

**Defining Singers' Musical Identity Using Contemporary A
Cappella in the Choral Curriculum**

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**DEFINING SINGERS' MUSICAL IDENTITY USING
CONTEMPORARY A CAPPELLA IN THE CHORAL
CURRICULUM**

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ABSTRACT

Defining Singers' Musical Identity Using Contemporary A Cappella in the Choral Curriculum (August 8, 2015)

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The purpose of this study is to define a musical identity for singers and explore how contemporary a cappella music can be used in the middle school choral curriculum to strengthen all facets of vocal musicianship. This study employs a philosophical mode of inquiry by surveying vocal music teachers about their self-identity as singers, musicians, and performers and empirical data from a survey regarding priorities for student learning in the choral ensemble. This study also uses a historical mode of inquiry by exploring the history of contemporary a cappella and its relationship to vocal music education. The findings will inform the development of an arrangement, curriculum, and assessments for middle school choral students that will facilitate their development as singers in roles of both musician and performer.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to define a musical identity for singers and explore how contemporary a cappella music can be used in the middle school choral curriculum to strengthen all facets of vocal musicianship. This study employs a philosophical mode of inquiry by surveying vocal music teachers about their self-identity as singers, musicians, and performers and empirical data from a survey regarding priorities for student learning in the choral ensemble. This study also uses a historical mode of inquiry by exploring the history of contemporary a cappella and its relationship to vocal music education. The findings will inform the development of an arrangement, curriculum, and assessments for middle school choral students that will facilitate their development as singers in roles of both musician and performer.

The concept of musical identity was interesting to explore because of the unique makeup of my school community. Mark Twain Intermediate School for the Gifted and Talented is a public school for students in grades six through eight located in Brooklyn, New York. The school is home to a magnet program which requires students to pass an entrance exam in a talent of their choice to be admitted into the school. Talent offerings for students include: Visual Art, Athletics, Computer/Math, Creative Writing/Journalism, Dance, Drama, Instrumental Music (Strings), Instrumental Music (Winds), Media (Photography/Video), Science, or Vocal Music (New York City Department of Education 57). This area of specialization becomes a major subject course for their three years of study. This talent area also becomes a part of their middle school identity; students identify themselves by talent area and the social/academic reputations associated with those designations.

In the Performing Arts Department there are five talent areas: Dance Talent, Drama

Talent, Strings Talent, Winds Talent, and Vocal Talent. Although the entire Music Department follows a similar curriculum sequence for teaching elements of music to our sixth grade classes, the curriculum for vocal and instrumental music shifts drastically for the older students. As students are faced with more challenging musical concepts and terms, I noticed a disconnect between their performance abilities (skills) and musical knowledge. While the majority of students were making significant gains in their performance abilities, many students were still struggling with the theoretical concepts in music, including defining musical terms and reading notated music. Conversations with students revealed they self-identify as *performers* more often than musicians, or even singers, because of their confidence in active music making and struggle with theoretical areas of musical learning.

During the 2013-2014 school year, I met with colleagues in Carnegie Hall's Music Educators' Workshop to discuss the notion of "singer identity," as my goal was to increase students' self-identification as musicians. This developed into conducting a survey of 30 vocal music teachers to define singer identity and establish criteria for assessing vocal skills and knowledge. I compiled the survey data which helped me to create an a list of criteria for a choral curriculum that would engage students as musicians and performers.

One of the biggest influences in the development of my singer identity was singing with an all-female a cappella group, The Cleftomaniacs, at New York University. Participation in my collegiate a cappella group afforded me the opportunity to create, perform, and connect with music in ways I had never experienced. I researched the development of contemporary a cappella music to determine the social, cultural, and identity-driven benefits to studying and performing this genre.

Using data from both studies and my knowledge of curriculum, I created an cappella arrangement, unit of study, and vocal assessment for middle school choral students during the 2015 spring semester.

Throughout the deployment of this study I hoped to gain clarity on the specific skills, knowledge, and affective outcomes that should be present in a vocal unit of study. The New York State Standards for Teaching and Learning in the Arts outline the benchmarks of participation, elemental understanding, composition, and listening, but do not define specific criteria for technical facility and aural musicianship (New York State Department of Education).

The survey of vocal music teachers allows for the understanding of how teacher identity as musician, performer, and singer shapes student self-identity. Inquiry into the development and implementation of contemporary a cappella also helps to understand ways to increase student musicianship and ownership in the choral ensemble. Findings from this study and implementation of this unit will be used to inform further instruction in teaching my students to be vocal musicians and performers.

Chapter 2: Seeking Singer Identity

Assessing Vocal Talent

Musical ability is viewed by many as something intrinsic, that nature has provided. As a young singer, I was often validated as talented because of the sound of my voice and performance abilities. As a young teacher, I began to realize that talent should be cultivated as often as it is evaluated. When thinking about defining abilities of students, teachers must look at both performance abilities (nature) and aptitude (nurture). Aptitude includes the potential for students to learn or acquire a skill set even when they have little or no experience. In my role as the Vocal Talent Teacher at Mark Twain Intermediate School for the Gifted and Talented I have been asked to assess and work with a specialized population of students who have self-selected into a vocal ensemble and passed an aural and performance audition required to participate.

The Vocal Talent Test has been designed to give all students equal opportunity, testing for musical aptitude, not just musical performance proficiency. The listening portion of the exam asks students to identify patterns in: pitch (same-higher-lower), rhythm (same/different); intervals (step/skip); and phrasing (same/different). This seeks to see if students have the ability to hear musical difference. Additionally, by performing a short solo, I am able to hear the student's voice. Solos are judged on what is prepared, but also by how students approach the singing: If a tone is breathy, can it be developed? If a student is using heavy chest voice tone, do they lighten the sound when applying correct breath support?

Because our school is a gifted and talented program for students in the city of New York, I have a responsibility to create assessments that reflect the needs of the program and design

curriculum to reflect high levels of vocal musicianship. In thinking about this responsibility, I wondered how I could create a definition for what it means to be a singer; not just the act of singing itself but the unique qualities of a vocal musician and how to help students self-identify in that way.

Teacher Identity and Influence

Psychologist Erik Erikson posits that one's identity "can be traced from the past and projected into the future" (qtd. in Parker and Powell 23). Many music educators can recall a musical experience or teacher who influenced their decision to follow a particular career path and role as music teacher. In Parker and Powell's phenomenological study of music education majors, their findings reflect the work of Schmidt (2010) and Dewey (1934), that "pre-service music teachers' previous experiences determined what they valued--and thus what influenced their identities--within the undergraduate program" (Parker and Powell 38). In my own music education, my middle school choral director was a driving force for my desire to pursue my passion of singing.

Researcher Melissa Mills interviewed adolescent singers in a children's choir to gain perspective on how choral participation influences student definitions of musicianship. Many of their comments regarding what it means to be a musician were rooted in their director's words. She notes, "In particular, comments about creating beauty, phrasing, preparing, and loving the music seem to have been pulled directly from the chorister's rehearsal experiences" (Mills 46). The influence of a teacher as a model for student learning is not a new concept, but it is an

important consideration when seeking to define students perceptions of musicianship and musical understanding.

There is much research on the study of adolescent psychology and identity development in teenagers and young adults. For this reason I was more interested in exploring how teachers' musical identities shape the curriculum and assessments that they present to their current choral students. Reflecting on their own experience can help vocal music teachers to refine the most significant aspects of musical learning (both skills and knowledge), 21st century skills (such as creativity and critical thinking), and social development (creating an identity as a singer-musician-performer).

Method of Inquiry

During the 2013-2014 school year, I was part of a workshop for secondary school music educators from various New York City schools. The focus of the workshop was to meet once a month to discuss professional topics. My research questions to seek to define "singer identity" arose out of these conversations and similar conversations I was having with my students.

I chose to survey 30 of my colleagues (all teachers of middle school or high school vocal music) for their answers in relation to their personal music education experiences and current teaching philosophies. I chose not to include personal information about each participant in the data gathering process. Although including the teachers' personal stories could inform the data in some ways, I was less interested in documenting their personal history and more concerned with understanding how their reflection of personal experience informed the concepts they taught and

valued as vocal music teachers. Teachers were asked the following questions:

- **How do you define yourself as a *musician*?**
- **How do you define yourself as a *singer*?**
- **How do you define yourself as a *performer*?**
- **Please list key *skills* that good singers should possess.**
- **Please list key *knowledge* that good singers should possess.**

An important consideration in generating these research questions was to form questions that would require responders to create narrative answers. Because the terms of *musician*, *singer*, and *performer* have many similarities, asking responders to elaborate on and explain their thoughts helped to gain perspective on how they view their identity in these roles. In addition, posing such open-ended questions would result in a large amount of qualitative data; this was purposeful in the hopes to get the most organic construction of the definition for “singer” that I could from colleagues who were influencing young and developing vocalists. I chose to analyze answers based on key terms that were mentioned in many or most of the answers. A compilation of survey results appears in Appendix A.

Results

The top three definitions for each category are listed below (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: *Survey Results (Top 3 Answers)*

How do you define yourself:	I am...
A Musician	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Technically proficient as an instrumentalist (7)● Able to read music (pitch and rhythm) (4)● Able to play multiple instruments (3)● Confident in musical ability (3)
A Singer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Able to sing with good technique (5)● Able to sing with a resonant tone (4)● Confident in my singing ability (4)
A Performer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● A Strong presence on stage (8)● Able to engage an audience (7)● Confident (5)

In defining the distinction between musician, singer, and performer, I found minor overlap in word choice. When describing what it means to be a *musician*, most teachers indicated skills or knowledge related to instrumental music, composition, or theory. Seven responders listed “Technically proficient as an instrumentalist” as the defining characteristic as a musician while “Able to read music” was listed second by four responders. Although some responders chose phrases that indicated musical knowledge in their self-identification of *singer*, most responses indicated technical proficiency with the voice, with the top definition listed as “Able to sing with good technique.” As I expected, the distinction between *musician* and *singer* largely became one of theoretical knowledge. The teachers’ definitions indicated the need to address the

notion of the voice as an instrument and how vocal music teachers can address theoretical concepts as they relate to the voice.

Unlike the definition of *musician*, responses for *singer* identity included key indications of performance, including “confident in my singing ability” (four responses), “Able to sing with emotional range” (three responses), and distinct responses that included the word performance, “Consistent in my performance” and “A creative performer.”

The conversations with my students regarding their identities as musicians, singers, and performers revealed that many saw themselves as performers because they loved the act of singing, and were therefore most comfortable with their performance abilities. Although the teachers all indicated distinctions for their identities in these three categories, the most consistent terms fell under the umbrella of *performer*. Eight responders stated “A strong presence on stage” and seven responders said they were “Able to engage an audience” as a *performer*. Because similar terms were so widely used, it could indicate that these are terms that choral students hear most often. As Mills found in her conversations with children’s choir participants, our students may be reflecting the messages put forth from their directors.

Teachers’ definitions for their self-identification were varied and nuanced, so I was interested to know what specific criteria they used to define key *skills* and *knowledge* for singers. When sifting through the data, distinct categories emerged which I have outlined below:

Discipline indicates skills regarding singer motivation.

Music Literacy indicates score reading ability.

Performance Ability includes skills specific to a musical performance.

Aural Skills indicate singer listening abilities.

Technical Facility indicates ability in sound production.

Terms mentioned most often fell into the *Technical Facility* category. Tone color and natural talent were mentioned most often by responders as skills that they valued in a singer. I found this really interesting because of my specific teaching placement. As a teacher of students that have passed an admissions test to show their musical aptitude, this response from my peers of **tone color** and **natural talent** as important factors in singers helped me to refine my curriculum.

The most diverse pool of terms were in the *Performance Ability* category, including distinctions of: energy, passion, emotion, communication, memorization, personal aesthetic, stage presence, and confidence (which was mentioned most often in this category). This is an important element because the terms seemed to point to the showmanship (personal aesthetic, stage presence) that is distinctively different in vocal and instrumental music.

Valued skills mentioned least often fell into the category of *Aural Skills* which was very interesting to me. I would have expected that skills of listening and harmonization would be more widely mentioned as key skills as they are core foundations of what it means to be a musician. Considering this data, it seems that choral educators struggle to create a curriculum that will be accessible to many students while maintaining a high level of musicianship.

Overall, there were more diverse terms and categories mentioned for the *skills* than for *knowledge* that singers should possess. This leads me to believe that most vocal music teachers value what students are able to do (performance) over what students should know and understand (pedagogy). For instrumentalists, learning music theory and aural skills are a crucial part of the learning process in developing identity as an instrumentalist. For many choral singers, their K-12 education does not require this skill set, which can be detrimental to singers' identity as

musicians. Elizabeth Cassidy Parker and Sean R. Powell studied the identity development of music education majors in methods courses outside of their major instrument. When speaking of her experience, one vocalist expressed, “In high school I guess I didn’t really think about it...I was singing, listening, [and] thinking about techniques to use as a singer or a vocalist, but I wasn’t thinking about learning how to write music or, you know, do any...all the aspects of music. It was a big step for me when I got to college,” (Allison, qtd. in Parker and Powell 31). Considering the research and survey results, it is imperative that choral educators find ways to increase confidence in musicianship for vocal music students.

As an undergraduate music education major, one of the most defining roles for me was becoming the musical director of my collegiate a cappella group: The Cleftomaniacs. As the director I was running rehearsal and listening critically to shape our overall sound, which would help to facilitate my development as a music educator. I was also engaging with music in a completely new way: arranging pieces to reflect different musical styles and creating mash-ups or medleys that would be fun to sing and exciting for an audience. My experience with collegiate a cappella played a major role in shaping the musician that I am today.

Creating a musical curriculum that helps vocalists construct identity that is both musical and performance oriented is of paramount importance for secondary choral educators. Creating a unit to help my students’ musical development presented an opportunity to draw on my past experience to inform my teaching.

Chapter 3: The Case for Contemporary A Cappella

In Chapter 2, I discussed how the results of the survey defining singer *skills* and *knowledge* impact the curriculum choices that I have made for my program. The three key ideas of (1) Developing aural confidence in singers, (2) Using performance as a bridge from skills to knowledge, and (3) Increasing technical facility through instrumental practice are addressed here, with specific research and relevance to how contemporary a cappella can accomplish each goal in the choral curriculum. Additionally, the idea of student identity is explored in this chapter, with the focus on ownership and creation.

A Brief History of Contemporary A Cappella Music

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, Ivy League students began to form collegiate glee clubs that operated as student-directed a cappella choirs. In 1909, seven men from The Yale Glee Club established what is believed to be the first on-campus a cappella group: The Whiffenpoofs (Duchan 479). The Whiffenpoofs' early repertoire was dominated by homophonic texture and Barbershop harmonies. As Swing Music took root in American culture, groups like the Mills Brothers popularized instrumental imitation that became a trademark of contemporary a cappella music (Duchan 480). A cappella music continued to climb the charts with the popularization of Doo-Wop music in the 1950s and 1960s, with hits like the Penguins' "Earth Angel" and "In the Still of the Night" by the Five Satins (Michaels 27).

The popularity and sound of these groups influenced the development of professional a cappella groups, notably the King Singers (1968), The Nylons (1979), and Rockapella (1986). Rockapella, in particular, changed the game for contemporary a cappella singing with the

incorporation of beatboxing, or using your mouth and voice to mimic the sound of drum machines. Beatboxing is a central pillar of hip-hop culture and allowed for more freedom and diversification of repertoire for contemporary a cappella groups (Binek).

In 1990, Deke Sharon formed the Contemporary A Cappella Society of America (CASA), following his experience as a member of Tufts University's a cappella group: The Beelzebubs. His ideas shaped the way that contemporary a cappella was arranged and performed; he used different tonalities of the human voice to emulate a rock band (Newton). The representation of instruments through syllabic choice elevates contemporary a cappella to a new level of vocal artistry. Sharon's vision of contemporary a cappella exploded into mainstream culture through his role as a producer on NBC's *The Sing Off*, which was dedicated to a cappella acts, including *The Pentatonix* (Newton).

Young audiences have also been introduced to a cappella culture through the TV series *Glee* as well as the hit movie *Pitch Perfect*, based on a novel about collegiate a cappella competition. Sharon's former group, The Beelzebubs, provided the voices to The Warblers, a fictional all-male a cappella group on the TV series *Glee* (Beelzebubs). As an arranger, Sharon's work can be heard throughout both *Pitch Perfect* movies.

Developing Aural Confidence in Singers

Teachers of beginning vocalists rely on students' aural comprehension to recall familiar patterns (do-re-mi) and synthesize those patterns in the context of larger material, whether a phrase or an entire song. I have found that young singers understand the concepts of pitch and tuning but have less confidence when asked to think about aural music theory in larger scope.

As stated in Chapter 1, I developed an Aural Assessment for my oldest students, which includes concepts that they should know to move beyond the skill of harmonization into the understanding of how harmonies are created and manipulated. The assessment asks them to discern melodic patterns (step/skip), triad qualities (major/minor/augmented/diminished), and harmonic function (I/IV/V) (See Appendix C).

Contemporary a cappella music lends itself to developing aural comprehension in singers because there is multi-layered listening involved when arranging, rehearsing, and performing a piece. Before beginning a new piece with a group, Justin Binek--an accomplished contemporary vocalist, educator, and composer--explains his process of “Listening through the Layers” to make students accountable for the aural concepts in an arrangement. He shares his sequence here:

Students are asked to identify, listen to, and understand the functions of:

1. *Melody*
2. *Harmony vocals (counter-melody or background vocals)*
3. *Guitars (including rhythmic texture)*
4. *Bass*
5. *Drums (to accurately translate into vocal percussion)*
6. *Overall form and structure*

Instead of just learning their individual part, students are asked to understand how their part is integral to the whole, allowing for musical understanding and ownership for the importance of their individual voice. Students are also exposed to several functions of musicianship outside of performing: listening, evaluating and analyzing, identifying vowels and diction (to create the instrumental textures), rhythmic structures, and musical form and function.

Performance as a Bridge from Skills to Knowledge

Teachers know that the deepest learning occurs when we are able to connect what students already know to new content or ideas. This synthesis allows for greater connectivity among teacher, subject, and learner. Christopher Small's vision of "musicking" allows for students to be actively involved in a musical endeavor through performance, listening, discussing, and even composing (Kelly 63). This view of music education allows students to become actively involved in musical activities that will carry them through school and continue throughout their lives.

The survey data indicated that most vocal music teachers in my community value performance skills. This is also true of many of my students. Because of the confidence in their singing abilities (skills), I sought to find a medium to teach theoretical concepts through performance. Contemporary a cappella music was the bridge I chose to build from what my students are able to do, to what they should be able to know and understand.

Most singing that occurs in a choral classroom is ensemble performance; individual students have few opportunities to sing a solo unless they are in a small ensemble. Solos can often be a point of contention within a group. One of the biggest challenges as a director is to balance the timbre of an individual voice with the artistic texture of the ensemble sound. Allotting time to work with individual voices on tone color, vibrato, and phrase shaping allows individual students an opportunity to sing in a contemporary context while still under the guidance of a skilled teacher.

Because the repertoire in contemporary a cappella is so varied, it provides opportunities for voices that otherwise might be marginalized in a more traditional choral sound. In his article about collegiate a cappella arranging, Josh Duchan writes, “Sharing the spotlight also allows singers to tap into the powerful cultural archetype of the ‘rock star’--a figure with considerable social capital (especially in youth culture). For many, a cappella is simply fun; there is a certain pleasure in the creation of a virtuosic or spectacular vocal-only rendition of a familiar musical icon” (Duchan 497).

Performance of contemporary music validates students’ personal identities and culture in a way that allows for deeper conversations. Of his experience teaching secondary methods to undergraduate music education students, Randall Everett Allsup writes, “When popular music finds itself in a formal educational setting, its engagement requires that teachers and students connect and deepen its cultural, emotional, and musical references. The so-called elements of music (e.g., intervallic relationships, tonal centers, melodic contours, forms, and phrases) are only different aspects of a larger cultural encounter. The value of any musical work is amplified when we connect its musical structure to the historical context in which it was created and the contemporary context in which it is being re-created” (Allsup 32).

Although we start from performance, identifying the other dimensions of music will allow for students to also become educated consumers of music. In her book, *Making Musical Meaning: Unlocking the Value of Music Education in the Age of Innovation*, Elizabeth Sokolowski addresses “the other 80%,” that is, students not enrolled in performing ensembles (Sokolowski 132). I would also propose that most of our students involved in performance ensembles will not pursue music professionally. Our choral curriculum, then, should ask students

to dig into facets of vocal musicianship that will benefit musical consumers, as well. Sokolowski writes, “Through music, students learn a wealth about themselves and the ways in which they interact with society, others and life. Students can tap into their expressive and creative capacities to develop their own unique voice if we open our minds and our design to support and nurture this ideal” (Sokolowski 132).

Increasing Technical Facility through Instrumental Practice

A cappella music is an important link in validating singers as musicians. Joshua S. Duchan describes the typical repertoire choices for collegiate a cappella groups as pieces from the 20th and 21st centuries that seek to imitate the sound of the original recording while also creating a unique sound or original take on the track (477). Because contemporary a cappella music uses recorded music as raw material, vocalists are creating a different texture with their voices than in traditional homophonic music.

Arrangers and soloists in contemporary a cappella music use sophisticated musical techniques, like musical quotation, formal expansion, variation of texture, varying the melody across many voice parts, and reinterpreting the tone and shape of a solo (Duchan 491).

Syllabic choice is another way in which a cappella vocalists are validated as musicians. Choosing an appropriate syllable reinforces the idea that the singer is an instrumentalist, in part because they are using their own instrument (their voice) to replicate the function and quality of another instrument (Binek). In Duchan’s writing about emulation in a cappella arranging, he presents how syllabic choice has allowed for more complexity in creating background parts.

Syllables like “doo” and “ba” migrated from improvisational swing scat, but in the 1990s arrangers began to use *j* syllables to represent the guitar strum, including “jun” and “jin” (Duchan 486). Considering syllabic choice challenges students to think creatively about how to shape their sound to emulate an instrument’s tone, rhythmic drive, attack, and duration. This also asks student singers to take ownership of rhythmic notation and concepts.

The ultimate validation for the voice as instrument and the idea of singer as musician comes from the flexibility of the tone of the human voice. Binek states, “No matter how hard you try, an alto saxophone cannot imitate a violin, an oboe cannot imitate a trombone.” A cappella music asks vocalists to change the tone and texture of sound and draws on different colors of the voice (Binek). Thinking of the voice as an instrument can be a new consideration for some, but it is an important point for vocal teachers who seek to build musicianship in their singers. In an interview about his hope for the future of a cappella singing, Deke Sharon asserts, “The human voice is the most varied, the most versatile instrument, and the most powerful instrument. No synthesizer, no piano can make you laugh or cry within three seconds. That’s what we have inside of ourselves.” (Sharon, qtd. in Verge).

Student Identity, Ownership, and Validation

When I was in 6th grade, my school district built a new facility for grades 4-6. Because the playground was not complete, our only options for recess were to play on the basketball courts or to walk the expansive track around the property. Two friends and I decided to walk the track, and as the year progressed we started to sing music from the radio, creating 3-part arrangements of some of our favorite songs and approaching other kids on the track to perform

“gigs” for them. This was a turning point for me as a singer, because I was able to create and arrange music for the first time.

When Justin Binek was in high school, he and his friends performed Boyz II Men’s #1 hit “It’s So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday” as part of a vocal quartet. He notes this as a pivotal moment in shaping his singer identity as musician because as the vocal bassist he had to navigate the the chord structure. This allowed him to think about singing in a musical way (Binek). This quartet experience also allowed Binek to create musical meaning as a student; the process was not led by a teacher, but instead discovered with his friends through their study and practice of the piece.

The disconnect between musical participation in everyday life and musical participation in schools is a detriment to many school music programs. In her article concerning cultural diversity in musical ensembles, Kate Fitzpatrick notes that, “When a student sees, for instance, that the music that he or she enjoys and values at home or with friends is ignored or degraded by institutions, such as schools, it creates cultural conflict. By authentically aligning our music curriculum with the music that our students value, we can find better ways to connect more effectively with their personal identities,” (Fitzpatrick 54).

Creating a cappella ensembles in school, or even adding a contemporary a cappella piece to the curriculum, allows for more student choice and student-centered learning, resulting in meaningful individual experiences within an ensemble setting.

One of the defining characteristics of collegiate a cappella music has been that it is student created and student-led. Stephen Paparo studied the musical and cultural landscape of an all-male a cappella group, noting that, “While only one of the current members was majoring in

music, all previously enjoyed making music enough to want to continue their involvement in college. They worked together under student leadership and relied on each other's strengths for the benefit of the ensemble" (Paparo 33). He continues, "If educators can understand the scope of the experience and meaning that students create through informal music making, perhaps they can apply what they have learned, and more students in their formal settings will develop curiosity and desire to learn the skills necessary to create music" (Jaffurs, 2006 qtd. in Paparo 21).

Thinking about individual musicianship within the context of large ensembles will also help choral directors to engage all students in learning 21st-century skills through musical study and performance.

Chapter 4: Creating a Curriculum and Assessment

Chapter 2 discussed the results from teachers' definitions of singer *skills* and *knowledge* and Chapter 3 considered how contemporary a cappella music could accomplish important *skills* and *knowledge* and improve areas of weakness. This chapter will synthesize how the survey results and inclusion of contemporary a cappella repertoire will impact the curriculum choices that I have made for my program.

Synthesis of Survey and Standards

Patrick Freer explores the dilemma most ensemble teachers experience regarding balance of performance practice and pedagogy in rehearsals, writing, "Choral teachers worldwide have struggled to build curricula that achieve a balance between performance and educational goals" (Freer 166). To aid in the creation of a curriculum, the New York State Department of Education provides a framework for teaching in the arts, through the four key standards listed below:

Standard 1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in The Arts

Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.

Standard 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in arts in various roles.

Standard 3: Responding To and Analyzing Works of Art

Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

Standard 4: Understanding Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of The Arts

Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

(NYSED)

The state standards provide a foundation and starting point for the formation of curriculum, however, “The Arts Standards provide school districts the direction and basic structure for the development of local curricula that link instruction and assessment to the content standards” (NYSED). Each school in the New York City Public School System is so distinct that it warrants educators to create a curriculum that suits their needs. Because Mark Twain Intermediate School is a gifted and talented program, it was imperative that I sought the advice of other vocal music teachers to create appropriate content for our population. Also, as the specialists in the area of vocal music, my peers provided specific content goals and benchmarks that can be synthesized with content standards.

Understanding by Design

In New York City, music educators have been using a model of a *Wrap-Around* to guide student engagement through a piece of repertoire. This *Wrap-Around* guides the rehearsal process starting with overarching goals for student learning. As I was working through my pre-course assignment for the Curriculum and Assessment course, I realized that this *Wrap-Around* roots itself in the framework of Understanding by Design.

Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe created the Understanding by Design model for curriculum development that has been highly successful in engaging student learning because it shapes curriculum from the point of student understanding (Sokolowski 43). My goal in creating

an a cappella curriculum was to increase the musical identity in my students. The results of my survey found that *skills* were more widely defined than *knowledge* for young singers, and the model of Understanding by Design takes curricular considerations further to consider what students should *understand* through the content. Additionally, this model provides for the transfer of learning, which is essential as students are exposed to new repertoire and musical content.

Starting from the goal of musical understanding and moving through the lens of essential skills and knowledge (determined from survey data), I developed a sequence of instruction for an introduction to contemporary a cappella music that included learning an arrangement adapted from my collegiate a cappella repertoire. In this way, students weren't just learning the content (skills and repertoire), but moving their knowledge forward in applicable ways (including some concepts discussed in Chapter 2).

Curricular Considerations and Initial Engagement

For the last six weeks of school, Vocal Talent students spent much of our rehearsal time on a contemporary a cappella curriculum. This was an ideal time of year to experiment with repertoire. Because we were not working toward a performance, our rehearsal time allowed for deeper engagement with conversations and student questions. At the conclusion of the unit, all students took an aural assessment. The format of the assessment was similar to their audition into the program, but focused more deeply on understanding higher-level concepts of musicianship. While not specifically used for this study, the data from the assessments will allow me to determine student understanding. In this way, the practice of working through these concepts and

material will benefit the students and me for next year's ensembles. The full unit plan, as well as part of the musical arrangement are located in Appendix B.

One of the first tools I use to engage my singers in understanding pitch is solfège. Many students are familiar with the syllables and understand how the notes move in the sequence of a major scale. As this pitch pattern is already in their ear, I used this as a bridge to new concepts of pitch and harmony. As explored in Chapter 3, arranging with students allows for a deeper exploration of aural comprehension. My students were asked to create the "voice leading" for the background parts in *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*, an easy pop arrangement using a I IV I V chord progression. By engaging in this task, they had to think creatively about how each voice part moved as a melodic line as well as the harmonic structure overall. Using a tool that they are comfortable with (solfège) to introduce a higher-level concept (voice leading) allowed even young singers to move into understanding about voice leading and how music is structured: not only what sounds good, but *why* it sounds good.

Understanding the voice leading led us into conversations about chord structure, and solfège once again proved to be a useful tool. The most engaging group work I have seen all year was during the sharing session of chord progressions from music of their choice. Students loved having the chance to engage with music that they listen to outside of school. I was excited knowing that they were able to see connections between concepts that we have studied in regards to traditional repertoire and the music that they enjoy. This was a successful application of using performance (singing music they already know) into knowledge (song structure and chord progression).

Asking the students to think of their voices as instruments was met with skepticism at first. It seems as if most students see instrumental music as completely separate from any type of vocal music. I know that many of them believe they aren't strong musicians because they cannot *play* an instrument they can only *sing*. Thinking about the function of their voice part was a valuable way to change this perception.

As the unit progressed, they shared thoughtful reasons for their instrumental syllables of choice, though many still performed with traditional choral vowel shapes. So far, students have sung with traditional technique. It's essential to stand and breathe in a healthy way, but tone shaping can greatly impact the color of a piece. This is a point that I will consider greatly when programming music for next year's ensembles.

What stood out to me most was the level of student engagement. Students that typically fade into the sound of the ensemble were volunteering to sing the solo, try vocal percussion, or give their opinion on a syllabic/dynamic choice. They surprised each other with their opinions and talents. For example, the solo sits in such a low range and has a rock quality to it, allowing for other voices to take center stage (not just strong classical or Broadway singers). Students who volunteered to conduct engaged with their peers in new and dynamic ways, making thoughtful choices about how to shape the sound.

Although students were engaged overall, one of the ways that they were disconnected is through the shaping of their sound. We sing a variety of repertoire, but many students have a specific idea of what sounds "good," and most of their definitions are based on classical standards of beauty. When discussing the idea of talent and standards of beauty, Justin Binek explains, "One would never describe Willie Nelson's voice as objectively beautiful, but it's what

he does as a storyteller and as a lyricist and as a deliverer of the music at his disposal that he's able to create some remarkable beauty through his singing" (Binek). I see contemporary a cappella music as a way to redefine beauty of sound in new ways that will open the possibilities for all singers in my ensemble.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Teachers are curators of the curriculum for their students. A curriculum should allow students to build *skills, knowledge*, and understandings through the content. Through the survey of my vocal music colleagues in the New York City area, I was able to determine critical needs of vocal musicians. Curriculum should: (1) Develop aural confidence in singers, (2) Use performance as a bridge from skills to knowledge, and (3) Increase technical facility through instrumental practice. The inclusion of contemporary a cappella in my choral curriculum has been a helpful tool in accomplishing these goals, and has also allowed for student musical identity to develop through ownership and creative decision making.

The recent explosion of contemporary a cappella music in popular culture offers a chance for student singers to engage with vocal music in new and exciting ways. In an interview with *The Verge*, noted arranger and a cappella entrepreneur Deke Sharon spoke of his hopes as more singers engage with a cappella music. “Everyone used to sing. All of our ancestors...they’d sing together and they’d tell stories and there was a sense of community...The act of music was something everyone had inside of them” (Newton). Contemporary a cappella can serve as a way of engaging all learners in musicianship while also holding students to high musical standards.

As a teacher of students in a gifted and talented setting, it is critical to continue to review ways in which my curricular choices are helping students to see themselves as singers through performance and music learning opportunities. Although time and resources can be a constraint in the choral rehearsal, the most important determinate in shaping student identity is for choral educators to model musicianship and performance ability in their teaching and in the curriculum.

Appendix A: Survey Results (Questions 1-3)

- How do you define yourself as a *musician*?
- How do you define yourself as a *singer*?
- How do you define yourself as a *performer*?

How do you define yourself:	Responses I am...
A Musician	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technically proficient as an instrumentalist (7) • Able to read music (pitch and rhythm) (4) • Able to play multiple instruments (3) • Confident in musical ability (3) • Knowledgeable about music theory (2) • A skilled composer (2) • Able to engage an audience through musicianship (2) • A professional (2) • Aurally proficient (strong musical ear) • Creative thinker • A professional (this is my profession) • Talented in this regard
A Singer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to sing with good technique (5) • Able to sing with a resonant tone (4) • Confident in my singing ability (4) • Able to sing with strong intonation (3) • Able to sight-sing or read music (3) • A singer with a large vocal range (2) • Able to sing with emotional range (2) • Able to support my sound with breath • Fluent in solfège • Passionate about singing • Able to hear aural elements of music • Consistent in my performance • A creative performer
A Performer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Strong presence on stage (8) • Able to engage an audience (7) • Confident (5) • Passionate/Giving my all (3) • Emotionally connected to my craft/musicianship (3) • Not afraid to perform (2) • A hard worker • Able to share my talent with others • An actor through music

Appendix A: Survey Results - Please list key *skills* that good singers should possess.

Key Term Category	Number of Times mentioned in responses	Words Mentioned	Number of Times mentioned (by different responders)	Percentage of Responders who addressed this Key Category
Discipline	14	Focus	4	13.3%
		Responsibility or motivation to practice and improve	10	33.3%
Music Literacy	13	Sight-reading	4	13.3%
		Ability to read music	9	30.0%
Performance Ability	24	Energy	2	6.7%
		Passion/Emotion	5	16.7%
		Communication	2	6.7%
		Memorization	3	10.0%
		Vocal Style	1	3.3%
		Stage Presence	3	10.0%
		Confidence	8	26.7%
Aural Skills	9	Listening	5	16.7%
		Ability to harmonize	4	13.3%
Technical Facility	31	Good Technique	4	13.3%
		Natural Talent	10	33.3%
		Breath Control	7	23.3%
		Tone Color	10	33.3%

Appendix A: Survey Results- Please list key *knowledge* that good singers should possess.

Key Term Category	Times mentioned in responses	Words Mentioned	Number of Times mentioned (by different responders)	Percentage of Responders who addressed this Key Category
Music Literacy	24	Solfege	5	16.7%
		Pitch, Major scale/tonality	4	13.3%
		Understanding of rhythm, beat, time signature	6	20.0%
		Score reading, reading music notation	9	30.0%
Performance Ability	6	Understand dynamics, articulations on the page and how to create	6	20.0%
Technical Facility	14	Understand Range	2	6.7%
		Understand breathing mechanics	8	26.7%
		Understand Mouth Shape and Vowel Production	4	13.3%

Appendix B: Curricular Documents-Unit Outline

Mark Twain IS 239		Vocal Talent Curriculum	
Contemporary A Cappella Unit			
<u>SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE:</u> Developing Aural Confidence in Singers Performance as a Bridge from Skills to Knowledge Increasing Technical Facility through Instrumental Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none">Instrument FamiliesDescribing sound textures Student Identity, Ownership, and Validation <ul style="list-style-type: none">Arranging	WEEK 1 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: How do musicians and composers make creative decisions? UNDERSTANDINGS: Repeats in music are used to create musical shape		
	<u>WARM-UP</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">P/T/K/F/S different rhythmic valuesStudent conductor chooses a syllable to conduct to the class. Ask them to think about what to choose, Ex: Choose a legato sound, an accented sound, a creepy sound, etc.	<u>REHEARSAL OUTLINE</u> Listening to Instrumental Tracks for Rock/Pop Styles: Identify instrumental family groups <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strings (Guitar/Bass)WoodwindsBrassKeyboardPercussionElectronic/effects Brainstorm words to describe sound for each group <ul style="list-style-type: none">Similarities and differences with the voice Group Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Create a list of consonants/vowels for your instrumental family including WHY	<u>WRAP-UP/ ASSESSMENT</u> Find a song of your choice that features your instrument family. Experiment with the different consonant/vowel combinations and determine which fits that track the best.
<u>SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE:</u> Developing Aural Confidence in Singers <ul style="list-style-type: none">SolfègeTriadVoice leading Performance as a Bridge from Skills to Knowledge Increasing Technical Facility through Instrumental Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none">Drum Kit patternsVP Student Identity, Ownership, and Validation Arranging	WEEK 2 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: How do musicians and composers make creative decisions? UNDERSTANDINGS: Listening vertically to all voice parts and not just the melody allows the entire song to take shape		
	<u>WARM-UP</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">C Major scale ↑↓C Major triad with movement I IV VOctave slide for mix for group pop soundP/T/K/F/S different rhythmic valuesQuarter, eighth, sixteenth	<u>REHEARSAL OUTLINE</u> <u>Class Project/Discussion:</u> Listening and group arrangement of <i>The Lion Sleeps Tonight</i> background vocals (chords I IV and V). Students make creative decisions about: <ul style="list-style-type: none">RhythmsVoice leading: Should the Sopranos stay on "Do" or move down to "La"? Let's try it... Text/syllables: Should voice parts sing words or syllables? Both? Vocal Percussion workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none">Practice basic rock patterns/take turns	<u>WRAP-UP/ ASSESSMENT</u> Listen to pop songs in different styles or from different eras. Try to sing along to a background part that you hear (vocals or an instrumental) Listen again to the same tracks and try to mimic what you hear from the percussionist <ul style="list-style-type: none">InstrumentEffects Don't overdo it! Practice mouth shape more than volume

Appendix B: Curricular Documents-Unit Outline

Mark Twain IS 239		Vocal Talent Curriculum	
Contemporary A Cappella Unit			
SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE: Developing Aural Confidence in Singers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solfège• Triad• Voice leading Performance as a Bridge from Skills to Knowledge Increasing Technical Facility through Instrumental Practice Student Identity, Ownership, and Validation Arranging	WEEK 3 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: How do musicians and composers make creative decisions? UNDERSTANDINGS: Listening vertically to all voice parts and not just the melody allows the entire song to take shape		
	WARM-UP <ul style="list-style-type: none">• G Major scale ↑↓• Scale degrees• Major triad vs. minor triad do-mi-sol la-do-mi• G Major triad with movement in I-V	REHEARSAL OUTLINE Listen to the original recording (intro/verse/chorus) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initial observations about sound/shape Measures 1-4 Move in G Major V-I asking students to determine appropriate voicings for chords Review tie vs. slur <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak straight vs. syncopated rhythm Add to pitch Opening Guitar Chords: Students make creative decisions about text/syllables: Should voice parts sing words or syllables? Both? Invite a student to step out of the choir, listening for vowels/text and dynamics.	WRAP-UP/ ASSESSMENT Look up the chords to a song that you are interested in learning for yourself. Do you notice any repetition in the chords that are used? Print/Write out the chords used for either the verse or the chorus and bring in to class next week for discussion.
SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE: Developing Aural Confidence in Singers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solfège• Triad• Voice leading Performance as a Bridge from Skills to Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chord progression• Ostinato Increasing Technical Facility through Instrumental Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homework Student Identity, Ownership, and Validation Arranging	WEEK 4 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: How do musicians and composers make creative decisions? UNDERSTANDINGS: Repeats in music are used to create musical shape		
	WARM-UP <ul style="list-style-type: none">• G Major scale ↑↓• Scale degrees• G Major triad with movement in vi IV V G Major Solfège <ul style="list-style-type: none">• la-do• sol-do-ti-do• mi-fa-sol-do,-sol	REHEARSAL OUTLINE Meet in sectionals to discuss their chosen song <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there similarities in your choices?• Same chords/Same structure Choose one to discuss as a class Use circle of 5ths/ Solfège to understand the connection between what they know into what they need to know 2 measure patterns to create our chord progression G Major Solfège from warm-up to recognize patterns in m. 5-12	WRAP-UP/ ASSESSMENT Listen to the original recording of <i>Behind These Hazel Eyes</i> to try to determine your instrumental function in the piece.

Appendix B: Curricular Documents-Unit Outline

Mark Twain IS 239		Vocal Talent Curriculum	
Contemporary A Cappella Unit			
<u>SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE:</u> Developing Aural Confidence in Singers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solfège• Triad• Voice leading Performance as a Bridge from Skills to Knowledge Increasing Technical Facility through Instrumental Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instrument identity Student Identity, Ownership, and Validation Arranging	WEEK 5 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: How do musicians and composers make creative decisions? UNDERSTANDINGS: Listening vertically to all voice parts and not just the melody allows the entire song to take shape		
	<u>WARM-UP</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• G Major scale ↑↓• Scale degrees• Major triad vs. minor triad do-mi-sol la-do-mi• G Major triad with movement vi IV I V	<u>REHEARSAL OUTLINE</u> Listen to original track as a class. Follow your part along with the recording: What instruments do you hear? Brainstorm a list <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the sound qualities of each instrument? Musical and non-musical terms• Identify which instrument your part is imitating• Bring thoughts/answers back to the group Students brainstorm with their Voice part which consonants +vowel sound would best imitate the sound of their instrument Put parts together in combinations to align rhythm, text choices, tuning Critique/fix any issues with text choices	<u>WRAP-UP/ ASSESSMENT</u> Listen to the original recording of <i>Behind These Hazel Eyes</i> to understand the tone/inflections in the solo. Next week we will be rotating: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soloists• VP• Student conductors
<u>SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE:</u> Developing Aural Confidence in Singers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solfège• Triad• Voice leading Performance as a Bridge from Skills to Knowledge Increasing Technical Facility through Instrumental Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tonal shaping for soloists• Drum Kit patterns• VP Student Identity, Ownership, and Validation Arranging	WEEK 6 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS: How do musicians and composers make creative decisions? UNDERSTANDINGS: Listening vertically to all voice parts and not just the melody allows the entire song to take shape		
	<u>WARM-UP</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• G Major scale ↑↓• Scale degrees• Major triad vs. minor triad do-mi-sol la-do-mi• G Major triad with movement vi IV I V• NEW chord: a minor (ii)	<u>REHEARSAL OUTLINE</u> Sing through m. 5-12 Listen vertically to identify how parts interact and when specific parts are more important. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SII/Alto change m. 9• Bridge to chorus m. 13• SI counter melody m. 13 Add melody Rotating students in different roles as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soloists• VP• Student conductors Discuss how different gestures/sounds changes the overall arrangement	<u>WRAP-UP/ ASSESSMENT</u> Listen to Cleftomaniacs' arrangement from 2007. What do you hear in syllabic choice/sound that is same and different? How did students perform as soloists, VP, and conductors? Who was more comfortable in the ensemble setting? Who had strong considerations about arranging?

Appendix B: Annotated Arrangement

Behind These Hazel Eyes

Transcribed/edited by
Ms. Cascio from 2007
Audio Recording

Kelly Clarkson/Max Martin/Luke Gottwald

Arrangement by Nick Fox for the NYU Cleftomaniacs

INTRODUCTION

SOLO Voice

**UNISON RHYTHMS:
SYLLABLES?**

1 a [2]+ [34]

Soprano 1

Soprano 2

Alto

Bass

VERSE 1

vi IV I V

SOLO

Seems like just ye - ster-day You were a part of me

S 1

Instrument? Syllables?

S 2

Instrument? Syllables?

A

B

vi IV I V

SOLO

First system of the musical score. It features five staves: SOLO, S 1, S 2, A, and B. The SOLO staff has lyrics: "I used to stand so tall, I used to be so strong." S 1 and S 2 have a long horizontal line indicating a sustained note. A and B have a melodic line.

I used to stand so tall, I used to be so strong.

NEW MATERIAL



SOLO

Second system of the musical score. It features five staves: SOLO, S 1, S 2, A, and B. The SOLO staff has lyrics: "Your arms a - round me tight, Ev - ery thing felt so right,". S 1 and S 2 have a melodic line. A and B have a melodic line. The staves for S 2 and A are circled in orange.

Your arms a - round me tight, Ev - ery thing felt so right,

Behind These Hazel Eyes

3

Un-break-a-ble like no-ting could go wrong, now I can't breathe no,

COUNTERMELODY I can't breathe no,

NEW TEXTURE

Chorus

I can't sleep I'm bare-ly ha-ving on jin jin jo wa DOW

I can't sleep I'm bare-ly ha-ving on jin jin jo wa DOW

jin jin jo wa DOW

jin jin jo wa DOW

jin jin jo wa DOW

How does this syllable choice shape the sound? How can we build the sound up to this point?

Appendix C: Aural Assessment

Mark Twain IS 239

Name: _____

Vocal Talent

Aural Skills Assessment

Homeroom: _____

Overall Score:

Voice Part: _____

Aural Skills Assessment

Section 1: Intervals (Steps or skips)

Identify the following intervals by writing STEP or SKIP for each example.

a) _____ b) _____ c) _____ d) _____ e) _____

f) _____ g) _____ h) _____ i) _____ j) _____

Section 2: Tonality (Major/minor/diminished/augmented)

Identify the quality of the following triads or chords by writing MAJOR, MINOR, DIM, or AUG for each example.

a) _____ b) _____ c) _____ d) _____ e) _____

f) _____ g) _____ h) _____ i) _____ j) _____

Section 3: Harmonic Function (Tonic/Dominant)

Identify the function of the following chords by writing I for a tonic chord (Do-chord) or V for a dominant chord (Sol-chord) for each example.

a) _____ b) _____ c) _____ d) _____ e) _____

Section 4: Rhythmic Dictation

You will hear a 4-measure phrase in 3/4 time. This rhythmic phrases uses ONLY quarter, half, and eighth notes. Write down the rhythms correctly. You will hear the example played three times.

Section 5: Melodic Dictation

You will hear a 3-measure phrase in C Major and 4/4 time. This melodic phrase uses ONLY quarter, half, and eighth notes. Write down the melody and rhythms correctly on the staff below. You will hear the example played three times.

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