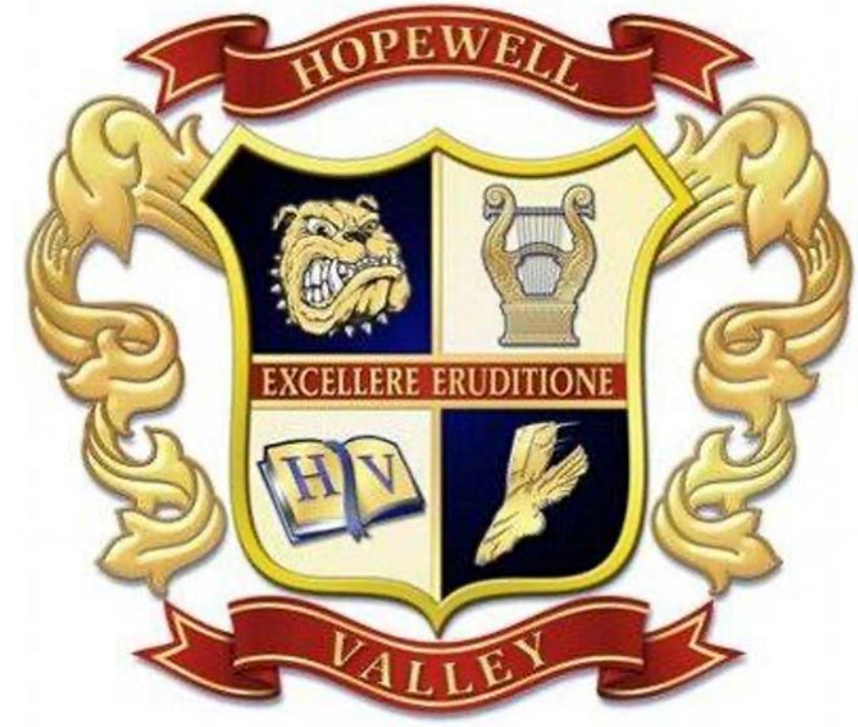


# Early Puberty Matters: Keeping Elementary Boys Singing Through the Vocal Change



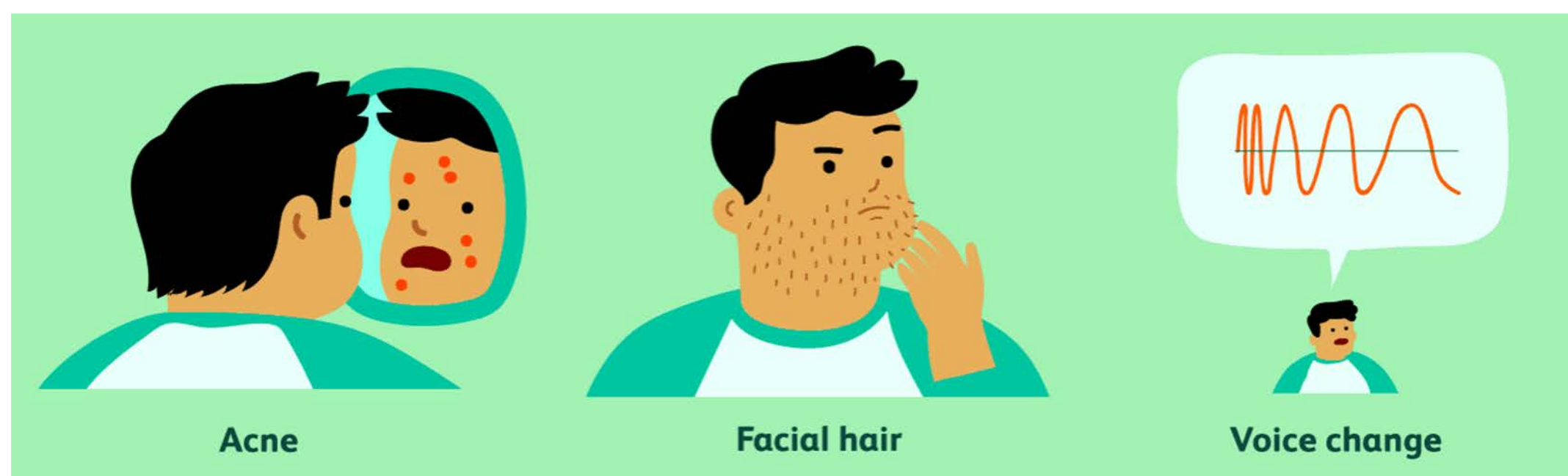
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## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this practical action research is to seek ways of engaging early adolescent boys in an elementary choir program.

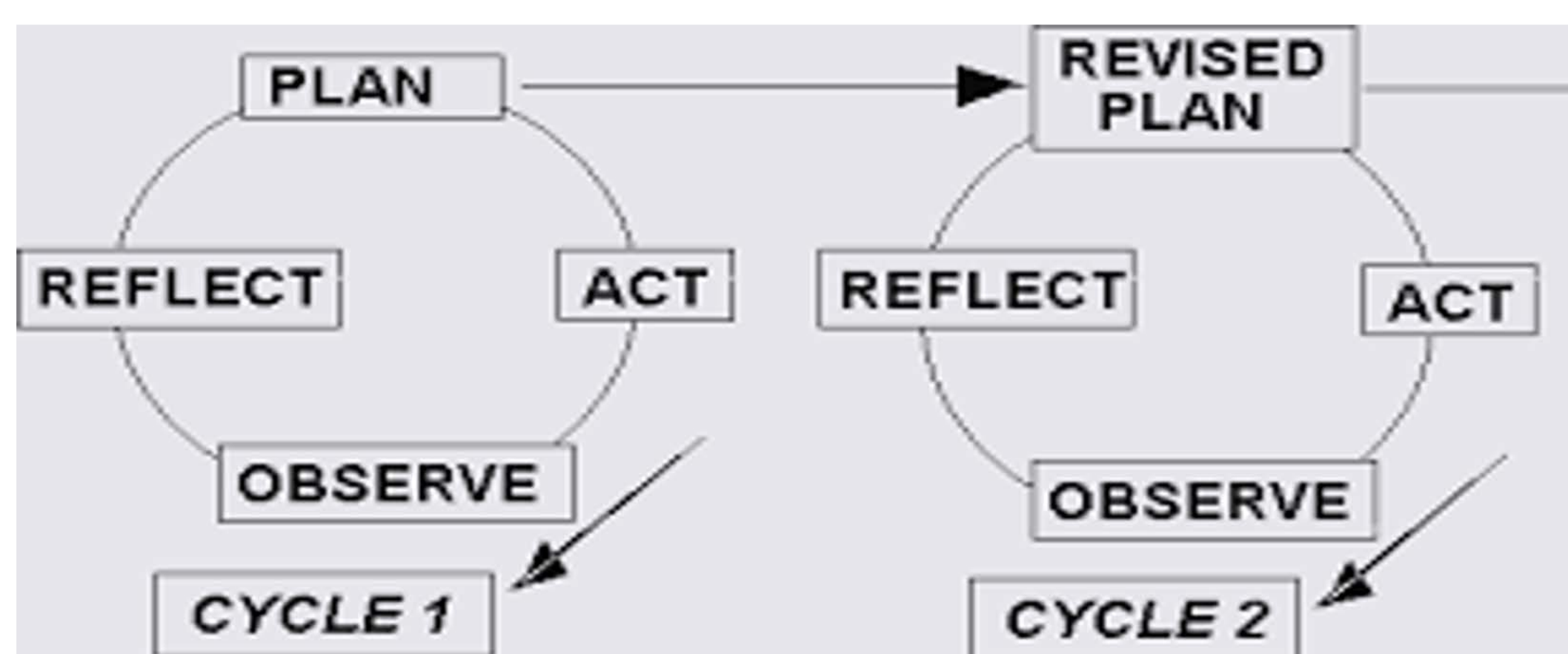
### 1. Puberty Signs in Boys (Ages 11.05 to 15.28)



- Upper grade elementary boys are 11 to 12 years old.
  - Early puberty has a higher risk of mental health problems (Jaltiala-Heino et al., 2003): isolation with peers, inactive music class participation.
- ### 2. Lack of Studies including Elementary Boys
- Studies including secondary boys suggested self-perceptions of musical autonomy, assisting vocal skills, providing good role models, establishing a network of peer social support (Abrahams, 2012; Freer, 2012, 2015)
  - Would this be a solution for elementary boys as well?

## Methods

### 1. Action Research Cyclic Process (Mertler, 2014)



- Two cycles with 11 5th grade boys, 1 researcher, 1 music teacher, 4 preservice teachers, 2 supporting teachers (the principal and the instrumental music teacher).
- 4 small groups with one preservice teacher and 2 to 3 elementary boys; two half-an-hour sessions in a week, for 4 weeks.
- Short debriefing meetings before and after each session.

### 2. Data Sources

- Preservice teachers' journals
- Supervisors' observations
- Participant boys' surveys, initial and post interviews.

## Cycle #1: Exploring Students' Voice

### Range

- The first half of the study focused on exploring students' vocal range.
- Preservice teachers assisted the students in accessing and embracing their new range.
- "I feel a lot better because before it was actually pretty hard to reach down there. But now I feel fine."
- "I see my voice as an instrument... going lower has its own benefits."
- Moderator: "How do you feel singing in a lower range now?" Student: "It feels less like you can't do anything about it"

### Pitch Matching

- Many of the students had trouble matching pitch to a piano.
- Some students needed extra help matching pitch and would often need guidance to find the right pitch.
- Positive reinforcement was key, reassuring them when they have the pitch and encouraging them when they're not quite there.

### Confidence

- No progress could have been made without building confidence and trust within the small group.
- Keeping students invested in each other's learning.
  - 2-3 singers, meeting regularly.
  - Peer feedback: One Positive, One Negative
  - Build a rapport with the students; allow them to get comfortable.
- "I would also do this group more because I like singing...I don't like big groups of people and the coaches are nice." - Student

## Cycle #2: Honoring Students' World

### Big Ideas

- Emphasizing individuality of each student:
  - Each student found comfort in their individual voice.
  - "I guess now I'm like how much, like knowing how high and how low I can go without it feeling weird." - **Student A**
  - "Yeah" - **Student B**, when asked about if he is comfortable with his voice.
- *Comfortability builds confidence, which leads to engagement.*

### Repertoire

- The second half of the study centered around comfort in singing popular/familiar music.
- Students were given the opportunity to choose the repertoire they felt most comfortable doing.
- At the end of the study, students expressed appreciation in being involved in repertoire selection.

### Check-Ins

- Students and coaches both assessing regularly:
  - Coach's knowledge and experience combines with student's familiarity with their own voice and honest feedback.
  - Creates a constant flow of information, wanting to get better.

## Implications

### <K-12 Classrooms>

#### 1. Shared Experience among Male Teachers and Boys

- Before the intervention, boys often stayed silent, became emotional, or acted out to cover their anxiety when asked to sing individually.
- The small group intervention created a safe place for the boys to express their uncertainties and navigate challenges.
- Male preservice teachers used their lived experience and learned pedagogies to help boys.

#### 2. Strategies

- Create a boys supporting group in the music classroom.
- Utilize high school students in the same school district who went through the voice change.
- Position boys as a vocal model for other struggling boys.
- Choose musical pieces that meet their vocal range and interest.

### <Higher Education>

#### 1. Self-Directed Practicum Experience

- Female college supervisor and cooperating teachers were limited to guide male preservice teachers working with boys.
- Male student teachers overcame initial fear and gradually trusted their pedagogical competence.
- It was a culturally responsive experience for male preservice teachers. They constructed new knowledge based on their prior experience.

#### 2. Strategies

- Not only the university classroom learning but also the practicum experiences can be culturally responsive.
- A university and community school partnership can fill in the gap in the K-12 classrooms to serve diverse student population groups.