

Voices from the Studio

Experienced singing teachers discuss the ways in which they *conceptualise* and *enact* the translation of vocal science in singing pedagogy and the role of strategic imagery frameworks in that process

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Why do this?

- Natural progression from previous academic exploration of imagery
- Enhance my pedagogical practice
- Knowledge creation and dissemination
- Positioning the grassroots practitioner's voice as a legitimate and irreplaceable source of knowledge
- The use of imagery in singing pedagogy is a fundamental human, creative, responsive form of expertise that cannot be replicated by AI and is worth preserving and cataloguing

Why Imagery Matters in Vocal Pedagogy

The challenges of teaching singing

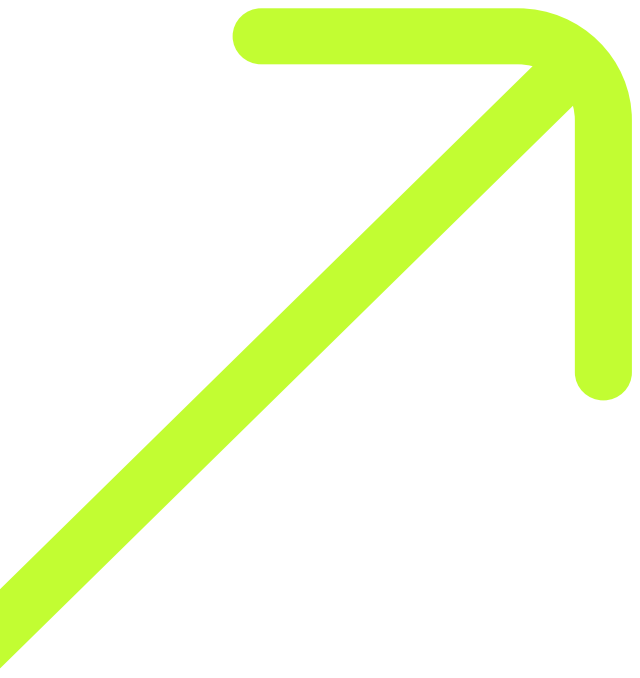
- Inherently covert activity (Brown, 2022; Madill, 2025; Moss Erickson, 2025)
- Singing is complex
- Process is neither linear nor logical (Obert, 2023)
- Diversity of abilities and ages and genres
- Requires somatic awareness (Brown, 2022)
- Translational tool of science



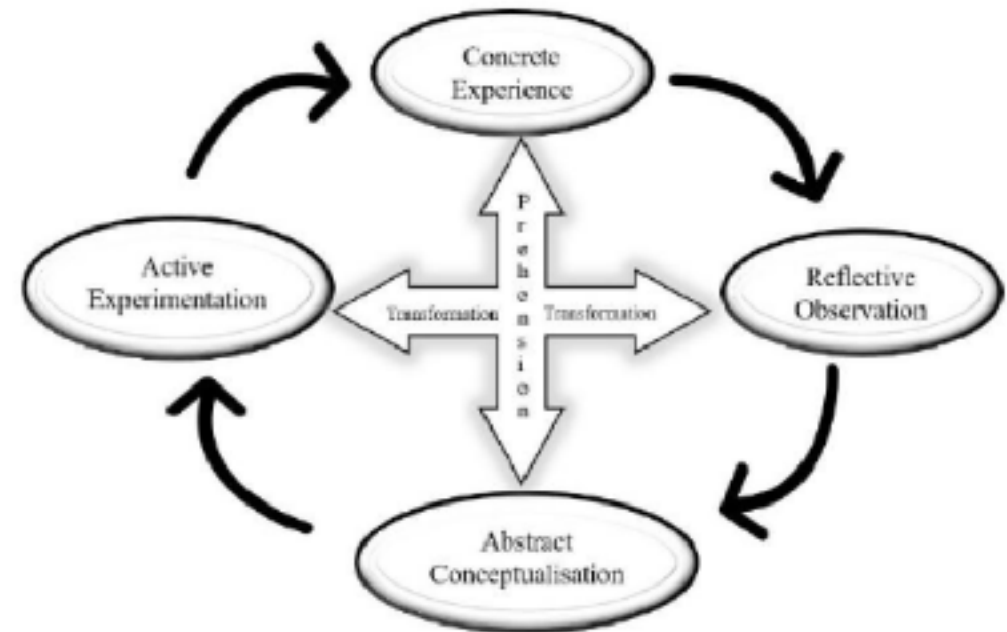
“In the absence of theoretical knowledge, misconceptions and superstition rage” Sundberg (2025)

Bridging the gap between “Knowing That” and “Knowing How” (Ryle, 1949)

- "A teacher's knowledge has little value to the learner if the teacher cannot find a way into the learner's mind" Holding (2020, p98)



‘Knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ process represented in **Kolb’s 4.01 Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)**. The learner must first experience the ‘prehension’ (grasping) stages which leads to the ‘transformation’ process depicted in the horizontal axis



What is Voice Science (“Knowing That”)?

‘Voice science’ may be defined as the interdisciplinary study of the physiological, acoustic, neurological and psychological processes involved in voice production, perception and pedagogy. Alongside biomechanics and acoustics, *neuroscience* and *cognitive science* has expanded the scope of vocal science.

(LeBorgne et al., 2025; Sundberg, 1989; The Voice foundation, 2025; Zhang, 2016).

The Research Gap

The Problem

Sophisticated studies on physiology & acoustic, however...

Limited documentation of practical translation

Gap between research and studio practice

The Opportunity

Wealth of anecdotal practitioner experience...

Complements existing authority publications *

Captures tacit, embodied knowledge

Aims

Aims

To enhance my pedagogical practice as a singing teacher through exposure to colleagues' methods, strategies, and theoretical frameworks.

To build on previous research

To create 'useful' research

To gain a Masters degree to allow for employment opportunities

To expand my professional network and raising my profile within the vocal pedagogy community

* Chapman, 2006; Holding, 2020; Leborgne et al., 2024; Caesari, 1944

Lens Theory (Wiltsher, 2019, 2022)

Lens Theory illuminates how imagination functions as a dynamic, procedural mechanism focusing, filtering, magnifying and transforming abstract concepts into embodied experience. Allows for the ability to select, adapt, refine, and co-create imagery in real-time response to student needs.



Humanistic, Qualitative
Phenomenological methodology to
capture tacit, embodied knowledge of
expert practitioners through
Tanya Participants targeted

- Semi-structured interviews with experienced teachers
- Focus on experiential knowledge

(Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Moustakis1994; Polayni, 1966)

- Pivot on questionnaires
- Zoom interviews - AI transcription
- Delve software for deductive/ inductive coding
- Creation of Imagery matrix: strategies, outcomes, modalities
- EBVP (Evidence-Based Voice Pedagogy) where no scientific explanation exists but 'truth' is considered evidence

Approach

Process



Methodology

Ethical Considerations

- The Singing teacher as researcher
- Advantages of insider status
- Challenges and mitigation strategies
- Consent / anonymity and attribution
- Protection of Intellectual Copyright ($n=10$ agreeing to be named)
- Trustworthiness & true representation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

What happened?

13
Elite
practitioners

72
Imagery
examples

11
Key
Themes

5
Grassroots
Pedagogical
frameworks

Participant Quality

Elite practitioners with varied professional backgrounds across voice pedagogy

Ethical protocol: informed consent, intellectual property considerations, withdrawal rights

The Imagery Matrix



Connecting imagery strategies to physiological outcomes

72 documents examples across multiple modalities

Key Findings

Proprietary Frameworks

- ➔ 5 unpublished pedagogical systems identified
- ➔ Systematic approaches developed through practice
- ➔ Evidence of grassroots innovation

Divergent / convergent Approaches

- ➔ Whole body vs. isolated approaches
- ➔ Teacher background influences strategy choice
- ➔ No single 'correct' methodology
- ➔ Co-construction of imagery
- ➔ Cross disciplinary approach

Critical Insights

- ➔ **Multimodal Necessity**
No single imagery modality works universally
- ➔ **Science as a Tool**
Understanding physiology helps devise strategies
- ➔ **Beyond science**
Not all effective techniques have scientific explanations
- ➔ **Documentation Value**
Grassroots experience filling research gap

Participant quotes

“Lip synching creates a relationship between how you imagine what you do, how you do it physically and how it actually happens. Playing with different realms of imagination” Mossman (2025)

“voice production is inseparable from full-body coordination.”
(Participant A)

“It’s important for a teacher to live it in their own body” (Participant B)

Emergent question for pedagogy



What does a singing teacher actually need to know to be effective?



The answer perhaps lies in the **WAYS** in which knowledge is assimilated and communicated to the student

Emergent insights

Mossman's Actualisation Triangle

- *Conceptualisation* (imagining), *Physicalisation* (embodying through lip syncing or movement) and *Actualisation* (performing with voice). Non-linear, iterative process.
- “Playing with different realms of imagination”
- Leans into *bio-tensegrity* and *fascia*

Byrne's Cognitive-Associative-Autonomous Learning framework

- leveraging existing neural pathways
- “What do I already understand that is a shortcut for me to get where I need to go?”
- Use of gaze for performance anxiety
- Tuning fork on face and skull

Emergent insights

Burke's Twang Farm

- Drawn imagistic framework using animal sounds
- Visual and conceptual roadmap for vocal versatility
- System filters complexity (Wiltsher, 2019,2022)
- Playful, reduces inhibition
- Reflects training as SLP

Weiss's Breaking Down the Riffs (BDTR)

- Auditory processing, spatial-imagery feedback and gestures
- Attention to specific melodic contours, rhythmic patterns, and tonal qualities by translating abstract musical notation into spatial-visual representations.
- Introduces concept of chunking (Miller, 1956)
- Reflects Weiss's own learning

Emergent insights

Howell's Absolute Spectral Tone Colour (ASTC)

- Sound frequencies as bright and dark and that vowels possess tone 'colours'
- Emphasises behavioural understanding of vocal function before aesthetic refinement
- Highlights *Perception-Production Paradox*
- Bayesian approach to antique classical pedagogy

Kutsal's Colour Wheel

- Informed by Howell's ASTC
- Multiple modalities for learning
- Inspires wider range of colour possibilities

Emergent insights

Brown's published Clean Language Model

- Feedback must be precisely reproduced, using the student's own words
- Singing as powered and generated through emotional responses and communication
- Uses Damasio's Somatic Marker Hypothesis

Participant A

- Chekhov's psychological gestures
- Removes moments of disconnect between the imagination and the body's ability to express it
- Listener perception (third person v first person)

Imagery essential
for optimal
learning outcomes

All imagery
modalities enable
translation of
scientific
observation into
practical
applications

Science Helps

Understanding
vocal science
aids strategy
development, but
isn't always
available

Documentation

Practitioner
experiences must
be captured to
advance the field

Student centred
co-constructed

Imagery must be
meaningful to
individual. Teacher
facilitates student
generated imagery

Cross-
disciplinary
practices

Enriches
pedagogical
practice

Strong links between personal learning experiences and pedagogical philosophy; injury, training, performance experience

No one way to teach singing!

Conclusions

Professional practice

Implemented new strategies into my teaching practice; learned through interviews and literature review. More effective teacher through this experience. New learning will inform my practice for years to come

Professional Development

Built professional network across voice pedagogy community

The creation of useful research

Imagery Matrix and discussion with elite teachers may contribute to pedagogy literature that can be adapted by novice teachers

Key learning

Helding describes the differences between **learning** and **performance**; “learning is messy and chaotic, frustrating and rewarding”, while performance draws together all the learned skills. Singing lessons are invariable about learning **not** about performance and both teacher and student should be aware of this (Helding, 2021)

Personal and professional development

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