

Movement-Based Voice Training towards Embodied Singing: A Literature Review

III. Critical Reflection

When I decided to choose this topic, I knew that I wanted to explore the connection between movement and singing. I had already observed how body-based exercises improved my students' vocal freedom, especially during the integrated sessions in our musical theatre programme. I also had some personal experience with methods such as Fitzmaurice and Linklater, and was curious to learn more. I did not begin with a fixed framework or a systematic search strategy. Instead, I started by learning more about the five approaches I had previously heard of but not yet studied in depth. I am sure there are more approaches out there, and I don't have a strong justification for choosing these five methods in particular. However, they felt relevant and rich enough to explore within the limits of this 4500-word assignment.

I began working seriously on this topic when I had only about one month left before the first draft deadline. The delay was due to practical reasons. I was busy with my regular teaching schedule at my private studio, organising a musical theatre production in the month before, and running the final weeks of our ongoing musical theatre programme, which just ended on that ongoing month. When I finally able to sit down and ready to begin, I knew I had to be realistic about the time I had left. This is why I then chose to use a narrative literature review approach. This type of review is more flexible and manageable within a short timeframe (Baumeister and Leary, 1997; Smith and Noble, 2016). I couldn't do a full systematic review with extensive database searches and exclusion criteria. My aim was to look closely at the features of the approaches studied and find shared patterns that could help me better understand about this somatic approaches.

One of the biggest challenges for me was getting access to high-quality sources. I have been relying to get everything online. However, many books I wanted were unavailable due to they are behind a pay wall. I had to work with what I could access, which is mostly the open-access journal or those that can be accessed through the university. This limitation definitely shaped the scope of the review. I often got worried that I may not reading enough materials or missing something important, but I reminded myself that this project is not about being exhaustive. It is about making sense of what I could find and reflecting on how it connects to my real teaching context (Milat, Bauman and Redman, 2015).

As I read through the sources, I found myself submerged to the joy of finding information and learning. I was thinking that I could be too descriptive in my writing later if I just enjoyed myself in receiving information mode, and not questioning and being critical. I had to constantly remind myself that to make this critical, this should not just become a summary of the five techniques, but it had to be a comparison. That meant focusing more on the shared ideas and differences. I tried hard to pick up the features of each method and try to categorise them which then becomes themes for each method. I compared all five methods side by side and began to notice that some of the themes from different methods are actually have the similar context which can be grouped under a bigger same theme. I began to see the similarities of these five methods and assign themes that are shared by all five. I can also see how some methods have distinct features, in which then help me to compare and see the differences.

One of the things I didn't expect was how much I would learn from comparing the five methods side by side. Grouping these methods into shared themes helped me see the bigger picture and the connection between them. Before conducting this review, I heard about each method separately, and tried to understand what it is and how it works. At first, I thought that all five methods are totally different strategies and distinct to each other, but after comparing among them, I began to notice how they are connected. I can feel how one method (such as Alexander Technique) can be present, or influencing the other method (such as Linklater and Feldenkrais).

I also found that although they come from different backgrounds, actually deal with similar issues. Things such as tension, over-controlling the voice, or feeling disconnected from the body are problems that each method is trying to help us overcome. Although each method addresses these problems in its own way, they have the same orientation which is to teach voicing with a more connection to the body, in a subconscious manner without thinking about it too much. I began to understand how this might help my overthinking students to sing with less tension and focus on telling the story. I began to critically evaluate which methods that I could use to create the exercises which is inspired from some parts of one method added with some of the other methods, and thinking about how to order them to create 'my version' of fully applicable embodied singing exercises.

Conducting literature assignment, in my now 46 years old, do face some 'classics' challenges. It has been pretty clear to me that my brain is no longer the same brain that I had worked with when I was undertaking MBA programme, during my late twenties, back in

Washington DC. Picking up main ideas from academic writings need lots of note taking and repeating the sentence reading over and over. It has been taking too much time, which I had to struggle with, considering I also need to make a living and have family to taken care of. It was frustrating as always, but I knew I have to get things done, and I believe that the result that I got front the learning has always been rewarding.

Looking at the results, this review gave me a much clearer picture of what somatic voice approaches can really offer. They are not just for warm-ups or to release physical tightness. They are also about helping singers return to themselves which is to their own breath, body, imagination, and feeling. This has made me think a lot about the students I work with, especially those from dance or acting backgrounds. Many of them feel nervous when singing or try too hard to control their sound. I now believe that these body-based tools might actually give them more freedom, because they allow the voice to come from a more connected and expressive place without having to think much about the technique.

If I had more time, I probably would have looked into a few more approaches. Initially I was interested in Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and was including this method into my study. It was almost until the last few days toward the draft submission time, that I swapped it with Leessac. I spent quite some times reading about LMA and watching lecture videos on voice study centre's video banks. I felt that the LMA has too different elements and I was insecure whether I can actually will be able to connect them with the other four. I was then finding other methods and came to Leesac and was happy to see a more direct connections with the other four methods compared to LMA. If I had more time I would explore LMA more and put that into the bigger six methods of embodied singing approach.

Even though I didn't have much time, and I felt stressed now and then, I still feel like this process has been very valuable. I now feel a little more confident when I talk about somatic voice work, and I'm starting to make clearer choices in how I teach. I had a few workshop engagements recently and directly use and mentioned these methods in those workshop. I will also have another one today, and will definitely mention some of these five approaches in my presentation. This study gave me space to stop, reflect, and think carefully about the kind of teacher I want to become. Although I was groomed in a more traditional classical approach, I have now evolved into a different person with different POV to singing pedagogy than before, a more embodied one. I do still have more to learn, but I hope I can keep exploring these ideas and bring more embodied awareness not only into my teaching but also into my own singing too.

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