

Distance Learning and the Adolescent Voice: A Look into the Effects of Virtual Learning
on the Maturing Adolescent Voice

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Abstract

In this paper I have two main points of discussion: distance learning in music education, and the adolescent voice in relation to the vocal health, social and emotional tolls, pedagogical debates, and role of a choral director in an adolescent's journey. I will discuss the findings of my survey where secondary choral directors are asked questions pertaining to their new "normal" in the choral rehearsal and how these results relate to the adolescent voice and distance learning. Survey participants will respond with both the positive and negatives surrounding distance learning as well as how they will progress in the future.

Lovingly dedicated to:

My parents for always being my biggest fans;

My sweet babies: Evelyn, Simon and Maggie;

My Michael for letting me follow my dreams.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to look into the effects of virtual/distance learning and how it changes the way adolescent voices learn. In this study, secondary choral teachers completed a survey surrounding the adaptation of their teaching strategies toward the adolescent voice when teaching virtually. Teachers were asked a variety of questions based on the vocal health of their students and how being virtual may hinder or help their students. Data was analyzed for the drawbacks associated with the inability to teach young voices in-person, and conversely, any positives to teaching adolescent voices virtually that may be adapted to use with in-person learning.

In addition, I researched the history and growth of distance learning in music education as well as the vocal pedagogy of the adolescent voice, specifically the maturing voice. Questions posed are: will the traditional platform to teach music be applicable in the virtual universe? Or will tradition keep the online music making from growing in the future? Can a new tradition of methods and pedagogies be created to push online music education into the future?

Teachers during the Covid-19 Pandemic have had to look “outside of the box” for new teaching strategies in order to best help their students. Choral teachers in particular have had to find/create new ways of teaching their subject, as singing is not allowed in most schools or is riddled with restrictions. Adolescent voices in general can be difficult to work with as students navigate their vocal changes, let alone the social and emotional struggles they face daily. With students being asked to practice on their own without the presence of their peers, could they actually find some benefit in this situation?

It is an interesting notion to think that virtual choral teaching may in fact have positive effects on the adolescent voice. This study surveyed secondary choral teachers asking them what techniques were used in teaching adolescent voices virtually and how these old/new techniques proved to be either successful or unsuccessful. The data collected will be used to create a thorough list of teaching tools/strategies to help other teachers when working virtually with adolescent voices.

Chapter 2: The Development of Distance Learning in Music Education

The idea of “Distance Learning” is not a new concept. While many people may not have been familiar with the notion of learning outside of the brick and mortar classroom prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the roots of this style of learning can be traced back several centuries. In this chapter I will discuss the path that distance learning has taken to this point in time, as well as how this style of learning is being used in and out of the “traditional” music classroom. I will be using the term “distance learning” to reflect the “non-traditional” learning process whereby student and teacher are not working together in-person, but rather are using other tools such as technology for the learning process. This process can utilize both synchronous and asynchronous instruction.

The use of learning in an online manner has become, in many ways, the rule as opposed to the exception (Kentnor, 2015). Prior to the pandemic, many new online education resources have increased in popularity allowing students to choose his/her best path for education. Although the idea of distance learning has grown in popularity over the past two decades, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic school districts and other learning institutions have had to re-organize their teaching and learning styles in an effort to help quell the spread of the virus while still teaching at the highest standard level possible. But as Kentnor (2015) states, the idea of learning outside of the school building is not a new, but rather dates back as early at the 18th Century. In her 2015 paper, she writes that the path of distance education began with the Parcel Post, and then with advancements in technology distance learning quickly grew via radio in the 1920’s, television in the 1960’s, and finally with the internet in the late 1980’s with the University of Phoenix and their online degree program. The creation of the World Wide Web

has allowed programs such as this to grow, and other new programs to begin. Not only are there post-graduate courses of study, we now find a growing number of both elementary and secondary curriculums.

In contrast to the growth of the programs listed above, Koutsoupidou (2014) notes that music education course study and research is still relatively new. The reasoning behind this he states as being the result of “music training at all levels of education is traditionally seen as people’s serious engagement in practical, hands on activities, such as learning how to play a musical instrument, singing, performing solo or in groups, improvising and composing music. As a result, informal avenues such as computer software and apps are the more popular tools for online music making/training. But Music training, however, can be examined from different perspectives considering factors such as the age of people involved, the level of education, the nature of learning (formal, informal), specific fields of music instruction and the mode of instruction” (Koutsoupidou, 2014, Introduction section). Carol Johnson (2017) also speaks to the traditional thinking of instructors whereby certain concepts simply cannot be taught in an online environment. She also noted that many instructors are simply not knowledgeable enough about the tools necessary to teach in this platform, or that they feel as though the tools needed to teach would not be helpful to the students. Blake (2018) also tells of the lack of studies focusing on music education in an online platform and states that the studies focused on either the “pedagogical practices” or “student perception”.

As Blake (2018) suggests, there are few studies on the pedagogies associated with online music education. There are yet to be established structured pedagogies for online music education and as a result each teacher is creating his/her own based on his/her training. Post-secondary online music education has been focused around more informal musical outlets

but is now shifting increasingly to a more formal based education (Johnson & Hawley, 2017) as teachers are now transitioning from "...a traditional pedagogy to an online pedagogy" (Johnson, 2017, p.448). In a survey completed by Carol Johnson, many teachers noted that much of what they centered their online pedagogies around was their own learning experiences as well as their previous experience in teaching. It was also mentioned that their online teachings were a constant work in progress and that with each new class they were able to apply new ideas and technologies to help make the online learning experience more valuable to their students.

Formal online learning, when it is a performance-based lesson, has its own set of limitations, "...in many music departments in the United States and Canada, performance-based teaching staff are generally performance-based graduates. While their terminating degrees in performance demonstrates expertise in performance, this suggests that many music faculty members may not have background expertise in teaching" (Johnson, 2017, p.442). In addition, teachers and students alike may experience issues with the sound or have a delay, and the internet connection can be hindered simply by the weather or too many users on the Wi-Fi. Instructors may not be able to reach the appropriate objectives of the lesson as the methods used for in-person instruction do not translate well through the screen. Additionally, assessment in performance-based classes may not be as individualized and specific and therefore growth of the student might be hindered.

Online courses based on performance, such as instrumental lessons, moving, clapping, and singing activities are not based on reading material. They include one-to-one instruction, which relies on image and sound. The student needs to observe the teacher in the way she holds a musical instrument, the correct method to produce sound, the body movement that is sometimes required for musical expressions. Similarly, in performing

activities such as singing and clapping (e.g. the Kodaly method), the student and the teacher follow a series of different activities: they have to synchronize their movement, to imitate each other, to create dialogues, to improvise music. (Koutsoupidou, 2014, Practical Limitations section)

The formal online teaching environment, along with the struggle of creating appropriate pedagogies and the issues associated with working on technology, also has to create an appropriate learning environment thereby meeting the students social and psychological needs. The lack of social interaction can have a negative effect on the students as they may feel disconnected from other classmates as well as their teachers (Koutsoupidou, 2014).

Conversely, formal online instruction can be a valuable tool when students are simply unable to attend the physical school (Koutsoupidou, 2014). Students can access teachers and alternate forms of instruction that may not be available to them monetarily or geographically speaking (Johnson & Hawley, 2017; Koutsoupidou, 2014,). Sherbon & Kish (2005) also note that having formal online instruction allows students to work at their own pace, on their own time and can provide opportunities to those who have other time-consuming obligations such as a full-time job or children.

As mentioned above, much of online music training has been through informal applications and software. These online tools have been accessible to all students of all ages, focusing on notation and composition where even young children can find “play-like activities” (Koutsoupidou, 2014, Introduction section). Johnson & Hawley (2017) acknowledged that the use of technology has greatly assisted in the informal learning of music and has helped to “creatively explore” the future of music. Students are now able to facilitate their own musical learnings by choosing how they want to experience music. “Given the vast opportunities for

informal online music learning provided by the Internet, students can now choose how they wish to develop their music learning – by professional learning community groups, desire for a particular social community, or by concrete, sequential manner” (Johnson & Hawley, 2017, Informal Online Music Learning section).

As a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the stoppage of in-person instruction, music educators have had to adapt and create new performance outlets. One such outlet is the Virtual Choir. Virtual choirs are almost a must in our current situation (Podd, 2020). With the virtual choir, singers are responsible for learning and recording themselves singing repertoire which is then added to the choir as a whole. Choral teachers spend endless hours putting together each video to create one unified sound. But as Podd (2020) suggests, this is a way for singers to still connect and it satisfies the need to perform. Through these medium, choral teachers get the unusual ability to “see and hear every individual, in order to synchronize and balance each member with the ensemble. Hearing and seeing everyone in isolation, there is such vulnerability, fragility, and individuality: some voices at a whisper, others confident” (Podd, 2020, Time Saving Tools for Conductors section). Teachers are finding that the video submissions are a positive way to assess students; by hearing each voice individually, directors can assess not only the knowledge of the piece being performed, but also the vocal quality and technique. The virtual choir is not only appearing in educational arenas, it is also being used by community choirs, churches and even professional choirs and orchestras. Current choral composer and director Eric Whitacre has been working with virtual choirs since 2011. During the 2020 pandemic, Whitacre composed a new piece of music, *Sing Gently*, which was performed by 17,572 singers from 129 countries (www.ericwhitacre.com/the-virtual-choir). “The magic of these projects is to witness vulnerability transform into something with such

strength, far greater than the sum of its parts. After all, isn't that the purpose of a choir, no matter the medium" (Podd, 2020, Time Saving Tools for Conductors section)?

In conclusion, there is still much to be learned about online music education, both formal and informal, performance and non-performance. Koutsoupidou (2014) found in his survey that while performance-based music educators were unsure about the limitations they face in the online medium, they still found these lessons to have purposeful outcomes. Music educators are still in need of a more structured pedagogy, but, they have been able to develop online tools necessary to create a positive online presence.

Chapter 3: Vocal Health and Pedagogy of the Maturing Adolescent Voice

It is no secret that the changing/maturing of the voice can be a very difficult and emotional time in an adolescent's life. While some face the emotional strife in a very public manner, there are even more that suffer in silence. In this chapter I will discuss the physical, emotional, and social aspects of the voice change as well as the choral director and societal role that is played in an adolescent's voice change. "Adolescence is a difficult time, full of raw emotion and self-doubt. Singing in a choral group can give adolescents a sense of peace and happiness" (Davids and LaTour, 2012, p. 213).

An interesting research finding has revealed vocal changes occurring earlier in children within the past 30 years as opposed to children in the mid-20th Century (Skadsem, 2007; Davids & LaTour, 2012). Skadsem (2007) reports the changes happen as early as the Third or Fourth Grade, Davids & LaTour (2012) and Fischer (2014) agree that the changes are occurring as early as the age of nine. They suggest that females experience voice changes typically from the age of nine to fourteen (even up to 16) with the major changes occurring between 11 and 12; male voice change happens from the age of nine to eighteen with the major changes happening between the ages of 12 and 13 and then again at the ages of 14 and 15. The changes occur as a result of the increase in hormones which leads to a growth in the vocal fold length (Davids & LaTour, 2012, p. 201). This growth can hinder the muscle control of the larynx which can cause adolescents to struggle when speaking or singing (Sweet, 2007). Male adolescents are usually associated with vocal change, especially a more severe and obvious vocal change. The image of a young boy talking with a squeaky voice or his voice cracking is what is typically associated with the maturing voice. However, female adolescents also experience a voice change, but little research has been completed on this topic (Davids & LaTour, 2012; Sweet, 2007). Just as humans grow

at different rates with diverse experiences, so too does the changing voice affect individuals in ways unique to them. Sweet (2007) comments that males and females can both experience either a slow and difficult change or a quick and easy change. Freer (2016) believes that while some of the difference is based on biology, and therefore unalterable, the adolescents who sing through voice change tend to have an easier transition.

There is much debate on the proper introduction and pedagogy surrounding the young singer. Where agreement lies is there is no specific age that is the correct age to begin vocal training. Children should be exposed to singing at a young age but should not be forced into “extensive training programs,” instead an introduction to age appropriate groups like a church choir, Kinder-Music or Gymboree, where they can gain an appreciation for music and begin ear training is best (Kelchner et al., 2014, p.138). Kelchner et al. (2014) notes that traditional vocal training is typically a “master/apprentice” relationship. Studios were established whereby students had to audition and when accepted, had to maintain an appropriate growth over several years in order to continue with that studio. The focus of these studios was to first establish good technique, and then song study would come several years later. This focus has shifted in recent years as the objective is a more “tangible” end product such as a performance. Parents are paying for vocal lessons and want to see a product, even if the time of lesson taking has been inadequate. Parents want their children to be performers and do not understand the “technical voice training” resulting in poor techniques being established (Kelchner et al., 2014). Therefore, young vocal students are not given the appropriate technique creating an appreciation of the need to first establish healthy habits and then blossom into performance.

Where many experts agree is that singing and being involved in a choral setting has a positive social and emotional impact on adolescents. Davids and LaTour (2012) suggest that the

social aspect of singing allows adolescents to have a strong support system as they mature and can help alleviate some of the isolation being felt as a result of the vocal changes (Sweet, 2007). Negative emotions due to vocal changes can linger into adulthood as stated by Fischer (2014). Equally as important are the positive experiences that tend to have an even stronger emotional response (Sweet, 2015).

As male and female voices change differently, the idea of separating the male singers from the female singers has grown in appreciation. In an interview by Sally Hook (1998), John Cooksey and Nancy Cox, both experts in the vocal health of adolescents in the choral setting, agree that by separating the girls from the boys and allowing them to sing repertoire appropriate for their maturing voices, they will have a better social and technical experience. As noted above, the male voice is associated more so with the changing voice than females, and as a result, boys are able to “joke” with each other when audible slips occur. Females on the other hand, are afraid of being embarrassed and will sing timidly in choir as a result (Sweet, 2015), further acknowledging the idea of separating the male and female singers into their own choirs. Singers are more likely to have a positive experience if their needs are being met socially and emotionally. Fear of embarrassment can lead singers down a negative path which can result in the possibility of vocal harm or the abandoning of singing altogether.

Selection of repertoire can have a major impact on young singers and their overall choral experience during adolescence. More appropriate repertoire is being written for middle and junior high choirs as a result of scientific research surrounding the vocal range and changes in adolescents (Hook, 1998). In Sally Hook’s 1998 interview with John Cooksey and Nancy Cox, both experts agree that repertoire is one of the two most important things for choirs in this age group (the other being vocal pedagogy). Cooksey says the following during the Hook interview:

For me, it's the core part of the whole curriculum, and here again, knowledge of the voice helps when you select repertoire. As I have often said, you need to be careful in applying the criteria of range and tessitura for the pieces that you select. Be sure you understand the vocal abilities of students at this level. You must understand the technical demands of the music you choose, whether there is a fit between what they can do vocally and what they can do in terms of their range and register adjustments. Consider whether they can relate to this music emotionally. And I think music should have an educational value. Those things are very important to me, because if you combine those things, the students are going to have an aesthetic experience with the music. And it doesn't have to be music that caters to them, but music that stands on its own as having an educational aesthetic value. (p.22)

Cooksey and Cox also agree that the arrangement of the repertoire is important. Neither one favors the SAB (Soprano, Alto, Baritone) format but feels as though a different three (Soprano I, Soprano II, Alto; Part I, Part II, Part III) - or four (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) -part arrangement is better as it gives the singers more/better options for which part they are comfortable singing. In addition, Skadsem (2007) feels as the typically used SAB structure in the middle and junior high choirs is not as appropriate for the singers as the SATB arrangement, as it does not allow students the flexibility to sing in an appropriate range/tessitura and can put unnecessary strain on the voice as the singer tries to reach pitches that are not available.

Adolescent singers need guidance and assistance in the growth of their voice and should look to their middle/junior high choral teacher to have a profound effect on them. The knowledge of both repertoire and vocal health allows educators to create a positive environment where the change is supported, acknowledged and given the proper amount of education in order

to make the transition “normal.” Voices can be harmed if improper technique is present through the vocal change (Hook, 1998), but as Fischer (2014) explains, most middle and junior high choral directors have a hard time dealing with vocal changes in their students. Davids and LaTour (2012) suggest that choral directors routinely listen to their singers to assess where they should be singing part-wise and allow them to move around in parts as needed due to comfort therefore allowing more opportunities to sing using both head and chest voice. Leading voice change expert John Cooksey agrees that the moving of voice parts as the voice changes can help alleviate any possible bad habits created as a result of singing improperly (Hook, 1998). He further states that “the core of the voice is the tessitura of the voice. Basically where they’re most comfortable in singing and where the medical compression is most efficient in the scientific way. For me the core of the voice is where you get the most efficient sound, where it is most comfortable for them to be singing” (Hook, 1998, p. 23). Unfortunately, as Sweet (2015) discovered, most girls associate early with a voice part which can in turn, hinder their vocal development. Her own experience in middle school placed her as an “adolescent alto” simply because she could sing low and was good at harmony. As a result, she says that her “high range was never developed, and she never learned how to properly sing the high notes” (Sweet, 2015, Epoch section). When researching the topic of female voice change, many of Sweet’s participants felt embarrassed when singing in choral class and as a result would sing in a way that restricts their voice so as not to make an audible mistake. Knowing this, choral directors may need to be more concerned about female students as they may be slipping through the cracks; female singers may not be creating as obvious or audible of a reaction to their change as their male counterparts. Adolescents, for the most part, do not understand what is happening during their vocal change, but as Freer (2016) noted, most want to learn. Vocal teachers and

choral directors alike seem to agree that informing young singers about the change can have a positive impact on their lives.

Choral directors need to use themselves as a positive role model. The way the conductor looks, plans rehearsals, selects repertoire and even in keeping their own mind and body healthy can have an effect on young singers (Davids & LaTour, 2012; Santos et al., 2019). Choral directors need to remember to take care of one's own voice in both singing and speaking, even completing their own set of warm-ups prior to rehearsals. When singers can hear and see proper technique, they are better able to emulate.

Whether or not adolescent singers should sing through the voice change during puberty is a topic of great discussion among experts. There are not many studies about adolescent vocal health in terms of vocal injury and "pedagogical debates regarding training of the adolescent voice will continue to persist in the voice community until empirical studies document the efficacy of specific training modalities" (Kelchner et al., 2014, p. 140). Davids and LaTour (2012) believe that singing through the change is important and that children should be taught proper technique along with proper terminology. Having a professional teacher to educate young singers about the anatomical changes can be helpful (Kelchner et al., 2014). Informed training throughout the change is especially crucial as many youths try to sound like their favorite pop icons. Kelchner et al. (2015) states that many young singers try to emulate the sounds of current pop stars, not understanding the strains put on their voice as a result and how they might be injuring their developing voice. The breathy quality of Pop singing and the Broadway belt are especially bad for the changing voice as it can damage the young voice when improper technique is used; young voices are more likely to be injured as a result of poor technique (Davids & LaTour, 2012). Sweet (2015) discovered during her research that many female singers admitted

to singing improperly outside of choral class as a way to “achieve the sound they desired” (Implications section). “The popular singing style does not have a technical standard, as the classical does; it is learned informally, mainly through vocal imitation, and may favor vocal misuse” (Santos et al., 2019, Introduction). Classical singers are therefore more aware of vocal health than that of pop singers as they are more cognizant of the vocal demands of their craft (Santos et al., 2019).

Throughout all of the research, there is one common thread: adolescents should be taught about their vocal change. Not only are they trying to deal with the physical changes and limitations as a result of the change, but also the social and emotional changes that come along. Support and mindfulness of young singers should be given by choral directors and private teachers as they are the key to the education of the change. While much debate still exists over the proper way to sing through puberty and the vocal change, the teaching of technique by means of appropriate warm-ups and repertoire as well as a strong role model, can have a positive impact on young singers.

Chapter 4: Survey Results

The purpose behind my survey is to gain some insight into how secondary choral directors are continuing to teach vocal health while working within the distance learning model due to the Covid-19 restrictions. I contacted three local Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) District Presidents and asked if they would be willing to share my survey to their members. I received confirmation from two Presidents. Unfortunately, I only received two responses in total from these groups. Due to lack of response, I began contacting friends and current/former colleagues. Out of the 19 contacted, 13 responded. I therefore had a total of 15 survey participants. The survey was designed around three types of questions: learning model(s) used, vocal health past and present, and the future of vocal/choral education. In this chapter I will discuss the results of the survey and what this might mean for the future of vocal/choral education in our schools.

The survey respondents included nine high school directors, five middle school and one junior high school director. At the time of the survey (March 2021), 13 were in district models of hybrid/blended learning, one was completely in-person, and one was solely virtual. When asked if their model has changed throughout the year or will be changing, 11 responded that the model has changed/will be changing, while four have been and will continue working with the same learning model. The directors were asked to specify the learning/teaching changes they have had to work with this school year; one noted that they flowed between models depending on the number of Covid-19 cases present in their school while two changed from virtual to hybrid to in-person throughout the school year. Two mentioned moving back into a fully virtual model, six moved from virtual to hybrid model and six transitioned into an in-person learning model. Three interesting models mentioned were: half day in-person with asynchronous

assignments moved to half day in-person with live streaming, hybrid model moved to students electing either be virtual or in-person, and hybrid learning with asynchronous assignments change to hybrid learning with a synchronous component.

Respondents were asked to explain the platform they are using for rehearsals in regard to synchronous and/or asynchronous instruction. The sole respondent teaching virtually all year holds rehearsals synchronously while requiring asynchronous work to be completed. The other 14 respondents have been working with students both virtually and in-person. Eight noted using synchronous instruction with their virtual students, four specifically mentioning working with the in-person students simultaneously (students at home were muted with cameras on). Other responses were as follows: using asynchronous assignments for virtual students while working with small in-person groups; asynchronous for all students. Asynchronous assignments for both virtual and in-person students were mentioned by 12 out of the 15 respondents. Of the 14 directors with hybrid/in-person (with virtual students as well) learners, six are focusing on their in-person students, while two focus their instruction to the virtual students. As a result of this data collected, it appears as though 80% of choral directors are using some form of asynchronous instruction to assist with the lack of in-person instruction. 34% of choral teachers with students both virtual and in-person students favor teaching towards those who are in-person, while 14% favor tailoring their instruction to the virtual students.

Assessment has been one of the most difficult aspects of teaching students in any distance learning setting, but the choral setting has been especially impacted. Survey participants were asked to describe their means of assessing students, whether virtual, hybrid or in-person. 13 out of 15 (87%) responded that they have been using asynchronous assignments for their assessments. Examples given were: video recordings through Flipgrid (7), non-singing related

assessments such as Google quizzes, writing assignments or other projects (6), rehearsal observation form (1), other music apps such as Sight Reading Factory and Music First (4), vocal recording (4), singing tests to pre-recorded tracks (3) and a practice journal (1). Of those 13 respondents, 3 noted also assessing when students are in-person through part-work. Two participants did not give any specific mention of their current assessment strategies.

Adolescents face many struggles when dealing with vocal changes; physical, social and emotional. The question asked to survey participants pertained to the physical, and was in regard to vocal health being a priority before the Covid-19 pandemic; was vocal health a priority during choral rehearsals in a “normal” year? Of the 15 participants, ten specified that vocal health has always been a priority, six noting that it is an important part of their curriculum. The other five participants said that it was not a focus, although some attention was paid to it during rehearsals, mostly via warm-ups. One participant acknowledged that they never even gave it a thought as a focus or part of the curriculum prior to this year. Specific tools mentioned to assist with the teaching of proper vocal health were: warm-ups, using the repertoire to teach technique (two used this terminology in preference to vocal health), the devoting one day each week specifically to technique, and the modeling of proper posture, facial shapes, breath support, and a relaxed jaw/throat.

The changing of the traditional in-person choral format to include distance learners, was the motivation behind my asking participants if they have had to alter, one way or another, their focus on vocal health. Of the 15 responses, 10 (67%) responded that they have needed to alter their vocal health focus in some way. Less time overall with students in-person has resulted in less focus by the singers as was noted by three responses; this lack of time has made it more difficult to learn repertoire, resulting in more time spent rehearsing repertoire and less on warm-

ups, technique and overall vocal health. One director even made the statement that his/her students are suffering without that focus; the choir's overall sound has been adversely altered as less time can be spent correcting the poor technique. Some positive changes mentioned were that with the cancelling of concerts, participants have been able to focus more on vocal health and technique as they are not trying to prepare repertoire. In addition, as a result of the restrictions placed on singing, one participant mentioned that they are talking/singing less which has led to a more deliberate focus on vocal health and warm-ups. Two of the directors who said they have not changed their focus stated that proper technique was still a main focus but being able to hear the singers during rehearsal has been difficult leading to the inability to properly assess and therefore correct poor habits.

Eight participants elaborated on how they kept vocal health a priority during their rehearsals, even as they dealt with in-person restrictions and students learning virtually. Three responded they used their warm-ups as an opportunity to teach vocal health (one specifically mentioned helping the singers understand their adolescent voices), one wrote that they had students model their own breath, posture, etc., and two used the time to help students sing through the mask with the understanding that they will not have as productive a sound and that they should not try to force their sound. Also mentioned were using activities on vocal health, using daily reminders, and even working with students on a one-on-one basis (preferably in-person, but not limited to these students).

Making vocal health a priority can be difficult at any point in time during the school year, but the extra obstacles thrown at choral directors this year has led to a new list of issues. Six participants expanded on how these obstacles have hindered their approach to vocal health. The most common thread throughout the responses was that the biggest hinderance was simply *time*

(four out of six mentioned time specifically); overall time with students is less and/or it takes more time to prepare all of the needed resources to teach both virtual and in-person students. In addition to time, other obstacles faced were: trying to sing through masks leading to improper singing as well as not being able to properly hear the singers to assess and give feedback; teaching both virtual and in-person students at the same time; virtual students only receiving asynchronous instruction; teachers are unable to demonstrate proper technique.

As mentioned above, adolescents face many struggles when coping with their voice change (physical, social, emotional). I asked the choral directors to try and speak on behalf of their students, hoping to gain some insight as to how their students are reacting to the social and emotional implications of the choral rehearsal during this pandemic. Participants responded with the positive and negatives that have surfaced. Negatives mentioned were, students miss the social aspect of singing in a group, the energy is not present in the small groups and the overall lack of bonding that is usually a large part of the experience. Students are also missing the simple act of singing and singing with the whole choir, especially in preparation for a concert, which is also missing in many schools. One teacher summed it up with “they miss the therapy of listening to and creating music.” Teachers are responding empathetically to their students and are themselves dealing with the loss of the usual and powerful experience. Conversely, a few positives from these unfamiliar circumstances were revealed. Some students like singing in smaller groups, as they are able to get to know each other better and the director can hear individual voices. Also mentioned was that students are making the best out of the situation and are still having a good time, and, have even found a new appreciation for what their choral director does and how they work tirelessly for their students.

Several participants declared some fears they have as a result of their student's reactions. Many programs are suffering in terms of numbers of students participating, and several directors fear that many students may not return next year, or ever again. Along those lines, younger students (sixth graders were mentioned specifically) do not really understand what choir class involves, and as a result may not continue next year. One final comment to note, stated that their students see no positives in the situation and lack motivation as a result of losing the true choral experience.

Although this year has been difficult on all teachers, I posed the question to the survey participants asking if any of the adapted teachings of vocal health they incorporated will impact their future teachings? One responded the simple ability to adapt is how they will move forward as they do not believe virtual instruction will be going away. Of the 15 respondents, two specified they would keep vocal health as a focus and/or add more deliberate instruction on vocal health, and one even mentioned the use of a microphone for their own vocal health. Five responded that having the virtual element of singing tests/student recordings was something they will continue to use as they can customize and differentiate their instruction and can give individual feedback (one noted this gives encouragement to his/her students and hopes it will have a positive effect long-term). Additionally, it was mentioned that this year has caused one participant to become more organized, and as result has created a vocal health unit that is readily available to his/her students. Other comments were to continue incorporating mini-lessons focusing on vocal health, integrating asynchronous assignments, and the ability to hold asynchronous rehearsals (participant noted that they will no longer feel guilty about having to take a day off). In contrast to the positives mentioned above, one participant commented that they "believe the next few years will be a challenge helping students to get into a routine. The

return of breathing exercises, stretching, singing in close proximity, and peer assessment have all been eliminated this year. I was in a routine of being able to comment on poor technique immediately -- the visual aspect of singing, which is now covered by masks.” A second participant also commented on the negative aspect of the changing of the choral rehearsal stating, “I fear that the changes I have made in the class this year will have lasting effects for several years. Next year, I will have students joining 6th grade chorus that have never been in a choir before and will be starting from “Square 1”. It will be challenging to not eliminate critical work and focus on teaching vocal health in attempts to catch up.”

In my final survey question, I asked the choral directors if they were able to foresee any positives that might come as a result of their new approach to choral teaching? Out of the 15 participants, only one stated that there are no positives as a result of this and will not continue with any of their adapted practices once things get back to “normal.” Five listed the use of new technologies as a major player in their program and will continue to be a major part in the future. Teachers were able to use this new-found resource as a way to prepare fun and engaging assignments, create more purposeful singing assessments, use the flipped classroom model and enhance student’s musicality (e.g. Sight Reading Factory). Three participants mentioned that they would be more purposeful in addressing vocal health; adding vocal rest without fear of losing rehearsal time was also a point of interest. The use of literature as a tool to help teach vocal health was an included point as opposed to focusing solely on the warm-up portion of the rehearsal. In regard to this point, one participant felt as though his/her students now have a heightened awareness of how to protect their voices. Another participant even said that they were pleasantly surprised by his/her students as new leaders began to emerge as a result of the small rehearsal groups.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion, distance education in the field of music education is still in its infancy. Although the traditional idea of distance learning may be centuries old, the lack of formal training for educators and the well-practiced ways of teaching music are slowing the growth of this teaching/learning style. Informal avenues of music study, such as compositional applications or music games (online), are accessible to students young and old, but the more formal structures are yet to become mainstream. Unlike the time-tested pedagogies and methods used in the traditional teaching of music (performance and non-performance based), there has yet to be developed an approved pedagogy for online music studies. Currently, music educators are using their own personal experiences with both music making/teaching and technology to create their own structure, a structure which was noted previously, is constantly changing and improving.

In addition to the fluctuating nature of online music making, so too is the debate on adolescent vocal health and pedagogy. Experts are not in agreement on the proper pedagogy of the adolescent voice and as was stated by Kelchner et al. (2014) “pedagogical debates regarding training of the adolescent voice will continue to persist in the voice community until empirical studies document the efficacy of specific training modalities” (pp. 140-141). Consequently, adding further obstacles such as distance learning, can only compound the debates already in existence. Further studies need to be completed on the vocal health and pedagogy of adolescents in the traditional style of learning, prior to studying the extra component of distance learning. As an aside, online tools such as Skype, YouTube, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet have allowed students to continue working on their musical studies, on some level, even when they cannot be in a traditional setting. The Covid-19 Pandemic has forced teachers and students to be

creative in how they work together; having the mediums listed above has given the platform to continue their studies/teachings with less interruption.

Furthermore, the participants of my survey were able to give valuable insight into how the teaching of vocal health and the health of the choral programs are functioning when distance learning is involved. Of the questions posed in the survey, the majority on vocal health, participants responded in the majority (67%) that vocal health has always been a focus in their rehearsals and distance has not changed that focus. While alternate resources have needed to be used, such as vocal recordings and more targeted repertoire to assist in technique, the directors are still keeping the vocal health of their students a top priority.

Though faced with an unusual teaching, and possibly detrimental, situation, all survey participants were able to locate some positive avenues to assist their students. One such example is the finding of new ways to assess students, as the standard in-person way is not applicable. At some point during the survey, eleven participants mentioned using student's recordings as a way to assess, and this is a tool they will continue using even after the restrictions have lifted. The ability to hear students on an individual basis allows directors to give specific feedback as a way to create a unified sound and a positive focus on vocal health. Equally as important is the use of asynchronous assignments and websites such as Music First and Sight Reading Factory, which allows the participants to expand their students overall musical skills, producing a more purposeful and productive rehearsals.

Nevertheless, all participants mentioned the need to return to a "normal" learning situation. While in agreement that some positive approaches may come from being forced to alter and adapt their usual teachings, the idea of returning to the choral classroom with no restrictions is the short-term goal for all. At some point during the survey, all of the participants

commented on the health and wellness of their students, whether that is vocal health, mental health or overall physical health. In terms of vocal health, 10 out of 15 participants have always made it a priority in their classroom, even if that classroom is virtual. The other five have not made it a focus, but one mentioned that this will change after the return to the traditional learning model.

Finally, this research has shown that while distance learning has not deterred the process of helping adolescents with overall vocal health, it has exposed the severe lack of research on the subject of vocal health in adolescents, and how in-turn, to assist adolescents learn the proper ways to persevere through the voice change without injury. Music educators will continue to work with their students, on any platform available, in order to protect and hone their maturing voice. But, with lack of empirical evidence to help establish a pedagogical approach to the adolescent voice in general, let alone when distance learning is involved, music educators will need to continue creating their own structure and pedagogical approach.

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