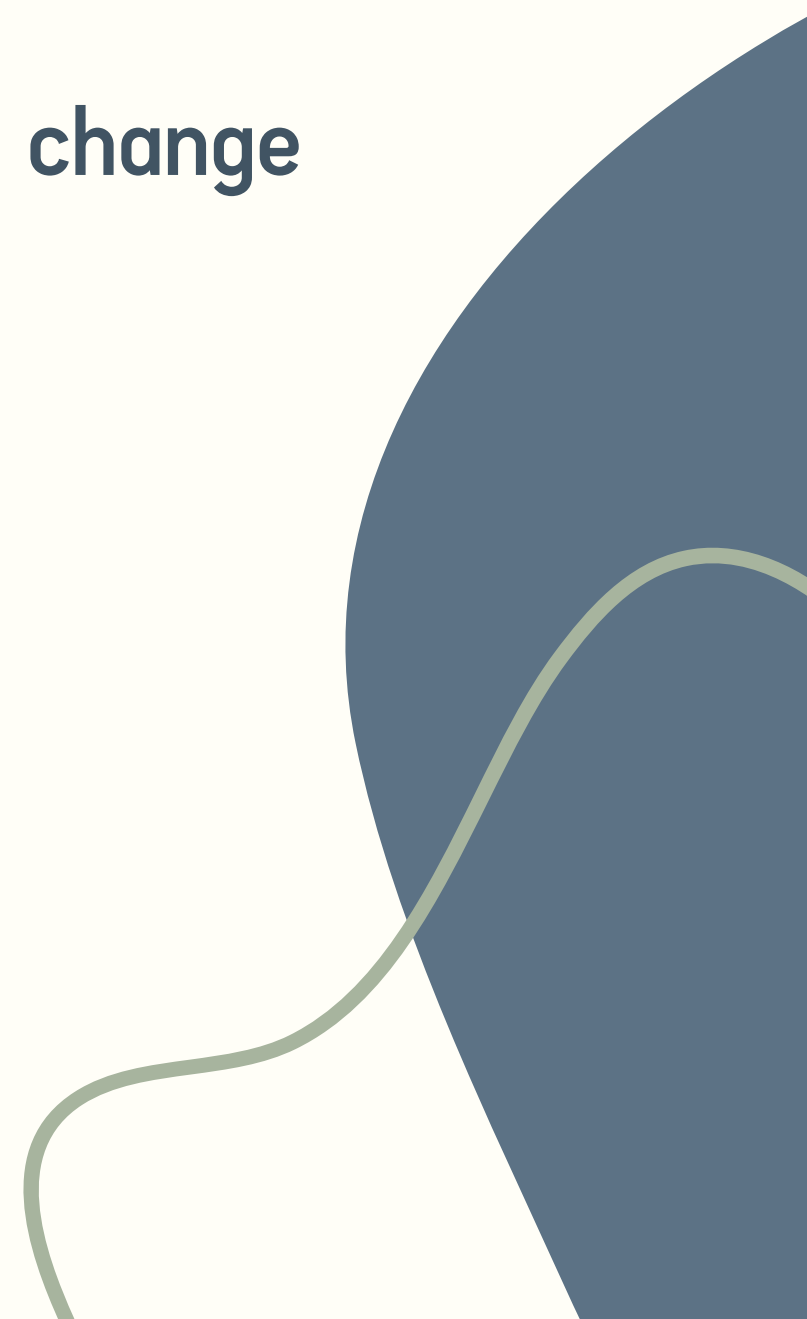


Barbara Reggio

***‘A study on adolescent vocal identity: self-perceptions
of singing students with regards to
their changing voice and singing activities’***



Researcher background

- Peripatetic singing teacher working in secondary schools
 - Teaching students aged **11-16**
 - Previous research explored **female and male adolescent vocal change**
- 

Adolescent Vocal Change: From Physiology to Experience

- Early research: physiological development, vocal classification and pedagogy (Cooksey, 1977a; 1977b) for boys; (Gackle 2000b, 2014) for girls.
- AVC is both physiological and psychosocial.
- Increasing focus on the emotional experience of vocal change, confidence and self-perception (Sweet 2015; 2018); (Freer, 2016, 2022).
- participation, gender, belonging, peer culture; these experiences are socially mediated
- Increasing recognition of the adolescent's **own experience**



Much research has focused on choral contexts

The Research Gap

What remains less explored:

Adolescents' own perspectives on:
Emotional wellbeing and confidence
Developing vocal identity
Continued engagement with singing
Individual/small-group singing tuition

vocal identity (Monks, 2003): individual tuition in a secondary-school context





The research is guided by two questions:

1. How do adolescent singing students perceive and experience their changing voices in relation to their singing activities?

2. How do these experiences relate to their confidence, participation and developing vocal identities?



Research Philosophy and Design

Methodological Position

Relativist ontology

→ multiple, context-dependent realities (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Constructionist epistemology

→ knowledge and meanings are situated and constructed (Crotty, 1998)

Interpretivist perspective

→ understanding how participants make meanings (Crotty, 1998)

Qualitative methodology

→ exploring adolescents' perceptions

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019)

→ interpreting patterns of meaning

hybrid: inductive /deductive

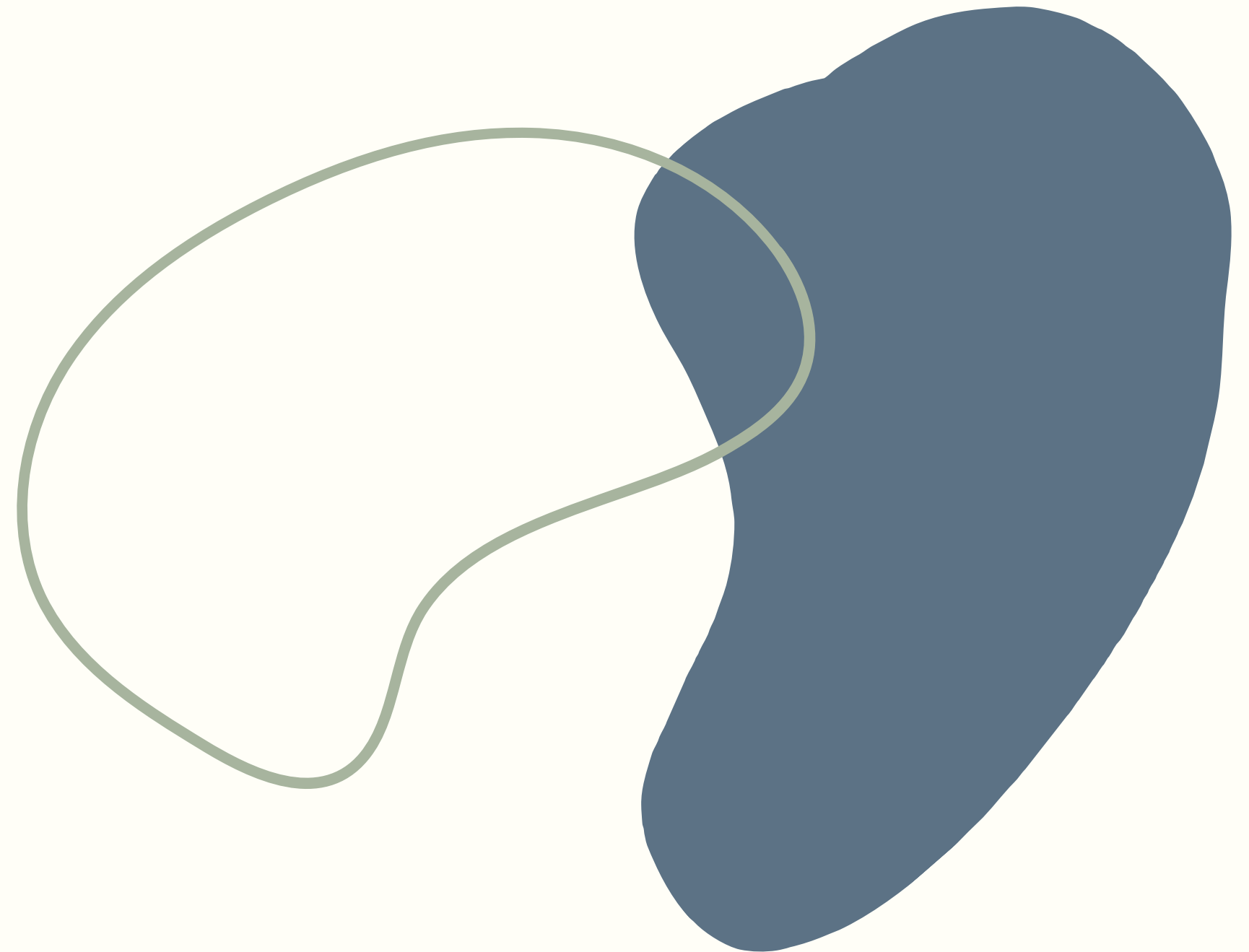


Researcher Positionality

Insider researcher + singing teacher

Advantages

- Contextual knowledge
- Established relationships
- Understanding of musical/educational context





Reflexive considerations

Existing assumptions

Teacher-student power relationship

Potential influence on participants

Influence on interpretation



Participants & Recruitment



INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

- Male and female secondary-school **students attending singing lessons**
- Age 11-16 (Year 7-11)
- Vocal change self-reported
- Purposive convenience sampling
- Schools selected by my Music Education Service

7 schools approached

2 schools agreed

15 female participants (all taught by the researcher)

No boys, no Year 11 students





Data collection

1. Paper questionnaire

Closed and

Open-ended questions

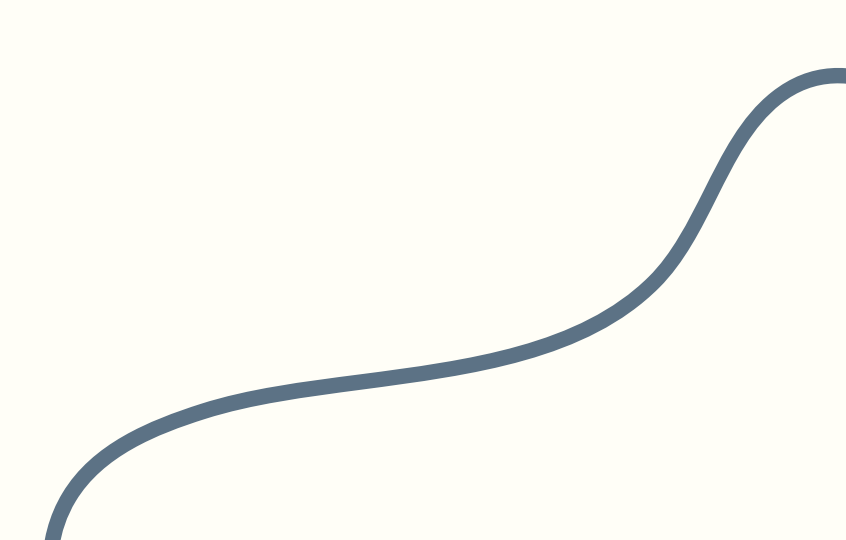
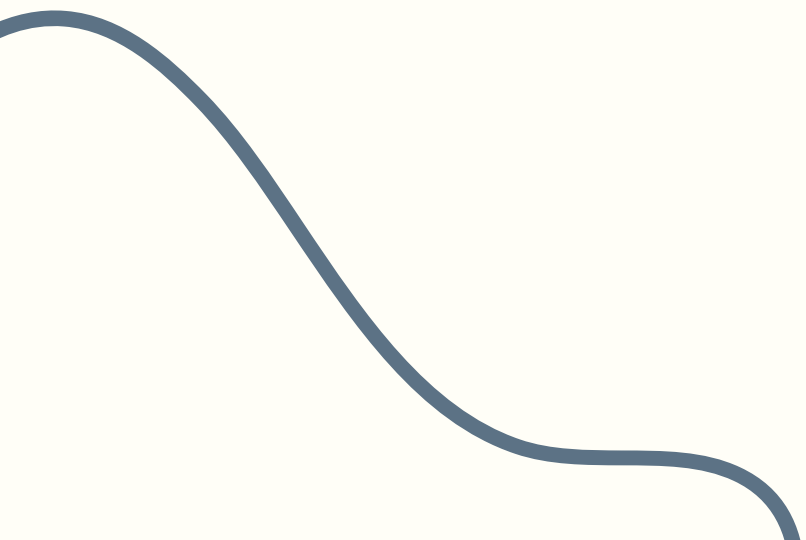
Reflection period: ~suggested 2 weeks

2. Optional individual interview

Semi-structured

~30 minutes

Conducted at school



Ethical considerations

UWTSD ethical approval
Parental/guardian consent

Verbal student assent

Voluntary participation

Right to decline questions/withdraw

Anonymisation and pseudonyms

Secure data storage

Safeguarding procedures

BERA (2024)





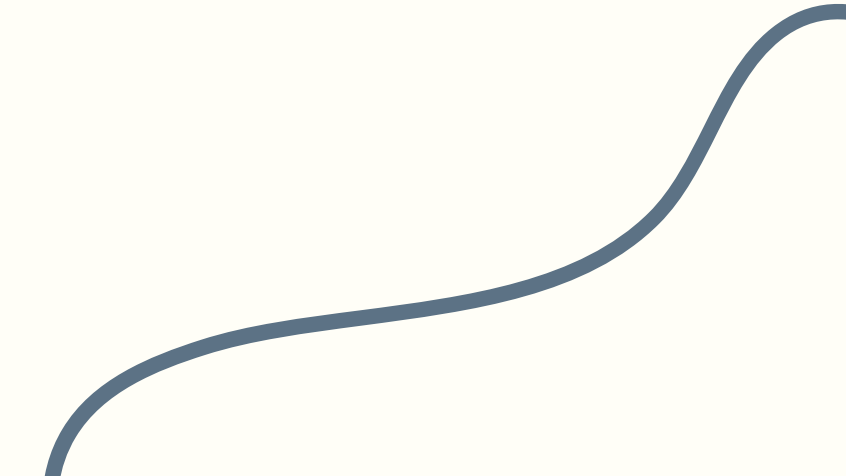
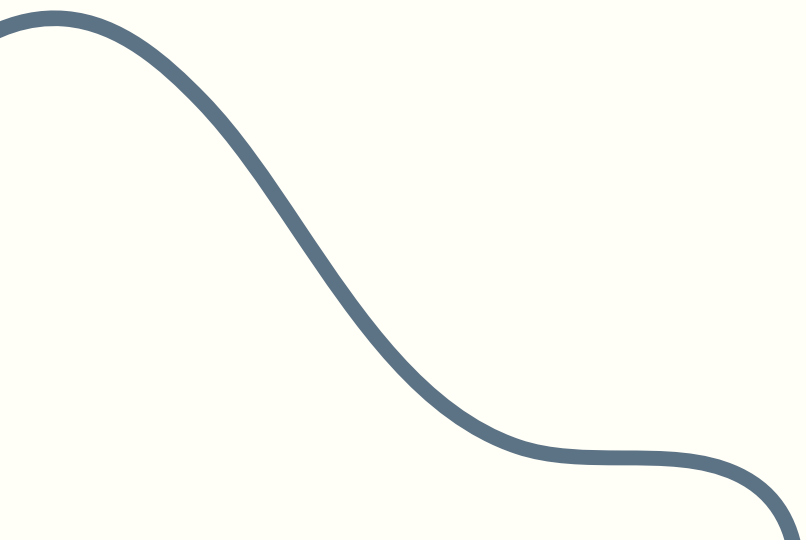
Overarching central analytical argument

Negotiating a changing voice: uncertainty, social exposure and the navigation of agency

Theme 1: The disruption of vocal control: negotiating uncertainty and an unfolding new horizon

Theme 2: The voice under observation: comparison, judgement and vulnerability

Theme 3: Learning to work with the changing voice: developing agency

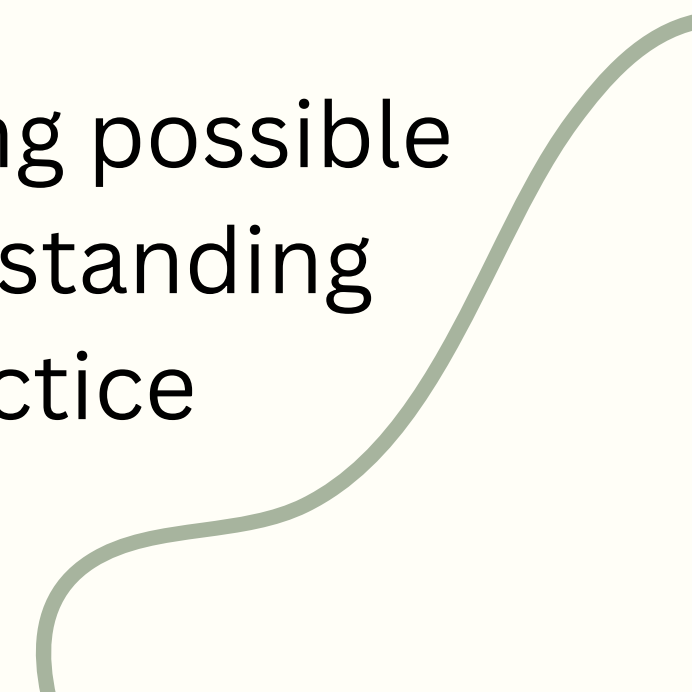




1: The disruption of vocal control: negotiating uncertainty and an unfolding new horizon

Adolescent Vocal change = uncertainty and instability
↔ instability ↔ adaptation ↔ new possibilities

Having 'good day' and 'bad days'

- Voice cracks and unpredictability
 - Changes in range and vocal quality
 - Loss of previously familiar control
 - Contradictory experiences of improvement and deterioration
 - Emergence of new vocal possibilities
 - Higher notes becoming accessible
 - Lower range developing
 - New repertoire becoming possible
 - Greater technical understanding
 - Adaptation through practice
- 



2: The voice under observation: comparison, judgement and vulnerability

‘I’m not very good at singing’

Social comparison

Perceived gap between self and others

Embarrassment / self-consciousness

‘when they just stare at me...
I feel like it’s bad’

Singing confidence - relational

Who is listening? Friends, classmates,
older students, family, teacher,
strangers

Social exposure → perceived judgement →
vulnerability

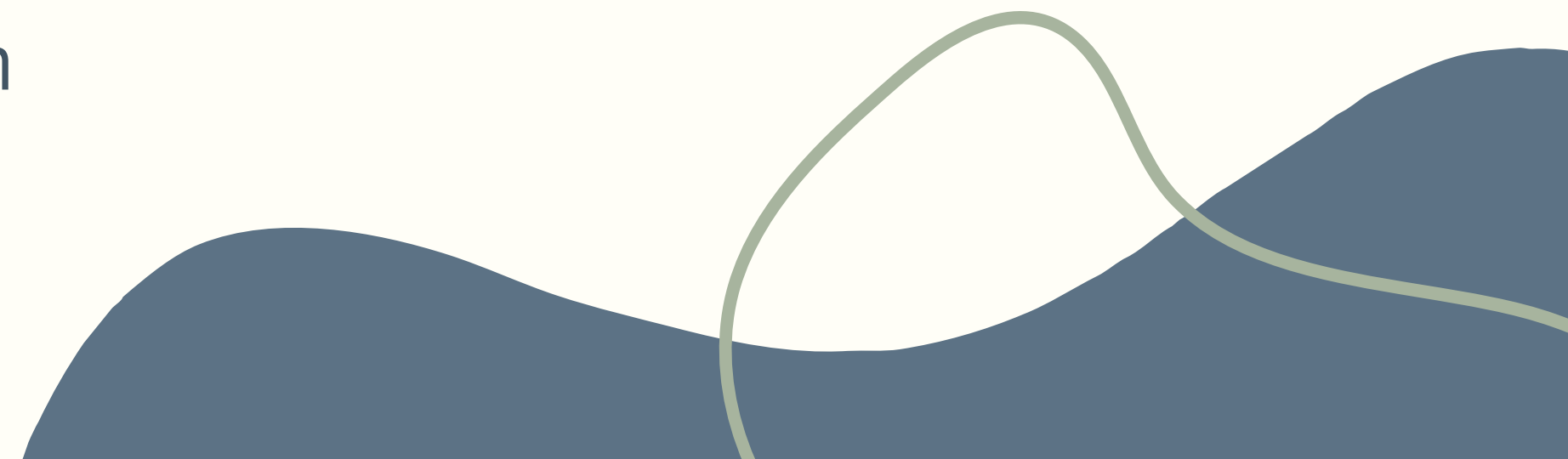




Safe spaces and social shields

‘if I mess up when I'm singing in a choir,
you can't really hear it.’

What reduced vulnerability:

- Home (low pressure)
 - Trusted friends (affirmation)
 - Choir (shared anonymity)
 - Unfamiliar audiences (freedom from established peer identity)
- 

3: Learning to work with the changing voice: developing agency

**Agency = capacity to navigate
uncertainty,
learning to work with, rather than
overcome, the changing voice**

Agency developed through:

Repertoire choice
Practice
Technical knowledge
Adaptation
Teacher support
Performance experience
Acceptance



Having a voice also means having a choice

Agency through meaningful choice

a disliked song ‘like a big ...wall’
blocking off my true potential’

Repertoire

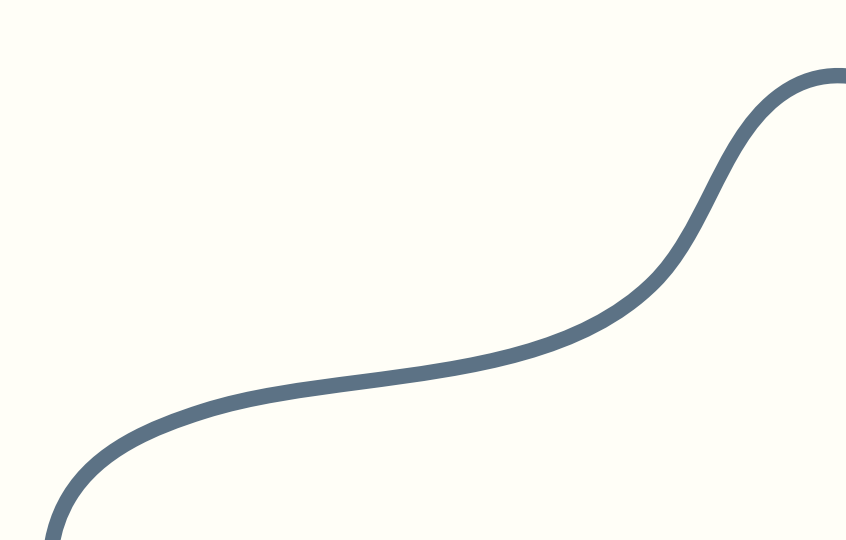
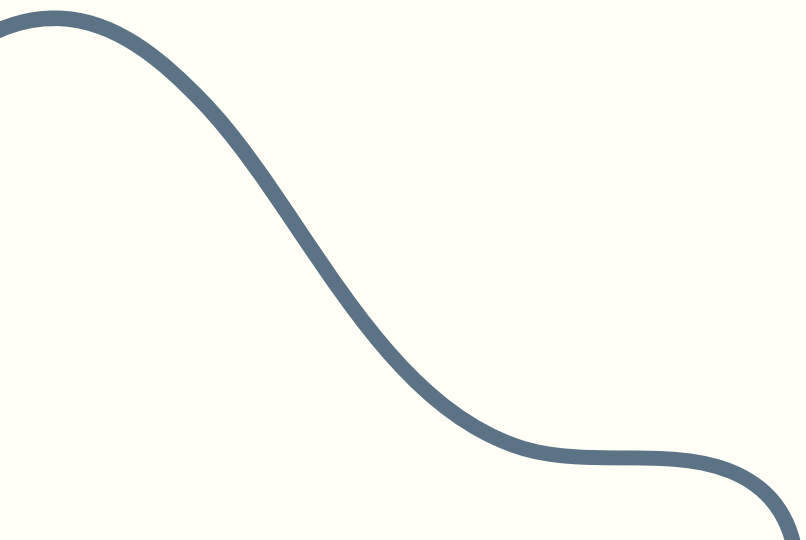
Preferred songs
Appropriate vocal range
Personal relevance

Learning

Feedback
Challenge
Progress
Autonomy

Performance

When? Where?
For whom?

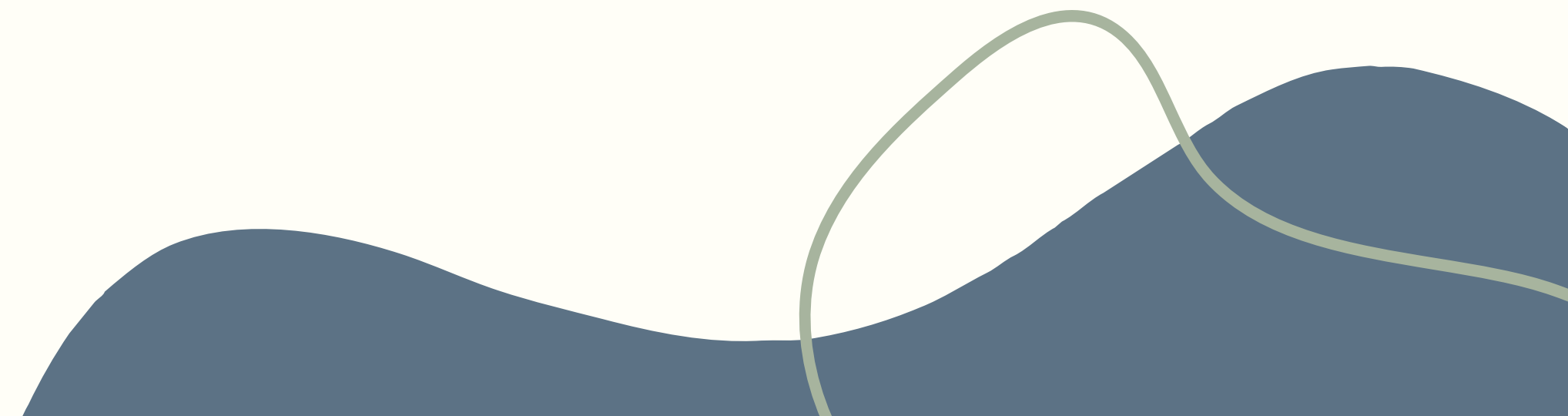




Vocal knowledge becomes meaningful when embodied, actionable and normalising

‘how to manoeuvre around it’

feeling ‘a lot more like okay with my voice like straining or cracking’ if one understands these changes as related to puberty.



Confidence as relational, contextual and dynamic.

Confidence is not a fixed trait

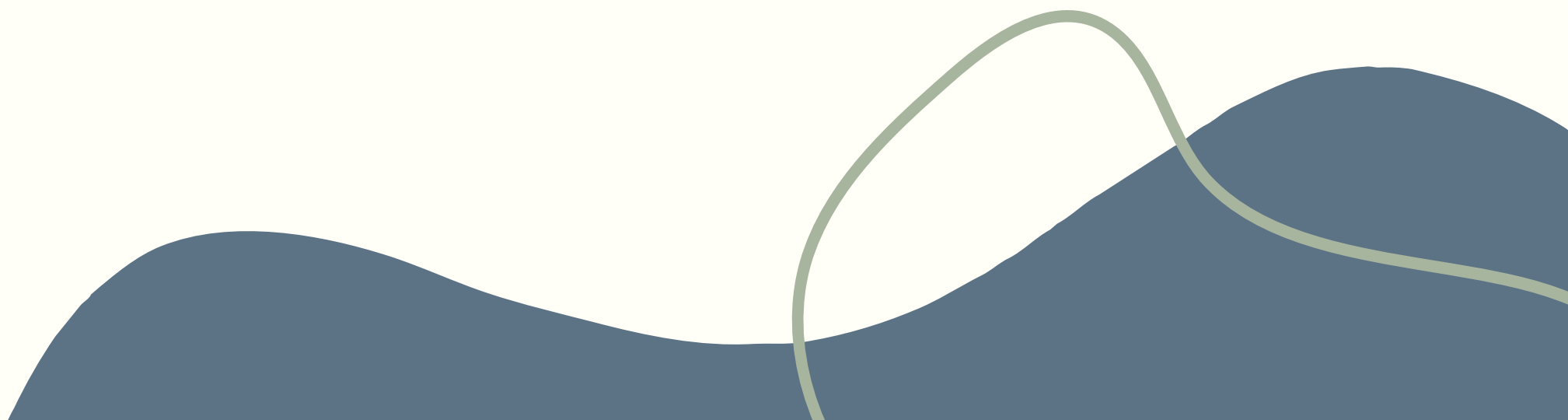
A student could be:

technically capable + anxious

technically uncertain + willing to
perform

confident in a group + vulnerable alone

nervous before performing + confident
once performing



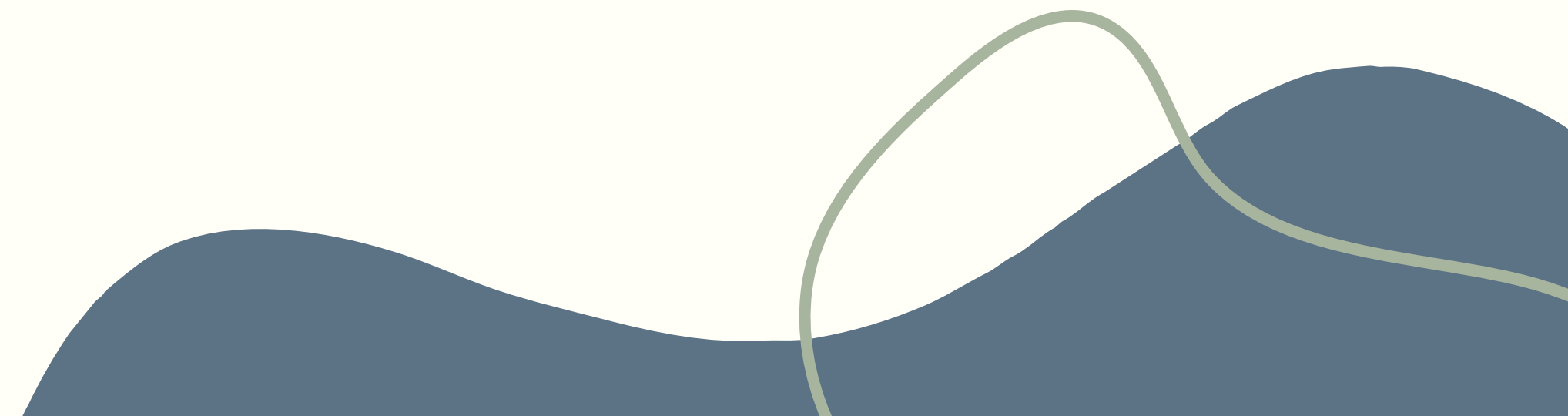


Summary

Negotiating a changing voice: not a linear process, but recursive and context-dependent

Vocal change - Uncertainty- Social exposure - Comparison / judgement - Vulnerability

However, through choice + practice + support + knowledge = Agency
Leading to Confidence / continued engagement



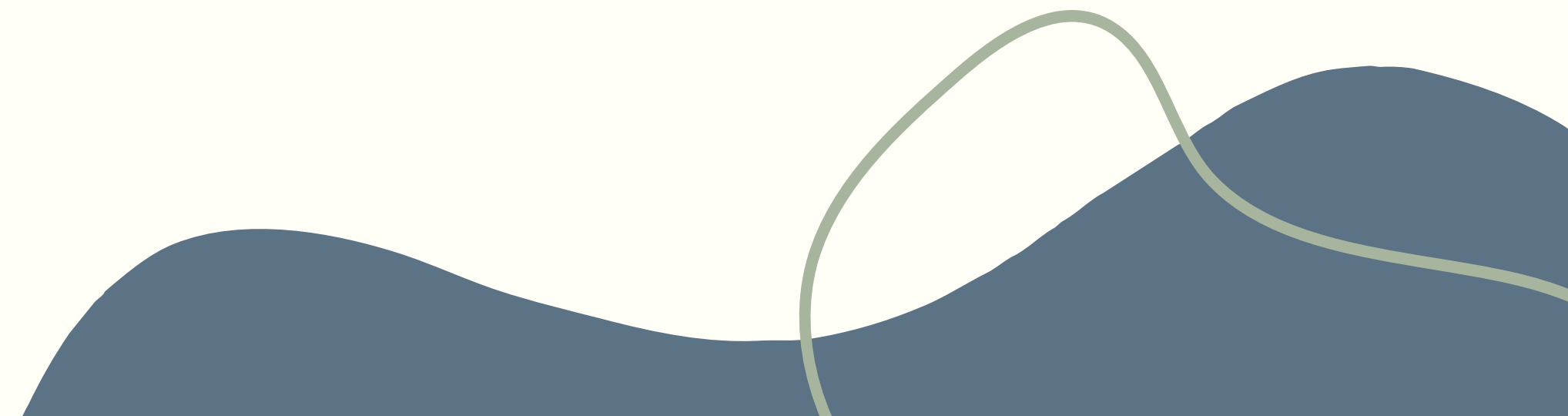


Conclusion

Adolescent vocal identity is negotiated, not fixed.

Learning to sing through vocal change may be less about regaining control and more about learning how to work with uncertainty.

Supporting adolescent singers may be less about helping them regain complete control over a changing voice, and more about helping them learn how to work with uncertainty while maintaining a meaningful sense of agency and belonging as singers.



Limitations and future research

- Small sample: $n = 15$
- All participants female
- No Year 11 participants
- Researcher was participants' teacher
- Findings are contextual, not generalisable

- Male adolescents' experiences of AVC
- Full secondary-school age range
- Longitudinal research
- Peripatetic singing contexts
- Insider/outsider comparative research

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