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A collaborative research inquiry into issues of male choral participation at the middle and high school level

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Dissertation

A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH INQUIRY INTO ISSUES
OF MALE CHORAL PARTICIPATION AT THE MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

by

KEVIN ANDREW HAWKINS
B.S., Missouri State University, 1985
M.M., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988

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Approved by

First Reader
Roger Mantie, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Music Education
Arizona State University

Second Reader
Joseph Michael Pignato, D.M.A.
Associate Professor, Music
State University of New York, Oneonta

Third Reader
Lee Higgins, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Music, Music Education

Fourth Reader
André de Quadros, Ed.D.
Professor of Music and Chair, Music Education
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KEVIN ANDREW HAWKINS

Boston University College of Fine Arts, 2015

Major Professor: Roger Mantie, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Music Education, Arizona State University

ABSTRACT

Choral music and public singing was once regarded as an acceptable and popular socio-cultural activity for males. Through centuries of gradual socio-cultural change male choral participation and public singing became marginalized in the United States. During the past century (1914–2014), adolescent female singers have typically outnumbered male singers at the secondary level. The numerical imbalance between adolescent males and females in secondary choral classrooms is a symptom of a more complicated problem that involves a complex web of perceived physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling barriers. If no single perceived barrier accounted for the lack of male choral participation our collaborative group surmised that no one-dimensional approach would likely succeed in increasing male choral participation. Collaborative inquiry provided a more holistic approach to dealing with the lack of male choral singers at the middle and high school levels and answers questions not adequately addressed by other forms of research.
The purpose of this collaborative inquiry was to cooperate with five vocal music practitioners, at two different district sites in the Midwest region of the United States. Our collaborative inquiry group set two broad goals for this study: (1) to implement specific action-oriented strategies in our choral classrooms with the intention of encouraging male choral participation at the middle and high school levels; and (2) to learn more about collaborative inquiry as a research approach and adult learning strategy. My collaborators and I realized a very delicate ecosystem is required for adolescent males and females to engage in singing activities at school. The findings of this inquiry suggest that action-oriented strategies (e.g., single-sex choirs, recruitment and retention activities, same-sex peer role modeling and mentoring) can be implemented in the choral classroom to mitigate the perceived physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling barriers and encourage male choral participation at the secondary level. Our inquiry group found that external issues beyond the control of the choral practitioners (e.g., changes in administration, school schedules, class requirements, and elective choices) were difficult to address. While the goal of encouraging male choral participation continues to be an important issue for everyone that was involved in this inquiry, we came to realize the most important outcome was recognizing the power of collaboration.
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Chapter One

Introduction

In my earlier years as a choral music educator, I did not realize that the balance between male and female singers I achieved at Glendale High School was not typical of most secondary choral programs in the United States. Although I was proud that my choirs had been selected to perform at several state and national conferences, what really caught the attention of my colleagues was that over thirty male singers from my choral program were selected for All-State Choir over a five-year period.

In 2008, I was invited to lead an interest session at the Missouri Music Educators Association (MMEA) annual conference on “Male Gender Issues in American Choral Music.” For months after the presentation choral directors contacted me seeking assistance, additional information, and guidance working with adolescent males (e.g., literature selection, warm-up exercises, and recruitment, retention, and voice classification strategies). The experience presenting at the conference led me to further explore the perceived barriers that inhibit adolescent males from participating in singing activities at school.

A perusal of pre-service choral music textbooks, music education journal articles, interest sessions at choral conferences, and professional music education websites reveals that recruiting, training, and retaining enough male singers to maintain a balanced choir remains one of the most pressing issues
choral directors face at the middle and high school levels (Ackerly, 2009; Adcock, 1987; Brinson, 1996; Castelli, 1986; Demorest, 2000; Dunaway, 1987; Eshelman, 1992; Freer, 2007; Gastler, 1993; Harrison, 2004; Lamble, 2004; Lucas, 2011; Manesco, 1983; Phillips, 1988, 1996, 2004; Reed, 2004; Roe, 1983; Tipps, 2003; White & White, 2001; Zemek, 2010). Although I considered adding to this body of literature for my dissertation work, the prospect of standard empirical research left me underwhelmed. While I wanted to make a positive contribution to the profession, I did not feel that the “study” of male choral participation was the best path for me.

In June 2009, after 12 years of teaching choral music at Glendale High School, I resigned and accepted a position as Worship Pastor in a large local church. I remained active as a choral clinician, adjudicator, and honor choir conductor throughout the Midwest region of the United States. In November 2009, I began to consider initiating and facilitating a collaborative inquiry group. Tuesday was my assigned day-off at church, which provided me an opportunity to spend time with public school choral practitioners in their field settings.

A collaborative inquiry group can be defined as a small group of peers who are trying to answer a question that is of great importance to all of the group members through repeated cycles of action and reflection (Bray et al., 2000; Heron & Reason, 2006). Group members tap into their own experiences and ground those experiences in new knowledge, rather than receiving experience and knowledge from others (Heron, 1996). Scholars have suggested keeping
collaborative inquiry groups relatively small (five to eight members) to minimize time constraints and scheduling issues of group members, and maximize the efficiency of the group (Bray et al., 2000; Reason, 2008). During the selection process I considered secondary choral directors with interest in the topic of male choral participation. Other areas taken into account included practitioner training, expertise in the classroom, and their passion and eagerness to learn (Bray et al., 2000).

My plan was to collaborate with secondary choral practitioners who struggled to gain a choral balance between adolescent males and females, to cooperate with these practitioners and find effective strategies we could implement in our classrooms to motivate and engage adolescent males in the music-making process, to find practical and creative strategies to recruit, train, and retain male singers, and to learn more about collaborative inquiry as a research approach and adult learning strategy. Every Tuesday in 2010–2011 I traveled to Bedford Public School District or Deer Lake Public School District (all names are pseudonyms) to collaborate with five choral teachers and their students. The collaboration consisted of thirty-two weeks in the field and included a final wrap-up session in June 2011. Periodic follow-up visits were continued for three years (2011–2014) after the official research project was conducted in the field (2010–2011). This dissertation chronicles the efforts of our collaborative inquiry.
The Research Problem

Public singing was once regarded as a popular and acceptable male socio-cultural activity in Colonial America. Through centuries of socio-cultural change, summarized in Chapter Two, males began opting out of singing activities at the middle and high school levels leaving a disproportionate ratio of females to males (Adler, 2002). The imbalance between adolescent males and females in secondary choral classes is much more complicated than just a reduction of males in singing activities at school, it is a symptom of a much larger problem (Adler, 2002; Koza, 1994; Svengalis, 1978). The “missing males” problem is a complex web of interrelated threads involving stereotypes, identity formation, maturation issues (physical, vocal, emotional, developmental, and cognitive), and psycho-socio decisions made within a gendered and hierarchical context of schooling (Adler, 2002; Collins, 2012; Harrison, 2007, 2009; Lucas, 2007, 2009; Williams, 2011).

The numerical imbalance of adolescent males and females at the secondary level contributes to an array of problems for choral music teachers, administrators, male and female adolescent singers, and audience members. Perennial challenges for teachers and administrators might include: recruitment and retention strategies, limited repertoire choices, challenges with vocal balance and blend, difficulties selecting appropriate teaching strategies (Beery, 1996, 2009; Boyd, Crocker, 2000; Hires & Hopper, 2011), and decisions to combine or eliminate choral classes due to low enrollment (Hamann, 2007).
Adolescent males may endure personal and social costs (e.g., verbal and physical harassment, bullying, social isolation) for engaging in vocal music activities at the secondary level (Ackerly, 2009; Adler, 2002; Harrison, 2007, 2008; O'Toole, 1998). Due to the paucity of male singers, adolescent females compete with one another at a higher level in order to sing in a mixed choir (Koza, 1994; Moore, 2008). Choral students may favor singing in mixed groups because of the wider range of sonority, repertoire choices, and socialization (J. L. Jackson, 2009). If selected for the more advanced mixed choirs females are typically grouped with younger, less qualified males (Wilson, 2010). Females are sometimes required to cover male vocal parts when voice parts are not equally balanced in a mixed choir, a technique that can be unhealthy (Dunaway, 1986; Tipps, 2003). Female singers not selected for the top mixed choirs are then placed into less prestigious female choirs (Hylton, 1981). Female singers may feel neglected and discouraged by the attention paid to adolescent males and withdraw from the choral program altogether (Sandene, 1994).

**Rationale for the Study**

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries choral music and public singing were acceptable socio-cultural activities for males. A gradual socio-cultural shift occurred and singing in school was regularly seen as a feminine activity. Over the past century (1914–2014) male choral participation and public singing has become marginalized in the United States. Consequently, adolescent
singing ensembles at the middle and high school levels in the United States have, for many decades, exhibited a 3 to 1 imbalance of female to male singers (O’Toole, 1998; Williams, 2011). Recruiting, training, and retaining enough male singers to maintain a balanced choir remains one of the most pressing issues facing choral directors at the secondary level.

A review of the literature establishes the prevalence and persistence of such imbalance. The problem is complex and involves a delicate and interconnected web of perceived physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling barriers (Collins, 2012; Harrison, 2009; Lucas, 2007; Williams, 2011), contributing to an array of difficulties for choral music educators, school administrators, adolescent males and females, and audience members.

I felt that collaborative inquiry was a way of exploring the complexity of male choral participation issues that could result in meaningful change for my research participants. Collaborative inquiry provides a more holistic approach to dealing with complex problems and answers questions that cannot be addressed by other forms of research (Bray et al., 2000; Heron, 1996). Collaborative inquiry rests on principles articulated by Heron’s (1996) cooperative inquiry and Reason’s (1988) participative inquiry. Both Heron and Reason discussed working collaboratively with subjects in the field and developing knowledge as a catalyst for change (Bray, et al. 2000).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this collaborative inquiry was to cooperate with five vocal music practitioners, at two different district sites in the Midwest region of the United States in order to foster male choral participation. Our collaborative inquiry group set two broad goals for this study: (1) to implement specific action-oriented strategies in our choral classrooms with the intention of encouraging male choral participation at the middle and high school levels; and (2) to learn more about collaborative inquiry as a research approach and adult learning strategy. The inquiry group examined the wide spectrum of perceived barriers to male choral participation (physiological, psycho-socio, schooling) and implemented specific action-oriented strategies in our classrooms to see what impact they had on the numerical imbalance between adolescent males and females. Heron (1996) noted this type of inquiry provides “a systematic relationship between practice, experimentation, reflection, and evaluation” (p. 9).

Additionally, our collaborative inquiry group believed that research in education should hopefully make a tangible difference in the live of those involved. According to Reason and Bradbury (2009), the inquiry group’s goal should be transformational: (1) inquirers should seek new knowledge that transforms their individual and group practices at the micro level; and (2) the micro changes begin to impact organizational and social changes at the macro level (p. xxx). Choral teachers, school administrators, pre-service teachers, music publishers, professional music organizations, and those concerned with
gender issues may also glean useful insights from this collaborative inquiry.

One of the most powerful personal transformations that occurred during this research journey was moving from a novice inquirer to a collaborative inquiry specialist. After conducting a thorough review of the literature on male choral participation issues I realized the problem involved a web of perceived physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling barriers that could not be adequately addressed using a one-dimensional research approach. I selected collaborative inquiry because I felt this type of research fit my teaching style, personality, and I believed it was an approach that could result in tangible differences in my local context. To gain a basic comprehension of collaborative inquiry, I voraciously read and took notes on all the journal articles and books I could locate on this relatively new research inquiry. At this stage in the inquiry, I was a novice inquirer using collaborative inquiry as a tool to study and address the imbalances between adolescent males and females in secondary choral music.

**Delimitations**

The primary goal of this research collaboration was to strive to improve numerical imbalances between male and female singers at the middle and high school levels. We implemented various action-oriented strategies in our choral classrooms to improve male choral participation. Focusing our research on the recruitment, participation, and retention of adolescent males does not imply the collaborators involved in this study wished to overlook the struggles females face
or deny the opportunities they deserve (Harrison, 2001; O'Toole, 1998). It was the collaborators’ desire to continue to provide opportunities and recognition to both adolescent males and females proportionate with their abilities, talents, and dedication (Demorest, 2000).

The research instruments in this inquiry were the individual group members who participated in this collaboration (Heron, 1996). Using their own classrooms environments and choral students practitioners created actionable knowledge and new meaning (Yorks & Kasl, 2002; Yorks, 2005). The process was organic and free flowing (Bray, et al., 2000; Yorks, 2005). While much of the situated knowledge from this inquiry will likely be of value to others, generalizing (in the statistical sense) the experiences and learning from this collaborative inquiry would be imprudent and counterproductive.

**Organization of the Study**

This document is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction and overview of the study. Chapter Two includes an extensive literature review of perceived physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling barriers to male choral participation at the middle and high school levels. Chapter Three describes the methodology of collaborative inquiry. Chapter Four describes and compares the two districts, the four sites, and the five collaborators participating in this inquiry. Chapter Five includes reflections from our experiences with male choral participation. Chapter Six includes reflections from using collaborative
inquiry as an adult research strategy. Chapter Seven provides a conclusion and consideration of the inquiry’s implications for music education.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

At the middle and high school levels, an imbalance between adolescent males and females remains a persistent problem facing choral educators in the United States (Adcock, 1987; Adler, 2002; Castelli, 1986; Dunaway, 1987; Phillips, 1988; Swanson, 1984). Low levels of male participation in singing activities at schools reflects a much larger problem, which involves a complex web of delicate and interrelated threads (Adler, 2002; Collins, 2012; Harrison, 2007, 2009; Koza, 1994; Lucas, 2007, 2009; Svengalis, 1978; Williams, 2011). After a review and synthesis of pertinent literature, five salient themes illuminating this complex web emerged:

1. Choral music and public singing was once regarded as an acceptable and popular activity for males, but through centuries of socio-cultural change males began opting out of singing activities at school.

2. Three broad categories of perceived barriers to male choral participation surfaced from the literature (physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling).

3. The perceived psycho-socio barriers are the most difficult to eradicate or change because they are tied to socio-cultural values that are embedded in children over long periods of time.

4. No single factor accounts for the imbalance between adolescent males and females in singing activities at the middle and high school levels and
involves a complex web of delicate and interrelated threads.

5. No one-dimensional approach is likely to succeed in increasing male choral enrollment at the middle and high school levels.

Chapter Two is organized around the five themes that emerged from a review of relevant literature.

**Once Acceptable and Popular**

Two seminal articles (Gates, 1989; Koza, 1993) shed light on the historical perspectives and social attitudes regarding male and female choral participation and public singing in the United States. In 1989, Gates compared sex-related differences in period writings from colonial America to public singing data from the 1980s. Koza (1993) identified sex-related references in the first ten volumes (1914–1924) of the *Music Supervisors’ Journal*. Additional books, journal articles, and research data from dissertations are used alongside these two seminal articles to fill chronological gaps on public singing and choral music participation from colonial America to the twenty-first century.

**Singing an Acceptable and Popular Activity for Males**

Choral music and public singing was once regarded as an acceptable and popular activity for males. Gates (1989) described an inversion in public singing leadership taking place between the sexes from Boston in the early eighteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century throughout the United States.
**Colonial America (ca. 1600–1780).** In colonial America singing was perceived as an acceptable socio-cultural activity as men unabashedly sang in public (e.g., taverns, fraternal societies, church congregations). Men were also identified during this period as music teachers, singing school leaders, music literacy proponents, and tune book publishers. Gates (1989) concluded that men dominated public singing activities, and from their exclusion in the historical literature women and children were apparently not involved.

Gates’s (1989) analysis was based on a population of 12,000 inhabitants in the Boston area during the 1720s and did not represent the total population of colonial America. Additionally, Gates compared public singing activities during the colonial period to choral music data throughout the United States in the 1980s. Since most researchers and scholars reporting on male choral participation use Gates’s (1989) article as a fundamental part of their literature review, it is important to note that Gates’s comparison of public singing and choral music may not accurately represent the same measure of singing activity in the United States.

Another picture that emerged from the historical literature showed a decline in music literacy and aesthetically pleasing musical and singing practices (Crawford, 2001b; Eaklor, 1982). In many colonial period writings men were criticized for their crude and disorderly singing practices (Birge, 1928; Chase, 1987; Hitchcock, 2000). In response to the desperate state of singing in colonial America the intellectual and religious elite in Boston steered their community
(men, women, children) towards newly formed singing schools. The purpose of these schools was to teach music literacy and provide vocal training (Crawford, 2001a; Gates, 1989, 1990; Keene, 1982).

**Singing schools.** Singing schools were established throughout New England by itinerant singing masters and were typically held in churches, which were often the centers of social and religious life (Birge, 1989). Trained singers in New England gravitated towards each other forming church choirs, and were eventually given opportunities to sing separately from the congregation (Eaklor, 1982). Special seating and recognition was typically provided as these new church choirs performed music that was more elaborate and challenging than that for the congregation at large (Birge, 1928). Males, who once dominated public singing, began to relinquish their worship singing responsibilities to women and children (Eaklor, 1982).

**Singing societies.** The most famous singing society, the Boston Handel and Haydn Society, was formed in 1815 (Birge, 1928). At the inaugural performance of the Boston Handel and Haydn Society, 90 males and 10 females sang in the choir (Mark & Gary, 2007). During the early nineteenth century these predominantly all-male singing societies achieved rapid growth in metropolitan cities (Collins, 1993). In the mid-nineteenth century German refugees fled Europe and immigrated to the United States establishing male singing societies called Männerchor groups (Thomas, 1962). Founded in 1866, the Mendelssohn Glee Club is the oldest existing American singing society for amateur male voices.
(Jones, 2008). Singing societies reached their height in the 1920s, gradually declined during the Great Depression, and then regained their popularity after World War II as soldiers returned home (Thomas, 1962).

**Boys’ choirs.** Throughout the nineteenth century boys typically sang the treble parts in all-male church choirs. Choral directors preferred the timbre and blend of pre-adolescent male voices to adult female voices (Stubbs, 1917). In 1830, Lowell Mason used a boys’ choir to demonstrate the advantages of music instruction during a speech given by William Woodbridge at the American Institute of Instruction in Boston (Mark & Gary, 2007). In the early twentieth century the professional boys’ choir movement was well underway with established choral groups all over the country like the Apollo Boys Choir, American Boys Choir, Texas Boys Choir, Tucson Boys Choir, Phoenix Boys Choir, Harlem Boys, Pennsylvania Boys Choir, and the California Boys Choir (Collins, 1993).

**Singing soldiers.** As men and boys freely expressed themselves in choral groups during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries soldiers were also engaged in singing activities during military duty (Birge, 1928). Soldiers were found to be enthusiastic about singing together during and after the Civil War (Jones, 2008; Marvel, 2011). During the last two years of the Civil War hymn singing filled union and confederate camps as soldiers sought safety in spiritual matters. Even on furloughs soldiers often gathered together and sang wartime ballads (Stone, 1941). During World War I (1914–1918), President Wilson
required singing activities to be a natural part of a soldier's formal military training (Chang, 2001). Soldiers enthusiastically sang during meals in mess halls, at chapel services, in their barracks, during informal gatherings, and on the march (Campbell, 1944).

Males Begin Opting Out of Singing Activities in School

A shift began to occur at the secondary level in public schools at the turn of the twentieth century as adolescent males began to opt out of singing activities. Barnes (1915) surveyed the preferences of students from three schools in Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut and reported adolescent boys selected music class as their least enjoyed course in school. Adolescent females filled the void left by adolescent males, leaving large numerical imbalances between sexes in most choral programs throughout the United States (Collins, 2006; Gates, 1989; Giddings, 1915; Williams, 2011).

The gendering of music. One reason for the decline in male choral participation was the perception that singing in school was a feminine activity. Koza (1990) examined views regarding music instruction in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* from 1830–1877. Although the views and opinions in *Godey’s* periodical only represented a minority of Americans, the magazine was widely read and very influential, exposing important underlying ideologies, beliefs, and values (Koza, 1990). The *Godey’s Lady’s Book* was marketed specifically to literate white middle class women from the Northeast part of the United States (Pattee, 1966).
In the *Godey’s Lady’s Book* musical training of boys was rarely mentioned and writers often described music instruction as a feminine or un-masculine activity. Music instruction was also viewed as an ornamental or peripheral component of the school curriculum (Koza, 1990). Music teaching was not considered a suitable vocation for women until the middle of the nineteenth century, so mothers typically gave informal music lessons to their children in their homes (Koza, 1990). The first wave of feminism in the United States occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century as women grew weary and unsatisfied by their domestic roles in the house and found personal freedoms organizing local music societies (Campbell, 2003).

Koza (1993) also examined period writings from the *Music Supervisors’ Journal* (1914–1924) to discover dominant discourses or socially constructed messages. One reoccurring theme was boys’ unwillingness to participate in singing groups at school because they perceived it to be a feminine, effeminate, or un-masculine activity. Koza (1993) used the term “missing males” (p. 212) to describe the numerical imbalance between adolescent males and females. She cited multiple authors who discussed the shortage of male singers in singing activities at school. Koza suggested the “missing males” problem was attributable to rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity, gender stereotypes, and a devaluation of anything feminine (Koza, 1990). While Koza’s articles do help to reveal gender-related issues for a specific time period and specific populations, they only provide a brief snapshot within the complete historical picture of male
and female choral participation in the United States.

**A socio-cultural shift.** A gradual socio-cultural shift occurred from approximately 1930 to 1980, as adolescent males began opting out of singing activities in school and large numbers of adolescent females began to fill that void (Gates, 1989). Swanson (1984) noted the lack of male singers and gender imbalances at the middle and high school levels in 1932. Viggiano (1941) declared that adolescent boys did not sing in school because society had promoted it as a feminine activity. Koza (1993) concluded that out of fear of being punished for their close association with a feminine activity, adolescent males began opting out of singing activities at school (Koza, 1993).

In 1984, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) reported a numerical balance by sex in secondary instrumental music classes, but females far outnumbered the males by a margin of 5 to 2 in choral music classes. Van Camp (1987, 1988a, 1988b), a choral expert and clinician, published a series of provocative articles in the *Choral Journal*. Subjective responses from members of the American Choral Directors Association (N=325) revealed that fewer men were singing during the period of 1983–1988 in secondary and higher education choirs (Van Camp, 1988a). During this same time period Gates (1989) declared, “Singing among American males has probably never been held in lower regard” (p. 37).

NASSP (1996) conducted a follow-up report to their 1984 survey and found that 22.5 percent of high school females and 9 percent of males
participated in high school choirs. Due to the limited information provided by the NASSP regarding research data (e.g., enrollment data, demographics of responding choral programs, types of choral ensembles, whether groups were curricular or extra-curricular) both national surveys are limited in their value to researchers and scholars.

Based on her experience as a choral director, clinician, and music educator, O'Toole (1998) noted a 3:1 ratio of females to males in middle and high school choral groups. Williams (2011) conducted a national survey of middle school and high school choral teachers (N=575) who were members of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME). According to data supplied by choral directors about their programs, the average percentage of males enrolled in middle and high school choir was slightly less than a 3:1 ratio of females to males. Williams suggested the trend of imbalances between adolescent females and males in secondary choral groups have remained fairly stable for the past two or three decades.

The problem of “missing males” is perplexing and disconcerting when the scholarly literature reveals that male choral participation and public singing has been an acceptable masculine activity in certain cultural, historical, and musical contexts (Hall, 2005). Demorest (2000b) identified that in cultures where male singing is the norm (e.g., South Africa, Pacific Islands, Fiji, Iceland, indigenous cultures of Australia), men and boys are enthusiastic and eager to sing. Additionally, while singing in school activities in the United States is often
perceived as a feminine or un-masculine activity, other popular forms of singing outside the contexts of school (e.g., rock and roll, popular music, jazz, lyrical boy bands, heavy metal singing) are perceived to be masculine activities (Beynon & Heywood, 2010; Green, 1997; Hanley, 1998; Harrison, Welch & Adler, 2012; Jarman-Ivens, 2007; Walser, 1993).

Scholars, researchers, and choral experts have suggested adolescent males may have opted out of singing activities in school because of a poor selection of choral repertoire by the classroom teacher (Ackerly, 2009; Adcock, 1987; Beery, 1996, 2009; Crocker, 2000; Freer, 2006; Kennedy, 2002; Tipps, 2003) and ineffective pedagogical practices (Barresi, 2000; Beynon & Heywood, 2010; Conrad, 1964; Freer & Buske, 2012; Patton, 2008; Phillips, 1988; Viggiano, 1941).

In January 2011, NAfME asked members to take a poll on the topic of TV Singing (www.nafme.org/v/chorus/tv-singing-what-you-think). One might assume, by recent popularity and success of television singing shows in the United States (e.g., Glee, American Idol, The Voice, X Factor, The Sing-Off) that choral programs around the country have benefited from the successes of these television singing shows and male choral participation has increased. Although these singing shows have received some of the highest ratings in the past decade, NAfME members who participated in the survey expressed negative impressions of these shows by a 2 to 1 margin.

Research addressing the gulf between what music educators expect in the
choral classroom versus what adolescent males seek and desire within a singing context is scant. The choral music teacher’s preferences of musical style and genre, rehearsal and performance practices, and overall value system with regards to singing, may be oppositional to what adolescent males may enjoy and demand inside and outside of the context of school.

In a NASSP (1996) survey, 4.2% of males and 3.4% of females reported they considered music as a future career or vocation. However, 62.8% of males and 72.3% of females reported music was an important hobby or interest. The results may suggest that although adolescent males and females value music outside of school they may not value the musical style or vocational relevance of musical activities in school (Allsup, 2003; Freer, 2010; Neill, 1998).

**Perceived Barriers to Male Choral Participation**

Three broad categories of perceived barriers to male choral participation surfaced from the literature (physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling). Below, each broad category will be identified and specific perceived barriers to male choral participation will be briefly highlighted.

**Physiological Issues**

The male adolescent voice change and the unique developmental, cognitive, and maturational differences between males and females are two physiological issues that may play a role in the decisions of adolescent males to
enroll in school singing activities at the middle and high school levels. Scholars have noted that choral directors can lose singers permanently from their programs if physiological differences between adolescent males and females are ignored (Killian, 1999; May & Williams, 1989; Nycz, 2008).

**The male adolescent voice change.** Researchers have noted the greatest perceived physiological barrier to male choral participation at the secondary level is the male adolescent voice change (Collins, 1999; Cooksey, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1978, 1999; Cooksey & Welch, 1998; Cooper, 1950; Demorest, 2000a; Hook, 2005; Kennedy, 2002; Killian, 1997, 1999; McKenzie, 1956; Phillips, 1988; Stupple, 2007; Tipps, 2003). The literature points to three plausible explanations why the male adolescent voice change is perceived as the greatest physiological barrier to male choral participation at the secondary level.

First, the male adolescent voice change is frequently viewed as a “problem” for middle and high school choral teachers (Adcock, 1987; Barresi, 2000; Conrad, 1964; Cooksey, 1977a, 1978; Cooper, 1950; Demorest, 2000b; Freer, 2007, 2008; Galvan, 1987; Groom, 1984; Harrison, 2004, 2007; Hoffer, 1991; Swanson, 1964; Van Camp, 1987; Viggiano, 1941; Williamson, 2000; White & White, 2001; Winslow, 1946). Choral teachers may view the male adolescent voice change as a “problem” because of the lack of teacher preparation and training at the college or university level (Adler, 2002; Gackle, 2006). Some music educators who work with adolescent singers approach middle school teaching with uncertainty, fear, and anxiety (Demorest, 2000a).
Rather than seeing the male adolescent voice change as a “problem,” choral teachers and students could embrace voice mutation and maturation as an exciting time of growth and rewarding challenge (Conrad, 1964; Crocker, 2000; Freer, 2006; Hoffer, 1991; Schenbeck & McClung, 2006; Williamson, 2000).

Second, the male adolescent voice change is complex, confusing, and controversial due to a lack of research-based data and a conflicting body of knowledge (Adcock, 1987; Adler, 1999; Barresi, 2000; Bowers, 2006; Cooksey, 1977a, 1977b; Cooksey & Welch, 1998; Cooper, 1950; Cooper & Wikstrom, 1962; Demorest & Clements, 2007; Freer, 2008; Friar, 1999; Groom, 1984; Leck, 2000). Due to the complexity of the various factors that cause the voice change (e.g., anatomical, biochemical, physiological changes), dealing with the male adolescent voice becomes extremely difficult (Cooksey, 1977c). The two contrasting voice theories (voice-break theory and the modern theory) added to the controversy and confusion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Weiss, 1950). Both theories were based on personal observation, opinion, and empirical and anecdotal evidence (Cooksey, 2000b). Most European voice teachers supported the traditional voice-break theory and they believed that male adolescent singers should rest their voices during mutation (Beynon & Heywood, 2010; Brodnitz, 1983; Brown, 1996; Chapman, 1989; Collins, 1981, 1982; Cooper, 1964; Friar, 1999; Garretson, 1998; Gustafson, 1956, 1965). Voice-break proponents typically used pre-adolescent boys in their choirs until their voices began to break or change (Cooper, 1964; Friar, 1999;
Garretson, 1998). Adolescent boys who began to show signs of the voice change were immediately replaced in the choir with younger singers and then forced to rest their voices until after the voice change (Swanson, 1964). Frequently adolescent males lost enthusiasm to sing during the resting period (Cooper, 1964). Modern voice change proponents, mostly American voice teachers in newly formed junior high schools, argued that male adolescent voices should be exercised and developed during the voice change (Collins, 2006). Those proponents claimed no harm would come to the male adolescent voice as long as proper guidance and training was administered (Cooksey, 1977a, 1988). By the middle of the twentieth century, most European and American voice teachers realized the benefits of training the male adolescent voice during mutation. Three modern voice pioneers (McKenzie, Cooper, and Swanson) emerged with unique plans for working with male singers during adolescence (Cooksey, 1977a). The conflicting body of knowledge and unresolved questions continue to create confusion and frustration for voice teachers and choral practitioners (Cooksey, 2000b).

Third, the voice change is unpredictable, unique, and variable. Hook (2005) discussed the enormous challenges middle school choral teachers face due to the variability and idiosyncrasies of the male adolescent voice change. Although the voice change is unpredictable and unique to every adolescent male all healthy adolescent males progress through the same stages of vocal development (Cooksey, 1977a; Moore, 1995; Rutkowski, 1984; Killian, 1999).
In 1977 and 1978, Cooksey published four groundbreaking articles in the *Choral Journal* to answer the unresolved questions about the male adolescent voice change and eliminate controversies and confusion in the classroom. Cooksey (1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1978) gathered empirical research from Cooper, Swanson, and McKenzie, along with practical information from his own teaching experience, and prevailing practices from other voice practitioners. He combined that information with scientific research from medical professionals, laryngologists, speech pathologists, and speech-voice scientists to clarify issues regarding the male adolescent voice change and mutation. Using interdisciplinary cooperation Cooksey established a credible, eclectic, and cohesive framework of concepts and tenets for the development, training, and cultivation of adolescent males during mutation (Cooksey, 1977a, 1977b, 2000a, 2000b). Cooksey wanted to provide reliable information to the choral music profession so there would be some degree of consensus between choral directors and voice teachers (Cooksey, 1977a). Cooksey continued to research with peers and edit his eclectic plan into the first decade of the twenty-first century (Cooksey, 1992, 2000a, 2000b; Cooksey, Beckett, and Wiseman, 1984, 1985; Cooksey & Welch, 1998).

Cooksey (1977c) developed, identified, and defined the five stages of voice change (mid-voice I, mid-voice II, mid-voice IIA, new baritone, emerging adult) and voice classification guidelines using five criteria: 1) total pitch range, 2) tessitura, the most comfortable singing pitch range, 3) vocal quality, the degree
of strain, noise, and breathiness within the voice, 4) register delineations or transitions, and 5) the average speaking fundamental frequency (ASFF). Other pertinent criteria for voice classification are vocal agility and flexibility (Baressi & Russell, 1984; Cooksey, 2000a; Cooper, 1953; Groom, 1984; Hook, 2005). Researchers and choral practitioners at the elementary and secondary levels have tested Cooksey’s eclectic plan for three decades and many have found it practical, clear, and reliable in addressing the needs of male adolescent singers (Friar, 1999; Gackle, 2006; Hook, 2005; Killian, 1996; Killian & Wayman, 2010; Rutkowski, 1985).

The male adolescent voice change is directly related to the onset of primary and secondary sexual development during puberty (Barresi & Bless, 1984; Cooksey, 1977a, 1977b, 2000b; Cooksey, Beckett, & Wiseman, 1984, 1985; Freer, 2008; Groom, 1984; Rutkowski, 1984, 1985; Swanson, 1959). Typically, most adolescent boys 11–15 years of age are struggling in some way with the voice change (Baressi & Russell, 1984; Cooper, 1953; Freer, 2008; Groom, 1979; Lee, 1980, McKenzie, 1956; Swanson, 1959). Adolescent males can begin mutation as early as 10 year old or as late as 16 years old (Killian, 1999). Between 15–18 years old the male adolescent voice continues to settle and the voice change tapers off (Cooksey, 1984). Research has also shown the male adolescent voice change is occurring earlier than Cooksey (2000a) noted (Kennedy, 2004; Killian & Wayman, 2010; Moore, 1995; Rutkowski, 1984).

Physiological changes of the male adolescent body include rapid growth in
height, weight, chest size, skeletal structure, facial and body hair, loss of body fat, and the lowering of speaking and singing voice one octave (Garretson, 1998; Killian & Wayman, 2010; Regelski, 1981; White & White, 2001). Physiological changes in the male adolescent vocal apparatus include the growth of the larynx (cartilages, tendons, and muscles), the vocal folds, and the Adam’s apple (Cooksey, 1977a, Killian & Wayman, 2010; Regelski, 1981; White & White, 2001).

Vocal characteristics during the male adolescent voice change include “breaks” or “cracks” in the speaking and singing voice due to the growth of the larynx (Kennedy, 2004). Transitions, lifts, or “passaggios” between registers are difficult to control and manage due to growth in the larynx (Freer, 2006). A deeper resonance is recognizable as the speaking and singing voice lowers and resonating cavities expand (Hook, 2005). Other characteristics include an increased physical effort and strain in the upper range, “sluggish” articulation, and loss of flexibility and agility (Hook, 2005). Huskiness, breathiness, loss of volume, and an inability to sing in tune are additional signs of vocal mutation (Cooper, 1953). Often these out-of-tune singers are labeled as “uncertain singers,” “monotones,” or “drones” (Freer, 2006; Hall, 2005).

The singing range contracts and later expands in the final stages of voice mutation. A “blank spot” may emerge in the middle of the singing range (Kennedy, 2004), and singers may be unable to produce vocal sound (Collins, 2006). The falsetto register emerges as the chest and head registers continue to
lower and settle (Cooksey, 1977b). Adolescent male voices progress through multiple cycles of growth and stabilization. During periods of stabilization the adolescent male may experience some confidence, only to move quickly into another stage of growth, change, and uncertainty (Cooksey, 1977c, 2000b).

**Differences between adolescent males and females.** Another possible explanation for the lack of male choral participation at the middle and high school levels is the physiological differences between adolescent males and females (e.g., cognitive, developmental, and maturational differences). Scholars have noted that adolescent males and females mature physically, emotionally, and cognitively at different times (Demorest & Clements, 2007; Freer, 2007; Patton, 2008; Trollinger, 1993/1994). Karma (1982) studied gender-related differences in students eight years old to adult and discovered girls were more musically and verbally talented while boys were better on spatial abilities and organized sound. Schmidt (1995) studied teacher feedback and found girls were more responsive to adult praise than word of praise from peers, whereas boys were more responsive to praise from peers than adults. Robertson (1991) found that males tended to discount teacher criticism more than females. According to Asmus (1986), females believed success and failure in music was associated with internal-stable attributions (ability and innate capabilities) while males attributed success and failure in music to internal-unstable attributions (effort and persistence).

Scholars and choral experts have suggested dividing the middle and high
school level singers into single-sex choirs to address their unique physiological, developmental, and maturational needs (Barham, 2001; Bazzy, 2010; Berry, 2009; Brinson, 1996; Carp, 2005; Collins, 1999; Demorest, 2000b; Freer, 1998, 2007; Giddings, 1930; Hook, 1998, 2005; Kennedy, 2004; Killian, 1999; Koza, 1993/1994; Miller, 1988; Nycz, 2008; Patton, 2008; Richardson, 1962; Roe, 1983, 1994; Skoog & Niederbrach, 1983; Swanson, 1960, 1961,1984; Sweet, 2010; White & White, 2001; Wisenall, 1930; Zemek, 2010). McClung (2006) reported 83% of masters teachers in his study believed single-sex choral groups offered teachers more opportunity to attend to the students’ specific needs (e.g., social, emotional, musical). Other perceived benefits of single-sex choirs include: improved camaraderie, the use of specific teaching strategies for males and females, decreased classroom management problems, a more socially relaxed and safe atmosphere, improved vocal experimentation and risk-taking, and the choral teacher could select vocal literature and texts that fit the specific needs and interests of the singers (McClung, 2006; Zemek, 2010).

Adolescent males and females have always been challenged with physiological and maturational issues (e.g., the voice change, developmental differences between the sexes), and yet imbalances between adolescent males and females have not always existed and do not exist in all cultures. Despite the extensive amount of information published on the perceived physiological barriers (e.g., prevailing practices, anecdotal data, personal observation, empirical data, scientific research), choral practitioners at the middle and high
school levels in the United States have continued to struggle with imbalances between adolescent males and females. While perceived physiological barriers may carry some influence on male choral participation there must be other perceived barriers that inhibit adolescent males from singing at the middle and high school levels.

**Psycho-Social Issues May be Difficult to Change**

The psychological and sociological issues adolescent males face merge to present one of the most challenging and important areas of male choral participation at the secondary level (Beynon & Heywood, 2010). Perceived psycho-social barriers to male choral participation may be very difficult to eradicate or change because they are tied to socio-cultural values that are embedded in children over long periods of time (Freer, 2010a; Gates, 1989; Koza, 1990).

**Stereotypes and a rigid gender system.** Researchers and scholars suggested that sex stereotypes are culturally defined and enforced (Castelli, 1986; Green, 1997; Hall, 2005; Hanley, 1998; Harrison, 2004; Koza, 1993, 1994; Szabo, 1999; Trollinger, 1993/1994; Walker, 2007; Wilson, 2010). Even before they enter public school, children display a broad concept of how their gender is expected to perform (Sherban, 1995). Gilligan (1982) determined that gender identity is formed around the age of three for boys and girls, while Hall (2005) reported gender stereotypes were evident in five-year old boys.
In Western society masculinity and femininity are promoted as opposite polarities and males and females are expected to conform to one or the other (Davies, 1989). Traditional notions of masculinity have been defined as the antithesis of femininity (Ashley, 2008; Connell, 1989, 2005). According to Koza (1993/1994), men in Western society are valued and perceived to be strong, powerful, and good. However, women or non-masculine males are devalued and perceived to be weak, powerless, and the “undesirable other” (p. 50). One of the greatest challenges in education is the way gender is constructed and enforced in Western society (Jordan, 1995).

The gendering of music. Singing in school is often perceived to be a feminine, effeminate, or un-masculine activity (Adcock, 1987; Beynon & Heywood, 2010; Gehrken, 1935; Koza, 1993, 1993/1994; Lucas, 2007; Viggiano, 1941) and an inappropriate activity for adolescent males (Castelli, 1986; Freer, 2006; Hall, 2005; Koza, 1990, 1993, 1993/1994; Van Camp, 1988b; Winslow, 1946). The choral director’s job is also perceived as a feminine profession (Fortney, Boyle, & DeGarbo, 1993; Gates, 1989; Harrison, 2004) and choral teachers at the elementary and secondary levels are mostly female (Van Camp, 1988b). Researchers and scholars acknowledged the lack of male role models in choral music (Demorest, 2000b; Freer, 2007; Van Camp, 1988b; White & White, 2001; Winslow, 1946).

Young males begin to identify and value the activities and opinions of male role models and their peers (Phillips, 1988; White & White, 2001). The
adolescent male may inwardly enjoy singing in school, but if his peer group believes singing is not a masculine activity in school the adolescent male may opt out (White & White, 2001). According to Harrison (2004), gender stereotypes place pressure on males and discourage them from participating in vocal music. Media also impacts gender boundaries and stereotypes (Adler, 2002; Freer, 2007; Walker, 2007) and frequently portrays males who participate in choral music with derogatory connotations (Van Camp, 1987, 1988b).

**Harassment and bullying.** Adolescent males who cross gender boundaries and participate in gender incongruent behaviors are punished for socially undesirable behaviors (Bem, 1974; Hall, 2005; McCreary, 1994). According to England (1992), society tends to respond more negatively to male gender role transgressions than female gender role transgressions. Some boys who participate in singing activities at school risk being verbally and physically bullied by peers, teachers, coaches, and even family members (Ackerly, 2009; Adler, 2001; Connell, 2005; Green, 1997; Hanley, 1998; Harrison, 2003, 2004, 2007; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Martino, 1999; Phillips, 1996; Plummer, 1999; Szabo, 1999; Viggiano, 1941; Zemek, 2010).

Researchers and scholars have noted boys’ resistance to singing in school might be based on homophobia (Ackerly, 2009; Adler, 2001; Beynon & Heywood, 2010; O’Toole, 1998; White & White, 2001). Homophobia is the irrational fear of or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals (Green, 1997; Harrison, 2003, 2005, 2007). According to Adler (2002), when males
participate in the gender incongruent activity of singing, non-singing males perceive their engagement in singing as an indicator of homosexuality. Homophobic labels like “sissy,” “gay,” and “faggot” are used to police and curtail gender incongruent behaviors (Adler, 2001; Harrison, 2004, 2005, 2012; Lucas, 2007; Olweus, 2006; Rigby, 2000; Sweet, 2010; Svengalis, 1978). Harrison (2007) found that most of this type of verbal harassment occurred during fifth and sixth grades.

A viable vocation. The literature revealed that singing in school is perceived as a feminine activity and rarely viewed by adolescent males as a suitable career pursuit (Chase, 1987; Demorest, 2000b; Koza, 1990; Tipps, 2003). Adolescent males may also be encouraged by authoritative figures (e.g., parents, counselors, teachers) to focus on relevant vocational courses rather than enroll in elective music courses (Castelli, 1986; Phillips, 1988). Van Camp (1988b) posited that adolescent males typically see the income of a music teacher as a second income in the family and not financially feasible.

Schooling Issues

Choral experts and researchers have noted a wide spectrum of perceived schooling issues that may discourage adolescent males from singing at the middle and high school levels. For example, the emphasis placed on sports may inhibit some adolescent males from participating in choral music at school (Freer, 2007; Green, 1997; Hall, 2005; Siebenaler, 2006; Tipps, 2003). Harrison (2005)
found that music activities always came second to sports. In Harrison’s (2007) study two adolescent males summed up their relationship between music activities and sports in school. Frederick declared, “Music was not looked upon favorably when it clashed with sports-related events” (p. 276). Brian concluded, “Basically you either did sports, which is very accepted, supported, and praised, or you did music, very uncool, and nerdish” (p. 276).

**Orchestras and bands.** One plausible explanation adolescent males began to withdraw from singing activities in school during the first half of the twentieth century could be attributed to the formation of orchestras and bands in the curriculum. Music classes and choirs were typically the only music subject offered in public schools in the nineteenth century (Birge, 1928; Mark & Gary, 2007), although string orchestras were implemented in some public schools by the late nineteenth century (Keene, 1982). By the turn of the twentieth century, small town bands sparked an interest in adding extra-curricular bands to the public schools (Birge, 1928). With lower production costs of instruments, and patriotism after World War I, bands quickly received popularity in the public school curriculum by the early 1920s (Mark & Gary, 2007). Keene (1982) declared, “The meteoric rise of instrumental music in the public schools eclipsed choral singing” (p. 305). This explanation, however, like many others, does not adequately account for the disparity between male and female participation in instrumental versus choral music.
Lack of qualified teachers. Scholars, researchers, and choral experts have frequently blamed the loss of adolescent males in secondary choral programs on: (1) poor pedagogical and instructional practices by the classroom teacher (Barresi, 2000; Beynon and Heywood, 2010; Conrad, 1964; Freer and Buske, 2012; Koza, 1993; Patton, 2008; Phillips, 1988; Viggiano, 1941); (2) teachers failing to understanding the vocal changes of adolescent males during mutation (Freer, 2008; Garretson, 1998; Hoffer, 1991; Koza, 1993; McKenzie, 1956; Wisenall, 1930); (3) a lack of coordination and collaboration between elementary, middle school, and secondary school music teachers (Van Camp, 1988b); and (4) a lack of energy and enthusiasm displayed by the classroom music teacher (Ball, 1952; Barresi, 2000; Beynon & Heywood, 2010; Conrad, 1964; Hoffer, 1991; Rodgers, 1926; Van Camp, 1987).

The poor choice of music literature was also noted as a possible reason adolescent males withdrew from singing in school (Ackerly, 2009; Adcock, 1987; Beery, 1996, 2009; Conrad, 1964; Crocker, 2000; Freer, 2006, 2007; Hoffer, 1991; Kennedy, 2002; Phillips, 1988; Tipps, 2003; Viggiano, 1941). The choice of musical literature may contribute to negative attitudes towards singing if music is chosen without regard to age and grade appropriateness (Mizener, 1993). Music experts also challenged choral directors to choose a wide variety of styles of repertoire with careful consideration to quality (Ackerly, 2009; Crocker, 2000; Kennedy, 2002; Phillips, 1988; Van Camp, 1987, 1988a). As Freer (2007) concluded, “A boy faced with choral repertoire he doesn’t like, a changing voice
he doesn’t understand, and instruction he finds boring will become a boy who proclaims he hates school music and disengages from choral music forever” (p. 32).

**Constraints in the schedule.** School scheduling is also perceived as a barrier to male choral participation (Adcock, 1987; Freer, 2007; Kourajian, 1982; Lucas, 2007; Rodgers, 1926; Tipps, 2003; Van Camp, 1987, 1988b). Added graduation requirements, advanced placement, college preparatory, and dual-credit classes were mentioned as deterrents to male choral participation (Rodgers, 1926; Van Camp, 1988b).

**No Single Factor Accounts for the Problem**

The perceived schooling barriers listed in the literature may bear some credence to male choral participation at the middle and high school levels. However, those same perceived barriers would also inhibit adolescent females in the same manner, and yet adolescent females have continued in large numbers to remain engaged in singing activities at school. Although scholars, researchers, and choral practitioners have frequently identified specific perceived barriers to male choral participation in the literature (e.g., male adolescent voice change, choral music is considered a feminine pursuit, the lack of role models, an emphasis on sports, the lack of qualified choral teachers), the wide spectrum of literature suggests that no single factor accounts for the numerical imbalances in choral programs at the secondary level (Lucas, 2007; Williams, 2011).
The “missing males” problem is more complicated than a reduction of males in choral programs at the secondary level, it is a complex web of interrelated threads involving stereotypes, gender and identity formation, maturation issues (physical, vocal, emotional, developmental, and cognitive), and psycho-social decisions made within a gendered and hierarchical context of schooling (Adler, 2002; Harrison, 2007; Koza, 1994; Lucas, 2009; Svengalis, 1978). Over the past century, a broad spectrum of research studies have been conducted to study, explain, and resolve the “missing males” problem in choral programs at the secondary level. Researchers and scholars have sought to understand the exodus of adolescent males from choral programs at the middle and high school levels by using contrasting methods of research and inquiry.

- Traditional survey research was used to gather and assess the opinions, perceptions, and thoughts of practitioners and participants (Castelli, 1986; Clements, 2002; Galvan, 1987; Green, 1993; Hook, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Karr, 1988; Kaufman, 2006; Keating, 2004; Lucas, 2007, 2011; Mizener, 1993; Phillips, 2003; NASSP, 1983, 1996; Pogonowski, 1985; Schmidt, 1995; Siebenaler, 2006; Svengalis, 1978; Swanson, 1960; Russell, 2001; Usher, 2005; Van Camp, 1988; Williams, 2011).
- Historical research was used to examine past events and provide a plausible interpretation why these events occurred (Eaklor, 1982; Freer, 2008; Gates, 1989; Koza, 1990, 1993, 1994).
• Other researchers used case studies, focusing on specific cultures or
groups to gain additional insights (Adler, 2002; Ramsey, 2013; Sweet,
2010).

• Mixed methods researchers examined this issue from multiple vantage
points (Sweet, 2003, 2008; Wilson, 2010).

• Gender researchers considered equity issues (Adler, 2002; Freer, 2007;

• Sex-stereotypes in music (Abeles & Porter, 1978; Griswold & Chroback,
1981; Delzell & Leppla, 1992; Fortney, Boyle & Carbo, 1993; Hargreaves,

• Narrative-based research was employed to understand the lives of others
through stories (Freer, 2006; Kennedy, 2002, 2004; O'Toole, 2005).

**Need for a Multi-dimensional Approach**

Clearly, male choral participation is a complex phenomenon that has
received attention in a variety of ways. Based on my examination of the literature,
I felt that a different approach to the problem was called for, one that sought to
embrace the complexity of the problem while simultaneously striving to make a
positive difference in the lives of those involved in the study. In Chapter Three,
the methods and procedures used in this collaborative inquiry are described in
detail.
Chapter Three
Methodology

The chapter is organized to cover the following areas: limitations and growing dissatisfaction with traditional research; new trends in educational research; collaborative inquiry and its five broad characteristics; the four-fold extended epistemology of knowing; and a description of the six stages of the collaborative inquiry undertaken in this study.

Limitations of Traditional Research

In the last decades of the twentieth century a growing dissatisfaction developed within some quarters of traditional research (Bray et al., 2000). Seven frequently cited criticisms of traditional educational research drawn from the literature follow below:

1. There is a strict separation between researchers who are producers of knowledge and subjects who are consumers of knowledge (Bray et al., 2000; Gibbons et al., 1994; Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006; Rynes et al., 2002).

2. Researchers design and control the research (Argyris, 1970; Bray et al., 2000; Heron, 1996; Ospina et al., 2008; Whyte, 1991).

3. Participants are often treated as passive subjects rather than active agents (Heron, 1999; Heron & Reason, 2006).
4. Researchers typically have a monopoly on knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Reason, 1999).

5. Relevant knowledge rarely passes from researchers to practitioners (Bartel & Radocy, 2002; Bray et al., 2000; Coles & Knowles, 2000; Heron & Reason, 2006; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Ospina et al., 2008).

6. Researchers often present knowledge in venues that are inaccessible to practitioners (Adler, 2002; Heron & Reason, 2006).

7. Knowledge can be perceived as invalid since it is defined apart from the knower (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Heron, 1996).

Those who grew weary and dissatisfied with traditional educational research began to pursue other forms of research (e.g., action research, participative action research, appreciative inquiry, cooperative inquiry, and collaborative inquiry). Their goal was to encourage democratic collaboration between peers, colleagues, and practitioners in the field (Bray et al., 2000; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Heron, 1996; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

**New Trends in Educational Research**

Near the end of the twentieth century a shift occurred in educational research where researchers joined with practitioners in the field to confront troubling issues (Coles & Knowles, 2000). Teachers began to take ownership of research conducted in their classrooms (Adler, 2002; Lichtman, 2006; Ospina et al., 2008; Yorks, 2005). Gay et al. (2006) described three emerging trends in
educational research: (1) an increased emphasis on teacher reflection, teacher research, action research, and self-study; (2) an emphasis on teacher knowledge; and (3) empowering teacher voices in the educational research process through collaboration. Reason and Rowan (1981) encouraged researchers to work collaboratively with practitioners in the field developing knowledge as a catalyst for change.

Throughout this chapter I use a dual font system. Alternating between two fonts differentiates the methods and procedures described in the literature and the methods and procedures our inquiry group used during this collaborative inquiry.

**Why Collaborative Inquiry?**

Van Camp (1987) and Harrison (2007) challenged researchers and practitioners to collaborate and solve pressing issues in choral music education. After listening to my story about male choral participation, and sensing the passion I had working with other practitioners, my dissertation supervisor challenged me to read a book on collaborative inquiry (Bray et al., 2000). I remember reading the book and feeling energized by the thought of conducting research with like-minded practitioners. I told my dissertation supervision, “I want to be involved in a research project that makes a difference for teachers in the classroom. I’m not really interested in writing a dissertation that sits on the shelf and collects dust.”

I was curious to learn if I had the personal qualities that matched this type of research. Bray et al. (2000) noted that collaborative inquirers should possess: dedication, intellectual courage, a high personal integrity, and limitless energy. Kasl (in Bray et al., 2000) suggested the
inquirer should have a desire to experiment, be able to tolerate ambiguity, and have a sense of humor and inexhaustible curiosity. I felt the descriptions of a collaborative inquirer matched my personal qualities, passions, and work ethic.

My dissertation supervisor discussed with me important features of collaborative inquiry. He discussed the time commitment for this type of research. He noted a collaborative researcher should be a person who interacts well with others. He warned that choosing collaborative research could be a potentially controversial dissertation project. Collaborative inquiry resists conventional thinking about how research should be practiced (Borthwick, 2001; Bray et al., 2000; Fullen, 1993). My supervisor spoke candidly regarding the obstacles I would face if I chose collaborative research. I responded, “I am under no time constraints for finishing my degree. I want to pursue a research project that is practical and transformative.”

The characteristics of collaborative inquiry were compelling to me and I became energized by the opportunity (Yorks, 1995). Reading a quote by Kasl solidified my final decision to initiate, facilitate, and participate in a collaborative inquiry group. According to Kasl (quoted in Bray et al., 2000), “Inquirers who choose to participate in collaborative research will embark on a learning adventure that has the potential for being among their most energizing and significant learning experiences” (p. viii). I immediately secured as many resources as I could to study and learn about this new paradigm in research.

**Collaborative Inquiry**

Bray et al. (2000) defined collaborative inquiry as “a process consisting of repeated cycles of action and reflection through which a group of peers strives to
answer a question of importance to them” (p. 6). Collaborative inquiry is part of a larger family of research methodologies that are experience-based and action-oriented (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Collaborative inquiry was inspired by Heron’s (1981, 1985, 1988, 1992, 1996) contribution to co-operative inquiry, and Heron, Reason, and Rowan’s work with participatory human inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason, 1988b, 1994b; Reason & Heron, 1999; Reason & Rowan, 1981). This type of inquiry was conceived to counter academia’s monopoly over knowledge production (Brooks & Watkins, 1994; Reason, 1999). The quote by Heron and Reason (2006) that became the cornerstone of my inquiry was, “This type of inquiry is research with people rather than traditional research on people, about people, or for people” (p. 144).

**Five Broad Characteristics of Collaborative Inquiry**

Defining features of collaborative inquiry can be found in the DNA of other qualitative, participatory, and action-based research methods (Bray et al., 2000). Five broad characteristics of collaborative inquiry are discussed in the relevant literature:

First, the separation between researcher and subject disappears (Yorks, 2005; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). In a collaborative inquiry, group members have a dual role; co-researchers during the reflection phases and co-subjects during the action phases (Bray et al., 2000; Elden & Chisholm, 1993; Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006; Ospina et al., 2008).
Second, collaborative inquiry is a democratic process whereby group members produce actionable knowledge and new meaning (Bray et al., 2000; Craddock & Reid, 1993; Fine, 1992; Grundy & Kemmis, 1982; McTaggart, 1991; Ospina et al., 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Yorks, 2005; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Group members are as fully involved as possible in all research decisions: methodology; design of the research; procedures; management of the research; and interpretations (Heron, 1996).

Third, collaborative inquiry is transformational (Heron, 1996; Yorks, 2005). According to Bray et al. (2000) and Reason (1999), the most fundamental validity criterion is the change produced in inquiry group members and how they function in their settings.

Fourth, the form and design of a collaborative inquiry is emergent and continuously adopted and shaped by group members (Bray et al., 2000; Heron, 1996; Ospina et al., 2008; Van Stralen, 2002; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

Fifth, researchers are self-directing persons with insider knowledge (Bannister, 2011; Bray et al., 2000; Reason, 1976; Usher, 1997; Yorks, 2005). Insider knowledge is essential to collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data (Roberts, 1994). Heron (1996) noted group members use their own experiences and ground those experiences into new knowledge.
Producers of New Knowledge and Meaning

Our collaborative inquiry group frequently wrestled with these five defining features, especially during the first few months of the inquiry. We were all products of the traditional hierarchical educational system. Teachers received knowledge from experts (e.g., books, papers, classes, seminars, and conventions), and passed that knowledge to students.

Group members were comfortable with my roles as initiator and facilitator; these roles mirrored leadership positions in the traditional system. However, when I began to share responsibility and leadership with group members, asking them to step into the role of co-inquirer, they began to express great discomfort and confusion. Collaborative inquiry forced a paradigm shift in the way we received new knowledge and meaning. We acknowledged it was easier to be intermediaries of knowledge than producers of new knowledge and meaning. One member of the group chuckled and said, “It’s like we’re having to relearn how we learn.”

Four-Fold Extended Epistemology of Knowing

Collaborative inquiry relies on a four-fold extended epistemology of knowledge (experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical knowing). Typically, everyone tacitly uses these four ways of knowing in everyday life. But in collaborative inquiry we extend the normal process of creating knowledge by moving one step further, becoming more intentional and making certain the four ways of knowing are congruent with each other through cycles of action and reflection (Bradbury & Reason, 2008; Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006, 2008; Reason, 2006; Reason & Torbert, 2001). In the traditional research model,
propositional knowing is the highest form of knowing (Heron, 1999). Heron (1996) altered the traditional model, switching propositional knowing and practical knowing. According to Heron (1996), placing practical knowing at the top of the pyramid can pose a challenge for university researchers who favor propositional outcomes.

![Pyramid of Fourfold Knowing](image)

**Figure 1.** The pyramid of fourfold knowing (from Heron, 1996)

Heron and Reason (2006) suggested integrating the four forms of knowing through the use of action and reflection cycles. Their four ways of knowing, described below, work together as learners engage their whole selves in making new meaning from experience (Heron & Reason, 1997, 2001). The four forms of knowing work interdependently, complementing one another and providing pathways into holistic knowing (Reason, 2002, 2008; Van Stralen, 2002; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

**Experiential knowing.** Heron (1996) proposed that experiential knowing is at the base of the pyramid, supporting the other forms of knowing. Experiential knowing is achieved through a direct, face-to-face meeting or encounter with a
place, person, or thing and is achieved through empathy and/or attunement, a kind of in-depth knowing that is almost impossible to put into words (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006).

**Presentational knowing.** Presentational knowing uses the aesthetic, creative, and expressive arts (e.g., artwork, graphics, music, drama, and poetry) to communicate an idea or experience (Heron & Reason, 2006). Presentational knowing grows out of experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expression through story, drawing, sculpture, and movement and dance (Reason & Hawkins, 1988). Inquirers typically use presentational knowing to express experience from the action phases of the inquiry (Heron, 1996). Story and metaphor are frequently used to clarify actions implemented in the group member's environment (Bray et al., 2000).

**Propositional knowing.** Propositional knowing takes the form of language, like words, concepts, and statements (Heron, 1996, p. 35). Bradbury and Reason (2008) asserted that the only skill that can be demonstrated conclusively by writing a research report is the skill involved in writing that report. Hence, published reports become entirely secondary to the group members’ demonstration of competence in action (Heron & Reason, 2006). Written reports simply provide supporting program notes to practical knowledge (Heron, 1996).

**Practical knowing.** Practical knowing is the ability to exercise or demonstrate a skill, and to make changes through actions (Heron, 1996). Heron
and Reason (2006) submitted that practical knowing “consummates” the other forms of knowing (p. 145).

The Four Kinds of Knowing as they Worked in This Study

The four kinds of knowing (experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical) worked interdependently throughout the entire collaborative process creating a subjective-objective reality for our inquiry group (Heron, 1992, 1996). However, in the beginning of the inquiry, the concept of the four-fold epistemology of knowing was intimidating and overwhelming to us. We came to realize the four phases of knowing already took place in our daily routines; we were unaccustomed to consciously isolating each form of knowing.

For example, propositional knowing occurred weeks before our induction meeting. As initiator, I summarized the broad characteristics of collaborative inquiry and sent each practitioner an email copy to peruse before our initial meeting. The written document helped inform each practitioner about basic tenets of this type of research. Experiential and presentational knowing occurred during our first meeting together. Practitioners sat around the table and shared pertinent information about their programs and experiences in the classroom. We empathized and connected with each other as individuals used stories, metaphors, illustrations, and drawings on paper. Practical knowing took place in our individual classrooms as we used action-oriented strategies to encourage male choral participation in each of our choral programs. The cycle continued as we each drafted field notes from action stages and then joined together to reflect on our experiences in the classroom.
Six Stages of Our Collaborative Inquiry Process

In comparison to traditional research, prescribing definitive steps or guidelines is antithetical to the nature of collaborative inquiry and information should only guide without restriction (Bray et al., 2000). Heron (1996) emphasized the highly individualized nature of collaborative inquiry. Ospina et al. (2008) noted three stages in their particular inquiry while both Heron (1996) and Reason (2008) described four stages. Tuckman and Jensen (1977) went further, describing five stages in small-group development structure (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning). During our collaboration we experienced six unique stages. The following provides a description of each stage, along with the roles and tasks we assumed during our collaborative journey.

Stage One: Initiating a Collaborative Inquiry Group

A collaborative inquiry is usually initiated by a person who experiences discomfort, imbalance, or unrest in an aspect of their life and wishes to explore this sense of frustration (Bray et al., 2000; Heron, 1996; Rowan, 1981; Van Stralen, 2002; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

Ironically, our collaborative process began from a positive teaching experience and not from a negative disquiet or discomfort. During a five-year period (2003–2008), over thirty male singers were selected for All-State Choir from my high school choral program. In 2008, I was asked to lead a session on “Male Issues in American Choral Music” at our annual state music educators’ conference. I came to realize the male choral participation I had achieved in my program was not
the typical situation. I began to wonder, “What action-oriented strategies was I using that encouraged male choir participation?” and “How can I help other choral practitioners who are struggling with male choral participation at the middle and high school levels?”

The initiator. The initiator extends an invitation to a cohort of peers, with similar interests, who might be willing to pursue the topic (Reason, 2008; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Collaborative inquiry groups can be initiated internally or externally (Heron, 1996). Internally initiated, or peer-directed groups, are initiated by a person who works within a system or environment. Heron (1996) noted that peer-directed groups are rare because initiators lack prior experience and/or training in the methodology. Externally initiated groups are most common and initiated by an outside researcher who has some experience with the methodology. Group members are fully involved in the action phases (co-subjects) and fully involved in the reflection phases (co-researchers). However, the outside initiating researcher is only partially involved in the action phases, since he or she is not a member of the workplace or environment (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1985; Heron, 1996; Reason, 1988).

Recruiting participants. The initiator grounds the original question in his or her experience and is passionate about the topic (Heron, 1996; Reason, 2008). Before recruiting participants the question is only broadly stated by the initiator. The initiator recruits potential participants who have demonstrated an interest in the topic (Bray et al., 2000). During the first sessions the group collectively forms a more focused version of the question (Heron, 1996).
Selecting participants who are interested in the topic. I networked and developed friendships with several middle and high school choral teachers before the inquiry. I selected lead choral teachers who might be interested in the topic of male choral participation. I also considered the practitioner’s training, experience in the classroom, passion, and eagerness to learn (Bray et al., 2000). My goal was to keep the number of participants small (five to eight members) due to time constraints of the practitioners, scheduling issues, and the efficiency of the group (Bray et al., 2000; Reason, 2008).

In the beginning, I planned to initiate and facilitate one collaborative group. After reading pertinent literature on the subject, and discussing the issue with my dissertation advisor, I decided to initiate two separate groups. I was reasonably confident the second group would add diversity and help validate outcomes. By email, I contacted the first two lead teachers on my list and explained the basic tenets of collaborative inquiry and a possible time commitment for the inquiry (Reason, 2002). I suggested the two lead choral teachers respond to my invitation by email within two weeks. I wanted to make sure their commitment was voluntary, without pressure or obligation (Reason, 2008).

Motivation for practitioners. Bray et al. (2000) cited three possible motivations for practitioners to join a collaborative inquiry: (1) some are curious about the research process and find it challenging to embrace new approaches; (2) some have a personal commitment and high regard for the initiator’s leadership abilities; and (3) others have a desire to work collectively with others. David (2008) and Yorks and Kasl (2002) suggested educators are attracted to an environment where they can work collaboratively on a topic of mutual concern.
Both lead choral directors enthusiastically agreed to participate in the collaborative inquiry. We determined they would communicate with their teaching partners to see if they were also willing to participate. All five practitioners (two in one district and three in another) agreed to participate in the inquiry. The districts were 100 miles apart with middle and high school choral programs that shared many similarities. None of the practitioners at district one or district two had a history of working together.

The settings. Bray et al. (2000) observed that the setting of the inquiry (e.g., physical environment, historical background, social values, and key leadership) is critical to the success or failure of the collaboration. At both districts, the middle school was housed in a separate facility near the high school location. The lead choral teacher at site one traveled to the junior high school, accompanied the choirs at the piano, helped lead sectionals, and supported the junior high choral teacher. After two classes, the lead choral teacher traveled back to the high school and joined another music teacher/accompanist for the rest of the day. At the second district, both the lead choral teacher and his teaching partner traveled to the middle school location to teach three middle school choirs. They both traveled back to the high school location for the rest of the day. Action phases of the inquiry occurred in classrooms, practice rooms, and auditoriums. Reflection phases occurred before and after school, in-between classes, in offices, hallways, teacher lunchrooms/workrooms, and occasionally at local restaurants.

Obtaining consent. Support is gained by establishing trustworthy relationships with prospective group members and then with administration (Bray et al., 2000; Gay et al., 2006; Kasl & Yorks, 2010). The initiator should work carefully with administrators and “gatekeepers” to obtain support and establish
parameters for the inquiry (Reason, 2002). Permission from key decision-makers must be achieved without coercion or projections regarding outcomes of the inquiry, which compromise the validity of the inquiry (Bray et al., 2000).

For our collaborative inquiry, it was essential we received permission and support from two district superintendents and four principals (one junior high school, one middle school, and two high schools). The lead teacher at both districts suggested they would work to gain initial permission and support from key decision-makers (June–July 2010). Once initial permission was received, I sent an official letter to the five practitioners, two superintendents, and four principals outlining our basic inquiry plan and thanking them in advance for their willingness to participate.

Ethical considerations. Safeguards and ethical issues should be considered to minimize the risks to the participants (Gay et al., 2006). Bray et al. (2000) suggested that administrators, principals, and participants enter the research voluntarily, understand the nature of the study, and be informed of any possible dangers that may rise from the inquiry. Pseudonyms should be used throughout the entire process to protect the participants, districts, and research process.

After permission was granted, I emailed prospective group members a few documents about the collaborative inquiry process. It was my hope the participants would become familiar with basic principles of collaborative inquiry before the induction meeting. I communicated with the participants multiple times by phone and email until we reached an agreeable date, time, and location for the induction meetings. Both teaching-teams agreed to meet at a local restaurant in
early August, 2010. Both locations provided psychological space away from their regular work environment (Bray et al., 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

**Stage Two: Establishing Conditions for Collaboration**

The second stage of the inquiry involves initiation of group members into the methodology. In the beginning stages of the inquiry the initiator walks a fine line as he or she provides structure, direction, and leadership (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006; Ospina et al., 2008). Heron (1999) warned that participants might become dependent on or resistant to the initiator if too much control and direction is provided in the early stages of the collaboration.

**Induction meeting.** The initiator should create an emotionally safe atmosphere during the induction meeting (Bray et al., 2000; Reason, 1988, 2008). The purpose of the induction meeting is to: (1) share background information and motivations for joining the group; (2) orient participants in the methodology; (3) introduce a tentative research question and devote time for clarifying and reframing; (4) establish basic ground rules; (5) determine procedures by which data will be observed, recorded, and gathered; (6) discuss and agree on structural components of the inquiry; (7) draft a tentative schedule and timeline; (8) establish validity procedures; (9) discuss and agree on action-oriented goals that will be implemented in the first action phase to explore the question; and (10) answer questions or address concerns from potential group members (Bray, 2002; Bray et al., 2000; Charles & Glennie, 2002; Heron, 1996;
Heron & Reason, 2006; Ospina et al., 2008; Reason, 1988, 1999, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2009; Traylen, 1994).

**Induction meeting details.** Confidentiality surfaced from prospective members regarding personal information shared during the inquiry. Reason (1988) suggested inquirers craft ground rules to preserve confidences within the group. Our inquiry group agreed that what was said in the group should not be discussed outside the group. I informed participants that the locations and names of the two school districts, four school sites, and five collaborating teachers would be replaced with pseudonyms in the dissertation to ensure confidentiality and participant anonymity. I also encouraged group members to choose their own pseudonyms. Prospective members seemed outwardly excited about being included in that part of the process.

Once the group was formed and the participants agreed on the focus of the inquiry, the group began to redefine the research question and make it their own. The group also faced multiple decisions regarding organization and structure of the inquiry group. These decisions were made in light of the inquiry group’s focus and research question. The group negotiated and then settled on procedures to gather and record data during the inquiry. The group also agreed to undertake specific actions in their classrooms contributing to the exploration of the topic (Reason, 2002).

At both districts we discussed teaching duties and sketched a tentative schedule (2010–2011 academic year), including specific weeks, days, and times I would travel from my district to each of their districts. We explored roles and responsibilities for each member and discussed how the roles and responsibilities would shift throughout the inquiry.

The two inquiry groups would function independently during the fall 2010 semester
(August–December 2010). During the spring 2011 semester, the two groups would share demographic data (cities and sites), biographies of group members, descriptive information about the choral programs, field notes from each week, specific action-oriented goals implemented in the classrooms, and reflections from collaborations in the field. We tentatively scheduled a date for all group members to join together (in a neutral location) for a final wrap-up session June 2011.

**Data collection.** During the induction meeting we discussed four broad categories of data we might encounter during the inquiry: observations (e.g., behaviors and attitudes of singers, social norms, and daily interactions), interviews, documents (e.g., repertoire lists, curriculum materials, concert programs, and emails), and audiovisuals. We discussed specific ways we could collect, record, and store data: field notes, self-reflection notes, journal entries, emails, autobiographical notes, jottings, letters, recordings, and transcriptions (Barone, 1995; Creswell, 2007; Nichols, 1991; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

**Organic process.** The emergent nature of the collaborative inquiry process has been described as a whimsical journey that meanders, swirls, spirals, and wanders in any direction group members choose (Van Stralen, 2002; Yorks, 2005; Zelman, 2002). Some of the most pertinent and exciting learning experiences develop during these emergent adventures (Bray et al., 2000).

While we found the organic process very synergetic, we also experienced periods that were time-consuming, confusing, frustrating, messy, and even daunting (Bray et al., 2000). We constantly questioned our traditional ways of knowing, how we related to one another, and our assumptions regarding the inquiry question. During the induction meeting, I challenged the group to see the organic and emergent process as a friend, not an enemy to our collaborative inquiry.
Concluding the induction meeting. To close the induction meeting, I asked each practitioner to briefly describe their choral programs and share some specific goals for the future. After the meeting, the notes were transcribed (Olympus digital hand-held voice recorder) and sent to each group member for their approval, edits, and/or amendments. After final corrections were made the notes were again sent to each group member for their perusal.

Stage Three: Acting on the Inquiry Question

In stage three the facilitator transitions to collective leadership and shares responsibility with group members. The facilitator continues to share his or her opinions and views as the group collectively makes decisions (Heron & Reason, 2006). York and Kasl (2002) noted that when the inquiry group adjourns from reflective sessions each member shifts from co-researcher to co-subject. As co-subjects, inquiry members implement specific action-oriented goals to answer the inquiry question (Heron, 1996; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Reason (2008) added that all group members could undertake the same activity (convergence) or individually they could select their own specific strategy to implement (divergence). Members of the inquiry group keep reflective records of their experiences during these action phases (Heron, 1996; Reason, 2008). Using critical reflection, they also begin to notice how practice does and does not conform to their original ideas of the research question.

After the induction meeting. Both collaborative groups returned to their school sites and immediately began to implement specific action-oriented goals (e.g., listening individually
to singers and tracking their voices, selecting range-appropriate literature, using movement exercises, games, and competition in classroom activities). In the beginning, co-inquirers were anxious because of their dependency on me as initiator and facilitator of the group. I physically joined their teaching-teams one day every two weeks (alternating districts every Tuesday throughout the 2010–2011 school year).

The co-inquirers were curious about the inquiry method, yet at the same time confused because of their lack of knowledge and experience. I encouraged them to stay in contact with me through emails, phone calls, or live video chats. Although we were all novice collaborative inquiry participants, I assured group members our experience would be exciting and transforming (Heron, 1999; Heron & Reason, 1981). I also encouraged group members to pace themselves, “You don’t have to change everything you are doing; just make a few changes at a time and try to be conscious of what you are teaching and how the students are responding.” I challenged the co-inquirers to keep reflection journals and notes (Bray et al., 2000). I explained, “This experiential data will be used in our reflection times together as we make meaning from our actions.”

**Stage Four: The Meaning-Making Process**

After action phases the collaborative inquiry group convenes and makes meaning from their individual and collective experiences (Bray et al., 2000; Van Manen, 1990). Reflection phases can be brief or comprehensive, depending on the data generated and what transpired in the action phases (Yorks & Kasl, 2002).
**Action and reflection cycles.** The relationship between action and reflection, often depicted in terms of cycles, is a central tenet of learning from experience (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Cell, 1984; Jarvis, 1992; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). Yorks (2005) asserted that action and reflection must receive equivalent emphasis during the inquiry process. Reflection is also a form of action, although essentially cognitive (Heron, 1985; Mezirow, 1991).

**Reflection meeting format.** Heron (1996) and Heron and Reason (1985) encouraged every inquiry group to develop their own format for their reflection meetings, but suggested that reflection meetings might include some of the following nine possibilities: sharing food and drink together; greetings and informal activities to begin reflective meetings (Heron & Reason, 2006; Reason, 2008); sharing experiences and actions implemented in the previous action phase (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997); there should be equal time and space for each member of the group (Reason, 1994; Treleaven, 1994; Van Stralen, 2002); noting and discussing themes and trends (Heron, 1996); reviewing and revising the inquiry question (Bray et al., 2000); reviewing validity procedures; discussing and agreeing on new strategies to be implemented in the next action phase; discussing and dealing with individual and/or group tensions and emotional distresses; and closing the reflective meeting with informal activities (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1985).

*Our inquiry group used the suggestions above by Heron and Reason as a guide for our extended reflection meetings. As noted earlier in this chapter, one of the basic tenets of*
collaborative inquiry is there are no specific parameters or rules for this type of inquiry, the process is fluid and each group is unique (Bray et al., 2000; Zelman, 1995).

Our inquiry groups agreed to conduct short mini-cycles rather than the suggested six to eight major action and reflection cycles (Bray et al., 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). According to Heron (1996), outcomes are well-grounded if the inquiry group progresses through as many cycles as possible. A majority of our action and reflection mini-cycles were planned and conducted during specific times/locations (e.g., in-between classes, before and after school, conference periods) while other action and reflection mini-cycles were spontaneous. The frequency of the mini-cycles enabled the inquiry process to remain fresh, vibrant, and exciting to group members (Heron & Reason, 1985; Reason, 1988).

**Reflection.** Reflection helped our inquiry group learn from our actions. During reflection phases our inquiry group agreed to follow specific guidelines to aid in the meaning-making process. First, I challenged group members to try and bracket-off or set aside biases, prejudices, or personal concerns (Mezirow, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1983). I explained it was impossible to bracket-off all pre-interpretations as our prior knowledge and socio-cultural surroundings impact present and future interpretations (Bray et al., 2000; Heron, 1992). Second, in an atmosphere of trust and respect, each member shared actions they implemented in their classrooms, without rebuttal or discussion from other group members (Bray et al., 2000; Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006). We experienced a unique power in the simple act of sharing our stories with each other, and individual and group relationships were strengthened. Third, we discussed and evaluated individual and group experiences and conflicting ideas were encouraged and welcomed (Bray et al., 2000; Heron & Reason, 1981; Van Stralen, 2002; Yorks, 2005). We were aware that groups could unknowingly
distort the meaning-making process and produce invalid meaning (Argyris, 1985; Bray et al., 2000; Elmes & Gemmill, 1990; Janis, 1972, 1982). Specific procedures and techniques were used to guard against deception and distortion: peer questioning and the Devil’s advocacy procedure (Heron & Reason, 2006; Rosenwasser, 2002), avoiding defensive routines (Argyris, 1985; Bray et al., 2000), and avoiding Groupthink (Heron, 1988; Janis, 1972; Patton, 1990).

When a group member suggested a theme we examined it, evaluated it, and determined whether it described the experience of the group (Van Stralen, 2002). As the inquiry progressed, conversations became more engaging and productive. The reflection sessions had a spirit of their own and resulted in fresh new concepts and ideas. The process was synergetic as we collectively discussed our experiences in the classroom. These sessions contained heightened levels of energy and enthusiasm (Bray et al., 2000; Reason, 1988, Smith, 2002).

The consensual process is successful when all members concur that the meaning and/or interpretations are consistent with their own experience and actions (Bray et al., 2000; Eisner, 1991; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Mezirow (1991) described consensus as the essential element in communicative learning. If consensus is not actively sought out and protected, then the meaning-making process will be flawed (Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

Our inquiry group worked hard to reach consensus: keeping communication lines open; not assuming agreement by other members; and avoiding premature closure (Bray et al., 2000; Yorks, 2005). When consensus was not reached we continued the discussion until we sifted through the experiential data and reached an agreement (Bray et al., 2000). One group member said, “The meaning-making process is like panning for gold.” The nuggets of new meaning and knowledge
were revealed through a process of sifting and sorting. A large portion of the experiential data was released or “let go” to find essential patterns and themes (Group for Collaborative Inquiry & thINQ, 1994). We began to gradually identify and understand these cycles of action and reflection more clearly and crafted a visual representation of our learning processes. The diagram below conceptualizes the multiples cycles of action and reflection and the collaborative inquiry process.

Cycles of Action & Reflection

![Diagram of Cycles of Action & Reflection]

Figure 2. Action and Reflection Cycles

**New actions.** The cycle was completed when we agreed on new actions and then implemented those actions in the classroom. We used convergent and divergent actions to lend
greater validity to our experiential data. During convergent phases, group members focused on one specific issue that related to our inquiry question. For instance, during a reflection session, group members agreed to focus on the perceived physiological differences between adolescent males and females for the next action session. The individual notes were used to discuss the perceived differences between the sexes in the next reflection session. During divergent phases each member chose a unique or idiosyncratic path (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1985, 2006; Reason, 1988). For example, Mr. Stevens focused on strategies to motivate adolescent males in rehearsal, while Mr. Green focused on range-appropriate literature for males. Mr. Thompson focused on recruitment strategies, while Mrs. Beatty focused on warm-up and sight-reading examples.

In the beginning of our inquiry we each followed divergent paths to the inquiry question. During the middle portion of our inquiry we used a combination of divergent and convergent actions. For the final leg of our inquiry we all converged and focused on one specific issue (single-sex choirs) that addressed our inquiry question (Heron & Reason, 2006).

Stage Five: Subsequent Cycles and Data Analysis

As the inquiry group continues the process of repeating cycles of action and reflection, further meaning emerges and is tested (Bray et al., 2000). Heron (1996) observed that, “research cycling refines, clarifies, extends, and deepens the focus of the inquiry. Research cycling also checks, corrects, and amends what inquirers find ill-grounded in action phases” (pp. 50–51).

As noted earlier in this chapter, during 2010–2011 we spent 32 weeks collaborating in the field. For the first 16 weeks (August–December 2010) the two groups worked independently. Both
groups set separate action-oriented goals to encourage male choral participation. In stage five, the two independent groups (Bedford Public Schools and Deer Lake Public Schools) began to share information.

In January 2011, I prepared a 3-ring notebook for all five practitioners for their perusal. I combined the induction meeting notes from August 2010, field notes from weeks 1–16 (eight weeks at Bedford Public Schools and eight weeks at Deer Lake), and included city and school demographics. For the first time in our collaborative inquiry both groups were able to read about the other group’s journey (e.g., progress, struggles, and action-oriented strategies implemented to encourage male choral participation). Combining the groups at the midway point helped inject new energy and excitement. During weeks 17–32 I began sending all five practitioners weekly field notes so they could read, print, and place in their notebooks. Sharing data helped meld our two unique groups into one.

Data analysis. Near the end of the inquiry, members of the group dedicated considerable amounts of time, energy, and resources to data analysis. Data analysis consisted of members reading and re-reading the field notes, interview texts, and marginal notes (Burns, 2000). We sat around large open spaces and sifted through experiential data.

Types of sources included: structured and unstructured interviews, informal and casual conversations, hand written and typed transcripts, demographic data, email messages, anecdotal evidence, classroom observations, concert programs, jottings and marginal notes, journal entries, field notes, stories and narratives from inquirers, autobiographical and biographical information, vocal techniques and classroom instructions, audiovisual recordings, photographs, lists of musical literature, and descriptions of interactions between practitioners and their students.
We analyzed the data and looked for common words, phrases, patterns, and themes, and then sorted them into categories using large sheets of paper and colored pens (Bray et al., 2000; Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Gall et al., 1996; Hawkins, 1986; Van Manen, 1990). Data analysis and reduction was exciting and exhausting (Reason, 1988). As facilitator, I tried to be sensitive when group members were getting exhausted from the data analysis process and planned a change of activity to help them relax (Heron, 1996).

Validity of data. Validity is central to any learning strategy and one must establish that interpretation is valid (Bray et al., 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). One major challenge for facilitating researchers is creating a culture where validity issues are grasped and validity procedures are applied throughout the inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2006; Traylen, 1994). In Stage Four, validity procedures were discussed (repeated cycles of action and reflection, grounding knowledge in practice, bracketing of pre-interpretations, varying patterns of convergence and divergence in the action phases, the Devil’s advocate procedure, ensuring authentic collaboration, and avoiding defensive routines and Groupthink). One additional way validity is tested is through the transformation of inquirers. Although transformation can occur at any stage in the inquiry, I include discussion of it here because it was especially evident in Stage Five of our inquiry.

Transformation. The most fundamental validity criterion is the change or transformation in participants and how they function in their settings (Bateson, 1972; Reason, 1992; Yorks, 2005). New knowledge and a self-correcting
awareness can have a significant influence on practice in the classroom (Bray et al., 2000; Fisher & Torbert, 1995; Torbert, 1995). As noted earlier in this chapter, practitioner-based collaborative inquiry can lead to a variety of changes and transformations: personal identity; intellectual skills; knowledge content; cognitive strategies; and heightened awareness (Yorks, 2005).

*During the initiation and facilitation phases I continued to study and uncover as many resources as I could to assist me in understand collaborative inquiry and its related methodologies (i.e., action research, participative research, cooperative inquiry). I began training and equipping the practitioners in the basic principles of this new approach. The act of verbalizing what I knew about collaborative inquiry to the other practitioners, and moving between multiple roles (initiator, facilitator, peer inquirer, participant-observer, and encourager) expanded my knowledge and understanding of this new research approach.*

*I turned over leadership responsibility to group members and continued to guide and mentor when they needed assistance. I gradually began to gain a sense of pride and excitement about my new knowledge and understand of this research approach. During the initiation and facilitation process male choral participation issues and collaborative research began to take on equal significance for me. I perceived I was making a slow “turn” from an informed practitioner to specialist in collaborative research.*

**Stage Six: Final Wrap-Up and Follow-Up Sessions**

*At the conclusion of our agreed-upon cycles of action and reflection, our two collaborative inquiry groups combined for a final one-day corporate reflection session in June 2011. Yorks and Kasl (2002) called the final reflective session an “end-of-year symposium” (p. 79). Our goal was to*
bring the informative and transformative threads together and make sense of the entire inquiry (Bray et al., 2000).

**Final wrap-up session.** The last official phase of our collaboration was the wrap-up session (June, 2011). This was the first time all the collaborators from both districts physically came together in one location. Our final wrap-up session was located in a large conference room at a church. We planned the final wrap-up session in a neutral location so group members could be comfortable, attentive, and unhampered by their school surroundings (Bray et al., 2000; Van Stralen, 2002; Yorks & Kasl, 2002; Zelman, 1995). Pressures of daily lesson plans, rehearsals, and seasonal concerts had diminished and the collaborators were visibly rested, energized, and relaxed.

During the wrap-up session group members were involved in reviewing, distilling, collating, and refining the cumulative data from all the action and reflection cycles (Heron, 1996). We took time to review themes and threads, clarify outcomes, and determined how each practitioner would participate in the final written report (Heron & Reason, 1985; Reason, 1988). Also during the wrap-up session, each group member was given time to celebrate their experiences, take care of any unfinished business, and wind down emotionally and share any final thoughts regarding the collaborative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Reason, 2008). We went around the room and took turns with final reflections. Members shared experiences from the collaboration and their voices grew animated (Van Stralen, 2002). One member challenged the group, “Let’s stay in contact with each other even though our inquiry is over.” We began this journey as peers and casual acquaintances, but ended as friends and partners. I closed the wrap-up session asking permission to continue periodic follow-up sessions. Everyone verbally agreed and I ended the meeting by presenting each
member with a small gift of appreciation.

The written report. The inquiry group agreed that I would be the lead writer and coordinating editor for the written report with feedback from all inquiry group members (Heron & Reason, 1981; Marshall & McLean, 1988; Glennie & Cosier, 1994; Traylen, 1994; Treleaven, 1994). Findings would be corroborated and participants retained a “veto” if there were elements they did not want to be included in the final written report. For example, in the spring of 2014 I traveled to Deer Lake for a follow-up session with Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson. Both choral practitioners believed external issues (e.g., changes in administration, class requirements, and elective choices) were causing a downward trend in the enrollment of eighth grade girls in their choral program (see Chapter Five). In an atmosphere of trust, they verbalized their feelings about these new changes at the middle school. After reading my written transcripts, Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson asked me not to include them in the final report. They felt their comments were made “in the heat of the moment” and too abrasive and divisive.

The group also agreed to abide by the following Heron and Reason (2006) statement, “Anyone can write whatever they like about the group, so long as they state clearly who the author is and whether other or not other group members have seen, approved, edited, or contributed to the text” (p. 152). We also acknowledged that “going public” would accelerate the knowledge development process (Bray et al., 2000; Kasl & Marsick, 1997; Smith, 2002; Zelman, 1995).

In collaborative inquiry, the primary outcome is the changes and transformations that occur within the group members while the secondary outcome is the written report (Heron, 1996). As the lead writer and coordinating editor for the written document (my doctoral dissertation), I continued to stay in touch with the inquirers for post-collaborative follow-up sessions. I communicated to
members through emails and texts, personal phone calls, and visits to both districts. I also shared an occasional meal with inquirers at our annual state music convention. I received periodic updates regarding the action-oriented strategies we implemented to encourage male choral participation. I requested and received the group members’ journal reflection notes and included them throughout Chapter Five and Chapter Six. I shared multiple drafts of the written report with group members and they made edits and additions throughout 2011–2014.

And Finally

In Chapter Four, I use descriptive information to highlight and compare the two school districts, four school sites, two choral programs, and five choral practitioners participating in this collaborative inquiry.
Chapter Four
Descriptive Comparison

In this chapter, I describe, compare, and contrast the following: the two cities where the collaboration took place (Bedford and Deer Lake); the two participating school districts and secondary choral programs involved in the inquiry (Bedford Public Schools and Deer Lake Public Schools); the four school sites (Bedford Junior High, Bedford High School, Deer Lake Middle School, Deer Lake High School); and the five collaborating choral practitioners. Pseudonyms for the cities, school districts, school sites, and participants involved in this collaborative inquiry are used to protect and conceal the identity of those involved. However, the descriptions and data included in this chapter represent, as accurately as possible, everything and everyone involved in this collaborative inquiry.

The purpose of the data presentation below is: 1) to determine if and how particular variables may have had an impact on male choral participation at the middle and high school levels; 2) to inform the reader by comparing the similarities and differences between cities, programs, and personnel; 3) to engage the reader by including a descriptive picture of those involved in the inquiry; 4) to help the reader identify with the challenges and celebrations group members experienced during the inquiry; 5) to provide accurate and detailed information for researchers who wish to participate in collaborative research in
the future; and 6) to encourage other groups to pursue collaborative research within their school sites and districts.

**Bedford and Deer Lake**

**City Demographics**

**Bedford.** Bedford is a small residential community in Missouri. Originally based on agriculture, this residential community is now home to workers commuting 15 miles north to a growing metropolitan city or 30 miles south to a popular lakes and music entertainment community. Bedford is a fast growing community in the state (http://www.city-data.com).

**Deer Lake.** Deer Lake is a resort town flanked by two rivers supplying water to a popular recreational lake. Deer Lake offers seasonal visitors a variety of activities (i.e., fishing, boating, golf courses, shopping, fine restaurants, museums, and state parks). Deer Lake has experienced steady growth for the past decade although the town has a dramatic seasonal influx of visitors and part-time residents (http://www.city-data.com).

The populations of Bedford and Deer Lake are very similar in racial make-up and median age of residents. According to the 2010 U. S. Census, Bedford’s resident population (19,022) is more than five times the size of Deer Lake’s resident population (3,718). Bedford is a residential/bedroom community while Deer Lake is described as a recreational and retirement community (http://www.city-data.com). One final difference is the median household income,
where Deer Lake’s household incomes are just 60% of that of Bedford (2010 U. S. Census). Mr. Stevens explained, “For six months during the year (April–September) Deer Lake is a bustling town as visitors from major outlying cities enjoy the lake and recreational activities. During the other six months (October–March) the town is rather quiet. Most of the residents work to service the influx of guests who enjoy a second residence or spend time here vacationing.”

Table 1

*Comparison of City Demographics (2010 U. S. Census)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Bedford</th>
<th>Deer Lake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>19,022</td>
<td>3,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Make-up</td>
<td>94.5 White</td>
<td>95.0 White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1 Hispanic</td>
<td>3.7 Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.9 African American</td>
<td>.4 African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.7 Native American</td>
<td>.4 Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.8 Asian</td>
<td>.5 Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>7,264</td>
<td>1,441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Median</td>
<td>$51,000</td>
<td>$30,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Description</td>
<td>Residential/Bedroom</td>
<td>Recreational/Retirement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographics of School Districts

Although Bedford’s city population is five times larger than Deer Lake’s, Deer Lake Public Schools serves almost as many students as Bedford Public Schools. Mrs. Thompson noted, “The school boundary at Deer Lake is rather large because most of the small towns around the lake are very rural and cannot support their own school systems. Deer Lake reaches out to the smaller outlying areas and bus students to this location.”

The total number of school sites and their breakdowns are very similar in structure and organization. The racial make-up of students at Deer Lake and Bedford are similar and reflect the racial make-up of both cities. Due to lower family incomes, students at Deer Lake (deerlake.schools.org) receive a greater percentage (53%) of free and reduced lunches than Bedford (bedfordpublicschools.net) students (36%).
Table 2

**Demographic Comparison of School Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(bedfordpublicschools.net)</th>
<th>(deerlake.schools.org)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Schools (Grades PreK–4)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Grades (Grades 5–6)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School (Grades 7–8)</td>
<td>1 (800 students)</td>
<td>1 (640 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School/Vocational (Grades 9–12)</td>
<td>1 (1400 students)</td>
<td>2 (1350 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Schools (PreK–12)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Population</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>4,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Make-up</td>
<td>94.0 White</td>
<td>95.0 White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.0 Hispanic</td>
<td>2.5 Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.0 African American</td>
<td>.5 African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.0 Native American</td>
<td>.5 Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.0 Other</td>
<td>.5 Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0 Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One final difference between school districts is that, unlike in Bedford Public Schools, Deer Lake Public Schools offers both a traditional and a vocational high school setting.
Collaborative Organization

As facilitator (F), I traveled 32 Tuesdays during 2010–2011 and collaborated with five choral music teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5) in the two school districts. Our collaborative environments included two junior high/middle school sites (seventh and eighth grades) and two high school sites (ninth through twelfth grades). Before the collaboration, the secondary choral teachers at Bedford and Deer Lake already utilized a “team-teaching” structure. The figure below is a visual representation of our organizational structure during our collaboration in 2010–2011 and periodic follow-up visits in 2011–2014.

![Organizational Diagram](image)

*Figure 3. Organizational Diagram*
Collaborating Choral Practitioners

Bedford

Larnelle Green (T1), the lead vocal music teacher, traveled to the junior high Monday through Friday to team-teach with Audrey Beatty (T2) during the first two classes (Men’s Choir and Select Mixed Chorus). Mr. Green left the junior high and travelled back to the high school to direct choirs the remainder of the day (Freshman Mixed Chorus Class, Chamber Choir, Concert Choir, and Women’s Choir). At the time of this inquiry, Mr. Green was 30 years old with seven years of vocal teaching experience. All seven years of teaching experience had been as the high school choral teacher at Bedford. For his undergraduate degree, Mr. Green received a double certification in vocal and instrumental music.

Audrey Beatty (T2), the choral teacher at the junior high school, remained at the school all day teaching three choirs (Men’s Choir, Select Mixed Choir, and Women’s Choir) and multiple piano classes. At the conclusion of the 2010–2011 school year Mrs. Beatty retired after 30 years of public school teaching. Mrs. Beatty was 56 years old at the time of our collaborative inquiry and taught vocal music at three schools in three different districts. Mrs. Beatty added, “Like Mr. Green, I was also certified in instrumental and vocal music. I always thought I would teach elementary music.”

Maria Clapton (T3) taught multiple Music Appreciation and Music Technology Classes and accompanied Mr. Green at the high school. Mrs.
Clapton was 53 years old at the time of the inquiry with nine years public school teaching experience. Mrs. Clapton received undergraduate degrees in music and marketing and worked in the banking industry for two decades. Mrs. Clapton worked three years as an elementary music teacher before coming to Bedford High School. Mrs. Clapton reported, “The job at Bedford suits me perfectly. I get to accompany the choirs, soloists and ensembles, and teach music appreciation classes. I feel very blessed to be where I am.”

Deer Lake

Scott Stevens (T4), the lead choral director at Deer Lake Public Schools, team-taught with Ann Thompson (T5) at the middle school and high school. Mr. Stevens was 46 years old at the time of this inquiry with 23 years of choral teaching experience. For the first five years of teaching experience Mr. Stevens taught choral music in two other schools in another state. Mr. Stevens played trumpet and French horn in high school and was the Drum Major for the band. He started singing in choir during his eleventh grade. Mr. Stevens was selected for the All-Regional Honor Choir and All-State Choir in high school. He stated, “Vocal music started to click with me and I had a lot of success. After those experiences I was hooked and I knew exactly what I wanted to do in life.”

Ann Thompson (T5) was 60 years old at the time of the inquiry with 23 years of teaching experience. All 23 years have been at Deer Lake accompanying for the choirs. Mrs. Thompson noted, “Before Mr. Stevens was
hired at Bedford I was the accompanist for two other choral directors.” Mrs. Thompson and Mr. Stevens taught together for the past 17 years at Deer Lake.

Mrs. Thompson described their working relationship, “Mr. Stevens and I have a very unique partnership. I accompany the choirs and organize trips and fundraisers. Mr. Stevens is the 'up front' man who conducts and takes care of classroom management issues.”

District Vocal Schedules

At both districts, the lead secondary choral teacher began the day collaborating at the junior high/middle school level. Bedford predominantly used a co-educational or mixed choral structure while Deer Lake implemented a single-sex choral program. The Deer Lake choral program had one curricular mixed choir (Chamber Choir) and five single-sex choirs at the secondary level. At Bedford there were four mixed choirs and two single-sex choirs at the secondary level.

Even though Bedford’s total secondary school attendance was larger than Deer Lake’s (Bedford=2200, Deer Lake=1990), the choral enrollment at Bedford was smaller than Deer Lake’s (Bedford=304, Deer Lake=409). Mr. Stevens concluded, “Our choral program experienced tremendous numerical growth a few years after going to a single-sex program.” At Bedford High School, the Chamber Choir members were required to enroll in both the Concert Choir and Chamber Choir. However, at Deer Lake, the Camber Choir members did not enroll in any
other curricular choral group.

Table 3

**Comparison of Vocal Schedules**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Bedford</th>
<th>Deer Lake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>Men’s Choir (7–8) (7:40–8:30) 3 singers</td>
<td>Advisory/Team Building (7:45–8:15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select Mixed Choir (7–8) (8:35–9:25) 56 singers: 37F &amp; 19M</td>
<td>Conference Period (8:20–8:55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>Mixed Choir (9–12) (9:15–10:02) 54 singers: 38F &amp; 16M</td>
<td>Women’s Choir (7–8) (9:00–9:45) 75 singers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concert Choir (9–12) (10:07–10:54) 72 singers: 37F &amp; 35M</td>
<td>Men’s Choir (7–8) (9:50–10:35) 75 singers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chamber Choir (9–12) (11:34—12:23) 36 singers: 19F &amp; 17M</td>
<td>Travel &amp; Lunch (11:30–12:30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s Choir (10–12) (12:51–1:39) 53 singers</td>
<td>Men’s Choir (9–12) (1:20–2:10) 48 singers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 5</td>
<td>Conference (1:44–2:32)</td>
<td>Women’s Choir (9–12) (2:15–3:06) 103 singers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four similarities emerged between Bedford and Deer Lake secondary choral programs (future goals, organization, contests and competitions, and challenges).

**Similarities Between Choral Programs**

**Future Goals**

The choral practitioners at both districts expressed a desire to achieve numerical balances between males and females at the middle and high school levels. Mr. Green stated, “One of the toughest nuts to crack during my first several years of teaching was figuring out how to recruit more men into the high school and junior high choir program.” Mrs. Beatty added, “The most pressing issue or concern in our secondary choral program is the recruitment and retention of males.” Both secondary choral programs recruited and promoted their programs to upcoming sixth graders and ninth graders (e.g., school fair, freshman orientation, “Real Men Sing” tour, a gender-specific letter sent to prospective students) but still struggled to reach a numerical balance between adolescent males and females. Mr. Stevens noted, “We moved to a single-sex choral program a few years ago and have experienced steady growth, but we still have twice as many females involved as males.” Both Deer Lake and Bedford secondary choral programs had a female to male ratio of 2 to 1.

The choral practitioners yearned for more collaboration with music teachers within their districts. Mrs. Thompson revealed, “We wish we had better
coordination between the elementary music teachers and the secondary choral program." Mr. Green admitted, "It would be nice to have all the music teachers (elementary, intermediate, junior high, high school) coordinating and collaborating together." The five choral practitioners involved in this collaboration had little to no influence on the music curriculum or relationships with students before singers arrived at the junior high/middle school.

**Organization**

Both lead male choral teachers established positive relationships with middle school students since they also collaborated at the junior high/middle school. Mr. Beatty noted, "One advantage of this type of team approach is getting to know the students musically and personally before they reach the high school." The lead choral teachers conducted most of the choirs and handled classroom discipline and management and were paired with female accompanists who were responsible for the organizational details (e.g., attendance, fundraisers, and trips). All five collaborating teachers demonstrated strong organizational skills and enforced class policies and protocols. The choral participants began classes on time, vocally warmed up their singers, conducted sight-reading and ear-training exercises, and rehearsed specific music literature listed on the board. Classroom protocols were listed on the wall and enforced throughout the day.
Collaborators at both districts experienced support from students, parents, and their communities. Deer Lake collaborators perceived less emotional and financial support from administration than the Bedford collaborators. Mr. Green reported, “At the high school we have really good budgets, a very active parent booster club, and we get support from administration, counselors, and the community.” Mrs. Beatty stated, “When I express a need for equipment at the junior high (e.g., CD recorder, DVD player, risers) my principal is eager and willing to help.” Mrs. Thompson asked, “Does your principal ever attend the concerts?” Mrs. Beatty replied, “Sometimes. There is usually someone from the administration at the concerts.” Mr. Stevens responded, “We also have good budgets and support from parents and the community. The administration is quick to publicize our accomplishments, but we rarely see them attend any of our events.” Mrs. Thompson added, “Sometimes the choral program feels like a step-child to the extra-curricular sports activities. If we need additional equipment and resources we usually have to do fundraisers.”

Contests and Competitions

Bedford and Deer Lake high school choral programs had more singers selected for All-District and All-State Choir than any other participating high school in their districts. Both choral programs placed a strong emphasis on District and State Solo and Ensemble Competitions. Both choral programs entered the maximum number of choirs (Mixed, Chamber, Men, and Women), for
State Large Choir Competition (2010–2011), and all four choirs at Bedford and Deer Lake scored the highest possible ratings. Choral practitioners at both districts challenged their students with musical literature from a variety of styles and genres.

**Challenges**

Collaborators at both high schools perceived the female singers were more musically and socially advanced than their male counterparts. Female singers often had to sit quietly while the choral director spent additional time assisting male singers as they learned their parts. Three major differences emerged from the data between the Bedford and Deer Lake secondary choral programs: organization, attendance, and classroom management.

**Differences Between Choral Programs**

**Organization**

As stated earlier, Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson moved the secondary choral program at Deer Lake to a single-sex choral program in 2005. There were no mixed choirs at the middle school and only one mixed choir at the high school level (Chamber Choir). At Bedford, there were four mixed choirs and three single-sex choirs at the secondary level. Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson frequently noted that the move to a single-sex choral program in 2005 prompted their recent
numerical and musical growth. Mr. Stevens reported, “Prior to going to a single-sex choral program in 2005 we only had six males out of a 50 voice middle school choir and probably only 30 males in a 100 voice high school choral program. In 2014–2015, we have 80 male singers and 140 female singers at the middle school. Our high school program has 75 men and 105 females.” Mr. Thompson concluded, “Moving to a single-sex choral program has been the greatest move we have made in the past 17 years. We can pick music literature that fits their specific ranges and can work on vocal exercises to strengthen their changing voices. There is greater camaraderie, participation, and peer role modeling.”

Even though all four major ensembles at both districts scored the same ratings at State Large Choir Competition, students and staff perceived the mixed Chamber Choir as the most advanced choral group. Mrs. Thompson stated, “The Chamber Choir is mostly older students who have proved themselves in the single-sex choirs. This group is the brightest and best at Deer Lake.” At Deer Lake, the Chamber Choir performed traditional choral literature for two quarters (first and third) and then transitioned to a Show Choir for the other two quarters (second and fourth). At Bedford, the Chamber Choir performed mostly traditional choral literature throughout the year. Mr. Green noted, “The Chamber Choir is comprised of my best singers and they get to perform for additional events throughout the community.”
During all 16 visits to Bedford in 2010–2011 I noted student mentees, practicum students, and undergraduate student teachers participating in rehearsals at the middle and high school levels. I did not witness any student mentees, practicum students, and undergraduate student teachers involved at Deer Lake during my 16 visits in 2010–2011. The frequent use of practicum students and student teachers at Bedford may have been due to the close proximity of several colleges and university campuses. Both lead choral directors utilized student section leaders when dividing their choirs for rehearsals.

Enrollment

Enrollment and attendance differed between the secondary choral programs at Bedford and Deer Lake. Bedford Junior High School enrolled 77 females and 22 males in the choral program, for a total of 99 choral students. At Deer Lake Middle School 153 females and 75 males were enrolled in the choral program, for a total of 228 students. Deer Lake Middle School enrolled twice as many females and three times as many males in their choral program than Bedford Junior High School.

A comparison of high school choral students at Bedford and Deer Lake in 2010–2011 revealed Bedford enrolled 147 females and 68 males in their choral program, for a total of 215 singers. Deer Lake enrolled 118 females and 63 males, for a total of 181 singers. Although Bedford High School choral program outnumbered Deer Lake (215 to 181), the Bedford High School Chamber Choir
members (N=36) were counted twice as they were required to enroll in Concert Choir. Deer Lake and Bedford enrollment numbers are very similar if we take into account the 36 singers who are enrolled twice at Bedford (Bedford= 179, Deer Lake=181).

**Classroom Management**

The third major difference between the two participating choral programs involved classroom management. Although both district choral programs were highly organized and efficient, I perceived Mr. Green as timid when addressing discipline issues with a few male choral students. Differences in classroom management strategies between Mr. Green and Mr. Stevens may relate to years of teaching experience. Mr. Stevens managed the classroom with strict protocols and addressed any infractions without hesitation. He warned students by giving them three chances to correct their behavior throughout the year. Each time a student received verbal discipline they lost daily points. If a student received three infractions he or she was immediately sent to the “Refocusing Room” and assigned written work. At Deer Lake, Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson enjoyed working with adolescent males at the middle school. Mr. Stevens observed, “Most middle school choir teachers are intimidated by adolescent boys and don’t typically know how to deal with their excessive energy and competitive spirit. Mrs. Thompson and I have learned strategies to redirect their energy, their competitive spirit, and their desire for camaraderie.”
And Finally

In Chapter Five, group members reflect on the action-oriented strategies implemented in our choral classrooms to encourage male choral participation. Updates and transformations will be revealed from follow-up sessions during 2011–2014.
Chapter Five

Male Choral Participation

The purpose of this collaborative inquiry was to cooperate with five vocal music practitioners, in two different school districts in the Midwest region of the United States, with the aim of encouraging male choral participation. One goal of our collaborative inquiry group was to implement specific action-oriented strategies in our classroom environments, mitigate perceived barriers, and encourage male choral participation at the middle and high school levels. This chapter describes the action-oriented strategies implemented in our choral classrooms aimed at mitigating perceived barriers and encouraging male choral participation.

Inquiry Reflections

Four areas of interest surfaced during our action and reflection sessions, leading us from one topic to another like stones on a winding path. First, our collaborative group gravitated to the pronounced physiological differences between adolescent males and females. Second, the unique differences between adolescent males and females led us to consider the benefits and disadvantages of single-sex versus coeducational or mixed choirs. We were curious if single-sex choirs might mitigate some of the perceived barriers to male choral participation at the secondary level. Third, after study and reflection our inquiry group
concluded that single-sex choirs might be beneficial when recruiting, training, and retaining adolescent males. Inquiry group members made changes in their choral programs and teaching techniques to mitigate perceived barriers and encourage male choral participation. Fourth, group members reported some numerical and musical growth in their male choral participation at Bedford and Deer Lake secondary schools during our three years of follow-up sessions (2011–2014). Reflections by group members are used throughout this chapter to highlight the lessons we learned during our collaborative journey to encourage male choral participation.

**Differences Between Adolescent Males and Females**

From the literature on this subject, we remained cognizant that middle school represented a particularly challenging period of physical, emotional, and cognitive development for adolescent males and females (Killian, 1999; Nycz, 2008; Trollinger, 1993/1994). We also were aware that adolescent males and females mature at different rates (Demorest & Clements, 2007; Freer, 2007; Patton, 2008). Additionally, we also understood there were other internal and external influences playing a role in the differences between adolescent males and females such as the gender of the music teacher, classroom instruction, prior exposure to music, socio-cultural expectations, self-confidence, talent, and parental and peer support (Asmus, 1986; Karma, 1982; Robertson, 1991; Schmidt, 1995).
In our reflection times, we discussed that we might lose some of these students from our choral programs if we ignored the differences between adolescent males and females. Some representative comments included:

Because middle school boys are progressing through a drastic vocal change, many are intimidated to sing if females are present in the classroom. (Mrs. Thompson)

I also think boys are embarrassed in front of the girls when the teacher works with them on their changing voices. (Mrs. Clapton)

In my experience, adolescent boys want to physically move in class and they like challenges and competitions. On the other hand, adolescent females do not seem as motivated by movement and competition. (Mr. Green)

During action sessions, each practitioner listed potential physiological, developmental, and cognitive differences between adolescent males and females. We discussed these differences in multiple mini reflection sessions and developed themes and categories to further test and retest within our classroom environments.

**Adolescent males.** Compared to adolescent females, some adolescent males were: (1) louder, more aggressive, demonstrated shorter attention spans, and were less organized and successful at assigned tasks; (2) motivated by
challenges and competitions, yearned for activity and movement, used more space, and were unable to keep their hands to themselves and sit still in one place; and (3) inclined to separate themselves from anything feminine or non-masculine. On several occasions, when visiting at Deer Lake Middle School, I noted in my journal that the boys in the Men’s Choir could not stand still and “looked like a can of fishing worms or an ant hill after someone stirred their mound with a stick.” Mrs. Thompson acknowledged to me with a smile on her face, “Even though the middle school boys come to class smelling like dirty shoes and wet dogs I still love working with them because of their raw energy and passion for making music.” From the beginning of this collaboration I sensed Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson had a predilection working with adolescent males and often became frustrated with the lack of energy and motivation of the adolescent girls at the middle school.

Our collaborative group came to a consensus that we should implement classroom activities specifically designed to embrace and harness the unique traits and characteristics of adolescent males (Demorest, 2000b; Derry & Phillips, 2004). Mr. Stevens posited, “It is easier to redirect the energy adolescent boys have in class than it is to challenge the girls to sing with more energy.” Mr. Green added, “Adolescent males are extremely motivated by competition and movement within the rehearsal. As a result of this collaboration I have changed my whole approach to teaching males.”
We implemented a variety of strategies geared at competitions and challenges to harness the boys’ energy and passion. As Mrs. Thompson noted:

Mr. Stevens typically has the boys stand and physically move to the warm-up exercises. After Mr. Stevens perceives the boys have learned most of their notes and rhythms he selects four to eight boys to stand in front of the class and perform for the other boys in the choir. Also, during sight-reading exercises he frequently asks for volunteers to stand and sight-read examples in front of the class.

Mr. Green asked Mr. Stevens if he ever had any problems getting volunteers? Mr. Stevens responded, “No, I have so many volunteers it’s difficult for me to select individual boys since they want to prove themselves in front of their peers.” Mr. Stevens rewarded the boys who participated in front of class with a small prize or piece of candy.

Adolescent females. Compared with adolescent males, some adolescent females: (1) listened more critically, worked harder, concentrated longer, and showed greater patience; (2) needed more direction, took fewer risks, displayed greater self-control and had little difficulty sitting still in one place; and (3) were more physically and mentally advanced than adolescent males. Mrs. Beatty observed, for example, that one explanation for the difference in maturity levels could be the 2 to 1 ratio of females to males in both choral programs. Female singers in the mixed chamber choir at Bedford and Deer Lake were typically
eleventh and twelfth graders, while males in the chamber choirs ranged from
ninth through twelfth grades. As Mrs. Clapton observed:

The paths to the advanced mixed choirs, Concert Choir and Chamber
Choir, are more rigorous and competitive for female singers than for
males. Female singers at Bedford High School enroll in Freshman Mixed
Chorus during ninth grade and then audition for Women’s Choir during
their tenth grade year. During their eleventh and twelfth grade year they
typically audition for the advanced mixed choirs. If a female doesn’t make
the top mixed choirs they can continue singing in the Women’s Choir or
choose to leave the choral program altogether.

Mr. Green felt pressure to place younger, less experienced males in his
advanced choirs to numerically balance the older female singers. Mr. Green
reported, “Due to the scarcity of male singers, a freshman could audition and be
selected for the top two advanced mixed choirs.” Mrs. Clapton added, “Younger
adolescent males typically hold back the progress of the mixed choirs because of
their lack of focus and effort.” Mrs. Thompson agreed, stating that “the girls seem
to get their rhythms and notes faster and then have to sit idle waiting for younger
male singers to catch up musically and physically.” Our collaborative group
discussed how female singers might feel frustrated, devalued, and neglected in
these situations.
Sectionals During Mixed Choir Rehearsals

During the first few months of our collaboration I began to notice a trend as the choral practitioners regularly separated the males and females during mixed choir rehearsals. At Bedford Junior High School, Mrs. Beatty would often say, “I will remain here in the classroom and work with the females while Mr. Green rehearses the males in the auditorium.” At Bedford High School, Mr. Green repeatedly divided the three Bedford mixed choirs by voice part and enlisted student section leaders or student teachers to rehearse in practice rooms around the main classroom. At Deer Lake, the only mixed choir was the Chamber Choir at the high school level. Mr. Stevens would occasionally say to students, “Let’s go into sectionals. Section leaders take your section to your practice room and rehearse this new song for 15 minutes. We’ll come back together to sing for the last few minutes of class.”

In our reflection sessions we discussed the reasons for using sectionals during mixed choir classes. Mr. Beatty pointed out that it’s easier and faster to learn new music in sectionals. Mrs. Thompson added, “There’s greater participation, engagement, and singers have more confidence when they’re separated.” Mr. Green noted that there were fewer opportunities for disruptive behaviors. We concluded the secondary mixed choirs at Bedford and Deer Lake were essentially being separated by sex during rehearsals. Notating the physiological differences between adolescent males and females, and discussing
the reasons for separating the sexes in mixed choir rehearsals, paved the way for us to consider the benefits and disadvantages of single-sex choral programs.

**Single-Sex Versus Mixed Choirs**

I suggested that everyone in the group converge on the issue of single-sex versus mixed choirs. Mr. Stevens observed that since Deer Lake had already moved to a single-sex program, and Bedford was currently using a mixed choir format, there was an excellent opportunity to compare the two.” Mrs. Clapton recommended that the group members jot down notes in their personal journals so the ideas could be discussed in the reflection sessions.

**Benefits of single-sex choirs.** During multiple mini reflection sessions we discussed the perceived benefits of using single-sex choirs at the secondary level. Below are seven perceived benefits that surfaced from our discussions.

**Decreased classroom management issues.** We observed that adolescent males and females behaved differently when participating in single-sex choirs versus mixed choirs. Some representative comments include:

Without the opposite sex in the classroom the atmosphere seemed more relaxed. We rarely encountered discipline problems. (Mrs. Thompson)

We still had classroom management issues. I don’t think that issue will ever go away. (Mr. Stevens)
I noticed that my guys were more excited and eager to participate in a single-sex atmosphere and I spent less time keeping them on task. (Mr. Green)

**A supportive learning environment.** The singers were perceived by group members to be more focused, attentive, and productive in single-sex choirs. Mr. Beatty noted, for example, that concentration levels were improved and the students seemed to be more engaged. Mr. Green also pointed out that the singers were less inhibited and self-conscious when the opposite sex was not in the room, especially middle school males. Mrs. Clapton agreed with this, stating, “I think there’s less ego involved when the opposite sex is not part of the equation.” Mrs. Thompson observed that singers were willing to take greater risks or experiment with their changing voices in the Men’s Choir.” Mr. Stevens added that in single-sex classes the teachers were able to focus on specific teaching strategies for adolescent males and females and provide more individualized instruction. Mr. Green concluded that in the single-sex choral atmosphere the teachers were able to focus more on the unique emotional needs of the students.

**Improvement of vocal skills.** We tailored our vocal techniques to adolescent males or females and assisted singers as they experienced vocal problems during the vocal change. Mrs. Thompson noted that the middle school males were able to improve their pitch accuracy and choral tone without the female voices in the classroom. Mrs. Beatty concurred, adding that the smaller
single-sex choirs allowed them to monitor each singer’s voice and spend more time focusing on vocal issues related to their voices.

As Mr. Green observed, “One of the most challenging aspects of teaching adolescent male singers is helping them understand and exercise their vocal registers.” Mr. Stevens essentially agreed, saying that in co-educational choral settings the boys get embarrassed when he addressed the male head voice and falsetto. Adolescent males tend to have a poor concept of their head voice and strain from the neck to reach notes in their upper range. Mrs. Thompson described how Mr. Stevens handled the male voice:

In the Men’s Choir, Mr. Stevens does a great job teaching the boys to navigate through these vocal registers. He selects a song that all the boys know. The first time through he chooses a key that is comfortable for the whole group. The second time through the song he selects a lower key so all the boys have to sing in their chest voices. Finally, he pitches the song in a high key so all the boys have to sing in their head voice and falsetto registers.

In a personal conversation during lunch, Mr. Stevens explained that in the single-sex atmosphere, adolescent males are typically eager and willing to explore their head voice and falsetto. The boys in such settings compete with one another to see who can sing the highest.
Selecting and rehearsing literature was less problematic. In a mixed choir setting, selecting and rehearsing music literature is extremely difficult since adolescent males and females develop and mature at different rates. In our group discussions, we came to an agreement that much of the music literature published for the middle school level is unsuitable for adolescent males (see Freer, 2008; Garretson, 1998; Hoffer, 1991). As Mrs. Beatty pointed out, the vocal parts are usually too low or too high for the singers. Mrs. Thompson agreed, suggesting, “In quick tempo songs adolescent males cannot articulate the words fast enough because of their lack of vocal flexibility.” Mr. Stevens concluded that in single-sex choirs it is easier to select range-appropriate music and texts that fit the specific needs and interests of students.

When vocal ranges and tessituras of songs are inaccessible for adolescent singers, the vocal music teacher should edit or modify their parts to fit their specific abilities (McClung, 2006). Mrs. Thompson noted that in single-sex choirs it is easier to edit or arrange music for the specific ranges and tessituras of adolescent males. Mrs. Beatty agreed, remarking, “I’m always editing music for the boys. If the vocal part is too low for unchanged voices I assign optional higher notes. If the vocal part is too high for changing or changed voices I assign them optional lower notes.” In response to this, Mr. Stevens observed that the boys often begin to recognize what notes are out of their singing range and make adjustments on their own.
Rehearsing choral parts in a mixed choral setting can be a difficult task. As Mrs. Beatty observed, “A choral teacher at the secondary level can rehearse four to eight vocal parts within the rehearsal period (e.g., SATB, SSATTB, SSAATTBB). Choral teachers routinely work smaller sections of singers while the other sections sit idle.” Mr. Green replied that in a single-sex choir setting the music is typically written for fewer vocal parts. Mrs. Thompson remarked that in a single-sex choir there is less time for students to sit idle and become disengaged or create classroom management issues. Mrs. Beatty echoed this sentiment, stating, “I am able to rehearse the music more efficiently, expose students to a wider variety of literature, and manage discipline problems.”

**Improved social environment.** In a single-sex setting the connections between the choral director and the vocal students were stronger since choirs were typically smaller in size than coeducational or mixed choirs. Mr. Stevens noted, “The guys form a stronger bond, camaraderie, and a team-like identity in the Men’s Choir.” Mrs. Thompson added:

The middle school boys usually enter the choir room in a wave of excitement and energy. Each day they announced their presence by throwing their notebooks in the designated corner and removed their choir folders from the slots. Then they start to mingle and socialize. The atmosphere is like a locker room as the boys talked, joked around, and laughed with each other.
Mr. Stevens would often remind the boys, “Keep your hands to yourself. Don’t touch or punch each other. Keep space between your chairs. Face the front of the room and don’t turn around and bother the guys behind you.”

However, the girls at the middle school came into class quietly, placed their notebooks in the designated area, and sat in their chairs. Mr. Thompson stated, “One or two girls in each section usually sing with energy and enthusiasm, but they are sometimes seen as brownnosers by the rest of the girls.” One of the struggles for Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson was getting an energized choral tone from the girls. Mr. Stevens replied, “No matter how much we encouraged them to sing out their tone was usually weak, unsupported, and out of tune. The males, on the other hand, sang with energy and seem very excited to be in class.” Mrs. Thompson added, “It’s difficult to keep them in their seats and focused, but they always sing with volume and passion.”

An interesting phenomenon occurred at Deer Lake when the single-sex choirs were combined to form one large middle school mixed choir. Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson shared their experiences with me during a reflection session at lunch. Mr. Stevens recounted, “We witnessed an attitude and performance reversal when the girls and boys were grouped together for concerts and contest.” Mrs. Thompson continued, “The boys didn’t sing out and seemed almost intimidated by the presence of the girls in the choir.” Mr. Stevens added, “The girls were extremely energized and social when the boys were in the choir. They actually sang louder than the guys.” I pointed out that the changes in
dynamics might be attributed to the 2 to 1 ratio of females to males when all three middle school choirs were combined (150 girls from two choirs to 75 boys from one choir). Mr. Stevens responded:

That may be true, but after our concert was completed, and the boys and girls went back to their single-sex choirs, the boys once again sang out and became energized while the girls became passive and sang with a breathy tone. It’s the craziest thing.

We reflected on this complex issue and determined we should musically and mentally prepare the middle school singers a few weeks before concerts, contests, or competitions. Some representative comments include:

I want you to continue to sing with volume and energy when the Women’s Choirs join us for special occasions. (Mr. Stevens)

There will be twice as many girls in the choir so don’t get nervous and forget to sing like we have taught you in class. (Mrs. Thompson)

We need you to sing out and balance out the girls’ voices. (Mr. Stevens)

Throughout the rest of the year (2010–2011) this strategy worked well as the 75 adolescent males gained more confidence and became more secure when the 155 adolescent females joined the Men’s Choir to form a mass mixed choir of 230 middle school singers.
Development of leadership skills. In the single-sex choirs we witnessed an increase in leadership development as singers gained self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth. According to Mr. Green, “When I started my Men’s Choir in 2011–2012 I saw older singers mentoring younger singers. I don’t think I ever experienced that happen in one of my mixed choirs.” Mrs. Beatty added, “The Men’s Choir is like a safe zone where older males can mentor the younger males.” Mr. Stevens concluded, “The use of peer role models was one of the most successful strategies we used to encourage adolescent males to enroll and remain in the choir.”

Increased retention and enrollment. The primary goal of this research collaboration was to strive to improve numerical imbalances between male and female singers at the middle and high school levels. The “Real Men Sing” tour was one of the action-oriented strategies we implemented in our choral classrooms to encourage male choral participation. Focusing our research on the recruitment, training, and retention of adolescent males does not imply that we wished to privilege adolescent males over adolescent females. It was the collaborators’ desire to continue to provide opportunities and recognition to both adolescent males and females proportionate with their abilities, talents, and dedication (Demorest, 2000; Harrison, 2001; O’Toole, 1998).

During a mini reflection session in-between classes, Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson described their most successful recruiting tool to enroll males in their middle school program. Mrs. Thompson explained, “At Deer Lake, we combine
the male singers at the high school with the male singers at the middle school and form a mass choir of 140 singers to perform for the sixth graders during the spring.” Mr. Stevens continued, “Mrs. Thompson mails flyers to every sixth grade student. The flyer contains information promoting the choral program, like awards, achievements, and up-coming out-of-town trips.” Mrs. Thompson added, “The flyer arrives at the homes of prospective students a few days before the mass choir performs for the sixth graders. Every male singer gets a t-shirt that says ‘Real Men Sing’ printed on the front.”

Lucas (2012) started the first “Real Men Sing” festival in 2006 at the University of Oklahoma after reading an article by Demorest (2000) where he challenged choral directors to encourage male choral participation. The “Real Men Sing” festival has become one of the largest annual gatherings of adolescent male singers in the United States. In the past decade, “Real Men Sing” festivals have been organized in other states (e.g., Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Oregon, Minnesota) to promote singing as a respected male activity and encourage the recruitment and retention of male singers in local choral programs. The four major goals of these choral gatherings are: (1) to provide an atmosphere in which young men can have fun singing with other young men using appropriate choral literature; (2) to allow these students to experience a measure of success as singers in a choral ensemble; (3) to educate young men about their changing voices; and (4) to provide positive male singing role models for younger males (Lucas, 2012).
According to Lucas (2009), "Some adolescent males believe it's not manly to sing. Young men who see male role models singing are more likely to participate in choir."

Mrs. Thompson reported, “The 'Real Men Sing' tour is scheduled one week before the sixth graders turn in their final schedules for next year.”

According to Mr. Stevens, “The timing of the 'Real Men Sing' tour is critical and coincides with the students selecting their own classes for the first time at Deer Lake.” Mr. Thompson continued, “On the day of the 'Real Men Sing' tour we load the singers in four school buses and transport them to the intermediate school where they perform for all the sixth graders. Mr. Stevens concluded:

The sixth grade boys and girls look forward to hearing the mass choir of males. Many of the sixth graders have brothers who sing at the middle school and high school. Much of our recruitment success is due to the 'Real Men Sing' tour. Each of the past three years we have had over one hundred males and females sign up to sing at the middle school.

Mr. Green and Mrs. Clapton were inspired by Deer Lake’s “Real Men Sing” tour and began implementing this same recruitment model at Bedford in 2012. I informed Mr. Green that I thought the 'Real Men Sing' tour was an excellent idea for recruiting junior high males. But, I also wanted Mr. Green to be aware that Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson experienced some resistance when they implemented this recruitment strategy. I recounted a story Mr. Stevens told
me about a boy who arrived back at the middle school after the “Real Men Sing” tour in 2011. Mr. Stevens stated:

Tommy, an eighth grade boy, quickly took off his ‘Real Men Sing’ t-shirt and changed into another shirt. He immediately threw his ‘Real Men Sing’ t-shirt in a nearby trashcan. A classroom teacher retrieved the t-shirt, gave the shirt to me and explained what had occurred. I met with Tommy and discussed his behavior. He responded that he didn’t like to sing and he didn’t want to wear his ‘Real Men Sing’ t-shirt all day. I told him that Mrs. Thompson and I liked having him in choir, but maybe he should discuss this situation with his parents and schedule another class.

In a follow-up session in 2012 I asked Mr. Stevens if Tommy had continued singing in the choir program. Mr. Stevens responded, “No, he talked with his parents and choir was not something he wanted to continue.” I asked, “Why do think he quit?” Mr. Stevens added:

There are some adolescent boys who don’t want to be associated with choir at school because they may be verbally or physically harassed by their peers, family members, or coaches. Even though we have 140 males singing at the secondary level there is still a perception that singing in school is a feminine activity.

Throughout the rest of the inquiry I continued to think about Tommy. I
wondered, “Did Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson have other issues with Tommy before the ‘Real Men Sing’ tour? Did Tommy follow classroom protocols or was he disrespectful to Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson?” Mr. Stevens seemed frustrated and annoyed that Tommy did not enjoy singing and that he eventually chose to opt out of the middle school choral program. I asked Mr. Stevens if he had problems with Tommy before the situation with the “Real Men Sing” t-shirt. Mrs. Stevens responded, “Yes, we did have some behavior and attitude issues before this incident.” I then asked Mr. Stevens if he was upset with Tommy for dropping his class. Mr. Stevens shook his head and said, “No, I am sad that he’s no longer singing in the choir program. I wonder if there was something else I could’ve done to keep him singing.” I wanted to encourage Mr. Stevens and Mr. Thompson and remind them that male choral participation is a complex issue. I pointed out,

No matter how hard we try to lower the perceived barriers to male choral participation, the reality is that some students may never enjoy music activities at school. Other students, who experience overwhelming pressure from family members, peers, and other adults (e.g., coaches, counselors, teachers) may enjoy singing at school, but the physical, emotional, and social costs keep them from participating. It’s disappointing this young man no longer sings at the middle school, but don’t lose sight of the other 380 students that you are reaching at the middle and high school each year.
Throughout the collaboration, our group came to recognize the power of working together to solve pressing issues. When Tommy opted out of the choral program at Deer Lake Middle School Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson took it personally. One benefit of our collaboration was being able to encourage one another during difficult and trying circumstances.

**Perceived barriers to single-sex choirs.** One misconception of single-sex choral programs is that choral teachers and students can no longer participate in mixed choirs. As Mr. Stevens suggested, “A choral director can combine single-sex choirs (e.g., Boys’ Choir and Girls’ Choir) for concerts, contests, and competitions to form mixed choirs.” Our inquiry group discussed and compiled a list of perceived logistical, financial, and administrative barriers to single-sex choirs. Mrs. Beatty pointed out there might be “a limited numbers of male singers.” Mrs. Clapton surmised there could be “conflicts in the schedule.” Mrs. Thompson added that single-sex choirs are typically smaller in class size and there may be a lack of funding for staffing. Mr. Stevens added that administrators might fear they could be challenged constitutionally if they separate the sexes in the public school. Student perceptions of single-sex choirs may also have an impact on whether students enroll. As Mrs. Beatty reflected, “Singers may prefer the social atmosphere and choral sound of mixed choirs.” Mrs. Thompson added that students might view single-sex choirs as training choirs to the more advanced mixed choirs.
The effects of single-sex choirs on adolescent females. Wilson (2010, 2012) concluded: most adolescent females prefer the choral tone of a mixed ensemble; they enjoy the social aspect of having the males in the choir; the musical experience is perceived to be more challenging; there is a wider variety of music literature available for mixed choirs; and the mixed choir is perceived to be the most prestigious singing ensemble. Gauthier (2005) suggested female singers may feel devalued and neglected in single-sex choirs while males are motivated and energized by the same ensemble setting. While our group’s collaborative inquiry mission was male choral participation, it is possible that the single-sex classes might have benefited adolescent males while negatively impacting the engagement and participation of adolescent females. In retrospect, this is an issue to which our collaborative inquiry group should have attended more closely.

Challenges of Moving to a Single-Sex Choral Program

The decision to move to a single-sex choral program at Bedford High School was not easy for Mr. Green and Mrs. Clapton. Their decision would impact other classroom teachers, the junior high and high school students, and counselors and administration. During lunch breaks, in-between classes, and before and after school, Mr. Green and I discussed transitioning the high school choirs to a single-sex program. Mr. Green noted, “I think I’ll have to give up two of my mixed choirs, Freshman Mixed Choir and Concert Choir, to free up slots in
the schedule for the new single-sex choirs.” As I listened to Mr. Green a wave of fear came over me. That night I wrote in my reflection journal, “As the initiator and facilitator of this collaborative inquiry group I am a little anxious about Mr. Green’s decision to eliminate two of his mixed choirs. What happens if the program decreases numerically and musically?” Mr. Green shared that he experienced the same kind of emotions. As he reflected in his journal:

I am nervous about making such drastic changes to the high school choral program. Will this transition to a single-sex choral program benefit or hurt our progress? And yet, at the same time, I am excited and energized to move forward with the new schedule in 2011–2012.

Mr. Green felt that the Bedford High School choral program had reached the pinnacle of its numerical and musical growth and he needed to make changes to move the program to the next level. In a mini reflection session, Mr. Green shared that he met with the administration at the high school and presented this new schedule: Beginning Women’s Choir (grades ninth through twelfth); Advanced Women’s Choir (grades tenth through twelfth); Mixed Chamber Choir (grades tenth through twelfth); and Men’s Choir (grades ninth through twelfth). The new high school schedule at Bedford was very similar to Deer Lake, with the addition of a Beginning Women’s Choir.

During another informal conversation with Mr. Green he shared with me that the administration and counselors struggled to understand why he would
make these changes to a system that already seemed successful. Mr. Green explained to them that the choral program had grown as far as it could under the present mixed choir format. He shared Deer Lake’s story and the successes the choral program achieved after moving to a single-sex configuration. Because of their trust in Mr. Green’s leadership and musical expertise the administration agreed to make the necessary schedule changes for 2011–2012.

The most stressful part of the schedule change came when Mr. Green began to prepare students in April 2011 before they registered in May, one month later. Mr. Green reflected, “The guys were excited to sing in a Men’s Choir during the school schedule, but some of the girls were upset they only had one opportunity in the class schedule (Chamber Choir) to sing with the guys.” Mr. Green assured the students the Men’s Choir and Women’s Choir would be combined for concerts, contests, and choir trips.

Mr. Green and Mrs. Beatty also had to prepare the eighth grade singers for the changes that would take place at the high school. According to Mr. Green:

The new schedule changes proved to be much easier on us at the high school. The eighth grade females automatically scheduled for Beginning Women’s Choir and the eighth grade males automatically scheduled for Men’s Choir. In the old schedule, all eighth grade students would have to go through a try-out process in the spring. Then we would place each singer in an appropriate choir according to their ability.
Mrs. Clapton added, “That process was time consuming and complaints surfaced from students and parents because some eight graders were placed in intermediate or advanced choirs while others were placed in beginning choirs.”

The benefit of this collaborative inquiry for Mr. Green and Mrs. Clapton became clear. They had a mixed choral program at Bedford and struggled to reach a numerical balance by sex. Mr. Green was eager to make personal and program changes to encourage male choral participation. He wondered if moving to a single-sex choral program might mitigate some perceived barriers and encourage male choral participation.

The success Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson experienced at Deer Lake in moving to a single-sex choral program in 2005 encouraged Mr. Green to transition the high school choral program at Bedford to the same kind of configuration. In 2012, Green made this very optimistic statement: “Without this collaboration, I would have never been brave enough to make the transition to a single-sex choral program. To my delight, I have only seen positive results.” In 2013, however, Mr. Green began to have second thoughts about eliminating his mixed Concert Choir. He continued to make adjustments to the choir schedule to fit their specific needs in 2014 (see the follow-up sessions at the end of this chapter for an update). The lesson learned is choral strategies and program changes implemented by one practitioner, in one setting, may not necessarily receive the same outcome due to the unique variables within the environment (e.g., the choral teacher, students, administration, school setting).
While Bedford was making major changes to their choral program at the high school, I often wondered what benefit Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson received at Deer Lake from their participation in this inquiry. Their choral program was thriving and one of the best in the state. They had already moved to a single-sex choral program in 2005, several years prior to this study. I addressed this concern with Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson during a mini reflection session. Mrs. Thompson reported, “We were seeking affirmation that we made the right decision moving to a single-sex choral program in 2005, and we wanted to work collaboratively with other choral practitioners to encourage male choral participation.”

In our wrap-up session in June 2011, Mr. Stevens shared that both of their goals for participating in this collaborative inquiry had been met. Mr. Stevens stated:

Having the males in a separate class created a totally different dynamic. The boys were no longer intimidated by having girls in the classroom. They sang stronger and with more energy and we were able to use vocal techniques specifically designed to develop adolescent male voices. The changes in our program were dramatic.

Mr. Stevens cautioned the Bedford collaborators to be patient for several years in making this kind of transition. He added, “The first year or two we experienced a few bumps in the road with minimal improvement. The third and
fourth years our enrollment numbers began to increase.” Mrs. Beatty asked about the struggles they faced in the first year, to which Mr. Thompson replied, “Our numbers declined in some of our choirs as a few students perceived a drastic change in our program and decided to participate in other activities.” I asked Mr. Green if he felt the Bedford High School choral program would decrease in enrollment the first year or two with this kind of program change. Mr. Green responded that there might be a few girls at the high school upset that they cannot sing in a mixed choir, but they probably wouldn’t have many. I explored the issue a little further and asked about the girls that waited patiently for two or three years to be in the mixed Concert Choir only to find that the opportunity had been eliminated? Mrs. Clapton replied that everyone wouldn’t necessarily be happy about the change to a single-sex program, but that ultimately there should be growth in both the male and female choirs. Mr. Green confided in me, after the reflection session, that he was troubled about the possibility of losing some singers to other activities in the school. But, he concluded, “I feel this is the right move for the program.”

Other Possible Program Changes

In our reflection times at Deer Lake we often discussed the choir schedule at the middle school. I wondered why Mr. Stevens and Mr. Thompson did not separate seventh grade girls into one choir and eighth grade girls in another choir. At the Deer Lake Middle School, Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson had two
Girls’ Choirs of 75 singers with an equal balance of seventh and eighth grade girls in each choir. I asked, “What motivation is there for an eighth grade girl to take Girls’ Choir again after she already spent a year in the choir?” to which Mr. Stevens replied, “They can continue to improve their sight-reading skills. We do new music literature, their voices mature, and relationships are enriched.” Mrs. Thompson added, “We would rather separate the seventh grade girls and eighth grade girls, but due to scheduling issues the counselors said we had to keep the two grade levels together.”

Mrs. Beatty and Mr. Green were concerned the low numbers of males enrolled in the Junior High Men’s Choir, three total, would negatively impact the high school choral program. We discussed how Mrs. Beatty advanced adolescent boys to the Select Mixed Choir who sang with enthusiasm and followed classroom protocols. The boys who were emotionally disruptive or musically unsuccessful were placed in the Men’s Choir. I wondered if students perceived the Men’s Choir as a dumping ground for male “misfits.” By the middle of the fourth quarter, Men’s Choir was void of any singers and became an extra planning period for Mrs. Beatty. Two male singers were removed from all their classes and placed in a special recovery school and the other singer was promoted to the Select Mixed Choir.

In one of our mini reflection sessions we discussed future scheduling options at the junior high level. I asked them, “What if you only select the best eighth grade singers for the Select Mixed Choir? Right now you select the best
seventh and eighth grade singers.” I could tell this was a touchy topic from the expression on Mrs. Beatty’s face. Mr. Green sat quietly, so I continued:

In the Men’s Choir, you could include all the seventh grade boys and those eighth grade boys who are not chosen for the Select Mixed Choir. In the Women’s Choir you could have all the seventh grade girls and those eighth grade girls who are not chosen for the Select Mixed Choir.

Mrs. Beatty shook her head and responded, “We wouldn’t have enough singers for the Select Mixed Choir.” I countered, “You might have a smaller group for a few years, but your Men’s Choir and Women’s Choir would potentially grow in numbers and quality.” Mr. Green then chimed in, saying, “The seventh grade singers would certainly realize that if they wanted to be part of the Select Mixed Choir they had to prove themselves in the seventh grade choirs.” After the reflection meeting Mr. Green confided, “It’s difficult for Mrs. Beatty to make changes to the junior high choral program since she’s retiring this year.” I responded that I understood Mrs. Beatty’s situation. If I was retiring and this was my last year teaching, I wouldn’t make big changes to the choir program either, I told him. A new junior high choral teacher would take Mrs. Beatty’s place in 2011–2012 and Mr. Green felt he or she would need stability for their first few years at the junior high, so he decided to focus his energies on a single-sex choral program at the high school.
Wrap-up Session

After the 2010–2011 school year, our collaborative inquiry group members joined together for a final wrap-up session. The goal was to celebrate our collaboration, wind down emotionally, mourn the end of our collaboration, and provide each member an opportunity to share what they had gleaned from our experience together.

We took time during the wrap-up session to review themes and reflect on the changes that had occurred during our collaboration. Items covered during this session included: teaching schedules; support from administration and community; choir recruitment strategies; choir trips, concerts and contests; fundraisers; try-out protocols for select choral groups; the use of student mentors and student teachers; extra rehearsals; solos and ensembles; and single-sex versus coeducational or mixed choirs. During the wrap-up meeting everyone shared how they enjoyed connecting with other choral directors around the state who shared the same passions and struggles. In concluding our wrap-up session, Mr. Stevens told the group, “I'll miss the times we just sat together before school or at lunch and bounced ideas off one another. This process has been energizing.” I told the group I would follow-up with everyone periodically and try to keep everyone informed about updates at Bedford and Deer Lake.
Follow-Up Sessions and Updates

During follow-up sessions (2011–2014) I was informed of other program changes through emails, phone conversations, and personal visits to the sites. These periodic follow-up contacts were pivotal in tracking changes that had occurred after our collaboration in 2010–2011. The following sections provide relevant updates to the programs described throughout this chapter.

Bedford Junior High

At Bedford Junior High School a new female choral teacher took Mrs. Beatty’s place after she retired in 2011. Stacey James (pseudonym) was one of Mr. Green’s former student teachers. In her first year (2011–2012), Ms. James maintained the program that Mrs. Beatty had built. Mr. Green gradually shared with Ms. James the information from our collaborative inquiry. They both began to dream about and plan for program changes at the junior high for 2012–2013. They received approval from key decision-makers to choose only the top eighth grade singers for the Select Mixed Choir. They also followed through with the other changes discussed earlier in this chapter. The Men’s Choir and Women’s Choir contained all the seventh grade singers and those eighth grade singers that were not chosen for the Select Mixed Choir. Later in this chapter, five years of enrollment numbers are reported for Bedford and Deer Lake secondary choral programs.
The changes benefited the choral program in several ways: (1) the choral teachers no longer had to spend time at the intermediate school designating which sixth graders should go into the various choirs at the junior high; (2) all seventh graders who wanted to sing in the Select Mixed Choir had to show their dedication and musicianship in the Women’s and Men’s Choirs; (3) Ms. James and Mr. Green were able to focus on specific teaching strategies and music literature for the single-sex choirs and the eighth grade Select Mixed Choir; and (4) the Men’s Choir no longer was perceived as a dumping ground. In Mr. Green’s assessment, the changes have been successful:

We were scared to make such drastic changes to the choral program at the junior high, but for the third year in a row the program has grown. There are even plans to hire another choral teacher to assist Ms. James at the junior high. The junior high choral program has grown past the capacity of our small room and the district is in the initial stage of planning a larger space for the choir.

**Bedford High School**

When Mr. Green made the change to a single-sex choral program in 2011–2012 he worried there would be a decrease in enrollment. He reported to me that there has been numerical and musical growth in the new Men’s Choir and the other choirs remained stable and strong. The men in the top Chamber
Choir (Mixed) also wanted to enroll in the Men’s Choir because of what was going on in the group. Mr. Green described a renewed enthusiasm and excitement in his high school program from 2011–2014.

Mrs. Clapton no longer accompanies the choirs at Bedford. Her Music Appreciation and Music Theory/Keyboard classes have grown so large they have built a separate music theory/electronic keyboard classroom. Mr. Green is waiting on the administration to approve an additional choral teacher at the junior high level so Ms. James can “team-teach” with him at both the junior high and high school.

Mr. Green continues to make small adjustments to the secondary choral program. He admitted to me that he moved too fast when eliminating the two mixed choirs in 2011–2012. “I missed my large mixed Concert Choir in the school curriculum,” he said. Mr. Green shared with me he should have moved much slower and eliminated only the Freshman Mixed Choir. “I should have moved all the ninth graders into single-sex choirs” he lamented. After two years with the new schedule he placed the mixed Concert Choir back in the schedule for 2014–2015. He eliminated the Beginning Women’s Choir (ninth grade) and changed the name of the Advanced Women’s Choir to Women’s Choir (ninth through twelfth grades).

Changing from a mixed choral program to a single-sex configuration became a reality for both Bedford High School and Bedford Junior High School. In July 2014 the state music educators association notified Mr. Green that his
high school Men’s Choir was one of eleven choirs selected to sing for the annual
convention in January 2015. Mr. Green confided in me that much of the credit for
the success of the new Men’s Choir was directly attributable to the collaborative
inquiry experience.

Below is a summary of enrollment numbers for Bedford Junior High

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedford Secondary Choral Program Enrollment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 2</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Choir</td>
<td>54</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concert Choir</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber Choir</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Choir</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv. Women</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Choir</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>268</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dual Enrolled</td>
<td>-36</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at Bedford’s secondary choral enrollment numbers for 2010–2015, enrollment numbers decrease a little for two years. In the third and fourth years, enrollment numbers began to increase throughout the program. Interestingly, the biggest enrollment gains were among females.

**Deer Lake Middle School**

A new program change was implemented at Deer Lake Middle School as a result of our collaborative inquiry in 2010–2011. In 2012–2013, Mr. Stevens separated the two seventh and eighth grade Women’s Choirs into a seventh grade Women’s Choir and eighth grade Women’s Choir. In 2013–2014, the new seventh grade Women’s Choir had 80 singers. The second Women’s Choir had 52 singers, and this is down from 80 singers during our collaboration in 2010–2011. Due to scheduling and enrollment issues the second Women’s Choir contains a mix of seventh and eighth grade girls (37 seventh grade girls and 15 eighth grade girls). The enrollment of girls in the choirs at the middle school in 2013–2014 was 117 seventh graders and 15 eighth grade girls, a decrease of 60 eighth grade girls from 2010–2011.

During recent follow-up visits at Deer Lake in May 2014, Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson were frustrated and concerned about enrollment numbers at the middle school, especially eighth grade girls. New decision-makers at the middle school had created additional classes and reduced electives available for the middle school students. Mr. Stevens reported, “Eighth graders are now
encouraged to mentor at the elementary schools during the day." Mrs. Thompson was also convinced the drop in enrollment of eighth grade females was due to changes in administration and class requirements. "The eighth grade girls are more likely to mentor at the elementary level than the eighth grade boys. The Men’s Choir enrollment was stable with 70 singers in seventh and eighth grades."

Mr. Stevens similarly concluded, "It is difficult to recruit and retain singers, to grow or even maintain your program, when you have external forces pulling students from your classes."

**Deer Lake High School**

Mrs. Thompson speculated the choir enrollment numbers might decrease at the high school when the current middle school students move up to the high school. Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson have continued to work hard, and the quality of singers is still very strong, but recruitment issues for eighth grade girls seem to be a new challenge for their choral program. In October 2014 Mr. Stevens updated me on recent events:

Changes in school administration have settled down and we continue to recruit singers. Things have turned out well for us and we have so much talent this year. The seventh grade Women’s Choir is up to 93 and they are strong singers who aren't afraid to sing out with energy. The seventh and eighth grade Men’s Choir has risen to 85. We probably have the best
middle school men's choir we have ever had here at Deer Lake. Our eighth grade Women's Choir is up to 50. We did lose some girls to other electives, but the girls we have in the class want to be in choir and are very talented. We continue to see some of the girls who decided not to be in choir this year in the hallways and they tell us they want to come back, so hopefully at semester, we will gain a few more. The high school program is very still strong.

Below are the enrollment numbers for Deer Lake Middle School and Deer Lake High School during our entire collaborative journey (2010–2015). Although male enrollment gradually increased at Deer Lake Middle School and High School from 2010–2015, the decision of eighth grade females to opt out of choir has impacted both the middle school and high school enrollment numbers from 2011–2015.
Table 5

*Deer Lake Secondary Choral Program Enrollment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 1 (7)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Choir</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 2 (8)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>228</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber Choir</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Choir</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Choir</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>181</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Male Choral Participation Summary**

The problem of “missing males” in choral programs at the secondary level reflects a complex web of interrelated threads (Lucas, 2009). For this reason, our collaborative inquiry group joined together to implement specific strategies into classrooms with the goal of improving the numerical imbalances between adolescent males and females at the middle and high school levels.

Our collaboration in 2010–2011 was the catalyst for connecting choral practitioners who worked in different school districts but were unified by the same purpose and goals. Our collaboration also encouraged the Bedford choral teachers to move from a mixed choir program to a single-sex choir program at
the high school. Although some initial changes were considered too aggressive in retrospect, additional adjustments were considered and implemented. Our collaboration helped affirm Mr. Stevens’ and Mrs. Thompson’s decision in 2005 to move to a single-sex program at Deer Lake. Additionally, our collaborative inquiry follow-up visits (2011–2014) revealed residual program changes and celebrations that followed our collaboration in 2010–2011 (e.g., numerical and musical growth, the Bedford Men’s Choir selected to sing for the state music convention in 2015).

As an inquiry group focused on improving gender balance in school choral ensembles, we came to realize there is a very “delicate and interconnected ‘ecosystem’ that is required in order for boys [and girls] to maintain engagement in their musical activities” (Collins, 2009, p. 33). That ecosystem is vulnerable to the impact of perceived physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling barriers. We also discovered that choral directors could solve some issues within the choral environment with specific action-oriented strategies. However, Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson also learned that schooling issues outside of their control (e.g., changes in administration, class requirements, a decrease in electives) had a detrimental result on the enrollment of eighth grade middle school girls at Deer Lake.
And Finally

Chapter Six will take into account the personal reflections from group members about using collaborative inquiry as research approach and an adult learning strategy.
Chapter Six

Collaborative Inquiry

The second goal of our collaborative inquiry group was to learn more about collaborative inquiry as a research approach and adult learning strategy. This chapter accounts for personal reflections from group members about using collaborative inquiry as research approach and an adult learning strategy. As Heron (1996) cautioned, however, “There is no such thing as the account for this type of inquiry, only an account” (p. 6). Hence, what I offer here must be understood only as my best effort to represent our journey together.

Inquiry Reflections

During the course of our collaboration, we realized our lives had individually and collectively been transformed by using collaborative inquiry just as much as, or more than, the transformations that occurred in our choral programs regarding male choral participation. We came to understand and accept that the primary purpose of collaborative inquiry was transformation in each of our lives (e.g., working together to solve pressing issues, learning to use critical reflection, and creating actionable knowledge rather than being receivers of knowledge). Changes in our choral programs and school environments were secondary to the changes that took place in our individual lives (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Three major categories surfaced from using collaborative inquiry as an
adult learning strategy: (1) shifting roles and responsibilities; (2) creating collaborative social space; and (3) group synergy.

**Shifting Roles and Responsibilities**

The most challenging aspect of the collaborative inquiry process was our changing roles and responsibilities. My position morphed and changed into five different roles: initiator; facilitator; peer inquirer; participant observer; and encourager. Each of these roles required unique skills, abilities, and actions throughout the inquiry. Below, I describe the challenges when shifting roles and responsibilities throughout the six stages of this collaborative inquiry (See Chapter Three for a thorough explanation of these roles and responsibilities).

**Initiator.** My traditional education, training, and expertise prepared me well to handle the first two roles during our inquiry. A hierarchical or top-down leadership model is needed in the beginning phases when prospective members are learning about the methodology. Later, a hierarchical or top-down leadership model would defeat the main premise of collaborative inquiry (democratic participation). As the initiator of the group, I decided necessary details for the participants until they could be educated and trained in the basic tenets of collaborative inquiry. During the August 2010 induction meetings the prospective group members relied on me to provide direction, organize, and lay the groundwork for the inquiry. Specific responsibilities included: scheduling meetings; communicating information to prospective group members; answering
specific questions by email or phone; and planning agendas for both induction meetings. During the actual induction meetings I also planned informal activities so prospective members could get to know each other, feel comfortable with me, and understand the nature of the inquiry.

I suggested a tentative plan for the inquiry, but made sure the group members understood the plan was completely flexible. I maintained the schedule during the induction meetings and determined how much time would be devoted to specific activities. Even though my position as initiator took a considerable amount of time, preparation, and emotional energy, I was never overwhelmed or excessively anxious regarding my responsibilities as initiator of the group. After the induction meetings I made a smooth transition from the role of initiator to facilitator of the group.

**Facilitator.** Group members continued to depend on me to provide a basic map of the inquiry, answer questions, and clarify concerns regarding the research methodology. My ultimate goal as facilitator was to share responsibilities with group members and transition as quickly as possible to the role of peer inquirer (Bray et al., 2000). However, there were times I felt inhibited to fully participate and share my thoughts with the group. I caught myself withdrawing from reflection phrases because I feared some members might perceive my input too authoritative. A few quotes in prominent locations throughout my office guided and encouraged me in these times of uncertainty: “The facilitator is busy with the paradox of leading others into freedom” (Heron,
1996, p. 67); and “The more direction I assume the more difficult it is to remove myself from being looked at as the ‘owner’ of the inquiry” (Bray, 2002, p. 85).

Heron (1996) described the facilitator’s job as a “knife-edge business” (p. 65). I remember feeling very anxious during this particular phase of the inquiry. I wrote in my personal journal:

If I provide too much direction, group members might rely too heavily on me, while others might be resistant to my strong leadership position. If I withdraw from voicing my opinions, or fail to help the group in distressing times, group members might become frustrated, confused, and even withdraw from the inquiry altogether.

It was during these same difficult days of personal insecurity that inquiry members began to share personal stories from their experiences in their classrooms. Individuals began to open up and become vulnerable to one another (Heron, 1999). These personal stories broke our sense of isolation and we began to gain a sense of enthusiasm and energy that was not present during the first few months of the inquiry (Bray, 2002). Our respect for, and confidence in one another increased as we spent more time together (Roberson, 2002). We also grew more comfortable questioning our assumptions and using critical reflection to work our way out of difficulties within the choral classroom (York & Kasl, 2002).
Peer inquirer. In the beginning of the inquiry I assumed these roles would follow a linear progression. However, three of these roles were not linear (facilitator, peer inquirer, participant observer), and often oscillated back and forth depending on the circumstance. Below, is a visual representation I designed to assist group members understand my changing roles and responsibilities during the inquiry.

![Diagram of changing roles and responsibilities]

Figure 4. Changing roles and responsibilities

I found the transition from facilitator to peer inquirer difficult as group members often turned to me for direction and guidance with methodological issues (Reason, 1994). The role movement back and forth confused group members regarding my authority and posture within the group. When methodological issues surfaced, transition time from peer inquirer to facilitator
was quick and required little effort, like walking down stairs. However, the transition from facilitator back to peer inquirer demanded great physical, emotional, and cognitive energy, like walking up stairs.

Because of their traditional training and education, I perceived group members were more comfortable when I assumed the role of initiator and facilitator rather than peer inquirer. The group’s dependency on me diminished as they gained more confidence with the methodology (Zelman, 2002). It was through shared responsibilities group members began to see me as a peer inquirer instead of ‘owner’ of the inquiry (De Venney-Tiernan et al., 1994).

Participant observer. A reversal of leadership roles and responsibilities took place when I visited the two districts and four school sites each week in 2010–2011. The choral practitioners took the lead in their classrooms and I became a participant observer (Yorks, 2005). I participated in choir rehearsals, made observations, engaged in dialogue, conducted informal interviews, and collected descriptive data regarding the communities and choral programs.

In the beginning months of the inquiry, group members were uncomfortable when I observed and participated in their classrooms. The group member’s traditional training and education kicked-in and they viewed me as an authoritative figure, evaluating their performance as a classroom teacher and judging the quality of their choirs. It took time to build trusting relationships. I constantly reminded group members we were all on the same team. A few months later, after we had built trusting relationships, group members shared
they were initially intimidated by my reputation as a clinician, adjudicator, and choral director. Mr. Green reflected,

The only disadvantage to collaborating together was how unnerving it was for me to know that someone was watching my every move. It put a large spotlight on my teaching, and I often felt nervous and even apologetic for how things were going. I often caught myself worrying more about the impression I was making on Kevin and mentally questioning my every move rather than focusing on the actual teaching itself. However, after the first several visits, I was less self-conscious and my inadequacies became less of an issue.

Their journals reflect the challenges I faced. Mrs. Beatty, for example, wrote, “Because of his experience and reputation as a choral conductor it was a little awkward having Mr. Hawkins in our classes on a weekly basis.” Over time, however, trust began to develop. As Mrs. Clapton remarked, “He quickly made us feel comfortable and I think the social element of our get-togethers helped.” Mr. Stevens added, “It became very evident at the beginning of the collaboration that Mr. Hawkins was not there to criticize in any capacity. He was truly there in the spirit of collaboration.” The choral students trusted and accepted me in the classroom almost immediately. I would quickly find an open seat and freely participate in all the classroom activities. The first few weeks some students giggled and laughed, but they quickly welcomed me in their choral environment.
Encourager and monitor. The final role transition occurred when our collaborative inquiry concluded and group members continued creating actionable knowledge and new meaning in their classrooms without my assistance or help (Argyris, 1996). Three years following the collaborative inquiry (2011–2014), I periodically contacted group members by phone, email, or shared a meal with them at our annual state convention. Even though time had passed, and our inquiry was officially completed, our friendships remained strong. We laughed, shared stories, and updated each other about the changes that had occurred in our professional and personal lives. Group members asked my opinion and/or advice regarding actions they had implemented in their classrooms and trust levels remained high throughout these follow-up sessions.

Mr. Stevens acknowledged:

In the years since our collaboration we have periodically kept in touch. This collaboration has provided the validation and encouragement that we needed in the continued development of our program and proven to be an important resource in shaping our teaching practices.

Creating Collaborative Social Space

During the early stages of the collaborative inquiry, individual and group tensions developed due to prior experiences and assumptions regarding educational research (Heron, 1996). As a collaborative inquiry group, one of the
monumental hurdles we faced was creating a learning environment of high mutual trust, openness, and security. We felt the success or failure of our inquiry rested on creating a collaborative social space where intense dialogue and knowledge creation could take place (Fisher & Torbert, 1995; Mezirow, 1991).

We used four procedures to build and sustain this learning environment.

First, we developed trusting relationships through a deep commitment to one another and a passion for the inquiry topic (Ospina et al., 2008; Yorks et al., 2007). From the outset of the inquiry our group believed the quality of our individual and collective relationships would determine the quality of our outcomes. We dedicated time and energy to build genuine relationships and a sense of community. We shared meals together and discussed issues outside the contexts of the research inquiry.

Second, we wanted to create a relaxed atmosphere where individuals could feel safe and express themselves without attacks, coercion, or unnecessary pressure from other group members (Zelman, 1995). Early in the inquiry process we committed to the statement, “We will not share personal or private information with others outside the inquiry group that we discussed within the group.” Pseudonyms were also used during the inquiry to conceal and protect our identities and the identities of participating school districts and sites. Anonymity helped group members feel safe during the entire inquiry.

Third, the collaborative inquiry process was a highly personal and intimate approach to educational research. Individual and group relationships demanded
a high degree of care, respect, support, and sensitivity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within an environment of trust and security group members began to take risks and show vulnerability to one another.

Fourth, the use of storytelling became a natural and fundamental part of the inquiry communication process (Bray et al., 2000). There was an emphasis on equal time and space for all inquiry members (Reason, 1994). Members engaged in storytelling rounds sharing experiences from actions implemented in their classrooms (Bray, 1995). Creating a collaborative social space where intense dialogue and knowledge creation could take place inspired Mr. Stevens to open up and share a collage of teaching strategies and experiences to engage adolescent males in singing activities at school. Mr. Stevens reflected:

We observed the intense energy that exists with middle school and high school boys. We learned that classroom management looks much different in the boy's classes than in the girl's classes. The boys were more 'rowdy,' energetic, and interactive. They can't stand still and most of them sway back and forth while they sing. We also learned that it is much easier to manage their behavior by keeping them singing. While they are singing, they are more likely to stay on task. If we spend too much time talking to them, we experienced more classroom management issues. It is much better to refine or hone their singing in short quick statements or demonstrations. Also, boys' attention spans are about equal to their age in minutes. We never spend more than about twelve to fourteen minutes on
one activity or song. We rarely sing through an entire piece of music but rather isolate sections or problem spots, reinforce notes and rhythms, and then move on. It is also important to keep the pace of the class quick and don't allow for down time. Boys thrive on competition. We quickly began to implement competitions into our teaching strategies. If you ask a class of boys for volunteers there are hands that go up all around the classrooms. If you reward them with a piece of candy, the response is even stronger. We've learned to provide these opportunities for our boys' classes and to always be encouraging and positive with them. A positive affirmation to an adolescent male carries a lot of weight.

**Group Synergy**

The third major category that surfaced from using collaborative inquiry as an adult learning strategy was group synergy. According to the online etymology dictionary, the term synergy comes from the Latin word synergia, which means the increased effectiveness when two or more people work together. The word “synergy” was used to describe what our group felt when we joined together to solve pressing issues within our classrooms. Synergy evolved as members realized we were in complete control of the collaborative inquiry process. We were an autonomous and self-directing group that could pursue our own research question, design our own inquiry, implement specific action-oriented strategies, reflect on and learn from our experiences, determine outcomes
through consensus, and plan how we would share this new knowledge and meaning with those outside the group (Bray et al., 2000). The realization that we were in control of our own inquiry empowered us individually and collectively.

Several group members expressed they had been “burned-out” before our collaboration. It was the daily grind of working in isolation, the repetitiveness of writing lesson plans, and teaching classes that drained their energy and passion. During reflection phases, group members’ faces lit up with enthusiasm as they told stories about actions they had implemented in their classrooms and the reactions of their students. Group members often described a renewed energy, passion, and enthusiasm after our action and reflection cycles (Bray, 1995).

And Finally

For the final chapter of this dissertation (Chapter Seven), I discuss the areas of this collaboration that have shown great significance to me and the other members of the group. I conclude by discussing the implications of this study for music education (e.g., choral teachers, choral students, pre-service teachers), music publishers, school officials, and those concerned with gender issues. I will also offer commentary on the ways in which collaborative inquiry might serve as a model for future studies investigating similar phenomena.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion

For this final chapter, I provide a synopsis of our experiences using collaborative inquiry as a research approach and adult learning strategy. I synthesize the issues raised and strategies implemented in our classroom environments to encourage male choral participation, and discuss the implications of this study for music education, music publishers, school officials, and those concerned with gender issues. I conclude by offering commentary on the ways in which collaborative inquiry might serve as a model for future studies investigating similar phenomena.

Collaborative Inquiry

In the United States, students and teachers in the education system typically learn, teach, and demonstrate knowledge in competition with their peers. This practice is contradictory to the principles of teamwork and cooperation that are necessary in the workplace (Bray et al., 2000). One of the hallmarks of collaborative inquiry is that a group of self-directing peers work together to solve complex problems in the field using cycles of action and reflection (Heron, 1996). All members of the group participate in the research process (e.g., design of the inquiry, actions in the field, data collection, reflection sessions, and creating actionable knowledge and new meaning).
The numerical imbalance between adolescent males and females in choral programs at the secondary level is a complex issue involving a web of perceived physiological, psycho-social, and schooling barriers. The major contribution of this inquiry is that we used collaborative inquiry, a multi-dimensional and holistic research approach, to investigate a problem for which no single barrier accounted for the lack of male choral participation. There are no hard-and-fast guidelines for conducting a collaborative inquiry so describing our methodology is a paradoxical task (Heron, 1996). We conceptualized the process to encourage, not constrain those who might choose to initiate, facilitate, and participate in this type of inquiry.

**Fostering a group culture.** Although I had never initiated and facilitated a collaborative inquiry group, I was pleasantly surprised how smoothly the early phases (initiation and facilitation) of the inquiry progressed in 2010–2011. The two district groups worked independently for a semester (Fall 2010). In the spring of 2011 we combined the groups and shared information and strategies. Our collaborative group moved from divergence in the opening cycles, to convergence in the closing cycles.

Some initiators and facilitators of this type of inquiry may not have the luxury of selecting their own group members. In this inquiry, the selection of group members was one of the key components to the success of our collaboration. It was helpful that I had formed relationships with prospective group members prior to the inquiry. I was able to assess their individual qualities
and also consider whether they would fit with a group culture. Potential members possess certain traits that can increase or decrease the performance or effectiveness of the inquiry. I targeted prospective members who were dependable, reliable, responsible, flexible, adaptable, and open to change. As initiator, I invited potential inquiry members who I perceived were capable of hearing, processing, and responding to the perspectives of others without feeling personally attacked or threatened. I also looked for inquiry members that brought diversity of perspectives and viewpoints to the group. Our group contained three men and three women with different professional practices, lived experiences, and training and education. All members were highly organized and eager to learn, grow, and solve pressing issues within their programs. Group members had a desire to engage in activities with their peers rather than work independently, and were already “team-teaching” and collaborating at their school sites.

**Misconceptions regarding collaborative inquiry.** There were several assumptions I had about collaborative inquiry that drastically changed after I initiated, facilitated, and participated in this group. First, when I began the journey I assumed there was one correct way to initiate and facilitate a collaborative inquiry group. Through study of the pertinent literature and basic experience with the inquiry, I came to understand collaborative inquiry groups could be initiated and facilitated in a variety of ways. A full-form inquiry is when all the members of the group are members of the organization or profession (Heron, 1996). For
example, five to seven teachers in a particular school could form a collaborative group as part of their professional development. A partial-form inquiry involves an initiating researcher who is not a member of that particular profession and does not participate in the action sessions. Our inquiry group used a combination of these two forms. I was an outside initiator and facilitator who visited the other practitioners in their settings, but I also worked in the same profession and implemented and tested specific action-oriented strategies in my own environment.

Once I learned about the different ways an inquiry group could be formed I made the assumption the full-form inquiry was the most credible and valid method, since all members of the group were living and working in the same environment. I perceived that the partial-form inquiry was another form of qualitative research because the researcher was a visitor in the practitioner’s environments. However, I gradually came to understand that the full-form and partial-form were both collaborative inquiry approaches because the practitioners in the field were participating in all the decisions of the inquiry. In qualitative research, the researcher makes all the decisions and only occasionally checks with the subjects or participants to validate information.

Second, in the beginning of the inquiry I assumed that group members had equal influence throughout the entire inquiry. I often read that collaborative inquiry groups are “leaderless groups” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 67). This phrase was deceiving to me, as I assumed that any type of explicit leadership was taboo for
this type of inquiry. I eventually came to use the phrase “shared or collective leadership” instead of “leaderless groups.” When initiating researchers launch an inquiry group it is impossible to have a parity of influence between them and their co-inquirers (Heron, 1996). The initiator-facilitator can move from strong influence, to peer influence, and then to observer and participant. Practitioners can move from observer and participant, to peer influence, and then to strong leadership. As group members move from role to role within the inquiry they remain on the same level with the other collaborators by way of answering the research problem (e.g., making decisions within the group, implementing strategies to encourage male participation, reflecting on actions implemented, and creating actionable knowledge and new meaning).

Third, when I began this collaboration I assumed that valid reflection sessions occurred in pre-planned and structured settings. Reflection and meaning making proved to be as profitable in unstructured settings as they did in structured settings. In unstructured social settings (e.g., during meals, in the teacher’s lounge, in-between classes, before and after school) group members were more open and relaxed and often shared valuable insights into the inquiry topic.

Fourth, before I began this collaborative inquiry I had the assumption that traditional research outcomes, ones obtained by a detached and objective researcher, were more credible than outcomes reported by a group of practitioners collaborating in the field to solve problems in their own
environments. I worried the results of our inquiry would not be received in academic circles. In essence, we were taking a non-traditional research approach and reporting the outcomes and reflections in a traditional format.

I have now realized that although collaborative inquiry is a very fluid and emergent form of inquiry it is also a very long and rigorous process of grounding knowledge in experience (Bray et al., 2000). In collaborative inquiry, group members progress through repeated cycles of action and reflection to create actionable knowledge and new meaning. In our situation, we used hundreds of unplanned and unstructured mini reflection sessions and several longer planned and structured reflection sessions. Over a four-year period (2010–2014), our collaborative group members implemented a variety of action-oriented strategies to encourage male choral participation. We constantly tested, retested, reflected, discussed, and evaluated these strategies through the diverse viewpoints and perspectives of group members. After our four-year collaboration, Mr. Green reflected, “I benefited from collaborating together because there was an extra pair of ears and eyes in the room. This allowed a fresh perspective on how my classroom was run and its effectiveness. There was immediate feedback and we were able to implement new strategies, test for effectiveness, and make additional tweaks.”

I have come to understand that it would be imprudent and irresponsible for others to evaluate the validity of our outcomes in the same way traditional research outcomes are measured. In this type of situation-specific inquiry, we
measured the validity of our outcomes by the changes and transformations that took place in the members of the inquiry group, by the new approaches we used in our environments to solve pressing issues, and by the changes that took place in our programs.

The standards by which this type of inquiry is assessed are internal to the inquiry group through self and peer assessment. Heron (1996) explained that the four forms of knowing (experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical) should be interdependent and complementary. However, Heron also asserted that practical knowing is the highest form of knowing supported by propositional outcomes. The outcomes reported on paper should be secondary to the changes and transformation that occur in the participants.

**Tensions and pressures within the inquiry.** This type of inquiry is democratic and should be free from coercion. However, there are always expectations and issues of power and control, which eventually create tensions within the inquiry. Below are some of the issues we faced during our four-year journey (2010–2014).

First, as initiator and facilitator of the group, I felt pressure because we were “breaking ground” using collaborative inquiry. Heron (1996) and Reason (1992) used their seminal books as instruction manuals for this type of inquiry. In Bray et al. (2000), five doctoral students came together to research collaborative inquiry and then used their final written report for their dissertations. The closest work to our inquiry is a book edited by Yorks and Kasl (2002). Their book is a
collection of chapters from collaborative inquiry groups.

Second, the practitioners were initially intimidated by my presence in their classroom because of their prior experiences with me as a choral director, clinician, and adjudicator throughout the state. I also sensed tension from the practitioners as I frequently switched roles throughout the inquiry (e.g., initiator, facilitator, peer inquirer, observer and encourager).

Third, the choral practitioners worked weekdays, nights, and weekends preparing students for activities (i.e., concerts, solos and ensembles, musicals, fundraisers, large choir competitions), and they were logistically unable to invest a great deal of time to this inquiry. Knowing their time constraints, I frequently felt guilty pulling them together, training them in the methodology, asking them for reflective notes, and sharing leadership responsibilities with them. Sometimes it felt like I was a sergeant trying to get his unit through the endurance course together. Some wanted to run off and finish the course by themselves because others were slowing them down. Some wanted to quit because they felt the task was too difficult. Others encouraged group members to stay on task and finish the goal as a group.

Fourth, I wanted the final culminating document (my dissertation) to be a collaborative effort and may have failed to adequately describe my expectations to the other group members. The stakes in our collaborative inquiry were different from those in Bray et al. (2000). In Bray et al. (2000), the members worked together to understand and write about collaborative inquiry as a new
research approach and were motivated to complete the project because it was a collaborative dissertation. But unlike Bray et al. (2000), the group members in this inquiry did not have a stake in the final written document and had already achieved their primary goals during the initial inquiry in 2010–2011 (i.e., personal and program transformations).

Fifth, not all group members participated at the same level of intensity throughout the inquiry. There are four plausible reasons for varied participation levels. Several career transitions occurred during the 2010–2014 inquiry. Audrey Beatty retired in June 2011, after three decades as a choral music teacher. In 2012, Maria Clapton no longer accompanied the choirs for Mr. Green at Bedford High School and began teaching a full schedule of music appreciation and keyboard classes. Practitioners experienced health and family related issues during the inquiry. Ann Thompson’s husband was diagnosed and treated for cancer and her daughter gave birth to twins. Mrs. Thompson moved to a reduced schedule at Deer Lake in 2013. There was a lack of agreement on the completion of the inquiry. Some practitioners perceived the field portion of the inquiry (2010–2011) ended the collaborative experience. One member said, “I hope you were able to get what you needed to complete your dissertation.” Other group members participated throughout the four-year process. Mr. Green reflected,

I believe two things would make future collaborations even better. First, I would build in more time to reflect on ideas and their implementation. Due
to the crazy schedules we all kept, this was nearly impossible, but I think it would be beneficial. Second, I would like for the collaboration to have lasted past the first year into the actual implementation during the second year. It would have been nice to have Kevin back several times the second year to allow him to witness the implementation and have a chance to bounce ideas, questions, and suggestions back and forth.

We started the collaborative journey unified by a desire to improve the imbalances between adolescent males and females in our choral environments, but gradually drifted apart throughout the duration of the experience because of daily pressures, career changes, health issues, personal and family events, and a lack of agreement on the completion of the inquiry.

Male Choral Participation

Our collaborative inquiry group implemented strategies in our classroom environments with the goal of mitigating perceived barriers and encouraging male choral participation at the middle and high school levels. We considered the differences between adolescent males and females and wondered if using single-sex choirs might mitigate some of the perceived barriers adolescent males face when singing in school at the secondary level.

Single-sex versus mixed choirs. As a high school choral director at Glendale High School (1997–2009), and church music director in multiple
churches (1982–present), I had used single-sex and mixed choirs for over three decades (see Vita on pp. 223–224). However, I had never considered the benefits and disadvantages of dividing choral classes by these two delineations to specifically encourage male choral participation. This strategy was not on the radar for me as I began to initiate and facilitate this collaborative inquiry. The topic returned frequently in our reflection sessions and I remembered the quote, “If an idea is important, it will come around again” (Group for Collaborative Inquiry & thINQ, 1994, p.62). Our group knew that single-sex education was not a panacea for all educational issues between adolescent males and females, but we were curious if separating adolescent males and females into single-sex choirs might mitigate some of our existing choral education issues.

In the middle of the inquiry I began to see benefits of single-sex choirs over mixed choirs while working with Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson at Deer Lake. They had moved to a single-sex secondary choral program in 2005. Mr. Green also began to consider modifying the Bedford secondary choral program from a mixed choir to a single-sex program. Within these single-sex choirs we implemented and tested other strategies to encourage choral participation, such as the use of same-sex peer role modeling and mentoring, the use of competitions and challenges to motivate the singers, encouraging movement in the music-making process, designing fast-paced rehearsals with more singing opportunities and fewer verbal explanations, emphasizing a team-like atmosphere and camaraderie, encouraging experimentation to build self-
confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth, and selecting range-appropriate literature and modifying music that would meet their specific vocal needs.

Near the end of the inquiry our group came to a consensus the most optimal period for single-sex choirs was middle school, especially for the adolescent males (e.g., voice change, improvement of vocal skills, classroom management, psycho-social issues, a supportive learning environment, leadership development). We felt it was not as crucial to have a single-sex choral program at the high school level. Most high school males have already negotiated the most difficult stages of the voice change and determined to either participate in or withdraw from singing activities in school.

**Recruitment strategies.** We used a variety of recruitment strategies to lower the perceived barriers and encourage male choral participation. Some of those strategies were the “Real Men Sing” tour, promoting the secondary choral program at the orientation event for incoming freshman and incoming seventh graders, inviting a dynamic men’s choir or male ensemble from the community to perform at concerts and school assemblies, sending a promo video of the secondary choral program to all the elementary music teachers, mailing or emailing a gender-specific letter to all the incoming freshman and seventh graders, and requesting recommendations from elementary and middle school teachers of prospective students.

At Deer Lake and Bedford Public Schools, the “Real Men Sing” tour was an effective recruitment strategy to encourage male and female choral
participation at the secondary level. It provided an atmosphere where young men could join with other young men, where they could experience a measure of fun and success as singers in a choral ensemble, and provided positive male singing role models for younger males. After reflection and discussion, we also realized the “Real Men Sing” tour could evoke unintended consequences and reinforce society's belief that "real men" exist. It was not our intention to create a situation where individuals were classified as “real men” and “not real men.” A revision of the name of this strategy might benefit everyone involved.

In a reflection session in 2011, I asked Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson if they ever targeted and recruited female singers. Mr. Stevens responded, “With a two to one ratio of females to males we don't really recruit or target females.” I was surprised and startled by Mr. Stevens' revelation and I remembered feeling that their recruitment philosophy was somehow inequitable to adolescent females (see Wilson, 2010). Mrs. Thompson added, “We learned quickly, the more males we recruited at the middle and high school the more females enrolled automatically.” I was curious to see if the numerical results at the end of our inquiry validated or disproved Mr. Stevens’ and Mrs. Thompson’s theory of choral recruitment at the secondary level (see the follow-up session below).

The plight of adolescent female singers. In junior high or middle school, most adolescent males and females begin choosing their own class schedules for the first time. During this same time, adolescent males are confronted with a radical voice change where they “squeak-out” their musical part in an
atmosphere where they are outnumbered by adolescent females. Before this inquiry, I had no problem empathizing with the plight of adolescent male singers. Many of them face enormous pressures from adults, family members, and peers (e.g., social isolation, physical and verbal harassment). As a male singer and teacher, I sympathized with their struggles and worked hard to lower the perceived barriers to enable them to sing in school.

During our collaborative inquiry, I began to see the hurdles and obstacles adolescent females faced while singing at the secondary level. The paths to the more prestigious mixed choirs (e.g., Concert Choir, Chamber Choir) were more rigorous and competitive for females than males. Typically, a high school adolescent female would have to wait until their junior or even senior year while an adolescent male could possibly sing in the same advanced group their freshman year. Once a female singer attained their goal of making the top mixed choir they might feel devalued, neglected, and bored as they frequently have to sit idle waiting for younger male singers to “catch up” musically, physically, and mentally. During this inquiry, I began to empathize with adolescent female singers and recognize the perceived barriers they face when trying to sing at the middle and high school levels. This new perspective was unexpected, but I believe this new outlook will enable me to be more encouraging and compassionate for both adolescent males and females.
Follow-Up Sessions

During follow-up sessions (2011–2014), I was informed of other program changes through emails, phone conversations, and personal visits to the sites. These periodic follow-up contacts were pivotal in tracking changes that had occurred after our collaboration in 2010–2011. The secondary choral ecosystem is very volatile and must be routinely evaluated to determine if there are perceived internal and external barriers that might be inhibiting adolescent males and females from participating in choral ensembles at the middle and high school levels. To some of the group members, the duration of the inquiry (2010–2014) was uncommonly long and daunting. But, one of the benefits was implementing specific strategies in our classroom environments and witnessing the gradual transformations emerge over the duration of our inquiry.

There are internal strategies we can implement in our classrooms to mitigate perceived barriers and improve enrollment and participation. However, we also realized there are external issues (e.g., new administration, added class requirements, and fewer electives), beyond the control of the classroom teacher, that affect male and female choral participation. Mr. Stevens and Mrs. Thompson began the inquiry in 2010 desiring a better numerical balance of males and females in their secondary program. They ended the collaboration achieving their goal, but it was realized by means of a decrease in eighth grade girls. Mr. Stevens noted, “It is difficult to recruit and retain singers when you have external
forces pulling singers from your classes.”¹

At Bedford, Mr. Green also began this inquiry with a desire to have an equal balance of males and females in the secondary choral program. He moved the secondary program to single-sex choirs and experienced steady growth. The choral enrollment numbers decreased after changes were made to the program in 2011–2013. In the third and fourth years (2013–2014), numbers began to increase throughout the program. Interestingly, the biggest enrollment gains were among females (see Chapter Five). The new Men’s Choir at the high school grew musically and numerically over a three-year period (2011–2014). Mr. Green’s Men’s Choir auditioned and was selected and sang for the state music educators’ annual conference in January 2015. The junior high and high school choral programs at Bedford continue to grow and Mr. Green continues to make periodic changes (e.g., teaching strategies, schedule changes). Administration is currently considering adding additional staff and classrooms to meet the growth of the choral program.

**Implications**

Our inquiry group believed no single factor accounted for the numerical imbalance of adolescent male and female singers at the secondary level. We also believed this imbalance to be a symptom of a more complicated issue and

¹ Due to sensitive issues involving new administration and choral practitioners involved in this inquiry, the specifics of this issue cannot be discussed.
used collaborative inquiry, a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to address this problem. The conclusions drawn from this study are situation-specific and cannot be generalized to larger populations. However, practitioners may discover aspects reported in this collaborative inquiry that are applicable to their environments. From our experience, we believe there are numerous implications for choral music directors and teachers, administration and key decision-makers, those concerned with gender issues and equity, composers, music arrangers, and publishers of choral literature, and those considering collaborative inquiry as a research approach and adult learning strategy.

**Choral music teachers and directors.** The numerical imbalance of adolescent males and females at the secondary level contributes to an array of perennial challenges for choral music teachers, administrators, male and female adolescent singers, and audience members (e.g., recruitment and retention strategies, limited repertoire choices, challenges with vocal balance and blend, difficulties selecting appropriate teaching strategies, and decisions to combine or eliminate choral classes due to low enrollment (Beery, 1996, 2009; Boyd, Crocker, 2000; Hamann, 2007; Hires & Hopper, 2011). The findings of this inquiry suggests that action-oriented strategies can be implemented in the environment to lower the perceived physiological, psycho-social, and schooling barriers to encourage male choral participation at the secondary level. However, perceived psycho-social barriers may be very difficult to eradicate or change because they are tied to a very delicate and interconnected “ecosystem” where
values are embedded in children over long periods of time (Freer, 2010a; Gates, 1989; Koza, 1990).

**Adolescent males and females.** Adolescent males may endure personal and social costs (e.g., verbal and physical harassment, bullying, social isolation) for engaging in vocal music activities at the secondary level (Ackerly, 2009; Adler, 2002; Harrison, 2007, 2008; O'Toole, 1998). Adolescent females compete with one another at a higher level in order to sing in a mixed choir (Koza, 1994; Moore, 2008). Choral students may favor singing in mixed groups because of the wider range of sonority, repertoire choices, and socialization (J. L. Jackson, 2009). If selected for the more advanced mixed choir, females are typically grouped with younger, less qualified males (Wilson, 2010). Females are sometimes required to cover male vocal parts when voice parts are not equally balanced in a mixed choir, a technique that can be unhealthy (Dunaway, 1986; Tipps, 2003). Female singers not selected for the top mixed choir are then placed into less prestigious female choirs (Hylton, 1981). Female singers may feel neglected and discouraged by the attention paid to adolescent males and withdraw from the choral program altogether (Sandene, 1994).

**Single-sex choirs.** Choral educators at the middle and high school levels may consider providing single-sex choirs in their choral programs to encourage male choral participation. Without the distraction of the opposite sex, greater camaraderie, a team-like atmosphere, improved participation, and risk-taking during the traumatic voice change can be achieved (Jorgensen & Pfeiler, 2008).
Choral teachers should be cautious not to diminish or discourage female choral participation.

**Recruitment and retention strategies.** The classroom teacher was reported as the most important factor in recruiting and retaining male choral singers (Williams, 2011). The choral teacher must be able to guide adolescent males through the voice change using appropriate teaching strategies and selecting choral literature that meets students’ needs. Adolescent males need to be able to envision themselves as choral singers and should be exposed to older males who are successful at singing (e.g., local college, university, community choruses). Choral teachers may consider collaborating with feeder schools (i.e., the “Real Men Sing” tour, concerts and assemblies, freshman orientation event) to encourage younger singers to continue in singing ensembles at the middle and high school levels.

**Others.** Professional music organizations (e.g., NAfME, ACDA) might consider increasing resources and conference space to the topic of encouraging male participation. Practitioner journals might consider publishing articles that challenge choral teachers to collaborate rather than compete when trying to solve pressing issues within their environments. Colleges and universities may consider modifying their choral education methods courses to better train and equip pre-service teachers concerning the perceived physiological, psycho-socio, and schooling barriers that inhibit adolescent males from singing in school. Composers, arrangers, and publishers might consider increasing the number of
quality pieces of vocal literature for male and female singers at the secondary level (e.g., range-appropriate, additional voicing, levels of difficulty). Researchers and practitioners might bridge the gulf between research and practice and collaborate to solve complex issues rather than competing with one another (Heron, 1996).

**Suggested Future Collaborations**

When we began this journey in 2010, vocal music collaborators at Bedford and Deer Lake yearned for a unified music district. Both districts cooperated at the secondary level, but there was very little collaboration between the elementary and secondary levels. A collaborative inquiry connecting elementary, middle school, and high school music teachers would likely benefit the school district as a whole. The number of adolescent female singers to adolescent male singers in the United States is currently reported to be a 3 to 1 ratio. The two secondary choral districts that participated in this inquiry reported a female to male ratio of 2 to 1. The choral teachers at the high school and middle school used a “team-teaching” approach. Teachers who taught at both the middle and high school levels reported higher percentages of male singers than teachers who taught only at the middle school or high school (Williams, 2011). Further investigation of “team-teaching” strategies at the secondary level may reveal factors that positively affect male and female choral participation.
And Finally

One of the most powerful personal transformations that occurred during this research journey was moving from a novice inquirer to a collaborative inquiry specialist. I began training and equipping the practitioners in the basic principles of this new approach. The act of verbalizing what I knew about collaborative inquiry to the other practitioners expanded my knowledge and understanding of this new research approach. I turned over leadership responsibility to group members and continued to guide and mentor them when they needed assistance. I gradually began to gain a sense of pride and excitement about my new knowledge and understand of this research approach. I perceived I was making a slow “turn” from an informed practitioner to specialist in collaborative research.

Consistent with the emergent nature of collaborative inquiry, I could not imagine how our journey would unfold. Throughout the four-year inquiry process (2010–2014), we moved from curiosity, anticipation, excitement, and hope to moments of doubt, fear, apprehension, and frustration. There were also moments of satisfaction, pride, joy, relief, and exhilaration. While the goal of encouraging male choral participation continues to be an important issue for everyone involved in this inquiry, we came to realize the most important outcome was recognizing the power of collaboration. We worked together in a deliberate and systematic fashion and were able to achieve goals unattainable through individual effort alone. While the skills, education, personalities, and experiences
of the group members contributed to our success, we firmly believe that collaborative inquiry is adaptable to any group who has a desire to work together to solve pressing issues within their environments. It is our hope this study can provide some evidence of the power and usefulness of collaborative inquiry, and can serve as an inspiration to others.

Our inquiry group is optimistic about the future of collaborative inquiry, as practitioners join together to solve complex and pressing issues in their environments. Our desire is to further the dialogue about collaborative inquiry as an adult research approach and learning strategy. Our hope is that we can provide direction and support to those who might consider initiating and participating in a collaborative inquiry in the future.
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Vita

Kevin Andrew Hawkins
(b. 1962)

Address
1052 E. Highpoint Street
Springfield, Missouri 65810
k4hawkins1@juno.com

Education
Doctor of Musical Arts in Music Education, Boston University 2015
Master of Music, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary 1988
Bachelor of Science in Music Education, Missouri State University 1985
Post-graduate work at the University of Southern Mississippi, and 1995
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary 1996–1997

Professional Work Experience
Associate Professor of Music Education, Evangel University, Springfield, MO, 2015 to present
Worship Pastor, Second Baptist Church, Springfield, MO 2009–2015
Choral Director, Chairman of Music Department, Glendale High School, Springfield, MO 1997–2009
Music Minister, First Baptist Church, Picayune, MS 1991–1996
Music and Recreation Minister, Corpus Christi, TX, 1988–1996
Music Minister, Woodland West Baptist Church, Arlington, TX 1987–1988
Music and Youth Minister, First Baptist Church, Clever, MO 1982–1985

Professional Memberships
American Choral Directors Association (ACDA)
Missouri Choral Directors Association (MCDA)
Missouri Music Educators Association (MMEA)
National Association for Music Education (NAfME)

Professional Experience
Choral Adjudicator, Clinician, and Honor Choir Conductor
Performance of choir (Chamber Choir) at the National American Choral Directors Association Conference, Los Angeles, 2005
Performance of choir (Chamber Choir) at the Southwestern American Choral Directors Association Conference, St. Louis, MO, 2006
Performance of Worship Choir and Orchestra at the National Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta, GA, 2009
Performance of Worship Choir and Orchestra at the Missouri Southern Baptist Convention, 2011, 2012

**Awards and Recognitions**
Prelude Award, Missouri Choral Directors Association, 2001
GRAMMY Signature School, Glendale High School Music, 2001, 2003
Outstanding District Choral Director, Missouri Choral Directors Association, 2004
Teacher of the Year, Springfield R–12 Public Schools, MO, 2005–2006
Candidate for Missouri Teacher of the Year, 2005–2006