CHORAL EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES CREATING CONNECTION DURING GROUP SINGING

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

---

by
Jennifer C. Hutton
May 2023

Examining Committee Members:

Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, Advisory Chair, Music Education
Mitos Andaya Hart, Vocal Arts
Darlene M. Brooks, Music Therapy
Rollo A. Dilworth, Music Education
Pablo Vila, External Member, Sociology

ABSTRACT

Group singing is associated with numerous benefits to human health and wellbeing, including increased social ties and improvements in mental health (Ascenso et al., 2017; Clift & Hancox, 2001, 2010; Clift et al., 2010; Dingle et al., 2012; Grocke et al., 2009; Liebowitz et al., 2015; Livesey et al., 2012). In school ensembles, choral educators can significantly influence students' experiences of connection, encouraging wellbeing, enjoyment, and continued participation in choir (Arasi, 2006, 2008; Morgan, 1992; Pentikäinen et al., 2021). Extant literature indicates that during group singing, individuals experience connection in three forms, as drawing singers together, also called togetherness; as synchrony among singers; and as singers' sense of oneness with the world. These three forms of connection served as the conceptual lens for this study.

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine choral educators' experiences of creating connection during group singing in the forms of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. Four research questions guided this study: (a) How do choral educators describe the experience they create during group singing? (b) During group singing, how do choral educators facilitate singers' connection in the form of togetherness, synchrony, or oneness? (c) What benefits and challenges exist for choral educators as they create connection? (d) Why do choral educators choose to prioritize connection?

I used a phenomenological case study approach to investigate each participant's experience as its own unique case, then used cross-case analysis and phenomenological reduction to reveal commonalities and differences that further illuminated the essence of

creating connection during group singing (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Using purposive, reputational, and maximum variation sampling, I selected five secondary school choral music educator participants who prioritized facilitation of connection in their work with students and who represented a variety of teaching contexts, professional, and personal characteristics.

Data collection included interviews, field observations of rehearsals and performances, and classroom artifacts. Data analysis occurred cyclically and emergently (Creswell & Poth, 2018), following phenomenological procedures (Moustakas, 1994) to first analyze each participant's experiences as a bounded case then to engage in cross-case analysis to uncover commonalities and tensions across cases (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). For each case, data analysis revealed conditions that created connection, barriers to connection, and an essence; cross-case analysis revealed a collective essence representing experiences of creating connection for all participants.

Conditions that created connection involved using opening procedures, dissipating stress, releasing inhibitions, thoughtfully choosing repertoire, exploring choral texts, and fostering student ownership. Barriers included students' inhibitions, teachers' preoccupations, formal music education, school context, socioeconomic challenges, and COVID-19. The essence of each participant's experience involved fostering student ownership and collaboration; uncovering students' organic experiences of togetherness; "I gotchu," an expression of unwavering support; impacting students' mindsets; and vibrational alignment that can heal. Cross-case analysis through imaginative variation

(Moustakas, 1994) revealed that for all participants, the essence of creating connection involved participants communicating care for students' experience of life.

The study's findings offer implications for how choral leaders might facilitate experiences of connection during group singing. Findings suggest that choral educators seeking to create connection might help singers dissipate stress and anxiety, engage students in the creative process, reexamine traditional choral curricula, and use their personal strengths to communicate care for singers' life experiences. Findings suggest ways choral educators might help create experiences of connection that can have a positive impact on students' wellbeing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Cassidy Parker. Thank you for providing a consummate example of scholarship and teaching. Thank you for your keen, detailed feedback and your consistent encouragement. I feel fortunate to have your mentorship, and I can't thank you enough for supporting me and my growth as a scholar and educator.

Thank you to the remarkable scholars on the committee who have given their time, energy, and wisdom to support this work alongside Dr. Parker: Dr. Mitos Andaya Hart, Dr. Darlene M. Brooks, Dr. Rollo Dilworth, and Dr. Pablo Vila. I greatly appreciate your commitment to this project, and I have been honored to learn from your insights and expertise.

Thank you to Dr. Alison Reynolds, who has fullheartedly encouraged my work and championed my doctoral journey from the very beginning. Your generosity, knowledge, and support have been gifts, and I am very grateful.

Thank you to Dr. Rollo Dilworth, Dr. Suzanne Hall, and Dr. Dustin Cates for your kind help, your support of my work as a teaching assistant, and your encouragement of my career in teacher education. Thank you to the many individuals in the Music Education and Vocal Arts Departments of Boyer College of Music and Dance who have enriched my teaching and supported my work as a doctoral student.

Warm thanks to my wonderful colleagues at Temple, Lauren Ryals, Whitney Covalle, Aimee Pearsall, and Peter Oswald, for their companionship, assistance, and laughs. Thank you to Whitney for taking time to share your valuable insights on this

study. Thank you to Lauren for your consistent, kind encouragement through the entire process.

Thank you to the five participants in this study, with boundless appreciation for your contributions and for all you do to create a more connected world.

Thank you to the students of Counterpane School, Midtown (Grady) High School, and Cheltenham High School for the privilege of knowing the beauty and humanity that resides in their collective voices.

Thank you to my high school teachers Jennifer Betts and Nancie Smith for your long-lasting impact on my skills and self-assurance as a writer.

Thank you to Steve and to David for proofreading.

Countless thanks to Mom, to David, and to Kellie for your steadfast encouragement.

Deepest thanks and love to Ben and Will. Words cannot express my gratitude for your sacrifices, love, and support. The completion of this project is as much your accomplishment as it is mine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over 54 million people in the United States sing in choral ensembles in school, community, and worship settings (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019). Group singing is associated with numerous benefits to human health and wellbeing (Ascenso et al., 2017; Clift & Hancox, 2001, 2010; Clift et al., 2010; Livesey et al., 2012). Singers can experience health benefits including improved immune function (Beck et al., 2000; Kreutz et al., 2004) and improved mental health (Dingle et al., 2012; Grocke et al., 2009; Liebowitz, 2015). Individuals can experience a powerful sense of connection to others and to the larger world through group singing, and they identify social ties as primary benefits of participation in choral groups (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007; Kreutz, 2014; Livesey et al., 2012; Moss et al., 2018). For many, positive experiences of connection constitute an important reason they continue to sing in groups for decades (Arasi, 2006, 2008; Coffin, 2005; Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019).

Connection in School Choral Ensembles

School choral ensembles serve as important sites of group singing in the United States. Nearly two million high school students participate in school choirs each year, and most adult singers' first organized choral experience was in a school ensemble (Elpus & Abril, 2019; Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). For singers, experiences of connection in school ensembles can encourage continued participation in choir, creating a feedback loop of rewarding

experiences that can impact wellbeing and enjoyment for years to come (Arasi, 2006, 2008; Pentikäinen et al., 2021). Choral educators can significantly influence students' experiences during group singing, and those who help singers experience connection may have a particularly powerful impact (Arasi, 2006, 2008; Cape, 2012; Morgan, 1992). In this study, I set out to investigate the experiences of educators who prioritized creating connection in school choral groups. By offering ways to understand educators' experiences in creating connection, the study might offer insight into how music educators can contribute to students' wellbeing during group singing.

Conceptual Lens

A review of the literature on connection during group singing revealed that research topics clustered around three forms of connection: togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. I define togetherness, the first form of connection, as being drawn into a collective in relation with others. Research on togetherness encompasses various forms of social connection or bonding that can occur during group singing, including community, team, belonging, safety, or home (Adderley et al., 2003; Parker, 2010, 2016; Smith & Sataloff, 2013; Sweet, 2010). The second form of connection, synchrony, describes moments when singers' expression, sound, or movement align or when singers' heart rates, breath rates, and gestures synchronize (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; McCraty, 2017, 2022; Müller et al., 2018, 2019; Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009). Third, researchers discuss connection as oneness, defined here as a sense of unity with the world or connection to something larger than oneself (Ascenso et al., 2017; Bowman, 2021; Boyce-Tillman, 2016; Boyce-Tillman & Hendricks, 2021). Researchers studying oneness

have explored group singing as spiritual, transcendent, or reverent experiences (Boyce-Tillman, 2016; Jorgensen, 2008, 2021; Willingham, 2001). The three forms of connection, togetherness, synchrony, and oneness, formed the conceptual lens for this study. In Chapter 2, I describe research in togetherness, synchrony, and oneness in greater detail.

Literature on Connection in School Music Programs

Music education scholars have identified connection in a wide variety of ensemble settings (Cape, 2012; Hendricks, 2018; Hess, 2019). Experiences of connection are often viewed as part of the social context of group singing, as scholars situate individuals' experiences in relation to the larger ensemble (Bowman, 2021; Dolloff, 1997). In this section, I review researchers' work related to connection with student singers in school settings.

Several music education researchers have investigated high school students' experiences related to connection, including meaning singers derive from choir membership and their motivation to continue singing. Investigating meaning in high school ensembles, Hylton (1981) found singers attributed to their choral experiences six forms of meaning, two of which related directly to connection. Students experienced integrative meaning, reflecting a sense of belonging or needing to be with others, and spiritualistic meaning, reflecting ideas related to oneness (Hylton, 1981). In an investigation reflecting experiences of togetherness, Adderley et al. (2003) found high school students in performing ensembles gained a sense of wellbeing through social connections, relationships with peers, and a sense of being at home in their ensemble.

Kennedy (2002) also found relational aspects of ensemble membership were important to junior high singers' experiences; participants identified interactions with friends as one of the primary motivations for their participation in choir. Parker's (2010) investigation of a high school choral ensemble found belonging, another form of togetherness, characterized students' experiences. Parker's (2011) findings in a subsequent study mirrored three forms of connection: high school students experienced group singing as "simultaneously feelingful," reflecting synchrony; interpersonally rich, reflecting togetherness; and enlightening, reflecting a sense of oneness. The results of DeAmbrose's (2019) study with eighth-grade singers reinforced the importance of social connections and emotional bonding for students in school choirs.

Countryman (2008) expanded the scope of research by including high school teacher's perspectives alongside students' perspectives. Both student and music educator participants reported experiences of transcendent moments, community, belonging, family, and camaraderie in high school ensembles. Sweet (2008) centered the perspective of one exemplary middle school choir teacher who created a "safe space" for rewarding interpersonal interactions, reflecting ideas of togetherness. Borst (2002) investigated the experiences of two high school choral educators whose programs were known for technically-polished performances. Borst's classroom observations and interviews with students, parents, community members and educators revealed the most salient aspects of the educators' success were not repertoire or pedagogy, but the relationships and interconnectedness they built. Gurgel (2013) investigated engagement and culturally responsive teaching in a seventh-grade choir classroom and found students' sense of

connection to their teacher fostered engagement in choir. Gurgel also identified mood contagion, including the effect of peers' emotions, the teacher's emotions, and interactions, as influences on how much students would experience "feeling it" in moments of singing. Gurgel's findings echo ideas related to connection in the form of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness in choral ensembles.

Choral Leaders' Influence on Singers' Experiences of Connection

Researchers have found that choral leaders play an important role in developing singers' sense of social connection (Durrant, 2005). Relatedly, singers identify their school choral settings and teachers as strong influences on their self-concepts as singers and their enjoyment of singing (Arasi, 2006, 2008; Forshaw, 2018; Freer, 2006; Kennedy, 2002; Mudrick, 1997; Parker, 2010; Sweet, 2018; Vincent, 1997). Educators prioritize different elements of the choral learning experience, such as students' development of musicianship skills, delivery of polished performances, or exploration of specific categories of repertoire (Arasi, 2006; Borst, 2002; Countryman, 2008; Gurgel, 2013; Young, 2002). The five participants in the present study were selected because they prioritized the social, relational goal of creating experiences of connection. The benefits of group singing for health, wellbeing, and positive relationships, along with the influence of music educators on students' experiences, suggest that understanding how participants create connection can offer valuable insights into how choral educators might positively impact the lives of school choral singers.

Rationale

Researchers have frequently examined singers' experiences of connection during choral singing, and occasionally, researchers have investigated the work of educators who prioritize advanced technical skill (Borst, 2002) or who create a nurturing community (Sweet, 2008). Yet, to date, few researchers have centered educators in their investigations of connection in choral classrooms. Further, though researchers have investigated connection through a wide variety of topics, including community, meaning, belonging, and health, they have infrequently approached the topic with a broader lens designed to synthesize varied forms of connection. The present study contributes to the literature on connection during group singing through two primary approaches, including (a) focusing on educators' experiences of creating connection, and (b) examining connection through the three-part lens of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. The study also holds implications for how group singing might contribute to students' wellbeing when, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, students' mental health, welfare, and social connections remain significant concerns (Gazmararian et al., 2021; Mas-Herrero et al., 2022; Munir, 2021). An in-depth investigation of educators' practices, viewpoints, and experiences can illuminate ways music educators might create connection, thereby contributing to singers' motivation, sense of meaning derived from choral singing, and wellbeing.

To investigate educators' experiences creating connection during group singing, I used a phenomenological case study method. Phenomenology is well-suited to studying relational concepts that are sometimes considered obvious or taken for granted, and

phenomenological methods can help reveal the essence of complex human experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vagle, 2018). Case study allows researchers to focus on how a phenomenon is enacted within a specific, bounded context (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). In the present study, I investigated each participant's experience as its own unique case, then used cross-case analysis and phenomenological reduction to reveal commonalities and differences that further illuminated the essence of creating connection during group singing (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). In Chapter 3, I provide further detail on the study's methods and procedures.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine choral educators' experiences of creating connection during group singing, including drawing singers together, also called togetherness; synchrony among singers; and singers' sense of oneness with the world. The research questions were:

- How do choral educators describe the experience they create during group singing?
- During group singing, how do choral educators facilitate singers' connection in the form of togetherness, synchrony, or oneness?
- What benefits and challenges exist for choral educators as they create connection?
- Why do choral educators choose to prioritize connection?

Overview of the Study

The focus of this study was the social phenomenon of connection during group singing as experienced by five choral educators. Participants worked with singers in a

variety of school settings, reflecting significant differences across sites including school size, school setting (urban, rural, or suburban), history of the choral program, and percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Four participants worked in high schools, one worked in a middle school, and most participants also actively worked with singers outside of schools in community choir or worship settings. Each participant had served as a choral leader for seven to 25 years, with 18.8 years as the mean duration of choral leadership experience. All participants were selected purposively and reputationally (Patton, 2015) as educators who prioritized the creation of connection during group singing.

Definition of Group Singing

In this study, I define group singing as any experience where a group of individuals has gathered for the purpose of vocalizing together to make music. Group singing might take place in contexts including a curricular class at a school, a community choir rehearsal, a worship service, a professional symphonic choir performance, an amateur singer-led a cappella group, or any number of other formal or informal group singing settings (de Quadros, 2019).

Definition of Musicking

Christopher Small (1998, 1999) defined music as a social action, a form of creation embedded in relationships with others. Small articulated the "doing" of music as "musicking," signifying a complex process that encompasses a web of individual interactions. Musickers include anyone who helps create the musical experience, including those who make musical sounds, group leaders, audience members, and any

others who might be present or involved in the process. In this paper, I use the term "musicking" to reflect the relational, interpersonal nature of connection, a social, contextual, and fluid phenomenon.

Personal Orientation

The researcher's perspectives shape the genesis and the realization of any qualitative study (van Manen, 2016). For the phenomenological researcher, the central question "grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). The researcher's perspectives also guide data collection and analysis. While observing, the researcher makes decisions about what elements to attend to and judgments about how to interpret what they see (Bratich, 2018). In conducting this study, I worked to set aside reflectively my preconceptions and judgments, following the phenomenological process of epoché (Husserl 1913/2013; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021), which I discuss further in Chapter 3. Though I worked to set aside biases and assumptions, my existing perspectives related to connection during group singing provide important insights into the context of this inquiry (van Manen, 2016). Below, I share the conditions that shaped my interest in educators' experiences of creating connection during group singing.

Experiences as a Performer

As a child and adolescent, I loved singing at home and in school. My experiences of connection occurred when singing informally with friends but never in a choral setting. During my undergraduate music education program, I felt moved by the profound beauty

of choral singing for the first time. Our conductor was highly skilled at using gesture to help singers synchronize breath, and as a group, we created deeply expressive musical experiences through nuances of phrasing, tone, and diction. Regularly in rehearsal and performances, including in one memorable performance at a choral conference, I sensed that our choir effortlessly breathed and sang as one organic unit. My decision to focus my teaching career on choral and vocal music grew directly from my deep experiences of connection in that collegiate ensemble.

Experiences as a Teacher

As a beginning general music teacher of 3–18-year-old students, I quickly learned that, for me, our most meaningful classroom musicking experiences involved students' singing voices. I experienced the singing voice as holding great potential for expression and connection. As students learned to strengthen their voices and identify as singers, I saw a remarkable process of personal and collective growth. Often, students' singing provided the clearest path to a joyful and deeply rewarding group experience.

Togetherness

As I continued to teach general music and moved into teaching positions focused on leading choral ensembles, I noticed that different ensembles possessed different degrees of togetherness. I learned to treasure those years when a group's dynamic was positive, relaxed, energetic, and unified. In these instances, students in choirs unambiguously accepted other students as teammates. Despite differences, when singing together, they worked to create something larger than their individual identities. As they walked into the room, they exuded relaxation, happiness, and gratitude. They cracked

jokes as a group, made up dances to warm ups (or showed appreciation for the tenors who shared creative warm up variations), and, in their interactions, created a supportive atmosphere for music-making. In these years, the sense of togetherness was palpable. Students were ready and eager to give their voices to make something expressive, beautiful, and meaningful together.

Synchrony

I began to think more deeply about connection as synchrony after working with a high school orchestra I did not typically lead. In the first rehearsal, I conducted a rubato that students did not follow. We tried again, with conducting gesture, then with a verbal explanation and gesture; then again with a different verbal explanation and gesture. Even though some students' playing aligned with each other or with me, as a group we were always out of sync. The students had difficulty altering the steady phrasing they had practiced. The next week, when I returned to rehearse the same piece, the students executed a perfectly synchronized ritardando that had no relationship to my conducting gesture. In the intervening week, their teacher had instructed students to slow their playing in the measures where I had showed rubato before, and students had diligently responded. Though I appreciated my colleague's intent, I experienced the lack of synchrony as physically disconcerting and uncomfortable. The instrumentalists slowed in sync, but the group's playing and my gesture were more out of sync than they had ever been. Later, I examined my discomfort, wary that I was abusing the power of the conductor by demanding that students obediently follow my musical wishes while ignoring their own. After much reflection, I determined my discomfort did not stem from

frustration that students did not enact my musical vision. In fact, the musical effect of the ritardando, the phrasing with rubato, was not my priority at all. Rather, my work with students on that phrase stemmed from a desire for us to synchronize as an ensemble in the moment. The musical effect was secondary to my desire to experience spontaneous, flexible, and organic connection through music-making with students. I continued to critically examine whether my goal should take precedence over students' goals, and I still hold that question in my mind. Yet I remained convinced that the experience of synchrony, no matter how it took musical shape, would meaningfully enhance our musicking experience together.

Oneness

In rehearsals and performances I engaged in with high school choir students, when one person sensed oneness, it seemed everyone did. Those moments held a collective recognition that something special had occurred. I recall experiences of a profoundly expressive trio in a musical theatre rehearsal, a choral performance during which the whole room seemed to be hanging on singers' every sound and breath, and a moment in a choral rehearsal when a piece took shape in a new way, without words prescribing the change before or describing it after. When these experiences occurred, it seemed students knew. They all held their bodies in the same way. They responded with a subtle, synchronized exhale or a reverent silence at the end of the piece. If one student started to describe the experience of oneness that had just occurred, others knowingly finished their sentence. Or after a long silence, one student might whisper a "Yes" or exclaim "That was it!", then an eruption of affirmations would follow. At one state

conference performance with high school singers, their physical and sonic synchrony, their collective energy on stage showed that we all knew we were at our best; we had accomplished all we could hope to accomplish in that moment. I vividly remember the smiles, the joy and glee in their faces, as the first two students leapt offstage. As the wave of singers followed, everyone made eye contact. Students' bodies radiated energy, but for many seconds no one could say a word. We were as connected in celebration as we were in performance.

Summary of Personal Orientation

As I designed and carried out this study, I held respect and reverence for moments of connection during group singing, believing based on my own experiences that connection could act as the most meaningful element of group singing. At the same time, I had experienced significant challenges in creating connection with some groups in some years; I knew that experiences of connection could not be taken for granted. In Chapter 3, I discuss in detail my lens as a researcher and how I used phenomenological methods to set aside my perspectives to focus on participants' experiences of creating connection.

Study Timeline and COVID-19

This study examined educators' experiences of creating connection using three data sources: interviews, field notes from observations, and classroom artifacts. I conducted three rounds of interviews with each participant, observed each participant's work with singers for several hours, and gathered artifacts shared by participants. I collected almost all data from February through June 2022, with a final round of

interviews occurring in July, after the school year had ended. In Chapter 3, I provide further details of the study procedures.

Data collection began approximately two years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person schooling suddenly had ceased in almost all schools in the United States and instruction had moved to a virtual, distance-learning platform (Schaffer et al., 2020). During the 2020–21 school year, many schools moved back to in-person instruction, though singing in indoor classrooms was often highly restricted, and in-person concerts, travel for performances, and large group gatherings were mostly prohibited. During data collection in 2022, though many restrictions including mandated masking were being lifted in most schools, policies for mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic continued to limit interactions and activities. COVID-related policies had a monumental influence on school choral programs, and some of the data collected in the present study reflect the pandemic's effects. I further examine the impact of COVID-19 in later chapters.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide a review of literature related to connection during group singing. First, I review research that addresses group singing as an inherently relational practice, a distinct site of connection, and an activity with positive interpersonal and health outcomes. Second, I analyze theories of social connection outside and inside music-making contexts. Third, I highlight models of connection as profound experiences, including peak experiences, strong experiences in music, and flow. Fourth, I use the three-part conceptual lens of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness to review literature on connection. Fifth, I examine literature on how music educators create connection, how the conductor role interacts with connection, and the tensions that researchers have revealed between the conductor and the educator roles in creating connection. Finally, I explain how the present study relates to existing literature and how this study's findings might illuminate new areas of understanding in music education.

Overview of Connection During Group Singing

Individuals' intense experiences during musicking, including connection, occur in part because musicking is interactive and social. In this section, I review researchers' ideas about the interactive, social, and relational nature of musicking. Subsequently, I discuss researchers' findings on how singing reflects a distinct form of musicking that offers unique opportunities for connection. Finally, I discuss findings indicating group singing has positive effects on health and wellbeing.

Musicking as Relational

Scholars have addressed musicking as an inherently relational pursuit. Boyce-Tillman (2016) described musical meaning derived from lived experience as "essentially relational, contextual and potentially changing" (p. 5). As discussed in Chapter 1, Small (1998) coined the term "musicking" to reflect the idea that every actor, entity, and element present in a music-making experience is part of a dynamic interaction. To music, Small wrote, "is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (p. 8). Small conceived of musicking as a relational, collective, in-the-moment set of actions allowing for "openness of possibilities emerging from the musical event" (Odendaal et al., 2014, p. 165). Framed accordingly, connection is one such possibility to emerge from musicking.

Researchers investigating cognitive processes in group musicking have affirmed the importance of relational dynamics. Overy and Molnar-Szakacs's (2009) investigations of mirror neurons informed their findings on shared emotional experiences in musicking. The researchers (2009) developed the Shared Affective Motion Experience (SAME) model to reflect individuals' perceptions of music as expressive motor acts conveying the agency, action, and emotional states of others. The heart of the music, the researchers argued, is not auditory stimulus or the performance of motor skills, but the human interaction that guides individuals' musicking (Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009). Later in this chapter, I discuss the role of mirror neurons and models of interaction during group singing in greater detail.

Group Singing as a Distinct Site of Connection

Though all forms of musicking hold relational and interactive possibilities, scholars suggest group singing might hold unusual potential to facilitate connection. Approaching singing from a cross-cultural and psychological perspective, Durrant and Himonides (1998) stated that singing is a fundamental human need; it "is not just another way of making music, it is the ultimate way of expressing the human psyche" (p. 69). From a philosophical perspective, Dolloff (1997) wrote, "the intentional use of our body to create musical sounds is an intensely felt physical, spiritual, and cognitive pursuit" (p. 89). Singers' use of their bodies as musical instruments, combined with the synchrony involved in coordinating with other singers, can make singing with others particularly meaningful, and data suggest that group singing can have greater positive impact on individuals than musicking alone or listening to music (Kreutz et al., 2004; Livesey et al., 2012). Choral singers report higher wellbeing than solo singers or team sport players, indicating that the social setting of choirs has a special impact when combined with the act of singing (Stewart & Lonsdale, 2016). Framing singing as a unique group process, Mellor (2013) found that undergraduate singers and singing group leaders experience singing as strongly emotional, relational, and social.

The impact of singing may also reside, in part, in the fact that singing sounds are produced by human breath, "which is not only essential to our physical survival but also to our spiritual being" (Potter & Sorrell, 2012, p. 16). Hendricks (2021) described authentic connection as breathing together in both a biophysical and musical process.

When individuals sing together, they have the potential to unite not only their musicking but the fundamental processes of their bodies (Hendricks & Boyce-Tillman, 2021).

Group Singing and Health

Numerous research studies reflect the positive health effects of group singing (Dingle et al., 2019; Stacy et al., 2002). Moss et al. (2018) conducted a mixed methods study with an international sample of over 1000 adult choral singers. Participants reported health benefits including improved respiratory health, reduced blood pressure, stress relief, and mood enhancement (Moss et al., 2018). In a survey of over 1800 singers aged 62 or older, Grunwald Associates LLC and Chorus America (2019) reported almost 20% of singers attributed improvement in one or more health conditions to singing in a choir. Individuals over 65 years old who sang in choir reported fewer physical limitations than non-choral singers of the same age (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019).

Clift and Hancox (2001) found that students in a university choral society experienced health benefits from singing, including improved breathing, stress reduction, and heightened mood. Benefits clustered into six areas: benefits for wellbeing and relaxation, benefits for breathing and posture, social benefits, spiritual benefits, emotional benefits, and benefits for the heart and immune system (Clift & Hancox, 2001). Less than 10 years later, Clift et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study of over 600 adult choral singers in England, Germany, and Australia who identified similar benefits: improved mood, enhanced quality of life, greater happiness, stress reduction, and emotional wellbeing. Group singing could counteract participants' depression and anxiety, and

participants described group singing as so absorbing that they did not have the opportunity to think about their worries (Clift et al., 2010).

Lord et al. (2010) reported that individuals with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) who took singing classes experienced a greater sense of connection to others and improvements to overall wellbeing. Though participants' measurable breath capacity did not improve after singing classes, participants reported improved breath control and awareness, greater interest in physical activities, and decreased anxiety. The researchers' findings suggested that though the benefits of group singing may have been psychological rather than physiological, the psychological effects had secondary benefits for participants' overall wellbeing.

Bullack et al. (2018) found similar results in their investigation of affect, social connectedness, and stress in amateur singers. Participants perceived that singing significantly increased their wellbeing even when measurements could not confirm any physiological changes (Bullack et al., 2018). Other researchers, however, have identified physiological markers of stress reduction during group singing. Beck et al. (2000) studied professional choral singers' experience in rehearsal and performance and found that singers' levels of the immune system antibody Immunoglobulin A increased when they experienced a sense of relaxation or a "high" from singing. Kreutz et al. (2004), similarly, found that choral singers' positive affect and Immunoglobulin A increased after singing, while negative affect decreased.

Bailey and Davidson (2002, 2005) reported that group singing offered participants therapeutic, restorative benefits comparable to benefits derived from clinical therapy,

including comfort, internal balance, emotional release, and positive affect. Other researchers have identified therapeutic aspects of group singing in prison settings (Silber, 2005) and in adult barbershop groups (Coffin, 2005). Fancourt et al. (2022) reported that for individuals experiencing grief, weekly group singing experiences could help stabilize levels of depression and wellbeing and could help improve self-efficacy and self-esteem. Researchers investigating group singing using varied measures in varied contexts have reliably identified group singing's positive effects on health and wellbeing.

Connection in Groups

Because musicking is a social act (North et al., 2002), research on the psychology of social interactions can provide a foundation for understanding connection during group singing. In this section, I review researchers' findings describing psychological phenomena that occur in groups. Later in this chapter, I discuss how psychological concepts of social interactions apply to group singing and music education.

Theories of Group Bonding

Connection can be illuminated by psychological research on individuals' experiences of unity with fellow group members. Psychologists have described group members' unity as social bonding, social capital, group cohesion, and social cognition. Individuals who regularly interact in groups may feel connected through social bonding, or an increased feeling of closeness over time (Pearce et al., 2015). Group members might feel united as they develop social capital, described as individuals' engagement in social networks characterized by trust and reciprocity (Livesey et al., 2012). Sport psychologists have identified the phenomenon of group cohesion, a multidimensional

process through which group members unite and remain united to pursue instrumental goals or meet members' affective needs (Carron & Brawley, 2012). Group cohesion, which can be measured at both the individual and group level, produces positive affect and can improve group performance (Carron et al., 2002).

Sloman et al. (2021) presented a theory of social cognition, asserting that cognition does not reside in a single individual, but "extends into the physical world and the brains of others" (p. 2). When individuals join their attention into collaborative action and grow their own knowledge based on what others know, the group may develop a distinct, collective mind that amounts to something more than the sum of its parts (Sloman et al., 2021). Cognition should not be examined as an individual phenomenon, Sloman et al. argued; rather, researchers must view cognition as a communal process. Through social bonding, social capital, group cohesion, or social cognition, individuals can unite as they act collaboratively toward a common goal. Such social processes might overlap with experiences of connection during group singing..

Mimicry, Contagion, Emotion, and Empathy

Psychological research on the transmission of actions or emotional states from one individual to another can also illuminate connection. The chameleon effect describes individuals' unintentional mimicry of others' mannerisms, facial expressions, and movement (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Individuals who mimic another are more likely to report greater rapport and liking of the interaction partner (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Further, Neumann and Strack (2000) found that after engaging in mimicry, individuals can develop a mood congruent with the other's expressions, representing a process of

mood contagion. Hatfield et al. (1993) described a similar concept, emotional contagion, a largely unconscious tendency to mimic and synchronize with another's movements, vocal expressions, and facial expressions, leading to a convergence with the other's emotional state. As individuals direct their attention to another's behavior, even unintentionally, they might also align their emotions (Hatfield et al., 1993). Brennan (2004) developed the theory of transmission of affect, through which interactions with others change individuals' emotional state and biochemistry. Because one person's affective state can transmit to another and influence the recipient's energies, Brennan (2004) argued, "our emotions are not altogether our own" (p. 2). Researchers' findings on how mimicry leads to shared emotional states might help illuminate experiences of connection.

Group musicking involves alignment of emotion as group members respond to others' movement, facial expressions, and affect. According to Storr (1991), music coordinates and intensifies group members' emotions, giving increased meaning to individuals' musical experiences. Music "can make all the people feel the same thing at the same time and transmute what might be a trivial occasion into something which appears highly significant" (Storr, 1991, p. 7). As individuals' emotions align, as they might during experiences of connection, the musical experience has the potential to become more meaningful.

Researchers have reported that group musicking increases altruistic social interactions including sympathy, empathy, and cooperation. Schellenberg et al. (2015) found that eight- and nine-year-old children displayed more sympathy and prosocial

skills after engaging in 10 months of group music lessons. Similarly, Rabinowitch et al. (2012) reported that children who participated in a yearlong school music program experienced increased empathy. The researchers theorized that musical imitation and rhythmic synchronization led to shared intentionality and intersubjectivity, which helped build emotional connections including capacity for empathy (Rabinowitch et al., 2012).

Researchers have also identified a correlation between rhythmic synchronization and prosocial behavior in infants, suggesting that motor synchrony encourages social bonds from a very young age (Cirelli et al., 2014; Cirelli, 2018). Good and Russo (2016) specifically investigated group singing and found that children's prosocial behavior increased after group singing but did not increase after engaging in group art or competitive games. The researchers concluded that the synchrony in group singing plays an important role in generating cooperation between group members (Good & Russo, 2016). The links between musical synchrony, social bonding, and prosocial behavior suggest mechanisms for how and why connection might occur during group singing.

Mirror Neurons

The recent discovery of mirror neurons in macaques, a primate species, has radically changed scientists' understanding of mimicry, synchrony, and social interactions (Casile, 2013). Scientists have identified mirror neuron networks in humans and have described how mirror neurons might facilitate imitation and empathy (Molnar-Szakacs, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2021; see Turella et al., 2009, for alternate perspectives). Mirror neurons constitute clusters in the brain that activate when individuals enact a motor behavior and when they observe another enacting that same behavior. For instance,

mirror neurons activate in the area of the brain responsible for rhythmic movement when an individual sees another stepping in rhythm, even if the observing individual remains still (Hoffman, 2016; Reynolds & Reason, 2012). Mirror neurons also activate to reflect others' emotional states and social cognition, as individuals sense others' emotional states then reproduce them in their own body (Clarke et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2021).

In the context of music education, Elliott and Silverman (2014) explained that mirror neurons enable individuals to recreate others' actions in their non-cognitive body mapping systems and to synchronize rhythmic activity and dance. In a choral context, mirror neurons might help individuals understand others' intentions by watching their physical actions, as when choral singers interpret a conductor's gesture (Hoffman, 2016; Iacoboni et al., 2005). When individuals perceive the emotional state of fellow musickers, mirror neurons can act as the mechanism for joining the same emotional-musical experience (Elliott & Silverman, 2014). Connection between audience and performers might also be explained by mirror neurons, which can be activated in audience members as they watch a performance (Tanaka, 2021). Alongside literature on group bonding and transmission of emotion, research on mirror neuron systems offers explanations of mechanisms that might facilitate connection during group singing.

Connection as Profound Experience

Psychologists have identified forms of profound experience that relate to experiences of connection. In the section below, I describe Maslow's (1999) concept of peak experiences, Gabrielsson's (2001, 2010) research on strong experiences, and Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) work on flow. Analyzing scholars' work on profound

experiences may offer foundational insights for understanding connection during musicking.

Peak Experiences

Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow (1999) theorized that healthy individuals work toward self-actualization, a process of becoming their most fully human self. Self-actualization represents the highest level in Maslow's (1999) hierarchy of needs; once individuals' basic physiological, safety, and social belonging needs are met, "higher level" needs of self-actualization can be realized as individuals enact "an unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy" (p. 31). Self-actualizing individuals seek to discover their potential through engrossing pursuits that can take form as peak experiences.

Peak experiences reflect a transcendent ecstasy in which individuals' emotions have "a special flavour of wonder, of awe, of reverence, of humility and surrender before the experience as before something great" (Maslow, 1999, pp. 87–88). During peak experiences, individuals are completely absorbed in the activity, lacking in fear, inhibition, and self-consciousness, while feeling somewhat disoriented in time and space (Maslow, 1999). Maslow (1999) further described peak experiences as:

> the most wonderful experience of your life; happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps from being in love, or from listening to music, or suddenly 'being hit' by a book or a painting, or from some great creative moment. (p. 83)

Maslow's (1968) findings indicated one of the most common forms of peak experiences involved music, and he addressed some of his writings directly to music educators. The present study's investigation of connection as oneness during group singing, when

individuals experience a sense of unity with the world or connection to something larger than oneself, relates closely to Maslow's concept of peak experiences.

Strong Experiences in Music

Gabrielsson (2010) built on Maslow's work by researching strong experiences in music (SEM). Over several decades, in solo and joint research publications, Gabrielsson collected participants' narratives of their strongest experiences with music (Gabrielsson, 2010; Gabrielsson et al., 2016; Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik, 2003). Most participants described experiences while listening to music, but 19% described experiences while performing or composing (Gabrielsson, 2010; Gabrielsson et al., 2016). Together, researchers developed a three-level descriptive system with seven categories for the characteristics of strong experiences (Gabrielsson & Lindström-Wik, 2003). Here, I highlight the characteristics that relate to connection. Participants recalled experiencing feelings of community, physical sensations such as chills or tears, loss of a sense of control, absorption, powerful positive feelings (and much less frequently, negative feelings), transcendence and existential experience, and experiences that were difficult to describe in words (Gabrielsson, 2010). Strong experiences in music sometimes involved feeling small in comparison to the larger universe, and for many performers, experiences felt magical (Gabrielsson, 2010). Many participants discussed singing in choir, which involved pride, self-confidence, and a sense of being part of something greater (Gabrielsson, 2010). Gabrielsson attributed the strong experiences occurring in choir to close social relationships between choir members, underscoring the relational aspects of group singing.

Using Gabrielsson and Lindström Wik's (2003) Strong Experiences of Music Descriptive System, Lamont (2012) corroborated the importance of social relationships, reporting that performers' strong experiences were typically experienced alongside others and rarely in isolation. Further, performers' strong experiences could contribute significantly to individuals' desire to continue musical pursuits (Lamont, 2012). Strong experiences in music frequently related to social bonds between singers and rewards individuals experience from group singing.

Flow

Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) seminal work on *flow* offers another model for the intense experiences that occur as individuals become completely absorbed in an enjoyable task. Flow refers to complete and concentrated engagement in an activity during which individuals lose self-consciousness and experience a distorted sense of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). During flow experiences, the activity becomes self-rewarding, or autotelic; individuals perform the task not due to external motivation or reward but for the innate pleasure of the task (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Flow is facilitated when the challenge of the task is well-matched to the individual's skill, making activity intense and absorbing yet not strenuous (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Other characteristics that facilitate flow are clear, proximal goals, immediate feedback, and a sense that one has control over the situation and can handle any outcomes (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; van den Hout et al., 2018). Flow has several traits in common with peak experiences and strong experiences. All three describe intense, memorable experiences that occur in a variety of settings, including during musicking. Later in this

chapter, I discuss profound experiences as they relate to oneness and musicking in school settings.

Three-Part Conceptual Lens

This study's three-part conceptual lens derives from a synthesis of the literature on connection during group singing. In this section, I review the literature through the three forms, including togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. I draw on the work of scholars in multiple disciplines and on investigations of group singing in a variety of settings.

Togetherness

Researchers have described togetherness, defined here as being drawn into a collective in relation with others, as an essential characteristic of musicking in ensemble settings (Hess, 2019). Togetherness is reflected in researchers' investigations of phenomena including social bonding, meaning, belonging, safety, community, and team (Anderson, 2013; Glew et al., 2021; Hendricks, 2018; Küçük, 2020; Kulset & Halle, 2020; Parker, 2010, 2014, 2016). The reliable capacity of group singing to facilitate strong social connections has led some researchers to conclude that singing evolved as a mechanism of social bonding (Clarke et al., 2009; Huron, 2003; Kulset & Halle, 2020; Pearce et al., 2015), while others claim that relationships in group singing can serve as a proxy for healthy human relationships more generally (Camlin et al., 2020). Below, I first discuss research on togetherness in adult, community, and university choir settings, then I review research with adolescent singers in school settings.

Togetherness in Adult Singing Groups

Adults who sing together, whether in newly-established or long-established groups, consistently experience social bonding and increased positive emotion (Camlin et al., 2020; Clarke et al., 2009, 2015; Kreutz, 2014; Lamont et al., 2018; Pearce et al., 2015). Adults who sing in choirs feel less lonely than others, report stronger social skills and relationships (Clift et al., 2010; Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019), and experience belonging, trust, and desire to cooperate with fellow singers (Stewart & Lonsdale, 2016). In Clift and Hancox's (2001) study of university choral singers, 87% indicated that they had benefitted socially from group singing. In Moss et al.'s (2018) mixed methods study of over 1000 singers, participants experienced choral singing as an opportunity to develop social skills and engage in inclusive social interactions. For some participants, working toward performances and engaging in tours contributed to increased bonding and a sense that their choir was a second family (Moss et al., 2018). In a study of adults over 60 years of age, Pentikäinen et al. (2021) found that singing in a choir for 10 years or more correlated with better social engagement. Other researchers have found that choir experiences need not occur over many years to facilitate togetherness; one single experience of group singing can increase singers' feelings of trust and cooperation (Anshel & Kipper, 1988).

Tarr et al. (2014) proposed that social bonding in choir relates to changes in the endogenous opioid system (EOS), as group singing releases endorphins that boost mood and provide an analgesic effect. Reflecting previously-discussed findings on mirror neurons (Molnar-Szakacs, 2017; Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009), Tarr et al. (2014)

identified that mirror neurons help individuals experience unification as self-other merging, and both endorphin release and self-other merging facilitate social bonds between musickers. Kreutz (2014) investigated social bonding and affect in participants who were gathered as a choir for purposes of the study. After singing, participants' positive affect increased, along with their levels of oxytocin, a hormone associated with stress reduction and social bonding (Kreutz, 2014). In Pearce et al.'s (2016) study of university fraternity members' group singing in which participants sang together with individuals they did not feel interpersonally close to, group singing increased feelings of closeness. Interestingly, when participants engaged in a competitive singing task with individuals they already felt close to, their experience of closeness decreased, indicating competition in group singing activities can influence singers' feelings of closeness (Pearce et al., 2016). In summary, singers' experiences of social bonding and positive interpersonal effects have been verified by a variety of measures with singers in diverse settings.

While many researchers have investigated singers' social bonds with other singers, fewer have discussed the relationships developed between choral singers and conductors or between choral singers and audiences. Silber (2005) identified two planes that helped shape experiences of singers in a women's prison choir, a vertical plane including conductor–singer interactions and a horizontal plane including singer–singer interactions. Similarly, Hoffman (2016), through a phenomenological investigation of musical expressivity in a community choir, found that interpersonal synergies between singers and between the conductor and singers strongly affected participants' impressions

of the group's musicking. Ascenso et al. (2017) reported that professional musicians' rewards from relationships with fellow ensemble members and with audiences contributed strongly to participants' wellbeing. In a community choir of older people, singers identified interactions with audiences as a meaningful form of connection (Lamont et al., 2018). In qualitative studies involving a group of choral singers who had experienced homelessness, described as marginalized, and a group of singers described as middle class, Bailey and Davidson (2002, 2005) reported that, for marginalized singers in particular, the relationships they developed with audiences were a primary reward of group singing. Other researchers have identified experiences of togetherness between audience members themselves (Garrido & Macritchie, 2020; Pitts, 2016). The relationships between ensemble members, between conductors and ensemble members, and between ensemble members and audiences suggest valuable dimensions for investigations of connection during group singing.

Togetherness in School Ensembles

Music education researchers have used varied approaches to investigate togetherness in school music ensembles. In Campbell et al.'s (2007) analysis of over 1700 middle and high school students' essays on why music education mattered, participants identified making friends and feeling a sense of belonging as primary benefits of musicking with others. Participants often used the word family to describe the sense of security they felt with their peers in school music ensembles. Interpersonal relationships were key aspects of why music education mattered for secondary school musicians (Campbell et al., 2007).

Researchers have found that group singing facilitates social bonding in school choral ensembles and can provide significant social benefits for adolescents (Glew et al., 2021). In one of the first studies that extensively examined interpersonal elements of adolescents' choir experiences, Hylton (1981) used a survey to investigate 673 high school choral singers' experiences of meaning in choir. Principal components factor analysis revealed that the integrative, or social, function of group singing made participants' school choral experiences more meaningful (Hylton, 1981). Singing provided opportunities to interact meaningfully with others through positive, cooperative social relationships, and high school students gained rewards from collaboration, which served an integrative purpose by connecting individuals as a larger, unified whole (Hylton, 1981). Similarly, Adderley et al. (2003) reported that high school ensemble members in choir, band, and orchestra valued their social ties with peers and the experience of family or "home-away-from home" that their group membership provided. Parker's (2010) action research study affirmed that high school participants experienced choir as a shared experience of bonding and social safety.

Glew et al. (2021) conducted a review of literature focused on studies that examined group singing and wellbeing in children and adolescents; most of the reviewed studies reflected data from school settings. The researchers concluded that social connectedness, belonging, and social supports were key outcomes of group singing for young people (Glew et al., 2021). Kennedy (2002) identified that junior high boys' friendships and social interactions played the most significant role in their choir experiences. Similarly, Sweet (2010) found that dedication, caring, and teamwork were

most important elements of choir for eighth grade boys in the "Choraliers," who expressed the importance of teamwork to the group's identity and sense of pride. Adderley et al. (2003) affirmed that school musicians often build group allegiance, a form of togetherness, as their identity becomes tied to membership in their school ensemble.

Researchers have indicated adolescent singers are highly attuned to the relational aspects of group singing. Adolescents experience meaning in music making through shared emotional connection (Anderson, 2013; Parker, 2020), and their experiences of belonging, a form of togetherness, are key benefits of musicking (Parker, 2010; 2020). DeAmbrose's (2019) mixed methods study with eighth-grade singers identified the importance of emotional bonding and social connections in school choirs. Bartolome (2013), similarly, found that adolescents in a community choir valued the social and personal benefits they experienced in choir more than the benefits focused on the music or performances. Parker's (2011) qualitative study investigated experiences of high school choir students who described musical knowing as interpersonal knowing. Through the singing experience, participants developed closeness to one other, interdependence, and a sense of not being alone (Parker, 2011).

For adolescents, a shared identity in a group can be particularly powerful, as adolescents identify with ingroups and outgroups, forging identity with different communities through peer relationships (Mills, 2010; Parker, 2020). In Parker's (2014) grounded theory investigation of high school choir singers' identity development, student participants recognized team as the center of their social identity in choir, yet divisions

between singers including cliques interfered with participants' experiences of team and togetherness. In contrast, findings in Pearce et al.'s (2016) study with collegiate fraternity members suggested that when individuals view others as part of an outgroup or a different clique, singing alongside one another can increase a sense of shared identity. Group singing helps to mediate social identities and experiences of togetherness.

In a narrative inquiry, Countryman (2008) investigated meaning in the high school choir experience by collecting perspectives of seven music educators and 32 former high school choir participants, 10 of whom were Countryman's former students. Participants identified meaningful experiences that reflected togetherness, including community, belonging, acceptance, comfort, family, and camaraderie (Countryman, 2008). Sweet's (2008) qualitative dissertation study centered on one exemplary middle school choir teacher's work, revealing that, though she did not use democratic practices including sharing power or centering student voice, the teacher built community and helped create a "safe space" for rewarding interpersonal interactions. Countryman's (2008) findings on high school choral educators' insights into meaning in choir and Sweet's (2008) findings on how educators might create safe space and build community align with the present study's goal to investigate how choral educators create connection, often in the form of togetherness.

Synchrony

The second form of connection investigated in this study, synchrony, describes moments when singers' expression, sound, or movement align or when singers' heart rates, breath rates, and gestures synchronize. As individuals attend to fellow musickers'

sounds and motions, either consciously or unconsciously, they synchronize expressions (Morgan et al., 2015; Turino, 2008). Synchrony during musicking can include alignment of observable physical phenomena such as facial expressions, rhythmic movement, or a conductor's gesture (Fuelberth, 2003; Morgan et al., 2015). Synchrony might be mediated by processes discussed earlier in this chapter, including the chameleon effect, mimicry, emotional contagion, or mirror neurons (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Hatfield et al., 1993; Iacoboni et al., 2005; Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009). In this section, I examine literature on the relational nature of synchrony; links between synchrony and flow; physiological synchrony; and synchrony and social bonding. Finally, I review scholars' research on how synchrony might be experienced in school choral ensembles.

Synchrony as Relational

Researchers have established that synchrony is embedded in the relational nature of musicking. Rituals involving dance, marching, and drumming help musickers align in both a sonic and a social sense (Jackson et al., 2018; McNeill, 1995). Individuals are drawn to synchronize with other humans more than to a static musical source, reflecting the interactive, relational essence of musicking (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2009). Further reflecting the human element of synchrony, Nowicki et al. (2013) demonstrated that musicians achieve rhythmic synchrony by copying their coperformers' timing more than by self-correcting based on perceived errors. Further, visual contact with other musickers helps to coordinate rhythmic synchrony and increases creativity and engagement (Morgan et al., 2015). Research findings suggest that musicking experiences, especially experiences that are particularly engaging, require synchrony.

Synchrony and Flow

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (2008) viewed synchrony as an essential expression of social dynamics in musicking, asserting that synchrony reflects "a kind of heightened, immediate social intercourse" that relates directly to social unity and belonging (p. 43). When musicking is fluid, including in participatory settings, an increased level of attention is required to stay in synchrony with others, and musickers' resulting strong level of awareness can make flow experiences more likely (Turino, 2008). Csikszentmihalyi (2008) also described the spontaneity and synchrony of live performance as a possible pathway to flow. Musickers who engage together live in real time sense that they must pay close attention because the experience is unique and cannot be repeated, and the requirement for increased focus on other musickers' behaviors can facilitate flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Researchers suggest that synchrony itself might help create a form of connection.

Synchrony of Physiological Processes

Scholars have investigated how the synchrony of physiological processes might play a role in connection. McCraty (2017, 2022), after measuring heart rate variability and biofeedback, suggested that the alignment of group members' cardiac and respiratory rates can correlate with social coherence, a form of togetherness. Müller et al. (2018, 2019) directly investigated alignment of physiological processes during group singing. Müller et al. (2018) conducted a complex study using a network topography to analyze synchrony in the cardiac, respiratory, vocalizing, and gestural activity of 11 singers and a conductor as they performed a three-part canon in three conditions: in unison, in canon

with eyes open, and in canon with eyes closed. The researchers found that singers' respiratory and cardiac systems synchronized with the conductor's gesture and with singers' vocalizations. Interestingly, alignment of respiratory rates, cardiac rates, conductor's gesture, and vocalization differed based on whether the canon was sung in unison or in parts. When singing in unison, participants' respiratory, cardiac, vocal, and gestural signals strongly aligned. When singing in canon, singers performing the second entry oriented their respiration on the voices of those singing the first entry; subsequently, those singing the third entry oriented their respiration and vocalization on the vocalizations of those singing the second entry. When singers sang in canon with eyes open, vocal signals aligned closely with the gestures of the conductor. In addition, the researchers found that the conductor's respiration patterns occurred soon before the singers' respiration and then transmitted to the singers' respiration. Finally, data analysis revealed that though the ensemble functioned as a complete collective, each singer had an influence on the larger system. Individual singers, small groups of singers, the conductor, and the entire choir aligned their physiology in a system of coordinated action that the researchers described as a superordinate system, or superorganism (Müller et al., 2018).

Synchrony and Social Bonding

Rhythmic synchrony involved in musicking might be partly responsible for social bonding effects (Jackson et al., 2018; Tarr et el., 2014). McNeill (1995) described how the synchrony involved in dance, military drill, and religious rituals creates emotional bonds. McCraty (2017, 2022) suggested that synchrony in heart rates can be used to encourage group coherence, cooperation, trust, and prosocial behaviors. Based on

research with a diverse group of primary-school aged children at a summer camp, Good and Russo (2016) determined that synchrony encourages cooperation and prosocial behavior. Children who were engaged in a group singing experience were more likely to act cooperatively than those who had engaged in group art or competitive games, suggesting that prosocial behavior toward fellow group members was generated not simply by a creative or cooperative activity but by the group synchrony specific to musicking (Good & Russo, 2016). Further strengthening the link between synchronous musicking and prosocial behavior, other researchers have found that when children participate in repeated musical group interactions over a long period of time, their empathy levels increase (Clarke et al., 2015; Rabinowitch et al., 2012).

Researchers suggest that synchrony correlates with relational closeness. Synchrony occurring through emotional contagion as individuals match their facial expressions to others' is more likely when the individuals involved have a caring relationship (Hatfield et al., 1993). When individuals are more familiar with each other, or when ensemble members are further along in the rehearsal process, their body swaying and eye contact become more frequent and more synchronized (Keller, 2014). In addition, mimicry improves rapport between individuals, which then further increases the amount of mimicry those individuals engage in (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Tarr et al., 2014). Researchers suggest synchrony enhances musical and social relationships over time, and positive musical and social relationships enhance synchrony in a cyclical process (Tarr et al., 2014).

Synchrony in School Ensembles

Very little extant research has addressed synchrony in school choral ensembles. High school students have described conditions related to synchrony, such as experiences of musicking as "simultaneously feelingful" (Parker, 2011). High school ensemble members have reported that they gleaned valuable information from their teachers' conducting gestures and facial expressions and sometimes mirrored their teachers' movements (Cape, 2012; Whitaker, 2011). However, few researchers have directly investigated synchrony in school choral settings. As Delius and Müller (2023) have identified, though researchers view group singing as highly interactive, to this point, it appears no researchers have substantially addressed the idea of synchrony as connection with secondary school choral students. More research on synchrony in school settings would be beneficial.

Oneness

The third form of connection in this study's conceptual lens is oneness, defined here as a sense of unity with the world or connection to something larger than oneself. From a philosophical perspective, Bowman (2021) stated that "musical experience invokes and nurtures oneness, a shared world unencumbered by contingencies of time and space. . . . Singing voices merge into a sonorous unity that is profoundly centering, both individually and collectively" (p. 7). Oneness, sometimes described as an encompassing experience of profound togetherness (Rickson & McFerran, 2014), overlaps with some definitions of meaning, which can include the feeling of serving something larger than one's self (Seligman, 2011). Oneness includes experiences during

musicking identified as spiritual, transcendent, or reverent, involving connection to a larger world or a larger life force (Boyce-Tillman, 2016; Jorgensen, 2008, 2021; Willingham, 2001). Gibson (2021) described connectedness through singing as a transcendent, spiritual experience akin to "feeling felt" or feeling fully alive.

In Pitts' (2016) case study of professional string players at a chamber music festival, participants described musicking as a source of spiritual fulfillment. Musicking evoked a life-giving, positive emotional response that felt other-worldly and indescribable (Pitts, 2016). Ascenso et al. (2017) used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) to investigate wellbeing in six professional classical musicians. Participants experienced wellbeing as "oneness through performance," including a choral singer's sense of "soul fusion" during singing and a soprano soloist's sense that a performance was "one" and that everyone in the room was part of it (Ascenso et al., 2017). In Clift and Hancox's (2001) survey of over 1000 amateur choir singers, 49% of participants indicated that they had benefitted spiritually from group singing. Participants in Hoffman's (2016) phenomenological study of expression in a community choir experienced oneness as the vibration of the room or as an ineffable, cathartic synergy. Investigating another adult community choir using qualitative methods, Willingham (2001) found that singers experienced group singing with reverence and awe, suggesting connectedness to the human spirit and to the larger world through oneness. Parker (2021) reported that one university music major experienced singing as a spiritual experience that he described as fleeting, mythical, and bigger than himself.

Adult choristers in Moss et al.'s (2018) mixed methods study confirmed experiences of uplift, spiritual engagement, or transcendence during singing. Singers reported that singing "encourages your soul [to] feel part of something bigger than yourself" and provides "a sense of connection at heart or energy level" (Moss et al., 2018, p. 165). Participants reported that group singing was life-affirming and could encourage mindfulness and focus on the present moment (Moss et al., 2018). Singing in choir helped participants take their mind off their worries, release tension, and leave stressors outside the choir room (Moss et al., 2018).

Self–Other Merging

Scholars in a variety of disciplines have described an experience of oneness during group singing as a sense of "merged subjectivity" or a loss of sense of self as boundaries between the individual, others, and the outside world seem to evaporate (Clarke et al., 2015; Rabinowitch et al., 2012). Bowman (2021), writing philosophically, described the unique ability of musical experience to "dissolve dualities of self-other, inside-outside, and subject-object" (p. 54). In their quantitative investigation of music and social bonding, Tarr et al. (2014) referred to this phenomenon as self–other merging, a blurring of lines between one's own and another's experience that might be mediated by networks of mirror neurons and neurohormones. McNeill (1995), a historian who analyzed the role of physical synchrony in social movement, described dancers' experiences of boundary loss as their self-awareness blurred and they sensed themselves as one. Psychologists Good and Russo (2016), investigating synchronous movement in

school-aged children, noted the same phenomenon as a shift in social boundaries through which the group becomes a collective social unit.

Spirituality, Reverence, and Profound Experiences

The concept of oneness reflects scholar's writings about spirituality. Boyce-Tillman (2016), a prolific scholar on spirituality and musicking, defined spirituality as one of the five domains of the musical experience, sitting alongside values, construction, materials, and expression. Boyce-Tillman argued that spiritual experiences in musicking involve a complex, multi-dimensional, and holistic process that connects body/mind and spirit. Boyce-Tillman's work, alongside collaborations with Hendricks and Morgan (Boyce-Tillman & Hendricks, 2021; Hendricks & Boyce-Tillman, 2021; Morgan & Boyce-Tillman, 2016) affirms that spirituality, authentic connection, and wellbeing are essential to musicking.

Jorgensen (2008) asserted the value of spiritual elements in music education and described oneness as reverence. An almost-magical experience apart from daily existence, reverence involves deep respect in the presence of what seem to be sacred, supernatural forces and "the sense that one is standing on holy ground" (Jorgensen, 2008, p. 20). Reverence reflects the deep significance of a particular moment, and it might be experienced as intensity, ecstasy, wholeness, awe, or wonder at one's smallness in relation to the magnitude of the larger world (Jorgensen, 2008). After musickers experience reverence, they might feel "sheer joy, relaxation, and quietness of mind—a sense that one has come face-to-face with transcendence and imminence," including what is beyond oneself and what is felt deeply within oneself (Jorgensen, 2008, p. 23).

Maslow's (1999) concept of peak experiences, which also include reverence and awe, overlaps considerably with oneness. In both experiences, individuals can lose self-consciousness and experience atypical passage of time. Peak experiences are characterized by total attention and absorption, sometimes with a sense that the entire universe has been united at once (Maslow, 1999). Like experiences of oneness, peak experiences sometimes involve "identification of the perceiver and the perceived, a fusion of what was two into a new and larger whole, a super-ordinate unit" (Maslow, 1999, p. 90). Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) concept of flow also aligns with oneness, as it is characterized by an intense, seemingly effortless focus on the present moment, merging of the self and other, and suspension of judgment as one's awareness grows deeper and more expansive (Lamont, 2012). Peak experiences and flow might be used to characterize aspects of oneness during musicking.

Oneness in School Ensembles

Scholars have recognized the value of spiritual elements in music education. Writing from a historical and philosophical perspective, McCarthy (2009) challenged music educators to incorporate the spiritual into their practice, noting that music can help humans feel connected to a divine source. In a phenomenological case study investigating meaning and value in music teachers' lives, Pellegrino (2010) described spirituality as an important part of a holistic view of teaching and urged educators to create spiritual, artful experiences that are "beyond normal and lived experience yet one with it" (p. 98). The role of spirituality in educators' work has also been highlighted by education philosopher Parker Palmer (2017), who framed teaching as an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual

pursuit. The spiritual in teaching, Palmer (2017) wrote, reflects educators' response to "the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life" (p. 5).

Researchers have identified experiences of oneness in school music settings. Glew et al. (2021) concluded based on their review of literature that children and adolescents benefitted from the elevating, existential nature of group singing. Young people experienced group singing as "sometimes connected to divine, religious or enlightening experiences, or to the sheer uplifting quality of singing and performing together" (Glew et al., 2021, p. 255). Hylton's (1981) study reflected that high school choir students found spiritualistic meaning through group singing, as some experienced "reaching for the supernatural" or "experiencing spiritual uplift" (Hylton, 1981, p. 297). Similarly, former high school choir students in Countryman's (2008) study reported the value of transcendent moments in their school choral experiences. Parker (2011) interviewed high school students enrolled in mixed choirs who described group singing as an enlightening, extraordinary, uplifting experience that could help them connect to a divine presence. When singers experienced this oneness as connection, they became "more self-unified and more aligned with the world" (Parker, 2011, p. 314).

Music education researchers have frequently investigated flow, an experience that overlaps significantly with oneness, in classroom settings. Custodero (2002) recommended that music educators facilitate conditions of flow through their instruction, responding to students' needs and offering enriching and engaging musical experiences. Freer (2003) investigated choral educators' communication with middle school singers and found that educators' use of scaffolding helped create experiences of flow. In a

quantitative study of flow and peak experiences in music classrooms, Bakker (2005) reported that when teachers experienced flow, the experience could transmit to students as emotional contagion, generating flow for students. Some high school instrumentalists that Cape (2012) interviewed had experienced moments of flow in music classes, but they indicated that the meaning of their musical experiences was holistic and multi-faceted, more than a sum of the most memorable peak experiences. In a study of a university wind ensemble, Kraus (2003) concluded that while educators might make experiences of flow more likely, individual students' autotelic qualities also play a role in whether they experience flow. Jaros (2008) studied high school students' experiences of flow in a festival choir setting over several days, concluding that students fully experienced flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi (2008) but experienced distinctly different levels of flow on different days, which depended on the conductor's choice of activities. Findings on flow in music education settings can help illuminate experiences of oneness.

Summary of the Three-Part Conceptual Lens

In this section, I have reviewed research on togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. The three-part lens serves to reflect the literature and illuminate educators' and students' experiences of connection. However, in practice, the three forms of connection are not always easily separated. Hendricks's (2018) study of compassionate music teachers provided an example of how connection might occur in multiple forms, sometimes including togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. An elementary educator who served as a model of compassionate music teaching in Hendricks's work described connection this way:

> There's an electricity or magic in the air when a teacher truly connects with a group of students. You see them in front of their students, and they are smiling, and their students are smiling, and they're laughing, and there's something special about that connection because it's almost like they're one. (p. 148)

The educator's and students' smiling, laughing interactions reflect both togetherness and synchrony; descriptions of magic, specialness, and unity reflect oneness. Echoing the scene presented by Hendricks (2018), researchers can expect that in practice, the three forms of connection will overlap and intersect as educators and students experience connection. In the next section, I present research literature on how educators might create connection in the classroom.

How Music Educators Create Connection

Because this study examines educators' experiences creating connection with students, an understanding of music educators' influences on students' learning in choir will provide important context. In this section, I first review the literature on how music educators' practices influence students' experiences. Second, I review literature investigating choral educators' approaches to connection in the classroom. Third, I examine contextual influences on connection. Fourth, I address students' roles in creating connection.

Music Educators' Influence on Student Experiences

School music educators play an important role in students' experiences of music. Students report that they value their school music experiences in part because of their teacher's personality, musical expertise, or pedagogical skill (Adderley et al., 2003; Arasi, 2006; Davidson et al., 1998). High school ensemble students' sense of group unity

relates to their perception of their teacher's supportiveness (Matthews & Kitsantas, 2007), and educators' approaches to teaching and instruction create an atmosphere that can motivate students to join or to remain involved in school music classes (Arasi, 2006; Kennedy, 2002). Underscoring music educators' influence on students, researchers have determined that school choral experiences can have a lifelong impact. How choral educators speak with adolescents about their singing voices can affect their self-concept and confidence decades later (Arasi, 2006, 2008; Freer, 2009; Joyce, 2003; Sweet, 2018). Further, high school choir students absorb their teachers' values, philosophies, and self-perceptions, further boosting educators' influence over several years (Cape, 2012; Morgan, 1992).

Though successful, enjoyable school choir experiences may contribute to continued participation in school and in adult community choirs (Arasi, 2006, 2008; DeAmbrose, 2019), negative singing experiences may also have a negative impact. In his self-study, Freer (2006) described how one teacher's comment negatively impacted his identity as a musician and singer for decades. Joyce (2003) described the discouragement and anger experienced by adults who had come to consider themselves non-singers based on the feedback of their music teachers. In another study of adults who felt that they could not sing, Knight (2013) reported that many adults developed the belief that they could not sing after a memorable negative interaction with a teacher in a school music setting. Undergraduate and graduate female singers in Sweet's (2018) qualitative study shared that practices of their high school choir teachers could negatively influence their vocal development, damaging singers' confidence, security, and self-concept as vocalists.

In a quantitative investigation, Demorest et al. (2017) found that the instruction junior high music students received could lead to a negative musical self-concept and a misleading understanding of talent, causing students to drop out of programs.

Further, the impact of secondary school music educators occurs at a sensitive time in adolescent development. Adolescent singers can be particularly susceptible to low self-concept as singers due to the instability of voice change, social embarrassment, and social anxiety (Abril, 2007; Freer, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Killian, 1997; Orton & Pitts, 2019; Sweet, 2015, 2018). Researchers investigating students' experiences in choir have found that adolescent singers, especially girls, recognize the importance of confidence in their experiences as singers, but face challenges to developing confidence in their singing voices (Orton & Pitts, 2019). Choral educators in middle and high school settings play a vital role at an important time in students' vocal and social development.

Choral Educators' Approaches to Connection

Music education researchers have identified teaching approaches that might be most helpful for creating connection. Connection plays a role in teaching practices including creating community, honoring student voices, engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy, and enacting principles of social justice (Gurgel, 2013; Hendricks, 2018; Hess, 2019; Shaw, 2016, 2020). In *Music Education for Social Change*, Hess (2019) acknowledged music education's "connective potential" as she investigated the work of 20 activist-musicians. Using a lens of critical pedagogy, Hess identified three practices activist-musicians used to build community in the classroom, including teaching ensemble as togetherness, creating mutually supportive spaces, and giving youth

important responsibilities. Participants worked to build relationships by teaching students the value of togetherness in ensembles, prioritizing reciprocal, dynamic interactions that honored all participants' voices. In working to create mutually supportive spaces, participants avoided interactions involving judgment or shaming around musicking. Activist-musicians' third practice involved trusting youth with significant responsibilities, which communicated to young people that their contributions held value and encouraged them to assert their voices in the world (Hess, 2019). Hess's participants viewed music education as connection, and teaching practices involving togetherness, support, and student voice helped students experience connection during group musicking.

Hendricks's (2018) investigation of five compassionate music teachers' practices revealed themes including trust and vulnerability, development of community, and authentic connection. Of the six qualities of the compassionate music teacher, Hendricks (2021) discussed connection last, "as the ultimate compassionate quality that would presumably follow after effective demonstrations of trust, empathy, patience, inclusion, and community" (p. 238). Hendricks (2018) described connection as a collective energy that is "much more than an interplay of pitch and rhythms," a "shared synergy" that those engaged in group music-making would easily recognize (p. 145). Compassionate music teachers embraced a view of musicking that included self-expression, soul-to-soul interactions, languages of the heart, and students' authentic experiences of connection to others through music (Hendricks, 2018).

Gurgel (2013) studied engagement and culturally relevant pedagogy in a seventh-grade choir classroom. Students benefitted from deep, agentic engagement with other students, and their engagement created a sense of connection or emotional contagion (Gurgel, 2013). Students remained engaged in choir class with their teacher, Ms. Beckman, when she led challenging, relevant activities, and when she provided context for the learning and repertoire she presented to students (Gurgel, 2013). When students reported a sense of accomplishment and "feeling it" together, they described experiences of community, connection, and self-efficacy (Gurgel, 2013). Sweet (2016) described that Deb Borton, a middle school choir teacher, situated the phrase "Singing Produces Awesome Miracles" as a centerpiece of the classroom philosophy, and students adopted the acronym SPAM with enthusiasm. The phrase's implication of the awe-inspiring, uplifting experiences created through group singing may have helped clear space for experiences of oneness during choral musicking (Sweet, 2016).

Researchers have identified that educators' presence, demonstrated enthusiasm for teaching, and sharing of their authentic selves might make space for moments of connection (Hibbard, 2017; Hutton, 2022; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). When educators practice empathy and give attention to individuals' characteristics, and when educators offer choices related to their musicking, students might be more likely to experience connection (Hutton, 2022). Further, a culture of caring relationships may open space for experiences of connection (Edgar, 2014).

Contextual Influences on Connection

Though educators' practices have great influence on students' experiences of connection, researchers have also identified influences on connection outside the classroom. For example, the reception that audiences and peers offer singers can influence students' experiences of connection and their commitment to their ensemble (Sweet, 2010). The increased time some school choral ensemble members spend together engaging in extra rehearsals or trips may increase their sense of connection (Parker, 2010). Bullack et al.'s (2018) research suggests that length of rehearsal could play a role in connection, as participants were more likely to experience social connectedness after rehearsals longer than 30 minutes. Furthermore, a school community's values might influence the culture of its choir program and students' experiences. Bannerman's (2019) qualitative case study of culture in a rural school district demonstrated that because the school's families, administrators, and students valued positive teacher–student relationships, the choral educator's focus on relationship-building was sustained through strong enrollment and community support. Bannerman's findings suggest that an alignment of the school community's values with the choral program's values might provide students more opportunities for connection through singing.

Student Roles in Creating Connection

Though the present study is designed to explore educators' experiences, the interactive, relational nature of group musicking suggests that connection is a multilayered, relational process influenced by all musickers who are present. In some situations, students might play the most influential role in creating connection. In a

qualitative dissertation study on the Northridge Children's Choir, Mills (2008) concluded that the students were largely the ones responsible for creating the social and relational environment. In the Seattle Girls Choir, Bartolome (2013) reported, an atmosphere encouraging student leadership and empowerment affected adolescent singers' sense of self-efficacy and independence, which might have, in turn, helped create connection. In any group singing situation, directionality and agency of creating connection will likely reflect a complex system.

The Choral Conductor Role

In this section, I discuss the choral conductor role in formal music education. Most music educators complete formal music education in choral conducting, typically during undergraduate and graduate programs. Further, music educators learn the conductor role from their vantage point as singers in college and university choirs, which often reflect a formal Western choral tradition of the conductor role. In this section, I discuss literature on the choral conductor role, including research exploring how the conductor role as developed through formal music education may influence creating connection.

Approaches to Choral Conducting Pedagogy

Especially in Western choral traditions, conductors' formal training prioritizes the pedagogy of technical-musical details (de Quadros, 2019). Resources for choral conductors frequently address responsibilities for score study, conducting gesture, performance practice, repertoire selection, vocal pedagogy, error detection, and efficient rehearsal strategies (see, e.g., Brinson & Demorest, 2014; Collins, 1999; Emmons &

Chase, 2006; Holt & Jordan, 2008; Phillips, 2004). Though conducting textbooks less frequently address the relational nature of choral music education, several researchers and choral conducting scholars have addressed the role of the choral leader in shaping interpersonal dynamics and experiences of connection (Durrant, 2005, 2017).

Choral conductors who prioritize connection during group singing have encouraged practitioners to consider the musician's soul and breath (Jordan, 2013; Jordan et al., 2013) and to lead ensembles with passion and purpose (Boonshaft, 2002). In her book *The Conductor as Leader*, Wis (2007) recommended that choral leaders embrace a servant-leadership model by acting as generous facilitators, working to develop trust and placing singers' experiences at the center of the ensemble. Morgan and Boyce-Tillman (2016), in a philosophical work on the community choir experience, suggested that rather than taking on a *conductor* role focused only on musical skills, leaders might adopt a *catalyst* role focused on fostering community, inclusion, and offering singers a balance of challenge and support. In a choral pedagogy text, Carter (2005) offered conductors strategies for helping ensembles perform with charisma by helping singers connect to the music "via the shared source of human experience" (p. 39). Once singers experience connection, Carter asserted, singers' connection might then return energy and inspiration to the leader. Bonshor (2018) suggested that leaders help singers develop into a confident choir through reciprocal peer learning, team building, and establishment of rapport and trust. Durrant (2005) recommended that conductors work to help singers feel confident and comfortable within a safe, non-threatening, and reassuring atmosphere that encourages risk-taking.

Describing connection through oneness, collegiate choral conductor Weston Noble highlighted the conductor's responsibility to help singers become one beautiful unit connected to larger forces of love and peace (Glenn, 1991, p. 241). Other choral leaders have identified synchrony of breath and synchrony with conductors' gesture as mechanisms for uniting a group and transmitting emotion (Fuelberth, 2003; Jordan, 2013; Julian, 1989). These choral leaders' recommendations encourage conductors to facilitate meaningful relational experiences that might create connection. Though choral pedagogy texts infrequently emphasize connection as the top priority, several approaches to the conductor role involve experiences related to connection, including community, trust, unity, breath, and meaning in the choral experience.

Power, Hierarchy, and the Conductor Role

Though some approaches to choral pedagogy aim to facilitate connection by centering singers' experiences, a singer-centered approach stands in stark contrast to the hierarchical ensemble structure that is prominent in Western choral music education (de Quadros, 2019; Small, 1986). In Western choral traditions, the conductor's role is to shape the sound according to their own vision for the music, largely ignoring the experiences of performers who "have no creative role to play, only a recreative one," as they are directed to follow the instructions of both composer and conductor (Small, 1986, p. 13). This formal concept of the conductor situates the singers and conductor as distinct and separate, distanced physically and distanced by the differential of power ascribed to their roles. The practices deemed most important for the Western conductor include

prioritizing technical excellence and efficiency, the skills typically taught to conductors in institutions of higher education (de Quadros, 2019).

Patricia O'Toole (2005), in her article "I Sing in a Choir But I Have No Voice!" used a critical feminist lens to describe the uneven power dynamics between conductor and singers. Based on her own experience as a singer, O'Toole argued that the power dynamics inherent in Western choral traditions serve to ignore singers' personal agency, control singers' voices, and make the musicking process tedious and unenjoyable. O'Toole offered that the choral conductor reinforces the hegemony of their own legitimized, institutionalized expertise, which reflects their experiences but silences singers' own knowledge and extramusical motivations. O'Toole's critique illuminated how conductors' roles in Western choral traditions are framed as sites of power and expertise, rather than as facilitators of fulfilling experiences for singers.

Music education researchers have identified how O'Toole's critique can be visible in choral settings. When high-level music performance standards are prioritized over relational goals, especially through a demanding, authoritarian leadership style, high school students and community choir members alike may experience diminished positive connections in the choral setting (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Kreutz & Brünger, 2012; Morgan, 1992). Furthermore, when choral educators prioritize technically-focused performance goals over connection or other relational goals, singers' enjoyment and fulfillment can suffer.

Tensions in the Conductor and Educator Roles

Scholars have drawn attention to the tensions between the traditional conductor role as an authoritarian decision maker (Dolloff, 1997; Hendricks, 2018) and more democratic values in music education (Allsup, 2003; Pearsall, 2021). O'Toole's (2005) pointed critique highlighted hegemonic power differentials between conductors and singers. Several researchers have further exposed these tensions in the conductors' and educators' roles.

Scholars have identified that music educators' work with choral ensembles reflects a tension between goals related to technical excellence in performance and goals related to singers' positive experiences. For instance, Boyce-Tillman (2020) lamented music educators' concern for the musical product over the prioritizing of human experiences and human emotion. According to Wis's (2007) servant-leadership model, concern for people should be more important than the musical product they create. Pascale (2005) conceptualized the tension as two contrasting aesthetics for singing. Aesthetic A reflects formal music education rooted in a Western tradition, with an emphasis on product, ability, and standards of excellence; while Aesthetic B reflects non-judgmental, participatory, community-based musicking focused on process more than product (Pascale, 2005). Freer (2011) framed the contrast as the "performance-pedagogy paradox," explaining that educators are taught to prioritize flawless performance over skilled and effective pedagogy. Freer's (2011) critique illuminated a tension between striving to craft a technically perfect product and prioritizing the learning process that helps singers learn and grow. The tensions researchers identify between the conductor

role, which is focused on excellence of performance outcomes, and the educator role, which might include creating rewarding experiences for students, might influence choral educators' creating of connection.

Chapter Summary

This chapter's review of literature demonstrated experiences of connection during group singing are widespread and well-established and can have a significant positive impact on choral singers and leaders. Researchers portray multilayered, complex forms of connection that can occur between different actors in a variety of musicking settings, and the three-part lens of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness offers a foundation for understanding how connection might be created and experienced in choral classrooms. Further, the literature reveals tensions in the priorities of the choral conductor and the music educator that educators seeking to create connection may need to reconcile to create connection.

The benefits of group singing, the evidence that connection is a meaningful element of the choral experience, and the ability of choral educators to create connection suggest that researchers and practitioners will benefit from more in-depth study of how educators create connection during group singing. This study's purpose was to examine choral educators' facilitation of connection during group singing through the three-part lens of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. The research questions prompted investigation of how choral educators describe the experience they aim to create during group singing, how educators facilitate connection, what benefits and challenges exist for educators creating connection, and what might explain educators' motivations to create

connection. By investigating these questions, I aimed to illuminate how choral music educators might facilitate student experiences of connection that can increase positive experiences in choir, contribute to health and wellbeing, and increase students' desire to continue singing. In the following chapter, I outline the method and procedures I used to answer the research questions and to address the study's purpose.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

In this chapter, I describe the research methods I used to conduct this study. I begin with the purpose and research questions. Next, I discuss qualitative research, including phenomenological and case study approaches. I include my rationale for using the two approaches and my role as a researcher. I then describe the study's procedures including participant sampling and data collection, offer profiles of each participant, and close the chapter by detailing the procedures I used for data analysis.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine choral educators' experiences of creating connection during group singing, including drawing singers together, also called togetherness; synchrony among singers; and singers' sense of oneness with the world. The research questions were:

- How do choral educators describe the experience they create during group singing?
- During group singing, how do choral educators facilitate singers' connection in the form of togetherness, synchrony, or oneness?
- What benefits and challenges exist for choral educators as they create connection?
- Why do choral educators choose to prioritize connection?

Qualitative Research

This investigation of connection, a subjective, interpersonal concept, was well-served by qualitative methods, which help researchers construct knowledge based on

individuals' subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creation of connection during group singing was best examined as experienced in its "natural setting," as is typical in qualitative work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). A qualitative approach was also well-suited to answering research questions about individuals' perspectives on complex phenomena and their experiences of social interactions including connection (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Phenomenology

I structured the study as a phenomenology. German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1913/2013) wrote the foundational texts on the philosophy of phenomenology in the early 20th century. For Husserl, an examination of individuals' lived experience is the key to understanding complex phenomena, and experience "should be examined in the way that it occurs, and in its own terms" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). Husserl wrote that by attending to "the things themselves," one can analyze lived experiences deeply enough to reveal their essential features, or essence. By uncovering the essence of an experience for one or more individuals, phenomenologists can illuminate how others might experience the same phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenological Reduction and Epoché

Phenomenologists assert that ideas must not be taken for granted but carefully reflected upon as they appear in consciousness. Husserl (1913/2013) suggested phenomenologists engage in a series of reductions to steer them toward elements of an idea as it is consciously experienced (Smith et al., 2009). As part of the phenomenological reduction, Husserl called on researchers to bracket out their

perspectives, suspending personal judgments to focus on the phenomenon at hand (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenologist refrains from judgment, "disconnects," "brackets," and sets aside, "out of action," their views (Husserl 1913/2013, p. 108–9). The researcher neither ignores nor doubts their judgment of the phenomenon under investigation; they simply suspend it and refrain from applying it as a truth of the phenomenon (Husserl 1913/2013; Peoples, 2021). Bracketing allows the researcher to focus on the research topic, to avoid shaping the findings based on assumptions, and to heighten their awareness of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Vagle, 2018). Husserl (1913/2013) termed this process of setting aside preconceptions and biases the phenomenological *epoché*.

Noema and Noesis

A phenomenological approach focuses on how ideas are made known to consciousness and how the world appears to individuals in terms of their subjective experience (van Manen, 2014). Husserl (1913/2013) described two ways individuals experience the world, through direct perception of the ideas as objects, which he termed *noema*, or through the meaning experience assigns to the ideas, which he termed *noesis* (Hourigan & Edgar, 2014). *Noema* describes the object precisely as it appears to the perceiver in consciousness, directly giving "meaning to what one sees, touches, thinks, or feels" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69). *Noesis*, in contrast, describes the idea as it is actualized or given meaning by the participants' (and researcher's) dynamic process of experiencing and describing (Giorgi, 2009; Hourigan & Edgar, 2014; Husserl, 1913/2013). The phenomenological researcher's task is to grapple with both forms of experience,

understanding that participants' experience of a phenomenon contains both *noema*, the object that is experienced, and *noesis*, the way that object is experienced (Moustakas, 1994).

Rationale for Phenomenology

Connection during group singing is well-poised for a phenomenological investigation. Choral leaders, singers, and researchers regularly describe connection as endemic to the group singing process but rarely examine the phenomenon directly. Because experiences of connection during choral rehearsals or performances are "readily known to musicians and remembered in mind's eye and ear," many singers and educators may embrace the concept "without understanding explicitly how it works as music is made" (Jorgensen, 2008, p. 23). A phenomenological approach can be particularly effective for illuminating such "obvious things. . . , things that have become so 'normal' that we do not even notice what might be at work and what might be assumed" (Vagle, 2018, p. 10). Phenomenological methods also help researchers analyze experiences that, like connection during group singing, are inherently emotional, intense, or relational (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The conceptual experience of connection centers on "what it is like when we *find-ourselves-being-in-relation-with-others*," as individuals relate to each other as singers, students, conductors, teachers, or audience members (Vagle, 2018, p. 20). A phenomenological approach can help researchers uncover the "lived, felt, and sensed significance" of a taken-for-granted, relational experience of this kind (Vagle, 2018, p. 22).

Case Study

I chose to frame this study as a multiple case study, in which researchers examine bounded units, or cases, defined by parameters including time, place, or setting (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). The distinct nature of each case requires study of cases in their natural context and detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources to answer the research questions (Barrett, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2013). In this study, I treated each participant within their school teaching setting as one bounded case. While case study methods provided a structure for bounding each participants' experience, phenomenological methods served to illuminate the essence of each case. Cross-case analysis was used to provide another layer of insight as I sought to understand the experience of creating connection broadly across participants' settings (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Rationale for Case Study

Because case study requires the researcher to place tight boundaries around each case and attend to each case's distinct setting, the approach is well-suited to studying context-dependent phenomena such as the present study's topic, participants' experiences creating connection during group singing. Creating connection involves a confluence of activities, individuals, and perceptions that may not be easily replicated when contextual factors change. A method that examines participants' experiences as situated in their natural setting reflects the contextual nature of creating connection. Additionally, through a case study design, I was able to view each participant's experience in context of their particular school setting and approach to teaching.

Phenomenological Case Study

A combination of phenomenological and case study methods served this study's goals well. Phenomenological methods (Moustakas, 1994) allowed me to analyze each case in depth and determine its essence. Cross-case analysis using a phenomenological lens then allowed me to compare and contrast each case, identify commonalities and tensions across the five cases, and determine an essence across cases (Stake, 2006). The phenomenological multiple case study design illuminated individual choral educators' specific, bounded experiences and also elucidated educators' experiences of creating connection more broadly through findings that reflected more than one school setting and individual context.

Method and Procedures

Participant Selection

I selected participants in two phases. First, they were selected purposively and reputationally (Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). I purposively sought participants who prioritized the creation of connection in their work with singers in PreK–12 school settings. After receiving the Temple University Institutional Review Board's approval to conduct the study (see Appendix A), I formally contacted choral music educator colleagues for recommendations of potential participants who prioritized creating connection in their work with student singers. Colleagues recommended potential participants whose work they had seen directly and who viewed the work as facilitative of connection during group singing.

By combining colleagues' recommendations with my own knowledge of potential participants, I gathered names of 37 individuals recommended for the study. After narrowing the potential participant pool to those who did most of their work in PreK–12 settings and with school-aged singers, I emailed 19 potential participants to explain the study's scope and ascertain their interest in participating. If the participant expressed interest, I requested that they complete a six-item questionnaire (see Appendix B), which provided information about their potential fit for the study (Yin, 2018). Potential participants chose whether to complete the questionnaire in writing through a Google Form or verbally through a Zoom video interview.

I reviewed nine potential participants' questionnaire responses for rich and detailed data that aligned with the aims of the research questions. I retained as potential participants those who spoke with depth and detail about creating connection during group singing. Next, I used maximum variation sampling to include participants with a wide range of teaching contexts, school sizes, geographic locations, student demographics, and history of school support for choral programs. I also sought diversity among participants themselves, including duration of their position at their current school or school district, roles as choral music educators outside their school position, racial and ethnic background, and gender identity. I reasoned that such variation might help me more accurately represent the phenomenon of creating connection, as commonalities that arose across different participants would speak strongly to the essence of the experience (Patton, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Maximum variation sampling also allowed data analysis to represent the unique realities in different teaching settings and with a variety

of educators, illuminating how connection might be created differently in different educational contexts. After selecting participants purposively and reputationally, then for maximum variation, I invited five participants to join the study. This number of participants reflected common recommendations for case studies and allowed for ample data collection and effective data analysis across cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Each of the five invited educators agreed to participate and signed a consent form (see Appendix C) before I began data collection.

School Permissions

After participants signed consent forms, I inquired about what permissions might be needed from participants' school administrators for field observations. Because my school visits would not include substantial interaction with any students or collection of identifiable student data, four of five participants' schools needed no special permission aside from verbal permission from their principal. To one participant's school administrator, I wrote a letter detailing the observation procedure and sharing that my observation would be focused on the participant, not their students. I also shared that I would be audio recording the observations to verify other data and to provide the possibility of using student words or singing to illustrate the findings. In the letter, I communicated that all proper names and places would be pseudonyms, and all data would be deidentified and stored on a password-protected computer. After receiving my letter, the school administrator approved my visit for field observations.

Participant Descriptions

In this section, I describe the teaching setting and characteristics of each of the five participants (see Table 1). I provide information on each participant's background as a music educator, along with information about the schools and other settings where they taught. All participant names and school names are pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Name (pseudo-nym)	Years at school/ teaching	School (pseudonym)	School setting	Region	Type of school	% free or reduced lunch[a]
Ms. H	12/25	Pine Village Middle	Large suburb	East	Neighborhood public	3
Mr. F	1/7	Liberty Charter High	Urban	Northeast	Charter	82
Ms. A	1/21	Garrison High	Urban	Midwest	Neighborhood public	99
Mr. E	5/17	Falcon Point High	Large suburb	Midwest	Neighborhood public	28
Ms. N	10/24	Walker Area High	Rural	Northeast	Regional magnet	26

[a] Data from National Center for Education Statistics (2023).

Ms. H

Ms. H had spent more than 25 years in choral music education, conducting numerous community and school choirs, leading honor choirs, and facilitating clinics and professional development sessions nationally and internationally. She worked extensively with university choirs, particularly as she was engaged in graduate study in choral

conducting. At the time of the study, Ms. H was leading a large community choir program and teaching choir at a public middle school.

I focused on Ms. H's role as a full-time choir teacher at Pine Village Middle School. The school, where Ms. H had worked for over 12 years, was located in a large suburb in the Eastern U.S., about one hour's drive from the nearest large city. The school enrolled just over 800 students in grades six through eight, three percent of whom qualified for free or reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Fourteen percent of Pine Village Middle School students identified as Asian, three percent as Black, six percent as Hispanic, 72% as White, and five percent as two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). At the time of the study, Ms. H taught approximately 200 sixth- through eighth-grade students in eight different choir classes. Ms. H, who grew up in a nearby large city, identified as a Black female.

Mr. F

Mr. F taught at Liberty Charter High School in a large urban center in the Northeastern United States. Liberty Charter, part of a national network of urban charter schools, was founded in the late 2000s with a mission to provide a college preparatory education to students from across the city. As data were collected for this study, Mr. F was in his first year teaching at Liberty Charter High School.

At the time of this study, Liberty Charter enrolled approximately 450 students in grades nine through 12, 82% percent of whom qualified for free or reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). The overall student population identified as 34% Black, 63% Hispanic, less than one percent American Indian/Alaska Native, less

than one percent Asian, two percent White, and less than one percent two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Mr. F, who identified as male and of Middle Eastern and Indian descent, taught five sections of choir classes with a total of about 130 students. Music class enrollment at the school was limited to only juniors and seniors, some of whom had elected to be in music class and some who were placed in the class. In addition to curricular sections of choir class, Mr. F worked with an auditioned choral group that met weekly after school. During his lunches, he also worked with a small group of students who had formed a modern band ensemble.

Prior to his work at Liberty Charter, Mr. F led the choir program at Fairwood North High School, a public high school in a large suburb of another Northeastern U. S. city. Mr. F had attended Fairwood North High School and sang in choir there. During Mr. F's high school years, the Fairwood North choral program had a strong reputation for excellence. The school's choral ensembles performed at national conferences and competitions, and the choir director's work was widely known in the choral music education community. After his former choir teacher retired and immediately after earning his music education degree, Mr. F returned to Fairwood North to lead the choir program.

Mr. F taught at Fairwood North for six years before moving to his position at Liberty Charter, which he chose partly for its stark differences from Fairwood. Fairwood North was located in a large suburban, mostly White, middle- to upper-class community with a median income around $100,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In contrast, the majority of individuals in Liberty Charter's community were Hispanic or Latino, and the

median income was around $40,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In Liberty Charter's underresourced urban community, unfortunately, gun violence and substance addiction affected students' lives on a regular basis. These conditions did not affect the Fairwood North community as frequently or directly.

Inside the school building, Mr. F's role at Liberty Charter differed significantly from his previous role. At Liberty Charter, Mr. F worked to launch a music program in a school with no history of choir or music classes. Prior to high school, most Liberty Charter students had not had any regular music instruction in school. On the other hand, many Fairwood North students entered into a high school choral program with well-established traditions and practices after engaging for many years in a vertically-aligned K–12 school music curriculum. Many of Mr. F's perspectives were shaped by his examination of the contrasts between Liberty Charter students' needs and Fairwood North students' needs, through which he added a unique perspective to this inquiry.

Ms. A

Ms. A has been a choral educator and clinician working with singers of all ages in church choirs, honor choirs, and community groups for over 20 years. She entered into choral leadership at the age of 12, when she started leading her church gospel choir in a large city in the Midwestern United States. At the time of the study, Ms. A worked part-time in the same city as a choral teacher at a Garrison High School. She also directed a community group of high school singers from across the city and worked regularly with church choirs, honor choirs, and children's choirs. Ms. A identified as a Black woman and described one of her professional goals as bridging gaps between music education

traditions in the Black community and traditions centered on Western European choral practices. She owned a company that provided music education resources representative of diversity, and she regularly led clinics and professional development sessions for choral educators.

For this study, I focused on Ms. A's work at Garrison High School, an urban, public high school where she taught two days a week. The school had a distinguished history of facilitating achievement for Black students in the local community. Several famous musicians, athletes, and luminaries graduated from Garrison in the early- and mid-20th century, when the school enrolled around 2000 students and held a reputation for high academic achievement. Over the last 50 years, the school's achievement scores and graduation rates declined markedly, along with enrollment. At the time of the study, the school enrolled approximately 220 students. Ninety-six percent of Garrison students identified as Black, two percent as Hispanic, one percent as White, and less than one percent as two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Ninety-nine percent of students received free or reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Due to low enrollment, low graduation rates, and low achievement measures, along with safety concerns, the school had been threatened with closure in recent years.

When Ms. A began working at Garrison the school year this study began, the school had not had any regular music or performing arts programs for decades. One effort to increase enrollment and protect the school from closure involved reviving the arts. At the start of the school year, students in ninth through 11th grades were presented with

choices of music, dance, drama, or visual art "tracks." Ms. A was hired to teach one choir class, two days a week, to students who elected the music track.

At the start of the school year when Ms. A began teaching at Garrison, approximately 45 students elected music. After Ms. A shared with students that the music track required singing in a choir, many students switched to a different track, leaving approximately 13 students in the choir by the middle of the school year. Under Ms. A's direction, the choir students met twice a week for 90 minutes at the end of the school day, and they performed in concerts at the school in December and in May.

Mr. E

Mr. E taught six choral ensemble classes at Falcon Point High School, a large public high school in a suburb of a large Midwestern city. Mr. E grew up in the Falcon Point community and as a high school student, he sang in the choir classroom where he later taught. Mr. E's family had ties to Falcon Point High School, too. He met his spouse in the school's choir program, and during data collection for this study, one of his children was a student in one of the school choirs he led.

Almost 2100 students attended Falcon Point High School at the time of this study, about 180 of whom were enrolled in one or more of six different choir classes. Approximately 28% of Falcon Point's students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student population identified as less than one percent American Indian/Alaska Native, one percent Asian, 10% Black, eight percent Hispanic, less than one percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 73% White, and seven percent two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Mr. E, who identified as a White male,

noted that the racial representation of choir students roughly reflected the racial balance of the school; or, sometimes, the choir program reflected a larger enrollment of students of color than the school as a whole. In addition to the curricular choir classes, Mr. E led the school's extracurricular show choir, and he engaged with choir students in several extracurricular choir events including fundraisers, adjudicated performance festivals, and tours (though prior to and during data collection, many such activities were curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

At the time of this study, Mr. E was in his fifth year teaching at the high school and his 17th year of teaching at the K–12 level. Immediately prior to his work at Falcon Point High School, he had taught fifth and sixth graders in the same school district's intermediate school for eight years, and before he held that position, he had taught seventh- and eighth-grade choir for three years in the district's middle school. In addition to his work at the high school, Mr. E served as a church choir director, a position he began as an undergraduate student and had held for almost 20 years. Mr. E also regularly led honor choirs in his local and regional community, and he had held statewide leadership positions in professional choral and music education organizations.

Ms. N

Ms. N taught at Walker Area High School, a regional public school in a rural area of the Northeastern U.S. She was in her 10th year teaching at Walker Area High School at the time of the study and in her 24th year of teaching overall. Prior to her work at Walker, she taught elementary general music and worked with elementary school choirs, children's community choirs, and choirs of senior citizens. Ms. N was active in her state

and regional choral and music education organizations, regularly serving in leadership roles and sponsoring her students at festivals and other special performance events.

Walker Area High School enrolled nearly 1100 students who came to the school from three neighboring rural towns (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Approximately 200 of the school's students were enrolled in the agricultural magnet program; they were not able to enroll in choir due to scheduling conflicts. Twenty-six percent of the school's students were eligible for free or reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Less than one percent of the student body identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, seven percent as Asian, four percent as Black, 12% as Hispanic, less than one percent as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 76% as White, and less than one percent as two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Ms. N identified as White and female.

Ms. N taught approximately 120 students in three curricular choir classes and one extracurricular choir, which occasionally met briefly during the school day. Before the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated changes to in-person schooling in 2020, Ms. N had also met regularly with small lesson groups of five to six students; each group met for 25 minutes each week. In addition to teaching curricular choir classes, Ms. N directed the adaptive musical. She regularly led special events including retreats, community concerts, and interactions with composers, and she sponsored students' participation in honor choir festivals and local and regional choral events.

Data Sources

Data sources in this study included interviews, field observations, and artifacts. As is typical in phenomenological research and case studies, participant interviews were a rich, vital data source (Creswell & Poth, 2018; King & Horrocks, 2010). To further dimensionalize the data and to examine the phenomenon of creating connection in its natural setting, I conducted field observations in participants' schools, aiming to understand how participants' work with students reflected the perspectives they shared verbally. Finally, I examined artifacts related to participants' work creating connection with student singers. Below, I describe each data source in greater depth.

Interviews

I interviewed each participant three times using a semistructured interview protocol (Brinkmann, 2018; King & Horrocks, 2010; see Appendix D). With one exception, in advance of each interview, I shared with participants the questions that would guide the interview, giving participants the opportunity to consider the questions in advance while emphasizing that our conversation was flexible and they need not script any responses. During interviews, I probed further after some participant responses, and if their responses led to another topic or suggested a need for clarification, I followed up on the thread. The second-round interview protocol was partly created based on data analysis of first-round interviews. Questions in third-round interviews were almost entirely crafted from the emerging data analysis, and they included a member check of the findings in process.

First-round interviews occurred in February and March of 2022. I conducted second-round interviews in April and May after completing at least one field observation with each participant in April. The one exception to this was Ms. A, as my field observation of her work had to be rescheduled once due to severe weather and later for COVID-related reasons. Third-round interviews occurred in July, after I conducted second field observation visits for three participants in May and June. Most interviews took place via Zoom video call; one interview took place via phone; three second-round interviews took place in person before or after field observations. Interviews ranged from 30–59 minutes, with 45 minutes the average length.

After conducting interviews via video call, I downloaded audio recordings from Zoom. I recorded the one phone interview using the TapeACall app on an iPhone and downloaded the audio from the app. During in-person interviews, I recorded audio using the Voice Record Pro app on an iPad Pro. I uploaded all audio recordings of interviews to Otter.ai for automatic transcription. After Otter.ai software transcribed the interview audio, I carefully reviewed each transcript alongside the audio recording, and I made significant word-by-word edits to each transcript to ensure accuracy. The 15 complete interview transcripts spanned a total of 225 single-spaced pages.

Observations

To provide further dimension to my understanding of participants' experiences of creating connection during group singing, I observed participants working with singers in the schools where they taught. Observations supported the goals of the case study, which require descriptions of cases within their "real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 15).

Observations also served to triangulate the data, and emerging analysis of my observation field notes often led me, in subsequent interviews, to probe participants' perceptions of the classroom teaching and learning activities I observed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Most field observations took place in April and May, with final observations occurring in June 2022. I observed each participant teaching singers in a school setting for a time ranging from four to six hours, over one day or two non-consecutive days. In most cases, I observed regular classes that took place during the school day. In addition, I observed Mr. F's work with high school students during a live, in-person concert for over two hours, and I observed Ms. H working with adolescent singers in a community choir rehearsal.

One limitation of the study is that though I observed, recorded, and took field notes on Ms. A's in a church choir setting, I was not able to observe her in-person in her school setting. On the day I was scheduled to observe her teaching at Garrison High School, severe weather required cancellation of the trip, and an alternate observation could not be scheduled before the end of the school year for reasons related to COVID-19. Ms. A left her position at Garrison High School after the 2021–22 school year; thus, rescheduling an observation for fall of 2022 was not possible.

During observations, I focused on the teacher and their interactions with students. I took extensive fieldnotes and audio recorded the observations. I used the audio recordings to triangulate the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), reviewing portions of recordings to analyze interactions that were directly relevant to the research questions or that reflected interview data.

Soon after the observation, in most cases, I discussed the class activities with participants. These conversations allowed participants to share reflections on the observations and allowed me to ask follow-up questions directly related to the classroom activities. Post-observation conversations were mostly informal and occurred while we were walking through the school or on a lunch break. In two cases, immediately following an observation, we conducted the participant's second formal interview. In one of those cases, the interview questions closely followed the planned protocol, and in the other, some of the planned protocol questions were covered. In both cases, the interview questions addressed classroom interactions during the observation.

In addition to formal interviews, during field observations, participants regularly shared other perspectives on their teaching setting or on connection during group singing. These conversations emerged differently with different participants, according to their class schedule and their availability after or before observations. As soon as possible after these impromptu conversations, I took notes on participants' communication, and I later analyzed them as field notes.

Data collection with Ms. A provided the sole exception to the observation protocol. To gather similar data, I viewed and analyzed over two hours of video of Ms. A working with high school students in rehearsals and performances with the Lee Community Honor Choir and in performances with Garrison High School. In addition, I reviewed over an hour of video footage of Ms. A working with adult groups of singers and music educators in workshops and clinics. In person, I observed her working for almost three hours in performance and rehearsal in a church music setting where she

served as a singer and conductor of special choir performances. In that setting, she led a rehearsal of three gospel songs to be sung in an upcoming special service. I analyzed data from the rehearsal and performance videos and the church choir observation just as I had analyzed all other observation data.

At each observation, I took field notes on how each participant interacted with students in ways that might influence experience of connection. I wrote down verbatim key phrases, and I made note of classroom interactions that struck me as very similar to or very different from my own experiences as a teacher, in an effort to separate my analysis from my own assumptions and preconceptions (Moustakas, 1994). I analyzed the field notes through memoing and coding.

Artifacts

Participants shared with me several artifacts related to their work creating connection with students. Artifacts included videos of performances, concert programs, choir program "spirit wear" with connection-related slogans, podcast interviews, photos of classroom materials, and students' class assignments related to connection (deidentified, with student names redacted). Two participants shared class assignment data as spreadsheets including students' written responses to their teacher's questions. The participants removed all student names and identifying information before sharing the data with me. Alongside artifacts shared by participants, I gathered information related to participants from public websites, including their school district websites and their professional online presence. I transformed the artifacts into data by using them to verify codes from interview transcripts. In some cases, I also memoed about the artifacts'

content or imported the artifacts into MAXQDA, assigning them codes according to the procedures I used for analyzing interview data.

Researcher's Lens

As I discussed in Chapter 1, my interest in connection during group singing stemmed from my experiences as a singer, conductor, and most importantly, as a choral educator who sought to create connection with high school students. My teaching experiences of success and failure in creating connection convinced me of the potential impact of connection during group singing. Especially when I saw students who seemed disconnected from others, seemingly experiencing little pleasure from group singing, I became more motivated to explore how creating connection might be helpful to students' wellbeing. Thus, the present study's design reflected a phenomenological approach in two ways: its purpose was "rooted in autobiographical meaning and values," and it held "social meanings and significance" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103).

Epoché

I engaged in epoché at the start of this study and continued with the process as the study unfolded. I began by memoing about my own history of experiencing connection and creating connection during group singing. As a singer and choral leader, I had experienced moments of connection that felt profoundly impactful, when group members seemed to feel themselves acting as one and connecting to an energy larger than the sum of its parts. In working with singers, I had been struck by how, in those circumstances, it seemed that every individual in the room recognized that unified energy and experienced it as rewarding and invigorating. As a conductor, I had felt similar moments of

connection through synchrony of gesture and breath. It seemed that when musickers moved or breathed together, they were more likely to undergo those profound connective moments; in contrast, when gesture or breath were out of sync, it seemed clear that musickers did not experience connection.

In the fall of 2021, as I designed this study, I found myself in an unusual situation related to the students I interacted with as a full-time choir teacher. I was teaching high school choir where I had worked for 11 years. That fall marked my return to that teaching role after a one-year sabbatical for doctoral work. As I returned to the school building, many students were also returning to the choir classroom after over a year away due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students who had little experience singing live with others in the same room were working to reconnect with each other and with me. We were also challenged by the task of singing and interacting from behind masks, which were mandated for health and safety. These combined circumstances meant that, for me, much of the connection students and I had previously experienced during group singing was painfully and conspicuously absent.

The powerful, positive connection I believed students had experienced during group singing in the past motivated me to help create those feelings again. My desire to facilitate students' experiences of connection was intensified by my perception that many students were experiencing distress, discomfort, and isolation in the wake of the pandemic and as they returned to school after much time away from group singing and other collective activities.

Bracketing

As a researcher, I recognized my strong belief that connection during group singing could make a positive difference for students. Thus, during data collection and analysis, I put concerted energy into bracketing out my experiences and working to remain "completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). To better understand and bracket out my experiences teaching high school students in the position I held during data collection, I journaled, drew one visual diagram and one illustration, and recorded voice memos, often on my drive to and from work. These visual and verbal reflections reminded me of the boundedness of my own particular teaching circumstances, helping me recognize my views might be specific to my circumstances and unrelated to participants' experiences.

During data collection, I memoed to draw out questions and insights on the data, attending closely to perspectives that were new to me. When participants discussed or demonstrated an experience similar to one I had had in my classroom, I worked intentionally to view participants' experiences exactly as they were presented. At five particular moments during field observations or interviews, I invested great effort to separate my perceptions of participants' environments from my experiences with my own students. During observations at Mr. F's school, I noticed the commonalities between some of his students' behaviors and the behaviors of students I was teaching at the time. When I found myself thinking back to students in my own classroom, I wondered about Mr. F's experiences with students who did not seem open to or available for connection.

When Mr. F discussed students who did not want to be in class, I noted associations with some of my own students. During field observations, I jotted notes about the commonalities I was seeing and questions I had, then moved my focus back to Mr. F and his interactions with students. I continued to remind myself to focus on Mr. F's experience with openness, shifting my attention back to what was going on in Mr. F's classroom to see it with fresh eyes.

While observing in Ms. N's classroom, too, I occasionally found my attention moving to students who did not seem connected or seemed to have opted out of the experience of connection. I noticed my tendency to focus on Ms. N's strategies for responding to students who appeared to be disconnected as I considered my own students who appeared to be situating themselves apart from the group's experiences of connection. Again, when this occurred, I worked to bring my attention back to the interactions happening in the room, striving to remain open to Ms. N's experience as unrelated to my own. I memoed about the experience afterward, and I returned to analysis of my field notes and audio recordings on multiple occasions to help me focus on the participant's experience.

Mr. E's experience with connection during his group's statewide concert performance aligned with some of my own experiences with high profile performances with high school students. The opportunity to analyze a video of Mr. E's choir's performance, along with the concert program, helped me separate Mr. E's experiences from my own. In reviewing Mr. E's interview transcripts and performance video, I

recognized the parallels between my experience and Mr. E's, then worked to focus exclusively on the data.

When Ms. A and Mr. F spoke about challenges they faced in the structure of the choir programs at their school, I strove to separate my experiences from theirs. Though I could relate to struggles with developing a choir culture, obstacles related to enrollment and vertical alignment, and struggles with the presence of music programs in the life of the school, I recognized my experiences as distinct from Ms. A's and Mr. F's. My analysis of participants' challenges reflected my concerted attention to the experiences they presented directly during data collection.

Finally, in interviews, when Ms. A, Ms. H, and Ms. N discussed the challenges caused by COVID-19 and masking, I sometimes found myself having visceral reactions of sympathy and sadness. Though I recognized that masking, in particular, felt like a significant part of the struggle my students and I experienced with connection, I refrained from commenting on my own experience and reminded myself that different school communities' experiences with masking and singing during the pandemic varied widely. Again, I focused on participants' words and descriptions, and I asked questions to help me to fully understand participants' experiences as separate from my own.

Often, I followed up on participants' experiences that were new or perplexing with questions in subsequent interviews. At the same time, I held in mind the framework of noema and noesis, looking for participants' definitions of what connection *is* and what it looks like while also seeking the more complex layers of *how* participants experienced the phenomenon (King & Horrocks, 2010). Each participant discussed connection as they

experienced it with students in the moment (*noema*), and they also grappled aloud with their own conceptions of the experience of connection (*noesis*). Awareness of these two distinct dimensions deepened my analysis and helped me be open to the complexity of the phenomenon as participants experienced it.

Data Analysis

I first analyzed each bounded case, using phenomenological methods to uncover the essence of each case (Moustakas, 1994). Second, I engaged in cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994) to uncover commonalities across cases. In accordance with qualitative methods, data analysis was emergent and cyclical (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I detail the data analysis procedures below.

Phenomenological Data Analysis

I followed the phenomenological data analysis procedures of Moustakas (1994), who extended Husserl's philosophical writings by outlining a system of phenomenological reduction that involves multiple analysis phases. After exploring the epoché, I began by coding the first-round interviews. Then I horizonalized the data by writing on paper all first-cycle codes and code categories, working to lay nonoverlapping ideas side by side and view each idea as having equal weight, as if one is viewing an infinite horizon of meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). I also used MAXQDA's Document Portrait to visualize the instances of all codes within each participant's data.

Next, I uncovered and attended to significant statements in the data (Moustakas, 1994). I analyzed first-cycle coding and created phrases that reflected the most

meaningful ideas addressed by the codes. After peer review and debriefing, I engaged in the same process again. I analyzed the significant statements, triangulated the data, reviewed memos, reviewed and revised codes multiple times, and then identified themes. Next, I created textural and structural descriptions of the themes by writing and rewriting drafts of my findings and returning to the "textural qualities" of the interview data often to focus on the "things themselves" (Schmitt, 1967).

I began coding in the midst of data collection, in a cyclical, emergent process of constant comparison (Wertz et al., 2011), using several coding cycles. I began by open coding all interview data using concept coding, assigning a word or short phrase to an idea with broader meaning, and in vivo coding, using participants' precise words or phrases as codes (Saldaña, 2021). Then I coded first interviews a second time, adding and revising codes based on an emerging view of the data collected to that point.

After coding first interviews, I revised interview questions for second-round interviews, changing some questions, eliminating some questions to follow threads that had emerged from data analysis, and for each participant, adding specific questions geared toward following up on their first interviews or inquiring about an idea that emerged from other participants' contributions. I added questions about the role of musical ability, interactions with composers, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

After coding first- and second-round interviews, I shared more than 15% of the data with a peer with qualitative research experience. I asked the peer to open code the data and to write memos reflecting their interpretations, after which we met in person to debrief. Following our discussion of the data analysis, the peer sent me their codes,

handwritten on the printed transcript data, along with another document including in vivo codes, significant statements, clusters of meaning, and ideas related to possible themes. Based on the peer's feedback, I added codes for "hard work," "defining success," and "common humanity." I also refined my interpretations of some clusters of data, giving more attention to some of Mr. F's statements regarding student ownership and more fully pursuing certain strands of emerging themes that my peer highlighted, including movement as human connection and musical elements of repertoire helping students to "open up." I then returned to first- and second-round interviews to complete third-cycle coding.

In third-cycle coding, I included focused coding, values coding, emotion coding, and magnitude coding (Saldaña, 2021). These coding methods helped me pull forth the most salient concepts in participants' experiences while reflecting the strength of ideas and emotion participants expressed in interviews. I reexamined first- and second-round interview excerpts, adding new codes that emerged from third-cycle coding. I also added memos or recoded field observations and artifacts to reflect new codes and emerging significant statements. As I analyzed the data, I adjusted my protocols for upcoming interviews to gather more information on ideas that seemed particularly rich and to uncover data that could help illuminate differences and similarities between different participants' experiences. I included in third-round interviews questions on threads left unexplored and in-process findings for member checking.

As I collected data, I wrote dozens of analytic memos to help me reflect on the data (Saldaña, 2021). Memos contained reflections summarizing interviews and offering

initial reactions to interviews, interactions, and observations. Many voice memos were recorded very soon after interviews or field observations. I sometimes generated memos as handwritten notes or as voice recordings in an iPhone's Voice Memos app. I recorded most memos in Notion, the digital workspace software I used to organize the dissertation project. I transferred to my Notion database all voice recordings and memos originally in the form of handwritten notes.

I also used memoing during the cyclical data collection and coding processes, exploring quandaries and queries that emerged from coding and from processing of participants' experiences. These memos helped me shape second-cycle and third-cycle coding and helped me tease out ideas to pursue in upcoming interviews. In addition, I recorded code-based memos in MAXQDA when my analytical thoughts were directly related to codes and their application to data.

Through these multiple phases of analysis, I organized codes into clusters of meaning that revealed themes (Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña, 2021). I used MAXQDA to create code clouds and cloud lines for each participants' data, helping me visualize the clusters of meaning. After returning to memos, transcripts, and codes to verify emerging themes, I again wrote textural and structural descriptions of the themes, attending to what participants experienced (*noema*) and how participants experienced (*noesis*) creating connection (King & Horrocks, 2010). Finally, these steps helped me to uncover the essence of the phenomenon of creating connection during group singing for each individual participant as a bounded case (Moustakas, 1994).

Cross-Case Analysis

Once I had determined themes for each individual case, I used cross-case analysis to uncover commonalities and determine the collective essence of the phenomenon as experienced by all participants. After initially using Stake's (2005) process as a guide, I maintained a phenomenological approach to cross-case analysis, remaining open to intuition and working to suspend judgment. I employed imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994) to think reflexively as I searched for the collective essence of creating connection during group singing for this study's participants. Imaginative variation helped me view the broad contexts of participants' experiences of the phenomenon, to consider the phenomenon's potential invariant constituents, and to use the most vivid data to illuminate structural themes (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness in qualitative research as four qualities that can help verify the soundness of data analysis: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I worked to ensure trustworthiness in the form of credibility using three methods. First, I triangulated the data using multiple sources, as discussed above. Second, I expanded my perspectives on the data by having a peer experienced in qualitative methods analyze a significant portion of the data and discuss their interpretations with me (Patton, 2015). After discussing codes with the peer, I added three codes and returned to first- and second-round interviews, using my enhanced perspectives for second-cycle coding (Patton, 2015). Third, I performed a member check in two phases. During third-round interviews, I shared with each participant some of the

findings in progress and asked them to share how much the findings represented their experience. Their responses were analyzed in the same ways as other interview data. Finally, after drafting the completed findings, I sent to each participant the written findings that reflected their particular case, soliciting their feedback. The participants responded by verifying the data analysis. With the exception of one participant who requested I remove one detail to protect their anonymity, which I did, participants requested no changes.

CHAPTER 4

WITHIN-CASE FINDINGS

In this chapter, I discuss findings for each case by presenting each participant's lived experience of connection in six sections. In the first section, I reintroduce each participant with a rich description of their work with singers. I chose to craft this writing in present tense to situate participants in their teaching context at the time of data collection and to share vignettes compiled from interviews and observations. In the second section, I describe how participants experienced connection during group singing. Third, I provide context on how participants developed their philosophy of connection over several years. Fourth, I share participants' experiences of the conditions that create connection, and fifth, I describe the barriers that participants experienced in creating connection. Finally, I provide the phenomenon's essence, the meaningful core of the experience without which the phenomenon would not be the same for that participant. Beginning with the second section, I write using the past tense to reflect the data collected from February to July 2022.

Though I use headings to help readers process the complexity of participants' experiences, participants' experiences are multilayered, and they do not always fit neatly into categories. For instance, some concepts I have chosen to present as barriers instead could have been framed as conditions that create connection. Sometimes, I present one element of the data in two opposed forms, as both a condition that creates connection and as a barrier to creating connection. I frame the data based on how the analysis illuminated the richest and most salient representations of participants' experiences.

Ms. H

On Tuesday evening in the newly-renovated sanctuary of a local synagogue, Ms. H leads a rehearsal of the Bayview Youth Chorale. As the official rehearsal start time approaches, about 40 adolescents in grades 10–12 check in with a volunteer and then filter into the sanctuary. Finding their seats on the sanctuary's side benches, many students enthusiastically greet nearby friends and settle in to chat.

It takes little more than Ms. H's presence to gain students' attention. As she walks down the long center aisle and greets the students at a casual, conversational volume, they quickly and quietly turn their attention to her. She asks students to move into small groups as she counts down from five, and when the sound level gets louder, she regains students' attention with a spoken rhythm pattern. Students adjust group sizes to include their peers as Ms. H comments, "I like how you problem-solve. . . . You have to figure it out." Following her next instruction to see "what you have in common with each other," students begin chatting energetically. She counts down again, and singers efficiently move into voice part sections, then transition into warm ups and repertoire rehearsal.

At Pine Village Middle School, Ms. H's sixth-grade students enter the cafeteria, where choir classes have been moved to help minimize COVID-19 transmission. A few students approach Ms. H to ask questions about what voice part they are singing or about next week's voice assessment. After offering words of appreciation for each student's question and responding using their name, Ms. H takes a handheld wireless mic from the stand and states calmly, "Listen very carefully. I do notice that you did not get your music folders, so it seems as if you have forgotten that portion." Ms. H asks students to

reset their chair positions if needed, counts down, then clarifies the request for students to stand behind their chairs, “if you’d be so kind.” After praising a student’s problem-solving, Ms. H leads the group through echo games with speech and movement, drawing their attention to balance. “I would like for my sound to always balance with you. So would you be so gracious as to balance the sound with me?” After students’ respond, she prompts the students to continue listening and balance even more. “I like how you did that.”

Encouraging students to pay attention to those around them, Ms. H provides straightforward feedback and allows the group to self-correct with help from student leaders. She asks one student to share with the group how they were successful “when even those around you were having a little struggle.” Drawing attention to another student’s work, Ms. H comments, “If Cindy was a bank, I’d put my money there, because she will never fail you. She is that consistent.” Calling on a student with a raised hand, Ms. H advises, “Listen to her, village. She’s keeping order.” Ms. H frequently passes the microphone to students who are singing their parts accurately, allowing their amplified voices to support classmates singing the same part. As students’ parts solidify, Ms. H lets out affirming yells of “Hey!” and “Bravo!” After rehearsal on one piece, she prompts students to ask their neighbor how it went. Later, she invites a student leader to the front to conduct. Ms. H communicates clearly and respectfully, and at every prompt or invitation, several students raise hands. Even with the sounds and smells of food preparation behind them, students demonstrate engagement and investment in activities including movement, singing, self-evaluations, and collaborations with their peers.

Connection as Experienced

Ms. H described experiences of connection in terms of musical success, such as "when we all grow a phrase together, and our eyes just light up." When singers were working on a piece in F that was not tuning well, a simple change of key helped generate connection. Ms. H explained:

> F just never tunes. And so I was going to try F sharp or E. So we started with F sharp first, and we did eight bars of music. And magically, everyone's entire being, even behind the mask, there was such a connection to the key, to each other. . . . [They] just all experienced a musical moment, that you struggled with F major, but when you sang in F sharp, just by raising it a half step, everything fell into place.

At that moment, Ms. H said, "everybody just looked at each other and sighed," and "the sigh at the end of it was the confirmation that that was a connection." She added, "we relish in those moments." In such instances, connection occurred alongside what Ms. H considered "just good music making."

Some experiences of connection grew directly from singers' relationships with one another. As community youth choir singers prepared a piece honoring graduating seniors, the younger singers started tearing up, Ms. H said, because "the reality of having [the seniors'] presence not there anymore was overwhelming." That remarkable experience, Ms. H shared, was "about the connection that they have with each other." Further, she explained, the connection between singers relied on them having "common denominators through the music." The younger singers' sadness at the thought of making music without their older fellow singers created experiences of connection.

Ms. H discussed Pine Village Middle School students' experiences of connection at a community event paying tribute to Komi Earl, an enslaved person who lived near

Pine Village in the 19th century. To prepare the performance, students researched Earl, and they explored how themes in the spiritual they performed intersected with his life. Ms. H shared that an eighth-grade choir student introduced the piece, explaining Earl's search for freedom:

> was a physical search as well as a spiritual search. . .And [the student] understood what a spiritual [was]. And then, they sang. There was a shift in the atmosphere. They understood the life of Komi Earl. They wrote about it, they talked about it, they gave testimonials to it, they drew about it, they did artwork. But there was a deeper connection.

Ms. H noted members of the audience experienced the connection, too. "Now, when I say they sang, my superintendent who is African American, female, she's like, 'They done caught the holy ghost.' I said, 'I thought so, too!'" At the end of the performance, Ms. H said, "the audience didn't even wait. . . . They were clapping before they even got to the end." She clarified the applause did not signify that students were "any greater of a choir than anyone else. But it was the emotional context of which they performed. They sang with emotional content." Ms. H was "humbled by" the experience:

> They took that simple song. . . sang with such a cultural and social understanding of all that was happening at that event. And those kids put their heads back and just sang it out. I was impressed. . . . But they sang out because they knew the obstacles and the hardships that he had.

She added, "that's something I can't teach. That's just something one has to experience."

Students in Ms. H's community choir sometimes experienced connection through choral text, though she described one instance when the process did not unfold as expected. When the group discussed a piece with text related to gender roles, the text "didn't really resonate with them as much as I thought it should. . . I don't think they really had the text settled." In a rehearsal three weeks later, however, Ms. H overhead

students beginning to discuss gender issues in the text without her prompting. Initially, she had set out to build "an environment where we can just connect with the text"; later, students started making that connection on their own. "It still worked," Ms. H concluded, but in "my pedagogical process, I have to remember that not everything is immediate, that it needs saturation."

Ms. H shared that sometimes students experienced connection when they felt proud of their work as they simply moved in sync with one other. From students' biweekly journal entries, Ms. H learned that some students "felt as if there was a connection when they were building their crescendo together because they all moved in that same direction. They felt a physical movement." Ms. H witnessed connection coincide with spontaneous expressions of pride in musical accomplishment:

> I love it when the middle school kids, they immediately start applauding for themself [*sic*]. I don't say, "Applaud!", . . . and there's nothing that I could say, because they already decided themselves. That to me is the most exciting. . . . Something magical happened, and they knew it happened, and they were excited.

Ms. H described that when students moved in sync or executed other musical skills they were proud of, their excitement and connection were evident.

Ms. H said she did not always recognize students' experiences of connection in the moment, and she could not always predict when those experiences would occur. When her middle school students experienced connection one day, she said, "They all felt something together. I didn't feel it because I'm so busy doing other things. But there was something special about what happened. I missed it." She described another instance when all the students experienced an immediate connection, but she did not know why

they were excited. In such moments, Ms. H said, "I'm like, 'Oh!' Usually I ask them, 'What did I miss?' And they're like, 'Ms. H, weren't you just here?!'" She shared that sometimes it was hard "to always stay present in the connection. And even though I think I'm creating connection, sometimes the connection happened without me."

Ms. H explained that she might miss students' moments of connection because she and the students had different standards. "When it's good in the way that I'm expecting, like the phrasing, or the tone quality, or we're actually singing in four part[s], I get excited. They don't get excited about that." Sometimes, she said, students got excited about their musical growth instead. For instance, when eighth-grade students experienced connection while playing drums, Ms. H did not perceive the musical quality as high. "It wasn't where I wanted it to be." Yet the students experienced connection and felt excited about their drumming, she said. "They notice their growth." For students to experience connection, Ms. H noted, musicking did not have to meet her standards; musical growth, not achievement, could generate connection between students.

When Ms. H's standards for success differed from students' standards, she noted, "sometimes my evaluation system is a little different than theirs. I think I'm still evaluating that I got the perfect phrase, I got the perfect tuning. But I don't necessarily think they all feel that same way." Ms. H offered an example from earlier in the day, when students were working on movement:

> And these children were not in sync [laughs]. I mean, I'm saying let's go to the left, they going to the front. But they were still happy, they were still excited that they were moving with each other. . . . They still evaluated it as being in sync. . . . All 40 of them. I was the only one that wasn't feeling it.

Ms. H described her initial reaction when students' swaying was out of sync. "I was so hot," she said. "I was like, 'No, that is not how it's supposed to go!'" She chuckled as she described a student's reply: "One of the kids, sixth grader, was like, 'You just need to calm down. It's not that big of a deal. We're having a good time. And we're doing it together.'" On her drive home from school that day, Ms. H decided to take time to "reset" and reframe what happened once she felt calmer. At that point, she was able to focus on how students were "building their own community" and "having a great time." Reflecting later, she said:

> I could see the beauty in them just being so excited to move together. . . . And they're in sync because they're all stepping to the beat—just not all the same direction. They were just excited to have that movement and to do it together.

Ms. H was not always aware of students' experiences of connection because of her focus on her own goals. "And that's okay," she added. "But they have goals, too."

Development of Approach to Connection

Creating experiences of connection was central to Ms. H's "pedagogical process" throughout her teaching career, yet she was "not consciously aware of when I've made it intentional." She shared that the family and culture she grew up in affected her approach, including a focus on community and collaboration. "Having been raised in an environment where. . . my entire life, from my family, from church, from my community, it has always been community at the center," she said, "it just kind of seeps out in everything that I do." Ms. H described the collaborative dynamic she experienced:

> Growing up with my parents who are very musical, and all about working together, [there was] always a collaborative energy. . . . If one person is working on a project, we are all working on that project. . . If someone's

> working on a Christmas concert, we are all working on that Christmas concert. If one of us are hurting, we all hurt, and we stop everything that we're doing.

She explained that her teaching reflected her family's approach because she focused on community-building, working together, and helping each other. For instance, in a rehearsal, "if sopranos are struggling with the syncopation, let's all just keep the beat for them until they get that." Or, if "I don't have time to teach those new parts. . . I can put a seventh grader in front of you," and "they can be the person that can teach you that part." Ms. H shared that in her professional life and teaching, she looked to collaborate with others. "It's so much better if we could work together, that we can share ideas, celebrate each other, or find that common denominator that excites us."

Ms. H's community-centered values were also shaped by working with a choir in South Africa many years ago, when for the first time she felt there could be "connection across the globe." In South Africa, just as in her family and her hometown, she shared, the culture was community-based and focused on helping others. She noted the collaborative nature of singing in the South African choir. "As a community within your section, [you would decide], 'Oh, yeah, that sounds good, [or] oh, we shouldn't do that.'" Movements, too, were decided on as a community. She shared, "That was by far my greatest musical experience."

Ms. H noted that approaching connection by building community was not reflected in her formal music education in undergraduate and graduate school. In "music schools that are like conservatories," she said, building community is "tough. . . . It is survival of the fittest. They don't care about community." She articulated, "I don't find

that [community] happens in the conservatory model," because "you have to be an individual, be the best. And the only time you're going to collaborate with someone is if you're going to do a chamber work. And that chamber work has to still let you stand out."

Recognizing the individualistic values that drove the model of music making in her university-level education, Ms. H said, helped her see that her focus on community and collaboration "is someone who I am and something that I believe." She described the development of her philosophy: "So in my educational practice, it developed over time where I was finding ways to break further away from that conservatory model and the type of education I received," a model she viewed "more like a benevolent dictatorship" than a collaboration. In contrast, she aimed to make the classroom a reciprocal learning environment, helping students understand that "we share the knowledge, and that we're all responsible for the knowledge, and we work together."

Creating Connection Through the Pedagogical Process

Ms. H discussed how her pedagogical process helped facilitate students' experiences of connection. "I'm always intentional," she said, "in implementing musical and social activities that will allow them to have agency and. . . input." She referred to the philosophy of choral educator Helen Kemp, who considered singing a holistic, joyful process involving body, mind, spirit, and voice; Ms. H worked to facilitate students' awareness and engagement with multiple components of singing to create experiences of connection. As part of this pedagogical process, she included musicianship activities to help students "build ensemble skills" in an atmosphere "where there is no judgment."

At the start of each choir class, Ms. H led activities that served as "a temperature check" to identify challenges or to reveal "what's happening socially, musically," or vocally with students that day. For the first 10–12 minutes of class, Ms. H used questions and nonverbal cues to "see how they're responding to my facial expressions or the silly things that I'm doing just to awaken their body, their mind, their voice, and the spirit." Sometimes, she continued, students' reactions are "very telling. And that will help to guide me for the remainder of our time together."

Ms. H's group exercises intentionally fostered community-building and collaboration. Often, she said, "I'm creating an opportunity for them to work together without me" and "to connect with each other." Movement and singing activities helped students internalize musical concepts and build the ensemble's unity:

> If I ask them to clap 20 times, I'm just interested to see what tempo they will choose together. Who will start it? How will they end it? If they have a problem with someone not ending it, how will they all figure out how to stop it together? Or if I'm asking them to sing any pitch they would like, and just to sing that over four beats, what will they create together? How will they evaluate what was good about it or wasn't good, or take judgment out all completely?

Ms. H shared that helping students work together to solve musical problems through deliberately-crafted, collaborative classroom activities could facilitate experiences of connection.

Barriers to Creating Connection

Ms. H identified two barriers to creating connection. The first, a conflict between prioritizing students' learning process versus prioritizing their performance product,

reflected tensions in her teaching. The second barrier reflected challenges to creating connection stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. I discuss each barrier below.

Process versus Product

Ms. H discussed the conflict between defining musical success based on standards of excellence, or the *product*, and defining success based on singers' experiences, or the *process*. She related the two definitions to her experiences as a singer. In undergraduate and graduate choral ensembles, she said, "I never felt connected. I mean, [I've been] singing in choirs all my life. I never felt that connection." Following her conductors' ambition for musical excellence, "I did it right, and it was perfect." But when her choral leaders prioritized accuracy and perfection, she said, "I never felt in sync."

Yet Ms. H, like her former conductors, grew frustrated with students' musical inaccuracies. "What's frustrating for me is when it doesn't reach a certain level of excellence that I particularly seek." She sometimes found her drive for excellence troublesome. "This is what I've been dealing with my whole life. . . . Here it is, I'm upset because it wasn't accurate." Her tendency to focus on the product while she also wanted to help students through their learning process, was a tension "which I dearly struggle with."

Describing the divergence between students' perceptions of success and her own, she recounted eighth graders applauding for themselves even though their movements were not aligned. Ms. H explained, "I think to myself, well, if you watch the tape, you'll probably realize the errors and the problems." However, she said, students were less concerned with their errors and "more excited about what they created together as a body

of singers, and the process." She described such experiences as feeling connected. Yet students' experience of connection "doesn't necessarily mean the outcome was what I was looking for, or what we were all looking for. But which one was more important? I think being connected, right?" Ms. H said "it has not been easy" to work through the tension between prioritizing excellence and knowing that priority can interfere with students' experiences of connection. "I have to say, I've been struggling."

In the end, however, Ms. H said, "I have changed my evaluation system. I think it's more important that they are connected. And hopefully, that connectivity will help them to be more successful." Ms. H concluded that she prioritized connection above all else, yet still wished connection could occur alongside musical accuracy. "I was hoping sometimes the connectivity and the outcome that we're all searching for are tied together. It's not always that way." However, she said, if she had to choose one, "as long as they are feeling. . . that they are part of something greater than just themselves, I'll still take the connection over the perfectionism that I'm looking for."

COVID-19

Ms. H shared that before the COVID-19 pandemic, she found it easier to facilitate connection, helping students "cultivate an awareness of community, an awareness of compassion, and awareness of empathy." She said that before the pandemic, finding ways for students to work together wasn't easy, but it was more manageable. However, at the time of data collection, due to safety measures to prevent transmission of COVID-19, Ms. H explained, students had "learned in their most impressionable years that they have to stay distant." She continued, "I'm still fighting for them to be socially and musically

engaged but physically distant for their own safety." The work of creating opportunities for students to engage with each other was still in process. "Let me just tell you, it has not been happening in some classes. I think it probably won't happen until next year." Despite the challenges, Ms. H said, "my faith is strong" that "we are doing the right thing and building a climate where they are independent thinkers but collaborative in their practice."

Essence of Creating Connection: Fostering Student Ownership and Collaboration

The essence of how Ms. H created connection was *fostering student ownership and collaboration*. She designed classroom activities that encouraged students to make discoveries and work together as a team. In one instance, Ms. H had noticed that her colleagues in adjacent classrooms were closing their doors more frequently during class. She shared the issue with students and asked them to propose solutions for lessening the sound coming from the choir room. "Everyone came up with solutions. Not every solution we tried worked. But they figured it out, that let's just move the entire class closer to the other end" of the choir classroom. Ms. H described the advantages of helping students solve such problems collaboratively. She acknowledged that she could have told students the best solution, "but how much richer is it for them," she asked, "to find a solution on their own?" She explained:

> I gave them an opportunity to put themselves in someone else's shoes. . . . I'm asking them to acknowledge my colleagues and their students, which are their colleagues, and how can we make it better for them?. . . just the act of giving them an opportunity to have a problem that we problem-solve together to make it better.

Designing activities to build students' empathy, care for others, and problem-solving skills helped them "be a collaborative force within the rehearsal space."

Ms. H sought to build "a reciprocal environment" in the classroom, in contrast to "that conservatory model and the type of education I received." She drew a distinction between student ownership and a leader-centered approach. "I think sometimes as choral leaders, we find that we have to just own everything. And no one gets to own it." She aimed to help students take ownership of their own learning and to share knowledge with everyone in the classroom. Ms. H often invited students to conduct the choir because it was "wonderful for them to have that type of artistic leadership in the choral music making experience." For one piece, she asked students in small groups to use body percussion and vocal exploration to build atmospheric sounds, then asked them, "How do we want to put those sections together?" In other instances, she suggested to students, "I think we can make a collective decision. . . . Where would be the best place to take that breath so that the idea of the text comes through to the audience? Let's try it two different ways."

In another opportunity for student ownership, Ms. H asked students to sing the starting pitch for warm ups rather than determining the first pitch herself. "It's pedagogically for vocal technique," she explained, "but it's more community. Here's a chance for you to be a vocal leader." In a sixth-grade class, Ms. H led students through an activity related to tempo. "I was interested to know how they can take ownership of the tempo. [One student] gave a very insightful response about strategies: use the eye and the ear. And that was really brilliant." She aimed to help students "connect with their own

artistry" and connect with the music, often through conversations with peers. She continued, "me telling you it and dictating it is nice, but I think learning happens better when it's meaningful and it's authentic. And that you have a buy-in, you are invested in that process."

Ms. H often asked students to reflect on their collaboration. For instance, after working on staggered breathing, she asked students, "In what ways did we work together as a group?. . . I was just really impressed how they were able to articulate the various different ways that we were working together as a team." She concluded, "So I'm always looking for ways to build their connectivity between each other, as well as their connectivity to the music that they're singing, as well as their connectivity to me as a teacher." She noted that when experiences of connection happen naturally during group singing, "it's wonderful." But because experiences of connection do not always happen spontaneously, she aimed to facilitate or encourage connection whenever possible. She wanted students to have ownership and input through the repertoire and the pedagogical process. She explained:

> Because chorally, I can't do it by myself. I can look as cute as I want on the stage, but unless there's a connection between myself and the singers, and the singers between themselves and each other, and the music, it really is a moot point. At the end of the day, we have to collectively do that together.

Ms. H hoped helping students experience connection through ownership and collaboration could have an impact beyond the choir classroom. If students "could collaborate with each other in problem solving, to come to understandings that will make their experience better for themselves and for everyone else, that's the way I see what our

world should be." When students "take it beyond the four walls we work within," she said, "the greater community could be enriched for the better."

Mr. F

Mr. F's classroom at Liberty Charter High School is almost identical to nearby English and math classrooms except that its edges are packed with musical instruments and equipment. In the center of the room, three rows of chairs face a white board and screen on which Mr. F projects slides with lesson activities. At the front of the room sit a digital piano, public address system, mic, and the rolling desk chair that Mr. F often uses as he teaches and accompanies on the piano. All the musical equipment is new. When Liberty Charter's administrators hired Mr. F, they gave him what he described as a healthy budget, and he was able to purchase choir folders for each student, a choir folder rack, the full-size digital piano, the public address system, several mics and mic stands, and a modern band set up, complete with another full-size digital piano, a drum kit, two electric basses, an electric guitar, an acoustic guitar, a studio desk with a computer, studio monitors, and a studio mic. Most of Mr. F's time during the school day is spent teaching choir classes. Students use the modern band equipment during lunch periods, when the music club, which Mr. F usually refers to as "the band," runs their own informal rehearsals, with Mr. F providing guidance.

As students enter for choir class, many banter with Mr. F, greet him with a handshake or fist bump, or quickly say hello. Mr. F jokes about bribing one student with their favorite bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich and mock-protests that "I wanna be in on the laughs" with one talkative group of students. He begins class by asking students about

the recent visit from a local poet whose text will be performed at the spring concert. When one student responds then hesitates in the middle of their sentence, Mr. F prompts, "Say it in Spanish." Mr. F reviews the timeline leading up to the concert, then leads vocal warm ups, beginning with student-led stretches. Mr. F's pacing is fast and his energy high. Occasionally, he startles students as he models loud, high "ee" slides in his falsetto range, and he occasionally places his mouth close to the microphone to get students' attention.

Sirens sound just outside the classroom window as Mr. F mentions a letter written by Nina Simone that students saw on a recent school trip. While students, instructed to sit in "position 2," rehearse Simone's "I wish I knew how it would feel to be free," Mr. F plays active piano accompaniments, asks questions frequently, and provides feedback on phrasing, syncopations, and intervals. He calmly intersperses instructions with comments including "that phone is not well hidden," "that posture's not working for me," and a quick reminder to "watch your mouth." Urging singers to sing one phrase with more confidence and conviction, he points out that Nina Simone's lyrics and songwriting choices reflect her experiences of racism.

Throughout the class, one or two students do not sing or participate visibly. (Mr. F later shares that he chooses not to address those students' lack of participation in front of their peers.) Some students regularly make eye contact with Mr. F, nod and smile during their interactions, and laugh at his jokes. A group of three students in the front row produces significant sound, moving their heads along with the phrases as they sing. Occasionally, students in other classes drop by in the middle of the class period. One

student steps just inside the classroom door to say matter-of-factly, “Mr. F, you get better every day. I appreciate you as a teacher. You’re my favorite.”

Connection as Experienced

For Mr. F, the experience of connection during group singing was “really tough” to describe. “I was reading your questions,” he told me, “and just still struggling” with how to define the experience. “Like, well, of course, can’t you just feel it? If you’ve sung in a choir, you know what I’m talking about. If you’ve been there, you’ve been there.” After reflecting further, Mr. F compared the experience of connection to flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). “I’m starting to think that maybe what I’ve been experiencing and [at a] loss for words with, when a choir does get to that point, is a shared sense of flow.” Flow, he said, occurs “across genres, “across grade levels,” and “even with community choruses.” Mr. F recalled experiences of flow at both schools where he had taught. At Fairwood North, he said, connection as flow occurred when students “were singing beautiful polyrhythms,” and at Liberty Charter, he said, “I see it in the Latin dances.”

Mr. F associated flow with an absence of inhibition and fear. “The lack of fear is what I see and hear when I flow—people uninhibited from external worry, pressure, and even judgment across the choir.” When singers are not occupied by worries, he suggested, they may be more ready to experience connection. Singers who, paradoxically, disconnect from “their worries outside of the moment or life outside of the moment” are more likely “to connect to something larger, and really to themselves, and

to the music." He continued, "if you can release fear," group singing can "take up all of your brain's focus and your body's focus," facilitating experiences of connection.

Mr. F sensed connection through singers' physical movements—not necessarily with choreographed movement, he said, "but just when people can release their muscles enough to let their body follow their voice and follow the music." Along with impromptu, natural movements of singers' bodies, reading students' eyes, Mr. F shared, might provide insight into singers' experience of connection. Darting eyes might suggest singers were "not necessarily sharing in that moment," he said; closed eyes or eyes "really focused on the conductor or. . . the audience" might indicate that singers are experiencing connection.

Mr. F discussed connection as synchrony when he described "the way people synchronize through" Randall Thompson's "Alleluia." Recalling rehearsals of that piece at Fairwood North, he said:

> That was a piece I really liked to have them practice feeling the ebb and flow of the lines with each other. I would just sit on the floor, and sometimes have them close their eyes. And that to me really represented that sense of togetherness because you could hear the synchrony, you could see the synchrony, and you could kind of in an intangible way, feel it.

Mr. F said experiences of connection were sometimes stronger when the teacher was not actively facilitating and when students felt ownership over the musical experience. During moments of connection, he described:

> . . . a moment where I feel like I can. . . trust the singers and actually remove myself a little more. Where I feel like I'm just a template, I'm not commanding every moment, and it's just naturally happening because the music is so in them or the connection is so in them.

Mr. F associated connection with singers' increased ownership of the experience and, reciprocally, the teacher's decreased ownership.

Mr. F also saw connection in terms of performers' relationship with the community and with a live audience. At one Liberty Charter school town hall meeting, the student-led band responded to the audience's energy by continuing to play after the song's planned end. He described the scene:

> Everyone was up and dancing and running around the room and trying to moonwalk and doing flips. It was such a good time. [The students] in the moment figured out a vamp on that bassline for five minutes at the end of the song just for people to dance. . . . I was so proud of them. . . . That was the most community engagement I've ever seen, was the entire community just going wild for "Billie Jean."

The band's responsiveness to the audience and the synchrony between the band and the community were, for Mr. F, highlights of connection at Liberty Charter that school year.

Development of Approach to Connection

Mr. F's experiences as a student in Fairwood North High School's choir "completely set the tone" for his ideas about connection during group singing. In high school, his regular experiences of connection led him to seek "that musical high and that connection high" in all choral experiences. "You get this expectation, because you live in a bubble in high school, that this is. . . the high that choir always is." Mr. F explained that "those early experiences and the fact that they continued in a fairly similar fashion all the way through college and beyond, pretty much right up until the pandemic, gave me a very specific sense" of how individuals experience connection in choir. He considered his frequent experiences of connection as representative of "what a good, connected—and I

hate to use the word successful. . . but in every sense of the word including connection—what [a good, connected, successful choir] looks like."

Mr. F later recognized his experiences represented only one form of choral singing. He shared:

> My wife says it ruins me. . . to have been part of such good groups in high school. . . because then my expectation of what people will get out of a choral experience, or what a choral experience will be, is through the roof. My expectation is, you know, seeing the face of God in every performance. It's a little nonsense, and I've come to be self-conscious of that. But it's something I have to own in order to modify it, to serve my current students and singers the best I can.

Mr. F expressed that many individuals might not experience connection as he did, and aiming to replicate his own experiences would not serve his students well.

Mr. F probed and clarified his perspectives on connection based on his teaching in two very different school settings. Fairwood North, the well-resourced community where Mr. F grew up and taught for six years, had a vertically-aligned music program and high school choral ensembles that regularly earned national recognition. Liberty Charter, in contrast, was situated in an underresourced community, and the school had no history of a music program until Mr. F was hired. Few Liberty Charter students had attended elementary or middle schools with consistent music instruction.

Mr. F shared that his approach to connection differed across the school settings, and his views of connection changed over time. "I think I try to force [experiences of connection] less now. I feel like I could get away with forcing it more because of the environment I was in" at Fairwood North. By the time he started teaching there, he said, "To a large extent . . . there was already a culture" of connection. "And because it was

my own high school," he continued, "I had a certain ownership of [in a lower, more booming voice] 'You are part of a long line of Fairwood North choral greatness.' And it was a little nonsense."

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began during his time as a Fairwood North teacher, prompted Mr. F to reconsider his focus on "choral greatness" and his approach to connection. Due to "the fear of literally killing people with singing during the pandemic, and the disconnection that happened with virtual teaching," many students dropped out of the Fairwood North choir program. Mr. F noticed that "for the most part," only the students who exhibited "openness" to connection and had "a very good support system at home seemed to stay in the program." Concluding that the program served only a subset of students well, Mr. F aimed "to change what my expectation is of connection in order to cast a wider net and include more students."

After Mr. F changed schools, he grappled with how he might create connection at Liberty Charter. He eventually found that, "I have to hide the goal [to experience connection] a little more here. . . but I'm starting to see that it is possible." He explained, "to be honest, it's very on and off, whether they're experiencing" connection. Yet, seeing how Liberty Charter students experienced connection had a large impact on him:

> . . . [I felt] very relieved, because you worry that what works in one sense from a fairly traditional choral upbringing may be just a bubbled understanding of psychology. And what we think of [as] the universal might not be. I don't know if there is really a true universal. We don't know. . . . But I'm starting to feel that it is possible.

Mr. F's work at Fairwood North and Liberty Charter shaped his perspective that connection during group singing is possible in varied settings, but individuals in contrasting settings may experience it differently.

Barriers to Creating Connection and Conditions that Created Connection

Data analysis showed that for Mr. F, creating connection required the absence of barriers. He described creating connection as removing obstacles or "dismantling inhibitors," and he shared that reduction of fear or inhibition cleared pathways for connection. Reflecting Mr. F's view that creating connection depends upon removing barriers, here I combine into one section Mr. F's perspectives on conditions that created connection and on barriers to creating connection.

Fear and Vulnerability

Mr. F described students' fear, whether of singing or of sharing one's voice, as a barrier to experiences of connection. Mr. F paraphrased an idea from Will Smith "that I overquote," he said: "fear kills your ability to see beauty." Mr. F said fear could prevent students from seeing music's beauty and "prohibit [them]. . .not only from connecting but just even enjoying" music, an experience that could be difficult for a teacher to witness:

> And so it can be frustrating then and scary as a director, when you think, these kids don't feel anything when they hear a song? How could that be? They must—something must be wrong with them. No. What it is, is there's a block. And that's the fear. And that's when it's been most challenging.

Fear could prevent students from singing at all in choir class. Mr. F described a challenging class period during the second week of school with his largest class, when in a group of 30, only four students were singing:

> I did a restorative circle the next day. And what was shared with me on many notes was, 'It's not that we don't like you or this class, or it's nothing against the material. We are just scared. We are all just scared.'

Mr. F clarified that "many, many, many" students in that one class period described themselves as scared. "That period," he said, when he learned the extent of students' fear, "taught me more about teaching than anything else I've ever done."

Mr. F suggested singing requires vulnerability, and students' fear of being vulnerable in front of others diminished their ability to experience connection. Performing as a singer, he explained, is "somehow much more vulnerable" than listening to music because "you're being asked to represent [the] music in your face and body and mind on stage." The vulnerability required to sing in front of others "can close off a lot of kids," he said. "That's the biggest challenge is getting them to be uninhibited, which you have to be to sing fully, in any way, in any technique."

Mr. F attributed Liberty Charter students' fear of being emotionally vulnerable, in part, to cultural values that discouraged students from being seen as "soft." He shared, "for right reason, there's a lot of nervousness about baring yourself or showing any vulnerability whatsoever." Students' fears of being seen as vulnerable "are not unfounded. . . in the neighborhoods that they live in," because "if you make yourself vulnerable [in those neighborhoods], you're likely gonna get hurt." He commented, "It's something I talk [about] openly now with a lot of students is, they can't enjoy the music unless they can let go of their fear of being seen as soft. And we've started to talk about that as a specific issue." As a result of those conversations, he stated, students were "starting to see [answers to], 'Why can't I enjoy this class? Why, no matter what music

Mr. F hands me, even if it's a song I loved before this, I don't want to be seen enjoying it?'" Mr. F encouraged students to notice and discuss their fear of being vulnerable, aiming to help them experience connection. He saw his encouragement shape the dialogue between students:

> Now we're getting to the point where a guy will say, 'What? Vulnerability is bad because. . . ' this, that, and the other. And then someone else will go, 'Well, you know, but how are you ever supposed to love anything, if you can't make yourself—?' And so they're starting to grapple with these ideas that, oof, we're gonna have to be uncool to experience the full benefits.

Mr. F's perspectives on fear, vulnerability, and connection were shaped by comparing choral music programs in different schools. When he considered why "big, traditional choral programs" are "much more common in wealthy suburbs than they are in other areas," he said, "I'm starting to see that a lot of it seems to be that fear thing." He expressed that students in different settings such as at Fairwood North or Liberty Charter might need different learning experiences to help them be vulnerable during group singing. Contrasting the vulnerability of students "who have been enabled both at home and in vertically-aligned music programs their whole lives" with the experience of students who, while singing, might be feeling vulnerable "for the first time," he explained, it was important to him to create a distinction between the two experiences and the teaching approaches they might require. "The ingredients" needed to help students "embrace that feeling of vulnerability," Mr. F explained, "are sometimes different, even if the end goal is the same."

Though Mr. F saw differences in how vulnerability is experienced in different school settings, he also shared that fear was the "most challenging" barrier or "block" to

connection “across environments.” He recalled students in Fairwood North’s beginning-level choirs who feared singing in front of others and Fairwood North students whose fear kept them from auditioning for ensembles. At Liberty Charter, he said, “the anxiety of singing, which is still a lot of what I deal with, is a big thing in my freshman course.” “That fear of singing definitely inhibits the connection. . . . If you’re afraid of your own voice, then yeah, that’s gonna inhibit, for the time being, their ability to connect.” At Fairwood North, too, students who had never sung in a choir before, “felt very exposed and unbalanced, off balance, because it’s such a different format of what they’re being asked to do the rest of their days in school.” Regardless of the school environment, Mr. F said, “you have to. . . try and educate them all for wherever they are.”

Mr. F shared positive stories about students who were able to “release fear” and become more likely to experience connection or flow. When younger students became less fearful or could “dismantle that inhibitor,” they could “go from closed and shy” to “being the face of the choir program by their senior year.” When students changed in those ways, he said, “it’s a wonderful success story” because “when they rid themselves of that fear and that inhibition, . . . they’re able to fully reap the rewards of connecting with others.” Mr. F actively worked to help students release fear. He frequently talked with students about how to gain confidence in singing and structured several lessons around that goal. He sometimes felt successful as he encouraged students, “Okay, today you sang for five minutes, and tomorrow you’re gonna sing for 10.” Yet Mr. F did not always reach his goals. “I think there are probably as many kids as I try to open up” as there are “slipping under the radar, who have great anxieties. . . who I maybe haven’t

done any of that for." Yet, he said, to "keep doing a good job, I have to believe that that's worth trying to fight for and attain, [to move] past all the fears and musical problems that get in the way of that flow."

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Students' Readiness to Connect

Reflecting on barriers to connection and conditions that create connection, Mr. F pondered why experiencing connection is "so easy for some and not others." He concluded that those who experienced connection more easily did so because their basic human needs had been met. Referencing psychologist Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of human needs, he said, "I embrace the idea that hierarchy of needs [must] be met" before students can experience connection.

Maslow (1943, 1970) asserted that individuals' basic physiological, safety, and social belonging needs must be met before they can realize more complex or "higher" needs for esteem and self-actualization. Mr. F suggested experiences of connection are higher-level needs that require students' basic needs to have already been met. "Often, choir provides that top level need of connection—emotional intelligence, and understanding, artistic expression, and vulnerability," and choral educators must keep in mind, Mr. F expressed, that students' basic needs must be met before such experiences are possible. For teachers, he shared, it could be all too easy to misunderstand what connection requires, thinking simply, "'Well, [connection is] what I'm in the business of,'" while "forgetting that there's a whole scaffolding underneath that that's holding it up."

Mr. F's perspectives on connection and the hierarchy of human needs reflected his observations of students at Fairwood North and Liberty Charter. The experiences of connection he aimed to create at Fairwood North, he realized, "favor people who have less tangible worries," while most students at Liberty Charter, he said, held many tangible worries. Mr. F described several difficult events that occurred in his first year at Liberty Charter. Tragically, a ninth-grade Liberty Charter student was killed by gun violence. In another incident, several Liberty Charter students were "stopped and frisked at the park next door because there was a rape," Mr. F shared, "and those students were in need of some time and space." In another incident, one of Mr. F's choir students had to be hospitalized for one month after an overdose in the school bathroom, and he said, "her friends were a mess." In the span of a few weeks, Mr. F's students mourned the loss of a murdered classmate and had multiple concerns about the safety and wellbeing of themselves or other community members.

Mr. F discussed one Liberty Charter student who, he said, had "none of the hierarchy of needs." She had strained relationships with both parents, and one of her parents was terminally ill. The student's family income, like that of most of his students, Mr. F said, was low enough to qualify for federal nutrition assistance. He shared that it was common for Liberty Charter families to need financial assistance; "even the ones who have quasi-professional jobs don't make nearly enough." He stated that, in general, students with such strains on their basic needs were less prepared to experience connection during singing. In contrast, students at Liberty Charter who "have had parents in. . . more professional jobs, or two parents in the household, or more stability" tended to

be more ready to experience connection, which he described as a painful situation because "we don't want it to be that way." However, students with unmet needs did sometimes experience connection. In the band, Mr. F said, "the lead guitarist, the bassist, the other vocalist all have very unstable lives and are phenomenal musicians, some of the best. . . And they're failing all their classes. . . But they're such joyful kids." He continued, "it's still very possible for them to achieve some wonderful things."

Mr. F communicated that different students' readiness for connection necessitated different approaches to creating connection. The "entry points and the patience required" he said, differed for the typical Liberty Charter student and the average Fairwood North student. In his first year at Liberty Charter, he said, many students did not experience connection. Yet, as trust was built during the year, he saw some students become ready for that experience. He described the change:

> There's a threshold, and I've seen so many kids suddenly pass over it and go from kids who have been *so* difficult to have in class and so difficult to run a rehearsal with, to being my leaders. And I can't pinpoint what made them ready besides maybe time and exposure. They need a lot of time. They need a lot of patience.

Mr. F shared that, with time, patience, and exposure, students with less initial readiness to connect could experience connection.

COVID-19

Mr. F stated that after the COVID-19 pandemic began, students' basic needs were less frequently met, which made experiences of connection more difficult. Fear played a role, too. "Even when we came back in person," he said, a "tangible fear" related to "the nature of singing and COVID" acted as a barrier. As a result, he said "I had to rethink

what my goals were with connection. . . . Maybe we're not going to get to this point," for every student, "but maybe we can get one step higher on that. . . hierarchy of needs for you." He articulated how he aimed to adjust his approach:

> How can we reimagine choir, to not just provide that top part [of the hierarchy of needs], but give you as much as we can provide in the way of tools below it? Or at least give you the tools to think about your situation, to be conscious of what needs of yours are going unmet that keep you from getting to that point?

The strategies Mr. F developed to create connection reflected his view that Maslow's hierarchy of needs drove students' readiness to connect.

Teacher's Preoccupations

Mr. F discussed that his own preoccupations sometimes prevented him from joining in experiences of connection with students. At Liberty Charter, his attention to logistics at concerts prevented him from sharing fully in students' performance experiences. "It used to be [at Fairwood North concerts]" that "all of the delegation I've done, the students we've put in place, the chaperones we've gotten. . . the seating charts are made, everything's done. Let me just focus on connecting and making music." However, in his first year at Liberty Charter, "even though I wanted to go there, because of needing to be much more hands on, especially with sound and stage setup. . . I would be frustrated" by not being able to be present. And "the kids that were closest with me would be ecstatic about a rehearsal or a moment that I just completely missed," he said, because he was thinking about something else or "going on autopilot at the piano." At the concert, students experienced moments of connection Mr. F didn't "know if I can describe," he said, "because I feel like I've missed them."

Mr. F related that Liberty Charter students commented on his anxiety about the spring concert as the performance approached, "Yeah, Mr. F was stressed." Based on "what they've told me," he said, "I definitely felt more doom and gloom leading up to the concert than the kids did. . . . They were apparently fine." But "I hadn't had the brain space to even think about it." Mr. F shared that because of his stress about the spring concert, he was not fully ready to experience connection at the performance.

Mr. F also experienced stress in relation to the same tragic community events that affected his students. He discussed the difficulty of the ninth-grade student's death, including his concern about "kids getting shot in the street" and the fact that it "was a 17-year-old kid who did the shooting." The event clearly impacted Mr. F, and he and his students dedicated the spring concert to the student who passed away. Mr. F also shared that he worried about the fate of the student who had overdosed in the school bathroom:

> a lot of days I was thinking about this student because it was kind of touch-and-go with her. She was, unfortunately, already failing all of her classes and had not garnered a lot of allies in the school. And. . . very few teachers were checking in with her friends or with her family about how she was doing cause she just hadn't connected with anyone yet. So that would constantly be on my mind this spring while she was in the hospital, especially during her class periods, or class periods where I knew her friends were texting her mom or whatever it was.

Sometimes, difficult community events affected Mr. F more than they affected students. "I think those things weighed on my mind maybe even more than theirs. Cause. . . they weren't always aware of what was going on with their classmates." Mr. F's preoccupations with stressful events in the school community could prevent him from being mentally present and open to connection.

Reexamining Conservatory-Style Conducting Practices

Mr. F viewed his formal training as an ensemble conductor as ineffective for supporting experiences of connection. In his high school and undergraduate education and early career, he was taught that conductors should be a conduit for the music, as if "music is God" and "you must respect it." According to what he referred to as the "conservatory mindset," he expressed, it did not matter what methods the conductor used as long as they served the music. However, Mr. F eventually concluded that a conductor-led focus on musical excellence came with a human cost:

> That's the age-old conductor question . . . greatness at what cost? . . . Sometimes we put on—and I put on—pedestals [a lot of conductors] who have pretty nasty ways of getting [people] musically there. But I think you can see in the eyes of the singers when the connection is not actually there.

As his career unfolded, Mr. F no longer believed his role was "to force [singers] to focus on the music." He explained:

> . . . before, I thought the music could be a central focus we all are around. . . . [Now] I realize. . .at least for what I do, in order to be successful, it just cannot be at the expense of [elements] unrelated to music.

Mr. F criticized the notion that "nothing of yours could be bigger than. . . the music" because, he said, "that's assuming a little bit that people's problems are fairly trivial." Many Liberty Charter students' problems, Mr. F emphasized, were not trivial. He shared the example of a student who did not sing in class all year. One day, unexpectedly, the student began weeping in class because a song reminded him of his cousin, who had died from gun violence weeks before. For many students, Mr. F suggested, given the challenges they faced, prioritizing the music above everything else simply was not realistic.

Mr. F said that rather than prioritizing the music above all else, he now prioritized "solid relationships, trust systems. . . and attempts to try and remove. . . non-musical barriers." He contrasted his approach with one of a conductor who is futilely "yelling at someone to open them up," or being "punitive for being disconnected." Mr. F aimed to "be a little more holistic," asking, "Why are they disconnected? And what can I do? What is in my purview to do something about it?" Mr. F expressed that "in the ideal world," choral leaders would work to uncover why singers were feeling "disconnected," then help remove barriers to their experiences of connection.

Mr. F described his change from an approach that prioritizes musical goals to one that places students at the center:

> I think it's a common thing for young people who come from programs like I did to go through this transition of 'musical excellence is all that matters, and I'm going to dedicate my life to that'—and then, as I think about it now, people are all that matter. And the music is a tool. One of many.

As Mr. F focused his teaching more on people, using music as just one tool, he acknowledged that it was "painful. . . letting go of music" as the primary pathway for connection. "I love music personally, and I love choral music specifically. . . . But it doesn't mean it's the only tool that works on everyone else with their thousands of other experiences in life." Describing his shift in mindset, he said, "What I would say now is that I think of myself as more of an educator now than I do a musician." He explained his approach, "I think that means the choir is no longer an ensemble but a community and needs to be served in a community-minded way."

Conductor's Cult of Personality

Mr. F discussed the possibility for choral conductors to "create connection in a kind of unhealthy way" if they develop a "cult of personality." He explained, "I think connection is a lightning rod, and you can direct it towards the music or you can direct it towards personality, too." He described seeing undergraduate students in a collegiate choir who were:

> . . . so desperate—and I remember feeling this way—to please [the conductor] and show [him] how connected they are. And it's a bit unhealthy how much they rely on his positive feedback. . . . His students are devastated if they don't get this attention in this moment. . . . Or [they] feel lesser than, or [feel] that certain students are favorited.

When connection is directed toward the personality of the conductor, he explained, the experience "detaches you from reality and yourself a little bit." He commented, "I don't know if I'm too jaded," but "I've just seen so much artificial connection. . . in the choir world."

Mr. F had seen conductors who enacted a "cult of personality" draw divisions between singers who experienced connection and those who did not, indirectly communicating to singers, "if you're not feeling it in every moment, then you must hate this and must not belong here." Mr. F worked to avoid such divisions, he shared. "I want to be in [a] welcoming place. So even when I see [students experiencing] that connection, I try and not make my whole life about those eight students, because otherwise no one else will ever join them."

Though Mr. F sought to avoid unhealthy, conductor-centered means of creating connection, he shared that earlier in his career he had engaged in similar practices. "The

cult of personality is often very strong with choral directors, and I've been guilty of it, too, especially early in my time at my previous school." While teaching at Fairwood North, he said, sometimes "I was having the kids serve my. . . musical needs and ego needs." He continued:

> I definitely loved being the fun, funny, energetic teacher, and didn't hate that students wanted to impress me or wanted to show that they were buying in. And that's not a bad thing always. You do want to motivate your students in some way. But I think I'm seeing now that you can't depend on it because that leaves kids out.

Mr. F moved away from many conductor-centered leadership practices that he viewed as barriers to creating experiences of connection.

Essence of Creating Connection: Uncovering Students' Organic Experiences of Togetherness

As Mr. F aimed to create connection in ways that best served his students, he expressed the essence of creating connection: *uncovering students' organic experiences of togetherness*. The essence of Mr. F's approach was intertwined with his development as an educator and his interactions with students at Fairwood North and Liberty Charter. In this section, I share how Mr. F's attention to students' needs and self-reflection on his own teaching shaped the essence of his approach.

Discovering That Connection is Not Always Under the Teacher's Control

The essence of Mr. F's experience of creating connection evolved over time as he learned about his students. Mr. F shared that in his early years of teaching, he believed he had significant control over whether students experienced connection. "I think a lot of musicians do feel this ownership over their ensembles," he explained, "as if it's us doing

all the work." Now later in his career, he said, "I don't think everything's as in our control as I previously" thought. "There's a ceiling of what I can do." He concluded, "what I thought was always connection as sparked by me was. . . just setting up the pieces." He continued, "sometimes the pieces line up and sometimes they don't. . . . I don't think I could force the connection." Instead, he shared, connection is sometimes created by students.

Students Experiencing Connection Independently of their Teacher

Mr. F noted that students' experiences of connection sometimes occurred when he was not actively leading the student group. Students in one Fairwood North ensemble, he said, would "start to go into those moments of connection with each other when I wasn't looking and just kind of caught them." For instance, students spontaneously sang pieces that were not in the group's official repertoire, sang on the bus, or sang together when Mr. F was not present. He explained, "when it wasn't necessary, they were still seeking that feeling." Based on his observations, he began to consider "as a specific thing" the phenomenon of students building connection without their teacher present.

At Liberty Charter, too, students experienced connection without Mr. F's direct involvement. Students in the band created connection independently, he shared, when at the town hall meeting they spontaneously responded to the crowd by creating a vamp on "Billie Jean." At a pizza party Mr. F threw for the band and the after-school singing group, he said, the students played music, danced, and sang karaoke for an hour and a half, "just yelling songs together. . . belting completely off key. . . really enjoying themselves and completely uninhibited." Students made the musical choices, "and they

put on a few Spanish songs, and we were all bachataing, and it was wonderful," he said. "It's a good feeling. . . when they don't feel like they're being watched—their ability to let loose and actually form those relationships." Mr. F perceived that when those students danced and loudly sang karaoke at the pizza party, they experienced connection by losing their inhibitions without him actively leading.

Mr. F shared that former students' social media posts showed that their experiences of connection rarely involved their teacher. When his former Fairwood North students posted about the successes of the school music ensembles, he said, "90% of the content was about them." During the entire school year, Mr. F said, he saw only one post that mentioned a teacher. The musical experiences students shared were "about those individuals and about their friends and about that connection between themselves," not about connection as facilitated by their teachers.

Similarly, at Liberty Charter, Mr. F saw that recently-graduated students experienced connection without his knowledge. He noted that during the last few days of school, choir students expressed that they were "sad to be leaving each other," and some graduating students created positive posts on social media "about the music department." He reacted with surprise, "I didn't know you were building this culture by my own back, behind your teacher's back!" Mr. F suggested students had been experiencing connection through the music program he led, but not in ways he had seen directly.

The student-led band at Liberty Charter, which experienced remarkable success and connection independent of Mr. F's direct involvement, seemed to have a large impact on how Mr. F viewed connection. The recently-graduated student leader of the band had

posted on social media band photos, “sometimes with me,” Mr. F said, “but more often without,” suggesting to him the students did not view his presence as integral to their success. Throughout the year, Mr. F shared, sometimes the band would rehearse after school hours without him knowing. “They would just meet, you know, trespass after school.” The band members, he said, “felt so much ownership of the creation of the ensemble that I only needed to help in the margins.” He said, “I’m very proud of that. . . it was all about their initiative.” The success of the student-led band, Mr. F expressed, was a highlight of his school year:

> That was by far, empirically, the most successful ensemble. An ensemble that wasn’t a class led by me and wasn’t even, didn’t even have a formal time slot, to me was the most successful and connected, and became the best of friends, and became the most connected while making music, in a pretty obvious way. So I was questioning everything I do when you see that.

Making Space for Connection Independent of the Teacher

Mr. F said he had begun to orchestrate ways for students to learn without him present. When several Liberty Charter students were interested in learning drums, he worked with them during lunch periods. He realized that “to get them to practice, I just needed to not make them feel so self-conscious in front of me.” He would sometimes fabricate a story that he “needed to go do something in the staff room,” leaving the drummer and their friend in the music room. When “I’d come back,” he said, “they’d have the beat. And they’d be celebrating with a little circle of people around the drums.” When he was present in the room, however, “they would feel more resistant,” he shared. “They needed some space.”

The concert program Mr. F created for Liberty Charter's Spring Chorus Concert reflected his approach of stepping back to offer students space rather than centering himself as a leader. Mr. F included five color photos in the program. He was visible in just one photo in which his face was partially covered. Student band members, the guest poet, and chorus members' faces were situated front and center. The program's layout also reflected how Mr. F situated his own role. Several pages into the program, after the student-illustrated cover, the listing of songs, solo singers' names, band members' names, chorus members names, the student master of ceremonies' name, and the choral texts, I was able to locate Mr. F's name, written discreetly at the bottom of a list entitled "Arts Staff." During most of the concert, too, Mr. F did not give himself a formal role as the director. Students welcomed the audience to the concert and introduced their solo song performances while Mr. F, wearing jeans, sneakers, and a t-shirt with the neighborhood's logo, ran sound and provided accompaniment.

Mr. F explained how his goals for the next school year made space for students' organic experiences of togetherness. "I'm trying to be more holistic with how I think about directing. . . . My goal is more and more to pull back and let students create those bonds with the music in a more organic way, not just from my vision." Mr. F said that though creating connection was a consistent value for him wherever he taught, creating connection was different depending on the context, and at this point in his career, he worked less actively to control connection. Instead, he aimed to *uncover students' organic experiences of togetherness* and clear space for students to build their own experiences of connection. Having worked to understand students' readiness to

experience connection at both Fairwood North and Liberty Charter, he learned that his goal was to facilitate connection by stepping back and providing students with more independence so they could generate their own experiences of togetherness through musical growth.

Ms. A

When Ms. A addresses singers, she stands with tall, stable posture and speaks with precision and purpose. She communicates using few filler words and keeps singers' attention with a slow yet varied speaking pace. Ms. A's consistent eye contact, frequent smiles, and relaxed presence contribute to her warm, welcoming manner. She conveys kindness, encouragement, and support.

When Ms. A teaches musical content, her energy transforms into a more extroverted form. She embodies the music through her ringing, expressive singing voice and with claps, snaps, stomps, and conducting cues that reflect her expertise in gospel music. As is common in the gospel tradition, Ms. A often teaches without notation. Musical interactions are continuous as she layers in vocal parts one by one. Without pausing the choir or accompanist, she inserts verbal instructions between phrases and sings pitches as needed, helping singers become more secure with each repetition. Ms. A moves to the music and sings with committed expressiveness. One senses that she is fully immersed in the musical and teaching experience.

She begins each rehearsal by sharing the plan, helping singers understand their aim to make progress toward an end goal. Remaining pleasant and conversational, Ms. A does not hesitate to make known her high standards for singers' work. "I need you to give

more," she urges. "Come on with some power!" Or, she states calmly, looking singers in the eye with a smile, "Yes, but we have to sing." When she hears inaccurate pitches, she responds quickly, "Oh! Let's do that! Let's do that again." She offers feedback as the singers loop the phrase, "Better!" Ms. A intersperses her teaching of repertoire with vocal pedagogy lessons, and she regularly reminds singers of what effort and techniques are needed for their optimal performance.

Connection as Experienced

Ms. A experienced connection during group singing as unmistakable and intense:

> It's like when the sound is washing over you. You can feel the room change. That's the best way to describe it. You can feel the room change when everybody locks in. And not only just the notes lock, but the hearts lock. You can feel that. It's palpable.

Ms. A described the Garrison High School Choir performance that had the strongest experience of connection as "united" and "in sync." The experience affected everyone involved, Ms. A believed, including the singers, herself, and audience members. When that kind of connection occurred she said, it "changes not just the sound. It changes the whole atmosphere where we are."

Ms. A set goals for her students based on the power of experiences of connection. She reminded students that their goal was "to reach the hearts." Before performances, she told students, "It's bigger than us, whatever we're getting ready to sing." She shared that students recognized and responded to experiencing connection during performance with surprise, joy, and pride. "When they get done, they like, 'Aw, that was us! Did we do that?! We did that?! That's our voices?!'" After the Garrison High School Choir's first performance of the year, Ms. A shared, her students felt energized and almost in disbelief

of their impact. She remembered that students excitedly reacted, “I can’t believe we’re that good.” And in that moment, Ms. A said, “as a teacher, I’m on the sidelines, jumping up and down like crazy, like, ‘Yes, you guys get it! You get it!’”

Ms. A viewed synchrony of movement as part of connection. In one interview, she cited a profoundly inspiring performance of a collegiate choir she had seen. Ms. A described the singers’ synchrony vividly, as if she were still in the room with them. She said that audience members could see the singers:

> once they really get into the vibe of a song, you can see them sway. And the sway wasn’t . . . choreographed for them. But it was just a sway like, we are all into this moment. And some people had a faster sway, some of them had a slower sway, but they were all swaying. They were all locked in. And to the point where we in the audience, even though we were sitting, we found ourselves swaying with them. Because that’s what we saw them doing, and we were so engulfed in their sound.

It was amazing, Ms. A stated, and “I got chills telling you about it.” “You can *feel* it,” she emphasized. “And you can see it.”

Ms. A associated physical sensations of goosebumps and chills with connection during group singing. Another physical experience of connection reminded her of a 20th-century cartoon. As she described connection experienced by Garrison High School and Lee Community Honor Choir students in performance, she explained, “You know how Jerry would hit Tom on the head, and his head will go, boy-yoy-yoy-yoy-yoing, with that little—[she gestured with both hands quickly moving out farther and farther from the sides of her head.]?” She laughed. Ms. A continued, describing the phenomenon as a shared feeling everyone in a singing group experiences together:

> I feel like when we singing in tune and everything’s locked, and that boy-yoy-yoy-yoy-yoing feeling, feel like we all feel it. I want to say I’ve been

> in rehearsals where people have been like [turning toward one other], 'Y'all, do you *feel* that?!' I've experienced that. And I love it when my kids experience it because that's when it's real. It's when you know it's real.

At one point, Ms. A contrasted music with other classes in school, explaining that art and math class do not have the same impact as music, because unlike artistic or mathematical activities, "singing reaches the soul." She continued, "and by my music, I can change your soul. I can change your life. I can help you get through whatever it is." This phenomenon cannot happen in math class, Ms. A expressed. She explained, laughing, "Never has 'two plus two' made me have some feelings." But music's distinct ability to create experiences of connection, she said, is profound. "We teach music. The greatest job in the world. Y'all can talk about all that other stuff you do, that's fine and dandy. When you get done, it's the music that's gon' get you through."

Development of Approach to Connection

When I asked Ms. A about how her approach to creating connection developed over time, she immediately replied, "Well, I'm a gospel choir director first." She viewed her values and practices related to connection as stemming directly from her extensive background in gospel music. When discussing connection, she referred to physical synchrony and the gospel choir tradition of rocking or swaying in sync:

> That's natural to the style of music that I'm most comfortable with. One person sways, we all sway. One person claps, we all clap. . . . Everybody has to clap at the same time so that we look like a group and we're together.

For Ms. A, connection was ingrained in the musical practices she had been immersed in

almost all her life. Focusing on creating connection was a natural outgrowth of her experiences singing and leading gospel music in church.

Conditions that Created Connection

The following three themes, heart and soul, drive for accomplishment, and responding to singers' readiness embody the pathways Ms. A used to create connection during group singing. Each theme took on strong salience in the data analysis and was present in multiple forms throughout the data. The themes acted as vital elements of Ms. A's philosophical outlook on creating connection and her teaching in action.

Heart and Soul

The terms heart and soul were central to Ms. A's perspectives on creating connection. She described connection as the simultaneous locking of musical elements and hearts. She told students that as performers, "our goal is to reach the hearts" of audience members. Further, she believed, "Singing reaches your soul," and when singers connect with each other and the audience, "We connect souls." The conceptual ideas of reaching and uniting hearts and souls guided Ms. A's communication about creating connection; she explicitly used those concepts to help students understand the aims of group singing.

Drive for Accomplishment

Ms. A infused her rehearsal processes with an energetic drive for musical accomplishment, and she expressed that connection is more likely to occur when singers work hard to reach a goal. She regularly aimed to help Garrison students "put in the work" required for successful and connected group singing. Ms. A shared that Lee

Community Honor Choir (LCHC) singers were more likely than Garrison singers to work hard, to learn their parts, and to approach group singing with an attitude that "we come here to work." Their embrace of hard work as part of the group singing process, Ms. A believed, made connection more likely to occur.

Ms. A's emphasis on a *drive for accomplishment* derived from her undergraduate music program, where she participated in what she described as "probably the best group singing that I've done." Her collegiate choir conductor focused on repetition and refinement in rehearsal "because he wanted us to get it right." This instructor taught her that reaching musical goals was imperative even when the challenge of the rehearsal process felt tedious. The hard work required, Ms. A stated, helped create connection in the form of unity, togetherness, or "getting everybody on the same page."

> We tryin' to accomplish a mission. We *have* to, we *have* to get it right. And those moments, I'll never forget those moments, because I feel like it was during those times that I really, really got to understand about singing in a group. . . . It's tedious work to get everybody on the same page. But it's so rewarding once you do. . . .

When Ms. A led groups, her drive toward improvement steered the rehearsal process. She began by describing the day's rehearsal goals, and her regular feedback helped singers work to improve pitch and rhythm accuracy, expressiveness, and tone quality. Singers' progress toward group goals sometimes created a positive feedback loop of gradually increasing challenge and accomplishment, which accompanied connection. Ms. A described her interactions with singers at Garrison High School when they experienced connection:

> As a director, that [connection] encourages me to put even more into it. So it's like if they start at level five, okay, well, I'm gonna start at a seven. But if they

> give me level seven back, all right, then I'm going to a 10. If they give me 10 back, then I'm going even further. . . . We're all in this constant push and pull of each other so we can keep going higher to the next level.

The drive for accomplishment was sometimes a struggle at Garrison. The students had experienced connection at their very successful, first concert performance in December, and though Ms. A expected students' energy and momentum to continue upward, instead, she said, "it went sideways." She described the strategy she developed after the December concert to help motivate students to sing: "every day we. . . focus on what we've got to accomplish." To create connection after motivation waned, Ms. A drew singers back to the goals at hand and aimed toward accomplishment.

Responding to Singers' Readiness

The interactive and escalating responses Ms. A engaged in with Garrison High School singers represented another path to creating connection, responding to singers' readiness to experience connection. As she taught at Garrison, led the Lee Community Honor Choir, and worked with church singers, Ms. A crafted rehearsals based on what the individuals in front of her needed, and she changed plans in the moment to respond to what she sensed in the rehearsal room.

When I observed Ms. A leading a choir in the church where she also served as a singer, it was the choir's first day back together after many months apart due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the rehearsal, Ms. A described her sensitive approach to leading that group that day:

> It's a whole lot of [inaccurate] notes that I let fly that rehearsal--that I didn't really harp on. Because for a lot of those people, they are delicate, you hear me? Tender people. [laughs] . . . They haven't sang in over two years. And I didn't want to be

> too hard on them and then they not come back. Cause that defeats my goal. I need them to want to be here.

The next week at that same choir rehearsal, Ms. A explained, she spent more energy working on the choir's accuracy, but still not too much, given that they were volunteer singers who hadn't sung in a choir for two years. Even still, within that group some singers served as designated leaders, and Ms. A felt they needed to know their part solidly and accurately. She was "tougher on them." Ms. A sensed singers' states of mind and their needs, measured their needs alongside her musical goals, and, accordingly, asked of singers the focus and attention to precision that were most appropriate for them in that moment.

At Garrison High School, when Ms. A realized some students were not ready to work on the goals she had set forth, she responded to their readiness level:

> So there were days where I went to really focus on the music, but they weren't in that headspace. And so because they weren't, then I couldn't push the music as hard as I would have wanted to. And I would have to do something else.

On one particular day, as a Garrison choir class began, she found every student seemed very upset about "some type of issue." Quickly determining she would not be able to teach her planned lesson effectively, she instead engaged students in "self-care activities." Ms. A believed this sensitivity to singers' readiness to connect was vital for choral leaders, especially when singers seemed to be struggling:

> As conductors, directors, we have to be mindful of who we dealing with. I don't want to push you from a broken place. That doesn't make me feel good, and that doesn't make you feel better, whatever you got going on.

Ms. A explained at times singers were so distraught they could not experience connection through group singing. Describing a choir student whose entire family, tragically, had been in a fatal car accident, Ms. A asked, "How do I get somebody to sing when they whole family just died? What's the motivation?" By showing sensitivity to singers' needs in the moment and balancing her rehearsal goals with singers' state of mind, she might pave a way for connection at a later time.

Barriers to Creating Connection

Ms. A shared her experiences of barriers to connection among Garrison student singers, including singing culture, connection to the school and its music program, and socioeconomic challenges. For Ms. A, it appeared, singing culture related directly to students' motivation to sing. Socioeconomic challenges also influenced students' motivation to sing. Ms. A shared that all three barriers were in play with students at Garrison High School.

Singing Culture

For Ms. A, a group's singing culture influenced their ability to connect. She contrasted the singing culture of Lee Community Honor Choir (LCHC) with that of the Garrison High School Choir, indicating that students in LCHC "love to sing" and had come from a background of singing. LCHC, an auditioned community group, garnered members from high schools throughout the metropolitan area. The most recent class of LCHC seniors were all college-bound with music-related scholarships. When LCHC students arrived at rehearsal, Ms. A said, they were ready to go. "I don't have to pull on them to sing." She stated that Garrison students, on the other hand, approached choir

class with the perspective, “If we sing, fine; if we don’t, fine. . . . [They] sing because this is the class they got put in.” Garrison students “just don’t have a culture of singing. They don’t come from a community of singing.” In Ms. A’s view, students who came from a singing culture were motivated to sing; those who did not come from a singing culture were less motivated, and singing was not as important for them.

The absence of a singing culture does not mean that the group is “bad,” Ms. A emphasized, but simply that they do not come from a culture of singing and can find it difficult to build one. On some days, Ms. A shared, Garrison choir students’ motivation to sing was so low the students did not participate in any singing activities during the entire class time. Despite the challenges, Ms. A believed that over time, a culture of singing could grow at Garrison. She considered it part of her job to keep working with the students to create that culture and eventually, she said, to help them “love to sing and love choir.”

Connection to the School and its Music Program

Ms. A believed students’ motivation and singing culture related to the history of Garrison High School’s music program. The fact that the school had not had any music program in decades, she explained, lowered Garrison students’ motivation to sing. As Ms. A worked to build a culture of singing, she called on students to build a relationship with the culture of the school. In December before their concert, Ms. A and the other arts teachers told the students, “when you get to perform today, when you get to sing today, you’re not only singing for yourself, but we are inviting people to the culture of this school, we are helping to establish that culture.” She believed students succeeded in

establishing a school culture while experiencing connection during the December concert. “All the kids took some ownership into that and really got into representing not only themselves, but really taking on the representation of the entire school. It was really beautiful to see them connect in that way.” By working to build their school culture, Garrison choir students connected to each other and the school community as they performed.

Socioeconomic Challenges

In Ms. A’s experience, the ability to build a singing culture also related to singers’ socioeconomic challenges, including living with endemic poverty and frequent exposure to crime. Garrison, a neighborhood school, is located in a zip code with a median household income of $32,607 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), and 99% of Garrison’s students qualified for free or reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Ms. A believed crime and violence in the neighborhood were barriers to students’ motivation. Because Garrison is an underserved school in an underresourced neighborhood where students hear gunshots regularly, she talked with students about surpassing others’ expectations of them and seeing past their local circumstances. “Every day,” she said, “we talk about the connecting and growing and beating the stereotypes, beating the naysayers.” She aimed to “try to help inspire them, try to help them to keep going further, to try to help them see what we can be.” Yet, Ms. A said, because of students’ ongoing poverty and exposure to gun violence, her students feel “very little hope.” “And how do you build a choir culture,” she asked, “when there’s little hope?”

Organization of the School Program

Ms. A identified three barriers to connection related to the organization of Garrison's choir program. The first was the fact that the program included no seniors. At the beginning of the year, the choir included students from all four grades. Then school personnel decided all seniors would be "exempt" from the arts programs, and "we just looked up one day and they were out of our program." A lot of the strong singers, Ms. A said, were seniors, and removing them from the choir after the year started weakened the group. Ms. A lamented the fact that juniors who had developed strong singing skills would have to leave the program in their last year and that no student would get to sing for all four years. The exclusion of seniors acted as a barrier to her facilitation of connection in the choir.

The second organizational barrier involved enrollment of students who did not want to sing. At the start of the school year, Ms. A encouraged students who were enrolled in the class but did not want to sing to switch to a different arts elective. Many of them did. What started as a group of about 45 eventually turned into a group of 13. The majority of those students, Ms. A said, had elected "music" but were more interested in music production than in singing.

Still, some students who did not want to sing remained in the choir. Ms. A shared that some students were placed in choir but told by school staff that because they were also enrolled in the theater technology program, they did not need to sing during choir class. Ms. A identified this challenge, "But what am I doing with you while you're in my class, though?" She said that those students would sometimes bring "negative energy"

and be “a distraction to those who actually want” to sing. For Ms. A, the ongoing question of whether, on a given day, the student would sing with the group or distract other students detracted from her goals for the group’s work.

The third barrier involved the organization of performances by the school’s staff. The choir’s December concert performance took place in the afternoon, at the end of the school day. Because the organizers had not timed the performances in advance, Ms. A said, when the choir was ready to perform its final song featuring an original rap, not enough time was left to perform the whole song. From the stage, just before the song started, Ms. A had to tell a student performer that he could only do one verse of the rap he had written. After the concert, students were frustrated with the unexpected shortening of their performance. “We did all this work for nothing,” they responded. The experience of not performing their final song as they designed it, Ms. A said, nullified the sense of accomplishment the group had been moving toward. “You work hard to say, ok, we gon’ do this, it’s gon’ be amazing. And then you get these other things. . . that are beyond your control. [The students] get knocked back down.”

Essence of Creating Connection: “I Gotchu”

The essence of creating connection for Ms. A was embodied by support for singers, or “having their back.” This approach related to choir as family. “I build all my programs as family,” she explained. “I constantly harp about family.” Her approach to building family involved investing energy in getting to know students, helping guide how students supported each other, and conveying to students that they have her unwavering

support. Ms. A aimed to communicate to singers that that, "Whatever you need, *I gotchu*."

Ms. A believed singers should support one other as family, too. She reinforced to students the supportive nature of choir when students had disagreements. On one occasion when two students were arguing, she explained, "Y'all, we can't do this. We have enough people in the world to fight, enough people outside to fight. Y'all can't fight each other." She believed the Garrison choir could provide an environment of belonging and support that students might not have available elsewhere. Students needed to know, she said, that their peers, "these people who are in this wichu, they got your back."

Ms. A enacted her value of family and support by getting to know students, showing love for them, and meeting their needs as much as possible, whatever form that might take. "If that's us going to get bras cause you don't have a bra, I gotchu. If that's us going to get pants cause you don't have pants, or shoes, I gotchu. I *gotchu*." Ms. A acknowledged she could not provide students with everything they needed, for instance, when a student needed mental health services or medication, or when, for example, one student asked her to be their godparent. It was hard for her, she shared, when students had needs she could not meet. But no matter the circumstance, she continued, "I do try to show love to everybody. And I think that's what I can offer these kids. Is somebody loves you, and I got your back. . . . I'll be here for you." The essence of Ms. A's approach to creating connection was familial support embodied by the phrase, "I gotchu."

Mr. E

Mr. E teaches in a large windowless classroom with high ceilings, choral risers, and no chairs. Almost every wall, shelf, and cabinet is covered with vocal pedagogy posters, charts of current students' singing ranges, photos of Falcon Point High School choirs, printouts of silly memes, pennants from colleges alumni have attended, and playful objects including dozens of rubber ducks and one large paper-mâché spoon. On the large whiteboard are neatly-written plans for each of the six choir classes that day alongside reminders of upcoming performances, festivals, and fundraisers.

During each 46–49-minute class period, Mr. E projects a slide presentation that guides students through a regular routine. Each class begins with voice-building games and exercises then moves to repertoire work, sightreading, discussion of a quote of the day, then a return to repertoire work. As Mr. E leads activities, he intersperses friendly questions about students' days, follows up about their recent activities or absences, jokes with individuals and the larger group, and solicits their ideas about class activities.

Mr. E regularly invites students to share individual perspectives and personalities. Student leaders take roll and deliver announcements. Student volunteers read aloud his chosen quote(s) of the day and discuss the quote's application to their lives and their work as singers. Many students raise hands and offer responses to the quote as Mr. E sits on the back row of risers next to students and guides the discussion with follow up questions. Mr. E's pacing is brisk and efficient, yet relaxed and conversational. Though the energy and personality of each group is different, in each class, students appear attentive, comfortable, and engaged in the group's work.

Connection as Experienced

For Mr. E, connection during group singing involved togetherness and unity. He believed that "everything we do in a choral rehearsal. . . is set up to unify us." He used daily voice building (which he formerly called warm up) to allow singers to first "work our individual voices," then focus "on our blend. . . so that we get one cohesive sound." He said that blending in choir can be seen as an "analogy for life" because a choral educator's central aim is helping others move from individuality to unity. "The whole point of what we do," he stated, "is to make one art through many people."

Mr. E expressed that students' emotional engagement with the music helped create connection. Often, singers experienced connection when their "emotions overwhelm[ed]," when "the tingly feeling happens," or when they were so overcome by the text and music that they cried. Mr. E related one student's description stating that every few weeks, the choir would have "our 'Cry Day'" when students would cry during a moment of connection to the music or the text. Mr. E described his student's idea of a "Cry Day" as "that day where everybody is ready for the emotional experience of whatever the song is."

Mr. E shared that such experiences of connection occurred more often in rehearsal than in performance. Yet, he and members of the Falcon Point Select Singers experienced connection alongside audience members at a statewide music conference performance in January, soon before data collection began for this study. At that performance, the choir's and audience's experiences of connection had collided, he said, and he and the singers could sense that the audience "wanted us to be amazing."

Reflecting on the experience weeks later, Mr. E shared that that performance and working with that group of singers might be the top highlight of his career. At the end of the conference performance, for the students, "to a person, there was this joy, this innate happiness about the work that they'd done." Mr. E described a "palpable love" in the room during the performance—love for music making, love within the group of performers, and "love of the audience for us." He added, "I don't know how to quantify that. If I could bottle it and spray it on people, I would."

Development of Approach to Connection

"I love music," Mr. E said, "but I like the connection the most, the way people come together through singing." Mr. E's experiences of connection, including a moment he experienced as a high school singer, inspired him to become a choral leader, he shared. In one rehearsal at an All-State Festival, as the music built into a powerful crescendo, "I felt like I was out of body for a second. . . like I was floating above." Taken aback, he turned to the singer next to him and said, "What was that?!. . . That was really weird." After that "magical" moment, he thought, "This choral music thing's pretty cool." Mr. E said, "I still tell that story to my students. And I tell them to keep on the lookout for it, because that moment is just waiting for them to find."

Mr. E shared that his approach to connection was different in his 17th year of teaching, at the time of this study, than at the start of his career. Earlier in his career he used to be satisfied with teaching primarily musical elements of pieces, including the pitches, rhythms, and dynamics. At that time, "the superficial mattered more than the depth." He said that in recent years, however, "I find it less rewarding to just teach notes

and rhythms and crescendo here and decrescendo here. I'd rather be, 'What is the feeling behind this and why?' I like the why more than the what now." From the start of his career, Mr. E's interest in creating connection shaped his teaching philosophy. Yet only after many years in the classroom did Mr. E focus on the deeper, more emotional elements of musical experience that he believed facilitate connection best.

Conditions that Created Connection

For Mr. E, four conditions helped create connection during group singing. Singers' sense of togetherness, which he framed as home and belonging, his own responsiveness to students, discussions of choral text, and hard work helped create connection. I discuss Mr. E's experiences of these four conditions below.

Home and Belonging

When asked about creating connection, Mr. E discussed how he helped singers experience the Falcon Point High School choir program as a home and a place to belong. He aimed to explicitly center those values: "We're gonna name it, and we're gonna live up to it," he said. "It's actually our mantra." Mr. E placed a sign on the classroom door reading, "A place to belong." He shared as classroom artifacts the plastic wristbands he gave to each singer at the start of the year. On the outside of each orange wristband, white letters read "A Place to Belong," and on the inside, embossed letters read, "Welcome Home." Mr. E shared that the letters on the inside were concealed purposely so students could feel them but not see them. "Because I tell them," he said, "Home is not a place, it's something you feel."

Mr. E explicitly discussed with students the value of belonging, and he encouraged them to help make the choir program a place where everyone felt at home. He used this value to guide students' interactions. "We've set this up as a place to belong," he said. And "if there's every anything that's out of place," such as a student mistreating another student in the choir program, he continued, "I can point to that. . . collective commitment." He explained to students that they might not agree with another student, but "you have to allow them to have a space here where every person can be a part. . . .The treatment you have of other people in our room matters."

The idea of belonging permeated students' conversations, too. As part of a class discussion about why their statewide conference performance felt successful, one student shared, "we've all really found a home here in this choir." Mr. E shared an artifact of a podcast featuring another Falcon Point choir student. During the podcast interview, the student said that even though he had been in choir less than one year, "I feel like I found a place to belong, essentially. And I feel like I'm loved."

Mr. E acknowledged that the concept of the Falcon Point choir program as home was based in part on his own personal background. As a Falcon Point High School alumnus who grew up in the area, bought a home there, met his spouse in the high school choir, and taught his own child as a singer in the Falcon Point choir program, the program served as home for Mr. E on multiple levels—including his path to become the choral director. When Mr. E was an undergraduate music education student, the Falcon Point choir teacher unofficially invited him to take over the high school position upon the teacher's retirement, which would coincide with Mr. E's graduation. Unexpectedly, the

teacher passed away before his intended retirement date, and by the time Mr. E graduated, another teacher held the Falcon Point position. Mr. E taught for 12 years in other schools (11 of them at the middle and intermediate schools in Falcon Point School District) until the teacher retired. When Mr. E began the high school teaching role, it felt like a long-awaited homecoming.

The first performance Mr. E led at the high school reflected the unfolding of his path; the fall concert's theme was "home." The choice of theme was purposeful, he shared. "I was like, 'This is where I was meant to be. I wanted to be the teacher here, so I'm home.'" At the start of that school year, Mr. E asked every singer to create a 30-second video describing what "home" meant to them; he played edited versions of those videos during a portion of the performance. During the concert, he encouraged audience members to post on social media their interpretations of "home." For Mr. E, being "home" at Falcon Point High School was personal, and his experience led him to openly invite others to find their own experience of home within the program.

Nearly five years later, at the statewide conference performance, "home" continued as a central theme. One of the concert pieces, written by a commissioned composer, used Mr. E's own poem. The students sang Mr. E's words, including the lines, "There's nowhere else I'd choose to stand/. . . Oh take me back to home once more/. . . For I have found that home at last." Mr. E said that as the concert approached, in moments of "divine intervention," he dreamt about elements of the performance. After dreaming about the shape of the letters "H-O-M-E," Mr. E shared the dream with the students who then decided, he said, to create the shape of the those letters on the risers.

"To us it meant, 'Yeah, let's show the world that we are home. And let's show everybody. And to them that was really meaningful.'"

Mr. E also discussed the significance of having taught the juniors and seniors in the group when they were fifth and sixth graders, when he taught at the district's intermediate school. Having known those students for so long, especially the seniors, helped the performance feel like a homecoming. Students' understanding of the text's meaning to Mr. E also played a role. It "meant the world to the kids" that the piece "was something that I had my fingerprint on." The singers who knew Mr. E as fifth graders even chose to sing the piece with his text at graduation because, as Mr. E described it, "they wanted to sing that song as their goodbye to the school."

Responding to Students' Energy

Mr. E identified responding to the energy in the room as an important element of creating connection. "You always respond to the climate of the culture of the room. You can feel the way a situation is." To help him respond to students effectively, Mr. E noted how they entered the classroom. He asked students to greet him at the beginning of each class by saying hi, and if they liked, giving a fist bump, high five, or handshake. "And I explained it to them, I said, that's not for you, that's for me. It lets me know where you're at that day and tell us [*sic*] what you're bringing to rehearsal."

Mr. E shared that he adjusted class activities and discussions based on his sense of students' energy, mood, or mentality. For instance, when he noticed students "are not connecting," he stopped the rehearsal process and led students through a breathing exercise to help them feel "comforted." In those moments, he said, "I will often. . . say,

okay, everybody stop for a second. Let's take in those breaths and try to—whatever is causing you to be distracted, . . . breathe it out." After the breathing exercise, he said, then "we'll come back together" to rehearse. Mr. E viewed responding to students' energy and readiness to connect as an important way to help students reach goals during rehearsal.

My observation field notes indicated that Mr. E adjusted his pacing of class activities in response to students' energy. For example, even though Mr. E structured the same warm up activity each in class, he led activities differently based on students' reactions. When students were generally quiet during energetic, movement-oriented activities, for instance, Mr. E transitioned to quieter, listening-focused warm ups; when students engaged loudly and enthusiastically in the movement activities, he extended the activities by adding variations.

Sometimes Mr. E knew that a particular day was going to be "stressful" for students based on current events or happenings at school. So "from the very beginning," he said, "you're trying to be proactive about it." For example, on the day local law enforcement staged a Mock DUI reenactment for the school's juniors and seniors, Mr. E addressed the public safety exercise directly. Throughout the day, he asked students to share their perspectives on the Mock DUI, he shared a story about a DUI accident victim he knew, and he left space for students to discuss their concerns and fears. When he knew students were preoccupied with an issue, he aimed to help them "own it as a class." He explained, "The older I get, the more I'm like, 'Let's just name what's going on.'. . . If something's going wrong, and I feel like there's a friction, I want to fix it right then and

there." Mr. E paid close attention to the energy and mental states of his students, and he worked to help students clear away distractions, aiming to help them be more ready to experience connection.

Helping Students Connect Through Text

Mr. E shared that his love of choral music involved an appreciation of the text. "I've always found myself. . . drawn to choral music because of text. Text is what I connect with." He aimed to help students experience connection through text, too. "We talk a lot about the poetry and the reasons behind certain songs that we sing." Mr. E described how, on one piece, Select Singers:

> really connected with the lines in the poetry. . . . And [connection] was easy for them to find. I think if we pulled it out right now and sang it, the kids will get to this spot so quickly, connected with one another, because of how much they've put the work in to dive into the text and to understand what it's about.

I noted in observations that students also reflected on the importance of a song's text. In one class discussion, when Mr. E asked students what made their last performance successful, a student explained, "I think it really helps to talk about the songs." In another rehearsal, with the Advanced Treble Choir, Mr. E asked students, "What is it that you connect to so much in this piece?" One student immediately referred to the text, "I just feel the message of the song." Following that comment, Mr. E facilitated a lively discussion in which students described how the text's themes related to their lives.

To help students experience connection, Mr. E invited composers and poets to discuss with students the texts they chose and music they had written. Composers and

poets spoke with Mr. E's students in person and by Zoom, sharing their personal experiences related to the choral texts students were rehearsing. After these visits, Mr. E expressed that students' appreciation of the text deepened, which made it easier for them to experience connection. "Any way that you can humanize the whole, the totality of a piece of music for kids, any way you can see the humanity within it, I think that makes everything more meaningful." For the Select Singers' state conference performance, Mr. E programmed all music by living composers, and students interacted with the composers and poets for five of the six pieces. "And I think that might be another reason why it was so meaningful to them. Because every single one of those people had a story" that students heard directly. Singers' knowledge of the text's context and creation, Mr. E believed, helped them experience connection more deeply.

Mr. E's design of concert performances reflected his focus on text as a means for creating connection. The Select Singers' state conference performance included a visual presentation reflecting each piece's poetic themes. In the weeks leading to the performance, Mr. E asked each student to choose their favorite line of text from one of the concert pieces and then built the concert and classroom activities around those chosen passages. For the concert, he printed students' chosen lines of text, placed one printed line in a small gift bag, then gave a bag to each concertgoer before the performance began, helping audience members attend to the lines singers valued most. In rehearsals, Mr. E used his knowledge of students' favorite lines to create connection as students rehearsed and performed. During one phrase, he shared, he always looked at the same student as he conducted because he knew she connected the text meaningfully with

memories of her grandmother. Others in the choir sensed the text's impact at that moment, too, Mr. E shared. "Everybody sang the line, but they were singing it for her." Mr. E continued to discuss the impact of students' choices of favorite lines, "I think the fact that each of them had their own little thing that they connected with along the way helped them to feel like they were invested." For Mr. E, a wide variety of meaningful interactions with text helped create connection during group singing.

Hard Work

Mr. E believed that part of the students' success at their January performance could be attributed to "the hard work that we put in." The hours students spent leading sectionals independently during winter break evidenced to Mr. E that "they were just 100% committed." Students' experience of connection during the performance, Mr. E said, "[reflected] the work we put into the whole thing." At the end of the performance, the joy he and students experienced was "about the work that they'd done." He added, "the kids had just worked so hard."

Students' perspectives reflected the value Mr. E placed on hard work. During my observation of a classroom discussion, one student explained the group's recent successful performance in terms of their determination to work hard. "It's really a big mindset thing." Looking at Mr. E, the student added, "You say, 'You get out of the choir what you put into it,' and it's really just that mindset and that effort." Mr. E and his students expressed that hard work helped them experience connection during and after their concert performance.

Barriers to Creating Connection

Mr. E shared few barriers to creating connection with Falcon Point High School students. He did articulate that when students were experiencing "stresses that you can't let go of," for instance, a "giant test weighing over their head the next [class] period," they might have difficulty experiencing connection. However, he expressed that those barriers were "individually-based;" he did not consider them barriers for the Falcon Point High School ensembles generally. The two barriers he articulated as consistent obstacles for the Falcon Point groups involved restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and his own preoccupations during rehearsal and performance.

COVID-19

For approximately two years prior to data collection for this study, policies to protect against the spread of COVID-19 had restricted travel for Falcon Point High School choirs and had limited when, where, and how students were allowed to sing together. In the school year when data were collected for this study, Mr. E and his students were permitted to sing in person in the choir classroom, but masks were required for the first several months of the school year. Soon before the Select Singers' state conference performance, restrictions on travel ceased and the school's mask-wearing mandate was lifted. Mr. E attributed part of the students' experience of connection at the performance to those changes:

> We were overnight for the first time in a long time. We were without masks for the first time doing our entire set. So we were seeing each other's faces. That can't be minimized. They were really hearing themselves for the first time without the masks on. I mean it was kind of the perfect storm. All this, it was like a cathartic release of two years of frustration.

Being able to sing unmasked and perform again in public after a sustained time singing under multiple restrictions enhanced the singers' experiences of connection and the success of the performance.

Based on the effects of COVID-19 restrictions, Mr. E altered classroom activities. Prior to the pandemic, he had offered students frequent opportunities to exercise musical leadership by making decisions during rehearsals. However, at the time of data collection, because the pandemic had disrupted students' previous two years of music education, he offered those opportunities less frequently, especially for ninth-grade students, whom he described as musically behind. He explained, "I had never had a group of ninth graders less musically inclined than the group I just got." As a result, he said, he aimed "to catch them up musically, and I didn't work as much on handing over the leadership part." He continued:

> I just didn't do a good job with my younger kids this year of going, 'Hey, listen to this musical phrase, what—how do you guys think this should go? Somebody lead us through this.' I probably did that a total of four times. And normally that would be a regular process.

Mr. E stated a related goal he had set for the following school year was to rely on student leadership more. Anticipating that in the following year his younger students would be more musically equipped to make choices after a school year with fewer COVID-related restrictions, he aimed to give those students more responsibility.

Teacher's Preoccupations

Mr. E shared that preoccupations sometimes affected his readiness to experience connection, though his preoccupations did not necessarily affect students' readiness to

connect. When acting as a musical leader for singers, Mr. E sometimes found himself preoccupied with technical details and less open to experiences of connection:

> . . . my brain wants that beautiful aesthetic before I'll even open myself up to experience [connection] because I'm so critical. If it's not musically right, I have a hard time getting to the space of what's deeper than that. Because all I'm focused on is, 'No, the tenors missed that rhythm, or the basses were sharp.'

Mr. E said he "could be connected" when musical details were inaccurate, but "it's certainly easier. . . to feel that connection when the music is at a high, high, high level."

Mr. E also described feeling preoccupied by his responsibilities related to managing logistics of rehearsals or performances. He explained, "we [teachers] have other things on our mind that the kids don't have to worry about." For instance, during one performance competition, he noticed, "I probably wasn't very open [to experiencing connection] because I was worried about our schedule. . . we had a stupid tight schedule to run around and do our contest stuff." At other times, Mr. E focused on "what comes next after this song" or logistics of what happened after a performance:

> I've got to remember that when we're done that I tell the singers to not forget to go this way, and to not forget to thank everybody, and to pick up, and to do all those logistical things that we have to worry about that the singers don't. Because as the leaders, we have to take that on ourselves.

Mr. E viewed his leadership responsibilities to include monitoring singers' technical excellence and managing logistical elements of performances; these responsibilities, he shared, could act as a barrier to his experiencing connection during group singing.

Essence of Creating Connection: Impacting Students' Mindsets

Mr. E said he incorporated into his classes the development of students' soft skills, which he appeared to view as interpersonal habits that could lead to a well-lived

life and help students be "ready for the emotional experience" of connection. He led activities he intended to "build a positive culture." Each class day, he "strategically" chose quotes that students could apply to benefit themselves and others, and students' discussions of these quotes, he expressed, could lead to greater experiences of connection. "Those sorts of conversations can get everybody's mindset in the right place to do all this work . . . [in] connecting to each other and in finding those 'Sing Me to Heaven' moments in a rehearsal." Mr. E designed activities intended to, in his words, "impact their mindsets." *Impacting students' mindsets* was the essence of creating connection for Mr. E.

One topic Mr. E frequently discussed with students was a "silly theory that I came up with that I go do motivational talks on," the idea that there are three types of people in the world—those who bring positive energy, those who bring neutral energy, and those who bring negative energy. He explained:

> For any situation you go into, you have the choice. . . So as you come into the rehearsal space, I encourage them to be either a positive energy person, or at least a neutral, but leave all the negative outside. Because if you come in as a neutral energy person, all the positivity is gonna pick you up. And it's gonna make you have a better day. Or, if you can come and be that spark plug, that positive energy person, you do that. Come in and do that.

Mr. E described the idea that there are three types of people as "literally nothing life-changing, but it's a mindset shift." His intention was to help students adjust their mindset and become more ready to experience connection.

Mr. E discussed approaching teaching and learning with a "playful mindset," a concept he said he learned from educator and author Becky Bailey (2015). Adopting this

approach, he used games and icebreaker activities regularly because "you can have them connect with one another better by playing a game." He explained:

> having a playful mindset and letting the kids have fun within a rehearsal context, stopping what you're doing and playing a stupid game for no reason other than to just have fun with them, or to get to know each other better—we do that kind of thing all the time.

My observation field notes indicated that when Mr. E led students in singing and movement games, students frequently laughed, smiled, and engaged with peers, enjoying the activities' challenges and surprises.

Mr. E designed other classroom activities and discussions to "build a positive culture" while impacting students' mindsets. Mr. E shared an allegory in which a parent, while at the breakfast table, explains to their child the sacrifice farmers and animals make to provide them with nutrition. Mr. E used the allegory to explain to students that they can choose the extent of their positive impact on others' lives. From this story, Mr. E developed a ritual in which a graduating senior sits in front of the class and calls on three fellow choir members to share stories of the positive impact the senior student has had on them. After the "ceremony," each senior signs an old theatre prop, a giant paper-mâché spoon, creating a physical representation of the impact they left on the Falcon Point choir community. For Mr. E, this classroom ritual, along with other classroom activities he designed, helped impact students' mindsets to experience connection during group singing.

Ms. N

Ms. N teaches in a medium-sized, windowless classroom with stone walls, built-in tiered seating, burgundy musician chairs, and a clean tile floor. The gray walls are

enhanced by white icicle string lights and large photos of Walker students at special events including honor choirs, performance tours, and collaborations with commissioned composers. A baby grand piano sits at the bottom level of the room near Ms. N's small desk with a computer and a live potted plant.

Ms. N greets students as they enter, encourages them to check their phones for "those last messages," and asks them to make eye contact with someone around them. She shares the plan for the class, prompting a few students to exclaim "yes!" when she refers to one piece of repertoire. Students quiet as Ms. N invites them to close their eyes, place one hand on their heart and one on their belly, and direct awareness to their breath and posture. "Allow your body to shed any energy you don't need. As you inhale, take in any energy you need." As they hum then "oo" in unison, she invites students to listen to their own individual voices then to their collective sound. "Allow your hearing to go to the people on either side of you. . . . As you're listening to them, let your body readjust. . . . anything that makes you feel a little grounded, alive, and ready." After a sustained unison, Ms. N encourages students to "let that sound go," and students gently stop singing. Following Ms. N's hand signs, they begin singing solfège patterns in unison, then in two parts. As the class continues, students prepare repertoire for performance the following month. Ms. N comments on the group's return to repertoire work after several days away from class for special activities. "It feels so good to connect with this piece again."

Connection as Experienced

Ms. N recalled "a few times in my life that singing choral music has deeply and profoundly affected my body and my soul and my brain." At those times, she felt "amazing" while singing pieces she "deeply resonated with" and "felt in my whole body." Singing in an All-State choir at age 15, she said, was "the first time that I felt synchrony and the feeling of singing with a group and feeling real freedom in my voice." She remembered:

> I had never in my life really experienced a synchronous moment musically to that depth. But it was vibrationally connected, Jenny. So I can remember—oh my God, it makes me just want to bawl. I just want to weep thinking about it because I distinctly remember feeling the vibration of that choir going through the center of my body. I can remember feeling it in all of my body. And just inhaling—I just kind of remember, I think I stopped singing so I could [inhales–exhales], I could absorb that feeling of the vibration. I remember having a moment where I just had to be in it. I just had to be inside of it.

Feeling "freedom" at the All-State festival, she said, "I felt like myself. Like the real me showed up. And she was like, 'Hey, girl, here I am [laughs]!" As an undergraduate, when Ms. N sang at a choral conference, she felt "deeply connected" to herself, the music, and those around her, including the audience. In those moments, she shared, "It's almost like my brain's kind of out of it. It doesn't really function." Emphasizing that she viewed the mind as inseparable from the body and soul, she explained, "There's not a lot of thinking that goes on in those moments. There's a lot of just being" and feeling "deeply present and aware of the present moment."

Ms. N described her own experiences of connection in choral settings as "life-giving and restorative." She aimed to foster similar experiences for the high school

students she worked with. She explained, “If I can create it even just a little bit from the chorister perspective, I’m going to do it.” To help students feel enveloped in the collective sound and feel “the vibration of their voices and their souls,” she frequently situated students in a circle or in mixed formation. She encouraged students to connect to “a resonant space,” a place of healing, as they sang. “I try to describe it to them as the place inside of them where they are loved. And where they can rely on themselves, they know themselves, and they return to caring for themselves.”

One Walker choir member expressed to Ms. N that choir had served a healing function for her in a stressful time. After class, the student told Ms. N that her close friend had been in serious car accident. After the two hugged, the student said, “Thank you so much. . . . I needed this class so much today. . . . I just felt safe in here.” Ms. N said that the student needed an experience of connection on that day “in a different way than other kids needed it.”

Ms. N regularly encouraged students to close their eyes and conduct during rehearsals, inviting them to be “in the collective sound.” She helped students practice gestures that reflected the music and encouraged them to “conduct their own voices and their own bodies. . . in whatever way feels natural to them.” During those experiences, Ms. N said, students “begin to need me less and less, which is the best thing ever,” and sometimes, “it’s the best moment in that repertoire. . . that we ever experience.” When students have their eyes closed and are “self-conducting,” Ms. N said:

> There’s just something about it that there’s a freedom inside of it. And the details might not be technically perfect, but the vibrational quality of the content and the way the kids feel about it is primo. They’re like, ‘Oh my god, what just happened?!’ They live for those moments. Because it is so

> connected. And I think it's because they're really connected to themselves, and then they can extend that connection to each other.

Development of Approach to Connection

Ms. N's approach to creating connection developed from elements inside and outside her professional life. Her personal experiences with exercise, bodywork, and spiritual practices affected her approach to connection, as did professional developments including graduate study and work on social justice in choral music education. In this section, I describe how these experiences helped develop Ms. N's approach to connection.

Physical Practices

Ms. N considered movement and bodywork as integral to her approach to connection. She shared that her considerable experience as a dancer, "my first musical experience as a child," shaped her work as a choral educator. Though she did not dance in formal settings as an adult, "I've always gone back to and used elements of movement and dance in all of my teaching. At every level, we've always, I've always danced with my students." She explained that her experiences with movement and dance helped her conducting to evolve. As she set priorities for developing her conducting practice, she said, "I knew that I needed to push myself as a person in my body if I was going to be creative in the body and to understand the body differently."

Ms. N shared that other ways of engaging with her physical body, including completing three triathlons and practicing yoga, shaped her approach to creating connection. Yoga study helped her feel at home with the sound of her voice and to "think about breath and think about connection and vibration differently, throughout my entire

body, not just like singing from here up [gesturing from neck upward].” Learning to meditate was also an important part of her approach to connection, she shared, because she incorporated practices of awareness she learned from meditation and yoga into classroom activities. For Ms. N, “physical engagements. . . opened me up to feeling my own voice differently.” Further, she explained, “the more I became connected to myself as a singer in my own physical body, the more I could guide that for my students.”

Spiritual Practices

Ms. N said, “when I was a more religious person, in the past, I definitely equated my religious practice along with singing.” However, she continued, “in the past two to three years, that has shifted around. And I know that singing *is* my religious practice. . . . Choir is my spiritual practice. Singing in community with people, that’s my spiritual practice.” After the COVID-19 pandemic began, when Ms. N no longer had “access to the communal aspect of my religious community, and I didn’t have access to the communal practice of choir, of singing with my students,” she “went through a massive deconstruction of my faith practice.” She shared that during that time, she asked, “What do I believe? What is important to me? What allows me to feel connected to my body and myself and the universe?” Through reflection and questioning, “I began to realize that those feelings and those experiences were very similar, between religious experience and the experience I had being with my choir and conducting the choir.”

Further, she explained, experiences of connection with choirs, “took the place of religious experience in my life.” Choir “became the place where I sought that connection.” She explained that for her, choir “did not hold. . . the kind of clearly-defined

rules and obligations and shame inherently baked into religion that I experienced in my life." She determined she had to leave behind those parts of her religious experience, and choir offered "that same vibrational feedback, and even to a deeper level."

Life-Threatening Illness, Healing, and Gratitude

Several years before data collection for this study, Ms. N experienced a life-threatening illness. In a hospital's intensive care unit, she "had the experience of leaving my body and coming back in it. . . . a really wild almost near-death experience." After the illness, she said, "my body changed" along with "my perception of the world." And "since that experience, there was born in me a really intense desire and need for that kind of meditative vibrational feedback." Ms. N noted, "I keep using the word vibration," because:

> I have no other word to articulate what I mean. But it's a resonance that I seek. And choir is the place where I find that resonance. And standing in front of a choir as a conductor is the place where I find it. And so I will do anything and everything I can to protect and facilitate and create a space where people will exist together to create that thing. Because I want them to experience the same thing that I'm experiencing. Because for me it's just so profound.

Ms. N experienced the resonance and vibration of group singing as healing. Through tears, Ms. N said, "Every time they sing, it's like I'm healed. Every time. Like *every* single time. And so I just never take it for granted, Jenny." She regularly shared her gratitude with her students. "I tell them this so many times. I'm just so grateful. Because I get to stand in front of them. I get to be in that space."

Graduate Education

Ms. N's graduate work in music education shaped her approach to connection. Her degree focused on early childhood, and in her Master's thesis, she described the role of lullabies as "a storytelling mechanism to connect people to each other, and obviously parent to child." She expressed that lullabies served a basic, primal function for all humans and were part of connective tradition of singing. Studying lullabies, she said, "somehow changed me as a music educator. And it changed my awareness of the depth of [my] need and desire. . . to establish that kind of connection with my students." She added that the humming often involved in lullabies was something, "I'm still doing, by the way, now 10 years later with my high schoolers."

During her graduate study, Ms. N developed an interest in facilitating flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008), working to "constantly do this dance" to find the place "where challenge and skill [meet], and the beauty of that place where it's just dancing together." Teaching pre-K through fourth-grade students, she had determined, "okay, we're gonna find flow in kindergarten this week. It is going to happen. [laughs]. And I was very intentional about that."

Her graduate education also shaped her perspectives on teacher-driven versus student-centered instruction. In her early practice as an elementary school teacher and children's choir conductor, "so much of it was teacher-driven, teacher-led, sequential. . . . That's what had been modeled for me." For a long time, she said, "that was good enough for me because that's all I knew. And I was a very young teacher." But graduate school "was a completely different experience. And it was very much grounded and founded

upon shared leadership, and not a teacher-driven experience, but a student-driven experience." After her graduate work, she said, "I started sharing choice" with students. "We started doing things in small groups where the kids made choices, and the kids were leaders. . . . The vibe changed." Ms. N began crafting a student-guided approach to creating connection.

Crafting Practices as a High School Educator

Ten years before data collection for this study, Ms. N shifted from working primarily with children in elementary school to teaching high school full time. When she first made the transition, she said, she did not use the student-led practices she had used with younger students "because I was super scared. . . . I was like, 'Oh my god, I'm a high school director, Ah, what do I do?" In the first year or two as a high school teacher, she indicated that she reverted back to more formal, teacher-driven practices. Eventually, "I evolved past my own self and my own old patterns," she said. "I was no longer willing to be in that kind of teaching space." Instead, she began using more student-centered practices.

After three or four years of teaching high school choir, Ms. N "started experiencing choral music differently and looking at it differently. . . And I began to see my goals shifting. . . . I didn't feel like I had to abide any longer by certain structural choral norms." She explained that she became less concerned with choral tone quality that had been modeled as "perfect" and less concerned with performing "a certain kind of literature." She reached out to other choral educators "doing some similar things, where they were either diving deeper into the emotional aspects of literature or the social justice

aspects of literature" rather than prioritizing competition or perfection in performance above all else. As she observed other educators' work at clinics and conferences, she spent time "really thinking deeply about the purpose of choral music," asking "Why do we do this? What do we do with this art form?" As she explored these questions and developed her practices, the Walker Area High School choral program began to receive more visible recognition, including being selected for performance opportunities and awards. She shared that these recognitions were surprising, and she considered them "a direct reflection of the connection that we were making in the classroom. Because suddenly, we were together."

Social Justice Choir

Ms. N expressed that the deepest shift in her practice involved work with social justice choirs, as she began to understand the power of communal singing and protest songs for the first time. She described social justice choir experiences in which musical content served as the entry point for dialogue while the ultimate goal was human connection. In social justice choir, she found musical similarities to her experiences as a child singing in church, "where the short-phrase, repetitive songs. . . would take the congregation or the singer into almost a meditative state." She noticed that when her students sang in this way, "they would sing and sing and sing and sing these repetitive, short melodic things, where it's almost like they were in sync physically and emotionally." Then, she said, when "the musical element would release. . . a question would be asked, and conversation would emerge about the words, about the text, about the meaning." Ms. N shared that through work with social justice choir, she began

thinking about "creating that space for intentional connection" during group singing. She explained how a social justice focus meshed with her development as an educator:

> It just felt right to me, so I trusted my instinct. . . . And I knew that I wanted more connection with my students. And I knew that I wanted to be a more aware choral conductor and educator. So all of those things. . . happened within a couple-year period.

Subsequently, Ms. N began every school year with repertoire from the Justice Choir Songbook (Betinis et al., 2023), "cause I think that we change. I think that society changes. I think our communities change. And connection," she continued, "is just such an important part of our experience. I've just learned that it's everything. And I've got an art form, and I'm going to use it to try to facilitate that in the lives of these kids."

Conditions that Created Connection

For Ms. N, three related conditions helped create connection. She used the opening sequence in each class to create readiness for connection, she aimed to help students center disparate energies from their school days, and she worked to help students leave aside stress and self-judgment. In this section, I share findings on these three conditions that helped Ms. N create connection.

Opening Sequence

The sequence Ms. N used to start each class embodied her approach to creating connection. She guided students through an "intentional grounding," inviting students to "settle into your body" as they breathed deeply then hummed in unison. As the process continued:

> People leave and rejoin the sound when they're ready. . . . And as they inhale and exhale to come back in, their direction is always to adjust the

> body in a way that they need to. Because they know themselves best, obviously.

After a unison hum, Ms. N guided students to sing scale patterns or solfège exercises, working to move students' awareness from their individual sound to the collective sound. She aimed to help students physically and mentally prepare to sing as they sensed, "Ok, here I am. I'm in my body. I'm making noise. I'm listening to myself. I'm listening to the people around me. I'm here. . . . I'm a singer. I'm an instrument. I'm ready." The process, she stated, was "an important element of every single class," a routine students knew "so well. . . that it's just the daily part of their life." The procedure helped create connection by "honoring their bodies and their breath and their sounds, and then honoring the collective sound and unison." The use of this regular procedure, she said, "has created an expectation of synchronicity. There's just immediately a facilitation of togetherness, . . . a pathway for emotional togetherness and mental togetherness." Ms. N shared with me written student reflections as classroom artifacts. Reflections verified that students experienced the opening procedure as an opportunity to feel grounded, focused, and ready for connection with the group.

Energies of the School Day

Ms. N said she used the opening sequence to help students' bodies and brains transition from their previous school activities and ease into the process of choir class. When students arrived to her room, she explained, "their brains are spinning" because they have come from so many different classes, energies, and experiences in other parts of the school building. For students, she said, "school, a school day, the life of a teenager in a public school, there's so many things to navigate." The opening sequence, "provides

a way in to a different way of being," a way to "shed the other stuff of the day, to wake up their body in a different vibrational energy." She explained that when students go through the process, it "leaves the rest of the school day behind. It vibrationally dismisses it in a way. I don't know if that's real or not, but that's what it feels like. Other things are released so they can be present."

The opening sequence served a similar purpose for Ms. N herself, she expressed, because her school days were packed. "The 20 minutes before class, you've just answered 17 emails, and taken phone calls, and managed your student teacher, and broken up a fight in the lunchroom, and you're running in" to class, when "suddenly it's time for breathing" and "humming and being unified." She said, "sometimes it takes a minute." Facilitating the opening sequence helped Ms. N move "into a different state," and, she said, "in the process of that facilitation, I often feel more grounded." Ms. N also actively engaged in the activities she led students through. "I do all of the exercises with them. . . . I often will leave space in my instructions just to breathe with them or to hum with them. And it helps me to feel connected to them."

Leaving Aside Stress and Self-Judgment

During the opening sequence, Ms. N could "perceive and see and observe how [students] physically change and how stress leaves their faces." She said she could see evidence of connection and comfort in their bodies when students "start to move together and as they breathe together." Ms. N discussed how the opening sequence could help students minimize self-judgment that might act as a barrier to connection. She explained:

> A lot of our exercises are done with our eyes closed. We block out visual stimulus to just give a little more room to listening, and. . . [to] eliminating any sort of judgment that might not even be real but would be perceived.

When students rehearsed repertoire with eyes closed, the exercise helped students minimize inhibition and self-judgment, she shared, because they could be assured that, "no one will see you." When students were "conducting and moving their body in a safe place where they're not observed by anyone other than themselves," Ms. N said, students were more likely to experience connection.

Barrier to Creating Connection: COVID-19

Ms. N articulated one major barrier to creating connection, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of data collection, adjustments to teaching and learning due to COVID-19 had created "a different kind of psychological barrier" than Ms. N and her students had experienced before. Since the pandemic began, even "just basic" connection was a challenge, she said, "because we've been over a screen, because we've been behind masks, because [students'] ability to connect with the world. . . has been deeply shifted." Ms. N expressed, "we have all forgotten a little bit, how do we connect through the art form? . . . We're out of practice. . . . I feel that disjointed lack of connection. It just hasn't been as easy."

However, by the end of the school year, when students performed "real concerts in front of people. . . there was definitely a shift in the feeling and the engagement of being really connected to each other." Ms. N and her students had to "find our way back to each other very, very slowly. . . . It took time over the year." Masks played a role in experiences of reconnection. "I have to be honest about this—I feel like [students and I

experienced connection again] because I took my mask off my face." After receiving a booster vaccination, she recalled, "I was like, 'That's it, I have to teach.' And I will tell you that I felt more connected to them, and they were more connected to me with my mask off."

COVID-related changes to the school's schedule presented another barrier when Ms. N lost opportunities to meet with students. Before the pandemic, she met with ninth and 10th graders weekly in small lesson groups. In those 25-minute meetings with five to six students each, "trust is built" and students "feel seen and cared for, and it's a more intimate relationship, which is so necessary." After the pandemic began, when Ms. N was working with sophomores and juniors who "never had those [small group meetings] in the same way," she explained, "it's really different." Small group work had influenced students' experiences of connection in large ensemble settings; without small group meetings, creating connection was more challenging.

Essence of Creating Connection: Vibrational Alignment that Can Heal

For Ms. N, the essence of creating connection during group singing was *vibrational alignment that can heal*. She aimed to help students experience "vibrational connection" and to "vibrationally dismiss the day's residue" through physical and spiritual approaches. Singing with "hands on our abdomen, on our heart," "reestablishing posture," and "just touching the body, feeling the breath, feeling the vibration" helped students use physical sensations to experience connection.

Ms. N's focus on connection as vibrational alignment derived partly from her life-threatening illness, after which she realized that "standing in front of the choir and

opening my body up to that vibrational sound, and absorbing it, and responding to it" felt profoundly healing. For Ms. N, the experience involved a loving connection to the divine inside herself. "We talk a lot about the love we feel for other people," she said. "That vibrational sacred space inside of them is the place where they know that they are loved, and that it's the love that you give yourself." Ms. N associated that love with God, but "I don't necessarily say that to them. I don't want it to be religious in any way." She described the idea to students as "the divine inside of them that already exists. They just have to find it. It's already present inside of them." She continued, "Or, it's a connection to the universe," or it is "however they want to define that for themselves."

Ms. N described how the experience of vibrational alignment in choral settings, especially the power to heal after illness, shaped her practices as a choral educator:

> I just feel like this deep, deep, deep responsibility. Because I think the choir is the place, is just the place where magic can actually happen, where they can actually be human beings and connect to their own vibration of their own souls, and the vibration of the people around them. And they can feel the essence of who they are is alive and real and not hidden.

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE FINDINGS

In this chapter, I discuss findings across cases, highlighting commonalities and differences in participants' experiences. First, I examine connection as participants described it. Second, I discuss the conditions that helped participants create connection. Third, I explore complexities the data revealed about who experiences and who creates connection during group singing. Fourth, I review cross-case findings about barriers participants identified. Finally, I present the collective essence that ties together each participant's experiences of creating connection during group singing.

Connection as Experienced

Participants aligned in their experience of connection as *magic* or *magical*. All participants described evocative moments when participants, students, and audience members recognized a special, intangible phenomenon had occurred. Connection was not always predictable, as Mr. F expressed, "It's just like sometimes the pieces line up, and sometimes they don't." Similarly acknowledging that teachers do not always control the creation of connection, Ms. H distinguished between spontaneous moments of connection and moments she worked to engineer. Sometimes, she said, connection felt more magical when "it just happens."

Two participants used the concept of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) to frame experiences of connection. Ms. N strove to create a "dance of challenge and skill" to encourage flow in her classes, and Mr. F aimed to facilitate flow by helping individuals disconnect from worries and preoccupations to remain focused on the present moment.

Other participants' ideas overlapped with elements of flow, but they did not explicitly refer to flow or to its characteristics such as balanced levels of challenge and skill.

Participants established *togetherness* as a cornerstone of connection, communicating to students that togetherness was essential to their work. Each participant framed togetherness differently, as family, home, vulnerability and lack of inhibition, community and collaboration, or vibrational alignment. Yet participants' definitions of togetherness also overlapped significantly; for all, connection was dependent on a unified, relational experience. The primacy of togetherness strongly shaped participants' pedagogy as they crafted activities to foster togetherness and explicitly invited students to take part in a unifying, relational experience of group singing.

Interestingly, though participants aimed to include each individual student in experiences of togetherness, they acknowledged that in practice, unity with every student was not realistic. Participants held space for students who were unable to join the group's experience on a particular day or moment, and they worked to include and welcome students as they were ready, sometimes crafting for them different roles as stage managers or choir librarians. Ms. A shared that after offering a student a different role and making the lesson "so fun, so intriguing" that joining in was almost irresistible, a student might reengage in group singing. When a "family environment [is] already created, those people still feel like they are a part of that. And then eventually, even though they say they don't want to sing," Ms. A said, "you find these people humming and singing along." Participants' commitments to togetherness helped them extend grace and patience as they worked to support and include all students in the group.

All participants experienced *synchrony* as a form of connection, and they most often discussed the visible synchrony of singers' movements. Participants brought varied perspectives to their understandings of synchrony, and synchrony played a different role in each participant's pedagogical approach. Due to Ms. A's background in the gospel tradition, synchrony through movement was a familiar, natural path to connection. Mr. F's approach reflected his goal of helping singers release inhibitions, as he aimed to help students "release their muscles enough to let their body follow their voice and follow the music." He viewed synchrony through movement as shaped by repertoire, as when Fairwood North singers moved in synchrony to Randall Thompson's "Alleluia." Ms. H's pedagogical process of collaboration and community centered synchrony, as she frequently asked students to clap together, step together, or move together to express the music. Her students affirmed in journal entries that moving together to demonstrate a crescendo, for instance, helped them experience connection. Ms. N said that Walker students sensed an expectation of synchrony because the opening sequence she used prioritized unity of students' breath and sound. Though Mr. E did not discuss synchrony, he regularly led voice-building activities based on synchronized movement and synchrony of breath, and he expressed that daily voice building played a vital role in creating connection. Each participant's background and pedagogical development shaped how they used synchrony to create connection in the classroom.

Participants' work to create *oneness* frequently drove their pedagogical philosophy and practices, and oneness took different forms for different participants based on their experiences as singers. In Ms. N's most memorable moments of

connection, she described feeling temporarily out of her body and connected to something larger than herself in an experience of "meditative vibrational feedback." Ms. N aimed to help students feel similarly vibrationally connected, as they let themselves out of their bodies and experienced connection to the universe or to the divine present inside of them. Ms. H worked to help students experience that "they are part of something greater than just themselves." Her conception of oneness was rooted in students' sense of togetherness as a collaborative community, and she aimed to help students see themselves and the group's work as part of the larger world. Mr. F described his experiences of oneness as a singer, sometimes half-jokingly, as pouring out one's soul, experiencing a high, or "seeing the face of God in every performance." Mr. F sometimes expressed frustration that at Liberty Charter, oneness did not occur in the form of the choir acting as a single organism. Mr. F's analysis of oneness drew him to explore how he might open space for Liberty Charter students to experience oneness in different ways.

Conditions that Create Connection

Participants discussed several conditions that created connection during group singing. All participants used activities to help invite students into connection, and they paid close attention to students' readiness to experience connection, deciding in the moment how to respond. Below, I analyze the conditions participants used to help create connection, highlighting commonalities and differences in participants' approaches.

Opening Procedures and Responding to Students' Readiness to Connect

Participants crafted procedures at the start of class to help create experiences of connection. Warm ups, voice building exercises, and other opening sequences provided

participants with ways to assess students' readiness to connect. Opening activities helped students shed stresses of the day, ground themselves, and transition from an individual focus to a collective approach to singing. Participants aimed to help students' energies shift as they entered the choir classroom, leaving behind what may have been more chaotic or stressful surroundings. As Ms. H described it, choir class was a place to "come for retreat or recovery from the outside pulses of the world." Students might use time in choir class to "repair," Ms. H said, before they return to the more pressure-filled environs of the remainder of the school day. When students experienced choir as safe space or a retreat, participants expressed, they might find it easier to experience emotional connection with fellow singers. Further, on days when students were going through particularly difficult times, as Ms. N's student dealing with her friend's car accident, group singing could act as a comfort and a healing influence.

Ms. A and Mr. F described situations where students' stress severely hampered their energy and motivation to sing, and singing could not help them feel better. When Ms. A sensed that students' stress levels were too high to make group singing successful, she chose not "to push [students] from a broken place." Similarly, after a Liberty Charter student broke into tears after being reminded of his cousin's recent funeral, Mr. F shared that it would have been futile to force the student to focus on experiencing connection through music. Ms. N said it was important at times to allow students "the freedom" to situate themselves apart from the group's experience of connection, "cause not all of us can show up every single day." Participants recognized that they could not always help

students become ready to experience connection through group singing, but they could help students by recognizing and making space for their needs in the moment.

All participants adjusted their instruction based on perceptions of students' readiness to connect. When participants assessed that students were able to experience connection but were not quite ready, they changed their teaching approaches in the moment. Mr. E paused repertoire work to lead students through breathing activities. Ms. H switched her repertoire teaching strategies based on what she saw during warm ups. When Ms. N noticed students "peace out" or "float away somewhere," she said, she changed the way she was engaging with them, varying her instructional pace or adjusting students' positions in the room.

All participants acknowledged that each day, students entered the room in varying states of readiness to connect. In every class period, Ms. N said, some students "walk in and they're completely disconnected. . . . They observe, and they're kind of on the outside." Each participant had grown to expect this variability. In response, they crafted ways to assess students' readiness for connection, to help move students closer to readiness for connection, and to handle with sensitivity and understanding the situations where students could not experience connection on that day. Participants' reactions to students who were not ready to connect acted as essential elements of their approaches to creating connection.

Students Seeing Beyond Local Circumstances

Ms. A and Mr. F were the only participants who taught in schools where the majority of students experienced endemic poverty, and they described approaches to

connection not reflected in other participants' school settings. Ms. A and Mr. F described their motivation to help students see beyond the challenging socioeconomic circumstances in their communities. Ms. A described her goal at Garrison to build culture, community, and "fruits of the spirit" including hope, joy, love, peace, and understanding. She explained, "We just tryin' to make it work so that they can see beyond what they see outside in the window. And that's not easy." Mr. F also looked to help students broaden their perceptions of their surroundings and believe in their own potential success. As he discussed a class visit from a poet who grew up Liberty Charter's neighborhood, Mr. F prompted students to juxtapose the "needles you walk over" on the way to school with the poet's resilience and strength. Aware of students' lived experiences in their school's neighborhoods, both Ms. A and Mr. F aimed to help students see beyond the challenges of their immediate local circumstances by looking outward and developing a sense of connection to something larger than themselves.

Repertoire

Participants' perspectives varied significantly on how repertoire choices influenced students' experiences of connection. For example, Ms. N based decisions about repertoire almost exclusively on the music's potential to facilitate experiences of connection, whereas Ms. H expressed that students can experience connection irrespective of repertoire. All participants used elements of repertoire to create connection, though they highlighted different elements of repertoire in the process. Repertoire's influence might lie in its text and themes, its musical elements, or in students' interactions with the creation and composition of the piece.

Ms. N said she chose every piece with the goal of facilitating experiences of connection to the text, to history, and to social justice. She continued, "I'm just never gonna choose a piece because it's Haydn, and we should sing it. It's never gonna happen. I used to do that. . . . Never again." Ms. N aimed to find repertoire whose text and themes could speak directly to students to facilitate connection.

In contrast, Ms. H expressed that students did not "even need a song, a piece," to help students experience connection; "I can do it with an improvised rhythm canon." Ms. H shared that repertoire serves students better when it can "allow creativity" or act as "a reflection and representation of those who you are working with." She described repertoire as a vehicle, not a driver of connection in her pedagogical process. At times, Ms. H did use elements of repertoire to facilitate connection, such as when she helped students understand a spiritual's context through the story of Komi Earl, but she did not view repertoire as the primary avenue for creating connection.

In contrast, Mr. F's repertoire choices helped him understand what musical elements could best to facilitate connection for his students. Nina Simone's "I wish I knew how it would feel to be free" worked better for Liberty Charter students than other repertoire he had chosen, he said, because its low range, unison voicing, accessibility, and catchy "push and pull" made it "super satisfying to sing." Mr. F indicated that those musical elements had to be present to facilitate connection, and students' success in singing and experiencing connection with that piece convinced him that "it can happen."

Mr. E and Ms. N regularly commissioned works, and they shared that when students were able to engage with composers and provide input into the compositional

process, connection was more likely. Mr. E noted that when students "talk to the artist who has a vision" for the piece, it makes everything more meaningful by helping to "humanize the whole, the totality of a piece of music for kids." Similarly, Ms. N stated that her students "are so much more connected to the song having engaged with the composer." Preparing commissioned works, Ms. N noted, reflected some degree of economic privilege at her school, along with sacrifices in her program budget. She chose to make those sacrifices, she said, because commissioning a choral work could increase students' investment and readiness to connect:

> . . . because it's written for you. It's written for your voices. You get to be the derivative composer and the creator of the art, and you cocreate that piece of art together. That binds you together. . . because you're so bonded to the music, you feel so much perceived engagement of bringing this work into the world.

A sense of collective responsibility through commissioned works helped Ms. N's students experience connection to the music and to each other.

Ms. A did not commission works, but she decided to create her own arrangements of popular songs for Garrison students. She involved students in selecting and arranging the music, and in an end-of-year survey, Garrison students indicated their favorite songs were ones Ms. A had arranged. She explained that students took ownership of those pieces because they felt like part of the music creation process. Students gave input on musical choices when Ms. A asked them, "How should we do this part?" or "What do y'all think? Should we add some harmony on this part or should she just sing that by herself?" Students' involvement led them to sense those songs "were created for them, by them." Further, Ms. A told students she would use one arrangement to inspire other

choirs to perform popular music, and she urged students, “Let’s make it amazing so that somebody else can use it.” The approach helped students’ motivation, Ms. A said, by giving students a sense that they were involved in something “bigger than us.” Mr. E also solicited students’ input into repertoire selection, asking students to choose the repertoire for their final chamber choir concert of the school year. He commented, “there’s a magic that happens because the kids get to pick what songs we do.” For Ms. A, Mr. E, and Ms. N, experiences of connection were more likely when students made choices about repertoire, and agency in creating or choosing the music helped students experience connection while singing it.

Text

All participants discussed choral texts with students to help create connection, but for three participants, discussions of text constituted a consistent, significant part of their approach. Mr. E made space during classes for thoughtful analysis of text’s meaning stating that “deeper discussions or deeper understandings” of text are reflective of “how you experience connection with others.” He explained that Falcon Point students could sometimes experience a direct, almost immediate path to connection during group singing “because of how much they’ve put the work in to dive into the text and to understand what it’s about.”

Ms. N often discussed the text’s themes of social justice or unity as she helped students engage with “words and language that matter.” She said she used text to create connection, facilitate awareness, and develop community while, through a lens of social justice, encouraging students to “see themselves and see the world in a different way.”

Ms. N said she experienced a deep feeling of responsibility to use the art of choral music to help students "connect emotionally and historically." To help reach that goal, examination of choral text represented an essential part of her pedagogy.

Ms. A and her students would often "talk about the meanings of songs, what it means to each person, and then how we find something common that we can agree on that this song means." Finding meaning in song texts reflected Ms. A's perspective that "these songs matter" to students' life experiences. Ms. A discussed her own experience of connection to the text of a song she was teaching a church choir: "It is so so pretty. I love it. But it gives me goosebumps not only when I think about the song, but when I think about the message." Ms. A incorporated in the importance of text into her pedagogy as she worked to create connection with Garrison students.

Student Ownership

All participants worked to help students experience ownership of music making, which they expressed could facilitate experiences of connection. Ms. A sought students' input into repertoire and arranging. Mr. E and Ms. N worked to facilitate students' decision-making and shared leadership in the choral setting. Ms. H incorporated student ownership throughout her pedagogical process, and Mr. F noted the positive impact of student ownership in Liberty Charter's band. Though no participant approached choral leadership entirely democratically, they each incorporated strategies for encouraging students' ownership of their musical work.

Mr. E aimed to help students develop their own interpretations of repertoire rather than replicating others' performances, and he invited students to offer musical ideas to

help accomplish this goal. As a young teacher, he thought he should always know exactly how a piece should sound before rehearsing it with singers. “But once you hear your singers,” he later asked, “why am I trying to make them sound like this recording in my head when that recording is not them?” In the end, he said, “the best thing ever would be [that students] just take so much ownership” that they are “the one in charge.” Similarly, Ms. N aimed for shared leadership and hoped students would own their choral experience; she said, “I love that moment” when “they don’t need me.” Ms. N’s effort to commission repertoire, she said, offered students special opportunities for ownership and agency, and she described agency as an important element of connection.

Ms. H’s pedagogical process relied on students contributing their perspectives to the group, and like other participants, Ms. H asked students to offer musical ideas and express artistic leadership. In soliciting students’ opinions about, for example, where it would be best to breathe to communicate the text to the audience, she said, “I’ve had to let go of some of the artistic license and allow them to make some of those decisions, to allow them to connect and have a communal voice.” Even in instances when Ms. H made the ultimate decision about the musical choice, she said that students’ contributions of musical ideas helped them “come together as a group” and made their learning more meaningful. By asking students to help shape the music, “you’re giving them an opportunity to talk among each other, to connect with the music, connect with their own artistry.”

Though he did not discuss opportunities for student ownership in Liberty Charter’s choral ensembles, Mr. F emphasized that the band, the only music group at

Liberty Charter that was "all about [students'] initiative," was the school's most successful ensemble. Students took instruments home to learn their parts, worked together to create arrangements, and "enjoyed figuring it out for themselves and feeling that full ownership," Mr. F said, while he acted as more of a supporter than a leader. Based on the growth he saw in the band, Mr. F planned to adjust the choral ensemble curriculum to encourage more of the student ownership the band members experienced.

Commitment to Giving 100%

Mr. E identified students' hard work, Ms. A identified a drive for accomplishment, and both participants identified a commitment to giving 100% as facilitators of connection. Mr. E used the annual ritual of students sharing graduating seniors' positive impact to remind students to commit and to give. He explained, "if it's something you care about, you need to be all in, you need to give 100% of yourself." Ms. A, similarly, talked with the choir members about needing to "leave it all on the stage." She communicated an expectation that everyone "give 100%," explaining, "I can't give 100 and you give 10. No, we all have to give. And that's the way our message reach the audience." While the other three participants expected students to commit energy to their work in choir, Mr. E and Ms. A were the only participants who associated "giving 100%" with creating experiences of connection.

Students' Musical Skill Level

Participants held complex and sometimes conflicting views on how students' musical skill level affected their ability to experience connection. Data analysis also revealed that some participants expressed contradictory views. For example, participants

suggested that musical skill might affect connection in one setting but not in another, or musical skill might affect creation of connection for the teacher but not for students. Findings on this topic were multi-layered. Below, I present the findings according to the different perspectives that participants expressed.

More Musical Skill Might Make Creating Connection Easier

Both Mr. F and Mr. E expressed that when singers have more musical skills, creating connection is easier. With students who possess fewer musical skills, Mr. F said, connection can be harder to create, he explained, because students got "bogged down so much in the rehearsal process." In contrast, he said, older, more experienced students often "had the solid musical skills to let the connection happen." Mr. E expressed a similar view, saying he found it challenging to create connection with students in Falcon Point's unauditioned 10th–12th-grade treble choir. Because connection happened more rarely in that group than in auditioned groups, Mr. E said, "when I can get that group to connect, it's the greatest joy." In years when students in the group possessed higher levels of talent and skill, he explained, connection was easier to achieve:

> This particular year's group was a talented bunch. They were really good singers. And it was my favorite group to teach that I've ever had in that group, . . . and I think part of that's because they came to me with this talent that I had never seen before. They were able to go deeper and better than just singing a unison song.

Mr. E viewed students' ability to sing in harmony, to do something "better" than singing in unison, as an avenue to creating connection.

Mr. E's views on ninth-grade choir members suggested students needed a baseline level of vocal technique to have a "deeper" experience including connection. When

ninth-grade students begin singing at the high school level, he said, they noticed their sound was less mature than other singers' sound. Later in the year, though, "freshmen get really excited when they sound good for the first time. Like, 'We sound great! Listen to us!'" After students "check that box of 'I sound great,'" Mr. E explained, experiences of connection are more likely: "then they need to go deeper."

Less Musical Skill Might Make Creating Connection Easier

On another occasion, Mr. E expressed the opposite idea about the relationship between musical skill and experiences of connection. Individuals with "very little musical acumen can still find a connection in singing with other people," he explained. "Goodness knows I've got people in my church choir that are not the best singers. And they are some of the most connected." Frequently, those individuals "feel the music more so than the people that are the better musicians." Thus, for Mr. E, though in some settings, more musical skill helped create pathways to connection; in other settings, such as in his church choir, less musical skill correlated with greater ability to connect.

Mr. E indicated that in some settings, students' higher levels of skill can actually prevent experiences of connection. "Sometimes," he said, "the more advanced you are in the choral medium, the harder it is to get to those experiences [of connection] because you're hypercritical." He said that at the first school he taught in, many years ago, the few students who attended the All-District Choir Festival had a "mountaintop experience." In contrast, in his current position, the many Falcon Point students who participated in All-District Choir Festivals sometimes returned saying, "Well, this isn't as

good as our chamber choir at school." Mr. E explained, "sometimes. . . knowing what is high level can preclude you from having a musical experience."

The Role of Talent

When they discussed creating connection, participants more often referred to students' skill level or experience than to their talent. Two participants discussed talent, however, and they expressed opposing perspectives on how talent affects experiences of connection. For Mr. E, the higher-than-usual talent level of the students in Falcon Point's unauditioned treble choir made it easier to create connection. Their talent, in part, made them his favorite group compared to students in the same ensemble in the past. Mr. F aimed to help students understand that their potential success as singers did not depend on talent. Many less confident singers at Liberty Charter, he shared, believed they did not have the talent to sing well. Some thought, "either I have it or [I] don't," and Mr. F lamented, "unfortunately, I couldn't break the mindset that this is just a talent." Mr. F aimed to help students change their perspective on talent and focus instead on intentionally building specific skills, such as pitch matching, hearing intervals, or singing with accurate timing. However, Liberty Charter students' idea that innate talent determined their success as singers acted as a detriment to their confidence and their ability to experience connection.

Musical Skill Might Have No Bearing on Creating Connection

Ms. A, Mr. F, Ms. H, and Ms. N expressed that, generally speaking, singers' musical skill level had no bearing on creating connection. Mr. F and Ms. N highlighted the role of repertoire selection in facilitating experiences of connection for students at all

skill levels. Contrasting with some of his other perspectives, Mr. F stated that connection could happen with students at all musical skill levels, provided the repertoire was appropriate. “I’m not gonna choose eight-part music for my current kids because most of them are struggling to match pitch still. . . . That doesn’t mean we can’t have connection.” That group’s “end goal” may be different, or they may be “on a different timeline. . . than the choir that’s already got private lessons for every kid,” but they can experience connection. Mr. F added that choosing music on the high edge of students’ skill level could provide challenge that helped facilitate connection. At Liberty Charter’s winter concert, he said, one “challenge song” was “so tough, there was an ownership of their work on it, and. . . that’s where the connection happened.” In Mr. F’s experience, repertoire that matched or just exceeded students’ skill level could facilitate connection.

Ms. H said that no matter singers’ skills, age, or musicianship level, “my goals will still be the same.” Musical skill, for her, did not determine readiness for connection. She shared that her eighth-grade students were performing a piece they had performed in sixth grade because COVID-19-related adjustments to schooling had limited choir students’ skill development. “We should be so much further” in skill level, she commented. Yet Ms. H decided, “At the end of the day, let’s just sing what we can.” In her view, the piece’s lower difficulty level did not prevent students from experiencing connection in performance because students’ skill level did not correlate with their ability to experience connection.

Though experiencing connection did not depend on a particular skill level for Ms. H, she did express that uniformity of skill level within a group might influence

connection. Experiences of connection came more easily, she said, when all members of a choir "have the same common denominator of ability" and skill set. Working with a summer community choir of singers with varied musicianship and vocal skills was, she said, "a little tricky" and "very frustrating" because neither the most- nor the least-experienced singers felt aligned with the rest of the group. Connection would have been easier to create, she explained, if across the group, singers' musical skills had been more similar.

Ms. A did not directly address the relationship between musical skill and connection. Speaking of her work at Garrison High School, she expressed appreciation for the opportunity to "really, really meet people where they are," because Garrison students "didn't have any singing background." Yet she did not describe their skill level as either a barrier or facilitator of connection. Rather, Ms. A discussed Garrison students' level of experience in terms of "singing culture." She expressed that if Garrison High School had an auditioned ensemble, it would help build a singing culture, which could in turn facilitate experiences of connection.

In another setting, Ms. A also indicated that singers' musical accuracy did not preclude them from experiencing connection. She shared that in situations like her church choir rehearsal, when she often heard "some [wrong] notes flyin'," she would still say to singers, "Did you guys feel that? I can feel it. I got chills. Did you get chills?" Singers' musical errors could coexist with experiences of connection. Regardless of singers' skill level, Ms. A aimed to foster connection, "to get them singing together so they not only

feel like they sound good, but they feel good." Ms. A aimed to help singers experience positive emotions through experiences of connection regardless of skill level.

Technically-Challenging Music and Comparison to Standards of Achievement

For Ms. N, advanced musical skills and technically-challenging repertoire were not top priorities. "Musical skill is great, and it's wonderful, and it's good for their brain and their body, and I get it. But all of that is secondary." Difficult music, she shared, did not make experiences of connection more likely; in fact, very challenging or complex music could interfere with connection if the group spent "all of our time. . . stressing out about it or demanding perfection from it." Students "feel connected to each other" and "to their own body," Ms. N said, when they are singing music at a comfortable skill level, when their "brain is not thinking so much that [their] body cannot go into the zone." For her, connection could be facilitated through music that met students' skill level but did not push their skills to the point of strain.

In contrast, Mr. E expressed that a choir's musical achievement level correlated directly with students' ability to experience connection. "The aesthetics of music matter," he said. "You can be connected to people when making mediocre music, but it's certainly easier to connect with people, or to feel that connection, when the music is at a high, high, high level." However, Mr. E also expressed that students with differing musical skills have different definitions of "high-level" music. For instance, when less skilled singers combined into a choir with more skilled singers, he said, the former group might experience connection because they perceived "they were surrounded with better singers, higher level singers. And they felt like they elevated and had that great performance." In

that same performance, however, "probably myself and those higher-level singers didn't have that same experience." He explained that the level of beauty expected by students of differing skill levels is scaffolded, and when singers have different thresholds for what qualifies as a high level of music, their experiences of connection may differ.

Motivation and Artistic Maturity

Ms. H aimed to create connection regardless of singers' skill level, yet she shared that creating connection was most effortless when she was conducting a group with high levels of skill and motivation. She described honor choirs she conducted where students were:

> . . . all there because they are highly motivated to have the mountaintop experience as an artist. The common denominator is they all come in with a high level of musical ability, vocal ability, and they're prepared. Wow, then the music making and the connection! We're only working with community building and ensemble building. We are not teaching notes. We are not doing any of that. We are making music.

For Ms. H, because students' motivation was high and learning the musical material was not an obstacle, honor choir settings offered a direct route to creating connection.

Similarly, Ms. N's perspective suggested that singers' motivation for artistry might impact the creation of connection. While for Ms. N, complex, high-level music did not increase the likelihood of connection, she did express that creating connection was easier with older, more experienced choir students. With Walker's "upper-level, older group," connection "seems to be more intense," she said:

> Because they've gone a step further in their artistic development, I feel intuitively they're a little more open to that kind of body-soul-spirit academic engagement. It's like they crave that in a way, and they don't even know that they do. The bigger, younger choir is more rooted in general experience, a wider, broader skill base and artistic experience. I do

> go there with the younger kids. I do. I just don't feel like it's as frequent or as pointed. But the vibe is definitely there.

Though Ms. N's experience of creating connection differed according to the ensemble, she did not attribute the difference to students' musical abilities or skills. Instead, she discussed the difference in terms of artistic maturity and openness to deeper levels of artistic engagement.

Participants' multi-layered, often contradictory perspectives on the relationship between musical skill and creating connection reveal important complexities in understanding educators' creation of connection. In Chapter 6, I return to these issues to discuss their implications.

How Connection Works

When participants discussed connection, they described a complex phenomenon experienced by different individuals in a variety of forms. For example, connection could be experienced by individual singers, by unified groups of singers, or by some singers and not others. It could be experienced by performers, by audience members, or by one very anxious student in a rehearsal. It might be experienced by a complete group of students but not by their teacher. Individuals might experience connection to other singers or connection to text. Participants also held very different views around the topic of how connection works. In the following section, I share cross-case findings on who experiences connection, what students might feel connected to, audiences' roles in connection, alignment of participant and student experiences of connection, and students creating connection.

Who Experiences Connection

Participants described moments when every individual in an ensemble experienced connection at the same time. Ms. H said of the connection eighth-grade performers experienced at the community event, "they all felt it." Mr. E described the joyous connection experienced at one performance as "each to a person," and at another concert, "they felt like one." Ms. A said that when connection occurred, it "feel[s] like we all feel it." In some rehearsals Ms. A had been in, she shared that singers turned to each other to acknowledge, "Y'all, do you feel that?!" She described her community choir students' collective experience of connection while performing at a special venue: "they were all drawn in." Mr. E suggested that all students have to experience connection for oneness to occur: "once every [singer] in the room is in the right place, that's when the oneness starts to happen."

Though participants described a unified, collective experience of connection, they also expressed that, in practice, not all singers in a class or ensemble experienced connection together. Ms. N said, "really good connection can happen when not every single member maybe is in it." Mr. E agreed, saying, "I think we're naive to say that every singer connects every time. Some kids might find that was the most connecting performance ever. And other kids are left going, 'Ah, it was okay.'" He explained, "you can be totally connected to something and somebody else can totally be checked out. And that doesn't mean that your connection is any less valid." Mr. E compared students' different experiences of connection with worshippers' different experiences listening to a sermon. Sometimes, "our pastor will give a message, and there's a woman sitting there in

tears, and the person next to her is going, 'Well, I didn't get anything from that message.'" Mr. E explained the difference in individuals' experiences, "everyone gets out of any situation what they put into it."

Some participants expressed that students who were not experiencing connection detracted from others' experiences. In Ms. A's view, the "negative energy" of students who are not singing "is gonna affect the rest of the class." Mr. F had a similar experience and aimed to minimize the potentially negative influence of students who were not experiencing connection. "For the kids who *were* connecting, I decided it was my goal to just give them the chance to. . . ignore the haters around you for a moment and try and enjoy this and connect with each other." Students not experiencing connection might negatively affect those who were ready for connection, Mr. F shared, but it did not have to be so. At Liberty Charter, he decided to "drop that expectation" that everyone in choir achieved oneness together, concluding instead that connection "might have to happen in smaller clumps. Otherwise, it just wasn't going to happen at all."

What Students are Connected To

Participants discussed the object of students' experience of connection, which could be connection to fellow singers, to the teacher, to the music, to the audience, or to the greater world. "Connection is so multifaceted," Ms. N said. "It's physical. It's emotional. It's interpersonal, between me and them, and them to each other." For Ms. N, students experienced connection to the music, to her as a teacher, to their accompanist, and even to the physical education teacher who stopped by the choir classroom to share appreciation for students' singing. Ms. H also discussed the directionality of students'

experiences of connection. It is "hard to tell" if the connection is "to the music, to the choral space, or to the other choristers that they're collaborating with, or if it's to the director," she said. But "most of them. . . are feeling connected to the experience in some type of way."

Audiences' Roles

Participants shared that audiences influenced connection. The audience at Garrison High School's winter concert played a role in the performance's success. Feeling the energy from the crowd, Ms. A said, boosted students' experience of connection. Mr. E expressed that an audience was rooting for Falcon Point singers because of an emotional connection; he had sensed "the love of the audience for us, like they wanted us to be amazing." Ms. H experienced an audience being deeply moved by the Pine Village eighth-grade singers' performance. The connection was obvious to Ms. H because the audience members were so moved by the emotion students conveyed, she said, that they applauded before the piece's end. Ms. N shared that sometimes, who was in the audience mattered. Performing at a choir conference where she experienced a deep sense of connection, she said, felt different because the audience was "a roomful of choir directors."

Mr. F described the band's performance of "Billie Jean" at Liberty Charter's town hall meeting as an experience of connection highly dependent on audience interaction. He said he felt very proud when the band responded to the energy in the room by spontaneously creating a vamp to keep audience members dancing, and the audience's wild cheers represented the strongest community response he had seen at Liberty Charter.

At the Liberty Charter spring concert, too, the audience and other student performers were actively involved as they danced, moved, shouted, and cheered in support of performers throughout the show.

For Mr. F, connection could be created during interactions between audience and performers. He said, "I always wanted to put on performances that got rid of" the barrier between audience and performers. A stark separation between them, he said, reflected his own training in classical music and characterized many choral and classical concerts. Yet, he explained, "that's not what the rest of the world does for music." Audiences' active involvement reflected what has been "happening in communities that weren't predominantly White, to be honest, for a long time." Mr. F intentionally broke down barriers between audience and performers to help create experiences of connection and to reflect broader musical and cultural traditions.

Alignment of Participant and Student Experiences of Connection

Ms. H, Mr. F, and Mr. E shared that students could experience connection while participants themselves did not. At times, participants were unaware of students' experiences in the moment, and they learned about students' experiences later. After Ms. H realized that students "all felt something that I totally did not feel," she aimed to understand their experiences. "Their takeaways are always different. I can only ask questions and see what they're thinking." Ms. H expressed that even when students experienced connection without her, she still played a role in creating that connection. "I had to remember that sometimes I do create opportunities for them to connect" even when "the connection happened without me even being aware."

Unlike the other three participants, neither Ms. A or Ms. N could recall ever experiencing a disconnect between students' experiences of connection and their own. Rather, they expressed that their experiences in the moment aligned with students' experiences. "I try to be really in tune with my singers," Ms. A said, "especially at Garrison." On days when students were not "in that space" of readiness to experience connection, Ms. A said she did not try to "push the music" on them but would instead do something different than she had planned. Connection therefore reflected an intertwining of her experiences with students', a push and pull of responding to students' energy in performance, as if they were creating connection together.

Similarly, when Ms. N stood in front of a choir, she said, she felt very aware of the singers' experiences of connection. "I feel deeply connected to them in rehearsal and in performance," she explained. She aimed to create "a chamber music sort of vibe" in which she and students could collaborate as artists. Ms. N and Ms. A experienced connection occurring alongside student singers, while the other three participants sometimes described students' experiences as separate from their own.

Students Creating Connection

Participants expressed that some experiences of connection are generated by students, not by teachers. Ms. H shared that sometimes in moments when she did not intend to create connection, Pine Village Middle School students spontaneously expressed their joy in connection, as when eighth graders surprised her by cheering for their work on a drum part. Ms. A described how students created connection at their winter concert as a student leader urged the group pre-performance, "Come on, guys, we

got this. Let's believe in what we come here to do." Then, she said, more students "started to encourage each other like, 'Yes, we can do this. Okay, I know you scared, we all scared, but we actually can do this.'" The performance's success and students' experiences of connection, Ms. A said, could be traced to students' initiative.

Mr. E and Mr. F expressed that students' most meaningful moments of connection occurred in their absence. When Falcon Point students recalled their favorite activities, Mr. E said, "the things that they talked about had nothing to do with me conducting them at all, or me leading them even." Mr. F, similarly, gleaned from former students' social media posts and observations of students on karaoke days that students' experiences of connection were independent of their teachers' presence.

Sometimes, participants discovered students had experienced connection after they left the room. Ms. H noted that community choir singers experienced connection in her absence long after she had first encouraged them to connect around ideas in the text. Additionally, when students unabashedly belted karaoke while Mr. F stood in the back of the room or when the band snuck into school after hours to rehearse without him, Mr. F saw students building connection "behind the teacher's back."

Mr. E and Ms. N expressed not only that students had the ability to experience connection without teachers, but that they wanted them to do so. Mr. E said, "I tell my kids a lot, I would rather you don't need me. My goal, . . . the greatest compliment of me as a teacher is that you don't need me anymore." Ms. N expressed similar thoughts. As students in small groups discussed text or a musical passage, Ms. N regularly stepped back to leave students space for connection without her. She explained that during those

activities, “they’re deeply connected to each other, and not to me. . . I’m on the outside.” Often, during students’ conversations about repertoire, she said:

> …they ignore me completely, which I love. I want them to ignore me because I want them to be so engaged and honestly, so connected, that it doesn’t bother them, that it doesn’t influence them that I’m standing there.

Ms. N described that sometimes students did not need her to conduct, and they sometimes sang more expressively without her active leadership. Describing moments in rehearsal, she said it is “the best thing ever” when students are “in the collective sound, and they begin to need me less and less.”

Though Ms. N said sometimes connection could be more impactful without her direct influence, she also shared she felt a responsibility to set up conditions that would help students experience connection. “I know that I’m the one to build it,” she said. “They build it, too. It’s not me by myself, certainly not. But I have to be the one to facilitate it. Because I’ve lived a million more years than they have. And so it has to start with me.”

Similarly, Mr. E expressed that a teacher might be needed for connection to occur, though he argued teachers may be needed most by students with lower musical abilities. “I can’t fathom that a group of singers could come together without some sort of leader, teacher, and find that connection, unless they were all already competent choral musicians.” Mr. E cited that the strong abilities of students in Falcon Point’s Select Singers allowed the group to create connection independently. “They’re just talented singers. . . . And they don’t need me to be musical. They have musicality within them to create pretty special musical moments.” Mr. E viewed Select Singers as competent

enough choral musicians to create connection on their own; students whose musical abilities were less developed, he suggested, would likely need a teacher to help them experience connection during group singing. Again, Mr. E's viewpoints on the role of musical skill in creating connection differed from other participants' perspectives.

Barriers to Connection

Participants named barriers to connection including students' readiness to experience connection, conditions in the school, students' inhibitions, COVID-19, and formal music education. For some barriers, including school conditions, participants' experiences varied considerably. For other conditions, including COVID-19 and formal music education, most participants' experiences overlapped significantly. Below I review participants' diverging and overlapping experiences of barriers to creating connection.

Students' Readiness to Experience Connection

All participants shared that sometimes students were not ready to experience connection. Though connection was an expected part of the Walker choral program's culture, Ms. N articulated that, "in every class, in all the choirs," one or more students were not ready to experience connection. Mr. F said that in the spring concert, he said, "there was more connection" than in the winter concert, "but only amongst some of the kids." In the spring, he observed behaviors that indicated a lack of readiness or willingness to connect. "Some of the kids were clearly just leaning on the rail [of the risers] no matter how many times I told them not to," not singing along with the group.

Students Not Singing

When students did not sing, some participants interpreted their behavior as a lack of readiness to experience connection, and they worked to address it. Mr. F compared the number of students singing in the two concerts. “The winter concert, almost half the kids must have been faking it. And this time, [in the spring concert], that just wasn’t the case. Only maybe 10 of them were faking it. One of them, maskless, just standing there not singing a word.” Ms. A described how a student not singing in class could become a distraction. “Well, you can’t sit in my class and not sing. . . . So that became a thing every day, like, ‘Are you participating or not?’” She explained, “It’s not that I’m being mean to you. . . . I need to grasp those who are participating. I need them to sing.”

In Ms. H’s, Mr. E’s, and Ms. N’s classes, it was rare for any students not to sing. Ms. H explained that Pine Village Middle School choir classes were elective; students “have chosen to participate. . . . So I haven’t seen too much of those who did not want to participate, did not want to sing.” Mr. E said, “I’m fortunate for where I teach that I don’t see a lot of kids that don’t want to participate.” He could recall only a handful in his five years at Falcon Point. Ms. N, too, did not share any regular experiences with students who did not sing during class.

Why Students were Not Ready to Experience Connection

Participants offered varied interpretations of students’ not being ready to experience connection. Mr. F saw that students at Liberty Charter faced challenges with connection because their basic needs were not being met; thus, they were unable to experience higher-level needs including the “top-level need of connection” that choir

offers (Maslow, 1943, 1970). Though Ms. A did not refer directly to Maslow's theory, she too shared that environmental and psychological stressors prevented students from experiencing connection. Ms. A and Mr. F stated that in both Garrison's and Liberty Charter's communities, socioeconomic stressors, family challenges, gun violence, and drug use placed great strain on students and diminished their readiness for connection.

Mr. E rarely noted similar challenges faced by his students, though he did share that if students experience stressors "outside of the rehearsal space" they are "always constantly thinking about," their preoccupations can be a barrier to experiencing connection. Mr. E described effects of socioeconomic stressors on students in Falcon Point's unauditioned treble group. Many students in that ensemble, he said, missed school days because of suspensions, and they faced challenges outside of school. He viewed students' placement in a group home, difficulties getting rides, or lack of appropriate concert clothing as evidence of obstacles they faced. Some such circumstances, he said, prompted students to drop out of Falcon Point High School to attend an alternative school or earn their GED. When students experienced obstacles to success in school, Mr. E suggested, their ability to experience connection would be diminished.

Regardless of the broader context of students' lives, Mr. E shared, he viewed students' ability to experience connection on an individual basis. It would "be disingenuous for me to say a blanket statement for why" students are not experiencing connection. "What every individual brings to a choral rehearsal is going to decide whether they can find connection with it or not. . . . It goes back to mindset of the

individual kid." In the end, he said, is "it's up to" individual students "to come to us ready to learn and ready to be a part of something."

Ms. N expressed that students who did not have an adequate breakfast, enough sleep, or otherwise had unmet basic needs would have more trouble experiencing connection. She viewed her own students' challenges experiencing connection as related to physical, emotional, and mental fatigue. "It's not that they're not interested," she said; rather, "they don't have the resources." Sometimes, "other demands in their life, in the flow of the school day, or what happened the night before are so intense or so much, taking so much of their space, that they don't have anything left." Or, she said, students disconnect during class "when the challenge is too hard. And it doesn't feel good in their bodies." When students' resources were not sufficient for the class activity, Ms. N shared, they had difficulty experiencing connection.

Ms. H shared she did not notice students' struggles in the outside world as barriers to connection. Rather, she said, choir sometimes served as a place for students to take a break from their struggles, including academic pressures or "learning disabilities or learning challenges" in school. She explained, "many of those things go away" in the choral setting. Rather than identifying students' struggles outside the choir classroom as barriers to connection, she said, "I typically find the opposite," that Pine Village students experienced choir as "retreat or recovery from the outside pulses of the world."

Discovering Later that Students Experienced Connection

Mr. F was surprised when students who he thought were disconnected from the group singing experience revealed weeks later that the experience had been meaningful.

Mr. F shared that at the end of the year, some graduating seniors who "messed around in my class the entire year" approached him to say, "Mr. F, I know you're soft, and you should probably become tougher. But you did have a big impact on me, and I respect you. So thank you." Mr. F said it was shocking to receive this "very positive feedback from lots of students" because their prior communication had not indicated they were experiencing the class as impactful. He shared a similar story of a graduating senior "who really did outwardly seem to hate being in the class and the concerts" and who "kind of complained about everything." After graduation, "she came over and just gave me a hug and told me how much she enjoyed the class and that she would miss it." And I was like, 'What the heck?!' [laughs]."

Mr. F's students sometimes surprised him with sudden readiness to experience connection during class. One student, he said, "wouldn't sing for the majority of the year. I was getting really frustrated with her class. And one day, she just was like, 'Can I sing for you?'" Mr. F resisted the urge to keep running rehearsal efficiently, he said, and paused his lesson plan. "Okay, sure, yeah, go for it." After she sang, he realized, "it turns out she had no issue with how I was teaching or the music. All of what I perceived to be her distaste of me and my class was nervousness and anxiety."

Though no participants other than Mr. F described being surprised to find out students had experienced connection, Ms. A did share that, in her experience, it could take time to help students "one day love to sing, love choir." As she gave students different roles and encouraged them to join the group by creating a sense of family, Ms. A made space for students to develop a connection to the group over many months of the

school year. Her approach suggested a belief that students who initially showed little readiness to connect could eventually experience significant connection.

Conditions in the School

Five conditions in participants' schools, participants shared, shaped the degree to which they were able to create connection. First, scheduling processes and the choir program's structure introduced obstacles for some participants. Second, for some, organization of school performances proved a barrier to connection. Third, students' absences from class could affect connection. Fourth, for some, vertical alignment of district music programs or students' prior school music education affected creation of connection. Fifth, participants indicated that development of a "singing culture," and the prior existence of a singing culture at a school, was essential to creating connection on a consistent basis.

Scheduling and Program Structure

At the time of data collection, Ms. A taught at Garrison in the first year the school had had a music program in over 20 years, and Mr. F taught at Liberty Charter in the school's first year with a music program. Both participants stepped into program structures that they had not designed, which could presumably be refined and improved in future years, as might have already occurred in Ms. H's, Mr. E's, and Ms. N's longer-established school programs. Both Ms. A and Mr. F articulated that elements of the program's structure beyond their control acted as barriers to connection, and they described many more school-based barriers than did other participants.

Ms. A expressed frustration with the system that did not include seniors in the choir program because "as they grow up, you never have nobody that's wichu all four years. Because you pull the seniors. Why?" Other scheduling obstacles affected Ms. A's work, including students enrolled in choir who did not want to be there or students whom school personnel told they did not have to sing. Ms. A also said she knew students in the school who wanted to sing in choir, but they were not placed in choir class. She explained that such scheduling and structural obstacles created barriers to connection and to the program's success. In addition, Ms. A said she believed the choir program could have been stronger if her position had not been part-time. "Choir probably would have been better if I was there every day," she said, "all day like a regular teacher. I probably could have made deeper connections." The newness of the program, uneven enrollment, lack of predictable procedures, and the part-time status of Ms. A's position detracted from her goals in working with Garrison students.

Procedures for enrolling students in choir class presented challenges for Mr. F, as well. Because the Liberty Charter program was just beginning, school administrators worked to put large numbers of students in choir classes. Mr. F described the many students who did not elect choir as part of the reason connection with everyone was difficult to achieve. "Partially because it was just kind of 'y'all come,' half of them didn't know they were choosing the class," he said, which led some students to feel resentment about being in choir.

Ms. N, Mr. E, and Ms. H did not identify significant obstacles related to students rostered in their classes. Ms. N discussed scheduling obstacles in terms of contact time

rather than as challenges with rostering. “That scheduling of having such a finite time to create a connective experience. . . It’s a lot because there is so much transition” in students’ school days. Ms. N lamented the loss of student contact time in small lesson groups, and she looked forward to the coming year’s new bell schedule which would allow her to see students more frequently, which “lends itself to a better connective process, because we just see each other more.”

Mr. E discussed structural obstacles involving students missing class temporarily, as when students in the unauditioned treble choir missed class due to in-school or out-of-school suspensions. Students’ curricular choices sometimes required them to leave the choir program. “I do think schedules preclude us a lot. . . Sometimes choir is the thing that [students] give up because there’s a degree field or there’s a path that they want to go to, whether it’s our culinary institute” or “offsite programs.” For Mr. E, scheduling challenges came from students having to choose between choir and other elective or special programs.

Ms. H discussed the scheduling compromise made at Pine Village to allow students to participate in both choral and instrumental ensembles. At every other class meeting, students who were enrolled in band or orchestra missed choir class, leaving only the students who were enrolled only in choir. Ms. H did not describe this scheduling compromise as an obstacle, however. Instead, she considered it an asset to have time to work with choir-only students on musicianship skills, ensemble skills, or part singing.

Organization of Performances

Both Mr. F and Ms. A described obstacles related to the organization of performances. Mr. F said at Liberty Charter, he had to "be much more hands on," taking more responsibility for logistical details, including "sound and stage setup" because there was no history of students who had developed a knowledge base for those tasks. "That will hopefully change as I am able to delegate more as these kids gain experience." Until Mr. F was able to release some responsibilities to students, he shared, performance responsibilities pulled his attention away from his focus on creating experiences of connection.

Ms. A expressed frustration with how the timing mistake at Garrison's winter concert had cut short students' performance. She explained how the error negatively affected students' motivation:

> It's 2:59. School is out at 3:02. We don't have time. We don't have *time*. So with that, 'I did all this hard work for nothing'–that's what they were saying. We did all this work for nothing. So you get knocked back down.

The organization of the first concert at Garrison in over 20 years did not go smoothly for Ms. A's students, and Ms. A viewed the organizational error as a negative influence on her students' ability to experience connection.

Absences from Class

Other obstacles involved students missing class due to detention or holidays. Mr. F described one part of the spring concert as "messy" due to student absences. He had tried to engage a few seniors he described as "mischievous" and "checked out" by asking them to add some ad libs, callouts, and "playful banter" during one of the songs.

However, Mr. F said that part of the performance did not go well because the students "were in detention during the final rehearsal [laughs], so they didn't really get a chance to try it."

Another obstacle for Mr. F was that for a month of rehearsal, "a good section of kids" missed class to observe Ramadan. In the one to two weeks before the concert, he worked to help those students catch up, but "they were crazy weeks of field trips, and college this, and assembly that, and constant soccer and basketball," which caused more absences from rehearsals. Mr. F shared he wished he had more foresight to plan for the absences in advance. But ultimately, at the concert, "there were pockets of kids who were overprepared and pockets of kids who were severely underprepared. So I suspect that might have affected their ability, even if they wanted to connect with the concert, to feel good about it."

Vertical Alignment

Mr. F described structural obstacles related to the lack of vertical alignment in the Liberty Charter music program. Only juniors and seniors were enrolled in Mr. F's classes, which he saw as a limitation in bridging the curriculum between middle school and high school. Further, the juniors and seniors he taught, he said, "had very minimal to no exposure to music prior to this." He was working to strengthen links with the middle school music teacher's program, "but that two-year gap in when my students can take her classes and take mine is obviously pretty brutal towards building the more full-fledged music program." Mr. F described his strategy for moving forward despite obstacles to creating connection, saying that for the moment, he would keep doing his best "to not

worry about the overall structural issues to creating that community. Cause if I just worry about that, then we'll never actually create it." Mr. E identified an obstacle related to vertical alignment that involved educators at the middle school level. He shared that the middle school choir teachers, unlike in previous years, did not commit to co-lead a joint festival and concert with middle school and Falcon Point High School singers. Aside from yearly middle school visits being canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions, Mr. E did not identify any other specific challenges related to vertical alignment.

Singing Culture

Several participants discussed the role of a "singing culture" in facilitating experiences of connection. Ms. A explained a lack of a singing culture at Garrison, saying students "don't come from a community of singing" and singing is "not as important to them." In contrast, Ms. A said, students in the Lee Community Honor Choir "come in ready. . . . Everybody's working hard, everybody's trying." She made it clear that the difference between groups did not reflect a change in her directing style, "it's just one group has a culture of choral singing; the other does not."

One of Ms. A's goals was to build a singing culture at Garrison while she helped students learn to represent their school with confidence. Ms. A unhesitatingly said that a singing culture could be built at the school, and she suggested an auditioned choir would help develop it. At the same time, she viewed Garrison's community context as a persistent obstacle to building a culture of singing. Because Garrison was an underresourced, underserved school in a community with high poverty and high crime rates, Ms. A questioned how students could maintain hope. She suggested that, with

changes in the program structure, building a singing culture could be possible, but other obstacles might remain.

Mr. F discussed a need to build a singing culture at Liberty Charter. Some students, he said, showed evidence of a growing culture of singing when they did "the chorus thing" of looking at each other and interacting while they sang. He shared that he was "starting to see kids finally move with the music. . . . Even if it's just moving with the rap, and just starting to try it." He continued, "so it makes me feel like it is possible to develop that culture. But that is a culture that needs to be developed." At Fairwood North, in contrast, a singing culture had already existed for many years before he began teaching there, an element he described as very important when a teacher aims to create connection.

Ms. N and Mr. E described well-established singing cultures in their teaching settings. Ms. N described a culture of participation and connection at Walker Area High School:

> That's just the culture that I and the students have created over the past 10 years, that they want to be there. And there's an expectation of connection to each other, but also to the content. And it's just an expected part of the culture. So I don't feel a struggle for that connection.

Similarly, when Mr. E shared that active participation in choir is not a regular obstacle at Falcon Point, he said, "a lot of that is the culture that we've got." He explained that seniors, over four years, had helped to establish a culture of belonging. Creating a culture, Mr. E expressed, was vital to his goals: "It's all about culture. . . . The whole thing about connection has to do with culture." Ms. H, in contrast to other participants, did not discuss the existence of a "singing culture" at Pine Village or its effect on connection.

Students' Inhibitions

Participants identified students' inhibitions as barriers to connection. Four concepts, fear, vulnerability, judgment, and trust, sometimes played a large role in either creating or blocking experiences of connection. Often, participants expressed that safety or various forms of togetherness in the classroom were requirements for creating connection. Below, I share participants' views on inhibitions and the role of fear, vulnerability, judgment, and trust as elements of creating connection.

Fear

Ms. A and Mr. F most extensively discussed fear of singing or performing as a barrier to connection; Ms. N identified students' fear of making mistakes as a barrier; and neither Mr. E or Ms. H discussed fear in relation to connection. At Liberty Charter, Mr. F said, the "anxiety of singing," students' "fear of [their] own voice," and the overwhelming fear, for some, of having to sing in front of others, was the primary inhibitor of connection. Hearing a group of students explain that they did not participate in class due to fear fundamentally changed Mr. F's approach to teaching. During Liberty Charter classes, he discussed fear as an obstacle and worked to help students incrementally develop confidence in using their voices. For Mr. F, the influence of students' fear was not limited to Liberty Charter; he described fear as the largest challenge "across environments," no matter what the school setting.

Ms. A also saw fear as an inhibitor to students' experiences of connection. At Garrison students' first concert performance, Ms. A recognized their fear, and a student leader acknowledged it, too, saying, "I know you scared, we all scared, but we actually

can do this." When students got on stage, they reported their fear was so overwhelming they had hives. However, Ms. A said, once "the audience was getting more involved, they were getting stronger and stronger on stage," and "the fear that they once had was gone." With encouragement from their peer and support from the audience, their fear diminished, and, Ms. A said, "they were amazing."

Ms. N discussed reducing fear in a rehearsal context, explaining that she aimed to eliminate students' fear of making mistakes. When students are afraid to make mistakes and their experience becomes more "fear-based," she said, "they are hesitant to come into the experience." Ms. N worked to reduce students' fear of committing errors by noticing where students hesitated, helping students increase their awareness, and avoiding interactions with a relentless focus on technical musical details, which students might experience as criticism.

Vulnerability

Ms. A, Mr. E, and Mr. F expressed that experiencing connection requires vulnerability. Ms. H and Ms. N did not discuss vulnerability, though they did discuss related ideas of judgment and trust. Mr. E said students' vulnerability signified an experience of connection "because to truly connect with someone, you have to be vulnerable." Mr. E viewed part of a conductor's responsibility as helping singers feel vulnerable within the group and discussed how gender related to vulnerability. He considered himself a role model because "for a lot of kids, I would be the first male that they see that's vulnerable in front of them." Other males in their lives, he expressed, might put up a "wall of masculinity" rather than expressing vulnerability in front of

others. Mr. E shared that through modeling, being vulnerable and being real in front of students, he helped create connection.

Ms. A explained simply, “singing is vulnerable. It’s vulnerable to do.” She encouraged vulnerability by working to create togetherness as family, working to build “that sense of connection, that family, that I gotchu.” Mr. F agreed that singing requires vulnerability, which “can close off a lot of kids,” partly because cultural values discouraged vulnerability in Liberty Charter students’ community. Mr. F described how vulnerability related to emotional expression during choral singing. “I think it’s all kind of related,” he said. “People with interpersonal fears about making themselves emotionally vulnerable. . . struggle connecting to the emotional element and the connection element in singing, as well.”

Judgment

All participants except Ms. A expressed that eliminating judgment could help students feel comfortable and confident enough to experience connection. As Ms. H worked to help students build collaborative skills and take ownership of their knowledge, she hoped students could offer input on musical activities in an atmosphere “where there is no judgment.” At times, she asked students to evaluate their musical accuracy not as good or bad, but by removing judgment completely. Ms. H aimed to help students build ensemble skills and have meaningful choral experiences while communicating that their work was not being judged.

As an undergraduate singer, Ms. N struggled to eliminate judgment of her voice. “It didn’t matter how many voice lessons I had, I still felt judgment toward myself for my

singing." She eventually eliminated the undesired "silent comparison" in her head and learned to "just really make sound, and to be at home with that sound." In the opening sequence she used with students, Ms. N looked toward the same goal. When students closed their eyes, it helped eliminate judgment from others "that might not even be real but might be perceived." Absence of self-judgment, she expressed, helped create a pathway for students' experiences of connection.

Mr. F and Mr. E also associated a lack of judgment with facilitating experiences of connection. Mr. F described connection as "being uninhibited from external worry, pressure, and even judgment across the choir." Mr. E discussed judgment as it related to students' vulnerability. Judgment from others, he said, negatively affects students, causing them to "close up" and be less vulnerable around others. Mr. E also shared that, though teachers can help shape a non-judgmental atmosphere, individual students' traits can mediate the potential effects of judgment. Confident individuals, he said, do not "feel like every person in the world is going to judge you."

Trust

Every participant discussed trust as a facilitator of connection. Mr. E explained, "It's so much easier for a singer to experience connection in a group that they know, in a group of people that they trust." Depending on the choral setting and how long singers had known each other, he said, trust could be easier or more difficult to build. For instance, in "the church choir that has known each other for 20 years" or "the high school choir whose director's known them for seven years," trust comes more easily. With the Falcon Point students Mr. E had known since they were in fifth grade, he said, "there's a

special amount of trust that these kids have with me, that they trust that I've got their best . . . [interests] at heart and that I want them to be successful." On the other hand, Mr. E said, when singers do not know each other or know the teacher, the challenge to build trust is greater. For instance, he said, "it's nearly impossible to develop [trust] in a one-day honor choir."

Ms. N shared that trust is required as students move closer to a performance. When a performance is approaching, students sense, "we better trust each other, we better connect to each other because there's a thing that's going to happen. And there are expectations here of ourselves, and of us as a group." Ms. A also discussed the trust required for performances. Students at Garrison "made magic on that stage" in their first concert, she said, because they all wanted to pull their weight, and because they "trusted me, and they trusted each other."

Ms. N related her goal of working toward social justice to creating trust within Walker Area High School ensembles. She wanted students to know themselves and their world, to "feel like they can trust this group of people that are around them," and to "be themselves." After Ms. N's students did their "unison singing process every single day. . . they trust that sound so much, they trust that process so much," and they extended that trust into their work on repertoire. The relationships in choir could be especially valuable, Ms. N shared, "because I don't know how many other places in their lives or other classrooms or in their homes that they actually have people they can trust." Ms. N, like Ms. A, aimed to create an environment where students could trust that "there are people around them who've got them," who have their backs.

Ms. H explained that in her class, students learned to trust each other when they used their peers as models. During one rhythmic exercise, one student looked at Ms. H for help. Then, she said, he "trusted that first group" of students, "and just watched them and just relied on them." Working together collaboratively facilitated trust between Ms. H's students, which in turn, she said, facilitated connection.

When Mr. F's students experienced connection and sang with abandon during a pizza party, he attributed students' lack of inhibition to their trust of each other. There were "only maybe 12 kids there," he said, and "they are all deeply trusting of each other" because of how much time they spent together outside of curricular class time. For Mr. F, as for all participants, students building trust in one another could help create experiences of connection.

COVID-19

All participants shared that conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic presented barriers to creating connection. Time away from group interactions and in-person performances, requirements to remain distant, mask-wearing, and loss of learning opportunities increased the challenge involved in creating connection. In instances when some COVID-related restrictions ceased, such as when masks were removed or performance travel resumed, Ms. N and Mr. E described strong, noticeable moments of connection. Still, participants expected the effects of COVID-related restrictions to last a long time. Both Ms. H and Ms. N identified the process of recovery from pandemic-related conditions as slow, and they expected patience would be required as individuals

slowly regained characteristics of unity, closeness and trust that were more reliable before the pandemic.

Formal Music Education

Formal music education helped shape participants' experiences of connection as choral singers, their views on musical achievement and connection, and their interpretations of the conductor role. Below, I share findings about participants' experiences of formal music education. Their experiences illuminated complexities in how they created connection with students.

Experiences as a Choral Singer

Ms. H was the only participant who shared they never experienced connection in an undergraduate or graduate choral ensemble, and she expressed that several of her values and practices conflicted with her formal music education. She wanted "my intellectual voice as well as my physical voice to be embraced in the rehearsal," but, she said, the wealth of musical, artistic knowledge she possessed was not recognized in undergraduate and graduate choral settings. Contrasting her knowledge with the Eurocentric model of education, she explained that before formal music education, she already possessed the skills she needed for success. She shared that in her private voice lessons:

> I learned how to breathe. And it was all incredible. But I didn't need to know that. When I was in the church choir, I naturally breathed and was able to hold the note properly, without pushing the voice or straining the voice. It's amazing how. . . you just have things that you understand naturally in the experience. But sometimes when you go to the Eurocentric type of education, they strip all of that away, and then teach you. My sound was always there. All you needed to give me was the symbol. That's all you needed to do.

Growing up in her family and community, Ms. H said, "I always was able to sing with a freedom that I really enjoyed," but classical choral singing was different "not because of the repertoire, but my freedom of breath." Further, because she was "always asked to sing *senza* vibrato, which always was so hurtful. . . . Choral singing for me was difficult." When conductors asked Ms. H to change her singing voice, she said, "I think that just took a piece of me every time." Her experiences in formal university music education shaped her goals as an educator: "And so for me, I'm always trying to find a way to build community, rather than take away those tiny community pieces." Ms. H's goals to help students create and share knowledge in a community setting expressed her values, she said, but not the values of the formal institutional settings where she studied music.

Mr. F expressed tensions between his formal singing and conducting experiences and the world of music-making he aimed to engage in with students. As both a high school and undergraduate singer, he experienced a "high" of connection during conductor-led performances. His formal, classical music education, he shared, framed the conductor as someone who leads singers to excellence by respecting the music above all else. However, Mr. F saw that students' strongest experiences of connection occurred when leaders prioritized people over music. Contrary to his formal music education, Mr. F aimed to minimize his role as a conductor and make more space for students to create connection on their own.

Ms. N experienced profound moments of connection during her undergraduate choir experience, including feeling deeply connected to those around at a memorable choral conference performance. However, she also struggled with her vocal technique

and minimizing self-judgment. The demands made on her singing voice in the choral setting, including singing without vibrato, were challenging. The varied vocal techniques asked of her in show choir, voice lessons, and choir differed so significantly, she said, that she found her voice exhausted to the point that sometimes she could make no sound. At those moments, she recalled, she had to mouth the words during choir rehearsal, an experience of shame for her. As a singer in formal music education settings, Ms. N experienced moments that were both uplifting and deflating.

Ms. A described being part of one undergraduate performance ensemble as "probably the best group singing that I've done," and she credited that experience with teaching her about disciplined rehearsal practices and high standards. At the same time, Ms. A said, because "the classical world is not my culture," her experience of undergraduate music education "was being immersed in a new world." The gospel tradition she grew up in, not the formal university setting, provided the foundation of her approach to connection, she shared.

Mr. E experienced memorable moments of connection as a choral singer in both high school and university settings. He did not share any challenges or difficulties with his undergraduate or graduate education as a vocalist or choral singer.

The Conductor Role

Most participants shared a view that the traditional role of a choral conductor ran contrary to their values as educators. Ms. H expressed that the conductors she worked with in her university studies prioritized musical excellence. They studied their scores thoroughly and aimed to present a flawless performance that was faithful to the score.

Singing with those conductors, Ms. H said, “I did it right, and it was perfect,” she said. But “I never felt as if the conductor even knew my name.” Further, she shared, conductors dictated musical decisions including where to breathe or how to interpret a phrase; singers were never consulted about the musical ideas they brought to the rehearsal.

Mr. F painted a similar picture of the traditional role of choral conductors. Many conductors, he shared, prioritized music instead of people, sometimes acting “nasty” to singers to get them to the desired musical performance. That approach did not create connection, he said. Instead, Mr. F suggested, all choral conductors “should be thinking of themselves as educators. . . not just musical conduits.”

Considering the conductor role, Ms. N asked, “do we need to have a conductor? I don’t know. Um, do we? Maybe. [Laughs]” She clarified, “Obviously, in some circumstances, yes, of course, we need to have a conductor for some things.” She specified her beliefs about the conductor’s role in interacting with student musicians. “I guess,” she said, “I’m hoping that, at least in the experiences I have with my students, that it doesn’t feel like conductor-to-student-driven all the time. And that . . . the experience is collaborative and not one directional.” Ms. N, like other participants, saw the ideal approach to conducting as one that honors students as collaborators.

Mr. E did not discuss or characterize the conductor role as inherently problematic or as contrary to his values. He described the conductor’s responsibility to help singers experience connection by understanding “the depth and beauty of choral music.” Yet he also told students, “You don’t need me.” Using James Jordan’s (2017) metaphor of the

conductor as prism, he explained that the sole reason to have a conductor is that "together it gives us a focal point that we can shine the rainbow or the beauty of our sound out to the audience." Rather than "giving and shaping every phrase" himself, he wanted to leave singers with more responsibility for choices related to musical expression. When conductors make all the musical choices, he said, students are unlikely to experience connection as much as educators would like. If choral educators tell students to perform music precisely the way they would like it to be, Mr. E explained, they will create experiences of connection for themselves but not necessarily for students.

The Conductor's Role in Error Detection

Participants discussed how the conductor's role in identifying errors could act as a barrier to connection. Ms. H and Mr. E shared that when they were preoccupied with technical imperfections or constantly scanning for passages needing technical improvement, they were unable to experience connection alongside students. Ms. N described how focusing on musical errors could negatively affect her work with students. "If there's too much focus or stress on. . . fixing something or perfection," she said, "that connectivity between us, me and them, and them to each other" weakens. Part of Ms. N's development as a conductor, she said, was trying to "engage with musical excellence. . . and the pursuit of meaningful interpretation—cause that's the goal always—in a different way that doesn't put stress on the relationship." Ms. N worked to identify errors in ways that avoided diminishing students or making them feel "less-than in the moment"; instead, she framed the process as bringing an issue to students' awareness or helping students notice where they were hesitating.

Ms. A, similarly, aimed to continually communicate to singers even if something was not going well. She described her approach as being like your "favorite auntie" who can tell you something difficult to hear in a straightforward, loving way. She communicated to students, "'Ok, it's pitchy? I see that, that's okay. But don't worry, I gotchu.'" She continued, "'If you trust me, I'll fix this, and I'll fix it in a way that you don't feel intimidated, you don't feel like I wanted what's bad for you.'" Trust was essential when Ms. A was helping students fix errors, she explained. "I try to find those ways to ensure that they know, whatever I'm doing, I'm doing it for you, for the best of you, to make you better."

Process versus Product

Ms. H reflected deeply on the tensions between process and product. She expressed that her own experiences as a singer left her feeling undervalued because of her conductors' overemphasis on product, yet she sometimes regrettably found herself prioritizing an excellent product in ways that could jeopardize students' experiences of connection. She recognized that a perfect product did not exist and acknowledged that students did not need a technically-refined product to experience connection; but still, she expressed, she had to work against her instincts to prioritize technical excellence, the priority that had been modeled in her formal music education.

Ms. N shared that in her formal musical education, success was also based on a refined performance product. Over years of development as a teacher, her values related to process and product had changed. She described that when she moved from an elementary school teaching position to a high school role, she felt pressure to prioritize

competition and excellence in the product students created. It took a few years, she said, to return to the student-centered values of her true teaching philosophy, which had guided her teaching at the elementary school level. Like Ms. H, Ms. N articulated a tension between the values in her formal musical education and the values she sought to enact while working with students.

Collective Essence: Connection is Created by Caring for Students' Life Experiences

Cross-case analysis yielded a collective essence: *connection is created when educators communicate care for students' experiences of life*. This collective essence guided all participants' work, as this care shaped the pathways participants used to help students experience connection. Participants honored students' perspectives, noted how students were feeling and worked to support them, and aimed to create connection that could benefit students in music classes and in their broader experiences of life.

Ms. H expressed care for students by honoring their perspectives and contributions. After her own voice was minimized and her knowledge overlooked during her undergraduate and graduate music education, Ms. H worked assiduously to ensure students' contributions were valued and heard in the rehearsal process. Ms. H shaped a collaborative environment where knowledge was shared and students worked in community to create connection, which occurred both with and without her deliberate facilitation. Mr. F also cared for students by honoring their perspectives and recognizing students' ability to create connection independently. After observing that students' chronic stressors, fear, and inconsistent past school music instruction acted as barriers, Mr. F re-crafted his pedagogy to help students create connection through their existing

strengths, with his guidance. Similarly, Ms. A took careful note of students' energies and mental states, and she sought to create experiences of connection when students seemed ready. Seeking to care for every student in a family-like community, Ms. A expressed unconditional support for students no matter what their state of mind. Mr. E aimed to help students develop mindsets that could help them live more flourishing lives. Through classroom rituals, quotes, and examining messages in choral texts, Mr. E communicated that students' thinking could help create connection and profoundly change their experience of life. Ms. N, similarly, strove to create experiences that impacted students on a deep level. By drawing students' awareness to the healing, regenerative, and stress-relieving effects of connection, Ms. N communicated care for students' spiritual and physical wellbeing. Through her focus on social justice, she helped extend students' experiences outward to a sense of care for the larger world. All participants' practices suggested they created connection through caring and seeking to help their students live more meaningful and rewarding lives.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I discuss implications of the findings and the findings' relationships to existing literature. Second, based on the findings, I offer suggestions for how music educators might create connection. Third, I propose ideas for how researchers might investigate connection in future studies. Finally, I offer a conclusion to the study.

Collective Essence: Connection is Created by Caring for Students' Life Experiences

The participants in this study were selected because they prioritized connection during group singing. Aligning with concepts of educators as ones-caring (Noddings, 1992, 2012) and as individuals in singing-caring relations (Parker & Hutton, in press), participants' teaching practices exemplified care for students' life experiences. Participants created connection by heightening their awareness of students' readiness to connect in the moment and responding accordingly. Their responsiveness reflects research on the importance of educators' empathy, attunement, and presence along with findings on building positive teacher–student relationships in a compassionate, safe learning environment (Hendricks, 2018; Hutton, 2022; Reeve, 2006; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006; Sweet, 2008).

Each participant cared for students' life experiences through a distinct approach that reflected their personalities and past experiences as musicians and educators. Differences among this study's participants reflected research by Borst (2002), who found that the personalities of exemplary high school choral teachers were woven into

their teaching through a personal, situational process. Despite individual differences, the core of each participant's approach was the same; they began by valuing students, then worked to help students deepen their connection to others, to music, and to the world. Findings suggest educators can effectively create connection while being guided by their own individual histories, perspectives, and approaches.

Connection as Experienced

Participants affirmed that connection occurred in the form of togetherness, synchrony, or oneness. Participants' practices of creating connection indicated that togetherness served as a foundation, that synchrony's role in connection most often involved singers' physical movement, and that oneness, often described as magic, also took a variety of forms. In this section, I discuss participants' experiences of different forms of connection and how these experiences relate to existing literature.

Togetherness as Foundational

Togetherness formed the foundation of creating connection, as each participant named, fostered, and discussed togetherness in the choral classroom. As they facilitated community and belonging, participants encouraged students to rely on and support each other as family or collaborators. They recognized the need for vulnerability and trust in creating connection and expressed that connection through togetherness created meaningful and rewarding life experiences. To foster their goals for group singing, participants encouraged students to build relationships and to work together as a unified whole. The finding that togetherness serves as a foundation for connection reflects extant research, which has identified social and relational interactions as a primary positive

effect of group singing (Adderley et al., 2003; Bartolome, 2013; Campbell et al., 2007; Hylton, 1981; Lee et al., 2017; Parker, 2010, 2011, 2016). Additionally, the present study offers togetherness as a lens that might complement or broaden previous researchers' investigations of community, team, belonging, or safe space (Adderley et al., 2003; Hendricks, 2021; Jorgensen, 1995; Parker, 2010; Sweet, 2010; Willingham, 2001).

Exploring the relational nature of group singing reveals how togetherness might serve as a foundation for connection. Positive teacher–student relationships and reciprocal singing-caring relations can build experiences of togetherness (Hutton, 2022; Parker & Hutton, in press). Furthermore, researchers have reported that positive teacher–student relationships correlate with effective teaching practices (Li et al., 2022; van der Lans et al., 2020). Relationships and teaching practices can interact cyclically, as relationships facilitate effective teaching which can, in turn, incite more positive relationships. This study's participants, who prioritized connection in their work, may have built healthy teacher–student relationships that aided their development of effective teaching strategies which, in turn, helped them create experiences of connection.

Togetherness might also act as a foundation for connection by enhancing synchrony. When individuals have a caring relationship with another, they are more likely to mimic the other's facial expressions. Hatfield et al. (1993), who found that mothers synchronize movements with their own children more than with others' children, explained, "we generally mimic the behavior of those to whom we feel close, and feel closer to those who mimic our behavior" (p. 44). When singers feel close to one another, educators can expect them to more often synchronize their movements. In light of

Hatfield et al.'s (1993) finding about synchrony and parent–child relationships, Ms. A's encouragement that students should experience choir as family takes on further dimension. Nagoski (2010) described multilayered interactions between choral conductors and singers, also noting the relationship between care and emotional contagion. "Individuals are more likely to be susceptible to someone's emotional contagion when they care about them, which generally comes about through knowledge and trust" (Nagoski, 2010, p. 26). The idea that knowledge and trust facilitate emotional contagion supports Ms. A's idea that if she had been at Garrison High School every day, and if students had had more time to interact with her and get to know her, students may have been more likely to experience connection while working with her.

Synchrony

Participants described synchrony as an important part of connection, and participants most frequently mentioned synchrony of singers' movement, including swaying or stepping. Presumably, participants found such forms of synchrony easier to discern and evaluate than, for example, synchrony of conducting gesture and singers' posture or individual singers' synchrony of breath. And understandably, participants did not comment on singers' alignment of heart rates or other physiological changes that occur during group singing, as such effects are not readily observable in classroom settings. However, it was somewhat surprising that participants rarely discussed synchrony of breath, despite the fact that they sometimes led participants through synchronized breathing exercises as part of the warm-up process. Moreover, participants did not discuss a potential direct relationship between synchronized movements in warm

ups and creation of connection. Researchers have explored how movement strategies in choir can aid expression, interpretation, or vocal technique (Benson, 2011; Manganello, 2011). Findings in this study raise the possibility that such movements, when synchronized, not only serve vocal-pedagogy goals but can also create connection. Singers' unification of breath and of movements during classroom activities might represent overlooked opportunities to create connection through synchrony.

Oneness

Participants frequently described connection as oneness. Their view of connection as magical affirmed previous findings that connection during group singing has a reverent, awe-inspiring quality that makes it difficult to describe in words (Boyce-Tillman, 2016; Countryman, 2008; Gabrielsson, 2010; Parker, 2011). Aligning with perspectives of a high school choir student in Parker's (2011) study who said, "You can't really put your finger on it, but it's there" (p. 309), participants expressed an assured sense that connection occurs during group singing even if it is difficult to name. As Ms. H described it, when connection happens, "You just know."

Ms. N described her experiences of oneness as being "the real me" and aimed to help students have the same experiences of showing up as their true selves. Ms. N's conception of connection reflects Maslow's (1999) theory that peak experiences relate to self-actualization, including the expression of one's truest self. Mr. F and Ms. N discussed experiences of connection facilitated by shedding self-judgment. The two participants' perspectives likely reflected their study of Maslow's and Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) work, as absence of self-consciousness and judgment reflects Maslow's

description of peak experiences, along with researchers' findings on flow and strong experiences in music (Custodero, 2002; Gabrielsson, 2010; Gabrielsson et al., 2016). Individuals undergoing flow lose self-awareness as they become completely absorbed in an activity and, sometimes, experience a sense of merging with the world that characterizes oneness (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Lamont, 2012; Maslow, 1999). Releasing fear, expressing vulnerability, and shedding self-judgment constitute elements of peak experiences and elements of connection.

Ms. N cited singing as her spiritual practice, discussed connection as a profound sense of awareness, and described connection as vibration and a sense of being alive. Several scholars use similar descriptions of vibration and aliveness during group singing. Alexander (2021) found that gospel choirs' ecstatic experiences grow from alignment of singers' vibrational, resonant qualities. Gibson (2021) described singing with children as a "wonderful multi-layered experience of sound, vibration, interaction, and emotion" that begs the question "Why do I feel so alive when I sing?" (p. 161). A participant in Hoffman's (2016) study of adult amateur choristers described an experience of oneness as "the whole room" (p. 126) or "every cell of my body" vibrating (p. 139). In their work on compassion and authentic connection, Hendricks (2018, 2021) and Boyce-Tillman (2016) have described musicking as alignment of vibrational qualities. Music, Hendricks (2021) wrote, can "offer unique avenues for authentic connection by the sheer essence of this vibroacoustic art, where musickers can not only see and hear, but also *feel* the vibrations of their collective endeavor" (p. 249). Ms. N's experience reflects a common

experience of connection during group singing as oneness, a relationship to a larger, vibrational spiritual energy that, though unseen, is profoundly felt.

Healing

Ms. A discussed the power of music to help individuals weather difficult times. "Singing reaches your soul," she said, like no other experience in life. "When you get done, it's the music that's gon' get you through." Ms. N expressed a similar idea as she described the power of group singing to heal, which she reconceptualized after her own serious illness. Ms. N's experience reflected Castle's (2021) description of singing's healing power and Joyce's (1993) findings on seven women who used singing as a holistic and connective practice to facilitate healing from trauma and abuse. Similarly, participants in Willingham's (2001) study of an adult community choir reported choral singing was restorative as it reduced stress and encouraged a sense of wellbeing. Ms. N's goal to extend healing to high school singers is supported by Campbell et al.'s (2007) findings that adolescents use music as a therapeutic tool and by multiple findings that group singing can improve wellbeing and health (Stacy et al., 2002).

How Connection Works

Findings related to how connection works addressed questions about who experiences connection and the complexities of musickers' roles as they interact to create connection. In this section, I discuss findings on how connection works, including the alignment of student and teacher experiences of connection, teachers' preoccupations that can interfere with connection, audiences and connection, and students creating

connection. As I discuss each element of participants' experiences of connection, I relate the findings to existing literature.

Alignment of Student and Teacher Experiences

Two participants, Ms. A and Ms. N, reported experiencing connection alongside their students as they led rehearsals and performances. Ms. H, Mr. F, and Mr. E, in contrast, reported that sometimes they were unable to remain mentally present in students' experiences of connection because of preoccupations with logistical responsibilities or technical performance details. Sometimes, they were simply unaware of what prompted students to experience connection.

These findings indicate that, to varying extents, educators who prioritize connection may join their energies into a "simultaneously feelingful" experience with their students (Parker, 2011). It may also be that when choral educators experience emotional contagion or experience the group as a unified organism, educators' and students' experiences of connection are more likely to overlap (Hatfield et al., 1993; Hoffman, 2016; Willingham, 2001). The relationship between participants' and students' experiences is partially illuminated by Bakker (2005), who revealed that when music educators experience flow, the experience can cross over to their students in a form of emotional contagion. Forbes and Bartlett (2020) investigated the experiences of facilitators of singing groups, finding that facilitators experienced synergy in experiences of flow with singers. Findings in this study support the idea that the process of contagion might operate in both directions, with educators responding to students' flow experiences in a process of cyclical mutuality.

The present study's findings also support a conception of connection as mutuality. Describing a cyclical, collaborative experience, Ms. A discussed the push and pull of interactions between her and Garrison High School singers, and Ms. N experienced a reflexive, communal process of healing with Walker Area High School singers. Ms. H alluded to potential mutuality as she explained that not only she, but also students, had meaningful goals for their work. Odendaal et al. (2014) argued that a relational definition of musicking must consider the agency and motivations of both students and teachers. "Small's notion of musicking also implies that the music teacher should be considered as part of this social context: music teachers' goals can be as relevant for the musicking community as any other participant's goals" (Odendaal et al., 2014, p. 169). Indeed, all participants' conceptions of togetherness reflected a mutual, social context for connection in which the musicking experiences of teacher and students are intertwined. Participants' views of the classroom community reflect an interactive, relational view of musicking, suggesting that students and educators mutually shape the creation of connection.

Teachers' Preoccupations

Educators aiming to align their experiences of connection with students' experiences might benefit from increasing their intention, awareness, and attunement (Hutton, 2022; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). In some situations, however, intractable obstacles might prevent educators from joining in experiences of connection with students. Participants' experiences evidenced that when choral educators are tasked with too many logistical responsibilities for a performance, including, for instance, acting as a sound engineer, stage manager, accompanist, MC, and conductor, they might not have

the mental resources to engage in connection with students. Such logistical hurdles might act as an unfortunate barrier to relationships between educators and students, as participants indicated that students noticed when their teachers were not able to experience connection in the same ways they were. Creating stronger experiences of connection for students may require that educators bear fewer responsibilities during performances.

Participants attributed disconnection from students' experiences to another frequent preoccupation, namely their focus on technical musical perfection. Much extant research identifies a preoccupation with excellent performance outcomes as a barrier to meaningful musicking in ensembles (See Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Kreutz & Brünger, 2012; Morgan, 1992; O'Toole, 2005). Ms. H and Mr. F described a traditional conservatory-style model of ensemble leadership that prioritizes the leader's vision of a perfect performance. At its core, such a model of musical leadership pulls conductors' awareness away from singers' experiences as leaders strive to realize their own musical vision through a focus on technical details. Mr. E identified one undesirable outcome of choral leaders' focus on their own technically-perfect version of a piece: "you're the one connecting, not them." Mr. E acknowledged he sometimes focused on technical excellence, and like other participants, he said that preoccupation represented an unwanted barrier to the connection he aimed to facilitate.

Audiences and Connection

Participants' sense that connection occurred between performers and audiences is affirmed by research investigating adolescents' experiences and audience members'

experiences. Adolescents have identified connection with audiences as a meaningful element of their participation in music activities (Hylton, 1981; Parker, 2020). Other researchers have identified audience members' mirror neurons in action as they watched an opera performance (Tanaka, 2021). Findings on mirror neuron activation in audience members can help explain Ms. A's experience when, while watching one performance, she felt herself swaying in synchrony with the choral performers on stage.

Ms. A and Ms. N both noted particularly strong interactions between performers and audience members at choral conferences. Their experience may involve the emotional contagion that can occur not just between audience and performers, but among audience members. Garrido and Macritchie (2020) reported that the emotional strength of an audience's response can be mediated by social bonding. When audience members feel socially bonded to one another, they tend to respond to performances with stronger emotion than they otherwise would. In Ms. A's experience as an audience member and Ms. N's experience as a performer at choral conferences, audience members may have felt especially bonded to each other by their identities as choral conductors. The social bonding of audience members might have increased the power of their emotional contagion and, therefore, their reaction to the performances.

Choral conductors' particularly salient reactions to watching choral performances might also be explained by mirror neurons. When the activity an individual observes is one they have experienced themselves, mirror neuron activity is stronger than when they watch an unfamiliar activity (Tanaka, 2021). Given that nearly all choral conductors have sung in choir, often for many years, one might expect their mirror neuron response to be

significantly stronger than that of other audience members. The strength of audience response that Ms. A and Ms. N experienced might be explained, in part, by emotional contagion and the action of mirror neurons.

Students Creating Connection

Mr. F's experience with the Liberty Charter band reflects a perspective that student-led, informal learning can offer students greater opportunities for connection than teacher-directed learning (Green, 2008; Pearsall, 2021). Breaking from what he termed the conservatory model of choral leadership, Mr. F created space for students to shape musical experiences and incorporated informal music learning in the classroom (Allsup, 2003; Green, 2008). Mr. F also noted that students most reliably experienced connection without him present. His perspectives, alongside other participants' experiences with student ownership and connection, reflect Mills's (2008) conclusion that the students are largely the ones responsible for creating the social and relational environment.

Conditions that Create Connection

In this section, I discuss findings on the conditions that created connection. I examine in relation to existing literature conditions including repertoire, hard work and achievement, culturally responsive pedagogy, and dissipating stress. In this section, I also discuss at length issues related to choral educators' perspectives on musical skill level and connection.

Repertoire

Participants expressed varied perspectives on how they used repertoire to create connection. Ms. H's statement that connection could be created with any repertoire aligns

with Small's (1999) concept of musicking as active and relational. To Small, musicking requires the active creation of musical sounds, but not a musical work or audience. Ms. H's example also reflected her frequent inclusion of synchronized movement and small group work in her pedagogical process. It may be that no matter what the repertoire, Ms. H's processes for teaching students through collaborative, synchronized activities helped create experiences of connection.

Ms. N viewed very challenging repertoire as a potential barrier to connection. Her perspective aligns with Silvey's (2002, 2005) findings on high school singers' preparation of a challenging work. Silvey reported that singers' potential to reflect on the piece's text and expressive qualities was limited by their preoccupation with the difficulty of "interpreting the symbols and disciplining the body to perform them accurately" (p. 110). A piece more suited to student participants' skill levels, Silvey (2005) wrote, may have better facilitated participants' "heightened perspective" and "deeper levels of understanding" (p. 116). On the other hand, Silvey reported, for some students the piece's technical challenges may have resulted in a beneficial sense of accomplishment. Mr. F observed a similar phenomenon when his students worked on the "challenge piece" for Liberty Charter's spring concert, as student engagement with the repertoire's challenges helped facilitate connection. Repertoire with high levels of challenge might encourage connection in some situations for some students but might act as a barrier to connection in others.

Participants expressed that providing context for the repertoire students sang helped create connection. Whether by analyzing text, discussing historical context, or

engaging with the composer or poet, participants framed the repertoire to aid students' connection to the piece. For instance, Ms. A shared that she regularly drew students' attention to a piece's meaning, and Mr. E made discussion of text a cornerstone of his pedagogy. Participants' strategies for engaging students with text reflected Lee et al.'s (2017) findings that repertoire can provide a valuable sense of meaning, which contributes to students' wellbeing. Participants' practices also reflected Gurgel's (2013) findings that seventh-grade choir students could engage meaningfully with a wide variety of repertoire as long as they could make a contextual connection to the music. Silber (2005), investigating a choir in a prison context, found that familiar, relevant repertoire was beneficial for singers. The high school students that Silvey (2002, 2005) interviewed affirmed the importance of repertoire's context and meaning, as they evaluated repertoire based on their own experiences of singing it, not based on outside evaluations of the work's aesthetic quality. That is, the musickers' connection, not the music itself, served as the criterion for students' repertoire evaluation. The present study's findings affirm that singers' experiences with repertoire's content and meaning can help create connection.

Hard Work and Achievement

For some participants, hard work and achievement of technical musical successes facilitated experiences of connection. The benefits of achievement are reflected in work by scholars in positive psychology, led by Seligman (2011), who identified accomplishment as one of the five constituents of wellbeing, along with positive emotions, engagement, relationships, and meaning. Researchers investigating school

music ensembles have identified singers' experiences of accomplishment as contributors to a sense of meaning and overall wellbeing (Cape, 2012; Croom, 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Mills, 2008). Participants' experiences also align with findings that high school singers derive meaning from their achievement in choir (Hylton, 1981) and that high school singers' musical "high" can relate to experiences of achievement (Parker, 2011). Much like the Garrison High School singers Ms. A described, the mixed choir participants in Parker's (2011) study reported a burst of excitement and pride after their concert, stating, "Yeah, we did that" (p. 308). Participants in Parker's study also expressed reward from the musical achievement they experienced in tuning a chord, similar to the experiences that motivate barbershop singers (Coffin, 2005) and amateur choral singers (Hoffman, 2016). Though not all participants expressed that hard work guided their approaches to connection, findings from this study and existing literature suggest that students' achievement might help generate connection in some situations.

Dissipating Stress

Researchers have identified that group singing in a variety of contexts can reduce individuals' anxiety and stress (Beck et al., 2000; Caetano et al., 2019; Lord et al., 2010; Kreutz et al., 2004; Moss et al., 2018). With anxiety cleared away, students may be more likely to experience flow, which requires "intense and focused concentration on the activity, without any distractions" (van den Hout & Davis, 2019, p. 9). Ms. N's students' written reflections, which she shared as artifacts, indicated that the class's opening sequence helped students relieve stress. Researchers exploring adolescents' musicianship confirm that high school students often use music to relieve stress (Campbell et al., 2007;

Parker, 2020), and that choir class activities can be a powerful tool to cope with stress (Parker, 2010). Findings from the present study suggest that the stress relief adolescents gained from class activities increased their readiness for connection.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Ms. H's pedagogy and curriculum offered opportunities for students to exercise critical musical thinking through interaction with peers. Reflecting culturally responsive pedagogy, she engaged students in collaborative tasks, valued students' "funds of knowledge" as sources of expertise, and worked to create a supportive classroom community (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2022; Lind & McKoy, 2016). Aligning with Gurgel's (2013) recommendations for effective culturally responsive teaching in the middle school choir classroom, Ms. H cultivated "an environment where students are seen as equal contributors with the teacher to the learning" (p. 231). In such an environment, music educators show care and willingness to engage students in challenging, rewarding work (Gurgel, 2013). Ms. H's pedagogical practices reflect culturally responsive teaching in her creation of a complex, challenging learning context influenced by relationships, emotions, and responsiveness to students, including their readiness to connect (Gurgel, 2013).

Musical Ability and Connection

Participants presented various and sometimes contradictory ideas about the relationship between students' musical abilities and the potential to create connection. Each participant expressed that in some situations they found it easier to create connection with students who had what participants referred to as higher-level musical

abilities. The issues participants revealed bear important implications for music education practice and equity in school music programs.

Honor Choirs

Ms. H found it easier to create connection in honor choirs than in other choral settings, and she offered two shared qualities of honor choir students, including that they have high levels of musical skills and that they bring high motivation to have "the mountaintop experience as an artist." Researchers suggest the difference in creating connection with honor choir singers might reside in Ms. H's observation about students' motivation more than in students' musical ability. The importance of students' motivation is reflected in Neill's (1998) survey of middle school and high school students who participated in honor choirs. Unlike many students in school choral programs (e.g., Adderley et al., 2003; Sweet, 2010), who were motivated to be in choir primarily for social rewards, honor choir participants indicated that the love of singing, a musical motivation, was their primary reason for joining choir. Honor choir singers' focus on musical rewards might also explain Ms. H's ease in creating connection with honor choir students; the honor choir singers she worked with may have been more ready to have a peak musical experience than students in school or community choir settings. Ms. N reinforced the idea that students' motivation for artistic experiences might have a greater impact than their skill level. She found it easiest to create connection with her most experienced ensemble not necessarily because of students' skill, she said, but because of ensemble members' academic engagement and artistic motivation.

Another explanation of creating connection with honor choirs might involve the relationship between choral educators' and singers' goals. Examining the goals of singers in high school ensembles, Hylton (1981) reported that high school ensemble members rated musical-artistic goals as less important than their high school choir directors. If choral educators tend to prioritize musical goals more than the students, in honor choir settings, singers' motivation toward musical goals might better match educators' orientations toward musical achievement. The alignment of educators' and singers' motivation might be responsible for Ms. H's relative ease of creating connection in the honor choir environment.

Research on Skill and Connection

Though Mr. E reported creating connection more easily when students exhibited higher levels of skill, talent, or experience, he also expressed the opposite view, that church choir singers with the least musical skill were the individuals who experienced the strongest moments of connection. The latter view that musical skill is not the primary determinant of connection is reflected in the work of Bailey and Davidson (2002, 2005), who compared the experiences of two groups of choir members, those with less musical skill and who were socioeconomically marginalized, and those with more skill and more socioeconomic resources. The researchers found members of both groups experienced very strong emotional responses during group singing. Though the social effects of choir participation were stronger for those who had less choral experience, overall, singers' skill levels and training were not the primary determinant of choir members' experiences of emotional connection. In terms of singers' own enjoyment of the choral singing

experience, Bailey and Davidson (2005) reported, “There may be very little difference in the enjoyment of generating musical sounds at the most professional and most amateur levels” (p. 299).

In a study investigating high school singers’ experiences of flow, Jaros (2008) drew similar conclusions. Singers’ years of experience correlated with only one element of flow, a sense of control, and singers’ affect during group singing was unrelated to years of experience in choir. Beck et al.’s (2000) study indicated that professional singers’ years of experience had no effect on their immune system’s antibody levels after singing. The present study’s findings, supported by extant literature, suggest that singers’ experience or skill does not determine the reward they experience from group singing.

Audiences and Formal Music Education

Bailey and Davidson (2002, 2005) noted that, compared to singers with more formal musical training, choral singers in marginalized groups experienced greater reward from audiences’ receptions to their performances. Singers with more musical training gained less reward from performances in front of audiences, and they were more self-critical of their own voices and performances. Though part of this difference may have stemmed from the social status of the two groups of singers as marginalized and privileged, the difference might also relate to formal musical education, which could have encouraged experienced singers to be more self-critical, subsequently limiting their enjoyment of their own performance (Bailey & Davidson, 2005). The explanation that formal music education can limit singers’ connection with audiences during performances reflects the perspectives of Mr. E, who shared that that singers with more

experience had a more difficult time experiencing connection because they became hypercritical as their choral skills grew.

Vocal Tone Quality

Mr. E expressed that students need to have a baseline level of skill to experience connection. Specifically, he said, to "go deeper," students needed to possess competence with vocal tone quality. Mr. E's view prompts skepticism about the link between connection and vocal tone quality, a subjective characteristic that varies across cultures and bears no known effect on potential for connection during group singing (Bailey & Davidson, 2002). Mr. E's view that tone quality correlates with ability to experience connection, instead, may reflect the hegemony of Western standards for choral singing and the view, widespread in formal Western music education, that some vocal tone qualities hold more worth than others (Good-Perkins, 2020; Potter, 1998). Perception that tone quality determines readiness for connection likely stems from judgments of tone quality influenced by formal music education. Tone quality is not in itself a barrier to connection, but it may prove a barrier if it constitutes part of educators' preoccupation with a specific form of technical excellence.

Mr. E's perception of ninth graders' vocal technique and tone quality as low in skill might reflect instead qualities of adolescent voice change. Mr. E described ninth-grade singers' self-consciousness about their developing sound and pride as they started to sound more mature, reflecting researchers' findings on adolescents' experience of voice change (Freer, 2009; Sweet, 2015). In this study, Mr. E's judgment of vocal tone quality necessitates more critical reflection as educators examine their own challenges

around creating connection. Presuming that educators aim to create connection for all students at all ages and stages of vocal development, they should avoid equating characteristics of adolescent vocal development or tone quality with singers' readiness to experience connection (Abril, 2007).

Unison Singing

Mr. E described the talent of students in the unauditioned treble choir as indicative of their readiness to "go deeper and better than just singing a unison song." His view that unison music is less compatible with creating connection stands in contrast to views of Mr. F, who determined a unison song was an ideal route to connection for his students, and of Ms. N, who often started the school year with unison pieces and focused on unison in the class's opening procedure. In fact, researchers investigating synchrony of body systems have demonstrated that unison singing facilitates greater synchrony than singing in parts (Müller et al., 2018). Unison singing, by offering singers a clearer experience of synchrony, may be a particularly effective facilitator of connection. Therefore, educators who prioritize connection might consider including unison repertoire rather than or in addition to more elaborate, multi-part repertoire, whose complexity might sometimes make singers' experiences of connection less likely.

Equity

The belief that students with higher musical abilities have greater capacity for connection is problematic and raises concerns about the equity of students' experiences in school choral ensembles. If choral educators find it easier to create connection with more experienced students or older students farther along in voice change, students who are

less experienced or younger may have fewer opportunities to experience connection. For example, if educators believe that students whose skills are well-suited to unison singing have lower readiness to experience connection, educators may spend less time and energy aiming to create connection with those students. With fewer experiences of connection, students may have less motivation to remain in choir class. Such a cycle may create a self-fulfilling dynamic where students with higher skill levels continue to have their participation in school choral ensembles reinforced and supported, while those with less experience or skill tend to drop out. Because experiences of connection during group singing contribute to wellbeing and to continued participation in choir, omitting such experiences from some students' music education could have deep, troubling effects, as it is likely some students will not experience the psychological, social, and musical benefits group singing can provide, potentially over many years.

The concern of equity is exacerbated by the correlation in the United States between students' school music experiences and their socioeconomic status. Schools with high concentrations of students in poverty are significantly less likely to offer any music classes, and those that do have music offerings offer fewer music classes than schools with less poverty (Elpus & Abril, 2019). A study of Texas music programs revealed that resource-rich schools provided consistent access to music, state-of-the-art facilities, and parent support, and they enrolled fewer students of color (Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007). Schools with more students of color or socioeconomically disadvantaged students were likely to have fewer resources allocated to music, worse facilities, and less parent support (Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007). Across the United States, students of low

socioeconomic status (SES), students of color, students with individualized education plans, English language learners, students with low standardized test scores, and students with single parent/guardian homes remain significantly underrepresented in high school music ensembles (Elpus & Abril 2011, 2019; Pendergast & Robinson, 2020), and students of low SES are more likely to drop out of school music programs (Shaw, 2017). Therefore, if educators do not encourage students with less musical skill to experience connection, they may reproduce existing inequities. Any mechanism that limits the opportunities of underrepresented students to experience benefits from school music programs multiplies the unjust denial of musical opportunity. Educators' approaches to creating connection have the power to help remediate or to exacerbate the troubling inequities in United States school music programs.

Barriers to Creating Connection

Of the barriers participants identified, those related to COVID-19 were most common across participants, and several participants identified conservatory-style, formal music education as an obstacle. Ms. A and Mr. F, who taught in the most underresourced areas and whose choral programs were the newest, expressed the most barriers. Ms. N identified one barrier, Ms. H and Mr. E identified two, Ms. A, four, and Mr. F, six. Though barriers reflected individual participants and their contexts, themes in the data clustered around six topics, including school contexts, socioeconomic challenges, COVID-19, students not singing, inhibitions, and formal music training. Below, I discuss each of these barriers and relate findings to existing literature.

School Context

Elements of the school context varied greatly between participants. While Mr. E and Ms. N expressed a handful of obstacles related to scheduling, Ms. A's and Mr. F's school settings presented much greater barriers in terms of scheduling, vertical alignment, and singing culture than other participants' schools. In fact, for Ms. A, the only barriers to creating connection related to school context. Ms. A and Mr. F expressed they would change major elements of the program structure if they could, suggesting that choral educators may face distinct challenges when leading new choral programs in their first year. Ms. A's and Mr. F's experiences with their communities' singing culture and structural elements of the school program align with research showing that the values of a school's culture and structural obstacles including scheduling and resources can either support or hinder music educators' work (Bannerman, 2019; Pendergast & Robinson, 2020). Findings also reflect the work of Lee et al. (2017), who concluded that when a choir program plays a positive, present role within the school culture, the choral experience might provide more meaning for students.

Socioeconomic Challenges

Mr. E, Ms. H, and Ms. N reported that the students they taught occasionally experienced personal challenges including academic pressures, family instability, and stress as barriers to connection. Yet these three participants described that, on most days, experiences of connection in choir helped lessen the effects of such life stressors. In contrast, for Ms. A and Mr. F, who shared that their students were likely to experience family instability, violence, and chronic socioeconomic stress on a daily basis, students'

challenges could rarely be overcome by experiences of connection in choir. In fact, Ms. A and Mr. F shared, students' stressors could sometimes prevent students from participating in class activities at all. Mr. F also articulated that students' stress levels were increased by the COVID-19 pandemic, affirming research suggesting individuals of lower SES experienced more negative effects from the pandemic and that parents under more stress during the pandemic were less able to meet their children's needs (Munir, 2021).

Aligning with Maslow's (1943, 1970) theory of the hierarchy of needs, Ms. A and Mr. F shared that when students' basic needs were not met, often due to chronic socioeconomic challenges, they were more challenged to experience connection during choir classes. According to Maslow (1999), it is only when individuals' basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect, and self-esteem have been gratified that they become freed and motivated toward self-actualization and better prepared to have peak experiences of connection. When Ms. A asked rhetorically how Garrison HS students could be expected to have hope without their needs for safety being met, she reflected Maslow's idea; a sense of safety is required before students can move toward the process of self-actualization.

Ms. A and Mr. F were the only participants who taught in urban settings. Their experiences with program structure and scheduling, with students who did not sing during class, and with students' significant stressors align with literature in urban music education. Urban school settings offer distinct challenges and sometimes require context-specific teaching approaches to best serve students (DeLorenzo, 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2011;

Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015; Frierson-Campbell, 2006). Urban school contexts may more often call on educators to help students process grief and loss, as Ms. A and Mr. F did in the course of data collection (DeLorenzo, 2019). Further, inequities in availability of music education often bring challenges related to program continuity, scheduling, and vertical alignment (Costa-Giomi, 2008; Costa-Giomi & Chappell, 2007; Elpus & Abril, 2011, 2019; Pendergast & Robinson, 2020). In their urban teaching contexts, Ms. A and Mr. F faced substantial challenges to creating connection.

COVID-19

Changes made in choral programs to mitigate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic acted as pervasive barriers to creating connection for all participants. In fact, obstacles related to COVID-19 represented the only barriers that all participants identified. During data collection, though singing indoors in groups was permitted, participants expressed the lingering effects of more severe COVID-19-related restrictions. Masking, school schedule changes, and past practices of mandatory physical distancing and limits on public singing continued to constrain participants' ability to create connection.

Research illuminates why COVID-19-related restrictions may have had strong effects on participants' experiences of creating connection. Researchers have shown that physical distancing can negatively affect musickers' ability to synchronize movement (Morgan et al., 2015). Further, when facial expressions are hidden behind masks, the ability to respond to, synchronize with, and communicate through facial expressions can pose significant challenges to experiences of connection (Kastendieck et al., 2022). Togetherness became more challenging for students during the pandemic, and researchers

have reported that social isolation had significant negative effects on students' mental health (Gazmararian et al., 2021; Munir, 2021). Because singing can help improve singers' mental health and increase their sense of social connection, the cessation of group singing may have removed a vital social support. On the other hand, the return of in-person group singing, even in a restricted form, likely played an important role in helping adolescent singers weather the broader social isolation created by the pandemic (Mas-Herrero et al., 2022).

Students Not Singing

In Ms. A's and Mr. F's classes, some students regularly did not sing. The situation frustrated Ms. A, who shared that when one student refused to sing, other students felt less comfortable singing. Her perspectives suggest that negative effects on other students emerged through emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1993), transmission of affect (Brennan, 2004), or mimicry (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Gurgel (2013), similarly, identified mood contagion (Neumann & Strack, 2000) as a mechanism of transmitting emotions and behavior in a seventh-grade choir class.

Researchers have investigated why students do not choose to sing, even after they have elected to be part of a choir class. Gurgel (2013) found that, though seventh-grade choir students expressed that they liked and appreciated their teacher, Ms. Beckman, they disengaged when her practices represented a lack of cultural congruence with their own musical practices or when her instruction did not challenge or interest them enough. Gurgel's findings affirm that class instruction affects students' comfort with singing, a notion further supported by a reality that students who do not always sing during choir

classes sometimes sing freely in other settings. Adolescent participants in studies by Orton and Pitts (2019) and Sweet (2015), for instance, shared that they sang with abandon in informal settings such as on school buses and at home. Similarly, many of Mr. F's students felt much less inhibited to sing in front of others on karaoke days than on typical choir rehearsal days.

Students in Ms. A's and Ms. F's classes, who had had less formal music education, on average, than students of other participants, might have been hesitant to sing out partly because of anxiety, which is common in adolescent and adult singers (Dingle et al., 2019). Adolescents with fewer years of singing experience in formal music education settings are likely to have a lower sense of confidence and self-efficacy in singing (Fisher, 2014). Furthermore, students' anxiety and vocal insecurities may have been exacerbated by voice change, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Kennedy, 2002; Sweet, 2015, 2018). For female middle and high school singers, challenges related to voice change, including limited ranges, voice cracking, and unpredictability of vocal tone quality can result in embarrassment during singing in choir class (Sweet, 2015). Because individuals in the midst of voice change perceive less control over their voices than they did prior to voice change (Abril, 2007; Freer, 2009; Sweet, 2015, 2018), voice change can exacerbate anxiety around singing, posing a barrier to connection.

To his frustration, Mr. F's students perceived singing abilities as controlled by innate talent rather than as skills one could learn. Researchers have affirmed Mr. F's concerns, reporting that students' understandings of talent can affect their anxiety about singing. Abril (2007) noted that the common, erroneous perception that singing ability

cannot be learned contributes to individuals' sense of a lack of control of their singing voice. Asmus (1986) reported that elementary and secondary students often attribute musical skill to talent or ability, and Ruddock and Leong (2005) found that adults who believe musicianship reflects innate talent are more likely to engage in self-judgment. Students of Mr. F may have experienced anxiety while singing because they did not believe they had the talent to control their singing voices and thus responded with a decision not to sing.

After his first year at Liberty Charter, Mr. F decided to change the format of music classes, thereby providing more avenues to connection for students whose fear of singing proved a barrier. The changes he planned at the time of data collection included more informal, small-group experiences and fewer formal, full-group choral experiences. Mr. F's decision to reshape the Liberty Charter curriculum as more responsive to students' needs and interests reflects music educators' ongoing concerns about the relevance of school music curricula, particularly in large performance ensembles (Allsup, 2015; Kratus, 2007; Miksza, 2013; Pendergast & Robinson, 2020; Williams, 2011). Mr. F adjusted curriculum to engage more students who were not singing, offering learning settings that he expected might engender less anxiety and fear.

Inhibitions

Participants expressed that experiences of connection required releasing fear and self-judgment, embracing vulnerability, and building an atmosphere of trust. Fear, self-judgment, vulnerability, and trust are often intertwined in participants' experiences and in research findings. Maslow's (1999) concept of peak experiences, Gabrielsson's (2010)

study of strong experiences in music, and Csikszentmihalyi's (2008) flow all involve an absence of fear or self-judgment, as individuals lose self-consciousness, doubts, and inhibitions. Music researchers and practitioners assert that musicking requires an absence of fear and judgment and that musicking relies on individuals' experience of vulnerability and trust (Hendricks, 2018; Higgins, 2008; Hoffman, 2016; Wis, 2007).

In Wiggins's (2011) work on vulnerability and agency, professional musicians shared that vulnerability was an essential quality for musicking. Though participants emphasized the importance of openness and risk-taking, they also expressed a fear of the vulnerability that performing required. Even seasoned professional performers vividly recalled experiences of humiliation and anxiety as they took risks involved in performance. Reinforcing Wiggins's findings, Parker (2020) found that adolescents reported feelings of fear around musicking. Those who persevered in musical activities did so because they had come to view vulnerability as part of "feeling musical" (Parker, 2020, p. 86).

Findings in developmental psychology suggest that feeling vulnerable and losing self-consciousness pose specific challenges for adolescents, who are susceptible to social anxiety and social comparison (Aggarwal, 2021; Festinger, 1954; Kwok, 2019; Parker, 2020). Letting go of inhibitions and self-doubt can be difficult for adolescents in classroom settings. Choral music educators often aim to help adolescent students trust each other and feel comfortable being vulnerable in front of others by creating a safe space and by encouraging a sense of shared vulnerability (Parker, 2010; Sweet, 2008).

Unfortunately, when adults experience anxiety around singing, they frequently trace the anxiety to negative interactions with teachers in school music programs (Abril, 2007; Bodkin-Allen et al., 2019; Freer, 2006; Joyce, 2003; Knight, 2013). Further, adults' anxiety may arise from a fear of judgment by fellow group members (Abril, 2007). Given the risks experienced by adolescent singers, researchers have urged educators to respond sensitively to students as they sing in group settings (Bodkin-Allen et al., 2019; Freer, 2006; Knight, 2013). As this study's participants affirmed, educators must foster singers' lack of self-judgment and comfort with vulnerability to help them feel comfortable and confident enough to experience connection during group singing.

Fortunately, when educators work to create connection, they may help decrease students' anxiety. Swain and Bodkin-Allen (2017) reported that, for singers with less confidence, an accepting approach to group singing that encouraged mindfulness and reduced self-judgment could facilitate increased confidence. Researchers have shown that experiences of connection can lessen anxiety, and specifically, that students' experiences of flow might help eliminate performance anxiety (Cohen & Bodner, 2019; Kirchner et al., 2008). The relationship between experiences of connection and anxiety may be cyclical; if anxiety can be lessened enough for connection to occur, experiences of connection may lessen anxiety even further, with the positive cycle continuing.

Formal Music Education

Formal music education acted as a barrier to experiences of connection on three levels. First, the self-scrutiny and judgment required by focus on achieving technical excellence limited both student singers' perceptions of their own abilities and

participants' abilities as leaders to experience and create connection. Second, participants' experiences of connection as high school or university singers sometimes led them to define connection in ways that did not always best serve their students; through self-reflection, participants sometimes redefined connection to counteract the negative practices they experienced in formal settings. Finally, some of participants' training as conductors, which prioritized development of excellence and high musical achievement through a controlling, autocratic leadership style, did not serve participants' goals for connection.

Judgment and Standards of Excellence

Ms. N discussed the debilitating self-judgment she developed during university voice training, and other participants discussed how students' self-judgment of their own voices could limit their experiences of connection. Research reflects the idea that formal music education can increase singers' self-criticism of their own voice, limiting enjoyment and possibilities for connection. In their study of middle-class choristers with significant vocal music experience and education, Bailey and Davidson (2005) found participants had internalized the idea of singing as a talent, resulting in self-consciousness and reticence to share their voices freely. Participants' musical training and awareness of standards of excellence constrained the joy of singing, as they feared not measuring up to a formal standard of vocal skill.

Pascale (2005), in a philosophical examination of "the myth of the non-singer," provided further insight into how formal music training might contribute to individuals' hesitance to identify as singers. Pascale offered two aesthetics for singing. Aesthetic A,

rooted in formal music education, promotes an idea that some individuals are singers and some are not; some have musical ability and some do not. Aesthetic B focuses on enjoyment and collaboration, avoids judgment, and welcomes all as musicians. Pascale's framework echoes Joyce's (2003) and Knight's (2013) work on the tyranny of the ideas of talent and ability, the "tenacious Western discourse of talent, giftedness, and innate ability which promotes the idea that some people 'have it' and some do not" (Joyce, 2003, p. 4). Participants affirmed that viewing singing as a talent that requires cultivation through formal music education limited students' experiences of connection.

Participants' Experiences as Singers

Participants' experiences as singers influenced the approaches they took to developing connection. In some ways, participants aimed to recreate their own magical experiences of connection as choral singers. Yet some actively worked to counteract assumptions and goals borne from their own experience. For example, Mr. F recognized that his experiences of connection as a singer at Fairwood North could not be recreated for some Fairwood North students or for most Liberty Charter students. Ms. N worked to avoid students' feeling the same self-judgment of their voice that hampered her in her university choir. Ms. H aimed to center the collaboration that was present in her family and community yet strikingly absent in the university setting. Participants strove to avoid the common practice of uncritically teaching as they were taught (Dwyer, 2015; Saunders, 2010). Though they acknowledged the imprint of their formal training, they sought to reject practices that did not create connection for their former selves or that would not create connection for their current students.

The Conductor Role

Participants identified a conservatory-style model of a conductor as an autocratic leader whose vision controls an ensemble's musical interpretation to the detriment of singers' autonomy, freedom to be expressive, and opportunity to make their individual selves known and heard. Ms. H vividly described the oppressive nature of the conservatory model, explaining that singing in her formal, institutional choir experience took away her freedom of breath in a setting where the conductor did not even know her name. While Ms. H already possessed the tools she needed to succeed, she said, her vocalism was restricted as she was asked to eliminate vibrato and to make her individual voice imperceptible within the ensemble. Further, the program's priority was on individual achievement, and she experienced no sense of community and no connection.

Ms. H's description of conservatory-style education as competitive and individualistic is reflected in Wiggins's (2011) study of professional musicians, one of whom explained:

> everybody had to be the best. When it was time to play, it wasn't about having a shared experience or giving something to the audience and getting back. It was about, 'I have to be perfect,' and to me, that takes the music out of it. (p. 360)

O'Toole's (2005) critical feminist analysis of the power dynamics between conductors and choral singers described the destructive results of the traditional conservatory model. O'Toole argued that conductors, granted legitimacy by their formal institutional credentials, led ensembles with a "teacher-directed, antagonistic, hegemonic approach" that "silenced the wealth of talent and experience" singers held (p. 7). In a process Mr. E described as part of his formal education, O'Toole depicted a conductor arriving at

rehearsal with a model musical sound in their imagination then directing singers to create that sound with no consideration of the preferences, skill, or characteristics of the singers themselves. The resulting rehearsal process was, for O'Toole, unpleasant, tedious, and exclusive of individuality.

In the conservatory model, the conductor's qualifications (and not the singers') signify the requisite skill to monitor high technical standards (O'Toole, 2005). Accordingly, the conductor's training qualifies them to use error detection as a primary mode of interaction with singers in rehearsal (Durrant, 2009). Though Ms. A reported learning valuable techniques from her collegiate conductor who addressed errors through repetition and high performance standards, she and other participants eschewed the conservatory model of conductor-as-error-detector. Participants indicated a narrow focus on errors could weaken the relationship between themselves and singers, introduce undue stress into the rehearsal, and distract from singers' successes. Scholars affirm that error detection techniques including stopping singers frequently and requiring multiple repetitions to ensure accuracy can be frustrating to singers (Hoffman, 2016; O'Toole, 2005). The repetition and corrective nature of error detection can put a strain on the relationship between conductor and singers while limiting singers' agency and decision-making capabilities (Elliott & Silverman, 2014; O'Toole, 2005). Some participants aimed to avoid such negative effects of the conservatory model, as they took different approaches to error detection with the goal of creating connection.

Participants described their own preoccupations with technical excellence as developed through their formal music education, and they navigated tensions between

prioritizing technical elements of students' performances and clearing space for student-centered interactions. Freer (2011) described the tension as the "performance-pedagogy paradox," arguing that university training offered choral educators ample strategies for developing technical excellence and few strategies for enacting pedagogical excellence. The conflicts that participants articulated signified this tension. The findings also reflect again Pascale's (2005) two contrasting aesthetics for musicking. While the stark dichotomy between two aesthetics may not reflect the complexity of most music education settings, the framework provides dimension to participants' values. The contrast between Aesthetic A and Aesthetic B illuminates Mr. F's recognition and appreciation of the participatory musicking that happens in most of the world, Ms. N's views on the irrelevance of music of the Western classical canon to her students, and Ms. H's views on conservatory-style training and the tension between process and product.

Researchers have offered alternatives to the traditional conservatory model of the conductor, discussing potential benefits of framing the conductor-singer relationship as collaborative rather than demanding. Framing recommendations through the lens of critical pedagogy, Abrahams (2017) suggested that conductors invite singers to collaborate using constructivist approaches to learning that align with Ms. H's values on knowledge sharing and collaborative problem-solving. De Quadros (2019) offered one non-traditional model of a conductor, asking how choral leaders might participate alongside singers and guide them rather than dictate to them. Shaw (2017) also called on choral music educators to reframe the relationship between conductor and singer. Using frameworks of asset-based, culturally responsive teaching, Shaw encouraged educators to

share responsibility for musical decision-making and validate students' experiences. These researchers affirm the tensions participants experienced around the conductor role and offer possibilities for how educators might break from the conservatory model to better serve students.

Conductor's Cult of Personality

Mr. F described a "cult of personality" in choral settings that encouraged singers to focus narrowly on pleasing the conductor and to fulfill the conductor's vision, benefitting the leader rather than the singers. Singers' development of a shared identity focused on fulfilling musical leaders' wishes can pose a real danger, as leader-focused connection can be used to advance causes of fascism, oppression, and exclusion (Bradley, 2009; de Quadros, 2019; Kertz-Welzel, 2005; O'Toole, 2005; Perkins, 2019; Turino, 2008). Mr. F was the only participant who explicitly discussed a desire to avoid a "cult of personality" as a conductor. However, participants' approaches to connection indicated they aimed to avoid conductor-pleasing interactions. Their communication of care for students' experiences of life, regular solicitation of students' contributions, and critical reflections on conductor-centered models of music education countered a conductor-focused approach. Still, Mr. F's perspective on the "cult of personality" and the potentially destructive nature of connection in a conductor-focused model prompts choral educators to reflect critically on when their own practices might unintentionally center their own priorities over students' needs.

Social Justice and Activist Approaches to Connection

Offering students a social justice or activist context for group singing might provide one pathway for moving from formal music education's focus on technical elements to a relational focus on students' experiences. As Ms. N distanced her pedagogical approach from the goals of Western classical music education, she committed to using the art form of choral music to make a meaningful impact in the world. Her approach reflects McCarthy's (2009) recommendation that music educators reject blind adherence to norms of excellence and integrate music's social and cultural contexts into instruction. Ms. N's practices also reflect a transformative, activist approach to music education that aims to change society through musicking in community, contributing to the greater common good (Hess, 2019; Odendaal et al., 2014; Perkins, 2019; Yob & Jorgensen, 2020). Choral education for social justice might help create connection while avoiding some of the barriers participants associated with formal music education.

Suggestions for Music Education Practice

Participants articulated that students played a large role in creating connection, yet they also took great responsibility for fostering conditions that might lead to connection. For instance, though Ms. N expressed that students help build conditions for connection, she stated, "I have to be the one to facilitate it. . . . It has to start with me." Ms. N's perspective aligns with Kincheloe et al. (2018), who asserted that even when educators situate themselves as guides or learners alongside students, they maintain authority as facilitators and remain responsible for building a classroom context that promotes

students' growth and learning. Understanding educators' vital responsibility for shaping learning contexts, in this section, I offer ideas for educators who aim to create connection during group singing. While I recognize that the findings do not generate prescriptions for practice and that each educator's experience and context is different, I invite readers to consider these suggestions as seeds for critical reflection on teaching.

Create Space for Experiences of Connection

All participants openly discussed with students their goals for creating connection. Though participants did not claim to create connection simply by telling students about it, they incorporated into classroom interactions the message that students could have meaningful, valuable, or transcendent experiences through group singing. In so doing, participants made space for experiences of connection to occur.

Music educators might build on participants' approaches by drawing students' attention to connection and making room for unnamable experiences. Like Ms. A or Mr. E, educators might ask students, "Did you feel that?" Like Ms. N or Mr. F, educators might help students enter into a state where they can shed self-judgment. Dimming lights, having students close their eyes, or inviting students to sing karaoke in large groups where they sense they cannot be heard might invite students to lose self-consciousness. Mindfulness exercises or breathing exercises could help students shed stress and become more open to the positive experiences during group singing (Lamont, 2012). Using class activities to build trust within the ensemble, as Ms. H did by prompting students to rely on their peers' help and expertise, might help create pathways to connection. To facilitate growing trust, educators might invite students in small groups to create an original

composition, to enlist a peer's help to learn a new voice part from a known song, or to share their personal reflections on the meaning of repertoire's text.

Scrutinize the Conservatory Model

Mr. F's and Ms. N's teaching practices evolved over time as they saw diminishing value in what they viewed as the conservatory model of the conductor. For Ms. N, returning to her student-centered practices a few years after she began teaching at the high school level increased her self-assurance as a pedagogue and helped grow students' experiences of connection. Though she initially experienced pressure to conform to the formal, competitive aspects of choral music education, Ms. N eventually found students experienced more success, both through connection and with technical musical elements, when she focused on creating connection more than on achieving technical perfection. Mr. F, at the conclusion of data collection, had begun to reform his teaching approach and curriculum to enact the student-generated connection he aimed to facilitate. He concluded that stepping away from a formal role as the conductor on a podium and making more space for students to create connection would be much more effective than the practices he had been trained to enact under the conservatory model. Scrutinizing a focus on the technical musical product might offer students more reliable pathways to connection through new and different means. And paradoxically, minimizing preoccupations with technical perfection might result in a more technically sound performance. Further, participants' experiences suggest educators who prioritize connection might feel more rewarded and more effectively create connection with

students when they prioritize singers' experiences over the excellence of a musical performance students might produce.

Ms. A's, Ms. H's, and Ms. N's approaches provide models for how educators can help singers adjust errors without putting stress on the teacher–student relationship. Ms. A was careful to notice when singers seemed to feel tender, tentative, or delicate. In those moments, she made few corrections to errant pitches. Rather, she simply continued teaching, or she moved to another musical passage or piece, explaining that pitches could be worked out later. Ms. H encouraged students to take responsibility for error detection, as she frequently asked students, "How did that go?" or "What did you notice?" before coaching students on any adjustments. Ms. N used both visual and aural feedback to detect students' moments of hesitation during class, and she framed errors as uncertainties rather than mistakes. When students felt positively about their progress on a piece, she simply noted the passages that might begin the group's work in the subsequent class. Such practices model a rejection of the conductor role as a critical evaluator of singers' work and provide an alternative choice to guide students rather than dictate to them. Participants engaged in collaborative, supportive interactions that held the potential to minimize singers' self-doubt, encourage singers' vulnerability, and make space for shared connection between conductor and singers. Educators might consider how their verbal responses to students' singing can affirm students' voices, supporting rather than critiquing, while opening space for students' self-evaluations and guiding students toward growth.

Compare One's Experiences with Student Needs

Educators can reflect critically to uncover their approaches to connection that might reflect their own experiences but do not best serve their students. In the present study, participants' experiences as singers and their formal music education as conductors shaped their approaches to connection. Participants sometimes reenacted their experiences and values in the classroom even when, upon reflection, they recognized their practices did not match student needs. For instance, participants' formal music education led them to falsely, and often unconsciously or unwittingly, equate experiences of connection with culturally-specific performance standards, high skill levels, or an autocratic view of the conductor role. Educators can work to serve students by first recalling their experiences of connection and examining the priorities evidenced by their training. Second, educators can critically reflect and ask themselves: will the musical experiences most familiar and comfortable for me constitute the most effective path to connection for my students?

Examine Judgments of Ability

Participants sometimes reported that creating connection was more challenging in groups of students with lower musical ability. As discussed earlier in this chapter, considerations of equity compel educators to view all students as ready for and capable of experiences of connection, and educators should work to disrupt the belief that music's technical challenges correspond with experiences of connection. In fact, as Mr. F, Ms. H, and Ms. N demonstrated, unison singing and repertoire that is comfortable and known to students may be more effective for creating connection. Further, Ms. H's work at the

middle school level offered an example of successfully creating connection, often through synchrony and collaboration, regardless of the musical material's difficulty. Though repertoire with technical challenges can help create connection through a sense of achievement for some students, educators seeking to create connection will avoid programming challenging repertoire for the sake of technical musical achievement alone.

Participants' experiences suggest that educators might find it easier to create experiences of connection with students whose musical experiences, skill levels, or formal music training reflect their own. This finding, too, holds troubling implications for equity in music education. Educators, who typically have many years of formal music education, might need to work harder to discover the pathways to connection for students who have not had access to consistent and vertically-aligned school music programs over many years. Like Mr. F, critical educators might discover they need to adjust their pedagogical approaches significantly to create connection with students with less experience in school music programs.

Affirm Students' Vocal Identities

Choral educators have the power to help students feel valued and seen for the strengths they bring or, on the contrary, judged or unrecognized for skills they might or might not display in formal choral settings. Ms. H's experience as a singer in undergraduate and graduate settings suggests that singers can feel devalued by choral leaders who overlook their individual identities and fail to recognize singers' musical and vocal expertise. Some participants' students may have feared that they and their voices would be judged or devalued, as well. Mr. F's students expressed the belief that singing

was a talent and that singing with others was risky in a school choral setting where peers or teachers might judge them or their voices negatively. Based on this study's findings, educators aiming to create connection with all students might examine how their own biases or judgments of students' voices might unknowingly contribute to students' anxiety or alienation. Equity-minded choral educators will work to communicate explicitly to students that all their voices are valued in the school choral community, including their tone quality, previous experience, skill level, and talent.

Reform Performance Ensemble Curricula

After his first year at Liberty Charter, Mr. F resolved to significantly change the music curriculum for the following year. He intended to continue offering a choral experience and aimed to add general music classes where students learned basic keyboard accompaniment skills and engaged in modern band, solo singing, and small group singing. At the time of final data collection, he was designing activities in which students could choose their own musical materials as they built transferable musicianship skills. Mr. F was optimistic that students would be more engaged by a general music/vocal music hybrid curriculum. Mr. F's work to provide students more opportunity for connection and agency can serve as a model for educators prioritizing connection. Educators can examine what feasible changes to traditional ensemble curricula might better serve the students in their school context.

Withhold Assumptions About Student Engagement

Findings indicated that educators might experience challenges reading adolescents' behaviors, or they might not have all the information needed to draw

accurate conclusions about students' engagement in class activities. For example, Mr. F was surprised when several students shared how much they appreciated choir class after they had chosen not to participate in the preceding weeks or months. Some of Ms. A's students, similarly, had chosen not to sing in class but after time rejoined the group in singing. Based on participants' experiences, educators should strive to attend to individuals' needs while avoiding making assumptions based on outward appearances. For educators aiming to create connection, prematurely determining that students are not engaged, invested, or appreciative of classroom activities comes with a risk. "Teachers who conclude, based on students' perceived disengagement, that they are not liked or are not competent may experience affective disengagement themselves" (Gurgel, 2016, p. 31). As Gurgel (2013, 2016) explains, assumptions based on students' behavior and mood contagion can create repeated cycles of disengagement. Thus, educators aiming to create connection should exercise patience with students' readiness to connect in the singing environment. Moreover, educators might hold in mind Ms. N's observation that no matter what the context, not every student can be expected to be ready for connection every day. As educators hold space for students who are not ready to connect, they can also work to uncover ways students can generate connection organically and collaboratively based on their strengths and abilities.

Engage Students in the Creative Process

Participants indicated experiences of connection increased when students chose repertoire, talked to composers or poets, or helped create a musical work by interacting with a commissioned composer. Though many music programs have limited funds with

which to commission a choral work, educators can connect students to music creators in other ways, such as inviting a local poet into the classroom or a composer to visit virtually, as Mr. F and Mr. E did, at no cost. Additionally, Ms. A offered other pathways, as she prompted students to choose the repertoire which she then arranged, invited students to provide musical ideas, and solicited students' help in presenting the finished arrangement to the public. Findings suggest educators seeking to create connection can pursue several avenues that effectively engage students in the creative process.

Use Personal Strengths to Communicate Care about Students' Experiences of Life

Decades of varied personal, professional, and musical experiences helped each participant develop an approach to creating connection that reflected their individual strengths and personality. Participants' experiences suggest educators can embrace their individual perspectives and use their experiences to create connection in ways that feel true to themselves. Though participants had forged different approaches to creating connection and they taught in varied contexts, each participant centered their pedagogy around care for students' experiences, and they valued what connection could offer students. Participants' approaches, which reflected Noddings's (1992, 2012) concepts of caring classroom relationships and Hendricks's (2018) work on compassionate music teaching, might serve as models. Educators are encouraged to approach connection as participants did, with conviction about its ability to make a vital difference in students' lives and with caring responsiveness to students' needs.

Recognize the Role of Administrative Support

Though educators' roles in shaping classroom environments are vital to creating connection, findings indicate several conditions affecting connection are determined not at the classroom level but at an administrative level. To help educators facilitate connection during group singing, school administrators can invest in full-time music teachers who have consistent opportunities to develop positive relationships and trust. To create stronger, more consistent experiences of connection, schools need to provide support to educators for logistical tasks, particularly during performances. School administrators should strive to schedule students into choir classes with continuity and integrity, honoring students' preferences whenever possible. Officials in schools must also work to provide students with continuous, stable, and vertically-aligned singing experiences over consecutive years to help students develop the security and confidence needed to experience connection. Finally, school administrators can focus on providing supports that improve students' overall wellbeing. When students' wellbeing levels are higher, they will more frequently arrive to choir class ready to experience connection and the benefits it brings.

Suggestions for Future Research

In this section, I offer suggestions for how researchers might contribute further to literature on connection during group singing. First, I offer suggestions related to research design including data sources and data collection. Second, I identify influences on connection that researchers might investigate to gain a fuller picture of the phenomenon. Third, I analyze the application of this study's three-part conceptual lens of togetherness,

synchrony, and oneness. Finally, I describe a holistic conception of connection that might guide future research.

Research Design

This study's purpose was to investigate choral educators' experiences creating connection. A direct focus on educators' perspectives offered important insights into pedagogical, philosophical, and practical approaches to creating connection. Though students' experiences were represented in field notes, classroom materials, and other artifacts that triangulated and verified the data, the study's design did not include student data collection. Given that connection occurs with student singers, future research should investigate the phenomenon through data collected from students. Findings from the present study and existing literature suggest a complex, dynamic, and mutual relationship exists between educators' and students' experiences of connection. Investigating students' experiences and comparing perspectives of students and educators would likely yield rich findings.

Future studies might include longer-term data collection in a school setting to gain a fuller, more inclusive understanding of connection as experienced by all musickers. Researchers engaging in multiple and lengthier classroom observations with the same group of students could provide greater insight into the relational dynamics of connection. Further, centering data collection in schools and engaging in more visits over a longer time might facilitate interviews with educator participants that yield a richer picture of creating connection. As Sweet (2008) noted, educators sometimes tell "stories of practice" or "secret stories" that can only be known and understood by being in the

classroom (p. 9). Interviewing educator participants in classroom settings soon after prolonged classroom-based data collection might yield different data than were presented in this study, when classroom visits were not regular and some interviews were conducted offsite via video. Given that educators and students create connection contextually, centering more extended data collection in the classroom environment could yield valuable understandings.

Influences on Connection

Several influences on creating connection merit further investigation. Researchers might work to identify a model of repertoire selection that can foster students' experiences of connection. A helpful model for repertoire selection might ask educators to locate a desired balance between fostering accomplishment through challenging repertoire and fostering connection through more accessible repertoire. Or, reflecting literature on the facilitation of flow, educators might choose repertoire by finding the ideal balance of challenge and skill (Custodero, 2002; Jaros, 2008). If connection is the priority, what approach might educators take to repertoire selection? Further, how might student involvement in repertoire selection or repertoire creation create connection?

Researchers might investigate connection as created in varied teaching settings, including at different grade levels. In the present study, Ms. H represented the only middle school setting, while other participants taught high school students. Ms. H's pedagogical process, which focused on collaboration, community, and synchrony through movement, might represent an approach most suited to teaching middle school students,

or it might simply represent Ms. H's individual approach. Future investigations might explore approaches at varied grade levels.

Similarly, participants' descriptions of differences across choral environments suggest directions for future research. How might connection be created differently in festival settings and in classroom settings? In community choirs and in school choirs? In groups with less-experienced choral singers and in groups with more-experienced choral singers? Further, what differences and similarities might be found in urban, suburban, and rural contexts or in settings with more or fewer students experiencing socioeconomic challenges? The present study suggests researchers asking such questions might reveal important implications for choral music education practice.

Conceptual Lens

This study's three-part conceptual lens provided an effective understanding of connection. All participants' descriptions of connection included togetherness, synchrony, and oneness, and no descriptions of connection were situated outside those three forms. Togetherness, which most often anchored educators' discussions of connection with students, appeared easier to identify and discuss than other elements of connection, an idea supported by the substantial body of research on forms of togetherness with adolescent choral singers (e.g., Adderley et al., 2003; Bartolome, 2013; Hylton, 1981; Parker, 2010, 2016). Synchrony and oneness also served as consistent elements of connection, though participants discussed these elements less frequently with students. Participants' approaches to synchrony in creating connection were not as salient or consistent as approaches to togetherness or oneness. Researchers might probe this

element of connection further by investigating how synchrony, particularly of breath and movement, might help create connection in classroom contexts. Participants aimed to create oneness through varied means, as they worked to help students feel connected to something larger than themselves. Given that oneness interacted in complex ways with students' stress levels, musical skill levels, experience in choral settings, and motivation for artistic experiences, the creation of oneness by choral educators in school settings constitutes a fruitful topic for future research.

Connection is a multi-faceted, intangible concept that participants described as eluding verbal description. At the same time, connection is somewhat obvious to those who experience it; individuals cannot see the phenomenon, but they know it is there. Findings from this study suggest a three-part conceptual lens of togetherness, synchrony, and oneness could help researchers meet the challenge of investigating this vague yet recognizable experience.

A Holistic, Relational Approach to Connection

The study's findings suggest the need for a model of choral music education that reframes the narrow, dualistic choice between the "sonic or the social aspects of music" (Odendaal et al., 2014, p. 167), a choice Borst (2002) referred to process-product dichotomy and Freer (2011) described as a performance-pedagogy paradox. Even though choral educator participants in Borst's (2002) study prioritized artistically excellent performances—product-oriented, sonic goals—participants' aims actually required a relational approach. Technical elements and social elements of musicking cannot be separated, because, as Small (1999) proposed, musicking is a social-cultural event that

integrates musical and social experiences. Further, musicking is not a distinct experience for performers, audience members, or conductors; musicking integrates the experiences of all persons and elements involved. Group singing is experienced holistically as a multilevel web of dynamic relationships (Countryman, 2008; Odendaal et al., 2014; Small, 1999; Sugden, 2005).

I view the present study's findings through this holistic lens of musicking. Conventions of research methods encourage investigators to separate participants' experiences into their constituent elements and to communicate findings as categories, and such methods can reveal valuable insights. However, a holistic view of musicking requires research design that also reflects group singing as a fluid, relational, and inclusive process. When researchers investigate connection through a dynamic, holistic lens, their findings are most likely to resonate and represent connection accurately.

Conclusion

Choral educators' practices can have a profound impact on students' musical experiences over many years (Arasi, 2006; Pitts, 2017; Sweet, 2008); group singing can contribute significantly to health (Clift et al., 2010; Clift & Hancox, 2001; Livesey et al., 2012; Moss et al., 2018); and the dynamic, contextual, and social nature of group singing can help enhance wellbeing through positive relationships (Ascenso et al., 2017; Croom, 2015; Forbes & Bartlett, 2020; Seligman, 2011). Participants in the present study, by caring for students' experiences of life, striving to create togetherness, synchrony, and oneness, and responding to students' readiness to connect, worked toward a deeply meaningful goal. Recognizing the influence of connection on students' lives, music

educators can aim to discover conditions that create connection, work through barriers, and reflect on how their practices of creating connection respond to students' needs. In so doing, choral music educators can fulfill their own potential to do good in the world, to help improve wellbeing of students and their larger community, and to situate experiences of connection as central to the interactive, social nature of group singing (Countryman, 2008; Lee et al., 2017).

REFERENCES CITED

Abrahams, F. (2017). Critical pedagogy as choral pedagogy. In F. Abrahams & P. D. Head (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of choral pedagogy* (pp. 13–30). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199373369.013.1

Abril, C. R. (2007). I have a voice but I just can't sing: A narrative investigation of singing and social anxiety. *Music Education Research*, *9*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800601127494

Adderley, C., Kennedy, M., & Berz, W. (2003). "A home away from home": The world of the high school music classroom. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *51*(3), 190–205.

Aggarwal, S. (2021). The effect of art and music on stress and anxiety levels in adolescents. *IAHRW International Journal of Social Sciences Review, 9*(3), 240–242.

Allsup, R. E. (2003). Mutual learning and democratic action in instrumental music education. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *51*(1), 24–37. https://doi.org/10.2307/3345646

Allsup, R. E. (2015). Our "both/and" moment. *Music Educators Journal*, *102*(2), 85–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432115613327

Anderson, L. L. (2013). *An examination of the relationship between high-school choir directors' teaching-style and choir students' sense-of-community* (Publication No. 1294904433) [Doctoral dissertation, Temple University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Anshel, A., & Kipper, D. A. (1988). The influence of group singing on trust and cooperation. *Journal of Music Therapy*, *25*(3), 145–155.

Arasi, M. T. (2006). *Adult reflections on a high school choral music program: Perceptions of meaning and lifelong influence* (Publication No. 3231924) [Doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Arasi, M. (2008). The lifelong impact of the choral experience: Philosophy and teaching styles. In M. Holt & J. Jordan (Eds.), *The school choral program: Philosophy, planning, organizing, and teaching* (pp. 1–42). GIA Publications.

Ascenso, S., Williamon, A., & Perkins, R. (2017). Understanding the wellbeing of professional musicians through the lens of Positive Psychology. *Psychology of Music*, *45*(1), 65–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735616646864

Asmus, E. P., Jr. (1986). Student beliefs about the causes of success and failure in music: A study of achievement and motivation. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *34*(4), 262–275. https://doi.org/10.2307/3345260

Bailey, B. A. (2015). *Conscious discipline: Building resilient classrooms*. Loving Guidance.

Bailey, B. A. & Davidson, J. W. (2002). Adaptive characteristics of group singing: perceptions from members of a choir for homeless men. *Musicae Scientiae*, *6*(2), 221–256.

Bailey, B. A., & Davidson, J. W. (2005). Effects of group singing and performance for marginalized and middle-class singers. *Psychology of Music, 33*(3), 269–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735605053734

Bakker, A. B. (2005). Flow among music teachers and their students: The crossover of peak experiences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *66*(1), 26–44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.11.001

Bannerman, J. (2019). Singing in school culture: Exploring access to participation in a rural choral program. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, *222*, 44–62. https://doi.org/10.5406/bulcouresmusedu.222.0044

Barrett, J. R. (2014). Case study in music education. In C. M. Conway (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research in music education* (pp. 113–132). Oxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199844272.013.007

Bartolome, S. J. (2013). "It's like a whole bunch of me!": The perceived values and benefits of the Seattle Girls' Choir experience. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *60*(4), 395–418. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429412464054

Beck, R. J., Cesario, T. C., Yousefi, A., & Enamoto, H. (2000). Choral singing, performance perception, and immune system changes in salivary immunoglobulin A and cortisol. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *18*(1), 87–106.

Benson, J. S. (2011). *A study of three choral pedagogues and their use of movement in the choral rehearsal*. (Publication No. 3483541) [Doctoral dissertation, The Florida State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Betinis, A., Anzaldúa, A., & Wondemagegnehu, T. (Eds.). (2023). *Justice Choir Songbook* (Vol. 1). Justice Choir. https://www.justicechoir.org/songbook/

Bodkin-Allen, S., Swain, N., & West, S. (2019). 'It's not that bad singing with other people': The effect of a single Outreach on singing attitudes and confidence in adults. *Australian Journal of Music Education, 52*(2), 22–32.

Bonshor, M. (2018). *The confident choir: A handbook for leaders of group singing*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Boonshaft, P. L. (2002). *Teaching music with passion: Conducting, rehearsing and inspiring*. Meredith Music.

Borst, J. D. (2002). *The exploration and description of the teaching life of two exemplary choral music teachers: A comparative case study* (Publication No. 3064204) [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Bowman, W. (2021). Sound, sociality, and music: Part one. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, *16*, Article 27. https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol16/iss5/27

Boyce-Tillman, J. (2000). *Constructing musical healing: The wounds that sing*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Boyce-Tillman, J. (2016). *Experiencing music—restoring the spiritual: Music as well-being.* Peter Lang.

Boyce-Tillman, J. (2020). An ecology of eudaimonia and its implications for music education. In G. D. Smith & M. Silverman (Eds.), *Eudaimonia: Perspectives for music learning* (pp. 71–89). Routledge.

Boyce-Tillman, J., & Hendricks, K. S. (Eds.). (2021). *Living song: Singing, spirituality, and wellbeing*. Peter Lang.

Bradley, D. (2009). Oh, that magic feeling! Multicultural human subjectivity, community, and fascism's footprints. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, *17*(1), 56–74.

Bratich, J. (2018). Observation in a surveilled world. In N. D. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 526–545). SAGE.

Brennan, T. (2004). *The transmission of affect*. Cornell University Press.

Brinkmann, S. (2018). The interview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 576–599).

Brinson, B. A., & Demorest, S. M. (2014). *Choral music: Methods and materials*. Schirmer.

Bullack, A., Gass, C., Nater, U. M., & Kreutz, G. (2018). Psychobiological effects of choral singing on affective state, social connectedness, and stress: Influences of singing activity and time course. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, *12*(223), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00223

Caetano, K. A. de S., Ferreira, I. M. F., Mariotto, L. G. S., Vidal, C. L., Neufeld, C. B., & dos Reis, A. C. (2019). Choir singing as an activity to manage anxiety and temporomandibular disorders: Reports from a Brazilian sample. *Psychology of Music, 47*(1), 96–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617739967

Camlin, D. A., Daffern, H., & Zeserson, K. (2020). Group singing as a resource for the development of a healthy public: A study of adult group singing. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *7*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00549-0

Campbell, P. S., Connell, C., & Beegle, A. (2007). Adolescents' expressed meanings of music in and out of school. J*ournal of Research in Music Education*, *55*(3), 220–236.

Cape, J. (2012). *Perceptions of meaningfulness among high school instrumental musicians* (Publication No. 3505872) [Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Carron, A. V., & Brawley, L. R. (2012). Cohesion: Conceptual and measurement issues. *Small Group Research*, *43*(6), 726–743. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496412468072

Carron, A. V., Colman, M. M., Wheeler, J., & Stevens, D. (2002). Cohesion and performance in sport: A meta analysis. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *24*(2), 168–188.

Carter, T. (2005). *Choral charisma: Singing with expression*. Santa Barbara Music Publishing.

Casile, A. (2013). Mirror neurons (and beyond) in the macaque brain: An overview of 20 years of research. *Neuroscience Letters*, *540*, 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neulet.2012.11.003

Castle, B. (2021). “Sing yourself to where the singing comes from”: Healing, singing, and reconciliation. In J. Boyce-Tillman & K. S. Hendricks (Eds.), *Living song: Singing, spirituality, and wellbeing* (pp. 269–281). Peter Lang.

Chartrand, T. L., & Bargh, J. A. (1999). The chameleon effect: The perception–behavior link and social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *76*(6), 893–910. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.6.893

Cirelli, L. K. (2018). How interpersonal synchrony facilitates early prosocial behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *20*, 35–39. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.08.009

Cirelli, L. K., Einarson, K. M., & Trainor, L. J. (2014). Interpersonal synchrony increases prosocial behavior in infants. *Developmental Science*, *17*(6), 1003–1011. https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12193

Clarke, E., DeNora, T., & Vuoskoski, J. (2015). Music, empathy and cultural understanding. *Physics of Life Reviews*, *15*, 61–88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.plrev.2015.09.001

Clarke, E., Dibben, N., & Pitts, S. (2009). *Music and mind in everyday life*. Oxford University Press.

Clift, S., & Hancox, G. (2001). The perceived benefits of singing: Findings from preliminary surveys of a university college choral society. *The Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health*, *121*(4), 248–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/146642400112100409

Clift, S., & Hancox, G. (2010). The significance of choral singing for sustaining psychological wellbeing: findings from a survey of choristers in England, Australia and Germany. *Music Performance Research, 3*(1), 79–96.

Clift, S., Hancox, G., Morrison, I., Hess, B., Kreutz, G., & Stewart, D. (2010). Choral singing and psychological wellbeing: Quantitative and qualitative findings from English choirs in a cross-national survey. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*, *1*(1), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.1.1.19/1

Coffin, J. D. G. (2005). *Why did we join? Why have we stayed? Membership in a women's barbershop chorus: A narrative inquiry into leadership, learning, and the development of voice through singing* [Master’s thesis, University of Prince Edward Island]. IslandScholar. https://islandscholar.ca/islandora/object/ir:21615/datastream/PDF/download/citation.pdf

Cohen, S., & Bodner, E. (2019). The relationship between flow and music performance anxiety amongst professional classical orchestral musicians. *Psychology of Music*,*47*(3), 420–435. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735618754689

Collins, D. L. (1999). *Teaching choral music* (2nd ed.). Prentice-Hall.

Costa-Giomi, E. (2008). Characteristics of elementary music programs in urban schools: What money can buy. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, *177*, 19–28.

Costa-Giomi, E., & Chappell, E. (2007). Characteristics of band programs in a large urban school district: Diversity or inequality? *Journal of Band Research*, *42*(2), 1–18.

Countryman, J. (2008). *Missing voices in music education: Music students and music teachers explore the nature of the high school music experience* (Publication No. NR39801) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Croom, A. M. (2015). Music practice and participation for psychological well-being: A review of how music influences positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. *Musicae Scientiae*, *19*(1), 44–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864914561709

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2008). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper Perennial.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, I. S. (Eds.). (1988). *Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness*. Cambridge University Press.

Custodero, L. (2002). Seeking challenge, finding skill: Flow experience and music education. *Arts Education Policy Review*, *103*(3), 3–9. https://doi.org/10.1080/10632910209600288

Davidson, J. W., Moore, D. G., Sloboda, J. A., & Howe, M. J. A. (1998). Characteristics of music teachers and the progress of young instrumentalists. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *46*(1), 141–160. https://doi.org/10.2307/3345766

de Quadros, A. (2019). *Focus: Choral music in global perspective.* Routledge.

DeAmbrose, M. M. M. (2019). *"Choir might actually save your life": A convergent mixed methods study on adolescents' attitudes and perceptions of singing and middle school level vocal music* (Publication No. 13862535) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Delius, J. A. M., & Müller, V. (2023). Interpersonal synchrony when singing in a choir. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1087517

DeLorenzo, L. C. (2019). *Teaching music: The urban experience*. Routledge.

Demorest, S. M., Kelley, J., & Pfordresher, P. Q. (2017). Singing ability, musical self-concept, and future music participation. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *64*(4), 405–420. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429416680096

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Dingle, G. A., Brander, C., Ballantyne, J., & Baker, F. A. (2012). 'To be heard': The social and mental health benefits of choir singing for disadvantaged adults. *Psychology of Music*, *41*(4), 405–421. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735611430081

Dingle, G. A., Clift, S., Finn, S., Gilbert, R., Groarke, J. M., Irons, J. Y., Bartoli, A. J., Lamont, A., Launay, J., Martin, E. S., Moss, H., Sanfilippo, K. R., Shipton, M., Stewart, L., Talbot, S., Tarrant, M., Tip, L., & Williams, E. J. (2019). An agenda for best practice research on group singing, health, and well-being. *Music & Science, 2.* https://doi.org/10.1177/2059204319861719

Dolloff, L. (1997). The singing classroom: A community of musicians. *The phenomenon of singing*, *1*, 89–96. https://journals.library.mun.ca/ojs/index.php/singing/article/view/931/806

Durrant, C. (2005). Shaping identity through choral activity: Singers' and conductors' perceptions. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *24*(1), 88–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X050240010701

Durrant, C. (2009). Communicating and accentuating the aesthetic and expressive dimension in choral conducting. *International Journal of Music Education*, *27*(4), 326–339. https://doi-org/10.1177/0255761409344374

Durrant, C. (2017). *Choral conducting: Philosophy and practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Durrant, C., & Himonides, E. (1998). What makes people sing together? Socio-psychological and cross-cultural perspectives on the choral phenomenon. *International Journal of Music Education*, *32*(1), 61–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/025576149803200106

Dwyer, R. (2015). Unpacking the habitus: Exploring a music teacher's values, beliefs and practices. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *37*(1), 93–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X15589260

Edgar, S. N. (2014). An ethic of care in high school instrumental music. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, *13*(2), 112–137. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Edgar13_2.pdf

Elliott, D. J., & Silverman, M. (2014). *Music matters: A philosophy of music education* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Elpus, K., & Abril, C. R. (2011). High school music ensemble students in the United States: A demographic profile. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *69*(2), 128–145. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429411405207

Elpus, K., & Abril, C. R. (2019). Who enrolls in high school music? A national profile of U.S. students, 2009–2013. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *67*(3), 323–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429419862837

Emmons, S., & Chase, C. (2006). *Prescriptions for choral excellence*. Oxford University Press.

Fancourt, D., Finn, S., Warran, K., & Wiseman, T. (2022). Group singing in bereavement: Effects on mental health, self-efficacy, self-esteem and well-being. *BMJ Supportive & Palliative Care*, *12*(e4), e607-e615. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjspcare-2018-001642

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human relations*, *7*(2), 117–140.

Fisher, R. A. (2014). The impacts of the voice change, grade level, and experience on the singing self-efficacy of emerging adolescent males. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *62*(3), 277–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429414544748

Fitzpatrick, K. R. (2011). A mixed methods portrait of urban instrumental music teaching. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *59*(3), 229–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429411414912

Fitzpatrick-Harnish, K. (2015). *Urban music education: A practical guide for teachers*. Oxford University Press.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2013). Case study. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. (4th ed., pp. 169–203). SAGE.

Forbes, M., & Bartlett, I. (2020). 'This circle of joy': meaningful musicians' work and the benefits of facilitating singing groups. *Music Education Research*, *22*(5), 555–568. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2020.1841131

Forshaw, L. (2018). Don't sing, just mouth the words: How being silenced shaped a philosophy and pedagogy of inclusion. *Canadian Music Educator*, *60*(1), 23–27.

Freer, P. K. (2003). *Rehearsal discourse of choral conductors: Meeting the needs of young adolescents* (Publication No. 3091248) [Doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Freer P. K. (2006). Hearing the voices of adolescent boys in choral music: A self-story. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *27*(1), 69–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X06027001050

Freer, P. K. (2009). Boys' descriptions of their experiences in choral music. *Research Studies in Music Education*, (*31*)2, 142–160. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X09344382

Freer, P. K. (2011). The performance-pedagogy paradox in choral music teaching. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, *19*(2), 164–178. https://doi.org/10.2979/philmusieducrevi.19.2.164

Frierson-Campbell, C. (Ed.) (2006). *Teaching music in the urban classroom: A guide to survival, success, and reform* (Vol. 1). Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Fuelberth, R. J. V. (2003). The effect of left hand conducting gesture on inappropriate vocal tension in individual singers. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 157*, 62–70.

Gabrielsson, A. (2001). Emotions in strong experiences with music. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Music and emotion: Theory and research* (pp. 431–449). Oxford University Press.

Gabrielsson, A. (2010). Strong experiences with music. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Handbook of music and emotion: Theory, research, applications* (pp. 547–574). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199230143.003.0020

Gabrielsson, A., & Lindström Wik, S. (2003). Strong experiences related to music: A descriptive system. *Musicae Scientiae*, *7*(2), 157–217. https://doi.org/10.1177/102986490300700201

Gabrielsson, A., Whaley, J., & Sloboda, J. (2016). Peak experiences in music. In S. Hallam, I. Cross, & M. H. Thaut (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology* (2nd ed.). Oxford. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198722946.001.0001

Garrido, S., & Macritchie, J. (2020). Audience engagement with community music performances: Emotional contagion in audiences of a 'pro-am' orchestra in suburban Sydney. *Musicae Scientiae*, *24*(2), 155–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864918783027

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Gazmararian, J., Weingart, R., Campbell, K., Cronin, T., & Ashta, J. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of students from two semi-rural high schools in Georgia. *Journal of School Health*. *91*, 356–369. http://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13007

Gibson, E. (2021). Interlude 3: Exploring aliveness. In J. Boyce-Tillman & K. S. Hendricks (Eds.), *Living song: Singing, spirituality, and wellbeing* (pp. 161–166). Peter Lang.

Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach*. Duquesne University Press.

Glenn, C. (Ed.). (1991). *In quest of answers: Interviews with American choral conductors*. Hinshaw Music.

Glew, S. G., Simonds, L. M., & Williams, E. I. (2021). The effects of group singing on the wellbeing and psychosocial outcomes of children and young people: A systematic integrative review. *Arts and Health*, *13*(3), 240–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2020.1802604

Good-Perkins, E. (2020). Rethinking vocal education as a means to encourage positive identity development in adolescents. In I. M. Yob & E. R. Jorgensen (Eds.), *Humane music education for the common good* (pp. 158–171). Indiana University Press.

Good, A., & Russo, F. A. (2016). Singing promotes cooperation in a diverse group of children. *Social Psychology*, *47*(6), 340–344. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000282

Green, L. (2008). *Music, informal learning, and the school: A new classroom pedagogy*. Ashgate.

Grocke, D., Bloch, S., & Castle, D. (2009). The effect of group music therapy on quality of life for participants living with a severe and enduring mental illness. *Journal of Music Therapy*, *46*(2), 90–104. https://doi.org/10.1093/jmt/46.2.90

Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America. (2019). *The chorus impact study: Singing for a lifetime*. https://www.chorusamerica.org/sites/default/files/resources/ChorusImpactStudy_SingingforaLifetime.pdf

Gurgel, R. (2013). *Levels of engagement in a racially diverse 7th grade choir class: Perceptions of "feeling it" and "blanked out"* (Publication No. 3589385) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Gurgel, R. (2016). *Taught by the students: Culturally relevant pedagogy and deep engagement in music education.* Roman & Littlefield.

Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1993). *Emotional contagion*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi-org/10.1017/CBO9781139174138

Hendricks, K. S. (2018). *Compassionate music teaching: A framework for motivation and engagement in the 21st century*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Hendricks, K. S. (2021). Authentic connection in music education: A chiastic essay. In K. S. Hendricks & J. Boyce-Tillman (Eds.), *Authentic connection: Music, spirituality, and wellbeing* (pp. 237–253). Peter Lang.

Hendricks, K. S., & Boyce-Tillman, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Authentic connection: music, spirituality, and wellbeing*. Peter Lang.

Hess, J. (2019). *Music education for social change: Constructing an activist music education*. Routledge.

Hibbard, S. L. (2017). *Music teacher presence: Toward a relational understanding* (Publication No 10760119) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Higgins, L. (2008). Community music and the welcome. *International Journal of Community Music*, *(1)*3, 391–400. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm.1.3.391_1

Hoffman, S. (2016). *Choral performance expression: Meanings, modalities, processes, synergies*. (Publication No. 10124800) [Doctoral dissertation, Teacher's College, Columbia University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Holt, M., & Jordan, J. (Eds.). (2008). *The school choral program: Philosophy, planning, organizing, and teaching*. GIA Publications.

Hourigan, R. M., & Edgar, S. N. (2014). Phenomenological research in music education. In C. M. Conway (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research in music education* (pp. 148–162). Oxford University Press.

Huron, D. (2003). Is music an evolutionary adaptation? In I. Peretz & R. J. Zatorre (Eds.), *The cognitive neuroscience of music* (pp. 57–75). Oxford University Press.

Husserl, E. (2013). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology* (W. R. B. Gibson, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1913)

Hutton, J. C. (2022). Teacher–student relationships: The lived experiences of four K–12 music educators. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, *32*(1), 38–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/10570837221097303

Hylton, J. B. (1981). Dimensionality in high school student participants' perceptions of the meaning of choral singing experience. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *29*(4), 287–303. https://doi.org/10.2307/3345005

Iacoboni, M., Molnar-Szakacs, I., Gallese, V., Buccino, G., Mazziotta, J. C., & Rizzolatti, G. (2005). Grasping the intentions of others with one's own mirror neuron system. *PLOS Biology, 3*(3), e79. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.0030079

Jackson, J. C., Jong, J., Bilkey, D., Whitehouse, H., Zollmann, S., McNaughton, C., & Halberstadt, J. (2018). Synchrony and physiological arousal increase cohesion and cooperation in large naturalistic groups. *Scientific Reports*, *8*(127), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-18023-4

Jaros, M. D. (2008). *Optimal experience in the choral rehearsal: A study of flow and affect among singers.* (Publication No. 3334427) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Jordan, J. (2013). *The musician's soul*. GIA Publications.

Jordan, J. (2017). *The conductor as prism: The power of metaphor in artistry*. GIA Publications.

Jordan, J., Moliterno, M., & Thomas, N. (2013). *Musician's breath: The role of breathing in human expression.* GIA Publications.

Jorgensen, E. R. (1995). Music education as community. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, *29*(3), 71–84.

Jorgensen, E. R. (2008). *The art of teaching music*. Indiana University Press.

Jorgensen, E. R. (2021). *Values and music education*. Indiana University Press.

Joyce, V. M. (1993). *Singing for our lives: Women creating home through singing.* (Publication No. MM86983) [Master's Thesis, University of Toronto]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Joyce, V. M. (2003). *Bodies that sing: The formation of singing subjects* (Publication No. NQ78458) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Julian, F. D. (1989). Nonverbal communication: Its application to conducting. *Journal of Band Research, 24*(2), 49–54.

Kastendieck, T., Zillmer, S., & Hess, U. (2022). (Un)mask yourself! Effects of face masks on facial mimicry and emotion perception during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cognition and Emotion*, *36*(1), 59–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2021.1950639

Keller, P. (2014). Ensemble performance: Interpersonal alignment of musical expression. In D. Fabian, R. Timmers, & E. Schubert (Eds.), *Expressiveness in music performance: Empirical approaches across styles and cultures* (pp. 260–282). Oxford University Press.

Kennedy, M. A. (2002). "It's cool because we like to sing": Junior high school boys' experience of choral music as an elective. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *18*(1), 26–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X020180010401

Kertz-Welzel, A. (2005). The pied piper of Hamelin: Adorno on music education. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *25*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X050250010301

Killian, J. N. (1997). Perceptions of the voice-change process: Male adult versus adolescent musicians and nonmusicians. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *45*(4), 521–535. https://doi.org/10.2307/3345420

Kincheloe, J. L., McLaren, P., Steinberg, S. R., & Monzó, L. D. (2018). Critical pedagogy and qualitative research: Advancing the bricolage. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., 235–260). SAGE.

King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. SAGE.

Kirchner, J. M., Bloom, A. J., & Skutnick-Henley, P. (2008). The relationship between performance anxiety and flow. *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, *23*, 59–65.

Kirschner, S., & Tomasello, M. (2009). Joint drumming: Social context facilitates synchronization in preschool children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *102*(3), 299–314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2008.07.005

Knight, S. (2013). Exploring a cultural myth: What adult non-singers may reveal about the nature of singing. *The Phenomenon of Singing*, *2*, 144–154. https://journals.library.mun.ca/ojs/index.php/singing/article/view/669/583

Kokotsaki, D., & Hallam, S. (2007). Higher education music students' perceptions of the benefits of participative music making. *Music Education Research*, *9*(1), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800601127577

Kratus, J. (2007). Music education at the tipping point. *Music Educators Journal*, *94*(2), 42–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/002743210709400209

Kraus, B. N. (2003). *Musicians in flow: Optimal experience in the wind ensemble rehearsal.* (Publication No. 3084646) [Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Kreutz, G. (2014). Does singing facilitate social bonding? *Music and Medicine*, 6(2), 51–60.

Kreutz, G., Bongard, G., Rohrmann, S., Hodnapp, V., & Grebe, D. (2004). Effects of choir singing or listening on secretory immunoglobulin A, cortisol and emotional state. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, *27*(6), 623–635. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-004-0006-9

Kreutz, G., & Brünger, P. (2012). A shade of grey: Negative associations with amateur choral singing. *Arts and Health*, 4(3), 230–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2012.693111

Küçük, D. P. (2020). Development of the choir team perception scale. *Educational Research and Reviews*, *15*(8), 438–453. https://doi.org/10.5897/ERR2020.3961

Kulset, N. B., & Halle, K. (2020). Togetherness!: Adult companionship—the key to music making in kindergarten. *Music Education Research*, *22*(3), 304–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2020.1765155

Kwok, S. Y. C. L. (2019). Integrating positive psychology and elements of music therapy to alleviate adolescent anxiety. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *29*(6), 663–676. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731518773423

Ladson-Billings, G. (2022). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Lamont, A. (2012). Emotion, engagement and meaning in strong experiences of music performance. *Psychology of Music, 40*(5), 574–594. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735612448510

Lamont, A., Murray, M., Hale, R., & Wright-Bevans, K. (2018). Singing in later life: The anatomy of a community choir. *Psychology of Music*, *46*(3), 424–439. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617715514

Lee, J., Krause, A. E., & Davidson, J. W. (2017). The PERMA well-being model and music facilitation practice: Preliminary documentation for well-being through music provision in Australian schools. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *39*(1), 73–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X17703131

Li, X., Bergin, C., & Olsen, A. A. (2022). Positive teacher–student relationships may lead to better teaching. *Learning and Instruction*, *80*, Article 101581. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2022.101581

Liebowitz, M., Tucker, M. S., Frontz, M., & Mulholland, S. (2015). Participatory choral music as a means of engagement in a veterans' mental health and addiction treatment setting. *Arts and Health*, *7*(2), 137–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2014.999246

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. SAGE.

Lind, V. R., & McKoy, C. (2016). *Culturally responsive teaching in music education: From understanding to application* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Livesey, L., Morrison, I., Clift, S., & Camic, P. (2012). Benefits of choral singing for social and mental wellbeing: Qualitative findings from a cross-national survey of choir members. *Journal of Public Mental Health*, *11*(1), 10–26. https://doi.org/10.1108/17465721211207275

Lord, V. M., Cave, P., Hume, V. J., Flude, E. J., Evans, A., Kelly, J. L., Polkey, M. I., & Hopkinson, N. S. (2010). Singing teaching as a therapy for chronic respiratory disease: A randomised controlled trial and qualitative evaluation. *BMC Pulmonary Medicine*, *10,* 41. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2466-10-41

Manganello, R. B. (2011). *Movement in the middle school choral rehearsal*. (Publication No. 3483472) [Doctoral dissertation, Boston University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Mas-Herrero, E., Singer, N., Ferreri, L., McPhee, M., Zatorre, R. J., & Ripollés, P. (2022). Music engagement is negatively correlated with depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic via reward-related mechanisms. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1519*, 186–198. https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.14931

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, *50*(4), 370–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Maslow, A. H. (1968). Music education and peak experience. *Music Educators Journal*, *54*(6), 72–171. https://doi.org/10.2307/3391274

Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.

Maslow, A. H. (1999). *Toward a psychology of being* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Matthews, W. K., & Kitsantas, A. (2007). Group cohesion, collective efficacy, and motivational climate as predictors of conductor support in music ensembles. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 55*(1), 6–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/002242940705500102

McCarthy, M. (2009). Re-thinking "music" in the context of education. In T. A. Regelski & J. T. Gates (Eds.), *Music education for changing times: Guiding visions for practice* (pp. 29–37). Springer.

McCraty, R. (2017). New frontiers in heart rate variability and social coherence research: Techniques, technologies, and implications for improving group dynamics and outcomes. *Frontiers in Public Health*, *5*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2017.00267

McCraty, R. (2022). Following the rhythm of the heart: HeartMath Institute's path to HRV biofeedback. *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, *47*, 305–316. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10484-022-09554-2

McNeill, W. H. (1995). *Keeping together in time: Dance and drill in human history*. Harvard University Press.

Mellor, L. (2013). An investigation of singing, health and well-being as a group process. *British Journal of Music Education, 30*(2), 177–205. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051712000563

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Miksza, P. (2013). The future of music education: Continuing the dialogue about curricular reform. *Music Educators Journal*, *99*(4), 45–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432113476305

Mills, M. (2010). Being a musician: Musical identity and the adolescent singer. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* (186): 43–54. https://doi.org/10.2307/41110433

Mills, M. M. (2008). *The effects of participation in a community children's choir on participants' identity: An ethnographic case study* (Publication No. 3312721) [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Molnar-Szakacs, I. (2017). Music: The language of empathy. In E. King & C. Waddington (Eds.), *Music and empathy* (pp. 97–123). Taylor & Francis.

Morgan, E., Gunes, H., & Bryan-Kinns, N. (2015). Using affective and behavioural sensors to explore aspects of collaborative music making. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, *82*, 31–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2015.05.002

Morgan, R. G. (1992). *A study of a director's behaviors and his students' perceptions in a high school choral ensemble* (Publication No. 9229967) [Doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Morgan, S., & Boyce-Tillman, J. (2016). *A river rather than a road: The community choir as spiritual experience*. Peter Lang.

Moss, H., Lynch, J., & O'Donoghue, J. (2018). Exploring the perceived health benefits of singing in a choir: An international cross-sectional mixed-methods study. *Perspectives in Public Health, 138*(3), 160–168. https://doi.org/10.1177/1757913917739652

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE.

Mudrick, A. W. (1997). *Student motivation in four successful high school choral programs in south central Pennsylvania: a qualitative study*. (Publication No. 9813531) [Doctoral dissertation, Temple University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Müller, V., Delius, J. A. M., & Lindenberger, U. (2018). Complex networks emerging during choir singing. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1431*(1), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13940

Müller, V., Delius, J. A. M., & Lindenberger, U. (2019). Hyper-frequency network topology changes during choral singing. *Frontiers in Physiology*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fphys.2019.00207

Munir, F. (2021). Mitigating COVID: Impact of COVID-19 lockdown and school closure on children's well-being. *Social Sciences, 10*, 387. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10100387

Nagoski, A. (2010). Thoughtful gestures: A model of conducting as empathic communication. *Choral Journal*, *50*(9), 19–30.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, February). U.S. Department of Education. *CCD Common Core of Data, 2021–2022*. https://nces.ed.gov

Neill, S. L. (1998). *Motivating factors for student participation in high school choral programs and vocal enrichment activities* (Publication No. 9830227) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri-Kansas City]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Neumann, R., & Strack, F. (2000). “Mood contagion”: The automatic transfer of mood between persons. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*(2), 211–223. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.2.211

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2012). The caring relation in teaching. *Oxford Review of Education*, *38*(6), 771–781. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.745047

North, A. C., Hargreaves, D. J., & Tarrant, M. (2002). Social psychology and music education. In R. Colwell & C. Richardson (Eds.), *The new handbook of research on music teaching and learning: A project of the Music Educators National Conference* (pp. 604–625). Oxford University Press.

Nowicki, L., Prinz, W., Grosjean, M., Repp, B. H., & Keller, P. E. (2013). Mutual adaptive timing in interpersonal action coordination. *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain, 23*(1), 6–20. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032039

O’Toole, P. (2005). I sing in a choir but “I have no voice!”. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, *6*. http://users.rider.edu/~vrme/v6n1/visions/O%27Toole%20I%20Sing%20In%20A%20Choir.pdf

Odendaal, A., Kankkunen, O., Nikkanen, H. M., & Vakeva, L. (2014). What’s with the K? Exploring the implications of Christopher Small’s ‘musicking’ for general music education. *Music Education Research*, *16*(2), 162–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2013.859661

Orton, A., & Pitts, S. E. (2019). Adolescent perceptions of singing: exploring gendered differences in musical confidence, identity and ambition. *Music Education Research*, *21*(1), 40–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2018.1507019

Overy, K., & Molnar-Szakacs, I. (2009). Being together in time: Musical experience and the mirror neuron system. *Music Perception*, *26*(5), 489–504. https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2009.26.5.489

Palmer, P. J. (2017). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (20th anniversary ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Parker, E. C. (2010). Exploring student experiences of belonging within an urban high school choral ensemble: An action research study. *Music Education Research*, *12*(4), 339–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2010.519379

Parker, E. C. (2011). Uncovering adolescent choral singers' philosophical beliefs about music-making: A qualitative inquiry. *International Journal of Music Education*, *29*(4), 305–317. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761411421092

Parker, E. C. (2014). The process of social identity development in adolescent high school choral singers: A grounded theory. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *62*(1), 18–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429413520009

Parker, E. C. (2016). The experience of creating community: An intrinsic case study of four Midwestern public school choral teachers. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *64*(2), 220–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429416648292

Parker, E. C. (2020). *Adolescents on music: Why music matters to young people in our lives*. Oxford University Press.

Parker, E. C. (2021). Two adolescents on singing and becoming themselves. In J. Boyce-Tillman & K. S. Hendricks (Eds.), *Living song: Singing, spirituality, and wellbeing* (pp. 39–52). Peter Lang.

Parker, E. C., & Hutton, J. C. (in press). Singing and caring. In K. S. Hendricks (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of care in music education*. Oxford University Press.

Pascale, L. M. (2005). Dispelling the myth of the non-singer: Embracing two aesthetics for singing. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, *13*, 165–175.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Pearce, E., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. (2015). The ice-breaker effect: Singing mediates fast social bonding. *Royal Society Open Science*, *2*(10), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.150221

Pearce, E., Launay, J., Van Duijn, M., Rotkirch, A., David-Barrett, T, & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2016). Singing together or apart: The effect of competitive and cooperative singing on social bonding within and between sub-groups of a university fraternity. *Psychology of Music*, *44*(6), 1255–1273. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735616636208

Pearsall, A. D. (2021). Bridging practices: Infusing general music into the choral classroom. In S. L. Burton (Ed.), *Engaging musical practices: A sourcebook for middle school general music* (2nd ed; pp. 223–247). Rowman & Littlefield.

Pellegrino, K. (2010.) *The meanings and values of music-making in the lives of string teachers: Exploring the intersections of music-making and teaching* (Publication No. 3429263) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Pendergast, S., & Robinson, N. R. (2020). Secondary students' preferences for various learning conditions and music courses: A comparison of school music, out-of-school music, and nonmusic participants. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *68*(3), 264–285. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429420931826

Pentikäinen, E., Pitkäniemi, A., Siponkoski, S.T., Jansson, M., Louhivuori, J., Johnson, J. K., Paajanen, T., & Särkämö, T. (2021). Beneficial effects of choir singing on cognition and well-being of older adults: Evidence from a cross-sectional study. *PLOS ONE 16*(2), Article e0245666. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245666

Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide*. SAGE.

Perkins, J. (2019). Student perceptions of a choral-dialoguing social justice course. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, *221*, 72–86. https://doi.org/10.5406/bulcouresmusedu.221.0072

Phillips, K. H. (2004). *Directing the choral music program*. Oxford University Press.

Pitts, S. (2016). *Valuing musical participation*. Ashgate.

Pitts, S. E. (2017). What is music education for? Understanding and fostering routes into lifelong musical engagement. *Music Education Research*, *19*(2), 160–168. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2016.1166196

Potter, J. (1998). *Vocal authority: Singing style and ideology*. Cambridge University Press.

Potter, J., & Sorrell, N. (2012). *A history of singing*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139024419

Rabinowitch, T.-C., Cross, I., & Burnard, P. (2012). Long-term musical group interaction has a positive influence on empathy in children. *Psychology of Music*, *41*(4), 484–498. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735612440609

Reeve, J. (2006). Teachers as facilitators: What autonomy-supportive teachers do and why their students benefit. *The Elementary School Journal*, *106*(3), 225–236. https://doi.org/10.1086/501484

Reynolds, D., & Reason, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Kinesthetic empathy in creative and cultural practices*. Intellect Books.

Rickson, D., & McFerran, K. (2014). *Creating music cultures in the school: A perspective from community music therapy*. Barcelona Publishing.

Rodgers, C. R., & Raider-Roth, M. B. (2006). Presence in teaching. *Teachers and Teaching*, *12*(3), 265–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/13450600500467548

Ruddock, E., & Leong, S. (2005). "I am unmusical!": The verdict of self-judgement. *International Journal of Music Educatio*n, *23*(1), 9–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761405050927

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.

Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. SAGE.

Saunders, J. A. (2010). Identity in music: Adolescents and the music classroom. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, *9*(2), 70–78. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Saunders9_2.pdf

Schaffer, G. E., Power, E. M., Fisk, A. K., & Trolian, T. L. (2021). Beyond the four walls: The evolution of school psychological services during the COVID-19 outbreak. *Psychology in the Schools*, *58*(7), 1246–1265. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22543

Schellenberg, E. G., Corrigall, K. A., Dys, S. P., & Malti, T. (2015). Group music training and children's prosocial skills. *PLOS ONE*, *10*(10): e0141449. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0141449

Schmidt, S. N., Hass, J., Kirsch, P., & Mier, D. (2021). The human mirror neuron system—A common neural basis for social cognition? *Psychophysiology*, *58*(5), e13781. https://doi.org/10.1111/psyp.13781

Schmitt, R. (1967). Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological reduction. In J. J. Kockelmans (Ed.), *Phenomenology: The philosophy of Edmund Husserl and its interpretation* (pp. 58–68). Doubleday.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.

Shaw, J. T. (2016). “The music I was meant to sing”: Adolescent choral singers’ perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *64*(1), 45–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429415627989

Shaw, J. T. (2017). Toward socially inclusive music organizations: Promoting socioeconomic diversity in choral ensembles. *Choral Journal*, *58*(4), 22–37.

Shaw, J. T. (2020). *Culturally responsive choral music education: What teachers can learn from nine students’ experiences in three choirs*. Routledge.

Silber, L. (2005). Bars behind bars: the impact of a women’s prison choir on social harmony. *Music Education Research*, *7*(2), 251–271. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800500169811

Silvey, P. E. (2002). *Learning music from the inside: The process of coming to know musical works as experienced by four high school choral singers* (Publication No. 3070436) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Silvey, P. E. (2005). Learning to perform Benjamin Britten’s *Rejoice in the Lamb*: The perspectives of three high school choral singers. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *53*(2), 102–119. https://doi.org/10.1177/002242940505300202

Sloman, S. A., Patterson, R., & Barbey, A. K. (2021). Cognitive neuroscience meets the community of knowledge. *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience*, *15*, 675127. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnsys.2021.675127

Small, C. (1986). Performance as ritual: Sketch for an enquiry into the true nature of a symphony concert. *The Sociological Review*, *34* (1_suppl), 6–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1986.tb03312.x

Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. University Press of New England.

Small, C. (1999). Musicking—the meanings of performing and listening: A lecture. *Music Education Research*, *1*(1), 9–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461380990010102

Smith, B., & Sataloff, R. T. (2013). *Choral pedagogy* (3rd ed.). Plural Publishing.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE.

Stacy, R., Brittain, K., & Kerr, S. (2002). Singing for health: An exploration of the issues. *Health Education, 102*(4), 156–162. https://doi.org/10.1108/09654280210434228

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443–466). SAGE.

Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. Guilford Press.

Stewart, N. A. J., & Lonsdale, A. J. (2016). It's better together: The psychological benefits of singing in a choir. *Psychology of Music*, *44*(6), 1240–1254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735615624976

Storr, A. (1991). Music in relation to the self. *Journal of British Music Therapy*, *5*(1), 5–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/135945759100500102

Sugden, N. L. (2005). *Meaning of the choral experience and musical self-concept of secondary choral music participants* (Publication No. 3298528) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Swain, N., & Bodkin-Allen, S. (2017). Developing singing confidence in early childhood teachers using acceptance and commitment therapy and group singing: A randomized trial. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *39*(1), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X17700141

Sweet, B. (2008). *Everybody's somebody in my class: A case study of an exemplary middle school choir teacher* (Publication No. 3348226) [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Sweet, B. (2010). A case study: Middle school boys' perceptions of singing and participation in choir. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, *28*(2), 5–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/8755123310361770

Sweet, B. (2015). The adolescent female changing voice: A phenomenological investigation. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *63*(1), 70–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429415570755

Sweet, B. (2016). *Growing musicians: Teaching music in middle school and beyond.* Oxford University Press.

Sweet, B. (2018). Voice change and singing experiences of adolescent females. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *66*(2), 133–149. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429418763790

Tanaka, S. (2021). Mirror neuron activity during audiovisual appreciation of opera performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, Article 563031. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.563031

Tarr, B., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. M. (2014). Music and social bonding: "Self-other" merging and neurohormonal mechanisms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *5*(1096), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01096

Turella, L., Pierno, A. C., Tubaldi, F., & Castiello, U. (2009). Mirror neurons in humans: Consisting or confounding evidence? *Brain and Language*, *108*(1), 10–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandl.2007.11.002

Turino, T. (2008). *Music as social life.* University of Chicago Press.

U. S. Census Bureau (2021). *QuickFacts*. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/

Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

van den Haut, J. J. J., & Davis, O. C. (2019). *Team flow: The psychology of optimal collaboration*. Springer.

van den Hout, J. J. J., Davis, O. C., & Weggeman, M. C. D. P. (2018). The conceptualization of team flow. *The Journal of Psychology*, *152*(6), 388–423. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2018.1449729.

van der Lans, R. M., Cremers, J., Klugkist, I., & Zwart, R. (2020). Teachers' interpersonal relationships and instructional expertise: How are they related? *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *66*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100902

van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing* (1st ed.). Routledge.

van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Vincent, P. M. (1997). *A study of community choruses in Kentucky and implications for music education* (Publication No. 9735637) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Wertz, F. J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L. M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. The Guilford Press.

Whitaker, J. A. (2011). High school band students' and directors' perceptions of verbal and nonverbal teaching behaviors. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *59*(3), 290–309. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429411414910

Wiggins, J. (2011). Vulnerability and agency in being and becoming a musician. *Music Education Research*, *13*(4), 355–367. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2011.632153

Williams, D. A. (2011). The elephant in the room. *Music Educators Journal, 98*(1), 51–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432111415538

Willingham, T. L. (2001). *A community of voices: A qualitative study of the effects of being a member of the Bell'Arte Singers* (Publication No. NQ63635) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Wis, R. M. (2007). *The conductor as leader: Principles of leadership applied to life on the podium*. GIA Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.

Yob, I. M., & Jorgensen, E. R. (Eds.). (2020). *Humane music education for the common good*. Indiana University Press.

Young, J. R. (2002). *A grounded theory study of the values and beliefs that shape the teaching strategies of middle-level music educators* (Publication No. 3045545) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Nebraska-Lincoln]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Temple University
Office of the Vice President for Research

Research Integrity & Compliance
Student Faculty Center
3340 N. Broad Street, Suite 304
Philadelphia, PA 19140

Institutional Review Board
Phone: (215) 707-3390
Fax: (215) 707-9100
e-mail: irb@temple.edu

Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects Research
that is Approved as Exempt

Date: 22-Dec-2021

Protocol Number: 29004

PI: ELIZABETH PARKER

Review Type: EXEMPT

Approved On: 22-Dec-2021

Risk: Minimal risk

Committee: A1

Sponsor: NO EXTERNAL SPONSOR

Project Title: Choral Educators' Experiences Creating Connection During Group Singing

---

The IRB approved the protocol 29004.

The study was approved under Exempt review. The IRB determined that the research **does not require a continuing review**, consequently there is not an IRB approval period.

As this research was approved as Exempt, the IRB will not stamp the consent or assent form(s).

Note that all applicable Institutional approvals must also be secured before study implementation. These approvals include, but are not limited to, Medical Radiation Committee ("MRC"); Radiation Safety Committee ("RSC"); Institutional Biosafety Committee ("IBC"); and Temple University Survey Coordinating Committee ("TUSCC"). Please visit these Committees' websites for further information.

Finally, in conducting this research, you are obligated to submit the following:

- **Modifications - Any changes to the research that may change the Exempt status of this study must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.** Examples of such changes are: including new, sensitive questions to a survey or interview, changing data collection such that de-identified data will now be identifiable, including an intervention in the methods, changing variables to be collected from medical charts, decreasing confidentiality measures, including minors or adults lacking capacity to consent as subjects when previously only adults with capacity to consent were to be enrolled, no longer collecting signed HIPAA Authorization, etc. Please

reach out to the IRB Staff with any questions about if a change to the study warrants a Modification.

- **Reportable New Information** - Using the Reportable New Information e-form, report new information items such as those described in HRP-071 Policy - Prompt Reporting Requirements to the IRB **within 5 days**.
- **Closure report** - Using a closure e-form, submit when the study is permanently closed to enrollment; all subjects have completed all protocol related interventions and interactions; collection of private identifiable information is complete; and analysis of private identifiable information is complete.

For the complete list of investigator responsibilities, please see the HRP–070 Policy – Investigator Obligations, the Investigator Manual (HRP-910), and other Policies and Procedures found on the Temple University IRB website: https://research.temple.edu/irb-forms-standard-operating-procedures.

Please contact the IRB at (215) 707-3390 if you have any questions.

If you would like to tell us how we are doing, please complete this 5-minute Satisfaction Survey: https://forms.gle /9EcgYGDEEANnvMw37

APPENDIX B

INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Choral Educators' Experiences Creating Connection During Group Singing

Delivered as a Written Google Form or Delivered Verbally During Video Call

The purpose of this research study is to examine choral educators' facilitation of connection during group singing, including connection involving togetherness, synchrony, and oneness. A choral educator colleague familiar with your work recommended you as a participant for this study based on observations of your work leading group singing.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study, either before or after completing this survey. These questions will help determine alignment of your work with the study's goals and to help assemble a representative group of study participants. By answering these questions, you make no commitment to participating in the research study. After answering these questions, you might be formally invited to participate in the study, at which point you would receive additional information on the research and a participant consent form. Please feel free to ask any questions about the study at any point by contacting Jenny Hutton at jennyhutton@temple.edu or 404-918-1583.

Name:

Current Position(s) as a Choral Educator [title, organization]:

Years at Current Position(s):

Past Position(s) as a Choral Educator [title, organization]:

Years at Past Position(s):

Total Years as a Choral Educator:

Questions

1. What are your primary goals in your work as a choral educator?
2. In working with a group of singers, have you ever sensed that singers felt particularly connected to each other? Can you describe that experience?
3. Singers in groups sometimes experience synchrony as their movements, sounds, or even heart rates and breathing rates align. In working with a group of singers, have you ever sensed an experience of synchrony? Can you describe those experiences?
4. Singers in groups sometimes experience a sense of oneness with the larger world as they sing. In working with a group of singers, have you ever sensed an experience of oneness? Can you describe that experience?
5. Tell me about how you create connection during singing in your classroom.
6. In your experience, what factors influence singers' experience of connection during group singing?
7. What other thoughts do you have on this topic or this experience?

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title: Choral Educators' Experiences Creating Connection During Group Singing

Protocol Number: 29004

Investigators: Principal Investigator:

Dr. Elizabeth C. Parker

Associate Professor of Music Education

Boyer College of Music and Dance

2001 N 13th St

Philadelphia, PA 19122

eparker@temple.edu

Coinvestigator:

Jennifer C. Hutton

PhD Student

Boyer College of Music and Dance

2001 N 13th St

Philadelphia, PA 19122

jennyhutton@temple.edu

Daytime Phone Number: 404-918-1583 or 215-204-6211

DETAILED RESEARCH CONSENT

You are being invited to take part in a research study. A person who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant. In this consent form "you" generally refers to the research participant.

What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- You volunteer to be in a research study.
- Whether you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide, it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before and after you decide.
- By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of the legal rights that you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to examine connection during choral singing. Specifically, this study will look at how choral educators experience and facilitate togetherness, synchrony, and oneness during group singing.

How long will I be in this research?

Participating in this study will take approximately 180 minutes of your time. The estimated duration of your study participation is January–April, 2022.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

First, you will be asked to complete a 15-minute screening questionnaire. If you consent to be part of the study, the coinvestigator will interview you individually three times for approximately 35–45 minutes each interview, asking questions about your experiences leading group singing. The interviews will take place in person at your workplace, at another public place, or via Zoom. They will be scheduled during time convenient to you. The coinvestigator will also observe you working with singers in rehearsal, performance, and/or classroom music-making interactions for approximately 4–6 hours over the course of one or more days. The rehearsal, performance, and/or classroom music-making interactions will be audio recorded for verification purposes. Portions of the audio recording may be transcribed. Audio recordings will be made available only to the researchers.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to:

- Respond to interview questions as described above, to the best of your ability.
- Facilitate the researcher's observations of rehearsal, performance, and/or classroom music-making interactions as described above.

Could being in this research hurt me?

The reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts are minimal.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

No.

Will being in this research benefit me?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, a possible benefit you will obtain from the research includes knowing that you have contributed to an understanding of how choral educators facilitate experiences of connection during choral singing.

What other choices do I have besides taking part in this research?

The alternative to participating is not to participate.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

- All data will be stored on a password-protected computer or on password-protected cloud-based storage.
- We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. A pseudonym, or fake name, will be used in reports of the research findings.

- We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research, Temple University and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information.

Although this is not the purpose of this research, we are required to report instances of child abuse and/or neglect to the relevant university and law enforcement agencies.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or irb@temple.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

What happens if I agree to participate in this research, but I change my mind later?

If you decide to leave this research, contact the research team so that the investigator can delete all data associated with your participation.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

No.

Permission to record audio

By consenting to participate in this research, you are also consenting to having interviews and observations audio recorded for verification purposes. The investigators will audio record the interviews. After interviews, we will transcribe your words into text. The investigators will record audio of rehearsals, performances, and music-making classroom interactions; portions of that audio may be transcribed. All digital audio files will be kept in a password-protected computer or in password-protected cloud-based storage. Transcripts and audio files will be destroyed within six years of the recording dates.

Signature Block

Your signature documents permission for the individual named below to take part in this research.

Signature of participant	Date
Printed name of participant	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol #1

1. Please describe your experiences of facilitating connection during group singing. You might discuss experiences of togetherness, or a sense of being drawn together; of synchrony, in which singers' sound, movements, and physiological processes align; or of oneness, a sense of connection to the larger world.
2. How would you describe your experience of these phenomena in the moment, while leading group singing?
3. How do you know when singers are experiencing connection to each other? synchrony? oneness with something larger than themselves? Could you describe examples of those experiences?
4. Have you always worked toward helping students experience connection? How have your views on this topic developed over time?
5. Have you experienced these phenomena yourself as a singer? If so, what was that experience like for you? What is your sense of how the choral educator involved (if there was one present) might have facilitated your experience?
6. Have you been in settings where helping singers experience connection is particularly challenging? or particularly effortless? Please describe those experiences.

7. When working with singers, do you speak about or directly address the idea of togetherness? of synchrony? of oneness? Please describe how you and singers communicate about these ideas.
8. What else comes to mind when you think about these experiences with singers?

Interview Protocol #2

Questions for All Participants

1. How does singers' role in creating music and/or singers' interaction with a composer, arranger, or poet (singers working to understand, shape, or interpret music) affect or create connection?
2. What role does an ensemble's musical ability or experience in choral settings play in creating connection?
3. How has the pandemic shaped your practice of creating connection or your understanding of connection during group singing?
4. As much as you feel comfortable answering, how do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity, gender? Are there any other parts of your identity that might be important to your perspectives or experiences?

Bank of Additional Questions for Ms. A

*Not all questions were asked.

1. In recent weeks, what moments of togetherness, synchrony, or oneness have you and the singers you work with experienced?
2. In your view, does connection happen only when every single individual in the room is connected?

3. Why do you think connection happens in the ensembles you work with?
4. What do we mean when we talk about a singing culture, or a choir's culture?
5. What other choral contexts, if any, do your students experience? How might those experiences influence the ways you aim to create connection?
6. What role does repertoire play in creating connection during group singing?
7. How does connection relate to musical expressiveness? emotion? discussions about the meaning of the text?
8. Do all your students enter into the classroom with similar openness to the kinds of connection offered? Are some students more able to tap in right away? If so, why do you think that is?
9. Does more time help students experience connection?
10. Some talk about connection as transcendent experiences, or peak experiences, or a sense of merging with something bigger. Have you ever experienced something you might describe that way, while singing or while leading singing? Or have you sensed that the singers experienced it?

Bank of Additional Questions for Mr. E

*Not all questions were asked.

1. Have any of your recent experiences in rehearsals or in performances with students given you a sense that connection was happening? Did any experiences in the spring particularly reflect togetherness, or synchrony, or oneness?
2. You described the conference performance as a highlight of your career with what might be the top ensemble of your career. What makes it feel that way to you?

3. What went on during the performance that indicated there was connection?
4. To what extent do you sense that this connection is created in various Falcon Point ensembles? Does connection work differently in different groups?
5. Does connection happen only when every single individual in the room seems to be connected?
6. Does an ensemble's musical ability or choral experience play a role in creating connection?
7. In your experience, how does singers' role in creating music and/or singers' interaction with a composer, arranger, or poet affect or create connection? (Do singers work to understand, shape, or interpret the music?)
8. How has your own life or personal development impacted your approach to teaching? I'm thinking also of your inspirational quotes, philosophies of life, and motivational speaking.
9. Has your upbringing in this community affected the idea of making Falcon Point choirs "home"?
10. How has the pandemic shaped your practice of creating connection or your understanding of connection during group singing?
11. Would you be willing to share any artifacts from students (notes, written reflections, etc.) that relate to students' experience of connection during singing?

Bank of Additional Questions for Mr. F

*Not all questions were asked.

1. Could you describe your experience of the concert? How did what happened at the concert relate to your goals for creating connection?
2. When talking about students' experiences of connection during group singing, you've discussed Maslow's hierarchy of needs and ideas about fear and vulnerability. Can you share more about what makes students ready or able to experience connection?
3. What role does an ensemble's musical ability or experience in choral settings play in creating connection?
4. What have you learned this year about facilitating connection with your current students? Have you drawn any conclusions based on your experiences at Liberty Charter and your previous teaching experiences?

Additional Questions for Ms. H

*Not all questions were asked.

1. The first sequence of questions followed up on the classes I had just observed Ms. H teach, including questions soliciting her thoughts on activities she chose and her interactions with students.
2. Do you have any obstacles that you run up against in terms of scheduling or who gets to be in your classes? It depends on the school environment, but some educators have lots of barriers there, and some have fewer.
3. I was thinking about the idea you were talking about, how your class got so excited that they stepped in time, but you were not excited because it wasn't accurate. But they didn't care. Do you think in those moments where they're clapping for themselves, do you think that's about connection?

4. When you were talking about that student with their grandfather, singing a song to experience connection with a person, what has been your experience with that idea? Have you experienced other circumstances when singing to someone enhances the connection?
5. Last time, you were talking about your experience in a classical choral setting, as a singer. And you were also talking about how you ask your students, what has been your best musical experience? So I was curious about what your answer would be to that question, what has been your best musical experience?
6. If you're comfortable, could you share how you identify—in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, any other things that are important to your identity in terms of your perspectives, if you're comfortable sharing about that? How do any elements of identity play out in what you aim to do as a choral educator?
7. What role does the repertoire play in connection for you?
8. How much do you think connection is related to the amount of choral experience or the musical skill? You shared when you work with honor choirs, you feel like you can go right to that connection place. But you're also saying with these students, it's not necessarily about the fact that they have very highly advanced musical skills. Is experience or skill a barrier or a facilitator of connection?

Additional Questions for Ms. N

The second interview with Ms. N occurred unexpectedly immediately after a classroom observation, and I had no questions prepared. The interview was a long, spontaneous conversation that followed up on the classroom observation and on other topics covered

above. Topics covered overlapped with many of the questions above, including challenge level in repertoire, movement during singing, commissioned works, small group work, readiness for connection, and connection as experienced with students.

Interview Protocol #3

Interview #3 questions were designed to serve as a member check and to develop further dimension in cross-case analysis. These were the least structured of the three interviews. Not all questions were asked.

Ms. A

I'm hoping to share with you some of the overall findings, in process, and hear your thoughts on how much those ideas resonate with your experience. [Describe findings in process. Teachers might perceive it is easier to help students experience connection when they: have higher musical ability; have more choral experience; have chosen to be in the class.]

1. How much, if at all, does connection operate differently in different ensembles or settings? How is creating connection different if some students don't want to sing, or there is less "singing culture," or students are facing stress?
2. Teachers and students may not have the same experiences of connection in a moment. [Teachers' own performance standards might get in the way.] Do students have a different measuring stick for connection than teachers?
3. Does connection have to include everyone? When might it and when might it not?
4. Connection might be facilitated by the teacher, and it also might happen when the teacher is not actively leading. How much is this true to your experience?

5. Repertoire can help create connection, but connection does not always need specific repertoire to happen. How much is this true to your experience?
6. Does connection work differently in ensemble and solo singing, or other vocal ensemble contexts?

Mr. E

These questions reflect ideas that you and other participants have shared. I invite you to share how well these ideas represent your experience.

1. Participants have discussed challenges creating connection during singing. Challenges include situations where some students don't want to sing, or they haven't chosen to be in choir class, or there's less of a singing culture in the ensemble or school, or scheduling is an obstacle to student participation. Have you seen any of those factors as challenges to creating connection?
2. Another challenge may be when students are particularly stressed or are facing personal challenges. Have you seen those factors as challenges to creating connection? If so, do you see part of your role as offsetting or minimizing the effects of those sorts of stressors?
3. Do singers' musical ability or their singing experience affect how you help students experience connection or whether students experience connection?
4. You've discussed that sometimes the singers feel connected, but you as the teacher are not experiencing the same connection that the singers are experiencing. What is going on there? Why might that happen—or why not?
5. How often does connection happen for the singers when you are not actively leading?

6. How much of singers' experience of connection is created or choreographed by the teacher, and how much of it happens because of the singers themselves?
7. Related to obstacles due to COVID-19, you talked about how what your seniors do now helps the current sixth graders belong. Did adjustments due to COVID-19 put any kinks in the continuity across and between grades and singing cultures at Falcon Point?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Mr. F

1. These questions reflect ideas that you and other participants have shared. I invite you to share how well these ideas represent your experience.
    a. Participants have discussed challenges in creating connection during singing. Challenges include situations where some students don't want to sing, or they haven't chosen to be in choir class, or there's less of a singing culture in the ensemble or school, or scheduling is an obstacle to student participation. Have you seen any of those factors as challenges to creating connection?
    b. Another challenge may be when students are particularly stressed or are facing personal challenges. Have you seen that as a challenge to creating connection? If so, do you see part of your role as offsetting or minimizing the effects of those sorts of stressors?
1. How did you "start them singing," the classes that sang at the beginning? You said you thought it was successful.
2. How are you planning to redesign the classes for next year and why?

3. How did you focus on connection differently when at Fairwood North? If you were to go back there now, would you do anything differently?
4. Does singers' musical ability or singing experience affect how you help students experience connection or whether students experience connection?
5. Does connection happen when not everyone in the room is feeling connected? Does everyone need to be feeling connected for connection to occur?
6. Do you think there are times when you might experience connection happening, but singers don't? Or only some singers do?
7. Or are there times when some singers are experiencing connection and other singers are not?
8. You've discussed that sometimes the singers feel connected but you as the teacher are not experiencing the same connection that the singers are experiencing. Why might that happen—or why not?
9. How often does connection happen for the singers when you are not actively leading?
10. How much of singers' experience of connection is created or choreographed by the teacher, and how much of it happens because of the singers themselves?
11. Do you work to create connection differently with singers of different ages? Or singers in different ensembles?
12. Do you select repertoire to try to facilitate experiences of connection? What role does repertoire play in creating connection, if any?
13. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ms. H

These questions reflect ideas that you and other participants have shared. I invite you to share how well these ideas represent your experience.

1. Participants have discussed challenges in creating connection during singing. Challenges include situations where some students don't want to sing, or they haven't chosen to be in choir class, or there's less of a singing culture in the ensemble or school, or scheduling is an obstacle to student participation. Have you seen any of those factors as challenges to creating connection?
2. Another challenge may be when students are particularly stressed or are facing personal challenges. Have you seen that as a challenge to creating connection?
3. If so, do you see part of your role as offsetting or minimizing the effects of those sorts of stressors?
4. Do singers' musical ability or singing experience affect how you help students experience connection or whether students experience connection?
5. Does connection happen when not everyone in the room is feeling connected? Does everyone need to be feeling connected for connection to occur?
6. You've discussed that sometimes the singers feel connected but you as the teacher are not experiencing the same connection that the singers are experiencing. Why might that happen—or why not?
7. How often does connection happen for the singers when you are not actively leading?
8. How much of singers' experience of connection is created or choreographed by the teacher, and how much of it happens because of the singers themselves?

9. What role does trust or risk-taking play in students' experiences of connection during singing?
10. Do you work to create connection differently with singers of different ages? Or singers in different ensembles?
11. Do you select repertoire to try to facilitate experiences of connection? What role does repertoire play in creating connection, if any?
12. Would you be willing or able to share any artifacts of the Komi Earl performance? A video, or students' writings (with names removed)?
13. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ms. N

1. How has your own development as a person impacted your facilitation of connection for your students?
2. I'm wondering about whether there is privilege needed to be able to feel connection, from students' perspective. But also the privilege teachers might need to have to focus on connection. For instance, what is their stress level? Are they able to be open and in touch? What are your thoughts on these questions?
3. Do you ever do any work with students on solo singing? Does connection happen there, or can solo singing experience help connection to happen in the group singing context?
4. The idea of connection as an experience of oneness is related to literature about spirituality and musical experiences. You've discussed the idea that your experiences

during singing, or while leading singing, are your form of spirituality. Can you talk more about that?

5. What did your conductor at All-State do to that facilitated that moment of connection for you?
6. Have you facilitated honor choirs, festival choirs, or similar experiences? Do you think the experience of connection is different when students don't know each other?
7. Have any conditions in the institution or organization you're working within influenced the frequency or type of connection you are able to facilitate? How?
8. Are there any daily realities, practical realities of teaching, that particularly affect your ability to create connection?