

Communication and Conducting High School Choirs: During COVID-19 and Beyond

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★ Introduction ★

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, educators and conductors were forced to reflect on their experience from a time absent of a pandemic and apply the combination of their knowledge of music and their drive for innovation to perform with their students and ensembles *during* a pandemic. This research analyzes the communication between high school choir directors and their students via interviews with conductors. The effects of non-verbal conducting gestures and of COVID-19 on communication were studied through interviews with high school choral conductors of varying years of experience conducting choir.

Method

Ten high school choral conductors who had taught in Region 1 of PMEA (as defined by PMEA) were interviewed in 30-50-minute sessions via Zoom. Automatic Zoom transcriptions were checked alongside the interview recordings and were edited for accuracy. Themes were retrieved from newly corrected transcripts. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

Purpose

The study is intended to serve educators and pre-service educators by:

- Supplying insight into the realm of communication, as it pertains to choir, through interviews with various conductors.
- Allowing a better understanding of how a pandemic can present us with knowledge/insight that may become useful later.

Interview Questions:

- What is the name of the school(s) at which you taught? How big is the population of the school and your classroom?
- How many choirs are there in the school(s)? What choirs are/were you responsible for teaching?
- When analyzing your own conducting gestures, do you notice any tendencies that are unique to your conducting?
- How do your conducting gestures seem to influence the students' ability to perform? Are there any gestures that seem to improve communication between you and your choir?
- How has COVID-19 affected your conducting? Has this impacted communication between you and your students?
- What would you consider valid forms of assessment in terms of determining the quality of a performance? Since COVID-19, how has your vision of a successful performance changed?
- Is there anything else you would like to share or ask?

href="https://pngtree.com/so/conductor">conductor png from pngtree.com/

RESULTS: Two Central Categories:

The Choral Setting and Conducting

- **Personal Conducting**
 - Personal influences, personal interpretations, and personal expressivity regarding conducting tendencies
- **The Educator Versus the Conductor**
 - Identity of choral directors; differences in pedagogy
- **More than Just Hand Gestures**
 - Nonverbal gestures; teachable moments; eye contact
- **Involvement of Students in the Conducting Process**
 - Creation of gestures; agreeing on gestures; clear communication between director and students; critique

COVID-19's Impact on the Vision of Choral Programs

The Impact of COVID-19 on:

1. Choral Conducting

-Limited range of motion; face masks; social distancing guidelines; importance of structure for students

2. Choral Rehearsals

-Energy of lessons; effects on confidence; outside class settings; growth/fixed mindsets; loss of communication

3. How Choral Directors Assessed Success

-The conductor's vision; student growth versus student competency; assessing through group/self reflection; teamwork and diversity; increase in student drive to make music

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