

MYERS, GERALD C., D.M.A. Sight-Singing Instruction in the Undergraduate Choral Ensembles of Colleges and Universities in the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association: Teacher Preparation, Pedagogical Practices and Assessed Results. (2008)

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The purpose of this research project was to address questions of teacher preparation, pedagogical practices and student outcomes related to the instruction of sight singing in the choral rehearsal by means of a survey of collegiate conductors. Subjects included college or university choral conductors who were active members in the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA).

A survey was developed for data collection and featured thirty-nine questions categorized by demographics about the conductor, demographics about the college or university, frequency with which a sight-singing method is used, attitudes about sight-singing instruction, and methods of sight-singing assessment. Five purposes served as the basis for creation of this survey and a discussion of the results. The first purpose was to consider if a conductor instructed a choral ensemble in sight singing and the second was to consider the method of sight singing used in a conductor's undergraduate music courses. The third purpose was to consider a conductor's self-rating of sight-singing ability, the rating of ability to teach sight singing and the rating of college preparation to teach sight singing and the fourth was to consider the materials a conductor used to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. Finally, the fifth purpose was to consider if a conductor has a method to measure if a choral ensemble's sight-singing skills were

improving. Participants were E-Mailed a letter of invitation describing the research project and a link to complete the online survey.

Respondents to this survey were distributed quite evenly over eleven States. Most (83.9%) teach in a 4-year college or university. Two-thirds of respondents hold a doctoral degree in music. Overall, 87.2% of respondents indicated excellent or good when asked to rate their ability to teach sight singing. When asked to rate their ability to sight sing, 97.2% chose excellent or good. The responses of excellent and good, however, were indicated by only 46.1% of conductors when asked to rate their college preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. An impressive 93.4% of respondents indicated that they believe sight-singing instruction should be a part of the collegiate choral rehearsal, but only 64.5% currently teach the skill with one or more of their ensembles.

A group of 40.9% disagree that rehearsal time should be spent preparing repertoire for performance rather than instructing an ensemble in sight singing; 88.6% believe that choirs who sight sing regularly learn music faster. Despite these impressive numbers, 61.8% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they have difficulty finding enough class time to teach sight singing.

A large 72.9% of respondents do not have a method to measure if their ensemble's sight-singing skills are improving. Of those who evaluate their ensemble's improvement as a result of sight-singing instruction, 80.5% strongly agree or agree that such instruction has improved their ensemble's ability to sight sing. A larger 88.6% strongly agreed or agreed that such instruction has improved their ensemble's ability to learn new repertoire faster.

SIGHT-SINGING INSTRUCTION IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CHORAL  
ENSEMBLES OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE  
SOUTHERN DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN CHORAL  
DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION: TEACHER  
PREPARATION, PEDAGOGICAL  
PRACTICES AND ASSESSED  
RESULTS

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

**Background and Need for the Study**

This research project addresses questions of training, practices and outcomes related to the instruction of sight singing in the choral rehearsal by means of a survey of collegiate conductors. A delimiter was used; the focus of this study was on conductors of undergraduate choral ensembles in the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). The researcher requested permission from Dr. Jerry Warren, interim president of ACDA, for the use of E-mail addresses of organization members in the Southern Division states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. A geographical region was used as the delimiter to retain a manageable response rate. ACDA was chosen, as it is the major professional organization of choral conductors in the United States.

In the first years of scholarly attention on the importance of instruction in sight singing, Grace (1938) emphasized that:

It ought not to be necessary to emphasize the importance of sight singing; yet every experienced competition festival adjudicator will agree that (1) the standard of [sight-singing] in all classes is lower than it ought to be, (2) its value is far from being fully realized (there is even a prejudice against it in some quarters), and (3) its practice is usually so haphazard as to produce poor results, and to make the subject unattractive (p. 15).



Such “haphazard” approaches to sight-singing instruction at the collegiate level—whether in the classroom or choral rehearsal—may indicate why many conductors do not believe that they should offer such instruction to their own students. If their college preparation was substandard, their belief in the benefit of instruction in sight singing to their own students may be biased negatively.

As noted by Sunderland (1994), however, such concern for skills in music literacy does not always result in “good [sight-singing] skills.” “Only 15 percent of those tested,” as part of the first National Assessment of Educational Progress in Music, 1971-72, “were able to [sight sing] the simplest of melodic lines.” This early study noted that students interested in performing music were not necessarily taught skills to succeed at their chosen endeavor. Studies since have not indicated much progress.

Smith (1998) considered the aforementioned “haphazard” tradition of sight-singing pedagogy and its impact on teacher training. While her observations and study focused on high school pedagogy, these facts are amplified when considering the role of collegiate educators and their impact on students in a music education curriculum. Smith noted the following:

Many choral directors have abandoned the quest to teach students how to sight sing in favor of more visible pursuits such as public performances and high contest ratings. Furthermore, the issue of how directors teach sight singing, i.e., with what methods and how consistently, is still being debated. If prospective teachers receive sight-singing instruction at the college level that is inconsistent or haphazard, it is likely they will pass that tradition of inconsistency on to their high school students (p. 13).

While Grace advocated for instruction in sight-singing pedagogy seventy years ago, the statements are still relevant when critiquing current pedagogy. Since the inception of the voluntary *National Standards for Arts Education* (MENC 1994), “scholarly investigation has been generated to help music educators address and achieve the new standards, including sight-singing achievement” (Smith 1998). Although the *National Standards* informs educators about various methods for teaching sight singing, Scott (1996) maintained that students do not perform at the level suggested in the *Standards*. Furthermore, Smith believed that collegiate educators have no standards to instruct their ensembles in sight singing or rubric by which to measure success. Collins (1993) urged that, “Singers in secondary school must be taught to read music. It is an imperative.”

In 1992, Constanza and Russel reported the following regarding a folk-like tradition of pedagogy:

There is an extensive tradition of teaching techniques and methods that have been transmitted historically from one generation of teachers to the next, not always codified into an actual methodology. In the field of teacher training, there is speculation as to whether such strategies are systematically taught at the university level, or merely “caught,” as young teachers often end up teaching just as they were taught. New teachers often fail to explore the best possible teaching techniques, methods, curricula, and methodologies (p. 498).

Crowther (1993) reveals that, “Recently-documented findings indicate that many teachers of school choruses do relatively little teaching of specific choral concepts in their classes. Instead, their teaching tends to center almost exclusively in the preparation of specific pieces for performance.” One specific purpose of this study, discussed later in

detail, was to reveal if a conductor does not instruct sight singing due to pressures to prepare for concerts.

Educators and researchers agree that sight-singing skills are a necessary part of successful choral ensemble rehearsals. While studies related to sight singing in the choral rehearsal were “narrow and fragmented” in the 1970s, according to Hylton (1983), conductors’ attitudes toward or willingness to instruct their choral ensembles in sight singing are the focus of descriptive and qualitative studies, including Hales (1961), Daniels (1985), Johnson (1987), and Smith (1998). Additional studies have been conducted on student’s attitudes towards such instruction, notably Hodges (1992). Few notable studies exist regarding the attitudes of choral conductors at the higher education level toward sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal.

Sight-singing and sight-reading research has focused predominantly on the primary and secondary levels. This is understood when considering the role of the researcher—mostly primary and secondary educators, even if they now teach at a collegiate research institution—and in consideration of a standard of instruction aimed primarily at methodology prior to the higher education level.

Researchers, however, must consider all contributing factors on instructional methods. The process of teacher preparation is often one part of a study or questionnaire, but rarely the focus. Moreover, studies focus on educators in the primary or secondary classroom and their collegiate preparation. Few studies investigate the collegiate conductor/professor as an indicator of the training a music education student receives before himself or herself serve as an educator at the primary or secondary levels.

## **Observations**

For the past decade, this researcher has observed the lack of sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal first-hand. In observations of rehearsals by colleagues in the secondary and higher education levels, it was noted that very few offer any formal sight-singing instruction to choral ensembles. Many conductors, in fact, openly state their belief that such instruction is not necessary for a quality performance by their ensemble.

Observations by this researcher while serving as a festival adjudicator found a similar lack of training in sight singing. Most choral ensembles that enter a festival will, if given the option, choose not to compete in sight singing. Those who elect to sight sing as part of the festival either succeed and receive a near-perfect rating or fail altogether.

While observing choirs prepare to sing a piece at sight, one may note either reasoned and well-organized preparatory drills or a lack of such organization and drills. It is clear from the subsequent sight-singing performance that this differential proves a consistent indicator of success. Thusly, those ensembles who learned the skills necessary to prepare for sight singing will likely succeed at the task. While these observations take place during a festival competition, the skills are also likely to aid singers in preparing music during the regular choral ensemble rehearsal.

This researcher's observations of students in an entry-level collegiate choral ensemble and a first-semester theory course are quite comparable. After hearing a decade of auditions by college freshman representing all fifty states, less than ten percent indicated that they had been trained in sight singing, either in a formal course or during a

choral ensemble rehearsal. In fact, most of those who had received such training did not yet understand the benefit of utilizing such a skill during the choral rehearsal.

Students entering a first-semester theory course routinely state that the course is their first such experience with sight singing. While many students indicate significant instruction in ear training (e.g., melodic dictation, intervals, etc.), few were exposed to the skill of sight singing. These observations clearly show that sight-singing instruction, both in formal coursework and the choral rehearsal, are necessary at the higher education level if potential music educators are to exit the program with an appreciation for the skill and a desire to teach it to their students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The first purpose of this study was to consider if a conductor instructs a choral ensemble in sight singing. A conductor's highest degree earned and number of years teaching choral music were both correlated with responses to questions regarding if instruction in sight singing is given to a choral ensemble, the number of days of such instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing. This purpose was also correlated by type of program indicated—either a 2- or 4-year college or university—accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music and number of music majors and minors.

The second purpose was to consider the method of sight singing used in a conductor's undergraduate music courses. This data was correlated with the method used, if any was used at all, for instructing a choral ensemble in sight singing.

The third purpose was to consider a conductor's self-rating of sight-singing ability, the rating of ability to teach sight singing and the rating of college preparation to teach sight singing. These responses were correlated with a respondent's indication of highest degree earned and the specific course(s) that were beneficial to the current pedagogy of sight singing.

The fourth purpose was to consider the materials a conductor uses to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. These responses were correlated with a conductor's indication of the number of days of sight-singing instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing.

The fifth purpose was to consider if a conductor has a method to measure if a choral ensemble's sight-singing skills are improving. The responses to this question, and responses to a method of evaluation, were correlated with the number of days of sight-singing instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing.

### **Research Questions**

In consideration of the above-mentioned purposes of this study, the survey sought to answer the following comparative questions:

1. Is there a relationship between a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing, if a conductor instructs a choral ensemble in sight singing, and the pedagogical practices they use to teach this subject in the choral rehearsal?
2. Is there a relationship between a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing and how he/she rates his/her sight-singing abilities?

3. Is there a relationship between a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing and how he/she rates his/her preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal?
4. Do the respondents devote time in the choral rehearsal, and how is such time allotted, to the practice of teaching sight singing?
5. How do these conductors evaluate the results of sight-singing training in their choral rehearsals?

### **Definitions of Terminology**

For purposes of this study, **sight singing** is defined as the performance of a work by one or more singers with no preparation. In the current literature, there is an interchangeable use of the terminology "sight singing" and "sight reading." In this study, the term "sight singing" is used to define music reading at sight in the vocal or choral context and in music theory courses. The term "sight reading" is used to define music reading at sight in the instrumental context.

**Teacher preparation** is defined as a conductor's formal instruction in sight singing during the undergraduate music curriculum. This may include instruction in music theory and aural skills courses, choral methods courses, applied music or private lessons, Orff or Kodály courses or certification, and other types of courses as indicated by responses in the survey. **Pedagogical practices** are those instructional methods in sight singing utilized by the conductor. This may include the systems of moveable *do* with *do*-based major and minor, movable *do* with *do*-based major and *la*-based minor, fixed *do* with *do*-based major and minor, fixed *do* with *do*-based major and *la*-based minor, scale degree numbers, a single syllable (eg, *la*) sung on each pitch, or other types of systems as indicated by responses in the survey.

The systems of sight singing are further defined whereby **moveable *do*** indicates that the solfeggio scale begins with *do* on the tonic of a given key and **fixed *do*** indicates the solfeggio scale always begins with *do* on the pitch class of “C” no matter the tonic of a given key. Furthermore, ***do*-based minor** indicates that the solfeggio scale begins with *do* on the tonic of any minor key and ***la*-based minor** indicates that the solfeggio scale begins with *la* on the tonic of any minor key. **Scale degree numbers** indicate the use of Arabic numerals to represent each degree of the major or minor scale, and **a single syllable** indicates the use of a neutral syllable, such as *la* or *da*, on each pitch of a melody; the syllable does not indicate the relationship of a pitch to tonic. Other systems that were indicated in responses to the survey will be defined as they are discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Organization of the Report**

This research study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter contains the previously detailed introduction, which focuses on the background and need for the study, observations, the purpose of the study, the research questions and definitions of terminology. Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature, divided into the topics of sight singing in the choral rehearsal, teacher preparation, methods for instruction, instructional time, materials and assessment and a summary. The methodology used to complete this study is detailed in Chapter 3. An analysis of the survey data, organized by purpose, is found in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a summary of the results, conclusions and a discussion of the need for future research. The appendices include the survey and initial and follow-up letters of invitation.



## CHAPTER II

### RELATED LITERATURE

“Sight-singing is a necessary and useful skill and should remain an essential element of a choral singer’s training” (Demorest 2001, p. 19). Such advocacy is common amongst researchers focused on the instruction of sight singing in the choral rehearsal. Many choral directors surveyed in prior research also stress the need for such skills; however, as indicated in this and other studies, most directors do not devote rehearsal time to instruction in sight singing despite their belief in its usefulness. Rather, as stated by Telfer (1993), “In most choirs, a very small number of singers who are good at sight-singing tend to lead the others.”

Murphy (1962) advocated for sight-singing instruction in the most elegant of rationale:

The immediate purpose of music reading or ‘sight singing’ is dual: to learn to read music silently and to reproduce it vocally. The selection of descriptive names for these two related skills depends upon the relative emphasis given to each. Each is important, but as a means of musical growth the ability to read mentally takes precedence, and consequently the term music reading, with its educational implications, is probably preferable to ‘sight singing’. The ultimate purpose, common to all skills, is of course the acquisition of musical insight.

Why is this training of the inner ear of primary importance? Simply because the vocal reproduction is merely the echo of the silent sound (that which is heard silently). In other words, hearing precedes singing... The ability to think music is essential to real musicianship—and its importance and cultivation cannot be exaggerated. It means hearing with the eye.”

### **Sight Singing in the Choral Rehearsal**

The problem of sight singing in the choral rehearsal is complicated by the origins of formal, co-curricular choral ensembles. According to Demorest (2001), “This problem stems from our beginnings in the high school as a source of entertainment as well as education... Success in choral teaching is often defined in relationship to success in performance rather than success in teaching musicianship.” The beginning of sight-singing instruction is rooted, in fact, in the need to teach Colonial Americans how to read music in church. A history of both teaching and assessing musicianship skills has not been a part of the choral rehearsal; rather, assessment belongs almost exclusively to the instrumental music education curriculum.

Burwell (2006) and Grutzmacher (1987) completed in-depth studies in the field of instrumental sight-reading. Minimal research in instrumental sight-reading, however, is applicable to this study of sight singing in the choral rehearsal. According to Boyle and Lucas (1990), “Discoveries about instrumental sight-reading do not readily generalize to sight-singing, because the nature of the vocal task and instrument requires different skills.” Stegall (1992), among others, also found that band experience did not improve sight-singing abilities. In this study, pedagogical considerations, such as the technique of “fingering” a pitch, are significantly different when considering the “vocal task.”

During the late 1980s, studies conducted by Dwiggins Daniels (1984, 1988) began connecting sight singing to the choral rehearsal. Studies flourished in the 1990s, especially after the publication of the voluntary *National Standards for Arts Education* (MENC 1994). Nolker (2001) treated choirs and measured an individual’s success. This

is the most recent of such research; in the seven years since Nolker's publication, few significant studies have focused on sight singing in the choral rehearsal, neither qualitative nor quantitative.

In Nolker's study, members of the ensembles were tested individually even though instruction was administered to the ensemble as a group. In a study where ensembles were selected based on ratings at festivals, results indicated that the mean scores of individual members in each ensemble, no matter the ensemble's festival rating, were statistically identical. Stebleton (1987) noted that such differences may be due to inherent factors within the individual or the type of training received. Stebleton realized that instructional methods in a laboratory-like setting might lead to findings that are not "fully applicable to the actual sight-reading experience." She accepted, however, the need for this controlled environment.

Demorest argues against the full effect of the *Standards* in that, "Historically, 'top down' approaches have had little direct impact on daily instruction." In fact, the proficiency standard for sight singing in an ensemble states that, "Students who participate in a choral or instrumental ensemble class... sightread, accurately and expressively, music with a level of difficulty of 3, on a scale of 1-6." Not only do the *Standards* fail to define this rubric, Demorest clarifies that, "Unlike band, no national standard of difficulty exists for choral literature." If a high school choral conductor does not have a method for evaluating the success of their instruction, and no *Standards* exist for the training of musicianship skills in the collegiate choral rehearsal, one can expect sight-singing instruction to lack in the collegiate choral rehearsal. This study examines

the methodology and assessment procedures used by collegiate choral conductors, if any such systems are used at all. Furthermore, in consideration of Stableton, the focus of this study, observations from non-laboratory-like settings, may result in data that are more accurate.

In a survey by Collins (1979), some faculty within colleges accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) did not appreciate the need for instruction in sight singing. Perhaps this is due to vagueness in the NASM standards for musicianship skills. Under the category of “Musicianship Skills and Analysis” for undergraduate degrees in music from a university accredited as “professional” or any program granting a degree in teacher education, the NASM Handbook (2007) states that, “Students must acquire... An understanding of the common elements and organizational patterns of music and their interaction, the ability to employ this understanding in aural, verbal, and visual analyses, and the ability to take aural dictation.” A competency of this requirement is fulfilled easily in a formal music theory course; application is not even implied to take place in an ensemble rehearsal.

According to Smith, “Pembroke and Riggins (1990) found that college sight-singing teachers are frustrated by the fact that ‘aural-skills instruction is not fully appreciated by many students, teachers, and administrators.’” If such a lack of appreciation is found within the general music curriculum, the same might be true of sight-singing instruction during the choral rehearsal. If teachers do not enjoy support for their instruction, and it is taught only in a manner that fulfills a degree requirement, one may safely surmise that quality of instruction will suffer. More so, teachers may find a

lack of support to initiate sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal. Dwiggins Daniels concluded, “It appears that successful sight reading is determined more by factors pertaining to the school, the individual student, and the teacher than by factors relating to the chorus curriculum.”

If choral curricula proper are not a factor, a student’s chances of achieving the necessary sight-singing skills are reduced significantly if factors pertaining to the school and teacher suffer due to a lack of support. Any lack of support for sight-singing instruction will readily lead to its decline in the classroom and ensemble rehearsal. Such decline furthers the inability of students to master sight-singing skills.

Many studies focused on a student’s inability to sight sing including, but not limited to, Collins; Thostenson, 1962; Foltz, 1976; Stegall, 1992; Nolker, 2001; and multiple studies by Demorest, et al. Despite such attention on this problem for decades, it still exists today with little improvement. Demorest notes that, “interest in teaching sight-singing is on the rise” as of 2001, but he and other 21<sup>st</sup> century researchers conclude that, despite such interest, “not all [directors] spend significant rehearsal time developing the skill [of sight singing].”

Smith cited Slaughter (1957) in describing the music literacy of high school and college music students as “appalling.” (Slaughter, p. 88; Smith, p. 55). Smith also discussed other earlier studies, such as Carey, 1959; Hoffer, 1964; Rennoldson, 1973; and Parker, 1979, as reporting, “The state of sight singing in choral groups... is not adequate.” In fact, Carey stated, “In public school music there is perhaps no single

problem which is as universal in scope as that of sight reading” (Carey, p. 7; Smith, p. 55).

While this problem seems confined to the high school choral rehearsal, and perhaps extended thereby to the collegiate rehearsal, Johnson (1987) advocated that instruction in sight singing as part of the choral rehearsal might result in musicians who choose to be a part of the arts community thereafter. Whether or not a student is training for a career as a music educator, the musician who appreciates the difficulty of the art will appreciate more so its place in the community.

Dwiggins Daniels (1985) was a strong advocate for improved “attitude of the chorus teacher towards sight-reading instruction.” She, however, noted that studies two decades prior (Hales, 1961; Flom, 1969)—now 47 and 39 years old, respectively—did not “consider the development of sight reading ability to be a primary objective for the high school choir.” If instruction is not a primary objective at the secondary level, this researcher questions if it exists as an objective of any importance at the collegiate level.

Dwiggins Daniels noted that, “It can safely be assumed that a teacher who believes that chorus students should learn to read music will find ways to develop within students some degree of sight-reading skill and that any effort made towards this goal will be more beneficial than no effort at all.” In fact, such efforts at the high school level will foster students who transition to college with the belief that sight-singing instruction should be a necessary and regular part of the choral rehearsal. If this belief is codified during a student’s music education training, their future lesson plans for a high school or

collegiate choral rehearsal will most certainly include sight-singing instruction. Thus, the future of such instruction in the choral rehearsal depends on a cycle of training.

### **Teacher Preparation**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, music educator Lowell Mason researched teacher preparation. A clear trend for research in the methodology of teacher education programs followed. Smith notes that, “A teacher’s training does not begin in college, but it is generally expected that certain skills and competencies will be mastered at this level.” To master the intricate skills required to sight sing with competency, and to teach thereby these skills, a student must achieve at least an intermediate level of success prior to entering college. This corresponds to the minimum requirement in the *National Standards*. To master these skills, however, and be able to teach them in the choral rehearsal, students must be subjected to instruction in sight singing with vigor at the collegiate level. Smith further quoted Costanza and Russell (1992) in their discussion of teacher training:

There is an extensive tradition of teaching techniques and methods that have been transmitted historically from one generation of teachers to the next, not always codified into an actual methodology. In the field of teacher training, there is speculation as to whether such strategies are systematically taught at the university level, or merely “caught,” as young teachers often end up teaching just as they were taught. New teachers often fail to explore the best possible teaching techniques, methods, curricula, and methodologies (Smith, p. 51; Costanza and Russell, p. 498).

Scott (1995) believed that college aural skills courses teach “rote memory” and not sight singing. Smith ties this point to teacher training by noting that, “teachers who are taught by rote will, according to many studies, also teach by rote, thus carrying on the

tradition of training musicians who cannot read music at sight.” Dwiggins Daniels, however, found that “only one curriculum variable was shown to be a significant predictor of sight-[singing] ability.” It was, as she further notes, “the occasional use of rote procedures for teaching music.” In teacher training, it is expected that students are exposed to a variety of methods. In this case, rote methods were not a “significant predictor” of sight-singing skills. Certainly, such a method does not result in a student’s mastery of sight-singing skills or the ability to teach these skills.

Smith furthered the discussion of problems in teacher training by summarizing the findings of Collins (1979) concerning collegiate programs accredited by NASM:

The information given by the respondents [to Collins’ study] indicated that sight singing in the theory curriculum is not given enough time, all colleagues do not fully support the need for sight singing, music education majors do not have any more sight singing requirements than performance majors, systems used most frequently in sight singing classes are movable *do* and numbers, isolated drills and patterns using solfege or numbers were the most frequent activities, and that for many schools, a grade of a “D” is considered passing.

While Collins focused on instruction in the theory course, if one notes that many collegiate choral conductors yield sight-singing training to the theory instructor—a finding of this study that will be discussed in Chapter IV—and that Collins found such instruction in the classroom to be insufficient, a problem of mastery of sight-singing skills is identified and defined. Therefore, if instruction in sight singing is limited to the theory course and all music education majors receive this instruction in a curriculum that lacks a record of proficiency, one may assert that a deficiency in sight-singing instruction



exists in teacher training. Henry and Demorest (1994) assert that, “The acquisition of music reading skills is one of the fundamental goals of music education.”

### **Methods for Instruction in Sight Singing**

According to Demorest (2001), “A sight-singing *method* should include specific teaching approaches, a careful sequencing of materials, and even a teaching philosophy.” It should not be limited to the medium by which methods simply “represent pitch notation.” That is, a system of moveable *do* is not, by Demorest’s rigid definition, a complete method. Studies by G.J.B. Johnson (1987) and May (1993) were significant indicators of what systems are used to teach sight singing, but not necessarily a methodology.

Since questions in this study focus on the identification of systems that collegiate choral conductors use for sight-singing instruction, the terms “system” and “method” will be used interchangeably. Historically, studies by mode of survey typically did not inquire about materials for sight-singing instruction. Rather, they focused mostly on the method. This survey asked respondents to indicate both the system(s) and the material(s) used to teach sight singing.

In Demorest and May (1995) respondents indicated that when choosing a method for sight-singing instruction in the high school choral rehearsal, they must first consider how a student was taught in years prior. While this consideration is valid when students are entering one high school choral program from a limited number of “feeder” schools, it is not available to most collegiate choral conductors. Even in a college or university setting where most students come from high schools within a state, the large number of

programs—and, thus a number of differing methodologies—renders useless the consideration of prior teaching. While a high school choral conductor may be able to influence the teaching in some “feeder” programs, the collegiate conductor has far less influence over methods in a secondary school. When considering collegiate programs where students come from multiple states or countries, the conductor has no opportunity to influence these “preparatory” schools.

The collegiate choral conductor must teach a group of students who come from a wide variety of programs and methodologies. If conductors claim that they have no rehearsal time to devote to sight-singing instruction—an assertion that is discussed later—they certainly will not devote time to determining the methods by which their new students were taught sight singing—if they received any instruction at all. Thus, the collegiate conductor has yet another excuse not to teach sight singing in their rehearsal.

A variety of studies and articles by Autry (1975), Philips (1984), Siler (1956), Smith (1992), More (1985), Demorest (2001) and others show a significant contrast in available systems, or methods, for instruction in sight singing. Robichaux and Elliott (1973) define the reasons behind the lack of a unified system:

If ever a subject was touchy, it is the favorite method of a choral director in teaching his choral groups sight [singing]. Why all the difference of opinion? Each director has been taught [solfege] and sight [singing] by a certain method, believing it to be the best. Colleges of music disagree on the best method as do the experts, those who edit and publish sight [singing] methods and music education textbooks (p. 44).

Smith believes that the blame lies with the textbook publisher. It should be argued, though, that the blame resides first with the music teacher and conductor. The

creation of textbooks for any subject relies on the purchase of these books by educators and students alike. If there is disagreement as to the methods a teacher should use for sight-singing instruction, then publishers must create textbooks to satisfy all available methods. The problem of having more than a few accepted methodologies creates an excuse for the publisher to either produce “watered down” versions of sight-singing textbooks—not a full version focused on any one method—or to ignore the curriculum altogether. Justus (1969) notes that, “The lack of a basic, universally accepted text for the teaching of sight singing seems to be a handicap to success” (p. 9). Smith summarized Bolden’s 1967 study, in which, “differences in sight-singing ability were not significantly related to what method was used for instruction.” She surmised that, “This may explain why a disparity exists among scholars and textbook writers with regard to the superiority of one method over another.” Beginning in the 1980s, materials for teaching sight singing allow for more adaptation by the teacher. This publication practice continues to the present day.

Daniels (1986) found the attitude of a teacher to be a significant positive influence on success more so than the method or materials used. Demorest believes that researchers may not be able to “separate the effectiveness of a particular [method] from the effectiveness of the teacher using it.” If a teacher’s attitude is a significant indicator of sight singing success and current materials offer adaptability to a teacher’s method, it stands to reason that a teacher with a positive attitude toward sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal, who uses any text deemed appropriate, would enjoy success. This, however, still does not seem to be a universally accepted conclusion.

As stated in the previous discussion, there are many systems for teaching sight singing. This survey allowed subjects to choose from moveable *do* with *do*-based minor, moveable *do* with *la*-based minor, fixed *do* with *do*-based minor, fixed *do* with *la*-based minor, scale degree numbers, a single syllable (eg, *la*), intervals by name (eg, M2, P4), intervals by a “tune tag” (eg, P4=“Here Comes the Bride”), or another system or a combination of systems. The frequency of responses will be summarized in Chapter IV. It is clear, however, that many options exist for instructing a choral ensemble in sight singing. Philips stated that, “Advocates of the fixed *do* system note that seventeen different names are all a singer needs to learn for the entire scale, contrasting with a possibility of seventeen names of each pitch in moveable *do*.” Roe (1970) thought that secondary level students would not be able to master the fixed *do* system. Would a high school student be able to master moveable *do*, another system, or a combination of systems? The *National Standards* do not expect a student to master any system at the high school level. Rather, this researcher believes that they should be introduced to a system so that mastery of sight singing is possible at the collegiate level.

Smith summarized a notable study of methodology by Bolden in 1967:

The study involved 348 elementary music education majors at Michigan State University. The experimenter questioned whether the use of the piano keyboard, syllable/letters, or the recorder would have an effect on growth in sight singing and rhythmic reading... The contention was made that there was a difference in the effectiveness of one method over another for teaching sight singing and rhythm reading... It was shown that the most effective method was the one that employed syllables/letters. Although this method proved to be the most effective of the three, the degree of difference between methods was not significant. The significant finding reported by Bolden was that the amount of musical training did not have an effect on the sight singing growth of the group.

Danfelt (1970) found “the type of material selected (contrived or composed)”—written specifically for sight-singing instruction or excerpted from music literature, respectively—“had no influence upon sight-singing performance.” Dwiggins Daniels’ states in her recommendations for further study that, “questions pertaining to the effectiveness of the different sight-reading teaching methods and other curriculum concerns remain unanswered.” Conclusions by Philips, Bolden, Danfelt and Dwiggins Daniels, among many other early researchers, are upheld in later studies by Smith, Nolker, Demorest and May, Henry and Demorest, and Demorest. In fact, the disparity among methodology was evidenced in the responses to this survey.

In the most recent study by Demorest, he infers that teachers should be allowed to choose their own method of instruction. If one method is not clearly appropriate for all teachers and students after decades of research, the solution to this dilemma may be found “with teachers who believe in the importance of sight-singing and who teach it every day through whatever means they deem most effective.”

### **Instructional Time**

While the importance of teaching sight singing has been well established in research and writing, and respondents to this survey assert this belief, there is a strong, conflicting opinion amongst collegiate choral directors that rehearsal time should not be devoted to instructional time for sight singing. Demorest thought that this attitude might be due to the belief that, “Teaching sight-singing might hamper the quality of choral performances by taking away instructional time.” If a conductor teaches an ensemble of advanced singers who receive sight-singing instruction in multiple courses outside of the

choral rehearsal, this statement, to some extent, holds true. Many conductors, however, have at least one ensemble where some, if not most, of their members are not currently enrolled in a theory or aural skills course. In these instances, devoting rehearsal time to sight-singing instruction will decrease the amount of time needed to learn pitches and rhythms and thereby afford the conductor more time to rehearse ensemble skills and stylistic considerations of the repertoire.

Smith (1987) believed that sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal has faded due to a lack of time as well as inadequate methodology. It is, in Smith's belief, a responsibility of the choral conductor to teach sight singing. Hales' 1961 survey found that time, along with materials, attitude of both the teacher and student, and teacher training, were significant factors regarding the instruction of sight singing in the choral rehearsal.

It is the responsibility of the choral conductor to devote rehearsal time, however minimal, to the instruction of sight singing. While many conductors agree with this statement, as concluded by Johnson (1987) in a survey of North Central division members of the American Choral Directors Association, few actually allot rehearsal time for this task. As noted by Demorest (1998), Johnson's findings were substantiated in other parts of the country by Daniels in 1988 and Szabo in 1993.

### **Materials and Assessment**

While found repeatedly that materials used to teach sight singing are less an indicator of success versus the combination of teacher and method, it remains necessary for a teacher to choose materials to which they can adapt. Perhaps the combination of

teacher, methodology and carefully selected materials would be an indicator of success, but such a hypothesis is the basis for future research.

Disagreement amongst researchers and educators as to the superiority of one textbook is not a reason for conductors to avoid the task of identifying the best materials for use with their methodology. Annotated bibliographies, such as those by Smith (1998) and Demorest (2001) are excellent sources for such research. The early dates of publication for some materials are not a factor since the systems and methods have not changed for many decades. A conductor may also review materials directly with a publisher, but one might find annotated bibliographies by researchers to be less biased; a publisher might inadvertently lend superiority to one system as a means to sell a particular text.

Hutchcroft (1985) reviewed texts for collegiate sight-singing instruction from 1960-1981. His unique focus on collegiate materials detailed many aspects including scope of content and a comparison of contrived versus composed musical examples. Danfelt (1970) studied the difference of sight-singing instruction with contrived or composed music. He found that the use of one method was not a significant indicator of success. Demorest found that, “no methods or materials were found to be dominant” in surveys prior to his 2001 study. These claims have been substantiated by other studies and will be discussed in Chapter IV of this study.

The dilemma in choosing one specific textbook is further emphasized by Brink (1980):

One way to view all the variety in recent texts is through the perspective of perceptual or structural approaches to aural training. Most texts are increasingly specialized in presenting perceptual tasks. A few offer modest efforts in the direction of a structural approach. Yet hardly any texts deal with more than pitch and rhythm fragments isolated from a compositional context. Other structural parameters are virtually ignored. And very few authors offer any explanation or rationale as to the principles which govern their selection of content or method.

In order to evaluate current materials and pave the way for more significant contributions to aural training, there is a real need to study the foundations upon which aural research is conducted; to determine whether the questions asked by aural researchers have been the right kinds of questions; and then to forge aural programs based on the insights gained from that study (p 7-8).

A comprehensive approach to musicianship training began in the 1960s, whereby focus shifted from exclusively performance to analysis, creativity and performance.

Demorest identifies a new text by Hylton in 1995 as a methods book that focuses on the comprehensive approach. Demorest believes that this approach “should have a positive impact on the teaching of musical skills in the choral rehearsal, but several issues have interfered,” including:

1. The “comprehensive” aspect of the training that involves composition and improvisation is difficult to implement because of the lack of such activities in teacher-training programs.
2. The focus on music listening and analysis helps to introduce general musical concepts through literature, but the focus is sometimes more on talking about music than on developing musical skills.
3. The role of performance in comprehensive musicianship is not always clearly associated with the need for music-reading skills.



In his first point, Demorest adds yet an additional argument for improvement of methodology in collegiate music programs. If music education students are expected to teach certain prescribed skills to their students, they must first master these skills in their teacher training programs.

In regards to assessment, a system is provided in some textbooks, but no one method of evaluation prevails. A clear assumption of this finding is evident when considering that no one method of instruction predominates. Henry and Demorest (1994) concluded that, “The need for tools to evaluate individual as well as group success is clear, and authors of sight-[singing] texts should include concrete materials for individual evaluation.”

If sight-singing instruction will be respected as a necessary module in the choral rehearsal, the instruction must be measured and assessed in a manner accepted by the general population of educators. Demorest argues that, “The best hope for the success of the [*National Standards*] lies in implementing a clear system of assessments so that teachers will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction and their pupil’s progress.”

Demorest further argues that if success of an ensemble in the task of sight singing is not a predictor of individual success, then conductors “must make an effort to assess students’ individual progress.” The results of his survey indicate, “Individual assessment is becoming a more central part of choral sight-singing instruction.” A majority 53% of conductors in his survey indicated that they assess students individually in rehearsal, on tape, or alone with the conductor. A greater 64% of conductors indicate that this

assessment is part of a student's grade, but 2/3 of conductors only weight these scores for less than 10% of a student's overall grade.

This furthers the question of assessment method to include rehearsal time. Based on the findings of prior surveys, conductors would argue that such assessments take up valuable rehearsal time. As noted in several other studies, conductors are already hesitant to devote rehearsal time to the initial sight-singing instruction. Those who will not devote lesson time to sight singing during a rehearsal—no matter the reason—will certainly not consider allotting additional time to individual or group assessment. In Chapter IV, the findings of assessment methods will be discussed.

### **Summary**

Demorest stated in 2001, "Interest in teaching sight-singing is on the rise." He notes that there are more published materials, a trend of sight-singing evaluation in contests and festivals, and more attention to assessment. The literature reviewed for this study does not support his claims; however, research since Demorest is nearly nonexistent. The studies reviewed herein may have contributed to Demorest's conclusions.

Smith found that her literature review, "suggests that a need for study and investigation of sight singing in the high school choral rehearsal still exists." Her statement remains appropriate a decade later. Restating her conclusion to replace "high school" with "collegiate" is equally appropriate given this study's literature review.

As stated in the *National Standards*, "all students should be literate." Therefore, all music students should be able to read music. If we are to expect music educators to

provide this component in a choral rehearsal, then the collegiate choral conductor must provide such instruction to the music education student.

After a thorough literature review, this researcher concludes that the same problems exist in sight-singing instruction as were identified and investigated throughout the past several decades. The multitude of “calls for action” by researchers and professional organizations alike contributed to the *National Standards* in the 1990s. A few studies indicate improvement in sight-singing instruction in the high school choral rehearsal since the *Standards* were published, but no studies show improvement in the instruction a music education student receives while studying to be secondary teachers themselves. Specifically, no improvement has been substantiated in sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal.

This literature review also reveals that the same lack of methods and materials exists as was identified by many researchers from the 1930s to Demorest in 2001. While educators have many such resources available, they have no guidelines for choosing a specific method or material. At the collegiate level, conductors have neither the aforementioned guidelines nor standards to guide their assessment of sight-singing instruction.

This study purports to describe teacher preparation for sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal, teacher attitudes for such instruction, current practices, and methods for assessment of collegiate choral conductors in the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association. The detailed purposes were stated in Chapter I and descriptions of this study’s methodology are forthcoming in Chapter III.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Steven Demorest (2001) provided perspective on the subject of sight-singing research. The following three questions have been the focus of recent studies:

1. What are the most commonly used methods and materials for teaching sight singing? Is one method more effective than another?
2. What is the most important factor in sight-singing success? Is it related to the type of instruction students are receiving or to other aspects of their musical background such as outside training? Does group sight-singing success translate into individual skills?
3. How much time do choir directors spend on sight-singing instruction in rehearsal? What place do they feel it has in the curriculum?

These topics—materials, factors and time—were factors in the development of research questions and methodology for this survey.

As mentioned in Chapter I, the earliest contemporary research on sight-singing instruction was seen in the work of Grace (1938). Methods for teaching sight singing, however, can be traced to the work of Guido d'Arezzo. Educators have studied and altered his systems since their 11<sup>th</sup> century debut. While research increased in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the literature review in Chapter II indicated a lack of sight-singing studies in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such research was especially lacking in regards to sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal.

The purpose of this study was to determine, through an online survey of collegiate choral conductors and a comparative analysis of the data, a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing, their current sight singing pedagogical practices in the choral rehearsal, and their perceived results of such practices. The sample population included conductors of undergraduate choral ensembles in the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association.

This study is categorized as a descriptive study and the mode of inquiry was an online survey. As with the work of Smith (1998), the researcher did not manipulate any variables, so no cause-and-effect relationship exists. As advocated by Smith, "The fact that cause and effect does not exist in descriptive studies does not preclude the evidence of relationships between variables, however, or the importance of description of trends, attitudes, methods, and needs."

Five purposes and research questions were fully defined in Chapter I and are repeated as follows:

The first purpose of this study was to consider if a conductor instructs a choral ensemble in sight singing. A conductor's highest degree earned and number of years teaching choral music were both correlated with responses to questions regarding if instruction in sight singing is given to a choral ensemble, the number of days of such instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing. This purpose was also correlated by type of program indicated—either a 2- or 4-year college or university—accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music and number of music majors and minors.

The second purpose was to consider the method of sight singing used in a conductor's undergraduate music courses. This data was correlated with the method used, if any was used at all, for instructing a choral ensemble in sight singing.

The third purpose was to consider a conductor's self-rating of sight-singing ability, the rating of ability to teach sight singing and the rating of college preparation to teach sight singing. These responses were correlated with a respondent's indication of highest degree earned and the specific course(s) that were beneficial to the current pedagogy of sight singing.

The fourth purpose was to consider the materials a conductor uses to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. These responses were correlated with a conductor's indication of the number of days of sight-singing instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing.

The fifth purpose was to consider if a conductor has a method to measure if a choral ensemble's sight-singing skills are improving. The responses to this question, and responses to a method of evaluation, were correlated with the number of days of sight-singing instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing.

Therefore, the following serve as research questions in the creation of methodology for the survey:

1. Is there a relationship between a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing, if a conductor instructs a choral ensemble in sight singing, and the pedagogical practices they use to teach this subject in the choral rehearsal?
2. Is there a relationship between a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing and how he/she rates his/her sight-singing abilities?
3. Is there a relationship between a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing and how he/she rates his/her preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal?
4. Do the respondents devote time in the choral rehearsal, and how is such time allotted, to the practice of teaching sight singing?
5. How do these conductors evaluate the results of sight singing training in their choral rehearsals?

### **Subjects**

The subjects for this study were 414 collegiate choral conductors who are registered members of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), list a work E-Mail address with ACDA, and reside in the organization's Southern Division. Specifically, this includes the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. The subjects of this study must teach at least one undergraduate choral ensemble in a college or university located in one of the aforementioned states.

The researcher contacted the Interim Executive Director of ACDA, Dr. Jerry Warren. Dr. Warren agreed to release email addresses of members in the organization's Southern Division for use in this survey. It was discovered that the sample list included invalid E-Mail addresses. The researcher attempted to resolve errors in the addresses. Those addresses with errors that could not be resolved were removed from the sample.

During the survey process, a subject was removed from the sample if they chose the “opt out” option or emailed the researcher stating that they were retired or no longer conducting an undergraduate choral ensemble at a college or university. The sample was reduced thereby to 380.

### **Data Collection**

A study by Susan Smith (1998) was the primary model for this study. Her research, also by mode of survey, focused on high school choral conductors. The methodology, however, was applicable to this study of collegiate choral conductors with prudent, but necessary adjustments. Other studies that contributed to the methodology of this study include Demorest (2001), Hales (1961), Daniels (1985), Johnson (1987) and May (1993). The former was the only study not considered by Smith as it was completed three years thereafter. Demorest’s study is the only significant survey study on the topic of choral sight-singing instruction since Smith.

The aforementioned studies are similar due to their content and mode of inquiry. The survey questions used in each of these studies served as models for this study. The bibliographies, albeit outdated, also served to inform this study. The disparity of time between the referenced research and this study should not be considered a factor. Research of related literature revealed no sight-singing study with a similar mode of inquiry since Demorest. Thus, such disparity only serves to strengthen the need for this study. Moreover, all studies considered in the creation of methodology for this study were focused on a population of choral conductors in high schools, while this study is unique in its focus on collegiate choral conductors.



The studies by Demorest, Hales, Daniels and Johnson were discussed in Chapter 2; their contributions to this study's methodology were minimal compared to Smith. The research questions and survey design of Smith, while focused on the high school choral conductor, were applicable to this study with minimal revisions. Changes were made to the purposes, research questions, and survey questions. The survey itself was expanded; an online platform offered more flexibility in survey design versus the paper-based survey used by Smith and others.

### **Survey Instrument**

A survey instrument was designed based on questions from other surveys, current research, and the researcher's pedagogy. The questions of demographics by Smith were used in this survey, but some were expanded to allow for a sample of collegiate conductors. The attitude questions that Smith excerpted from Daniels were used in this study, though they were also edited to study collegiate conductors. Other questions were added to this survey as applicable to a study of collegiate choral conductors. The questions from Daniels and Smith used as a model for part of this survey include the following:

1. Sight-singing instruction should be included as part of the high school chorus curriculum;
2. I have difficult finding adequate class time for teaching [sight singing];
3. [Sight-singing] experiences of some form should be included in every chorus period;
4. Distribution of sight-singing experiences throughout the year is more effective than giving all sight-reading instruction at the beginning of the year;
5. [Sight singing] should be emphasized more strongly at the beginning of the school year, but should not be neglected throughout the remainder of the school year (Daniels, 1985, pp. 24-25; Smith, 1998, p. 83).

The current survey instrument featured 39 questions categorized by demographics about the conductor, demographics about the college or university, frequency with which a sight-singing method is used, attitudes about sight-singing instruction, and methods of sight-singing assessment. The questions were grouped mostly by category, though some were organized by response type (i.e., multiple choice versus matrix of choices).

### **Timeline of the Survey**

The survey, shown in Appendix B, was sent to a pre-selected list of subjects on December 14, 2007. The E-Mail invitation, shown in Appendix A, included a coded URL link to a survey created at SurveyMonkey.com. The deadline for completing the survey was December 23, 2007. An embedded code in the URL link tracked respondents; however, as reported to the Institutional Research Board, at no time during the processes of data collection or analysis could the Principal Investigator or the Student Researcher correlate a respondent's email address with the survey data.

A reminder E-mail, shown in Appendix C, was sent on December 21 to all participants who had either not responded or only partially completed the survey. An extended deadline of January 4 was offered to these respondents. On January 4, 2008, the online survey collector was closed.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis started on January 7, 2008. The researcher received exemption under guidelines of the Institutional Research Board (IRB), before the E-Mail invitation

was sent. Results of the analysis of this survey's purposes and research questions are reported in Chapter IV.

Results were analyzed using SurveyMonkey.com. Data from 152 respondents were configured using questions from this study's purposes as constants. Frequencies, correlations and descriptive statistics were used to determine significant relationships.

This study purports to identify relationships and determine the similarities and differences between responses in the categories of demographics, frequency with which a sight-singing method is used, attitudes about sight-singing instruction, and methods of sight-singing assessment. Descriptive data is the means by which this survey's results are reported herein. Rodeghier (1996) stated that, "Statistical testing is not always necessary or even desired with survey data analysis."

For unknown reasons, some respondents omitted questions. A respondent could omit most any question, but still complete the survey; only a few survey questions required a response before proceeding to the next. The number of omitted questions was nominal, except as forced on a respondent by the "skip logic"—the ordering of questions based on a respondents answers—of the survey design, and did not affect overall data analysis.

The survey response rate of 40% was considered appropriate for completion of data analysis. While a small percentage of the initial sample, there were 152 total respondents and the difference between answers within most questions was substantial. It is not known if time of year and/or the medium of invitation contributed to a lower-than-

expected response. Furthermore, spam filters may have blocked many subjects from receiving the email invitation or reminder.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

This research project addressed questions of training, practices and outcomes related to the instruction of sight singing in the choral rehearsal by means of a survey of collegiate conductors. A delimiter was used; the focus of this study was on conductors of undergraduate choral ensembles in the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA).

Five purposes will serve as the basis for discussion in this Chapter. In brief summary, the first purpose was to consider if a conductor instructs a choral ensemble in sight singing and the second was to consider the method of sight singing used in a conductor's undergraduate music courses. The third purpose was to consider a conductor's self-rating of sight-singing ability, the rating of ability to teach sight singing and the rating of college preparation to teach sight singing and the fourth was to consider the materials a conductor uses to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. Finally, the fifth purpose was to consider if a conductor has a method to measure if a choral ensemble's sight-singing skills are improving.

A survey instrument was designed based on questions from other surveys, current research, and the researcher's pedagogy. The questions of demographics by Smith were used in this survey, but some were expanded to allow for a sample of collegiate

conductors. The attitude questions that Smith excerpted from Daniels were used in this study, though they were also edited to study collegiate conductors. Other questions were added to this survey as applicable to a study of collegiate choral conductors. The complete survey is included as Appendix B.

This study purports to identify demographics, frequency with which a sight-singing method is used, attitudes about sight-singing instruction, and methods of sight-singing assessment. Descriptive data is the means by which this survey's results are reported herein.

### **Demographic Data**

The information collected for the purposes of demographics included State in which a respondent resides, number of years teaching at all levels, number of years teaching at the primary or secondary levels, highest degree earned, and type of college or university (2- or 4-year institution). The first thirteen questions addressed such demographics along with the accreditation status of a respondent's department or school of music through the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM).

The first question asked a respondent for the State in which their college or university is located. Each State in the ACDA Southern Division was represented in the responses with Virginia and North Carolina receiving the highest return, 15.2% and 13.9% respectively, and Florida and Georgia following closely with 10.8% and 10.1% respectively. The remaining States were represented well, but with slightly lower percentages. No rationale exists for the distribution of responses to this question.

The second question asked to identify if a respondent's college or university was a 2- or 4-year institution. A high 83.9% teach at 4-year institutions while only 16.1% teach at a 2-year institution. Accreditation through NASM was indicated by 56.8% of respondents in the third question. Of these schools, 39.8% are accredited as "Professional" programs and 33% are "Liberal Arts."

In the fifth question, most respondents, 57.1%, indicated that they are not the only faculty member in their school or department that conducts a choral ensemble. Of these multiple choral conductor programs, respondents indicated that there are anywhere from one to seven additional choral conductors.

In question eleven, 66.2% of respondents indicated that they taught vocal/choral music in the primary or secondary levels before starting their position in higher education. These respondents indicated a total of one to thirty years of such experience.

Finally, respondents' highest degree earned include Bachelors degree with a major in music (2.1%), Masters degree in music (17%), Masters degree in a field other than music (0.7%), additional work beyond the Masters degree that did not result in a doctoral degree (12.1%), Doctoral degree in music (66.7%), and Doctoral degree in a field other than music (1.4%). This demographic data will be discussed further in the forthcoming section on data by purpose.

### **Data by Purpose**

For this study, five purposes were defined and survey questions were designed to gather data based on these topics. The following sections will discuss findings by means of descriptive data.

The **first purpose** of this study was to consider if a conductor instructs a choral ensemble in sight singing. A conductor's highest degree earned and number of years teaching choral music were both correlated with responses to questions regarding if instruction in sight singing is given to a choral ensemble, the number of days of such instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing. This purpose is also correlated by type of program indicated—either a 2- or 4-year college or university—accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music and number of music majors and minors.

Considering respondents who indicated a doctorate (66.7%) as their highest earned degree, the number of years taught at all levels ranges from one to fifty-five. Those who teach in a 4-year institution included 96.8% of respondents. A total of 63.8% instruct at least one choral ensemble in sight singing, but only 35.2% of these respondents do so with all of their ensembles. A lower 16.5% indicated that they do not currently teach sight singing, “due to a lack of instructional time.” Furthermore, 2.2% cite a lack of their own undergraduate training as a reason for not teaching sight singing, 5.5% cite pressures to prepare for concerts, and 12.1% offer other reasons. One respondent who indicated “other” noted that, “Performance pressure is serious.” The respondent stressed that instruction decreases as a term progresses, but such a decrease was not part of the original plan. Of those who teach sight singing in a choral rehearsal and hold a doctorate in music, 44.6% indicated that they gave such instruction two or three days per week, 14.3% for only one day per week, 14.3% for four or five days and 26.8% periodically or irregularly.



Finally, these same respondents indicated that they teach sight singing in a choral rehearsal from five to twenty-five minutes, with one respondent indicating forty-five minutes. This latter response was in the context of an atypical 4.5-hour rehearsal. Responses also indicate that 68.4% teach sight singing at the beginning of rehearsal and during warm-ups, while 52.6% teach the skill at random points and 43.9% indicated that they administer this instruction between repertoire and connected to a specific piece. It should be noted that this question allowed respondents to choose multiple answers. In a follow-up question, however, respondents indicated that 34.2% mostly instruct a choral ensemble in sight singing between repertoire and connected to a specific piece, while 31.6% teach the skill mostly “at the beginning, during warm-ups.”

Considering respondents who indicated a masters degree in music (17%) as their highest earned degree, the number of years taught at all levels ranges from three to thirty-six. Those who teach in a 4-year institution included 58.3% of respondents. A total of 62.5% instruct at least one choral ensemble in sight singing, and 41.7% of these respondents do so with all of their ensembles. A lower 12.5% indicated that they do not currently teach sight singing, “due to a lack of instructional time.” No respondents cited a lack of their own undergraduate training as a reason for not teaching sight singing. An additional 12.5% cite pressures to prepare for concerts and 12.5% offer other reasons. One respondent who indicated “other” noted that, “The number of performances for which we must prepare take[s] the vast majority of our rehearsal time. I hope that music majors and minors will gain sight-reading skills in ear training and music theory classes.

It is the non-majors who suffer the most.” Another stated, “All students take a sight-singing course, so we use sight-singing, but I do not have to teach it.”

Of those who teach sight singing in a choral rehearsal and hold a master’s degree in music, 40% indicated that they gave such instruction two days per week, while no respondents indicated that instruction was given three days per week. An additional 13.3% teach the skill only one day per week, 13.3% for four or five days and 33.3% periodically or irregularly.

Finally, these same respondents indicated that they teach sight singing in a choral rehearsal from five to ten minutes, with one respondent indicating fifteen minutes and another thirty. Responses also indicate that 85.7% teach sight singing at the beginning of rehearsal and during warm-ups, while 71.4% teach the skill at random points and 50% indicated that they administer this instruction between repertoire and connected to a specific piece. It should be noted again that this question allowed respondents to choose multiple answers. In a follow-up question, however, respondents indicated that 40% mostly instruct a choral ensemble in sight singing between repertoire and connected to a specific piece, while 50% teach the skill mostly “at the beginning, during warm-ups.”

The **second purpose** was to consider the method of sight singing used in a conductor’s undergraduate music courses. This data was correlated with the method used, if any was used at all, for instructing a choral ensemble in sight singing.

Those who indicated training in their undergraduate music courses using “moveable do with do-based major and minor” state that they use this same system when instructing their own choral ensemble in sight singing always (36%), often (40%),

sometimes (8%) and never (16%). A total of 44.2% indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate theory/aural skills course(s).” Only 18.7% indicated the same responses to the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate choral ensemble(s).” A total of 37.2% indicated that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, “My undergraduate training in sight singing was adequate for teaching sight singing in the choral rehearsal.”

Those who indicated training in their undergraduate music courses using “moveable do with do-based major and la-based minor” state that they use this same system when instructing their own choral ensemble in sight singing always (40.6%), often (28.1%), sometimes (18.8%) and never (12.5%). A total of 38.6% indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate theory/aural skills course(s).” A slightly lower 36.4% indicated the same responses to the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate choral ensemble(s).” A total of 45.5% indicated that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, “My undergraduate training in sight singing was adequate for teaching sight singing in the choral rehearsal.”

Conductors who indicated training in their undergraduate music courses using “fixed do with do-based major and minor” state that they use this same system when instructing their own choral ensemble in sight singing always (20%), sometimes (40%)

and never (40%). A total of 37.5% indicated that they agreed with the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate theory/aural skills course(s).” A reduced 12.5% indicated that they agreed with the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate choral ensemble(s).” No respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with either of these statements. A total of 42.9% indicated that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, “My undergraduate training in sight singing was adequate for teaching sight singing in the choral rehearsal.”

Of conductors who indicated training in their undergraduate music courses using “fixed do with do-based major and la-based minor,” none state that they use this same system when instructing their own choral ensemble in sight singing. These respondents mostly disagreed with the statements, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate theory/aural skills course(s)” and “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate choral ensemble(s).” Interestingly, though, 60% indicated that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, “My undergraduate training in sight singing was adequate for teaching sight singing in the choral rehearsal.”

Those who indicated training in their undergraduate music courses using “scale degree numbers” state that they use this same system when instructing their own choral ensemble in sight singing always (19.4%), often (45.2%), sometimes (25.8%) and never (9.7%). A total of 34.6% indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was

taught in my undergraduate theory/aural skills course(s)”; 30.8% indicated the same responses to the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate choral ensemble(s).” A total of 36.5% indicated that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, “My undergraduate training in sight singing was adequate for teaching sight singing in the choral rehearsal.”

Finally, those who indicated training in their undergraduate music courses using “a single syllable (eg, la)” state that they use this same system when instructing their own choral ensemble in sight singing always (16.7%), often (50%) and sometimes (33.3%). A total of 32.1% indicated that they agreed with the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate theory/aural skills course(s)”; 7.1% indicated the same response to the statement, “To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate choral ensemble(s).” A total of 39.3% indicated that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, “My undergraduate training in sight singing was adequate for teaching sight singing in the choral rehearsal.

The **third purpose** was to consider a conductor’s self-rating of sight-singing ability, the rating of ability to teach sight singing and the rating of college preparation to teach sight singing. These responses were correlated with a respondent’s indication of highest degree earned and the specific course(s) that were beneficial to the current pedagogy of sight singing.

Conductors who indicated excellent (69.3%) in regards to the question, “Please rate your ability to sight sing” chose excellent and good at 47.4% each for the question,

“Please rate your ability to teach sight singing.” These same respondents chose good and fair at 30.9% each, while 18.6% indicated excellent and 19.6% indicated poor for the question, “Please rate your college preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal.” Of these respondents, 69.1% hold the doctorate, 15.5% have completed some work beyond their masters degree, and 12.4% hold as their highest degree earned the masters in music. They indicated (80%) that Music Theory and Aural Skills Courses were the most beneficial of undergraduate courses to their current pedagogy of sight singing in the choral rehearsal.

Conductors who indicated good (27.9%) in regards to the question, “Please rate your ability to sight sing” chose good at 53.8%, excellent at 23.1% and fair at 20.5% for the question, “Please rate your ability to teach sight singing.” These same respondents chose fair at 35.9%, while 25.6% indicated good and 23.1% indicated poor for the question, “Please rate your college preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal.” Only 15.4% indicated excellent. Of these respondents, 61.5% hold the doctorate, 5.5% have completed some work beyond their masters degree, 25.6% hold as their highest degree earned the masters in music and 5.1% a bachelors in music. They indicated (95.5%) that Music Theory and Aural Skills courses were the most beneficial of undergraduate courses to their current pedagogy of sight singing in the choral rehearsal.

All conductors who indicated fair (2.9%) in regards to the question, “Please rate your ability to sight sing” chose excellent for the question, “Please rate your ability to teach sight singing.” These same respondents chose only poor (75%) and fair (25%) for the question, “Please rate your college preparation to teach sight singing in the choral

rehearsal.” Of these respondents, 75% hold the doctorate and 25% hold as their highest degree earned the masters in music. They indicated equally that Music Theory and Aural Skills Courses or Choral Methods were the most beneficial of undergraduate courses to their current pedagogy of sight singing in the choral rehearsal. No respondent indicated poor to the question, “Please rate your ability to sight sing.”

The **fourth purpose** was to consider the materials a conductor uses to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. These responses were correlated with a conductor’s indication of the number of days of sight-singing instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal time devoted to sight singing.

Of the conductors who teach sight singing using materials directly from choral music literature (80.2%), they instruct an ensemble in sight singing for one day per week (17.6%), two days per week (29.4%), three days (14.7%), four or five days (11.8%) or periodically or irregularly (26.5%). These same conductors devote five to twenty-five minutes of rehearsal to teaching this skill, with two respondents indicating thirty minutes of instruction and one at forty-five minutes. A total of 69.2% of these respondents indicated equally that they teach sight singing at the beginning of rehearsal and during warm-ups or “between the rehearsal of repertoire, and connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble's repertoire.”

Conductors who teach sight singing using materials from a published textbook (31.4%) instruct an ensemble in sight singing equally for one or two days per week (59.2%), three days per week (18.5%), four or five days (11.1%) or periodically or

irregularly (11.1%). These same conductors devote five to fifteen minutes of rehearsal to teaching this skill, with one respondent each indicating twenty, twenty-five and thirty minutes of instruction in atypically long rehearsals. A total of 57.9% of these respondents indicated that they teach sight singing mostly at the beginning of rehearsal and during warm-ups, while 26.3% teach the skill “between the rehearsal of repertoire, and connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble's repertoire.”

Respondents who teach sight singing using their own exercises that are not specifically designed for the needs of their ensemble (14%) instruct an ensemble in sight singing equally for one or two days per week (33.3%), three days per week (25%) or periodically or irregularly (8.3%). These same conductors devote five to ten minutes of rehearsal to teaching this skill, with one respondent each indicating twenty-five and thirty minutes of instruction in atypically long rehearsals. A total of 50% of these respondents indicated that they teach sight singing mostly at the beginning of rehearsal and during warm-ups, while 37.5% teach the skill “between the rehearsal of repertoire, and connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble's repertoire.”

Conductors who teach sight singing using their own exercises that are specifically designed for the needs of their ensemble (41.9%) instruct an ensemble in sight singing equally for one day per week (11.1%), two days per week (30.6%), three days per week (16.7%), four or five days (13.9%) or periodically or irregularly (27.8%). These same conductors devote five to fifteen minutes of rehearsal to teaching this skill, with one respondent each indicating twenty, twenty-five, thirty and forty-five minutes of instruction in atypically long rehearsals. A total of 46.4% of these respondents indicated



that they teach sight singing mostly at the beginning of rehearsal and during warm-ups, while 35.7% teach the skill “between the rehearsal of repertoire, and connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble's repertoire.”

Respondents who teach sight singing using other methods (8.1%) indicated methodology including “warm up exercises utilizing numbers” or “Sight-singing exercises that were written by others specifically designed for choral ensembles.” Another respondent encourages students to write exercises and other conductors indicate that they “steal from others,” use “hymnals” or sing “by intervals.”

The **fifth purpose** was to consider if a conductor has a method to measure if a choral ensemble’s sight-singing skills are improving. The responses to this question, and responses to a method of evaluation, were correlated with the number of days of sight-singing instruction, the average amount of rehearsal time devoted to such instruction and the portion of rehearsal devoted to sight singing.

While respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they do not currently use a method to measure improvement in an ensemble’s sight-singing skills (72.9%), conductors who did indicate use of a method to measure improvement (27.1%) chose a “conductor’s observations in rehearsal” as the predominant method of evaluation (77.1%). Since a conductor could choose more than one response in this question, an additional 62.9% indicated a use of “Non-graded evaluation in which the entire ensemble performs a piece/excerpt at sight” and 42.9% chose “Non-graded evaluation in which a reduced number of singers (eg, an octet) perform a piece/excerpt at sight.” The option of “Non-graded evaluation in which individual members of the ensemble perform a

piece/excerpt at sight (either in front of the ensemble or in private with the conductor)” was chosen by 28.6%. “Graded evaluation in which individual members of the ensemble perform a piece/excerpt at sight (either in front of the ensemble or in private with the conductor)” was chosen by 31.4% and “Graded evaluation in which a reduced number of singers (eg, an octet) performs a piece/excerpt at sight” was chosen by 28.6%.

Of the conductors who use a method to measure improvement in their ensemble’s sight-singing skills, 85.7% indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed to the statement, “Sight-singing instruction in my choral rehearsal has improved my ensemble’s ability to sight sing.” A similar 88.6% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “Sight-singing instruction in my choral rehearsal has improved my ensemble’s ability to learn new repertoire faster.”

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Summary of Results**

Respondents to this survey were distributed quite evenly over the eleven States in the Southern Division of ACDA. Most (83.9%) teach in a 4-year college or university. Of all respondents, a slight majority (56.8%) teach in a program accredited by NASM. Two-thirds of respondents hold a doctoral degree in music, while 17% hold as their highest degree earned a masters degree in music and an additional 12.1% have completed additional work beyond a masters degree that did not result in a doctoral degree.

Overall, 87.2% of respondents indicated excellent or good when asked to rate their ability to teach sight singing. When asked to rate their ability to sight sing, 97.2% chose excellent or good. The responses of excellent and good, however, were indicated by only 46.1% of conductors when asked to rate their college preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. An additional 31.9% chose fair as a rating to this question.

An impressive 93.4% of respondents indicated that they believe sight-singing instruction should be a part of the collegiate choral rehearsal, but only 64.5% currently teach the skill with one or more of their ensembles. A much-reduced 23.9% teach sight singing to only some of their ensembles.

Most respondents indicated that they teach sight singing “at the beginning, during warm-ups” (73.6%) though only 34.4% of these conductors use this portion of rehearsal

for sight-singing instruction most often. An additional 34.4% also instruct an ensemble in this skill “between the rehearsal of repertoire, and connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble’s repertoire.”

The respondents indicated that music theory and aural skills courses were the most beneficial to their current pedagogy of sight singing in the choral rehearsal, while choral methods, applied music (private lesson) courses, and Orff or Kodály Certification were indicated by fewer.

Conductors who indicated that they teach sight singing to only some of their collegiate choral ensembles (23.9%) noted the predominant reason lies in that their members already have sufficient sight-singing skills (46.9%). A smaller 34.4% cited a lack of instructional time and an additional 34.4% noted pressures to prepare for concerts. The rationale, “Because the members of this/these ensemble(s) receive sight-singing instruction in another ensemble or course” was chosen by 15.6% of conductors who teach the skill to only some of their ensembles.

When asked the frequency with which a respondent uses a system or method for sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal, 38.6% indicated always or often for “moveable do with do-based minor” and 51.4% indicated the same choices for “moveable do with la-based minor.” A very large 87.7% indicated never for “fixed do with do-based minor” and 94.4% indicated never for “fixed do with la-based minor.” The system of “scale degree numbers” was indicated as used often or sometimes by 62.2% of conductors and “a single syllable” was indicated as used sometimes by 43.9%. The system of “intervals by name” is never used by 39.3% while “intervals by a ‘tune tag’

(eg, P4='Here Comes the Bride')' was indicated as used sometimes by 48.6% of conductors. A large 76.2% of conductors indicated never when asked if they use another system or a combination of systems.

Of all respondents, 62.2% strongly agree or agree that available published materials to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal are adequate for their ensemble's needs. When asked if sight singing is an important component of the collegiate choral rehearsal, 80.5% strongly agreed or agreed. A smaller 60.1% believe that sight-singing instruction should be a part of every rehearsal.

A group of 40.9% disagree that rehearsal time should be spent preparing repertoire for performance rather than instructing an ensemble in sight singing and 88.6% believe that choirs who sight sing regularly learn music faster. Despite these impressive numbers, 61.8% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they have difficulty finding enough class time to teach sight singing.

A large 72.9% of respondents do not have a method to measure if their ensemble's sight-singing skills are improving. Of those who do have a method of evaluation, however, most use their own observations of an ensemble during rehearsal, though many indicated evaluation using a type of non-graded method in large or small groups.

Finally, of those who evaluate their ensemble's improvement as a result of sight-singing instruction, 80.5% strongly agree or agree that such instruction has improved their ensemble's ability to sight sing. A larger 88.6% strongly agreed or agreed that such instruction has improved their ensemble's ability to learn new repertoire faster.

## Conclusions

This study addressed questions of teacher preparation, pedagogical practices and perceived results related to the instruction of sight singing in the choral rehearsal by means of a survey of collegiate conductors. Results from responses by conductors of undergraduate choral ensembles in the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) were analyzed in the Chapter IV and summarized in the previous section.

Five purposes served as the basis for creation of this survey and a discussion of the results. In brief summary, the first purpose was to consider if a conductor instructed a choral ensemble in sight singing and the second was to consider the method of sight singing used in a conductor's undergraduate music courses. The third purpose was to consider a conductor's self-rating of sight-singing ability, the rating of ability to teach sight singing and the rating of college preparation to teach sight singing and the fourth was to consider the materials a conductor used to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. Finally, the fifth purpose was to consider if a conductor has a method to measure if a choral ensemble's sight-singing skills were improving.

The discussion in Chapter IV identified the demographics of respondents, frequency with which this sample used particular sight-singing methods, attitudes about sight-singing instruction, and methods of sight-singing assessment. Descriptive data was the means by which this survey's results were reported and discussed.

Results of this survey show respondents overwhelmingly agree that a collegiate choral ensemble should receive sight-singing instruction during rehearsal (93.4%), but

only 64.5% currently include such instruction in their rehearsal pedagogy. A respondent's self rating of sight-singing ability was very strong—97.2% rated their skills as excellent or good—but a respondent's rating of college preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal was at 61% for responses of good and fair combined.

There is a clear lack amongst respondents of the accepted place in rehearsal to teach sight singing. Most indicated that they teach the skill at multiple points in the rehearsal, though such variance might be a positive aspect in some conductors' pedagogies. The variance of materials used to teach sight singing by respondents may indicate that they do not agree on a single type of material. It may indicate, however, that conductors use a method with which they are comfortable, that serves the needs of a specific ensemble, and/or is consistent with their undergraduate sight-singing preparation. This is, most certainly, a topic for future and expanded research.

Some results of this survey are synonymous with prior studies, including respondents' indications that a lack of instructional time or pressure to prepare for concerts (68.8% combined) was a reason for offering sight-singing instruction to only some of their choir ensembles. While conductors may be charged with both beginning and advanced ensembles, this researcher asserts that sight-singing instruction, at a level appropriate to the members of a given ensemble, must be a routine part of rehearsal. Such instruction will improve a myriad of skills for all students of singing, even those in an auditioned ensemble identified by a conductor as “advanced.”

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

The discussion of related literature in Chapter II indicates a sufficient lack of study regarding sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal. A trend for such research existed as recently as the 1990s but does not exist today. Furthermore, a trend for sight-singing research at the collegiate level has never existed. This study should be the means by which a trend emerges for research regarding sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal.

This is considered Phase I of a long-term project. A replication of this survey will be initiated soon with an altered delimiter and larger sample. The results of this replication will be analyzed using crosstabulations and more comparative statistical techniques to identify trends amongst practices of sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal.



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APPENDIX A  
COVER LETTER

Dear Choral Conductor:

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro School of Music and the Associate Director of Choral Activities at Washington and Lee University. I am currently engaged in a study concerning teacher preparation, pedagogical practices, and perceived results of sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal. Your input, by means of an online survey, will be most vital to the outcome of this study.

This survey is intended for those who conduct a choral ensemble at 2- or 4-year colleges and universities. If you fit this criterion, please complete the survey online by clicking the following link: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

If you cannot click on the above link, please copy and paste it into any web browser. It should take you no longer than 15 minutes to complete this survey. The deadline for responses is December 23, 2007.

Please note that my published study will not reveal your name or the name of your school. Your name and email address will not be connected to the responses that you give in this survey.

As a choral conductor in higher education myself, I know of and respect your valuable time. It is only with your assistance, however, that I might complete this study in hopes of updating standards and pedagogical materials related to the instruction of sight singing in the collegiate choral rehearsal.

If you have any questions or problems, or wish to receive a copy of the completed study, please contact me at [myersg@wlu.edu](mailto:myersg@wlu.edu) or (540) 458-8697.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gerald Myers, DMA Candidate  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Associate Director of Choral Activities  
Washington and Lee University

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To opt-out of this study and remove your email address from the database, please follow this link: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

APPENDIX B  
SURVEY



## **SURVEY OF SIGHT-SINGING PRACTICES IN THE COLLEGIATE CHORAL REHEARSAL**

The purpose of this study is to determine, through an online survey, a conductor's undergraduate training in sight singing, their current sight singing pedagogical practices in the choral rehearsal, and their perceived results of such practices. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdrawal your consent to participate at any time. There is no risk to the participant. Responses will be kept in strict confidence and at no time will your name or contact information be connected to responses given in this survey. Information gained through this study may assist music educators in the development of standards and pedagogical materials by revealing the current methods of sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the following survey.

This study has been reviewed and received clearance through the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Questions or concerns regarding the risks related to this study should be directed to Eric Allen, Director of the Office of Research Compliance at [eric\\_allen@uncg.edu](mailto:eric_allen@uncg.edu) or 336-256-1482. Please contact Dr. Brett Nolker at [dbnolker@uncg.edu](mailto:dbnolker@uncg.edu) or 336-334-3642 or Mr. Gerald Myers at [myersg@wlu.edu](mailto:myersg@wlu.edu) or 540-977-2880 if you have any questions regarding this survey or research project. Respondents may request a copy of the summary results by contacting Mr. Myers.

Your voluntary participation in this survey is greatly appreciated. To begin the survey and indicate your consent to participate in this study, click "next" below.

### **1. In what State is your college or university located?**

- A. Alabama
- B. Florida
- C. Georgia
- D. Kentucky
- E. Louisiana
- F. Mississippi
- G. North Carolina
- H. South Carolina
- I. Tennessee
- J. Virginia
- K. West Virginia
- L. Other

If other, please specify:

2. **Do you teach currently in a 2- or 4-year college/university?**
  - A. 2-year
  - B. 4-year
  
3. **Is your Music Department or School of Music accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music?**
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
  - C. Don't know
  
4. **Is your Music Department or School of Music considered as liberal arts or professional as determined by the N.A.S.M. accreditation?**
  - A. Liberal Arts
  - B. Professional
  - C. Don't know
  
5. **Are you the only faculty member in your Music Department or School of Music who conducts a choral ensemble that is officially a part of your Department or School's curriculum?**
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
  
6. **How many OTHER faculty members in your Music Department or School of Music conduct a choral ensemble that is officially a part of your Department or School's curriculum?**
  
7. **How many undergraduate music majors do you have in your Music Department or School of Music?**
  
8. **How many undergraduate music minors do you have in your Music Department or School of Music?**
  
9. **How many undergraduate students attend your college or university?**
  
10. **Including this year, how many years have you taught choral music at the primary, secondary and/or higher education levels?**
  
11. **Before starting your current position in higher education, did you teach choral/vocal music in schools of primary or secondary education?**
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
  
12. **How many years did you teach choral music at the primary or secondary levels?**

**13. Indicate your highest level of collegiate training:**

- A. Bachelors degree with a major in music
- B. Bachelors degree with a minor in music
- C. Bachelors degree in a field other than music
- D. Masters degree in music
- E. Masters degree in a field other than music
- F. Additional work beyond the Masters degree that did not result in a doctoral degree
- G. Doctoral degree in music
- H. Doctoral degree in a field other than music

**14. What method(s) for sight singing did you use in your undergraduate music courses? (Choose all that apply.)**

- A. Moveable *do* with *do*-based major and minor
- B. Moveable *do* with *do*-based major and *la*-based minor
- C. Fixed *do* with *do*-based major and minor
- D. Fixed *do* with *do*-based major and *la*-based minor
- E. Scale degree numbers
- F. A single syllable (eg, *la*) sung on each pitch
- G. I was not trained in sight singing in my undergraduate music curriculum
- H. Other  
If other, please specify:

**15. Please rate your ability to teach sight singing.**

- A. Excellent
- B. Good
- C. Fair
- D. Poor

**16. Please rate your ability to sight sing.**

- A. Excellent
- B. Good
- C. Fair
- D. Poor

**17. Please rate your college preparation to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal.**

- A. Excellent
- B. Good
- C. Fair
- D. Poor

- 18. How many ensembles do you conduct that are officially a part of your Music Department or School of Music's curriculum?**
- 19. In reference to the ensembles included in your answer to the previous question, how many are auditioned and how many are non-auditioned?**
- 20. How many times per week do you rehearse a choral ensemble?**
- A. Once per week
  - B. Twice per week
  - C. Three times per week
  - D. Four or Five times per week
  - E. More than five times per week

*Please respond to the following questions to the best of your knowledge, without taking a formal survey of your ensemble.*

- 21. Indicate the percentage of students in your choral ensembles by year of membership.**  
**While you may estimate the percentage below, please be certain that the following five responses to this question total 100%.**
- First year in your ensemble(s):
  - Second year in your ensemble(s):
  - Third year in your ensemble(s):
  - Fourth year in your ensemble(s):
  - Fifth year (or more) in your ensemble(s):
- 22. Of students in your choral ensemble(s), what percentage was familiar with a sight-singing method before joining the ensemble?**
- 23. In general terms, do you believe that sight-singing training should be a part of the collegiate choral rehearsal?**
- A. Yes
  - B. Yes, but I qualify my answer with reasons stated in the textbox below
  - C. No. Please explain your reasons in the textbox below
- 24. Do you currently teach sight singing in your collegiate choral ensemble rehearsals?**
- A. Yes, with all of my collegiate choral ensembles
  - B. Yes, but with only some of my collegiate choral ensembles
  - C. No, due to a lack of instructional time
  - D. No, due to a lack of instruction in MY OWN undergraduate music courses/ensembles
  - E. No, due to pressures to prepare for concerts
  - F. No, for other reason(s) stated below:

- 25. In regards to your answer in the previous question (“Yes, but with only some of my collegiate choral ensembles”), why do you NOT offer sight-singing instruction to certain ensembles? (Choose all that apply)**
- A. Due to lack of instructional time
  - B. Due to pressures to prepare for concerts
  - C. Because the members of the ensemble already have sufficient sight-singing skills
  - D. Because the members of this/these ensemble(s) receive sight-singing instruction in another ensemble or course
  - E. For other reasons stated below
- 26. Please indicate the number of days per week in which you instruct an ensemble in sight singing.**
- A. 1
  - B. 2
  - C. 3
  - D. 4 or 5
  - E. Periodically or irregularly
- 27. Please indicate the average amount of rehearsal time you devote to sight singing.**
- 28. Considering the rehearsals in which you teach sight singing, please indicate the average TOTAL length of these choral rehearsals.**
- 29. Please indicate the portion(s) of your rehearsals that are devoted to sight singing. (Mark all that apply.)**
- A. At the beginning, during warm-ups
  - B. Throughout the rehearsal, at random points
  - C. Between the rehearsal of repertoire, but not connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble’s repertoire
  - D. Between the rehearsal of repertoire, and connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble’s repertoire
  - E. Other  
If other, please specify:
- 30. If you chose more than one response to the previous question, please indicate the one response you use most during rehearsal.**
- A. At the beginning, during warm-ups
  - B. Throughout the rehearsal, at random points
  - C. Between the rehearsal of repertoire, but not connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble’s repertoire
  - D. Between the rehearsal of repertoire, and connected to the instruction of a specific piece from the ensemble’s repertoire
  - E. Other (as specified in my response to the previous question)

**31. Which of your undergraduate collegiate courses would you consider as beneficial to your current pedagogy of sight singing in the choral rehearsal? (Choose all that apply.)**

- A. Music Theory and Aural Skills Courses
- B. Choral Methods
- C. Applied Music (Private Lessons)
- D. Orff or Kodály Certification
- E. Other

If other, please specify:

**32. Please indicate the materials you use to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal. (Choose all that apply)**

- A. Directly from choral music literature
- B. Published sight-singing textbook
- C. Sight-singing exercises that you write, but are not specifically designed for your ensemble's needs
- D. Sight-singing exercises that you write and are specifically designed for your ensemble's needs
- E. Other

If other, please specify:

**33. Please indicate the frequency with which you use the following sight-singing systems/methods:**

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Moveable <i>do</i> with <i>do</i> -based minor	A	B	C	D
Moveable <i>do</i> with <i>la</i> -based minor	A	B	C	D
Fixed <i>do</i> with <i>do</i> -based minor	A	B	C	D
Fixed <i>do</i> with <i>la</i> -based minor	A	B	C	D
Scale degree numbers	A	B	C	D
A single syllable (eg, <i>la</i> )	A	B	C	D
Intervals by name (eg, M2, P4)	A	B	C	D
Intervals by a "tune tag" (eg, P4="Here Comes the Bride")	A	B	C	D
Another system or a combination of systems (please specify)	A	B	C	D

If applicable, please specify your system or combination of systems:

**34. Have you attended at least one workshop, presentation, or interest session on the topic of sight singing in the choral rehearsal in the last five years?**

- A. Yes
- B. No

**35. Did this/these workshop(s), presentation(s) or interest session(s) lead to changes in your pedagogy of sight-singing in the choral rehearsal?**

A. Yes

B. No

**36. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
<b>I feel that the available published materials to teach sight singing in the choral rehearsal are adequate for my ensemble's sight-singing needs/training.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Sight singing is an important component of the collegiate choral rehearsal.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Sight singing should be a part of every rehearsal.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Rehearsal time should be spent preparing choral literature for performance rather than instructing the ensemble in sight singing.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Choirs who sight sing regularly learn music faster.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>I have difficulty finding enough class time to teach sight singing.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Sight singing should be taught more frequently at the beginning of the year/semester.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Sight-singing instruction should be evenly distributed throughout the year.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>I use isolated melodic drills for sight-singing training more than I use excerpts from choral literature.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F

<b>I use excerpts from choral literature for sight-singing training more than I use isolated melodic drills.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>It does not matter what sight-singing method is used as long as one is used consistently in the choral rehearsal.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate choral ensemble(s).</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>To instruct my ensemble in sight singing, I use the method of instruction that I was taught in my undergraduate theory/aural skills course(s).</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>My undergraduate training in sight singing was adequate for teaching sight singing in the choral rehearsal.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>My music/choral department has prescribed standards and methods for sight-singing instruction in the choral rehearsal.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>My music/choral department has prescribed standards and methods for sight-singing instruction in course curriculum (eg, theory/aural skills courses).</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Sight-singing ability should be a prerequisite for placement in a select choral ensemble.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Students in my select choral ensemble enjoy sight-singing activities.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F



<b>Students in my non-select choral ensemble enjoy sight-singing activities.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>I find that students lack focus during the sight-singing portion of the rehearsal.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>My students understand the value of learning to sight sing.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F

**37. Do you have a method to measure if your ensemble's sight-singing skills are improving?**

A. Yes

B. No

**38. Please indicate your method(s) of evaluation in the choral rehearsal. (Mark all that apply)**

- A. Graded evaluation in which the entire ensemble performs a piece/excerpt at sight.
- B. Non-graded evaluation in which the entire ensemble performs a piece/excerpt at sight.
- C. Graded evaluation in which a reduced number of singers (eg, an octet) performs a piece/excerpt at sight.
- D. Non-graded evaluation in which a reduced number of singers (eg, an octet) performs a piece/excerpt at sight.
- E. Graded evaluation in which individual members of the ensemble perform a piece/excerpt at sight (either in front of the ensemble or in private with the conductor).
- F. Non-graded evaluation in which individual members of the ensemble perform a piece/excerpt at sight (either in front of the ensemble or in private with the conductor).
- G. Conductor's observations in rehearsal
- H. A contest or other professional rating system.
- I. Other  
If other, please specify:

**39. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
<b>Sight-singing instruction in my choral rehearsal has improved my ensemble's ability to sight sing.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Sight-singing instruction in my choral rehearsal has improved my ensemble's ability to learn new repertoire faster.</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F

Thank you for taking from your valuable time to complete this survey!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [myersg@wlu.edu](mailto:myersg@wlu.edu) or 540-458-8697.

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT!**

APPENDIX C  
FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Dear Choral Conductor:

I sent a survey invitation to your attention one week ago. This survey is intended for those who conduct a choral ensemble at 2- or 4-year colleges and universities. If you fit this criterion, would you be so kind as to complete the survey online by clicking the following link: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro School of Music and the Associate Director of Choral Activities at Washington and Lee University. I am currently engaged in a study concerning teacher preparation, pedagogical practices, and perceived results of sight-singing instruction in the collegiate choral rehearsal. Your input, by means of this online survey, will be most vital to the outcome of this study.

If you cannot click on the above link, please copy and paste it into any web browser. It should take you no longer than 15 minutes to complete this survey. The deadline for responses is December 23, 2007.

Please note that my published study will not reveal your name or the name of your school. Your name and email address will not be connected to the responses that you give in this survey.

As a choral conductor in higher education myself, I know of and respect your valuable time. It is only with your assistance, however, that I might complete this study in hopes of updating standards and pedagogical materials related to the instruction of sight singing in the collegiate choral rehearsal.

If you have any questions or problems, or wish to receive a copy of the completed study, please contact me at [myersg@wlu.edu](mailto:myersg@wlu.edu) or (540) 458-8697.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gerald Myers, DMA Candidate  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Associate Director of Choral Activities  
Washington and Lee University

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To opt-out of this study and remove your email address from the database, please follow this link: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>