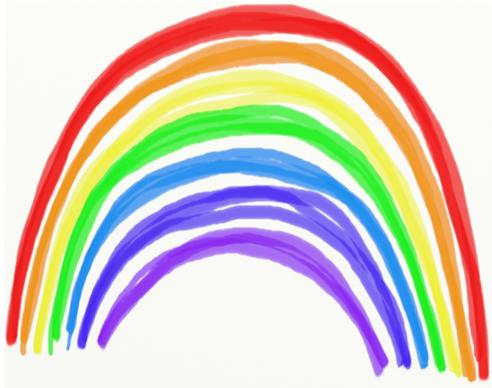


Transgender students in the choral classroom

Palkki, 2017



key terms

- **Gender** — a set of socially constructed ideas regarding gender roles and what behaviors and physical attributes are considered “masculine” or “feminine.”
- **Gender binary** — the assumption that all people are either male or female
- **Cisgender** — a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex
- **Transgender** — a blanket term to denote any kind of variance from, or opposition to, binary gender
- **Gender dysphoria** — when trans people feel a disconnect between their gender identity and their body (or voice!)

Choir contexts are gendered in many ways....

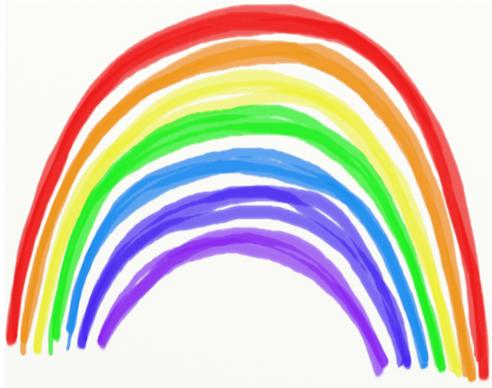


- “men’s glee club”
- “women’s choirs”
- choir dresses and tuxedos
- lyrics portraying heteronormative situations
- gendered rehearsal language (e.g., “let’s hear the women now”).



What should we do in our classrooms?

- Use inclusive practices (e.g., inclusive vocabulary) *all of the time*—not only when there are visibly “out” trans/questioning students in the program
- Negotiate voice parts with care & sensitivity
 - Determine through conversation the level of connection, if any, between the student’s voice and gender identity then ***create a personalized voice part***
 - Recognize: vocal health is important, but the connection between the choral experience and gender identity may determine whether or not a student continues to sing in choir



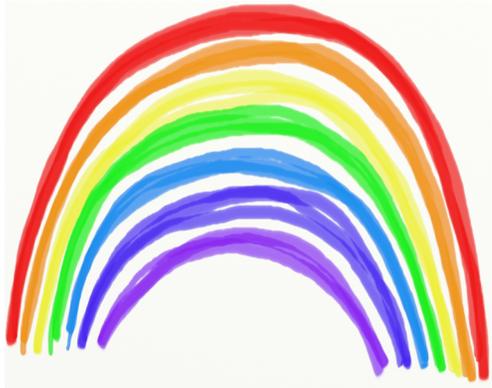
Hypothetical Student A

- a trans girl who previously sang tenor who wishes to sing alto
 - work with the student to determine her ability to sing healthily in falsetto
 - chart the student's range and determine which voice part she could sing on each piece
 - monitor the student for tension, as the alto tessitura may be tiring for someone used to singing tenor
 - consider a "hybrid" tenor/alto tenor approach on certain pieces

Hypothetical Student B



- a trans boy who previously sang soprano but now wishes to sing tenor
 - determine the full range of notes the student is able to sing healthily
 - propose singing tenor most of the time and switching to the alto line when the tessitura is consistently too low
 - position the student at the edge of the tenor section, next to the altos



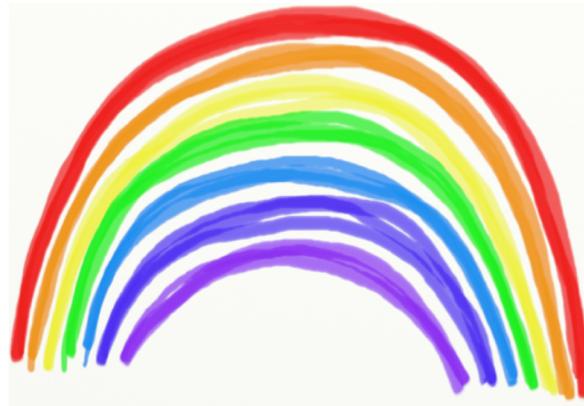
Hypothetical Student C

- a non-binary student joining choir for the first time who is unsure about their voice part
 - begin a dialogue about the student's voice and whether using a certain range causes feelings of dysphoria
 - do a vocal range check to determine which pitches the student can healthily sing
 - negotiate a voice part carefully considering the level of connection, if any, between the student's voice and gender identity

Real Student Sara

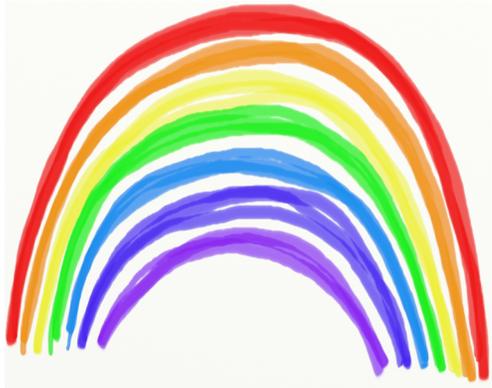


- identifies as male-to-female, initially desired to sing soprano or alto
 - her choir teacher worked with her one-on-one, and recommended that she remain a bass 2
 - Sara was comfortable with that, indicating that she does *not* feel a strong connection between her voice and her gender identity.
 - as Sara proudly proclaimed: “I’m a girl and I’m a bass and I own that.”



Real teacher suggestion

- If a student comes to you and wants to change voice ... it's understandable if you don't think that's healthy for their voice...
- ...But can you talk to them about it and figure out what makes them the most comfortable that's *possible* for the program and for their voice.
- What's the most comfortable for them and doesn't hurt them?



Other considerations

- Students' preferred names and pronouns, that may change!
- Tenor & bass choir vs. Men's choir
- Treble choir vs. Women's choir
- Seating/standing arrangements
- Uniforms...all black vs. dresses and tuxedos

Homework

- Read and respond to one of the LGBTQ related articles I've posted on the class website by Tues. Dec. 4

