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Introduction

There continues to be a growing body of literature exploring the multiple benefits of choral singing for both healthy adults and those with health conditions to promote physical and psycho-social well-being (Goode et al., 2020, Clift et al., 2010). The last decade has seen a steady growth in the number of aphasia and mixed neuro choirs around the globe (Talmage et al., 2022). While aphasia choir research has shown encouraging outcomes, most studies have focused on choir involvement over a relatively short period of time (Mantie-Kozlowski et al. 2017, Zumbansen et al., 2018, Tamplin et al., 2013). There is little research looking at the long-term (year or longer) impact of participating in an aphasia choir.

Aims: This qualitative study explores the member experience of long term (1-8 years) participation in the in-person Aphasia Tones Choir.



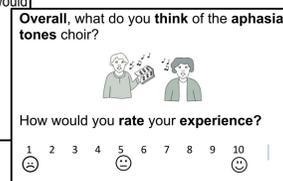
Meet the Aphasia Tones Choir: Singing together since 2009, the Aphasia Tones is a LPAA choir that focuses on singing, performing popular music, and raising aphasia awareness. SLP graduate student directors ensure participation at every level is supported through aphasia-friendly strategies at weekly 90 minute rehearsals.

Methods

Sample: Convenience sampling of 15 of 25 existing choir members (CM) and 5 care partners (CP). **Criteria:** Choir member for at least 6 months; at least 1 year post onset. CP roles and numbers included: Wife 2, Husband 1, Father 1, Sister 1.

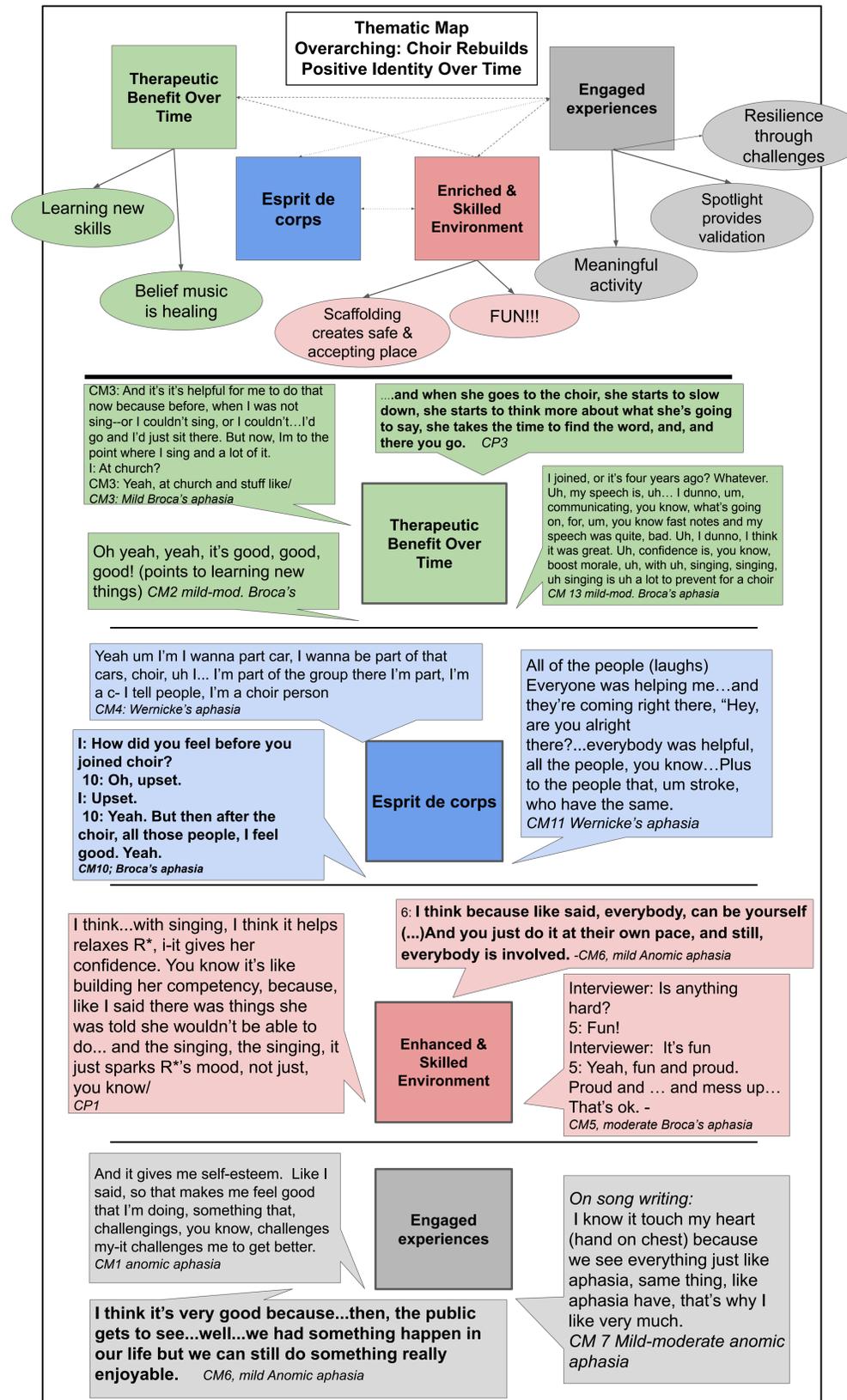
Choir Member (CM) Demographics					
Gender	Age	Race	Time Post Onset	Years in Choir	Aphasia Type
9 males 6 females	Range: 28-71 years Mean=60	API 2 African American 4 White 7 Latinx 2	Range: 5-19 years Mean=10 years	Range: 3-8 year Mean=5.8 years	Anomic 4 Broca's 6 Conduction 3 Wernicke's 2

Semi-structured interviews (Siedman, 2012) were conducted by 3 SLP graduate students who had received Supportive Conversation for Aphasia (SCA) training and had at least one quarter of group facilitation experience. Interviews, conducted in the university clinic, were video recorded and ranged from 35 to 100 minutes, with most choir member interviews lasting at least an hour. A visual interview guide with 18 core and 18 optional questions was designed using large font, bold key words, and visuals (<https://www.aphasia.ca/participics>) to clarify comprehension. Rating scales and picture arrays supported member output. Content areas: **General, Mood, Memory & Communication, Motor, Community/Social Support & Function, Long Term Commitment, Cultural, and Closing.**



Transcripts were analyzed using the 6 phases of reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2022), using both latent and semantic coding. Both CM and CP transcripts were coded by a primary researcher and then reviewed by a second researcher. Candidate themes and subthemes, thematic maps and definitions were developed collaboratively as a team. After noting that the CP coding generated a small set of unique codes, the CP & CM data were collapsed for this analysis. This study received CSUEB IRB approval.

Results



Discussion

Therapeutic Benefit Over Time: This dominant theme speaks to the contribution of an ongoing sense of progress to well-being (Bright, 2020). The emotional impact on PwA of hearing the word “plateau” from health care providers during post-stroke recovery is a longstanding clinical issue (Simmons-Mackie, 1998, Cheng, et al. 2020, Worrall et al 2017). Choir members frequently expressed pride and accomplishment in learning new music over time, despite their challenges in word retrieval, and expressed hope that they would continue to improve communication and/or singing skills. This supports the motivation of new learning identified in other choir studies (Ahessi, 2017). The popular culture belief that sees music as healing (Leviton, 2006) was a subtheme. Members spoke about singing as a way to help their brains “get better”.

Esprit de Corps: The sense of belonging, friendship, and group pride that came from being part of the choir was a robust pattern across the data set. Aphasia is often characterized as socially isolating which has negative consequences for health and wellness (Parr, 2007). Likewise, the detrimental impact of aphasia on friendship is well established (Azios, et. al. 2021). The power of aphasia groups to contribute to connection and well-being continues to be championed in the literature (Elman, 2007). This sense of social connectedness may be further enhanced by the unique capacity of singing together to promote social bonding (Goode et al., 2020).

Enriched and Skilled Environment: This theme identifies how structure, supports, and atmosphere contribute to successful choir participation. Members expressed their sense of connection with the Directors and their efforts to implement aphasia-friendly adaptations, reflecting the value of therapeutic affiliation (Bright, 2021; Lawton et al. 2018). Another dominant pattern was the enthusiastic expression that choir was fun, suggesting that this activity might promote the experience of “flow”, another way to foster a sense of well being. (Buetow et al., 2014, Sather et al., 2017).

Engaged Experiences: This theme explores the contribution of having meaningful activities on quality of life and eudaimonic well-being (Ryff, 2014). Choir members spoke about looking forward to rehearsals and the value of meeting new challenges. They expressed a sense of resilience, the willingness to keep trying even when adversity made it hard (Netuveli, et al. 2008). The validation of being in the spotlight was a subtheme, with performances as capstone experiences providing ample positive feedback. Both publicity and writing and performing a song about aphasia were additional sources of empowerment.

Conclusions

The study outcomes align with many of the themes in the literature about the benefits of choral participation and suggests it's an activity that **helps to rebuild positive identity over time**. The themes also support many of the factors suggested by Brown and colleagues (2013) that contribute to living well with aphasia: social connection, sense of improvement, sense of purpose, positive life approach. They also support Baker et al's (2018) recommendation of aphasia choirs as a level 1 treatment option in the stepped care model of depression. The long term commitment of the Aphasia Tones members affirms Cohen's (2016) perspective that arts-based interventions foster “**sustained involvement because of their beauty and productivity...keeping participants involved...compounding positive effects**”.

Selected References/Acknowledgements

Selected References



Thank you to the talented SLP grad students who have led the Aphasia Tones choir, and to all of the choir members and supporters. We also thank Giti Cira, Kristen Hart, and Charlotte Reimer for generously serving as project interviewers. This study was supported by the CSUEB Center for Student Research and NRRL.