

## ABSTRACT

### *An investigation of the use of the keyboard and moveable do solfège in American high school choral instruction*

The use of the keyboard – specifically piano – in the teaching, learning and performance of repertoire has been a long-standing choral practice. Recent emphasis on music literacy has fostered the spread and use of sight-reading systems, such as moveable *do* solfège, in the choral rehearsal. These systems have also led to questions regarding the appropriate place of the keyboard as a tool in the rehearsal context. The purpose of this study was to examine the use of the keyboard and moveable *do* solfège in choral curricula and instruction. Research questions pertained to how conductors apply the keyboard and/or solfège in rehearsals, as well as differences in curricular instruction, ensemble rehearsal and performance among choral conductors and students who use the keyboard and/or solfège in rehearsal.

A survey (  $n=102$ ) was distributed to high school choral directors in six different states to identify traits and tendencies associated with keyboard and solfège use, and to provide a context for a cross-case study. The cross-case study involved four different choral directors and their auditioned choirs, from the northeastern United States. All directors agreed to introduce and teach the piece “Now, O Now, I Needs Must Part” (John Dowland, c.1563-1626) to their ensembles in seven rehearsals over a two-week period, using whatever amount of piano and/or solfège they would naturally use in rehearsal. Data sources included researcher’s field notes from observations, recordings of rehearsals, interviews with directors, student questionnaires, copies of musical scores, and pertinent documents provided by each school.

The survey data revealed a disparity between directors' beliefs in the importance of music literacy and extensive use of the keyboard in the teaching of repertoire. Data from the qualitative case study revealed that the keyboard and moveable *do* solfège can facilitate, but do not ensure, rote or note learning of repertoire. While fine choral performance can be achieved with either the use of solfège or keyboard, these tools are most compelling when subsumed by the broader goal of artistic excellence. The effectiveness of the keyboard and moveable *do* solfège depends upon their interaction with a complex range of variables in the rehearsal context.

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