

Together but Disconnected: Involving Parents and Children in an Intergenerational Choral Collaboration

By

Andrew Sutherland

The London Oratory School

Abstract

Secondary students have many activities competing for their time outside of the classroom. Establishing choral singing as a viable option with a critical mass of students in a secondary school is no easy task. To do so can develop a singing culture in the school with its concomitant musical, health and social benefits. A school in West London fosters collaboration between students and members of the community in a choral society formed as a permanent partnership to perform large choral works. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, I interviewed pupils involved in the choir to explore the perceived benefits of making music with parents, teachers and adult community members. I used Intergroup Contact Theory to discuss the data, which revealed the efficacy of school music programmes to integrate community involvement that ultimately fosters the development of a singing culture. This study identifies positive implications for community engagement but notes cautions against processes that avoid intergenerational disconnect.

Keywords: Collaboration, singing culture, interpretative phenomenological analysis, intergroup contact theory, motivation, performance, school music departments.

Introduction

Developing a positive culture of singing in a secondary boy's school is challenging and requires a multi-faceted approach (Ashley, 2015; Freer, 2015). Teenage boys dealing with issues of identity, sexuality, relationships and the changing adolescent voice are not always naturally drawn to choral singing when many other leisure activities are available (Harrison, 2004). Internationally, many school music programmes have successfully achieved a critical mass of boys who enjoy singing together (Lucas, 2011; Powell, 2013), which helps reduce negative stigmas about singing being contrary to their forming identities (Harrison, Welch & Adler, 2012). Boys benefit from singing together as it is an important form of communication and expression.

Although the literature frequently focuses on the need to adopt a contemporary or 'masculine' repertoire to appeal to the adolescent boy (Palant, 2007) this is not always necessary. Palkki (2015) and Harrison (2007) reject the proposition that masculinity should be expressed overtly and narrowly in the choral context, and suggest instead that boys' choirs benefit from music that is inspiring and challenging.

The aim of this study is to investigate factors that impact students involved in collaborating with an adult choir. Previous studies into intergenerational choirs advocate for further investment from schools in developing positive community engagement and improved intergenerational understanding (Bowers, 1998; Drummer, 2003, Belgrave, 2011; Darrow & Belgrave, 2013; Jackson, 2016). Participants in this study attend one such school which adheres to this position and their experiences provide constructivist understanding of the benefits of school-based intergenerational choirs. Specifically, the research question is: Does student collaboration with adult choristers, enhance a culture of singing within a community?

Intergroup Contact Theory

To frame my study, I applied Gordon Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) as it focusses on understanding and constructing group interactions to reduce prejudice and develop tolerance and understanding between different cohorts (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Harris & Caporella, 2014). The main concept of ICT is that under optimal conditions contact between different groups can reduce prejudice (Harris & Caporella). Allport posited that the four important components for effective contact were: equal status among group members, common goals, intergroup cooperation with consistent and meaningful contact, and support by authorities. These are explained in turn. First, all groups involved in collaborative processes should feel that their status is of equal importance before the activity begins. Second, if both groups share a common goal requiring them to work together to achieve it, it is likely that tolerance and understanding between groups will be enhanced. Next, the two groups must not feel that their cooperation is in some way competitive, rather common goals should be attained through interdependent effort. Finally, if there is support from an authority or body outside of the participant members, the nature of the collaborative process will be perceived to be important. If social sanction is supported explicitly, intergroup contact is more positively accepted as, "authority support establishes norms of acceptance" (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 67).

The positive effects of reducing prejudice can still occur without all four features manifested but studies have shown that having all four features provides a greater effect (Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012). Stinchfiel and Zyromsky (2010) acknowledge the need for schools to engage with family members to support mental and physical health. They posit, "to ensure opportunities for student, school, community, and family success, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary" (p. 267).

In an intergenerational choir case study in the United States, Harris and Caporella (2014) found positive effects of ICT. The choir director introduced structured activities allowing for meaningful activities between members. This in turn created an environment in which positive change could occur for members feeling a sense of isolation related to mental health issues. The resultant effect was, “building of community across generations and health conditions” (Harris & Caporella, 2014, p. 279). If ICT is successfully applied to a collaborative music activity, participant members should be respectful of the contribution of both groups. In this case study, I explore perceived intergenerational differences between the two groups and seek to identify the presence of intergroup contact theory features.

Background

The participants for this study attend a school in West London with a population of nearly 1200 students. The school has a single-stream intake of boys in Key Stage Two (KS2) and this is known as ‘Junior House’. KS2 refers to students in the United Kingdom studying the National Curriculum. Students are generally aged eight to eleven or in Year Three to Year Six. Another intake occurs at Key Stage Three (KS3) and then there is a final intake for students taking A-Levels at the school. KS3 follows KS2 and students are aged between eleven and fourteen or in Years Seven to Nine.

There is a large Music Department in the school with four full-time classroom music teachers and approximately 50 part-time instrumental and vocal teachers. Choral music is particularly strong with five large choirs involving students from every age group. All students in Junior House attend choir rehearsals for 30 minutes every morning before classes begin. Students are auditioned into a high-profile Chapel Choir, or may choose to participate in the Chamber Choir which consists of 80 singers. The Chamber Choir automatically combines with the adult members of the Choral Society for concerts once each term. The adults rehearse separately on Wednesday evenings in the school Music Centre and comprise

parents, grandparents, school staff, and former students. Student members of the Chamber Choir are therefore automatic members of the Choral Society. The name of the choir depends on whether the performance project is independent, or involves collaboration with the adult members.

Initially, I interviewed adult and student choristers for this case study. The data were rich enough to necessitate two separate articles. The themes emerging from the two groups differed and therefore, I prepared a second article that explored the perspectives of the adult choir members.

Methodology

During a two-week period, during which time the choir performed Verdi's *Requiem*, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a small group of students belonging to the Choral Society and Chamber Choir. I asked ten open questions that encouraged the participants to discuss their experience of being in the choir. Applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 2011) to analyse the interviews, helped to me to understand and make sense of their experiences.

IPA requires the researcher to be close to the phenomenon and therefore have an empathetic understanding of the participant's experience. Engaging in the IPA process, the researcher realizes that there is no single way of experiencing a phenomenon. The research should express the participants' experience from up close rather than from afar (Smith, 2011) and it is essential to draw out the participant's narrative to encourage depth of understanding. Bonner and Friedman (2011) note that, "IPA is an inductive method that starts by considering individuals to be experts on their own experiences" (p. 225). The role of the researcher is to allow the participant to make sense of their 'lived experience' of the phenomenon, thereby creating a double hermeneutic. Participants make sense of their experiences and the

researcher engages in a process of making meaning in the analysis of the data (Bonner & Friedman, 2011). The individual's lived experience informs the process first and acknowledges the complexities of human interactions. Smith, Harré, and Van Langenhove (1995) explain that, "It is a methodology concerned with the process by which people define their world, recognises life as dynamic and interactional, and is concerned with persons and individuals rather than actuarial statistics and variables" (p. 3).

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is required in place of validity used in quantitative inquiry. Credibility replaces internal validity, transferability for external validity, dependability for reliability and confirmability for objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In this study, I checked the participants for credibility through confirmation of the choir conductor, and used thick descriptive data for transferability auditing by a research colleague and member checking by sending findings back to the participants for dependability and confirmability.

With ethical oversight and permission from the school principal, at a rehearsal I invited students to participate in the one-to-one interviews with me. I asked interested students to complete a consent form with signed, parental permission to be returned to the choir conductor. The conductor, a colleague of mine, then passed the forms on to me, and I arranged interview times with the students at the following rehearsal. There were 40 students at the initial rehearsal I attended and four boys volunteered to participate. IPA is best served by a small and homogenous sample of participants (Smith, 2011). I included all four volunteers in this case-study. I conducted interviews, each lasting 45 minutes, in the school music centre at the end of the school day in June 2016. Examples of questions asked include: What do you enjoy most about being in this choir? Is there anything about being in this choir that you don't enjoy? What is it like singing with people from a different generation? Can you describe an important moment for you in the last performance you did with this choir? If

you were to encourage friends to join this choir, what reasons would you give for joining? and Where do you think singing in this choir might lead to in the future? I designed these open-ended questions to promote personal narrative and sometimes posed smaller questions were to prompt elaboration (Smith, 2011). Once collected, data must be analysed and coded. I first transcribed the recorded interviews for analysis. The analysis process involves creating a column on the right-hand side of the text. As the text is read repeatedly, emergent themes are noted in the column. Strong themes are identified through repeated reference of an idea or concept or by emphasis by the participant. Quotations from the participants are provided verbatim allowing their personal voices to be heard. To provide anonymity I withheld names of the school and participants. In fact, I use pseudonyms throughout the study to disguise identity.

Participants

The four participants attend the same school, are friends who are close in age, and who have similar musical backgrounds. The four student participants who are all members of the Choral Society are; Edward David, Ian, and Tony.

Edward joined the school at the beginning of Year Seven. He had already been singing in Primary School and when joining Secondary School, considered involvement in the Chamber Choir as a natural step. He has been singing in the choir for five years and is studying GCSE Music. The Graduate Certificate of Secondary Education is offered to students in the United Kingdom as a two-year qualification after completion of KS3 that precedes Advanced Level (A Level) which is a subject-based qualification within the General Certificate of Education. A Levels are also a school leaving qualification which may qualify students for university entrance.

David is aged 17 and is studying AS Music. AS refers to Advanced Subsidiary Level which is the first year of A Level studies and is equivalent to Year 12. David began singing in his Primary School choir and then joined his local community choir in which he is still involved. David entered the school in Year Nine joining the Chamber Choir a year later. He has been a member for three years.

Ian began in the Junior House in Year Three and joined the Chamber Choir two years later. He immediately connected with choral singing at the school feeling it was a great way to start the day. He is studying A-Level Music and has studied voice at the school. He has been a member of the Chamber Choir for eight years.

Tony discovered his love of singing while participating in hymn-practice with his Music class in Year Seven. A Music teacher noticed Tony and encouraged him to join the Chamber Choir. He is studying GCSE Music, having now sung with the Choral Society for four years.

Findings

Following an analysis of the transcribed interviews, four important themes emerged; Power of large-scale music, Intergenerational connection, Challenge and opportunity, and Community and unity. Each theme will be addressed in turn.

Power of large-scale music. Each of the four participants spoke effusively of their experiences of singing in large-scale, collaborative performances. Edward discusses the difference between singing in the student-only Chamber Choir and the Choral Society which combines adults. He says, “It’s quite interesting to be in such a huge group of people. It just has such a bigger sound [sic]. It’s a lot more powerful sound than just Chamber Choir being the only choir.” When the choral forces combine, the nature of the concerts also changes. He elaborates, “We often do churches with really high ceilings and a lot of echoes and that

makes it a lot more interesting; there's just a lot more sound." He explains how the sound makes him feel, "It doesn't always go to plan but it normally works. When you're singing a really loud...everyone's singing a really rich texture, it's just really grandiose; you feel really powerful." The experience was important for Edward who considered the impact, saying,

It's hard to explain how it feels being part of a big thing. You feel like you're part of a big group that's all doing the same thing at the same time, it sounds good. You feel like you're making a difference even though you're a small part of the choir.

For Tony, the main difference between the student-only Chamber Choir and the Choral Society is the musical power that he experiences. He elaborates, "It's different because there is a wide range of ages. It sounds more powerful because the Choral Society is made up of adults and the Chamber Choir and some members of the [Chapel Choir]." He goes on, "It is a bigger choir and it has more experienced singers inside the Choral Society so it definitely sounds better and it feels like a more experienced choir."

Edward reflected that not all Choral society concerts provided him with the same feeling of excitement. He recalled, "It was a tiny concert in Earlsfield. That wasn't the best concert. No-one really liked the music. It was a really long book of not very well-known Christmas Carols." The repertoire seemed to have a lesser impact for Edward. He goes on, "We just sang through it and no-one was really very interested in it. It was music that wasn't very orientated towards the younger people. That's quite a one-off; normally the music is better and more interesting." Not being orientated to younger people seemed to indicate that the event lacked the excitement of the larger-scale works. In contrast, the most recent performance provided Edward with the thrill of singing in an epic sound world. He explains,

It was Verdi's *Requiem*. It was just so...it had a much bigger orchestra than the other times and a much bigger choir because they got loads of people from other parts of the school and old school pupils who came back to sing. There was just a bigger sound in a bigger church and Verdi's *Requiem* is quite a loud piece. That was one of the moments when it felt like a huge thing to be part of.

Edward elaborated on the power of the music, saying, “There’s a big part where everyone sings, all the parts are split in two and it’s just like the final chord of the piece and everyone was singing really loud all around you.” He continues, “It was a really powerful sound and all the instruments were playing as well, the cymbals and the trumpets and the trombones, it was just a really loud, rich sound.” Edward feels that being enveloped in such a sound changes how he feels as a young musician. He elaborates,

I think quite often in youth choirs, it doesn’t always sound very professional but with the professional musicians and the adult singers and the soloists, it sounded really rich and professional. I think it boosts your confidence when you hear it sound like that so you sound better and everyone around you sounds better.

Edward explains that the professional orchestral accompaniment is a standard feature of the Choral Society concerts which allows the experience of recognisable repertoire. He notes, “They use the orchestra whenever we have a concert and that just makes it sound very different and you can start getting pieces that you recognise.” He feels that the combination of orchestral forces and large choir is a selling point for recruiting other student choristers. He says, “I would tell them to come to hear the sound of the orchestra. That would probably be reason enough. It’s quite unique for a choir to have such a big orchestra and such a huge amount of people.” Although this choir’s performances with an orchestra may not be unique, for Edward, he feels part of something that is special and unique in his lived experience. He goes on, “It’s having that sensation of the rich sound that’s quite a unique thing. I don’t think you can get that very easily. I don’t think you would find many other places where you would get such a rich sound.”

Although Edward is relatively young, this choir is not his first experience of large-scale collaborative performances. He recalls, “There was a Primary Schools Choirs festival and they all went to the Royal Festival Hall and all the different schools sang together and that was a really nice experience.” Edward would like to relive this experience. He states, “I think

if you could get loads of choral societies and a really good orchestra and a really famous piece of music that everyone engaged with, that would be a really fun experience; a really big concert hall.”

Ian had also previously been in a large-scale, collaborative performance. He recalls, “I sang *The Lord of the Rings* Soundtrack at the Albert Hall and that was really exciting. We were one choir which was quite large on its own.” He continues, “Then there were about four or five other quite large choirs there as well so it was a really, really exciting experience, not just because it was in the Albert Hall but we had a full orchestra and everything.” This was a transformative experience for Ian. He notes, “That’s the first time I think I’ve sung with a full orchestra and professional choirs and that was a really cool experience.”

David also enjoyed the epic sound of the recent concert. He explains, “We did Verdi’s *Requiem* and I absolutely love it, it’s one of my favourite pieces now, but Verdi in this case goes completely off the limit.” He loved the huge, symphonic sound he experienced for the first time. “It was pretty nerve-wracking because there was a massive orchestra and I absolutely love the Verdi drum. It was amazing. It was big and explosive. It was really, really exciting.” This was a life-changing experience that David had not considered would be possible for him. He reflects, “No-one would ever think about singing something as massive as the Verdi. I just absolutely love the trumpets and it starts really quiet and then builds and builds, and then the choir come in and it’s just really massive.”

David had not considered that he would have the opportunity to be part of such an epic sound. He states, “Singing that with the orchestra was a very, very good experience because it was something that I never thought that I’d be able to do. It was really, really fun and it’s an amazing movement.” The surprise for him was on the day of the concert when the ensemble was fully gathered. He notes, “It’s completely different to what you experience in

rehearsals because it's piano and school choir and now you've got orchestra and choir when you put that together it has an amazing sound, absolutely fantastic."

Ian recalls the first time he sang through Verdi's *Requiem*, saying, "When I heard it, I was like, 'Yes! This is a brilliant piece. I'm really excited to sing this.'" For Ian, it was the power of the music that excited him. He explains, "The first few times that we sung through the really powerful bits, I was like, 'Wow. I'm actually singing this piece now.'"

Ian now wants to have more experiences with large-scale music events. He remarks, "I think I'd really like to perform in the Albert Hall maybe one more time." He reflects on an experience he had as a dancer and explains,

It might be quite cool to maybe do a chorus to an opera or something. That would be quite fun because I've never performed in that kind of opera house setting or anything and I know I really enjoyed it when I've danced in a setting like that with the orchestra in the pit and the audience around there. So, I'd really like to try what it feels like singing there because the music was really...the way it resonated, it was really empowering when I was dancing to it and I'd love to feel what it was like to be part of a choir, especially with opera singers who are unbelievably good.

Tony also enjoyed singing in the recent, large-scale music event, saying, "It was a lot bigger and the acoustics were amazing. We were doing Verdi's *Requiem*, quite a wide range of instruments as it uses quite a big orchestra." He elaborates, "There were strings, there was woodwind, there were these two huge drums. It definitely added to the singing and it was it was a very enjoyable thing, it was very powerful in size." The size of the venue that matched the size of the piece also had impact for Tony. He explains, "The fact that the church was big definitely made an impact and there was a bigger audience as well because of the nature of the piece. My mum said that it was definitely the best one we've done yet." Singing in a large venue helped make the event memorable for Tony. He reflected on another experience, saying,

We sung at the Royal Albert Hall in a symphonic concert at Christmas, it was quite a big thing. To do more of that, to sing at the Royal Albert Hall to sing at the Southbank... Yeah, and it's something you can tell people, 'I sang at the Royal Albert Hall, I sang at the Barbican Centre', and it's something that would definitely stand out. It would be something that you would talk about later in life.

Tony describes what it was like for him to sing in such a large and prestigious venue.

He recalls, "It's quite nerve-wracking at first because it feels big and it's cool that you're singing in it but then afterwards when you're rehearsing and you're singing at the concert it's less nerve-wracking." He remarks, "Singing in big venues is definitely fun at the end once you've come out of it." He concludes,

I remember when I was singing at the Royal Albert Hall, I would say it looks far bigger on the inside than it looks on the outside. Going in there for the first time, I did feel very small. Singing with the choir on the other hand makes you feel very large because you stand out and you're the one that the audience is watching. It's quite a contrast.

The four participants have reflected on several aspects of large-scale performances but did not mention the numerous solo and chamber music opportunities they have at school. Their reflections indicate the importance of the volume, scale and richness of the performance situations. For these young musicians, the bigger the better.

Intergenerational connection. Edward feels that the adults in the Choral Society view themselves as superior singers. He claims, "The adults sometimes like to think that they are the best singers there. They kind of sing out even when they are not necessarily singing the best." He recalls an incident, "When you're standing there and someone drops a book on your head from up high, it can be a bit off-putting." Despite not appreciating their vocal contribution, Edward can see benefits to having adults involved. He admits, "Generally they add a bigger sound because they have a stronger voice sometimes but they keep the rehearsals calmer. I think when you just have the younger pupils it's harder to get things done." He elaborates, "A lot of the people in the choir, their parents are the choral society so they don't tend to muck around and get told off. The rehearsals go smoother when the parents

are there if not always sounding better.” Edward acknowledges the trade-off between tolerating substandard vocal ability and benefiting from a larger sound and smoother and calmer rehearsal process.

Edward describes his sense of social disconnect between the adults and the student choristers, “I don’t think we interact much when we’re together because the parents all have their groups of friends that they talk to at the breaks and then the students, they talk to each other in the breaks. There isn’t much interaction between the two groups.” He goes on, “I think they would get along if they did start talking to each other but I don’t think they do just by chance, unless they were made to.” Edward theorises about factors contributing to his perceived social disconnect, “The Choral Society stands as the Choral Society. The Chamber Choir and the other choirs from school stand around and they don’t mix.” Edward notes that when performing, the two groups do not use a mixed formation. He explains, “You don’t get students mixed in with parents all the way through when we’re standing. It’s more separate in that way.”

Tony prefers the social interaction within the student-only choir to the intergenerational model. He explains, “I’d say I enjoy the Chamber Choir more because it’s all the same age and we go to the same school, we know everyone, it kind of creates more of a social aspect.” He goes on, “We go on tours and you get to know everyone more, whereas the Choral Society, we only play two or three concerts a year and you’d be singing with the adults but it doesn’t create that social aspect.”

Ian suggests that there is a disparity in vocal ability between the two groups. He notes, “There are people who are...let’s just say not as gifted with tuning. Sometimes they take a while to settle their nerves or get something and it puts you off if you’re not quite sure of yourself.” He sees the situation in positive terms, stating,

Now that I am more confident, I find that it gives you a sense of what it's like to have to lead others because even though you're a lot younger than them, you actually have much more singing experience than them.

David concurs with Ian's perception of skill disparity. He says, "It depends on their musical experience because adults like my Mum for example doesn't have any form of choral training or musical experience, so if they don't have a lot of musical experience...it can be really stressful." He elaborates, "There are things you are trying to do but they just contradict it so it doesn't sound as good so it can be a bit of a pain sometimes."

Ian feels that singing with choristers of lesser ability helps him develop his skills. He posits, "It's a bit tricky because they get something's wrong and that can be really off-putting but you have got to learn to zone that out and push forward and then eventually they actually join with what you're doing."

David has a slightly more positive perspective of the intergenerational relationship between the two groups. He states, "Most of the Choral Society are made of parents, one of my friend's Mum is in the Choral Society actually. Yeah, we get along and they're understanding." He notes the mutual love of music, saying, "They tend to have really nice chats with us and I guess they convey...they're showing that they love the piece of music that they're singing so we have that common interest as well." David expresses mixed feelings about the social dynamics. "They are older and they've gone through the whole process of school and things so they understand what it's like to be in our shoes. It has its ups and it has its downs." He feels that the intergenerational relationships vary with individuals. He states,

It depends on the person because some adults tend to talk to other adults whereas students tend to talk to students so you have that sort of line but then there are other adults who do talk to students and get along with them, especially when we're singing. We discuss bits that could be fixed or things that people joke about.

Ian suggests that the two groups relate well to one another. He explains, "Oh yeah, they get along. Especially because some of our parents are in the choir so we do get along with

them.” Despite feeling negatively about the social interaction, Tony considers the benefits to intergenerational singing. He suggests, “It feels a lot better because you’re singing with people of different ages. Of course, it sounds better and it also feels like you’re contributing to something better.” Once again however, he notes the lack of social cohesion, “I know the adults might get together socially. Apart from the odd conversation about maybe the music or just whatever is happening on the day. There’s nothing really apart from the connection between the adults and the children.”

Tony believes he would feel comfortable singing in the same choir as his parents. He states, “My dad has been trying to convince my mum, she has quite a good voice. She doesn’t think it would be a good idea but it would be.” He continues, “It would kind of be weird at first. It’s up to her really, I mean I sing in the choir and it’s definitely something I enjoy but if she would enjoy it too then I think she should.” Tony thinks the boys with parents in the choir are mature enough to be happy about it. He says, “I don’t really hear of anything that they feel embarrassed or something, it’s just that they go and they are at an older age now, it’s something they can cope with and they seem fine with it.”

The views about the intergenerational connection in the Choral Society are divergent and provide several facets of the collaboration for discussion.

Challenge and opportunity. The four participants are in the last stages of their school careers and their thoughts turn to their futures as they discuss the challenges and opportunities of singing in the Choral Society. David finds learning a variety of skills valuable for his future as a musician. The Choral Society places him, “out of my comfort zone. Initially when I first joined, I wasn’t used to seeing a piece of music and singing it on the spot but now it’s got better and better and better and helps with all my aural tests.” He

says that choral singing is important for his current studies and possibilities as a composer.

He clarifies:

I'm doing A Level Music at the moment and it helps with that. It helps with ... aural tests, different graded exams and identifying notes and listening out for certain techniques or ideas you have in a piece of music that you've never thought of before. It opens a whole new door.

Being challenged is an important facet of David's enjoyment of Choral Society. He says, "The Brahms German *Requiem*...it was quite difficult but it was really good fun and it was a massive challenge and something out of my comfort zone." Prior to joining the Choral Society, David had only considered composing for instruments. He explains, "It was a completely different experience and I'm still learning as I go; how to harmonise, how to write for S.A.T.B. and four-part choir. That's what initially got me into joining the choir." David also found that being in the Choral Society changed his perception of the process of learning ensemble music. He notes, "One thing I noticed when I first joined was that you had to learn music for yourself and that's something I was never really used to." He contrasts this experience with previous ensembles he performed with, saying, "Before we were spoon fed and they would teach us the parts and different parts of the music, now you have to learn it for yourself, you have to sing bits on your own and it can be quite difficult." David feels that these skills are helpful with his music studies. He reflects on learning Verdi's *Requiem* and Poulenc's *Gloria* stating, "It really helps with me when I'm doing my aural tests. It really helps because if you're able to sight-read something like that, then sight-reading five notes in a grade five to grade eight exam is fairly easy."

Ian discusses how it felt when he realised his skills had developed, allowing him to cope with the demands of singing Verdi's *Requiem*. He states,

I was like, 'Wow. I'm actually singing this piece now.' That was really quite amazing and the great thing was that I could hit the notes and I could understand it and...that was quite a moment for me actually because I spent so long developing my musical skills and I got to this point there this really famous piece

which I thought was fantastic to listen to, I can read and I can sing it and I can be a part of it and that was really great for me.

Tony considers that his Choral Society training has developed numerous facets of his musicianship. He says, "With the wide range of repertoire, I definitely feel I am a more experienced musician with knowledge of different composers relating to choral music and with music theory. I'm a lot more comfortable singing." He elaborates, "I know how to sing relative to the notation and I guess I feel that it's less nerve-wracking singing because I've done it so many times and I'm used to it and it's just something that comes naturally now." Tony thinks these skills will be helpful in the future. He says, "I am doing GCSE Music right now and I'll be continuing in A Level and hopefully later in life. It's something I can adapt; I can use what I've learned and apply it in my work." He elaborates further, "You can put it on your CV and in later life say you've sung in the choir and all the places you've sung if you're looking at going further into music." For Tony, every time the Choral Society performs in a concert, "it's more experience and it's more interesting, it's opening up a wider range of opportunities." He feels however, that the Choral Society could capitalise more on opportunities. He states, "Maybe if we sung more concerts, sung in more places, had more opportunities because Choral Society is only Thursday after school, it's only an hour." He contrasts Choral Society with the Chamber Choir, explaining, "It's quite different from the Chamber Choir when we rehearse a lot more and we go to more places, we go on tour." Tony feels that the Choral Society should perform to a wider audience, saying, "I'd like to see it opened up more to the public rather than just within the school because maybe about 90% of people attending would be related to the school."

Edward feels that choral singing compliments other career interests. He notes, "I don't really see singing as a career path. I think it's something that you can do." He continues, "I would come back to sing in the Choral Society like other students have come back when we have big concerts but I don't think it would take me to sing like the soloists do as a career."

Ian considers that the Choral Society demands little of his time for the reward that it brings him. He says, “For the little amount of time you’re going to do for this, you’re going to get a lot out of it.” Each of the four participants felt that being in the Choral Society was a positive activity which will influence their future.

Community and unity. The theme of community and unity emerged as the participants provided a sense of belonging. David expresses how the choristers feel connected, noting, “Everybody is very, very close and there’s a strong sense of unity within the choir. Everybody wants to work together to try and reach a goal and I think that’s really nice.” He feels that the Choral Society is inclusive regardless of ability. Asked whether the adults and students relate effectively, he notes, “I think so because of the strong sense of unity. I don’t know whether they have that in [Chapel Choir] as well. It’s sort of for people who have never done choral music before so I’d say, yeah.” The Chapel Choir is auditioned and highly selective. Ian elaborates further about his experience of the inclusive nature of the choir. He states,

Whereas this choir has a wider range of people and not all of them quite have that same level of experience. It does make rehearsals a little bit tougher sometimes, I think it frustrates [the conductor] now and then but I think that’s the whole point of the choir, everyone can sing and that’s what makes the choir really great.

Ian feels that, “The choir isn’t the really tuned-in, professional choir, everybody can join’, which helps provide a sense of community.” He concludes, “What I really like about that is you get lots of different people, and lots of different vocal skill levels but it actually comes together really well and it really works.”

Ian describes the support he felt when he first joined the choir, saying, “I felt really safe, really secure with all the other boys around me. It was quite a shock; actually, it was quite a different experience.” He continues, “Even to this day I’m still a little bit nervous about singing on my own. I still prefer singing in a group because I think I’ve sung in a group

for so long I've forgotten my insecurity." Ian discusses his perception of unity in the Choral Society, claiming, "Everybody is friends with each other, knows each other. Everybody's great friends actually which is really nice. My dad isn't [in it] but my mum is."

Tony remembers joining the school and found that membership of the Choral Society and Chamber Choir helped him feel part of a community. He recalls, "When I first joined Choral Society I didn't really know many people because joining secondary school you have to make friends and all of that. It's how I got to know people who were in my year more." He goes on, "Going on the tours with the Chamber Choir and singing in the Choral Society concerts, the friendships grow as I spoke with them more." Edward describes the environment in the choir, saying, "I think quite often it's the musicians making fun or [the conductor] making jokes with the students or about the music or the composer. If it's fun, it just makes it more interesting."

David is a member of another choir and states the reason for remaining in it for many years. He posits, "The reason I stayed in the Camden Youth Choir for so long is not just because of the music but because there's a very strong sense of unity there." He goes on, "I've been doing it with people I've been growing up with for the last 16 years of my life so I think the strong sense of unity would have to be something that would keep me inside." Belonging to a community is clearly important to David. He concludes, "If there's not a strong sense of unity I don't think I would stay but if there is and everybody is really friendly toward one another then that would be the driving force for me to stay."

Discussion and conclusions

There was no evidence in the data to suggest any perception of unequal status between the two choirs. The two groups share the same conductor and the participants articulate that each group is stronger for the collaboration. Similarly, the two choirs appear to share a

common goal; the successful performance of the work. The participants did not articulate any particular support from the school administration. Equally, there was no discussion of a lack of support. The participants did express a desire to perform to a wider audience than the school community which suggests a level of support in terms of attendance from school staff.

The only element of Allport's (1954) four factors to decrease prejudice, which was found to be lacking, was consistent and meaningful contact in intergroup cooperation. Regarding this concept, the participants articulated a need for more time spent connecting with their adult counterparts. They also stated that there was significant intergenerational disconnect between the two groups. Although the family connections with parents or grandparents, singing together with children is helpful in encouraging a strong singing culture, in this research, elements of prejudice, although polite are evident.

The level of enthusiasm and excitement the participants expressed for large-scale choral works was clear. The singers not only enjoyed singing in them but felt that the experience of learning this repertoire was important for them. In a study of student identity in music ensembles, Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz (2003), note that "Students' love of music and their understanding of its power was acknowledged" (p. 198). The participants described the physical and emotional impact of singing in such epic performance opportunities. Such physical and emotional responses are important as they can reinforce and expand the possibilities of working on a larger scale than people are accustomed to (Oddy, 2005, p. 1). My own reflections of large-scale, collaborative performance projects were identical. It is to be expected that a large ensemble creates a sense of power in performance but "It is the anticipation of this power however, the moments before it is realised that creates excitement and adrenaline" (Sutherland, 2015, pp. 1642-1643).

The participants in this study repeatedly articulated their desire to be challenged. These challenges allowed them to develop their musical skills which they saw as important. Adolescents are motivated by providing a nurturing environment, giving specific feedback, providing interesting repertoire and achievable challenges (Freer, 2009). The challenges that the singers referred to primarily involved repertoire. They enjoyed learning about music they perceived to be important and they spoke enthusiastically about the pieces they had encountered. Although the participants were all adolescent boys, there was no desire to sing easier music; they wanted to be pushed to the next level. Freer (2012) posits, “The problem is that young men are not attracted to what is easy—they are attracted to that which is challenging yet attainable, specifically in choral music” (p. 14). The participants discussed the need to learn the music for themselves rather than being spoon-fed. This approach meant that these adolescents were given responsibility and were treated maturely which they valued highly.

The theme of community and unity was a prominent theme to emerge from the data. The members of the Chamber Choir felt a strong sense of unity. Clift et al. (2008) state, “Choral singing offers social support and friendship, which ameliorate feelings of isolation and loneliness” (p. 205). The singers reflected on experiences in which they felt supported by one another despite differing levels of singing ability. In discussing friendships formed in music ensembles, Adderley, Kennedy and Berz (2003) note that “the social climate of these surroundings contributes to the solidification of these unions” (pp. 200-201). The feeling of community and unity was not expressed in relation to the Choral Society. This suggests that the types of activities such as tours, which provide bonding experiences for the Chamber Choir and do not happen for the Choral Society, are important. The infrequency of the collaborative occasions for the two choirs does not provide for a strong sense of community.

Although there are family connections between the two choirs, the general membership from the two groups are relative strangers.

This case study provides insight into a collaborative model between two choirs belonging to one institution which allows for intergenerational connectivity. The positive features of the model outweigh any shortcomings identified by participants. Through ICT, it is clear that three out of the four elements needed to reduce prejudice between two groups are present and one is lacking. If alterations to this model could allow for greater connection between the two choirs through structured rehearsals and informal social opportunities, the benefits to participant members and the wider community could be far reaching.

The research question asked if student collaboration with adult choristers enhances a culture of singing within a community. The enthusiasm with which so many boys engage with this intergenerational choir suggest that they find purpose in performing with others. The boys became aware of their choral skills through juxtaposition with their older counterparts, which encourages feelings of self-worth. Although intergenerational understanding could be improved in the model presented in this study, the positive culture of singing is clearly articulated by boys who are supported by interested adults. Through collaboration with the adults, the boys experience the power of the large-scale performance which is motivational. The adults who collaborate with the boys can bring much to the school singing culture and this study suggests that with increased interaction, their contribution could be even greater.

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Andrew Sutherland (asutherland76@hotmail.com), is a PhD candidate at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. His thesis by publication is focused on collaboration between music ensembles. He completed a Master's degree in Education at Edith Cowan University and his thesis examined the West Australian music curriculum. He has also written articles on film music and the use of children's choruses in symphonic music. He has lectured in Music at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts, and Music Education at Edith Cowan University and the University of Western Australia. He currently teaches music in London.