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Module BMPF7013 Independent Study

Wordcount: 9214

Title: The impact of singing exams on student motivation in the private voice studio.

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Portfolio

Introduction and rationale

Throughout the last thirteen years as a private voice teacher, I have worked with both adults and children in contemporary styles from pop, rock, country, folk to musical theatre. One cohort in my studio primarily made up of school going age students, choose to go through assessment processes in the form of graded singing exams. They are among thousands of singers across the globe that enter into examinations every year through organisations such as Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM), Rockschool (RSL), Trinity College London (TCL), London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). With the exception of RSL, these examination boards have been in operation since the mid 19th Century (Wright, 2012; Tse, 2024). Initially they offered certification by way of a graded solo instrumental or singing examination (Salaman, 1994; Neary, 2013). Nowadays, these organisations have expanded their offerings to include certification based on feedback only, group performances, and many other formats (RSL Awards 2024) However, the graded examination endures as an extremely popular certification (Ang et al., 2024). In this review, I hope to explore how student motivation in the private voice studio can be affected throughout this type of assessment journey.

There has been much written in education theory around assessment and motivations of music students (McPherson and McCormick, 2000; Asmus, 2021; Ang and Odendaal, 2024). In music classroom settings, assessment is used extensively. However, some schools are moving away from traditional formal exam assessments (Kohn, 1992; Stommel, 2023). In recent years it has been widely acknowledged that formal assessment practices can have a negative impact on student learning (Coimbra et al., 2001; Hallam et al., 2021; Winstone et al., 2021). Anecdotal evidence from my own professional practice is that improvements in the singers voice do not always result from engaging in examination processes. The assessment process does not always result in a positive experience for the student, it can act as a demotivator for some (Shah and Saidon, 2017). Those that enjoy the process do not always cross transfer the skills developed into the rest of their music making (Colwell, 2002). Another informal observation from my studio is that there is an expectation among many parents and guardians that their child will become a better singer if they progress through singing grades. This expectation, whether founded or otherwise, can have an effect on the relationships between teacher, student and parent, and can be another factor that effects the

motivation of the student (Davidson and Scutt, 1999; Tse, 2024). Having said all this, there are many who find the process of achieving recognition through grades rewarding (Cook and Artino, 2016) and this motivates them to continue with their vocal studies. The rationale behind embarking on this literature review, is to explore motivation theories in order to better understand how I can best support this cohort that make up a significant number of clients in my private studio.

In my recently completed work-based research project, entitled “A study of teacher attitudes to singing exams. Does this type of assessment make our students better singers?” I conducted a small mixed methods study (Dunne, 2024). It emerged that the teachers in the study were divided in opinion as to whether the graded singing exam process was wholly or partly responsible for making voice students better singers. The teachers, through questionnaire and interview, were also divided as to whether student motivation was adversely or positively affected by participation in examinations. This literature review will hopefully shed some light on the topic of student motivation as it pertains to graded singing exams.

Aims and objectives

Aims:

To garner insight into motivational theories to enhance my understanding of how the student navigates the singing exam process, from deciding to take an exam through to receiving the results.

To find and critically analyse the current research into the effect of assessment (in the form of graded examinations) on motivation.

Objectives:

- To understand how student motivation can potentially be affected during the various stages of the singing exam process.
- To be best placed to advise students and parents on the positives and negatives of singing assessment, and be able to recognise whether the process is going to enrich the lives of the learner or hinder their progress and motivations.
- To recognise at any stage throughout the exam process if a student is becoming demotivated and to understand why that may be and how best to navigate such a scenario.

-To keep up to date with the latest research into how assessment, in the form of singing exams, affects learning in the private voice studio.

-To use the information gathered from this literature review to (at a later date) develop a framework /guidelines for my private studio and for other voice teachers that wish to partake in formal assessment practices.

The Planned programme of study

The following Gantt chart outlines the programme of study that I will take (Wilson, 2003).

TASK	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY
Topic for module chosen					
Research into literature reviews					
Outline of portfolio and literature review to be written up					
Portfolio to be written					
Literature search and analysis to be undertaken					
Literature review to be written					
Draft submission					
Re-writes and final submission					

The Literature review methodology

My first step was to decide which type of literature review to undertake. A systematic review was ruled out as it is normally carried out by teams of reviewers with specialised knowledge (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). When conducting a systematic review, researchers rigorously gather international evidence from a smaller range of studies that have been assessed for quality. They identify gaps and conflicts in research, and can use the collected data to inform policy (Munn et. al., 2018). For the purpose of this module, it was therefore not appropriate or useful to utilise a systematic approach. In the area that I chose to review, most of the data was qualitative. The challenge with gathering qualitative data is that it is harder to search, as many key words are left out of the ambiguous titles of papers, and often there is no abstract contained within the piece (Cargo et al., 2018; Noyes et al., 2019). With this in mind, after ruling out a systematic review, I looked towards the advice given by the Cochrane collaboration (Noyes et al., 2019), which was set up to formulate a way of gathering qualitative studies. In their chapter 21 paper, this collaboration argued that researchers can systematise and be rigorous about collecting qualitative data. The security of a

systematised review was an appealing proposition while allowing room for interpretative and artistic expression (Munn et al., 2018). I kept in mind the Cochrane collaborations extensive writings on qualitative evidence synthesis (QES) when searching and gathering data. Before selecting the methodology I utilised the RETREAT framework which details seven considerations (Booth et al., 2018).

1. The review question: I considered which elements of the question needed focusing on. By clarifying the key objectives and questions, I avoided potential difficulties later in the literature review process (Munn, 2018).
2. Epistemology: I endeavoured to note the philosophical underpinnings of the studies for review.
3. Time frame: With only a short period of time to complete the review this was a major factor in deciding which type to undertake.
4. Resources: As there are countless research papers into motivation and assessment, and less research into graded singing exams, it was of benefit to select the methodology based on these factors.
5. Expertise: While my teaching expertise has been advanced over the last 13 years, my level of knowledge in research methods is minimal, so I chose a method that reflected this. Another major factor in helping decide which literature review methodology to use was the expert advice given to me by my tutor and voice study centre lectures on choice of methodology.
6. Audience and purpose: I took into account the intended audience when deciding which approach to take. In this instance, this included fellow voice teachers and those with an interest in assessment and motivation theories that pertain to music education.
7. Type of data: As previously mentioned, with the majority of the research into music education and the creative arts being qualitative (Bresler, 2021), this was another major factor in my decision.

After considering the above 7 considerations from the RETREAT framework, I chose to undertake a scoping review.

The scoping review

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) describe a scoping review as an examination of type, scope and extent of research on a chosen topic. A scoping review allowed me to identify the evidence that was available on the topic of assessment and motivation in music education, analyse the gaps in research, such as the lack of research into singing exams specifically, and clarify motivation theories

and concepts that already exist, and in turn, identify their characteristics (Khalil, 2016; Peters et al., 2020; Nundy et al., 2022).

I chose to adopt a hermeneutic approach to the scoping review. Hermeneutic methodology is concerned with human experience and the desire to understand how it is expressed (Boell and Cexez-Kecmanovic, 2014). The framework that hermeneutics provides for interpreting the texts, language and actions of humans as described by William Dilthey was helpful in this module (Schmidt, 2016). The hermeneutic circle allowed me to go forward and back from the literature, while keeping the main question always in mind (Crotty, 1998). With this approach, I was able to assess whether a particular article or piece of literature was directly relevant to the question. In instances where this was not the case, the article was put aside. This enabled me to focus on core texts (Boell and Cexez-Kecmanovic, 2014). It is preferable to enter into the hermeneutic circle with fewer relevant texts rather than a larger body of research articles (Boell and Cexez-Kecmanovic, 2014). With this in mind, I chose to adopt a pearl growing approach, in order to begin gathering data for the review.

The data collection

It was my ambition to quickly find one or two highly relevant articles that related to my question, with the purpose of adopting a pearl growing approach. Pearl growing involves reviewing a document of relevance in order to extract keywords that can subsequently be applied to other searches (Schlosser et al., 2006). In order to locate pearls, I began with a consideration of the three step approach to scoping review data collection as outlined by the Joanne Briggs Institute (Santos et al., 2018). They advise a comprehensive strategy that not only identifies published evidence, but also grey literature or unpublished evidence. They suggest the first step should be a search of selected databases, followed by a second search of keywords identified from the first search, and thirdly a search of the reference lists gleaned from the first two searches. I adapted this approach as I was unsure initially which databases were going to return the most relevant articles. Firstly I typed my module title into google scholar. The rationale behind this was that it contained keywords that I had intended to separately search. "Singing exams", "motivation", "Private voice studio" This returned 21,700 results, too many to go through individually. On the first few pages, some articles of relevance were captured, but in the interest of rigour I decided to include some exclusion/inclusion criteria before selecting an article to act as a pearl. I narrowed my initial search to review articles written after 2020, and from this, I allowed cross referenced articles of relevance that were beyond this date.

The Inclusion/exclusion criteria

In order to be included the following criteria had to be met:

- Mention of assessment in education
- Reference to motivation theories
- Had to be relevant to the title as per the hermeneutic methodology
- Grey literature was accepted for inclusion (Tyndall, 2008)
- Both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered for inclusion

Exclusion criteria

- Articles where the entire text was not available
- Non-english language studies or articles

Peer reviewed journal entries were given priority from the following journals: journal of singing, journal of voice, *Journal of Educational Psychology*; *Journal of Research in Music Education*; *Contemporary Educational Journal*; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

After this initial search I found two articles that I deemed suitable as pearls. I examined them for relevance, and from them found more keywords to enter into searches: “attribution theory” “achievement goal theory” “intrinsic motivation theory” “growth and fixed mindset” These were added to the other keywords for searching: “assessment in singing” “music exams” “private voice studio” “positives of assessment”, “negatives of assessment” “assessment of the arts”, “graded music exams” “summative assessment in music” “exams and motivation” “extrinsic motivation” “intrinsic motivation”.

In order to check that I was retrieving as much relevant data from the pearls and other keyword searches, I considered a list of six strategies that was set out by Bates (1989). Firstly, footnote chasing is also called backward chaining, and involves moving through the bibliography and footnotes of a selected document in order to uncover more articles. Bates (1989) notes that this method is popular in humanities and social science research as there is no need for subject description searches. The reason for its popularity may be explained by Cooper et al. (2017) when they note that indexing of qualitative studies can be poor and therefore backward and forward chaining, and using features such as related articles can be useful. Secondly, citation searching, which is also called forward chaining, can ultimately lead to the most up to date articles on a particular search. This I found particularly useful and uncovered two very recent dissertations that dealt with the graded exams process specifically. Thirdly, a journal run, which involves searching the entirety of a journal for topical articles. I was familiar with the journal of voice and journal of singing

from previous modules. Bradford's Law states that there is a likelihood of core journals having a greater return of relevant data, and I found this to be the case with those two journals (Bates, 1989). I also found the Journal of research in Music education worthy of journal running. The fourth strategy that Bates recommended was area scanning. This was not a strategy I adopted as it involves browsing the physical materials that are located beside other relevant materials, and as my research did not involve visiting a physical library, I ruled this out. The fifth strategy suggested subject searches from bibliographies. I found it useful to glance through bibliographies in order to search for key subject matter. Finally, the sixth strategy, author searching. I found useful as it became apparent in the earlier data searches that there were certain authors that have produced many studies in the specific areas of education in music, assessment and how it effects the motivation of students. By utilising the above strategies I was able to collate circa 200 articles for my literature review. Not all were referenced in the final paper, however each provided insight into some aspect of my module topic.

Critical reflection

"By reflecting on our experiences, we maximise the potential of any new learning" (Bartram, 2024). When choosing a reflective model, I was drawn to the DEBRIEF model that was an enhanced version of Kolb model of reflection (Kolb, 1975). Kolb's model has been described as having started the learning style movement, and essentially breaks the process into four distinct stages: doing, thinking, reflecting and plan/repeat (Coffield et al., 2004). The DEBRIEF model which helps the user to be an autonomous thinker and seek to answer important questions: Describe, Evaluate, Bring, Review, Identify, Establish and Feedback (Grennon Brooks and Brooks, 1993). Under each DEBRIEF heading, I will first reflect on elements of the research process and then reflect on my topic of research.

DESCRIBE events as factually as possible

The research process:

The aim was to explore how student motivation in the private voice studio is potentially affected by the completion of graded singing exams. I knew I wanted to further explore the topic of singing exams, having already completed a small research study in the area. I was not sure exactly from what angle to approach the research, as at the end of my last module I was left with unanswered questions pertaining to teacher motivation, the "business" of certification and the effectiveness of exams in improving the voice. After exploring these options in my initial tutorial, I decided to focus on student motivation. The first step was to absorb all the information given by the college with regards requirements. Next, I started the research process, as described in the portfolio section above. With each module I had been developing my own system for collecting research papers and

filing. Initially I collated references and papers using Mendeley software (Hicks, 2011), however, for this module, I utilised word documents to keep notes and summaries and desktop folders to store the studies in pdf format.

The Topic:

What I found through researching was the extensive research into motivation of music students. I knew from my previous module that there was limited literature on the graded examination process, other than research that had been carried out by the various examination boards (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2024; RSL Awards, 2024), and no article that I could find that explicitly researched graded singing exams. However, since the beginning of 2024 there has been two research papers that have extensively dealt with the impact of graded music exams (Tse, 2024; Ang et al., 2024). Thus, reinforcing my opinion that there was a need for research in this area from researchers outside the certification companies themselves.

EVALUATE what went well/change next time

The research process:

In this process, what I feel went well were the initial stages of my researching the topic. I utilised UWTSD library searches as I had done in previous modules, however, this was the first time I used google scholar (Jacsó, 2005), and I found it to be really useful for forward chaining and for locating articles that were not available on the university database. I felt that as my system of filing and collecting information was being refined this had the knock on effect of making my limited time more productive. I started researching before fully honing in on my research question, and as a result, collected articles that were less relevant as the process developed. I could also have spent more time at the beginning of the process getting a clear structure for my literature review (Peters et al., 2015). Once I had a structure decided upon, the writing of the literature review became less of a daunting task. For the next research project, I will take more time deciding on a structure and flow before researching and writing.

The Topic:

I found the research into how assessment can have an effect on motivation, highly illuminating and relevant to my everyday practice. My day to day teaching since starting this review has been affected by the information I have gleaned from the literature. The many ways in which we assess our students during each lesson, the language we use in terms of praise or criticism (Bonshur, 2017), and the perceived pressures that the student may be facing during the examination process, are aspects I will be more aware of going forward in my professional practice.

BRING out emotions/beliefs/assumptions)

The research process:

I had assumed that this literature review was going to be a less challenging experience than my small mixed method study (Dunne, 2024), which was completed during a perfect storm of life/work events in 2023. I was determined, therefore, to make sure I was working weekly on the review.

The Topic:

My anecdotal evidence from my studio is that singing exams are not always an enjoyable or motivating experience for students. More worryingly, many students that do exams have no hatred of or excitement for the process. It is something they just do because there is an expectation for them to complete certification. As I still offer singing exam preparation, it was a journey of discovery that I felt I needed to explore. I had assumed I would find a plethora of studies that corroborated my views in relation to singing exams, however I had to make sure I was giving attention to studies that had opposing viewpoints.

REVIEW & analyse in light of previous experience, what would a colleague have done

The research process:

In light of previous modules and the time pressures I found myself under, I will have to review how I fit academic work into my schedule. Other colleagues I have spoken to that work in colleges or are employed by organisations have set teaching hours, and have been able to devote more time to college work. As I am self-employed and have no teachers working for me, I am at full capacity and work 6 days a week with upwards of 70 one to one clients a week. Now that I have experienced two modules of 9000 words, I have an expectation of the amount of work involved.

The Topic:

I now have a clearer picture of how students can potentially be affected at the various stages of the examination process. Previously, I gathered teacher opinions on the effectiveness of singing exams. I am using the knowledge I have gained in this review to retrospectively look at the answers I received from the teachers in my survey and questionnaire from my previous mixed method study (Dunne, 2024).

IDENTIFY lessons learned

The research process:

I have learned how to use google scholar in addition to UWTSD library resources, with Boolean filters more effectively (Ryan, 2023). I have developed my own colour coded filing system for research studies collected.

The Topic:

The learning from this module has already had a profound effect on my teaching. Knowing what my role as a facilitator of learning is, being able to encourage self-directed learning and have the

knowledge and courage to change my own practice in light of research into intrinsic motivation and assessment.

ESTABLISH follow up actions

The research process

I will be reviewing my own method of data collection and filing. And doing further research into reflective journals, as I think this is something that may benefit me throughout the next module (Lindroth, 2015).

The Topic:

I will be starting the conversation with fellow teachers on the ways in which our actions as teachers have an effect on the motivations of students, throughout the process of graded examinations.

FEEDBACK on actions

The research process:

The feedback already received from the draft mark was invaluable, reinforcing the current research into the importance of timely and constructive feedback that has not been attached to assessment (Brown 2006).

The topic:

I am looking forward to a debrief session with my tutor at a later date to discuss areas for further research.

Title: The impact of singing exams on student motivation in the private voice studio.

The Literature review

Introduction

In this review I hope to uncover literature that clarifies whether student motivation to learn can be favourably or adversely affected by proceeding through graded singing examinations. First I will take a brief look at the literature pertaining to motivation and assessment. After this, I will explore how motivation is affected throughout the graded exam process, starting with the decision to take an exam, followed by the initial selections of exam board, grade level and repertoire. After this, I will analyse the literature on how student motivation can be effected during the one to one preparatory lessons, under the subheadings: teaching style and practice. Literature pertaining to anxiety on exam performance will briefly be looked at before finally reviewing the literature on how student motivation is related to receiving the final grade and feedback from the examiner.

Motivation

According to Ryan and Deci (2018), motivation relates to a feeling of competence, autonomy and the basic psychological needs of humans. Cook and Artino (2016) define it as “the process whereby goal-directed activities are initiated and sustained”. In everyday life we go through various motivational states at various levels, from motivation to do housework, to exercise, and to learn (Cook and Artino, 2016; Atay et al., 2020). Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) proposed a hierarchical motivational model in which motivation can occur at several levels. Our overall motivational disposition can be seen as global and has strong links to our wellbeing and concept of self (Deci and Ryan, 1985), contextual motivation can reflect our family life, work and activities. A person can feel demotivated in some scenarios, such as work, while experiencing positive motivation in other areas such as family (Vallerand, 1997). At the heart of research into motivation is the distinction drawn between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985; West, 2013). Extrinsic motivation relates to external factors outside the person, for example manipulating behaviours such as rewards and incentives and environmental or social influences (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 1989; Asmus, 2021). Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is defined as “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions” (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 56).

Motivation in music education is a growing topic of research in the last number of years (Asmus, 1990; Deci and Ryan, 2000; McPherson and McCormick, 2000; Evans, 2015a; McHugh, 2016; MacIntyre et al., 2018; Rolandson, 2020; Evans and Ryan, 2022), however, there is still more research needed (Triantafyllaki, 2005; Driscoll, 2009). Having an understanding of motivation in music education helps us understand why people take up a musical instrument, how they navigate the challenges of learning and how they achieve success, or the reasons they may quit (Evans, 2015b). While it is widely accepted that motivation plays a major part in the learning process, there is a lack of research into student motivation in the voice studio (O'Neill and McPherson, 2002; Frey-Monnell, 2010 ;Biasutti and Concina, 2014) despite the desirability of the one to one private studio as a study medium (Frey-Monnell, 2010).

The almost universal research position in music education is that intrinsic motivation plays a bigger role in learning a musical instrument than extrinsic (MacIntyre et al., 2018). However, Comeau et al. (2019) argue that there have been strong links between extrinsic motivation and persistence and competency, providing a counter argument to the notion that only intrinsic motivation generates optimal results (Renwick and McPherson, 2009; Valenzuela et al., 2018). A recent review by Evans & Ryan (2022) concludes that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have a place in music learning, and according to Ryan and Reeve (2021), the motivation to do well in an exam does not have to be either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, it can be somewhere in between.

Extrinsic motivators, in the form of high stakes graded examinations are a major part of instrumental and vocal education, in jurisdictions from Ireland and UK, to Asia and Australia (Evans, 2015a). In many private vocal studios, including my own, students are entered for graded examinations where the student typically performs either three or four songs from a set list along with technical exercises and in some cases theory elements (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2019). On completion of a grade the student is given a percentage mark and awarded a grade such as distinction, merit, pass, or fail (Salaman, 1994).

Many studies have been completed over the last number of decades into the influences of rewards on motivation in the general population (Deci,1971; Deci et al., 2001; Hattie and Clarke, 2018) and also specifically their influences in music education (Austin, 1988; Parkes et al., 2017; Evans and Ryan, 2022), and more recently studies specific to graded examinations (Salaman, 1994; Shah and Saidon, 2017; Ang et al., 2024; Tse, 2024). Davis (2023) has found that students can feel motivated to learn through the accountability that grades demand, whereas West (2013) suggests a focus on awards and grades can have a demotivating effect on the student. Furthermore, those students who

do not excessively focus on the end grade can still experience demotivation by engaging in the assessment process (Gorichanaz, 2024).

Assessment

We live in an age of measurement (Kohn 1992; Biesta, 2010). Many theorists believe that neoliberal influences on education policies have led to an assessment culture that is deeply embedded in society (Jeong & Ryan 2022; López-Íñiguez & McPherson 2023). Richerme (2016) argues that music policymakers, students and teachers should question their assessment practices and aim to make music learning more interactive between the teacher and the student. Frank Abrahams (2019) in his essay on the writings of Paulo Freire describes teaching and learning as a partnership, and argues that assessment of music making is only valid if it is transformational in the lives of the students and teachers involved.

Assessment can be defined as an evaluation of the level of skill and knowledge reached by a person (Fautley, 2010; Booth, 2016). Formative assessment can be referred to as assessment *for* learning, while summative assessment as assessment *of* learning (Booth, 2016). The latter represents a judgement of learning that has taken place, at the end of the learning, and in graded exams the aim is to measure the attained level and award certification along with a grade (Fautley, 2010). Formative assessment has an element of judgement, although the aim is not to mark or grade the student, rather to aid progression towards mastery (Bloom et al., 1971, p.61). Both summative and formative assessments are often overlapped, and the nomenclature is often unclear and described by Cookson (2018, p. 930) as a 'conceptual mêlée'. In colleges and schools summative assessment practices are extensively used and there is no sign of this dissipating in the near future, despite the move in many circles towards an alternative to grading (Kohn, 1992; Spidel and Thelin, 2006; Blum 2020; Carillo 2021, 2023; Gorichanaz, 2024). The move away from grading in classrooms and universities is being explored more often in light of recent research into the part it plays in learning, motivation and the wellbeing of the student (Inman & Powell 2018; Davis 2023; Dosmar & Williams 2022). However, a comprehensive review of the philosophical theories that question the grading of music performances is beyond the scope of this literature review.

Graded singing exams are a form of summative assessment (Royal Irish Academy of Music, 2024). In singing and instrumental graded exams, the examiners follow a set of rubrics to mark the performance. Kohn (2006) raises many questions as to the fairness of summative assessment, in particular the use of rubrics. He argues that rubrics attempt and fail to legitimise the grading process. He concedes that while he is opposed to grading, the use of rubrics in the beginning stages of designing a curriculum may be useful, provided they are not the only source of assessment. The

fairness of assessment gets called into question by Vaugeois (2019) who noted that in one institution, examiners were preoccupied with the grade being no higher than 79 so they could not be accused of grade inflation. Summative assessment is impossible to avoid in second and third level education (Winstone and Boud, 2022). However, in my private voice studio and many others, entering our students for formal assessment through graded singing exams is a choice. Recent studies have shown that there are multiple reasons that students partake in graded music examinations, some of these reasons are non-music related (Elliott and Southcott, 2021; Tse, 2024). When deciding whether to guide a student through the exam process, it is useful to know what their motivations for taking the exam may be.

The singing exam

The decision to take the exam

Students can be extrinsically motivated to take a singing exam for many reasons including pressures from parents, peers, teachers or society, or desires to achieve high grades or reward and recognition (Pomerantz et al., 2007; Khoo et al., 2023). A subset of these students can experience a demotivation, and in some cases demotivated students can cease their music playing permanently after assessment (Cheng and Southcott, 2016; Mitchell, 2017; Shah and Saidon, 2017; Tan, 2017). There is a belief among some parents, and in society in general, that learning a musical instrument can nurture desirable characteristics such as intelligence and non-music academic performance (Demorest and Morrison, 2000; Dai and Schader, 2001), however, this has been contested (Schellenberg, 2001; Levitin, 2012). In one study it was revealed that parents are more likely to send their kids to lessons if there is academic benefit, rather than just for fun (Myers, 2023). In Ang et al. (2024), teachers spoke of the unrealistic high expectations of parents towards their child's ability in achieving success in piano music examinations. The twelve teachers interviewed believed that many parents only cared about the certificate and not about whether their child enjoyed making music or whether they could play proficiently. There was an acknowledgement that societal pressures trapped teachers and parents into the exam system in Malaysia and Singapore, where this research was undertaken. Evans (2015b) stated that while one would expect in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) that extrinsic motivation of graded examinations would have a less positive effect on students, a study by Renwick (2008) found that the motivation of the graded exam candidates was more akin to intrinsic motivation. Evans suggested that this may be due to the students using the examination process as a way to gauge the development of their mastery.

Cook (2003) argues that external rewards including stickers, certificates, praise, approval, incentives, food treats and competitions are proven and successful forms of external motivators. However, Evans (2015b) believes that student compliance to achieve a reward may not induce the student to practice independently or improve their skill once the reward has been removed. Students that are extrinsically motivated may respond well to having an initial external goal, but the aim of the teacher should be to facilitate a gradual move towards internalisation of the students motivations (Evans, 2015b). Caution is needed when the student is already intrinsically motivated, as according to Evans, these students can be moved towards external motivation should there be too much praise or control on the part of the teacher.

Expectancy value theorists suggest that some students are less likely to begin a task if they do not believe they can succeed (Cook & Artino, 2016). Wigfield and Eccles (2000) suggest these beliefs fall into three categories: their belief in their own ability, their perceived difficulty of the task, and their interest in the task itself. An application of this theory in the vocal studio would suggest that student motivation to complete and succeed in an examination can be influenced by whether they like the song choices and/or whether they believe the exam is too difficult.

The Initial choices

After the decision has been made to proceed with a singing exam, the initial choice of grade level, examination board, examination type and song choices must be made. Involving the student at this stage is essential, as the education theorist Dewey (1938) believed that the student who was more involved in their own learning experienced greater motivation. Students who develop their own learning goals are more engaged in the process of learning (Bathgate et al., 2011; O'Neill, 2011; Prichard, 2012; Baughman, 2017). However, the teacher must ensure that in the case of the singing exam the grade being attempted is not too difficult for the student at the particular stage in their development, as this can lead to a less favourable motivational outcome (Maxfield, 2023). Conversely, students can be demotivated to learn if they feel the exam or task is too easy (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989). Through the lense of expectancy-value theory, Gates (1991) observed six different types of music school learners: professional and apprentice musicians, hobbyists and amateurs, recreationists and dabblers. Gates argued that students had different motivations for developing their musical skill, therefore, there should be a diverse curricular offering in music schools. As a private voice teacher it is necessary take this into account when choosing which certification board and musical genre (e.g. opera, musical theatre or popular music exam) to recommend to students. Despite this, in my small study it emerged that teachers tended to use the same certification board for all students, and did not choose the exam structure or genre examined on a student by student basis (Dunne, 2024).

Teachers should help pick repertoire that challenges but matches the skill level of the student (Fletcher, 2020). Renwick and McPherson (2002) found that students experience more autonomy when they choose the repertoire themselves. Autonomy can be defined as the opportunity a person has to control their own actions (Cook and Artino, 2016), and it can lead to a greater learning and motivational outcome (Deci and Ryan, 1987). Leaving the student out of the decision making process at this point can lead to resentment among some students who may perceive the syllabus as tedious and dull (Davidson and Stott, 1999). Anecdotally, I have observed that a student will often distinguish between *exam songs* and songs they like singing *for fun*. In my studio I endeavour to encourage the student to choose their own repertoire for an exam, and have in the past encouraged the student to focus on other goals other than exams when they have shown no interest in exam repertoire.

After the choices of exam board, grade level and song selection have been made, how the teacher structures the preparatory lessons may be considered. Vallerand (1997) wrote that a student's motivation to learn an instrument can be adversely or positively affected by their experiences on a situational level, for example moment to moment, during lessons and interactions with a teacher.

The Preparatory lessons

Teacher style

According to Stephenson (2018), it is not the job of the teacher to motivate the student, however there are many teaching strategies that can have a positive or negative effect on the students motivation to proceed through the exam process (Atlas et al., 2004; Assor et al., 2005). According to Bloom (1985), the teacher-student relationship develops through three stages. In first stage, or earlier years, the interactions focus more on fun and informality, moving through towards higher standards, and eventually a relationship that is dedicated to mastery. With graded examinations, the examination boards describe the process as one that promotes progressive mastery, with each grade demanding more technical skill than the grade before (Conconi, 2023). While the grade system aligns with the research, as per Bloom (1985), the teacher must still take into account motivational factors at every level. A beginner student doing a lower grade may experience the same motivational dips as a more experienced student (Rae and McCambridge, 2004; Hallam et al., 2021).

There are certain specific challenges that I find can arise when working towards a graded singing exam. The ways in which the teacher approaches these challenges is worthy of exploring. With many certification boards the exam periods are fixed. In the case of RIAM there are Christmas, Easter and Summer exam sessions. They must be applied and paid for in advance (Royal Irish Academy of Music, 2024). With ABRSM online performance grades, you can choose to upload for

assessment at any point during the year (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 2019). When time pressure is a factor sometimes the teacher can show frustration when a student does not practice for the impending exam (Assor et al., 2005). The temptation can be to take control of the task and adopt a master-apprentice style of teaching, although this has been proven to be a less effective style for encouraging intrinsic motivation (Clemmons, 2006; Stephenson, 2018; Sherwood, 2023). According to Copolla (2023), some teachers can value elitism and their own preservation over providing the care and service that is best for the student. However, some research suggests that in music classrooms in particular, intrinsic motivation can be positively affected as students can have both respect for, and an implicit trust in the teacher as a guide. (Chirkov, 2009; Jang et al., 2009, 2010). Rapport between teacher and student can build a student's feeling of autonomy, self-worth and motivation (Clemmons, 2006). Hattie (2021) believes that a strong teacher-student relationship includes empathy, trust and warmth, and that a student must see mistakes as a learning opportunity in a safe environment to grow. Tools exist that may help a teacher recognise the motivation perception levels in their students, such as the MUSIC model of motivation, (MUSIC stands for empowerment, usefulness, success, interest, and caring) (Jones, 2012; Mohamed et al., 2013; Parkes et al., 2017) or the MLM (Motivation for learning Music) questionnaire (Comeau et al., 2019). Patston and Waters (2015) suggest that teachers should be encouraged to engage with learners by developing individualised lessons and plans for practice.

Practicing

When preparing for singing examinations it is unlikely that all of the practice will be done during lesson time, therefore the student must engage in practice at home. Studies have shown that the student is most likely to adopt the practice strategies that have been favoured and emphasised by the teacher (Barry, 2007; Koopman et al., 2007) therefore teachers should make students aware of a wide variety of practice strategies in order to promote self-regulation (Rohwer and Polk, 2006; Baughman, 2017). In order to encourage optimal practice, in my studio I endeavour to identify whether the student has a fixed or a mastery mindset. A mindset informs our goals and decisions and how we look at others and ourselves in the world (O'Neill, 2011). If a student has a fixed mindset they are likely to believe that their ability to sing or play a musical instrument is predetermined, a talent that is fixed (Dweck, 2006). In these instances the student is more likely to shy away from challenges and are less likely to pursue their learning, especially if they exhibit low ability (Smith, 2005). O'Neill and Sloboda (1997) did extensive research into practice behaviours and found that students with a fixed mindset were actually practicing twice as much as those that hold a mastery mindset, however this practice was less efficient and effective as those with a mastery mindset. Children with a mastery mindset are more likely to see failure of a task as part of the process of learning, a challenge that effort can overcome (Dweck, 2006).

When a student loses interest and does not want to work on singing exam preparation this can be considered to be related to their motivation levels (Hallam, 2016; Evans and Ryan, 2022). And students who try to distract away from the task or claim it is boring or not fun tend to be displaying traits of helpless motivation (O'Neill, 2011). In order to understand whether the maladaptive behaviours of our students are linked to motivation factors, it is also useful to understand whether perfectionism is present. A link has been made between avoidance of practice and perfectionism traits in students (Steober and Eismann, 2007; Diaz, 2018). According to Cleary (2013), students undertaking music exams are more likely to experience music performance anxiety (MPA) if they possess traits of debilitating perfectionism that have been exacerbated by perceived external pressures from families and teachers.

The exam performance

Anxiety

Perfectionism can be defined as a predisposition towards excessive self-criticism, concern over making mistakes and unrealistic high expectations of one's own performance (Patson and Osbourne, 2016). In the Jeong and Ryan (2022) review of music pedagogy and perfectionism in children, the distinction was drawn between perfectionism that can be linked to increased anxiety in children (debilitative perfectionism) and perfectionism that can occur as a factor of intrinsic motivation that correlates with a mastery mindset (facilitative perfectionism). Research has shown that there are links between debilitating perfectionism and MPA (Dobos et al., 2019). Since 2000 there has been a refocus away from MPA studies in professional musicians towards looking at children of school going age (McAfee and Comeau, 2020; Jeung and Ryann, 2022). Rae and McCambridge (2004) found that MPA was not linked to the grade achieved or years of study, and therefore did not necessarily reduce over time. However, Kokotsaki (2003) argued that students with more years of formal training are more likely to perform better and control their anxiety levels. Anecdotally, I have noticed that some students can get anxious especially on the lead up to a singing exam. A study by Ryan & Andrews (2009) suggests that singers feel less anxiety while performing compared to instrumentalists. The reason for this may be that as the instrument is internally in the body the singer may feel that they have more control (Kokotsaki and Davidson, 2003). Studies have shown that singers may have personality traits that differ from other instrumentalists, such as extraversion and independence (Kemp, 1996; Kokotsaki *et al.*, 2001). However Stothart (2012) suggests that a singer may feel more exposed or vulnerable and therefore more anxious, as the voice is an integral part of a person's emotional and psychological being. While some historical research suggested that a medium level anxiety can stimulate a better performance (Yerkes and Dodson, 1908; Duffy, 1962; Sloboda, 1995; Çimen, 2001; Steptoe, 2001), it is widely accepted that

managing high levels of anxiety is beneficial, especially during performance assessment (McHugh, 2016; Henshaw and Collier, 2022). As singing teachers we play an important role in not only helping a student manage anxiety for the exam performance, but in helping them with any anxiety that may occur on receiving the grade (Hallam, 2019; Atay et al., 2020).

The grade

Receiving a grade can have a motivational effect on a student (Kohn, 1992; Blum, 2020). If a student attributes the outcome to external factors, such as bad luck, subjectivity of examiner or bad teaching, they may be likely to either keep trying or conversely quit depending on their perception of the situation (Cook and Artino, 2016). When considered in the private vocal studio, the student may seek out reasons for their success or failure in the graded singing examination. Attribution theory suggests that the learner tries to establish cause and effect relationships after an event such as receiving a grade, particularly if the grade received is unexpected or negative (Weiner, 1974, 1985; Urdan and Turner, 2007). Researchers of Goal orientation theory have studied student reactions to receiving grades (Harackiewicz et al., 2002; Elliot, 2005). When the grade received is favourable the performance goal oriented student has a boosted belief in their own ability (Cook and Artino, 2016). In these instances the student feels motivated to continue learning, but only as long as the task is achievable and not too difficult. Difficult challenges have a negative effect on performance goal oriented students as they also typically have a fixed mindset (Manturzewska, 2011; West, 2013). By linking the outcome to innate ability, the student can be less motivated towards future effort (Weiner, 2000). The singing teacher that recognises signs that a student is attributing failure to innate skill level, may be able to refocus their attention towards factors they can control, in order to encourage a mastery mindset, as according to Weiner (2000), past success can predict success in the future. The student who holds a mastery goal orientation does not shy away from more difficult tasks and is less interested with, or affected by, the grade result (Cook and Artino, 2016). Dweck (1999) recommends that teachers focus on the process rather than the product, and in doing so the learner may see ability as something that is not fixed but can be developed incrementally. Flow theory which is a relation of mastery theory builds on Dweck (1999) and suggests that an overemphasis on how students perform rather than how they experience the process can inhibit learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Future research into flow theory may further the debate into the effectiveness of assessment in the private voice studio (Frey-Monell, 2010; Peifer et al., 2022).

Research has shown that there is a link between the grade received and student motivation. In one study, Hallam et al. (2021) asked over 2000 students who take graded examinations a series of Likert scale questions pertaining to the relationship between motivation, practice and student examination outcomes. They concluded that those that got lower marks were less motivated. For me this research piece misses a vital component. The students were asked whether they liked

performing and practicing, but nowhere in the question set were they asked if they enjoyed being graded, or if they enjoyed the examination process. My thoughts are that any correlation between demotivation and lower grades may have further been clarified should we have this extra information.

A critique that focusses on shortcomings can inhibit performance and be detrimental to a student's motivation to learn (Buckingham and Goodall, 2019). In my studio I have had to reassure students who were unhappy with a result that the assessment is only one person's opinion. This subjective nature of assessment is addressed by McPherson and Schubert, (2022) who argue that it is not possible for even a highly experienced or expert musician to accurately assess the performance of other musicians in a reliable and valid way.

Butler (1988) argues that students have different motivations to engage with both grades and feedback. She believes there is an ego involvement in receiving a grade and a motivation to preserve self-worth, whereas with feedback the motivation is task-involved and encourages mastery. Despite the extensive body of research into music assessment the distinction between assessment and feedback must be considered (Blackwell and Matherne, 2024).

The feedback

When the grade is received it is accompanied by a breakdown of the scores given. There is a comment box beside each element for examiner remarks and feedback. It is traditionally a small paragraph that includes comments such as “mostly secure” or “you conveyed the emotion of the song”. Often this will be followed with “work on articulation” or “try not to use too many hand gestures”. According to Winstone and Boud (2022), feedback becomes less effective when entangled with assessment. They accept that the same task can result in both assessment and feedback, but they recommend feedback should be less of an afterthought. There is evidence to suggest that when feedback accompanies a grade it takes second place and becomes less important than the grade (Mensink and King, 2020; Bailey and Garner, 2010; Rand, 2017; Winstone et al., 2017). Current research into feedback emphasises the need for a consideration of student affect (Hattie et al., 2021; Wisniewski, 2020). This is of particular importance as learning is an emotional process, and the student is working their way through their shortcomings to endeavour to improve their performance (McPherson et al., 2022). Feedback that is not highly directive yet works on developing the students own ability to self-regulate, would result in a more meaningful learning experience and promote a mastery mindset (Casas-Mas et al., 2019; Mandouit, 2020 ;López-Iñiguez et al., 2021). With graded singing exams, the examiner does not know what feedback the student

has previously received, or indeed what grade, if any, they have completed. They award the grade without knowing whether the student is just naturally gifted, or whether they have overcome great obstacles in preparation (Medina, 2012). Feedback is only effective if there can be a dialogue between the student and the person giving the feedback (Pitt and Winstone, 2018). The examiner is not in a position to check if the feedback has been read, understood or indeed actioned (McPherson et al., 2022). Feedback loops are limited therefore and the student becomes a passive receiver of the critique (Clarke and Boud, 2018; Winstone, 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2022). In the graded exams the certification boards aim to give the results in a timely fashion. However, this can take from days to weeks or months with some examination boards (Royal Irish Academy of Music, 2024). The problem with this time lag is that students are less likely to meaningfully engage with the feedback (Duke, 2005; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Yang and Carless, 2013), as in almost every case they have moved on to new repertoire and goals. Anecdotal evidence from my private studio suggests students are less likely to return to work on a particular exam song after the many weeks they have waited for the assessment and feedback.

Conclusion

Assessment is deeply imbedded in society (López-Iñíguez and McPherson, 2023). Many education theorists question the effectiveness of summative assessment (Bailey and Garner, 2010; Booth, 2016; Abrahams, 2019). In recent years there has been an increase in educational research into the negative effects of grading (Blum, 2020; Dosmar and Williams, 2022; Davis, 2023). In the field of music education research, the debate is ongoing as to whether it is useful to assign a mark to someone's creative output (McPherson and McCormick, 2006). Despite this, each year thousands of singers around the world enter into graded singing exams facilitated by examination boards such as RIAM, ABRSM, TCL and Rockschool (Salaman, 1994; Tse, 2024). My previous module, a mixed methods study, showed a divided opinion among teachers into the effectiveness of singing exams in the private studio (Dunne, 2024). This literature review was a follow on from that study. I was curious to understand not only the motivation of students to *take* exams, but also look at how the students were motivated to continue and thrive *throughout* the experience. The review has shown that learners can have a motivational shift at any stage of the process, therefore, it is useful for the teacher to be aware of the many scenarios that may result in demotivation: From deciding to proceed with an exam, choosing the exam board and repertoire, the preparatory lessons, the exam day, through to managing the expectations of the students when they receive their grade and feedback. I discovered throughout those scenarios

that there are many motivational theories that approach assessment from different angles, including self-determination theory, attribution theory, goal orientation theory, expectancy value theory, mastery theory and flow theory (West, 2013; Cook and Artino, 2016). The literature review has reinforced my belief that the students experience of taking a singing exam can be directly affected by the actions and attitude of the teacher (Goleman, 2006).

The literature, while very relevant to assessment and motivation in music education, lacked depth in studies that specifically dealt with the graded singing exams. However, many of the articles that discussed instrumental music were also applicable to the private voice studio (Baughman, 2017). Further research into the effectiveness of singing examinations would allow me to offer the most up to date advice to students and parents. While this review was examining student motivation, I noted that there was also a lack of research into the motivation of the voice teacher to enter students for singing exams. Whether teachers agree or disagree that singing exams are effective, there are many business and career benefits to putting students through graded examinations (Tse, 2024). The question of whether we have the students best interests at heart is worth exploring, and this is an area that I hope to study further in the future.

There are many ways to learn how to sing and play musical instruments that were not available to students over a century ago when graded examinations were conceived. Websites such as YouTube, Instagram and Tictoc provide endless content, students can become highly motivated to learn from these websites (Edwards et al., 2023). A drawback is that students do not get feedback on how they are progressing. Feedback is widely accepted as crucial in the acquisition of new skills such as playing a musical instrument or singing (Blackwell et al., 2023). However, assessment and feedback should not be confused (Blackwell & Matherne, 2024). As vocal teachers we should use graded examinations with caution, encouraging our students to rely less on enticements and external rewards, aiming instead to facilitate environments where students can find motivation from the engagement with music itself (Evans. 2015).

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