

University of Wales Trinity Saint David
MA in Professional Practice (Voice Pedagogy)



Charlotte Emily Wheatcroft
Student no: 1920982

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Critically evaluate a range of methodological approaches, research designs, and research methods appropriate to gather data from complex work-based settings, with due consideration to research ethics and issues of insider research.

Introduction

The singing teacher is constantly conducting practice-based research within the studio which makes them an 'insider researcher'. The work involves constant teacher/student communication and collaboration that requires recognition of practitioner beliefs, values and morals in order to align to the most suitable research paradigm. This is with the intention that it will inform appropriate research designs, approaches, methodologies and methods. Brodie & Irving (2007: 11) explain that in order to justify a particular approach to practice, it is important to review the range of factors that have influenced its development. Clarifying my position as a voice practitioner researcher will help to ensure a strong foundation for accurate, reliable and detailed research.

Ontology and Epistemology

In pursuance of the most efficient way to design research as a voice practitioner researcher, it is important to understand that the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher will affect the methods and the outcome.

Ontology refers to that branch of philosophy that studies the nature of reality (Jennings, 2001). The researcher's beliefs about the nature of the world and their place in it (Biggs and Büchler, 2009) can impact how they engage in the research process.

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge (Cahn & Passett, 1971: 10) and epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated - *what it means to know* (Scotland, 2012). This will be informed by the ontological position and will determine the types of research and data collected, as well as how this will be designed. This will include whether the primary independent research will be qualitative, quantitative or mixed method as well as how the secondary research will be collected and evaluated.

The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism. Relativism is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 110; Scotland, 2012: 11). As a voice practitioner, a subjective viewpoint resonates because identical information is often delivered to multiple clients, but the cognition, retention and outcomes will differ due to the experience, learning style, perception and ontological position (worldview) of the client. I would attempt to define my ontological position as one in which there are multiple

realities or even that reality itself is purely perceptual. Although my stance is largely subjective, my reasoning is abductive because it is also informed by the scientific nature and anatomical aspects of voice work - “the pursuit for the only truth” (Littlejohn, 2016; Callaghan, 2014). Philosophically speaking, I believe that if the ‘only truth’ does exist, then no human being can truly know it, because the ‘only truth’ lies in the gaps between the individual perceptions of humanity itself.

An Overview of Paradigms

Bogdan and Biklen define a *paradigm* as ‘a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research’ (1998: 22). I will discuss a selection of the main paradigms to find the most suitable approach in consideration of my ontological and epistemological position, practice and research.

Positivism

Positivism is often referred as the ‘dominant paradigm’ (Morgan, 2007: 57). Mackenzie & Knipe (2006: 2) illustrate that the origins of the positivist paradigm are in scientific methods and Feilzer (2010: 6) explicates that it incorporates a realist approach that compliments and underpins quantitative research methods. Ontologically speaking, positivism ascribes to the belief in one singular reality and its epistemology resides in the realm of objectivism. Guba & Lincoln (1994: 110) articulate that the investigator and the investigated are considered independent entities, and the investigator is to be capable of studying the object without influencing it or being influenced by it. The researcher assumes an objective stance.

In regards to voice research, Callaghan (2014) states that voice science has informed vocal pedagogy therefore a distinct shift towards the positivist tradition can be observed as voice practitioners quest for objective truths through science. This is in contrast to the majority of industries moving closer to subjectivism. There are also issues with the positivist paradigm in voice research such as: ethical problems due to the invasive nature of voice research, and small samples rendering data unreliable (larger proportions of research provide more reliable data in quantitative data collection).

As a voice practitioner researcher I need to be aware of my own limitations within my research. Quantitative data can be collected rapidly but processing and analysing the data can potentially be time-consuming, particularly for a lone researcher.

Post-Positivism

Positivism was replaced after World War II by “post-positivism” (Mertens, 2005). Bryman (2008: 18) expresses that post-positivism differs in its more accommodating stance towards qualitative data. The ontological position of post-positivism is labeled as “critical realism” (Cook & Campbell, 1979) and post-positivism reflects a deterministic philosophy that can determine effects or outcomes (Creswell, 2003: 7). Guba & Lincoln (1994: 110) clarify that emphasis is placed on “critical multiplism” as a way of falsifying (rather than verifying) hypotheses and the aims are accomplished largely through the increased utilisation of qualitative techniques. Cook & Campbell (1979: 24) relay that post-positivists work from the assumption that any piece of research is influenced by a number of well-developed theories apart from, and as well as, the one which is being tested. In contrast, O’Leary (2004: 6-7) provides a definition which aligns in some sense with the constructivist paradigm claiming that post-positivists see the world as ambiguous, variable, multiple in its realities, intuitive, holistic, inductive and exploratory with findings that are qualitative in nature. Regardless of O’Leary’s assessment of post-positivism, positivist and post-positivist research is still most commonly aligned with quantitative methods of data collection and analysis (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006: 3).

Due to the nature of work as a voice practitioner researcher, the data collected will most likely be qualitative and a mixed methods approach will potentially be adopted at points. It may however, prove beneficial to employ the use of the positivist and post-positivist paradigms in some quantitative methods to support the research.

Social Constructivism

The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm grew out of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's and other German philosophers' study of interpretive understanding called “hermeneutics” (Mertens, 2005: 12). Social constructivism assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate. Constructivist inquiry starts with the experience and asks how members construct it. Charmaz (2006: 187) addresses the acknowledgement of constructivists that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction. Her interpretation

describes realities as apprehensible in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature. Guba & Lincoln's detective angle depicts the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the "findings" are literally created as the investigation proceeds (1994: 111). The social constructivist paradigm can offer valuable pedagogical insights and it acknowledges reality as 'socially constructed and given meaning by people' (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008: 58). It engages in social observation and searches for meaning via critical reflection and induction.

Ontologically and epistemologically, this paradigm aligns with voice education and the practitioner-client relationship because it identifies the importance of qualitative data. It also exposes and accepts multiple realities. Charmaz (2006) declares that it can be used to capture nuanced, interpersonal relationships within the studio and it accepts moral and personal engagement of the researcher. Within my work and research, constructivist ideology is more suitable in comparison with positivism and post-positivism.

Pragmatic Paradigm

The need to categorise research into one of the two main paradigms (positivism or social constructivism) resulted in what has been coined 'the paradigm wars'. At the heart of this, discussions about quantitative and qualitative research tended to be underpinned by a sense of their incompatibility of fundamental assumptions and epistemology (Bryman, 2008: 13). Ultimately, the forced choice dichotomy between post-positivism and constructivism (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007: 27) resulted in the birth of a new paradigm: pragmatism.

The pragmatic paradigm provides an opportunity for multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006: 5; Creswell et al, 2003: 12). Pragmatists' view of the measurable world relates more closely to an existential reality with different elements or layers, some objective, some subjective, and some a mixture of the two (Dewey, 1925: 40-47) and that reality is changing and negotiable (Feilzer, 2010). The pragmatic paradigm places "the research problem" as central and applies all approaches to understanding the problem (Creswell et al, 2003: 11). Pragmatism can be used in deductive, inductive and abductive research, offering the opportunity to provide properly integrated methodology for the social sciences (Morgan, 2007: 73).

I strongly identify with the notion that practitioner-based problems remain central to the research process because this is incredibly useful for voice practitioners who are trying to target issues in the studio as they arise. It allows for the existence of multiple realities and layers within these realities (Dewey, 1925) as well as subjectivism, mixed methods data collection and abductive reasoning.

As a practitioner, having a strict allegiance to a particular philosophy and adhering to a framework can limit the research design and methods. Therefore the primary concern is the collection and analysis of the most efficient and substantial data as this “allows for a highly flexible research design” (Morgan, 2007).

Transformative Paradigm

According to Mertens (2005: 17) the transformative paradigm arose during the 1980s and 1990s partially due to dissatisfaction with the existing and dominant research paradigms and practices (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006: 3). Transformative researchers felt that the interpretivist/constructivist approach to research did not adequately address issues of social justice and marginalised peoples (Creswell, 2003: 9). The transformative paradigm seeks to emancipate the marginalised within society and seeks to enable group action (Merton, 1972). It has a political agenda for social change and draws on critical theory such as Marxism and Feminism to aid design. Contextual and historical factors are described, especially as they relate to oppression (Mertens, 2005, p. 9) and transformative researchers may utilise qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods in much the same way as the interpretivist/constructivists (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006: 4). A mixed methods approach provides the transformative researcher structure for the development of more complete and full portraits of our social world through the use of multiple perspectives and lenses (Somekh & Lewin, 2005: 275).

The transformative paradigm resonates with my practice working with injured singers and professional voice users in a rehabilitation context. The demand, energy, frequency and stamina required illustrates singers as the vocal athletes of the voice world (Sataloff, R., 1987a) but it has been identified by several voice practitioners and researchers that professional voice users receive little or no voice training for the intensity or quality of their voice use (Carding, P., 2007). Researching the availability of voice education and

rehabilitation is likely to identify areas where people are marginalised due to geographical location, socio-economic position, education, gender, race and disabilities/impairments.

Methodological approaches

Chilisa and Kawulich (2012: 3) characterise a methodology as a summary of the research process that begins with a choice of research paradigm. The methodological process is guided by philosophical beliefs about the nature of reality, knowledge, and values as well as the theoretical framework that informs comprehension, interpretation, choice of literature and research practice on a given topic of study.

Furthering the discussion of suitable paradigms to affiliate and consolidate this type of practice, I have chosen to align with the **pragmatic** paradigm as the research problem is central and it concurs with abductive reasoning, subjectivism and my ontological and epistemological position where reality multi-layered and/or perceptual.

There are two main methodologies in research and data collection: Quantitative and Qualitative.

Quantitative

Quantitative data focuses on 'quantities' and generally deals with the numerical. It has its roots in mathematical and scientific research and there is usually a hypothesis. The reasoning is generally deductive as it focusses on testing theory and the approach tends to look for cause and effect. This methodology may be useful in the form of surveys and questionnaires that utilise scoring systems (e.g. how is your voice feeling today? 1 = Very poor, 5 = Excellent). Due to the objective stance of the quantitative data, I feel it would not solely capture the practitioner-client dynamic and the perceptual nature of voice work but it could aid the research.

Qualitative

Qualitative data collection will have 'qualities' that are not numerical and the approach tends to look for meaning and experience. Usually the researcher lacks an hypothesis and inductive reasoning is used as the theory is developed from the data. Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or worldview, a basic set of assumptions that guide their inquiries (Creswell, 1998: 74) and view participant data

contextually: in space, in time, and within the specific context of the research process (Merriam, 2009).

Firstly, the analysis is hugely complex and often researchers spend much time planning how they will collect their data and too little time planning how they will analyse that data (Jirwe, 2011: 5). Åhlström (2007) also emphasises the link between data and theory as mandatory to convince and persuade the general audience about the qualities of your case analysis. Informed by the analytical and theoretical ideas developed during the research, these categories are further refined and reduced in number by grouping them together (Pope et al, 2000: 115). Identifying key themes prior to the collection can aid with the analysis as it will be easier to organise and categorise the data. There is also the chance that different researchers may interpret the same data somewhat differently. Consequently, this leads to the issue of the verifiability of qualitative data analysis. There is, therefore, a debate as to whether qualitative researchers should have their analyses verified or validated by a third party (Gil et al, 2008: 431).

Mixed Methods

The core principle of this approach is that the sum of quantitative and qualitative is greater than either approach alone. Instead of looking at mixed methods as a priority of one approach over the other or a weighting of one approach, the researcher considers the equal value and representations of each (Creswell, 2009).

The classic qualitative–quantitative debate has been largely resolved with recognition that a variety of methodological approaches are needed, and that the challenge is matching methods to questions rather than adhering to some narrow methodological orthodoxy (Patton, 2002). If advocates of a paradigm shift toward pragmatism are sufficiently influential, we envisage similarly comprehensive justifications for mixed methods research within a pragmatic paradigm (Robinson et al, 2011: 342).

The synergistic approach along with other challenges to typological perspectives contribute to a softening of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, provide answers to questions about dominance of one method over the other and honour the formation of research teams with diverse expertise (Creswell, 2009: 104). Interview transcripts, field notes and observations provide a descriptive account of the study, but

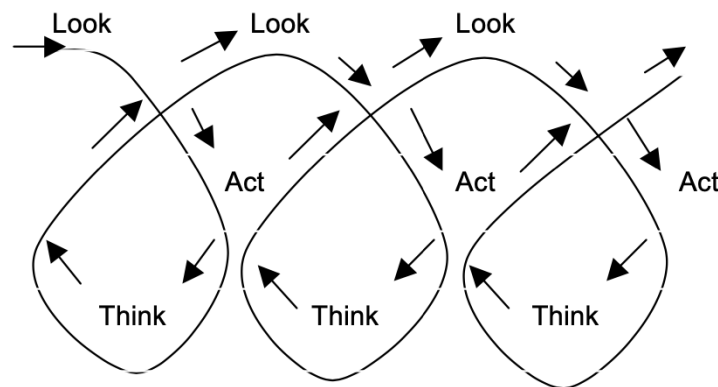
they do not provide explanations. It is the researcher who has to make sense of the data that has been collected by exploring and interpreting them (Gil et al, 2008: 429-430).

Utilising mixed methods enables the researcher to keep the question central and allows freedom in choosing methods that are most beneficial to the research without entanglement of philosophical issues. This logical and unrestricted approach operates in conjunction with the pragmatic paradigm.

Action Research

Action research assumes a tight coupling between research and action (Rowley, 2003: 132) and occurs through a repeated cycle of reflection, observation and planning with a view to enabling social change, or some other positive purpose (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Kemmis (2009) describes action research as a form of collective reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. Due to the links with social injustice, action research tends to fit very well with the transformative paradigm.

Stringer (2007) introduced the cyclical action research process of 'Look, Act, Think'.



In the 'Look' stage, information is gathered by careful observation through looking, listening, and recording. During the 'Think' stage, researchers analyse the collected information to identify significant features and elements of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the 'Act' stage is where the newly formulated information is used to devise solutions to the issue being investigated (Stringer, 2007; Hine, 2013: 154).

Action research presents as a strong option for producing research that is thorough and detailed. It is important to be aware of the time consuming nature of this cyclical process due to the high risk of data expansion and determining the right time to complete and evaluate.

Action research, though relatively uncommon in information systems, is often valuable, breaking new ground and synergistic with practice based research. Perhaps because the field is relatively unploughed, authors there seem better able to avoid current dogma (Dick, 2009: 425). It is democratic and collaborative in that participants within the research are actively involved in the process which fits well within my research because the teaching of singing is a symbiotic art form. Hine identifies that it can also be used within the education setting to improve educational processes and to develop pedagogy and classroom-based knowledge (2013).

Ethnography

Ethnography means recording the life of a particular group and thus entails sustained participation and observation in their milieu, community, or social world (Charmaz, 2006: 21) and is sometimes described as 'folk description' (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008: 94). The term ethnography has come to be equated with virtually any qualitative research project where the intent is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice (Hoey, 2014: 1). Through the interactive voice, researchers examine their voices - their subject positions, social locations, interpretations, and personal experiences - through the refracted medium of narrators' voices (Trahar, 2009). Berg (2001: 134) explains the concept of ethnography is that practice places researchers in the midst of whatever it is they study. It seeks to describe and analyse personal experience in order to extrapolate detailed understandings about wider cultural experience and other people's realities (Ellis et al, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al, 2008: 155).

Participant observation is the most common form of ethnographic research, but semi-structured or unstructured interviews, textual analysis and verbal descriptions may also be employed. There have been many instances throughout history, of ethnographic research having been undertaken in a covert manner, in order to elicit more realistic information (Berg, 2001: 56). This raises many challenges - particularly when working within an organisation - because the participants lose control of how their data is collected. This creates another "layer of complexity" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) as subjectivity is

countered by a “systematic analysis” (Brown and Baker, 2007). There is also a danger that the researcher’s involvement could render the data unreliable and ethically compromise the participants.

Hermeneutics and phenomenology

Hermeneutics and phenomenology are used interchangeably as they are both concerned with lived experiences, but they do have distinct differences. The father of modern phenomenology is the German philosopher Edmund Husserl and Hans-Georg Gadamer is known as the founder of philosophical hermeneutics. Martin Heidegger serves as the link between Husserl’s phenomenology and Gadamer’s hermeneutics (Kakkori, 2009).

Husserl (1970) criticised psychology as a science that had gone wrong by attempting to apply methods of the natural sciences to human issues (Lavery, 2003:22) and created phenomenology as a counter-movement. Phenomenology of practice operates in the space of the formative relations between who we are and who we may become, between how we think or feel and how we act. In some sense all phenomenology is oriented to practice—the practice of living (Van Manen, 2007:13-26). Crowther et al (2017:827) ascribe the well-crafted phenomenological story as being able to reveal ways of being, thinking, and acting in the world that shed light on what is known but covered over, or forgotten. According to Husserl (1970), the state of transcendental subjectivity may be accomplished by employing the process of ‘bracketing’, which involves consciously and actively seeking to strip away prior experiential knowledge and personal bias so as not to influence the description of phenomenon at hand (Swanson & Wojnar, 2007).

Heidegger focussed on understanding human consciousness and the lived experience through interpreting language (Lavery, 2003) therefore hermeneutics is the study of human culture through the interpretation of dialogue, narrative and text (Kvale, 1996) and refers to the shared understandings that we already have with each another (Koch, 1999). Heidegger (1927) developed the concept of the hermeneutic circle whereby movements back and forth from the whole of the experience to part of the experience provides new meaning and Gadamer (2013) also believed that the circle of interpretation is never closed but is ongoing, with movement of understanding from the whole, to the part, and back to the whole.

Unlike phenomenology employing the process of 'bracketing', the hermeneutic tradition believes the reflective process to be part of the interpretation process and the project requires an intimate understanding of the participants' experiences and those of the researcher so that a "fusion of horizons" occurs (Crowther et al, 2017:827). Due to the fundamental difference regarding the role of the researcher, phenomenology is most compatible with the post-positivist paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenology with the social constructivist paradigm.

Both methodologies align with my practice due to the nature of performance preparation; embodying a character and portraying lived experiences. Oftentimes this is through theoretical mediums such as sheet music, scripts, lyrics etc; and in practice, the student and teacher partnership bestows equal importance to the researcher and participant alike which is most concurrent with the hermeneutic phenomenology.

Case Studies

The case study focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a single setting by typically combining data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations in order to produce evidence that may be qualitative, quantitative or both (Eisenhardt, 1989: 534). Dillon and Reid (2004: 25-27) explore the types of case study and identify three categories; Intrinsic - intrinsically interesting and one benefits greater understanding of the case, Instrumental - provides insight into a an issue or refinement of a theory, and Collective - study multiple cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon (Corcoran et al, 2002; Stake, 2000: 237).

Case studies can be very useful for small scale and pilot studies such as the one I will be undertaking as it provides a snapshot of the situation. The findings can then be used to identify key themes for further detailed investigation. The key criticism according to Berg (2001) is the subjective nature and lack of generalisability that can indicate a lack of validity among research that is more scientific or fact-based. To counteract this, Stake (1995) distinguished between petite generalisations and grand generalisations in order to emphasise the importance of not overstating findings and avoiding making claims to validity. Case studies can be time consuming and completion can be hard to distinguish. Eisenhardt (1989: 545) realises two issues that are important in reaching closure: when to stop adding cases, and when to stop iterating between theory and data. Utilising the case

study could be an effective pilot study for my research but compensations would need to be made for the lack of generalisability, time management and subjectivity.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory emerged from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and draws on inductive strategies for generating theory. The researcher begins with no hypothesis, no literature review, no theoretical foundation and no restrictions on methodologies. Grounded theorists believe that the absence of preconception provides space for the data to emerge organically. "It requires an ability to be patient and deal with, even relish, ambiguity" (Simmons, 2010: 19). Grounded theory engages a rigorous and refined coding process.

Charmaz and Henwood (2008: 241) sum up grounded theory as follows:

"We gather data, compare them, remain open to all possible theoretical understandings of the data, and develop tentative interpretations about these data through our codes and nascent categories. Then we go back to the field and gather more data to check and refine our categories".

The comparative and interactive nature of grounded theory at every stage of analysis distinguishes grounded theory from other approaches and makes it an "explicitly emergent method" (Charmaz, 2008: 163). The scrupulous coding process enables a greater chance of reliability and accuracy but the ambiguous nature of grounded theory instils concern due to not knowing when and how to bring the project to completion as well as the lack of researcher control.

Bricolage

In complete contrast, Bricolage allows freedom and flexibility within the research framework. The main purpose is to produce research reports quickly without getting caught up in philosophical issues. Kincheloe discusses that by appreciating research as a power-driven act, the researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naive concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of their position in the web of reality, the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge (2011: 2).

To fashion their bricolage projects, bricoleurs use only the tools and materials "at-hand" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966) and from varied, sometimes conflicting, perspectives, a theoretical

bricoleur performs multiple readings on an artefact, text, or phenomenon (Rogers, 2012: 6). Denzin and Lincoln justify that the combination of multiple methodological practices, and empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (1999: 6). The empiricism of using one methodology or even one single theory presents only a partial answer to the original research question" (Berry, 2004: 105). The "best fit for the job" ideology matches the pragmatic paradigm I have chosen and I resonate with the freedom of methodologies and avoidance of getting caught up with philosophical issues. Time management could potentially be an issue because a bricoleur has to be prepared to read widely and it can often be difficult to hone in on the optimum approach due to the sporadic attempting to fit the specific.

Practitioner Research and Professional Practice Considerations

Practitioner research is a transdisciplinary field that sits outside of subject-frameworks and has its own set of norms and practices (Lester and Costley, 2007). It has developed key tools and concepts tailored to its unique position where practice and theory are intertwined. Voice practitioners seek to solve everyday problems within their practice and are best served by the emerging discipline of work-based learning (Costley & Lester, 2009). Armsby and Costley (2007: 348) summarised the candidates' descriptions in their study of practitioner-led research were often dominated by the need to solve real-world problems rather than researching an issue in a theoretical way. In other words, the ideology has to be able to transition into practical application.

Gibbons et al (1994) describes knowledge created through practice-based questions that require practical answers as 'mode 2 research'. It involves the drawing together of multidisciplinary knowledge to inform individual practice. For this reason, Costley and Lester (2009) align practitioner research roots with the emergence of the pragmatic paradigm. In outlining key facets of practitioner research, Lave and Wenger (1991: 67) introduce 'social situatedness' which emphasises the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing. There is also the concept of 'insider research' where the worker-researcher conducts their project within their employment. Regarding measuring the findings, Costley (2013: 1) recognises that the most valuable outcome of practitioner-led enquiry might not be the research itself but the practitioner's own self-development. Singing teachers and vocal coaches epitomise

‘insider research’ since they are immersed within their own research (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008: 94).

Sampling

Teddlie and Yu (2007: 97) summarise that the sampling strategy should be feasible, efficient, ethical and allow researchers to draw clear inferences from both qualitative and quantitative data. Regarding a small scale project such as mine, samples that collect large quantities of quantitative data are generally easy to obtain but may prove problematic and time consuming to collate and analyse. As a singing teacher, **Convenience Sampling** is an obvious and logical choice as it can be carried out on those who are readily available such as a selection of singing students. **Snowball Sampling** is an offshoot of convenience sampling and can be particularly useful in large scale studies. It occurs when people from the original sample refer other people they know with similar characteristics (e.g. sharing a sample via a voice forum, questionnaires etc). This could be an effective way to increase the data collected but potentially time consuming to analyse for a small scale venture such as mine. **Purposive Sampling** would be a more deliberate option as the researcher selects the sample based on a preconceived judgment (e.g. selecting singing students based on characteristics such as voice type) however there would be concern for generalisability. **Quota Sampling** uses a matrix to establish characteristics of a specific group of people (e.g. vocal range and age of participant). It targets one section of a community to then apply the findings to the wider population. Depending on the research question this could be a useful tool because the smaller sample size would make the data less time consuming to examine. It is difficult to determine sample size however a researcher needs to consider the issues related early in the research planning process. To aid in the decision, Aitken and Burmeister (2012: 4) outline factors that influence sample size as: effect size - the difference of change expected as a result of your intervention, homogeneity - how similar are the participants to each other, and the risk of error.

Methods

The methodology encompasses the research design of the project as a whole, while the methods determine the tools and key concepts employed as well as how the researcher interacts with the data. The selection of method is informed by the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher and the chosen paradigm because that sets down the “intent, motivation and expectations for the research” (Mackenzie and Knipe,

2006). The pragmatic paradigm provides an opportunity for multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study (Creswell, 2003: 12). With the research question central, data collection and analysis methods are chosen. For this small scale project I will primarily focus on the qualitative data collection from interviews and focus groups. I will however, explore the possibility of utilising observations and questionnaires to underpin the research and maximise generalisability.

Interviews

Multimedia allows for interviews to take place in many ways e.g. face-to-face, telephone, video call email, messenger etc. This can be useful when there are time or geographical constraints however, the face-to-face nature of an interview will allow for social cues, such as voice, intonation, body language etc. The interviewee can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee on a question (Opdenakker, 2006).

Rubin and Rubin (2006) refer to the variety of interview structures as a 'family' and these include *structured*, *unstructured* and *semi-structured*.

Structured interviews are sometimes described as "surveys administered verbally" (Costly et al, 2010: 93). They require the respondents to be asked the same questions in an identical way and it suits a research framework that is seeking to extract specific information. It is easy to analyse and code but may be problematic if any of the questions are misunderstood so careful wording is very important as the interview subjects will all need to understand exactly what is being asked.

Unstructured interviews warrant the researcher to have clear aims for the research and a topic of study. The importance of the method is to allow the interviewee to talk from their own perspective using their own frame of reference and ideas and meanings that are familiar to them (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 30). It is highly responsive with the capacity to elicit rich data and it enables flexibility and further investigation. According to Berg (2001), they are sometimes used to augment field observations. The downfalls to this interview style include the possibility of inconsistent data and the generation of vast quantities of data that does not necessarily correlate which can cause problems with time and data management.

Semi-Structured interviews consist of some pre-determined questions, but the researcher retains freedom to either digress or ask some probing, follow-up questions. This is an effective tool for garnering rich but more manageable data which is the most appropriate interview style to include in this study as it will allow for more generalisability. The amalgam of multiple methods and tools will help in legitimising the research and this could be achieved through gaining permission to record the interview for more accuracy in the analysis and creating field notes.

Focus groups

Berg (2001) defines the focus group as an interview style for small groups and typically consists of a small number of participants who are guided by a facilitator or moderator. Interaction is key to a successful focus group; sometimes this means a pre-existing group interacts best for research purposes, and sometimes stranger groups (Gil et al, 2008: 293). The informal and stimulating nature of the focus group is designed to elicit discussion that can be dynamic by allowing opinions to flow and views to build. Focus groups are useful when there are time limitations therefore making field notes, observing, recording with consent and logging the process, would aid in capturing the findings accurately and reliably. Due to being in the education sector, focus groups would be a useful tool to elicit feedback on a classroom initiative. Consideration of group size is important as a study by Fern (1982) found that focus groups of eight members generated significantly more ideas than focus groups of four members. Moderating a focus group looks easy when done well, but requires a complex set of skills in order to guide without influence and make participants feel comfortable to share their views without judgment (Gils et al, 2008: 294). Facilitation of a focus group within my project would require researcher discipline, scholarly integrity and respect for the participants. Both researcher and participant could benefit from the culmination of data collection in a shorter time period making analysis more manageable.

Observations

There are two main types of observation: *unstructured* and *structured*.

Unstructured: according to Bell & Waters (2018), this occurs when the researcher has a clear idea of the purpose of the research but may be lacking in the detail.

Structured: this type of observation is much easier as it is pre-determined however it has been criticised for its bias. It is important to devise a checklist/templates that suits the

purpose of the investigation. Structured observation could be useful tool to support the bulk of my research as it could accentuate changes in pattern and behaviour over a period of time.

Darlington and Scott (2002) draw attention to the subjective nature of observations as we invariably impose our own interpretation on the observation e.g. a singing teacher who is applying new techniques may have a vested interest in interpreting the results favourably. In order to prevent the accuracy of the results being compromised, awareness and transparency on behalf of the researcher must be acknowledged.

Surveys and questionnaires

The questionnaire is another widely used research tool often associated with short-term evaluations though capable of more qualitative use (Costly et al, 2010: 94). It is essentially a list of written questions that are restricted to two basic types: open-ended or closed-ended. Closed questions illicit suitable responses provided from a list that is given by the researcher and they produce quantitative data. Open questions require the respondent to answer in their own words without aid from the researcher which produces largely qualitative data (Sociological Research Skills). Questionnaires can create large quantities of results and be produced rapidly, however the format design can exclude examination of complex issues and opinions. The findings may be vast but lack substance. Using a questionnaire may be an effective way to reinforce research findings but it would not be the main focus of my study due to the scale of the project, time and data management and available resources.

Validity

Questions most commonly posed to qualitative researchers reflect concerns with the validity and reliability of the research findings (Merriam, 1995: 51). Morse et al (2014: 14) discuss that without rigour, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility. Hence, a great deal of attention is applied to reliability and validity in all research methods. Instead of reliability, one can strive for what Lincoln and Guba (1985: 288) call “dependability”, “truth value” and “consistency” by analysing whether the results of the study are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 1995). This can be done via: triangulation, peer examination and an audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). There is also call

for transparency of the roads not taken and gaps in the findings (Tuval-Mashiach, 2016: 134).

Ethics

Once the research framework is completed, I must consider researcher ethics as well as ethical issues that may arise within the study. Ethics is about permissions, both at an individual level, and an organisational group level (Rowley, 2003). Saldana (2013: 39) emphasises the need to maintain a sense of scholarly integrity by being rigorously ethical with the participants, the data, and the analysis. This is incredibly important as a singing teacher because the learning environment and working dynamic has a big impact on any outcome. The participant should feel respected at all times and the information generated from the project must not exploit or harm them. The researcher/teacher should endeavour to maintain a reputable and trustworthy standing amongst participants/students.

Guba and Lincoln (1989: 220-222) identify conventional responses to ethical dilemmas by suggesting three levels of ethical guidelines (wisdom ethics, content ethics and ethical decisions), three moral responsibility criteria (publicity, reasonable persons and discretion), and four of the most commonly used legal responsibilities (no harm, fully informed consent, protection of privacy and confidentiality and no deception). This correlates with the European and Social Research Council (ESRC) principles.

Insider Research

The insider researcher inhabits a unique perspective on systems (Coghlan, & Shani, 2008) that allows them to conduct in-depth study with insider knowledge and easy access to participants and information. They are in the prime position to investigate and make practical changes (Costley et al, 2010). Nixon (2008) demonstrates that engaging in reflection at work and undertaking insider-led research can make significant contributions to work practices.

There is however, a body of criticism concerning practitioner-led enquiry, mainly concerning the validity and rigour of what is perceived as insider-led, and therefore subjectively biased approaches and articulations of the research (Costley, 2013: 1). Many researchers that favour quantitative data (e.g. positivists) feel that qualitative research is alleged to be merely story telling; full of anecdotes and personal impressions of

researchers (Sarma, 2015: 176). This effect is true, but those in favour of qualitative research view these findings as positive and rich. This belief is only enhanced when the researcher involvement increases. Chenail (2011: 260) acknowledges that researchers may remain blind to their biases, be unable to anticipate problems with the study's instrumentation, and have unforeseen difficulties in utilising the questions effectively. Breen (2007: 164) recognises that insider-researchers might find the process of interviewing complicated due to the assumption among their informants that the researcher already knows the answers.

Mercer (2007: 13-24) acknowledges the ethical dilemmas of informant bias, interview reciprocity and research ethics. Many researchers believe that for these reasons, the insider researcher contaminates the findings as boundaries are crossed and lines are blurred. The insider researcher does however provide insight into the world in which they occupy that an 'outsider' could not accomplish. Established connections, in-depth knowledge and lived experiences make the insider researcher unique and valuable; however those that oppose the approach and deem this reasoning bias and unreliable. One wonders if this is simply a case of viewing a glass half empty or half full.

Conclusion

To summarise, this research design stems from the ontological position of subjectivism and the focus of inquiry in this emic study will be idiographic with abductive reasoning to allow for the scientific nature of voice work and lived experience. The singing teacher role requires a research framework that supports 'real-world' practical application therefore placing the research question central to the study enables freedom to choose the most appropriate methodologies and methods. The pragmatic paradigm subscribes to these values and allows for the existence of multiple realities.

When considering methodologies as a small scale researcher, qualitative data may be the most beneficial to the study as it produces rich content that is generally easier to manage however, a combination of both (mixed methods) would increase verification of the results. Stringer's (2007) 'look, act, think' action research initiative complies with real world teaching practice and this could be explored in the context of the study. In the analysis stage, the back and forth reflection of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle (1927) could prove useful when examining 'lived experience' experience as a insider researcher and I am also

drawn to the best fit selection of method that bricolage offers without concern for philosophical issues.

Centrist methods that veer slightly towards qualitative data seem to be the most appropriate for my research such as semi-structured interviews, a mixture of convenience and purposive sampling, focus groups, structured observation and open ended questionnaires. As a self employed contractor in schools and in private practice, I may be able to gain consent from various institutions in order to obtain a larger sample size of both adults and young adults. The insider research issues of validity, ethics and bias must be carefully considered. To avoid contaminating the findings I must be transparent in my involvement and look at solutions that combat these issues e.g. advertising the study to external singing students by engaging with other singing teachers. Through this initial exploration, I feel confident that the preparation is now in place to design my research and transition to practical and theoretical application.

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