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Connections Between Theatre and Choral Music in a High School Setting: A Pilot Study

BACKGROUND/PURPOSE

Pedagogues wonder at the division that has arisen between the arts in education. Detels (1999, 2002) pointed out that specialization has become the norm, each person focusing on one very specific area to the exclusion of all else. She specifically cited the lack of “opportunity to consider the connections of music to other disciplines and activities” (p. 3). Paynter (2002) also expressed a desire for music education to become more collaborative with other creative arts, indicating a belief that music is currently held separate from the other arts. Legg and Green (2016) further argued that music theatre should be incorporated into standard music education. Several researchers have investigated how theatre and music lessons function independently and compliment each other (Bautista et al., 2015; Gibson 1989, Hamann, Bourassa, & Adderman, 1991; Mota & Abreu, 2014; Mourik, 2008; Sawyer, 2007).

Blom (2011) investigated student reactions to collaborative learning concluding a need for data collection from students regarding how the arts, music, and theatre are interrelated.

Therefore, the purpose of the current study was two-fold:

- 1) to assess the reliability of a measurement instrument; and
- 2) to investigate high school choir student perceptions regarding specific components of chorus and theatre.

METHOD

A survey was designed to measure the extent of similarities students perceived between skills in choir and theatre. The survey was revised per suggestions from a content validity panel. A field test yielded further revisions. The portion of the survey that was tested for reliability included 18 5-point Likert-type items that ranged from *not at all similar* to *extremely similar*.

Responses were collected via Qualtrics and paper and pencil questionnaires. A link was sent to a choir director at a midwestern middle/high school. Two subsequent reminders were sent to students as well as the addition of a \$20 iTunes gift card raffle for participation. The questionnaire was also disseminated to high schoolers during a local children's choir rehearsal. The questionnaire was disseminated a second time for the purpose of measuring test-retest reliability.

RESULTS

Participants ($N = 20$) participated in between two and ten semesters of choir ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 2.82$) and between one and five choral ensembles ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.2$). Half of the students participated in choral activities outside of school, including religious ensembles (25%), community ensembles (25%), and honor choirs (4%). 80% of the sample participated in theatre productions in school ($M = 2.5$ productions), and 75% of the sample was cast in a chorus role in a play or musical. With regard to gender, 10% were male ($n = 2$), 85% were female ($n = 17$), and one participant identified as gender fluid. With regard to grade, 50% were freshmen ($n = 10$), 10% sophomores ($n = 2$), 15% juniors ($n = 3$), and 25% seniors ($n = 5$).

The survey yielded acceptable reliability ($r > 0.7$) with the exception of three items. Those three items will be omitted in the full study. See Tables 1 for item reliability for the test-retest participants ($n = 7$). See Table 2 for initial pilot results from the entire sample ($n = 25$).

IMPLICATIONS

These preliminary findings suggest that students often find themselves applying skills learned in one art form to another. With a better understanding of where students see similarities between choir and theatre, the two subjects may better assist each other in teaching ideas that are shared across content areas and allowing students the freedom to learn in the manner that best suits them. There is an additional potential for this comparison to translate to other arts subject areas as well.

Table 1

Test-Retest Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient by Item

<i>How similar is the application of the following skills across choral and theatrical settings?</i>	
Item	<i>r</i>
Text memorization	0.58
Text accuracy	n/a
Understanding text	0.79
Movement and music memorization	0.38
Movement and music accuracy	0.89
Interpreting movement and music	0.88
Emotional connection to a piece	0.93
Showing emotion in performances	0.93
Consistency of performance	0.8
Blend of actor and singer tones	0.79
Blend of acting and singing style w/ensemble	0.75
Pronunciation blend w/ensemble	0.86
Emotional blend of ensemble	0.97
History of a piece	0.87
Performance context	0.91
Interpersonal skills	1.0
Giving attention to the director	0.92
Understanding the director	1.0

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Item	Range	Mdn	Mean	SD
<i>How similar is the application of the following skills across choral and theatrical settings?</i>				
Text accuracy	3-5	4.0	3.66	0.55
Understanding text	1-5	4.0	3.53	0.95
Movement and music accuracy	2-5	4.0	3.34	1.03
Interpreting movement and music	1-5	4.0	3.42	1.16
Emotional connection to a piece	1-5	4.0	3.68	1.26
Showing emotion in performances	1-5	4.0	3.76	1.19
Consistency of performance	1-5	4.0	3.84	1.05
Blend of actor and singer tones	2-5	4.0	3.74	1.15
Blend of acting and singing style w/ensemble	1-5	4.0	3.39	1.30
Pronunciation blend w/ensemble	1-5	4.0	3.66	1.10
Emotional blend of ensemble	1-5	4.0	3.66	1.24
History of a piece	1-5	3.0	2.71	1.11
Performance context	1-5	3.0	3.24	1.25
Interpersonal skills	2-4	3.0	3.16	0.73
Giving attention to the director	1-5	4.5	4.03	1.24
Understanding the director	1-5	3.0	4.26	1.18