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.

In order to begin my work-based research project, I must first delve into my own “intent or motivation for undertaking a study” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 1994, p. 38). As a Voice teacher, it is my priority to provide my students with the most up to date knowledge, skills and techniques within my practice, this is my primary focus as I plan for my research project. Mertens (2005) describes the definition of research as being “influenced by the researcher's theoretical framework" (Mertens, 2005, p. 2). It is important that I develop my ‘theoretical framework’ and consider my own personal values when conducting my research with the development of my students needs in mind.

John Creswell (1994, pp. 4–5) clearly breaks down the qualities of quantitative and qualitative paradigms and describes them as a matrix of ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological beliefs which make up the structure in managing research. In this essay I will break down these methods in hope to discover my preferred paradigm which will enable me to undergo my research.

It is essential to have a good understanding of my ontological and epistemological positioning in order to discover which paradigm reflects my point of view.

Ontology defined by Willig (2019, p. 187) as being “concerned with what exists”, and “a theory of being”. Morgan (2007, p. 57) refers to ontology as the nature of reality while, Guba & Lincoln (1994, p. 108) question “What is there that can be known about it?”. All theories are formed on an ontology, this is because a theory requires a definite process to exist, a person's own ontology is to express what they assume exist (Willig, 2019, p. 187). I question what I would consider as my ‘nature of reality’ and what are things I ‘assume exist’ in my role as a singing teacher. In my position, I work with different age groups and abilities, I recognise that every individual has a different view of what they perceive as their own reality. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) demonstrates this theory of ontology very clearly with an example based around a workplace report, the report asks

whether it reflects the truth, or if it only reflects what the author ‘believes’ to be the truth. They describe the complications that can occur when considering factual circumstances. For example, culture, power, and what is known to exist, or if it is merely a figment of the imagination. With this in mind, it is important that I acknowledge that we all have deep rooted ontological assumptions which will have an impact on our vision of what is real and what needs to be considered as a researcher.

Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and the possibilities and limitations that are obtained from it. Epistemology asks what distinguishes actual knowledge (Willig, 2019, p. 187). It is believed that one should go beyond their own understandings and encounters and be open to the unknown in order to achieve this. As a researcher you must take into consideration the accuracy of methods and possible ways of learning what is reality. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) raise an interesting query, ‘knowing how you can know’ questioning how knowledge is created and at what basis can we determine what is good knowledge and what is bad? What is the correct way for reality to be described? They also raise the importance of the relationship between epistemology and ontology, how they are interchangeable and how they both rely on each other within the research process (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006).

I ask myself these questions and how they would relate to my practice, I believe that there can be many different ways to clarify the knowledge you seek and various interpretations of reality which depend on the individual's outlook. My particular interest as a vocal teacher is based around those who experience Music Performance Anxiety (MPA). What are the causes of MPA, the signs and symptoms that occurs, how it can affect the voice and what are the best ways to overcome it? These are all questions that I need to ask in order to build a theory behind my research. It is vital that I enter this study with an open mind and with acceptance of others views and emotions. I believe that my ontological positioning is based on the idea that there are multiple reasonings around the questions I wish to research. How one person may experience MPA may vary as well as the cause and the solution. Based on my area of questioning I believe that a relative ontology would suit my methods of research best.

Paradigms

Bogdan & Biklen (1998, p. 22) describe a 'paradigm' as a varied group of logically connected ideas that position a way of thinking and direction of research. Whilst Cohen & Manion (1994, p. 38) describe a paradigm as the philosophical motive for pursuing a study. Mac Naughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) had an interesting way of defining a paradigm as having three elements: ‘a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology and criteria for validity’ (Naughton, Rolfe, Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p. 36). There are different paradigms that are specifically used based around your research theories and what they stand for. Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) list a number of theoretical paradigms that are considered in literature such as: positivist (and postpositivist), constructivist, interpretivist, transformative, emancipatory, critical, pragmatism and deconstructivism.

A **positivist** and Post positivist paradigm can be known as a 'scientific method' or 'science research' that is usually applied to the social world (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This idea has been formed with the understanding that "the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method for studying the social world that is value free, and that explanations of a causal nature can be provided" (Mertens, 2005, p. 8). Whilst O'Leary (2004, p. 5) states that a Positivist will set out to trial a theory or report an encounter by observing or quantifying what powers the forces that surround us.

The transition from Positivism to post-positivism occurred after the second world war (Mertens, 2005). A Postpositivist view is that research is shaped by many different theories that have been tested and well established (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 24). O’Leary breaks down his view of post positivism by stating that "what might be the truth for one person or cultural group may not be the "truth" for another" (O’Leary, 2004, p. 6). O’Leary (2004, pp. 6-7) also outlines that post-positivism has an instinctual and rational approach to its findings that are classed as qualitative in its variety. O’Leary’s interpretation of postpositivism conflicts with the views of Mertens (2005) which seem to be the preferred definition for postpositivism (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) and describes postpositivists to “Modify their claims to understandings of truth based on probability rather than certainty.” (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). Although there is a shift between

positivism and post- positivism, the post-positivist will still approach reality with an objective outlook but acknowledges the difficulties that could occur (Trochim, 2006).

The **constructivist** paradigm also recognised as Interpretivism, was formed from the knowledge of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's study of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Mertens, 2005, p. 12, citing Eichelberger, 1989). The approach for a constructivist is to set out research with the purpose of recognising "the world of human experience" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36). Unlike post positivists, Constructivists would prefer to develop a theory through meanings and would rather collect information from the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p. 8).

The **transformative** paradigm emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, Mertens (2005) believe the beginning of the transformative paradigm is due to discontent of existing and dominant research paradigms and practices. Mertens (2005) highlights the sociological concerns with previous research paradigms and emphasises that they were not inclusive to society and "had been developed from the white, able-bodied male perspective and was based on the study of male subjects" (Mertens, 2005 p.17). Transformative researchers had the opinion that the interpretivist/constructivist attitude to forming research did not raise the matters of social justice and marginalised groups appropriately (Creswell, 2003, p. 9). Creswell states the views of a transformative researcher to "believe that inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda" (Creswell, 2003, p. 9). With political agenda in mind, they often curated studies with the intention to try and “change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life" (Creswell, 2003, pp. 9-10).

A **pragmatist** will center their attention on the 'what' and 'how' of the research question (Creswell, 2003, p. 11), and are not devoted to any one view of philosophy or reality. Feilzer (2010) believes that the pragmatic paradigm can offer a clear path for the researcher to discover their own theories without limiting themselves to one ideology and framework. Feilzer (2010) favors the flexibility of the pragmatic paradigm as it is known to be open to change when perceiving reality and has described other paradigms to be paralysing to the researcher using one methodology.

After a breakdown of the different paradigms, I can see the positives of each ideology and how they would be useful when undergoing research within voice pedagogy. For example, O'leary's (2004) interpretation of the post-positivist, what might be true for one person may not be the "truth" for another". However, I feel that Mertens (2005) view is the outlook of most who choose the post-positive paradigm and although we must be open to individual opinion, there must also be evidence to honor their theories. Within my role as a voice teacher, I naturally have a person-centered approach to my work, I believe that I should reflect this by including the participants views and experiences. This ideology could be suited to the frame work of a constructivist view, who form their theories around those of the people involved and believe that the truth can be dependent on the individuals experiences. However, I do not believe this to be completely true. We must take into consideration that someone's personal experiences could also warp their own view of reality. For example, those who have a negative experience with singing during their past, may believe that they will never be able to sing and could present this personal thought to themselves as a fact. A transformative view could be an interesting approach to my research as I do believe there are some elements of politics involved around the arts. I believe that there is a divide when it comes to available opportunities within the working class and that there is not enough accessible exposure to music within the educational system for those who might not be able to afford lessons.

I believe that a pragmatic paradigm would be most compatible with the research I wish to complete. The open approach to the idea of different philosophies and realities along with a focus of the 'what' and 'how' is appealing when working with people from different walks of life. However, a mixed methods approach combining pragmatic and transformative paradigms, could be a viable option.

There are three main routes of research methods that I could choose from which are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods.

A **quantitative** method will usually involve the use of numbers and statistics. Almeida et al (2017) describes quantitative research to usually be conducted as large studies and classed as illustrative of the population. The results of a quantitative trial are often set out as if they amount to a universal and diversified view of the whole population

(Almeida et al, 2017, p. 370). A Quantitative study is usually less time consuming compared to the qualitative method and the results created can cover a wider population due to the ability to conduct research with larger groups (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012). Easterby-Smith, et al (2012) highlight the limitations of quantitative approach by claiming that the research produced does not allow the understanding of the process or substance that an individual would attach to their actions. The quantitative method can also restrict the factor of coming up with theories due to the outlook of focusing on the ‘what is’ or ‘what has been', limiting the development of helping to decide on future actions (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012). For example, I could measure how many out of a group of amateur singer's experience MPA with the use of a questionnaire and record the results in chart format. However, the collection of data would not allow me to form an understanding of the cause or development of the MPA within the individual.

Qualitative research is the opposite to quantitative research in the sense that it does not focus on the inclusion of numerical representation and instead focuses on the strengths of the insights of the problem that are presented. The purpose of qualitative practice is to construct in-depth and expository knowledge to create a better understanding of the various aspects of the issues that are presented under analysis. If I choose a qualitative approach to my research, it would allow me to focus on gaining a better understanding of how individuals view their own experiences, how they form their existence in the world, and what significance they bring to their experiences (Merriam &Tisdell, 2016, p. 24).

Merriam and Tisdel (2016) describe some of the common characteristic of qualitative research, as often featuring the researcher as the primary tool for gathering data and analysis. The reason for this is because, as humans we are able to instantly respond and adapt to the data that is collected. A positive element for the researcher collecting the data, is that the person who is leading the research can widen their understanding through a range of different ways, readily process the data that is collected, check with the participants if they have interpreted the information that has been provided correctly and allows them to investigate further if there have been any unpredictable responses. However, there have been concerns that through this method there might be some biases responses that could influence the study. Peshkin (1988, p. 18) argues that a

researcher's subjectivities “can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected.” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 18). Instead of trying to eradicate the biases views of the researcher, it is important instead to recognise them with observation in relation to the theoretical framework and the researcher's own regard. It has been argued that it is better to make it clear how these biases may be forming the analysis of data. (Merriam &Tisdell, 2015, p.16).

The data obtained through qualitative research is not practical for statistical analysis, it does not always set out to demonstrate a hypothesis and can be influenced by subjective views. The process of gathering data can take time to produce and the results may appear bias and maybe seen as an unreliable contribution to science by those who favour the quantitative method (Anderson, 2010). However, qualitative studies can also provide substantial data and allows access to real insights within culture and the understanding to particular groups within society.

Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative methods within the same study. The development of mixed methods has grown over the years and although this combination has not been a new method for researchers the combination of qualitative and quantitative data became recognised as a research methodology in the 1980s (Denscombe, 2008).

The central reasoning for the use of mixed methods within a study is to provide a better understanding of the problems that occur in your chosen research area. The decision to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches would help to produce a better understanding of the research and any complex circumstance that can occur more than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). A clearer perception of results can be discovered by assessing one set of outcomes with another which strengthens the sustainability of conclusion. Some other advantages of mixed methods research are achieving an explanation of the results from one practice with the discoveries from the other, using the results from one practice to help the development of the other and it

can contribute to the expansion of the scale in question by using varied methods for different questionable elements (Greene, Caracelli, Graham,1989).

There are some issues that come with the use of mixed methods research, Bryman (2007) highlights the challenges that occur when conducting a mixed method study, the amount of time it takes to run a study for example. The time it can take to run a qualitative or quantitative can be lengthy so a researcher must be open to the time it would take to collect data through mixed methods. There is also the cost financially and the extension of knowledge that is involved that could be seen as an inconvenience to the researcher. However, I would argue that the choice of mixed methods is beneficial for the researcher to expand their knowledge and contribute greatly to their chosen research subject.

After assessing the main three methodologies I would like to summarise how I believe each method would benefit my research. I think quantitative research would be useful for my practice in order to record the statistics of students who have experienced MPA and the extent it has affected their performance. I could do this with the use of a survey and record the data that is collected in a chart to show these figures. However, in order for my research to make a substantial contribution to the practice of voice pedagogy, I would need a large number of participants to partake in the study. This could be an obstacle for a teacher like myself who runs a small private practice and who does not have guaranteed access to a large number of candidates who are willing to be a part of the study.

A Qualitative method seems to be better suited for a smaller study which is the most likely form for my research project. A vocal teacher has practical access to clients whom they can interview and discuss the reasoning behind the answers in depth with. The main obstacle with this type of research is the risk of biasness, which is something that would need to be made clear before conducting the study.

In order to record credible results within my study, it is an option to approach my research with mixed methods. The combination of interviews and statistics would be seen by the researcher as more substantial. The practicalities of a mixed method approach would need to be addressed as although the results would be more evident, I would need to assess the time it may consume to run this study.

Methodologies

Amongst quantitative and qualitative research there are many forms of methodologies to collect the data that you wish to record.

Action research is known as an “inquiry teachers undertake to understand and improve their own practice” (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990, p. 144). As a voice teacher I may look into my method of teaching and try to improve my skills to advance my learning (Jones, Kaufman & Rudd, 2004). It is recognised as a process that provides emphasis on correcting issues in a practical manner. It is usually practiced by professionals and educators and can involve critical reflection, research and action that prioritises on improving in areas of your work. It involves collecting information and observing the actions that have formed your practice in the past and assessing what actions you would require to improve these areas (Kusumarasdyati, 2016).

Ethnography is distinguished by lengthened participant observation as an essential practice. A researcher will spend an extended time in a social group with the aim to gather data (Morgan-Trimmer, Wood, 2016, p. 1). Berg (2001, p. 56) informs us that throughout history, it has been known for ethnographic research to have been handled in a concealed approach in order to increase the outcome for more viable information to be discovered. The ethical issues that surround ethnography have been a debate amongst researchers in the past (Bell and Wynn, 2021). However, Bosk (2007) argues those who complain are often lacking in reflecting on the ethical issues of ethnographic approaches and may even be objectifying these methods in order for the return of past methods of a simple nature. Diana E. Forsythe (1999) also emphasises the amount of work it takes to run this research method, stating that it is not “just a matter of common sense.” There is a particular method to ethnographical research that is well recognised and with a developing set of leading principles. It is necessary to train extensively in this area, with reflection, and careful assessment of the responsibility ethnography entails.

Bricolage is a word that describes the movement of the bricoleur, an individual who makes uses of resources that are accessible to them to create or conclude a duty (Kay, L, 2016). B*ricolage* is widely used across many fields, Norman Denzin and Yvonna

Lincoln (2000) advocate bricolage as a process to set out a multi-methodological structure of research accessing a range of research processes that allows the researcher to study different circumstances (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Rather than being limited to one framework, bricolage is a method that allows the researcher to explore a variety of methodologies during their research process where they judge appropriate (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 1). The wide range of methodologies used within bricolage allows “depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). As a reflexive process it enables would allow the flexibility to respond to what is presented at the time that is imperative to the study. The flexibility and wide usage within research in the arts certainly makes this method appealing for my research process (Kay, 2016).

Grounded theory is a method that allows the study of issues that emerge in the applied world, there is also flexibility to continue the enquiry if an unpredicted finding occurs (Charmaz, 2008, p. 155). The collection of information is structured to develop a theoretical analysis and repeated until a result is finalised (Charmaz, 2008, p. 167). It promotes the idea of open-ended values that contribute to the development of new analyses and evokes early analytic theories that hook the researchers interacting with their data and emerging study (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory could be useful to expand my knowledge around my chosen subject and allow discovery of new information without the expectation surrounding my findings.

I believe that as a vocal teacher I am practicing action research and bricolage on a daily basis within my studio. Each student brings something new and different that allows me to delve and explore current research in order to improve my abilities. The pragmatic nature of bricolage to best serve the research question with flexible models and methodologies that suit the specific situation required is something that draws my attention and I will be considering including this method in my practice. A grounded theory would allow my research the flexibility to move into any direction. This would be useful if I want to explore in more depth the different causes of MPA.

Research methods

Gill et al (2008, p. 291) states that there are three types of **research interviews: structured, semi structured** and **unstructured**. A structured interview described by Gill et al (2008) as a, verbally controlled list of prearranged questions that are presented to an individual. Follow-up questions are not permitted to be added even when a response may warrant further details. A structured interview is easy to direct and may be of useful for clarification of cer-tain questions (Gill et al, 2008, p. 291). An unstructured interview described by Gill et al (2008, p. 291), does not involve any preproduced ideas and are executed with little arrangement. An unstructured interview is designed to investigate the views, participation and reason of individu-als on certain issues. Whereas a Semi-structured interview is made up of a variety of crucial questions that contribute to clarify the areas that are being explored, it permits the interviewer or interviewee the flexibility to go into a different direction if the response opens up a different port of enquiry (Gill et al, 2008, p. 291). An inter-view is thought to supply a wider understanding of social circumstances and are most suitable to studies where little is already known or where detailed insights are required from individual participants Gill et al, 2008, p. 291). When running an interview, it is important to create a surrounding where the participants are comfortable, you must listen carefully and respond in an appropriate manner. Creating a friendly environment, showing interest in the participants response and rehearsing the delivery of the questions helps to assist the informal surroundings (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, p. 292). Recording and transcribing an interview to document the process, and making field notes about any observations during the interview is the best way of collecting data.

A **focus group** is a group discussion on a particular topic that is arranged for the purpose of research **(**Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). The group is led, observed and documented by a researcher and are used for producing information on mutual views, and the reasoning behind those views (Gill et al, 2008, p. 291). They produce a strong understanding of the insights and views encountered by the participants. Kitzinger (1995, p. 300) highlights that a focus group can enable the discussion of topics that may be seen as taboo, allowing the confident members of the group to initiate the acceptance of these topics in a discussion which helps to ease the anxieties of those who may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences straight away. Gill et al (2008, p. 294) empasises the importance of venue, that it should be convenient and comfortable; the use of appropriate

recording equipment and the number of participants; with close monitoring of length of discussion needs to be considered as a lengthy process of transcription and data analysis could be difficult to manage.

Survey research is used in the hope to find the forms and cause of a question which may be accessed easily by a large amount of the public (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012). A survey is commonly designed to collect data from a selection of the community and will aid in presenting the discoveries that are viewed as an exemplar of the whole population (Bel, 2010). The benefits of a survey is that it allows the participants to remain anonymous, this makes it easier for the researcher to collect sensitive data.

The types of research methods used to collect data is dependent on what methodology is chosen by the researcher. The form of an interview and focus group is likely to be the practical choice when conducting my research. I prefer the nature of a semi structured interview as it allows access to delve further into other questions that may occur. I also believe the advantages of working with a focus group are particularly appealable to the area I wish to research. Both methods would allow me to discover what the participants believe to be the root causes around their MPA and would be practical for a small-scale research project. However, if I wanted to conduct a survey, I would be able to access those beyond my practice and gain access to larger and more sensitive data.

Ethics and insider research

Ethics aim is to do good and desist from harm (Beauchamp & Childress, 1989). Appropriate research ethics is related with gaining approval from Research Ethics Boards (REBs) and assessing the researchers' concept of independence, confidentiality, respect, philanthropic and morality (Mauthner & Birch, 2002). Guidelines are created to safeguard the participants and researchers, diminish anguish, declaration of trust, securing research integrity, meet professional demands, and deal with new and challenges (Denzin & Giardina, 2007).

As a professional aiming to develop my practice and conducting research, it is important that I am aware of the responsibilities of insider research. The concerns surrounding validity and rigour of insider-led research can be drawn upon subjective and biased approaches (Murray and Lawrence, 2000). However, my experience as a voice teacher,

accessibility to forming data and my understanding of my research topic is a benefit to the contribution of research (Costley, 2006).

Conclusion

After assessing the methods behind conducting a research study, it has come to my attention that I must take my personal circumstances into account. With my ontological view of interchangeable realities and my role as a private singing teacher, I believe my research will be most compatible with a pragmatic paradigm and a qualitative method. The scale of my study is likely to be small and will require the flexibility to discuss the reasoning behind the information discovered. A grounded theory would allow my research the flexibility to move into any direction which is appealable with my interest in MPA.I must consider the validity of my study and ensure that a bias opinion does not interfere with my results. With the quantitative method of a survey using anonymous data, I am likely to eliminate any subjectivity within my research and produce a study that is strong in validity. I must consider how my relationship as a teacher of the participants may cause insider research issues and how this might impact my study. It is possible i may need to seek participants whom I do not have a connection with to eliminate these issues. The knowledge I have gained within this essay has allowed me to feel prepared in conducting research and has broadened my understanding of the process and issues that could occur.

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