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Assignment Title: Independent Study

Module Code: BMPF7013

Submission Date: 11/01/2021

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A Desktop Study into the Teaching Strategies Employed in Training for the Triple Threat Musical Theatre Performer

Assignment 1 – Portfolio

Introduction and Rationale

There has been an “explosion in research, study, interest, and writings about the voice” (Cleveland and Teachey 1992, 33), and the meeting of science and voice practice has become “more common” (Callaghan 2014, 7). Jean Callaghan notes that “there are signs that these advantages are becoming more widely appreciated by singing teachers, and the findings of voice science will come to have a much greater influence on the profession than they have done in the past” (Callaghan 2014, 172). I have noticed that influence in my own teaching practice, and am excited by the value that research will add to my practice: “The particular value of scientific research in education is that it will enable educators to develop the kind of sound knowledge base that characterizes other professions and disciplines; and one that will ensure education a maturity and sense of progression it at present lacks” (Cohen et al 2007, 48). My leaning to qualitative research aligns with what appears to be the trend in singing research as “every year adds to the number of those who recognize singing as an art, whose vision is clear enough to see that the work of the scientific investigator should be confined to the laboratory and that it has no place in the studio” (Broadwater 2020, 600). Though Broadwater may be losing sight of the role that scientific research still has to play in the field, I do agree that “the basic principle of singing is freedom in the expression of the beautiful, and that the less there is of the mechanical in the process the better” (Broadwater 2020, 600). When starting a research project there are many considerations that need to be made about the perspective of the researcher and what their approach to undertaking the work might be. This begins with how they view the world and what makes up their research philosophy, as Wojnar and Swanson say, “researchers need to self-reflect about their own ontological and epistemological beliefs before they decide which approach to use” (2007, 178).

Ontology considers the researchers' relationship with reality, asking "what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?" (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 108). It is imperative to consider this relationship with reality as it "tends to influence how you see other people, and also the kind of approach you adopt in research" (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, 22). An ontological position usually falls into objective or subjective, meaning that you either perceive reality as being independent of your mind (objective) or you perceive it as dependent on perceptions (subjective). After looking at ontological positioning we move to epistemology, as "your epistemological stance is inevitably influenced by your ontological stance" (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, 23). Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, asking "what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?" (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 108). A researcher's epistemological stance will follow their ontological position – an objective view usually has a Positivist stance, and a subjective view like my own is considered to be interpretivist. My own ontological position resonates with a subjective/interpretivist approach because I hold the view that the world is not comprised of black and white facts, but rather am open to hearing the perception of others and giving them validity within the context of their experience. I am looking to approach my work with the pragmatic paradigm which is said to end "the paradigm war" (Feilzer 2010, 14) by not asking for specific lanes of qualitative or quantitative research, and not excluding mixed methods either (Feilzer 2010, 13). In response to previous paradigms, pragmatism was developed by Dewey, who "sought to break down the dualism between realism and idealism" (Morgan 2014, 1048). There was a realisation that both quantitative and qualitative methods can give results for the other (Feilzer 2010, 13), and so the pragmatic paradigm examines "not just *what* researchers do but *why* they do things the ways they do" (Morgan 2014, 1051). The fundamental question that Dewey's pragmatism addresses is: "What is the nature of human experience?" (Morgan 2014, 1048). Ontologically, Pragmatism is therefore asking the researcher to balance subjectivism and objectivism and consider both when interpreting the data. Pragmatism could be a particularly useful paradigm for my research in the field of

singing as it is able to balance both the artistic and scientific approaches to voice research, giving them both attention.

Research methods and methodologies are varied and wide-ranging to support many different research philosophies and approaches. For my own approach to work-based research, I am drawn to the subjective, pragmatic philosophy, with a predisposition for qualitative research but an interest in mixed methods.

Working in the field of singing with students readily available, action research is very appealing, and the use of both observations and interviews appear to give useful, appropriate data that could give very fruitful results. There is “no one single or correct way” (Cohen et al 2007, 461) to present data from research, so long as it is readable, and the researcher (myself) needs to decide what they want “the data analysis to do as this will determine the kind of analysis that is undertaken” (Cohen et al 2007, 461). As Unluer says, “it is crucial for social researchers to clarify their researchers’ roles, especially for those utilizing qualitative methodology to make their research credible” (2012, 1).

I am approaching the research as a teaching practitioner working in both dance and singing. I have danced since the age of three in theatre styles (ballet, tap, jazz etc), finding contemporary dance at university, and came to singing around 12 – taking it seriously from the age of 17. My own experience of performing in both disciplines simultaneously has been that I was expected to be able to navigate that by myself. Now that I have started to look at singing pedagogy and academia in this field - especially the links with dance and movement – I have found gaps in the research and an interest in pursuing it.

This study, therefore, is concerned with finding safe and effective teaching strategies when working with triple threat musical theatre performers – specifically the integration of disciplines and their at times opposing techniques. The study of the conjunction of disciplines has sometimes been touched on in the academia of singing and dance, but academia in musical theatre itself is still relatively young, and consequently this issue has only been addressed by a handful of academics working in that growing field.

Aims

- To broaden the knowledge of differences in training across the disciplines of dance, voice and singing
- To generate a practical teaching approach to the triple threat performer
- To collate generally held ideas about the training of the triple threat performer
- To investigate the current research

Learning Objectives

- To identify the gaps in knowledge and research for training the triple threat performer
- To consider the implications on my own teaching practice
- To evaluate these implications and analyse their practicalities in application

Timescale	>21/08/2020	>11/09/2020	>25/09/2020	>27/11/2020	>04/12/2020	>11/12/2020	>07/01/2021	>08/01/2021
Agree topic with tutor								
Write project rationale								
Plan methodological approach								
Gather literature and review								
Write first draft of assignment 2								
Write critical reflection on process – send all for feedback								
Time for re-writing draft (after feedback)								
Submit final assignment								

Literature Review

A literature review is an important step in this project, as in the role of the researcher I must first “understand what has been done before, the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies, and what they might mean” (Boote and Biele 2005, 3).

To begin the literature review I formulated six points of inquiry as a starting point, which later became my headings for the essay:

1. What is the triple threat performer and how are they trained across disciplines?
2. What is the big difference with dancers?
3. Breathing – what do the different disciplines say?
4. How is movement integrated with voice?
5. How is voice integrated with singing?
6. What are the gaps in the research?

To find the existing literature I have focused mostly on established academic journals that focus on dance, singing and musical theatre respectively. Using these as my primary search points meant that I was using a trusted source, and many of the articles used were peer reviewed. This encouraged me as to the validity of the research. Whitehead and McNiff define validity as “establishing the truth value, or trustworthiness, of a claim to knowledge” (2006, 97), and that to establish validity the researcher needs to show “the authenticity of the evidence base, explaining the standards of judgement used, and demonstrating the reasonableness of the claim” (2006, 98). Showing this authenticity in a tangible way is not always straightforward, and so we should really consider validity “as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state” (Gronlund 1981 in Cohen et al 2007, 133). Though the many articles felt trustworthy and valid, they are often reporting on experiential data rather than quantitative.

In a way my literature review process has been unconsciously happening since the beginning of my study on the PGCert course. My first exploration into posture and its impacts on vocal function gave me an

understanding of the research in that area, and how it may connect to dance, and consequently the triple threat performer. The following quote from Morton brought me to this next step:

“the singer needs to know where ‘home base’ is. They need to have a good understanding of where neutral is in their body and for their voice so that wherever they are in the movement, they’re moving in and out of that neutral, but they’ve always got the neutral to come back to and try and find that as often as they can throughout the movement. The issue with dancing and singing simultaneously is actually more of an issue of breathing patterns” (Lightfoot and Morton 2014, 282-3)

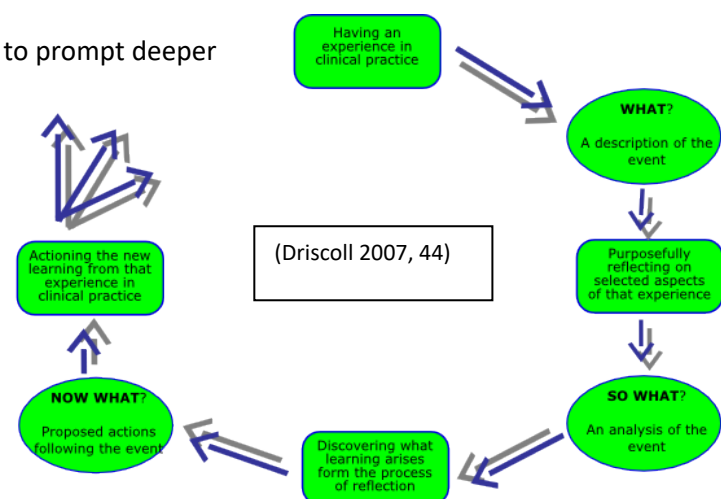
Morton recognises that the ‘neutral’ posture and ‘neutral’ working position is an important first step, but that it does not solve the issue of the triple threat performer in opposing techniques.

Reflective practice is the process of engaging with your personal performance and knowledge, and recognising both the successes and areas for further development. It is often a cyclical process that is ongoing throughout a career or project. Reflective practice has long been theorised, arguably founded in relation to education by John Dewey in 1933. Dewey wrote about reflecting as an “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it leads” (Dewey 1933 pg. 118). Since Dewey, reflective theory has been continually re-evaluated by others, with a range of models being presented in various contexts.

The model I have chosen to engage with is Borton’s *What? So What? Now What?* reflective model (1970) which was later updated by John Driscoll in 2007. Driscoll connected Borton’s three questions with the experiential learning cycle, ensuring the model was cyclical and providing questions to prompt deeper discussion.

The model asks where I have come from, where I am now, and where I am aiming to go – clear questions with the further prompts that are simple to answer and give a direct path for future development. I feel that

this model encompasses the situation I am in and gives a springboard for further development in a straight-forward manner. The objective here is to describe, analyse and propose the next steps in this investigation.



What?

I approached this research with a background primarily in movement and a bodily practice through dance. I have a growing knowledge of the voice in practice through experience and my time on the PG Cert. In my practice I have recognised that I tend to separate the two practices with my students, rather than connecting them. I began my PG Cert study looking into posture and developing my knowledge of the impact on vocal function of misalignment and postural habits. I have now moved my attention to

considering how we train performers, thinking specifically about the triple threat performer – reflecting on my own duality as a singing and dance practitioner.

The first task I was presented with was examining the existing literature on the triple threat and the impact of the different teaching strategies on the student. After generating a reading list, I proceeded to read through it, collating the relevant information ready to be summarised. I also examined the reliability of the evidence, identifying primary and secondary sources. I enjoyed the reading process, finding myself nodding in agreement often and being excited by the gaps I found.

This study met an early challenge with the global pandemic, and the consequential change of working practice for all teachers in the three disciplines. Consequently, any data collection could not be collected in the manner I had originally hope for. It was therefore confined to a desktop study rather than Action Research as intended. With hindsight, however, I think that being restricted to a desktop study was the right course of action. It has been an important step in understanding the existing research – setting the groundwork for further examination and potential data collection in the future.

So what?

Through this desktop study I have learnt that the change in working environment had a big impact on my working attitude, and especially my motivation towards work. Whilst I enjoyed the research, it was difficult to set aside time for it, and motivation was a large hurdle, resulting in a short bursts of energy, and a consequential rush at the end to collate it all. I found myself in a new and strange way of thinking – I enjoyed the work, but couldn't bring myself to do the work. I got myself into a vicious cycle of only working late at night, even though I was still having to get up in the morning to work. My planned timeline for the project was quickly forgotten, and I did not stick to it. I think also that my questions were too large – I feel as though there is much more than I have been able to fit in around 4500 words. This project needs a larger scale, and more attention than this small project could give.

Despite these struggles though I do recognise the value of what I have learnt, and the impact it will have on my own teaching practice. Through this project, and those that came before it, I have grown in confidence as a singing teacher, recognising that I have value and that my knowledge is valid. That, more than the research is the biggest positive of this experience.

Now what?

As I am departing the course at the PGCert, I will not be taking this research forward in the context of this course. I hope, however, that I will return to complete the MA when I will be able to pick this back up and reflect on how the training for the triple threat may have changed in the mean time. I feel that I have re-found my academic voice through this project, and have really begun to find the research that interests me and inspires me to move forward. The impact on my own teaching practice is that I will endeavour to use choreography to support breathwork for the singers, and will communicate with my peers in a more thorough way, broaching the subject of our students' safety and need for cohesion. I hope that I can find more harmony in my own teaching practice and continue to bring my movement and voice experiences together into one teaching practice.

What is the Triple Threat?

“Singers often perform in suboptimal work environments such as dusty theatres, outdoors, in heavy costumes, under hot lights, singing while dancing, etc” (Zuim et al 2019, 1).

The triple threat performer is often working in these ‘suboptimal’ conditions, where they are contending with a multitude of tasks. They “must seamlessly integrate all three disciplines into a cohesive and seemingly effortless performance” and are “expected to synthesize these disparate elements of their training into a unified technique” (Glasheen 2017, 20). This triple threat performer is most often found performing in musical theatre, where “singers must be able to execute a 4-minute dance break and then return to sing the big finish without sounding out of breath” (Benson 2018, 11). This has been the expected standard in musical theatre since the development of the integrated musical – “the inexorable movement since *Oklahoma* (1943) has been towards serving the integrated material through a single cast able to deliver all the elements of performance: towards the ideal of the ‘triple threat’ performer” (Napier 2008, 287). Musical theatre triple-threat performers are not just performing these great feats, but they are often performing them eight times a week. For this, they need “a solid all-round technique which can be relied upon to produce a consistent performance” (Morton 2014, 212). This technique training, especially at a higher education, conservatoire level, “is a uniquely varied, demanding and time-intensive endeavour” (Curtis 2019, 333). Having to learn multiple techniques to such a degree of accomplishment means “developing technique(s) in an integrative way” but this has led to many “conflicts, or differences between dance and voice techniques in the area of breathing” (Melton 2014b, 199). Indeed, “in musical theatre training it is very rare for what we call ‘integrative training’ to occur” (Lightfoot and Morton 2014, 283-4). Frustratingly, there are even professionals writing about “how much vocal training you really need – or rather, how *little* you really need – to make it” (Hilton 2020, 54). Without safe, thorough, integrative training, musical theatre singers are “more susceptible to vocal risks that may cause altered laryngeal function, inability to perform their professional activities and, in severe cases, contribute to vocal problems

that may affect their psychological well-being and professional lives” (Pacheco and Behlau 2019, 804.e17).

Not only are musical theatre performers having to combine disciplines, but inside those disciplines themselves they are “expected to function in virtually all styles both as actors and singers” (Melton 2014b, 199). As Gillyanne Kayes says: musical theatre is the “amorphous cloud that absorbs lots of other genres” (Kayes and Cook 2009, 446). In singing, the “three *worlds* of voice training are often separated and often pitted against each other: classical singing, musical theatre and voice for the actor” (Melton 2007, 197). One notable vocal technique common in musical theatre singing is the belt voice. The belt voice rose out of necessity when orchestras were growing in size and “the female singer needed to discover a vocal technique whereby she could be heard, especially in her low and middle registers” (Burdick 2005, 261). The belt voice certainly has “different implications” for the female voice (Streeton and Raymond 2014, 134), and many teachers “do not consider male belt to be equitable with a female belt” (Burdick 2005, 261). Belting has a different “glottal or vocal tract configuration” to chest voice and “has the longest closed quotient” when compared with both “speech and operatic production” (Burdick 2005, 262). Yet another complex and difficult skill for the triple threat to have under their belts.

It is not enough for us to use the same training we’ve used in the past as “today’s musicals are requiring evermore demanding skills in both voice and dance” (Morton 2014, 212). As productions and demands grow and change, “so must the techniques teachers use to train the next generation of musical theatre students” (Weiss 2020, 380).

The Dancer Mentality

A common thread I have found through the research is the idea that the trained dancer has a different mentality and approach to singing than the average singing student (Edwin 2015, Glasheen 2017, Lightfoot and Morton 2014, Melton 2014a, Melton 2014b, Melton 2015, Pauzer 2009). This approach differs in postural attention, muscular activity and breathing as well as in learning styles. These differences can provide a positive and helpful starting point for the dancer student, and perhaps even are something for singing teachers and students to learn from.

An advantage that Pauzer notes is that “the dancer already possesses sophisticated mind-body awareness [...] there is a relationship, a place of understanding” (2009, 76). This awareness and experience of the body gives the dancer a greater knowledge of the housing for their vocal instrument, and the knowledge that all parts of the body impact the others. Dancers also have an appreciation of lengthy development processes, and “Dancers learn that muscles take time to develop strength, co-ordination, flexibility and endurance [...whereas] singers want to sound good immediately” (Edwin 2015, 79). This confidence in the extended development process means that dancers are familiar with repeated actions and creating muscle memory – which is important in developing effective vocal performance. Consequently, dancers are “generally more mentally and physically disciplined than singers” (Edwin 2015, 79). Edwin even suggests that dancers can be brought “back on track” when “behaving too much like “singers”” (2015, 79), suggesting that the behaviour of a dancer is preferential for singing training than that of the usual singing student. He also praises the “fact-based mantra” that dancers often use concerning their commitment to training nearly every day, and that if they don’t there is a “measurable loss in muscle strength, flexibility, coordination and endurance after only forty-eight hours of inactivity” (Edwin 2015, 80). Not only is there a recognised commitment and discipline towards training for dance students, but they also have an understanding of the body in action.

Aside from the discipline and commitment, a fundamental difference in approach that “seems to separate us clearly in the training process is our concept of anatomy and physiology” (Melton 2014b, 205). This concept of the body in action is particularly contradictory as “Dance teachers use a fact-based pedagogy that respects and obeys the laws of nature, while singing teachers often teach as if the laws of nature don’t apply to the physical act of vocalisation” (Edwin 2015, 80). This pedagogical difference may mean that there is “a disconnect between the teacher’s expectation of how the work needs to be applied and the student dancer’s response to the work” (Pauzer 2009, 76). This difference in communication is also especially noteworthy as “dance is a visual/physical art, so much of the teacher/student communication can be unspoken” (Pauzer 2009, 77). As the communication can be unspoken, the students may be

learning by observing and then imitating the teacher (Pauser 2009, 76). This can be a productive way of learning, but “it is a long established and accepted tradition within the dance world that there is a certain protocol of respect for the teacher, which includes seldom questioning or challenging what is being taught” (Pauser 2009, 77). Coupling together the potentially limited communication that dancers have experienced both from their teachers and themselves could lead to disaster for their progression into the world of singing as it “is of course counter-productive for tapping into a creative impulse and free breath” (Pauser 2009, 76). And so we can see the “conflicting and confusing experience that can lead to a great deal of frustration for both the student – and the instructor” (Pulliam 2009, 59).

The hard work of the dancer is not done to be seen, as the attitude is that “People come to the performing arts for escapism” (Lightfoot and Morton 2014, 281). Morton realises the problem with this facet of the dancer’s mentality: “culturally there’s this sort of idea that these people [performers] are super human and don’t get injured” (Lightfoot and Morton 2014, 281). This culture can often lead to shame in injury and a pressure for dancers to work through any pain they feel as a consequence of poor technique and practice.

The posture of a dancer, especially those with significant ballet training has typical requirements such as: “an anterior center of mass over the balls of the feet and typically hyperextension at the knees. Inward bracing and holding of the abdominal muscles [...and] An elevated chin position with extension of the cervical spine is also typical (Morton 2014, 213). The preference for this posture in classical dance began with early costuming with heavy corseting- which was then imitated in the dancers’ bodies (Pulliam 2009, 61). This imitation posture “restricts the rib cage, diaphragm and abdominal muscles, resulting in a shallow breath, not conducive to singing or speech” (Pulliam 2009, 61). Indeed, Morton notes that her “classical dancer’s posture was affecting [her] ability to sing correctly and [she] was having trouble reaching [her] upper register” (2014, 212). This rib restriction is occurring because by overusing the “obliques and the rectus abdominis, the dancer holds the tibs *in and flat*” (Pulliam 2009, 61), not allowing for the lateral swing often aimed for in singing breathing techniques. Not only does the ‘dancer posture’ replicate this

posture for the aesthetic, but also to “maintain core strength in the torso” (Pauzer 2009, 77), and “though adverse to vocal function, these postural requirements for dancers are [...] imperative to the safety of the dancer” (Glasheen 2017, 29). Because of this it is vital that singing teachers do not approach their dancer students with the attitude of ‘undoing’ their dance training – it could be unsafe to their continuing dance practice as a triple threat performer. These “discrepancies between the postural requirements” mean that we must “find some common denominators in posture and muscle recruitment” (Morton 2014, 213) across the disciplines rather than cancel out the training in each of them.

If the singing or voice teacher is working with highly dance trained students, “they come into the room with those habits” (Melton 2014a, 288), so there need to be strategies put in place until we reach a time when the training is compatible. Pulliam suggests that we use their postural experiences as a starting point, helping them to “create the “look” without the ribcage restriction” to do this he recommends using “the image of expanding the breath *into* the *corset* – not letting the *corset* squeeze the ribs [...] saying the *corset* is elastic and will move with you” (2009, 62). Pulliam’s suggestion of using imagery has a lot of potential in being useful to the dancer – after all they are used to working in a visual artform. Whilst the delivery of the idea may be successful, putting it into practice will take time. Pauzer notes the potential stumbling block when learning new pathways for muscular recruitment – “Dancers are used to working and controlling large muscle groups” (2009, 78). The sensory feedback they are receiving from the work often “*doesn’t feel like it’s enough!*” (Pauzer 2009, 78). It can therefore be difficult for dancers to adapt and recognise the scale of muscle engagement needed. Though more attention is being brought to this issue, it is still often the case that “the dancer is left to try and figure this out for themselves” (Lightfoot and Morton 2014, 284).

Sussuma wrote an interesting article (2019) that may be worth further consideration for the cross-discipline training we’re aiming for. He observes that “Tension seems to be the big bad wolf of our vocal world” (Sussuma 2019, 226), and indeed it is something that I have often come across as an ‘issue’ in my research, especially when looking at muscle recruitment - “tension is a frequent and universal problem for

singers" (Deeter 2005, 27). He even goes so far as to suggest that "the concept of tension (vocal or otherwise) is completely false", and yet "tension seems to be both the symptom and the cause of all our vocal ills" (Sussuma 2019, 226). In response to this, Sussuma advocates "beginning to see and sense the skeleton as the structural basis of all actions" (2019, 227) rather than focusing on the muscular activity. This could be an answer for when working with muscles that are dual purpose – after all, we must remember that "Respiratory muscles also play an important role in postural support" (Sliiden et al 2017, 253.e3). Both voluntary and involuntary muscles are performing a multitude of tasks, so we "cannot be aware of what each and every muscle is and/or should be doing at any given time [...] what we can do is be aware of the basic lines of our skeleton and the shapes they are making in space" (Sussuma 2019, 230). Focusing on the idea of lines and shapes could be especially helpful for the dancer. As Zervas notes: "dancers move as if architecting the space around them with their limbs. There is a strong sense of the lines one is making when dancing, even in everyday life" (Melton 2014a, 288). Finding a place of understanding with common language and reference points will be important for creating a training system for triple threat performers- giving them a technique for singing whilst dancing that is safe and supports each discipline separately too. There will need to be compromises, but the disciplines need to learn from each other.

Breathing

Investigations into breathing techniques are well documented in many academic texts, including exercises for teachers to put into practice supporting the theories (Allen 2019, Lightfoot and Morton 2014, Lyle 2011, Palmer 2020, Ragan and Kapsner-Smith 2019, Shewell 2009, Stewart 2000).

Respiration is the foundation process of voice production and an inhibition here will be felt throughout the voice. For example, moving the skeleton out of alignment adjusts the space for available lung expansion, movement of the diaphragm muscles as well as the intercostal muscle movement capabilities. Just one misalignment can have a large impact, for instance – "Respiration can be hindered by excessive ribcage

elevation, resulting in a disproportionate arch in the lumbar spine, lifted shoulders, and anterior pelvic rotation” (Deeter 2005, 28).

The diaphragm connects to the bottom of the ribcage and the spine and is “like a giant mushroom cap” (Olsen 1991, 62). The diaphragm is responsible for pulling in air, and assisting in exhalation, via contraction and relaxation (Campbell 2016, 31) and this is supported also by the abdominal muscles. The balance of the pelvis has an impact here, as a “displaced pelvis also impedes the use of the lower abdominal muscles during expiration” (Deeter 2005, 28). An extended ribcage inevitably changes the relationship between the connecting points of the diaphragm, and even the angle at which the diaphragm lies. Inhibited movement here therefore leads to a diminished airflow capacity and poor breath control.

“Breathing techniques are the great divide” (Melton 2001, 313), and as Melton says it “tends to confuse and complicate matters” (2001, 313).

One potential way forward for bridging the ‘breathing divide’ is the Accent Method. The Accent Method is concerned with helping “singers and actors access the natural functioning of the abdominal muscles” (Melton 2009, 434). It also recognises that “use of the abs is key to our experience of a character as a whole person, rather than as a *talking head*” (Melton 2009, 434), moving away from the singing technique of full abdominal release. Melton notes that “focus on the abs can be scary initially for some students, especially if the belly has been held habitually” (2009, 434), which we know is often the case for dancers. Introducing this earlier on in training may help to reduce that fear and eliminate the breathing issues.

Integrating Voice and Singing

Two of our disciplines, singing and voice, have seen some integration, but this is inconsistent, and still leaves progress to be desired. Though on the surface these disciplines may seem close to each other in that they are dealing with the same instrument, there are significant differences between speech and song. As Bean says, “singing is bigger than speaking. Singing exists where mere speaking would no longer suffice”

(2007, 167). This key difference has meant that “singing is often considered an outsider, an elite outsider” (Melton 2001, 312).

The student being taught in voice will of course be covering basic skills in voice use such as “speaking, laughing, crying, screaming, wailing, fight sounds, and accents and dialects” but though “singing may be included in a peripheral manner” but it is “seldom an integral part of the theatre voice curriculum” (Melton 2001, 312). Melton goes on to tell us the potential results when singing training is not integrated successfully, such as “confusion” and a “a strong conviction that there are two voices, one that speaks and one that sings” (2001, 312). This separation of the voice is especially troubling for the triple threat musical theatre performer because they are expected to transition between these ‘two voices’ with ease. It is impossible for them to achieve this safely if they are navigating potentially opposing techniques, and having to do a vocal gear change every time they move from spoken to sung text.

Integrating Movement and Voice

The integration of movement and voice practice is certainly not new to the field, and indeed “Most voice teachers agree that sound and movement work is a liberating informative and essential experience for the student” (Lugering 2009, 13). Well known voice practitioner Cicely Berry noted that “Physical movement keeps people breathing in a full-bodied way, which is essential to get the voice really sounding out” (Mortimer 2005, 325), though this does contradict the findings made about the opposing breathing techniques in dance (movement) and voice/singing. It is agreed though, that “for a singer, the body is the instrument” and “An increased sense of kinesthetic awareness of the body allows a singer to monitor the efficiency of the entire instrument” (Benson 2018, 11).

Glasheen suggests that “Pilates may be a good place to start” as it “incorporates another key component of musical theatre performance, breath” (2017, 22). Despite this use of breath though, a danger with using Pilates is the focus on ‘core stability’. Especially for dancers using Pilates, it may be further encouraging

them to keep those core muscles “engaged the whole time, even during inspiration” (Kayes and Cook 2009, 445).

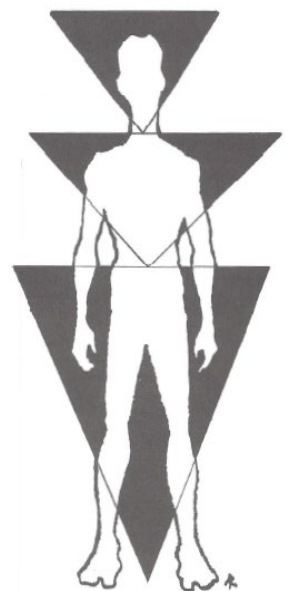
Often movement practices are employed in the voice or singing classroom with the aim of improving posture. Both moving and holding the body in misalignment has an undeniable impact on the voice. Indeed, “the vocal mechanism is so sensitive to alignment that even a small deviation in posture could hinder technique” (Deeter 2005, 28). Important to note also is that “one common feature of the alignment faults is that they contribute to additional faults” (McKinney 2005, 41), meaning that there is a domino effect in place. These movement practices are often used with the aim of moving in an economical fashion.

Moving in an *economical* fashion has been at the forefront of posture work in recent years, with the inclusion of techniques such as Feldenkrais and Alexander Technique in voice study and development. By striving for economical movement, these practices focus on the conscious re-learning of habits through motor learning. It is important to note though that both Alexander and Feldenkrais are of course coming from a practitioner standpoint, rather than scientific. Their anecdotal evidence is still valuable though and has since been supported by many academic studies (Peterson 2008, Hudson 2002a, Hudson 2002b, Klein et al 2014).

Feldenkrais’ technique is a somatic practice that works towards economical movement and considers the body “as a series of inverted triangles” (Gilman 2014, 175). This image of stacked triangles implies the necessity for balance in order to prevent a toppling over of the body. Afterall, any “movement or shift in balance in any one of the triangles would disturb the equilibrium of the others”

(Gilman 2014, 175). This could be interpreted as a rigid and fixed way of

moving, such as might be found when balancing a book on the top of your head whilst walking. This rigidity, however, is counteracted by a heightened awareness of “the body’s own innate processes to change and refine functioning” (Deeter 2005, 30). This awareness is achieved through



(Gilman 2014)

visualisation – “Feldenkrais said that you can *do* what you can kinesthetically imagine” (Peterson 2008, 69).

This is a very slow process, moving back to “slow and subtle movements” (LeBorgne and Rosenberg 2014a, 18), allowing the brain to map new neurological pathways, and develop new muscle memories.

For the singer, this somatic practice can help to combat unnecessary tension, and move the skeleton through space with the least effort possible – in an optimal free-moving posture (Nelson and Blades 2005).

Alexander technique has an even clearer connection with the singing practice, as it began as a personal development programme for F.M. Alexander himself to improve his speech quality, and so it’s application to voicework has always been central (Hudson 2002a).

Similar to the Feldenkrais technique, it is working towards an efficiency of movement, and it is widely accepted that lessons in Alexander technique wield “results in an improvement of posture” (Klein et al 2014, 8). Not only does posture see an improvement, but there is consequently a release of “habitual body tensions and muscular misuse” (Hudson 2002a, 9). It is well established as a tool for the actor. It is concerned with “opening and allowing the space [...] In short, the channel for sound is open” (de Veer 2009, 36).

Both Alexander technique and the Feldenkrais method “demand practice and awareness” (Peterson 2008, 70) from the singing student, and it can be difficult for the student to remain engaged as the results are unlikely to be felt or evidenced instantly. The idea of reaching for an end point “distracts from the steps (or means) needed to achieve that end” (Hudson 2002b, 109), which can be an unattractive commitment of time, especially for a young singing student. This consistent practice though, does have an undeniable impact on building and re-directing habits, and both techniques can be used as a “preventative approach” too (Deeter 2005, 30). After all, as Linklater says – “The first step toward freeing the natural voice is to develop an ability to perceive habits and register new experiences” (1976, 19).

Constructive rest is the term given to the semi-supine position in the Alexander Technique. Constructive rest is a position of minimal effort for the body, and it can serve as a ‘reset’ for the spine – encouraging the student to reconnect with it. This may be a useful tool for the dance student.

To perform constructive rest, you must lie on the floor with the knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Hands are held lightly on the bottom of the ribs, and the neck is supported by a book or block. Make sure that the height of the book/block is promoting correct curvature of the cervical spine – this will be different for each student. This position should be held for as long as is possible in the schedule or class and should be encouraged as a daily practice for the student. Fifteen minutes a day is quite achievable and has a significant impact on posture and alignment, which impacts on breathing as examined by Hoit in 1995 (Shewell 2009, 141).

Incorporating constructive rest in the singing lesson has immense value, but it does use up considerable time, which may not make it viable in a 1-1 context every week. It could also discourage the student if they feel they are paying you to simply ‘lie on the floor’! In a group teaching setting, however, this exercise can have the additional benefit of helping to focus and relax the students. It can bring their attention back to their bodies, and away from chatting. “It would be optimal, then, if the choral director could make some time and space for singers to lie on the floor for 5-10 minutes once a week” (Peterson 2008, 70).

Any movement practice is important in bringing bodily awareness to the student, but Yoga in particular is helpful as it “improves an individual’s mental and physical health through the release of tension in the body” (Deeter 2005, 30). Yoga has “become interwoven with contemporary voice therapy and the teaching of singing” (Lloyd et al 2017, 511) and is the study of a series of body *poses*, and the movement through those poses – whether with speed or with stillness, depending on the school of Yoga being practiced. Yoga is useful in strengthening muscles and lengthening the spine in particular, helping to release any compression. Yoga should ideally be performed as a daily practice, but can of course be introduced in the singing lesson, and could also be used as part of the warm-up preparation on a performance day when there is more time for the teacher and student to practice together. The knowledge of just a few poses can be beneficial for the student so that they can tune into their body, finding stretch and lengthening as well as strength and stillness. It is key to remember though that yoga encourages a different breathing

technique, but this is not a problem so long as singers are aware of these differences and can recognise them (LeBorgne and Rosenberg 2014a, 22).

Rootberg writes about “the enormous possibilities in improving the actor’s vocal function and expression through application and integration of movement principles” (2000, 291). In her 2000 article she explores the possibility for Laban Movement Analysis working in partnership with Kristin Linklater’s approach (1976). She recognises that “a Linklater approach to voice already assumes there is a synthesized process between the body, voice and psyche” (Rootberg 2000, 292), but that “Applying principles such as mobility/stability can lead to better support of the body, thus freeing the voice” (Rootberg 2000, 309). A clear argument for incorporating Laban Movement Analysis, that I would agree with, is “its vocabulary for describing movement” (Rootberg 2000, 309). Having a language across disciplines can only aid communication and the synthesis of training approaches.

Another combination of movement and voice practice I have come across is Chekhov and Fitzmaurice. Saklad suggests this partnership in training because “students can experience acting, voice, and movement as one unit” (2009, 48). Something of particular interest for the triple threat performer could be that “Fitzmaurice Voicework employs a unique series of exercises called destructing that encourage release in held muscle tissue that affects breathing” (Saklad 2009, 46).

ATM (Awareness Through Movement) is another practice I have come across in my research that may be of use to us, as lessons in ATM “encourage the coordination of unrestricted breathing to facilitate the movement tasks” (Gordon et al 2007, 174). Though ATM is not primarily concerned with voicing, “many of the lessons focus on the motor functions of muscles involved with voicing, speaking or singing” (Gordon et al 2007, 174). Because of this, ATM may be useful for the triple threat performer once they have an already established vocabulary and deep understanding of their voice. Perhaps it has a place in a graduate or professional development programme rather than at undergraduate training and lower.

Other movement practices I've come across include Somatic Voicework The LoVetri Method (LoVetri 2009), Embodied Presence (Hurt 2009), and the combination of Lecoq Movement with George Voice (Steen and Deans 2009). These all demonstrate promising techniques for use with the triple threat performer, but what is missing is an athletic dance practice that works together with voice.

Gaps in the Research

One gap in the research I have found is a consideration of dance beyond ballet, tap and jazz – the standard musical theatre styles. Contemporary dance already has an established relationship with somatic practices, and breath work is a key component. Further investigation may find some training practices for contemporary dancers that could be applied to the triple threat performer. I do think that my own experiences in contemporary dance later in life (at university) helped me to understand my breathing for singing better – and having those experiences sooner may have helped me to navigate singing with more ease.

The need for skills on top of the usual triple threat (as if that wasn't enough!) means there is a growing requirement in musical theatre, with an increased need for musicianship (Bond 2010). Musical theatre training is already a large undertaking with multiple disciplines, and music theory training is a desired part of that training. As Alt says, "the quick ear is often not enough" (2004, 391) and "the singer who does not have the ability to read and retain a voice part quickly is at a disadvantage" (Alt 2004, 390). Training to actually play an instrument on top of being a triple threat performer is more and more being asked of performers, in productions such as *Company* on Broadway in 2006, *Once* in 2011, and the West End production of *Amelie* in 2019.

Aims for the Future of Training the Triple threat Performer

Glasheen theorises that "The most problematic conflict between the disciplines is the use of the abdominal muscles", and that the consequential "restricted movement of the diaphragm [... results in] inhibited breath support for the voice" (2017, 28). Morton summarises it well when she states that voice teachers

must have an “understanding [of] what these dancers are having to do and how they’ve been trained and how we can, using the anatomy, safely integrate all these disciplines” (Lightfoot and Morton 2014, 284-5).

One of the clear solutions here would certainly be increased communication across disciplines, in both education institutions and on professional productions. There must be a move of “the voice community from a mindset of separation to one of connection” (Melton 2014b, 204), as the current “training and preparation for successfully combining these athletic tasks repeatedly [singing and dancing] is not satisfactory, even for performers of some ability” (Sliiden et al 2017, 253.e10).

Some suggestions for improving this training across the disciplines include muscular recruitment and intention. Morton, for example, suggests that the “solution lies primarily in correct recruitment of the transversus abdominus, psoas, and pelvic floor muscles [...]. This will make the dancer more stable and decrease the tension in the muscles of the neck and vocal apparatus” (2014, 214). Another suggestion from Pauzer when working with dancers is to “begin with a lot of floor work in order to introduce the idea of getting out one’s own way while observing the breath and releasing excessive muscular holding” (2009, 78).

Improving communication across the disciplines, especially with dance, could be achieved if the potential benefits for dancers were known. Pauzer suggests “the wider reaching positives of breath awareness for dancers as they begin to observe and bring new awareness to their breath in voice class, the awareness seeps over into the dance class deepening and changing their dance technique” (2009, 77), and Zerfas notes that voice class was “key” for “learning how to find a different centre and grounding” (Melton 2014a, 289).

If training for dance, voice and singing practitioners included each of the disciplines perhaps those unexpected or unknown benefits would be readily known and understood – leading to a better training experience for students of musical theatre.

I think the crux of the issue is singing/voice teachers dismissing dance training as a negative influence on

singing and that it makes their job harder. This superiority serves no one! We need to, as Napier says:

“build bridges” (2008, 292).

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