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(2026) Vol. 14 128-153**VOCES8 Foundation “Sing Together” U.S. Pilot Program: Perceived Impact on Grade 3 Children**Cathryn Booth-LaForce¹, Ann Wright², & Olivia Earl³**Abstract**

The VOCES8 Foundation Sing Together program is a US elementary-school music education project, enabling children to explore their voices through body and vocal percussion; warm-ups involving expressive sounds, stories, actions, and singing; and learning a variety of songs. The program is delivered through regular visits by semi-professional music teaching artists and reinforced by the school music teachers and classroom teachers. In the pilot phase of the program, elementary-school music teachers ($n = 4$) at four Title I schools (i.e., those with a high percentage of low-income families), each partnered with a classroom teacher ($n = 4$) at their school to provide the program to their Grade 3 students ($N = 90$; ages 8-9; class sizes 20-25 students). The purpose of the Sing Together research project was to evaluate the teachers' perceptions of the impact of the program and perceived changes in children's behavior and characteristics. We interviewed all participating teachers ($N = 8$) at the end of the school year using both rating scales and open-ended questions and employing both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The teachers had positive attitudes about the program; about perceptions of students' engagement and enjoyment; and about perceptions of impact on children's singing, behavior, learning, and well-being. The study yielded information about directions for future development of the Sing Together program, as well as results relating to the literature on the impact of vocal music on children's development.

Keywords: *classroom singing, child development, teacher attitudes, music education, elementary school music*

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VOCES8 Foundation “Sing Together” U.S. Pilot Program: Perceived Impact on Grade 3 Children

Structured vocal and choral activities in elementary school are associated in the extant literature with developmental benefits for children who participate. Through singing, students engage in a variety of cognitive, emotional, and social processes that enhance their overall growth and learning experience (Hallam & Himonides, 2022). Additionally, singing can be a source of enrichment and enjoyment in children’s lives (Geoghegan & Mitchelmore, 1996).

Cognitive and Academic Development

Participation in vocal music activities stimulates various cognitive processes in children. (Hallam, 2010). Miendlarzewska and Trost (2014) found that early and sustained musical engagement—including singing—supported language development, memory, and executive functioning. In contrast, Sala and Gobet (2020) found that once high-quality study design and active control conditions were applied, the overall effect of music training—including vocal instruction—was not significant in relation to cognitive and academic benefits.

Studies of the effects of music activities on reading and phonological awareness have produced mixed findings in meta-analyses, with some reporting small benefits, and others none (Butzlaff, 2000; Gordon et al., 2015). In more recent research, Steinbrink et al. (2019) found that in two studies with young children, music processing tasks were associated with phonological awareness and literacy skills. Additionally, Davis (2017) found that singing may promote both receptive and productive vocabulary acquisition, increase motivation, and improve pronunciation, communicative abilities, and literacy.

Of particular note, Johnson and Memmott (2006) analyzed data from over 4,700 elementary and middle-school students across four U.S. states and found that participation in high-quality music programs correlated with higher standardized test scores in English and mathematics, but participation in lower-quality music programs was not related. The researchers concluded that program quality—not just participation—determined the magnitude of benefit.

Social and Emotional Development

Among elementary school children, vocal music activities provide a platform for emotional expression and regulation (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001; Rickard & McFerran, 2012). Extensive literature reviews in this area have concluded that participation in choral singing fosters social cohesion and collaboration. Specifically, group singing has been shown to promote empathy and a sense of belonging and camaraderie among children, leading to positive peer relationships and reduced feelings of isolation (Hallam & Himonides, 2022). Additionally, Hallam (2018) concluded that collaborative singing activities require students to communicate, cooperate, and compromise, thereby enhancing their social skills and interpersonal relationships.

In a systematic review of the impact of group singing on well-being and psychosocial outcomes in children, Glew et al. (2021) found that well-being was enhanced primarily through mechanisms of social connectedness and confidence. In a more recent study of children aged 5–7, Welch and Baxter (2025) observed significant improvements in singing competency and children's self-reported well-being following a six-month class singing program. Although the statistical relation between singing and well-being was limited (as children already reported high well-being), results suggest that vocal participation sustains positive emotional and social engagement.

Del Barrio and Arús (2024) found that music and movement pedagogy in basic education fosters not only physical and cognitive aspects but also emotional development and social inclusion. Moreover, Good and Russo (2016) found that primary-school children who had engaged in group singing were more cooperative with one another in a prisoner's dilemma game, compared with children who had participated in group art or competitive games.

Taken together, the literature on the impact of structured vocal and choral activities in elementary school on children's development shows promise. However, results are dependent on program quality and other contextual factors.

VOCES8 Foundation Sing Every Day Program (UK)

One such high-quality singing project—the VOCES8 Foundation Sing Every Day program (referred to hereafter as Sing Every Day)—was undertaken with 6-year-old disadvantaged students in London, UK. Sing Every Day is a whole-class singing program delivered by specially trained vocal teaching artists from the VOCES8 Foundation (<https://voces8.foundation>), a vocal music education charity. Participating classes take part in bi-monthly singing sessions across at least 6 months and the children's generalist classroom teachers sing and learn alongside their classes. Classroom teachers are encouraged to incorporate at least 5 minutes of singing per day. The children learn to explore their voices and learn healthy singing habits through scaffolded learning that includes body and vocal percussion; warm-up activities involving expressive sounds, stories, actions, and singing; and learning a variety of songs that are curated and arranged by the VOCES8 Foundation. The program culminates in a performance with a group of the VOCES8 Foundation's professional singers.

In a research study of the Sing Every Day program in the UK, Welch et al. (2020) found that the children participating in the program showed significant improvements in their singing compared with control-group children. Relative to the control group, the children participating in the program also exhibited positive changes in reading and aspects of executive functioning related to inhibition and phonological working memory.

Following this positive evaluation of the VOCES8 Foundation Sing Every Day program in the UK, we endeavoured to offer a similar program in the United States together with one of our music partnership organizations, Quintessence. Thus, we initiated the VOCES8 Foundation Sing Together pilot program.

Method

In this section, we describe the implementation of the VOCES8 Foundation Sing Together Pilot Program, followed by describing the separate research project method.

VOCES8 Foundation Sing Together Pilot Program (US)

The VOCES8 Foundation Sing Together pilot program (referred to hereafter as the Sing Together program) was offered in four Title I elementary schools (i.e., those with a high percentage of low-income families), chosen to represent the four geographic areas of the city. The city's fine arts department introduced the project and 14 music teachers applied to participate. Two members of the fine arts department selected the four schools and the music teachers based on criteria that included student need, teacher development, and geographic representation. They were not selected based on their alignment with singing-centered pedagogy. These music teachers then each selected a Grade 3 class (ages 8-9 years) at their school to participate, based on teachers volunteering to be included. The music teachers chose Grade 3 because they believed that children were ready for a singing project at this age and would benefit most from participating. A total of 90 students participated across the four schools, with 20-25 students per class.

Two VOCES8 Foundation teaching artists, one from the US and one from the UK, visited and worked with the children on three occasions during the school year. Additionally, six teaching artists from the VOCES8 Foundation's local partner, semi-professional choral group Quintessence, worked with each class in pairs, six times during the school year. These visits occurred during the children's regularly scheduled music classes. The music teachers collaborated with the teaching artists to engage the children in warm-ups and songs, and the music teachers then continued this work with the children when the teaching artists were not present. The children's classroom teachers also attended these sessions, and they were encouraged to incorporate singing into their daily classroom routines.

Warm-up materials included specially designed group activities based on rhythm, body and vocal percussion, and expressive sounds (Smith, 2013). Songs were suggested by the VOCES8 Foundation. Both the school music teachers and teaching artists drew on these as well as other warm-ups and songs found on the VOCES8 Foundation's resource platform, the VOCES8 Digital Academy (<https://academy.voces8.foundation/>). The project culminated in the children having the opportunity to sing with a local choir, and to engage and sing with Apollo5, one of the professional vocal ensembles from the VOCES8 Foundation.

An additional element of the project was linking the US children participating in the Sing Together project with children in four London primary schools participating in the parallel Sing Every Day program. The children in these two programs connected through the exchange of pen pal letters. Two of the London classes participated in a virtual performance with the US children. One of the UK classes took part in a virtual meeting with one of the US classes so the children could ask one another questions and share a song, and the UK class supported the US class in learning a new warm-up.

Research Project

The purpose of the Sing Together research project was to evaluate the impact of the program and to relate perceived changes in children's behavior and characteristics to the extant literature on the impact of vocal music programs on children's development. Based on teachers' responses to prior educational offerings by the VOCES8 Foundation, we hypothesized that the teachers in the present study would have more positive than negative views of the program. Stemming from the relevant research literature, we also hypothesized that teachers would report positive changes in the participating children, but we did not hypothesize about the specific areas of change. The research project was approved by the University of Washington Institutional Review Board and the relevant Public School Research Review Board, and all participating teachers signed informed consent forms.

Research Approach and Paradigm

We conducted the study from a scientific pragmatism point of view, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection followed by a content analysis approach for the latter. This report aligns with the 21 items of the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR; O'Brien et al., 2014).

Participants

The participants were the four music teachers at the schools that were chosen for the program, and the four classroom teachers whose classes were chosen to participate at each school. The music teachers had bachelor's degrees in music performance or education and had spent an average of 10.25 years teaching (range = 2–24). They taught music school-wide, with an average of 333 students per school (range = 190–425). Two of the classroom teachers had bachelor's degrees in elementary education, and two had master's degrees. On average, they had taught for 16.5 years (range = 10–23), and their class sizes averaged 23 students (range = 20–25).

Procedure

At the end of the school year (May and June) the first author conducted confidential Zoom interviews with all the teachers who were involved in the program (four classroom teachers and four music teachers), after obtaining their informed written consent. Each participant received a \$100 gift card after the interview as a token of our appreciation for their time. The interview questions comprised both quantitative Likert-type rating scales and open-ended queries. The teachers were not given the interview questions in advance. The questions were designed to ensure ample opportunity for the teachers to express both positive and negative views, to offer suggestions, and to provide examples. The teachers' responses were automatically transcribed by Zoom and then the first author watched each recording and lightly edited the transcripts to eliminate errors (e.g., duplicate words, separated fragments

of sentences).

Quantitative analysis. We calculated median scores and ranges for each rating scale separately for music teachers (MT) and classroom teachers (CT) and for the combined groups. Medians were the appropriate measure of central tendency here (rather than means) because the data were ordinally distributed (Siegel & Castellan, 1988).

Qualitative analysis. We used the Atlas.ti program for the qualitative analysis. The first author identified and highlighted all quotations in each transcript. After reviewing the entire body of quotes, she developed coding categories based on the interview questions and on more general comments made by the teachers. She assigned at least one code to each quotation (and frequently, multiple codes), using an iterative process involving generating new codes, splitting or combining categories, etc.

The second independent coder reviewed each quotation and assigned single or multiple codes to each one. She also provided input that resulted in clarifying coding definitions, as well as making a few changes involving combining categories and adding a new one. With these changes in mind, each coder independently reviewed the quotations again to make modifications. A final analysis of coder agreement revealed complete agreement on 50% of the quotes (i.e., the exact same single or multiple codes for each quote); 41% partial agreement (i.e., the two coders had at least one code the same for a quote, but one coder had additional codes that the other did not); and 9% disagreement (i.e., no overlapping codes for a quote). Therefore, the coders had 91% agreement or partial agreement. Following this analysis, the two coders discussed any disagreements or partial agreements and came to consensus on code assignments for each quote.

Quantitative Results

Teachers' Knowledge and Attitudes

The results for the teachers' knowledge and attitudes about the program are displayed in Table 1 on the next page, with medians and ranges calculated for each 5-point scale (with medians reported here for music teachers first and classroom teachers second). Of particular note, both the music teachers and classroom teachers had very high ratings for their perceptions about the program when they learned about it (Mdn = 5.0 and 4.8), the extent to which they thought the program was beneficial (Mdn = 5.0 and 4.8), their enjoyment in delivering the program (Mdn = 4.5 and 4.8), the ease of implementing warm-ups and songs (Mdn = 5.0 and 4.5), and the extent to which they would like the program to continue in their classroom or school (Mdn = 5.0 and 5.0). The teachers differed in their knowledge about the program before it began, with the music teachers knowing a moderate amount (Mdn = 3.0) and the classroom teachers knowing very little (Mdn = 1.0). As well, the classroom teachers were relatively low in their initial confidence about leading singing in the classroom (Mdn = 2.8), but the music teachers were very confident (Mdn = 5.0). It is noteworthy that the

classroom teachers' confidence improved a great deal by the end of the program (Mdn = 4.5), and they were singing in their classrooms almost every day of the week (Mdn = 4.8). To summarize, the teachers had generally positive attitudes about the program, with knowledge and confidence improving over time.

Table 1

Median Scores (ranges) for Teachers' Knowledge and Attitudes about the Sing Together Program

Question	MT	CT	All
How much did you know about this program before it began in your school? (1=nothing, 3= moderate amount, 5=a lot)	3.0 (1-5)	1.0 (1-3)	2.0
How did you feel about this program when you learned about it? (1=very negative, 2=negative, 3=neutral, 4=positive, 5=very positive)	5.0	4.8 (4.5-5)	5.0
Prior to the project, how confident did you feel about leading singing in the classroom? (1=not at all, 3=some, 5=very)	5.0 (3-5)	2.8 (1-4)	4.0
Now, how confident do you feel about leading singing in the classroom? (1=not at all, 3=some, 5=very)	5.0 (4-5)	4.5 (3-5)	5.0
To what extent do you think this program is beneficial? (1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=somewhat, 4=a great deal, 5=extremely)	5.0 (4.5-5)	4.8 (4-5)	5.0
To what extent do you enjoy delivering this program? (1=not at all, 3=some, 5=a lot)	4.5 (4-5)	4.8 (4-5)	4.8
How easy was it to implement the warm-ups and songs? (1=not at all, 3=some, 5=very)	5.0	4.5 (3.5-5)	5.0
How many times per week are you using singing in your classroom?	5.0	4.8 (3-5)	5.0
To what extent would you like to continue this program in your classroom or school? (1=not at all, 3=somewhat, 5=a great deal)	5.0 (4-5)	5.0 (4.5-5)	5.0

Note. N = 8; 4 music teachers and 4 classroom teachers. MT = music teachers; CT = classroom teachers.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Program Impact on Children

Results are shown in Table 2 for teachers’ perceptions about program-related general changes in the children and the perceived effects on children with specific characteristics (with medians reported here for music teachers first and classroom teachers second). The teachers thought that the children enjoyed the program a great deal (Mdn = 5.0 and 5.0) and that they had changed quite a bit because of their participation (Mdn = 5.0 and 4.3). They perceived that general classroom behavior changed somewhat (Mdn = 3.0 and 3.8). In terms of children with specific characteristics, they thought that the program was somewhat helpful for children with behavior issues (Mdn = 4.3 and 3.0) and children who are English-language learners (Mdn = 3.0 and 4.5). They gave higher scores (between somewhat and a great deal) for positive changes in children who were shy or withdrawn (Mdn = 4.5 and 4.3), who had difficulty paying attention (Mdn = 3.8 and 4.5), who had problems with their peers (Mdn = 4.0 and 4.5), who had few friends (Mdn = 4.0 and 5.0), and who had learning difficulties (Mdn = 4.0 and 3.5). In summary, the teachers had positive perceptions about the program’s general impact and children’s enjoyment of the program, as well as perceptions of varying impact based on child characteristics.

Table 2
Median Scores (ranges) for Teachers’ Perceptions of Program-related General Changes in Children and Effects on Children with Specific Characteristics

Question	MT	CT	All
How much are they enjoying the program?	5.0 (4-5)	5.0	5.0
How much have they changed because of the program?	5.0 (3-5)	4.3 (4-5)	4.5
How much has their behavior in the classroom changed?	3.0 (3-4.5)	3.8 (3-5)	3.5
To what extent do you think that this program has helped children in your classroom who are shy or withdrawn?	4.5 (4-5)	4.3 (4-5)	4.5
To what extent do you think that this program has helped children in your classroom who have difficulty paying attention?	3.8 (3-4)	4.5 (3-5)	4.0

Continued on the next page

To what extent do you think that this program has helped children in your classroom who have behavior issues?	4.3 (3-5)	3.0 (3-3.5)	3.3
To what extent do you think that this program has helped children in your classroom who have problems with their peers?	4.0 (3-5)	4.5 (4-5)	4.3
To what extent do you think that this program has helped children in your classroom who have few friends?	4.0 (3-4)	5.0 (4-5)	4.0
To what extent do you think that this program has helped children in your classroom who have learning difficulties?	4.0 (3-4)	3.5 (2-4)	4.0
To what extent do you think that this program has helped children in your classroom who are English language learners?	3.0 (2-5)	4.5 (3-5)	3.8

Note. $N = 8$; 4 music teachers and 4 classroom teachers. MT = music teachers; CT = classroom teachers.
Ratings: 1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = a great deal.

Teachers' Perceptions About Parents

Results for teachers' perceptions of parents' knowledge and attitudes about the program are shown in Table 3. Teachers perceived that parents appeared to be somewhat knowledgeable about the program ($Mdn = 3.0$ and 3.0). The teachers also perceived that parents' reactions to the program were very positive ($Mdn = 4.5$ and 5.0) and not at all negative ($Mdn = 1.0$ and 1.0).

Table 3

Median Scores (ranges) for Teachers' Perceptions of Parents' Knowledge and Attitudes about the Program

Question	MT	CT	All
To what extent do you think that parents know about this program?	3.0 (1.5-4)	3.0 (1.5-3)	3.0
To what extent are parents' reactions positive?	4.5 (4-5)	5.0	5.0
To what extent are parents' reactions negative?	1.0	1.0	1.0

Note. $N = 8$; 4 music teachers and 4 classroom teachers. MT = music teachers; CT = classroom teachers.
Ratings: 1 = not at all, 3 = somewhat, 5 = a great deal.

Qualitative Results

The iterative process of analyzing the qualitative data yielded 40 codes for 396 quotations. The number of quotations per teacher ranged from 30 to 37, and the number of codes per teacher ranged from 28 to 34. The coding categories and their frequencies, as well as the number and percentage of teachers whose quotes were assigned to each category, are shown in Table 4. We selected representative quotations to illustrate the major coding categories (Table 5 on pages 139–147), and these results are summarized in the following text. In general, we found that the qualitative results enriched and expanded upon the quantitative results.

Table 4

Coding Categories and Descriptive Statistics

Coding Category	Frequency	# Teachers	% Teachers
Children enjoyed the program	30	8	1.00
Social cohesion	24	7	0.88
Global connection	16	6	0.75
Children's focus, attention	16	7	0.88
Positive comments about staff	15	6	0.75
Resources provided and teaching techniques	13	7	0.88
Teacher's desire to continue program	13	8	1.00
Enjoy delivering program	13	7	0.88
COVID19 impact	12	8	1.00
Children changed, singing	12	6	0.75
Effect on children with peer/friendship issues	12	7	0.88
Children's engagement	12	6	0.75
Parents' knowledge	11	8	1.00
Teacher's concerns at beginning	11	8	1.00

Continued on the next page

Effect on children with behavior issues	11	8	1.00
Program beneficial	10	6	0.75
Teacher volunteered	9	8	1.00
Parents positive	9	8	1.00
Changes in teacher's attitudes and perceptions	8	7	0.88
Effect on children with attention issues	8	7	0.88
How teacher found out about program	8	8	1.00
How much teacher knew at beginning	8	8	1.00
Communication issues with program staff	8	5	0.63
Program improvements needed	8	4	0.50
Effect on children who are shy, withdrawn	8	6	0.75
Ease implementing	8	7	0.88
Teacher's perceptions at beginning	8	7	0.88
Teacher's confidence now	8	6	0.75
No change, children already great	7	5	0.63
Parents not negative	7	7	0.88
Children's well-being	7	3	0.38
Effect on English-language learners	7	7	0.88
Effect on children with special needs or learning difficulties	7	6	0.75
Teacher's confidence prior	6	5	0.63
Training	6	5	0.63

Continued on the next page

Ties to academics	6	3	0.38
Program delivery	5	2	0.25
Children's leadership	4	2	0.25
How much singing in classroom	4	3	0.38
Downside of participating	1	1	0.13

Table 5
Representative Quotes for Each Code, and Code Frequencies

Code	Freq.	Teacher	Quotes
Teachers' Knowledge and Attitudes			
Teacher's Concerns at Beginning	11	CT4	So I was just a little bit concerned that I would have to do something, maybe outside of my comfort zone, because I'm not a singer.
		MT4	I guess my only concerns were about my students and myself representing our school and representing my State and representing, you know, my city well. That was my only concern.
Changes in Teacher's Attitudes and Perceptions	8	MT3	I think it's just a matter of the repetition, and me doing it over and over and over. Just gave me a little bit more confidence in it; whereas before it was easier for me to shy away from singing in my classroom. because I have so many other avenues that I could go musically. but with this one the sole focus was singing, and so that kind of forced me out of my comfort zone a little bit more. and I really invested in the practice
		CT2	So my attitude in the beginning was kind of that's... this is cool. That's a cool experience for them to take part in. Now it's something that I feel that everybody should do, because it's super engaging for kids. It kind of brings a light to the arts in a different way. and it I don't know. I feel like there's not a lot of respect for the arts.
Resources Provided and Teaching Techniques	13	MT4	I like that they get instruction from somebody else. and I like seeing things that I wouldn't see from any of my other professional development. It's just another. It's another great resource.
		MT1	Yeah, the website was really cool. That was there. And to have those videos and whatnot for someone who's not a singer. I think that website with the tools on there is extremely beneficial.

Program Beneficial	10	MT2	So I think it's a really wonderful thing. Very positive approach, gives the kids like experiences that they may never have their lives like a lot of our school, like our State, is a poor State. a lot of our schools, are title one schools, our families, are very low income or in poverty. so like getting to go to a concert for musicians of this level, or sing with people like this like these kiddos may realistically, never have a chance to do something like that in their life unless we provided it to them. So it's been really special to do that.
		MT4	So this class that's participating in Sing Together, They are so excited to sing every song that they know and every song they learned over the last year. and I don't always get that kind of buy in from all of my students. So it's extremely beneficial in that sense.
Communication Issues with Program Staff	8	MT1	I just didn't always know what was going on... on the other side of the pond. There was a disconnect with over here, and communication of things, and the whole go with the flow. Lots of things changed, and we didn't always quite know what we were supposed to be working on for certain things. And so it seemed a little disjointed this year with everything we were doing.
		MT3	I just want to know, where are we heading with it? What do we have planned for in the future? How are we going to facilitate that communication-wise that's been...That's been the hardest piece...
Program Improvements Needed	8	MT3	The hardest piece is. you know they're not all teachers that exactly know how to how to teach to an 8 year old kid for example. And so whenever we're watching those videos online for the kids to learn whatever they're trying to learn, the singers do a great job as a model for voice. But I'm finding that I'm having to pause the video and step in a lot to kind of, you know, bring it to the level of a child. So you know, and that's just that's no fault of their own. They're just not. you know. teachers with an education background. They're professional singers that are coming in and showing their craft, and so I don't fault them for that. It's just that little piece there. If we could find some way to get the teaching to the kids a little bit more on their level. It would just it would really take off.
		MT4	I think in maybe just in some of like from an instruction perspective when they come in and work with the students. They, you know they sing together. They sing with the students pretty much the whole way through. I would like to see some more student led activities. and I would like to see maybe the instructors like step back and see if the students can do it without them. Because for me, you know, as an educator, that's going to be a a huge assessment tool to see if they're retaining, and if they're internalizing what they're learning from everybody. It's easy for the kids to do it when they have an adult in front

helping them. But I think if we, if they stepped back and just let the kids sing the songs without them I think they wouldn't maybe notice that the instruction isn't always as successful as we think it is when we're singing along with them. Maybe not, you know. Maybe because I don't know if this is a good singing group. So yeah, I would just like to see like a little more independence for the students, a little more ownership of the of the material that they're learning.

Teacher's Desire to Continue Program	13	MT3	I'm curious to see if we could just kind of make this part of the school-wide culture. because it was such a new idea when it came to me that I just wanted to test it with one class as opposed to try to do you know, multiples and try to manage all of that. But seeing the effect that it's had on one class and how much all of the other students kind of missed out on an opportunity, I want to see if I could make that a part of the school culture where all of the kids get invested in this, everyone has that opportunity.
		CT2	But I do love this program, and I hope it continues and just gets bigger. I know they were talking about making it bigger and hopefully reaching more schools next year, so that'll be really cool if they can do that, and I do it with my same group of kids next year, or do it with all of my school, which would be even better.

Impact on Children

Children Enjoyed the Program	30	MT3	Through participation in this, it has fostered a great love and appreciation for singing like that class that particular group of kids when they come into the room. You know, half the time they're walking in already singing something, and they are just so eager to sing anything we throw at them now.
		CT2	The kids really enjoyed it. They just loved having it, and any time it was time to sing for their you know same aged peers, I guess, they were so excited to do all the different pieces to it,
Children's Engagement	12	MT4	I see a huge difference between the buy in in the class that is participating in Sing Together and my other classes, that I just continue like my regular curriculum.
		CT4	Even those that try to or were more embarrassed to try, and so they would give that attitude like. Oh, I don't want to do this. This is dumb, or whatever it was. I would see them still participating in and join, or what they look like and join.

No Change, Children Already Great	7	MT1	They're pretty focused when they're in here. So I think I mean they were good kids to start with.
		CT3	They do pretty well together. They're very kind. I have the what we call the social emotional learning class out of the third grade, I would say, because they are very empathetic. They are very caring to one another. And so when somebody's down. They're all rushing to their aid.
Social Cohesion	24	MT2	Even if since everything was like about a group, and then we'd be working together for things a lot of focus on teamwork and like honoring because a lot of what they do is, you know, asking kids for suggestions for things, and then the adults always honoring what the kids pick, even if it's really silly. I think that like really empowered the kids and helped them feel more connected both to the adults and to each other. So they knew there was somebody who cared about them.
		CT1	I think that for someone, if it especially with this, they have to work together in order for the song to really harmonize, you know, and we are definitely struggling as a school which is just like conflict, resolution, and kids being able to even work together. And so then, having to collaborate and do something to create a product like their performances that they're doing well, then our performances, but they're performing for the teacher in the classroom, and it's allowed them to work together as a team. ...And so I think that that was really good for them to come together to create something really beautiful, like the songs that they're singing, and they have to support each other. They can't sing louder than the other, they have to be able to help their friend learn the songs.
Global Connection	16	CT3	We started a pen pal program with the students overseas.... But I didn't expect how excited they were, and then it also brought in cultural questions. You know. Why do they say this? Why are they asking this? And then it led to other discussions about how it just made them more global to see, just not themselves in this little pocket. But also there's a world out there, and they do different things than we do so. Even in the language, even the language. They speak English, but they say things differently. And so what we say here is not what they mean over there, and those are in conversations we had.
		MT3	My kids really enjoy being able to interact with kids on the other side of the world

Children Changed, Singing	12	MT2	I mean. I just see a lot more confidence in their singing and expressing themselves and giving their opinions. and talking about a piece of music like This is what I notice. This is what I heard. I think that maybe it could mean this, or. you know, engaging in the artistic like really thinking about the artistic elements of a piece. It's like I've noticed in across the whole class a lot more of my kiddos tuning into that stuff and feeling like they can... they have something to say about it.
		CT2	I feel like the students kind of found a better respect for music in general. I mean they really enjoy music anyway. But they would come back singing all of the songs, and so they would always sing it and want to sing with me. And so it felt a little bit a little bit easier to just take the lead on that and get them to continue to sing, whereas before it was not something I would typically just do with them... I have one student who wants to be a singer now. that's what they were. That's their goal So I'm like, go for it. Please do it. And invite me to all your concerts.
Children's Focus, Attention	16	MT3	It's definitely engaging them and pulling them in. I think the only thing that's making it a little bit hard for some of the kids to focus is that as you're going through a lot of the content there isn't necessarily a sense of cohesion between one song and another, or one activity to another. It's just very kind of all over the place, right? So whenever you're diverting their attention all over the place, some of the kids are finding it hard to kind of zero in on what we're actually looking for.
		CT2	I have another student who will sing while they do their work. which is really cool, because I at first I didn't know that they were doing their work, so I would come over and be like, hey, can you not do that? You're kind of not staying focused. And then they would tell me. Oh, no, I have all of this done, and they would show me their paper, and they have all these things done, and they're just singing away. and I'm like, oh, okay, Well, like. If that works for you, then great, you know. So some of them. aside from having that release, they also it helps them focus.
Children's Well-being	7	MT1	...because when they walk out of here, even if they're having a low day, they walk out of here, and they're full of life, full of energy, and it they realize without even verbalizing. They realize how important this is to them and to their mental health. and how great they're feeling. And that's because they were singing.
		CT2	The students were able to write down anything that they use to help them calm down, and the majority of them said they used music, or the songs that they learned. They're just helping them focus or release that tension and stress...

Ties to Academics	6	CT1	We've been able to tie everything to something academic, whether it's the pen pal letters working with narrative writing we've done. I mean, they asked if England or London or Big Ben like where they could find that. And I'm like, Well, okay, hold on, let's backtrack. This is one place. This is not like, Big Ben is not a person that is a landmark. And so it's been good to kind of even do just some geometry, not geometry. Sorry geography work with them. We pulled up Europe on a map. They got to see all that, and it was just. I don't know it. Just They got to see that [our state] is part of the United States, and out of the United States there's other places. And that was kind of surreal to some of them, because most of my kids are familiar with like Mexico, you know. And so for them. That's leaving the country, not going to London.
		CT3	Music is extremely important, not just encapsulated in the music class, I mean. It builds within their brain. and they could carry that over. It helps them with focus, and then to be able to work on the writing skills and doing the pen pal letters. It piques their interest, because it's something that's very personal. So it's not just meeting a group and singing some songs, they carried over into what we do in our classroom. Not just in music class.
Children's Leadership	4	CT1	Yeah, like I'll call on kids to be our..like if the song that they're working on has movement, which most of them do, I'll call on 2 kids to come up, and I tell them I have to be able to trust that you're going to be responsible and reliable, and you're not going to be up here goofing around, and so they feel like they want to show me that they can be that.
		CT4	The more rambunctious [ones], even though they participated. They still were who they were. But I did notice that those that the other students would hold them more accountable because of it.
Effect on Children who are Shy, Withdrawn	8	MT2	I think it's definitely like I've seen some of them come out of their shells more and participate more in singing activities than they used to. and I see them thinking about all this is fun instead of thinking about. Oh, people are looking at me
		CT3	It did bring them out of their shell a little bit more than I think that they would. They were willing to sing. They may have started off not wanting to sing, maybe in the music class, but oftentimes when they come back from music they'd be singing with everybody else, so that shyness went away.

Effect on Children with Attention Issues	8	MT2	There's a lot of movement also, and creativity involved that helps draw their minds back when they get distracted
		CT2	I have one student who in particular would previously just kind of sit there and do nothing, which is why I did lots of check-ins with them. and when they are singing along ... I just hear the tune, the melody, whatever it is that they are. they're humming or singing quietly, and when I go over and assume that they're just trying to be distractive or mess around, and just to get out of doing work. It's the opposite. So they are actually doing more work than I think they're doing. So I guess that's really changed them in a great deal of a way
Effect on Children with Behavior Issues	11	MT1	I have a couple of students with behavior issues. and one just very much, you know, never even wanted to come to my class whatsoever, and it wasn't necessarily a personal thing. It's just who the kid is. But over the course of the school year the amount of grief that the child gives to the adults in the room has lessened. The actual participation in what we're doing has dramatically increased. and I dare say that even a few times the student was having fun. And you know we pointed it out
		CT3	So I have a couple. and that was their motivation to do well all week was to make sure that they participated within their music time that they did work on this.
Effect on Children with Peer/Friendship Issues	12	MT3	And so those kids that have fewer friends are oftentimes reluctant to interact with their peers on their own. And so because this is forcing them to come out of their shell a bit more. Their peers are able to see. get a better glimpse of their personality. and so they're starting to. They're starting to see that. Hey? Maybe this could be somebody that I could be friends with out on the playground. So I'm seeing a lot of a unique friendships forming in this group that I wouldn't have expected.
		CT3	It's a little bit easier for some kids to sing than it is to have a conversation because you're given the words. And you're coming together with a common language, I guess I should say, instead of having to come up with certain words to have that conversation, and some kids lack in that that social aspect. They're not able to find the right words or to come up and have a cohesive for a good conversation with another student. So I could see that bonding them with each other.

Effect on Children with Special Needs or Learning Difficulties	7	MT4	We revisit material, you know. at least once at least once a month, and then usually more. Even when they're not here. We they get to. They get more time to process the songs that they learn, and the motions that go with them. and so, like spreading that out over the year They're able to get better at those things, whereas if we were just doing like a regular unit, you know, that was maybe 4 weeks long. We'd have to go at a faster pace, and we wouldn't necessarily revisit things as much. So just that they have more processing time.
		CT1	I have. quite a few kids this year in our special education program. and they're typically my kids who I do end up calling for my leaders because they might struggle to be able to remember sequencing. But they have these songs memorized. And using music is actually help them with multiplication, because I found like songs where the it's the repeated addition. And that's actually been really help. I would have never thought to use music to help them with math.
Effect on English- language Learners	7	CT1	Because sometimes we do have a especially when the words are that like from England they struggle even more right, because they're still trying to understand what some of the words mean in English, and translating that into Spanish, so that when you throw in a word that just we don't even use that can sometimes be hard for them. It's like a double translation for them.
		MT4	They're basically learning by rote and watching the other students, and they're probably not necessarily internalizing the instruction.
COVID19 impact	12	MT2	Yes, because. being physically together, getting to create something with other people. and bring them back to that sense of community, I think, has been really positive. After that much isolation and having to be separated. I think it's like, since this is just my second year at the school. I was in college still when they were teaching online. But I know, like some of the kids like being at home, was not a great situation for them. So. being able to come back to an environment of supportive adults and other kids, it has been a really positive thing.
		CT4	I do think it was helpful, just because I think the pandemic, even though we still did classes online. And we, I was on Google meets all day every day just like if we were in class... However, I think this program helped because it even though we did some things online. like when they got to meet. you know, kids from the UK, and so forth. It just I think it wasn't tied to Covid. So it was just letting people still connect, but without having to think. Oh, my gosh! You know we have to do it this way rather than you know. I think so. I think it's played a role to letting people know we are not having to do this all the time. You know, this way. This is something that we're ABLE to do now, more or something more pleasant rather than because [of] the task.

Parents' Attitudes			
Parents Positive	9	MT2	I haven't heard from very many of them honestly, but the few parents and guardians that I had talked to like the ones who brought their kids to the concerts like they loved it. They thought it was incredible. They like to thank me so much for sharing it the opportunity with them. So it's a small sample size, but it was very positive.
		CT1	[The parents would tell me] My kid did not stop talking about this. They said it was the best thing ever. And so they've been super excited because the kids are super excited. So the kids have gone home and just talked it up.

Note. MT = music teachers; CT = classroom teachers.

Teachers' Knowledge and Attitudes

Both the music teachers and the classroom teachers expressed a great deal of support and enthusiasm for the Sing Together program and its perceived benefits for the students. Although the classroom teachers lacked confidence initially, they gained confidence over time and appreciated the tools (e.g., Digital Academy) and techniques available to them. They found the program to be highly enjoyable and were using singing in the classroom on an almost daily basis. Some of this was driven by the students themselves and their desire to practice what they had been learning, or to learn new material.

The music teachers started the program with greater confidence than did the classroom teachers and also had highly positive attitudes about program benefits for the students and the resources that were made available to them. They greatly enjoyed delivering the program, and part of that enjoyment was the high degree of perceived student enthusiasm and engagement.

The teachers also identified a number of communication issues (especially in relation to the three-way coordination of the schools with the local teaching artists and with the UK program). One music teacher believed that the Digital Academy was not designed for children of this age. Another believed that the strong focus on singing meant that the children were not able to experience the same quality of instruction in other areas of music.

Regardless of these issues, the teachers were highly positive about continuing the program in their school or classroom, with some of them expressing the desire to expand the program to the whole school. A few program improvements were suggested: Creating a greater sense of cohesion between songs; providing more visual cues in general, and visual and verbal cues specifically for children who are English-language learners; and fostering student independence by having them sing without their instructors at times.

In summary, the teachers expressed very positive attitudes about the program, their confi-

dence and knowledge increased over time, they expressed a few concerns, and they suggested a number of improvements.

Perceived Impact on Children and Parents

The teachers reported that their students were highly engaged in the program and enjoyed it a great deal. In terms of the perceived impact on the children and the ways in which they may have changed because of the program, some teachers reported that their students were already great in a number of ways. It also appears that classrooms with few behavioral (or other) issues were the ones that were selected to participate.

However, teachers also identified a significant number of ways in which they perceived that the children in their classrooms demonstrated positive changes due to the Sing Together program. Specifically, the teachers reported that the children increased their social cohesion with their classmates and with the adults working with them. A number of teachers also identified the importance of the global connectedness that resulted from the program, in terms of the students learning about the children in England and becoming pen pals.

Teachers also reported that the children changed in both the quality of their singing and their motivation to sing spontaneously with their classmates. They were viewed as gaining in leadership skills in terms of being able to lead singing and also holding their classmates accountable for their behavior in the group. Classroom teachers also mentioned the children's focus and attention, in relation to the use of music to help them focus on their independent classwork, but one music teacher commented that the children's focus during music time was sometimes hampered by lack of cohesion from one song to another. The teachers also commented on using singing to help their students' well-being, as a method of reducing anxiety and stress, and improving their mental health. In addition to the perceived specific music effects of the program, the teachers tied participation to other academic skills and subjects, such as geography and writing skills.

Teachers also noted changes in children with specific characteristics. Shy/withdrawn children and those with peer/friendship issues were perceived to improve through singing with their classmates and being part of a group. For children with attention issues, the teachers viewed singing (and the physical movements involved) as helpful for improving focus. The teachers also perceived that behavior issues (i.e., persistent disruptive or inappropriate behavior) improved somewhat as the children became more engaged with the music. They indicated that children with special needs and learning difficulties were able to participate more fully due to the repetition of the songs over the year. Finally, they perceived that English-language learners gained some benefit, but at times there were challenges for these students due to the differences between US English and British English.

It is not surprising that teachers thought the COVID19 pandemic had a large impact on the children. A number of the teachers mentioned the positive effects of the Sing Together program in terms of developing social skills and social connections—opportunities that were missing during online learning.

Teachers perceived that the children's parents were highly positive and supportive of the Sing Together program. The teachers reported that some of the parents did not seem to be very well-informed about the specifics of the program. However, they also reported that some parents appeared to be engaged through the enthusiasm of their children and the singing they did at home.

To summarize, we found that the teachers identified specific ways in which they perceived that the children changed because of the program, they identified variations in perceived impact based on child characteristics, and they addressed perceptions of parents' engagement and support.

Discussion

As hypothesized, we found, from both the quantitative and qualitative results of this study, that the teachers had positive attitudes about the program; about perceptions of students' engagement and enjoyment; and about perceptions of impact on children's singing, behavior, learning, and well-being. These results align with the current literature on the impact of vocal music education on children's development, particularly in the areas of social cohesion and peer relationships (see Glew et al., 2021, Good & Russo, 2016, Hallam, 2018, Hallam & Himonides, 2022). We also found areas of possible impact that are not as well addressed in the literature, such as teachers' perceptions of improvements or gains in children's (a) leadership skills, (b) mental health, (c) motivation to sing together, (d) attention, and (e) enriched connections with other academic subjects. These areas are worth further investigation, particularly because they would need to be confirmed via more direct assessments of the children. Also, we need to be cognizant of a possible halo effect in that teachers' overall positive perceptions of the program (notwithstanding a few concerns) may have influenced their perceptions of specific impacts on children in their classrooms. Moreover, we need to be cautious about the generalizability of our results, given the small sample size, non-random selection of participants, and specific context of the program.

The music teachers who participated, even those for whom instrumental music was their specialty, reported that they easily incorporated the Sing Together methods into their teaching. Classroom teachers, even those lacking confidence in their singing, reported that they were able to incorporate singing into their classrooms, and they gained confidence over time. In fact, the engagement of classroom teachers in the project was a critically important piece that ensured that children would be singing frequently (ideally every day) outside of the time they spent with the music teacher and the teaching artists. In a time of limited funding for music education, providing a modest amount of training and digital resources for music teachers, as well as encouraging classroom teachers to incorporate more singing into their daily interactions with children, may yield disproportionate benefits (see also Williams et al., 2023). Programs such as Sing Together may be particularly important in areas of high socioeconomic need (i.e., Title I schools) to ensure that these children can benefit from participation in high-quality music programs.

In delivering the Sing Together program, the school music teachers drew on a set of specially designed group activities based on rhythm (Smith, 2013) as well as warm-ups and repertoire from the VOCES8 Foundation's specially curated resources designed for elementary schools. Although standard elementary school music curricula might have some similar elements, the Sing Together program is unique in a number of ways. First, children explore their voices and learn healthy singing habits through warm-ups that incorporate expressive sounds, stories, actions, and singing. Teaching artists visit the children's music classes on a regular basis, bringing singing specialists to the classroom and the opportunity for children to both hear singers model the warm-ups and songs and to engage with these semi-professional singers. Second, the music teachers had access to the VOCES8 Foundation's resource platform called the VOCES8 Digital Academy which includes lessons and videos and provides a significant resource for their teaching. Third, the children in the US program were connected virtually, and through pen pal letters, with children in the UK who were engaged in a similar program. Fourth, the children had the experience of singing and interacting with a visiting professional vocal ensemble. Presumably, these elements contributed to the success of the program. That said, it is possible that similar results would be obtained with a more streamlined program involving primarily the provision of brief training and online resources for music teachers. This standalone method would have the advantage of being easier to disseminate broadly but the impact on children might be diminished, and the quality might also decline. A question for the future would be to attempt to identify which elements of the program are critical for its success, or to determine whether all are important. For example, the connections between children in the US and the UK seemed to foster learning about geography, other cultures, and language; and the teachers reported great student engagement and enjoyment in writing pen-pal letters. But it is not clear that this was a critical element of the program.

What does seem to be critical is program quality, which is an important moderator of the impact of school music programs on children's development (Johnson & Memmott, 2006). The VOCES8 Foundation ensures program quality in a number of ways, including training of teaching artists, provision of digital resources, and engagement with professional ensembles. Thus, the question about critical elements might be less important than the quality of what is offered.

In considering the results of this pilot project, it is essential that we address a number of alternative explanations and limitations. Notwithstanding the teachers' positive perceptions of the Sing Together program, it is also important to consider that these perceptions might have been influenced more by the novel aspects of the program—e.g., visiting professionals, teaching artists, links with the UK program—than by the central program elements of teacher training and provision of online resources. Additionally, because classrooms were not randomly assigned to the project, we do not know whether those that were selected to participate were exceptional in some way, e.g., they might have been especially cohesive or had highly motivated teachers and students. It is also important to consider that the nature

and quality of the relationship between the music teacher and the classroom teacher might have had a significant influence on the teachers' perceptions.

One limitation of the study pertains to our potential conflicts of interest. The first author is a professor and developmental research scientist at a major university and was also a member of the VOCES8 Foundation Advisory Board during the study. She initiated and carried out this research project, which was funded by donations to the VOCES8 Foundation for this purpose. The VOCES8 Foundation did not have any direct involvement in the research, nor access to the study data, nor did they place any restrictions on publication of the results. The first author had no contact with the participants or the schools during the delivery of the Sing Together program but served as the study interviewer as well as the primary data analyst. The second author is the Director of Education for the VOCES8 Foundation. She participated in designing and delivering the Sing Every Day and Sing Together programs and collaborated with the first author in developing the interview questions but did not do any of the interviews or analyze the data. The third author was a graduate student (unaffiliated with the VOCES8 Foundation) who joined the project at the end to serve as the second analyst for the qualitative data. We worked to reduce the possibility of bias by separating our roles as described above, by including ample opportunities for participants to provide negative as well as positive feedback through our choice of interview questions, and by engaging the third author as an independent unaffiliated coder.

A second limitation of the present pilot project is that we were constrained by resources to focus only on the teachers' perceptions in gauging the impact of the Sing Together program on the children. However, the teachers whom we interviewed, particularly the general classroom teachers, were important informants. They interacted with and observed the children in their classrooms throughout the school year in a variety of contexts and were therefore able to gauge the perceived impact of the Sing Together program in a more nuanced and comprehensive way. In this way, we gained a unique perspective not often included in other studies. Regardless, we cannot overstate the importance of replicating these pilot results with a larger sample, with multiple informants, and utilizing multiple assessment methods. In particular, it would be ideal to evaluate the children more directly before and after the program, as in the Welch et al. (2020) study about a similar effort in the UK. That said, we did obtain rich information from the present study about potential avenues for future development and possible expansion of the Sing Together program, as well as feedback on specific elements of the program that could be modified in future efforts. Additionally, we obtained more generalizable results adding to the literature on the potential impact of vocal music on children's development and providing greater insight into specific and novel aspects of development that are worth further investigation.

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