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## Motivation and Engagement in the Choral Classroom: Does Repertoire Make a Difference?

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Motivation and Engagement in the Choral Classroom:  
Does Repertoire Make a Difference?

A Project Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

Katy Haltvick

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine what motivates and engages students in a choral classroom and ensemble setting. Students were exposed to a variety of music ranging from challenging to more simplistic in nature. In addition, they even had pieces that they may have heard on the radio. The research participants for this study included students in grades 7-12 in a choral ensemble. Students were mixed races, as well as gender. Exposure to music varied depending on age. Older students have been exposed to much more repertoire, as well as much more variety of repertoire in terms of genre and part assignments, while younger students have less exposure and less experience singing choral music. Students were asked to fill out a survey two times during the Spring of 2020. These surveys were planned to coincide with two of the major performances each ensemble had for the year. These surveys were analyzed to determine if and what type of repertoire effects student motivation. The data suggested that music choice is a factor in student motivation and engagement when preparing for a performance. This conclusion will help to guide my repertoire choice in the future that will challenge my students, as well as motivate and engage them in the classroom.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

**General Problem/Issue.** Choosing repertoire for a choir ensemble sometimes feels like a daunting task. This is not because of a lack of quality repertoire available, or that there are not many pieces at the skill level of my students, because all of that *is* easily found on music publishing sites. The problem I face is, “How will my students respond to this music?” It is a question that I have to consider because of the backlash that occurs if the group of students I’m working with decides they simply do not like the music. This is not to say that, as their teacher, I give into their dismissal of the music, but instead tried to come up with as many teaching tactics that I can to help them learn the music and perform it to the best of their ability. I keep working and pushing the students, but the piece just never got ‘there.’ I can’t help but think that part of the problem was their lack of interest in the song itself. So, this led me to wonder, what type of repertoire motivates students? When picking performances pieces, it is important for a director to pick a variety of pieces as well as a range of difficulty. This is all about creating a well-rounded performance, while at the same time picking repertoire my students will enjoy.

**Purpose of study.** The purpose of this study was to determine what type of repertoire motivates and engages students in the choral classroom. Whether that be challenging or easy music, music they have heard, or brand-new pieces. While I anticipate that not every student is going to like every piece of music presented to them, I do want to understand what kind of music they enjoy most in a choral setting. I also wanted to know if the answer would be the same for all ages of students. I work mainly with middle school students, but I thought that perhaps a senior in high school might have different motivations. As a teacher and a choral director, I want my students to be motivated by the music we sing because they like the music, but also because

it makes them better musicians. It is truly amazing what an ensemble can create when they work and perform together, and I hope to create meaningful experiences for my students. My thought process was that if I could find what keeps them engaged in singing and what motivates them, I can better prepare and pick repertoire that has meaning to them, while still challenging them to succeed.

**Rationale.** This study began by administering a survey to students about their engagement and motivation based on the concert music selections. Students perform music from multiple genres throughout the year and their attitude toward the music can affect the learning process as well as the final performance. The information that was collected from students was used to determine if their motivation derives from the music they are learning. The survey the students took allowed them to give their opinion on music selections as well as the level of difficulty. This research has impacted me as a music educator and choral conductor to better fit the needs of my choral ensembles. I want to be able to provide students with music that challenges them and their musicianship skills, introduce them to new music and genres, but also understand the types of music that motivate them. I feel this study has allowed me to better meet them where they are at and provide a well-rounded choral ensemble experience for them.

**Hypothesis.** It was the belief of the researcher that most students would feel most motivated by the popular music genres, pop music and Broadway, rather than traditional choral music. These traditional musical genres include classical music, jazz, and spirituals. I also believed that this trend would vary as the age of the students increase. Therefore, it was hypothesized that students at a middle school level, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, are primarily motivated by popular music, but high school age students derive motivation from traditional music. Because younger students have less exposure to choral music in general, I thought that most of their opinions

would be based upon the music they listen to on their own, or music they have grown up listening to in their homes.

### **Subjects and Setting**

**Description of subjects.** The participants for this study included a group of 76 students in grades 8-12 in a choral ensemble. Students were mixed races, as well as gender. Exposure to music varied depending on age. Older students have been exposed to much more repertoire, as well as much more variety of repertoire in terms of genre and part assignments. Younger students have less exposure and less experience singing choral music. However, I feel it is valuable to collect information from a wide variety of students.

**Selection criteria.** Participants were selected based on their involvement in a choral ensemble for the 2019-2020 school year. These students participate in grade level choirs that meet every day for thirty to forty minutes. Some of the participants have been involved in a choral ensemble for multiple years, while others have little to no experience in a choral ensemble. The students who had little to no choral background were primarily younger students in middle school who have only had the opportunity to participate in choir for a one or two years.

**Description of setting.** The study took place in a middle school and a high school in southwest Minnesota. The middle school houses 713 students and the high school houses 850 students. The student body is approximately 64% Caucasian, 14% Hispanic, 13% African American, 9% Asian, and 1% Native American. About 41% of students receive free and reduced lunch services. 15% of students are described as English Learners and 14% are receiving Special Education Services.

### **Research Ethics**

**Permissions.** Permission were obtained from the parents of all students. Participants and their parents were informed of the purpose of the research and the procedures and the benefits of the study. Participation in the survey was voluntary and did not affect the student grades. Information was kept anonymous, and any identifiable information was kept private. Parents or students were able to discontinue participation at any time. Parents were given written consent for their student to participate.

**Informed consent.** Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board and from the school district to conduct this study. Protocol from the review board and the district was followed. This involved receiving permission from both school principals where the study took place.

**IRB approval.** Approval from the Institution Review Board for Exempt status was obtained prior to the start of the survey. Subjects were at no more than minimal risk because the activities were within the norms of the regular work we did in the classroom.

**Delimitations and Limitations.** A possible limitation of this study was that the data would not clearly define what motivates students to sing in a choral ensemble. The data could have concluded that musical choice is different for all students and that there is not clear genre that students are drawn to. I didn't necessarily see this as a negative conclusion because each student is unique, comes from a different background, has different beliefs and opinions.

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined:

*Repertoire:* is the vehicle through which students learn performance skills, music concepts, history and culture. Repertoire selections should be from different genres, time periods, and styles to help promote student learning. (Kramer, 2019).

*Ensemble:* is a collaborative learning process that supports learner's construction of musical understanding and the individuals within the group. The structure of the ensemble is fostered in peer scaffolding, with shared performance goals (Hogle, 2018). Choral Ensembles are the blend of voices for music making (Daugherty, 2001).

*Motivation:* "Latin term defines as "to move" ...what moves students to persist even when it might become challenging or boring." (Jang, 2015, p. 40)

*Engagement:* "...defined as engagement with the music itself, with the goal of acquiring musical skills." (Barlow, 2018, p. 20)

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

Student engagement and the motivation to do well in the classroom are key focal points in the world of education. As teachers, we all strive to engage every learner, while still accomplishing all standards and assessing each student individually. Student engagement can be affected by many different factors, such as time of day, what is going on in their life, or even how interested they are in the subject being taught. In a choral classroom, it is imperative that students stay motivated by the repertoire put into their hands. It is the director's job to both keep large groups of students engaged, but also motivated while singing the same music for months at a time. They must keep pushing students to sing and refine their performance after the initial note learning is done and the students have 'learned the song.' It needs to be taken into consideration, at least in part, as to what motivates students to want to learn, and to get better at something they do every day. This starts with repertoire choice.

### **Repertoire Selection**

In most choral settings, it is up to the director to determine repertoire choices for the ensemble. The director must take into consideration the age of the singers, the voice parts, age appropriate literature, how to challenge the singers, how many singers, experience levels, theme and so on. It is understood that not all students will enjoy every piece of music put in front of them, however, it might be another consideration for the director. Breaking down even further, a director should also consider some elements of music: melody, harmony, text, and form. Taking all of this into consideration, choosing appropriate repertoire can feel like a daunting task. David Brunner (1992) writes, "The selection of repertoire is an ongoing process determined by the specific needs of each new school year and each new chorus" (Brunner, 1992, p. 29).

There are many resources available to find repertoire, but where does a director start? There are many popular websites, including JW Pepper and Santa Barbara Publishing. Repertoire can be found at professional development sessions and choral ‘read-throughs.’ Songs may be chosen because a director has performed it in the past or may even be from scrolling through YouTube and discovering something new and interesting (Countryman, 2008).

### **Elements of Music**

When considering elements of music in repertoire choice, a few questions to consider are, “Is the range/tessitura appropriate for children? Will the student develop good vocal habits by singing this piece? Does it offer a remarkable musical experience; does it have rhythmic and melodic unity and variety? Is the harmony interesting?” (Beatty, 2013). Students end their elementary music education around the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. For some students, this is a complete end to their music education. For others it means joining an ensemble to continue growing in their musicianship and artistry. They have been learning about elements of music since their kindergarten music class, but now in an ensemble setting, they will get to experience those elements firsthand. A class discussion of text can be helpful to understand the meaning or setting and letting students ask questions and facilitate meaningful conversation about the music itself will help enhance the performance.

**Goal setting.** Goal setting can be another way to help students stay motivated in their performance preparation. Goals can be set by the director for the ensemble, or the ensemble may take part in the process. There may even be individual goals that students will set for themselves daily, weekly, or for the performance itself. This way of engaging students allows them to ‘buy in’ to what the process of learning and improving a piece of music. Setting goals is a great morale booster for the group. As they challenge themselves to work harder, and to create and

learn together, they also stay motivated to work together toward a common goal (Cook, 2016). The model of goals setting is, “attributions and cognitive self-regulation...referring to the goals as aims or objectives that students pursue when confronting learning tasks” (Arriaga Sanz, & Madariaga Orbea, 2014, p 375). Motivation in this case will depend on the students want to complete the learning tasks, but if they set the goal themselves, they are more likely to be self-motivated.

### **Influences**

**Pop music.** A problem many directors are facing today is the highly requested ‘pop music’ selections. Students hear songs on the radio and immediately want to sing those songs in class. Pop music has great relevance to students and to pop culture but is not always the best educational tool. There are many pop music choral arrangements, but the trick is weeding through all of the ‘garbage’ and find a piece that is valuable to both the education and the musicianship of the singers. It is important to find music that can be used as a vehicle for proper vocal technique, development and overall promotes good musicianship (Forbes, 2001).

The question many directors ask themselves is, does pop music have a place in choral ensembles? Many are divided on the issues. In a study of almost two hundred choral directors, eighty-five percent believe that much of the pop choral music available lacks substance and is poor quality (Forbes, 2001). Others find that pop music can be a quality tool to teaching music. The reason they believe this is because of how students relate to this music.

If used in an education way, popular music does have its benefits in a music or choral classroom. Popular music is what students listen to in their daily life. It is all around them via the radio, computers, their phones, and even at community events. It is the music they are drawn to because of how frequently they hear it. One way to immerse pop music into classroom

instruction is by crossing styles and transferring formal music skills into the informal music. Teaching students about blend, vowel placement, and proper vocal production can all still be done while learning popular music (Green, 2016). There is perhaps a place for popular music in formal music education and now is the time to embrace it. Furthermore, it is the duty of choral directors to teach singers the proper way to sing all genres to promote vocal health as well as high level of musicianship. "...the time has come to become cognizant of the special requirements of the pop idiom in order to contribute valuable to the training of future generations of singers who wish to perform this highly rewarding, exciting and ever-evolving genre" (Harrison & O'Bryan, 2014, p. 70).

### **Motivation & Engagement**

Keeping students motivated to sing can be quite the task. Especially taking into consideration how long a choir learns and prepares for a performance. So, the question is, what exactly motivates teenage students to sing in choirs? Some students are motivated by the performance itself and the thrill to perform. Others are motivated by the music and its complexities and how it challenges the ensemble. Then there are some students are motivated by the genre of music they are performing. No matter what motivates students, it is vital for the director to determine effective motivation strategies.

According to Rick Stramer (2009), students are motivated to learn something if it is meaningful, and interesting to them. Student motivation is enhanced by a teacher's enthusiasm, and their concern for the students and their success. Students are very perceptive and can tell when a task they are being asked to complete, is not worth their time. Finding motivational repertoire must be determined for each ensemble (Stramer, 2009). There is a difference between how a student and a director value music. A director may find a piece of music is valuable

because of how it will be used as an educational tool, while students might find value in a specific genre of music.

Rebecca Johnson (2015) presents the following points that promote a positive performance experience as well as highly motivated and engaged students:

1. Students have a balance of repertoire and activities.
2. Students are active participants in solving their own problems during a lesson
3. Students are physically and mentally engaged through healthy gestures and positive affirmations
4. Students leave lessons with a detailed practice plan they can accomplish
5. Students learn to develop practicing strategies for small sections that are transferable to other situations
6. Lessons are organized so students leave with a good feeling (Johnson, 2015).

**Student choice.** A different tactic to motivating students could be letting students take the reins and pick their repertoire. Perhaps students could put themselves in the role of the director and be given the opportunity to select repertoire for a concert. Parameters to be set would include variety of style, genre and tempo, as well as fitting musical selections into a ‘theme’ to create a well-rounded choral performance. This kind of project-based learning allows students to think critically about the musical skills they learn in a choral ensemble and what music is age appropriate for their level of ensemble. According to Lucy Green (2016), this type of informal learning engages students in the planning and creating process of music making. Free choice is a form of motivation for some students and it might shed some light on why a director picks certain genres and styles of music (Green, 2016).

Motivation is different for everyone, however when an experience is meaningful, students are more likely to stay motivated and engaged. Simply put, “Students were motivated to learn when they found the learning task meaningful and interesting,” (Stramer 2009, p. 25). When a director instills in their students that what they are learning matters, students will act

accordingly. Meaning, that when they feel valued and that they are working toward a common goal they are motivated to do the best they can (Schatt, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Teachers want their students to find value in work, and to excel in their musicianship. Keeping students motivated is an important part of the music making process. Student motivation can be directly linked to the repertoire choice and how that music relates to them. Although the student's opinion of the music is not always the most important part of an ensemble, it is something that should be considered by the director when choosing music. Finding music that relates to the students and is a tool to teaching quality musicianship will enhance student engagement and keep students motivated to work toward their performance.

### Chapter Three

#### Research Questions

In my action research project, I asked the following questions through the use of a survey to a group of 76 students in grades 7-12 in a choral ensemble:

1. Does repertoire choice affect student engagement and motivation of students?
  - a. How do different genre selections affect this?
  - b. Do certain genres motivate and engage students more?
  - c. Does age and/or experience make a difference in song preference?

#### Methods

**Data collection.** Students were asked to fill out a survey that coincided with two of their major performances each ensemble has for the year. The two performances have very different guiding themes. The first being more traditional choral music, but still relevant to music education. The second performance will have more popular music and lighter repertoire. They were the survey given prior to the performance, but well into the preparation phase. The survey was the same both times it was administered, as it was given electronically using Microsoft Forms. The students used their school issued devices to take the survey during class. The only variant of the survey included an open-ended question comparing their current music to their last concert. The survey used a numerical rating system of 1 through 5 for each question to collect data from students. As stated earlier, there was also one open ended question for students to give their opinion.

**Tools.** The data was collected through the use of a survey. This actual data collection was done electronically (See Appendix A). Student demographics that were considered during data collection were as follows:

Category	SPED	504 Plan	EL	Academic Support	Male	Female
Number of Students	11	2	10	8	22	54

*Figure 1* Student Demographics

**Data analysis.** Once the data was collected, I used the information to determine what type of repertoire students are drawn to. Student opinion is not the only factor to consider when choosing choral repertoire, however it is one important factor. As a music educator and a choral conductor, I know that it is important to pick a variety of styles and genres of music that teach musical elements and skills, and that students will not always agree with the choices made for them. This is why I believed it was important to understand their likes and dislikes to better choice repertoire for students of different ages.

### **Ethical Issues**

**Protection of human subjects.** A possible ethical issue was the possibility that students answered the survey the way they ‘think’ it should be answered, rather than completing the survey voicing their own opinion. Student information was kept anonymous and any identifiable information was kept confidential. Participants were at minimal risk because research activities were within the norms of classroom activities.

**Researcher bias.** Researcher bias could have been choosing repertoire purely based on student choice, which could have skewed the data. I did find myself thinking about how students would react to a piece of music, however I didn’t use that as the only deciding factor when choosing music for my choirs to perform.

## Chapter Four

### Description of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine what type of repertoire motivates and engages students in the choral classroom. I also wanted to know if the answer would be the same for all ages of students. Seventy-Six students participated within the study, which consisted of two identical surveys that took place over the course of eight weeks. The students were asked to rate each question on a scale of 1-5, one being low and 5 being high. Although the two surveys were identical, they were based on two different concert repertoires. I choose these two concerts because they are very different in genre. The first survey was based on a concert repertoire consisting of traditional choral music and the second survey was based upon a concert repertoire consisting of popular music.

The repertoire of each concert is learned and rehearsed over the course of about eight to twelve weeks. For the first survey, to ensure students had enough time to learn the music before they took the survey, I waited until each choir had been rehearsing their music for at least four weeks. As I will explain in chapter five, the second survey was based on music from the spring prior.

### Results/Findings

#### Survey One

Approximately four weeks into the learning process of the first concert repertoire, students were administered their first survey. This survey can be found in Appendix A. As shown in Table 1, responses of the students were analyzed as a whole group.

Table 1

*Survey One Overall Data*

Question	Results
How difficult or challenging did you find this concert repertoire?	3.07
Rate your motivation level throughout the process of learning this repertoire.	3.56
Did you enjoy the variety of genres performed in this concert?	3.64
Would you recommend this music to another choir?	3.73
How engaging did you find this music as a singer?	3.8
As a whole, did you enjoy the music from this concert?	3.89
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (Yes)	57
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (No)	19

*Note:* Overall data from Survey One.

I then took the data and organized it by the five different grade levels of the students involved. I felt it was important to look at the data by grade level to see how the data trends in each question as the students are older. When looking at the data by grade level, it mostly trends up as the age of the student increases. Table 2 shows the student’s answers to questions 1-7 organized by grade level.

Table 2

*Survey One: Grade Level Data*

Question	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
How difficult or challenging did you find this concert repertoire?	3.02	2.6	3.25	4	3.4
Rate your motivation level throughout the process of learning this repertoire.	3.37	3.7	4	4	4
Did you enjoy the variety of genres performed in this concert?	3.41	3.5	4.13	4.75	4.6

Would you recommend this music to another choir?	3.42	3.8	4.38	5	4.6
How engaging did you find this music as a singer?	3.63	3.8	4.25	4	4.6
As a whole, did you enjoy the music from this concert?	3.71	3.9	4.38	4.25	4.4
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (Yes)	34	8	6	4	5
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (No)	15	2	2	0	0

*Note:* Survey One results organized and averaged by grade level.

In addition to grade level of students, I also have listed the data by how many years students have participated in a choral ensemble. The reason for this is that there are some older students who have been in a choir for five or six years, but there are also some who have only been in a choral ensemble for two or three years. Analyzing the data this way changed the averages slightly, but they trended upward similarly to each grade level. Table 3 shows the student's answers to questions 1-7 organized by years in a choral ensemble.

Table 3

*Survey One: Years in Choir*

Question	Two Years	Three Years	Four Years	Five Years	Six Years
How difficult or challenging did you find this concert repertoire?	3.09	2.71	3	3.2	3.5
Rate your motivation level throughout the process of learning this repertoire.	3.35	3.75	3.79	3.8	4.12
Did you enjoy the variety of genres performed in this concert?	3.46	3.25	3.86	4	4.75
Would you recommend this music to another choir?	3.46	3.88	4.07	4	4.63
How engaging did you find this music as a singer?	3.69	3.75	3.79	4.2	4.5

As a whole, did you enjoy the music from this concert?	3.72	4	4.07	4	4.38
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (Yes)	32	6	7	5	7
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (No)	15	1	1	1	1

*Note:* Survey One results organized and averaged by years participated in a choral ensemble.

## Survey Two

Survey Two was based on a concert repertoire consisting of popular music selections from the spring concerts in 2019. Students were asked to consider this music when completing the survey, not to compare to their last concert music. Comparing data from Table 1 and Table 4 shows that students' answers for their motivation and enjoyment were slightly higher for their popular repertoire concert than their traditional repertoire concert. Data in boldface is higher than it was in Survey One. This is significant because it shows a higher average of engagement, preference of the songs, and motivation level of students in Survey Two than in Survey One. Table 4 shows the students' answers as a whole.

Table 4

### *Survey Two Overall Data*

Question	Results
How difficult or challenging did you find this concert repertoire?	3.01
Rate your motivation level throughout the process of learning this repertoire.	<b>3.8</b>
Did you enjoy the variety of genres performed in this concert?	<b>3.96</b>
Would you recommend this music to another choir?	<b>3.98</b>
How engaging did you find this music as a singer?	3.79
As a whole, did you enjoy the music from this concert?	<b>4.16</b>

Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (Yes)	<b>62</b>
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (No)	14

*Notes:* Overall data from Survey Two. Data that is boldface shows higher averages in Survey Two than in Survey One.

I again took the data and organized it by the five different grade levels of the students involved. It is important to point out that all grade levels reported they enjoyed their popular music more than their traditional choir music. Table 5 below shows the student's answers to questions 1-7 organized by grade level. Data in boldface is higher than it was in Survey One.

Table 5

*Survey Two: Grade Level Data*

Question	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
How difficult or challenging did you find this concert repertoire?	2.99	<b>3.2</b>	3.25	2.5	3
Rate your motivation level throughout the process of learning this repertoire.	<b>3.65</b>	<b>4.2</b>	4	3.75	<b>4.2</b>
Did you enjoy the variety of genres performed in this concert?	<b>3.67</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.38</b>	4.5	5
Would you recommend this music to another choir?	<b>3.76</b>	<b>4.4</b>	4	5	4.6
How engaging did you find this music as a singer?	3.63	<b>4</b>	<b>4.5</b>	3.25	4.2
As a whole, did you enjoy the music from this concert?	<b>3.96</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>4.63</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.6</b>
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (Yes)	<b>36</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	4	4
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (No)	13	0	0	0	1

*Notes:* Survey Two results organized and averaged by grade level. Data that is boldface shows higher averages in Survey Two than in Survey One.

Finally, I have listed the data by how many years students have participated in a choral ensemble. Notable data is that most students found this music less challenging than their music from Survey One. Table 6 below shows the student's answers to questions 1-7 organized by years in a choral ensemble. Data in boldface is higher than it was in Survey One.

Table 6

*Survey Two: Years in Choir*

Question	Two Years	Three Years	Four Years	Five Years	Six Years
How difficult or challenging did you find this concert repertoire?	3.04	<b>3.22</b>	2.89	2.67	3.2
Rate your motivation level throughout the process of learning this repertoire.	<b>3.63</b>	<b>4.42</b>	3.53	<b>3.97</b>	<b>4.18</b>
Did you enjoy the variety of genres performed in this concert?	<b>3.65</b>	<b>4.55</b>	3.77	<b>4.42</b>	<b>4.79</b>
Would you recommend this music to another choir?	<b>3.74</b>	<b>4.33</b>	3.67	<b>4.86</b>	4.59
How engaging did you find this music as a singer?	3.65	<b>4.31</b>	3.53	3.82	4.28
As a whole, did you enjoy the music from this concert?	<b>4</b>	<b>4.35</b>	4.01	<b>4.59</b>	<b>4.62</b>
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (Yes)	<b>34</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance? (No)	13	0	0	0	1

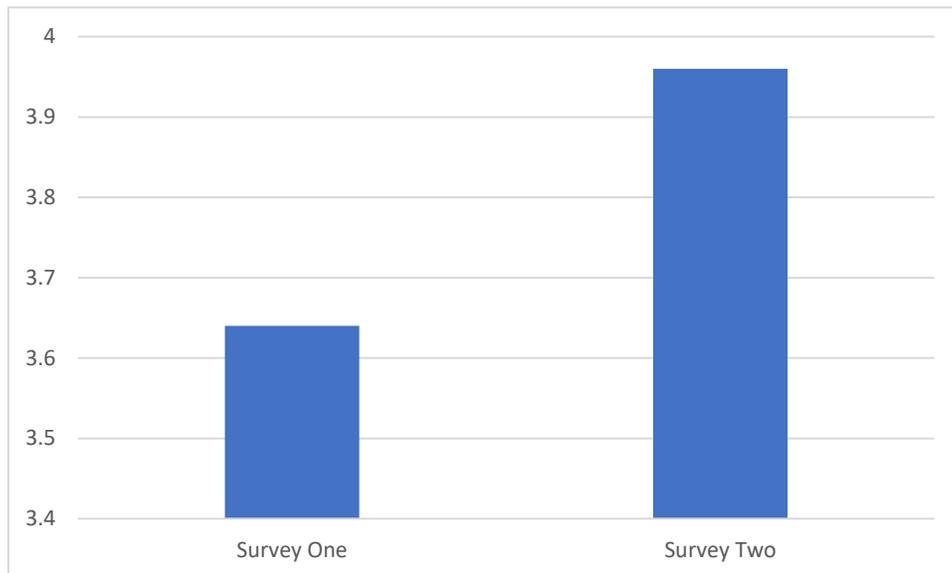
*Notes:* Survey Two results organized and averaged by years participated in a choral ensemble. Data that is boldface shows higher averages in Survey Two than in Survey One.

## Research Questions

**Research question 1.** After evaluating the data collected above, I reflect back on my research question. Did my data prove that: repertoire choice affects student engagement and motivation? I think overall student motivation was a big factor in terms of the music itself.

Although the data itself was far more similar than I had expected, I think it still shows that if students enjoy their music, their motivation and engagement in class were higher. A contributing factor could be that students had time to learn this music and live with it before filling out this survey. If I had given them this survey after only a few days of rehearsals, their answers probably would have been very different. I must also reflect up on sub-questions.

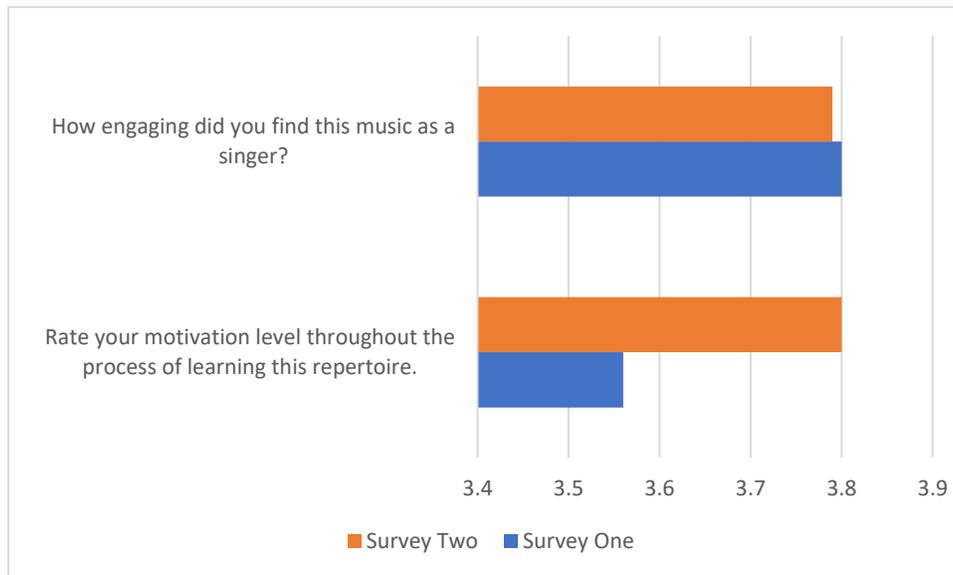
**Research question 1a.** The first sub-question I asked was whether different genre selections affect their motivation and engagement. Overall, students preferred the genre selections from their popular music repertoire more than traditional music repertoire. When comparing the data, although it is not a significant difference from Survey One to Survey Two, I am led to believe that genre preference can affect student motivation and engagement. Figure 2 compares genre preference from both surveys.



*Figure 2* Genre Preferences for Survey One and Survey Two

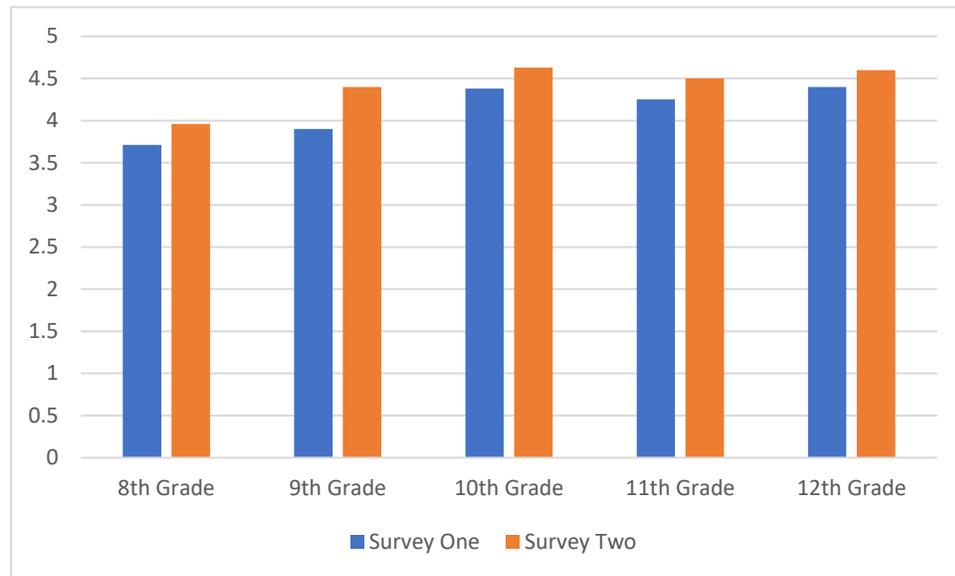
**Research question 1b.** The second sub-question asked if certain genres motivate and engage students more. According to the data in Table 4 students were more motivated with their

repertoire in Survey Two. However, their engagement was not higher in Survey Two. This leads me to conclude that genre preference does affect motivation, but not necessarily their engagement. Figure 3 shows students' answers to how motivated and engaged they were by the music organized by grade level.



*Figure 3* Student Motivation and Engagement for Survey One and Survey Two

**Research question 1c.** Finally, the third sub-question was whether age and/or experience make a difference in song preference. According to the data, students preferred the songs in their popular music repertoire over their traditional music repertoire. The data does trend higher as the age of the student is higher, but the differences between age levels are minor. This leads me to believe that the age of the student is a factor in song preference, albeit a small one. Figure 4 shows students' answers to their song preference organized by grade level.



*Figure 4* Song preference by grade level for Survey One and Survey Two

### **Conclusions/Implications**

When I first started this process, I thought I knew what kind of music student were most drawn to and I used this to select repertoire that I felt would be engaging and motivating for my students. For the most part, I think this is still true. However, I was surprised that the differences in the data between Survey One and Survey Two were not that different. I used to believe that a majority of students tolerated the traditional choral music and looked forward to the popular music selections more. To my surprise, students enjoyed their traditional music just as much as their popular music. As a teacher this excites me because students are finding the enjoyment and value in traditional music, which is what every music teacher hopes to instill in their students.

## Chapter Five

### Plan for Taking Action

After reflecting upon this process, I will use what I have learned when selecting repertoire for my students next year. Although the music choice is based on the choir itself, I can use this data to inform my decision when choosing music that is educational, but peaks student interest. I also plan to continue surveying my students on their engagement and motivation in learning and rehearsing their choral repertoire. The only change I would make would be to wait until after the performance of the music before surveying the students. This is because I think when students have the opportunity to perform music, they can reflect upon what they liked, disliked, and what engaged them in the learning process. I think this continued student input will help motivate students for future performances and keep students in the program.

I believe my biggest take-away from this process is that flexibility is a huge factor in the choral classroom and in education as whole. When I selected repertoire for this year, I wanted the music to teach students while engaging them in the learning process. I actually ended up picking too much music and there were a few pieces of music we didn't have enough time to learn and that changed our program. I also ended up picking a piece of music last minute for our performance that students ended up enjoying so much, they learned it in just over a week. This flexibility within the music selections actually engaged students more than if we had only learned the music that was originally planned.

The other flexibility I had to learn was due to COVID-19. In the middle of the data collection process, schools in Minnesota were closed due to the virus. It has rocked our educational system and I continue to learn that flexibility is a key to our new way of teaching. I feel this affected the survey data because students were not able to have a spring performance

this year. As I stated earlier, the spring performance is made up of popular music repertoire. Since students were not able to learn or perform this music this year, they had to base their answers for Survey Two on music they learned almost a year ago. Though I do believe the data collected is fairly accurate to what it could have been, I think there might have been bigger differences in motivation and engagement in the music from Survey One to Survey Two.

### **Plan for Sharing**

After analyzing the data and gaining knowledge of student motivation and engagement through this action research, I look forward to sharing my results with my 5-12 music colleagues who also teach performance ensembles. Although we teach varying music subjects (band, choir, and orchestra), I feel this research can benefit all students in each subject. Many of us struggle with student engagement and keeping our students motivated over the course of the rehearsal process. By sharing what I have learned, I think we can all think more critically when selecting repertoire for our concerts. We will also be able to create a repertoire list consisting of music that we have observed to motivate and engage our students in the past to be used in future performances.

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## Appendix A

**Survey**

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Grade\_\_\_\_\_

Years in Choir\_\_\_\_\_

Rate the following questions on a scale of 1-5, 1 being low and 5 being high

1. How difficult or challenging did you find this concert repertoire?

1      2      3      4      5

2. Rate your motivation level throughout the process of learning this repertoire.

1      2      3      4      5

3. Did you enjoy the variety of genres performed in this concert?

1      2      3      4      5

4. Would you recommend this music to another choir?

1      2      3      4      5

5. How engaging did you find this music as a singer?

1      2      3      4      5

6. As a whole, did you enjoy the music from this concert?

1      2      3      4      5

7. Did your motivation in learning this music effect your performance?

Yes              No

8. Was there one song that you liked most? Why?

Any other comments?