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INTRODUCTION

An understanding of research methods provides the researcher with a “deeper insight for understanding the implication of your research findings” (Williamson, 2018a, p.4). Research rigor and use of reliable research methods add validity, “the degree to which a measurement measures what it proposes to measure” (Bolariwa, 2015, p 195), and reliability, “the degree to which results obtained by a measurement and procedure can be replicated” (Bolariwa, 2015, p 195) to the research outcomes. (Cecez-Kecmanovic & Keenen, 2018). Validity of research, particularly in qualitative research, ensures that there is a credibility to the research results, due to the researchers requirement to quantify “abstracts, intangible, and construct that may not be observable” (Bolarinwa, 2015). This quantification of the abstract is a large hurdle for performing arts coaching research, due to the subjective nature of art, performance, and what is deemed a “good” performance. This challenge of quantifying “art” is explored throughout the essay.

In this essay, I will explore different paradigms and methodologies and how they apply to my own practice. I will approach my research from the perspective of a performance coach for performing artists, working primarily with those both within the professional musical theatre industry, and those in collegiate level musical theatre training.

First, I will explore Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology, and the research paradigms that are a result of those perspectives. I will have a particular focus on the Positivist and Constructionist paradigms. I will then examine different research designs, exploring grounded theory, action research, and Ethnography. Then, I will examine both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and how interviews, surveys, and observations can be utilised in both. Finally, I will examine the ethical considerations of insider research, as well as the possible ethical ramifications of my research

ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND AXIOLOGY

An ontology is an individual's understanding of the “Nature and existence of social reality” (Williamson, 2018a, p.5). Gaining knowledge of different ontological worldviews within the social sciences allows a researcher to understand their perspective on reality, and how their perspective shapes their approach to their research (Williamson 2018a) This knowledge informs the researchers' understanding of the reasoning of an individual's actions (Bracken, 2010). There

are a variety of ontological perspectives that live within a spectrum with realism on one end, and nominalism on the other (Williamson, 2018a). Realism is the belief that “the ‘real world’ exists independently of humans, and their interpretation of it” (Neuman, 2014, p.94). Whereas nominalism believes that our experience of the world is “always occurring through the lens or scheme of interpretations and inner subjectivity” (Neuman, 2014, p.94).

Once you have an understanding of your ontology, this allows you to further examine epistemology, or your ability to understand how you know what you know. (Moon et.al, 2021) Epistemology is concerned with understanding how knowledge can be considered legitimate and adequate (Maynard, 1994). An epistemological viewpoint considers “what constitutes a knowledge claim, how knowledge is produced or acquired; and how the extent of its applicability can be determined” (Moon et.al, 2021, p. 1). The amalgamation of one’s ontology and epistemology help determine one’s paradigm (Cecez-Kecmanovic & Keenen, 2018). Paradigms are what determine an individual’s philosophical worldview, and the framework through which we examine the world. (Kuhn, 1970). Within this essay I will be exploring the positivist and constructionist paradigms.

The final element to be considered when looking at the broader elements of one’s research paradigm, is one’s Axiology, or one’s values. Axiology is described as “The science of enquiring into values” (Bahm, 1993). It helps unify the researcher ontology and epistemology and gives them a sense of the requirements and standards of acceptable research, as well as a sense of how they should act within their practice (Alyiu et.al, 2015).

Axiology is integral in the study of aesthetics of the performing arts. Beardsley argues that “an artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest” (2018) The philosophical study of aesthetics aims to define the principles of beauty and art. The metrics of performance that the researcher values, and believes contribute to beautiful or good art, is an axiological question.

For example, should a coach value the amount of skills a performer has, their research may be focused on skill acquisition and learning. However, should the coach value the mindset of the performer, then their research may be on happiness and positive psychology. Thus their axiological perspective determines the direction of their research.

PARADIGMS

Our paradigms are seen as “a set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the systematic study of the world” (Kuhn, 1970, p.10). The positivist paradigm has a focus on what can be “observed and experienced” (Williamson, 2018a). Positivists believe that there is a reality or truth to be discovered, and this can be achieved through measurement and objectivity, with a focus on quantitative data (Williamson, 2018a). Positivists believe that reality is “patterned, orderly, and stable”, which allows the researcher to discover an “objective existing reality” (Cecez-Kecmanovic & Keenen, 2018, p135). This objective reality is independent of the observer or researcher (Bello, 2014).

The Positivist paradigm has been critiqued due to a researcher's inability to separate the subjectivity of the human being who is generating these “objective” ideas, and the objective ideas themselves (Bello, 2014). Furthermore, approaching the performance arts, which is subjective in nature (Philosophy Tube, 2022), with the objectivity of a positivist paradigm restricts the researcher in understanding the interpretive nature of the piece, which, as Arthur Danto argues, is what makes art “art” (1981). Or approaching it from Leo Tolstoy’s perspective, “Art begins when some one, *with the object of making others share his feeling*, expresses his feeling by certain external indications” (1904, p.10). This perspective of art is through expression, which is also subjective in nature.

Attempting to force a quantitative metric onto a subjective experience can lead to misleading and dubious “facts” about the art form (Lakshaman et.al, 2000). Therefore, approaching performing arts research with interpretive research paradigms may produce more applicable knowledge for the performing arts industry, and the performers within it. Interpretive paradigms are based on “subjectivist and relativist assumptions”, and aim to research complex social phenomena, and the systems and knowledge within them, within the context of a society (Cecez-Kecmanovic & Keenen, 2018, p135-136). One approach within the interpretive paradigm is the constructionist paradigm (Williamson, 2018a). Constructivism is “concerned with the way people construct their worlds”. (Williamson, 2018a, p.12). Within this there are personal constructivists, who research both the individual and their personal constructivists, and social constructionists, researching the “shared meanings and social constructions” (Williamson, 2018a, p12). Both of these paradigms are highly applicable to the performing arts, allowing observation of both the individual performer, and the complex system of the performance.

The constructionist view allows us to view the societal and interpersonal systems within the performing arts, however, utilizing elements of a phenomenological paradigm could allow further interpretation of the “richness of experience, the fullness of all the ways in which a person experiences and describes the phenomena of interest” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p.117). Phenomenology is focused on the individual's lived experience within the world (Neubauer et.al, 2019). It aims to find meaning in both what is experienced, and how it is experienced (Neubauer et.al, 2019). This paradigm allows individuals to find more understanding of elements of the human experience, such as “caring, healing, and wholeness of experience” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2008). The expression of the human experience is integral to art (Tolstoy, 1904), and phenomenology gives the researcher a lens to examine this element of art.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Broadly speaking, research methods come under one of two categories, Qualitative and Quantitative research (Williamson, 2018a). Quantitative research examines “The effects of specified circumstances (independent variable) on an outcome of interest (dependent variable) in ways that can be expressed numerically” (Lakshman, 2000, p.369). Quantitative research has the advantage of being able to analyze data effectively, investigate relationships within the data, and help control biases (Creswell, 2015).

Qualitative research is where “relevant variables producing an outcome are not apparent or where the number of subjects or outcomes under study are insufficient for statistical analysis” (Lakshman, 2000, p.371). It allows us to delve into the individuals, or larger systems, within the context of their settings and subcultures, and allows us to develop a subjective understanding of the how and why the individuals or systems “perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret, and interact” (Baker & Edwards, 2012, p.4).

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation (Thiselton, 2009). For example, there is the original text, the authors interpretation of the text, and then the readers interpretation of the authors text. A text is more than the sum of its parts. The interpretation of individual words changes once the wider context of the sentence is considered. The hermeneutic circle is “how the understanding of parts relates to the understanding of a larger whole and vice versa” (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010).

Within the context of performing arts, one's understanding of what makes a good performance would influence one's perspective of what good art is. Then as one views more and more performances within a certain context eg. commercial modern musical theatre, this will then have an influence of what one determines is good art. As that changes, one will re-examine the performances under the new interpretation of good art, and this will further inform their interpretation of what a good performance is.

Qualitative research is essential in researching theater performance, due to its ability to produce knowledge when “when contextual forces are ill-defined, uncontrolled or situational.” (Lakshman, 2000, p.371). Within theater practice, what is considered “good” theatre is ill defined and subjective (Philosophy Tube, 2022). We can utilise quantitative measures, such as number of tickets sold, number of reviews etc. to express how “good” a piece of theatre may have been, but this is more a measure of commercial success, rather than artistic value. (However, this in of itself could be debated). When working with an individual, in a coach to coachee relationship, qualitative measures, such as feelings after the performance, vocal quality, personal expression, are more in the control of the individual, and arguably more valuable to research from a coaches perspective.

RESEARCH DESIGNS

Research designs should be considered only after the formulation of a research question, (Williamson, 2018b). I wish to examine and glean information that can be practically applied within the chaotic nature of a performing arts setting, that will benefit the performing artist.. Methodologies that produce “Mode 1” knowledge (Gibbons et.al., 1994), or knowledge that is “characterize as oriented toward discipline-based problems and subject to disciplinary codes of practice, reward structures, and criteria of quality” (Holland, 2009) would not deliver practical information, as can have “ limited relevance outside academia” (Van Aken, 2001, p.1)

Grounded theory was originally described by Glaser and Straus in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). It is designed to allow the researcher to gather a wide range of data from a social setting (Herring, 2018). Its aim is to generate theories based on the data collected, and develop practical and applicable knowledge from the observations (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Although grounded theory is a qualitative method of research, it takes elements of the quantitative approach, utilizing the “logic, rigor and systematic analysis inherent in

quantitative survey research” (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Opposed to the more quantitative approach of theorising a hypothesis, and gathering data to prove/ disprove the hypothesis, grounded theory firstly gathers a wide variety of data and then cultivates a theory based on the data presented (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Traditionally, grounded theory viewed the researcher as a truly objective, and free of biases (Herring, 2018). Purist grounded theorists suggested not to conduct a literature review before undertaking the research, to avoid any biases (Herring, 2018), however, Bryant suggests that it is not possible for a research to be completely objective and unbiased. (2003). This led to the development of constructivist grounded theory, which accepts past knowledge of the researcher and their past experiences and biases. (Charmez, 2014). Instead of assuming that the theories are “discovered”, as is tradition in tradition grounded theory, they are instead “constructed” by the researcher, using their previous knowledge, and the data presented to them (Charmez, 2014).

Constructivist grounded theory is more practical for my own approach to the research, due to my personal experience of the theatre industry and collegiate level theatre training. However, this would also mean that my own biases of the industry should be examined before undertaking the research, to add an element of objectivity to the practice.

Action research is seen as a participatory research which amalgamates both theory and practice to address practical problems within an environment (Williamson, 2018c). There is a wide variety of participatory research approaches that fall under action research (Williamson, 2018c). The common thread of each of these branches of action research is “to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science” (Hult & Lennung, 1980). Action research involves a process known as the Action research spiral (Smith, 2007). This is a process of planning the research, implementing the plan, observing the process of the research, reflecting on the research outcomes, and repeating the process with the newly acquired knowledge from the reflection (Smith, 2007) There is more of a fluidity to the spiral when practically applied. There is often an overlap among the stages. However, a focus on the research is to have a strong and authentic response to the practice you’re developing, rather than following clear steps (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005)

I am currently working within the education system, which is a prime environment to undertake action research (Elliott, 2015). However, I propose that further development of my

knowledge of the current musical theatre industry would be preferable before applying it to action research with an educational setting. This will ensure that the practical problems I intend to tackle within the educational environment, thought action research, are practical and applicable to the industry the students will be entering into.

Ethnography is the development of ideas from an insider perspective (Jones & Smith, 2017) It involves the “immersion in a culture and the artistry of seeing, learning and interpreting reality by engaging with participants, either overtly or covertly in their natural environment” (Jones & Smith, 2017). One of the key methods used within ethnography is observation, which I explore more later, and insider research, which I will describe within the Ethics section.

Through my current work within a university, I have the ability to observe the students through 1-2-1 sessions, group settings, and from the perspective of the lecturers. This allows me to get a sense of the culture of the university, and will allow “critical categories and meanings to emerge from the ethnographic encounter” (Hoey, 2014). Although my work has ethnographic elements, it is not ethnography, as I am not there with the deliberate intention of researching the institution.

METHODS

Interviews are widely used by both qualitative and quantitative researchers as a method of data gathering (Williamson, 2018d). Interviews are broken down into 3 categories; Structured, unstructured, and semi structured (Gill et.al., 2008). A structured interview is a predetermined list of questions that is administered by the interviewer (Williamson, 2018d). These can be useful for “detailed and specific information about current operations and requirements” (Williamson, 2002, p.243). Unstructured interviews usually start with one initial question, and the initial response will determine the rest of the interview (Gill et.al., 2008). The interviewer has freedom to ask follow up questions on topics brought up during the interviews (Gill et.al, 2008). These are primarily used when significant depth is required in the research, or when very little is known about the topic (Gill et.al, 2008). Finally, semi structured interviews will have a few predetermined questions, which will explore key areas, but also give the interviewer, or interviewee, the ability further explore other topics that naturally arise from the conversation, and may not have been previously thought of by the researcher (Gill et.al, 2008). The questions within the interview will normally fall into one of two categories:

- Closed questions: These questions usually have a yes/ no response, or will have a list of predetermined responses (Williamson, 2018,d).
- Open Questions: These cannot be answered with a yes or no, and allow the interviewee to respond freely (Williamson, 2018d)

Applying this to performing arts research, taking an interpretivist approach to interviewing, which has the “aim if eliciting the meaning of participants or to understand them from their own points of view” (Williamson, 2018d, p387) would allow the researcher to gleam insights from performing arts professionals, which may not be found within published research, as it can only be achieved through lived experience.

Surveys involve the “collection of primary data from all or part of a population, to determine the incidence, distribution, and interrelationships of certain variables within the population” (Tanner, 2018, p.160). The use of surveys can seem straightforward initially, but in order to add any validity, or generalisability to the results, a clear understanding of how to appropriately use them and how to implement them is needed (Tanner, 2018) The use of surveys has become more accessible over the years through technological developments (Tanner, 2018).

Litwin (1995) described 4 type of validity to a survey

- Face Validity: The review of the survey by non-experts to insure clarity and comprehensibility
- Content Validity: Review by topic experts to determine the appropriateness of the survey
- Criterion validity: Comparing the validity of the criteria of the survey to other already established measures
- Construct Validity: A review of the survey after its completion to see how well it performed

Once the survey itself has been constructed, one must consider the sampling used for the survey (Evans & Marthur, 2005).

Although there are variations in the titles used for observational techniques, they usually fall into two categories; Structured, and unstructured (Williamson, 2018e). Structured observations are used to record physical and verbal behaviour, based on predetermined metrics (Mulhall, 2003). They are predominantly used in positivist paradigms (Williamson, 2018e). Unstructured observations are used to “Understand and interpret cultural behaviour” (Mulhall, 2003, p.306).

There are different levels of participation for the research within observation;

- Complete participant
- Participant as observer
- Observer as participant
- Complete Observer (Gold, 1958)

Working as an insider researcher (which I will discuss more later), allows me to make observations due to my proximity to the individuals I will be studying (Marilyn, 2003).

ETHICS

It is important for all researchers to develop a duty of care for any research they undertake (Johanson, 2018). There are three main focus of ethics within research (Lincoln & Guba, 1989);

- Ethical Levels: There are 3 sub categories of ethical levels
 - Wisdom ethics: The anticipation ethical problems, and knowledge of ethical guidelines (Lincoln & Guba, 1989)
 - Content Ethics: An understanding of which acts are deemed right, and which are deemed wrong (Lincoln & Guba, 1989)
 - Ethical Decisions: The process through which ethical decisions are made, as well as the decision itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1989)
- Moral Responsibilities: An action “that is worthy of a particular kind of reaction—praise, blame, or something akin to these—for having performed it” (Eshleman, 2014). Within research, these actions is be deemed morally responsible by reasonable persons, preferably individually to whom the decisions affect (Lincoln & Guba, 1989)
- Legal responsibilities: The research must be conducted within the confines of the law, doing no harm, gaining full consent from the participants, without deception, and with respect for the privacy and confidentiality (Lincoln & Guba, 1989)

Ethical considerations must not only be considered from one’s own perspective, but also from “alternative ethical paradigms in other cultures” (Johanson, 2018, p480). These are broken into three categories; relating to differing cultural concepts, to national interests, and to ever expanding devotion to universal human rights (Johanson, 2018).

Insider research, also known as endogenous research, is when research is “undertaken within an organization, group or community where the researcher is also a member” (Fleming, 2018, p.311). There can be great advantages given to insider researchers, such as access to, and rapport with, their current colleagues, knowledge on the internal system, and possible influence within an organisation (Marilyn, 2003). The presence of the research will not alter the natural flow of the organisation, due to them already being a part of it (Unluer, 2012). However, this familiarity with the organisation may lead to bias on the researchers behalf, making it more difficult for them to make truly objective observations (Unluer, 2012). The researcher may also have access to sensitive information that may add bias to the research itself (Unluer, 2012).

Within my own practice, insider research would not be appropriate, as I work within pastoral care. This gives me a wide access to sensitive information which would lead to a large bias in my work. It may also change my interactions with the students (Marilyn, 2003). The students' perception of me as “researcher”, rather than “pastoral support” may affect their ability to confide in me. Should they view me as a researcher there may be instances of subject bias, ie. giving a response that they believe the researcher wants to hear, rather than a genuine response (dictionary.apa.org). This would have an ethical implication on my ability to do my work.

Finally, when approaching performance coaching research, one needs to carefully consider the metrics that they are using. Self discrepancy theory describes how the pressure of an ought self can lead to feelings of anxiety (Higgins, 1989). Utilising a metric based off external validation of a performance (eg. audience approval, peer approval, judging panel, exam score), and then studying how to improve this metric could be justification teaching through an ought self. Would the application of this study emphasize a focus on external validation in performance arts training? (Which is often the metric used in universities). Could the nature of this training be what is causing the high prevalence of ill mental health and anxiety among performing artists? (Van Den Eynde, 2016) There is much further study that needs to be conducted on this topic, however, I believe further discussion is needed on the ethics of the metrics by which we measure performance.

CONCLUSION

A broad understanding of research methods equips you with the tools to approach a research problem from many different perspectives. Understanding the utility of each of the different

methodologies allows you to diversify research, and the knowledge acquired. Having both a breadth and depth of knowledge on research practices ensures that any research undertaken is of the highest standard, and produces valid, verifiable, and applicable knowledge.

As a performance coach, understanding what one views as “Art” is paramount to understanding the medium a coachee is working in, and as well as the skills they need to develop their craft. Utilising this knowledge will allow a researcher to approach the epistemological question of “What is art”? Is it an expression of the self? Or expression of an idea? Or if something is claimed to be art, is it so? Each of these questions require further exploration.

Upon gaining an epistemological understanding of art, one must take an ontological look of “How do we measure art?”. Is it level of skill? Authenticity of expression? Audience reaction?. Once again, each of these require further exploration. However, the ontological viewpoint that is decided by the researcher will inform the methodologies they use to measure the decided metrics of the craft.

Finally, a researcher must explore the axiological question of “What is the value of art?”. Does its value come from audience perception, or reaction? Does it come from the value placed upon it by the artist? Or is it a question of commercial success?

Exploring and understanding research methods gives a researcher the tools to explore all of the above questions with rigor, and produce knowledge that is of value to the betterment, and further understanding, of the art form.

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