

CHORAL VILLAGE

An Immersive Experience to Build Cultural Sensitivity and Empathy

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“Music has the potential to touch the inner world of humans, and in terms of education it can nurture the overall growth of people, while promoting their abilities to critically discuss and collaboratively solve problems, thus supporting harmony and humanity in today’s global world. Such a turn to ethics in music education would nurture citizens *for* a world by building bridges trans-nationally between the experiences, actions, and local cultures of individuals. This process could become a musically democratic path of learning to live together and of coping more effectively with the complexities and diversities of our contemporary world.”¹

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These are lofty and inspiring words. We are today witnessing polarization and fracturing of our societal norms unlike anything in recent history. The year 2014 marked heightened public awareness of violence at the hands of police, particularly in our communities of color. Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner all lost their lives, along with many others. How should we, as choral musicians and teachers, respond to this? What can we do to make a difference in our communities to address the divisiveness and violence we are seeing around us? How might we create in our rehearsals and classrooms “a musically democratic path of learning to live together and of coping more effectively with the complexities and diversities of our contemporary world”?²

As choral musicians, often our first response is to sing with others as a means to manage our grief and express our solidarity. Singing was integral to unifying people during the Civil Rights Movement and the early twentieth-century labor movement, for example. On 9/11, the United States Congress spontaneously broke into song on the steps of the Capitol building, singing “God Bless America.” How might we translate the strong feelings associated with singing in these situations into building empathy and cultural sensitivity that has lasting impact? Young people in particular may have a chance of carrying this message further and longer. Could choral music teach them empathy and cultural understanding? How would we know if our efforts actually made a difference?

Against this backdrop, I endeavored to identify best practices and assessment that would provide evidence that what we do can make a positive difference in the attitudes of students outside the rehearsal room and performance hall. This research ultimately led to what became *Choral Village*. The purpose of *Choral Village* was to intentionally bring together middle school-aged youth from diverse backgrounds to develop cross-cultural understanding and empathy through activities including choral singing, theatrical games, drum circles, shared meals, and guest artist presentations in a weeklong summer program. This article will discuss the rationale, development, and structure of the program before taking a closer look at the resulting research.



Instructor Jennie Gilrain leads the students in theater games that provoked deep discussions.

Consequences: Unintentional and Intentional

Considerable research exists that documents the power of music to unify, and the many positive effects of singing and performing music together. Chorus America’s 2009 *Chorus Impact Study*, for example, found that educators and parents agreed that singing in choir improved students’ ability to be more socially skilled, better listeners, and better group participants.³ A 2000 in-depth study of arts education in schools in Great Britain stated that the impact and effect of arts study in secondary schools far exceeded simply the technical knowledge, skills, and capabilities within the various art forms, finding that “there are whole domains of effects from arts education—such as the personal and social area documented ...that are broader and more frequent than outcomes related to creative and cultural developments.”⁴

As choral directors we may want to believe that the main reason our singers show up for rehearsal each week is for the music; however, some studies suggest that the main reason may actually be due to the psychological well-being they experience from being part of a group.⁵ There may even be an anthropological explanation for this phenomenon. Daniel Weinstein et al suggested that singing in groups promotes social closeness “consistent with evolutionary accounts that emphasize the role of music in social bonding,” and that music making may have even been a catalyst for social bonding.⁶

But could empathy and cultural valuing⁷ be inten-

tionally taught? A number of examples emerged in the literature. Linda Laird described some approaches to incorporate this instruction into music classes, including goal setting, self-assessment, and reflection.⁸ Ensembles such as the Jerusalem Youth Chorus, the Boston Children's Chorus, and the Chicago Children's Chorus (among many others) actively strive for increased communication and cultural awareness in their choirs.⁹ Ilari, Chen-Hafteck, and Crawford cited numerous studies that point to building cultural understanding through singing and utilizing a multicultural approach to learning music.¹⁰ These ideas led me to further exploration of a broader, multi-dimensional approach. As the form of *Choral Village* began to take shape, the idea of cross pollination with other art and cultural experiences emerged as a way to strengthen, deepen, and enrich the experience beyond choral music alone.

Theater/Dialogue

Drama has a particularly strong role to play in developing empathy and understanding. Harland et al found that secondary students "talked about the arts developing and improving their group work skills, [and] in their capacity to work with others," with drama being the predominant arts instruction mentioned in student comments in that study.¹¹ Augusto Boal (1931-2009) developed *Theater of the Oppressed* techniques based on the writings of Paulo Friere. This approach utilizes theater to foster dialogue for social change.¹² Personal experience with this technique at the 2015 Conducting 21st Century program at Yale University demonstrated to me the profound impact it could have on one's thinking.

Several authors support the use of dialogue to enrich and expand understanding and empathy. Juliet Hess asserted that "aside from seeing themselves represented in their classroom programs, students learn to think critically and reveal interrelationships and connections between musics, amongst themselves, and between themselves and the musics" when a dialogical approach to learning music is utilized.¹³ Julia Shaw cited Abril, who concluded that "dialogic spaces for students to engage in meaningful discussions and debates about the music they are studying...may offer the greatest opportunities for learning and social transformation."¹⁴

Karen Howard utilized "provocative declaratives" to initiate and promote conversation relative to the multicultural music highlighted in her study, an approach originally developed by Vavrus.¹⁵ Based on his experience with the Seeds of Peace program, Micah Hendler felt it was essential to integrate dialogue in the structure of the Jerusalem Youth Chorus, a program that brings together Jewish and Palestinian youth.¹⁶

I was fortunate to have an actor in my community who was schooled in using theater as a means to build community dialogue. The approach she used was based on Lecoq's *International School of Theater*, Rohd's *Theatre for Community Conflict and Dialogue*, and especially Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, mentioned earlier. Using theater games to build trust and a sense of community between the participants, our clinician, Jennie Gilrain, created a safe environment in which students felt comfortable taking risks. The goals were to build focus and listening skills, hone the imagination, develop trust, enhance self-knowledge and self-confidence, clarify values, and explore choice, problem solving, and communication. Student observations and comments that emerged in the process then became points of departure for discussion, creative movement, and personal reflection, providing a similar jumping-off point as the "provocative declaratives" proposed by Howard. In *Choral Village*, however, the statements came directly from the students and were focused on exploring attitudes and feelings. Following are a number of examples:

- I see discrimination in my community/school/neighborhood.
- I am uncomfortable around people with disabilities.
- My school needs to educate other students about people with disabilities.
- It is important to stand up for the outcast.
- I am afraid of people who are different from me.
- Gay marriage should be legal in all states.
- I am often afraid of being bullied.

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- Americans are generally very tolerant.
- I can make a significant contribution to decreasing racism, gender inequality, and homophobia.
- I have never been treated unfairly because of my gender, ethnicity, religion, or culture.
- Racial equality has been achieved in this country.
- Our school should bring in speakers to discuss the mistreatment of minorities.
- I know what it feels like to be treated unfairly and to have my feelings hurt.
- It is important to be American first, and my ethnic culture should come second.
- It is easy to hide my ethnic identity.

Drumming/Unity

Researchers find that drumming has positive effects on individuals of all ages. Eun Sil Suh found that peer relationships improved, and hostility was reduced in middle school youth who participated in a therapeutic group drumming program.¹⁷ Sebastian Kirschner and Michael Tomasello determined that preschoolers drumming with a social partner synchronized more accurately than with a drumming machine or drum sound. They hypothesized that drumming with a social partner created a “shared representation” or a “specific human motivation to synchronize.”¹⁸ Other researchers found evidence that suggests that “synchronous drumming is socially rewarding and facilitates prosocial behavior between the synchronized individuals.”¹⁹

Joe Tayoun, world drumming expert and drumming clinician for *Choral Village*, brought additional authenticity to his teaching of Middle Eastern drum patterns due to his Lebanese heritage. The student participants quickly picked up the language of world drumming, using “dum” and “tek” syllables to verbally articulate the patterns. Improvisation allowed for personal expression and exploration on the drums as students took turns in

drumming breaks within the given pattern. Each of the patterns learned was culturally contextualized to provide deeper understanding. Students also experimented with sustained drumming of a single pattern for an extended period of time (approximately 15 minutes) with their eyes closed. This caused them to listen to each other more intently and realize the challenge in trying to create a completely unified sound. Many students expressed a sense of calm and unity when they described the feeling of being entrained with the group as they drummed.

Commensality/Shared Meals and Ethnic Foods

Merriam-Webster defines commensality as “the practice of eating together” or “a social group that eats together.”²⁰ Claude Fischler explored the many aspects of individuals sharing a meal, concluding that “the sharing of food involves the very structure of social organization.”²¹ While sociologists differ in their views of eating as either strictly serving a biological purpose or having some higher function, Fischler posited that:

what contributes decisively to transmuting eating into an activity of a higher spiritual essence is sharing... [the sociological significance] actually is an essential dimension of the common meal and it could even be said that it finds its most salient expression in that particular, daily social occurrence. Above all, it counteracts the essential, basic, biological, ‘exclusive selfishness of eating’ and turns it into, at the very least, a collective, social experience.²²

Myrte Hamburg, Catrin Finkenauer, and Carlo Schuengel supported this conclusion with research suggesting that sharing food increases interpersonal closeness.²³

As *Choral Village* was intended to bring together youth from varying backgrounds, including various socio-economic backgrounds, it was important that all student participants be provided an equitable lunch. This would help to avoid any comparison of the sorts of bag lunches students would bring and ensure that the

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Singing together started and ended each day. Repertoire was based on the cultural background of the students and the broader community.

lunch would be healthy and of good quality. Sociological research pointed to the importance and significance of sharing food. Most importantly, a shared meal provided an additional opportunity for a cultural experience by serving cultural foods associated with the afternoon culture bearers. Lunch, therefore, became an integral extension of the day's immersion into the cultures represented each day, and included Middle Eastern food, Southwest chili, American sandwiches, homemade empanadas made by one of the parents, and Puerto Rican food.²⁴

Culture Bearers/Authenticity

Culture bearers bring powerful authenticity and personal connection to students' experience.²⁵ By including authentic culture bearers from within our own community, these representative cultures were affirmed and recognized.

Culture bearers for *Choral Village* varied widely. Camille Armstrong, an alumna of *Stomp!*, performed a creative hip-hop composition that included electronic looping, singing, and body percussion, and taught the student participants a body percussion pattern. Sam Younes, a local Syrian musician, brought an oud and a bouzouki and performed several Middle Eastern songs with our drummer. Participants were able to try their hand at playing these instruments and sang the Arabic song they were learning, "Lamma Badaa, Yatathanna," with

the musicians. Martha Monroy, director of El Grupo Folklórico Xochiquetzal, brought colorful costumes and spirited recordings of traditional Mexican music. She performed a variety of traditional dances and taught the participants a traditional Mexican cowboy dance. The final culture bearer, Dave Fry, was a local folk musician who played guitar and talked about the American folk tradition and especially the powerful role folk music played in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Choral Singing/Community

As the foundation of this program, it was essential to select choral music that was appropriate and accessible for the musical and vocal skills of the students and that piqued their interest. Ethnicity of the participants (if voluntarily provided on the registration) and the Lehigh Valley community²⁶ in general determined some parameters. "Africa" by William Billings provided an opportunity to learn about American shape-note singing and tied to the early roots of the city of Bethlehem, founded in 1741. A Bach Chorale ("Gloria sei dir gesungen") represented the German heritage of the Lehigh Valley region and acknowledged the cultural importance of the 130-year-old Bach Choir of Bethlehem. "Lamma Badaa Yatathanna" represented the growing Syrian community in the Lehigh Valley. Other songs came directly from the heritage of the students: "La Paloma se Fue" (Puerto Rican), "Peze Kafé" (Haitian), "Hashivenu" (Hebrew), "Kenya Melodies" (Kenyan), and "I Smile" (contemporary Gospel song, African American). The final repertoire list for the week follows:

J. S. Bach Chorale: "Gloria sei dir gesungen"

Billings (shape note): "Africa"

Puerto Rican Folk Song arr. Jimenez: "La Paloma se Fue"

Haitian Folk Song arr. Kallman: "Peze Kafé"

Hebrew Folk Song: "Hashivenu"

Kenyan Folk Melodies arr. Hugh: "Kenya Melodies"

Andalusian/Arabic Song arr. Hirokawa: "Lamma Badaa Yatathanna"

Contemporary Gospel Song by Kirk Franklin: "I Smile"

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The Program

With these various pieces in place, the structure of the day emerged. Singing first thing in the morning brought everyone together and focused the group, preparing them for the day. Theater games and dialogue followed, with the instructor sequencing the activities to gradually build trust and providing opportunities for individual expression through movement, dialogue, and listening. Drumming provided an emotional release and created a unifying experience for the group. Lunch was different each day, provided by local ethnic restaurants, and paired with the culture of the afternoon culture bearer. Student participants who were from the represented ethnicity (if present) explained and described foods that were new to the other participants. Participants were encouraged to try everything, and many were surprised to find how much they enjoyed tasting food that was unfamiliar to them. Afternoon cultural presentations challenged the

students to think in new ways about musical performance. Each day ended with singing, providing closure. On the final day, the students presented their week's work to the parents in an informal sharing session. The complete daily schedule can be found in Table 1.

Diverse Participants

Researchers make it clear that this work can only be successful if the participants themselves are of diverse backgrounds, and not of predominantly one characteristic with just a smattering of other, unique individuals.²⁷

To this end, we actively sought students to participate who would represent diverse races, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, and gender, and who came from across the Lehigh Valley region. Within the group of seventeen students in the 2017 program, there were:

Table 1. Daily Schedule for 2017 Choral Village

	July 9	July 10	July 11	July 12	July 13
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00 am	Arrival				
8:30 am	Singing with Dr. Hirokawa				
9:45 am	Snack Time				
10:00 am	Theater games with Jennie Gilrain				
11:00 am	Short break				
11:05 am	Drumming with Joe Tayoun				
12:05 pm	Lunch				
12:45 pm	Camille Armstrong (Body Percussion/ Hip Hop Music)	Sam Younes (Middle Eastern Music)	Martha Monroy (Mexican Folk Dance)	Dave Fry (American Folk Music)	Prep for Sharing Session
2:15 pm	Short break				
2:20 pm	Singing with Dr. Hirokawa				Sharing Session with parents (Begins at 2:15)
2:50 pm	Daily wrap-up				
3:00 pm	Dismissal				

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- Seven male, ten female
- Four age 11, four age 12, four age 13, five age 14
- Three African American, one Asian, one Haitian, two Latinex, ten Caucasian
- Eight from Bethlehem, four from Easton, two from Allentown, two from Emmaus, one from Wind Gap (Pocono Mountain area)
- Specific ethnicity/heritage listed:
 - Three Pennsylvania Dutch or German heritage (founding population of the region)
 - Kenyan
 - Haitian
 - Puerto Rican
 - Various Western European
 - Jewish
- Thirteen of seventeen students received scholarships for financial reasons

The Study

The research question was defined as: “What are the effects of participation in a week-long, diverse summer arts program on attitudes and perceptions of middle school-aged youth toward other youth of varying backgrounds and identities?” Measuring the impact of this work required finding an evaluation protocol that was flexible, research based, user friendly, arts oriented, easily accessible, and that measured the desired outcomes. Researchers from Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education wrote a comprehensive report on arts assessment that provided initial context and background for examining quality, excellence, and decision making in arts education assessment.²⁸

Several protocols came close to the needs of this project. The Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (YOLA) undertook an extensive evaluation of their programs as they instituted a new El Sistema-based program called the Expo Center Youth Orchestra Program. While the overall program focus was on musical instruction and self-growth, there was also the expectation that “students will gain

skills that have broader social and academic impacts... Listening, communication, and interactive skills that are applicable to other social contexts” were specifically cited as examples.²⁹

Researchers at the New England Conservatory took a broader approach, assessing and evaluating the development of musical literacy, sense of community, and personal agency in El Sistema-inspired programs across the United States.³⁰ They modeled their research on the logic model approach used by the Boston Youth Arts Education Project (BYAEP). They describe a logic model as:

a helpful way to animate the link between indicators, outcomes, and impacts, and to develop assessment and evaluation methods based upon mission and your unique theory of change... a logic model also helps to illustrate the correlation between your desired outcomes and the actual practices and inputs of your program.³¹

The BYAEP provided a comprehensive and practical assessment protocol, complete with pre- and post-program surveys, program evaluation surveys, and a detailed handbook for using their materials, all freely available on their website.³² Surveys were designed to allow for multiple learning styles, including drawing pictures, writing open-ended responses to questions, and responding to ranked survey questions.

The program launched in 2008 and had three goals:

- 1) To develop a youth arts evaluation language and methodology based on existing research and the experiences of Boston youth arts programs.
- 2) To use the new methodology to design, pilot, and implement evaluation systems for the five collaborating organizations.
- 3) To document what was learned and publish results to help other organizations implement evaluation systems for youth arts programs.³³

They determined that their work addressed three main outcome areas: skills of expression and art (I Create), ability to look at themselves (I Am), and ability to

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form connections with others (We Connect).³⁴ The framework and tools were thoroughly researched over a three-year period, and included piloting and modifying the framework and tools, experimenting with data collection, obtaining feedback from presentations about the project, and holding forums on their work.³⁵ The resulting handbook documents much of this work and provides solid evidence of the validity and reliability of the evaluation tools. The BYAEP encourages other arts programs to adapt their materials to suit local needs, with appropriate citation.

Significantly, the five arts organizations that collaborated on this project all maintain a strong commitment to social justice issues and focus on using the arts as a means to improve the quality of life of the adolescent youth in their communities.³⁶ Medicine Wheel Productions focuses on public art projects that explore “collective experiences,” and has a program specifically designed to positively reengage youth in their communities through individual and public art projects. The Theater Offensive reaches out to LGBT youth and strives to build an “honest and progressive community.” ZUMIX was created as a response to youth violence and provides a safe space for students to explore music and the arts.

Hyde Square Task Force focuses on dance to build a “stronger, safer, and more vibrant community.” Raw Art Works engages with underserved youth to “strengthen their identities as artists and build the confidence and connections they need to succeed in life.” It is also notable that all of these organizations serve adolescents, a unique age group for whom the arts can provide particularly meaningful positive impact.³⁷ As noted in the BYAEP Handbook:

Quality youth arts programs are able to attend to the deep complexity of teens’ lives while offering them the ability to work with peers and adults to navigate challenges, use strategic thinking, show leadership, develop resiliency, and learn to better understand and self-regulate their emotional selves.³⁸

Examining the BYAEP Logic Model for High-Quality Youth Arts Programs, many of the short-term outcomes listed under “I Am” and “We Connect” aligned well with the goals of *Choral Village*. Additionally, their focus on adolescent youth made the choice of these evaluation materials a natural fit (Table 2).

Table 2. BYAEP Logic Model for High-Quality Youth Art Programs³⁹

INPUTS OF PROGRAM QUALITY*	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES**	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
<p>Opportunities: Challenges and experiences that increase innovation, expressive skills, self-efficacy, and fun in the lives of youth.</p>	<p>I CREATE: Builds Artistic, Problem Solving, and Expressive Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases Artistic Engagement in focus, skills, and in one's authenticity and passion in the arts. Uses Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking to be reflective, analytic, and creative in finding solutions to challenges. Develops Expressive Skills and the ability to convey feelings and thoughts artistically and verbally. 	<p>Able to Navigate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes responsibility on diverse settings. Navigates risk taking. Responds effectively to challenges and opportunities. 	<p>Resiliency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapts and learns to thrive with change, challenges, and even failure. Is respectful of laws and/or works to change those that are unfair. Strives to be physically and mentally healthy. Engages in positive activities that bring one joy, pleasure, and captivation.

Table 2 continued. BYAEP Logic Model for High Quality Youth Art Programs³⁹

<p>Positive Climate: Meaningful structure that is youth-centered, safe, inclusive, engaging, and challenges youth to see, reveal, and strengthen who they are.</p>	<p>I AM: Strengthens Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds Confidence with self-assurance arising from one's belief in one's own abilities or qualities. • Increases Knowledge of Self through: <i>self-awareness</i> of characteristics, strength, and weaknesses; honest <i>self-reflection</i> into one's history, cultural influence, and one's current thoughts, feelings, and actions; and <i>self-regulation</i> of behavior to increase the likelihood of a desired end goal. • Understands how one's identity is informed by Cultural Identity (place, gender, race, history, nationality, abilities, language, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ethnicity, class, and aesthetics). • Develops a Positive View of the Future by internalizing optimism about the outcomes for one's life ("possible selves") and increasing one's ability to set short- and long-range goals (especially in education and/or employment). 	<p>Short Term outcomes combine and lead to Intermediate and Long Term Outcomes</p>	<p>Able to Engage and be Productive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays commitment (dedication shown in school/employment). • Strives for achievement (effort, courage, skills in progress toward goals). • Possesses a positive sense of one's uniqueness and potential (differentiation). • Displays a character that is genuine, empathetic, and is connected to one's cultural identity (integration). 	<p>Self-Efficacy and Personal Fulfillment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational level. • Economic self-sufficiency. • Job satisfaction. • Self-actualization (the desire and efforts that lead to realizing one's capabilities). • Continues to take steps toward dreams.
<p>Connections: Opportunities to belong, contribute, and build supportive relationships with peers, adults, and community.</p>	<p>WE CONNECT: Develops Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases Support and Belonging where one develops positive bonds, empathy, respect for others, and an increased ability to communicate and work with a diverse set of people including those with cultural identities and experiences different than one's own. • Builds Contribution by finding opportunities, exchanging ideas, and working together to create something in the community. • Gains Recognition, appreciation and/or acknowledgement for an achievement, service, or ability in the eyes of others/community. 		<p>Able to Make Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects with family. • Connects with peers/significant other(s). • Connects with adult mentors. • Joins groups/organizations. • Respects and is respected by others. 	<p>Community Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has dependable networks. • Has significant relationship(s). • Involves oneself in social groups (PTA, unions, support groups, religious groups etc.) • Votes, volunteers, works to create social change.

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The BYAEP developed five evaluation tools: a Beginning Self-Evaluation and Final Self-Evaluation, a Program Evaluation, an Alumni Survey, a Teacher Evaluation, and an opportunity for Artistic Responses. Staff and youth program participants provided input in the development of the evaluation tools, lending authentic language and understandability to the wording of the questions.⁴⁰

Since the BYAEP participating programs spanned instructional periods that varied from several months to full-year programs and *Choral Village* was a week-long program in its inaugural year, alumni surveys were not applicable and not used. Teacher Evaluations were also not used, as these were designed for longer term teaching situations. Close examination of the remaining surveys and evaluation materials resulted in only minor changes to the questions themselves, and some changes in the order to better fit the research question for *Choral Village*. The Pre-Program Survey included demographic questions (gender, age, grade, ethnicity) and twenty-one questions to be answered on a five-point Likert scale based on the BYAEP model and defined below. Table 3 shows the complete survey.

Check NO! if you strongly disagree with this sentence or you almost never feel this way.

Check no if you disagree with this sentence or you do not feel this way most of the time.

Check ? if you are unsure of how you feel or you neither agree nor disagree.

Check yes if you agree that this sentence is true for you or you feel this way a lot of the time.

Check YES! If you strongly agree with this sentence or you feel this way almost all of the time.

The Post-Program Survey was the same as the Pre-Program Survey to enable direct comparison, changing Question 21 to, “When you think about school, home, friends, and your life, what (if anything) has changed because of your involvement here?” and adding an open-ended writing option to complete the

statements, “I create...,” “I am...,” and “I connect...”

The Program Feedback Survey (Table 4) was similarly designed with the same five-point Likert scale but with room to explain the response in narrative form.

The final page (Table 5) included the prompt, “What (if anything) is changing because of your involvement here?” with an option to draw a response and explain the drawing. These varied opportunities for responses accommodated many learning styles.

Following IRB protocol, each student participant and parent signed a Consent to Participate, on which it was clearly stated that participation in the study was voluntary. On the first morning of *Choral Village* and following brief introductions, specific, scripted instructions were given to introduce the Pre-Program Survey and the purpose of the study. Student participants were asked to create a fictitious name for themselves that they used on both the Pre- and Post-Program Surveys to ensure confidential and anonymous comparison of their responses.

A complete statistical analysis of the data is outside the scope of this article; however, a summary of the findings may provide perspective on the impact of the program. While a comparison of Pre- and Post-Program Surveys did not yield statistically significant results, analysis of the open-ended responses and a more nuanced examination of the survey data suggested that student participants:

- Felt they learned to express their feelings better.
- Became more comfortable with themselves and gained or improved in their confidence level.
- Became better listeners.
- Developed a strong sense of trust with fellow participants and the instructors.
- Gained knowledge of other cultures and of themselves.

In their written comments, students specifically mentioned learning to be more respectful of other people’s culture, connecting better with people from different backgrounds, becoming more curious about their

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Table 3. *Choral Village* Pre-Program Survey, based on BYAEP Beginning Self-Evaluation Template⁴¹

Tell us what you think!		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I feel excited and focused when I am creating art.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
2	I am able to express who I am through the arts.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
3	I have knowledge of the artistic process and have skills in the arts.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
4	I use the arts to communicate feelings and meaning.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
5	I am a strong leader.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
6	People see me in a positive way.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
7	I am able to understand situations from other people's points of view.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
8	I find other people's culture interesting.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
9	I am comfortable working on projects with people from different backgrounds.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
10	I stand up for what I believe in even when it is unpopular.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
11	I think about how my past experiences and choices have influenced who I am.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
12	I rarely reveal who I am in a real and honest way.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
13	I explore my personal culture and roots to better understand who I am.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
14	I am connected to my community.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
15	I feel like I contribute positively to my community.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
16	I am proud to say where I was born.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
17	I am proud of my cultural heritage.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
18	I feel proud of who I am.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
18a	What are you <i>most</i> proud of personally?					
19	Challenges prevent me from working towards my goals.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
20	I think I will feel a sense of belonging in this program.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
21	What do you hope to gain from this week?					

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Table 4. *Choral Village* Program Feedback Survey, based on BYAEP Program Evaluation Template⁴²

How do you feel about this program?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I have improved as an artist and feel proud of my contribution.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
2	Because of this program, I can better express my ideas and feelings.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
3	I believe what I create positively impacts others.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
4	This program has helped me build my confidence.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
5	This program has helped me become a better listener.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
6	I have gained trusting relationships with my peers here.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
7	I have gained trusting relationships with the staff here.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
8	I feel the staff does a good job with this program.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
9	This program has a good balance of structure and freedom.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why or how?						
10	I would recommend this program to my friends.	NO!	no	?	yes	YES!
Why?						

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Table 4 continued. *Choral Village* Program Feedback Survey, based on BYAEP Program Evaluation Template⁴²

12	Place an X in the box that best describes how you feel: Since being in this program, my ability to do this or feel this way has...	Decreased (I do it less or feel it less)	Stayed the same (It hasn't changed)	Increased (I do it or feel it more)
	a. I use my culture and roots as inspiration for my art.			
	b. I socially reach out to others who have backgrounds different from my own.			
	c. I like to use my creative skills to connect with others.			
	d. I think about performing or presenting my work for others to see.			
13	Take a moment and write to your program Leader(s)/Staff. What have you learned?			
14	What is one thing we could (realistically) do to improve this program?			

Table 5. *Choral Village* Drawing Template based on BYAEP "Drawing It Out" Template⁴³

What, if anything, is changing because of your involvement here?
DRAW --- "Before coming here..."
DRAW --- "After being involved here..."
Look at your drawing and PLEASE write a few words below to tell us the story of what has changed.

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world and effecting positive change, and developing leadership skills. They appreciated the supportive environment and recognized that they had become better listeners and valued the thoughts of others more.


In response to the question, “What have you learned?” sample responses suggest strongly positive personal growth:

- “I have learned how to trust people. I’ve learned more about people’s ethnicities and how to have more fun while singing.”
- “I’ve learned so much about cultures and music and so much more. This truly was an outstanding experience and I am so genuinely thankful.”
- “I learned how to breathe correctly when singing and how to just ‘let go.’ And how to be open. I’m very thankful for that, so THANKFUL.”
- “I’ve learned how to better express myself through art.”
- “I have learned more about my abilities and how to use them.”
- “I have learned how to value everyone. I have also learned about different cultures.”
- “I have learned what it is like to meet people of many different cultures.”
- “I now want to better understand and observe everything going on around me and doing things about what I disagree with.”

Theater instructor Jennie Gilrain wrote extensive notes and reflections throughout the week. Her conclusion summed up the week’s experience well. She commented:

“We ended with sharing *Reflections* about the week. Students talked about being surprised to learn how much they had in common with other students who appeared to be so different

from themselves.”⁴⁴

The week was transformative for all involved, students and teachers alike. Helping students to deeply explore their identities and beliefs and challenge how they think about others in a safe, creative environment inspired all of us to continue this work. 

NOTES

- ¹ Marja Heimonen, “Music Education and Global Ethics: Educating Citizens for the World,” *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 11, no.1 (2012), 74-75.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Chorus America, *How Children, Adults, and Communities Benefit from Choruses: The Chorus Impact Study* (Washington, D.C.: Chorus America, 2009).
- ⁴ John Harland et al, *Arts Education in Secondary Schools: Effects and Effectiveness* (Slough, UK: National Foundation for Educational Research, 2000), 178, <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/eaj01/eaj01.pdf>.
- ⁵ Nick Stewart and Adam Lonsdale, “It’s Better Together: The Psychological Benefits of Singing in a Choir,” *Psychology of Music*, 44, no. 6 (2016).
- ⁶ Daniel Weinstein et al, “Singing and Social Bonding: Changes in Connectivity and Pain Threshold as a Function of Group Size,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 37, no. 2 (2016), 152.
- ⁷ Beatriz Ilari, Lily Chen-Hafteck, and Lisa Crawford, “Singing and Cultural Understanding: A Music Education Perspective,” *International Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 2 (2013), 208. The authors cite K. L. Edwards’s dissertation, *North American Indian music instruction: Influences upon attitudes, cultural perceptions, and achievement* in which is described four levels of cultural understanding: 1) Instructional Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes: children acquire learning of the instructional materials (learning outcomes from the instructions); 2) Cultural Awareness: children become aware of the differences and similarities of various cultures and their views are gradually less biased; 3) Cultural Sensitivity: children’s emotions are involved but are even less biased; and 4) Cultural Valuing: an unbiased view of the value of another culture.

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- ⁸ Linda Laird, "Empathy in the Classroom: Can Music Bring Us More in Tune with One Another?" *Music Educators Journal* 101, no. 4 (2015), 59.
- ⁹ <https://jerusalem youthchorus.org>; <http://www.bostonchildrenschorus.org>; <https://ccchoir.org>.
- ¹⁰ Ilari, Chen-Hafteck, and Crawford, "Singing and Cultural Understanding: A Music Education Perspective," 202-216.
- ¹¹ Harland et al, *Arts Education in Secondary Schools*, 172.
- ¹² <http://www.mandalaforchange.com/site/applied-theatre/theatre-of-the-oppressed/>
- ¹³ Juliet Hess, "Decolonizing Music Education: Moving Beyond Tokenism," *International Journal of Music Education* 33, no. 3 (2015), 346.
- ¹⁴ Julia Shaw, "Knowing Their World: Urban Choral Music Educators' Knowledge of Context," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 63, no. 2 (2015): 201.
- ¹⁵ Karen Howard, "Developing Children's Multicultural Sensitivity Using Music of the African Diaspora: An Elementary School Music Culture Project," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2014), 36.
- ¹⁶ Micah Hendler, "Music for Peace in Jerusalem" (senior thesis, Yale University, 2011), 18.
- ¹⁷ Eun Sil Suh, "The Use of Therapeutic Group Drumming with Korean Middle School Students in School Violence Prevention Programs" (PhD diss., Lesley University, 2015)
- ¹⁸ Sebastian Kirschner & Michael Tomasello, "Joint Drumming: Social Context Facilitates Synchronization in Preschool Children," *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 102 (2009): 299.
- ¹⁹ Idil Kokal et al, "Synchronized Drumming Enhances Activity in the Caudate and Facilitates Prosocial Commitment - If the Rhythm Comes Easily," *PLoS ONE* 6, no.11 (2011) e27272.
- ²⁰ "Commensality," in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commensality>.
- ²¹ Claude Fischler, "Commensality, Society and Culture," *Social Science Information* 50th Anniversary Issue 50, no.3-4 (2011): 530.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 532.
- ²³ Myrte E. Hamburg, Catrin Finkenauer, and Carlo Schuengel, "Food for Love: The Role of Food Offering in Empathic Emotion," *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, January (2014): 1.
- ²⁴ While our Latina culture bearer was Mexican, we have a sizeable Puerto Rican community in our region, and a number of the participants were Puerto Rican. This influenced the choice of Puerto Rican food over Mexican food.
- ²⁵ Howard, "Developing Children's Multicultural Sensitivity Using Music of the African Diaspora," 19.
- ²⁶ The Lehigh Valley in Southeastern Pennsylvania comprises the cities of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton and surrounding metropolitan area.
- ²⁷ Ilari, Chen-Hafteck, and Crawford, "Singing and Cultural Understanding," 210.
- ²⁸ Steve Seidel et al, *The Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education* (Cambridge: Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2009), III. This is a comprehensive starting point for anyone interested in arts education assessment.
- ²⁹ Yael Silk, Noelle Griffin, and Kirby Chow, *Youth Orchestra LS: Theory of Action and Proposed Evaluation Plan* (Los Angeles: CRESST/University of California, Los Angeles, 2008), 8.
- ³⁰ Andrea Landin et al., *Say Yes to Assess: An Exploration of Sistema-Inspired Assessment Practice* (Boston: New England Conservatory, 2013), 1-2.
- ³¹ Landin et al., *Say Yes to Assess*, 11.
- ³² http://byaep.com/1/BYAEP_Handbook_Workbook.html
- ³³ Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project, *Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project Handbook* (Boston: Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project, 2012): 7.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ³⁶ The following quotes from the five organizations are found in *Ibid.*, 11.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ⁴⁰ Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project, *Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project Workbook* (Boston: Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project, 2012).
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ⁴⁴ Jennie Gilrain, *Choral Village Theater Workshop, Summary and Reflections*, 2017.