

*The Chorus Room: Blogging about a middle school choral classroom*

Millie G. Shiflett

University of Michigan

Dr. Julie Skadsem, Thesis Chair, Associate Professor of Music Education

Dr. Colleen Conway, Professor of Music Education

Professor Carmen Pelton, Professor of Voice

### Abstract

The purpose of this action research study was to document the use of blogging in a middle school choral classroom. Research questions investigated the use of my blog, *The Chorus Room*, over the study period, how my understanding of the student learning process changed because of my blogging practices, how I perceived the influence of blogging on my practice and development as a teacher, my students' perceptions of the influence of blogging on their music learning experience, and how I drew meaning from student responses to blog posts. During the fall 2018 semester, I regularly engaged in often overlapping cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Published blog posts suggested that at least 35 cycles occurred during the study period. Data was collected through analysis of published blog posts from the study period, teacher-researcher journals, focus group transcriptions and an emergent data source: informal commentary. Findings suggest that blogging led to experimentation with more new assignments, lessons, and technology than ever before; increased student engagement; and increased knowledge of online resources. Students noted an increase in attentive listening and positive attitudes, felt that they grew closer as a group, and developed more vocally than in previous years. Blogging in music education is a relatively undiscovered tool with untapped potential to provide outlets for professional development, networking, resources, personal growth, and practical models for both active and pre-service educators. Additional study and development of this topic could lead to an increased knowledge base and resources for the everyday music teacher.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....iii-viii

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES.....ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

    Introduction to Topic.....1

    Personal Orientation.....1-3

    The Power of Blogging as a Tool for Professional Learning.....3-5

    Personal Framework.....5-7

    Purpose Statement and Research Questions.....7

    Summary.....7-8

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

    Blogging: Current Uses and Potential Impact on Educator Growth.....9-17

        Blog Utilization in Various Disciplines.....10-12

        Blog Use in Education.....12-15

    Other Social Media Use in Music Education:

    Online Communities of Practice.....15-17

    Process versus Product in the Choral Classroom.....17-31

        Process versus Product: A Philosophical Paradox.....18

        Process: Planning, Preparation, and Curricular Influence.....19-22

        Process: Rehearsal Structure and Strategies.....22-28

        Product: Optimal Performance.....28-31

    Student and Peer Feedback.....31-34

Student Feedback.....32

Peer Feedback.....32-34

Justification for Proposed Study.....35-36

**CHAPTER THREE: METHOD**

Design .....37

Pilot Study.....38-41

    Initial Data Gathering.....38-39

    Creating the Blog.....39

    Initial Feedback.....39-40

    Findings/Implications for the Study.....40-41

Data Collection.....41-44

    Blog Content and Use in My Classroom.....41-43

    Teacher-Researcher Journaling.....43

    Student Focus Group.....44

Curricular Content.....44-47

    Repertoire.....44-45

    Warm-up/Vocal Technique.....45-46

    Sight Singing and Music Theory.....46

    1:1 Technology.....46-47

    Performances.....47

Description of Site.....47-48

Selection and Description of Participants.....48-52

    Teacher-Researcher: Participant as Observer.....48-49

Student Participants.....49-52

    Albert.....50-51

    Angelina.....51

    Rachel.....51

    Elle.....52

    Monica.....52

Procedure.....52-53

    Action Cycles.....53

Trustworthiness.....54-56

Analysis and Organization of Findings.....56

**CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF COLLECTED DATA**

Primary Data: The Blog.....57-70

    Google Analytics.....57-60

    Structural Analysis of Posts.....60-62

    Categorizing and Coding Post Content.....62-69

    Online Commentary.....69-70

Supporting Data: Teacher-Researcher Journal.....70-75

Supporting Data: Focus Group Interviews.....75-77

**CHAPTER FIVE: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF ACTION CYCLES**

Review of Proposed Cycles.....78

Emergent Cycles.....78-79

The Overlap of Cycles.....79-81

**CHAPTER SIX: BLOGGING ABOUT MY CHORAL PROGRAM**

Description of Blog Post Construction.....	85-86
Images.....	83-84
Video.....	84-85
Links.....	85-86
Discussion of Categories and Codes.....	86-100
The Music Learning Process.....	86-93
Composition.....	86-87
Assessment.....	87-88
Critical thinking.....	88-89
Musicianship.....	89-92
Warm up and vocal technique.....	92-93
The Logistics of Running a Choral Program.....	93-97
Professional development.....	93-94
Scheduling.....	94-95
Organization.....	95-96
Advocacy.....	96-97
Overlap.....	97-100
Performing.....	97
Repertoire.....	97-98
Community.....	98
Technology.....	98-99
Reflection.....	99-100

Summary.....100

**CHAPTER SEVEN: THE INFLUENCE OF COMMENTARY**

Online Commentary.....101-112

    Blog Comments..... 101-103

    Blog Inbox.....103-104

    Facebook Interaction.....104-111

    Direct Message through Facebook Messenger.....110

    Comments through Google Classroom.....111

Focus Group Discussions.....112-115

    Focus Group One.....113-114

    Focus Group Two.....114-115

Informal Student Interactions.....115-126

**CHAPTER EIGHT: PERCEIVED IMPACTS ON CLASSROOM AND TEACHING**

Lessons and Assignments.....127-128

Formal and Informal Performance.....128-129

Professional Development Resources.....129-131

Networking and Professional Growth.....131-133

    Online Interaction and Communication.....131

    Real-Life Interactions.....131-132

    Activity in Professional Organizations.....132-133

**CHAPTER NINE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Purpose Statement and Research Questions.....134

Summary.....134-140

Connections to Past Literature.....140-144

Implications for Teaching Practice.....144-145

Implications for Future Research.....145-146

REFERENCES.....147-153

APPENDICES.....154-170

    Appendix A: IRB Exemption Notice.....154

    Appendix B: Blogging Guidelines.....155

    Appendix C: Blog Posts Published During Pilot Study.....156

    Appendix D: Proposed Calendar of Action Cycles.....157-161

    Appendix E: Sample Focus Group Interview Questions.....162

    Appendix F: Calendar of Published Posts.....163-165

    Appendix G: Transcription of Student Suggested Activities .....166

    Appendix H: Blog Posts Published During Study Period.....167-169

    Appendix I: Online Resources for Choir Directors.....170



**List of Figures and Tables****Figures**

Figure 1: Study Procedures

Figure 2: Google Analytics Aug.-Dec. 2018

Figure 3: Original Sketch of Axial Coding

Figure 4: Categories and Codes within Blog Posts

Figure 5: August Journal Code Percentages

Figure 6: September Journal Code Percentages

Figure 7: October Journal Code Percentages

Figure 8: November Journal Code Percentages

Figure 9: December Journal Code Percentages

Figure 10: Focus Group One Transcript Code Percentages

Figure 11: Focus Group Two Transcript Code Percentages

Figure 12: Illustration of Emergent Action Cycles

Figure 13: Example of Personal Image

Figure 14: Example of Non-Personal Image

Figure 15: Student Comments on the post *Using Tennis Balls as a Teaching Tool*

Figure 16: Backup Plans

Figure 17: Examples of Reaction Comments

Figure 18: Examples of Response Comments

Figure 19: Example of Spam Comment

Figure 20: Examples of Unrelated Comments

Figure 21: Facebook Post with a “Hook”

Figure 22: Example of Facebook Conversation

Figure 23: Beanie Babies Photo that Prompted Facebook Discussion

Figure 24: Student Staff from *Starting off on the Right Note*

Figure 25: Student Assignment Ideas

Figure 26: Student Solution for Holding Chromebooks

Figure 27: *Coda* Excerpt

Figure 28: Post-clinics reflections within a blog post

**Tables**

Table 1: Top User Spikes Observed With Google Analytics

Table 2: Structural Analysis of Blog Posts

Table 3: Open Codes and their Blog Post Occurrence

Table 4: Final Blog Post Codes

## Chapter One: Introduction

Teaching with technology can help bridge the gap between what a choral director knows and how today's [*sic*] students learn. The truly exciting part of incorporating technology...is that there will always be something new to explore coupled with an innovative way to get there. (Martin, 2014, p. 67)

We live in a world of connectivity. Instant communication is just a click away. In this age of technology, education professionals are beginning to utilize modern technology in their classrooms via 1:1 technology, and bring your own device policies. Teachers use technology to communicate with parents and the community through email, push notification apps like Remind, or social media pages on platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Many music educators also have websites for their school programs. Now, teachers are even beginning to use online platforms for professional development, personal growth and for developing communities of practice (Bernard, Weiss, & Abeles, 2018).

### Personal Orientation

As a young music education professional, I often find myself integrating technology into my teaching. My school went 1:1 five years ago when every student and teacher in my building was issued an iPad mini (a touch screen tablet device). Due to the district's investment in this technology, teachers were strongly encouraged to utilize student devices as much as possible. I began incorporating daily iPad use by transitioning my students into using digital scores, which streamlined my teaching immensely. I no longer spend hours punching holes, handing out music, making copies or picking up folders that students neglect to put back after class. Now I simply e-mail, airdrop or upload files into a student accessible online folder.

Using digital music has provided convenience in a number of ways, because students no longer need a pencil. They now consistently take notes in their scores because they need only use their finger to write. I “mirror” my music on a projector screen, which allows for clearer communication in relation to the score. I also teach my students to color-code different parts of the music to help them follow their individual lines better as beginning readers.

My students also use their devices for assessment. I give most written tests using Google Forms, and singing tests are recorded by students and e-mailed to me for grading. At the end of the school year I do something called the Chorus Creativity Project. Students get to choose any school appropriate song and create something inspired by their song. Many utilize their devices either by simply playing an accompanying track, or something more complex like creating a full-scale music video.

Once a month we use classroom technology for Karaoke Friday, where we use the entire period to take turns performing karaoke instead of our typical routine. Students have the option to sign-up to perform any school appropriate song alone or in a group. We use two basic items for karaoke: the YouTube app on an iPad, and a Bluetooth speaker. What started as a need to encourage and reward positive behavior with a program full of unruly students, acted as a catalyst for change within my classroom environment. Students now have the opportunity for informal music learning, and they get to share their own interests in a less formal, but supportive environment. I have better knowledge of my student’s interests, musical tastes and preferences, and even favorite snacks. The connection karaoke provides me with my students has proven invaluable over my teaching career.

Karaoke allowed me to learn more about my students’ interests and motivations through communication and transparency. I used blogging as a tool to do the same for my students.

Through creating content for blog posts, students were able to see what my focus was in class and my likes/dislikes about our learning processes. During the pilot period for the blog students were already very excited about the concept. Classes wanted to be featured on posts in photos or videos and I would have students approach me in the hall just to talk about what I posted online.

### **The Power of Blogging as a Tool for Professional Learning**

Blogs, short for weblogs, are “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence” (Herring, 2004, p.1). In the following review of literature, examples stem from political science (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010), arts administration (Bender, 2014), and science education (Luehmann, 2008).

An online search to find existing blogs focused on music education yielded an array of results. Using the search terms “blog” and “music education” in a Google search on June 6, 2018, roughly 120,000,000 sites emerged. On the first page of these search results, I found several “blogrolls” (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004), that provided a list of links to other recommended websites. Upon further investigation, many of the linked sites on these blogrolls were no longer in use. Those that were updated varied widely in their focus, ranging from educational practices like classroom management, repertoire, pedagogy, etc., to personal anecdotes. In my search, I found the following websites that I considered relevant to my study interests. They were (a) <https://www.mrsmiraclesmusicroom.com/> (Miracle, 2018), and (b) <http://inthemiddlewithmrd1.blogspot.com/> (Duncan, 2018).

Both of these sites were chosen as examples for their high-quality content, frequency of posts and focus of content. Some common features of both websites included (a) home pages containing posts in reverse chronological order, which provide real-time access to the most

recent entries, (b) “about” pages with information about the author, (c) a section with a quick link to popular posts, (d) contact page, and (e) resources list created by the author him/herself.

*Mrs. Miracle’s Music Room* (Miracle, 2018) is run by Aileen Miracle, an elementary music teacher in Ohio. She provides ideas, personal reflection and great lesson resources on her blog. She also has a site link to Teachers Pay Teachers, an online store where teachers sell their personally made resources. Over the 2017-2018 school year, Aileen posted 21 times, using the following classifications: children’s literature, learning centers, assessment, ukulele, songs, lesson ideas, classroom management, holidays, apps, melodic work and classroom décor (Miracle, 2018).

*In the Middle with Mr. D* (2018) is run by Dale Duncan, a middle school choral director in Georgia. His site includes links to his sight-singing program, “S-Cubed,” in addition to his blog, social media and YouTube pages. During the 2017-2018 school year Mr. D posted 17 times (Duncan, 2018).

Both of these blogs post relevant information about what is happening in real-time in the world of music education. Posts often cover real-life situations the author is dealing with during that particular time of the school year. These two examples provide models for other teachers at the elementary and middle school level from active in-service educators that are both practical and easily accessible.

While the two blogs previously mentioned focus on content for other educators, I utilized my blog to enhance my teaching, and ultimately student learning in my classroom. Creating and documenting content that reflected learning in real-time provided transparency and insight into my teaching practices. This allowed for ongoing communication and improvement during successive action cycles, which ideally resulted in increased engagement in the music learning

process, and produced an optimal level of performance from me and my students. Blog content was viewed through the lens of process and product, which I considered a driving force for learning in music education.

### **Personal Framework**

As the teacher-researcher in this study, my own educational philosophy played an important role in my preparation, design, and implementation of this study. One aspect of this philosophy that I constantly grappled with is that of process versus product-oriented learning. As a teacher of a performance based class, I can never fully separate myself from product-based instruction. But, I prefer to focus on music learning processes, rather than merely producing a product. The paragraphs below provide both empirical and non-empirically backed definitions and explanations of process and product that I referenced when dealing with my own identity formation in regards to these two aspects of teaching and learning in the choral classroom.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines process as “a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result” and “a series of actions or operations conducting to an end” (Merriam-Webster, 2018, accessed July 17). In the field of music education, Snow (1998) describes the preparatory aspect of process, or planning for instruction. McPhail (2010, p. 34) notes that in music learning, process explicitly develops and monitors broader learning goals. Kuzmich (2012) described process as “ongoing music learning that reflects an aesthetic sensibility of knowing, understanding and listening (p. 78). For the purpose of this study, I determined a twofold definition of process defined as (a) planning and preparing for instruction and (b) the resulting rehearsal strategies and structure needed for music learning/pedagogy. In the review of literature, my discussion of process includes: (a) planning and preparation (Snow, 1998); (b) curriculum and repertoire choice (Cooksey & Welch, 1998;

Durrant, 2000; Hamann, 2011); (c) rehearsal structure (Cox, 1989; Durrant, 2000; Freer, 2008); (d) use of movement (McCoy, 1989; Benson, 2011); (e) sight-singing (Demorest, 1998; Floyd & Haning, 2015); and (f) voice change (Cooksey et. al, 1998).

Product is “something resulting from or necessarily following from a set of conditions” (Merriam-Webster, 2018, accessed 7/17). Within the context of music education, product usually refers to a performance, project or other result of instruction. Repertoire is often the main vehicle for music performance, and often curricular planning (Hopkins, 2013; Reynolds, 2000).

Repertoire selection drives curriculum choices in the music classroom. Hopkins (2013) states that “selecting high-quality repertoire for our students to perform is a central component of our curricular planning and goals, and one of our primary responsibilities” (p. 69). Thus both process and product is infused in our repertoire selection. Repertoire selection influences the focus of our planning, the structure of our rehearsals and the resulting product of our labor.

Music educators choose repertoire for a variety of reasons, whether it is to teach specific skills and techniques, expand student understanding or provide opportunities to explore different styles and expand thinking. Hopkins frames choosing appropriate repertoire through the theoretical lenses of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal learning and Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory (2013). During the learning process, students should be challenged appropriately with opportunities for musical growth. During performance of the musical product students should ultimately end up with a balance of skill and challenge. This leads to “flow,” or the optimal performance experience for students (Hopkins, 2013). In Chapter Three, I provide detailed information about my curriculum during action cycles, including chosen repertoire. Repertoire was chosen both by me, and also determined according to events I had students attend during the semester. As repertoire drives the curriculum, much of my instruction revolved around what was



most relevant to our chosen repertoire. In addition to repertoire, I also discuss other determining factors in my curriculum including: (a) warm-up and vocal technique, (b) sight-singing and music theory, (c) 1:1 technology, and (d) performances.

My research of process and product in the music classroom (discussed in Chapter Two) focuses on elements of each that I perceive as important in my own teaching. Throughout the study, I challenged my own personal notions of what I believed these processes and products to be, which ultimately altered my educational philosophy. I discuss these ideas in relations to experiences and interaction with my students and the blog during action cycles in later chapters.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this action research study was to document the use of blogging in a middle school choral classroom. The research questions for this study were: (a) how do I describe my use of the blog over the study period, (b) how did my understanding of the student learning process change in relation to my blogging practices, (c) how did I perceive the influence of blogging on my practice and development as a teacher, (d) how did students perceive the influence of blogging on their music learning experience, and (e) how did I draw meaning from student responses to blog posts?

### **Summary**

Chapter One has articulated the advantages of technology in the classroom through description of my own personal orientation. This chapter also discussed the power of blogging as a tool for professional learning, including examples of blog use in music education (Duncan, 2018; Miracle, 2018), and how I intend to adapt blogging for the purposes of this study. A personal framework regarding my views on process vs. product, based on previous literature,

was outlined to provide the reader with information regarding the lens with which the study will be viewed.

Chapter Two reviews the body of literature to provide additional information regarding how blogs and other social media platforms are used, both in education and other fields. The second half of the literature focuses on individual aspects of the music learning process, including (a) planning, preparation and curricular influence; and (b) rehearsal structure and strategies. Literature relating to the product of optimal performance is offered, as well as literature on student and peer feedback.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The literature review focuses on four main aspects of this study: (a) blogging: its current uses in various disciplines, and potential impact on educator growth; (b) other social media use in music education: online communities of practice; and (c) process versus product in the choral classroom, and (d) student and peer feedback. These topics were chosen for discussion because of their importance and relevance to the study. Blogging was the main tool used in the study and aspects of process and product were possible content topics within individual posts throughout the study period. Additionally, I viewed data from the study through my own personal orientation, strongly rooted in my opinions of process and product based on the presented literature. Student and peer feedback emerged as a relevant topic during action cycles.

### **Blogging: Current Uses and Potential Impact on Educator Growth**

Early on in blog use the platform was hailed as “fundamentally different from what came before, and [seen] as possessing a socially-transformative, democratizing potential” (Herring, 2004, p. 1). Though the current format appeared in 1996, some claim that the earliest blog was actually the first website, created by Tim Berner-Lee in 1991 (Herring, 2004). The term “weblog” first appeared shortly after in 1997, followed by the eventual shortening of the term to “blog” in 1999. Through media praise of the grassroots power of blogging, in combination with the release of the first free platform (Pitas), activity has exponentially increased over time.

Journalists see blogs as alternative sources of news and public opinion. Educators and business people see them as environments for knowledge sharing... Last but not least, private individuals create blogs as a vehicle for self-expression and self-empowerment ... blogging makes people more thoughtful and articulate observers of the world around them (Herring, 2004, p.1).

Generally created and managed by an individual or group, blogs today tend to focus on a specific interest, or “niche,” such as fashion, lifestyle, home renovation, etc. In addition to reverse chronological sequence, some defining characteristics include: frequent updates, links to other areas of interest on the web with added commentary by the author and socially interactive comment sections to facilitate conversation and deliberation (Herring, 2004).

### **Blog Utilization in Various Disciplines**

In the field of education most existing peer-reviewed literature chronicles blogs in the classroom for student use, not as an avenue for professional growth. However there is particular interest in blogging in other fields, notably political science, on the effect of the “blogosphere” on the opinions and resulting actions of blog readers (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010). Farrell and Drezner (2008) conducted an analysis of politically-focused blogs to determine “Why do bloggers and their blogs have any influence at all?” (p. 15). After providing a basic introduction into the world of blogs, the authors examine the structure of the political blogosphere and discuss the possible implications of this distribution. Their findings show that within the niche of political science, “while blog exposure was limited to only 7% of the general population, over 83% of journalists had used blogs, and 43% of journalists used them at least every week” (Farrell et al., 2008, p. 28). Despite the relatively small number of blog readers in comparison to mainstream websites, journals, etc., “blogs provide a uniquely rich set of data that can be exploited in order to explore a variety of research questions” (Farrell et al., 2008, p. 29).

Lawrence, Sides, and Farrell (2010), focused on two questions: “do political blogs... facilitate deliberation”, and do they “stimulate political participation?” (p.141). They point out that “the importance of blogs derives in part from how they innovate on traditional media” (p.

142). Blogs offer greater variety on subjects, viewpoints and expert vs. novice voice. They also allow readers the ability to comment on posts both to the author and each other. Blogs that link to other blogs create conversations and venues “potentially exposing their respective readers to more voices and creating complex networks of idea diffusion and percolation” (Lawrence et al., 2010, p. 142). In their focus on the behavior of blog authors and readers, Lawrence et al. (2010) state “that bloggers exhibit homophily, the tendency to associate with others who are similar to them (p. 145, in reference to McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). They find that users seek out blogs to intentionally search for certain information.

*History, Identity, and Twenty-First Century Skills: Experiments in Institutional Blogging* describes how The Phillips Collection utilized a grassroots-style blog to provide various perspectives on their museum activity (Bender, 2014). Bender states that “bloggers challenge the traditional concept of “expertise” as they share their experiences and observations in their own voices” (2014, p. 69). The use of blogging has benefitted The Phillips Collection due to its ease of access for the community, and combination of “expert” and “novice” voices to provide new intellectual pathways (p. 70). Identifying features of The Phillips Collection blog, known as “The Experiment Station”, include (a) authentic, personal voice, (b) inclusivity via a conversational tone, and (c) distinct visual design emphasizing a creative, informal aesthetic.

In the planning phase of blog construction, the staff of the Phillips Collection created a compilation of roughly 50 other blogs on a spreadsheet. Based on this compilation the staff honed in on three blogs to use as inspiration (Bender, 2014). A managing editor at one of these blogs provided valuable insight to the staff by clearly distinguishing:

the venue of the blog from a scholarly publication. On the blog, the content is more conversational, and simply noting a source’s title is sufficient. If a point

needs a more detailed citation, it is an indication that either the post's tone is inappropriate for the blog or the content is better suited to a more formal article or essay (Bender, 2014, p.73).

“He said that images on the blog didn't have to be ‘beautiful;’ what was important was that they be ‘interesting.’ This straightforward perspective was liberating and inspiring on many levels related to content creation” (Bender, 2014, p. 73). As a result of their research the team created blogging guidelines which included a list of categories appropriate for their niche, and suggestions for writing in “a style similar to that used in an email message to a friend” (Bender, 2014, p. 74).

Following the creation and implementation of “The Experiment Station,” Bender concludes that “the blog has been a success in ways not anticipated at its inception” (2014, p. 80), noting that (a) the exchange amongst “experts” and “novices” occurs with great ease, (b) blogging “captures moments that might otherwise be lost” ( p. 77), (c) the blog is mutually beneficial to the museum and the local community, and (d) the blog demonstrates staff knowledge and skills that may not fit into their professional roles. The use of Google Analytics showed that the blog received steady visits. Within a year the Experiment Station saw nearly 58,000 hits with an average visit duration of three minutes and fifty-nine seconds (Bender, 2014). As a result Bender states “The positive impact on staff morale, as well as a greater internal awareness of the museum's mission and history, have helped create a richer workplace and stronger sense of institutional pride” (2014,p. 80).

### **Blog Use in Education**

As stated previously, much of the research focusing on blogging in education studied classroom blogging as a pedagogical tool, as opposed to a learning tool for professional practice.

One such example of blogging as a professional tool exists in Luehmann's 2008 case study. This study "explores the affordances a weblog (blog) offered to 'Mrs. Frizzle,' an urban middle school science teacher and exceptional blogger, to support her professional identity development" (p. 287).

Luehmann's review of literature contained a section focused solely on blogging as a tool for learning. She summarizes how blogs aid in learning by (a) allowing for self-direction, (b) providing rich opportunities for reflection and metacognition, (c) inviting perspective-making and -taking through interacting with an audience, (d) knowledge brokering, and (c) identity development (pp. 289-290). With these aspects in mind Luehmann explored what blogging could offer to teachers to promote professional identity development (2008).

The subject of this particular case study, Ms. Frizzle, took full advantage of the autonomy provided through the outlet of blogging. Posts focused on issues and topics that were central to her own personal practice and thinking in the moment. Luehmann notes that though this was an advantage for Ms. Frizzle, it may pose a challenge to others considering blogging as a tool for professional learning and development, stating "the amount of learning that teachers will derive from blogging will greatly depend on the choices they make about what to write about and how" (p. 332). She also suggests that the coding and categories generated as a result of her analysis may help future teacher bloggers.

Ms. Frizzle's blog showed strength in using personal stories for reflection and engagement. "The extent to which other teacher bloggers would realize this potential for reflection would depend on the way in which they use their blogs" (Luehmann, 2008, p. 332). Luehmann suggests that, in this instance, blogs have the advantage over other online sharing tools as they provide easier connections to previous posts.

Blog audiences play an important role in the activity as the authors write not only for themselves, but for their audience as well. Though attracting an audience, and thus maintaining an audience, may prove challenging for budding bloggers, Leuhmann muses “the community that develops around a successful blog is probably one of the dimensions that most distinguishes blogs from other tools for reflection and sharing” (p. 333). She also suggests that other potential teacher bloggers can use lessons from this case study to (a) build a community by inviting friends or colleagues to visit one’s blog, (b) comment on other blogs or link to other people’s blog posts, and (c) nurture that community by “frequently and regularly reading and integrating a subset of other’s work” (p. 333).

Blogging affords the ability to connect with other blogs and resources online with just a single click of a mouse. Depending on the individual goals of bloggers and whether they want to access the potential of blogs and their use for knowledge brokering, Leuhmann says “‘reading’ the Web as Ms. Frizzle does, including searching, evaluating, selecting and critiquing becomes an important part of blogging practice” (2008, p. 334).

Throughout this study there is repeated evidence that blogging improved Ms. Frizzle’s teaching practice via the development of “new and/or refined understanding, vision, and dispositions that were likely to have affected her practice” (Luehmann, 2008, p. 334).

In addition, effective blogging also required a willingness to make herself vulnerable as she shared both personal and professional information which often revealed her personal limitations. In order to use blogs effectively as tools for identity work, other teachers will need to be willing to do the same. Thus, teacher educators who want to support this use of blogs will need to foster an awareness of audience that encourages creativity and



empathy to lead to learners' construction of interesting, engaging posts. (Luehmann, 2008, p. 334)

Leuhmann concludes by again stating she felt this study suggested valuable opportunities exist in blogging that support every day practice, as well as development and growth as a professional educator (2008). This study also provides rare empirical support in the field of education regarding claims made in blogging literature about the benefits of the platform for learners, teachers specifically. She reiterates that other teachers must be willing to commit to lifelong learning as an investment if they seek to gain similar benefits from blogging.

### **Other Social Media use in Music Education: Online Communities of Practice**

Though no studies were found on blogging within music education at the time of this study, a small but growing body of research exists on other social media use in professional development. The major focus of this literature is online communities of practice, usually in the form of a Facebook group (Bauer & Moehle, 2008; Brewer & Rickels, 2014; Bernard, Weiss, & Abeles, 2018). Bauer and Moehle (2008) analyzed discussion forums on MENC's (Music Educators National Conference), now known as NAFME (National Association for Music Education), website. Brewer and Rickels (2014) analyzed posts within the *Band Director's Group* (BDG) on Facebook. Most recently Bernard et. al (2018) analyzed posts within the *Facebook Music Teachers* (FMT) group. All three of these studies conducted a content analysis on their chosen platform and used the following items as their main coding descriptors: (a) curricular, and (b) co-curricular.

Bauer and Moehle (2008) analyzed the band, chorus, general music, and orchestra forums on the MENC website from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005. Out of all posts, 86% of the threads were initiated by a first year teacher. 71% of posts were curricular in nature, while 29% were co-

curricular. The most popular topic in all studied forums was planning and preparation. Within this category, repertoire was the most discussed topic.

Brewer and Rickels (2014) analyzed the Facebook Band Director's Group. Between September 1 and October 31, 2012 the researchers collected a total of 14,854 unique content entries compiled of 1,656 original posts and 13,198 associated comments (Brewer & Rickels, 2014, p. 10). As with the Bauer and Moehle (2008) study repertoire was also the most discussed topic on this group comprising 12.1% of all activity on the page. All collected data (37.9%) was categorized as co-curricular, with instruments being the most discussed topic.

Bernard, Weiss and Abeles (2018) analyzed the Facebook Music Teacher's Group during three randomly selected weeks between the months of August and October of 2014. Questions (117) and corresponding interactions were analyzed from this time period. Resources were the most popular topic of discussion, and classroom management was the least popular. The researchers categorized comments into five categories:

1. Drop-in: quick responses usually giving advice to the poster, but lacking in detail. Occurs only once, with no logistical or pedagogical advice to accomplish advice.
  2. Empathy/ acknowledgement: states a sense of understanding and often provides a personal story reflecting the original post.
  3. Following: shows interest in the topic, but no actual contribution
  4. Active: continuous, often facilitates ongoing dialogue related to the posted question. Commonly published in a short time-frame, and could build on another member's post.
  5. Antagonistic: provokes negative discourse, threatens, or bullies. Tends to be active and includes personal advice, but results in unproductive conversation
- (Bernard et. al, 2018, p. 87-88).

Findings from analysis of all three studies were consistent with the three characteristics of a community of practice (Wenger, 2015). “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2015). They are (a) *the domain*, (b) *the community*, and (c) *the practice*. *Domain* is a shared thread or identity defined by similar interests. By learning from each other *community* is built by establishing relationships. Through time and sustained effort the *community* creates a *practice*, or “a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems” (Wenger, 2015).

Findings from these studies all resulted in similar data and conclusions. Repertoire appears to be a main concern for all music educators regardless of age, focus or experience. Though most topics were coded as curricular, it is obvious that co-curricular topics are important to teachers as well. From the amount of data analyzed the studies suggest that online communities of practice may provide professional development opportunities for music educators that traditional professional development cannot because teachers can socially engage and connect with one another on a consistent basis. This factor is important for music teachers, as they are often the only educator in their building teaching their particular subject. Thus, the connection these outlets provide help address feelings of isolation among music educators.

### **Process versus Product in the Choral Classroom**

The second half of this review of literature focuses on aspects of process and product in the choral music classroom. In addition to providing the theoretical framework (Scheib, 2014) for this study this body of research was selectively chosen based on what I believe will be pertinent topics of discussion and exploration on the blog. In this case the theoretical framework will aid in the collection of empirical material, and strategies of inquiry (Scheib, citing Denzin

and Lincoln 2000a, p. 22). This portion of the literature review begins with a philosophical overview of the paradox between process and product before reviewing and assessing literature regarding (a) process: planning, preparation and curricular influence; (b) process: rehearsal structure and strategies; and (c) product: meaningful performances.

### **Process Versus Product: A Philosophical Paradox**

Choral directors often struggle with the question: what is more important, the process of learning music, or the product of performance? Freer's (2011) philosophical writing referred to this dilemma as a paradox for all music teachers. Some would even argue "that a child can demonstrate the result of musical learning through musical performance" (Freer, 2011, p. 165). However going to one extreme over the other could have a negative impact on student learning. A focus on performance might cause a teacher to speed up learning repertoire by using rote teaching, therefore losing focus on music reading skills.

On the other hand too much focus on pedagogy may lead to over-analyzation, causing study to become non-musical. To synthesize statements made from a collection of conductors from varying backgrounds, Freer (2011) stated:

The musical satisfaction sought by conductors working at all levels, elementary chorus through professional ensemble, simply will not occur in the absence of carefully crafted pedagogy that enables singers to successfully perform the musical challenges presented by repertoire of increasing difficulty. (p. 170)

Simply put, one may define performance as mainly focused and informed by the repertoire, whereas pedagogy is fundamentally focused on the learner. But when "repertoire and pedagogy are aligned with the abilities and capabilities of singers, the result can be the highest levels of performance quality and musical satisfaction" (Freer, 2011, p. 171).

**Process: Planning, Preparation, and Curricular Influence**

Planning and preparing for rehearsals are not necessarily the same thing. Snow's 1998 dissertation investigated an alternative model to planning and preparing for teaching and learning in the choral classroom. Using a formative research design, she worked in conjunction with six undergraduate students in her choral methods class over a fifteen week period. During this time Snow examined teaching plans and other data that included participants' score analyses, rehearsal plans, written assignments, self and peer reflections on conducting and conducting/teaching, and teacher/researcher field notes and personal reflections (1998, p. 136).

Through her research Snow articulated the differences between these two classifications. Planning is "geared toward specific instructional strategies to employ, identification of resources/materials, ordering of content to be taught and considerations of teaching time frame" (Snow, 1998, p. 211). In contrast, preparation "precedes planning, is the widening of personal knowledge by imagining, visioning, or musing in the quest to blend previous knowledge and experience with new mental constructions" (Snow, 1998, p. 211). To put it plainly, planning is more the "nuts and bolts," or the logistics of what repertoire the choral conductor will choose according to the time frame or deadline they have to accomplish their perspective repertoire, whereas preparation is the teacher/conductor thinking about their "dream" for the repertoire, and how he/she intends to make it a reality.

Music selection is an important part of choral curriculum. In fact much of our curriculum concepts are formed around the idea of music performance. Therefore, standards of curricula should address the need for appropriate music selection. Cooksey and Welch (1998) presented a review of literature focusing on England's revised National Curriculum for Music in comparison to empirical research conducted that analyzes and classifies both male and female adolescent

voice change. They conclude that the standards discussed in their review do not take the adolescent voice change into account, and stress that choral music curriculum “needs to acknowledge the needs of the voice change” (Cooksey et al., 1998, p. 99). Cooksey and Welch (1998) also argue that there has been a lack of attention paid to the psychomotor skills necessary for successful singing development and experiences.

While national standards typically offer no specific requirements of repertoire, Cooksey and Welch (1998) suggested that individual needs (like range), cultural background and level of musical and vocal development should all be considered when choosing appropriate repertoire. The importance of choosing appropriate repertoire was particularly stressed to ensure that healthy habits are established and the selected music meets various needs of particular students.

Durrant (2000) mentioned music selection as an important factor in his study on rehearsing in the choral setting. His research suggested that students want to be challenged by a piece, and that “analysis is needed of the intrinsic qualities of each piece from its technical, expressive, stylistic and contextual angles” (Durrant, 2000, p. 46). Four conductors were observed during his study, who chose a variety of music which they believed would be meaningful to their own students. This study will be discussed in further detail in the rehearsal structure and strategies section.

McPhail, in his 2010 action research study, developed a model for teaching modes which he identifies as “practice” and “performance”. These modes were used as a conceptual tool for the researcher in planning and evaluating his lesson structure (McPhail, 2010). He provided a self-critique by videoing and then analyzing a series of lessons conducted with an individual student. Using his personal theoretical and pedagogical views McPhail then set goals for

improvement at the upcoming lesson, refined his feedback quality/type and monitored these changes in action (2010, p. 34).

In McPhail's practice mode, very detailed work focused mainly on technical aspects, with the teacher breaking down skills into manageable parts. Work in practice mode may include strategies such as scaffolding (breaking tasks into smaller, achievable parts), coaching, modeling, and is generally focused on detail-oriented work. Performance mode allows for more holistic work by playing entire pieces or larger sections of a piece without concern for technical error (McPhail, 2010). Focus is on musical goals in performance mode as opposed to technical goals reflected in practice mode. In performance mode McPhail believed there was a higher potential for music to be "magical." It is difficult, but necessary, to allow enough performance opportunities in the early stages of learning a piece to optimize musical learning and understanding. McPhail suggested that a balance of content (performance and practice) in lesson planning was important for optimal outcomes (2010). By implementing these modes McPhail reported increased student engagement and teaching enriched with perspectives from educational theory and practice.

Hamann's 2011 study asked (1) how do choir teachers respond to different constituencies in choosing curriculum for middle level choirs, and (2) what forces are most influential in affecting the curricular choices of middle level choir teachers (p. 65). After gathering information via a survey of 32 middle school choral teachers Hamann suggested that there is no "clear, focused vision for middle level choral music education" (2011, pp. 69-70). Most teachers report having choirs divided by grade during the school day, and extra-curricular choirs grouped by ability.

The most universally strong influences on curricular choices were items within the school setting: developmental appropriateness, personal preference, budget, and available materials. Professional organizations, community, and standards are also important, and most middle school teachers were aware of the importance of their program for developing talent for high school programs within the district. Among these findings, professional organizations provide the most influential mechanism for influencing the curriculum choices of middle level choral music educators.

(Hamann, 2011, p. 70)

Teachers' individual preferences also influenced curricular choices, particularly music selection. The most frequently articulated concern from middle level choral teachers was the "need for better literature, especially for the male changing voice" (Hamann, 2011, p. 69). Teachers overwhelmingly suggested that more resources and effort are needed to "develop lists of higher caliber material that other teachers found useful in their classroom" (Hamann, 2011, p. 70).

### **Process: Rehearsal Structure and Strategies**

Empirical findings stress the importance of rehearsal structure in the choral classroom, however there are several conflicting viewpoints on the best suggested structure. Cox's 1989 explanatory observational study attempted to identify the rehearsal structure of several successful high school choral directors in the state of Ohio. The different structures reflected in this study were: (a) placing faster paced activities at the beginning and end of rehearsal, with the middle of rehearsal focusing on slower paced activities in more detail; (b) similar to the first structure, this construct places faster paced activities at the beginning and end with more detail in the middle, but contains the most intense aspects of rehearsal roughly two-thirds of the way through; (c) spending limited time with each activity; and (d) a frequent change of pace (pp. 202- 203). The



relationship between rehearsal structure, teaching style and/or student attitudes was also investigated.

Data was collected by administering student, teacher and administrator questionnaires. In each setting the director first completed a questionnaire about his/her rehearsal structure, then 12 students selected by the director completed questionnaires about their attitudes toward chorus and their director's teaching style. The choral director also selected and requested two administrators to fill out a questionnaire regarding students' attitudes toward chorus and his/her teaching style based on the administrator's observations. Results from analyzed responses indicated a teacher preference for Rehearsal Structure A (faster paced activities first and last, with detailed slower paced activities in the middle). However, directors did not express negative feelings for any particular rehearsal structure, nor changing and adapting their rehearsal structure to their daily lessons. Thus emphasis was placed on the underlying belief in the importance of structuring rehearsal in general, not necessarily *how* it is structured. In addition, many participants also advocated for the importance of a closure activity before moving on to another piece (Cox, 1989).

Student attitudes were not found to be significantly different as a result of any particular rehearsal structure. Cox (1989) indicates this may be due to positive bias, since each director chose their student and administrator sample. Similar results were found in response to student perception of teaching style. However he notes that there were specific characteristics emphasized more by students in some cases, and more by administrators in others. For example students and administrators disagreed on whether the director was more or less patient, and more or less organized. Despite differences in rehearsal organizational structure there were

commonalities of teaching style from all of the directors in the study, which implied an underlying teaching style common to successful directors in the state of Ohio (Cox, 1989).

Durrant (2000) wanted to know “what makes a successful choral rehearsal and performance” (p. 40). He observed and described essential skills and characteristics of four different teachers in three countries over a period of five years. Based on review of previous research, texts, and consideration on the phenomenology of conducting Durrant developed an initial model for effective choral conducting, which provided a theoretical framework with attributes for (a) principles and knowledge underpinning the role of the conductor; (b) musical, technical skills; and (c) interpersonal skills (Durrant, 2000, p. 41).

As a result of the four observations the researcher revised his original framework of a successful rehearsal to (a) interpersonal skills of the conductor/teacher- the enthusiasm and commitment by each to the choral phenomenon, (b) music selected, and (c) rehearsal strategies (Durrant, 2000, p. 45). While interpersonal skills remained on the second list, the other two aspects emerged from observing *actual* influences during the various choral rehearsals.

Interpersonal skills remained from pre- to post-observation due to overall importance and need as a conductor in order to provide meaningful interaction and positive energy in rehearsal. Durrant (2000) noted that “many conductors, including the ones observed in these encounters, could be judged as extroverted to some degree” (p. 46). Music selected by conductors showed a conscious effort to provide music that resonated with members of their particular ensembles on some level, and provided an appropriate challenge. Resulting rehearsal strategies depended largely on the interpersonal skills of the conductor, and the majority of these rehearsals maintained a quicker pace (especially in ensembles in school settings) to encourage ensemble members to remain focused on the music.

Existing research suggests the use of instructional scaffolding as effective in enhancing student learning experience (Freer, 2008, p. 107). Defined as “sequential language patterns,” scaffolding involves a basic sequence: teacher issued question or prompt, student response, and teacher evaluation of answer (Freer, 2008, as cited in Price, 1983). In his 2008 study, Freer investigated the “relationship between teacher language use and student quality of experience during choral rehearsals” at the middle school level (p. 107). He examined recordings of two teachers over a period of 20 rehearsals in a non-auditioned middle school mixed ensemble setting for evidence of “scaffolding and sequential units of instruction” (Freer, 2008, p. 107). Findings were correlated with students’ self-reports of affect, challenge and skill. This mixed methods design used quantitative analysis to measure correlation between instructional discourse and student experience whereas qualitative analysis was utilized to study “classroom context, teacher interviews, non-verbal instructional procedures, student behaviors and field notes” (Freer, 2008, p. 109).

Freer (2008) found that “complete, sequential units of instruction were found in all rehearsals” (p. 112). While not all language in this study was perceived as scaffolding language, “when students were presented with scaffolding language in this study, they answered questions, explored options, made decisions, and searched for alternative approaches to musical problems” (Freer, 2008, p. 119). Procedural language was also noted and viewed as an important part of the choral rehearsal. As such the instructional scaffolding observed in this study demonstrates how teachers can lead students toward the discovery and maintenance of a balance between self-awareness and group membership. However the use of procedural language maintains constant focus on a variety of stimuli including the printed page, personal vocal technique, the choral sound and the teacher’s voice. It was no surprise that the largest percentage of language in choral

rehearsals was procedural, highlighting the importance of subtleties in scaffolding language highlighted in this project (Freer, 2008, p. 119).

Many consider movement an integral part of a choral rehearsal. McCoy (1989) studied the effects of movement as a rehearsal technique by quantitatively comparing two high school choral ensembles, one used movement and another did not. Benson (2011) studied three choral pedagogues and how they used movement in their rehearsals. Both studies evaluated student attitude or perception of motion in the rehearsal. Though no significant difference was found in performance rating in McCoy's 1989 study, the researcher's self-developed attitude rating scale revealed a notable increase in positive attitudes among students in the experimental group pre-test and post-test. It may be suggested that this increase was due to "a positive response to the movement activities themselves, or the variety they added to the daily rehearsal" (McCoy, 1989, p. 16). Student reactions recorded in Benson's study also reveal similar attitudes, and agreed that movement "engaged them in the music-making process, connected them to the music and to one another, and improved the overall sound of the ensemble" (2011, 80). Thus not only is movement helpful to the pedagogical process, but singers enjoy movement and are more willing to engage in rehearsal when movement is used.

Demorest (1998) conducted a quasi-experimental study to determine the effect of individual testing following group instruction on student sight-singing abilities. By using ensembles from six high schools in the state of Washington, Demorest (1998) was able to place students randomly into a pretest/posttest control group design to administer three individual tests throughout a semester. Students in the participating sample ( $N = 306$ ) had at least one year of prior experience in sight-singing instruction (Demorest, 1998, p. 184). The researcher concluded that individual testing following group instruction did show improvement in student sight-

singing abilities. He believed testing provided motivation for students to practice individually outside of class, and aids “in the transfer of skills learned as a group to individual performance” (Demorest, 1998, p. 189). He also concluded that

It seems that student individual testing can help to improve individual performance in connection with a variety of sight-singing approaches. In this case, testing is not only providing information on students’ progress, it is helping students to be better readers, perhaps by motivating them to spend more time practicing sight-singing.

(Demorest, 1998, p. 189)

While Demorest (1998) investigated the potential benefits of individual testing for sight-singing, Floyd and Haning (2015) studied the sight-singing pedagogical content of various choral methods books. The purpose of this study was “to investigate the amount and type of information regarding sight-singing pedagogy presented in choral methods textbooks” (Floyd et al., 2015, p. 17). Through content analysis of selected methods books they were able to determine that the provided information in the books was often incomplete. While most textbooks included information on pedagogical tools and sight-singing systems as well as philosophical discussion on the importance of sight-singing, the authors determined several factors not covered well or at all. Few choral music education textbooks specifically discussed audiation, or the concept of internally organizing sound, which is often considered a foundational pillar necessary for sight-singing skill development (Floyd et al, 2015). They also sparingly discussed how to “deal with various tonalities, harmonic context, and chromatic alterations. None of the reviewed textbooks included information on how to teach sight-singing with modulations” (Floyd et al., 2015, p. 18). In addition only half of the reviewed texts provided ideas for supplemental activities, and

curriculum planning in reference to sight-singing was sparsely covered. (Floyd et al., 2015) They stressed:

It is extremely important that music teacher educators make an effort to provide the preparation that teachers need and desire in the areas of sight-singing and aural skills—preparation that will allow those teachers to improve their instruction and nurturing of the students who represent the future of our profession. (Floyd et al., 2015, p. 20)

Research has been conducted on the male and female voice change and the physiology behind these changes. As previously stated, Cooksey and Welch (1998) studied adolescent singing development as it related to national curriculum design in the United Kingdom. Findings from their research indicated that curricula “makes no appropriate reference to this unique period of adolescent voice change and, as a result, teachers receive inadequate statutory guidance on the development of singing” (Cooksey et al., 1998, p. 99). Thus the goal for teachers is that, regardless of grouping:

in all key stages, pupils should be given opportunities to control sounds and develop awareness of their singing voices. They will then have opportunities to demonstrate increasing control of the psychomotor coordination so necessary to healthy tone production and musical success. The central task is the design of a differentiated adolescent singing curriculum, matched to physical abilities and potential. (Cooksey et al., 1998, p. 116)

### **Product: Optimal Performance**

For optimal performance many researchers in music education explore the effect of achieving a state of “flow” (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001; Custodero, 2002; Freer, 2008).

Flow experience is the result of how one feels when doing something so enjoyable that he/she wants to continue pursuing it for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

If you sing in a choir or play with a group...one of the most obvious things that people report is that they experience their own voice, the music they are making, as now being part of a much larger unit and it's a feeling of expanding the boundaries of the self.

(Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 137)

The following scholarly writings and studies depict flow experience and its impact on music product and performance.

A scholarly writing by Davidson and Salgado Correia (2001) explored what makes a meaningful performance to both the performer and audience. The researchers use Salgado Correia's (Jorge) account from an interview and self-report of rehearsal and performance to describe what constitutes a performance and what makes it meaningful to an audience (2001). This discussion, based on review of psychological and philosophical literature, focused on how the body can be central to the formation and expression of musical knowledge (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001). Data was gathered via videotaped rehearsals in which Jorge used a talk-aloud strategy, pre- and post- performance interviews, a video of the final performance, concert attendance by the first author and discussion and review between both authors to discuss emergent themes (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001).

During rehearsal Jorge played through each piece to delineate sections and assigned descriptive words to each section of the piece. He then explored specific small and large scale motions to help inform his concept and understanding of various sections in the music. From interviews with Jorge it is evident that his specific motions helped him create overall concepts for the music he learned (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001). The researchers stated that

through review of previous research and recordings of Jorge's rehearsal they "conclude that Jorge could only really formulate a meaningful interpretation by finding out how the music felt within his body and how he related to it" (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001, p. 74).

The act of performing was very different than the rehearsal process for Jorge (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001). While the performance included rehearsed motor processes and mental schemas, something more happened than relying solely on automatic memory. When actually performing in front of a live audience the researchers described how a level of spontaneity can occur due to the supreme amount of motor control involved in the performance. Jorge's account of the performance indicates he entered into a state of "flow" from being fully tuned-in, totally aware and in control of his performance.

This experience, described as an act of "becoming" or the "sense of becoming one with the sound," requires a need to pause self-centered activity (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001, p. 76). Reaching this level of "becoming" allows one's gestures to have a strong communicative power with the audience, resulting in higher levels of engagement and a symbiotic relationship where each has a direct influence over the other. The audience and performer "feed" off of one another. They stated their belief that "performance preparation is a creative act of merit equal to composition" (Davidson & Salgado Correia, 2001, p. 80), and that it "seems imperative to take note of the body in the production and performance of music" (p. 81). Thus further enjoyment and meaning can be found.

Custodero (2002) discussed the implications of flow experience as it relates to music education in her literature review. She defines flow experience as a "state of optimal enjoyment defined by the individual's perception of high skill and high challenge" (Custodero, 2002, p. 3). She noted steps consistent with the concept of flow and "specifically germane to musical



engagement” (Custodero, 2002, p. 4). These sequential steps are: (a) goals are clear, (b) feedback is immediate, (c) action and awareness merge, (d) concentration is deep, (e) control is possible, and (f) self-consciousness disappears (Custodero, 2002, pp. 4-5).

By conducting a series of observations Custodero synthesized implications for teaching by stating three fundamental tenets involving (a) the contribution of adults and peers and the need for communal context, (b) acknowledging autonomy in learners, and (c) authenticity in pedagogy and musical engagement (2002). She summarized that an approach to music education based on flow experience fosters a flourishing musical environment for singers. Teachers can use this to “read the cues that children provide about how they seek challenge and find skill through self-assigning, self-correcting, anticipating, expanding, and extending the musical materials in their environments tells us much about how to best educate them” (Custodero, 2002, p. 8).

As discussed earlier Freer’s (2008) study also described the state of flow via teacher instructional language and its effect on student experience. Referencing Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Freer used the following quality of experience classifications: flow (both challenge and skill levels are high), apathy (both challenge and skill levels are low), anxiety (challenge exceeds skill) and boredom (skill exceeds challenge) (2008, p. 108). Through use of this model, Freer (2008) observed teachers and classified their instruction in relation to scaffolding language. His study suggested that high use of scaffolding language leads to high student ratings of challenge, skill and affect, and a feeling of “flow” when actively engaged in music learning (Freer, 2008).

### **Student and Peer Feedback**

The influence of feedback emerged as an important theme during the study. Feedback (or commentary) was received from other music educators (peers) and students. Sections within this portion of this literature review focus on the impact of student feedback, and peer feedback.

### **Student Feedback**

Few studies exist that document the impact of student feedback on teacher growth in a secondary education setting. Most empirical findings focus on the efficacy of course evaluations in higher education. There are perceived pros and cons to student feedback data. Clayson and Haley (2011) surveyed students in undergraduate marketing business core classes to find out whether students were telling the truth when providing feedback on course evaluations. They found that “37% of students stated they submitted information in some form on the evaluations they knew were not deserved or were purposely false” (Clayson & Haley, 2011, p. 107). Despite this finding, the researchers still thought that “most students generally give honest responses and express heartfelt perceptions” (Clayson & Haley, 2011, p. 108).

While most evaluations occur at the end of the course, Harris and Stevens (2013) sought to learn more about the value of midterm student feedback. These researchers felt that receiving student feedback at the end of a course provided helpful information but did little to improve student learning outcomes during a class. The insight midterm student evaluations offered allowed the researchers to make changes mid-course, resulting in improved responses at the end of course evaluation (Harris & Stevens, 2013). Though midterm student feedback allowed for “timely correction of student concerns” (Harris & Stevens, 2013, p. 552), both studies (Clayson & Haley, 2011; Harris & Stevens, 2013) agree that the value of student feedback depends on how you use it.

### **Peer Feedback**

Peer evaluation and feedback can be an important vehicle for improving teaching performance in music education. Researchers have compared peer evaluation to both self and faculty evaluations in music teacher training programs (Bergee, 1993; Napoles, 2008), finding it

both accurate and reliable. Notably, peer feedback may address things that you yourself were not concerned with (Napoles, 2008) or were perhaps unaware of (Yoo, 2016) and can provide ideas for improvement.

Bergee (1993) compared the efficacy of peer and self-evaluation with instructor evaluation of applied brass jury performances. Using the Brass Performance Rating Scale (BPRS), a likert-type five point rating scale, five instructors were asked to evaluate between eight and 10 brass student performances. Participating students were given high quality video recordings of each performance (including their own), and copies of the BPRS to complete evaluations. Procedures were replicated at different universities. Bergee's data confirmed that in comparison to instructor evaluations, peer evaluations were accurate and consistent with in all areas with the exception of discrepancies in describing rhythm and tempo. Self-evaluations did not have a positive correlation to those of instructor evaluations.

Napoles (2008) also investigated the relationship between instructor, peer, and self-evaluations, this time among undergraduate music education majors and their micro-teaching experiences. Following each student micro-teaching session, all three parties filled out the same evaluation form that indicated (a) four things they did well, (b) one suggestion for improvement, and (c) an effectiveness score from 1 to 10 (Napoles, 2008, p 82). Students were asked to recall every comment that had been made about their teaching one week later. Like Bergee (1993), this study also showed a high correlation between peer and instructor feedback. Napoles (2008) noted that peer comments were more easily recalled, and proposed multiple possible reasons. It could be that individuals seek peer affirmation, assimilate and agree with peer feedback over time-even if they were first not in agreement with the feedback, or that feedback received from multiple peers was simply easier to remember (Napoles, 2008). Hearing similar comments from multiple

peers increased reliability because “when you get 10 different people telling you the same thing, it is usually something that needs changing” (Napoles, 2008, p. 90). She noted that peer feedback was usually positive and encouraging, which could help foster enthusiasm for continued growth.

Yoo (2016) investigated using web-based environments for self, instructor and peer feedback with undergraduate conducting students by conducting a case study of ten undergraduate music education students and their experiences during a choral conducting course. To engage in assessment, students were provided materials on the web-based platform to: (a) view and edit videos of their conducting to describe their performance, (b) complete self-assessments after reviewing the videos to evaluate their conducting performance, and (c) write and share peer feedback to experience different perspectives (Yoo, 2016, p. 113).

Study participants said that though they liked providing feedback in person, using online platforms provided a “safe place for expressing their own ideas” (Yoo, 2016, 124). Many felt more comfortable sharing online rather than in person. Without the time constraints of class Yoo’s (2016) students felt that they did not have to rush in providing responses. This led to more thorough and specific feedback that incorporated the use of professional terms and vocabulary. Participants were more comfortable giving and receiving critical feedback online, as one noted:

I don’t know how to nicely say something not good. Also, I sometimes felt depressed when I got negative feedback in class. But, when I read feedback at home, I could control my emotions and had a chance to think of comments on my conducting, which led motivated [*sic*] to improve my conducting.

(Yoo, 2016, p. 124)

### **Justification for Study**

My own personal experience with the impact of technology in music education led to my interest in this topic. Though I was not surprised to find a lack of literature on blogging in music education I was pleased to find a small body of literature in other fields (Herring, 2004; Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Lawrence et. al, 2010; Bender, 2014), including general education (Luehmann, 2008). This led me to explore other avenues of social media in music education where I was again surprised to find a growing body of literature focusing on online communities of practice (Bauer & Moehle, 2008; Brewer & Rickels, 2014; Bernard et. al, 2018). While this literature provides support for the potential impact of blogging, more research is needed for blogging as a platform in music education.

Many of the topics I expected to focus on during the creation of my blog content fell within the orientation of process vs. product. Though there are no sources that specifically address this, I have been able to choose resources that best fit within these concepts to create a personal framework for this study. Future studies might consider specific music learning processes and products, and their improvement in the classroom, as a worthy topic of discussion.

Finally, the impact of feedback was an emergent theme during this study. Previous literature focused on the four types of feedback (Hattie & Timperley 2007), student feedback (Clayson & Haley, 2011; Harris & Stevens, 2013) and peer feedback (Bergee, 1993; Napoles, 2008; Yoo, 2016). Yoo (2016) used web-based environments as a vehicle for providing feedback.

Chapter Two investigated the body of literature that supports the need for blogging in music education, and process vs. product as a guideline and personal framework in the choral

music classroom. Chapter Three outlines the method of this action research study to improve the teaching and learning process in the choral classroom through the use of blogging.

### Chapter Three: Method

The purpose of this action research study was to document the use of blogging in a middle school choral classroom. The research questions for this study were: (a) how do I describe my use of the blog over the study period, (b) how did my understanding of the student learning process change in relation to my blogging practices, (c) how did I perceive the influence of blogging on my practice and development as a teacher, (d) how did students perceive the influence of blogging on their music learning experience, and (e) how did I draw meaning from student responses to blog posts?

#### Design

This study employed an action research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), specifically, teacher action research. “The point of teacher action research is the improvement of teaching practice at the same time that the teacher-researcher develops into more of a reflective practitioner and creates new knowledge about and with her or his students” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 54). “Action research provides a mechanism for practitioners to theorise [sic], to evaluate their own work and then to instigate immediate action based on a new critical awareness of their practice” (McPhail, 2010, p. 38).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified five principles of action research. The first, is a focus on always improving practice. Second, is that the design is emergent, and goes through a spiraling cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kuhne & Quigley, 1997). Third, research is done with engagement from participants. Fourth, the researcher is usually an insider to the participating community. Fifth, multiple forms of data are collected and analyzed systematically throughout the research process. Data collection is usually qualitative in nature. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## Pilot Study

### Initial Data Gathering

During the spring of 2018, I conducted a pilot study to gather classroom data and compiled it on my newly created blog ([www.thechorusroom.com](http://www.thechorusroom.com)). Beginning in February I gathered data in two primary ways: a) filming classes, and b) keeping a teacher-researcher journal. I started by filming all of my classes daily for a period of two weeks primarily using the webcam on my school laptop. I also tested using the camera on my iPad and iPhone.

The camera quality on my laptop was not as high quality as my iPad or iPhone. But, I continued to use it because I could have the camera running in the background with minimal distraction to the class. There were some issues with sound quality while using the laptop. Some videos had no sound at all, and I was unable to determine why. Others had sound that would drift in and out of focus.

The amount of data collected during this timeframe proved to be overwhelming, and hard to analyze. I eventually began to film selectively, when I had something specific planned, or would start filming if something noteworthy emerged during class. This system worked much better and provided more concise, relevant content for blog post creation.

I also took pictures and informally surveyed students in each class. Pictures provided helpful visuals when describing activities, such as karaoke, or end of the year projects. I informally surveyed my students about their favorite warm-up activities and received interesting, rich feedback from all of my classes. I kept a teacher-researcher journal using Google Docs during the pilot period. I used this journal to document daily occurrences in class, make notes about possible information I might want to include on a post, select classes I may want to go back and watch on video, and document my experimentation with technology. During the pilot



period I spilled coffee on my work laptop and blew up a chip inside the computer. I thought all of my video data was lost, but the hard drive was fortunately unaffected by the spill. I moved my hard drive to another computer to retrieve my videos.

### **Creating the Blog**

To create the blog website I used an online host: [www.wix.com](http://www.wix.com). This host allows you to build a website for free and upgrade to a personal domain name with a small monthly subscription. To keep the link as simple as possible I chose to purchase a subscription to secure my domain name. The website builder allows you to use a pre-selected template or build your own pages using drag and drop features. I created the first posts using what I thought was the most relevant initial data collected during the pilot period. Posts written during the pilot study included information on planning events for students, adjudication preview concerts, spring concerts, Karaoke Friday and an end of the year project that I do with my students annually. Posts published during the pilot study are located in Appendix C.

### **Initial Feedback**

After publishing, I shared post links on Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, I shared links with my friends and family and posted them to the *I'm a Choir Director* page to seek feedback from other professionals. On Instagram, I shared posts on my personal page and my school Instagram page. Our school Instagram page was followed by my students, their parents, and some other teachers and members of the community.

Using Google Analytics, I was able to track information about each blog post. The app showed how many visits the blog received per day, and even per page. I saw how long individuals remained on the site before going somewhere else, how they were getting to the blog and what device they used to view each page. Upon publishing a new blog post there was an

initial spike in site views for 24 hours following the post. The majority of comments originated from Facebook as opposed to the blog itself. Many comments came from *I'm a Choir Director*. I also received some private messages in my inbox on Facebook expressing gratitude or providing feedback for a particular blog post.

I was most surprised by the student response I received. During data gathering I explained to my students that I would be filming, photographing, and documenting our class for the blog as a test for a project for school. Once I published posts I notified my students in class and shared the website link with them if they wanted to check it out. Students began approaching me in the hallway in between classes the next day to discuss blog posts with me, showing a surprising amount of interest. Many asked if their class was going to be on the blog and wanted to be featured, particularly when they did something they were proud of.

### **Findings/ Implications for the Study**

Findings from the pilot study led to the following conclusions:

- a) Videoing all classes every day was not feasible. There was simply too much data to go through concisely. It was better to video when I anticipated some particular result or activity.
- b) Students were interested in the concept of the blog and were willing to provide comments and feedback. They were also excited at the possibility of being featured on the blog in photos or videos.
- c) Based on the feedback already received in the form of messages, or comments, I felt that including this information as part of data gathered from the blog would prove helpful and beneficial to include in the study.

- d) Consistency is key. Judging by the pattern of visitation spikes within 24 hours of posting, the more frequently I posted the better participation I would have from the community at large as well as my own students.
- e) The perceived pattern of post followed by feedback led to choosing an action research design, due to the similar nature of cycles within action research.
- f) Though the laptop camera provided less distraction the use of iPad or iPhone was preferable for higher video and sound quality.

### **Data Collection**

In order to address the previously stated research questions I used the following sources for data collection: (a) blog content over the length of the 2018 fall semester, which included video observation, photos, and comments that resulted from posts; (b) teacher-researcher journaling, which was kept separate from the blog; and (c) a student focus group that met periodically throughout the study period.

### **Blog Content and Use in My Classroom**

Anything changing teaching and learning in my classroom as a result of the blog was considered part of the blog in general. This included:

- Videos, photos and other images used in creating blog content.
- Blog posts.
- Comments from interactions with professionals, the community and students.
- Social media responses including likes, comments, etc.
- Statistics about the blog taken from Google Analytics.

Blog posts were written at least once a week during the study period. These posts reflected what happened in real-time in my classroom. Other sources of data including videos and photos were

used to compose blog posts to provide further insight. Blog post guidelines, created based off of the suggested guidelines from Bender (2014), are located in Appendix A.

Use of photographic and video documentation provided a window into the daily activities in my chorus program. Utilizing media with an accompanying description provided richer detail than just description alone. Bender (2014) noted the need for blog images to be interesting as opposed to beautiful. Images and video were intended to enhance content and be straightforward in nature.

Generating multimodal and multimedia data affords researchers ways to observe, analyze and understand phenomena that might not otherwise be possible (Tobias, 2014). Photographic and video documentation varied during the study period depending on needs that emerged. Some potential ideas for incorporating this into data collection included filming from the teacher's perspective, filming from the student's perspective, simultaneously filming from multiple perspectives and audio/video recordings of student assignments (Tobias, 2014).

The unique nature of blogging also allowed for outside input via user comments. Comments were taken into consideration as I developed future blog content, lessons and activities. I hoped to foster meaningful discussion between commenters and myself, and the commenters with each other. Comments came from outside sources like other music educators, my friends and family, or friends and family of students in the chorus program. I also received comments from the students themselves, since they were given time weekly to read blog posts and comment if they choose to do so. Any commentary or feedback received in response to blog posts was considered part of the primary data set and was referred to for ideas and reflection for successive cycles during the study, coded post-study, and discussed where relevant.

To elicit commentary blog posts were shared on social media after publication. I shared links to posts using my personal Facebook account, where I created a Facebook page that linked to the blog. On Facebook, I also shared posts to related online communities of practice like *I'm a Choir Director* and *Middle School Choir Directors*. Instagram was also used to publicize posts. I shared occasionally through my personal account, but mostly through my school account. Sharing on my school Instagram account provided greater blog post exposure to my students, their parents and the larger school community.

### **Teacher-Researcher Journaling**

During the research period I used a journal to document daily activities, personal thoughts on aspects of rehearsal and time stamping/note keeping on interesting occurrences during class. By journaling I kept track of my own thoughts during the study period and was able to better compare my own opinions to the received comments and focus group transcriptions. Supporting data from teacher-researcher journals provided triangulation by documenting personal insights that might not be documented within the public setting of blog posts.

I kept a journal throughout the pilot study and found it useful for documenting aspects of my day that were not necessarily “blog worthy.” For example, I felt more comfortable documenting problems with individual students in the journal instead of publicly posting them as blog content. I also used my journal to note technical issues during the pilot study. Testing out different devices for videoing resulted in varying qualities, and two-thirds of the way through the pilot period I spilled coffee on the laptop where all of my data was stored. None of this information would be appropriate for the blog, yet was still important documentation for the study. Outside influences and events beyond my control could happen at any time. Though not intended, these could have potentially exerted significant influence on study findings.

### **Student Focus Group**

A focus group met twice during the study period. During focus group interviews five eighth grade students, selected based on the described criteria, met together in the classroom to discuss classroom activities, resulting blog posts and data, and their personal thoughts about each. I acted as facilitator during discussion, guiding and encouraging students to provide rich dialogue about what was happening in the classroom. Focus groups were minimally structured to allow natural emergence of thoughts and ideas. Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. This group met at the end of the day after school for the simple reason that most participants were already in my classroom at that time waiting for their buses. Focus group one was held on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018 for 7 minutes and 48 seconds. Focus group two was held on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and lasted 9 minutes and 38 seconds. Sample focus group interview protocols are found in Appendix E. Detailed descriptions of focus group interviews are located in Chapter Seven.

### **Curricular Content**

Much of my curricular content was already in place prior to the study, structured around planned trips and performances and my own personal teaching philosophy. Several aspects of this curricular content were later noted as important topics of discussion in blog posts. The curricular content described in this section pertains to: (a) repertoire, (b) warm-up/vocal technique, (c) sight-singing/music theory, (d) 1:1 technology, and (e) performances.

### **Repertoire**

During the study period repertoire was chosen around planning for the following: (a) TB clinic, (b) SSA Clinic, (c) Veteran's Day performance, and (d) winter concert performances. Students in seventh and eighth grade attended clinics in October and November and learned three

to four pieces to prepare. This repertoire was selected by the clinicians for each event. For the TB Clinic, selections were:

- Cover Me With the Night, arr. Andrea Ramsey
- Jambo, arr. Jacob Narverud
- Laudate Dominum, arr. Dan Davison
- We May Not Be Vampires (But We're Still Men), by Mark Burrows

SA Clinic repertoire selections were:

- Eu E Você, arr. J. Edmund Hughes
- Sisi Ni Moja, arr. Jacob Narverud
- Oceans and Stars, Amy Bernon

The Men's Choir and eighth grade girls combined to perform *I Choose Love*, arr. Mark A. Miller, at our Veterans Day assemblies. Clinic repertoire was reused for the winter concert in December. I tried out a composition project throughout the semester where students worked in groups to compose music that illustrated different pages of a children's book. I originally planned to perform this project as our closing number for the winter concert but was unable to due to time constraints.

### **Warm-up/Vocal Technique**

My students spent roughly a third of their daily class time working on vocal technique via warm-up exercises and songs. I formatted my warm-up to focus on the needs of the body, the voice and the ensemble. I began this sequence by engaging in activity to activate the muscles in the body. Many exercises involved keeping a steady beat, counting or some kind of stretching. The second part of this sequence was intended to train the individual voice. Exercises focused on breath control, the mechanics of vowel development and tone. The last aspect of warm-up

focused on building the ensemble. I chose exercises for the end of warm-up that students could use to focus on hearing and adjusting balance and blend, create an ensemble sound and work to hold multiple parts.

### **Sight Singing and Music Theory**

For several years now I have based my sight singing and music theory instruction around *S-Cubed*, a sight reading curriculum developed by Dale Duncan. This curriculum was available for purchase through *Teachers Pay Teachers*, an online database of materials created and sold by other educators. *S-Cubed* level one is a series of PowerPoints divided into 27 lessons, lasting roughly a week, aimed to instruct students with no prior musical knowledge to sight read confidently in two parts by the end of the program. My bell work and sight-singing assignments were often pulled from this curriculum. From repeated use of this program I have a thorough understanding of what worked best for my students and what I could alter to better suit their needs.

I also have *S-Cubed* level two curriculum but do not use this as consistently as level one, as it does not fit the needs of my eighth grade students as well. I continued my eighth grade students' sight-reading development by working with them to confidently read three part music by the end of the year. In addition to *S-Cubed*, I use repertoire to teach and reinforce structure, dynamics and phrasing, and other aspects of musicianship.

### **1:1 Technology**

My school district was 1:1 for four years prior to this study. "One to one" (1:1) means that every student received a personal device for learning in class and at home. In school years prior to this study my students used iPad minis to digitally complete bell work assignments, tests



and projects. Students kept pdfs of octavos for rehearsal in an app on their iPads, and were able to highlight, make notes and mark on their music using this particular app.

The use of 1:1 devices played a critical role in utilizing successive action cycles. During the study period, our school was transitioning from iPad minis to Chromebooks. Though I received my Chromebook several months prior to student rollout, many programs were still in a beta version and I was unable to test many of the apps and websites I planned to use prior to the start of the study. Chromebooks were utilized in many of the ways iPads were used in previous years. I also tried to come up with other innovative ways to use Chromebooks to improve learning in my classroom. In addition to regular device utilization and innovations I was trying to implement, eighth grade students used their devices to read blog posts every Friday in class for the first 10-15 minutes of the period.

### **Performances**

Eighth grade students performed multiple times during the study period. Informally, they performed at TB and SSA Clinics in October and November. In November Men's Choir and eighth grade girls performed at the Veteran's Day assembly during the school day. In December all chorus students performed in our winter concert. The winter concert was the only formal performance during the study period. Students received multiple test grades for the winter concert including: (a) attendance and behavior for the performance, (b) dress rehearsal, and (c) in-class critiques post-concert. Grades were averaged together and counted as their exam grade for the fall semester.

### **Description of Site**

One of the key components of teacher knowledge in action research is an understanding of the students and the environment in which the relationships between students and teacher

function. (Bresler, 1994). For research purposes, it is important to understand the school environment in which this study took place. My research site, a suburban middle school located in the upstate area of South Carolina, consists of approximately 1,100 students in grades six through eight. Of those students 41% are White (including our Russian/Ukrainian population), 16% African-American, 15% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 3% identify as two or more races and less than 1% identify as Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander or Native American/Native Alaskan. Fifty-two percent of students come from low-income families. The community population continues to increase with the addition of new subdivisions and apartment complexes annually, which provide housing for families moving to work in the various factories and businesses in our area.

### **Selection and Description of Participants**

#### **Teacher-Researcher: Participant as Observer**

Due to the nature of action research I, the teacher-researcher, was the primary participant in this study. When the researcher takes on the role of *participant as observer* “the researcher’s observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher’s role as a participant” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 144). During the study period I interacted with my students daily by planning and executing lessons, gauging learning and considering their feedback. This interaction was evident through my use of the blog, where I documented activities and events in my classroom in real time.

I was a female middle school choral teacher in a suburban area of upstate South Carolina, entering into my seventh year of teaching during the study period. My entire professional career has been with the same middle school choral program. In addition to teaching middle school chorus, I was also employed as a professional church accompanist, and participated in a

symphonic choir in the area. These musical roles outside of the music education profession may have influenced my views during the study.

One advantage of my role in this study was the depth of information I was able to reveal (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the teacher of the other participants, I have intimate knowledge of the students and their lives both at home and at school. I was able to gauge differing reactions, and bring my own personal experiences with each student into consideration. Disadvantages of this role concerned issues of confidentiality and the ability to separate my personal feelings and my observations as researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To insure confidentiality, student focus group participants are referred to by pseudonyms within the body of this study.

### **Student Participants**

Participants were students in eighth grade chorus at a suburban middle school in the upstate area of South Carolina. The chorus program consisted of roughly 220 students split among two classes for each grade. Students met daily for fifty minutes of rehearsal time during class, in addition to a few extra-curricular rehearsals. The male to female ratio by grade was 1:5 within chorus classes. To help encourage male singer enrollment, a Men's Chorus was created that meets before school twice a week outside of regular rehearsal. This study took place in the chorus room of the middle school; located in the fine arts hallway of the building, with an auditorium seating approximately 1100 adjacent to it. Events outside of school during the study period were state clinic trips and an all-state weekend.

Within the general class population that participated in this study, five students were selected to form a focus group using both criterion-based sampling, and maximum variation sampling methods. In criterion-based sampling, "you first decide what attributes of your sample are crucial to your study and then find people or sites that meet those criteria" (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). Students with at least one year of prior experience were chosen from eighth grade classes because they were able to draw on their previous experiences to provide comparison, reflection and feedback. Four focus group members had two years previous experience, while one member had only one. This provided a range of experience level to draw from. Students were selected to reflect the larger gender ratio of 1:5. Though not an exact reflection, one of the five focus group members was male.

Maximum variation is “purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). In addition to selecting students with varying levels of experience, and gender, I attempted to select both students who generally approved of my instruction in class, and students that I felt might disagree with some instructional methods for diversity in received feedback. Some focus group members were different from those I originally had in mind. This was not because they refused to participate, but because of scheduling. One student chosen in particular because I felt she might provide a counterpoint (I felt that she disliked my class in seventh grade) was unable to participate because of her transportation situation. The following paragraphs provide a detailed description about individuals participating in the student focus group. To protect their identities, focus group participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

**Albert.**

Albert was a male student in my seventh period class. This was his third year in chorus. I previously taught his older brother, who we occasionally talked about after school. He liked to consider himself a leader and liked to be in charge of activities. Albert also enjoyed debating and questioning his teachers, sometimes to the point of causing mild disruptions. I actually had to pull him aside several times and discuss the importance of listening first before arguing for the

sake of arguing. He took great pride in his grades and was proud to be in honors classes, occasionally to the point of rubbing it in other students' faces. Albert contributed many of my spam comments on the blog because he would post in the comment section to brag about his grades, and not always in the nicest of ways. He did not contribute to our second focus group discussion because he was mad at me that day after I had to reprimand him for repeatedly arguing with me in front of the class.

### **Angelina**

Angelina was a female student in my seventh period class. This was her third year in chorus. She is a very sweet, smart girl who is always attentive, works hard and is raised by a single mother. Normally Angelina was very quiet around me, but surprisingly showed interest in being a part of the focus group when I mentioned it at the beginning of the study period. Through our after school discussions, formally during focus group and informally when we were just hanging out waiting for buses to be called, I felt that Angelina and I grew closer to each other this year.

### **Rachel.**

Rachel was a female student in my sixth period class. This year was her second year in chorus. Upon entering chorus classes Rachel was someone who immediately "clicked" with me. I taught her older sister and her best friend (Monica), which motivated her to take my class. I enjoy her spunky personality and ability to be frank with me. Even though we had a close relationship I felt I could trust her to provide her honest opinion during focus group sessions. I also trusted her with other things like organizational tasks that I would not have trusted other students to do. Rachel often snuck down to my room after school to hang out with Monica, so she was an easy choice for focus group meetings.

**Elle.**

Elle was also a female student in my sixth period class. This was her third year in chorus. Raised by her grandparents, she is extremely quiet, but sweet and hardworking. She and I have spent more time together outside of school than other students in the focus group because she was selected to attend all-state chorus in both sixth and seventh grade. In getting to know her grandparents I have learned that Elle greatly admires me and is dedicated to learning more about music. As an all-state chorus member Elle was extremely high achieving in my class. She was fluent at sight-reading, had a great sound and vocal range, and was someone I could place wherever I needed within the ensemble.

**Monica.**

Monica was a female student in my seventh period class. This was her third year in chorus. I taught her older sister in one of my first groups after their family moved to our area from Alabama. In sixth grade Monica was one of the first to really begin to open up to me and establish a more personal relationship. Her enthusiasm for chorus motivated Rachel to join in seventh grade. Though quiet and attentive during class Monica always loves to come up and talk to me before or after class, in the hallways between classes or when I'm on morning duty before school. After school she shares stories with me about her family, like how her older sister who moved back to Alabama with her husband and was expecting a baby. Or how she really likes her Dad better than her mom.

**Procedure**

Figure 1 presents the study procedures as determined prior to the study period, and occurrences for each successive action cycle.

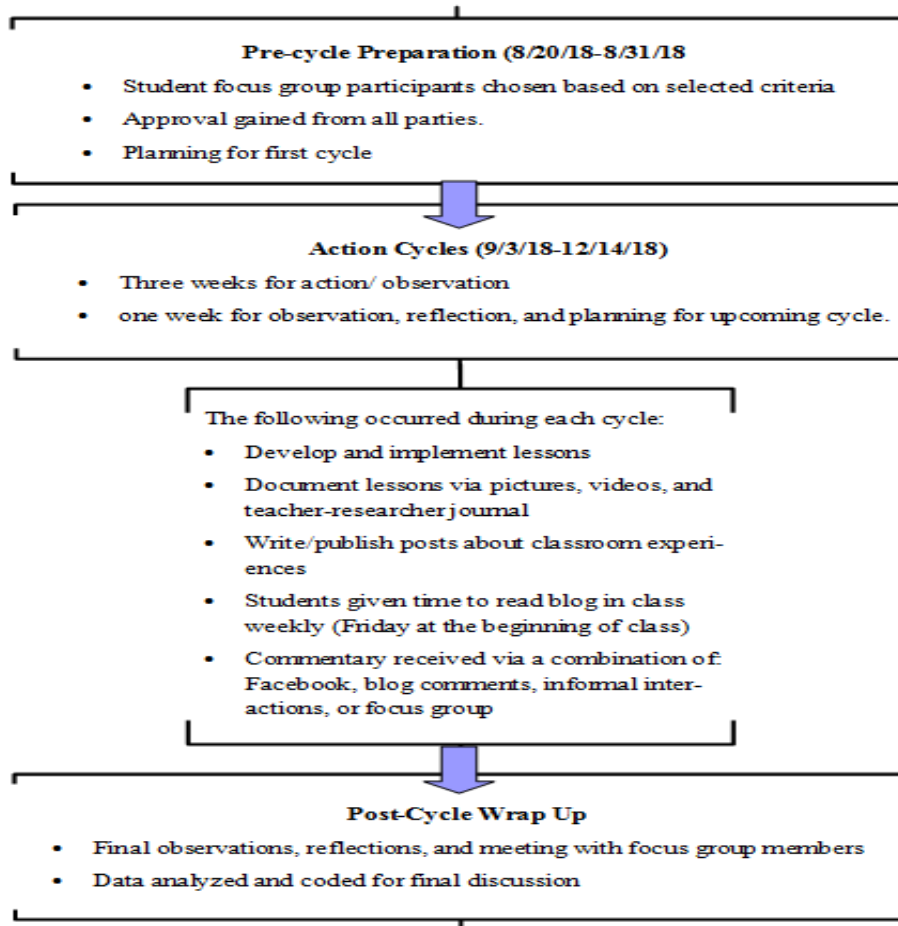


Figure 1: Study Procedures. This figure illustrates action cycle procedures in the form of a flow chart. Expected occurrences during each action cycle are included.

**Action Cycles**

During each cycle I created blog posts at least once a week that reflected what was happening in real-time in my classroom. Revisions to future cycles were made based on teacher-researcher observations, focus group observations and feedback for each successive cycle. During action cycles my goal as the teacher-researcher was to make my teaching as interactive, engaging and high-quality as possible. Feedback, both from students and outsiders, was an important influence and catalyst in this study.

### Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data directly relates to trustworthiness of the researcher. To promote the trustworthiness of this study I employed six of the eight listed strategies that Merriam & Tisdell (2016) reported in their chapter *Dealing with Validity, Reliability, and Ethics*. They are: (a) reflexivity, (b) adequate engagement in data collection, (c) audit trail, (d) peer review, (e) triangulation, and (f) rich thick descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259).

Reflexivity is “critical self- reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). In Chapter One I described my personal orientation and how my teaching regularly integrated technology. In place of a theoretical framework I declared a personal framework centered on my own ideas of process and product. In Chapter Three I shared how my role not only as a participant, but an observer would impact study conclusions.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe adequate engagement in data collection as “adequate time spent collecting data such that the data become ‘saturated’” (p. 259). To insure adequate data collection, action cycles took place over the fall 2018 semester, lasting roughly four months. I ended up with more cycles than originally proposed, yielding an immense amount of data collected from multiple sources. Blog posts, not including commentary, contained over 20,000 words. Teacher-researcher journals that were written for each month of the study period totaled 18,999 words. Transcriptions of focus group discussions averaged five pages in length. I also recorded classroom activities, tools, etc. via images and videos taken during action cycles to provide evidence and support findings in data sources.



An audit trail is “a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). All information provided within this study is easily auditable. First, the primary data set (the blog) is publicly available online with links to each post provided in Appendix G. Second, procedures and methods from the pilot study are amended and employed in this study as described earlier in this chapter and in later chapters. For example, an entire chapter (see Chapter Five) is dedicated to explaining how action cycles changed from what was originally proposed. Third, I described how I analyzed data sets in great detail before proceeding to a discussion of findings (see Chapter Four).

Peer review is having “discussions with colleagues regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretation” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). A discussion of my initial thoughts post action cycles with a peer influenced the steps in my analysis process. Notably, peer review led to the creation of code definitions and further analysis into a two category model for themes.

Triangulation uses multiple “sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). These sources were: (a) blog content, (b) teacher-researcher journal, and (c) focus group transcriptions. Blog content acted as my primary source of data, which included online commentary. My teacher-researcher journal and focus group transcriptions acted as secondary data sources. These served to support and confirm findings from created blog posts.

In a qualitative study it is important to provide rich, thick descriptions in order “to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). To support categories and codifying of blog post data, I share detailed

examples of posts in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven describes the influence that commentary had on the study, which I explain via examples from the data, detailed accounts and descriptions. I also described how the study impacted my classroom and teaching through how I created lessons and assignments, performances, knowledge of professional development resources, and networking and professional growth.

### **Analysis and Organization of Findings**

At the conclusion of the study period I conducted an exploratory analysis of all data sets to look for emergent themes that might help focus and guide successive analysis, coding and discussion. My first step in the analysis process focused on my primary data source: blog posts. I created a calendar to provide a visual timeline of blog post publication. I then reviewed each individual blog post, analyzing the structure of each post and coding according to emergent themes, using Luehmann (2008) as a model. Following an identification of codes and themes within blog posts I analyzed my teacher-researcher journals with the same themes and codes in mind. Focus group recordings were transcribed using [www.temi.com](http://www.temi.com), an audio to text conversion website. Portions of this data and teacher-researcher journals were used for triangulation and supported discussion from findings in the primary data set.

Chapter Four presents a detailed description of primary and secondary data analysis. Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Eight discuss findings, presented as the following themes: (a) the metamorphosis of action cycles, (b) blogging about my choral program, (c) the influence of commentary, and (d) perceived impacts on classroom and teaching. Chapter Nine provides a summary of the presented findings with reflection back to the research questions.

## Chapter Four: Analysis of Collected Data

### Primary Data: The Blog

During pre-action and action cycle periods lasting from August through December 2018, I created and published a total of 35 blog posts. Posts were not planned in advance but were created in real-time, meaning that posts were written in response to events happening in my classroom and professional career during the time surrounding each published post. Per my procedures set-up prior to the study period I attempted to post at least once a week. Over the five month period I was able to maintain this standard with the exception of three weeks: a) October 21-27, b) November 18-24, and c) December 16-22. During each of these weeks, the following occurred:

- October 21-27: I conducted my first clinic out of town and was travelling.
- November 18- 24: Thanksgiving.
- December 16-22: Multiple Christmas performances with little extra time.

A calendar of published posts is located in Appendix F. Blogging activity averaged 1.75 posts weekly. Many weeks include two to three posts, with a high of four posts during week two of the study (August 19-25).

### Google Analytics

During the pilot study, I set up Google Analytics to link and track data for the blog. Figure 2 shows basic data for pre-action and action cycles from August 1 through December 31, 2018.

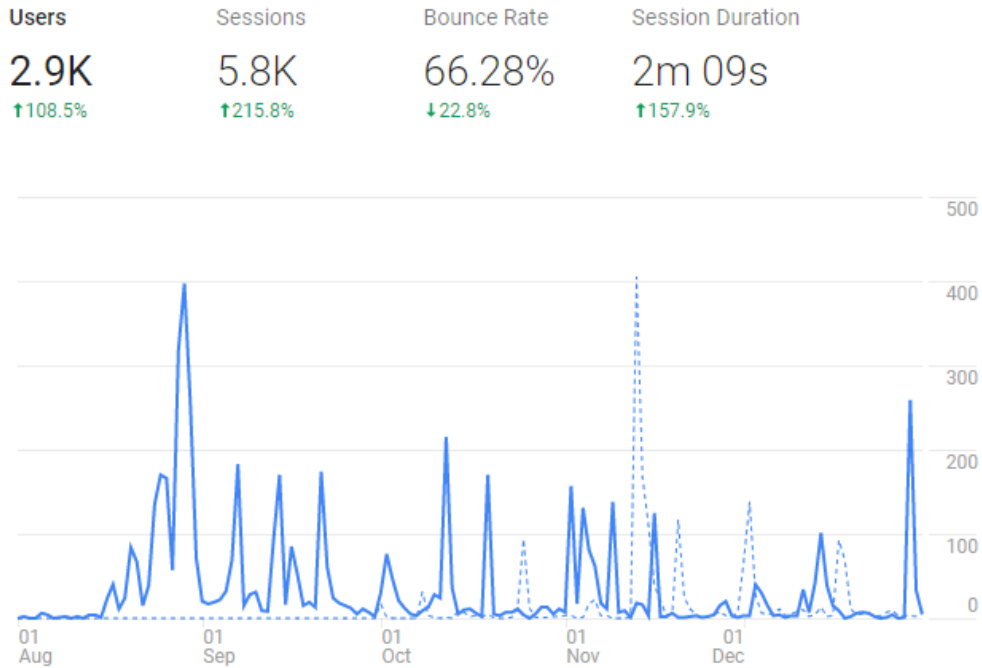


Figure 2: Google Analytics Aug.-Dec. 2018. Horizontal axis displays days/months. Vertical axis displays site visits. Dotted line is the previous six month comparison period. Across the top, numbers for Users, Sessions, Bounce Rate, and Session Duration are displayed for the selected time period. Numbers in green show the percent increase from the previous comparison period.

Definitions for terms used in Figure 3 are described below:

- Users: individuals visiting the site.
- Sessions: How many times the listed users visited the site.
- Bounce Rate: The percentage of visitors that leave the site after only viewing one page.
- Session Duration: The average amount of time users spend on the website before leaving, or going idle.

The largest spike in users occurred on August 29, 2018, with 397 users. This was after publishing and sharing *We Will Fight* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/we-will-fight>). The

second largest spike occurred on December 29, 2018, with 259 users, after publishing *Alfred the Alligator* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator>). Table 1 shows the 13 largest user spikes.

**Table 1.** Top User Spikes Observed With Google Analytics

Date	Users	Day	Associated post
8/29/18	397	Wed.	<i>We Will Fight</i>
12/29/18	259	Sat.	<i>Alfred the Alligator</i> (published 12/28/19)
10/12/18	215	Fri.	
9/7/18	183	Fri.	
9/21/18	174	Fri.	
9/14/18	170	Mon.	<i>The Five Pure Vowels</i> (published 9/13/18)
8/25/18	170	Sat.	<i>The First Week of School: Recap</i>
10/19/18	170	Fri.	
11/2/18	157	Fri.	
11/9/18	138	Fri.	
11/4/18	131	Sun.	<i>Using Tennis Balls as a Teaching Tool</i>
11/16/18	125	Fri.	
12/14/18	101	Fri.	

Note: User spikes are when more than 100 users visit the site in a 24 hour period. Dates that do not have an associated post were top uses spikes on Fri., when my students read the blog in class, therefore are not applicable user spikes. If the associated post was not published the same day as the user spike, it is noted next to the post title.

Of these 13 spikes, eight occurred on a Friday. During class on Fridays I allotted time for students to read, interact, and comment on blog posts published that week. User spikes on these days were mainly attributed to this interaction. The other five user spikes are directly related to publication of a specific blog post either the same day, or the day before the spike. These posts were (a) *We Will Fight* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/we-will-fight>), (b) *Alfred the Alligator* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator>), (c) *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>), (d) *The First Week of School: Recap* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap>), and (e) *Using Tennis Balls as a Teaching Tool* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to>).

Four of these posts (a, b, d, and e) were also in the top seven posts for Facebook interaction, and previously discussed. One post (c), was similar in content to another popular post for interaction, *The Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge>). A detailed description of *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>) is located in Chapter Six.

### **Structural Analysis of Posts**

Published posts during the study resulted in creation of materials containing a total of 20,789 words, 21 links, 39 videos and 141 pictures. In accordance with the guidelines created prior to the start of the study (see Appendix B), I focused on writing content that was conversational, informal in nature and structured using brief paragraphs to allow for ease of reading. On average there were 577.47 words per post, with a peak word count of 1,356 in *Classroom Tour* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/classroom-tour>). The lowest word count was *Concerts are Just the Tip of the Iceberg* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/concerts-are-just-the-tip-of-the-ic>), with 157. Table 2 provides a structural breakdown of each individual post.

**Table 2.** Structural Analysis of Blog Posts

<i>Blog Post</i>	Date of publication	Word count	Images	Video	Links
<i>Here's What I'm Thinking...</i>	8/16/18	925	3	-	-
<i>Classroom Tour</i>	8/19/18	1356	10	1	-
<i>Starting Off On The Right Note</i>	8/20/18	351	5	-	1
<i>Voicing</i>	8/23/18	755	-	1	-
<i>The First Week of School: Recap</i>	8/25/18	510	5	-	3
<i>Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge</i>	8/28/18	164	10	5	-
<i>We Will Fight</i>	8/29/18	387	-	2	2
<i>Marshmallow Space</i>	8/30/18	382	7	-	-
<i>Chromebook Rollout</i>	9/5/18	961	7	-	-
<i>A Real-life Middle School Choir Music Sight Reading session Extravaganza!</i>	9/6/18	713	-	1	-
<i>You Guys, Being In Charge Is Scary</i>	9/9/18	524	5	-	-
<i>The Five Pure Vowels</i>	9/13/18	305	10	1	-
<i>Vocal Technique and Warm-Up for Dudes</i>	9/16/18	800	1	1	-
<i>Taking Time For Teambuilding</i>	9/17/18	500	2	2	1
<i>Our First Chorus Tailgate!</i>	9/22/18	719	5	-	-
<i>Composing Is Not A Four Letter Word</i>	9/24/18	448	4	2	1
<i>Check Yo'self Before You Wreck Yo'self</i>	10/1/18	682	1	-	1
<i>Here's How I'm Using Google Classroom In Chorus</i>	10/2/18	639	7	-	1
<i>Conferences Make My Heart So Happy</i>	10/9/18	623	8	-	1
<i>Instagram For Choral Programs</i>	10/10/18	499	5	-	3

<i>Coda</i>	10/12/18	249	6	1	2
<i>Finding Our Groove With Composition</i>	10/15/18	868	5	2	1
<i>My First Clinician Gig</i>	10/28/18	782	2	-	3
<i>Rome Wasn't Built In A Day: Making Small Changes To An Already Established System</i>	10/31/18	633	5	-	-
<i>Reflections of Piloting An Event</i>	11/2/18	860	8	-	-
<i>Using Tennis Balls As A Teaching Tool</i>	11/4/18	563	1	6	-
<i>Time For A Tune-Up!</i>	11/6/18	569	1	3	-
<i>Veteran's Day</i>	11/13/18	457	1	1	1
<i>That Time I Was Ridiculously Sick During The ONE Week I Couldn't Take Any Days Off, a.k.a SSA Clinic Week</i>	11/27/18	719	1	3	-
<i>Buckle Up! Getting Into Performance Mode</i>	12/3/18	996	10	1	-
<i>Read My Mind</i>	12/4/18	369	3	-	-
<i>Snow Day?! But, It's Concert Day!</i>	12/11/18	652	5	-	-
<i>Concerts Are Just The Tip of The Iceberg</i>	12/13/18	157	1	1	-
<i>Three Snow Days, A Two-Hour Delay, and One Winter Concert</i>	12/14/18	452	2	4	-
<i>Alfred the Alligator</i>	12/28/18	220	1	1	-

---

Note: Dashes indicate that no data relating to the specific type of content were reported for that post.

### **Categorizing and Coding Post Content**

Open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) methods were used during preliminary review of data to help identify relevant themes within blog posts for later discussion. At this point in the analysis process I wanted to be “open to anything possible” (Merriam et. al, 2016, p. 204).

Through open coding I identified 16 codes across all published posts throughout the study, which are displayed in Table 3.



Upon conferencing with a critical friend I reassessed to look for overlapping themes. We decided that defining each individual code would help assess areas for simplification.

The drafted definitions using primarily the author's own language for these codes were:

- Organization: Organizing the classroom, organizing materials and resources for trips, events, etc.
- Music process: Addresses some aspect of the process of music learning in the middle school choral classroom.
- Scheduling: Event planning, scheduling, logistics.
- Reflection: Teacher self-reflection, or students reflecting on how something went.
- Vocal technique: How I teach/address vocal technique with my students.
- Musicianship: Performance etiquette; rhythmic, tonal, and music-reading ability; and creativity (West, 2015).
- Technology: Using available technology to enhance learning.
- Assessment: Gauging student learning and understanding, holding students accountable for learning.
- Advocacy: Promoting music education to stakeholders (parents, students, administration, etc.)
- Building community: Activities specifically designed to foster a team/ communal atmosphere.
- Performance: Discussing performance or preparation for a performance, including video of the performance where applicable.
- Critical thinking: Learning that engages the students at a higher level, activities intended to push students to apply or transfer knowledge in a new way.

- Repertoire: Mentions of specific repertoire and discusses justification, inspiration or reason for repertoire selections.
- Warm-up: Discusses structure of warm-up periods, vocal technique or shows specific warm-up songs/exercises.
- Composition: Student composition activities.
- Professional development: Discussion of my personal journey of professional growth.

After drafting definitions, and using axial coding to combine codes “into fewer, more comprehensive categories,” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 208), I noticed codes seemed to naturally group into two categories: (a) logistics of running a choral program, and (b) music learning process. The original sketch of category groupings appear in Figure 4. Upon further analysis, I felt that some codes reflected both categories. Thus, I determined a final model, presented in Figure 4.

In Figure 4, there are three zones: (a) The Music Learning Process, (b) The Logistics of Running a Choral Program, and (c) codes that reflected both categories. Categories are defined as:

- The Music Learning Process: Experiences, activities and lessons that focus on engaging students in any part of the music learning process.
- The Logistics of Running A Choral Program: Matters that concern the “nuts and bolts” of running an active choral program such as lesson organization and planning, scheduling, advocating for music education or professional development.
- Overlap: Codes that embody characteristics of both the music learning process and the logistics of running a choral program.

**Table 3.** Open Codes and their Blog Post Occurrence

Code	Occurrence
Organization (o)	19
Music Process (mp)	17
Scheduling (s)	15
Reflection (re)	15
Vocal Technique (v)	11
Musicianship (m)	10
Technology (t)	9
Assessment (as)	8
Advocacy (a)	8
Community (bc)	8
Performance (p)	8
Critical Thinking (ct)	7
Repertoire (r)	7
Warm-Up (w)	5
Composition (c)	3
Professional Development (pd)	2

Note: Occurrence refers to the total number of blog posts coded as that code. An individual post was only coded with a specific label once. Posts could receive multiple codes.

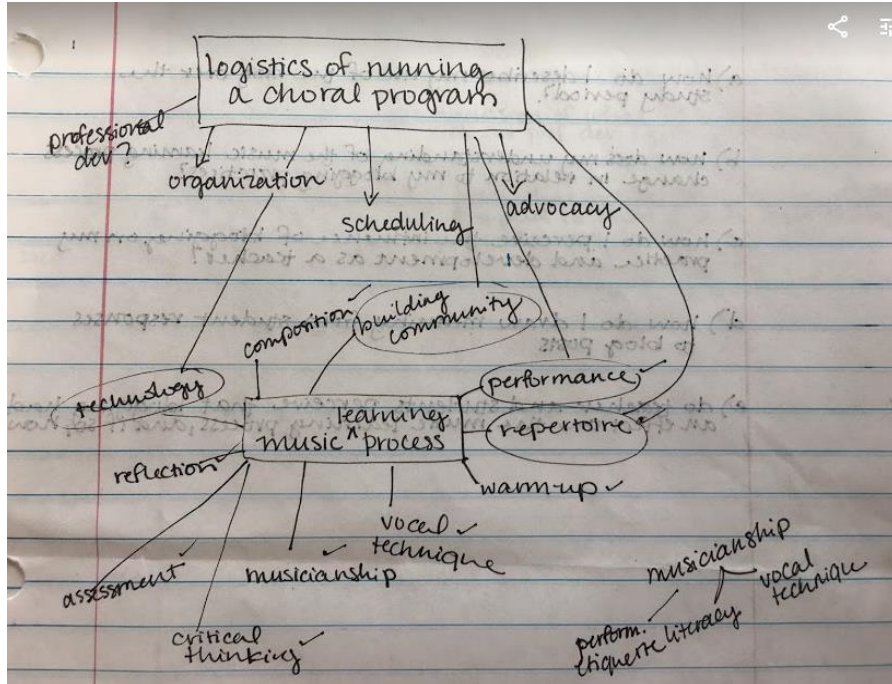


Figure 3: Original sketch of axial coding.

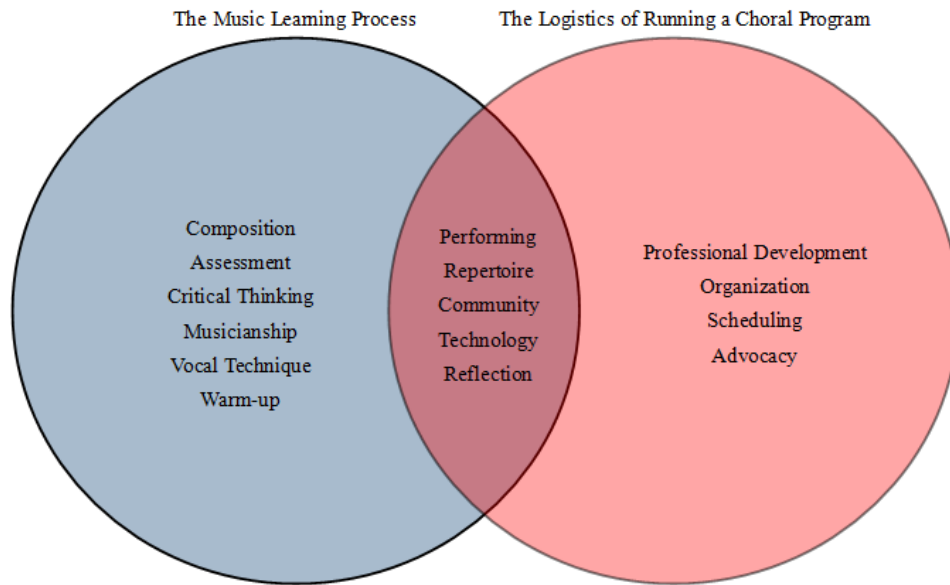


Figure 4: Categories and codes within blog posts. Codes originating from open coding were re-analyzed using axial coding to determine larger categories. Some codes fit within both categories.

You may notice that one original code, music process (mp), is no longer present. After I defined and further analyzed all codes I felt that music process was too large of theme to occupy a single code. To confirm my thoughts I referred to my original codes again and noticed that all blog posts that were originally coded mp also coded for at least one, if not multiple, codes now categorized under “The Music Learning Process.” Final blog post codes are in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Final Blog Post Codes

Blog post	Date of publication	Coding
<i>Here’s What I’m Thinking...</i>	8/16/18	re, o, s, as, re, c, bc
<i>Classroom Tour</i>	8/19/18	o
<i>Starting Off On The Right Note</i>	8/20/18	re, bc
<i>Voicing</i>	8/23/18	V, o
<i>The First Week of School: Recap</i>	8/25/18	o, s, m, bc
<i>Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge</i>	8/28/18	a, o, s, as, t, bc
<i>We Will Fight</i>	8/29/18	w, v, m
<i>Marshmallow Space</i>	8/30/18	w, v, ct, m, bc
<i>Chromebook Rollout</i>	9/5/18	o, re, t
<i>A Real-life Middle School Choir Music Sight Reading session Extravaganza!</i>	9/6/18	r, m,p
<i>You Guys, Being In Charge Is Scary</i>	9/9/18	a, o, s,re,pd
<i>The Five Pure Vowels</i>	9/13/18	v, as ,ct,m, t

<i>Vocal Technique and Warm-Up for Dudes</i>	9/16/18	w, v, s, m, bc
<i>Taking Time For Teambuilding</i>	9/17/18	bc, s
<i>Our First Chorus Tailgate!</i>	9/22/18	bc, re
<i>Composing Is Not A Four Letter Word</i>	9/24/18	ct, m, re, t,c
<i>Check Yo 'self Before You Wreck Yo 'self</i>	10/1/18	as, re
<i>Here's How I'm Using Google Classroom In Chorus</i>	10/2/18	t, r, o, as
<i>Conferences Make My Heart So Happy</i>	10/9/18	a, o, s, re, pd
<i>Instagram For Choral Programs</i>	10/10/18	a, o, s, as, re, t
<i>Coda</i>	10/12/18	re, t
<i>Finding Our Groove With Composition</i>	10/15/18	c, ct, re, t
<i>My First Clinician Gig</i>	10/28/18	r, a, o, s, re
<i>Rome Wasn't Built In A Day: Making Small Changes To An Already Established System</i>	10/31/18	a, o, s, re
<i>Reflections of Piloting An Event</i>	11/2/18	o, s, re
<i>Using Tennis Balls As A Teaching Tool</i>	11/4/18	w, v, ct, m
<i>Time For A Tune-Up!</i>	11/6/18	t, v, ct, m
<i>Veteran's Day</i>	11/13/18	p, r, o
<i>That Time I Was Ridiculously Sick During The ONE Week I Couldn't Take Any Days Off, a.k.a SSA Clinic Week</i>	11/27/18	a, s, p, r, o, re
<i>Buckle Up! Getting Into Performance Mode</i>	12/3/18	p, o, s, as, vt, m
<i>Read My Mind</i>	12/4/18	as, v, ct

<i>Snow Day?! But, It's Concert Day!</i>	12/11/18	p, o, s
<i>Concerts Are Just The Tip of The Iceberg</i>	12/13/18	a, p
<i>Three Snow Days, A Two-Hour Delay, and One Winter Concert</i>	12/14/18	a, p, o, s, r
<i>Alfred the Alligator</i>	12/28/18	w, v

---

Note: Organization(o), Scheduling(s), Reflection(re), Vocal Technique(v), Musicianship(m), Technology(t) Assessment(as), Advocacy(a), Community(bc), Performance(p), Critical Thinking(ct), Repertoire(r), Warm-Up(w), Composition(c), Professional Development(pd). Codes denote subjects discussed in each blog post.

Code frequency remained the same after removal of (mp), which can be viewed in Table 3. Of 35 total posts, 11 had codes from all three categories, 17 posts had codes that fit into two categories, and seven posts coded as a single category.

### Online Commentary

Students and adults had a variety of outlets to provide online commentary including: (a) blog comments, (b) blog inbox, (c) Facebook, and (d) Google Classroom. Blog posts and Facebook comments provided the most significant amounts of data and the primary focus for analysis. Five types of comments emerged from collected data, which were:

- **Response:** Comments that are responding to the information in the post itself. Most non-student comments were responses and usually thanked me for the information I provided in the post, or mentioned that the information I provided was a great idea. Student responses were typically less involved and had to do with whether or not they enjoyed participating in an in-class activity.
- **Reaction:** Includes use of emoji's, single words or simple phrases to connote an emotional response.

- Unrelated: Comments not considered spam, but were not on topic in relation to the blog post. These comments were usually from students conversing amongst themselves in the comment section.
- Spam: Completely unrelated to the post topic. Often multiple rows of emoji's or a student commenting on something unrelated to the post.
- Researcher response: Comments where I, the teacher-researcher, responded to other comments on the post, typically towards non-student comments.

Figures 17, 18, 19 and 20, located in Chapter Seven, display examples of each type of comment. The majority of comments on the blog posts themselves were from my students, their preferred method of written commentary. During the study period blog posts received a total of 493 direct comments; of this total 224 were coded as reactions, 165 as responses, 71 as unrelated, 25 as spam and eight as author response. There were 11 comments that were considered non-student responses, as they were written by other choir directors.

As of April 5, 2019 blog posts published during action cycles received a total of 750 interactions on Facebook. Using the same coding method applied to blog comments, there were 577 reactions, 94 responses, 59 author responses, 19 shares and one spam comment. There were 13 cases where an individual post prompted a conversation either amongst myself and another person, or amongst other individuals. Further discussion on how commentary influenced action cycles is located in Chapter Seven.

### **Supporting Data: Teacher-Researcher Journal**

Teacher-Researcher Journals were kept using Google Docs for ease of collaboration, automatic saving and back-up and accessibility. Journals were created for each successive month during action cycles, resulting in five documents. Each document contains dates, followed by the



reflections from that particular day. I did not pre-determine any particular recording format; journaling was left to be organic and based on my own train of thought from the day I recorded each entry. To code each journal I pre-determined colors for each code, then highlighted text in each entry according to the appropriate code. To align blog codes to journal codes I used the categories of music learning process (MLP) and logistics as primary codes. New codes emerged that were not found in blog posts. I identified them as (a) blog discussion, (b) student interaction, and (c) personal anecdotes. I defined these codes as:

- Blog Discussion: When I, the researcher, make any reference to the blog such as:
  - Writing blog posts
  - Interactions as a result of the blog
  - Influence from the blog
  - Impact of the blog in the classroom, etc.
- Student interaction: Reference to student discussion, input, or interaction during class or outside of regular class time.
- Personal anecdotes: My personal thoughts/opinions in reference to the topic I am journaling about.

After coding journal entries, I used word counts to look at the breakdown of how frequently I wrote about each topic:

August Journal

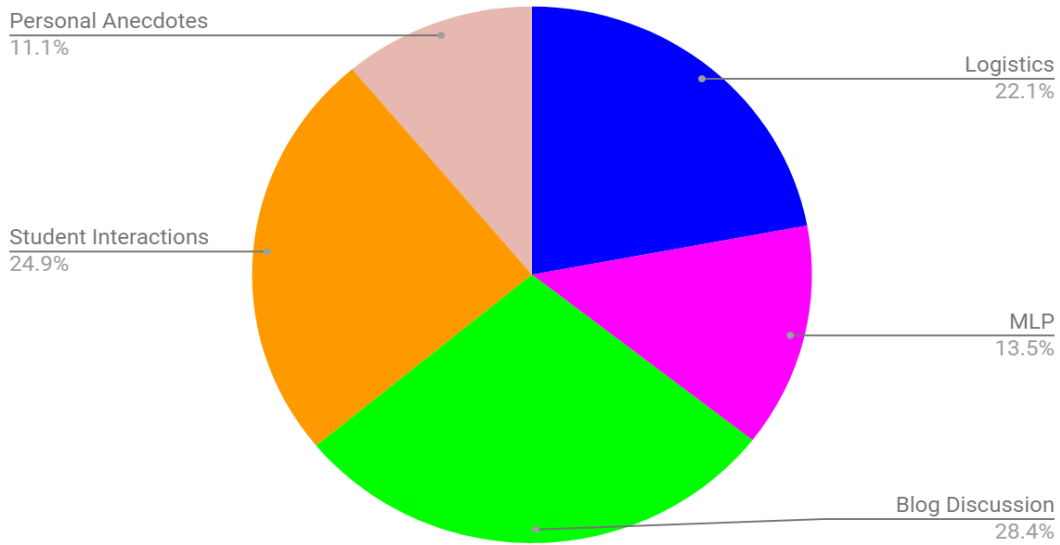


Figure 5: August journal code percentages. Each section of the chart displays what percentage of the entire journal text fell under each code.

September Journal

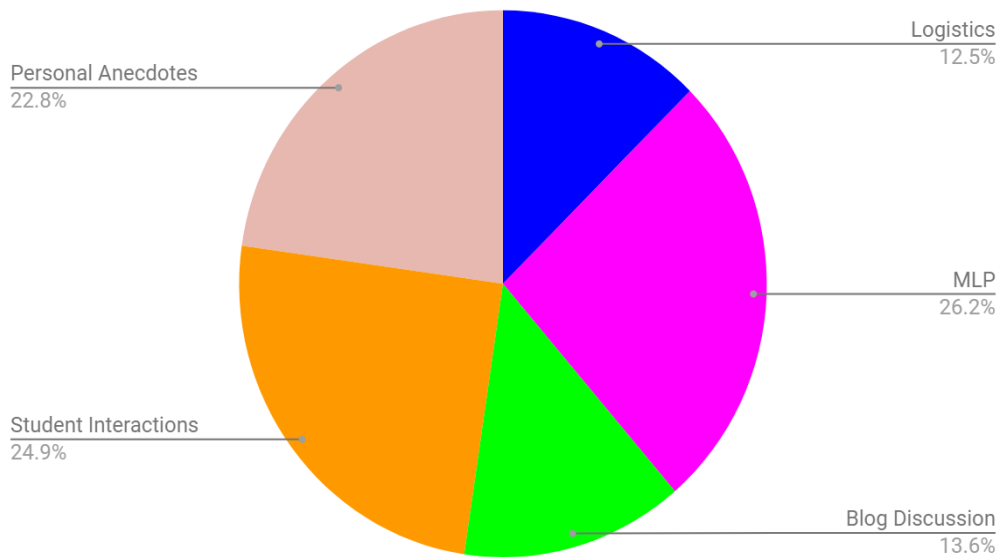


Figure 6: September journal code percentages. Each section of the chart displays what percentage of the entire journal text fell under each code.

October Journal

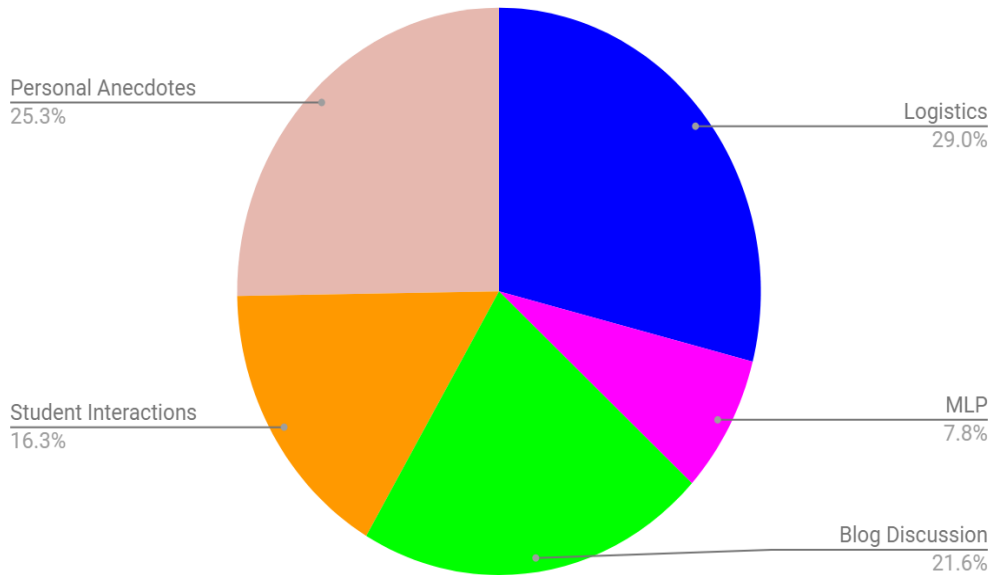


Figure 7: October journal code percentages. Each section of the chart displays what percentage of the entire journal text fell under each code.

November Journal

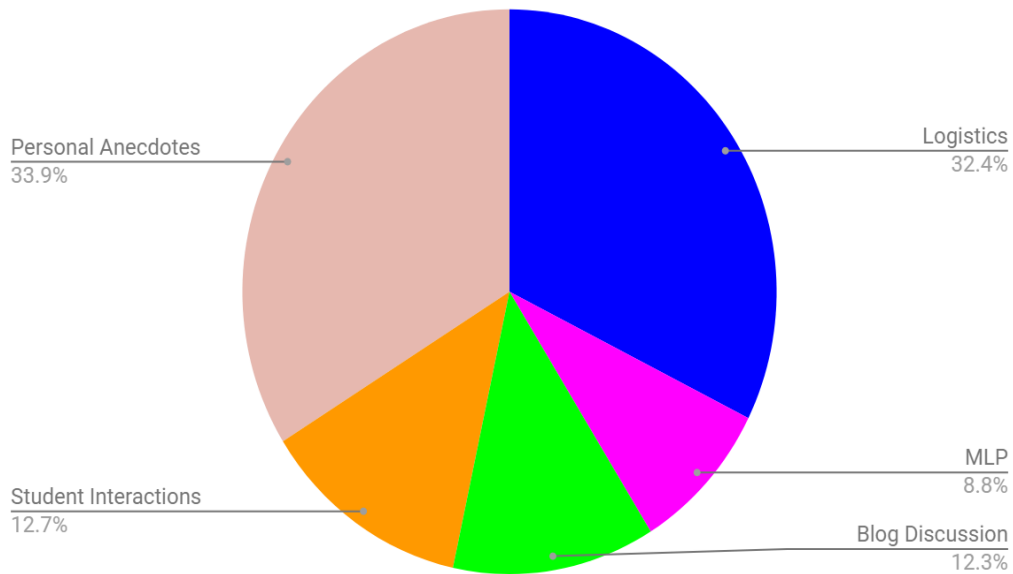
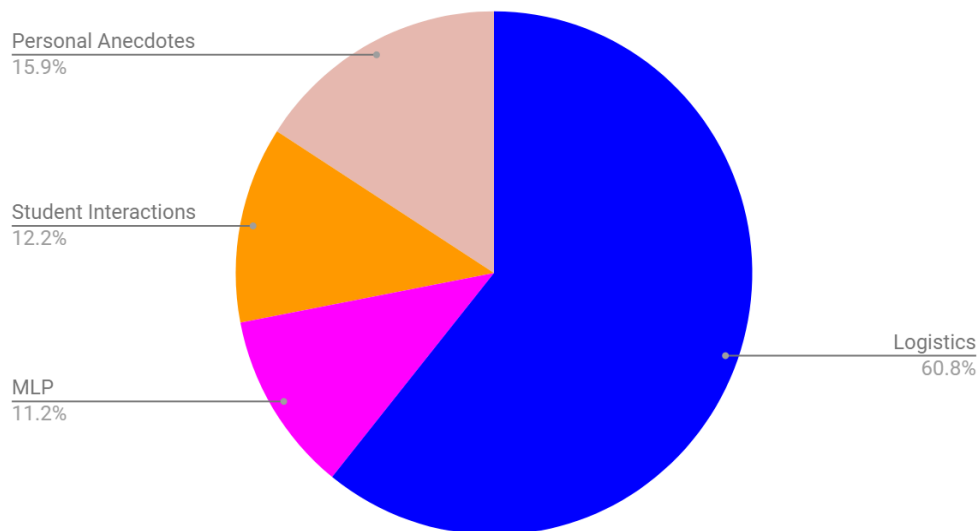


Figure 8: November journal code percentages. Each section of the chart displays what percentage of the entire journal text fell under each code.

## December Journal



*Figure 9:* December journal code percentages. Each section of the chart displays what percentage of the entire journal text fell under each code.

Analyzing my journals via word count, and further visualization with pie charts provided interesting insight. Prior to the research period, I fully expected that music learning processes would be the bulk of my focus. Upon looking at this data set, I realized that the only time that the majority of my focus was on the music learning process was in September; a month where I had no events, trips, or concerts for my students. While August also has this in common, I had not yet been back in school a full month, and during that time much effort was spent in class establishing rules, procedures and norms for the classroom. With the exception of September, the topic I journaled about most frequently was logistics.

In August it was the logistics of establishing classroom routines. In September it was deciding how to use new 1:1 devices in my room and training students to do so correctly. I also sent home preliminary information about clinics coming up for the next month and wrote about my work as a clinic committee chair for SCMEA. In October, November and December logistics

clearly take over as the most frequent topic in my research journals. During these months I began actively taking students on trips, performing for school assemblies, planning and performing semester concerts and acting in my role as chairperson for the middle school clinic committee. In my role as chairperson I was responsible for managing 12 events across the entire state during October and November. The months during the study period were the first time I had ever taken on this responsibility, so I wrote about my experiences with it frequently.

Since teacher-researcher journals were personal in nature, personal anecdotes frequently appeared in my reflections. After looking back at this code more in-depth, some of the themes within personal anecdotes included reflections and emotional responses to activities within the classroom and my personal well-being (mentioning if I felt stressed or anxious, thoughts on my work-life balance, motivation levels, and my physical health). I also discussed my professional obligations, like my work with our state organization on middle school clinics, things happening within my school, like my principal emailing the fine arts department about completing bulletin boards that were previously not our responsibility. I also used this space for ideas I had for the classroom and things I wanted to try.

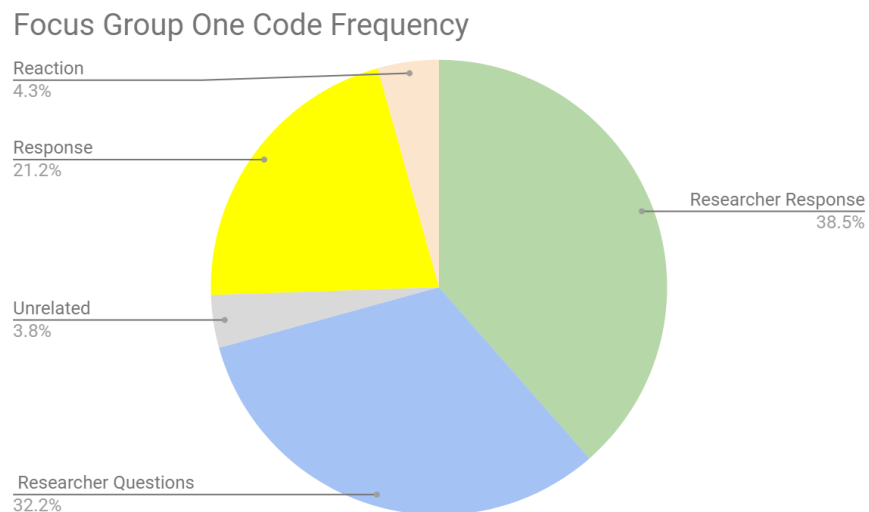
In Figures 5-9 student interaction includes references to building community, because in doing so I was actively engaging and writing about interactions and discussions with students. Blog discussion is an emergent code in my journals, not blog post data, because I wrote about how I chose to post, reactions from published posts, and ideas about future posts.

### **Supporting Data: Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group discussions were recorded using the voice memo app on my iPhone and later transcribed using [www.temi.com](http://www.temi.com). Transcripts were coded using the same codes as commentary (see Chapter Seven). Due to the nature of the discussion some modifications of the

aforementioned codes were necessary. Since discussion was in person and not online, reactions were different. I still coded reactions as single words or short phrases that connoted an emotional response, but obviously could not include use of emoji’s. Moments in the transcript indicative of an emotional response but not necessarily verbal acknowledgement, like laughter, were also coded as reactions. Other examples of reactions include answers like “yes,” “no,” “I like it” or “It’s frustrating.”

A new code emerged in focus group analysis: questions. Transcript text was coded as such when I, the researcher, asked a particular question to prompt a response or further discussion. However not all the questions I asked were coded as questions. Some were coded as author response because some questions I asked students were in response to their own reactions or responses, and I wanted to discuss something more with them. Additionally the “spam” code was not used for analysis of focus group data as commentary was not received via an online platform. Figures 10 and 11 display code percentages for each focus group session.



*Figure 10:* Focus group one transcript code percentages. Each section of the chart displays what percentage of transcript text fell under each code.

Focus group session one took place on October 15, 2018, and lasted 7 minutes, 48 seconds. Analysis of the transcript minus timestamps and speaker identification shows that the document was a total of 1,038 words. Using word count I tracked the percentage of each code.

Researcher response occurred most frequently, totaling 400 words and 38.5% of the transcript. Researcher questions totaled 334 words (32.2 %), responses totaled 220 words (21.2%), reactions 45 words (4.3%) and unrelated comments added up to 39 words (3.8%).

Focus group session two took place on January 9, 2019, and lasted 9 minutes, 38 seconds. Using the same format for analysis I found that this transcript was a total of 1,360 words.

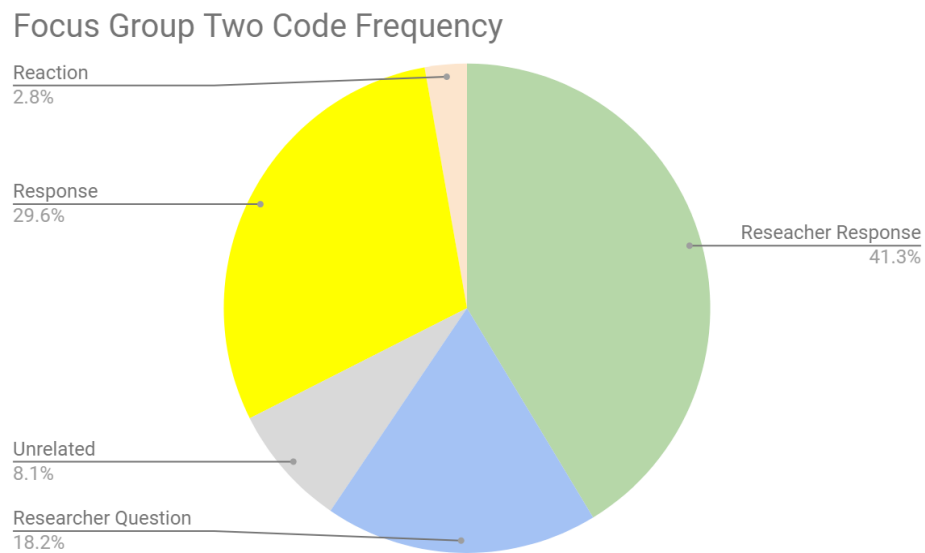


Figure 11: Focus group two transcript code percentages. Each section of the chart displays what percentage of transcript text fell under each code.

Chapter Four describes how I analyzed the primary and secondary sources of collected data. Chapter Five describes the metamorphosis of action cycles during the study period.

### **Chapter Five: The Metamorphosis of Action Cycles**

Chapter Four discussed the analysis of primary and secondary data sets. This chapter explains the metamorphosis of action cycles from the proposed model to the actualized model that emerged during the period of study.

#### **Review of Proposed Cycles**

In the proposed version of this study, I planned for four action cycles during the study period. Beginning after the first few weeks of school I intended for each cycle to last approximately three weeks, with a week for feedback and reflection in between each successive cycle. Figure 1 (located in Chapter Three) provides a model of these proposed cycles. A calendar detailing the original cycles can be found in Appendix D. During each cycle I planned on publishing blog posts at least once a week and then revising them based on feedback post-cycle. There was an initial concern that students might not be willing to readily provide feedback. So, to foster feedback, I set up a focus group to meet and discuss what was going on in the classroom, and what I was writing about on the blog.

#### **Emergent Cycles**

The emergent cycles were actually quite different than my original model. In my blueprint of action cycles I planned for clean cut periods lasting three weeks, followed by a week of reflection to prepare for the next cycle. As in real-life teaching things are not always so neat and clear cut. A combination of the following impacted the emergent action cycles:

- Blog post publication rates
- Planned time in class for students to read blog posts
- Informal student interactions
- Blog post commentary



The factors above resulted in a more fluid and frequent progression through action cycles. Cycles increased to a rate closer to weekly if not faster as students read posts at the beginning of class on Fridays. Following this I would receive commentary and feedback and the cycle would begin anew.

This also affected my focus group. Originally I planned to meet with the focus group at the end of each three week cycle. Due to the saturated amount of commentary and feedback constantly available I did not feel the need to meet with the focus group that frequently. Instead I met with them two times during the study period. The first time was on October 15, 2018, six weeks into the period I planned to begin action cycles. The second focus group meeting ended up being at the very end of the study on January 19, 2019.

### **The Overlap of Cycles**

Sometimes I might even say that cycles began to overlap as I would receive feedback upon publication from music educators, and students who read posts as soon as they went live. Though the overall cycles tended to occur weekly there were constantly new cycles occurring based on new information received through commentary. Since I received commentary constantly it actually felt more like two or three cycles were occurring simultaneously, based on whatever new information I had received. Figure 12 illustrates a more accurate representation of the emergent action cycles during the study period.

Prior to cycles officially beginning I was already actively publishing blog posts. Though I was not receiving feedback from students yet I was getting feedback from other music educators through Facebook. This, in addition to my own personal reflections, allowed me to begin action cycles with ideas I wanted to try in mind. Once getting an idea I would then plan how I wanted to implement it in class, and try it during the action part of the phase. Depending on a number of

factors, like if the idea turned out how I wanted it to, whether I remembered to video or photograph the activity, etc., I then chose whether or not to write and publish a blog post about that particular topic. Upon publication the post was then out for anyone to see, resulting in commentary discussed in the previous chapter. I consider blog posts as both part of the observation and reflection aspects of the teaching cycle, because in writing a blog post I was able to observe my own teaching via photos and videos and reflect on the impact of whatever it was I was writing about.

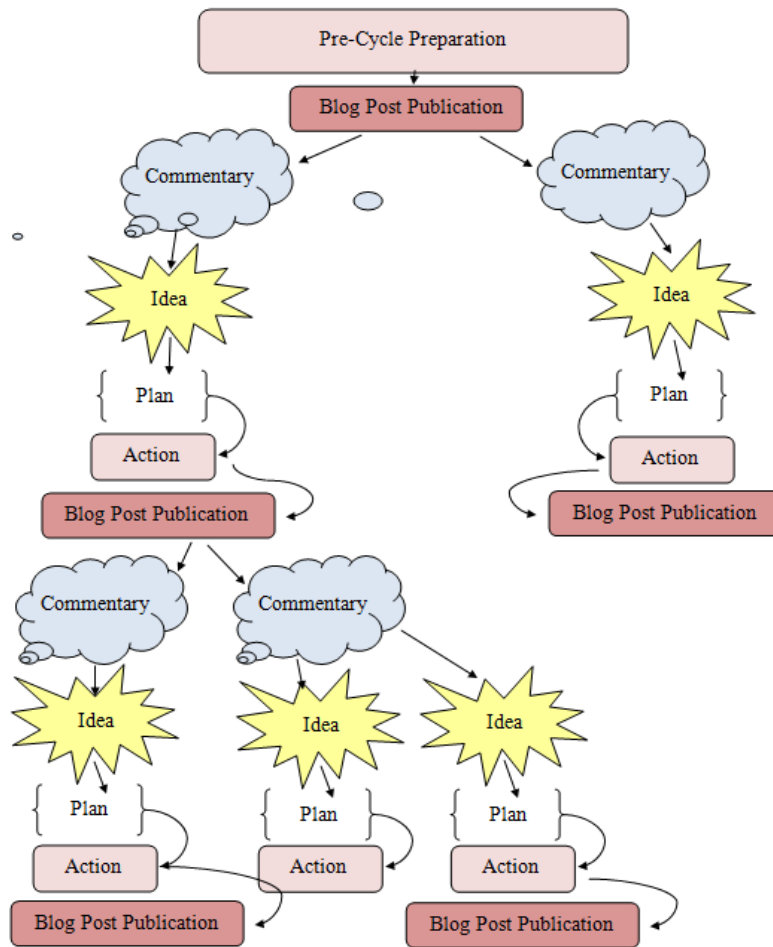


Figure 12: Illustration of emergent action cycles

Open commentary allowed others to observe and reflect with me. This collaboration between myself and those providing feedback, whether it was outsiders or my students, allowed me to gain new insights and ideas. Thus with these new ideas the cycle was perpetuated. In some instances an idea would lead to planning and action, but nothing further. In some cases I would write a blog post about something but would receive little or no feedback, and thus no further ideas on the matter. As illustrated in Figure 12 there were often multiple ideas that I was working to implement simultaneously. I found this most interesting because this felt like the most noticeable difference between standard action cycles referenced in other action research, versus what I felt was actually happening during the study. But I felt that my model reflected a more accurate representation of what teachers deal with daily. Teachers must constantly multi-task and deal with multiple ideas, standards and needs. We never get to compartmentalize and focus on only one isolated task at hand. Just as it is in real-life this model reflects the actual mind of my own teaching day in and day out, with too many tabs open at the same time.

Chapter Five discussed the perceived versus emergent cycles in this action research study and how blogging and the influence of commentary affected these cycles. Chapter Six explains how I constructed blog posts, and discusses published posts according to: (a) the music learning process, (b) the logistics of running a choral program, and (c) the overlap of these categories.

## Chapter Six: Blogging about My Choral Program

My blog, *The Chorus Room*, acted as both the primary tool to enact change during action cycles, and the primary data source from which I drew to facilitate discussion and formulate my findings. Therefore it is vital for the reader to understand how I created content for the blog, and how I used this content to identify themes and draw conclusions. The first part of this chapter provides a description of blog post construction; specifically the building blocks I used to create posts to best describe what was happening in my classroom and professional career at the time.

The second part of this chapter focuses on themes that emerged from analysis of blog posts. Themes will be discussed in accordance with the following categories: (a) the music learning process, (b) the logistics of running a choral program, and (c) the overlap of these two categories. Emergent codes within each category are discussed in relation to posts to provide examples and support for each.

### Description of Blog Post Construction

In order to recognize emergent ideas in this study it is important for the reader to understand how posts were constructed. Each post was written from my point of view about a chosen subject matter influenced by what was happening in my classroom, and supported through the use of images, video and additional links. This section provides a detailed description of these supportive mediums. For a full analysis of blog post construction, refer to Chapter Four.

### Images

I used two different types of images in posts: personal images and nonpersonal images. Personal images were photos taken in my classroom, on field trips, in my home, or screenshots. An example of a personal image is located in Figure 13.



Figure 13: Example of personal image

Figure 13 was posted in *Classroom Tour* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/classroom-tour>), where I exhibited and explained the logistics behind my room setup. This picture shows the wall immediately to the right as you enter. In the post I explain that

On the clipboards I keep the school phone logs/room numbers, a tardy sign-in, sign-up sheets for events, etc. On the calendar I write any important dates for the month including assignments and events for my class and other things happening around the school.

(Shiflett, 2018, para. 2)

Nonpersonal images were images that I did not personally create but used to further emphasize or enhance a point within a post. I discovered via informal conversation and focus group interviews that my students really enjoyed when I incorporated internet memes; humorous

images, videos, or phrases that reflect some cultural aspect of society (dictionary.com, 2018, accessed June 26). Figure 14 displays an example of a nonpersonal image:



Figure 14: Example of non-personal image

In *Check Yo'self Before You Wreck Yo'self* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/check-yo-self-before-you-wreck-yo-s>), I used Figure 14 to reiterate that middle school students “are quite possibly the most forgetful, scatter-brained human beings on the planet. Think Doug, from the movie *Up*” (Shiflett, 2018, para. 5).

### Video

Though I composed posts using a combination of sources, some topics were better explained with video. Videos provided an extra dimension that words or photos alone could not. I accompanied each video with a written summary or description to aid readers trying to decide if they were interested enough to click play. For example, I preempted a video of my concert presentation in *Concerts are Just the Tip of the Iceberg*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/concerts-are-just-the-tip-of-the-ic>) with

Our communities only see a brief glimpse of what we actually do day in and day out in our performances. In an attempt to shed a little more light on all of the work my students

have put in this semester, I decided to try opening our concert a little differently...with a video presentation. (Shiflett, 2018, para.1)

Some videos documented performances and required fewer explanations. There were five performances during the study period, four of which were filmed and included in a post. When writing about these videos I included titles, composers and other information about the pieces we performed. I accompanied a video of my eighth grade students performing on *Veteran's Day* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/veterans-day>), with four reasons why I thought *I Choose Love*, arr. Mark Miller, was a great piece for the occasion. They were:

1. It's a quick learn because the vast majority of it is unison. There are only a few measures where it's actually an SATB split.
2. Solo sections featuring my all-state students, since they were already familiar with them.
3. The text is beautiful, and meaningful to not only myself but my students. *I Choose Love* was written to commemorate the victims of the shooting at Mother Emanuel AME in Charleston, SC (which is, coincidentally, a few hours away).
4. Lots of opportunities to teach expression, work dynamics, etc.

(Shiflett, 2018, para. 3)

## Links

To provide further opportunities for interested parties I occasionally included links in blog posts. Of the 21 links in posts from the study period, 11 led to other pages on the blog. Pages were linked if I had already written about a topic to minimize re-hashing the material, while allowing readers to continue exploring the subject matter. I also shared links to other sites.

Site links would take the reader directly to something specific I mentioned, like an octavo of music, my chorus Instagram account, or to a specific item I found on Amazon.

### **Discussion of Categories and Codes**

In my content analysis of blog posts published during the study period, I identified 15 emergent codes that fit within two overarching categories: the music learning process, and the logistics of running a choral program. The following describes examples of these categories and codes by providing specific references to posts.

#### **The Music Learning Process**

I grouped the following codes under the music learning process: (a) composition, (b) assessment, (c) critical thinking, (d) musicianship, (e) vocal technique, and (f) warm-up. The music learning process reminds me of pedagogical practices. Students learn best from sequential pedagogy that empowers them to conquer the challenges of performing repertoire. To address those needs, I structured my curriculum to focus on the aforementioned codes.

#### **Composition.**

I documented my first attempts to incorporate composition in two posts: *Composing is Not a Four Letter Word* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/composing-is-not-a-four-letter-word>) and *Finding Our Groove With Composition* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/finding-our-groove-with-composition>). Composition was something I was always hesitant to teach because I do not consider myself a composer, and was unsure how to approach the topic in a meaningful way for my students. In one of my master's classes prior to the study period, a professor shared several composition projects completed in middle school and high school classrooms. He walked us through several strategies that these teachers used, shared their time frames and played



recordings of some of the resulting projects. One project that particularly piqued my interest used a children's book to create music.

In the original project I was shown in class, an orchestra program composed music to accompany *Horton Hears a Who* by Dr. Seuss. I took the same concept and modified it to work for chorus using *Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Groups of students drew slips of paper out of a cup that contained lines from the book. I tasked them with creating a melody that could be sung with the text. Classes used Chrome Music Lab to explore different sounds and melodies, record and save their ideas. Due to missed days from inclement weather, I was unable to put the entire piece together for our winter concert as I originally planned. But my students learned a lot about the creation and structure of music.

### **Assessment.**

Assessment is a necessary part of any learning process. Educators informally assess their students from moment to moment in the classroom to monitor whether students are grasping concepts, and determine how to proceed based on that knowledge. During the study period I engaged in informal assessment too many times to count. I also created student assignments and activities intended to assess their understanding. Plus, I actively tried to implement assignments that engaged my students as they wanted to be engaged, and not in ways they might have considered "boring." *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>) documented an assignment where students had to take "selfies" modeling the physical shape of each pure vowel. I left the assignment structure open-ended so students could adapt it according to their own preferences by creating presentations, videos or Snapchat posts to demonstrate their understanding. I even provided non-traditional outlets for students to complete and turn in their assignments. Students were allowed to send pictures and videos to the chorus

Instagram for a few specific assignments at the beginning of the year, which I describe in *Instagram for Choral Programs* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/instagram-for-choral-programs>).

My students also learn how to self-assess. Prior to entering high school, I expect them to have the skill set required to read, analyze, perform, listen to and critique performances. In *Read My Mind* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/read-my-mind>) I turned a personally stressful pre-concert day into a transferable learning moment. After noticing myself correcting similar things repeatedly that students should have noticed themselves,

I changed my tactic. Every time I stopped, I would just look at them for a second, and wait to see what they said. When I waited, kids would offer up reasons as to why they thought I stopped...they were right. Pretty much every single time.

(Shiflett, 2018, para. 2)

Once they realized they were correctly self-assessing, my eighth graders were able to transfer their knowledge into their performance. The change of focus from me to them increased the pace of rehearsal because I did not have to stop to correct. They instead corrected themselves.

### **Critical thinking.**

Self-assessment, as depicted in *Read My Mind* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/read-my-mind>), is one type of critical thinking, as is any activity that engages students deeply in music learning. Prior to demonstrating their understanding in *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>), I first helped students understand the physical shape to each vowel in *Marshmallow Space* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/marshmallow-space>). “To help my students feel the space they

need for proper resonance I started bringing in bags of marshmallows every year... when we are really focusing on the building blocks of vocal technique” (Shiflett, 2018, para. 1). I documented the specific steps I took before, during and after the marshmallow demonstration. I challenged them to really listen to their sound quality pre- and post-experiment, notice the amount of space the marshmallow physically filled and how the demonstration changed their perception of needed space in the mouth when they sing. For the remainder of the year all I had to say was “more marshmallow” to trigger an adjustment for proper resonance.

I also use physical activity and motion to engage my students in critical thinking. After attending a Dalcroze workshop two summers ago I was inspired to come up with ways to use tennis balls to enhance student learning, which I wrote about in *Using Tennis Balls as A Teaching Tool* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to>). Videos and written description detailed strategies I implemented to get students thinking about steady beat, vocal range exploration, phrasing, forward motion, energy, accelerando/ritardando and active listening during the introduction of new repertoire. My students undoubtedly enjoy tennis balls activities, as evidenced in Figure 15.

### **Musicianship.**

When I first tried to define my understanding of the term “musicianship” I felt I knew what musicianship was but struggled to put it into words. I could easily code blog post content as “musicianship” but failed to justify why until I stumbled across Chad West’s article in *Music Educators Journal*. He describes external and internal musicianship skills, focusing on the latter in what he calls “The Big 5” (West, 2015). West codifies these as “rhythmic ability, tonal ability, executive skills, notation-reading ability, and creativity” (2015, p. 102). *Time for a Tune-Up!*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-app-i-use-to-adress>) explained one strategy I used to address tonal ability.

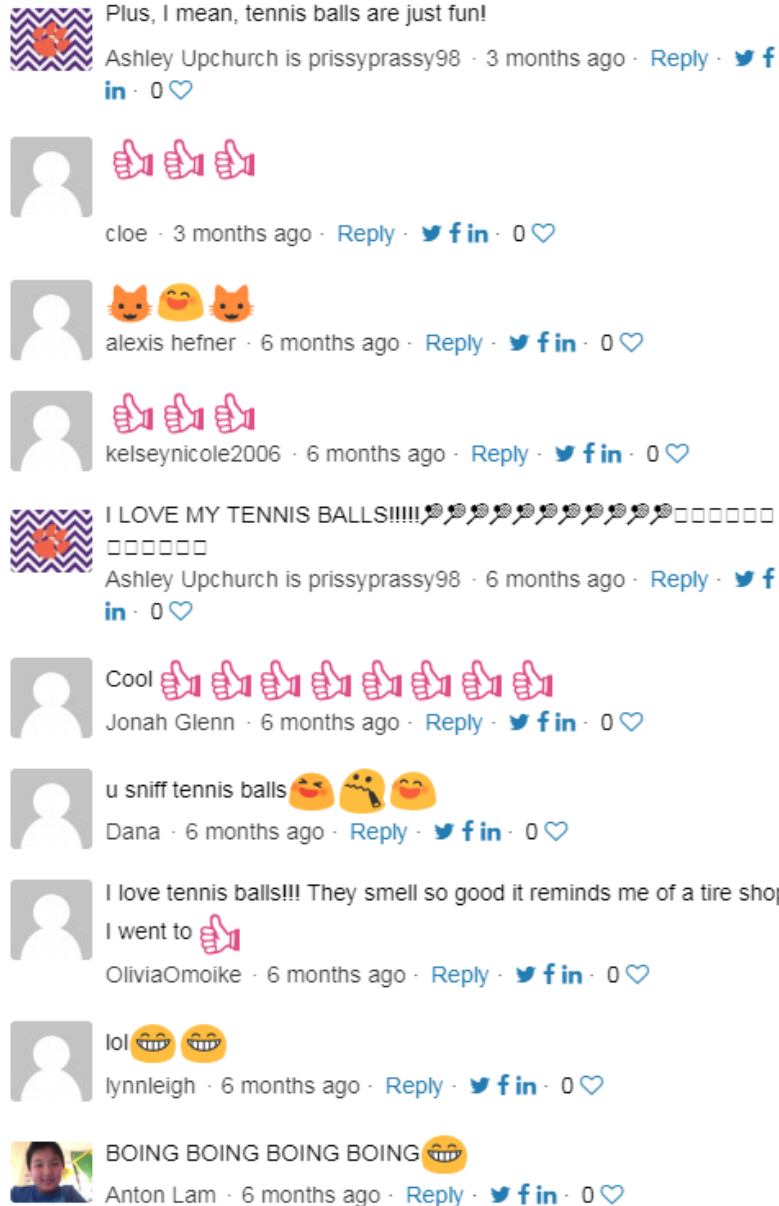


Figure 15: Student comments on the post *Using Tennis Balls As A Teaching Tool*

An app called *TonalEnergy Tuner* acts as a visual tool to teach intonation. The tuner is displayed as a bullseye. When students sing in tune the bullseye shows up as a smiley face. The closer to center their pitch is, the larger the smiley face. This visual is very motivating for my

students. I use the app to teach identification of sharp, flat, or in tune singing, and also self-correction through tiny physical adjustments. The examples I included in the post were:

Singing Flat? Try:

- Increasing your air speed to better engage the breath
- Add more tall space inside your mouth by lifting the soft palate

Singing Sharp? Try:

- Dropping your jaw a little farther to allow more room for proper resonance so the sound can properly leave the mouth
- Bringing in the corners of your lips; spread sound tends to push sharp.

(Shiflett, 2018, para. 6)

We also used the app when singing repertoire to monitor intonation within the pieces themselves.

I filmed sixth period working on *Oceans and Stars* by Amy Bernon while using the tuner to address and improve intonation.

*A Real-life Middle School Choir Music Sight Reading Session Extravaganza* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/real-life-repertoire-sightreading-se>) addressed another category of “The Big 5,” notation reading ability. My eighth graders wanted more chances to try to read through music independently, so I gave them a chance to do so. I filmed and posted the entire read through of one piece, accompanied by a written play by play. I typically refrain from letting students do this, as I prefer initially teaching new music in small chunks. But listening to student feedback helped me realize my classes need to understand the practical applications of sight-reading, so I let them try. This reminded me of McPhail’s (2010) suggestion in his study to build in those small performance opportunities early in the stages of learning for optimal outcome. Though I was initially hesitant to do so, this moment that I was able to capture on video

motivated my students to achieve more in this piece because they grasped its potential from the onset of the learning process.

These examples clicked with my basic definition of “being a good musician” and easily conformed to “The Big 5” (West, 2015). But I also consider performance practice and etiquette as an important part of musicianship, which I discuss in *Buckle-up! Getting into Performance Mode*. After returning from Thanksgiving break I shared what I do to help prepare my students and get them into the mindset of performing including: (a) rehearsing on risers instead of using chairs, (b) finalizing standing order, (c) solo auditions, (d) reviewing the concert “game plan,” (e) recording pieces so that we could listen together and make cleaning checklists, (f) sending home uniforms, (g) discussing appropriate dress, (h) run-throughs, (i) altering class structure to focus on performance, and (j) review and reinforce concert and performance etiquette.

### **Warm up and vocal technique.**

Though warm-ups and vocal technique go hand in hand, but are not mutually exclusive. I focus on vocal technique for a large part of my warm-up time in class and provide some examples of how I do so in *Vocal Technique and Warm-Up for Dudes* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/vocal-technique-and-warm-up-for-dud>) and *Alfred the Alligator* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator>). I also work on music theory and sight-reading skills within what I would consider my “warm-up period.” Likewise, I build vocal technique into much of my teaching throughout the entire class as demonstrated in several posts already mentioned, like *Using Tennis Balls as a Teaching Tool* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to>), *Time for a Tune-Up!* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-app-i-use-to-adress>), *Marshmallow Space*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/marshmallow-space>) and *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>).

### **The Logistics of Running a Choral Program**

The “nuts and bolts” of running a choral program often occur behind the scenes. Students may not actually see these things happening in the classroom environment, but they are essential foundational elements for the success of my program. As evidenced in my blog posts, they are: (a) professional development, (b) scheduling, (c) organization, and (d) advocacy.

#### **Professional development.**

I attended two conferences during the study period which I wrote about in *You Guys, Being In Charge is Scary* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/being-in-charge-is-scary>) and *Conferences Make My Heart So Happy* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/conferences-make-my-heart-happy>). Instead of writing about sessions I attended, I focused on the moments that stretched me as an educator. This year I began acting as committee chair for middle school clinics, which meant that I was now in charge of facilitating nine clinics throughout my state over the school year. At Choral Arts, our first professional development session of the year, I attended my first choral division executive board meeting and lead my first committee meeting. I shared my initial reactions, hesitations and ideas for moving forward. I even asked for advice, saying:

If you've been in charge of something similar, what did you do to provide the best experience for everyone involved? If you've hosted an event (we are hosting nine across our entire state!!) what are your tips for making sure everything goes off without a hitch? (Shiflett, 2018, para.7)

My students found my position fascinating. They really respected my management role of these events and emphatically provided helpful feedback. Feedback examples are located in Chapter Seven.

*Conferences Make My Heart So Happy* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/conferences-make-my-heart-happy>) shared a different view of a professional development conference: watching my students perform in an honor choir. We stretch ourselves professionally when providing opportunities for our students to grow. When describing how it felt to see my students performing in the honor choir, I said

Ok, not gonna lie. I was up in the balcony crying like a baby. I dunno, there's just something so touching and magical about sitting back and watching your students do their thing and be super awesome at it. (Shiflett, 2018, para. 8)

### **Scheduling.**

I run my program according to schedules created months, and sometimes up to a year in advance. I also schedule on a smaller scale, like setting lesson plans for the week or deciding assignment due dates. I would argue that without proper consideration towards scheduling, it would be very difficult to successfully run a choral program. Likewise, flexibility and adaptability are important should something arise, as it did in *Snow Day?! But, it's Concert Day!* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/snow-day-but-it-s-concert-day>)

By carefully watching the weather reports the week prior to my scheduled concert, I realized there was a high probability of school cancellations from snow. Preemptively, I chose to discuss four alternative options with my classes, located in Figure 16.



## Always Be Prepared: My Crazy List of Backup Plans

### Plan A (Original Schedule)

- Dress Rehearsal Monday after school until 5:00 p.m.
- Concert Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.

### Plan B (If school was cancelled Monday, but we were at school Tuesday)

- Dress rehearsal during club hour Tuesday (Our school has clubs during the day once a month, so that all students can participate...isn't that cool? I chose club hour to limit that amount of time my kids would have to miss their other classes)
- Concert Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.

### Plan C ( If school is cancelled Monday and Tuesday)

- Dress rehearsal Wednesday after school until 4:45 p.m.
- Concert Thursday at 6:00 p.m.

### Plan D (if school is cancelled Monday-Wednesday)

- Dress rehearsal sometime during the day (TBD) Thursday
- Concert Thursday at 6:00 p.m.

I am now on Plan C! Hopefully, we don't have to get to Plan D, but if we do I'll be ready.

*Figure 16: Backup plans*

I reviewed possible scenarios in class and shared the above information on Google Classroom, but never fully expected to get all the way to the last option. Due to the high amount of snowfall, we just barely made it to school on Thursday. Because I realized ahead of time, and figured out ways to adjust, my students and I adapted to the situation without panicking, and could actually enjoy our unexpected snow days.

### **Organization.**

Scheduling and organization go hand in hand when running a music program. Evidenced by my published posts, I would argue that scheduling concerns the big ideas, while organization addresses the smaller details within events, lessons or school year. In *Rome Wasn't Built in a Day: Making Small Changes to an Already Established System*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/rome-wasn-t-built-in-a-day>) I shared the current structure for middle school clinics across the state, some changes the committee decided to make, and my

own ideas for making small changes to improve our clinic model. I piloted an entirely new format that I personally believed would reinvigorate our clinics and appeal to more directors. I shared my ideas for the organization of the pilot format, like:

- Events would last all-day instead of a half-day, culminating in a performance.
- Schedule in time for team building activities and games.
- Tentative addition of a fourth piece to the repertoire list.
- Remove group performances.

In my initial attempt at coding, explained in Chapter Four, it was interesting to note that posts I coded as scheduling also coded as organization, reflecting how closely I feel they relate. There were a few posts I considered organizational in nature, but not scheduling related. For example, I coded *Classroom Tour* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/classroom-tour>) as only an organizational post because it describes how I set-up and organize my room. Though the reasoning behind my room set-up is methodical, I do not think it related to scheduling.

### **Advocacy.**

To advocate for our programs, we must communicate with others. I did so by finding unique ways to motivate students to share upcoming dates in *The Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge>), discussing my personal perspective of running events through a professional organization in *You Guys, Being in Charge is Scary* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/being-in-charge-is-scary>) and purposefully showcasing “the everyday classroom” in *Concerts are Just the Tip of the Iceberg* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/concerts-are-just-the-tip-of-the-ic>). Audience members watched a brief video at the beginning of our winter concert that explained what my students do every day. Community members are used to seeing performances, but are often unaware of the

instruction involved in performance preparation, or that we even focus on skills besides performance.

### **Overlap**

Some codes fell in the middle, meaning I felt they possessed qualities of the music learning process and the logistics of running a choral program. For example, performances require a huge amount of planning and preparation, yet are a vital part of the music learning process itself.

### **Performing.**

*Three Snow Days, A Two-Hour Delay, and one Winter Concert*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/7-8th-grade-winter-concert-2018>) depicted the day of my seventh and eighth grade winter concert, and included videos of the performance. Due to unplanned snow days I rescheduled the concert following a series of back-up plans I created in advance of an impending snow storm. We arrived at school after a two-hour delay and pulled students from regular classes for a last minute dress rehearsal. Planning ahead for the situation insured everything was smooth and successful.

### **Repertoire.**

Repertoire integrates both the music learning process and the logistics of running a choral program. The repertoire I choose sets most of my curriculum for the entire semester, so I have to make sure I carefully choose music that challenges, inspires and gets students thinking outside of the box. In a previously mentioned post, *A Real-life Middle School Choir Music Sight reading Session Extravaganza* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/real-life-repertoire-sightreading-se>), my students wanted more opportunities to attempt to read through music. If my students had ill-

chosen repertoire, such as music beyond their capabilities, they would not have experienced the level of success that made them want to cheer out loud.

### **Community.**

I consciously implemented activities during the study period to foster and build community within my program. In *Starting off on the Right Note* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/starting-off-on-the-right-note>) students helped decorate the classroom by coloring and displaying their own music notes. In *Taking Time For Teambuilding* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/taking-time-for-teambuilding>) I shared some activities I do with my students strictly to foster community, like playing the name game, or cup-up. In *Our First Chorus Tailgate* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/our-first-chorus-tailgate>) I documented a football tailgate I held after school to hang out with students socially without the confines of school day commitments. My middle school choral program works better when the environment promotes community, and feels like a familial safe place. Without this level of trust, I do not believe that my students would have complied with some of my crazier ideas, like moving and dancing around the room, or holding hands with one another during a choreographed moment in one of our pieces. Community building in a music program requires a concerted effort on the logistical, for the ultimate payoff on the music learning process side.

### **Technology.**

Delving into working with new devices was an ongoing focus during the semester the study period took place. My students and I were comfortable with technology already, because we used iPads in the classroom prior to this school year, but implementing Chromebooks was new territory for everyone. Students missed their iPads, especially the app we used for scores, but ultimately adapted. I did much experimentation and research myself, which I shared in

*Chromebook Rollout* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chromebook-rollout>), *Here's How I'm Using Google Classroom in Chorus* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-google-classroom-in-chorus>), and *Instagram for Choral Programs* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/instagram-for-choral-programs>). I also attempted to engage students in the music learning process in a more non-traditional manner via technology, detailed in *The Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge>), *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>) and *Finding Our Groove With Composition* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/finding-our-groove-with-composition>), which are discussed earlier in this chapter. These posts show how implementation of technology in the choral classroom requires the forethought of logistics, but can ultimately enhance and further engage students in the music learning process.

### **Reflection.**

Reflection is equally a part of the music learning process and the logistics of running a choral program because of how I personally implement it into my daily teaching, professional development, and growth as an individual. I hope to instill self-reflection to my students, therefore, I build opportunities for reflection into many of my classroom activities. I have already previously discussed one example, *Read My Mind* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/read-my-mind>). *That Time I Was Ridiculously Sick During The ONE Week I Couldn't Take Any Days Off, a.k.a SSA Clinic Week* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/ssa-clinic>) which documented our experience of me hosting and my students attending an SSA Clinic. Post clinic I set aside time for them to provide their thoughts on the event, which I listed in the post.

Likewise I model self-reflection in many of the posts my students read. In *Here's What I'm Thinking...* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/here-s-what-i-m-thinking>) I shared my ideas for

the upcoming school year. In *My First Clinician Gig* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/my-first-clinician-gig>) I described how my first time acting as a clinician went, the things I noticed, and how I planned to use that information in the future. I build reflection into our schedule because I feel that's how we grow best. Allowing time to reflect on our successes, failures and deciding where there is room to improve enables me to run my program more efficiently and model what it takes to be a conscientious human being and musician.

### **Summary**

Few posts pertained to information specific enough to fit into a single category. The majority of posts related to information both about the music learning process and the logistics of running a choral program. While we strive to focus on the musical aspects of our classes, logistics go hand in hand with running a successful program. Music learning cannot take place without elements of logistics providing the needed structure.

Chapter Six described how I constructed blog posts and identified emergent themes from analysis of blog posts. Chapter Seven presents evidence of the influence that commentary had on the findings in this study.

## **Chapter Seven: The Influence of Commentary**

There were three types of commentary that influenced my teaching in action. I received online commentary from adults and students, met with focus group twice, and informally received commentary from my students in passing, during a lesson, or in the halls between classes. This chapter will discuss in detail the nature of commentary received from these outlets and illuminate the impact this feedback had on the study as a whole.

### **Online Commentary**

There were five avenues in which I could have received online commentary: (a) direct comments on a blog post, (b) private messages through the blog, (c) comments on the link posted through Facebook, (d) direct messages through Facebook messenger, or (e) comments through Google Classroom.

### **Blog Comments**

Readers had the ability to leave comments at the end of each blog post. The ten most recent comments display on the post itself and the rest I was able to view through the comments plug-in on the server website. Students were not coached on how to comment in any way. There were times when I considered instructing them, but decided against it as it took away from the organic nature of commenting. While I was not surprised by the overwhelming use of emoji's I did find it interesting that all responses (including unrelated and spam) were positive in nature. Comment sections on the internet usually provide space for "trolls," and even though I had spam comments, they were often silly posts where students tried to see how many emoji's they could post in a row. Actually, many comments were uplifting towards other students, like "you guys sounded great!" or "Let's do that again!" I personally found it amusing when students reacted to a post where I described my schedule with feelings of stress with "mood." Figures 17, 18, 19

and 20 provide examples of each type of student comment: (a) reaction, (b) response, (c) spam, and (d) unrelated. Definitions for each of these codes are located in Chapter Four.

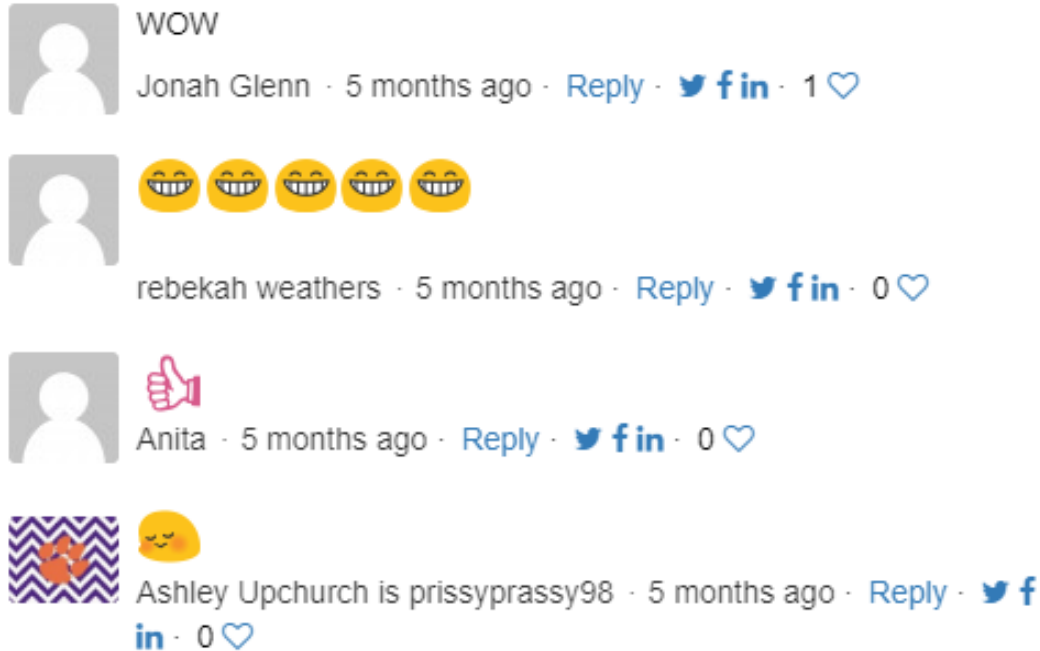


Figure 17: Examples of reaction comments

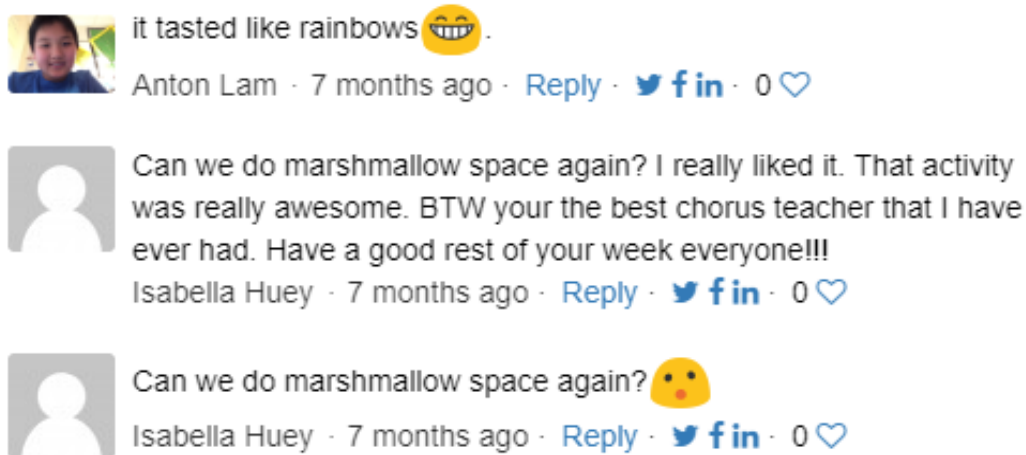


Figure 18: Examples of response comments



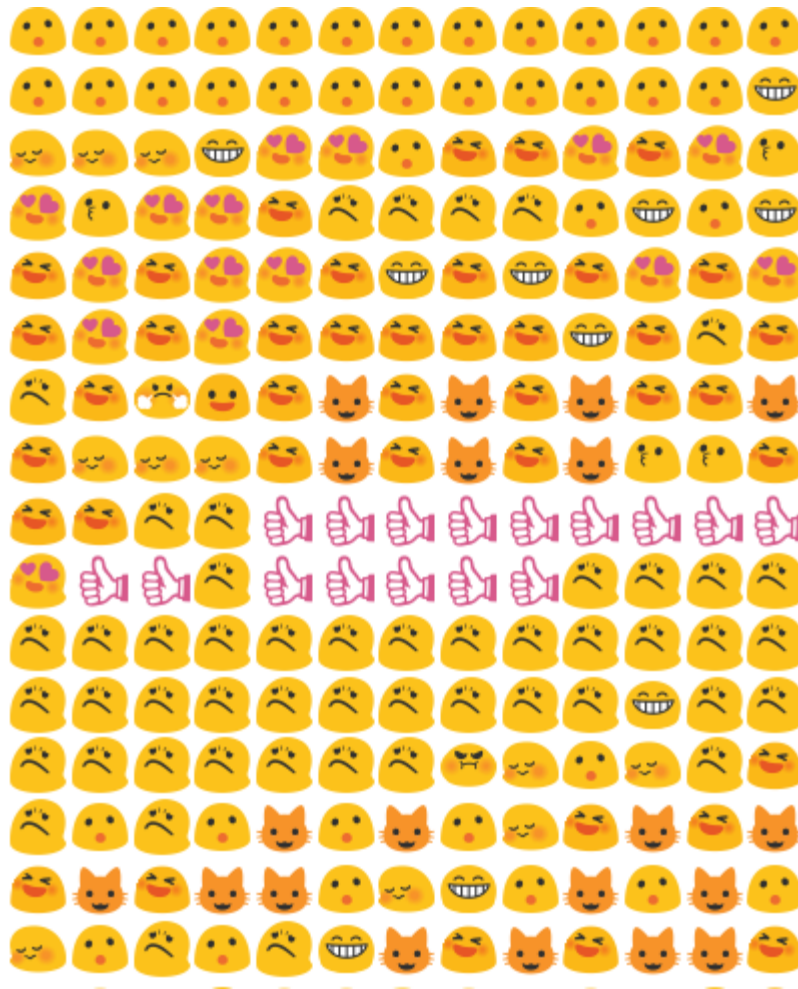


Figure 19: Example of spam comments

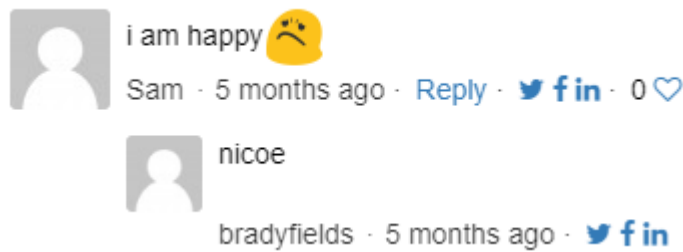


Figure 20: Examples of unrelated comments

### Blog Inbox

At the bottom of the blog website there is an area where readers can subscribe to a mailing list by submitting their email address. During the study period one person chose to send

a comment through this inbox. Like non-student comments on blog posts this individual was very complimentary, saying that he really enjoyed reading my posts and thanked me for my “tips and methods that are smart, practical, and fun” (personal correspondence, 10/10/18).

### Facebook Interaction

Links to published posts were shared on Facebook. To do this I created a page on Facebook titled *The Chorus Room*, just like the blog itself. On it, I posted links to provide a landing zone for all of my content, and a place where individuals could like or follow the page to receive updates. From there I also shared each post to two Facebook groups: (a) *I’m a Choir Director*, and (b) *Middle School Chorus Directors*. I posted each link with a catchy hook in attempts to garner further interest. Figure 21 shows an example.



Figure 21: Facebook post with a “hook.”

Facebook commentary was primarily between choir directors, and sometimes led to a unique phenomenon: conversations. Individual posts resulted in 13 conversations amongst myself and others, or amongst other individuals. Figure 22 provides an example.



Figure 22: Example of Facebook conversation.

*The Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge>) prompted this particular conversation. After receiving copies of the chorus calendar students were asked to prove they took it home by taking a picture or video of it. I told them that I was looking for their funniest, most creative pictures. The blog post included highlights of student work. In one picture (shown in Figure 23), a student staged her beanie

babies to look like they were reviewing the calendar together.



*Figure 23: Beanie babies photo that prompted Facebook discussion*

The resulting conversation (see Figure 22) related to the creativity of the assignment and how hilarious and entertaining commenters thought some of the images were, with specific mention of the image in Figure 23.

This post resulted in some of the highest levels of interaction. There were 153 reactions, 13 responses, six author responses and three shares on this post alone. Six other posts received at least 30 interactions. They were: (a) *The First Week of School: Recap*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap>), (b) *Alfred the Alligator*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator>), (c) *Starting off on the Right Note*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/starting-off-on-the-right-note>) , (d) *Classroom Tour*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/classroom-tour>), (e) *Concerts are Just the Tip of the Iceberg*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/concerts-are-just-the-tip-of-the-ic>), and (f) *Using Tennis Balls*

*As A Teaching Tool* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to>).

In *The First Week of School: Recap* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap>) I described how I structured my classes each day during the first week of school.

This included how I began establishing procedures and routines, activities students did to begin building community with myself and each other, an overview of the school year via the chorus calendar, and reviewing and establishing vocal technique routines with each group. Questions and conversations in reference to this post included:

- Requests for more information about mentioned warm-ups and exercises, like the rote song *We Will Fight*
- Commentary on my use of tennis balls to teach steady beat.
- Requests for my note template used in the activity on the first day.
- Inquiry about how I voice my students.

The overwhelming interest in *We Will Fight* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/we-will-fight>) prompted a follow-up post the next week with videos of one of my classes working on the song, and a body percussion demonstration. I created a post on how I voiced my students prior to this post and linked it in a comment for those who requested it.

*Alfred the Alligator* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator>) was the final post published during the study period. At the time of publication my students had been working on it off and on during their warm-up for about a month and a half. I discovered this rote song

one night at church when my colleague was searching YouTube for warm-up ideas. He stumbled upon it and shared it with me. I taught it to my own classes the next week and it was a big hit with my students. I did not share a video of this song until the end of the study period due to timing issues related to performances, and other topics I had already planned to blog about. Once published, this post was a hit with other directors on Facebook, who shared discussions they had with their own students about the logic of the text; whether people in Florida keep baby alligators and questioning why you would throw Alfred down the water spout if you are going to miss him.

The lyrics are found below:

*Have you ever been down the water spout,*

*Way down to the bottom of the water system?*

*There you'll find a little alligator who goes by the name of Alfred,*

*if you do, he's mine.*

*I lost him.*

*I threw him down the water spout,*

*and now I'm feeling lonely 'cause he's gone.*

*I miss him.*

*Starting off on the Right Note* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/starting-off-on-the-right-note>) explained my activity for the first day of school. Knowing that the majority of my students would be sitting in their other classes all day listening to rules and procedures, I wanted to create a different atmosphere for them from the moment they entered my room. Instead of starting off with procedures right away, I began with a relaxing activity to allow time to acquaint themselves with my room and the people in it. Upon entering the room, students read and followed directions on the board signaling them to grab a music note template off of an empty chair,

crayons and markers of their choice, and then decorated their notes in any way they chose while sitting in their assigned seat. This activity contributed a small amount of ownership right away because students not only designed their notes, but also cut them out and stuck them on the music staff I created on the back wall anywhere they chose to help decorate the room (see Figure 24).



*Figure 24: Student staff from Starting off on the Right Note*

Resulting interactions on Facebook were fascinating. Another teacher in my building that has probably never been in my classroom before commented on how much she liked what my student work. I had great conversations with other directors who complimented the idea, requested the template for my notes and shared their own pictures of their classroom decorations

that involved students. This was one of the most collaborative conversations from music educators during the study period.

*Classroom Tour* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/classroom-tour>) explained how and why I set up my classroom in a particular manner. I included descriptions, pictures and a video tour. I received interest in how I labelled my chairs and inquiries about the difficulty of removing labels, and how long I intended on keeping the labels on the chairs. One commenter began a conversation with me after he noticed the Florida State flag in my office. He remarked about how it was “so cool to see other #Seminoles (sic) flourishing in the field!” (Facebook comment, 2018, August 19). I also spoke with someone who was curious if I had to share my room with another teacher because she was in a situation where she would be sharing her room with the band director, and wanted to know if I had any ideas for how that could work.

After my seventh and eighth grade winter concert, I published *Concerts are Just the Tip of the Iceberg* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/concerts-are-just-the-tip-of-the-ic>). To begin the performance I showed a PowerPoint presentation that what we do in Chorus class besides performing concerts. I included photos, video clips, and short written descriptions about what we actually did that semester besides concert music. In the blog post I shared a video from my actual concert of the PowerPoint playing for my audience. I received really positive feedback from others on Facebook and even had brief discussions about other strategies to increase exposure to what we actually do in our classrooms. We (the commenters and I) mentioned informances (in-class performances either in person or through a social media platform) performing pieces on solfege, or using the same video presentation I shared with students at an in-school assembly, or even as a recruiting tool for incoming students.



*Using Tennis Balls as a Teaching Tool* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to>), described previously in Chapter Six, did not receive comments on Facebook, but there were 28 likes and two shares. Due to the privacy settings of those who shared the post, I was unable to see any additional responses or reactions that may have occurred. Using tennis balls was one of the strategies I mentioned in my recap of the first week of school. On that earlier post I received some comments about what a great idea it was, or that the responder's own students loved using tennis balls too.

Upon looking at the above mentioned posts I noted a commonality: they discuss unique or novel concepts. In fact in all of the posts with the exception of *Classroom Tour*, I was discussing implementation of a new activity with my own students. Evidenced from the interaction on Facebook, it appears that others in music education are also interested in learning more and possibly incorporating unique ideas in their own classrooms.

### **Direct Message through Facebook Messenger**

I interacted with one person over Facebook messenger after beginning a conversation with her on the page *I'm a Middle School Choral Director*. She said she followed my blog posts and enjoyed them, and actually lives in the same state. She had recently moved from another state and suggested we meet in person. This individual also created a website in response to what I had created on my blog to begin making her own resource, which is linked on my blog under the resources tab.

### **Comments Through Google Classroom**

I received little interaction through Google Classroom during the study period. Comments were only posted the first two weeks, and were things like "ok," "I'm done," or a

smiley face emoji. Students preferred to comment on the blog directly or discuss with me in person.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

A focus group met twice during the study period; once halfway through and again at the end. Students participating in the study group were all eighth grade students who volunteered to contribute freely. In the proposal I originally planned to meet with focus group members three times during the study, and tentatively mapped out dates. These meetings were intended to drive the action research cycle of plan, act, observe, and reflect. However, I did not meet with them again until the end of the study due to the emergence of new data. I felt it unnecessary to meet with them frequently when I was receiving so much other feedback. I wanted to make sure we met again at the end of the study period because I was interested in comparing initial thoughts with their final thoughts.

During the proposal period I drafted sample focus group questions to facilitate discussion. These were not intended to be strictly followed as I wanted discussion to “flow” and naturally progress. Sample focus group questions are located in Appendix E. Eighth grade classes met with me at the end of the day, thus each focus group discussion took place immediately after school while students were waiting for their rides because it was the most convenient time for participants. There were a few difficulties associated with this meeting arrangement. I was limited in the amount of time I could talk with students because they had to leave when their bus was called. I also had other students in the classroom waiting for their buses, resulting in a high amount of ambient noise in the focus group recordings. There are a few spots in the first focus group where I had to list something a student was saying as inaudible due

to interference with external noise like announcements, students trying to play on my piano or other conversations in the room.

### **Focus Group One**

To facilitate discussion I began by asking some of the pre-written sample questions located in Appendix E. At first students were a little stiff answering questions but got more comfortable as the conversation continued. When asked what they enjoyed doing in class students said they enjoyed warm-ups, “walking around,” and moving into circles for group sight reading. Their least favorite parts of instruction centered around sight reading because “it isn’t fun” (Focus group one, 2018, October 15). I asked them to think about ways that sight reading could be more fun for them. Students said that it was more enjoyable when they split up into sectionals. One student wondered if we could do sight reading while engaging in movement. I mentioned creating an incentive to encourage competitiveness which garnered some initial interest, until one of them thought they might always be the class to lose, so maybe we shouldn’t make it a competition.

When asked about the blog posts they had been reading in class all participating students agreed that I needed to use more visuals in each post. When asked further about this, focus group participants said that they liked seeing what everyone else was doing and the examples that it provided for them. They also liked when I included personal anecdotes about things that I do outside of school, or personal thoughts. Angelina felt like she gained a better appreciation for why I teach things a certain way because “I see more like, what you’re doing.” (Focus group one, 2018, October 15).

Discussion of my use of the blog prompted an idea from Elle. She said, “What if you did like a section that teaches students a little bit about your knowledge of piano?” (Focus group one,

2018, October 15). She thought using the blog as another avenue to teach, specifically piano, could be another way to reach students. Elle had interest in taking piano lessons. Due to the lack of time on my part I was not able to teach my students privately. I loved that she came up with this idea to further use the blog as a resource for students like herself.

Rachel mentioned that she would like us to do more with seasonal decorations in the classroom. I brought up that I didn't think I had the time to maintain that myself but mentioned maybe we could form a student committee to be in charge of that, which the entire group seemed to like.

### **Focus Group Two**

The flow of discussion felt much more natural during this session. Students shared their thoughts with me post-study about anything they noticed that was different for them this school year than the previous year. Two in particular, Rachel and Monica, were very active participants in this conversation. Both girls felt like their classes were going better and they had grown vocally during the study period. Rachel noted that people appear to be listening better and both said they thought the group had grown a lot closer.

As with the first focus group session they reiterated that they wanted to continue to see pictures and videos, but now they wanted to see more from other classes. I told them that part of the study was that I focused primarily on eighth grade, which was why they didn't see many pictures or videos of other groups until after the study period had ended. Monica liked doing activities to hang out after school without the pressure of focusing on rehearsal. She also said "I feel like the attitude has gotten better." (Focus group two, 2019, January 9).

When asked if there was anything they'd like me to do more of in class, Monica gave a really thoughtful answer,

I like when we do tennis balls....I think it's sometimes when we're sitting down, just singing for a while, yeah, it's boring. It's not boring, it just gets repeated. Like, it repeats, repeats, and repeats. Like, when you use tennis balls with our songs to get like rhythm, and beat, and all that, I think it focuses us more...

(Focus group two, 2019, January 9)

When further asked about this, she said the physical act of keeping the beat with a tennis ball helped her get the beat easier and remember things faster. Students three and five also responded that they enjoyed the field trips and they also helped bring the group closer together.

### **Informal Student Interactions**

I expected to gather most of my student feedback from focus group sessions but was surprised by the informal student interactions that emerged as a significant source of data and feedback during the study period. This began as soon as they received their new devices and started reading blog posts during the first few minutes of class on Fridays. August 30, 2018, was the first day that students browsed blog posts in class. I was surprised to note that the first time I tasked them with reading the blog each class stayed on task the entire time. I had no issues with students going to any other websites or playing games. They appeared genuinely interested in the site and read more than what I assigned to them. I ascertained this when I started hearing sounds coming out of all of their screens because they had discovered a post I published that summer, *Chrome Music Lab*. (Teacher-researcher journal, August 30, 2018)

Some documentation of informal student interaction was recorded in my teacher researcher journals. For example, on September 16, 2018, I wrote:

When I let the students read posts from the past week I had some interesting discussions with them about what I do in the choral community outside of school. They also seemed

to really relate to the memes I used about being overwhelmed. (Teacher-researcher journal)

Within my teacher-researcher journals I noted nine specific references to these interactions that influenced me in some way. From them I learned the following:

- Warm-up is their favorite part of class.
- They like moving.
- Music learning at first is really hard and tedious for them, so is sight reading.
- The first time I incorporated full body movement students said it was their favorite class so far.
- Students said that movement helped them focus more.
- They wanted more of a chance to sight read on their own with repertoire without my assistance.
- Students who had a chance to “teach” the class said they realized it was harder than they thought, and that they would never want to be a teacher because they’d want to kill everyone.
- They really enjoyed working on composition and had really creative ideas.

I gave my boys a chance to share their thoughts with me about the first clinic that I hosted. Their main points were:

- They didn’t mind that I hosted it at our school.
- The clinician was cool.
- It was much better than another clinic they attended in sixth grade.
- They ended up liking all of the pieces, including one we initially weren’t too excited about.

- Make sure I bring extra soda next year.
- They really enjoyed the time I built in for team building activities.
- The photo scavenger hunt was their favorite.

We discussed disrespectful behavior from students at another school during the clinic. They wondered whether their teacher allowed them to talk that way all of the time, and was that why a student was rude to the clinician. I told them I was proud of them for recognizing that the student's behavior was not ok, and that they did not act like that. They responded with "yeah, because you would have killed us if we acted that way" (Teacher-researcher journal, October 31, 2018).

Posts that received less feedback online often resulted in better feedback from students in person. They were really interested in what I did to plan and manage middle school choral clinics all over the state and thought it was cool that I was in charge of something so big. The girls also enjoyed giving me feedback about the clinic they attended, and provided a unique perspective, as eighth grade students attended a clinic in sixth grade prior to when I took over.

There were seven blog posts that documented informal student interaction: (a) *Voicing* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/voicing>), (b) *The First Week of School: Recap* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap>), (c) *Chromebook Rollout* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chromebook-rollout>), (d) *Composing is not a Four Letter Word* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/composing-is-not-a-four-letter-word>), (e) *Coda* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/coda>), (f) *That Time I Was Ridiculously Sick During The ONE Week I Couldn't Take Any Days Off, a.k.a SSA Clinic Week* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/ssa-clinic>), and (g) *Read My Mind* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/read-my-mind>)(Shiflett, 2018).

In *Voicing* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/voicing>) I was able to capture informal student interaction on video included in the post. In this video, I ask my students if they have any preferences about their voicing assignment, and many of them responded that they were comfortable singing any part I assigned them. I loved this because, pedagogically, I want them to be comfortable singing in all parts of their range rather than identifying with only one voice part. This interaction reinforced the notion that I was training them to use their full range in a manner that was empowering for them.

An image included in *The First Week of School: Recap* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap>) shows a picture I took of my dry erase board covered in student feedback. I asked them if they had any ideas for assignments. We had a rich, interactive discussion in relation to these assignment proposals. I provided the class with a couple of ideas I was considering implementing during the school year, and then we were able to bounce ideas off of each other. Figure 25 shows the results of our conversation. Though not all of them are practical for our situation many of them were, in fact, thoughtful, creative and fun ways to engage a class. Within these ideas I noticed students were interested in: (a) creating their own music; (b) engaging with their audience, family and community members; (c) intrigued by informal performances; and (d) excited about projects and assignments that deepened their knowledge of music, but in a creative, and meaningful way. My students showed they were eager to learn but not through a “boring” worksheet, writing assignments, etc. They want to actively engage in the learning process and be allowed creative freedom.



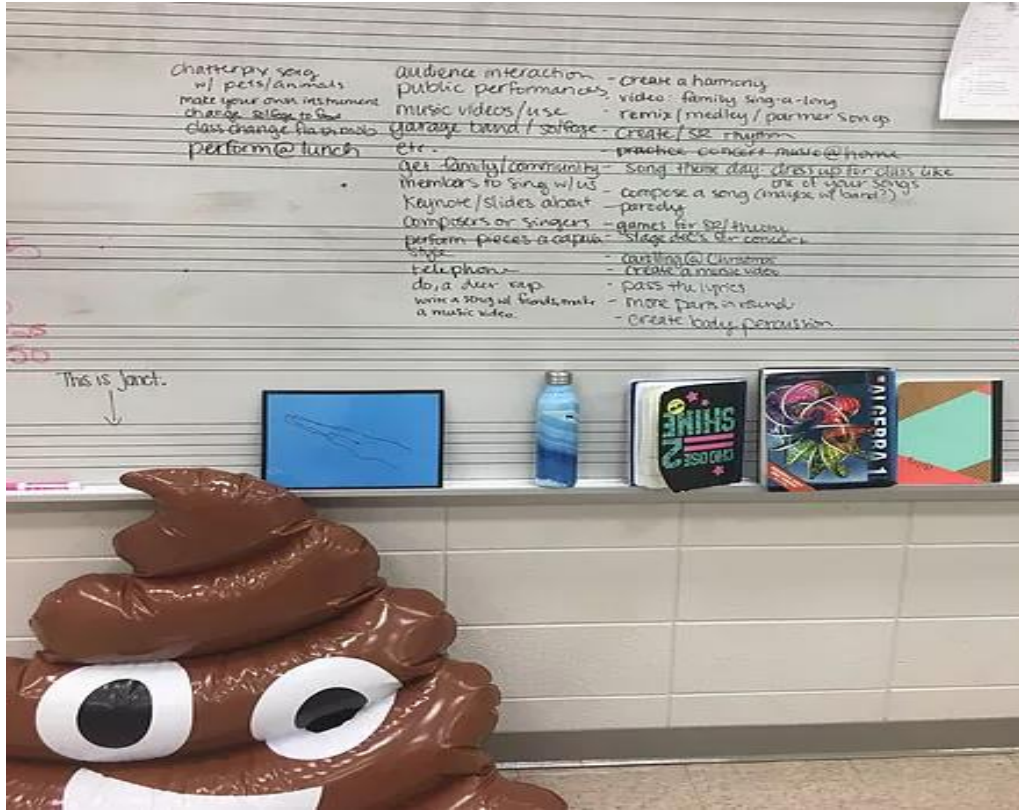


Figure 25: Student assignment ideas

Upon later review of this list I noted just how much this discussion actually influenced my curriculum choices during the study period. Classes worked on a composition project in which they were assigned lines of *'Twas The Night Before Christmas* and were tasked to create music that fit. We worked on this project several times throughout the fall semester and, though it remained incomplete, students still enjoyed working to compose their own music, and I was able to get over my fear of how to teach composition.

Though not documented on the blog, I altered our typical plan for our school-wide fine arts showcase where we perform for the student body during our last half day before winter break. Instead of recycling a few of our concert pieces, I chose several Christmas carols and taught them to the students to perform at the assembly. We also included several carols

specifically intended for audience participation. Surprisingly most of the student body sang along with some enthusiasm.

Students learned and performed these simple carols in roughly a week and a half. Perfection was not the goal of this informal performance, rather, it was engaging with the audience, learning traditional carols (that my students were actually not as familiar with as I first thought), and just enjoying singing for the fun of it. After the study concluded I provided another opportunity for an informal performance for eighth grade students. I took them to an amusement park to perform and spend the day together. This was the first time I have ever taken my students on a trip for an “informal” performance. I could have chosen to make the performance more formal, but chose not to because they had just completed our formal state adjudication. I again let them learn and clean something quickly (in two weeks) to perform for this trip. I also chose to change genres and allowed them to perform two musical theatre pieces, which they then re-used for their spring concert.

After the first week of getting used to our new 1:1 devices, I documented my initial thoughts, discoveries and uses in *Chromebook Rollout* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chromebook-rollout>). Prior to receiving Chromebooks my students and I were accustomed to using devices in Chorus, but were used to iPads. As a result of this learning curve one issue I initially struggled with on the Chromebooks was how we were going to engage with musical scores on our new devices. I tried out different apps for writing and looking at pdfs of scores, but it was my eighth grade students who actually figured out how to hold the Chromebooks in the most user-friendly manner. I was stuck on using our devices in “tablet mode” with the keyboard completely folded over. I was unable to see a different solution because of our prior use of iPads. While testing out my own Chromebook over the summer I was

successful using tablet mode to view scores, but did not account for the protective cases on students devices. Figure 26 shows the solution my students came up with, that we have used since with success.



*Figure 26: Student solution for holding Chromebooks*

Instead of letting the keyboard get in the way, my classes discovered how to use the keyboard to make holding the Chromebooks more ergonomically friendly. By propping devices up in this manner they were able to remove some of the weight, making it much easier to hold music at eye level for extended periods. They were also able to adapt this for their standing posture. By bending in the keyboard slightly and propping it up against their torsos they could again take some of the weight off of their arms, and still hold the score at eye level.

I documented other ways that students were able to help with Chromebooks, like figuring out how to switch the screen into tablet mode which allowed the borders on the screen to recede so we could see more of the score at once. After transitioning bell work questions to Google Classroom students preferred completing the assignment on their devices instead of looking at my board at the front of the room. It was easier for students with less than perfect eyesight to see questions on their own screen. Google Classroom allowed me to monitor which students actually completed their bell work because they could submit assignments directly through the site. After one period with a screen that was stuck upside down, the owner of the device figured out how to correct the problem if it happened again to another student.

As mentioned in *The First Week of School: Recap* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap>) my students expressed interest in composing, creating and interacting with music on a different level. In response, I allowed them to work on a composition project described in *Composing is Not a Four-Letter Word*. After detailing how I began the project I ended the post sharing the consensus from student interactions saying “I’ve already had some students say how excited they are to be able to make their own music, as opposed to just performing” (Shiflett, 2018, para. 11).

Inspired by these informal interactions I felt like I wanted to include something about all of the random, funny little things that happen in our classroom that don’t necessarily lead to an entire blog post. This led to the creation of a different type of post that I called *Coda* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/coda>). It was just a wrap-up post where I included a variety of things, usually student centered. Other blogs call this a blog roll and use titles like “Casual Friday” (Chris Loves Julia, 2019) or “Current Obsessions” (Remodelista, 2019). These posts are

usually round-ups of different subject matters, links, etc. An example from *Coda* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/coda>) is included in Figure 27.

#meanwhileinmiddleschool



- "Mrs. Shiflett, do you like my Gucci slides?"

*Figure 27: Coda* excerpt. *Coda* posts share some of the random moments between myself and my students in the classroom.

I wanted these posts to be a place where I could share all of the silly things, and seemingly unrelated moments, that occurred every day that made me smile. The first section of the post shown above I titled *#meanwhileinmiddleschool*, and shared a picture of homemade Gucci slides, an impromptu performance two of my students had after school one day while waiting for the bus and a website link to a .gif of a chihuahua spinning in bubble wrap. On a less humorous note,

I posted pictures from a Volleyball tailgate where several Chorus students stayed with me after school to hang out and watch the game.

After describing my experience in *That Time I Was Ridiculously Sick During The ONE Week I Couldn't Take Any Days Off, a.k.a SSA Clinic Week*

(<https://www.thechorusroom.com/ssa-clinic>) I wrapped up the post with some reflections post-discussion with students who attended the field trip. Figure 28 shows these reflections from the blog post.

### Post- Clinic Reflections

- We all had a discussion about the benefits of programming three vs. four pieces for the clinic...and we're still undecided to be honest.
- With three pieces, we were able to really focus on details
- At times, having only three pieces felt a little like we were spinning our wheels, and I was concerned we were running out of things to do.
- With four pieces, there would have been more to work on. The boys chimed in, and said that four pieces did feel like a lot for them.
- The girls liked being able to perform their fun rounds and part songs. I think it would have been neat to teach one or two brand new round/part songs at the clinic itself. I had one that we looked up, but didn't have the energy to learn it well enough to teach since I was so sick.
- The day was REAALLY long (Their words. Not mine.)
- Many of the breaks I built into the schedule were active breaks with some sort of activity. After some discussion, we felt like it would have been better to add on 15 minutes of down time to each break. At one point, the girls took a thirty minute break because they were starting to get brain-fried, and a lot of them laid down on the floor to rest. When they came back afterwards, they felt more refreshed and ready to work.
- I personally enjoyed showing a few of my church members what I do. I received a lot of very kind feedback from them, and lots of appreciation!
- Going off-campus felt more special, though many of my students said they wouldn't mind if we held the SSA clinic at school in the future.
- These clinics have been the best concert preparation! Most of the clinic repertoire is going to be used for our winter concert, so now my students are mostly prepared to perform. A one day clinic is equal to roughly a weeks worth of class!

*Figure 28:* Post-clinic reflections within a blog post

We debated the benefits of programming three pieces versus four pieces, and have pros and cons for both. Students shared their thoughts on building breaks into the schedule. Though I had already built in active breaks with team building activities my girls requested breaks with actual down time to just sit and relax. They felt that this would allow them to focus better when

beginning a new rehearsal session. Students all agreed with me that the extra rehearsal time was helpful in preparing for our winter concert, as it equaled roughly a week's worth of class time.

*Read My Mind* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/read-my-mind>), described in Chapter Six, documented another interesting moment of informal student interaction:

When I waited, kids would offer up reasons as to why they thought I stopped: “We sang that word too spread,” “We took a breath there where we weren’t supposed to,” “That was flat,” “We didn’t breathe together,” and you know what, they were right. Pretty much every single time. (Shiflett, 2018, para. 2)

When I allowed my students to provide their own feedback, they were forced to listen more closely. After identifying what they didn’t do well, I asked them how to correct what they messed up on. Guess what? They can do that, too! (Shiflett, 2018, para. 3)

The provided documentation above demonstrates how informal student interaction influenced me during the study period. But many more undocumented informal student interactions occurred during the study that shaped my teaching in some way. These would occur in the hallway between classes when students would come stand and talk to me as I was monitoring class change, randomly during the class period and during the class time I set aside for students to read blog posts. Examples of these interactions included:

- Discussing pictures I included that were not school-related, like my cat or pictures of my house or yard.
- Interest from students about what else I do professionally (besides clinics).
- Sympathizing with me after I write about feeling stressed, tired, mad, etc.
- Commentary on memes or other images I include in blog posts. Students related to use of memes because they use them as a means of communication themselves.

- Feedback from an individual student regarding a published post.
- Students making remarks about how they have a greater appreciation for my lessons now that they have more background knowledge on my motivations for approaching something a certain way.
- Showing me new silly websites, memes, or videos because they thought I might like them based on something else I shared on the blog.
- Interest in and discussion of chorus students in other grades and classes.

Chapter Seven described the different types of commentary I received through the blog, and personally during the study period. Examples were chosen to illustrate the influence that commentary provided on the resulting action cycles. Chapter Eight discusses the perceived impacts on my classroom and teaching.



## Chapter Eight: Perceived Impacts on Classroom and Teaching

I noted perceived impacts in both my classroom and teaching during this study in the following areas: (a) lessons and assignments, (b) formal and informal performance, (c) professional development resources, and (d) networking and professional growth. These impacts will be discussed in this chapter.

### Lessons and Assignments

Prior to the study, I assigned traditional assessments that usually involved taking a test with paper and pencil to demonstrate student knowledge and learning. Beginning as far back as the pilot study my students displayed interest in non-traditional assignments like *The Chorus Creativity Project*, which I wrote about during the pilot period. At the beginning of the school year I filled up almost an entire side of my whiteboard with student feedback regarding the kind of assignments and activities they would like to do during the school year. This led to experimentation and creation of different types of assignments like *The Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge>) and *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>). I used Google Classroom as an online platform for distributing, assessing and providing feedback for assignments. My students showed me that they can demonstrate their understanding without filling in a, b or c on a bubble.

Through student feedback I was able to tailor my lessons and activities to better engage them daily in the classroom. I learned that my students enjoy movement, even though I thought they hated it at first. I discovered that they crave activities to make the music learning process less tedious and more fun. Opening myself to their feedback helped me realize that my students want to be engaged and they want to learn, but they want to do it in a way that is interesting to

them. This student feedback provided input into how they best learn and I was able to make changes and try new things because of it.

### **Formal and Informal Performance**

A typical school year previously consisted of roughly the same amount of performances for my program: a Veteran's Day assembly, winter concert, CPA preview and Spring Concert. I feel very strongly about wanting to display only my best quality work and I believe that quality trumps quantity when it comes to performance. Once I started publishing videos of my students at all of the steps along the way it somewhat changed my perception. At first, I have to admit, I was a little nervous about the feedback I might receive. I cringed at the thought of someone judging my ensembles negatively or thinking that I was incapable of maintaining a quality program. The overwhelmingly positive feedback I've received proved me wrong. Others outside of the classroom, whether it be students in other classes, parents or music educators, want to know what it's like to be a "fly on the wall." Suddenly the process of music making is clear for all to see, and other directors seem to respond and identify with the "realness" of what was happening in my room every week.

This school year my students have sung informally more than they ever have. In combination with both formal and informal performances my students have taken part in eight to 10 performances during the 2018-2019 school year. This is almost double that of past years. New additions to our performance line-up included:

- Singing carols and engaging students in a group sing a-long the day before winter break.
- Informance at the end of middle school clinic events.

- Polishing two new pieces for a trip to Dollywood two weeks after our state adjudication.
- Experimentation with simple staging and choreography during our spring concert.

This transparency has allowed me to somewhat let go of my need for perfection and just try to enjoy the process more. I have also come to realize that in my own personal philosophy of music education performances are not solely a “product” nor an ending. Performing is just another part of the music learning process; a necessary and vital part of the growth of developing musicians.

### **Professional Development Resources**

During the proposal period I knew a few online resources available to music educators for professional development. In Chapter One I listed and described two of these: (a) *In the Middle with Mr. D* (Duncan, 2018), and (b) *Mrs. Miracle’s Music Room* (Miracle, 2018). I was also aware of online communities of practice, like Facebook groups, which I was beginning to use as a method to share published blog posts. Chapter Two included research into these Facebook groups as preliminary information for my study.

During the study I expanded my knowledge of online resources a great deal through interaction in Facebook groups and exploration of other platforms like Instagram. I created a page to begin to track all of the new resources I was discovering on my blog with the hope that other teachers could use these resources to their advantage. Appendix H provides a chart of some of the online/digital resources I discovered during the study period.

All of the resources in Appendix H are free to use and created by other practicing choir directors. Some have online stores to purchase resources, but most just share information to benefit others. Due to the nature of busy choir directors these sites vary in post frequency, professionalism and depth of resources. Some sites are just starting and are still growing

information because, as busy choir directors, site hosts do not always have time to publish frequently. Other sites contain more frequently published posts and have more information contained within them.

I was amazed by the wealth of information I discovered on Instagram. Many teachers are now creating pages on Instagram to share what they are doing in their classrooms. I, myself, have a school Instagram page which I sometimes used to share links to blog posts. I began following other teachers on Instagram, whether they were just other choir program pages like mine, or pages intended for professional growth. There are too many of these to list and describe successfully, but it is evident that other teachers want to share information, collaborate and help one another grow.

Publishing posts on the blog has not only allowed me to discover online resources but create one myself. From the first post published during the pilot study on April 27, 2018, I have published 66 posts ranging in topics from repertoire and vocal technique, to questions to ask in a job interview. Now during a casual scroll of my Facebook feed, if I come across a post on one of the online learning communities I follow that I feel I can contribute to I can simply share a link to a corresponding blog post. I've had other directors text, call or email me to ask questions like "how do I do this?," "what song would you recommend for this group?," or "how do you handle classroom management?," and all I have to do is send them a link to the blog. In April 2019, after the study period, I received the following comment on the blog:

I...stumbled across your blog last week. I'm loving it so much! I've been teaching in the same district for 18 years. I think I will use many of your suggestions next year to freshen things up a bit. It's a transitional type of year next year because I

am without a classroom during renovations. Thanks for posting such great ideas!

(Kristi Miehl, blog post comment, April 2019)

I've received other comments like this over the past year. I find it inspiring to receive feedback of this nature and it motivates me to continue writing posts.

### **Networking and Professional Growth**

#### **Online Interaction and Communication**

Regular interaction with the online music education community via Facebook and Instagram provided me with new insight and ideas to implement in my classroom. As evidenced in previous chapters I was influenced by commentary to continue to try new things, alter some aspects of my classroom to make them better and engage my students on a different level. This pattern continued post-study as I continued to try out new ideas, like an idea I had for recruiting more boys after someone simply asked me whether I allowed boys that were not in class to participate in dude choir. I shared this idea in February after the study period in a post called *Bring a Dude To Choir Day*.

I was also intrigued by ideas other professionals shared online. When I was absent to attend the national ACDA conference in Kansas City I left an activity for my students called "Meme Wars" that I saw other choir directors posting about in the Facebook group. My classes loved the activity and had fun making jokes about chorus class.

#### **Real-Life Interactions**

My regular interactions with professionals in the music community have started to change as well. At our annual all-county event, called Spartanburg Sings, I was surprised by a conversation I had with another director who served as the clinician this year. She caught me on the way in one morning to ask me about movement activities and warm-ups. She knew that I had

these activities at the ready because she had seen my blog posts, and asked if I would be willing to work with the students during the day to help keep them engaged. She later even left me in charge of the entire group for about an hour while she listened to solos because she felt like she could trust that if she left me in charge things would get done.

Recognition by local colleagues was flattering but getting recognized by others I only know online made me feel as though I was going in the right direction. Right at the end of the study period I received a notification that one of the original bloggers I follow, Dale Duncan, had subscribed to my blog. Not only that, but he was actively browsing and leaving comments on multiple posts! I was so excited that I texted my husband during class change to let him know that Mr. D liked my blog.

When I attended the national ACDA convention in Kansas City, Missouri, post study period I actually ended up having a conversation with a few other directors who had professional Instagram pages. I shared with one person that I enjoyed following her page *What Happens in Choir*, and that I had a blog. She actually knew who I was, what my blog was and said she enjoyed reading my posts.

### **Activity in Professional Organizations**

I wrote about my experiences serving as committee chair for middle school clinics several times during the study period in *You Guys, Being in Charge is Scary* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/being-in-charge-is-scary>), *My First Clinician Gig* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/my-first-clinician-gig>), *Rome Wasn't Built in a Day: Making Small Changes to an Already Established System* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/rome-wasn-t-built-in-a-day>), *Reflections of Piloting an Event* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/reflections-on-piloting-an-event>), and *That Time I Was Ridiculously Sick During the ONE Week I Couldn't*

*Take Any Days Off, a.k.a. SSA Clinic Week* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/ssa-clinic>). I received positive feedback from other directors this school year with regard to how the clinics were run, and others on my committee are planning on trying to adopt the all-day format that I piloted with the clinics I hosted. Additionally I was asked to begin serving on another committee for CPA, our state adjudication. I will begin serving on this committee in the fall, after a vote of confidence from the other committee members.

I was also approached about taking over leadership for the middle school area of our state ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) chapter. This person manages the largest middle school event in our state; the middle school honor choirs. Our state level NAFME (National Association for Music Education) does not sponsor a middle school all-state event, so the middle school honor choirs essentially serve the same purpose for us. The middle school chair is responsible for handling auditions, scheduling the clinicians and organizing the event for all of the middle school programs. I will begin an apprenticeship next school year and take over the following year by serving a two year term.

Chapter Eight discussed the perceived impacts of this study on my classroom and teaching. Chapter Nine will summarize the findings of this study by addressing the research questions, connecting back to previous literature, and presenting implications for teaching and future research.

## Chapter Nine: Summary and Conclusions

### Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this action research study was to document the use of blogging in a middle school choral classroom. The research questions were: (a) how do I describe my use of the blog over the study period, (b) how did my understanding of the student learning process change in relation to my blogging practices, (c) how did I perceive the influence of blogging on my practice and development as a teacher, (d) how did students perceive the influence of blogging on their music learning experience, and (e) how did I draw meaning from student responses to blog posts?

### Summary

The summary below provides a discussion of the findings of this study presented in relation to the addressed research questions.

#### **How do I describe my use of the blog over the study period?**

Over the study period I published a total of 35 posts at an average of 1.75 posts per week. Posts were written and published in response to what was happening in my classroom or in relation to personal professional experiences. Many posts provided documentation of what I was doing in my classroom at a particular time while also providing an explanation of how and why I came to a certain choice.

Upon publication of a completed post I shared the link through two online communities of practice on Facebook: *I'm a Choir Director* and *Middle School Chorus Directors*. Posts were shared with the intention of inviting interaction and feedback from other music educators. My eighth grade students read new posts in class every week and commented if they chose. Sharing blog posts via these online communities of practice and with my students in turn provided



feedback, and ultimately influenced action cycles, how I taught and what I taught in my classroom.

**How did my understanding of the student learning process change in relation to my blogging practices?**

Before engaging in this study I thought I was interested in process versus product in the music classroom. I believed that my own teaching was heavily process based which evidence from the study supports. I do not focus on performance as an end product. Rather performance is just another step in the ongoing music learning process. I promoted this through frequent and active reflection. In blog posts I modeled personal reflection by openly discussing my thoughts, successes and areas that needed improvement. By doing so I modeled how to engage in reflection for self-growth, even though I may not have set out to do it purposefully for my students. In blog posts reflection was coded most frequently, only surpassed by organization, and tied with scheduling.

After initial blog post analysis I recognized the similarities between emergent codes which allowed me to group them into larger categories: the music learning process, and the logistics of running a choral program. Code frequencies indicated that I discussed both categories almost equally. I cannot adequately engage my students in the music learning process without first implementing needed logistics like proper scheduling and organization. I need both school and community support which is why advocacy is vital for the future of my program. Continual professional development motivates and inspires me to continue to better my skills as a music educator.

I also now appreciate the value of student input. I've always respected feedback from peers and instructors but did not expect student commentary to influence me as much as it did. I

was influenced by this emergent data source multiple times during this study. There were lessons that I felt were a failure because classes did not seem to enjoy what we were doing. But taking the time to engage them on the subject proved that, as a matter of fact, they did enjoy that lesson. I mistakenly read concentration as disengagement. Students told me what they wanted more of in their lessons, like working with tennis balls or a chance to just sing through a piece when I worried they might not be ready yet. This primarily informal feedback even altered the planned action cycles during the study period from four total to at least one cycle, if not more, happening weekly.

My students were capable of engaging with music on a deeper level when I listened to their needs and allowed them the opportunity to do so. At first I was hesitant to engage in composition activities because of my own inexperience. Listening to what my classes wanted the first week of school when we made the list on the board indicated that they were ready for the chance to create music themselves, and they loved doing it. They also told me other ways they preferred to engage in learning. When I modified my instruction to meet that need they really blew me away with their creativity and efforts. Students can tell me how they want to learn, and when I adapted my instruction to meet those needs engagement in my classroom increased.

### **How did I perceive the influence of blogging on my practice and development as a teacher?**

Blogging impacted my teaching more than I imagined. When I first conceived of the idea to blog as part of a research study I thought it would be an ingenious way to provide access to resources and tools for professional development. What I realized during the study, and even more so post-study, was just how much influence the entire process had on what I was doing in my classroom every day.

I experimented with more new assignments, lessons and technology at once than I ever had in my entire career. Though seemingly narcissistic I tried ideas I thought might be “cool” in an attempt to increase blog traffic. While in some instances I did in fact receive higher traffic I ended up increasing student engagement. Positive feedback, higher traffic and student enthusiasm then motivated me to come up with and experiment with even more new ideas.

Initially I was a little uncomfortable publishing so much about my choral program. Everything was out there for others to see and I was unsure how they would react. The overwhelmingly positive support from professionals, students, parents and the community boosted my confidence in my own abilities. Increased confidence brought about increased engagement in online communities of practice like *I'm a Choir Director*. Engagement spurred more new ideas and further knowledge of online professional resources.

Blogging helped me deal with some of my personal insecurities. I have always strived to display my best work, and prior to this study I only wanted others to see a polished image. Through the confirmation of my process based mindset I slowly became more at-ease with showing others the “perfect imperfection” of the everyday. Documenting classroom experiences became a catharsis, even if that was occasionally venting about the not so perfect moments in my teacher-researcher journal. But mostly it was because of the simple act of focusing on little, happy successes every day. Even in venting I was still able to facilitate personal growth because I was actively reflecting. I feel this allowed me to approach my own students with more positivity and continue to foster the growth of our choral community.

### **How did students perceive the influence of blogging on their music learning experience?**

Focus group discussions provided an interesting perspective due to their placement at the beginning and ending of action cycles. During focus group one I learned that students were

beginning to appreciate my instructional methods more as they read blog posts because they better understood my personal motivations and lesson goals. In the second focus group discussion I learned more about their overall perceptions of the influence of the blog. Students noted that their classes felt different than before, everyone appeared to be listening to instructions more attentively, and believed the group as a whole had grown closer, which improved the overall attitude of the class. Focus group members also felt that they had developed more vocally during the study period than in sixth or seventh grade.

In documented informal student interactions students described an increased respect for me as a professional. After allowing students to attempt to teach the class those who tried acknowledged that it was much harder than they thought. Reading about my experience organizing clinics across our state began several student discussions. They wanted to know more about how I managed events, and thought it was cool that I was in charge of something statewide.

When asked, many students requested more activities that incorporated movement. When discussing the post *Using Tennis Balls as a Teaching Tool* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to>) during a focus group session, one student reported feeling more focused when engaging in movement during rehearsal. In one journal entry I wrote about feeling that an initial movement lesson backfired, only to discover through student feedback that I mistakenly interpreted the class' extreme focus on the task at hand as dislike and disengagement.

### **How did I draw meaning from student responses to blog posts?**

Students responded to blog posts in four ways: blog comments, Google Classroom, focus group discussions, and informal student interactions. Google Classroom did not provide any

feedback of quality or significance but other sources provided helpful data. I drew meaning from student responses by looking at each form of commentary individually and by also identifying commonalities and overlap between each source. On the blog itself students commented 482 times. I coded these comments as responses, reactions, unrelated or spam. I was struck by how positive these comments were, though there is a chance that students' motivations were different than my perception. As evidenced by the prolific use of emoji's and feedback like "Let's do that again!" I was reassured that my classes were enjoying lessons and gaining something from them.

Focus group discussions and informal interactions reinforced what students liked doing in class. In both cases, I recorded documentation of what students specifically liked or disliked about my class. For most, warm-up was their favorite part of class and sight reading was their least favorite. Multiple students said they enjoyed movement activities, so much so, that one student during a focus group discussion posed the idea of incorporating movement into sight singing to make it more enjoyable.

Students just wanted class to be more fun. I addressed this with activities like *Marshmallow Space* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/marshmallow-space>), where students felt the space needed for resonance by singing with jumbo-sized marshmallows in their mouths. We used tennis balls for vocal technique and repertoire, played with *Chrome Music Lab* during our composition project and enjoyed new warm-up songs like *Alfred the Alligator* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator>). I incorporated inventive ideas for assessment through *The Five Pure Vowels* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels>) and *The Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge* (<https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge>), enabling them to show their understanding of concepts in creative ways.

Students will tell you how they best learn and how they want to be engaged in meaningful ways. Taking time to listen to their ideas helped establish the tone for the year. Once my students knew that I was open to their input we were really able to have interactive discussions about how I was instructing them, how they wanted to be instructed and their performance and growth in class.

They loved watching each other and seeing themselves in action. I was consistently asked to keep putting in more pictures and videos. The eighth grade students lamented during a focus group session that the blog lacked videos and pictures from sixth and seventh grade students, and hoped to see more after the end of action cycles.

### **Connections to Past Literature**

Due to the unique nature of this field of inquiry within music education research, at first I was concerned that it would be a struggle to connect the findings of this study with past literature, particularly with regard to blogging as the primary tool. However I feel that the findings of this action research study actually support much of the literature reviewed on blogging and the potential impact for educator growth. For instance, I felt that interactions between myself, my students and other educators demonstrated the power of blogs to be transformative from a social aspect, and somewhat democratizing in my classroom (Herring, 2004). The social interaction with others in the profession online stimulated discussion (Lawrence, Sides & Ferrell, 2010), feedback, support and new ideas. Planned discussions, formal and informal interactions with my own students opened up a new window of communication, where students influenced (Farrell & Drezner, 2008) and helped guide activities and lessons.

Taking points from Bender (2014), I created guidelines for blog posts to help facilitate the format and publication of my writing. Posts embodied much of what was laid out in this study including several of Bender's noted impacts like:

- “Capturing moments that might otherwise be lost” (2014, p. 77).
- Demonstrating my knowledge and skills that might not be seen in the normal classroom setting.
- A positive impact on morale and sense of pride within my choral program, both personally and with students.

Luehmann's (2008) case study was an important discovery for my own research. Within the field of education, it was one of the few studies I found where blogging was used for professional practice. As the focus of her case study also did; I, too, used my blog to focus on topics and ideas I considered meaningful at the time. Writing reflected my personal interests and opinions, and helped garner engagement and feedback from others because they felt like I was someone they could talk to. I gained more from my blogging experience by receiving and responding to feedback than if I only published posts. Though professional identity development was not necessarily my intention in this study, I do feel that it was impacted. As Luehmann stressed, what you get out of blogging heavily depends on what you put into it. Aligning with her study I connected with others, engaged in “searching, evaluating, selecting, and critiquing” (2008, p. 334) online to increase my knowledge base by engaging in online communities of practice, seeking out new resources to enhance my professional development and help others to do the same, select relevant topics and ultimately reflect and critique my own practices.

I joined several online communities of practice as a means of publicizing my blog posts. In the process I became engaged in these groups myself by reading and discussing other posts.

Consistent with the reviewed literature on online communities of practice, I was constantly engaging in professional development, as is evidenced in previous chapters. I learned and implemented new ideas based on the feedback from others on my blog posts and from reading other posts and their comments.

Previous studies (Bauer & Moehle, 2008; Brewer & Rickels, 2014; Bernard, Weiss, & Abeles, 2018) found the highest discussed topics to be: (a) planning and preparation (Bauer and Moehle, 2008); (b) repertoire (Bauer & Moehle, 2008; Brewer & Rickels, 2014) and (c) resources (Bernard, Weiss, & Abeles, 2018). Some of my findings support these studies. I found myself writing most frequently about organization and scheduling, supporting some claims, but repertoire was one of the codes I assigned the fewest. Site traffic was highest after posting about something relatively novel, fun or engaging. In publishing these posts I was creating a resource for others to look to, though I did not code novel posts as “resources.” Regardless I still believe that my data supports that resources are needed.

I introduced my discussion of process versus product with Freer’s (2011) philosophical writing because it reflected my own internal struggle dealing with these two aspects of learning. What I discovered about my own teaching in completing this study is that I do not really structure my curriculum around “process versus product,” but rather what I would call “process, and product as an ongoing process.”

In agreement with studies reflected in the second half of my literature review I discovered that logistical factors like organization and scheduling took equal precedent with music learning processes in my own teaching. Without the proper elements of planning in place like preparation (Snow, 1998), repertoire selection (Cooksey & Welch, 1998) and reference to quality material (Hamann, 2011), I would be unable to execute my lessons to my highest capabilities. I structured



every minute of my rehearsals allowing for slight changes based on the needs and goals for my students. This structure employed aspects of scaffolding (Freer, 2008), movement (McCoy, 1989; Benson, 2011), sight-singing (Floyd & Haning, 2015) and instruction designed to meet the needs of the voice change (Cooksey & Welch, 1998). My methods were based on what I believed were best practices from my study of previous literature. Through the combination of ideas and intrapersonal interactions Durrant (2000) considered an integral part of a successful rehearsal, I was able to engage my classes in music learning processes to the best of my ability and improve these processes through regular interaction and feedback.

My study of flow theory in previous literature focused on flow as a product of performance. But this study changed my perceptions of process and product, and thus my opinions on where one can achieve a state of flow. Previous studies indicated that flow could be achieved in rehearsal as well. My own personal reflections and student feedback may indicate that we were able to achieve our own flow within everyday classroom structures. Likewise with the level of personal and class reflection I began to view performances as not an end but merely another stage of the learning process. To accomplish the “optimal enjoyment” (Custodero, 2002, p. 3) we must enjoy every step along the way and not wait to bask in the fruits of our labor at the very end.

The impact of student and peer feedback was an emergent theme within this study. Though I found nothing to indicate that 37% of students were dishonest in their feedback, disagreeing with Clayson and Haley’s findings (2011), it is worth noting how positive comments were. This may be because students genuinely responded positively to blogging about the choral classroom, or could result from some other motivation like a drive to please me, their teacher. Student feedback and its ability to influence the classroom is a topic that is not highly

researched. The few studies I found focused on course examinations in higher education. I was unable to find any studies on student feedback in music education.

I did locate some studies on peer feedback in music education (Bergee, 1993; Napoles, 2008; Yoo, 2016). My findings agree with these researchers in that peer feedback received online addressed topics I might not have considered, and was positive in nature (Napoles, 2008).

### **Implications for Teaching Practice**

Creating *The Chorus Room* impacted my teaching in such a positive way. I have always strived to approach my classroom with a growth mindset. Nothing will ever be perfect (as much as I want it to be) and there is always room for improvement. Knowing this, I have sometimes struggled with the notion of others viewing the imperfect aspects of my teaching. Exposing the inner workings of my program via blogging allowed me to embrace the imperfection and find the joy and excitement of watching myself and my students grow along the way.

Sharing the experience with my students by giving them voice further enhanced the experience. I realized the potential of taking student input into consideration. Listening to my students improved my teaching practice and would certainly benefit other teachers in their classrooms. When we take the time to listen to what our students have to say, I think we would be surprised by how much more they will buy into our classes. Likewise when we share our motivations their respect for what we are trying to implement increases.

Music teachers need other music teachers. I have always believed in pursuing professional development but did not consider the boundless possibilities of using online platforms to do so prior to this study. However one chooses to seek it I strongly recommend trying to regularly engage in informal professional development, whether you choose to chat online, read blog posts, follow other educators on Instagram or simply meet up with colleagues

for coffee. This connection diminishes the feelings of isolation that we often feel as typically the only person in our building teaching our subject matter, and provides the community that educators need to glean new ideas, get feedback or share a shoulder to cry on when something fails to go as planned.

Blogging and other social media platforms could provide a valuable window into the daily life of a music educator for the pre-service teacher. It could also prove invaluable as a resource for those in higher education to guide their curriculum and teaching practices towards what would be most helpful and practical for a pre-service teacher entering the field. Professors could expose their students to these resources and allow them to further explore on their own, or create lessons based on engagement with different platforms, like creating a warm-up sequence by researching videos online and determining their focus, or providing a class with a real-life situation such as “I only have three boys in my class of 45 students,” and ask them to brainstorm ways in which they might choose to address the problem at hand. During fieldwork or student teaching experiences pre-service teachers could journal/blog with their cohort and professors to stay connected with their community and work through experiences together.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Blogging in music education is a relatively undiscovered tool with untapped potential to provide outlets for professional development, resources, and personal growth. But to my knowledge this study is the first of its kind within our field. There is so much more study that could be done on this topic, as well as the potential of technology and social media platforms to aid teachers. For example, replication of this study would be beneficial to see if the conclusions I drew from my own experiences reflect those of other individual experiences. Further development of different music education blogs could have the ability to provide an increased

knowledge base and resources for the everyday teacher. I would be interested in following those journeys and think a format similar to Bender (2014) would be suitable for these studies.

Many teachers are already engaging in the use of social media platforms, whether it takes the form of blogging, engaging in online communities of practice, Instagram, YouTube, etc. I think it would be fascinating to interview those individuals who have used these outlets to their advantage and see how it has changed their own teaching practices.

Content analysis of other teacher created blogs, similar to those presented in previous literature on online learning communities, could provide valuable insight into what individuals find most relevant in relation to their choral programs. This could again help foster creation of relevant resources that classroom teachers most need to enhance the quality of our music education systems.

### References

- Bauer, W., & Moehle, M. (2008). A content analysis of the MENC discussion forums. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, (175), 71-84. Retrieved from: <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/stable/40319414>
- Bender, S. (2014). History, identity, and twenty-first century skills: Experiments in institutional blogging. *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 33(1), 69-80. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/675707>
- Benson, J. S. (2011). *A study of three choral pedagogues and their use of movement in the choral rehearsal* (Order No. 3483541). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (902726607). Retrieved from <http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/902726607?accountid=14667>
- Bergee, M. (1993). A comparison of faculty, peer, and self-evaluation of applied brass jury performances. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 41(1), 19-27. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3345476>
- Bernard, C.F, Weiss, L, & Abeles, H. (2018). Space to share: Interactions among music teachers in an online community of practice. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, (215). 75-94. Doi: 10.5406/bulcouresmusedu.201.0007
- Boyle, J., & Radocy, R. (1973). Evaluation of instructional objectives in comprehensive musicianship. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 32(1), 2-21. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40317258>
- Bresler, L. (1994). Teacher knowledge: A framework and discussion. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 123, 26-30. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40318686>

- Brewer, W., & Rickels, D. (2014). A content analysis of social media interactions in the Facebook band directors group. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, (201), 7-22. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/bulcouresmusedu.201.0007>
- Campbell, P., Connell, C., & Beegle, A. (2007). Adolescents' expressed meanings of music in and out of school. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 55(3), 220-236. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4543122>
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1999) The teacher research movement: A decade later. *Educational Researcher*, 28(7), 15-25. Retrieved from <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.3102/0013189X028007015>
- Cooksey, J., & Welch, G. (1998). Adolescence, singing development and national curricula design. *British Journal of Music Education*, (115), 99-119. Doi: 10.1017/S026505170000379X
- Cox, J. (1989). Rehearsal organizational structures used by successful high school choral directors. *Journal of Research in Music Education* 37(3), 201-218. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3344670>
- Cresswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Custodero, L. (2002). Seeking challenge, finding skill: Flow experience and music education, *Arts Education Policy Review*, 103(3), 3-9. Doi: 10.1080/10632910209600288
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Flow and education. In: *Applications of Flow in Human Development and Education*, 129-151. Dordrecht: Springer. [https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1007/978-94-017-9094-9\\_6](https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1007/978-94-017-9094-9_6)
- Davidson, J., & Salgado Correia, J. (2001). Meaningful musical performance: A bodily experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 17(1), 70-83. Doi: <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1177/1321103X010170011301>
- Demorest, S. (1998). Improving sight-singing performance in the choral ensemble: The effect of individual testing. *Journal of Research in Music Education* 46(2). 182-192. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/stable/3345622>
- Dodson, T. A. (1983). Developing music reading skills: Research implications. *Update: The Applications of Research in Music Education*, 7(4), 3-6. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41348850>
- Duncan, D. (2018, June 10) *In the Middle with Mr. D* [web log]. Retrieved from <http://inthemiddlewithmrd1.blogspot.com/>
- Durrant, C., (2000). Making choral rehearsing seductive: Implications for practice and choral education. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 15(41), 40-49. Doi: <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1177/1321103X0001500106>
- Eros, J. (2013). Second-stage music teacher's perceptions of career development and trajectory. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, (195). 59-75. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/bulcouresmusedu.195.0059>
- Farrell, H., & Drezner, D. (2008). The power and politics of blogs. *Public Choice*, (134), 15-30. Doi: 10.1007/s1127-007-9198-1

- Floyd, E., & Haning, M. (2015). Sight-singing pedagogy: A content analysis of choral methods textbooks. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 25(1), 11-22. Doi: 10.1177/1057083714539767
- Freer, P. (2008) Teacher instructional language and student experience in middle school choral rehearsals. *Music Education Research*, 10(1), 107-124. Doi: 10.1080/14613800701871538
- Freer, P. (2011). The performance-pedagogy paradox in choral music teaching. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*. 19(2), 164-178. Doi:10.2979/philmusieducrevi.19.2.164
- Hamann, K. L. (2007). Influence on the curriculum choices of middle school choir teachers. *Update – Applications of Research in Music Education*, 26(1), 64-74. Retrieved from <http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/1577374?accountid=14667>
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81-112. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4624888>
- Herring, S.C., Scheidt, L.A., Bonus, S., & Wright, E. (2004). Bridging the gap: A genre analysis of weblogs. Paper presented at the 37<sup>th</sup> Hawaii International Conference on Systems Sciences, January, Big Island, HI.
- Hopkins, M. (2013). Programming in the zone: Repertoire selection for the large ensemble. *Music Educator's Journal*, 99(4), 66-74. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43289020>
- Kuhne, G., & Quigley, B.A. (1997). Understanding and using action research in practice settings. In B.A. Quigley & G. Kuhne (Eds.), *Creating practical knowledge through action*



- research* (pp. 23-40). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, no. 73. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuzmich, N. (2012). Music learning: An ongoing process. *The Canadian Music Educator*, 53(3), 7-8. Retrieved from <http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/1021199390?accountid=14667>
- Lawrence, E., Sides, J., & Farrell, H. (2010). Self-segregation or deliberation? Blog readership, participation, and polarization in American politics. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(1), 141-157. Doi: 10.1017/S15375
- Luehmann, A.L. (2008). Using blogging in support of teacher professional identity development: A case study. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 17(3), 287-337. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27736733>
- Marcum, J. (2019, June 7). Casual Friday: Feelings on moving in, my first furniture purchase, favorite mom jeans and more! *Chris Loves Julia* [web log]. Retrieved from <https://www.chrislovesjulia.com/casual-friday-feelings-on-moving-in-my-first-furniture-purchase-favorite-mom-jeans-and-more/>
- Martin, L. (2014). Technology and the choral art: iRehearse: The iPad and the choral rehearsal. *The Choral Journal*, 54(7), 63-67. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/stable/23646412>
- McCoy, C. (1989). The effects of movement as a rehearsal technique on performance and attitude of high school choral ensemble members. *Contributions to Music Education*, 16, 7-18. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24134238>
- McPhail, G. J. (2010). Crossing boundaries: Sharing concepts of music teaching from classroom to studio. *Music Education Research*, 12(1), 33-45. Doi: 10.1080/14613800903568296

- Merriam, S., & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miracle, A. (2018, June 10). *Mrs. Miracle's Music Room* [web log]. Retrieved from <https://www.mrsmiraclesmusicroom.com/>
- Napoles, J. (2008). Relationships among instructor, self, and peer evaluations of undergraduate music education majors' microteaching experiences *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 56(1), 82-91. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40343714>
- Price, H.E. (1983). The effect of conductor academic task presentation, conductor reinforcement, and ensemble practice on performers' musical achievement, attentiveness, and attitude. *Journal of Research in Music Education* 31(4), 245-257. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3344628>
- Remodelista Team (2019, June 8) Current obsessions: City weekend. *Remodelista* [web log]. Retrieved from <https://www.remodelista.com/posts/current-obsessions-city-weekend/>
- Reynolds, A., & Beitler, N. (2007). Reflective practice in a middle school instrumental setting. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*. (173), 55-69.
- Robbins, J. (2014). Practitioner inquiry. In C.M. Conway (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research in American music education* (pp. 187-208). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199844272.013.011
- Scheib, J. (2014). Paradigms and theories: Framing qualitative research in music education. C.M. Conway (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research in American music education*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199844272.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199844272-e-005>.

- Tobias, E. (2014). Collecting, generating, and analyzing multimodal and multimedia data. In C. M. Conway (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research in American music education*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199844272.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199844272-e-016>.
- Warzecha, M. (2016). *Male peer modeling in the kindergarten music classroom*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Wenger, E. & Wenger-Traynor, B. (2015). *Introduction to communities of practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses*. Retrieved from <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>
- West, C. (2015). Developing Internal Musicianship in Beginning Band by Teaching the "Big 5". *Music Educators Journal*, 101(3), 101-106. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/stable/24755570>
- Yoo, H. (2016). A web-based environment for facilitating reflective self assessment of choral conducting students. *Contributions to Music Education*, 41, 113-130. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/stable/24711131>

Appendix A  
IRB Exemption Notice



Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS) • 2800 Plymouth Rd., Building 520, Room 1170, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800 • phone (734) 936-0933 • fax (734) 998-9171 • [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu)

To: Millie Shiflett

From:

Thad Polk

Cc:

Julie Skadsem  
Millie Shiflett

Subject: Notice of Determination of "Not Regulated" Status for [HUM00151923]

**SUBMISSION INFORMATION:**

Title: Blogging in the Middle School Choral Classroom

Full Study Title (if applicable):

Study eResearch ID: [HUM00151923](#)

Date of this Notification from IRB: 9/24/2018

Date of IRB Not Regulated Determination: 9/24/2018

**IRB NOT REGULATED STATUS:**

Category Outcome Letter Text

**Quality Assurance and** Based on the information provided, the proposed study does not fit the definition of human subjects research requiring IRB approval (per 45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 56 and UM policy).

**Quality Improvement** Although the results of your project may be published, program evaluations, self-assessment of programs or business practices, and other quality improvement projects do not

**Activities - Other** require IRB review because in these cases, it is the activities rather than humans subjects that are the objects of the study.

**Other**

Thad Polk  
Chair, IRB HSBS

Appendix B

Blogging Guidelines

<p>Use of Language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conversational, as if speaking with a friend</li> <li>● Use of colloquialisms and slang is acceptable.</li> <li>● Language should not be too formal or academic (as if for a more formal article or essay)</li> <li>● Shorter paragraphs are easier to read within the blog format</li> </ul>
<p>Content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Blog posts should contain a combination of text, pictures, video, or other additional media</li> <li>● Outside sources should be referenced via additional link, or otherwise visibly credited</li> </ul>
<p>Frequency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Posts will be published at least once a week.</li> <li>● Additional posts may be added as time allows or as needed</li> </ul>
<p>Categories</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Categories will be created according to post type.</li> <li>● Categories will influence the final coding during the study</li> </ul>
<p>Sharing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Published posts will be shared via social media outlets that may include Facebook, Instagram, etc.</li> <li>● Link sharing will be used to generate blog traffic, gaining new users and varying insight.</li> </ul>

## Appendix C

## Blog Posts Published During Pilot Study

Blog Post	Publication Date	Link
<i>Backstory, Lightbulb Moments, &amp; Goals</i>	4/19/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/backstory-lightbulb-moments-goals">https://www.thechorusroom.com/backstory-lightbulb-moments-goals</a>
<i>Bullet Journaling for Choir Directors</i>	4/29/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/bullet-journaling-for-choir-directo">https://www.thechorusroom.com/bullet-journaling-for-choir-directo</a>
<i>How Much is too Much? Planning Events and Opportunities for Your Students</i>	4/29/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/how-much-is-too-much">https://www.thechorusroom.com/how-much-is-too-much</a>
<i>What's Your Favorite Warm-Up?</i>	5/7/19	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/what-s-your-favorite-warm-up">https://www.thechorusroom.com/what-s-your-favorite-warm-up</a>
<i>CPA Preview Concert</i>	5/13/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/cpa-preview-concert">https://www.thechorusroom.com/cpa-preview-concert</a>
<i>Pulling off a Spring Concert in Four Weeks from Start to Finish</i>	5/23/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/pulling-off-a-concert-in-4-weeks">https://www.thechorusroom.com/pulling-off-a-concert-in-4-weeks</a>
<i>Spring Concert: Sixth Grade Edition</i>	6/4/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/spring-concert-sixth-grade-edition">https://www.thechorusroom.com/spring-concert-sixth-grade-edition</a>
<i>Karaoke Friday</i>	6/12/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/karaoke-friday">https://www.thechorusroom.com/karaoke-friday</a>
<i>The Chorus Creativity Project</i>	6/14/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-chorus-creativity-project">https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-chorus-creativity-project</a>
<i>How I Use iPads in my 1:1 Classroom: The Basics</i>	6/19/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/backstory-lightbulb-moments-goals">https://www.thechorusroom.com/backstory-lightbulb-moments-goals</a>

Appendix D

Calendar of Action Cycles

August

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13 Teacher	14 Prep	15 Week	16	17	18
19	20 First day of school	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

8/13-8/17: Teacher preparation week (no students)

8/20-8/31- First two weeks of school. Student focus group participants will be chosen based on criteria. Permission will be sought from students, parents, and administration.

September

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3 Labor Day- no school	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

9/3: Labor Day Holiday

9/3-9/21: First teaching cycle

9/24-9/28: Week for observation, reflection, and planning for the next cycle. Will meet with focus group during this time.



October

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26 Staff development-no school	27
28	29	30	31			

10/1- 10/19: Second Teaching Cycle

10/22-10/26: Week for observation, reflection, and planning for the next cycle. Will meet with focus group during this time.

10/29-10/31: Begin Third Teaching Cycle

November

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2	3
4	5	6 Election Day-no school	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21 Thanks	22 Giving	23 Break	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

11/1-11/16: Continuation of Third Teaching Cycle

11/19-11/23: Week for observation, reflection, and planning for the next cycle. Will meet with focus group during this time.

11/26-11/30- Begin Fourth Teaching Cycle

December

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21 Student half day	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

12/13- 12/14: Continuation of Fourth Teach Cycle

12/17-12/21: Week for observation, reflection, and planning for the next cycle. Will meet with focus group during this time.

## Appendix E

## Sample Focus Group Interview Questions

1. During this teaching cycle, what was a highlight of what we did in class?
2. What was your least favorite part of instruction during this teaching cycle?
3. How do you think I could improve my instruction for the upcoming cycle?
4. Do you feel that the majority of students in your class were actively engaged during\_\_\_\_\_ activity?
5. If not, what do you think I could do as the teacher to help with this?
6. Let's view the blog posts from this teaching cycle together. What did you think when\_\_\_\_\_ commented\_\_\_\_\_?

(Interview content will revolve around emergent themes drawn from each successive teaching cycle.)

Appendix F

Calendar of Published Posts

Calendars depict the five month period where pre-action, and action cycles occurred. Calendars display blog post titles on their publication dates.

August

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16 <i>Here's What I'm Thinking...</i>	17	18
19 <i>Classroom Tour</i>	20 <i>Starting off on the Right Note</i>	21	22	23 <i>Voicing</i>	24	25 <i>The First Week of School: Recap</i>
26	27	28 <i>Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge</i>	29 <i>We Will Fight</i>	30 <i>Marshmallow Space</i>	31	

September

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3	4	5 <i>Chromebook Rollout</i>	6 <i>A Real-Life Middle School Sight Reading Session Extravaganza</i>	7	8
9 <i>You Guys, Being in Charge Is Scary</i>	10	11	12	13 <i>The Five Pure Vowels</i>	14	15
16 <i>Vocal Technique and Warm-up for Dudes</i>	17 <i>Taking Time for Teambuilding</i>	18	19	20	21	22 <i>Our First Chorus Tailgate!</i>
23	24 <i>Composing is not a Four Letter Word</i>	25	26	27	28	29
30						

October

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1 <i>Check Yo'self Before You Wreck Yo'self</i>	2 <i>Here's How I'm Using Google Classroom in Chorus</i>	3	4	5	6
7	8	9 <i>Conferences Make My Heart So Happy</i>	10 <i>Instagram for Choral Program</i>	11	12 <i>Coda</i>	13
14	15 <i>Finding Our Groove With Composition</i>	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28 <i>My First Clinician Gig</i>	29	30	31 <i>Rome Wasn't Built in a Day</i>			

November

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
				1	2 <i>Reflections of Piloting an Event</i>	3
4 <i>Using Tennis Balls as a Teaching Tool</i>	5	6 <i>Time for a Tune-Up!</i>	7	8	9	10
11	12	13 <i>Veteran's Day</i>	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27 <i>SSA Clinic Week</i>	28	29	30	

December

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
						1
2	3 <i>Buckle up! Getting into Performance Mode</i>	4 <i>Read My Mind</i>	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 <i>Snow Day?! But, It's Concert Day!</i>	12	13 <i>Concerts are Just the Tip of the Iceberg</i>	14 <i>Three Snow Days, A Two Hour Delay, and one Winter Concert</i>	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28 <i>Alfred the Alligator</i>	29
30	31					

Appendix G  
Transcription of Student Suggested Activities

- Chatterpix song with pets/animals
- Make your own instrument
- Change solfege to food
- Class change flash mob
- Perform at lunch
- Audience interaction
- Public performances
- Music videos
- Use garage band/solfege, etc.
- Get family/community members to sing with us
- keynote/ slides about composers or singers
- Perform pieces acapella style
- Telephone
- Do, a deer rap
- Write a song with friends, make a music video
- Create a harmony
- Video: family sing along
- remix/medley. Partner songs
- Create your own sight reading or rhythm examples
- Practicing concert music at home
- Song theme day: dress up for class like one of your concert pieces
- Compose a song (maybe with band?)
- Parody
- Games for sight reading/theory
- Stage decorations for concert
- Caroling at Christmas
- Create a music video
- Pass the lyrics
- More parts in round
- Create body percussion



## Appendix H

## Blog Posts Published During Study Period

Blog post	Date of publication	Link
<i>Here's What I'm Thinking...</i>	8/16/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/here-s-what-i-m-thinking">https://www.thechorusroom.com/here-s-what-i-m-thinking</a>
<i>Classroom Tour</i>	8/19/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/classroom-tour">https://www.thechorusroom.com/classroom-tour</a>
<i>Starting Off On The Right Note</i>	8/20/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/starting-off-on-the-right-note">https://www.thechorusroom.com/starting-off-on-the-right-note</a>
<i>Voicing</i>	8/23/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/voicing">https://www.thechorusroom.com/voicing</a>
<i>The First Week of School: Recap</i>	8/25/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap">https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-first-week-of-school-recap</a>
<i>Chorus Calendar Photo Challenge</i>	8/28/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge">https://www.thechorusroom.com/chorus-calendar-photo-challenge</a>
<i>We Will Fight</i>	8/29/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/we-will-fight">https://www.thechorusroom.com/we-will-fight</a>
<i>Marshmallow Space</i>	8/30/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/marshmallow-space">https://www.thechorusroom.com/marshmallow-space</a>
<i>Chromebook Rollout</i>	9/5/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/chromebook-rollout">https://www.thechorusroom.com/chromebook-rollout</a>
<i>A Real-life Middle School Choir Music Sight Reading session Extravaganza!</i>	9/6/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/real-life-repertoire-sightreading-se">https://www.thechorusroom.com/real-life-repertoire-sightreading-se</a>
<i>You Guys, Being In Charge Is Scary</i>	9/9/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/being-in-charge-is-scary">https://www.thechorusroom.com/being-in-charge-is-scary</a>
<i>The Five Pure Vowels</i>	9/13/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels">https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-five-pure-vowels</a>
<i>Vocal Technique and Warm-Up for Dudes</i>	9/16/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/vocal-technique-and-warm-up-for-dud">https://www.thechorusroom.com/vocal-technique-and-warm-up-for-dud</a>

<i>Taking Time For Teambuilding</i>	9/17/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/taking-time-for-teambuilding">https://www.thechorusroom.com/taking-time-for-teambuilding</a>
<i>Our First Chorus Tailgate!</i>	9/22/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/our-first-chorus-tailgate">https://www.thechorusroom.com/our-first-chorus-tailgate</a>
<i>Composing Is Not A Four Letter Word</i>	9/24/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/composing-is-not-a-four-letter-word">https://www.thechorusroom.com/composing-is-not-a-four-letter-word</a>
<i>Check Yo'self Before You Wreck Yo'self</i>	10/1/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/check-yo-self-before-you-wreck-yo-s">https://www.thechorusroom.com/check-yo-self-before-you-wreck-yo-s</a>
<i>Here's How I'm Using Google Classroom In Chorus</i>	10/2/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-google-classroom-in-chorus">https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-google-classroom-in-chorus</a>
<i>Conferences Make My Heart So Happy</i>	10/9/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/conferences-make-my-heart-happy">https://www.thechorusroom.com/conferences-make-my-heart-happy</a>
<i>Instagram For Choral Programs</i>	10/10/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/instagram-for-choral-programs">https://www.thechorusroom.com/instagram-for-choral-programs</a>
<i>Coda</i>	10/12/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/coda">https://www.thechorusroom.com/coda</a>
<i>Finding Our Groove With Composition</i>	10/15/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/finding-our-groove-with-composition">https://www.thechorusroom.com/finding-our-groove-with-composition</a>
<i>My First Clinician Gig</i>	10/28/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/my-first-clinician-gig">https://www.thechorusroom.com/my-first-clinician-gig</a>
<i>Rome Wasn't Built In A Day: Making Small Changes To An Already Established System</i>	10/31/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/rome-wasn-t-built-in-a-day">https://www.thechorusroom.com/rome-wasn-t-built-in-a-day</a>
<i>Reflections of Piloting An Event</i>	11/2/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/reflections-on-piloting-an-event">https://www.thechorusroom.com/reflections-on-piloting-an-event</a>
<i>Using Tennis Balls As A Teaching Tool</i>	11/4/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to">https://www.thechorusroom.com/using-tennis-balls-as-a-teaching-to</a>
<i>Time For A Tune-Up!</i>	11/6/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-app-i-use-to-adress">https://www.thechorusroom.com/the-app-i-use-to-adress</a>
<i>Veteran's Day</i>	11/13/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/veterans-day">https://www.thechorusroom.com/veterans-day</a>
<i>That Time I Was Ridiculously Sick During The ONE Week I Couldn't Take Any Days Off, a.k.a SSA Clinic Week</i>	11/27/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/ssa-clinic">https://www.thechorusroom.com/ssa-clinic</a>

<i>Buckle Up! Getting Into Performance Mode</i>	12/3/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/buckle-up-getting-into-performance-">https://www.thechorusroom.com/buckle-up-getting-into-performance-</a>
<i>Read My Mind</i>	12/4/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/read-my-mind">https://www.thechorusroom.com/read-my-mind</a>
<i>Snow Day?! But, It's Concert Day!</i>	12/11/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/snow-day-but-it-s-concert-day">https://www.thechorusroom.com/snow-day-but-it-s-concert-day</a>
<i>Concerts Are Just The Tip of The Iceberg</i>	12/13/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/concerts-are-just-the-tip-of-the-ic">https://www.thechorusroom.com/concerts-are-just-the-tip-of-the-ic</a>
<i>Three Snow Days, A Two-Hour Delay, and One Winter Concert</i>	12/14/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/7-8th-grade-winter-concert-2018">https://www.thechorusroom.com/7-8th-grade-winter-concert-2018</a>
<i>Alfred the Alligator</i>	12/28/18	<a href="https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator">https://www.thechorusroom.com/alfred-the-alligator</a>

Appendix I

Online Resources for Choir Directors

Resource	Resource Type	Link
<i>Cult of Pedagogy</i>	Blog, website, podcast-general education	<a href="https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/">https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/</a>
<i>In the Middle With Mr. D.</i>	Blog, Teachers Pay Teachers store	<a href="http://inthemiddlewithmrd1.blogspot.com/">http://inthemiddlewithmrd1.blogspot.com/</a>
<i>Choral Clarity</i>	Blog, online store	<a href="https://www.choralclarity.com/choral-clarity-blog/">https://www.choralclarity.com/choral-clarity-blog/</a>
<i>New Choir Teachers</i>	Website	<a href="http://newchoirteachers.weebly.com/repertoire">http://newchoirteachers.weebly.com/repertoire</a>
<i>Chorus Rescue</i>	Website	<a href="https://sites.google.com/view/chorusrescue/home?authuser=1">https://sites.google.com/view/chorusrescue/home?authuser=1</a>
<i>Choir Bites</i>	Blog	<a href="https://www.choirbites.com/">https://www.choirbites.com/</a>
<i>Maria A. Ellis-Girl Conductor</i>	Website, blog	<a href="https://girlconductor.com/">https://girlconductor.com/</a>
<i>What Happens in Choir</i>	Instagram Page	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/wathappensinchoir/">https://www.instagram.com/wathappensinchoir/</a>
<i>Choir Baton</i>	Instagram Page/Podcast	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/choirbaton/">https://www.instagram.com/choirbaton/</a>
<i>Singing in the Middle with Abby Pags</i>	Podcast	n/a (available on Apple podcasts)
<i>I'm a Choir Director</i>	Facebook Group	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/128901670510020/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/128901670510020/</a>
<i>Middle School Chorus Directors</i>	Facebook Group	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/265422856991494/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/265422856991494/</a>
<i>I Teach Middle School Chorus!</i>	Facebook Group	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/349229248864102/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/349229248864102/</a>