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# CREATING EFFECTIVE CHORAL CONDUCTORS: A COMPARISON OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC STANDARDS WITH RESEARCH- BASED QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE CHORAL CONDUCTORS

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which the 2016-2017 National Association of Schools of Music Handbook adequately promotes the instruction of research-based behaviors demonstrated to improve effectiveness in choral conducting. A review of the Bachelor of Music Education, Master of Music in Choral Conducting, and Master of Music Education degrees will be presented identifying which standards and expectations are currently being promoted by NASM. The seven areas of teacher behaviors identified by the research focusing on effectiveness in choral conducting will be introduced and compared with those NASM standards and expectations. Following the comparison, potential solutions for missing behaviors will be presented. Based on the research, less separation of specializations between research-oriented and practice-oriented curricula could provide the opportunity for a more comprehensive education. This may include instruction in educational methods for the MM in Choral Conducting and more practical application of teaching methods in the MME.

## Preface

After five years of teaching choir at the junior high and high school levels, I decided to return to school to receive further study in choral conducting. I wanted to become a better teacher and improve my conducting skills. I initially began graduate study in a practice-based program. I was surprised to learn of the distinction between practice-based and research-based programs at the graduate level. Due to the degree of separation between the two program types, I changed plans to a hybrid of both practice and research. Becoming aware of the separation between the two tracks of graduate study caused me to wonder what competencies and qualities are expected in a choral conductor in order to be more successful. While exploring research in effective choral conducting, I began learning more about the National Association of Schools of Music. I then began to wonder how and if the NASM standards in three of the commonly used degree plans to become a choral conductor adequately promotes the instruction of these competencies and qualities for effective choral conducting.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Effective choral conductors possess mastery in three distinct areas: content competency, teaching skills, and social behaviors. Content competency refers to the abilities of the choral conductor as a vocal musician. Teaching skills include the methods and techniques used in the successful transfer of knowledge to singers, including the ability to facilitate the application of that knowledge and to ensure singer and ensemble comprehension. Social behaviors describe the manner of interaction between the choral conductor and ensemble affecting the learning environment of the rehearsal space. Referring to these three areas, the issue of how preservice choral conductors are being prepared will be examined through an in-depth analysis of the guidelines established by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM).

Following the review of the NASM guidelines, the author will further examine research that has specified the qualities of content, teaching skills, and social behaviors that have been shown to be influential in the effectiveness of choral conducting. A comparison between the NASM guidelines and the research will be examined to determine how and if the three predominant degrees sought in preparing to become a choral conductor aligns with the qualities of effective choral conductors.

This paper will be presented in three sections:

1. A review of the National Association of Schools of Music guidelines for the degree programs of Bachelor of Music Education, Master of Music in Choral Conducting, and Master of Music Education
2. The identification and explanation of research-based qualities associated with effectiveness in choral conducting
3. A comparison between the curricular standards and degree requirements with the research-based content of effective choral conducting qualities to determine the level of support the NASM guidelines provide for developing effective choral conductors.

For the purposes of this paper, a number of key terms must be defined to ensure that the reader understands the way they are being used. When referring to the choral conductor, the author assumes an equal division of mastery as both a music educator and choral conductor. It is the opinion of the author that the most successful choral ensembles are directed by a choral conductor who is effective as both a conductor and an educator.

An effective choral conductor constantly strives to demonstrate a mastery level of musicianship and proper singing technique. Musical content includes the necessary components of establishing musicianship including but not limited to the concepts of pitch, rhythm, form and style, history, and musical purpose or composer intent. The conductor then uses gestures as an effective form of nonverbal communication to present musical content. Additionally, the conductor uses methods of score study and analysis to prepare stylistically accurate and musical performances. Singing technique refers to the physiological action of creating vocal sounds appropriate for a singer. These include: posture, breath, phonation, resonance, diction, and their coordination in performance.

Choral conductors use specific strategies and methods to aid in the successful transfer of knowledge and skills to the ensemble. These are referred to as teacher delivery skills and include the ability to use efficient and successful rehearsal techniques, demonstrate appropriate leadership and communication skills, and maintain a positive environment through effective classroom management. Rehearsal techniques are strategies used to ensure concise and successful choral rehearsals. Process must be considered to be just as important as product. Leadership and management are ways in which rehearsal environment and learner readiness are established. These areas are necessary to ensure that conductor intent, musicianship, and singing technique are able to be successfully communicated to a choral ensemble. For progress to occur,

ensembles must be provided instruction in how to improve, and this is accomplished through effective delivery skills by the choral conductor.

The third area associated with effectiveness in choral conducting includes conductor behaviors. Conductor behaviors can best be described as both communication skills and magnitude used in the interactions with a choral ensemble. Communication skills involve both verbal and nonverbal ways of social interaction with a choral ensemble. Conducting gestures, eye contact, body proximity, facial expressions, and physical expressions are all forms of nonverbal communication that contribute to the environment of a rehearsal or performance. Verbal communication skills refer a brain friendly approach in rehearsal to help maximize ensemble retention and comprehension. Magnitude refers to the use of high energy, enthusiasm, and charisma in the interactions with choral ensembles. These behaviors can enhance the rehearsal process and performance by positively affecting the learning environment and ensemble perception of the choral conductor, and by helping the conductor establish an appropriate rapport with the choral ensemble.

Despite the focus on the preparation of pre-service choral conductors, the observations in this paper will be relevant to all choral conductors, regardless of experience, or ensemble level. All choral conductors desire to be effective and to create choral ensembles that exhibit vocal musicality with healthy singing technique. Ineffective choral conductors may lack knowledge and understanding in one or more aspects of content competency, delivery skills, or conductor behaviors. By identifying and ideally improving conductor effectiveness through the application and transference of musical content and through the use of research-based methods within the rehearsal, choral ensembles will experience more comprehensive rehearsals, thus enhancing the potential for true aesthetic experiences. It is the author's opinion that pre-service choral



conductors are receiving adequate instruction in musical content, but that more instruction in delivery skills and conductor behaviors may be needed.

## CHAPTER II: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC REVIEW

“The National Association of Schools of Music was founded in 1924 for the purpose of securing a better understanding among institutions of higher education engaged in work in music; of establishing a more uniform method of granting credit; and of setting minimum standards for the granting of degrees and other credentials...in the field of teacher education, the Association cooperates with the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation.”<sup>1</sup> The purpose of NASM is<sup>2</sup>:

- A. To advance the cause of music in American life and especially in higher education.
- B. To establish and maintain threshold standards for the education of musicians, while encouraging both diversity and excellence.
- C. To provide a national forum for the discussion of issues related to this purpose.

Membership, though not required, is a desirable affiliation. Institutions accredited by NASM adhere to the standards and expectations presented in the handbook. The 2016-2017 edition of the NASM Handbook will be used in the discussions in this paper.

The fundamental purposes and principles in undergraduate music programs are left up to each individual institution. These purposes and principles must be both logical and have functional relationships with NASM’s purposes, structure, and content. Each institution is expected to develop its curricular requirements for general musicianship, areas of specialization, and other disciplinary studies within NASM’s required percentages for each separate program and degree. The curricular structure and requirements for admission, including continuation and graduation must also be consistent with the programs purposes and content. The purposes, structure, content, and goals determined by each institution must be supported with sufficient

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1. *Handbook 2016-2017* (National Association of Schools of Music, 2016), 1.  
2. NASM, 2.

resources, meet the NASM curricular requirements, and should meet the standards determined by NASM.

NASM provides basic standards for admission into the undergraduate music degree programs. A high school diploma or equivalent is expected as well as musical aptitude and/or achievement. Aptitude and achievements may be evaluated through auditions or assessments, musicianship, performances/compositions/scholarships, standard exams, or credit transfers. NASM expects institutions to develop a method of determining if a candidate possesses the potential to develop high-level musicianship, artistic sensibilities, and a strong sense of commitment in the professional undergraduate degrees.

There are two types of degree structures for undergraduate study in music. They are the liberal arts structure and the professional degree structure. In the liberal arts degree, the program purpose is to study music in the context of a broad program of general studies. Music content must comprise thirty to forty-five percent (30-45%) for the Bachelor of Arts in Music and the Bachelor of Science in Music degrees. Areas of performance, musicianship, and elective musical studies make up the music content. The professional degree purpose is to provide intense work in music supported by a program in general studies. Music content must be at least fifty percent (50%) for music education majors. Degrees in the professional degree structure are labeled Bachelor of Music, likely with a specialization or with the option of adding a concentration. The Bachelor of Music Education degree plan expects all students to develop the competencies outlined in the NASM Standards for “All Professional Baccalaureate Degrees in Music” and “All Undergraduate Degrees leading to Teacher Certification.”

The NASM standards for all undergraduate and baccalaureate degrees that lead to teacher certification reference the professional degree plans, specifically those students seeking a

Bachelor of Music degree. Instructors are expected to develop student knowledge, skills, concepts, and sensitivities essential to the musician's professional life. In order to achieve these responsibilities, the musician or student must exhibit more than musical competence. Musicians must also exhibit a broad knowledge of music literature, the ability to integrate musical knowledge and skills, sensitivity to musical styles, and an insight into the role of music in both intellectual and cultural life.<sup>1</sup> The acquisition of a common body of knowledge and skills is referred to as "competency." This constitutes the basic foundation for work and continuing growth in the professional world. Students develop additional knowledge and skills through studies in subjects and issues beyond music. Specialization, or emphasis, implies students have gained competency in a specific area of study, such as a vocal or instrumental emphasis within the Bachelor of Music Education degree plan. Each individual institution determines the level of achievement and the means for preparing competent students.

The education of pre-service choral conductors in the "Four Year Undergraduate Music Education Degree Plan" is divided into three categories: Musical Studies, General Studies, and Professional Education. NASM provides a percentage of degree work that should be spent in instruction for each category. Fifty percent (50%) of instruction is to be spent in Musical Studies including basic musicianship and performance, as well as music education methods courses. Thirty to thirty-five percent (30-35%) of instruction should come from General Studies, including human and personal considerations with social, economic, and cultural components. Finally, NASM recommends fifteen to twenty percent (15-20%) of instruction to be in Professional Education. Within this category, philosophy of education and social foundations, educational psychology, special education, history of education, and student teaching are

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1. NASM, 96.

expected to be covered. In the Program Content section under the Curricular Structure of the BME, NASM states, “The musician electing a career in school-based teaching must develop competencies in professional education and in specific areas of musicianship. Professional education components should be dealt with in a practical context, relating the learning of educational principles to the student’s day-to-day work in music.”<sup>1</sup>

There are specific musical competencies identified for students in all music teaching programs. They are: conducting and musical leadership, arranging, functional performance, and analysis/history/literature. Students should be able to: create accurate and musically expressive performances, analyze and evaluate style in score reading, differentiate expected performance practices, read and comprehend instrumentation, and display conducting and rehearsal techniques. Conducting and musical leadership are acquired skills to effectively teach the areas of specialization such as vocal/choral music.<sup>2</sup>

Arranging is an expected competency so that pre-service choral conductors are able to, “arrange and adapt music from a variety of sources to meet the needs and ability levels of individuals, school performing groups, and in classroom situations.”<sup>3</sup> Functional performance includes the ability to perform on the instruments associated with the chosen area of specialization. In the vocal/choral area, both keyboard and voice are considered essential. Analysis/history/literature comprises of competency in the application of analytical and historical knowledge to the curriculum in creating lesson plans and classroom and performance activities.

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1. NASM, 116.
2. NASM, 117.
3. Ibid.

Pre-service choral conductors should be able to, “relate their understanding of music with respect to styles, literature, multiple cultural sources, and historical development.”<sup>1</sup>

Specialization assumes the student in the Bachelor of Music Education degree plan can choose an area of primary focus. In the vocal/choral specialization, NASM lists several specific competencies expected by students. They are: vocal and pedagogical skill, knowledge of content, methodologies, philosophies, materials, technologies, curriculum development, solo vocal performances and ensemble experience, the ability to perform on at least one instrument as a teaching tool, and lab experience in teaching vocal techniques. Specific care in beginning students is added to this list in specialization competencies for all levels and specializations.

The general studies program may support the intensive work in music within the professional degree structure. Expectations of general studies includes the ability to think, speak, and write clearly and efficiently. NASM advocates student acquaintance with fields outside music such as humanities, sciences, and social sciences. Functional awareness of the commonalities and differences of work in artistic, scientific, and humanistic domains is expected. Students should be able to provide perspectives and techniques for various issues and responsibilities as well as identify possibilities and locate information in fields outside of music that may have a bearing on musical questions or endeavors.

In addition to content and general studies competency expectations, NASM also provides expectations in teaching and professional procedures. In the teaching procedural area, students are expected to be able to<sup>2</sup>:

1. Apply musical knowledge and skills to lead students to competency and integrate music instruction in the P-12 process.

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1. NASM, 117.

2. NASM, 119.

2. Teach music in all varieties of classroom environments and at various levels or age groups to develop musical knowledge in how music functions as a medium of civilization communication.
3. Display classroom and rehearsal management skills.
4. Display knowledge in child-growth and developments, as well as principles of learning in music.
5. Utilize the ability to assess and meet the needs of students with a variety of aptitudes, backgrounds, and orientations.
6. Display knowledge of current methods and materials, including repertoires in the vocal/choral specialization with the ability to accept, amend, and reject those methods and materials based on the personal assessment of a specific teaching situation.
7. Apply evaluative techniques in assessment of students.

Professional procedures conclude the provided standards for the Four-Year Bachelor of Music Education Degree Plan within NASM. “In order to implement programs to achieve the competencies identified in foregoing sections, the following standards and guidelines apply<sup>1</sup>:

1. Program purposes and requirements must be clear to prospective students, the profession, potential employers of graduates, and the public.
2. Music education methods courses should be taught by music education faculty who have successful experience teaching music and maintain close contact with schools.
3. Institutions should encourage observation and teaching experience prior to formal admission into [the] teacher education program [and] should be supervised by qualified music personnel from the institution and cooperating schools.
4. Institutions should establish specific evaluative procedures to assess students’ progress achievement.
5. Institutions should provide opportunities for advanced undergraduate study in conducting, composition, and analysis.”

NASM briefly mentions the “Five-Year Program in Music Education.” Most notable is that while the previously described curriculum does not change in this degree plan, “This program satisfies the requirements for two differing degree programs.”<sup>2</sup>

Examples of this dual degree program would be students receiving the requirements for the Bachelor of Music Degree (1/3 General Education and 2/3 Music) and the Music

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1. NASM, 120.
2. Ibid.

Education Degree. NASM requires this program be, “considered as an integral plan, not...the superimposition of one curriculum upon another.”<sup>1</sup> NASM lists the total hours for the five-year plan to be between one hundred fifty to one hundred sixty-five credit hours (150-165).

There are no standards provided for a Bachelor of Music in Choral/Orchestral/Wind Conducting. NASM states, “A number of Bachelor of Music degrees fulfill a good proportion of [the basic competence in the components of the common body of knowledge and skills] whether or not they contain specific coursework in conducting.”<sup>2</sup> NASM also says that, “if an institution wishes to offer a focused program and publish it as preparing musicians for advanced studies in conducting, the appropriate curricular structure and title is the Bachelor of Music in either Performance, Composition, or Theory with an emphasis in pre-professional studies in conducting.”<sup>3</sup>

The National Association of Schools of Music provides expectations for post-baccalaureate degrees as well. Graduate programs exist to expand in-depth knowledge and competence of a musical specialization. As in undergraduate programs, individual institutions are expected to determine the purposes, structure, and specific content including specializations, how those specializations are related with other fields of music study and professions, and content area requirements. These include composition and performance, research, scholarship, and preparation of teaching in terms of the specialization, the support for the specialization, and its breadth of competence.

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1. NASM, 120.
  2. NASM, 172.
  3. Ibid.



Creative work, inquiry, research, and scholarship are listed as types of professional work employed in graduate music programs. Competency in the graduate specialization programs include the ability to create these types of works which can include a musical work or performance or formal research or scholarship. Both are considered creative work if the product contributes to the current knowledge and practice in music. This leads into two distinct types of degree programs offered at the graduate level: Practice-Oriented Degrees and Research-Oriented Degrees. There are also combination research and practice oriented degrees available. The degree titles are expected to reflect the level of study and content.

Graduate music programs assist in additional preparation for music professions. NASM assumes those pursuing graduate music programs will spend, “several decades in a variety of music and music-related professions” and as such, should develop advanced techniques in their specializations.<sup>1</sup> NASM also explicitly states, “most of those who are in graduate degrees in music are or will be engaged in music teaching of some type during the course of their professional careers. Institutions are therefore strongly encouraged to give attention to the preparation of graduate students as teachers.”<sup>2</sup> The introduction to the “pedagogy and subject matter considered fundamental to curricula for undergraduate music majors”<sup>3</sup> is also recommended for the preparation of teaching. Areas mentioned are: composition and improvisation, music theory and history, cultural music, technology, and performance. Professional education, as previously defined by NASM in the Bachelor of Music Education Degree plan, includes the areas of philosophy

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1. NASM, 123.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.

and social foundations, educational psychology, special education, history of education, and students teaching. These areas are not listed as an expectation in the Graduate Program category of Preparation for the Professions, despite the assumption that, “most of those who are in graduate degrees in music are or will be engaged in music teaching of some type during their course of their professional careers.”<sup>1</sup>

Choral conductors pursuing graduate study can choose between obtaining a degree in the music education field or in applied conducting. NASM has separated these two specializations at the post-baccalaureate level. In the Master of Music in Choral Conducting program, NASM identifies five areas of study.<sup>2</sup>

1. Study in the application of musical content
2. Study in at least one field outside the choral conducting major
3. Study in language and diction
4. Conducting practice
5. Public performance

There are no specific standards or recommendations for admission into the choral conducting graduate program provided by NASM. Students do not have to have previous music teaching experience or an education degree. Admission requirements are left to individual schools. A bachelor’s degree in any music field is the most common requirement.

Between thirty-three percent (33%) and sixty-six percent (66%) of the program of study in the Master of Music in Choral Conducting must be in content application. This includes conducting, analytical studies, score reading, and rehearsal techniques. A minimum of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the program must include study in of one or more fields outside the

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1. NASM, 123.  
2. NASM, 128.

specific major. This may include areas of orchestration, history/literature, musicology/ethnomusicology, performance, or composition. The remaining portions of the degree plan should permit students to become proficient in vocal pedagogy and in vocal diction in the five predominant singing languages: English, German, French, Italian, and Latin. Students should experience regular conducting practice and conduct a full length public performance as the culmination to the degree.

Curricula within the choral conducting graduate degree should include fifty-five to sixty percent (55-60%) covering the body of knowledge and skills. Courses that integrate elements of choral performance make up twenty-five to thirty percent (25-30%) of the program. Other music studies, such as history/literature and vocal performance make up the remaining fifteen percent (15%) of the program structure.

The common body of knowledge and skills is divided into three categories: musical skills, conducting skills, and background knowledge. Musical skills include musicianship, instrumental and vocal competence, analysis, and mastery of repertoire. Conducting skills include baton technique and rehearsal technique. Background knowledge consists of music history, language and diction skills, the business of ensembles, and audition/interview techniques.

Musicianship incorporates a large array of musical content. This includes the acquisition of advanced aural skills. These skills are expected to be frequently used in score preparation to anticipate potential problems of intonation, balance, and color. Expert competency in sight-reading, including transposition is also considered to be a frequently used skill in the preparation of scores. It is expected that all conductors will possess functional keyboard skills. Additionally, choral conductors should have sufficient

knowledge of orchestral instruments in order to conduct rehearsals and performances. Mastery of vocal performance with detailed knowledge of technique and pedagogy is expected for all choral conductors. Musical analysis and the ability to integrate analytical knowledge in order to create and develop artistic interpretation and in score preparation is expected of all conductors. Competence in counterpoint, harmony, composition, and orchestration is necessary for choral conductors to be able to analyze music at an advanced level. Finally, a comprehensive knowledge of choral repertoire, including literature from each historical performance period, ensemble type, operas, and oratorio is expected.

Two predominant areas in conducting are recommended: baton technique and rehearsal technique. Baton technique, as described by NASM is, “the ability to maintain continuity of rhythm, line, structure, and interpretive integrity in the overall performance of a work while, at the same time, being able to evoke and control response by gesture at all levels of musical detail.”<sup>1</sup> Rehearsal technique is explained as, “the ability to fuse analytical knowledge of the structure of a work and an artistic conception developed from that knowledge to sonic realization in minimal rehearsal time. This skill should be evident with all sizes of ensembles, from the coaching of soloists in chamber music to rehearsals with...choral forces.”<sup>2</sup>

The final component in the common body of knowledge and skills for career entry is background knowledge. This consists of history, language/diction, business of ensemble life, and audition/interview techniques. A comprehensive knowledge of music

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1. NASM, 170.
2. NASM, 170-171.

history with the relationship to the history of civilization is expected. Choral conductors should also have sufficient language and diction skills, with general knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet. With regard to the business of ensemble life, choral conductors should have “functional knowledge...and sufficient interpersonal skills to deal effectively with musicians and such other elements of management, unions, contracts, professional ethics, audiences, repertory, teaching institutions, and public relations.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, audition and interview techniques are included in knowledge for career entry and should be covered in the graduate program of study for choral conductors.

The other graduate program designated to help prepare effective choral conductors is the Master of Music in Music Education degree. There are four main areas of study within this degree plan. They are: musical competency, supplementary musical content, contemporary issues and problems in music, and the choice of a research or practice oriented program.

Each institution decides how much of the education should include musical competency. NASM does specify that advanced competencies in music education may comprise as little as thirty-three percent (33%) and as much as sixty-six percent (66%) of the entire program. Supplementary courses in music outside of music education should comprise of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total program. Suggested supplementary courses are performance, conducting, theory and analysis, and history and literature. The purpose of these courses is to broaden the student’s musical competence and experience. NASM, “strongly recommend[s] that institutions require at least one advanced course in music

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1. NASM, 171.

history, musicology, or ethnomusicology; one in performance; and one in music theory analysis.”<sup>1</sup>

The third content area discusses contemporary issues and problems in music education. Graduate students in the music education degree plan should develop proficient perspectives on issues such as curriculum development, teaching methodology, innovations, and multidisciplinary concepts. These perspectives may be gained in “seminars or by other means,” including observations or classes.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the fourth area discusses the institutional option of offering a practice-oriented music education program or a research-oriented program. The practice-oriented program focuses on performance and pedagogy competency. One-half (50%) of the curriculum should be in performance and/or pedagogy. NASM recommends a project be completed by students in this program in performance or pedagogy as a culmination of the program. Research-oriented programs focus more on theoretical studies and research problems in music education. In this program, one-half (50%) of the curriculum should be devoted to research in music education and related areas. Typically, a project-thesis is required as a culmination project. Combination programs of both research and practice oriented programs are available. Based on information provided, the type of final project and portions of curriculum focus are determined by the individual institution providing the combined research and practice-oriented program.

Information on previous student preparation for success in this music education degree is not available. The common entrance requirement for students is a Bachelor of

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1. NASM, 132.
2. Ibid.

Music Degree with a valid teaching certificate or a bachelor's degree in music with teacher-certification.

In summary, the review of the National Association of School of Music's guidelines for the Bachelor of Music Education, Master of Music in Choral Conducting, and Master of Music Education degree plans reveal several main areas of concentration or focus areas. Content is the main focus of all three degree plans. The remaining predominant areas for both the Bachelor and Master of Music Education degrees include general studies and professional education. The Master of Music in Choral Conducting has a more practical approach to a comprehensive education with focus on conducting practice and supplementary music courses. The assumption is that all three of these program areas are designed to create choral conductors, despite the different tracks of curricula.

## CHAPTER III: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH-BASED QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE CHORAL CONDUCTORS

According to James Mursell, success or failure in effectiveness is frequently associated with the acquisition of or lack of competency.<sup>1</sup> Seven different areas of competency have been shown to influence effectiveness in choral conducting. They are the acquisition of musical content, leadership, delivery and communication skills, rehearsal techniques, management skills, and conductor behaviors. Musical content serves as the common body of knowledge to be acquired by effective choral conductors so that ensembles can improve and learn. The remaining areas exist to ensure ensemble readiness and success in the transference of the musical content. These areas have been identified from numerous research articles, textbooks, and NASM publications discussing teacher or conductor effectiveness. In this chapter, each area will be further explained in detail by identifying the specific qualities or skills in each area associated with effectiveness in choral conducting.

Knowledge, competency, and/or mastery of musical content is of primary importance to effectiveness in choral conducting. A choral conductor must have sufficient content knowledge in the areas of musical style, score preparation, musical skills, singing ability, and conducting to be effective. In musical style, performance practice refers to expectations of performance in an effort to be historically accurate in the performance of repertoire. Musical style additionally includes knowledge of the full

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1. Manny Brand, "Research in Music Teaching Effectiveness," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* (1985), 13.



expanse of choral repertoire. A choral conductor's ability to choose appropriate choral literature is one of the most important components to a successful ensemble.

Understanding the ensemble's level of musicianship, and literacy, as well as areas of needed improvement are some of the considerations that should be used when choosing repertoire<sup>1</sup>. Effective choral conductors must also possess the skills to analyze and evaluate the musical scores in preparation for rehearsal and performance. This includes theoretical knowledge, form and analysis, performance practice, and the ability to interpret choral music based on these musical principles. An effective choral conductor has a rehearsal plan of the literature chosen and additionally has a vision of the final product before rehearsals begin.

Musical skills, including aural and vocal skills, have been determined to be necessary for effective choral conducting. Rohwer and Henry observed that musical skills were rated the third most important requisite skill of effective music teachers.<sup>2</sup> The considered elements of musical skills were additionally ranked in order of most to least pertinent. The rated order of musical skills determined by university professors was<sup>3</sup>:

1. Expressiveness
2. Error Diagnosis
3. Sight Reading
4. Singing
5. Conducting
6. Theory/History Knowledge
7. Piano Playing
8. Performance

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1. Cindy L. Bell, "Enhanced Rehearsal Strategies for the Undergraduate Choral Conductor," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* (2002), 25.

2. Debbie Rohwer, and Warren Henry, "University Teacher's Perceptions of Requisite Skills and Characteristics of Effective Music Teachers," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* (2004), 22.

3. Rohwer and Henry, 7-9.

## 9. Transposition

Leon Thurman, a vocal education specialist observed, “We need to learn as much as we can about good, healthy singing techniques and teach them as the core of our vocal-choral program.”<sup>1</sup> Choral conductors should be able to model healthy singing techniques to their ensembles to assist in teaching this core skill. All choral conductors expect fine singing from their ensemble, regardless achievement level. It is therefore, the responsibility of the conductor to shape the sound of the ensemble in an ideally healthy and expressive way. Vocal pedagogy refers to the teaching of the singing voice within either an ensemble or as an individual and will be further examined within the components of rehearsal techniques. Diagnosing and correcting vocal faults in an ensemble setting through proper vocal pedagogy is another core musical skill of effective choral conductors.

Expression is minimally mentioned within the research, possibly due to its subjective nature and because musical notation does not specifically convey expression. However, eurhythmics or movement has been shown to improve vocal expression.<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Ehmann, observed that, “if...the choir has actually danced to the music, then it should, from this bodily representation, have caught the feeling for the uninterrupted moving line, become aware of the rhythmic structure and a concept of a corporate plasticity of sound; these experiences should then be translated into the singing act.”<sup>3</sup>

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1. Russell Hammar, “Pragmatic Choral Procedures” (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1984), 26.

2. John Jost, “Sculpting the Music: Gesture, Movement, and Expression in the Choral Rehearsal” *The Choral Journal* (2011), 20.

3. Jost, 21.

While not all choral pieces allow for the freedom of extraneous movement on stage, expressive singing should be both supplemented and supported by the conductor's gesture.

Effective conducting utilizes non-verbal communication to convey expressive intention by means of gesture.<sup>1</sup> The use of gesture and other non-verbal communication skills contribute to teacher effectiveness and social skill development.<sup>2</sup> Gesture is the application of motion, predominately in the fingers, hands, and arms, to evoke sound. A conductor's gesture should be clear, efficient, and expressive. The gesture should look like the music sounds. Extraneous gestures limit a conductor's effectiveness due to the lack of clarity to the ensemble and minimize expressiveness while also distracting the audience from the performance of the music. Other forms of non-verbal communication shown to improve teaching effectiveness include emotional expressivity and sensitivity, and social control. Emotional expressivity involves the "nonverbal sending" of information; emotional sensitivity is "receiving and decoding nonverbal displays of others." Emotional control is "regulating nonverbal 'self' communication." All three nonverbal communication skills have been shown to positively influence teacher effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the intense specializations of content required for effective choral conducting, Debbie Rohwer and Warren Henry observed that current process of preparing future conductors may need to be altered. In the current educational system, particularly at the undergraduate level, students who graduate with the Bachelor of Music

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1. Max Rudolph, "Grammar of Conducting: A Comprehensive Guide to Baton Technique and Interpretation" (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1995), XV.

2. Donald Hamann, Nancy Lineburgh, and Stephen Paul, "Teaching Effectiveness and Social Skill Development," *Journal of Research in Music Education* (1998), 98.

3. Ibid.

Education and/or obtain a music teaching certification are qualified to teach K-12 in all areas of music (General, Choir, Band, Orchestra). According to Rohwer and Henry, given the desire for an all-levels certification, the goal of creating effective conductors in any specialization may be unrealistic. As such, further specialization or emphasis tracking may need to be considered. At the very least, separating the instrumental and vocal specializations and the certification associated with each area could improve the preparation of effective choral and instrumental conductors at the undergraduate or initial certification level.<sup>1</sup>

An effective choral conductor involves significantly more than possessing musical content competency. Being an effective leader is an additional necessary component. Rehearsals and performances are ultimately led by the choral conductor through a variety of methods. The choral conductor must be both committed and dedicated to the ensemble and to the ensemble's success. Effective leadership involves planning organized rehearsals, being efficient in rehearsals, creating and maintaining a positive classroom environment, and maintaining high professional standards.

For the choral conductor, the classroom is the rehearsal room and lesson plans are the rehearsal plans. As the leader of the ensemble, it is the responsibility of the conductor to create high quality plans for efficient and relevant rehearsals. High quality lessons have been shown to improve students' perceptions of effective rehearsals.<sup>2</sup> The amount of preparation necessary for high quality rehearsal plans is extensive. It involves an

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1. Rohwer and Henry, 22-23.

2. Donald Hamann, Dawn Baker, Peter McAllister, and William Bauer, "Factors Affecting University Music Students' Perceptions of Lesson Quality and Teaching Effectiveness," *Journal of Research in Music Education* (2000), 104.

awareness of what the ensemble needs, score study, and scheduling. There must be a significant amount of self-discipline involved in planning effective and efficient rehearsals.<sup>1</sup>

There are several leadership components that may improve rehearsal efficiency. Having a definite and specific plan has previously been discussed above. Additionally, avoiding long pauses and being bold in responses are desired behaviors within the rehearsal. The conductor should be fast paced and exhibit high-magnitude<sup>2</sup> and high energy.<sup>3</sup> Choral conductors engaging in efficient rehearsals also provide specific instructions to the ensemble, are flexible, and only drill notes and rhythms when absolutely necessary. Problems should be solved by gaining insight into the challenges singers experience rather than through rote learning only.<sup>4</sup>

Leadership in the rehearsal space particularly, implies a level of empathy. The conductor should anticipate the response singers may have to praise and/or criticism. Working well with others is desirable.<sup>5</sup> Leadership qualities assist in the creation of an appropriate rehearsal environment that is both positive and social. Given that learning is a social activity between singer and conductor and between singer and singer, a social environment should be encouraged and celebrated. Positive rapport is desirable for an optimal social atmosphere. The conductor must make a conscious effort to reduce stress in the rehearsal environment which may include providing students with the opportunity

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1. Sandra Willetts, "Beyond the Downbeat, Choral Rehearsal Skills and Techniques" (Abingdon Press, 2000), 81-94.

2. Cornelia Yarbrough, "Effect of Magnitude of Conductor Behavior on Students in Selected Mixed Choruses," *Journal of Research in Music Education* (1975), 142.

3. Hamann, Lineburgh, Paul, 87.

4. Hammar, 169.

5. NASM, 116.

to collaborate through teamwork. Encouraging, promoting, and using student generated ideas in the determination of musical and interpretive decisions improves student engagement, rapport, and ensemble ownership.<sup>1</sup> Establishing a classroom environment that offers singers a feeling of control helps to reduce the potential for stress. Learning and success must be celebrated. Gentle care and a reduced stress learning environment contribute to brain growth.<sup>2</sup> It also helps in creating a positive and relevant rapport with singers, that will also increase teacher effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

Leadership also implies that choral conductors must be able to work well with others both in the rehearsal and performance settings.<sup>4</sup> Conductors should be dedicated to their profession<sup>5</sup> and maintain high professional standards both for themselves and for the singers in their ensembles.<sup>6</sup> As the leader of the ensemble, being able to deliver skills, and communicate effectively is a requirement for growth to occur, and another skill proven to positively influence effectiveness in choral conducting.

Delivery skills, or effective teaching skills is one of the most important areas affecting efficient choral conducting. Teaching skills have the ability to influence an ensembles attitude in the rehearsal space, attentiveness, learning and retention, and perception of the choral conductor. Significant research has been conducted to determine which skills are the most influential. Verbal and nonverbal communication is one of substantial study. Consistent use of eye contact, vocal inflection, facial and physical

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1. Marilee Sprenger, *Learning and Memory: The Brain in Action* (Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999), 28.

2. Ibid.

3. Hamann, Lineburgh, Paul, 88.

4. NASM, 116.

5. Brand, 16.

6. Hamann, Lineburgh, Paul, 88.

expressions, and physical proximity to the ensemble positively improves delivery skills and encourages singer attentiveness in the rehearsal.<sup>1</sup> Changing pitch and volume of the speaking voice while teaching helps maintain singer interest. The ability to communicate nonverbally with students enhances effectiveness in teaching.<sup>2</sup> Verbal and nonverbal communication is also a factor in student perception of lesson quality and teaching effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

Four separate studies have reported that teaching skills were as or more important than musical skills in determining effectiveness or attitude toward music teachers.<sup>4</sup> Teachout reported both preservice and experienced teachers, “placed teaching skills [as] significantly more important than musical skills.”<sup>5</sup> Taebel documents that administrators and supervisors, “believed teaching skills to be more important than musical skills in determining the effectiveness of music teachers.”<sup>6</sup> Single discusses the importance of teacher delivery of content for effectiveness and Yarbrough found that, “attitude ratings between high-magnitude and low magnitude”<sup>7</sup> conductors were significantly different. Another study suggested that, “teaching skills may be deemed more important to effective teaching than other skills because they are more clearly defined and are not

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1. Cornelia Yarbrough, and Harry Price “Prediction of Performer Attentiveness Based on Rehearsal Activity and Teacher Behavior,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* (1981), 212-213.

2. Hamann, Lineburgh, Paul, 96.

3. Hamann, Baker, McAllister, Bauer, 103-104.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

affected by changing conditions such as teaching setting, grade level, and the observers' area of expertise."<sup>1</sup> As of 2000, the notion of content being more important than delivery skills in teaching has yet to be tested.<sup>2</sup> However, one study demonstrated that effective teacher-delivery skills enhanced student liking and interest levels regardless of the quality of the delivered content.<sup>3</sup>

Sprenger observed that communication skills involve the methods of sending, receiving, and regulating information.<sup>4</sup> The human brain consists of five memory pathways in long term memory: episodic, semantic, procedural, automatic, and emotional.<sup>5</sup> The emotional pathway however, is the most powerful. Therefore, in order to be effective when delivering information, a conductor must teach to all five memory pathways. There are multiple strategies in each memory pathway that can be activated by teacher delivery. Using as many of the memory lanes as possible results in more successful learning and retention in students.

Leadership and successful delivery skills combined with effective rehearsal techniques allows for a higher probability of learning and improvement within the ensemble. The techniques behind effective rehearsals is another necessary component for effective choral conductors. It is predominantly during the choral rehearsal that the acquisition of successful learning and retention opportunities occur. Choral conductors

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1. Rohwer and Henry, 22.
  2. Hamann, Baker, McAllister, Bauer, 104.
  3. Hamann, Baker, McAllister, Bauer, 111.
  4. Sprenger, 2
  5. Sprenger, 46.



must display the ability to effectively diagnose and correct both musical errors and vocal faults while also develop listening and analytical skills within the ensemble. “A conductor may expect to hear the tone he desires from his ensemble only if he understands how voices will respond to various suggestions, exercises, techniques, etc. which he uses in rehearsal.”<sup>1</sup> Those suggestions, exercises, and techniques, along with other musical tasks may ideally be presented in a three step system: 1) Present the musical task. 2) Students perform the task. 3) Related reinforcement following the student performance.<sup>2</sup> Feedback is considered to be one of the most important elements within the rehearsal. Positive responses may be the single most dynamic influence on a singer’s brain chemistry.<sup>3</sup>

Organization of the rehearsal must be considered when planning. An effective choral conductor prepares rehearsals with specific goals and objectives in mind.<sup>4</sup> Singers are more attentive at the beginning of rehearsal. Therefore, the composition in need of the most work, or of the highest priority piece should be rehearsed first. As the rehearsal continues, recognizing ensemble attentiveness and level of both mental and physical fatigue should be assessed. Rehearsals may need to be adjusted to ensure productivity and successfulness.

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1. Harold Decker, and Julius Herford, *Choral Conducting Symposium* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988) 10.

2. Cornelia Yarbrough, and Harry Price, “Sequential Patterns of Instruction in Music,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* (2004), 180.

3. Sprenger, 25.

4. Claire Wehr McCoy, “The Ensemble Director as Effective Teacher: A Review of Selected Research” *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* (1985), 12.

“Any performance by a chorus will reflect the conductor’s effectiveness as a teacher during rehearsals.”<sup>1</sup> The ability to transfer musical knowledge, refine pedagogical technique, instill and maintain dedication to the musical discipline, shape melodic and syllabic nuance, expand knowledge and technical proficiency in the ensemble, and lead the group to artistic performances determines effectiveness of the choral conductor in the rehearsal setting.<sup>2</sup> “A conductor who has mastered the music to be made, who recognizes the needs of the group to make the music, and who knows how to rehearse that music has a better opportunity to realize the fullest potential in the art of music making.”<sup>3</sup>

Choral conductors are directly responsible for the sound quality of their ensemble. Therefore, conductors must be a master at teaching and molding the voice within the rehearsal, both during warmups and through repertoire. Vocal warmups are designed to teach and protect the voice. Choral conductors are, in fact, voice teachers. Vocal technique that should be taught within the choral rehearsal include: posture, breath management, tone quality, blend, and intonation.<sup>4</sup> By improving the individual singer through proper vocal pedagogy in an ensemble, the entire ensemble benefits with higher singing quality, ensemble sound, intonation, articulation, and expressiveness.

Intonation must always be assessed by the conductor and solutions should be provided to promote in tune singing by the ensemble. Often, singing under pitch occurs during descending lines, repeated notes or passages, at the end of phrases, when the ensemble is vocally or mentally fatigued, or due to the rehearsal space. An ensemble may

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1. Decker, Herford, 91.

2. Decker, Herford, 99-100.

3. Willetts, *Introduction*.

4. Lynn Corbin, “Practical Applications of Vocal Pedagogy for Choral Ensembles,” *The Choral Journal* (1986), 5-8.

sing sharp during ascending passages, when singing at high ranges, or when the ensemble is excessively excited or pushed on with additional adrenalin. Ensemble level and size, lack of security with pitches and/or rhythms, non-unified vowels, difficult tessituras, problematic vocal production, non-unified vibrato, or singing too softly or loudly can also affect intonation within the ensemble.

Ensemble sound is also greatly affected by seating and standing formations. Choral conductors should make a conscious effort to appropriately place individuals in the ensemble to allow for the best composite sound.<sup>1</sup> While preference plays a significant role in ensemble sound formation, vocal production, pitch, resonance, and independence are all elements to consider when creating seating and standing charts. Balance between voice parts can also play a role in determining an arrangement for performance or rehearsal. While other considerations, such as height can influence row choice, especially in younger ensembles, ensemble sound should be the highest priority in creating seating and standing charts.

Additionally, effective choral conductors must be well versed in methods of instruction for teaching and promoting music literacy and expression. Resources such as the Kodaly Method, Edwin Gordon's Music Learning Theory, Orff Schulwerk, and Dalcroze Eurythmics all offer assistance in teaching music literacy and expression. Choral conductors have a responsibility to help foster and support independent and creative singers. Musicianship is vastly improved when music literacy is acquired and challenged. Also, expression is enhanced when more time can be spent on musicality rather than the concern of ensuring notes and rhythms are correct.

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1. Willetts, 55.

The belief that teaching musical concepts prohibits the opportunity to perfect ensemble performances has been discredited by multiple studies. In fact, research has shown that, “a significant portion of the rehearsal time [can] be devoted to other music learnings without impeding the development of performance skills...Music skills and performance skills can be taught in rehearsal effectively without lowering the level of ensemble.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the choral rehearsal is a widely debated topic. Ultimately, the individual conductor determines the purpose of the rehearsal. Common purposes include<sup>2</sup>:

1. To prepare for concert appearance
2. To provide a place to experience the summation of progress
3. To reveal the musicianship of the conductor
4. To determine musical taste
5. To provide knowledge of choral repertoire and styles
6. To understand the human voice
7. To understand people
8. To understand the abilities of the choral conductor

Often overlooked, other purposes that should be considered include<sup>3</sup>:

1. Enlarging the ensembles understanding and appreciation of choral music
2. Developing vocal and choral techniques
3. Encountering a vast repertoire of choral literature with stylistic integrity
4. Achieving mastery of musical scores
5. Achieving technical disciplines
6. Improving individual musicianship within the ensemble
7. Establishing a more expressive relationship between the director and ensemble
8. Improving listening skills
9. Achieving aesthetic experiences

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1. McCoy, 10.
2. Decker and Herford, 69-70.
3. Ibid.

Despite a choral conductor having a mastery level in musical skills and knowledge and profound rehearsal techniques, if the environment created within the rehearsal is not conducive to efficient and effective learning, progress cannot occur and information cannot be effectively transmitted from the conductor to the ensemble. Classroom management skills were rated the highest requisite teaching skill for music teachers by their university professors.<sup>1</sup> Classroom management, or rehearsal management skills, include the ability to establish and maintain student or ensemble attention. Consistent and continuous ensemble performance within the rehearsal is an effective management strategy to maintain attentiveness given the strong correlation between nonperformance activities and inattentive behavior.<sup>2</sup> The complete teaching sequence of task presentation, performance, and reinforcement also contributes to effective classroom management.<sup>3</sup> It increases positive attitudes within the ensemble and is associated with a high rate of student or ensemble attentiveness.<sup>4</sup> Teaching within the choral rehearsal varies substantially from a classroom. Choral conductors should avoid lecturing. Excessive verbosity by the conductor has been shown to increase off task behavior within the rehearsal. Instead, conductors should present the music and information to their ensemble with enthusiasm, an active imagination, and with efficiency in mind.

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1. Rohwer and Henry, 21.
  2. McCoy, 10.
  3. Yarbrough and Price, 180.
  4. Ibid.

Creating an effective ensemble rehearsal environment is another management tool that can help ensure that the singers are ready to engage in the choral rehearsal. The human brain is extremely sensitive to the learning environment when learning new material. Enrichment can make a significant difference in providing the appropriate environment for learning. Engaging in a social environment is a recognized form of enrichment and, given that learning and music are both social activities, choral directors should allow interaction within the ensemble and between the ensemble and the conductor. Providing an environment known to stimulate brain activity through management skills can positively influence more effective rehearsals.<sup>1</sup>

Environment, the rehearsal space, rapport, and most importantly, effectiveness, are continually reinforced by specific behaviors of the choral conductor. There are several behavioral traits that are positively linked with effectiveness and efficiency. These behaviors describe the habitual way an effective choral conductor interacts with singers and speaks within the rehearsal process.

These traits include having and maintaining high energy, enthusiasm, and motivating singers. The ability to inspire motivation was rated the second most important quality needed by preservice teachers, according to a sample of university professors.<sup>2</sup> Being able to generate excitement and interest within the ensemble is also a desirable attribute identified by NASM for future teachers. Charisma is another characteristic that may assist in motivation and is a recognized quality of effective teachers.<sup>3</sup> The choral conductor should exhibit enthusiasm. Enthusiasm refers to intensity and magnitude. Both

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1. Sprenger, 13-14.
  2. Rohwer and Henry, 22.
  3. Hamann, Lineburgh, and Paul, 88.

qualities have been demonstrated to influence perception of lesson quality<sup>1</sup> and teaching effectiveness.<sup>2</sup>

Choral conductors should strive to be realistic with the ensemble.<sup>3</sup> Being realistic establishes both trust and increased collaborative rapport. The ability to be tough-minded and strong-willed is commonly associated with a realistic perspective. Tough-mindedness improves effectiveness in music teaching.<sup>4</sup> Strength of mind also includes the behaviors of dedication, self-discipline, and appropriate communication skills. Leading a choral rehearsal means leading singers. Singers respond best to a conductor they trust, one who is honest, and confident. While communication skills have been previously discussed, those skills are also considered to be effective teacher behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

There are also research-based personality traits shared by effective choral conductors. They include warmth, empathy, and a sense of humor. Choral conductors that display warmth are perceived as being more approachable and understanding. Warmth ultimately leads into the ability to be empathetic with the ensemble. NASM also identifies empathy between students and colleagues of differing backgrounds as desirable.<sup>6</sup> “People who are empathetic are more attune to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want. It makes them better at callings such as the caring professions, teaching, sales, and management.”<sup>7</sup>

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1. Hamann, Baker, McAllister, and Bauer, 104.
  2. Brand, 15.
  3. Hamann, Lineburgh, and Paul, 89.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Hamann, Lineburgh, and Paul, 96-99.
  6. NASM, 116.
  7. Hamann, Lineburgh, and Paul, 87.

The use of humor in the rehearsal by the choral conductor has been frequently studied by researchers in the past. Displaying a sense of humor in the rehearsal space has been positively linked with teaching effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> Similar to the effects of warmth and having an empathetic disposition, showing a sense of humor in front of the ensemble positively affects the learning environment and the ensemble perception of the choral conductor. While desirable, having a sense of humor was rated the lowest priority of all personality traits in a survey by university teachers.<sup>2</sup>

This research has identified the acquisition of competency in content, leadership, delivery and communication skills, rehearsal techniques, management skills, and mannerisms to be highly influential in measuring the effectiveness of choral conductors. Displaying appropriate content knowledge in the field of music is an area of focus all choral conductors can agree on. Perhaps somewhat forgotten or potentially deemed less important are the research-based ways conductors can successfully use that knowledge to improve and educate the ensemble. The rehearsal environment created within the rehearsal space directly influences singer and ensemble learner readiness and comfort. The remaining areas of leadership, delivery and communication skills, rehearsal techniques, management skills, and mannerisms are all considered necessary in the creation a successful rehearsal environment, as well as dramatically increasing the potential for growth within the ensemble, and ultimately, the effectiveness of the choral conductor.

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1. Brand, 15.

2. Rohwer and Henry, 21.



## CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

Effective choral conductors must be measured by more than the product of the ensemble they direct. The process by which a choral conductor improves musicianship within an ensemble must also be considered. An effective choral conductor displays a high level of musical content, the ability to teach that content successfully, and the ability to maintain an environment conducive to learning and creating aesthetic experiences. Without these skills, choral conductors may be ineffective at improving the musical ability levels of an ensemble, affecting both the process and the product. Effective choral conductors are able to recognize areas of improvement needed within their ensembles and resolve the underlying problems, not just the symptoms. These qualities should be the foundation of a curriculum designed to train choral conductors.

While the standards and guidelines provided by NASM are considered threshold standards for all universities and colleges accredited by the association, the handbook is the only document that provides nationwide standards and guidelines for the education of future music professionals. Universities and colleges do not have to be members of NASM. However, if a university is accredited, adhering to these guidelines is expected. NASM gives significant freedom to the individual institution, especially at the graduate level, to determine what and how information should be taught to future choral conductors. Therefore, the following comparisons are based on the information provided by NASM and do not assume to be exclusively true for determining the effectiveness of all higher education institutions offering these specific degree programs. Following the review of three different degree plans of NASM used to prepare choral conductors, there are several areas consistent with the research-based qualities of teaching

effectiveness. Additionally, there are multiple areas that may need to be addressed if preparation of effective choral conductors is the primary goal.

Of the three degrees reviewed by NASM, the Bachelor of Music Education program provides the most extensive guidelines. The portion of musical content provided in this degree program is quite consistent with the research. However, rehearsal techniques are only briefly mentioned. Extensive detail in content competency has been established in the research to accompany effective choral conductors. This includes focus on teaching methodologies, vocal pedagogy and diction, conducting techniques, rehearsal techniques, theory/analysis, and score study. Within the musical content area of the Bachelor of Music Education program, all of these areas are, in some degree, referenced under musical competencies.

The other component of the Bachelor of Music Education degree plan linked to effectiveness is professional education. This area is to be between fifteen and twenty percent (15-20%) of the entire curriculum for future teachers. Special education and the history of teaching, which are included in this area, were not topics discussed in the research on teaching effectiveness. Yet, competency in educational methods and procedures for special needs students is vital for effectively teaching exceptional singers. Additionally, knowledge of the history of teaching may help shape a teaching /conducting philosophy. The areas of philosophy and social foundation, educational psychology, student teaching, and teaching procedures are all consistent with the research. According to NASM, professional education comprises the smallest portion of the music teacher educational curriculum. Student teaching is usually a semester long and appears to be the majority of the professional education credits.

NASM provides a list of teaching competencies expected upon completion of the Bachelor of Music Education Degree. The list references classroom and rehearsal management,

child development, the ability to assess and plan, current methods and repertory, and understanding evaluative techniques and the application of assessment and within objectives.<sup>1</sup> This list is consistent with the research. University teachers and professors identified the most important quality for pre-service teachers to obtain is the ability to effectively manage a classroom or rehearsal.<sup>2</sup> Management directly effects the establishment of environment, and the relationship created between conductor and their singers.<sup>3</sup> Child development, including an awareness of how to best deliver information for successful learning and retention in students, is shown to improve effectiveness. Assessment and planning, including the organization of the rehearsal can help establish specific goals and objectives while also improving literacy by using current teaching methods. Evaluative techniques and assessment within the ensemble references the third step of the teaching sequence, involving feedback.

Overall, the Bachelor of Music Education degree guidelines provided by NASM cover many areas shown to improve effectiveness. Research suggests that both music content and professional education are vital components of effective choral conductors. Within these two components, two substantial qualities are either minimally suggested or missing from this degree plan: communication skills, and conductor/teacher behaviors. Musical content within this degree plan focuses primarily on the future conductor as a musician. Professional education primarily focuses on the developing teacher. Therefore, there is an assumption that these two qualities would need to be included in the professional education component of the Bachelor of Music Education degree. In reality, the demonstration of communication skills and behaviors are more likely to be observed through the practice and experience of conducting choral ensembles. While

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1. NASM, 119.
  2. Rohwer and Henry, 4.
  3. See page 32-33.

NASM suggests students be provided with opportunities for multiple types of observation and teaching, there is not a suggested amount of practice time for students prior to the student teaching semester. The State Department of Education usually mandates field hour requirements.

Communication skills include both verbal and non-verbal forms of interaction with students. Verbal communication includes the the three-step teaching sequence identified by Yarbrough and Price.<sup>1</sup> Their research suggested this form of communication: 1) Task Presentation 2) Student performance of the task 3) Providing feedback. This is an efficient and effective strategy within the classroom or rehearsal. Additionally, several nonverbal forms of communication, including eye contact, physical and facial expression, and physical proximity are not mentioned, despite the connection between these forms of communication and classroom management improvement.<sup>2</sup> Emphasis in the successful transmission of information through the process of sending, receiving, and regulating information involves creating an environment that is both brain compatible and brain friendly. Aside from the expectation that pre-service choral conductors have a basic understanding of the principles of learning and teaching with child development, the NASM guidelines do not provide a standard or guideline for education in brain-friendly teaching strategies.

Conductor behaviors exhibited by choral conductors that have been shown to improve effectiveness are:

1. Displaying the ability to motivate
2. Exhibiting enthusiasm
3. Being tough-minded
4. Displaying energy
5. Being realistic
6. Exhibiting empathy
7. Being dedicated

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1. Yarbrough and Price, 179-187.  
2. See page 25-26.

## 8. Using a sense of humor

Specifically, choral conductors, “who are empathetic are more attune to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want. It makes them better at...teaching.”<sup>1</sup> An increased understanding of the human brain has demonstrated that certain behaviors of choral conductors can greatly influence a singers susceptibility and readiness to learn. These characteristics are also influential in creating and establishing a positive rapport and creating an environment more conducive to learning and exploration. Learning is a social experience and is facilitated within a rehearsal space through an environment that emphasizes safety and trust for optimal choral rehearsals.

Multiple studies have assessed how and if the behaviors used by a choral conductor improve effectiveness within a rehearsal. These behaviors reference the type of social interaction between conductors and their singers. Research has shown that the behavior of the choral conductor directly influences the type of environment created and maintained within the choral rehearsal and performances.<sup>2</sup> The Bachelor of Music Education degree, and both reviewed graduate programs lack any mention of instruction in the behavior of future choral conductors outside of the expectation of exhibiting professionalism. There is debate as to whether these behaviors, can in, fact be taught, or if effective choral conductors simply must have them as traits of their personality. Research, however, suggest these behaviors can and should be taught and improved.<sup>3</sup> Conductor behaviors must be one of the primary factors included in methods courses,

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1. Hamann, Lineburgh, and Paul, 87-101.

2. Yarbrough, 145.

3. Cornelia Yarbrough, and Katia Madsen, “The Evaluation of Teaching in Choral Rehearsals,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* (1998), 475-477.

professional education instruction, and throughout the application of rehearsal practice within all three degree areas.

The Bachelor of Music Education degree is commonly expected to be a four-year program. NASM does provide information for a five-year music education program. However, this program adds the additional year because it includes content from the Bachelor of Music degree plan. It does not provide an additional year of study alone in the music education field. Pre-service choral conductors may elect to extend their time pursuing this degree. Most degree plans use the last semester of the four-year program for student teaching. Therefore, in a traditional four-year plan, actual instructional time for choral conducting students is really limited to seven (7) semesters on the four-year plan without remediation.

With the completion of course work and student teaching, teacher certification is predominantly established in most states by passing one or more of the ETS Praxis tests. These tests are designed to measure academic and subject-specific skills and content knowledge believed to be necessary for teaching. There are three types of tests available, depending on the requirements determined by individual states. All three tests are designed to assess content. The Content Knowledge for Teaching Assessments (CKT) additionally examines principles of learning and teaching including general pedagogical knowledge at one of four grade level ranges. The Subject Assessments Test also measures general and subject-specific teaching skills and knowledge. These tests are administered online and assess the prospective teacher's ability to recall this information. The demonstration of the techniques and qualities proven to influence teacher effectiveness, outside of content, is not assessed in these mandated exams for teacher certification. Student teaching serves as the culmination of conductor demonstrated effectiveness, assessed and observed by the cooperating instructor and university professors.

The Master of Music in Choral Conducting is a more specialized, practice-based degree. Students in this program have already earned a bachelor's degree in music. However, NASM does not require students to have a Music Education degree or a valid teacher certification for admission. Study in music specific content encompasses the entirety of the degree plan. The program places a high priority on multiple areas consistent with research shown to improve effectiveness including: conducting and nonverbal communication, score study, repertory mastery, rehearsal techniques, and vocal pedagogy. A substantial benefit of this type of program is that the students may have the opportunity to practice regularly in front of choral ensembles during their study. Therefore, the areas of teacher delivery skills and conductor behaviors could potentially be more easily identified and refined with extended practice. However, these effectiveness components are not listed as expected competencies within the Master of Music in Choral Conducting degree plan.

NASM assumes that those students pursuing the Master of Music in Choral Conducting degree will most likely be teaching at some point within their career.<sup>1</sup> Despite this claim, the degree program lacks instruction in nearly all research-based teaching skills and delivery methods. Instruction in classroom management skills and environment, leadership skills, and methodologies are not specified and, therefore, may not be taught within this program. Further comparison between this program and the research cannot be completed due to the lack of specificity provided by NASM and the curricular freedom left up to individual accredited institutions.

The Master of Music in Music Education is much broader, more general, and therefore less prescribed in content competencies. Competencies in music education are a significant

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1. NASM, 123.

portion of the degree. However, detailed information as to what is included in these competencies is lacking. In the guidelines, NASM suggests students take supplementary courses in one or more of these fields: performance, conducting, theory and analysis, and history and literature. Additionally, NASM strongly recommends students in this program take at least one course in music history, musicology or ethnomusicology, performance, and music theory analysis. Contemporary practices and innovations in music education are also further explored and refined. These may include teaching methodologies and curriculum development.<sup>1</sup>

The NASM guidelines for the Master of Music Education are consistent in effectiveness with the research in the areas of musical competency, methodologies, conductor delivery skills, and leadership. However, the lack of more detailed guidelines in the music education competency section of the degree plan offers the potential for significantly different levels of student achievement. Individual institutions determine the remaining content for the Master of Music Education.

NASM distinguishes between two types of tracks for this degree program. Accredited institutions offering the Master of Music Education have the option of choosing between implementing a practice- or research-oriented program. The practice-oriented program includes performance and pedagogy while a research-oriented program includes theoretical studies and research problems. Final comprehensive projects include either a performance in the practice-oriented program or a thesis paper in the research program. NASM also describes the potential combination of both research and practice into a specialized, hybrid program.<sup>2</sup> Based on the

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1. NASM, 132.

2. Ibid.



research, a hybrid program of both practice and research could be the most effective option for choral conductors choosing to pursue the Master of Music Education.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to define the elements of effective teaching for choral conductors and determine if the National Association of Schools of Music provides adequate guidelines for the training of pre-service choral conductors. The Bachelor of Music in Music Education, Master of Music in Choral Conducting, and Master of Music Education degrees were reviewed extensively and compared with behaviors identified by research with effective choral conductors. After review and comparison, it was determined that NASM does promote the initial training of effective choral conductors in the Bachelor of Music Education degree. However, the Master of Music in Choral Conducting and Master of Music Education degrees lack specificity in their guidelines, making it difficult to determine effectiveness.

Effective choral conductors are those who successfully exhibit content comprehension, teaching skills, and social characteristics. These three distinctive components are determined by the seven areas research identified qualities of effective choral conductors. The areas are:

1. Content competency
2. Leadership
3. Delivery skills
4. Communication skills
5. Rehearsal techniques
6. Management skills
7. Conductor behaviors

The review of the Bachelor of Music Education revealed comprehensive guidelines that are overall, consistent with the research. Two areas that may be more extensively included in this degree plan are rehearsal techniques and communication skills. Additionally, while the percentages of amount of study in the three areas of this degree plan are potentially imbalanced, the general studies guidelines are consistent with other undergraduate college

degrees. The general studies component should provide basic competencies in areas outside of the major area of study. Therefore, slightly decreasing the amount of study in general studies and increasing the amount of professional education may provide students more opportunities to practice the skills and techniques not currently being adequately promoted for conducting effectiveness.

A broad world view is desirable for all undergraduate students. One of the competencies expected to be fulfilled within the general studies area of a bachelor's degree, pre-service choral conductors may also obtain this and other general studies competencies within the musical content areas and through performances. These general study competencies may include the ability to think, speak, and write clearly and effectively, identify and locate information from other fields that may have bearing on musical endeavors, and establish an awareness of the similarities and differences of work within artistic, scientific, and humanistic domains. Additionally, the areas of professional education including delivery skills, classroom management, teacher behaviors, and leadership may not be taught thoroughly enough at the undergraduate level to positively influence the effectiveness of future choral conductors. More time should be spent in subject-specific professional education taught by members of the music faculty.

The lack of conducting practicum time prior to student teaching in the Bachelor of Music Education degree plan is concerning. The majority of the skills referenced in the research to improve effectiveness are practice-oriented skills. If hours of conducting practicum were added to the degree guidelines prior to student teaching, perhaps pre-service choral conductors would be able to further advance and refine these skills. Providing students with multiple opportunities to explore successful behaviors in front of an ensemble, practice classroom management skills,

try different methodologies, refine rehearsal techniques, and improve their communication skills could greatly improve teacher effectiveness and success in the first crucial years of teaching. If institutions included a lab choir for pre-service choral conductors to practice, it could help these conductors improve and refine these skills.

Finally, given the significant amount of specific content, general studies, and professional education study within the Bachelor of Music Education degree plan, a traditional time frame of four-years seems daunting and impractical. University professors and advisors should advocate for comprehension over allotted time. Comprehension and understanding of content, practice hours, and the opportunity for a more in depth study in the practice of choral conducting should be the priority.

The specific guidelines provided by NASM for the Master of Music in Choral Conducting program showed extensive content in score study, conducting, mastery of repertory, rehearsal technique, and vocal pedagogy. The major benefit of this program is the implication of significant time to practice conducting in front of choral ensembles. However, this program, according to NASM guidelines, lacks any NASM guidelines that specify instruction in conductor behaviors, delivery skills, leadership, and additional forms of communication skills outside of manual gesture and conducting. In addition, it appears that this program is not specifically required to provide any instruction in effective methods of teaching or assessment. It is unlikely that program entrance requirements will be altered to only allow those with a teaching degree to be admitted to the Master of Music in Choral Conducting. Therefore, two potential solutions to improve the effectiveness of choral conductors would be to 1) add hours in content-specific professional education which would include methodology, philosophy, and delivery and communication skills, and conductor behaviors or, perhaps, 2) add a teaching certificate program

concurrent with the guidelines for the Master of Music in Choral Conducting. Students with an undergraduate music education degree, or with a teaching certificate could have the option of testing out of these courses.

Lack of instruction in professional education and in methods in this degree plan may produce a choral conductor who is able to manage a rehearsal, but not be able to effectively teach music in choral ensembles. The popular understanding of ensemble rehearsal is to prepare for concert performances. However, it must not be the only purpose. Rehearsals are the vehicle through which an ensemble's understanding and appreciation of choral music increases. Vocal technique and musicianship should be developed and improved. Musical skills must be taught effectively for successful rehearsals and performances. By improving the musical abilities of an individual, the quality of the ensemble greatly improves. Therefore, the skills required to effectively teach ensembles must be included in this program of study.

Currently, the probability of students entering the Master of Music in Choral Conducting without any prior conducting experience is quite high. Because of this, and the lack of training in teaching methods in the Master of Music in Choral Conducting degree, it is probable that a student could graduate with a bachelor's and master's degree designed to prepare them to conduct choral ensembles without any training in effective teaching skills. An even greater concern is that students continuing on to the Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting could potentially graduate without receiving any instruction in research-based rehearsal/teaching methods and professional education.

The Master of Music Education degree guidelines are consistent with the research in content, particularly in the areas of content and delivery skills. The musical content referenced includes performance, music history, musicology, and theory. Teaching skills included in the

guidelines are rehearsal techniques, conducting, and leadership. Behaviors references are communication and delivery skills. While multiple areas associated with effectiveness are discussed in the NASM guidelines for the Master of Music Education, the primary concern is the potential lack of practical experience for students studying in this degree program.

NASM notes that institutions offering this degree have the opportunity to choose between offering a research-oriented or practical-oriented plan. The research-oriented program appears to greatly limit the practical experience needed in this plan. Regarding the performance-oriented program, more information regarding the specific curriculum of this program is needed to formulate a comprehensive perception of its ability to influence a conductor's teaching effectiveness. Unfortunately, additional information regarding this degree was not available due to NASM's position of giving individual institutions the responsibility of determining the majority of the curriculum.

Both the guidelines in the Master of Music in Choral Conducting and in the Master of Music Education degree program revealed an interesting division in the primary method for educating choral conductors. The Master of Music in Choral Conducting is a practice-oriented degree program while the Master of Music Education is predominately a research-oriented degree program. In the Master of Music in Choral Conducting degree, the lack of theoretical study in methods and professional education may produce a choral conductor who might lack the ability to teach effectively in the rehearsal setting. The Master of Music Education degree, a research-oriented program, may be dominated by theoretical study over practical study, thus yielding a choral conductor lacking in communication and delivery skills, leadership skills, and rehearsal techniques. Based on these conclusions, the MM in Choral Conducting is potentially lacking in instruction in research-based teaching methods and the MME is potentially lacking in

the practical application of the teaching methods. It is the author's opinion that such a drastic division may not be in the best interest in the post-baccalaureate education of effective choral conductors.

NASM states that the purpose of graduate programs in music is to declare and focus on a specialization. While specialization may be a predominant and necessary component of post-baccalaureate degrees, fully separating the research and practical pathways within these two degree plans may not be the most effective. Both of these degree programs specialize in either a practical or research-oriented area of choral conducting. However, it is desirable that both degrees include some instruction in the other area to offer a more comprehensive program and specifically, to produce more effective choral conductors. The Master of Music Education degree may continue to provide a focus on educational research but should include a practical portion of the curriculum designed to improve and refine conducting and non-verbal communication skills. Likewise, the Master of Music in Choral Conducting may continue to focus on conducting skills and rehearsal techniques but should also provide instruction in effective teaching and research-based teaching methods. The idea of a combined research and practical oriented degree plan in both specialization degrees may be the most inclusive option. It is interesting to note that despite the opportunity to pursue the MME with a practical approach, NASM does not provide guidelines for a MM in Choral Conducting with a research component. Further study in the curriculum and program requirements for institutions offering some level of a research-oriented and practical-oriented plan in both degree options is encouraged. Despite specialization, both programs may include the areas related to effective choral conducting as they continue to prepare conductors.

The division between research-oriented and practice-oriented plans is evident in universities and institutions offering both graduate degrees in choral conducting and in music education. In most settings, students pursuing a graduate degree in choral conducting are the ones who have the opportunity to work with choral ensembles throughout their study. However, those students pursuing a graduate degree in music education are given minimal to no time in front of ensembles. The separation of practice and research extends even more dramatically in the jobs offered to individuals pursuing a career in higher education. Currently, choral conductors who have chosen to take the practical-oriented path throughout their graduate study will more likely be considered for jobs that include choral conducting activities, including ensembles. Additionally, choral conductors who pursue a research-oriented path in their graduate study will most likely be considered for jobs only in music education. Considering the previously determined limitations both degrees the MM and MME provide, including rehearsal techniques, communication and delivery skills, professional education, and methods, there is considerable concern in the degree of separation between the practice-oriented and research-oriented degree paths.

The National Association of Schools of Music strives to improve music education in the United States in higher education as well as provide a forum for discussion on ways to improve current instructional methods within higher education. The standards and guidelines provided by NASM are intended to be minimum standards for accredited higher institutions to follow. If NASM continues to promote the current predominance of musical content education and increases instruction in educator development, particularly at the graduate level, it is the hope that conducting effectiveness could then become an additional threshold standard which could



improve the quality of choral conductors receiving the degrees of Bachelor of Music Education, Master of Music in Choral Conducting, and Master of Music Education.

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