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## Music Teachers' Perceptions of Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items in Teaching Choir in the Classroom

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### Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine music teachers' perceptions of nonverbal conducting technique items based on their classroom choral teaching experiences. One hundred and fifty classroom choral music educators ( $N = 150$ ) participated in this study. I employed two procedures. First, using a seven-point Likert-type scale, participants rated 15 nonverbal conducting technique items in their importance to directing choral ensembles. I then arranged participants' mean ratings of the 15 items in order of importance. The three most participant-rated important items were providing right-hand indications for tempo changes, providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, and providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases. Then, participants selected their three most important nonverbal conducting technique items using the same 15 items. There was a tie for the rank of the third most important item, resulting in four items as most important. The four most participant-selected important items were providing right-hand indications for tempo changes, providing facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.), providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, and providing left-hand indications for attacks and releases. The choir teachers' responses gathered in this study can be beneficial in understanding which specific conducting technique components are viewed as important when developing successful conducting techniques to be used in choral classroom teaching.

**Keywords:** choral, conducting technique, preservice music teachers, classroom music teachers, music teacher preparation

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## **Music Teachers' Perceptions of Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items in Teaching Choir in the Classroom**

Music teachers should possess effective conducting techniques and various instructional skills to lead ensembles in the classroom (Silvey & Major, 2014). Steele (2010) specified that the three crucial characteristics successful classroom music teachers reflect are leadership, self-efficacy, and nonverbal communication. Among these three important characteristics, the development of nonverbal communication skills is foundational in becoming a successful music teacher and ensemble conductor (Wöllner, 2008). Thus, developing nonverbal conducting communication skills is an overarching part of music teachers' ensemble rehearsals and performance preparations (Silvey & Major, 2014).

### **Two Majors Components of Nonverbal Conducting Communication**

Clear and expressive use of nonverbal communication skills aid both conductors and ensembles to enrich their musical and artistic experiences (Silvey & Major, 2014). There are various conducting components that should involve effective unspoken interactions between a conductor and ensemble (Price & Winter, 1991). The two major components of nonverbal conducting communication that Morrison and Selvey (2014) identified are the use of hand and body gestures and facial expressions. These two nonverbal conducting communication elements are critical to convey conductors' wishes in the classroom ensemble setting (Ford, 2001; Fredrickson et al., 1998; Skadsem, 1997).

#### ***Gestures as Nonverbal Conducting Communication***

To be an effective conductor, appropriate musical choices must be made to support their nonverbal conducting communication (Nápoles & Silvey, 2017). After becoming familiar with a score, the conductor must decide which specific gestures to utilize prior to meeting an ensemble; proper gestural selection is imperative during this decision-making processes (Lane, 2006). Specifically, conductors should consider clarity and expressivity when determining which gestures should be used to effectively communicate with their ensembles (Nápoles & Silvey, 2017). According to Nápoles and Silvey (2017), the effective use of right-and-left hand gestural skills enhances conductors' expressivity and clarity when communicating with their ensembles.

#### ***Facial Expressions as Nonverbal Conducting Communication***

A conductor's use of facial expressions is essential to convey nonverbal ensemble directives (Manfredo, 2008; Nápoles et al., 2021; Romines, 2003). Research supports the use of facial expressions to reinforce effective nonverbal communication between conductors and ensemble members. Van Weelden (2002) found that conducting effectiveness and facial expressions were highly correlated. Byo and Austin (1994) indicated that expert conductors used varied facial expressions more frequently than novice conductors. Nápoles et al. (2021)

reported that participants preferred working with conductors who appropriately used facial expressions.

When conductors use contrasting facial expressions, they convey approval, disapproval, or neutrality (Nápoles et al., 2021; Yarbrough, 1975). In vocal settings, vocalists' facial expressions convey emotions of a sung phrase (Livingstone et al., 2009) and include smiles, grimaces, open mouth gestures, pursed lips, raised eyebrows, and a tilted head (Byo & Austin, 1994). Similarly, eye contact with the conductor becomes an indispensable element in communicating with ensemble members (Byo, 2001). Yarbrough and Price (1981) found that conductors' eye contact positively impacts the on-task behavior of high school students, which is an indicator of attentiveness and engagement.

### Teaching Nonverbal Conducting Techniques in Conducting Classes

Johnson et al. (2003) reported that ensemble members preferred working with conductors who communicated by using clear and effective nonverbal hand and body gestures and expressive facial expressions. In undergraduate conducting class settings, instructors encourage their students to use nonverbal communication techniques such as body movement (Byo & Austin, 1994) and facial expression (Wöllner, 2008) including eye contact (Price & Winter, 1991). Typically, in conducting classes, instructors guide students' nonverbal communication use in endeavors such as conveying tempo, styles, dynamics, and articulation (Nápoles et al., 2014), guiding speed of movement (Luck et al., 2010), and indicating left and right arm movement and independence (Byo & Austin, 1994). Instructors also encourage the use of nonverbal communication such as facial expression (Wöllner, 2008), body movement (Byo & Austin, 1994), and eye contact (Price & Winter, 1991). Techniques of nonverbal conducting communication are frequently taught in undergraduate conducting courses, so students can eventually clearly and expressively rehearse and perform with their ensembles (Green, 2004; Morrison et al., 2009; Morrison & Selvey, 2014). When conductors effectively use nonverbal communication conducting techniques, they not only augment their ability to communicate with ensemble members, but also enhance their status and effectiveness as teachers.

### Conducting and Teaching Effectiveness

When and how often performers look at a conductor can be associated with a conductor's proficiency in leading an ensemble and the ensemble members' ability to understand the nonverbal direction of the conductor (Byo, 2001). Steele (2010) noted the importance of nonverbal communication in the classroom and its relation to teaching effectiveness. Music education researchers have articulated the importance of conducting effectiveness and expressivity in working with ensembles and stressed the importance of teaching such skills in conducting classes (Byo & Austin, 1994; Johnson et al., 2003; Goolsby, 1999; Price & Winter, 1991; VanWeelden, 2002; Yarbrough, 1975).

## Need for this Study

Generally, preservice music teachers in the United States choose to enter their music teacher preparation program to acquire pedagogical skills in a specific area such as choir, band, orchestra, and/or elementary general music. As part of music teacher preparation, the acquisition of nonverbal conducting techniques is important to effectively conduct classroom ensembles. Conductors' nonverbal communication ability synchronized with ensemble performance clarity and expressivity is important (Pasquale, 2008). Johnson et al. (2003) reported that ensemble members preferred working with conductors who communicated by using clear and effective nonverbal hand and body gestures. Both collegiate musicians and secondary school ensemble students indicated their preference for working with conductors who showed conducting gestural clarity, technical fluency, and increased musical expressivity rather than those whose conducting seemed mechanical, unclear, and lacked expressiveness (Nápoles et al., 2021; Price & Winter, 1991; Silvey & Koerner, 2016). Hence, conducting pedagogues strive to teach vital conducting skills to preservice music teachers that enhance nonverbal communication effectiveness with ensemble (Nápoles et al., 2014).

Scholars have found that conducting course instructors present diverse curricular practices and instructional perspectives (Silvey et al., 2020) pertaining to the timing and sequencing of introducing certain conducting components (Manfredo, 2008; Romines, 2003; Silvey, 2013). Considering related research findings on the importance of conductors' effective gestural language and facial expressions, it would be pertinent to examine how music teachers prioritize various components of nonverbal communication when conducting their ensembles. For the purpose of this study, the word, importance, refers to a skill of significance or value. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine which nonverbal conducting technique items music teachers perceived to be the most and least important when they conducted their classroom choral ensembles. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What were classroom choir teachers' importance ratings of nonverbal conducting technique items?
2. What were the three nonverbal conducting technique items that participants identified as most important in conducting choir in the classroom?
3. What were the three nonverbal conducting technique items that participants identified as least important in conducting choir in the classroom?

## Method

### Participants

Participants in this study ( $N = 150$ ) were music educators who taught choir in K-12

school settings. I recruited former and current choir teacher participants through the Facebook Pages of I'm a Choir Director, Music Teachers, Middle School Choir, and I Teach High School Chorus for approximately three months in the summer of 2022. To obtain my final pool of 150 participants, I sent an initial survey invitation and three follow-up survey invitations. In order to establish a pool of qualified participants for the study, the following was the first survey question: Do you teach, or have you taught choir in the K-12 classroom? Only those individuals who stated they possessed classroom choral teaching experience qualified for this study and I retained their surveys for further study analyses. All the 150 participants were practicing K-12 choral music teachers. None of the participants submitted partial survey responses. Of those individuals responding, participation was voluntary. I did not offer incentives to participants. I informed the participants that the data were anonymous.

### Survey Instrument

I designed a survey to examine choir teachers' perceptions of important nonverbal conducting technique items by requesting music teachers' input based on their choral teaching experiences in the classroom. In addition to constructing seven survey questions which appear below under the head Survey Pilot Study, I listed 15 choral conducting items that were frequently presented and discussed topics in choral methods and conducting courses. To gather the 15 nonverbal conducting technique items, I reviewed conducting technique related literature (e.g., Byo & Austin, 1994; Morrison et al., 2009; Nápoles et al., 2021; Silvey & Major, 2014; Wöllner, 2008). I finalized 15 nonverbal items for the survey influenced by this literature and listed the following 15 nonverbal conducting technique items in the survey instrument, which is reported in Table 1 on the next page.

### Survey Pilot Study

In order to construct the survey instrument, I had originally gathered 12 conducting items. I recruited 16 choral music educators who had K-12 choir teaching experiences to review these 12 items. These pilot study participants had between 1 to 25 years of choral teaching experience. Pilot study participants reviewed 12 nonverbal conducting technique items for clarity, understandability, and proper survey question wording. Participants were also directed to rate the importance of the 12 items using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *not very important* to 7 = *very important*).

### Final Survey Questionnaire

After reviewing the pilot study, I decided to revise the instrument prior to confirming the final survey by adding three items relating to tempo indications: providing right hand for tempo changes, providing left hand for tempo changes, and providing facial/body expressions for tempo changes. As a result, the final survey instrument included 15 nonverbal

**Table 1.**  
*15 Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items*

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15 Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items
Right-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos
Right-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing
Right-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)
Right-hand indications for attacks and releases
Right-hand indications for tempo changes
Left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos
Left-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing
Left-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)
Left-hand indications for attacks and releases
Left-hand indications for tempo changes
Facial/body indications for crescendos and diminuendos
Facial/body indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing
Facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)
Facial/body indications for attacks and release
Facial/body indications for tempo changes

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conducting items. The overall pilot study was helpful in revising the survey items, eliminating typos and errors, increasing the clarity and understandability of the measure prior to finalizing and distributing the survey.

My pilot study participants reviewed the entire questionnaire for validity of the choral score preparation items. The content validity index (CVI), which provides an overall assessment of the measurement instrument, was 0.9 indicating that more than half of the experts agreed: values ranging from -1 (perfect disagreement) to +1 (perfect agreement). I removed errors in the pilot which increased the understandability of the measure prior to finalizing and distributing the survey.

The survey consisted of seven questions that I requested each participant to complete. In the first section of the survey, questions one to four, I asked participants to complete the four open-ended questions and/or click appropriate items in questions regarding their teaching background.

1. Do you teach, or have you taught choir in the K-12 classroom?
2. How many years have you taught music?
3. How many years have you taught choir?
4. Did you teach/have you taught choir as a primary, or secondary teaching area?

(Note: Primary means participants' main teaching area and secondary means participants non-main teaching area.)

In the second section of the survey, on question five, I asked participants to rate each of 15 nonverbal conducting technique items using seven-point Likert-type scales (1 = *not very important* to 7 = *very important*).

5. How important do you think it is that choral teachers, working with K-12 groups, perform the following? Please rate the level of the following items in their importance to choral conducting by clicking the appropriate box (1 = *Not Very Important* to 7 = *Very Important*).

In the third section of the survey, questions six and seven, I requested that participants select the three most and least important nonverbal conducting technique items.

6. Please select, by clicking the appropriate box, the 3 conducting items that you perceive most important when you conduct K-12 choral groups.
7. Please select, by clicking the appropriate box, the 3 conducting items that you perceive least important when you conduct K-12 choral groups.

## Reliability

To compute survey reliability and assess the internal consistency of my questionnaire (Groves, 2009; Rawlings, 2015) I calculated a coefficient of reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and the SPSS statistical software program version 24. The value of Cronbach's Alpha for the survey was  $\alpha = .860$ . Values of Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency  $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$  are usually interpreted as fine. Therefore, the internal consistency of the 150 participants' responses on my survey, across the 19 choral score preparation items on a multiple-item measure, can be considered acceptable (Pyrezak, 2018).

## Data Collection

I received my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to distribute survey

invitations. I used Google Forms to administer the online survey and collect data responses. The choir teacher participants ( $N = 150$ ) received a hyperlink to an online survey invitation on the specific Facebook pages on which they were members. Participants read my institutions' IRB statement in the survey invitation prior to looking at the first survey question; they responded to all survey questions to complete and submit the survey. I indicated that survey completion implied granting permission to use participants' data for study purposes. I downloaded survey responses from the 150 choral music educators in a spreadsheet format to use as the data for this study to compute their responses and analyze the data.

## Analysis

I employed the following procedures to analyze survey responses that formed the data pool. The purpose of question one was to identify qualified participants based on their responses to this question. Responses to questions two to four related to participants' music and choral teaching background were recorded. On question five, using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not very important* to 7 = *very important*), participants rated each of the 15 nonverbal conducting technique items in their importance to conducting choir in the classroom. I then computed the mean scores and standard deviations of the participant-rated 15 nonverbal conducting items. Following this procedure, I arranged the resultant participants' 15 mean ratings in order of importance to determine the three most important participant-rated nonverbal conducting items.

Using the same 15 nonverbal conducting items, on questions six to seven, participants selected the three most and least important items they perceived important when conducting their choral ensembles. I then identified participants' selections of the three most and least important nonverbal conducting items using frequency distributions. The rationale for requesting participants to both rate and select the most and least important nonverbal conducting items using the same list was to determine whether there was commonality between the two lists. In other words, were participants' responses consistent, similar, and/or different? There was congruency between the participants-rated-and-selected items.

Participants in this study indicated their years of teaching choir in the K-12 school. Participants' teaching experience ranged from one to 45 years. Among the participants, 62 (41.3%) taught choir one to 10 years and 88 (58.7%) taught choir 11 years or more. A majority of participants indicated that they taught choir as their specialized music teaching area; 119 (79.3%) taught choir as their specialized music teaching area and 31 (20.7%) taught choir outside of their specialized music teaching area. The measures of central tendency related to years of choral teaching experience are reported in Table 2 on the next page.



**Table 2.**  
*Measures of Central Tendency Related to Years of Choral Teaching Experience*

	Group 1 (One to 10 Years)	Group 2 (11 Years or More)	Primary (Choral Specialists)	Secondary (Non-Choral Specialists)
Mean	6.75	22.56	15.88	16.55
Median	5.75	22.00	16.00	15.00
Mode	1.00	15.00	1.00	12.00

## Results

### Participants-rated 15 Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items

I requested participants to rate each of the 15 nonverbal conducting technique items in their importance to classroom choral ensemble instruction. I referred to these as participants-rated items. I arranged participants' mean ratings in order of importance based on the survey results. The three most important participant-rated items were (1) providing right-hand indications for tempo changes, (2) providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, and (3) providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases. The three least important participant-rated items were (1) providing right-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, (2) providing right-hand indications for *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, & *fff* cueing, and (3) providing left-hand indications for tempo changes. The mean ratings and standard deviations for these items are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.**  
*Participant-rated Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items*

15 Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items	Mean	SD
Right-hand indications for tempo changes	5.37	1.85
Left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos	5.18	1.80
Right-hand indications for attacks and releases	4.99	1.90
Right-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos	4.98	1.81

Continued on the next page

Right-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	4.89	1.82
Facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	4.86	1.75
Facial/body indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	4.81	1.81
Facial/body indications for crescendos and diminuendos	4.80	1.96
Left-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	4.65	1.87
Left-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	4.62	1.92
Left-hand indications for attacks and releases	4.48	2.04
Right-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	4.26	1.99
Left-hand indications for tempo changes	4.25	2.02
Right-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	4.96	1.90
Right-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos	3.79	1.92

### Participants-selected Three Most Important Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items

I requested participants to select three most important nonverbal conducting items that should be prioritized in conducting choir. I refer to these analyses as participants-selected items. I analyzed participants' responses, using frequency distributions. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4 on the next page. From this frequency distribution analysis, I identified the participants' three most important nonverbal conducting technique items. There was a tie for the rank of the third most important item, resulting in four items as most important. The resultant four most important nonverbal conducting technique items in the order of the highest frequency counts were (1) providing right-hand indications for tempo changes, (2) providing facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.), (3) providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, and (4) providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases.

**Table 4.**  
*Participants-selected Most Important Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items*

Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Right-hand indications for tempo changes	61	13.6
Facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	50	11.1
Left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos	48	10.7
Right-hand indications for attacks and releases	48	10.7
Right-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	45	10.0
Left-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	33	7.3
Facial/body indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	27	6.0
Facial/body indications for crescendos and diminuendos	23	5.1
Right-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	21	4.7
Left-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	20	4.4
Left-hand indications for attacks and releases	19	4.2
Right-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	18	4.0
Left-hand indications for tempo changes	17	3.8
Facial/body indications for attacks and releases	14	3.1
Facial/body indications for tempo changes	6	1.3

### Participants-selected Three Least Important Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items

Each participant chose three least important nonverbal conducting technique items from the 15 survey items. I also refer to these analyses as participants-selected items. Table 5 on the next page presents the statistical results for the participants' three least important non-

**Table 5.**  
*Participants-selected Least Important Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items*

Nonverbal Conducting Technique Items	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Facial/body indications for tempo changes	57	12.7
Facial/body indications for attacks and releases	52	11.6
Left-hand indications for tempo changes	46	10.2
Right-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos	39	8.7
Right-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	36	8.0
Facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	35	7.8
Facial/body indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	34	7.6
Facial/body indications for crescendos and diminuendos	32	7.1
Left-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	28	6.2
Left-hand indications for <i>ppp</i> , <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , & <i>fff</i> cueing	27	6.0
Left-hand indications for attacks and releases	18	4.0
Right-hand indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.)	16	3.6
Left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos	16	3.6
Right-hand indications for attacks and releases	9	2.0
Right-hand indications for tempo changes	5	1.1

verbal conducting technique item selection. The three least important items in the order of the highest frequency counts were (1) providing facial/body indications for tempo changes, (2) providing facial/body indications for attacks and releases, and (3) providing left-hand indications for tempo changes.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate which nonverbal conducting technique items choral music teachers perceived to be the most and least important when they conducted their ensembles in the classroom. I sought to determine participant rankings of the three most and least important items. The following were the findings from the research questions. The three most important participants-rated nonverbal conducting technique items were (1) providing right-hand indications for tempo changes, (2) providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, and (3) providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases. The resultant four most important participants-selected items, due to a tie for the third rank were (1) providing right-hand indications for tempo changes, (2) providing facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.), (3) providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos; and providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases. The three most important participants-selected items were (1) providing right-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, (2) providing right-hand indications for *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, & *fff* cueing, and (3) providing left-hand indications for tempo changes. However, the three least important participants-selected items were (1) providing facial/body indications for tempo changes, (2) providing facial/body indications for attacks and releases, and (3) providing left-hand indications for tempo changes. Commonality between participants-rated-and-selected most and least important nonverbal conducting technique findings, as detailed above, guides the discussion below.

### Commonality Among the Three Most Participants-rated-and-selected Items

As stated previously, one of the reasons for requesting choral music educators to both rate-and-select items using the same list of nonverbal conducting technique items was to determine whether there was consistency among participants' responses. There was commonality between the most important items that participants rated-and selected. Three agreements between the two lists were (1) provide right-hand indications for tempo changes which was the first highest item in both lists, (2) provide left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos which was the second highest item that participants-rated and the third highest item that participants-selected, and (3) providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases which was the third highest item in both lists.

### *Providing Right-hand Indications for Tempo Changes*

Classroom choir teachers in this study perceived that providing right-hand indications for tempo changes was the most important nonverbal conducting technique item when they conducted choral ensembles. It seems that participants' previous choral conducting experiences and training accounted for this item being rated-and-selected as the highest on both lists. Music teachers might have been taught in their introductory conducting classes that the right hand should be used as the main indicator for this task (Ford, 2001; Silvey &

Fisher, 2015).

### ***Providing Left-hand Indications for Crescendos and Diminuendos***

Choral practitioner participants considered providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos as another most important nonverbal conducting technique item in teaching choir in the classroom. Pasquale (2008) found that undergraduate choral conducting course instructors taught the skill of expressing dynamics, such as using left-hand indications for crescendos and decrescendos. In a study by Morrison et al. (2009), when similar excerpts were given to a group of conductors, more expressive conductors demonstrated dynamic differences more effectively providing left-hand indications and received higher performance ratings from their ensembles than less expressive conductors. Classroom choir teachers in this study also prioritized the ability of providing left-hand indications for crescendos and decrescendos based on their choral ensemble teaching experiences. Participants, from their choral teaching as well as their undergraduate conducting course experiences, might have been trained in these situations to use the left-hand for indicating crescendo and decrescendo rather than using right hand indications.

### ***Providing Right-hand Indications for Attacks and Releases***

Participants perceived that providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases as one of the most required nonverbal conducting techniques when they rehearsed and performed with their choirs. Participants might have found that providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases was useful when they taught choir in the classroom and could have used right-hand indications for this task. Given the ranking of this item, it is suggested that choir teachers may wish to consider prioritizing providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases when conducting (Whitaker, 2011; Yarbrough, 1987).

### **Commonality Between the Three Least Useful Participants-rated-selected Items**

There was commonality in the three least important participants-rated-and-selected items, that being the use of left-hand indications for tempo changes. Participants-rated left-hand indications for tempo changes as the one of the least important nonverbal choral conducting technique items. While participants may actually use left-hand indications for tempo changes in their conducting, they indicated that they were less important than the other conducting technique items.

### **Implications for and Applications to the Profession**

I have several suggestions for conductor teacher educators based on the findings in this study. Respondents rated-and-selected providing right-hand indications for tempo changes as the most important nonverbal conducting technique item. This finding reflects a need to prepare preservice music teachers' clear tempo changes by providing right-hand indica-

tions as an expected gestural technique when conducting. It is recommended that exploring a collection of middle and high school choral literature that particularly involves frequent tempo changes and utilizes such repertoire as a means to enhance preservice music teachers' right-hand tempo change indication skill be employed in undergraduate choral conducting training. Silvey et al. (2020) stated that to refine preservice music teachers conducting technique, the use of nonverbal communication must be emphasized, which would reinforce the development of right-hand technique used for tempo changes especially when that conducting literature involves multiple tempo changes.

Participants also considered the use of the left-hand to indicate crescendos and diminuendos as one of the most important items in classroom choir conducting. The concept of left-hand independence becomes an important factor in this endeavor (Skadsem, 1997). Participants in Price and Chang's studies (2001, 2005) highlighted the value of left-hand expressivity in their overall ratings of conductors. However, Silvey (2013) reported that novice conductors' left-hand independence and expressive gestures were not developed properly during their conducting and/or music teacher preparation programs. As suggested by Green (2004), both hands should become equally skilled and independent, and more emphasis should be given to the development of left-hand independence in teacher preparation conducting programs. In choral conducting coursework, more opportunities should be offered preservice music teachers to strengthen left-hand gesturing of crescendos and diminuendos using various excerpts in front of lab ensembles (Livingstone et al., 2009).

Providing facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.) was the second most participants-selected item. Silvey (2013) found that the absence of conductors' facial expression in high school ensemble settings negatively affected ensemble expressivity. Participants in Wöllner's (2008) study rated conductor expressivity higher when they used facial expression. The participants' indication of providing facial/body indications for style emphases and changes as an important nonverbal conducting item in this study supports Yarbrough's (1975) findings that high school ensemble students perceived their conductors varied facial expressions as an effective means to engage them in the musical dialogue of a work. For singers, the use of facial expression is an effective means to convey the emotion and story of musical selections (Livingstone et al., 2009). It is suggested that choral music teachers practice utilizing facial expressions to increase their conducting expressivity in choral ensemble settings.

Undergraduate conducting course instructors should encourage preservice music teachers to conduct using expressive gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, and body movement (Price & Winter, 2001). Acquiring a host of nonverbal skills such as the 15 nonverbal conducting technique items reviewed in this study could assist individuals in developing clear and expressive conducting technique. The task of developing these skills could be accomplished in private or small group conducting sessions. In such sessions, conducting instructors could use information from this study in the development of specific nonverbal conducting technique components. For preservice music teachers, knowing which items

classroom choir teachers tend to think as the most important conducting skill can be helpful in developing their own conducting skills.

It is important that undergraduate choral conducting instructors, who prepare preservice choir teachers, continue to broaden their students' conducting skills by improving their nonverbal conducting communication skills to communicate more effectively with their ensembles. The art of conducting requires both highly developed knowledge and physical skills (Price & Winter, 1991). Most preservice music teachers typically begin to learn and develop the conducting skills necessary to teach classroom ensembles during their undergraduate conducting courses (Silvey et al., 2020). However, many music teachers wished they had been offered or procured additional conducting experiences in their undergraduate conducting program; especially conducting experiences that were similar to real classroom settings (Silvey et al., 2020) as well as actual conducting experiences (Silvey, 2011b).

Many music teacher preparation programs offer two conducting courses as required coursework (Hart, 2019; Manfredo, 2008; Silvey, 2013). Conducting instruction is also taught in choral methods courses. Often conducting and choral methods courses are not taught by the same individuals as many universities tend to assign choral methods courses to music teacher educators and conducting courses to conducting faculty members. Conducting courses tend to focus on teaching conducting technique to music students, regardless of their majors, while choral methods courses tend to focus on the preparedness of preservice music teachers for the choral classroom. However, the commonality between conducting and choral methods courses is evident in that both are preparing music education majors for future teaching/conducting experiences. Therefore, the results of this study would be beneficial for both conducting and choral methods instructors. I recommend that instructors in both settings focus on enhancing students' nonverbal conducting communication techniques in actual classroom or microteaching settings.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

I explored classroom choir teachers' importance ratings of 15 nonverbal conducting technique items. Using the survey in this study, future research comparing the response of novice and expert choir teachers would be useful to determine whether any differences exist between more and less experienced instrumental specialists in their nonverbal classroom choral conducting priorities. Comparing elementary, middle, and/or high school music teachers' responses, on a survey such as the one used in this study, could help determine if significant differences exist among various instructional groups/levels' specific conducting priorities.

Additionally, comparing a prioritized list of conducting technique items between those who teach choir as their specialized music teaching area and those who teach choir outside of their specialized music teaching area would be noteworthy to explore whether there are any priority differences between choral specialists and non-choral specialists when they conduct choral ensembles. Such findings can guide choral conducting and choral music



education instructors when ascertaining their approach to teaching choral conducting to non-choral specialists and in determining whether different topic foci be gathered in order that they develop the most effective classroom choral ensemble conducting practices given their training and experiences. Researchers could also consider completing research on the role that nonverbal conducting technique plays in support of student music making as well as the role nonverbal conducting technique plays in providing instructor direction. Both roles are important and should be explored further through focused research studies.

### Limitations

Similar to previous online survey studies (Silvey et al., 2020; Silveira & Hudson, 2015; Silvey, 2011b; Sims & Cassidy, 2019), calculating a response rate in this study was infeasible due to the questionnaire distribution method of posting the survey invitation for participant recruitment purpose on the Facebook. I'm a Choir Director Facebook including members who were unqualified to participate in this survey such as church, community, and professional choir directors was another reason of difficulty of calculating response rate. However, recruiting choral music educator participants on Facebook was an efficient way to sample from classroom choir teachers who had diverse teaching backgrounds and varied teaching instructional levels.

This study provides a basis for further inquiry and discussion regarding the importance of specific conducting technical components in terms of nonverbal conducting technique preparation for individuals planning to teach choir in the classroom. According to Silvey et al., (2020) conducting course priorities and perspectives can be slightly different among course instructors and therefore determining the importance of conducting components, based on the results of this single study, may not be generalizable to all classroom choir teachers. In this study, the word, importance, referred to a nonverbal conducting technique or skill of significance or value as perceived by choral classroom music teachers. However, the perception of importance of one's nonverbal conducting technique could vary dependent on the context in which it is defined. For example, a difference could exist between what teachers as conductors and students as ensemble members perceive as important. Whether the meaning of the word importance was perceived as intended by the researcher could be questioned.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore choir teachers' importance ratings of 15 nonverbal conducting technique items. The findings in this study could contribute to conducting course instructors' technical skill organization and presentation in their course offerings especially for preservice music teachers' choral ensemble conducting preparation. Connecting the relative importance of classroom choir teachers' nonverbal conducting technical skills to conducting course topic selection could be effective when instructors specify their course components. For example, by providing appropriate technical exercises and

learning activities that provide hands-on course experiences, conducting course instructors may offer more meaningful preservice music teacher conducting experiences. By concentrating on highly valued nonverbal conducting items instructors can focus on and design opportunities that encourage the development of nonverbal conducting techniques such as providing right-hand indications for tempo changes, providing left-hand indications for crescendos and diminuendos, providing right-hand indications for attacks and releases, and providing facial/body indications for style emphases and changes (legato, staccato, etc.).

An investigation of classroom choir teachers' most important nonverbal conducting technique items may assist preservice music teachers, classroom music teachers, conducting course instructors, and choral music teacher educators in determining essential areas of instructional needs, improvements, and developments regarding music teacher preparation. By gathering classroom choir teachers' importance ratings of nonverbal conducting technique items, preservice music teachers can use the information from this study to review, reflect, and enhance their specific conducting technical skills. The same information can be useful for conducting course design and development. The choir teachers' responses gathered in this study can be beneficial in understanding which specific conducting technique components are viewed as essential when developing successful conducting techniques to be used in choral classroom conducting situations and as such can assist preservice music teachers in their preparations to become successful choral ensemble conductors.

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