the change that you want to see.” (Appendix P) It was through my analysis of these responses (see Figure 6) that it became apparent to me that the students who were already demonstrating engagement in our class, responded indicating that they were responsible for their own motivation and thus should help lead others to be well behaved and motivated. The responses from the students who were already disengaged were solely focused on their role as how it applied to them getting what they wanted in life. Even in “the choir” section of this reflection, the disengaged students responses focused only on them and never related anything to their influence or contribution to the choir as a whole.

“Be the change you want to see.” Responses

Questions asked: What do you think this quote means? How do you think it applies to you personally? In choir?

Student Participants: A, B, and C choirs

Engaged Learners

Disengaged Learners

- *try to do my best no matter what I'm doing and always try to do the right thing*
- *be a leader and set an example*
- *have to be respectful, I want the choir to be respectful*
- *you gotta change for the change to happen*
- *get your goals*
- *I have to be a good role model*
- *encouraging others to sing out and see their change*
- *set examples for others*

- *I have goals but not enough motivation or persistence*
- *improve attitude*
- *do the change you want to do*
- *I have to be willing to change*
- *stop thinking about what I need to change and actually change it*
- *follow my dreams and work hard*
- *if I want good grades I have to work hard to get them*
- *I don't know*
- *personally it applies to me so I can change the way I run things in choir*

Figure 6: Be the change you want to see student reflections.

(Engaged learners were classified as those students with 5 or more positive student engagement comments on participant observations. Disengaged learners were classified as students with 5 or more negative student engagement comments on participant observations.)

At last, I found the disconnect; in order to engage every student in the choir, I must help my disengaged students identify with the group, and thus see themselves as part of a bigger entity. I had to find a way to help them identify with the group more personally and see that their behavior and contributions would make a difference on the group as a whole; in other words, choir is more than just about their individual needs. It was clear that the disengaged students were missing some of the most rewarding and beneficial aspects of our experiences due to their lack of connection and ability to see themselves as having an effect on the overall performance of the group. I set out to modify my plan in an attempt to build an effective learning culture, one student at a time; changes that I made to my original plan included: (a) get the students involved in aspects of the rehearsal process by inviting them as leaders in the warm-up processes of rehearsal, (b) create a protocol for student assessment and self-critique that identifies strengths and weaknesses in every student's individual performance and group effort.

The first part of the new additions to my plan focused solely on getting more students involved in the learning process. I realized that I had to establish a comfort level but that I also had to get the disengaged students actively involved in the rehearsal processes of our class. The first part of this plan began with inviting students to help lead part of warm-up. As we were continuing to refine

our rehearsal format, we established the first 15 minutes after morning announcements were to be dedicated to a solid warm-up. The format of our warm-up began with a rhythmic component that focused on using stretching and vocalizing on various vowel-consonant combinations first in unison and then in various sections. This was combined with a variety of physical movements used to accompany the rhythmic components to get the students active and energized first thing in the morning. I began to select student leaders to come down to the front beside me to lead each of the sections in the repetitive rhythmic and physical components of the warm-up, to keep them going as I altered the rhythmic and kinesthetic activities for another section of students. At first, I selected students that I knew would be good leaders and role models on the activity, and then I began to select random students, mixing those students who are most often disengaged with the students who were identified as leaders in the group. Interestingly, the students who were normally disengaged turned out to be some of my best leaders in incorporating enthusiasm and unity in the sections they were leading. I noticed as this started to become more of our daily practice that some of my normally disengaged students began to volunteer to lead the group.

The second part of the redesign of my plan focused on making connections between student performance achievement and self-critique. My thinking was that if we clearly define what the expectations are for each member of the choir individually then we will begin to look and act like that model. I

began to design a set of standards to be used in a checklist rubric assessment that would allow each student to see how they were achieving based upon my observations and then provide feedback and meet individually with me to discuss their progress. In order to encourage ownership of this new assessment and engagement tool, I began the process with an informal survey completed in small groups where students were to brainstorm what they thought the individual expectations for each member of the choir should be, in order for our choir organization to succeed as a whole. . Students were asked to list items that they think should be part of our choir goals, rules, and procedures in order to make choir a fun and beneficial experience.

After completing the brainstorm in small groups, the brainstorm sheets were then turned over to a group of students that had expressed interest in working with me on improving our policies and procedures; we worked together to create the standards and expectations for a successful choir student that we would then follow. During this collaborative process, the students began to meet regularly as a small team and with me to draft appropriate goals and objectives based directly upon the input that was provided from the brainstorm sheets that all choir members put together. I then took the student goals and aligned them with the curriculum objectives for the course to create the components of what was eventually to become our new choir goals for success. Unfortunately this process

was not concluded by the end of the study, and the goals and objectives were still being designed.

Portrait of an Engaged or Disaffected Learner

The next implementation that I began in my study was observational. I began noting rehearsal behaviors and levels of engagement through the use of participant observation notes. Upon reflecting on those observational notes, I found that there were certain key students who were factors in motivating or demotivating the progress of the entire group. Through the process of charting observed rehearsal behaviors, student comments, and observations from teacher-student conversations and interactions I identified four key students: Pierre, Angelica, Veronica, and Manuel. Each of these students were seniors who were involved in choir all four years. I chose these students due to information gained from my participant observations. Each of these four students either engaged or disengaged a large component of the group based upon their behavior, engagement, attitude, or comments on any given day.

Pierre is actively involved in all of the music programs at the school and is an upbeat person with some significant personal challenges in his life that he sometimes brings into his interactions in the classroom. He wears his emotions on his face and gives a clear indication when he walks in the room as to how his day is going, which he then transfers to every aspect of his performance for that day. The students look to Pierre for reinforcement, leadership, and for

entertainment as he often takes on the role as the funny guy and the distracter during rehearsal, despite the fact that he is very serious about singing and performing and is one of the best vocalists in the group. Pierre has been a student that is often willing to meet with me individually and discuss how to improve the choir and make things better; however, when he is in the group rehearsal setting, he distances himself from any opportunity to support or go along with anything that I am doing; he uses the time to make jokes, tell stories, or visit with friends.

The second student that I identified is Angelica. Angelica is very serious about music and music performance. Angelica spends a lot of her personal time working on contemporary voice and piano solo repertoire. She is very open to talking about her performance goals and the things that she thinks would make the group better. She is always actively involved in our rehearsals and she is often willing to step up as a student leader.

The third student that I identified was Veronica. Veronica is a student who is very open about her suggestions, disapprovals, and support for anything that we do in choir. She has been a member of choir all four years, and although she is not one of the strongest vocalists in the group, she is always excited to sing. Veronica spends her rehearsal time between talking in short bits with friends to being totally involved in what we are doing. She often likes to meet after class to give her debriefing and suggestions from the day and is very open about stating what she thinks is great and what she thinks is unacceptable.

The fourth senior that I chose is Manuel. Manuel tends to be the calming force in the choir. He does not say much, but when he speaks it is with authority and conviction. He is on task most of the time and is one of our best singers. He is always helpful and willing to lend a hand or input if asked or if he disapproves of something, and he is always extremely respectful. When Manuel speaks out or asks about something, the whole choir gets quiet as they seem to see him as the voice of reason, and if something concerns him or if he offers a suggestion, it is something for all to pay attention to. Manuel is also a student who has voiced privately to me on frequent occasions that he believes I should just kick out the students who do not do what they are supposed to do, as opposed to try to get them on board and change their behavior.

At this point in the study, I began to conduct informal student interviews with each of the key students that I observed. The questions that I focused on for each interview over the course of the study were derived from the reflection and check-in/check-out sheets of each of the four key students. The opening question for each student was the same; the follow up questions were appropriate for inquiry regarding their reflective response and check-in/check-out sheets. I created portraits of each student from my observations and conversations early in the study, later in the study, and at the end of the study (see Figures 7-10). The guiding questions at the early part of the study focused on the students like or dislike of the things we were doing in choir. The guiding questions at the later

part of the study focused on each individual students role or contributions to the group. The end of the study guiding questions focused on the individual progress and progress of the group that each student observed. These four students became the guiding force behind the measurement of our progress.

PIERRE

Early in the study:

I like choir, I just don't like some of things you do, I mean, it's not my place to tell you what to do, you are the teacher.

Later in the study:

I kind of fool around, I just find some things are funny... I sometimes get uncomfortable or something is bothering me and so I just make jokes and stuff but I want to sing and do well.

End of the study:

I think I've gotten better. I haven't been here much because I have a lot of stuff right now, so I'm not sure I am thinking of changing my major to music for next year though.

Figure 7: Portrait of Pierre

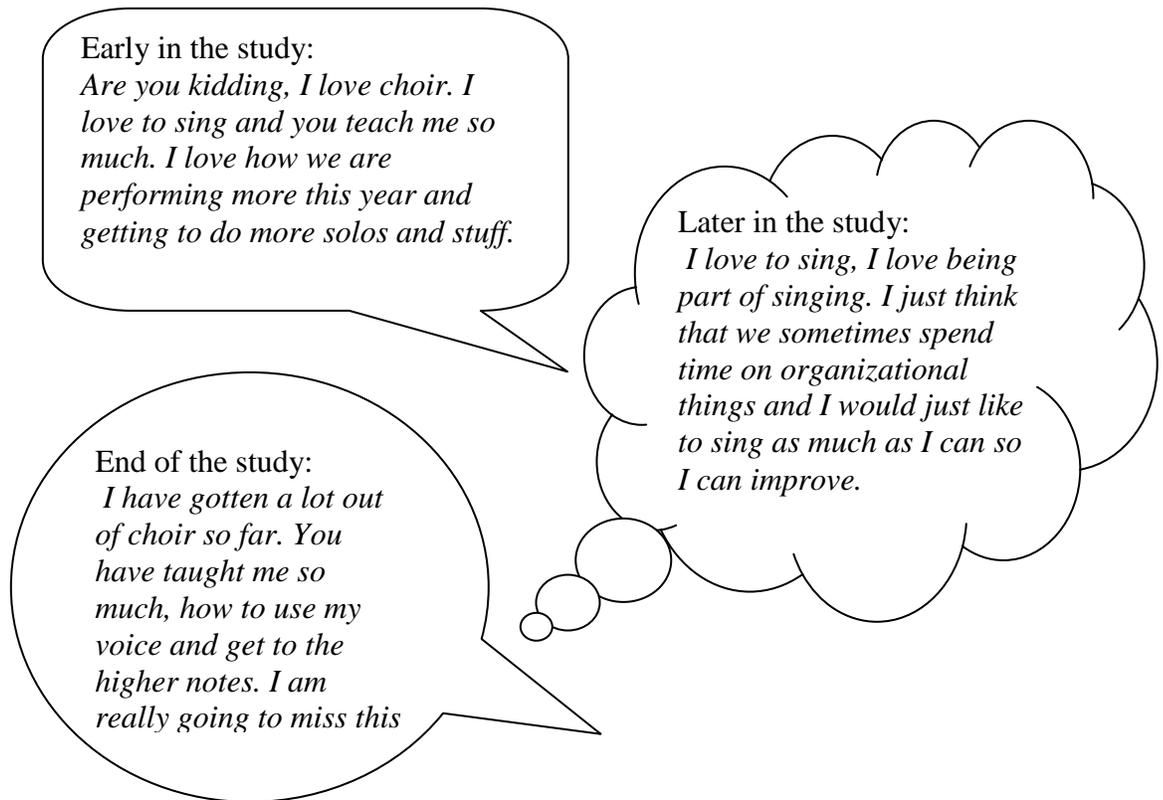
ANGELICA

Figure 8: Portrait of Angelica

Veronica

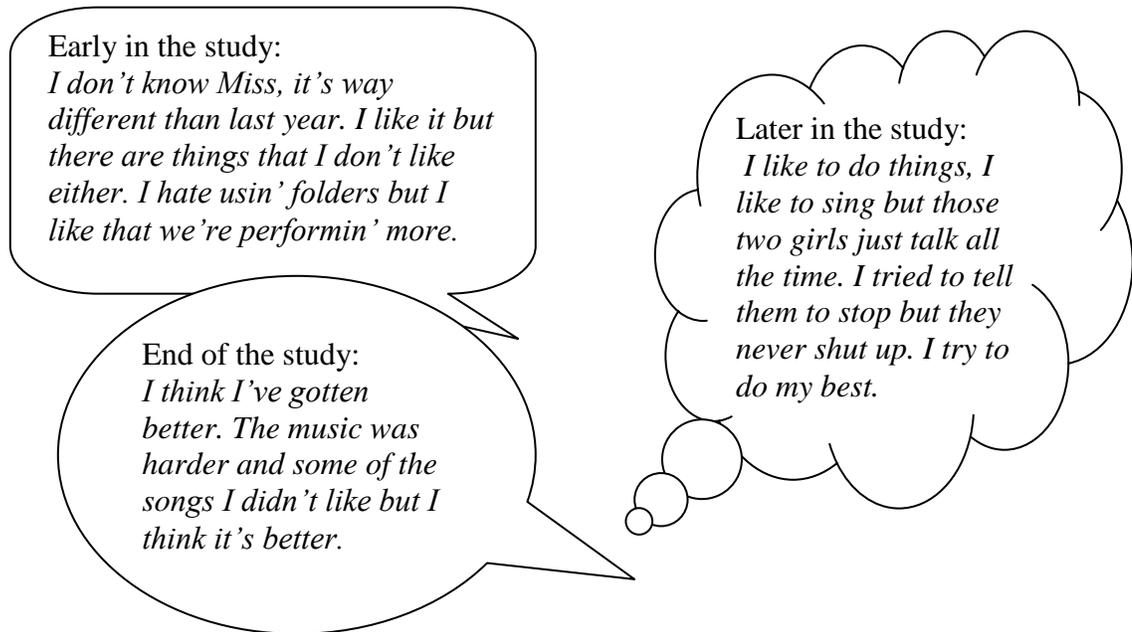


Figure 9: Portrait of Veronica

M A N U E L

Early in the study:

I think that we need to stay focused on the music. There are too many people not doing what they should be and you should just get rid of them.

Later in the study:

I don't know, you are the teacher I just need to do what you tell me to.. I think that we should just spend our time on music for the concert.

End of the study:

I still think that we don't spend enough time on just doing concert music. The small group stuff doesn't work unless you are rehearsing us, people can't do stuff on their own.

Figure 10: Portrait of Manuel

Open minded, open hearted, open for suggestions. As I began to investigate the very distinctive aspects of my students, I began to uncover some of the trends that I was able to identify as the driving force behind my progress or success in the study. The following is an excerpt from my field log that describes my insights:

October 22, 2012

Just this past week I found myself in awe of some meaningful insights that my students brought to me through some very casual one-on-one or small group conversations. I am reminded that if we as teachers just take the time to ask the questions and then listen, really listen to what our students have to say, they will be our best tools. I am amazed at how much my students are willing to sit with me to plan, program, and troubleshoot the reorganization of this choir. They have a personal investment, they are engaged in the process, and it is the day-to-day aspects of our operation that we must continue to improve. I am stunned at the wonderful ideas and insights that they have in order to improve and they are stunned that I am actually willing to listen. One of my students mentioned that one thing that is challenging the students is that they are not used to a teacher giving them ownership and a say in how class runs; they are not used to having a voice and then being expected to hold up their end of the deal. I found this astonishing and saddening.

I began to realize that if I scaffold my teaching in such a way that encourages student ownership in the planning process, not just in student feedback, then I would be much more likely to engage my students on an intrinsic level. Thus, it was not just important to collect student responses and feedback, but what I did with that feedback that became essential. In the early part of the study I was collecting feedback and changing the way in which I was teaching, hoping that by modeling appropriate rehearsal practice, rewarding and praising good technique and engagement, that the students would follow suit. What I discovered was that this only happens to a point. In order to fully engage, I had to share my own thoughts and reflections out loud with the students and engage them in planning the implementations for change. When I began to do this the real change began to happen.

Put to the Test

The real test came in early December as we were feverishly preparing for our winter concert. Due to all of the restructuring and the new opportunities that I introduced as a means of increasing student performance and understanding of the qualities of a great choir, we were behind a bit in preparation for the Winter concert. The student goal setting check-in/check-out sheets seemed to be filled with concerns about not knowing the music well enough, not having enough time to prepare, and about not being ready for the concert. I found it interesting that the student check-in/out sheets were also filled with comparisons to the previous

years, during which the students worked only on music for the Winter Concert from May (they began rehearsal of this music at the end of the prior year) through December; they never did any other performances, field trips, or community events. Interestingly, the students had been frustrated that in year's past they only worked on music for Winter Concert. They were pleased with the new activities and performances this year; however, they began to see the result of their lack of focus and cooperation in our daily rehearsals. They began to realize that they had to be working more effectively during our class time, there were no breaks; they could not have an excellent concert without coming together as a group. At this point I had modified our rehearsal plans in several different ways to maximize time. I began to define time slots for each segment of the rehearsal plan, focusing on 5 minutes for announcements and business, 15 minutes for warm-up, and then defined time slots for each piece. When posting the rehearsal plan on the board, I continued to include the goal for each piece of music. I also modified the rehearsal plan so that rehearsal goals were limited to one goal per piece of music, per day; past rehearsal plans had included multiple goals for each piece of repertoire. I also decided to implement a student reflection check-in sheet that encouraged the students to look at all the accomplishments that we achieved this year with the hope that they could see that our progress really did not compare to last year at all (Appendix K). The reality became that no matter what I did, our

rehearsals could not be totally productive until all of us were focused on the same goal.

I found myself struggling at this time as well. My concerns for the concert were on preparedness, but I also found myself drowning in worry over the imposed expectations of the public and my colleagues as to what the Winter Concert was supposed to be, traditions that I was told were part of my job requirements. As I found myself flooded with pressure, I was also unduly placing that upon the students, fearful of the unknown, worried if we would be ready. My fear and stress combined with their fear and concern resulted in a stressful dynamic for all of us, but for the first time we were all clearly focused on the same goal, having a great concert.

Due to my concerns and the concerns of my students, I scheduled a choir retreat, another new change. The choir retreat was a night that all of us would come together for five hours for the purpose of preparing for the concert and singing together as a full choir. We had only sung together in performances thus far, never in practice before this time. Since the A Choir, B choir, and C choir had never sung before and all of us were feeling the pressure of being prepared, I designed the evening to focus around collaboration and camaraderie. The goals of the retreat were: (a) finish teaching all individual parts on the combined choir pieces; (b) provide the chance for the choirs to sing together, work together, and blend for the first time; and (c) do something fun together that would take some of

the fear and stress out of our concert preparation. And so we spent the evening, old and young members combined, learning parts, singing on the stage together for the first time, and eating pizza while singing karaoke and getting to know members from the other groups that they had a chance to socialize with much before. The evening was a success, and we all left feeling a little more connected and a bit more prepared.

At this point in the study, there was not time for formal student reflective activities. The pressure of the concert was on, and our dress rehearsals were in the week ahead. It was at this point that the choirs came together. There was much to be done and many traditional things in the choreography of the concert that the public and administration expected from the concert. The students were forced to be involved and be leaders as I did not have any experience in how the processional, recessional, and staging of the concert was to be done. Although I worked with the choir the previous year, the former director did not include me in the planning or implementation of the concert structure. Therefore, I had done the best I could do to prepare us in diagramming the staging and placement, but the students had to lead us through. Although this made our dress rehearsal, which was supposed to be a walk through of the concert with lighting and uniforms, totally stressful and extremely difficult in the time frame we had, it forced everyone to be engaged and involved; everyone had to be working together or we would surely fall apart on the concert night that was just two days away. Despite

the fact that it was the worst dress rehearsal I had ever experienced in my life, much less led, I was amazed, and the feedback from the students who were appreciative and explained that even though it was challenging and difficult it was more practice in running through the concert than they ever had in a dress rehearsal before. For the first time they were coming together and were starting to be support each other in our common goals for success.

We Did It

Amazingly, after completing a dress rehearsal that was a total disaster in my frame of reference, the students pulled together through the use of our already established collaborative groups to achieve a concert of great success. We performed a 2 ½ hour concert filled with lighting effects, narration, child performers, solos, duets, dance, and large group pieces. My principal called it “a grand slam” for our first concert. We received many compliments and encouragement from the community, and many of the students and parents shared that it was the best Winter Concert they had seen at our high school in the last several years. The proof was there, collaboration was the key to increasing student engagement and student success. The new task would be to establish this without so much stress, hardship, and fear.

Upon completion of the program, we filled out a concert reflection (see Table 6) that focused on the accomplishments from the concert and the things that

we need to improve on. This feedback proved crucial in how we began to plan and structure our rehearsal and preparation for the next concert to come.

Post Winter Concert Reflection Responses

Questions: Please give your impressions and comments on our performance at the Winter Concert. How did the Winter Concert performance change your opinion of choir?

Student Participants: A, B, and C choir

Impressions and Comments

- *I think the concert went well. People really got together when they needed to. Although the distinction between the upper and lower classmen is trying to get erased, there are still some problems between them.*
 - *I felt that Friday night's performance was really successful. After the dress rehearsal we had I honestly wasn't sure whether or not the performance would fall apart and be nothing but a disaster. Honestly, it was quite the opposite.*
 - *The concert was a lot different than what I expected it to be. I thought it would not go as planned because of how the choir retreat went.*
 - *The concert on Friday was definitely much different than years past in a good and bad way. The best part was that we were extremely organized in moving..*
 - *I am feeling better about the future concerts*
 - *I was so proud of what we accomplished.*
 - *Well, we got through it, we didn't crash and burn. The show was pretty long and hectic.*
-

Opinions of Choir

- *The concert made me feel that everything you do is for a reason and in the long run it really helped. I still don't think that enough people are really serious about choir.*
 - *The concert didn't change my opinion of choir. It gave me a much more positive attitude on choir and I am very hopeful for the spring.*
 - *My opinion of choir is much different than the beginning of the year. Last night showed me that choir is capable of showing dedication to something.*
 - *We have gotten better at not talking so much. Our sound is okay, definitely better than the beginning of the year.*
 - *After hearing the way we sounded on Friday, I am proud to be in choir.*
 - *I was a little more confident*
 - *The concert did change my views. I saw what we can really do if we put our heart in it and "Believe"*
-

Table 6: Post Winter Concert Student Reflection

The Study Comes to a Close

Upon completion of the Winter Concert, I began to redesign my approach for the months ahead. With only four weeks remaining in the study observation period, and the winter break in the middle of that, I began to change my plans. I once again based upon the feedback that I had received from the choir members and the community. After reflecting upon the commentaries, I understood that our most successful experiences in the concert were directly connected to how involved the students were in the process. The areas, like the processional and recessional, where I had to rely on their leadership seemed to be some of the more polished aspects of the program. The solos and duets and small group numbers that required students to rehearse on their own as well as with me were those that appeared to be most polished and the most commented upon by the audience. And so there it was, involve the students in the process and they will succeed; creating ownership happens by engaging students in active performance experiences.

The next new step in involving the students in the process was to invite them to select music for the spring concert. Each choir was given two class periods to search, either in the music stacks or online, for songs that they wanted to do for spring. The students were given the theme, "A World of Rhythm," to guide their choices and they were to submit their selection via e-mail or in written form.

While beginning to plan for the spring concert, we continued preparing for our next performance, which was a recruiting assembly at one of our sister schools three days before winter break. This was our chance to show the incoming freshman students for next year what our choir was about and to encourage them to be members next year. This performance proved to be another example of the choirs coming together to create wonderful music and work towards a common goal. It served as a great way to end our first term together.

During this time between the concert and our break, I began to listen to each of the singers individually. My assistant director, who had been hired to join me in leading the choir, had noticed that many of the students had spoken to him about having trouble singing their voice part, so we decided to re-voice the choir. This time spent re-voicing opened up yet another important understanding for me. Many students verbally expressed how much they liked the time that was spent with them singing and figuring out their voice parts. After the winter break, as we began to learn new music, students expressed how they felt much more confident in singing their new parts because they were not straining or struggling to hit the notes, since they were re-voiced. Two very important understandings came from this implementation: (a) students are more engaged when they have a personal connection or personal attention from the teacher; they feel important and significant; (b) the level of student confidence on a task and the level of student engagement in a task are directly connected. I began to see students who were

previously disengaged during rehearsal asking to take their music home, get extra help with learning their part, and be actively involved in the rehearsal process.

Modeling for the Future

As the study came to a close, in the final week I was able to implement one more component of my plan. I had been working since the very beginning to travel with students to see other performing groups and to perform in select groups outside of our school. I observed that the students that had made the most progress in their engagement and music performance throughout the study were those that had experiences outside the of the school with music professionals that demonstrated what an excellent choir and excellent singing looks like and sounds like; they had excellent models beyond the choir in their school, which needed so much help. These students were inspired by what they could become instead of entrenched in how good they thought they already were.

Based upon this observation, I was able to hire a music professional for each group (odd day and even day) to come work with the students to improve their rehearsal and performance techniques. The last two days of the semester, the last days that I would have these exact students before their schedules changed again, we had the chance to work with a music professional that trained us in correct posture and breathing technique and a professional that trained us in the singing techniques of African spiritual music. Both of these experiences would

serve as the launch pad for our rehearsal behaviors and activities in preparation for our future concerts.

The Coda

In review of the journey of my study, I am most fortunate to have had the challenges and successes that were part of the process; the challenges that I faced forced me to look at things differently, to take a different direction, and to focus deeply on each of my students as individuals. Without addressing the concerns and impressions of each of my students, we would not have been able to achieve anything as a choir. My experiences throughout this study have taught me the importance of including all students as key players in their learning process, for when we include them as active participants in the planning and structure of their learning, we engage them at a higher level; it is then that both students and teacher can achieve the most success and it is then that the framework for all future learning experiences is formed.

Data Analysis

Analysis is described by Wolcott (2009, p. 29) as that which “follows standard procedures for observing, measuring, and communicating with others about the nature of what is ‘there,’ the reality of the everyday world as we experience it.” This definition of analysis is a clear reflection of the processes by which I observed, examined, measured, and made sense of my data throughout this study.

The use of a variety of data sources proved crucial throughout the study. Each data source provided insights in unique and powerful ways that encouraged change in my practice and planning that ultimately help increase my students’ success. Throughout my evaluation of the multiple data sources, I engaged in frequent reflection and analysis utilizing methods that encouraged me to look at each student response from a different perspective. By defining clear objectives for my reflection of each implementation, I was able to begin to understand the data from a variety of viewpoints, which ultimately led me to greater understanding of the data that I had collected.

Field Log Analysis

I used my field log on a daily basis to record observations, reflections and insights that I gleaned from my data. Data were coded and analyzed on a regular basis, using key terms from student engagement research literature. I then used these key terms to create a coding index, which allowed me to sort and group data

efficiently in a variety of categories for further analysis. The use of key terms and the coding index provided a cohesive focus for the analysis of my data and helped to create cohesive links between the many observational notes, student work samples, and insights that were part of the study.

Student Work Analysis

Student work was analyzed throughout the study in the form of student check-in/check out sheets and informal written surveys. Check-in/check-out sheets and written surveys were conducted on a regular basis: weekly at the beginning of the study, bi-weekly near the middle of the study, and monthly or following major events at the end of the study

Upon collection of all student work, I reviewed the data utilizing the following steps: (a) read and analyze for relationship to objectives; (b) read and analyze charting common themes, phrases, and student insights on a tally sheet; (c) read and analyze focusing on the most predominant themes to develop an overall statement; and (d) chart the frequency of key responses based upon Skinner (2008) elements of student engagement predictors of change to determine how overall themes reflect the opinions of the entire group.

Participant Observation Analysis

To gain a better understanding of the multi-dimensional connections between the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of each of my students engagement, I gathered data in the form of participant observations. I used a note

pad and post it notes to write down observable behaviors, examples of student talk, and student comments that occurred during rehearsals. I then entered these observational notes into my field log and wrote reflective journal entries to draw connections and analyze my observations in order to determine effectiveness and plan for each stage of the study.

Student Interview Analysis

Student interviews were conducted with four senior students early in the study, later in the study, and at the end of the study, as determined by my observations from student work, participant observations, or requests from students to meet with me regarding our progress. Upon completion of the interviews, I placed my observational notes in my field log. Interview data were coded and charted according to common terms and themes from the coding index and were analyzed for changes or developments in each students progress.

Teacher Journal Analysis

Complications in schedule and mix of students, over the course of a six day cycle dictated the use of my teacher journal for organizational, planning, and analysis purposes. Reflections and notations were completed in my teacher journal a minimum of two times per week throughout the study. My teacher journal was then coded and analyzed at periodic intervals throughout the study using the common themes and key terms from my coding bins (see Figure 17).

Codes, Bins, and Themes Analysis

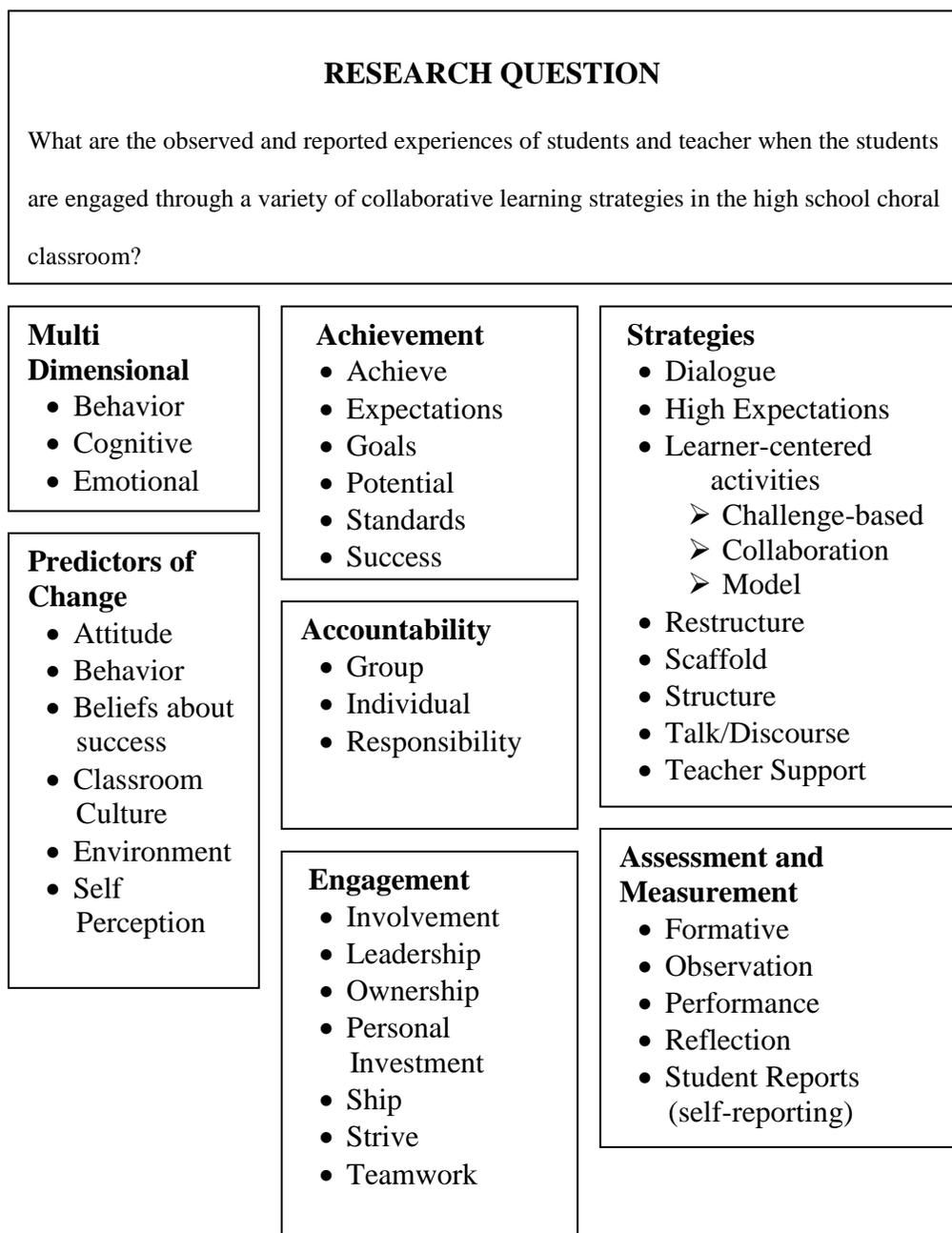


Figure 11: Codes and Bins

Upon analyzing the terms that fell within my bins, I then developed theme statements (see Figure 8) that illustrated the overall insights and findings that were a result of my study.

THEME STATEMENTS

1. The successful implementation of collaborative work groups requires the establishment of a culture that is supportive of collaboration behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally.
2. Student attitude, behavior, and beliefs about success are significant predictors of change in the implementation of any new strategy that involved collaboration.
3. It is necessary to use a variety of strategies to increase student engagement and these strategies must be implemented based upon student need and feedback as opposed to simply implemented on a pre-determined schedule.
4. Student accountability can only be increased by modeling, scaffolding, and training students to be accountable to themselves and to the group through a sense of ownership and responsibility.
5. Student engagement is increased through the development of positive experiences that foster involvement, leadership, ownership, personal investment, and teamwork.
6. Student achievement is directly affected by the level of student engagement, which must be directly tied to clearly defined goals and expectations in order to achieve student success.
7. Student achievement and engagement can be measured using a variety of tools that emphasize observation, performance, and reflection; all measurement tools must incorporate reflection and feedback from both students and teacher in order to be effective measurement tools.

Figure 17: Theme Statements

Findings

As I analyzed the data from my study, I observed several themes that began to emerge. The following themes illustrate the insights and understandings that I gained on increasing student engagement in my classroom.

The successful implementation of collaborative work groups requires the establishment of a culture that is supportive of collaboration behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally.

Collaborative learner-centered strategies cannot be effectively implemented in a classroom unless there is an already established culture of learning that includes respect of others, open communication between teacher and students, and cognitive and emotional support. Many of the cultural problems within the classroom became apparent to me as a result of the student check-in/check-out sheet responses and the participant observations that I conducted throughout the study. The check-in/check-outs provided a consistent flow of communication and feedback between me and my students that allowed me to be able to scaffold my plans in order to best support my students needs.

The check-in/check-out sheets made apparent to me the many barriers that were preventing the success of our choir as a result of classroom culture. The past history and culture of the group created tremendous strain on the new members of the choir, which was causing both groups to not enjoy their choir experience. This consistent strain in the dynamic and ability to collaborate among members of the

group was clearly impeding our ability to perform successfully. It was through the check-in/check-out sheets, participant observations, surveys, and interviews that I was able to clearly identify specific problems in the class culture. By using these collaborative strategies that allowed me to engage in a flow of dialogue between my students and myself I was able to begin to understand some of the cultural problems of the group and then take appropriate steps to fix them.

Although extremely useful in providing necessary insights through the course of my study, the use of the check-in/check-out reflective communication strategies also became one of my biggest challenges. The class time that needed to be allotted for my students completion of these activities, with thoughtful and focused consideration, detracted from our time spent singing. I found it very hard to involve all students in this reflective process due to our schedule, and found myself overwhelmed with lesson planning for the purpose of reflection instead of staying true to our purpose, which was to be able to perform successfully as a choir. I found the check-in/check-out sheets to be very useful and informative in the beginning of the study in gaining insight about the attitudes and perspectives of my students. As the study progressed, I found it to be more effective to give the check-in/check-out and reflective surveys only on an as needed basis, prior to or following important events or changes in class culture that appeared to necessitate student reflection.

Student attitude, behavior, and beliefs about success are significant predictors of change in the implementation of any new strategy that involves collaboration.

The relationship between previous student experiences and the implementation of new collaborative strategies strongly determines the level of success of the implementation. If students are not comfortable with their individual ability to perform in a new environment, be it a new classroom structure or with a new group of peers, their ability to work collaboratively will be compromised. This became apparent to me through the insights that I gleaned specifically from the student check-in/check-out sheets.

The growth and developments of my students' attitudes, behavior, and beliefs became apparent throughout the study as I compared data from early check-in/check-out sheets with data from later check-in check outs (see Figure 13).

**Positive Student Responses of Increased
Engagement Progress Monitoring
Based upon Skinner (2008) indicators**

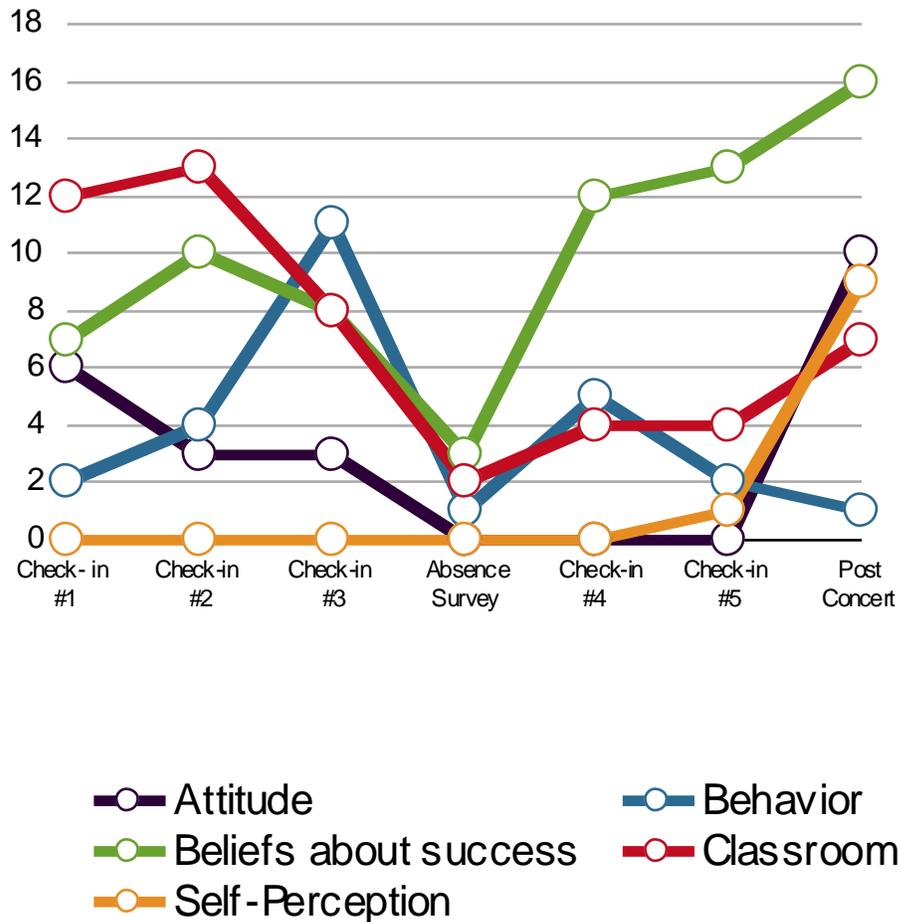


Figure 13: Positive responses from student check-in/check-out sheets based upon Skinner(2008) student engagement predictors of change. (Represents responses of A choir students.)

Progress in student attitude, beliefs about success, and classroom culture appeared to be directly related to each other in that they followed similar trends in the rise and fall of positive student responses. Of great interest in my analysis was the spike in positive attitude and self-perception at the end of the study, when most students felt that they had achieved great success after the Winter Concert. Based upon this analysis, I was able to conclude that student attitude and beliefs about success are linked to changes in classroom culture. As our choir began to work together in a positive and productive way students began to achieve greater feelings of success and improved attitude. After the successful performance of our concert, students began to experience a positive self-perception of success as it related to then individually and as a group. Thus, positive student attitudes about success demonstrate an increase in student engagement.

It is necessary to use a variety of strategies to increase student engagement, and these strategies must be implemented based upon student need and feedback as opposed to simply implemented on a pre-determined schedule.

Student responses from the check-in/check-out sheets, surveys, and informal interviews throughout this study illustrated clear evidence that the use of reflective and collaborative activities are helpful in gaining understanding and insight into student attitudes and the possible causes of certain student behaviors and class culture issues in the classroom. However, as indicated by student

responses, the strategies utilized cannot detract from the overall goals and objectives in the classroom, which in our case was the goal of music performance.

I learned from this experience that using the check-in/check-out sheets and reflective student activities are purposeful, but that I must begin to explore vocal performance strategies that might accomplish a similar goal of building a cohesive class culture and increasing student engagement. I feel as though I gained important understandings and will continue to use the reflective components of this study to scaffold learning and encourage collaboration and feedback in my classroom, but I must find other strategies that allow students to openly express their opinions and observations without detracting from the performance related components of our classroom. The students are there to perform and although written reflection is good, there must be other strategies that can be similarly effective in building a classroom community of learners.

Student accountability can only be increased by modeling, scaffolding, and training students to be accountable to themselves and to the group through a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Increasing student accountability in my choir continues to be an ongoing struggle and one that I believe was perhaps the least affected by this study. Although I feel as if the collaborative reflection activities and the beginning stages of student inquiry groups to create goals for success were very helpful, there is still a great divide between the students who feel accountable to the

improving the group as a whole (my most engaged students) and the students that do not feel accountable for their behavior, leadership, or involvement at all (my least engaged students). Despite my use of teacher modeling, student modeling, and reflective strategies, there is more work for me to do. In analyzing the four key learners in this study, I observed that there was some small progress in their attitudes and engagement in our class; however, those that made the most progress in their reflection and thinking were those that developed the most ownership over their learning and the success of the choir as a whole.

I plan to go back to begin a more extensive review of music engagement literature to try to find better strategies other than teacher modeling to engage my students on the deep intrinsic level necessary for them to change. The group did make progress in their ability to work together as a whole, but there is more work to be done in order to effect my students individually.

Student engagement is increased through the development of positive experiences that foster involvement, leadership, ownership, personal investment, and teamwork.

In order to begin to engage students individually, they must attain ownership and personal investment in their work. Through the analysis of my field notes from the winter concert choir retreat, dress rehearsal, and winter concert reflections, I began to understand that in order to increase student engagement it is necessary for each student to achieve the feeling of success at a

level that creates a transformation in their thinking, attitude, and behavior. The students that responded to the Post Winter Concert Student Reflections indicating that they were pleased with the concert and that their opinion of choir had changed in a positive way because of that experience have demonstrated through my analysis of participant observations a higher level of engagement, ownership, and understanding of purpose within our choir. The students that have not demonstrated growth in engagement, ownership, or dedication to purpose are the students that either contributed very little in their reflective response or indicated that there was no change at all since the concert performance. The students that demonstrated the most growth were those that were most shocked by the fact that we were able to have a great concert despite how difficult the dress rehearsal was.

Through the insights gained from analyzing the post concert reflections and end of study interviews, I have discovered that student comfort and feelings of great success, not just little steps but great success, are integral in transforming student attitudes and future behaviors as they relate to increasing engagement.

Student achievement is directly affected by the level of student engagement, which must be directly tied to clearly defined goals and expectations in order to achieve student success.

After analyzing the feedback from my students' reflective responses in relationship to individual progress and achievement and that of the choir as a whole, I realized that the primary goal of increasing student success in music

performance must remain the central focus of all student engagement strategies. As the study progressed, this became more apparent to me after my analysis of check-in/check-out sheets in the mid-point of the study. The time taken to complete the reflective exercises was detracting from our progress in preparing for the concert and was the cause of stress and concern among my students. This concern manifested itself in poor behaviors during my absence and in a general undertone of discomfort among all of us.

My insights in understanding the direct need to tie our reflective activities to goals and performance success was a key point in causing me to redesign my rehearsal plan to include reflective activities in a more timely construct and in a way that was more directly related to the curricular goals of my classroom. Implementing reflective activities surrounding major events or occurrences in our progress proved to more effective after this was taken into account.

Student achievement and engagement can be measured using a variety of tools that emphasize observation, performance, and reflection; all measurement tools must incorporate reflection and feedback from both students and teacher in order to be effective measurement tools.

The reflective nature of this study proved more significant in creating a culture of learning and increased student engagement in my classroom than I was originally prepared for. Students and teacher must collaborate on classroom policies and procedures in order for them to be effective. The discussion and

collaboration that developed as a result of the student check-in/check-out sheets, interviews, surveys, and conversations became the driving force behind the study. The students and I worked together throughout this study to share ideas and establish a framework for positive learning and performance experiences. The reflective feedback and collaboration that we engaged in to design rehearsal plans, to create exciting choir activities, and to restructure our goals and objectives was meaningful and important in developing a positive class culture and belief in success. The most effective engagement strategies are those that are designed and implemented by collaborative teams of students along with their teacher. It is through this collaboration that students develop ownership and are therefore engaged in the learning process.

Next Steps

Since the conclusion of my study, I have been afforded the opportunity to observe increased success in our choir. In some ways I have found myself frustrated because I could not include the most recent success of the choir in the analysis of my study; however, I am so very grateful for all that I learned from the study that ultimately brought the growth of my choir to the point they are at today.

At the end of the study and the start of a new term the choir gained eleven new members. They joined the group because they had heard that it was a fun place to be and they liked what they saw in our winter concert. The addition of new members and the shift of student schedules created a new breakdown of the students that are in A choir, B choir, and C choir, band, and orchestra, and therefore created a new dynamic in our group. As we began to welcome new members, the old culture of the choir began to diminish even more.

With the implementation of our student designed policies, the dynamic has changed yet again. Students were now being assessed based upon the goals and characteristics that were directly linked to our curriculum instead of linked to student behavior. Students now have to take ownership over their own learning and engagement.

As I proceed and continue to move forward, I plan to continue to alter the design of my rehearsal plan to reflect the musical needs of my students, while at the same time encouraging thoughtful reflective activities. The feedback that I

gained from the reflective strategies used in this study, mainly check-in/check-out sheets and student surveys, was extremely valuable, but I must continue to review music engagement research literature in order to discover new strategies that can engage students in reflective thinking in a more musical way.

I am so very proud to see these changes occur, but I must indicate that the continued growth since the end of the study has occurred because I have continued the reflective, collaborative practices that I established through the course of the study. Although the process is incredibly challenging and often uncomfortable, the growth and understanding that the students and I gain from working together, talking to each other, and sharing our ideas and frustrations is essential. We all must continue to work together and to reflect on our practices and behaviors in order to continue to move toward increased success.

In hindsight, I often wish that I had managed the process better to provide more positive experiences for all the members of my choir. Although as much as I wish I had managed it better, the insights that I gained and the experiences that we shared are what has shaped us into the choir that we are now. These experiences are what we will continue to draw upon as we strive for success.

I feel as though this study has barely addressed all that still needs to be done to build the choir into what an excellent high school choir should be; however, I feel that the culture change has begun and thus there will be more opportunities for us to learn and grow from our future experiences.

If there is any advice that I can offer to other teachers that are striving to increase engagement in their classroom it is to take the time to implement reflective engagement strategies in your classroom Encourage students to communicate openly through reflective activities, whether through reflective writing, interviews, performances, or informal discussions. This experience has transformed my teaching and I am sure that I am a better teacher and a better choir director because of what I have learned. I am excited to continue to move forward toward a bright a promising future of success with my choir.

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Appendices**Appendix A****WELCOME TO CHOIR**

Please turn over and complete the activity on the back!

WELCOME TO CHOIR!

Name _____
Choir Days _____
(odd, even, or both)

Please complete the following activity.

Look at the wall in front of you and read the message before you.

What does this message mean:

for you?

for us as a choir/group?

Appendix B

CHOIR CHECK IN/ CHECK OUT

Name _____

Choir Section _____

Please answer the following:

What did you like most about our first class yesterday?

What did you like least?

Appendix C



WELCOME TO THE FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR 2012-2013



Welcome to the Freedom Choir! If you are a returning choir member Welcome Back! I look forward to an exciting year ahead and are happy to have the opportunity to work with you. Please complete the information below, including the attached student information sheet and return it to Mrs. Volpato.

Last Name

First Name

E-mail address _____ Cell Phone # _____

Voice Part _____ Days that you are scheduled for Choir _____

Name(s) of Parents/Guardians _____

Parent/Guardians e-mail address _____

Do you have a portable music listening device (i.e. mp3 player, ipod, cell phone, etc.)? _____

Can you access the internet from that device from anywhere (i.e. you don't have to be signed into a designated server to gain access to the internet)? _____

Please answer ONE of the following questions in the space below in order to help me get to know you better:

Name something that is important to you and describe why that is important.

Name one of your strengths and describe why you think it is a strength.

Name one goal that you have for yourself this year and how you think you might achieve it.

Name one important experience that you had in your life and how it changed you.

Please answer the following questions to help us plan for a successful year.

Name one thing you would like me to know about you.

What personal goals do you have this year?

What is one thing that you would like to accomplish in choir this year?

Appendix D

CHOIR CHECK IN/ CHECK OUT

Name _____

Choir Section _____

Please answer the following:

What do you think we need the most work on?

What goals should be included in next week's schedule?

What did we do well this week?

What should we improve upon next week?

Appendix E

CHOIR CHECK IN/ CHECK OUT

Name _____
Choir Section _____

Please answer the following:

What did you like most about our first week of choir?

What did you like least?

How can we improve this?

Please comment below on our class meeting performances.

Appendix F

CHOIR COMMITTEE NOTES

Name of Committee _____

Choir Section _____

Today's date: _____

People in attendance:

President:

Secretary:

Goal(s) of the committee: What do you think this committee should do for the choir?

What is the first thing that you think you can do to accomplish that goal(s)?

What is your plan for the next time that you meet?

Appendix G

CHOIR PACKET #1

Name _____

Choir Section _____

Please answer the following in the spaces below:

Write down everything that you feel it is important for me to know about what happened in this class while I was out sick last week.

Integrity:

Respond to the following quote, first as it relates to your life, next as it relates to the events that took place in choir while I was out last week.

"Integrity is what you do when no one is watching."

The quote as it applies to you:

The quote as it applies to choir last week when I was out:

LEADERSHIP:

Answer the following questions:

1. What is a leader?

2. What are the characteristics of a good leader?

3. What makes someone a bad leader?

4. What kind of leader are you?

5. What kind of leader were you last week when Mrs. V was absent from class?

6. Are leaders that seek power good leaders or bad leaders? Why or why not?

7. Do good leaders lead for their own goals or for those of the group? Why?

8. What can you do to be a better leader in this organization choir?

RESPECT:

Answer the following questions:

1. What is respect?
2. In what ways can you demonstrate respect to another person?
3. Can you disrespect someone by your actions? How/why?
4. How can you earn back respect once it is lost?
5. Are respect and trust related? How?
6. How did the behavior of the group last week show disrespect to Mrs. Volpato and most importantly to this organization?
7. How can we fix that in order to move forward?

MOVING FORWARD:

1. What do you think Mrs. Volpato's response should be to the behavior from last week? What specific actions should be taken?

2. How does last week's event hinder our ability to move forward in the positive direction that we have been striving for these past few weeks?

3. How does your behavior when Mrs. Volpato is out effect her ability to trust you (the group) in the future?

4. What needs to be done to gain back that trust and positive focus?

5. What does our behavior say about us as:
a person:

a choir:

6. How is your individual behavior directly related to the success of our whole organization?

FINAL COMMENTS:

Please list below any final comments or considerations that you wish to share that will benefit Mrs. Volpato's understanding of last week, your role in this organization, and our ability to move forward with success.

Comments:

What actions should be taken to improve our organization for the future?

HOW TO BE A LEADER:

The characteristics of a good leader are such that they lead by example. Leaders are not just those that are in charge, each one of us is a leader at any given moment in a rehearsal.

In what ways do you think that you can help lead your peers, your group, or other members of the choir by your example.

1

2

3

In what ways do you think that you are not the best as leading by example? i.e what behaviors or characteristics do you have that do not help us move forward in rehearsal or practice?

How do you think that being a successful leader or follower in an organization is tied to having goals?

Are setting goals important to you?

What are the benefits of setting goals?

What are the drawbacks of setting goals?

Appendix I

CHOIR PACKET #3

Name _____

Choir Section _____

Please answer the following in the spaces below:

Describe the appropriate behaviors that should take place during choir when Mrs. Volpato is not here.

Leadership Profile:**WHO ARE YOU AS A LEADER?**

What are your biggest strengths?

in school:

at home:

in your life:

What are your biggest weaknesses?

in school:

at home:

in your life:

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD LEADER:

List the top 5 things/characteristics that you think make someone a good leader?

1

2

3

4

5

What are the characteristics of a leader that make people want to follow them?

1

2

3

What characteristics do you think our section leaders should possess so that they lead our choir sections in an effective manner?

1

2

3

What characteristics do you have that you can use to help the section leader for your section be successful?

1

2

3

4

MY GOALS:**What goals do you have for this year?**

personal:

family:

school:

other:

What are you doing right now to move forward toward those goals?

personal:

family:

school:

other:

What goals do you have for our choir/organization as they relate to:

you

your section (alto, soprano, tenor, bass)

our whole group:

What do you think you can contribute to help us reach those goals?

Appendix J

CHOIR PACKET #4

Name _____

Choir Section _____

Please answer the following in the spaces below:

What is engagement:

List the first five words below that you think of when you hear the word engagement?

Write your own definition for engagement in the space below:

**To Be Engaged or Not to Be Engaged
That is the question**

How are you engaged:

What activities do you participate in during your school day that you think would qualify as engaging?

What activities do you find least engaging in your school day?

What is the most engaging class that you have right now?

Why do you like to be in that class?

What makes you want to be part of what is going on in that class?

Is it a class where it is fun to learn?

What makes it that way?

What is the least engaging class that you have right now?

What makes you feel disengaged in this class?

What makes this class not a fun place to learn?

What could be done to make it better?

What makes you put effort into a class?

What keeps you from putting in your best effort?

What makes learning fun for you?

What activities are you involved in outside of the school day?

Do you think these activities keep you more engaged during school because you are looking forward to the end of the day to do what you like?

What do these activities offer that make you want to stay after school to participate in them?

If you do not participate in after school activities, why don't you?

Do you feel that this makes you less interested in putting forth your best effort in school?

What makes you want to participate in choir?

What would make you want to continue being in choir?

What do you contribute to the choir that helps make it a fun place to learn, sing, and perform?

What do you think you could contribute that you are not already?

How do you think that being engaged/involved in your classes, school, and after school activities makes you a better student?

Do you think not being engaged or actively involved in a class, your school, or other activities makes you a less successful student?

How do you think that being actively engaged in our choir makes you a better singer?

Do you consider yourself to be actively engaged during our rehearsals?

What aspects of participating in choir do you think help prepare you for life in the real world, after high school?

What aspects of participating in choir do you think detract from your ability to prepare for life in the real world, after high school?

Does every activity that we do help shape our future activities and choices in our life?

why or why not?

Appendix K

CHOIR CHECK IN/ CHECK OUT

Name _____

Choir Section _____

Please answer the following:

List all the things that you think we have accomplished/done so far this year? (performances, field trips, classroom accomplishments)

Please look at the calendar on the front board and realize the number of days that we have left before the concert. Then, answer the questions below:

What are the things you feel confident about in preparation for our performance?

What are the things you are concerned/worried about in preparation for our performance?

Appendix L

Dear Jenn,

The HSIRB has completed its review of your proposal, "Utilizing Collaborative Work Groups to Increase Student Engagement," and we found it very well organized and thorough. We are granting you a conditional approval. We are requiring a few very minor edits and clarifications. A copy of your revised proposal will remain with the HSIRB Co-Chair, Dr. Adams O'Connell, for the duration of the time of your study and for up to one year from the approval date indicated by the date of this email.

We ask that you proofread the document one more time as we found some grammatical errors throughout the document. In addition to these corrections we would like you to clarify one additional statement. We found a slight contradiction in responses to two proposal items. In the response to Item IV. 8, you state that your subject group will not include anyone with with physical or mental handicaps. Yet, in the response to Item IV. 9, you acknowledge that a number of the students have IEPs. We recognize that students may have an Individualized Education Plan for reasons other than mental handicaps, but we cannot rule out this possibility, so please state directly that this is not the case. We also suspect that those with IEPs may have learning differences that would make it difficult for them to complete some of the tasks (e.g. journaling) that you are requesting they perform. If none of these apply to your group, please just state this fact. If it does apply, please provide a brief statement outlining how they will either get the support they need to complete your tasks and or how they will be made aware that they can withdraw from an activity.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into topics other than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be. Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this email notification, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation, awaiting HSIRB approval of the changes.

We do still need to collect your electronic signature, so please respond to this email with your name and project title in the subject line. Dr. Shosh can provide his electronic signature by replying to this email with his name in the subject line. Your replies will serve as your signatures.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Virginia Adams O'Connell
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
(610) 625-7756
voconnel@moravian.edu

Appendix M

Dear Jenn,

Thank you for sending the revised document. Your file is now complete.

Dr. Virginia Adams O'Connell
Co-Chair, HSIRB
Moravian College
hsirb@moravian.edu
voconnel@moravian.edu
(610) 625-7756

Appendix N

December 21, 2012,

Dear Mr. LaPorta,

I am presently working towards earning a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. Many of the classes have allowed me to stay current with the most effective teaching methods, and in turn I am able to provide the best learning experiences for my students. As part of this program, Moravian requires that I conduct a systematic study of my teaching practices. As a result, I will be conducting a teacher action research study where I intend to examine the effects increasing student engagement through the use of collaborative work groups.

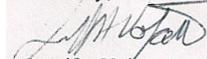
The purpose for my study is to continue to carefully design classroom lessons and activities that not only teach key concepts in the area of music but also foster an increased level of comprehension and engagement through peer discussion and analysis groups. I have been using this model of study, based upon previous research, since 2009, and have found it to be quite successful. My goal throughout this project is to confirm and enhance the effectiveness of student engagement and collaborative work groups as a teaching strategy and the link to increased student comprehension and academic success.

Throughout my classroom study students will continue to be involved in similar daily activities to those we have been using throughout the school year. Students will continue to work with their peers and with me as valuable resources. All students will continue their active involvement in group investigation, performance, critique, and analysis projects and will continue to work directly with a variety of approved literature to support our discoveries. The new component that will be added to this process include a focus on student feedback in the form of student surveys, reflective writings, and interviews. Students will continue to be involved in completing the regular choral music curriculum. As part of that curriculum, all students will have the opportunity to provide feedback to me in the aforementioned forms; however, I will only use feedback in the analysis and reporting of this study from participants that have given consent.

Data includes student and classroom observations, student surveys, student work, and student interviews. All student names will be kept confidential, as will the name of the school district or any participating faculty member. Only my name and the names of my sponsoring professors will appear in any written report or publication of this study. All students will continue to engage in all classroom activities as part of the regular curriculum. I will only use data in the reporting of my study from students who have completed the attached consent form, with the appropriate signatures, and have agreed to be participants. Students may withdraw from this study without penalty at any time.

Should you have any questions regarding my research my faculty sponsor at Moravian College is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be reached at Moravian at 610-861-1482 or by e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter at your earliest convenience. I thank you so very much for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

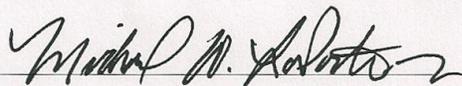


Jennifer Volpato

(Please detach and return)

I attest that I am the principal for the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand the consent form, and received a copy. Jennifer Volpato has my permission to conduct this study at Freedom High School, Bethlehem, PA.

Principal Signature:



Date: 1-7-13

Appendix O

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am presently working towards earning a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. Many of the classes have allowed me to stay current with the most effective teaching methods, and in turn I am able to provide the best learning experiences for my students. As part of this program, Moravian requires that I conduct a systematic study of my teaching practices. As a result, September 4, 2012 through January 11, 2013 I will be conducting a teacher action research study where I intend to examine the effects increasing student engagement through the use of collaborative work groups.

The purpose for my study is to continue to carefully design classroom lessons and activities that not only teach key concepts in the area of music but also foster an increased level of comprehension and engagement through peer discussion and analysis groups. I have been using this model of study, based upon previous research, since 2009, and have found it to be quite successful. My goal throughout this project is to confirm and enhance the effectiveness of student engagement and collaborative work groups as a teaching strategy and the link to increased student comprehension and academic success.

Throughout my classroom study students will continue to be involved in similar daily activities to those we have been using throughout the school year. Students will continue to work with their peers and with me as valuable resources. All students will continue their active involvement in group investigation, performance, critique, and analysis projects and will continue to work directly with a variety of approved literature to support our discoveries. The new component that will be added to this process include a focus on student feedback in the form of student surveys, reflective writings, and interviews.

I am asking for your permission to use the data gathered pertaining to your child's involvement as part of my study. Data includes student and classroom observations, student surveys, student work, and student interviews. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect your child's grade in any way. All student names will be kept confidential, as will the name of the school district or any participating faculty member. Only my name and the names of my sponsoring professors will appear in any written report or publication of this study. All students will continue to engage in all classroom activities as part of the regular curriculum. I will only use data in the reporting of my study from students who have completed the attached consent form, with the appropriate signatures, and have agreed to be participants. Students may withdraw from this study without penalty at any time.

Should you have any questions regarding my research please feel free to contact me, Our principal Mr. LaPorta, has approved this study, but should you want to speak with him for any reason you may reach him at 610- 867-5843 or by e-mail at mlaporta@beth.k12.pa.us. Should you have any further questions related to the effects of this study you may also contact our school nurse Ms. Gorbos or your child's guidance counselor at 610-867-5843. My faculty sponsor at Moravian College is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be reached at Moravian at 610-861-1482 or by e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter at your earliest convenience. I thank you so very much for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Volpato

(Please detach and return)

I attest that I am the child's legal guardian and that I have received a copy, read, and understand this consent form.

(Please initial the appropriate box below_

_____ I am willing to have my child participate in Mrs. Volpato's action research study

_____ I am not willing to have my child participate in Mrs. Volpato's action research study

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Child's Name: _____

Appendix P

Life Lessons

Name _____

Choir Section _____

"Be the change you want to see."

What do you think this quote means?

How do you think it applies to you?

personally?

in choir?