

BMPF 7005 : Undertaking Research in The Workplace

Critically evaluate a selected range of methodological approaches appropriate for research in work-based settings, with due consideration to research ethics and insider research issues.

Before describing my personal ontological beliefs, I shall first provide general definitions of ontology and epistemology in this study. From there on, I will talk about the two primary theories, positivism and constructionism, while also briefly mentioning pragmatism. I will discuss the two primary methodological strategies, quantitative and qualitative research. I will continue with exploring four key research methodologies : Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Survey and Action research. Before discussing the suitability of a mixed methodologies approach, I will first assess whether each methodology would be suited to my work field. I will next examine two research methods that I believe might be applicable to my work, followed by a discussion of ethical insider research and a conclusion. My field of research is extreme vocal effects in heavy metal music, I am both a teacher and a performer of these styles.

Ontology

I will start with the meaning of Ontology in a philosophical context : the study of what is real, what exists. The nature of reality and its overall structure (Crotty, 1998). Much has been said about reality, the existence of it and multiple realities and as an aspiring voice researcher in the field of extreme vocal effects, I find all these topics very intriguing. Ontological (and epistemological) issues are crucial to the social character of knowledge, interpretation's function, and how well-founded knowledge is. Although the field of extreme vocal effects in which I am doing my research has existed for over thirty years, very little scientific proof exists on the healthy vocal production when it comes to these extreme styles. And since the main difficulty for most of the metal singers that come to me is constriction (and that is a broad topic with many explanations as one can assume), I often find my ontological perspective between realism and relativism. Realism (i.e. an existence of a single reality or truth (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012)), is for me the case where constriction comes as a result of a dysfunction of the larynx and this is confirmed by an SLT doctor. My relativist ontological perspective (i.e. one that recognises that there are many truths, and facts may depend on the individual's viewpoint (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012)) comes as a result of a rather healthy voice with no vocal problems that constricts only when performing extreme vocal effects or even heavy melodic singing.

Epistemology

Epistemology in general, is the assumptions we make about the kind or the nature of knowledge (Richards, 2003) or how it is possible to find out about the world (Snape & Spencer, 2003). For Crotty (1998), epistemology is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. It requires information, and hence, it embodies a certain comprehension of what that knowledge means. Similar to that, but with a focus on the divergent perspectives of how the natural and social worlds should be explored, Bryman defines epistemology as “an issue concerning the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline” (Bryman, 2008, p.13). One’s epistemological assumptions concern how knowledge is formed, can be acquired and can be communicated to others (Cohen, et al., 2011). An individual’s ontological ideas, will determine their epistemology because ontology is linked to their conceptions of the nature of reality. Although in other fields of vocal production and vocal therapy we find numerous strategies and consistent evaluations on the difficulties that a client has to deal with, in the field of extreme vocal effects I can say based on my experience that there is not something formal yet. By numerous strategies I imply methods like the Lax Vox technique, laryngeal massage and semi-occluded vocal tract exercises with a more therapeutic/relaxing approach and endoscopy for the evaluation of the health of the larynx and the vocal mechanism.

My particular area of interest is the healthy production of extreme vocal effects in heavy metal music with Deathcore and Melodic Death being my primary sources of interest. I am interested in discovering the connection between the false vocal folds and the real vocal folds when they sound as one (that will be mixed effects or said differently, combined vocal effects) and how to minimize vocal fatigue and voice abuse while performing in this manner. Additionally, I am curious to know how many amateur and professional singers warm up prior to a performance or practice, and if doing so causes vocal fatigue. My ontological presumptions on the nature of these realities are that there exist actual, concrete facts which, although they may be hard to reveal, are independent of me as researcher (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012). I am aware, though, that this ontological position can seem at odds with my own professional work, in which different clients exhibit a wide range of variations in their reactions to these techniques. Furthermore, these variations may alter over time, causing each person’s reality or truth to change shape in accordance with their experiences. I am interested in discovering the experiences of both amateur and professional metal vocal singers and whether they were positive or negative or something in between. According to this, there may be different truths, based on the experiences of other people, which suggests a relative ontology.

The researcher’s belief system, or overarching perspective of the world, is based on how they connect with ontology (assumptions about the nature of reality) and epistemology (the best techniques to learn about the world) and this forms their paradigm. Three of the most common paradigms are positivism, constructivism and pragmatism.

Positivism

In an effort to create a new theory known as positivism, French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1859), who founded the field of sociology, attempted to combine rationalism and empiricism. (Bhattacharjee, 2012). In the 1800s, Auguste Comte was at the forefront of the development of the positivism paradigm, which is mostly based on science. Comte believed that human behaviour can be explained rationally by studying the social world using reason and observation (Comte, 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe Positivism as associated with an ontological viewpoint in which a specific reality is assumed to exist, and that research can, in principle, reveal this true state of affairs. The positivist epistemology makes the assumption that the researcher is apart from the object under investigation and is able to examine it without being affected by or influenced by it. The underlying methodology is rather unconventional : Empirical tests are conducted on presented hypotheses in controlled conditions to ensure that outcomes are not falsely influenced (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I will dare to say that a positivist paradigm in the practice of extreme vocal effects is made when using for example an endoscopy while extreme phonation to ensure that the person doing this phonation is safe.

Constructivism

Constructivist methodology was developed as an alternative to the Positivist paradigm and was first known as Natural Inquiry. A rival paradigm to the Positivist paradigm at the time, Natural Inquiry was developed, and its methods were viewed as the complete opposite of the Positivist way of thinking. Both anti-positivists and post-positivists reject the notion that human behaviour is regulated by broad, universal principles as well as the perspective of the researcher as an objective, dispassionate observer. They contend that in order to comprehend someone's actions and perspective on the world, the researcher must share that person's frame of reference and see the subject from the inside (Cohen, et al., 2011). In my practice of extreme vocal effects, a constructivist approach may put more emphasis on the effects of the lack of stress or outright tension in the masseter or tongue tension for example, when performing a high pitched fry scream. Each person's response will be different although the difficulty they have to face is more or less the same.

Positivism and constructionism's mutual exclusivity within the same subject, has been suggested through discussions of different paradigms thus far. In any case, a pragmatist approach allows for differing worldviews and different assumptions as well as different forms of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003).

Both positivism and constructionism are not wholly consistent with my preferred paradigm, or my philosophy on extreme vocal effects but I believe I can use them as components to my work. A positivist paradigm is ideally suited to my goal of learning the facts on the prevalence of vocal strain and fatigue among both amateur and professional heavy metal singers. On the other hand, a constructivist paradigm is a helpful lens through which to examine the study of extreme metal singers' experiences of seeking assistance for voice issues. Taking these into account, I might be able to employ a helpful alternate strategy if I adopt a pragmatic viewpoint. The pragmatic paradigm is a very open and free system of research, as the researcher is not tied down by any belief systems and can approach the methods they see fit, using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Morgan, 2014).

Methodological Approaches

Quantitative and qualitative research methods are the two basic approaches used in social science. Each uses a separate set of techniques to give a unique type of data. It is essential to take your research's objectives into account when choosing a research method to make sure you make the right decision.

Quantitative

In general, quantitative research is fact-based and employs methods that are likely to result in quantifiable findings from which it is possible to derive conclusions about the study's findings. Quantitative data offers unbiased information that researchers can utilise to create scientific hypotheses. (Johnson, 2014). A quantitative research topic will require seeing and documenting something that is measurable and is perfect for asking about issues that are comparatively established. One or more hypotheses may be present. A positivist paradigm is in line with the hypothesis since analysis of the outcomes can be used to support or refute it. A theory is advanced, put to the test, and conclusions are drawn in deductive research that is frequently decisive. Comparatively speaking, quantitative research is more organised, logical, quantified, and conducted on a larger scale than qualitative research, which is more intuitive, subjective, and conducted in a more intense manner on fewer subjects. Bouma and Atkinson state: "Some subjects are best investigated using the quantitative approach whilst for others, qualitative approaches will give better results. However in some cases both methods can be used" (Bouma and Atkinson, 1995, p. 208).

Survey

An example of quantitative methodology is survey research. It offers the researcher the chance to gather information from a population in order to ascertain the population's present situation with regard to one or more factors. The survey method is a constructive research methodology and can

be considered as a systematic data collection tool used in large scale investigations (Borg and Gall, 1989, Smith et al., 1994). Whatever tools are used, the main purpose of survey research is to obtain standard information from all subjects in the sample in order to generalise the findings (Gall et al., 1996).

This methodology would appear to be helpful for determining basic statistics on the way amateur and professional singers/teachers approach their extreme vocal effects and whether this has an impact on their vocal production due to strain or heavy constriction for example. The issue with this methodology is making sure the sample population is reflective of the population as a whole. Additionally, it does not even begin to consider the participants' perceptions or sentiments about their technique and vocal health challenges, let alone how those challenges affect their performances and teaching techniques (for both performers and teachers). For instance, some people can find a fry scream with great ease and sustain this scream for thirty seconds while others put heavy constriction to sustain this type of scream and get hoarse almost instantly (which can affect their remaining performance).

Qualitative

The qualitative research model was primarily created for social science research. It involves a specific method in addition to a philosophy. Studies that are naturalistic, ethnographic, participant-observational, case-study-based, subjective, or post-positivist are all included in this category of research. Comparatively, qualitative approaches frequently involve some sort of study in which a theory develops from the evidence gathered, and they are frequently inductive and exploratory. According to Borg and Gall (1989), this kind of study encourages close communication with the respondents. What people divulge to the researcher and the researcher's impressions are the data that come from these exchanges. In order to determine how the data fits with their hypotheses, the researcher may apply their own structure or theories to the data and analyse it deductively. Although this may seem like a very rapid and simple analysis procedure, it is not as versatile as an inductive method. According to Bouma and Atkinson (1995), the essence of qualitative research is to view events through the perspective of the people who are being studied, the way they think, and their view of the world. The researcher must have empathy for the subjects of qualitative research. Despite the possibility of some quantitative data, the analysis is typically qualitative. I find qualitative methods to suit my research in extreme vocal effects very well because this will help me gain extra knowledge and feedback from my participants. Three of the most recognised qualitative methodologies are phenomenology, hermeneutics and action research.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is frequently described as studying the essence. The greatest figure of phenomenology was the mathematician Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology is an experimental method Husserl suggested for studying phenomena where the bare essentials of the contents of consciousness stand out. Husserl attempted to achieve conclusions that were framed within the

parameters of science by starting with empirical data. Husserl aimed to free the researcher from all preconceptions about the world so that they could find out how things appeared directly (Cohen, et al., 2011).

Phenomenology, which places a strong emphasis on the thoughts and beliefs of the person while adopting a more qualitative analytical approach, is viewed as an alternative to positivism, much like the constructivist paradigm. In order to understand and interpret the experiences of people who have performed or taught extreme vocal effects, phenomenological analysis of open-ended survey questions about those experiences may be helpful. It may also show patterns in the approach of different screams and how these patterns are shaped in each situation.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is most frequently described as the art of interpretation. Different types of hermeneutics exist today, ranging from the exegesis of the Bible to radical hermeneutics as a philosophical system. Hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive and non-foundationalist, it examines the interpretive interaction between historical texts and the researcher (Lavery, 2003). Advocates of hermeneutics pay close attention to the setting and period in which the texts were written and carefully evaluate what was going on in the local or cultural context at that time. If I would like to use this methodology to analyse the backgrounds of singers and aspiring teachers in the field of extreme vocal effects and their experiences when they first started, I would recognise myself at that exact same point.

Action Research

Action research is a form carried out by a practitioner. It aims to comprehend how participants interpret a certain phenomena or issue in their practice, community, or place of employment. Additionally, it frequently aims to include participants in the process to some extent in order to address a real-world issue. Social workers, teachers, and health professionals often engage in action research to improve their practice (Stringer, 2014). Action research is one of the few research methodologies currently in use that embraces the ideas of involvement and reflection, as well as the empowerment and emancipation of individuals and groups eager to improve their social circumstances or conditions. "Action research is a collaborative approach to research that provides people with the means to take systematic action in an effort to resolve specific problems" (Berg, 2001, p.180). Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) also describe the action research process as a spiral of activity: plan, act, observe, and reflect. I find that this methodology represents my personal practise on extreme phonations. I use observation and supervision at my lessons and my students need to explain their choices when it comes to volume and constriction/contraction so that we can have a clear view on what they are doing.

I believe that both quantitative and qualitative approaches can benefit my research. On the one hand, the quantitative method is better suited for questions that are somewhat specific since it is more objective, works with numerical and statistical analysis and is less time-consuming. This would be ideal when it comes to heavy metal singers (and teachers) and the problems they deal with since there is almost no statistical analysis on this subject. However, due to the fact that it focuses on what is or has been, it is not very useful for the participants to make decisions about the future. On the other hand, qualitative approaches, such as participant observations and characteristics, may give new knowledge about the what and the why, can elicit very rich data and provide us with genuine insights into the lives and cultures of certain participant groups, perhaps enhancing our understanding of those groups. This is again beneficial for the data concerning extreme phonations and heavy metal music. But still, the process of gathering and analysing data might take time, and the outcomes may not seem objective. In any case, since my field of research is relatively "new" with not much scientific evidence, I could use the strong points of both approaches.

Mixed Methods

Mixed methods combine elements of both quantitative research and qualitative research in order to answer your research question. The advantage of using a mixed methods approach is that the researcher can examine the "ifs" and "whys" of a human experience by combining both quantitative and qualitative data. A researcher is an investigator. When a researcher simply employs one method, they fall short of realising the full potential of their research. Individuals' in depth thoughts from various viewpoints and experiences would be the data that would be excluded in a quantitative study and statistical data obtained from measurements would be the missing data in a qualitative investigation. So when your research requires statistical and naturalistic observations to address validity, it is beneficial to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches (mixed methods). As I have already mentioned, in my field of expertise which is extreme vocal effects in heavy metal music, very little research has been done and most of it derives from Complete Vocal Institute where they use test singers performing with a camera down their throat to record the exact movement of the whole vocal mechanism. This is a strong starting point. Additional research methods, in my opinion, will help throw some light on how these effects are produced in a healthy way.

Research Methods

When conducting a research project, there are numerous methods to take into account. In order to make sure the route they are taking is best suited for the answers they are seeking to achieve.

Denscombe advises the researcher to think about their approach and the benefits and drawbacks of their selected research methodologies (Denscombe, 2003).

Regarding my own research project, I will select a variety of methodologies to take into account as I am open to both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Interviews

Interviews are conducted if the researcher decides their project requires some in depth information from a specialist in the field they are researching (Denscombe, 2003). DeMarrais defines a research interview as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (DeMarrais, 2004, p. 55). The most typical form of interview is a one-on-one conversation in which one person seeks information from another. Collecting a specific kind of information is the primary goal of an interview. Having been in the Greek underground scene for many years and considering the recent increase in the interest of extreme vocal effects, I am aware of many people who would be willing to assist me in my research. However, it is still essential to decide whether to have a structured, unstructured or semi-structured interview.

Structured interviews include precise control over both the questions asked and the answers provided which can make data collecting more manageable but can also limit the amount of detail that can be learned. Example : What is your preferred or most used method for screaming?

Unstructured interviews seek to reveal the subject's real opinions on the matter. This type of interview can produce a lot more information and potentially result in a discovery, however it can also imply laborious data transcription. Example : What are your strengths and weaknesses in regards to your screaming technique?

Semi-structured interviews still contain a set of questions intended to extract specific information, but the questions are open-ended and permit the interviewee to openly discuss the subject (Denscombe, 2003). Example : How often per week do you practise your screaming technique?

Focus Groups

A focus group is an organised conversation about a certain topic for research purposes. This discussion is guided, monitored and recorded by a researcher, sometimes called a moderator or facilitator (Morgan, 1998). Focus groups typically have six to eight participants, which is a manageable amount to allow for varied and free flowing discussion of the subject at hand without drowning out any individual voices (Denscombe, 2003). A focus group can provide the researcher with more data than individual interviews because it allows participants to exchange

ideas and question one another's viewpoints, which results in a more varied set of data for the researcher to collect (Morgan, 1996).

A facilitator is urged to think about which participants to employ at all times in order to have the best results. A focus group that is successful will have interaction. This means that for research reasons, sometimes stranger groups interact better than already existing ones (Gil et al, 2008). I have a couple of options for recruiting participants, which would make this research project easier to facilitate. Data from people who work and train within the Greek metal scene would be useful, thus a few focus groups would be the most effective way to get this information. Given that most of my participants will come from the same scene, it is probable that they already know one another. Hopefully, this familiarity will encourage honesty and open discussion. As the facilitator it is important to keep the group focused without leading the conversation, while ensuring strong personalities do not dominate the conversation. In addition to this, keeping track of time is crucial to avoid a lengthy transcribing process (Gill et al, 2008).

Ethics

It is crucial to take the researcher's ethical responsibilities into account before any research project can start. According to Lincoln and Guba (1997) by treating participants as humans in their entirety rather than as "things" of scientific investigation, a researcher is already more likely to have a better ethical posture while employing a naturalistic paradigm. Regardless of the paradigm, Sangay (2012) argues that the following ethical beliefs should be part of our research's ethical code :

1. Honesty (honestly reporting methods, procedures, data and results).
2. Objectivity (avoiding bias in experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, grant writing, expert testimony, and other aspects of research, disclosing personal or financial interests).
3. Integrity (keeping promises and agreements, acting with sincerity, striving for consistency of thought and action)
4. Carefulness (avoiding careless errors and negligence, carefully and critically examining one's own work, keeping good records of research)
5. Openness (being open to criticism)
6. Respect for intellectual property (giving credit where credit is due, never plagiarising)
7. Confidentiality

8. Responsible publication (publishing in order to advance research and scholarship, not to advance just own career, avoiding wasteful and duplicative publication)

Additionally, it could be necessary for participants to fill out a consent form, which will explain the research being done, their part in it, and their freedom to leave the study at any time. (Denscombe, 2003). I find all the above ethical principles very important for my research project. The research on extreme vocal effects especially in heavy metal genres such as Deathcore and Progressive/Djent counts only a couple of years of existence. People are still very shy when it comes to explaining what they are doing and how they are approaching their sounds so knowing that there is a safe environment for research will make them feel more open and spontaneous.

Insider Research

Insider researchers can be defined in a variety of ways, but generally speaking, insider researchers are individuals who choose to study a group to which they belong, whereas outsider researchers do not belong to the group being studied (Breen, 2007). Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) outlined three major benefits of becoming an insider researcher : a) Having a greater understanding of the culture being studied, b) Not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally and c) Having an established intimacy which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth. Being an insider researcher has many benefits, but there are drawbacks as well. For instance, a loss of objectivity may result from increased familiarity. Additionally, the insider researcher getting access to private data could be another problem. Bias can be defined as an unconscious error in judgment about the study procedure based on the researcher's prior knowledge (DeLyser, 2001, Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). The focus of educational research, however, is on people and their behaviour, involving a number of participants who each provide a variety of viewpoints to the research process, including the researcher's own perspective.

I have been instructing students in extreme vocal effects for more than ten years, and I have been performing these effects for almost twenty. I think that all of these years of professional experience working as a performer and a teacher have really aided in my ability to grasp and get familiar with a variety of difficulties. They also provided me with a useful viewpoint that I may use as an insider researcher. Throughout the collecting and processing of the data for my research, I am aware of and abide by strict ethical standards.

Conclusion

My goal is to carry out a project based on my work, looking at the safe production of extreme vocal effects, the anatomy behind the different types of screaming in heavy metal music and a structured plan for both performing and teaching these effects. Interest around this topic has increased drastically and I hope that I will be able to offer some solid information based on my experience. In

the beginning of Module 2 when I was given all this access to information on paradigms, qualitative and quantitative approaches, mixed methods and so on, I was so unsure on whether I could use them in my research project in an effective way. I could not find the connection between the literature and my desired field.

I feel more confident now that I will be able to do something meaningful related to teaching strategies. I was able to think about my own beliefs and decide which paradigms best reflected them after learning about the philosophical foundations of research. Reading other people's research, has made me aware of how simple it is to become preoccupied with your paradigm, ontological perspective, and epistemological viewpoint and lose sight of what is crucial. Reading and learning more on mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative research, gave me new ideas on approaching extreme vocal effects in a more educational manner. A deeper insight could be achieved through interviews and focus groups appear achievable and could provide a variety of data.

To conclude, I am eager to start my research journey using the mixed methods approach on extreme vocal effects and find out how to design effective teaching strategies in a healthy vocal production.

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