

A STUDY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOCAL HARMONY ACQUISITION AND SKILL FOR THE MUSICAL THEATRE PERFORMER.



MODULE 6 BMPF7010D: WORK-BASED LEARNING PROJECT
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AGENDA OVERVIEW

01

THE CONTEXT

02

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

03

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

04

LITERATURE REVIEW

05

FINDINGS

06

CONCLUSION



CONTEXT

WHO AM I?

PREVIOUS RESEARCH?

- UK-based musical theatre singing teacher at university and conservatoire establishments.
- Vocal harmony ability is crucial for a professional musical theatre performer *(Winston et al., 2022; Morton, 2015; Portman and Playfair, 2012).*
- From my teaching experiences, ability varies from student-to-student, often impacting the speed in which material is covered during classroom time.
- There is **minimal literature** in this field.
- Lack of systematic vocal harmony development within core singing modules and the overall musical theatre curriculum.
- I wish to discover applicable methods to inform, implement, and assess a short course developing vocal harmony acquisition.
- This research may inform the initial stages of a vocal harmony syllabus for musical theatre tutors and performers.

THE JUSTIFICATION

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

01

To develop my capabilities of conducting a work-based learning project on a larger scale.

02

To learn how to research, design, and implement a robust 4-week short course in vocal harmony development.

PERSONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

03

To develop my own musicianship skills.

04

To expand my teaching repertoire for ensemble sessions.

05

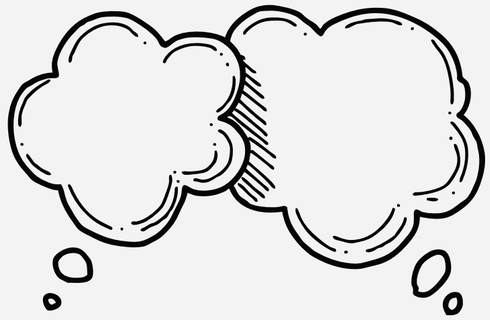
To widen my knowledge of motor performance and learning strategies.

06

To deepen my knowledge and understanding of vocal harmony physiologically and perceptively.

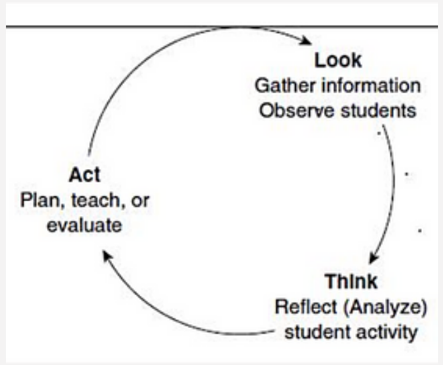
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW



PRAGMATIST VIEWPOINT: ACTION RESEARCH

Solving practical problems.
Highly interactive & collaborative dynamic.



STRINGER ET AL.S' (2010) "REFLECTIVE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE"

"Look, think, act"



EMBEDDED DESIGN MIXED METHODS

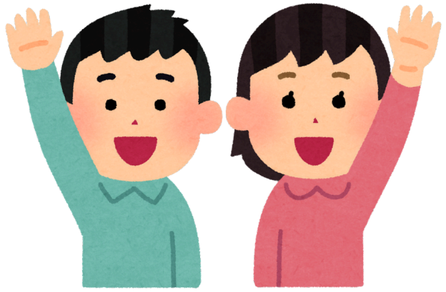
Quantitative & qualitative data.
Triangulation of methods.

METHODS



NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

- *First stage of data collection.*



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC

- *1st year BA Honours degree.*
- *10 participants.*
- *My place of work.*



FOCUS GROUPS

- *Theoretical saturation.*
- *6-10 students.*



PRELIMINARY AND CONCLUDING AURAL ASSESSMENTS

- *Trinity Rock & Pop, Gaston test of musicality, & Rock School.*



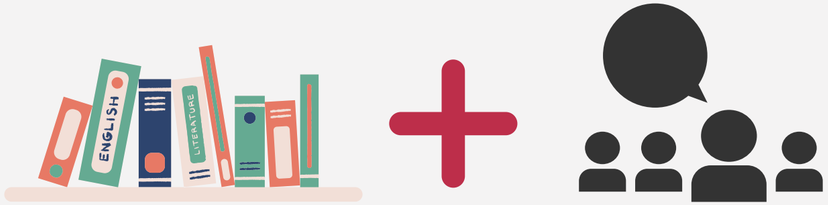
CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

- *Light touch observations.*



SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

- *2 participants.*
- *Valuable qualititative data.*







LITERATURE REVIEW:
SEARCH AND SELECTION CRITERIA

CRESWELL'S (2003, P 86) FIVE-STEP RESEARCH PREPARATION GUIDELINE

1

Identify the terms to typically use in the literature search.

"Vocal harmony acquisition", "aural skill development", "ensemble and choral singing".

2

Locate the literature.

Peer-reviewed journals, Google scholar, PubMed, UWSTD library.

3

Read and check the relevance of the literature.

White and grey literature.

4

Organise the literature I have selected.

Thematically coded.

Organised into a structured spreadsheet.

5

Write the literature review.

Neutral stance.

- **NO PEDAGOGICAL OR SYSTEMATIC SYLLABUS FOR TEACHING VOCAL HARMONY IN A MT ENVIRONMENT.**

LITERATURE REVIEW:

CURRENT PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES



AURAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT



EMBODIED MOVEMENT



VOCAL IMPROVISATION



PERCEPTION



MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

*These **5 key themes**, combined with the initial **focus group discussions**, informed the foundation of the implemented 4-week short course.*



LITERATURE REVIEW:

AURAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

1.Listening skills: Think in the music *(Karpinski, 2000).*

2.Closing the eyes: enhances auditory attention *(Perfect et al., 2011).*

3.Audiation: singing composition internally *(Caldwell, 2012).*

4.Extractive listening: auditory distractions *(Karpinski, 2000).*

5.Vocal development exercises: challenging scales, voice-voice.

6.Melody contour: tracing a shape *(Davies and Yelland, 1977).*

7.Short-term memory: accurate melodic recall (Miller, 1956).



LITERATURE REVIEW:

EMBODIED MOVEMENT



Inspired from the Dalcroze method:

1. Kinaesthetic and movement exercises: walking, gestures, skipping, jumping, and running *(Liao and Davidson 2007, 2016; Pearson and Pouw, 2022; Kilpatrick, 2020; Grant, 2014).*

2. Rhythmics and rhythm: clap hands, step to the beat, dual tasking *(Juntenun, 2016; Seitz, 2005).*

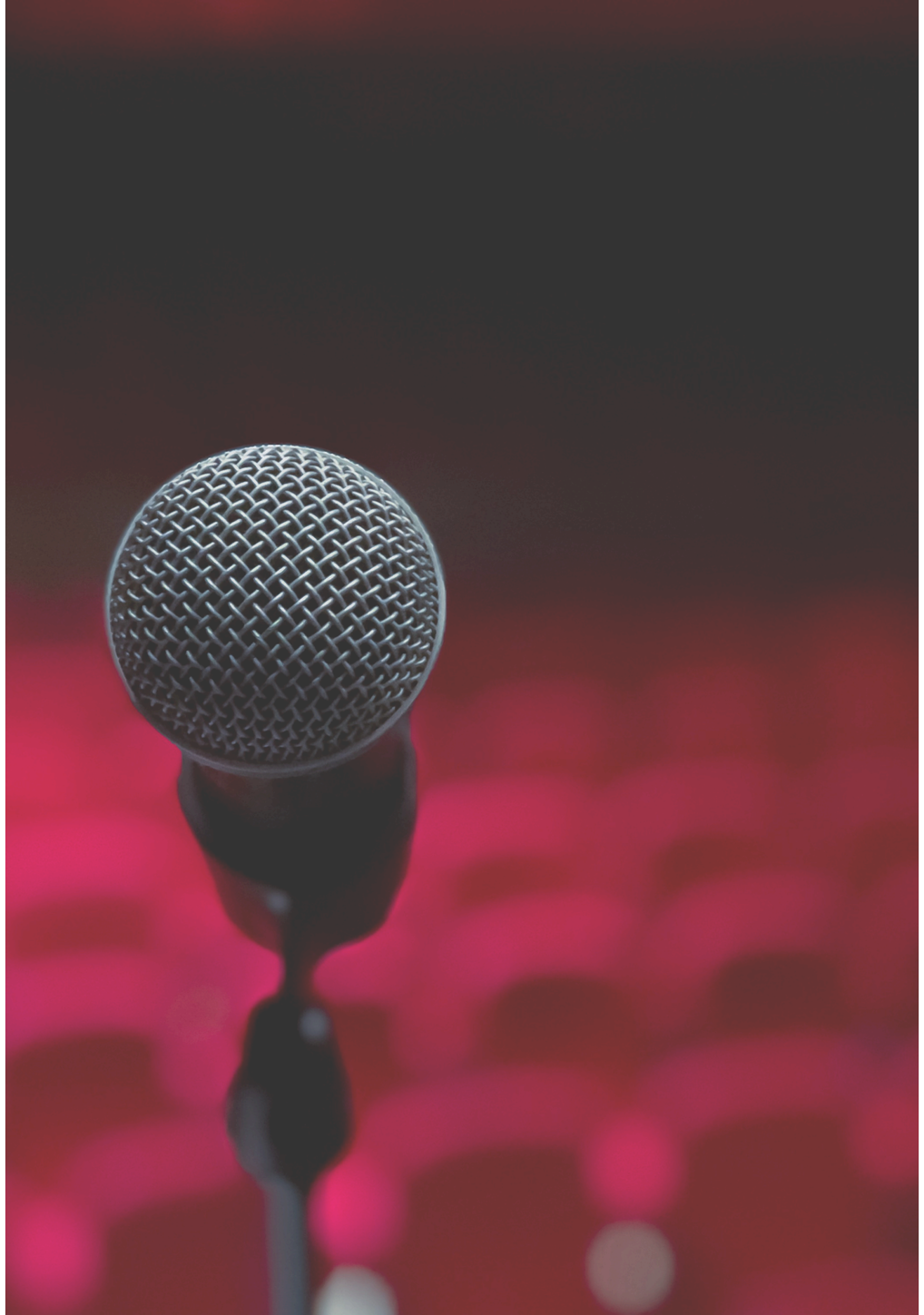
3. Rhythmic solfege and hand gestures *(Caldwell, 2012).*



LITERATURE REVIEW:

PERCEPTION

- G*romko (1993)* emphasises that perception of sound should be central to music education.
- “Psychological factors” or blocks are at play *(Karpinski, 2000, p 34)*.
- **Emotive association:** fosters emotional awareness and self-reflection *(Caldwell, 2012)*.
- **Group discussion:** shown to reduce music performance anxiety (MPA) *(Herman and Clark, 2024; Mazzarolo et al., 2023)*.



LITERATURE REVIEW:

VOCAL IMPROVISATION



1. Develops harmonic awareness *(Juntunen, 2016).*

2. Improvisation motivates students to **express their own ideas.**

3. It can be the key to **avoiding vocal tension** when adjusting to challenging harmony lines *(Caldwell, 2012).*

4. Addresses the **emotional and interpersonal challenge**s of learning harmony, particularly within musical theatre and ensemble contexts *(Winter, 2009).*

5. It **cultivates expressive freedom**, and therefore, contributes to reducing MPA *(Caldwell, 2012).*



LITERATURE REVIEW:

MOTOR CONTROL AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Make exercises more challenging.
2. Dual tasking.
3. Distribute practice.
4. Keep students motivated.
5. Mental practice is almost as impactful as physical practice *(Johnson, 2024)*.
6. Sleep helps consolidate memories made, promoting faster skill mastery *(Walker et al., 2003; Johnson, 2024)*.
7. Teacher feedback *(Johnson, 2024)*.
8. Student reflection.



ETHICS

INSIDER RESEARCHER

- I have a deeper understanding of the experiences being studied.
- Established trust and rapport.
- Maintained transparency *(Barlow, 2002)*.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Informed consent.
- Adhered to workplace safeguarding principles and received permission to conduct the study.
- Privacy and confidentiality.
- Students may feel emotional distress, frustration, or embarrassment.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

FOCUS GROUP THEMES



CONFIDENCE AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSE:

Fear of mistakes, performance pressure.



LEARNING AND MEMORY CHALLENGES:

Retention over time, melody line preference.



LEARNING STYLES:

Aural, visual, kinaesthetic - varied.



TEACHING METHODS:

Lack of varied approaches.



HARMONY COMPLEXITY:

Low & middle harmony challenges.



ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS:

Comfort rooted in group learning, industry time constraints.



SELF-AWARENESS AND REFLECTION:

Diverse learning needs - personalised support, self-doubt.



SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

- Provide a safe and low pressured environment.
- Deliver dynamic, responsive, and multi-modal teaching methods.
- Promote individual participation during sessions.
- Incorporate lower and middle pitched harmonies to address the greater challenges observed by participants.
- Include shorter harmonic phrases.
- Speed the pace of teaching *(Johnson, 2024)*.



CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS: LESSON ONE

VOCAL DEVELOPMENT

- **“Thinking <u>in</u> music”** (Karpinski, 2000, p4).
- Introduction to technical vocal exercises.
- Introduction to basic harmony technique.
- Introduction to applied physicality.
- **LEARNER ENGAGEMENT & CHALLENGES OBSERVED**

Actively engaged, positive response to performing exercises with eyes closed.

Difficulty in chromatic phrases, hesitancy when applying hand gestures.



CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS: LESSON TWO

INTERNAL VISUALISATION

- **Internalisation enhances body engagement, rhythmic accuracy, pitch perception, and listening skills in music development** *(Seitz, 2005; Johnson, 2024; Dalby, 2005; Bremmer and Nijs, 2022),*
- Introductory internal visualisation exercises.
- 4-part harmonic warmup.
- Musical theatre ensemble singing.
- **LEARNER ENGAGEMENT & CHALLENGES OBSERVED**

Responded well to hand gestures.

Hesitation when walking around the room.



CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS: LESSON THREE

VOCAL IMPROVISATION

- **Focus group theme: create an environment where mistakes are encouraged** *(Caldwell, 2012).*
- Group vocal improvisation with an instrumental.
- Improvised phrases at the piano.
- **LEARNER ENGAGEMENT & CHALLENGES OBSERVED**

Mixed response, varying levels of confidence.

Hesitation, higher level of encouragement needed.



CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS: LESSON FOUR

EMBODIED MOVEMENT

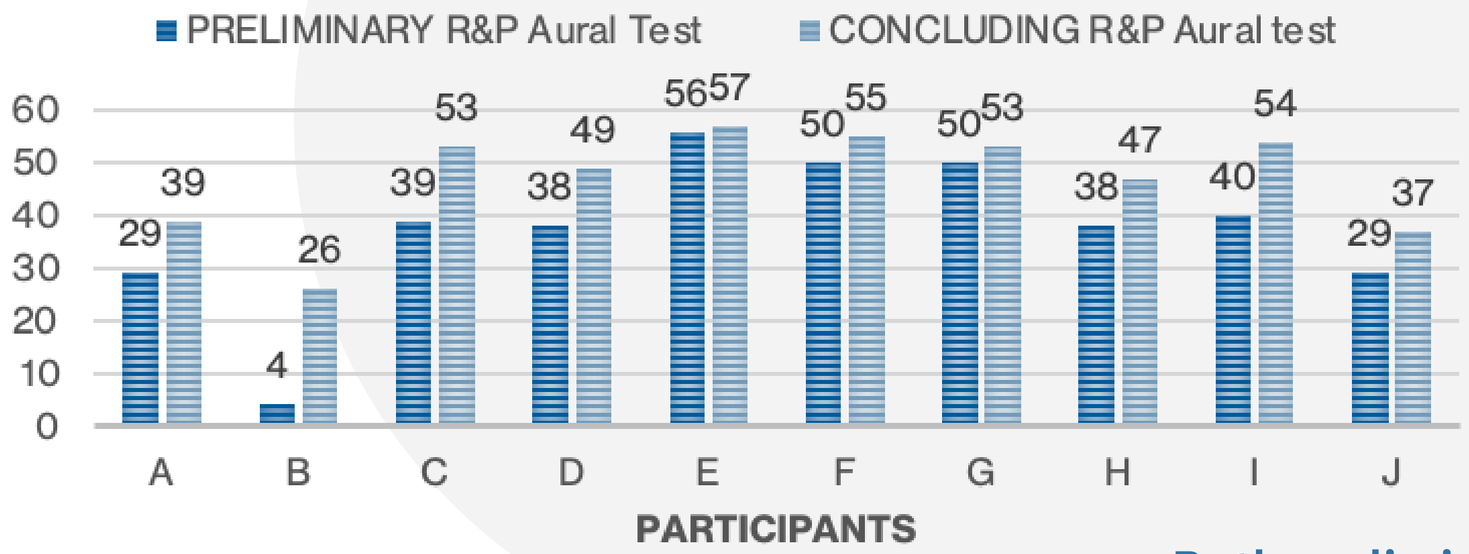
- **Embodied movement is an effective pedagogical tool to guide performers towards "a strong internal kinaesthetic sense of the music"** *(Caldwell, 2012, p 38; Stoney, 2024; Juntenun, 2016).*
- An exploration into dual-tasking.
- An exploration into Dalcroze emotive responses
- **LEARNER ENGAGEMENT & CHALLENGES OBSERVED**

Consistent engagement, thrived in a creative environment.

Inaccuracy of correct vocal application.

PRELIMINARY AND CONCLUDING AURAL TESTS

TEST ONE: TRINITY ROCK & POP LISTENING TEST



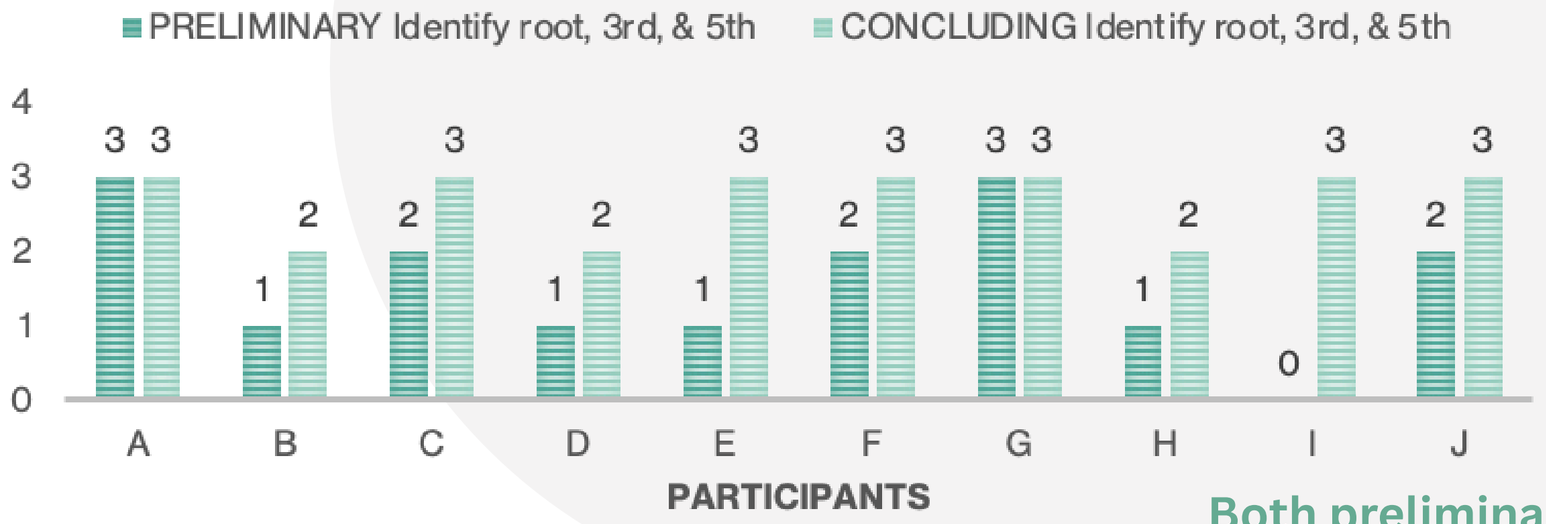
Both preliminary and concluding assessments were marked out of 58.

- All students showed progression ranging from 1.79% to 550% in improvement, with overall group development averaging at 75.72%.

- 22.60% overall improvement when removing anomalies.

PRELIMINARY AND CONCLUDING AURAL TESTS

TEST TWO: IDENTIFY ROOT, THIRD, AND FIFTH NOTES



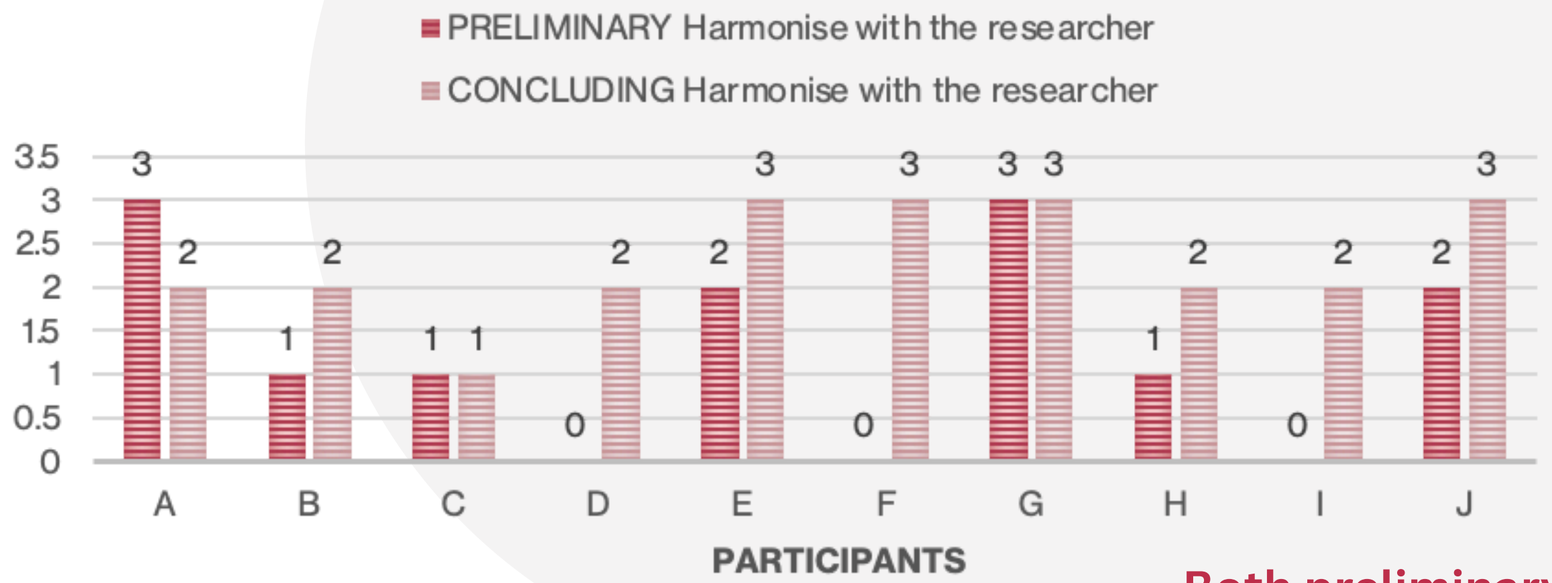
Both preliminary and concluding assessments were marked out of 3.

- All students either maintained or improved on their preliminary score, ranging from 0% to 200% development, with the group averaging a 65% overall improvement.

- Results were potentially unrepresentative (when scoring high on the initial test).

PRELIMINARY AND CONCLUDING AURAL TESTS

TEST THREE: HARMONISE WITH THE RESEARCHER



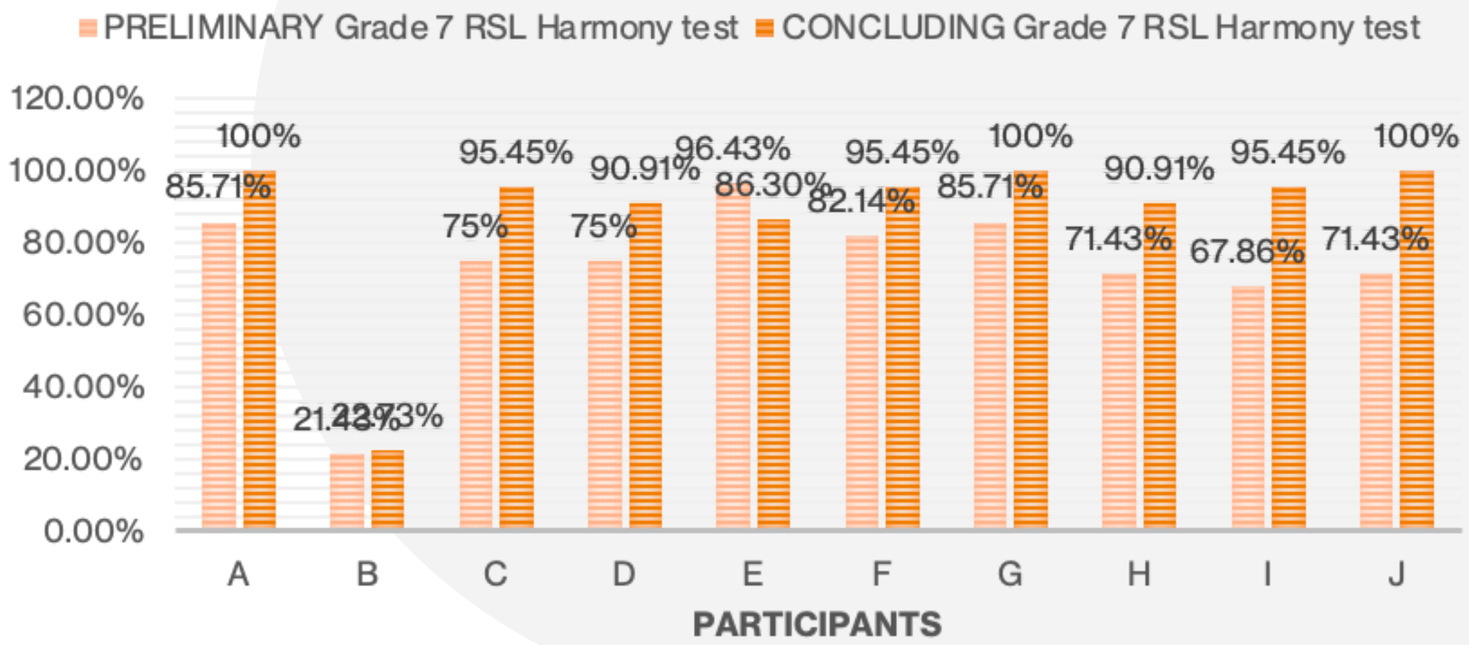
Both preliminary and concluding assessments were marked out of 3.

- Concluding results were mixed, with participant A receiving a lower concluding score, participant C and G maintaining their score, and the rest of the group showing an improvement.

- The statistics range from -16.67% to 100% in development, with an overall group average of 35.42%.

PRELIMINARY AND CONCLUDING AURAL TESTS

TEST FOUR: GRADE 7 RSL HARMONY TEST

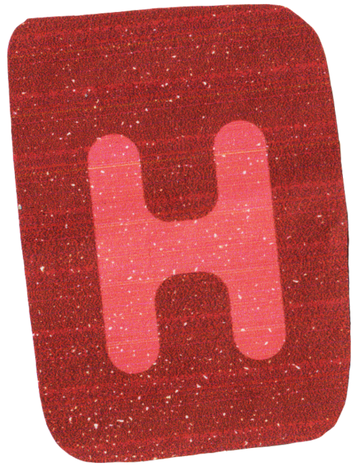


The preliminary assessment was marked out of 28, and the concluding assessment was marked out of 22.

- All students, excluding participant E, showed an improvement with the percentages ranging from -9.28% to 42.03%, with a 20.02% overall group average in improvement.









SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Participants B, D, H, and J showed improvement across **all four assessment areas**, indicating that 40% of the cohort exhibited measurable progress in both aural and harmonic skills after completing the short course.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW:

MAIN THEMES



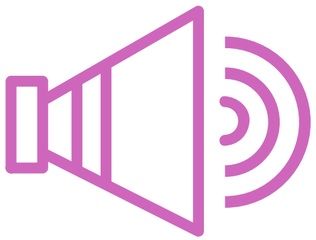
EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT:

Increased confidence, enjoyment enhances learning.



EXPERIENTIAL AND EMBODIED LEARNING:

Physical and kinaesthetic, internal visualisation, practice over theory.



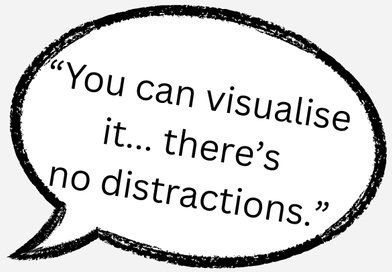
DEVELOPMENT OF AURAL AND HARMONY SKILLS:

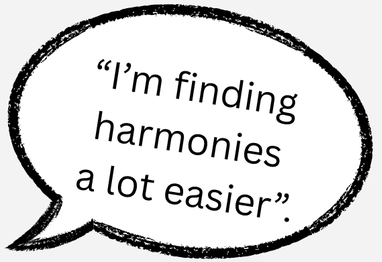
Perceptual awareness, improved aural perception, independance.

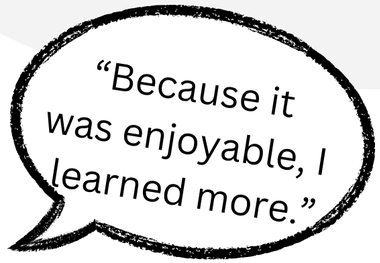


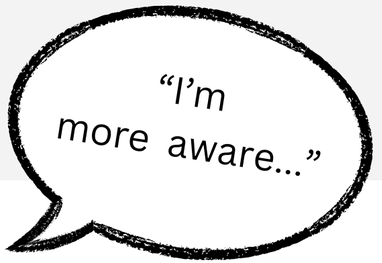
PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Value of variety, time constraints, foundational understanding.





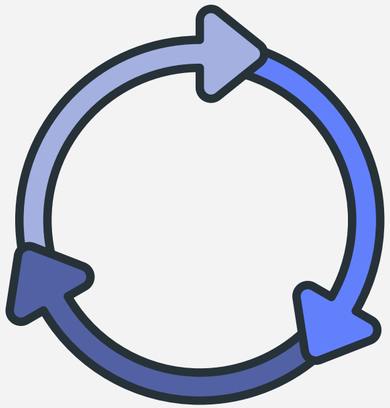




PROJECT REFLECTIONS

OVERVIEW

The aim of this project was to explore effective teaching strategies for vocal harmony acquisition within a multi-disciplinary musical theatre environment.



STRINGER ET AL'S (2010) REFLECTIVE CYCLE: "ACT"



COURSE CONCLUSIONS:

- *Impactful.*
- *Vocal harmony is not an isolated skill.*
- *Ability to think <u>in</u> music.*



PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONCLUSIONS:

- *Equipped with a versatile toolkit of pedagogical strategies.*

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY



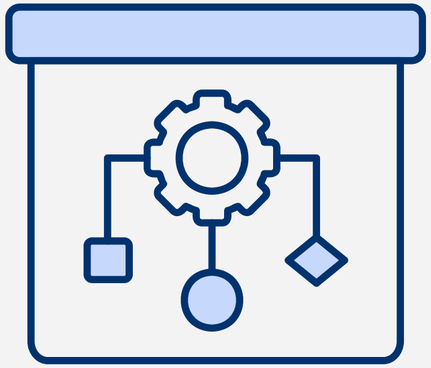
COURSE LIMITATIONS:

- *Small sample size.*
- *Time constraints.*
- *Representative sample of gender.*
- *Breadth of literature exceeded 4 lessons.*
- *MPA: Lack of confidence.*



INSIDER RESEARCHER LIMITATIONS:

- *Potential biases.*



FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Wider pool of students.*
- *Longer period.*
- *Focus on each method individually.*

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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Videos

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How Teachers Can Utilize Motor Learning Feedback to Accelerate Learning with Dr Colin Johnson. (2024) Johnson, C. Available at: https://voiceworkshop1-my.sharepoint.com