As a first large-scale initiative of ACDA’s new Center for Conducting Pedagogy, members were invited in the fall of 2015 to participate in a twenty-five-year anniversary survey of choral director teaching style priorities. From September 15 to December 15, respondents rated their teaching and conducting in surveys of the same well-tested psychometric type as personality profiles that assess deep-rooted characteristics out of multiple corresponding surface traits. This report compares present rehearsal teaching priority results with 1) priorities discovered in a 1990 national sample of high school choral directors, and 2) background experience and conducting priorities.

The Average Choral Rehearsal Approach

A first essential question is how the average choral director teaches now compared to twenty-five years ago. As illustrated in Table 1, certain priorities appear to have stayed the same and others changed. In the roughly 5% of ACDA members who contributed, the chief aim shown to have stayed the same is to control the breadth of ongoing rehearsal tasks. Remaining high in priority among these options are positive affirmation of learning and nonverbal motivation of attention to task, the latter effected through eye contact, circulating, pacing, and bodily presence. Time efficiency grew from relatively low priority in 1990 to be among the highest priorities in 2015—by keeping task directions and verbal interruptions brief, pace of activities quick, and musicians busy and active most of the time. Also notable is a sizable decrease in assertiveness—carried out through verbal task directions, close scrutiny of musician task completion, and specific corrective feedback.

On the depth of learning side, choral directors seem to have remained focused on performance artistry by their regular modeling, metaphors, imagery, rehearsal movement strategies, dynamic vocal technique, and other musically expressive

Table 1 Average breadth (purple shading) and depth (green shading) of rehearsal priorities in 1990 (orange line) and 2015 (blue line):
1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always

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methods. Further, collaborative group dynamics has remained of low priority across time, instead keeping choral directors in the lead of the whole ensemble with small-group sectional work on occasion.

How Choral Rehearsing Differs

A key discovery with both 1990 and 2015 survey participants was how choral directors develop across years of experience in stages, starting out insufficiently self-reflective and becoming effectively engaging of a breadth of active learning, inclusive of musicians’ interdependent influence, and only after a decade on average developing an insight into deeper conceptual, artistic, and creative learning.

In comparing priorities one at a time with a fuller range of background experiences (Table 2), present choral directors are shown to be: (1) less assertive in higher levels of choir and more assertive with the study of kinesics, or nonverbal communication skills; (2) more nonverbally motivating with advanced degrees, and for those who applied Kodály, mime, and kinesics to their teaching; and (3) more time efficient with advanced degrees and in applying mime and Kodály. In addition to the influence of years of experience already reported, directors whose priorities tip toward deeper forms of learning were shown to be: (4) more attentive in affirming episodes of positive growth when female and, again, kinesics-trained; (5) more allowing of peer-group and peer-led learning when in ACDA divisions farther west, female, and trained in kinesics, yoga, Kodály, and dance; (6) more inquisitively concept-learning oriented at lower levels of choir, with higher degrees, and when trained in kinesics, yoga, Kodály, and Dalcroze; (7) more artistic-performance oriented with applications of kinesics, mime, Tai Chi, and dance; and (8) more nurturing of musicians’ independent learning.

Table 2. Relationships between teaching and background experience in size (%) and direction (positive in green lines, inverse in red).
Creative and affective points of view when trained in kinesics, dance, yoga, and Tai Chi. Outside the natural course of influences due to personal identity, geographic location, and career status and position, the type and amount of training experiences seems to help route choral directors toward particular rehearsal teaching priorities. While not substantial, that such a logical pattern of influences emerged at all suggests that choral directors can steer their course more consciously than by given circumstance.

Demonstrating how philosophical differences aim and sway our pedagogical choices in rehearsal, the 1990 survey uncovered a set of eleven music teaching style prototypes that fit common “schools of thought.” As shown in Table 3, choral conductors differed in their focus on comprehensive musicianship—an equitable combination of music performance, conceptual analysis, and creativity—and distinct choices and combinations of these three key educational goals, including traditional concert performance as a chief aim. Foremost, Table 3 illustrates how scattered the state of choral pedagogy was in 1990.

The 2015 survey results reveal a less scattered state of choral pedagogy, yet still focused around recognizable philosophical and pedagogical issues of this day and age (Table 4). Note particularly in the list that well-rounded comprehensive musicianship is not done in such polar-opposite teacher versus student ways. One well-rounded group of choral directors taps into a full range of dependent-interdependent-independent learning in varying quick-to-careful approaches. A second group taps into group dynamics techniques that reflect educational pedagogies of social, cooperative, peer-centered, self-directed, and informal learning—the latter term used in British research for decades and brought to prominence in the United States in recent garage.
band-inspired pedagogy. These two prototypes reflect the workings of exemplary pedagogues of choral music and model music ensemble teaching practices written into the 2014 National Core Arts Standards.5

Add to these well-rounded approaches consistent tendencies toward conceptual learning and self-discovery, in the 2015 sample both rebalanced toward actively engaging nonverbal, positive, and efficient rehearsal management. Both fit long trends beginning in the 1970s to be more conceptually and creatively focused—to teach about the music and how to perform it.

The final two groups represent polar opposites between conductor-centric and musician-centric priorities of rehearsal teaching. A group of 177 choral directors is task-oriented, as one group was likewise found to be in 1990, yet leans closer toward the new norm of being less assertive and more nurturing to task. To the other extreme is a group of eight directors who continue to reflect the pedagogy of cooperative learning as identified in 1990, these same pedagogical tools now being promoted for teaching small, informal ensembles, or “emerging” ensembles as called in the 2014 National Core Music Standards.

In the mix of philosophically driven priorities reflected in both surveys, such distinctions as formality versus informality, dependence to independence, or conductor-directed versus self-directed seem to not be the point.

Table 4. 2015 choral music teaching style prototypes.
How Choral Conducting Differs

In answering what happens as ensemble conductors shift from teaching to conducting, a more recent line of research has discovered the same distinctions of dependence, interdependence, and independence wholly by the function of conducting gestures (Table 5, red/green arrows). In its own unique way, conducting also divides into gestures that reflect the music to musicians and connect with musicians’ attention and efforts in making the music.

Average conducting survey results show how choral directors reflect the music foremost, followed by connecting with musicians through eye contact, body stance, and other nonverbally motivating gestures fairly the same in priority as in rehearsal teaching. This is the same as would be expected given the traditions of conducting and is consistent with recent functional analyses of conductor, musician, and objective researcher observations of expert conductors.

As shown with teaching, conducting priorities vary and develop with experience (Table 6). On one hand—literally the right hand mostly—the repertoire of patterns and cues that form the basis of conducting develops to greater extents in the natural course of career experience, and by survey evidence are perhaps given quicker boost with advanced degree work and studies in mime. On the other hand—the left hand separately or coordinated with the right—gestures intent on displaying musical expression vary most as a matter of geographic, gender, and career experiences, and seems to be fostered above the norm by advanced degree work, yoga, and mime. Directors who applied Alexander Technique reported lower concern for time pre-

Table 5. Average music-oriented (encircled in orange) and musician-oriented (encircled in blue) conducting functions and how they divide into controlling (red arrows) and releasing (green arrows) aims and means:
1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always
cision and motivation of musician attention, though nothing of greater priority. Other methods strongly purported to heighten conductor expressiveness, Laban and Dalcroze to name but two, did not raise priorities above the norm.

Conductors’ motivational control—through increased intensity of gestures not aimed to heighten music expressivity but to heighten musician attention and cohesion—seems to have developed above the norm with mime and acting. It was also a greater priority for those in lower choir levels and otherwise honed through advanced degree work and career experience.

Interest in the effects of conducting on singing technique has peaked in recent years, which in this line of research was shown to divide into two priorities, first to guide and invigorate musicians’ bodily tone production efforts and second to ease restrictive tension of tone production. The latter aim is met through relaxing, lifting, smoothing, circulating, minimizing, and stopping gestures to allow musicians to connect with each other and unite in tone and tempo—thereby developing ensemble interdependence. As illustrated in Table 6, both aims take years of experience and advanced degree work, with mime helping sensitize to strength of effort, acting to develop responsiveness to both, and dance, kinesics, and Dalcroze to foster an ease of tone production from musicians.

How Conducting Aligns with Teaching

Finally, we look to answer fundamental questions in how to direct choirs in the dual sense of rehearsing and conducting, whether the two coordinate, if so in which ways, and why it may matter. In a display of dual survey results (Table 7), notice on the far left how assertive choral directors seem not to be so expressive in conducting and instead are more attentively motivating and strong-arm and restraining of singing technique in conducting. Further, choral conductors most faithful to the mechanics of beat patterns and cues are least open to strategies that would develop group dynamics, artistry, and independence in musicians.

Also note from the bottom left of
Table 7 how expressive conducting draws on a motivating sharp eye and enthusiasm in rehearsals and fits within an active and efficient rehearsal. From the top left, choral directors who are more or less motivating in rehearsal remain the same in motivational conducting and in guiding strength and ease of physical technique. These results alone deserve much more attention than possible in this brief report.

Note particularly the farther reaching cross-priority findings. Emanating from top left is illustrated what would not be guessed yet is rather profound in the face of arguments between opposing pedagogies—assertive and positive-learning interactions with musicians seem to have helped paved the way to assimilating socially learned gestures custom fit to musicians’ deeper needs and comprehension. More as would be expected, emanating from lower left is shown how expressive conducting draws from rehearsal strategies that foster artistry and originality. Remaining rehearsal priorities on the right are shown to enlighten conducting priorities on the right, as would fit choral conductors firmly embedded within progressive pedagogical camps. However, the facts of the survey remain that choral teaching and conducting are not as cleanly polarized as philosophical debates in the profession would have it seem; choral director actions on the one hand seem instead to inform actions on the other hand.

**Conclusions**

Though less philosophically scattered than a quarter century ago, choral music continues to be taught in diverse yet rationally explainable ways. Choir directors are neither ef-
fective or ineffective but instead seek to be effective in specialized ways in the rehearsal, as select priorities lead to unique effects. To those who tout a single approach above all, we can affirm that there is no such panacea. In our every choice in how to teach, we receive only the type and depth of results possible by our intended and unforeseen priorities.

Turning these results to ACDA as an organization, the inclusion of a Center for Conducting Research seems appropriate given the several avenues of pedagogy implied in this opening study. This study offers much for future inquiry both philosophical and empirical and for choral directors to consider for themselves. Certainly these results require verification and clarification, especially given the low number of respondents. I would hope that this study may guide directions for future division and national conference offerings, and in the Choral Journal, with an eye to complementing the various schools of thought identified within the profession beyond the varied types and levels of choirs we teach and conduct.

NOTES


2. In the three-stage 1990 survey (standardization sample N=475 of 2,000 sampled; test-retest subsample N=53 of 100
sampled; validation sample (N=210 of 700) no significant or substantial difference was found for ACDA members compared with participants affiliated with other professional organizations, and though the sample was drawn randomly in 1990, participation was highly restricted by self-volunteerism as experienced with the 2015 survey (N=763 of 16,322 in the membership email listserv), inferring that the two surveys provide a reasonably fair comparison though neither fully generalizable.

3 The statistical procedure used was stepwise multiple regression to control for partial correlations between the many independent variables, which provides a cleaner picture of relationships than simple correlations.

4 The statistical procedure used to sort out pedagogical differences was k-means cluster analysis with discriminant analysis to detect factors significantly distinguished between groups; k-means cluster analysis was again used with 2015 survey data.


