

2006 NCMEA Research Poster Session Abstract

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The Effect of Within-Ensemble Testing on Individual Sight-singing Success

With the increasing awareness of, and emphasis on, individual learning outcomes in the schools, there is a substantial need for investigations of the individual music student's experience while in the large ensemble setting. In recent years, ensemble directors are being held increasingly accountable for the individual musical skills of their students. With the specific individualized measures of success that the educational establishment and the music education profession are promoting, changes in the instructional method may be needed. The traditional public-performance-driven choral experience may not meet the needs of a choral program working to fulfill individualized standards. In the present educational environment, building individual music literacy skills will require efficient and effective methods of instruction and assessment of the individual student while in the large ensemble setting.

The present study was conducted to provide information needed in the development of instructional materials and methods for optimizing individual learning while within a group-learning environment. This study uses the area of music reading instruction to investigate the effects of a systematic individualized testing technique on the individual music reading success of high school choir students while within the large ensemble setting.

It has been suggested that a relationship exists between the individual testing of sight-singing and the ensemble sight-singing experience. However, in each case, the sight-singing experience was separated from the ensemble experience by the instructional and assessment setting itself. This study was designed to test the following prediction: Students given a systematic program of individual testing while within the ensemble will show a significantly greater improvement in individual sight-singing than students given only traditional group sight-singing instruction.

The testing method presented uses individual personal recorders to facilitate the assessment of individual high school choir members as they read music at sight. The students participate fully as a member of the group, yet are being assessed on individual music reading success exhibited during the group activity. When individual sight-singing test scores are compared through a traditional individual, isolated pretest and posttest, it will be possible to evaluate the effect of this within-group testing method on the sight-singing success of the individual.

Participants

Singers (N=240) were selected from 6 intact high school choirs. The choirs were selected for consistency of instructional method, and the availability of at least two choirs in the participating school. To account for possible bias due to teacher influence, two choirs, (one treatment, and one control) were used from each

school, across three schools. The control group consisted of all members of one ensemble selected at random from each participating school. Subjects for the treatment group were randomly selected from another choir at each school with a maximum participant pool of 35 students in each choir, due to a limited number of recording instruments. Each participant must have been a member of a choir with the same director for two or more years to insure consistency of practice.

Methodology

In a quasi-experimental design, a pretest and posttest was administered to all participants. The participants were individually audiotaped in an isolated setting while singing a short melody at sight. One ensemble from each school will serve as a control by participating in the pretest and posttest, but receive only the regular group music-reading instruction normally provided. The treatment group received weekly individual within-group testing and feedback. In 12 separate sessions, during the portion of the rehearsal devoted to music reading instruction, the treatment group was given a personal digital recorder and asked to record themselves while singing a predetermined exercise with the choir. At the end of the reading, the recorders were collected and the researcher scored each tape for accuracy of pitch and note duration. A written summary of the scoring results was returned to the student to provide feedback on their individual sight-singing progress. Comparisons of the pretest and posttest scores for the two groups were then analyzed.

Findings

In an initial finding consistent with previous research, ANOVA analysis of mean correct pitch and correct rhythm scores indicated no statistically significant difference between and among schools or choirs for the pretest scores or the posttest scores. Comparison of pretest/posttest scores through ANCOVA with pretest scores as a covariate indicated an initial statistically significant gain in both mean correct pitch and mean correct rhythm scores. This initial analysis indicates a significant positive effect for the individual-within-group testing method presented. Further analysis of data is underway and will be completed by the date of the conference.

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