

How can a brief, teacher-led, psychologically informed intervention support Portuguese Musical Theatre voice students in understanding and managing Music Performance Anxiety?

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WHY THIS MATTERS

Music Performance Anxiety is also a pedagogical issue



MPA is multidimensional

More than nervousness.
MPA can affect cognition, emotion, physiology and behaviour.



The singing body

In singing, body, breath, voice and sense of self are closely connected.



A role boundary

Support students without turning the teacher into a mental health professional.

Particularly relevant in singing: the voice is both instrument and embodied expression.

STARTING POINT

From personal experience to research

1 PERFORMER:

My own experience of MPA

2 VOICE TEACHER:

Recognising MPA in students

3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

MPA, pedagogy & professional precarity

4 PRESENT STUDY:

From understanding → pedagogical response

What can a voice teacher appropriately do?

The literature points to a gap in voice education

MPA is multidimensional

It is not simply nervousness.
Cognitive, Emotional,
Physiological, Behavioural

Multiple approaches show promise:

Cognitive-behavioural, ACT-informed, mindfulness, imagery, biofeedback and multimodal approaches.

The teacher's role matters:

Preparation, Breathing,
Simulated performance,
Reframing

The gap

Brief, teacher-led, psychologically informed work remains underexplored in Portuguese Musical Theatre voice education.

Question: How can psychologically informed approaches be translated into voice education? Particularly within Portuguese Musical Theatre education

RESEARCH QUESTION

The study asked how students could understand and manage MPA

How can a brief, teacher-led, psychologically informed intervention support Portuguese Musical Theatre voice students?

Aim: To explore students' experiences of a brief educational intervention addressing MPA.

FOCUS

- UNDERSTAND: MPA experiences
- EXPERIMENT: Cognitive, somatic and attentional strategies.
- DEVELOP: Agency, preparedness and personalised strategies

A small-scale mixed-methods study kept education separate from therapy

01 Pragmatist paradigm Mixed-methods design.	02 4 sessions: Teacher-led Consecutive 2 hour workshop for 4 weeks	03 14 participants Purposive Sampling
04 Quantitative Data K-MPAI: Pre-intervention profile	05 Qualitative data Reflections • Discussions • Mentimeter • Questionnaires	
06 Educational aim - Supporting students within pedagogical boundaries Learn, experiment, reflect and develop individual responses — not diagnose or establish clinical efficacy.		



Four Sessions: From understanding to agency

01

UNDERSTANDING MPA

Psychoeducation,
Normalisation,
Awareness

02

BODY & VOICE REGULATION:

Breathing,
Grounding,
Embodiment,
External focus

03

PERFORMANCE THINKING:

Thought–emotion–
behaviour cycles,
Cognitive
restructuring,
Imagery,
Acceptance and
Defusion,
Self-compassion

04

INTEGRATION:

Personal toolkit,
Scenarios,
Future strategies

UNDERSTAND → EXPERIMENT → REFLECT → CHOOSE

Two forms of data answered different parts of the question



Quantitative

K-MPAI administered before the intervention to provide a baseline profile, not a post-intervention efficacy measure.

Pre-intervention → Descriptive profile → Variability in MPA



Qualitative

Mentimeter responses, group discussions, written reflections, post-session questionnaires and session activities.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis → Four themes



Integration

Reflexive Thematic Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's approach, then quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated.

Convergence • Complementarity
• Expansion

FOUR THEMES: SELF-EVALUATION → RELATIONSHIP → ATTENTION → AGENCY

THEME 1

MPA as a threat to self-evaluation



Threat

Fear of failure, judgement, comparison and perfectionistic expectations shaped performance experiences.



Evidence

A mistake could become evidence of not being good enough.



Entanglement

Performance became entangled with competence and identity.

THEME 2

Developing new ways of relating to anxiety



Initial frame

Anxiety appeared as something to control, reduce or remove.



New possibility

"What if I don't need to get rid of the anxiety in order to perform?"



Useful responses

Noticing, questioning, accepting and experimenting, not forced positive thinking.

From control → acceptance / flexibility

THEME 3

Attention shifted from self-monitoring towards performance



Inward loops

How am I sounding?

Did I make a mistake?

What is the audience thinking?



Redirecting attention

Towards the body, environment, sound, communication and meaning.



The point

Flexible attention, not eliminating internal awareness.

From self-monitoring → performance / communication

THEME 4

From Control to Personalised Agency



No universal fix

No single technique worked universally.



Situational choice

What might help, when it might help and how situations differ.



The endpoint

“More options, and the ability to choose.”

From “Which technique works?” → “What works for me, here?”

The numbers showed variability, not a single student profile

Quantitative	Qualitative	Interpretation
Variable MPA levels	Different experiences	MPA is heterogeneous
Limited confidence	Experimentation with strategies	Expanded response options
High importance of MPA education	Strong engagement	Relevance of MPA education

Variablility in Participants' levels of MPA

K-MPAI: 70–189

M = 107.50 | SD = 35.18 | N = 14

Participants already used strategies, but confidence in managing MPA was comparatively limited.

Importance of MPA education:

M = 4.71 / 5

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

What can a voice teacher appropriately do?



Psychological preparation can become part of performance education.

- Offer psychoeducation and normalisation.
- Help students recognise cognitive and physiological responses.
- Introduce regulation and attentional strategies, reflection and experimentation.
- Create psychologically safer performance experiences and support personalised strategies.
- Keep boundaries clear and refer when needs exceed the pedagogical role.

FROM RESEARCH TO CURRICULUM

The research is already informing curriculum development

A dedicated Music Performance Anxiety module is being developed within the Musical Theatre curriculum.



A pedagogical development arising from the research, not part of the evaluated intervention.



From research to curriculum



From a brief stand-alone intervention → to curriculum-embedded MPA education

The study supports a possibility, not a causal claim

Sample Small purposive sample: 14 participants.	Comparison No control or comparison group.
Time Brief intervention with no long-term follow-up.	Measurement K-MPAI was administered only before the intervention, so reduction in MPA cannot be claimed.

Reflexivity - Reseracher Positionality

The teacher–researcher relationship may have influenced data and interpretation; reflexivity was used to address this.

This study does not demonstrate that the intervention reduced MPA.

CLOSING PROPOSITION

From Control to Agency



Understand what anxiety is doing.



Recognise its effects on thoughts, bodies and attention.



Experiment with different responses.



Develop a personalised sense of agency.

Voice teachers do not need to fix anxiety; they can help performers meet it with greater flexibility and preparation.

UNDERSTANDING → FLEXIBILITY → AGENCY



- MPA may not be something we can eliminate.

But we can help students understand it, navigate it and work with it.

Thank you

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