

**What is the relationship
between the development of
singing skills and a feeling of
belonging, for singing teachers
and avocational singers?**

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Justification and context

- Most people wish to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Winning, 2010; Allen et al., 2022).
- Evidence for singing and wellbeing (Welch, 2014; Davies, Bentham and Duah, 2023).
- How good a singer do you need to be?
- Who determines this?

‘Sense of belonging ... can be defined as the extent to which individuals feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in their social environment’

(Prince and Hadwin, 2013)

Aims and objectives



Definition of singing skills – culturally constructed? (Pascale, 2005; Papageorgi, 2022)?



If singing is ‘natural’ (Gudmundsdottir, 2020), where does the teacher fit in? (Biasutti, 2010)?



How to make singing more inclusive.

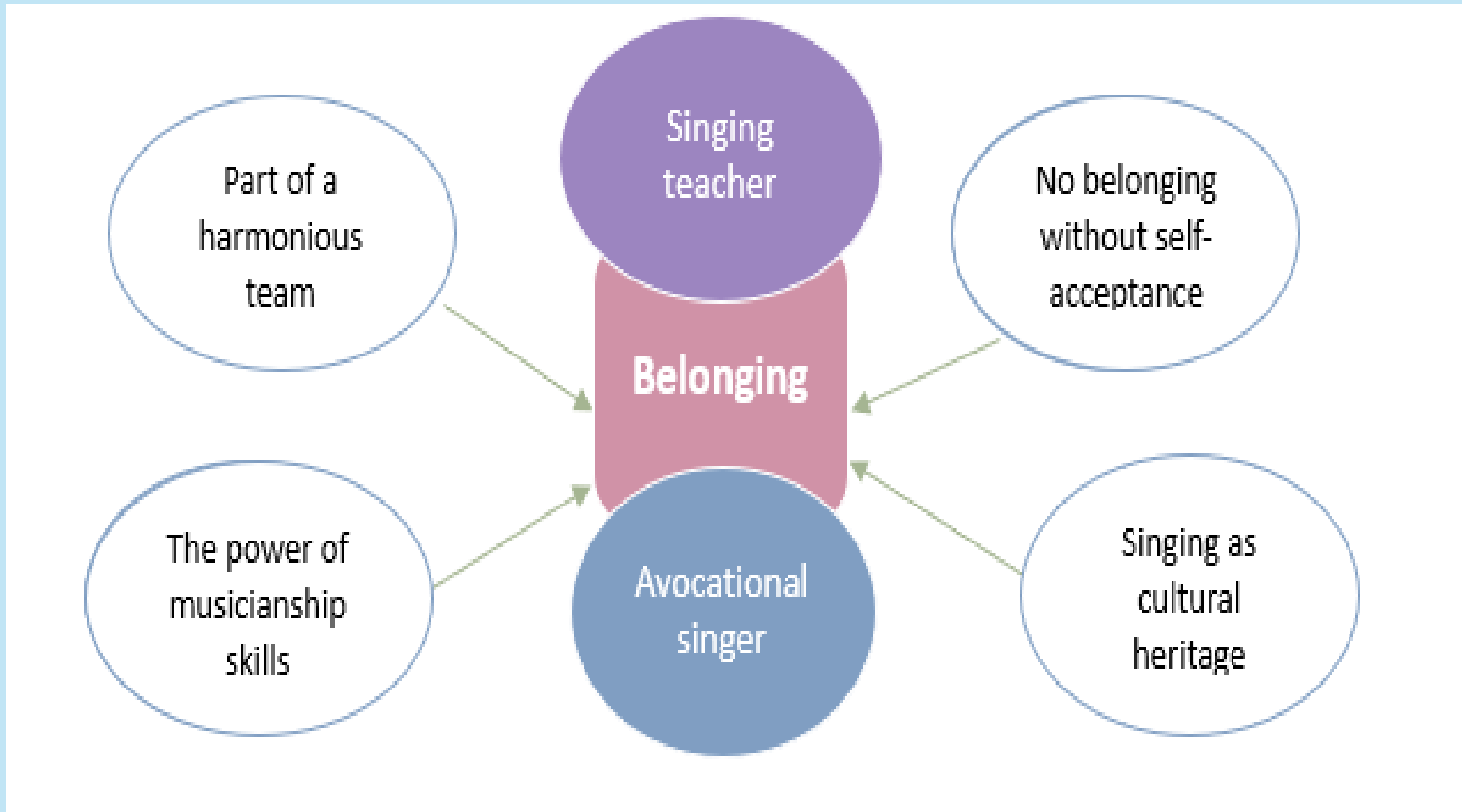


What does people’s language reveal (Wetmore, 2018)?

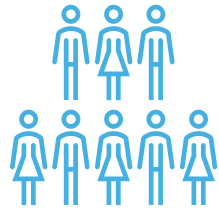
Methodology and methods



Thematic map for belonging



Findings



Part of a harmonious team

Belonging as teamwork and collaboration.

Pressure to belong vocally in choirs.

Awareness of hierarchical structure in choirs (Bailey and Davidson, 2005).

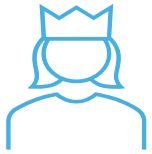


The power of musicianship skills

The voice as an intrinsic part of a person's body and self-identity (O'Bryan, 2015).

Aural and sight-singing – part of singing skills?

Usefulness of playing an instrument.



No belonging without self-acceptance

Inner confidence and self-esteem (Heydon, Fancourt and Cohen, 2020).

Feeling comfortable to make mistakes.

Finding one's musical niche: becoming an 'insider' (McPherson and McCormick, 2006; Cohen and Chen-Hafteck, 2020).



Singing as cultural heritage

The repertoire that belongs to us all as singers (Lang, 2020); the cultural continuum.

Culture of exams and being examined.

Possible flip side? : the insidious power wielded by institutions (Liu et al., 2024).

Analysis

Singing teachers

- Supported to maintain interest.
- Certain standards expected (Upitis et al., 2017).
- What do singing lessons offer?
- Need to be 'robust' for exams and competitions (O'Neill, 2011).
- Inclusivity versus need for 'talent'.

Avocational singers

- Collaboration with teachers and other singers.
- Pulling one's weight and taking responsibility (Stephenson, 2018).
- Knowing one's place and accepting authority (Bailey and Davidson, 2005).
- Singing 'more fun'.
- Need to be competent.

Limitations

Small overall sample size.

The 3 teachers were women of similar age and background.

The avocational singers were all from similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Ethics and insider research

- Ethical approval received from the UWTSD Research Ethics Committee.
- Risk of emotional distress to participants carefully considered. Ongoing support offered.
- Complete confidentiality assured.
- Steps to mitigate insider research bias or perception of bias: avoidance of leading questions; member checking of transcripts¹ for accurate representation of participants.²

¹ (Lim, 2024)

² (Aguilar, Torres and Macias, 2025)

Conclusions

- Teachers and singers value a feeling of belonging.
- Less emphasis on being skilled at singing than expected.
- Teachers support students, musically and emotionally (Ballantyne and Canham, 2023).
- Few suggestions from teachers for helping more marginalised singers.

Recommendations

- Ways forward:
 - Teachers sharing ideas.
 - Encouraging student autonomy in learning – student-centred approach to teaching (Bonnevill-Roussy, Hruska and Trower, 2020).
 - Continuing to ask the difficult questions.



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Reflection on learning experience

- Valuable insights to take forward into my practice.
- Critical stance helped me drill down into challenges of one-to-one singing teaching.
- Belonging is a subject I wish to explore further for my teaching.

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