

Metaphors or Mechanics?

An Exploration of Learning Preferences
in Adult AuDHD Singers

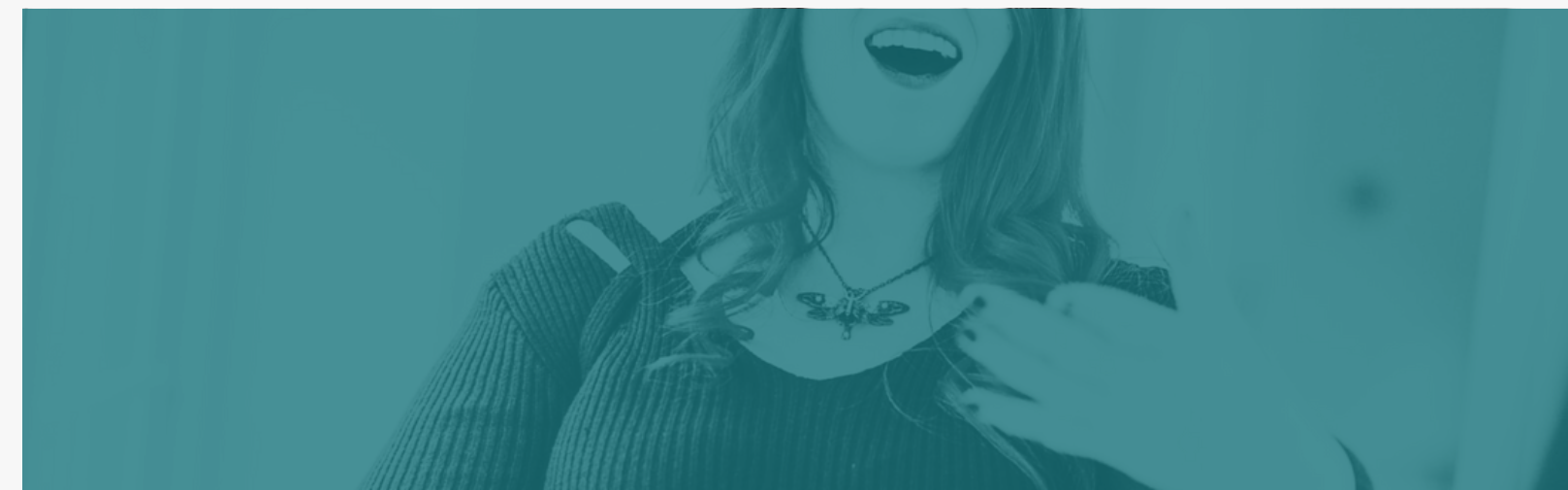
Context

Voice pedagogy often relies on metaphor and mechanics (Jaber, 2020; Brown, 2023)

Current approaches are rooted in neuronormative ideals (Azuka *et al.*, 2024)

There is a lack of literature exploring these approaches for neurodivergent learners (Bailey and Petty, 2025)

Study took place online at my private voice studio with seven AuDHD adult singers.



Participants

Participant	Age Group	Singing Experience	Prior Vocal Training	Notes
P1	Adult	Beginner	Self-taught	
P2	Adult	Professional	>10 years	Music Teacher
P3	Adult	Intermediate	1-4 years	
P4	Adult	Advanced	>10 years	
P5	Adult	Intermediate	5-9 years	
P6	Adult	Professional	>10 years	Music Teacher
P7	Adult	Beginner	Self-taught	

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Why?

Over 20 years as a vocal coach witnessing neuroinclusivity evolve.

Only recently realised my own AuDHD presentation

Seen first hand how learning preferences affect confidence, progress, and joy.

Want to amplify neurodivergent voices.



Aims & Objectives



Understand AuDHD responses to imagery-based learning and technical explanations

Co-create more responsive, accessible voice pedagogy that centres ND Voices

Strengthen my ability to translate research into practical teaching strategies

Develop my ability to design and deliver ethically sound, inclusive research

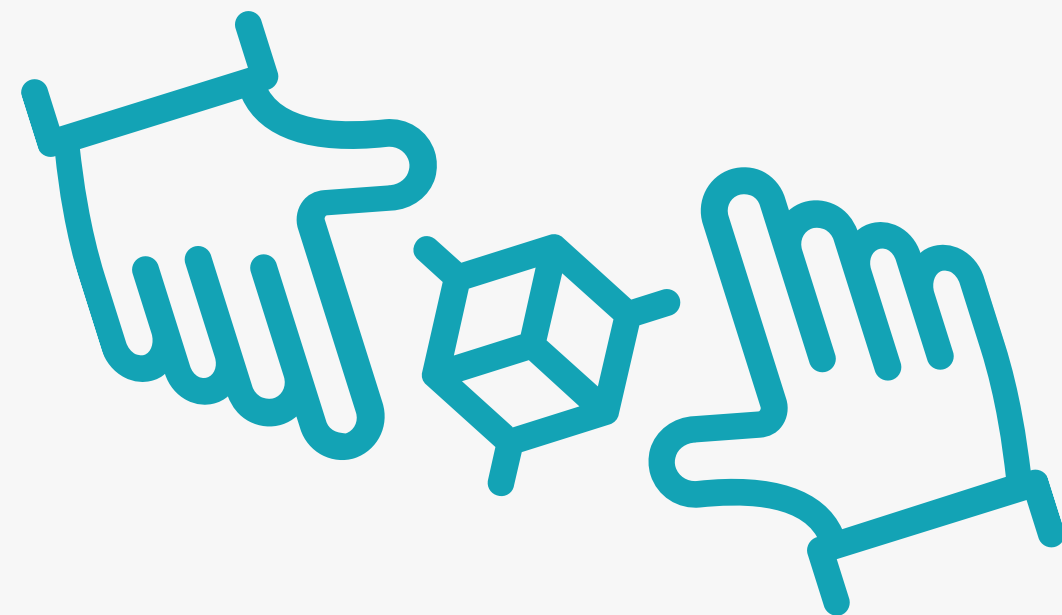
Enhance my capacity for insider reflexivity and critical self-awareness

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Methodology & Methods

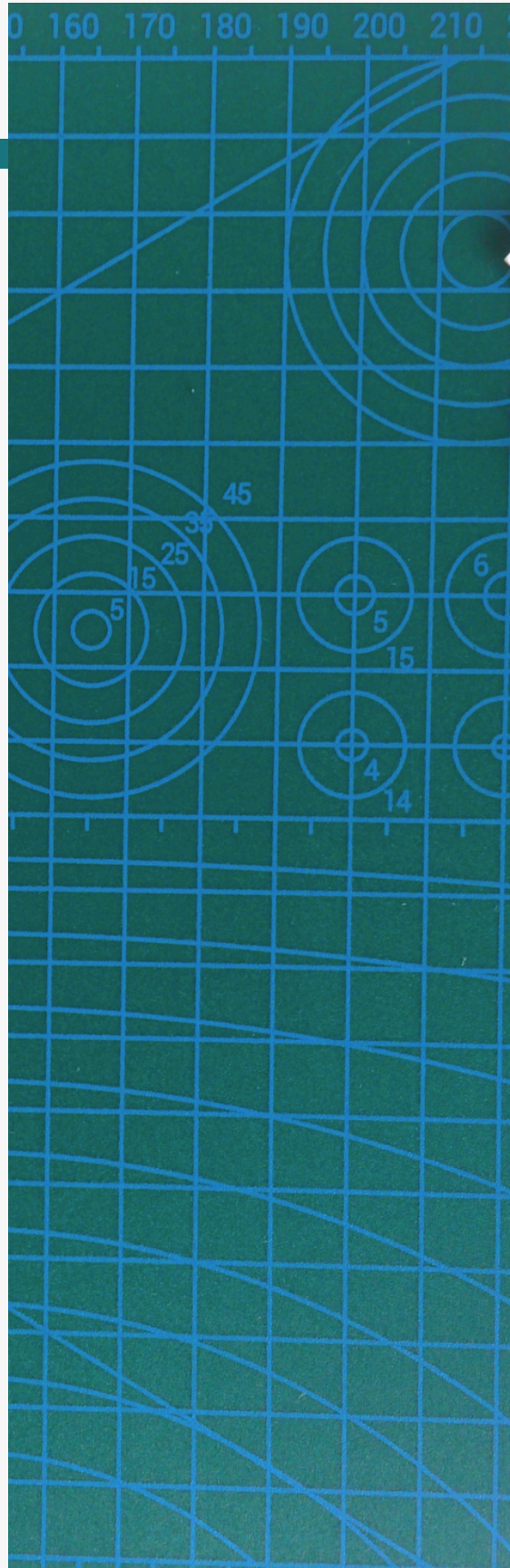
➔ Interpretivist-Constructivist Paradigm

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Creswell and Poth, 2024)



➔ Participatory Action Research

(Galletta and Torre, 2019; Wood 2019)



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Methodology & Methods

➡ Phase One

Asynchronous Focus group
(via secure group chat)

➡ Phase Two

Two short video lessons (imagery, technical explanation) + feedback (Google form)

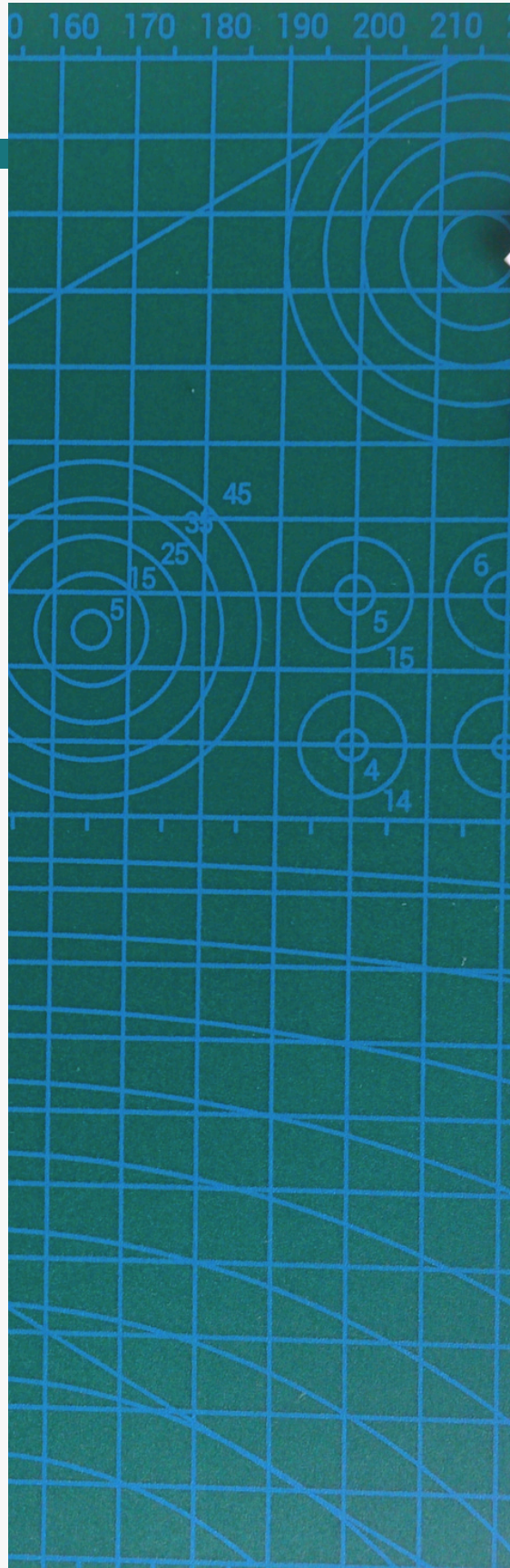
➡ Phase Three

Co-devised Lesson Questionnaire
(Google form)

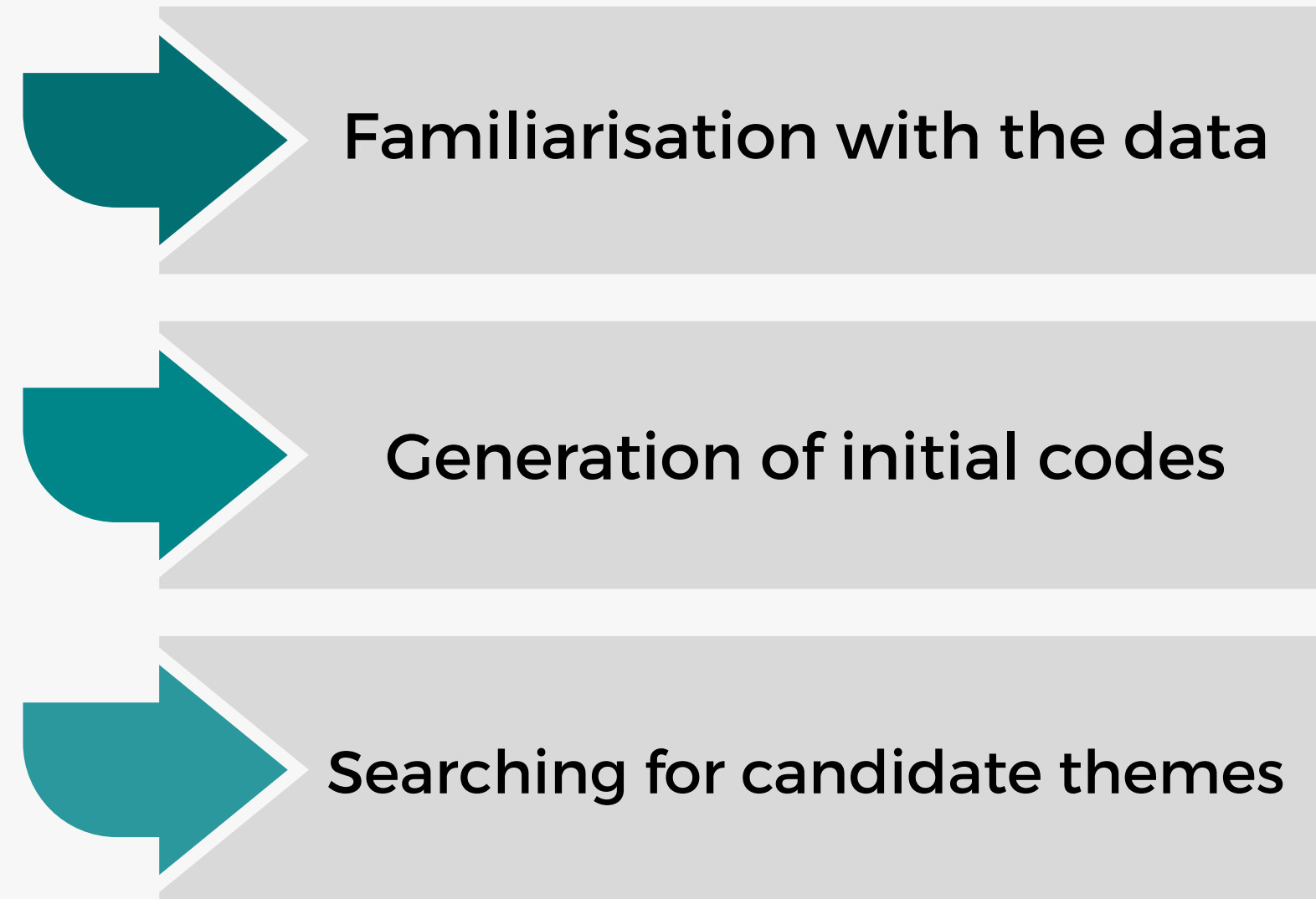
➡ Phase Four (Incomplete)

Delivery of co-devised lesson
(pre-recorded)

Aysnchronous Delivery: Functioned as the study's primary accessibility feature.



Analysis



Reflexive Thematic Analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2022)



Ethical Considerations



➤ Approval: UWTSD Ethics Committee

➤ Informed Consent: Participants given clear information sheets, consent obtained before participation

➤ Confidentiality: Anonymised data, participant group culture

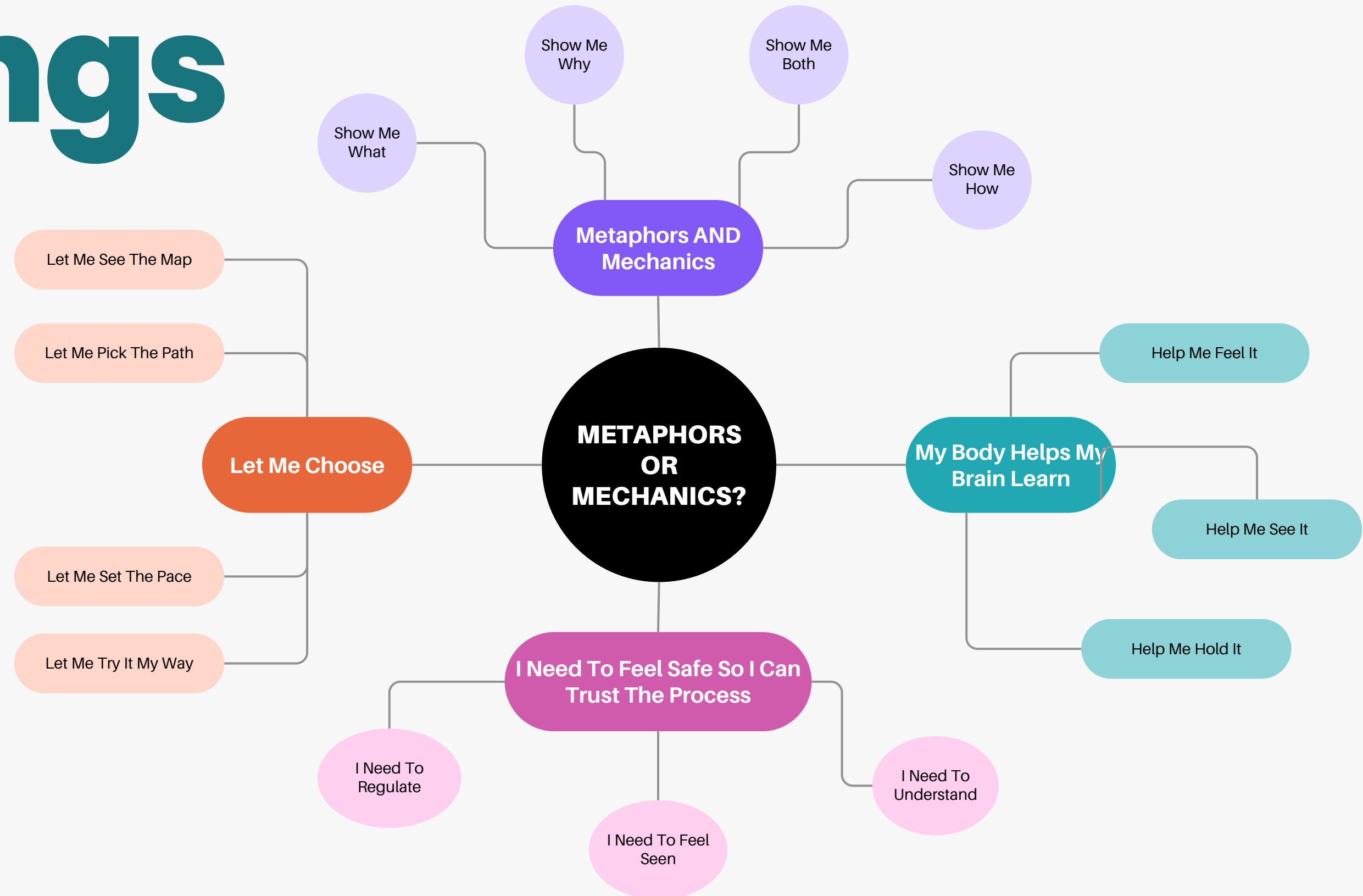
➤ Accessibility: Multiple participation formats to reduce barriers.

➤ Right to withdraw: Clear options provided at all stages

➤ Insider-researcher: Acknowledge my roles as teacher, researcher, and AuDHD peer.

Findings

Overview



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Findings

**“I like both...it creates
a fuller picture”**
(Participant 4)

Metaphors AND Mechanics

Show Me
What

Vivid and relatable imagery increased engagement and ease of skill application

Show Me
Why

Clear technical explanation offered contextual reasoning and consolidated understanding

Show Me
Both

Metaphors AND Mechanics created a more holistic understanding

Show Me
How

Demonstrations helped bridge the gap between conceptual understanding and application of skill

Dual Coding Theory
(Paivio, 1990)

Combining verbal and
non-verbal modes
enhances learning.

Findings

**“If my body is involved
...it will stay with me”**
(Participant 6)

My Body Helps My Brain Learn

Help Me
See it

Visual cues serve as anchors for abstract concepts

Help Me
Feel It

Physical cue establish concept and skill application

Help Me
Hold It

Embodied metaphors aid in recall and repeatable skill application

**Emodied Cognition
Theory** (Gallagher, 2005)

Thinking and
understanding develop
through body-world
interactions

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Findings

**“Having permission to be
my quirky, expressive self...
means everything”**
(Participant 7)

**I Need To Feel Safe So
I Can Trust The Process**

Feel
Seen

Readiness to learn depends on
regulatory and emotional state

Feel
Heard

Validation of neurodivergent learning styles
and adaptive teaching strategies

Under-
stand

Clear feedback as an invitation to explore
not correct

**Double Empathy
Problem (Milton, 2012)**

Communication
difficulties are mutual
misunderstandings not
autistic deficits

Findings

**“I like to know what’s
planned... just so I
can relax”**
(Participant 2)

Let Me Choose

See The
Map

Knowing the lesson structure helped participants regulate and stay present

Pick The
Path

Structured choice is a vital part of engagement and ownership of learning

Set The
Pace

Responsive pacing helps students manage cognitive load

Try My
Way

Personalisation and experimentation increased engagement and skill retention

Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988)

A framework for
designing effective
learning by managing
cognitive demand

Conclusion



So, do adult AuDHD singers prefer imagery-based or technical explanation, or do they need something more?

- Not simply a choice between metaphor and mechanics
- AuDHD singers need a hybrid-plus model: demonstrations, embodied tools, emotional safety, and structured autonomy
- Learning is most effective when approaches are integrated and flexible, not additive
- These findings mirror **Universal Design For Learning (UDL)** principles: multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (CAST, 2024)

Recommendations



For immediate practice:

Teachers could offer responsive multimodal explanations, clear structure, emotionally safe spaces, and prioritise student autonomy.

For vocal pedagogy:

More research into how UDL and similar principles for learning design might be applied and tested in the voice studio.

For my own future research:

Fully realise the PAR model, co-creating and testing teaching strategies with singers over time

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Reflection

- ★ **Understand** – AuDHD learning needs
- ★ **Grow** – as a researcher (PAR & RTA)
- ★ **Recognise** – my insider identity
- ★ **Co-create** – with participant voices
- ★ **Translate** – research into practice



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