

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Shifts in regular music programming: Engaging grade 3 boys in the singing process

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What you need to know

Engaging boys in singing in general elementary music classes can be a struggle for music teachers in schools. As a K-5 Music teacher, Spraggs investigated strategies to help engage grade 3 boys in the singing process. Strategies explored in this study included student involvement in the selection of musical repertoire, incorporating topics of student interest into singing activities, varied accompaniment instruments, utilizing a psychomotor approach to teaching singing, and the influence of male singing role models on grade 3 boys.

Why this research is important

According to the literature, many mixed-gender choral programs in Manitoba and across Canada maintain low male membership and struggle with the recruitment of male singers. Researchers have found that male attitudes toward singing become less positive between third and fourth grade. At this age, children become self-conscious and may resist participation in singing.

Finding ways to engage boys in singing in grade 3 could be integral to promoting lifelong participation in singing for males.

How the research was conducted

Ten grade 3 boys from a rural community in South-Central Manitoba participated in this teacher action research study. This study took place in mixed-gender grade 3 and 2/3 music classes. Two initial survey instruments were administered to determine students' preferred activities in music class, musical backgrounds, preferred music styles, and their interests in and out of school. Activities and repertoire were programmed into school music classes based on the survey results and information from the literature review. The researcher kept

a journal to reflect on the chosen teaching materials, activities, and strategies. At the end of the study, students participated in peer interviews where they discussed and recorded how the songs and activities in music class impacted their feelings, attitudes, and engagement surrounding singing. As part of the action research cycle, grade 3 and 2/3 music programming evolved and changed in response to teacher, student, and peer reflections as well as feedback.

What the researcher found

The following main four interventions engaged grade 3 boys in singing:

- including students in the repertoire selection process,
- incorporating student interests into the selection of musical repertoire,
- accompanying songs on the guitar, drums, and piano, and
- incorporating male role models into the teaching of singing.

Other effective interventions included selecting songs with a strong beat and rhythmic interest, incorporating movement, incorporating singing games, providing opportunities for student creativity, incorporating humour, incorporating current music, choosing songs with appealing texts, and providing opportunities for rhythmic speech. Selecting repertoire that was challenging—but not too challenging—was also found to be an effective intervention.

How this research can be used

Music teachers can use the suggested repertoire and programming interventions from this study to help engage their grade 3 male students in singing. Similar survey

instruments can be used by music teachers to help them choose teaching materials that reflect student musical preferences and interests.

About the researcher

Melissa Spraggs teaches K-5 General Music in rural South-Central Manitoba. Her program includes choral singing, handbells, ukuleles, African drumming, and a mixture of Kodaly and the Orff Approach. After teaching for five years, she returned to academic life to pursue her Master of Music (Education) Degree at Brandon University.

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