

January 2023

MA PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE VOICE PEDAGOGY

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WBL Research Project BMPF7008

Student Number
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What would helpfully be included in a toolkit for teaching pop and rock vocal improvisation to Musical Theatre (MT) singers?



Context and aims



My teaching context

- Musical Theatre (MT) students
- Settings - 1:1, drama school, online for Sing Space
- All levels



Industry Context

- Pop and rock scores in contemporary MT >50% (Benson, 2018)
- Require pop styling including ad-libbing (Edwards and Hoch, 2018)



Aims & Objectives

- Create teaching toolkit of strategies and exercises
- Suitable for all students
- Based on expert opinion and experience

Methodology

Paradigm: Pragmatic

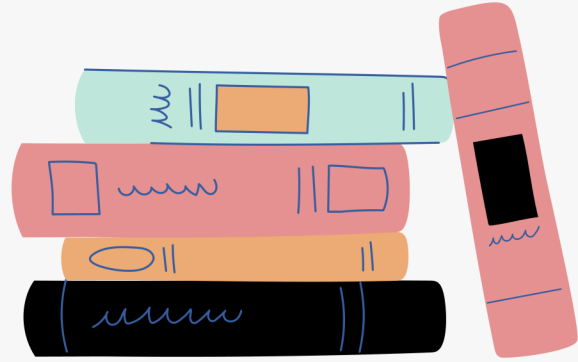
Mixed Methods: Qualitative and quantitative

Sampling: Purposive

- Voice pedagogues who taught vocal improvisation
- Information-rich cases (Saunders et al., 2012)



Methods



Literature Review

Available literature

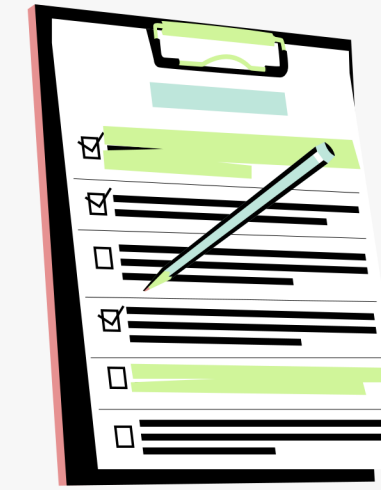
- CCM styles
- Vocal improvisation
- Grey literature



Semi-structured Interviews

3 Participants

- Framework of open questions
- Experiences, teaching strategies, exercises
- Qualitative data



Questionnaires

8 Respondents

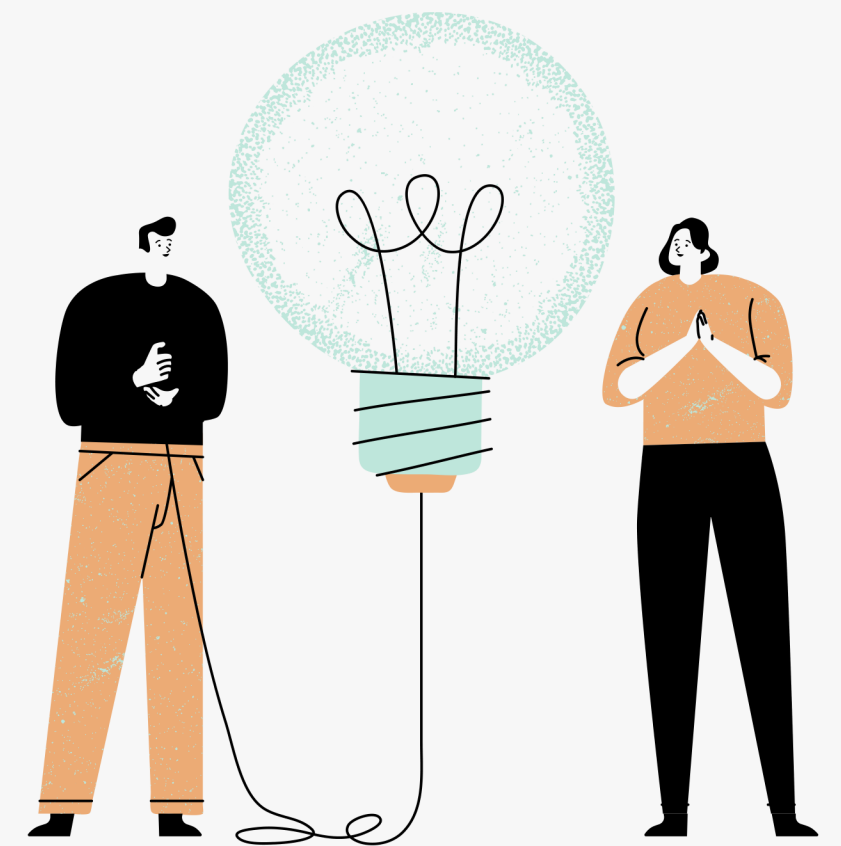
- Mix of open and closed questions
- Broader spectrum of tools
- Quantitative and qualitative data

Insider Research and Ethics

- Intellectual property - competition (Bell, 2010)

Mitigations:

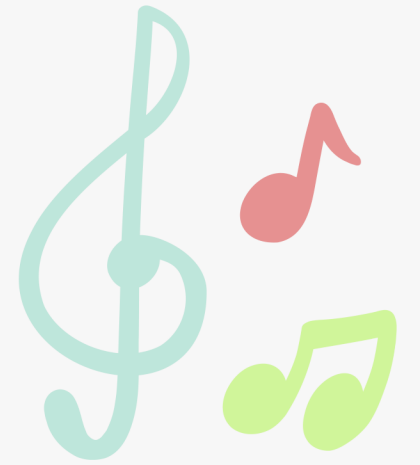
- Information and consent form
- Open questions in interview
- No essential questions in questionnaire



Findings



Literature Review – summary of themes



Mindset

- Fear of sounding "bad" (Robinson-Martin in Benson, 2020, p.232)

Ear training

- Fundamental to improvisational ability (Smallwood, 1980)

Listening

- Learn musical vocabulary (Bell, 2013)
- Listen to nuances of style (Peckham, 2003)

Riffs and styling

- Riffing skills - break into chunks (Popeil in Benson, 2020)
- 'Groove' - phrasing and syncopations (Edwards in Benson, 2020)

Interviews and Questionnaires – summary of data

Coding: In Vivo (Saldaña, 2016)

- Mindset
- Ear training
- Listening
- Vocal technique
- Vocal style
- Practical tasks / activities
- Repertoire
- Technology



Analysis – An improvising mindset

- Literature review, interview and questionnaire data
- Ego
- Playful approach
- Environment
- Student-centered



"...the student is there to play, to try things, and to develop the confidence to make mistakes"

(Questionnaire Respondent 3)

Analysis – Listening

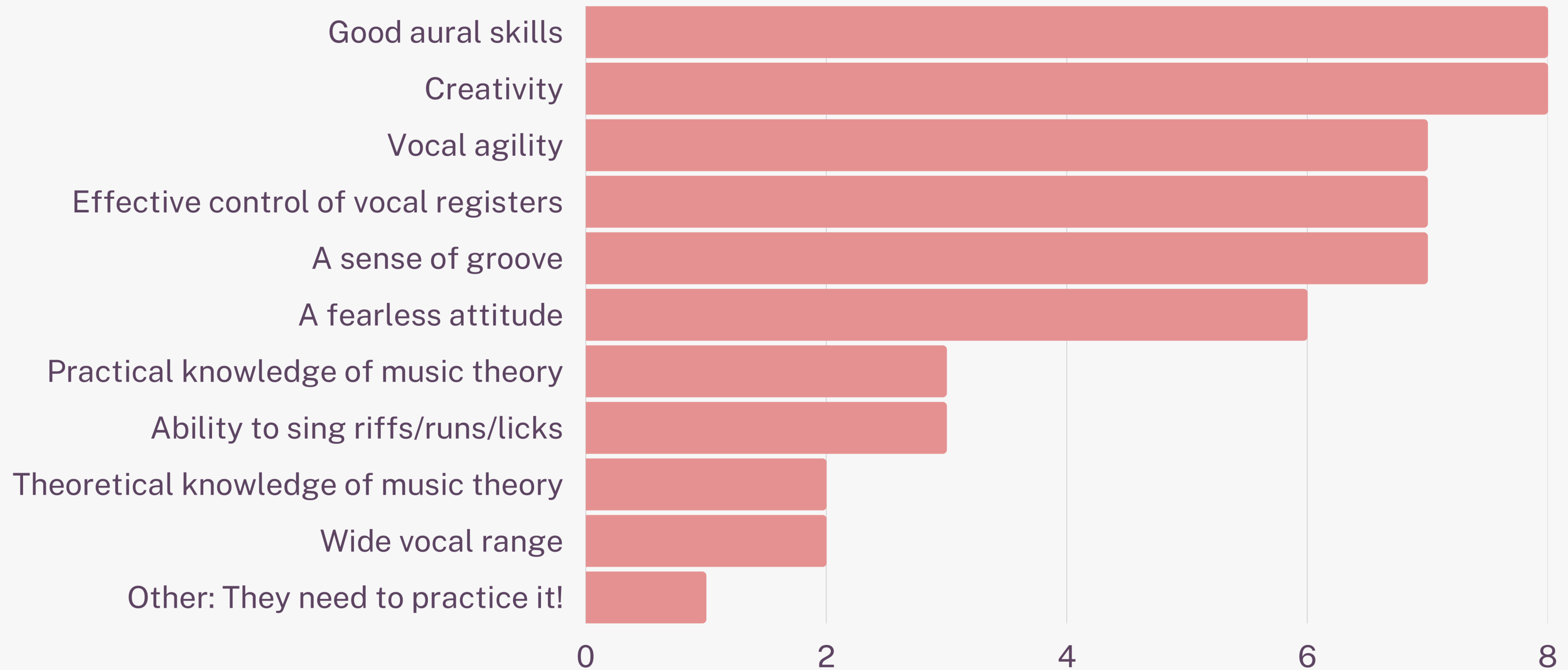
- Fundamental to building required skills
- Active tasks
- Relevant repertoire



Analysis - Skills

Which skills to pop-rock ad-libbers need to have?

■ Total number of selections



Analysis – Skills: Ear training

- Frameworks / structures as foundation
- Scales
- Harmony
- Normalise
- Play the piano, "a visual and kinaesthetic connection" to melody and harmony (Bell, 2013)
- A cappella work

SCALES	
1	Pentatonic
2	Blues
3	Modes
4	Minor
5	Hexatonic
6	Chromatic

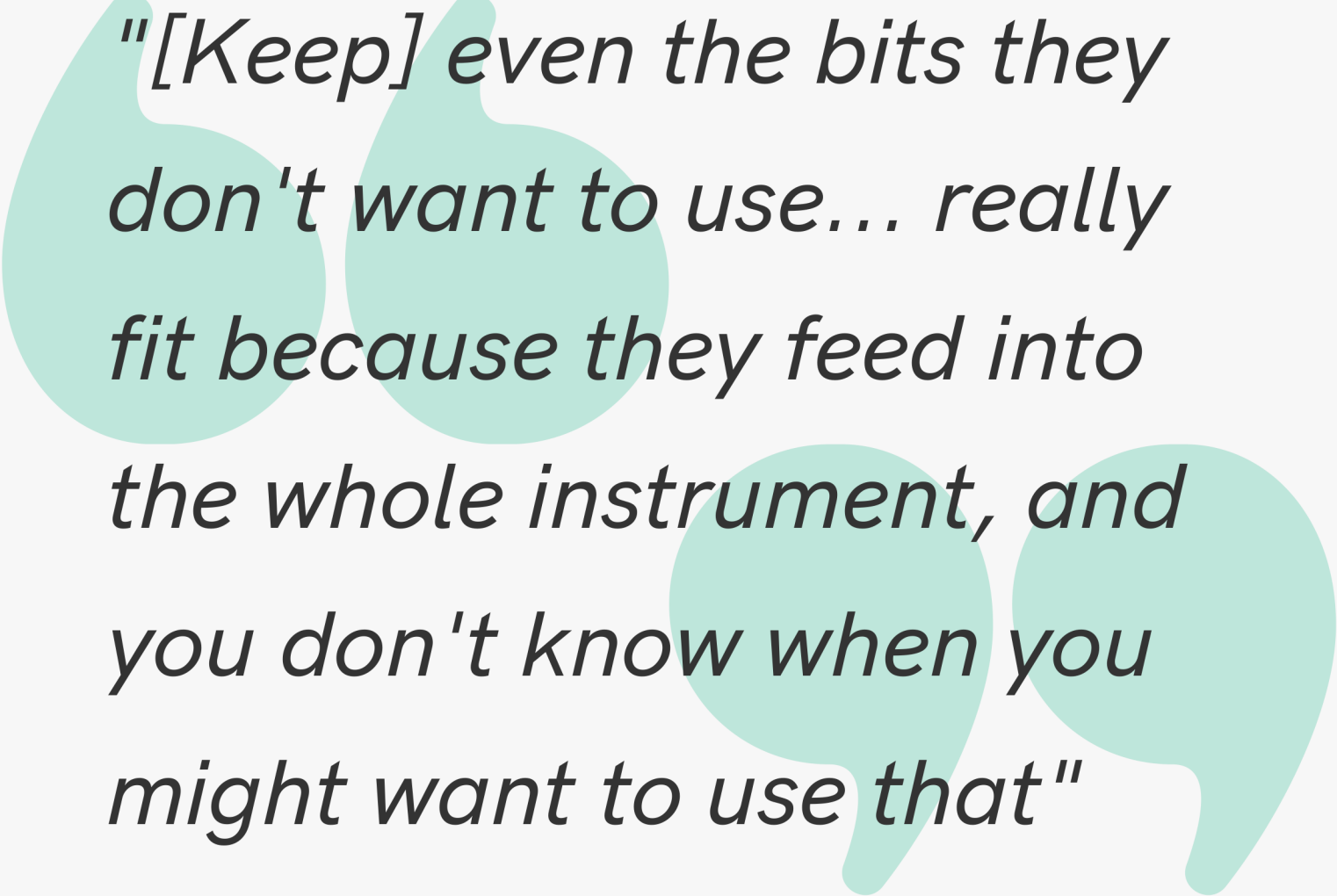
Most frequently mentioned scales across all data sets

Analysis – Skills: Vocal agility

- Vocal agility ranked highly in all data sets
- Whole voice - expressive toolkit

Riffing:

- Accuracy before speed
- Phrasing, onsets, offsets, stresses, rhythms

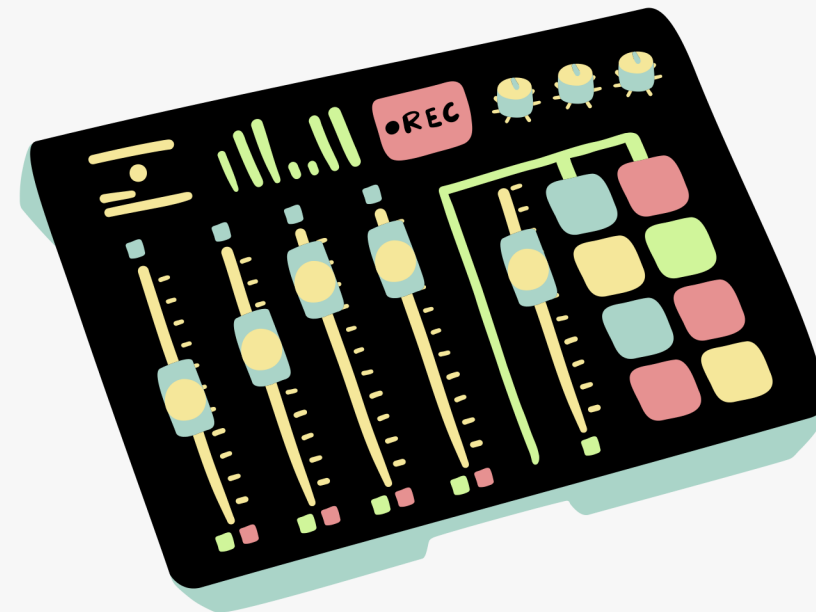


"[Keep] even the bits they don't want to use... really fit because they feed into the whole instrument, and you don't know when you might want to use that"
(Interview Participant 1)

Analysis – Harnessing technology

Uses:

- As accompaniment
- To create a fun atmosphere
- For inspiration
- To record exercises and vocalises
- To change speed
- To change key



Programmes / Apps	
1	YouTube
2	Logic
3	iRealPro
4	Garageband
5	iRehearse

Ranked in order of popularity
among questionnaire respondents

Pop and Rock Improvisation Toolkit

POP AND ROCK IMPROVISATION TEACHING TOOLKIT

working the complete instrument

person-centred

progressive pacing

PRINCIPLES

ACTIVITY	Benefits:	EAR TRAINING	MINDSET	VOCAL AGILITY Intonation, range, tonal colours	STYLISTIC AUTHENTICITY	CREATIVITY/ EXPRESSIVITY
						
Jam to chords on piano, guitar, or backing track/loop		•		•		•
12-bar blues jam - piano, guitar or backing track/loop		•		•		•
Get the mic and amp out for an immersive jam			•	•		•
Record ad libs at home for playback in lesson or to send to teacher			•			•
Channel a higher purpose - emotional connection, in service or worship, communication			•			•
Immerse yourself in listening to favourite pop/rock artists		•			•	
Sing along to bass lines of pop songs		•				
Sing along to harmony lines (or make one up)		•				•
Pick out melodies in instrumental music		•				
Reverse tonality of a song - major to minor and vice versa		•				•
Change a song from duple to triple time and vice versa		•				•
A cappella call and response				•	•	•
A cappella interval exercises		•		•		
Call and response to a backing loop or piano chords				•	•	
Collaborative call and response improvisation			•			•
Make silly sounds together			•	•		•
Use primal sounds to access appropriate tonal colours			•	•	•	•
Scale patterns for warm ups, vocalises and jams: Pentatonic, Blues, Modes, Hexatonic, Chromatic, Minor		•		•	•	
Identify scale patterns in repertoire		•				
Lyrical options: oohs/aahs/ nonsense syllables or repeated lyrics, narrate your day			•		•	•
Break riffs down into chunks - using technology to slow down, or the piano, or by ear, accuracy before speed		•		•	•	
Transcribe your favourite riffs, notes and nuances		•		•	•	

working the complete instrument

person-centred

progressive pacing

PRINCIPLES

ACTIVITY

Benefits:

EAR TRAINING

MINDSET

VOCAL AGILITY
Intonation, range, tonal colours

STYLISTIC AUTHENTICITY

CREATIVITY/ EXPRESSIVITY

Jam to chords on piano, guitar, or backing track/loop	•		•		•
12-bar blues jam - piano, guitar or backing track/loop	•		•		•
Get the mic and amp out for an immersive jam		•	•		•
Record ad libs at home for playback in lesson or to send to teacher		•			•
Channel a higher purpose - emotional connection, in service or worship, communication		•			•
Immerse yourself in listening to favourite pop/rock artists	•			•	
Sing along to bass lines of pop songs	•				
Sing along to harmony lines (or make one up)	•				•
instrument	•				

Discussion

- Narrow scope
- Selection bias and subsequent limitations
- Transferability - limited as specific to my own teaching context (Pandey and Patnaik, 2014) (genre, learner groups)
- Useful for those in similar teaching contexts (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016)



Conclusions

What? So what? Now what? (Driscoll, 2007)

What?

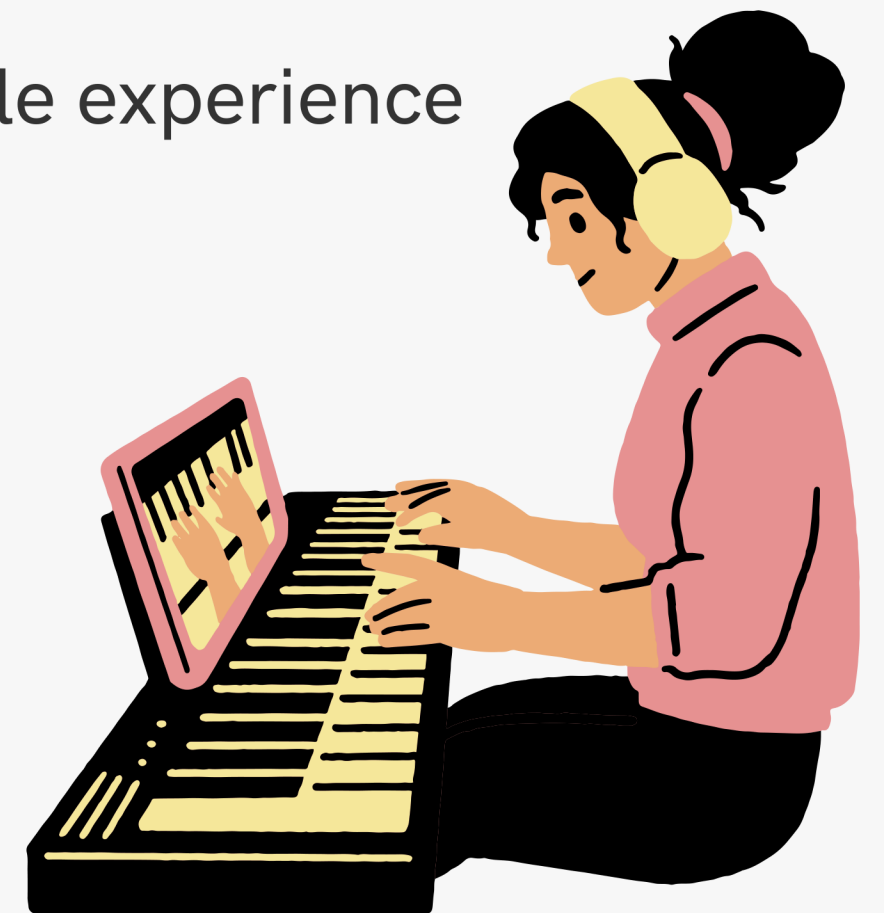
- Teaching strategies compiled, toolkit created
- Increased confidence and enjoyment

So what?

- Greater understanding about how ad-libbing fits within singer's whole experience
- Nuances of teaching whole person and responding to their needs

Now what?

- Nuances of style/genre: MT and pop/rock
- Expand to be more genre specific - R&B, jazz, Country, Blues
- Test efficacy of toolkit



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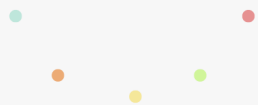
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Thank you for listening!



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