Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Practice

Andrew Cowell
M.M.Ed., Vocal Music, Kent State University, 2014
B.M., Vocal Music, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2006

Daniel Glossenger
M.A., Education, Truman State University, 2009
B.A., History, Truman State University, 2008

Equity and Ability Grouping: A Study of Whole-School Practices and Reflections on Vocal Music Education

Date: April 8, 2021
Time: 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Place: Remote

Abstract
This co-authored dissertation is a macro-level case study of a public high school tracking system and a micro-level autoethnography from a music educator about vocal music placement practices. The case study sought to comprehensively describe and analyze the characteristics of a tracking system in all core subjects at a single school, including the extent of differentiation of levels, placement practices, student mobility, teacher tracking, and inclusiveness by race, class, and gender. It also used network analysis software to map more than 75,000 connections among students created by their course-taking; it used this to quantitatively identify student communities, which then were analyzed for demographic trends. Paired with the case study, the autoethnography examined the assumptions and placement practices in high school vocal music and in educator preparation programs. The case study found limited student mobility, complex placement practices that differed from one subject area to another, extensive segregation in nearly all subject areas, and limited evidence for teacher tracking. It also revealed several student communities that function as segregated schools-within-a-school. The autoethnography reveals the impact of teachers as evaluators on the leveling and ability grouping practices within vocal music education and specifically highlights bias through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Recommendations for policy reform are provided.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.
Cheryl Osby, Ph.D.
Robert Good, Ph.D.