

BMPF 7013(F)

Teaching Between Pressures and Permissions:
A Reflexive Practitioner Inquiry into Voice Teaching, Agency, and Reflective Diagnostics

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Assessment One – Portfolio

1. Rationale and Context

1.1 Introduction

This project was born not out of a single research question, but out of a knot of lived tensions. In my work as a voice teacher across both drama school and private settings, I found myself returning to the same feeling: I was doing all the “right things,” and yet something wasn’t sitting right. Students were progressing, yes – but sometimes at cost. I could feel the strain in their voices, sense the passivity in their learning, and notice moments when I too was slipping into performance – offering solutions before sitting in questions. I had built my pedagogy on technical clarity, efficiency, and diagnostic precision, and yet increasingly I found that something relational and reflexive was missing.

1.2 Vocal Fatigue

During one particular term, this disquiet crystallised. A number of students presented with vocal fatigue by midweek, particularly during rehearsals. They were often unsure whether they could mark or pace themselves, and those who tried often did so apologetically or covertly. The issue wasn’t technical – it was cultural. Students didn’t lack tools; they lacked permission. And what I began to realise was that I too had stopped giving permission – perhaps not explicitly, but in the way I structured lessons, modelled behaviour, and filled space with correction. My responses had become quicker than my questions.

This was particularly striking in ensemble settings, where rehearsals were long, fast-paced, and often noisy. Despite my best efforts in 1:1 lessons to promote vocal health strategies, many students reported that they still “felt pressure to sing out” or “didn’t want to seem like they weren’t trying.” The concept of marking was technically available, but socially stigmatised. I could see that rehearsal load was not just a matter of time-on-voice – it was interwoven with dynamics of approval, trust, and perceived professionalism. I began to wonder: What if load management isn’t just about the voice – it’s about power?

This question would later become the first theme of my project. But at the time, I hadn’t named it yet. I simply knew that something in my teaching needed to open up.

1.3 Agency

Around the same time, I began noticing something more subtle: how my own language shaped the learning climate in lessons. I would say, “Let’s go again, but with more clarity,” or “You just need to

ground that breath,” and students would nod, comply, and try. But when I instead asked, “What do you think happened there?” or “Would it help to go back to the lip trill?”, something shifted. They paused. They reflected. They offered alternatives. One student, after a particularly open lesson, said, “I didn’t realise I was allowed to be part of the solution.” That stayed with me.

I started listening more closely to myself. When did I ask questions? When did I fill in answers? What kind of prompt generated creative experimentation, and what kind of prompt shut it down? The realisation that even a technically excellent suggestion could unintentionally reduce student agency was deeply confronting. I wasn’t failing as a teacher – but I was limiting the space for co-ownership.

This second thread – learner agency and the role of teacher language – became the second theme of the project. Again, it came not from theory, but from practice: from the facial expressions of students when I said something differently, or from the momentum that built when they were invited to shape repertoire choices, not just receive them. It made me question not only what I taught, but how the teaching dynamic itself created or closed down opportunities for ownership.

But it wasn’t until I began actively tracking these moments that the third piece of the project fell into place.

1.4 Reflection

Initially, I kept lesson notes and informal reflections. But I often found them retrospective – describing what happened without getting under why I responded the way I did. I needed a more structured, iterative way to observe myself. So I built a private rubric: a series of questions I’d complete after lessons. These questions were deliberately reflexive, asking not just “What worked?” but “Where did I default?” “What didn’t I notice until now?” and “What other choices were possible?” As I engaged with this rubric week after week, patterns emerged. I saw where I relied too heavily on imagery. I saw where I interrupted silence. I saw where I was hesitant to let students struggle.

This tool didn’t fix anything, but it changed everything. It turned my teaching into an observable field of data – not for judgement, but for curiosity. The more I reflected, the more I learned. And not just about students – about myself.

The rubric became the third arc of the project: how structured, private reflection could surface hidden assumptions and support more adaptive, responsive teaching. I didn’t think of this as

“research” at the time. It was just survival. But gradually, these questions – about vocal load, learner agency, and reflective diagnostics – started to cohere.

They became the three themes of the project. And from these themes, the following research questions emerged:

1.5 Research Questions

RQ1 – What new insights about vocal well-being and style preparation are gained by planned marking in rehearsals?

RQ2 – How do the wording of teacher prompts and a repertoire self-selection framework shape learner agency during lessons?

RQ3 – In what ways does using a private self-reflection rubric help surface hidden assumptions and refine teacher’s day-to-day teaching choices?

These questions were not hypotheses. They were invitations – ways to hold open space for inquiry, refinement, and growth. They helped structure the literature review, yes, but more importantly, they gave shape to the questions I was already asking in the studio.

This project, then, is not just a response to what wasn’t working. It is a record of learning through discomfort. It is a re-balancing – not only of power between teacher and student, but of clarity and care within my own teaching self. It marks a turning point from technique to trust, from performance to presence, and from reactive practice to reflective development.

2. Positioning the Research Questions

The formulation of the research questions in this project developed through cycles of professional observation, reflective pattern recognition, and iterative reframing. While initially informed by practice-based tensions, each question was progressively refined to provide a structured yet flexible lens through which to examine pedagogical development. The three questions do not serve as hypotheses in a positivist sense but function as heuristic tools – offering conceptual anchors for an inquiry rooted in professional learning, rather than traditional data collection or outcome testing (Brookfield, 2017; Moon, 2004).

The first research question – What new insights about vocal well-being and style preparation are gained by planned marking in rehearsals? – arose from repeated concerns about vocal strain and cultural expectations in institutional ensemble settings. Marking, though technically available as a vocal strategy, appeared to lack legitimacy within rehearsal hierarchies, contributing to habitual overuse and underreporting of fatigue. This question was therefore framed to explore the interplay

between voice health strategies and rehearsal dynamics, building on literature that critiques the disconnect between pedagogical ideals and rehearsal realities (Hunter et al., 2020; Welch and Howard, 2020).

The second question – How do the wording of teacher prompts and a repertoire self-selection framework shape learner agency during lessons? – emerged from observations that vocal outcomes were often shaped not solely by technical content, but by the communicative framing of pedagogical interactions. Student autonomy appeared particularly responsive to micro-linguistic choices and to opportunities for repertoire co-construction. In alignment with scholarship on learner motivation and adult education (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Carey and Grant, 2014; Evans, 2015), this question was positioned to explore how teacher discourse and structural design might either support or inhibit a more collaborative, agency-driven learning experience.

The third question – In what ways does using a private self-reflection rubric help surface hidden assumptions and refine teacher's day-to-day teaching choices? – was developed through the use of a practitioner-designed tool intended to scaffold more consistent and critically engaged reflection. Rather than functioning as an evaluative checklist, the rubric supported the surfacing of unexamined teaching behaviours, enabling more adaptive and intentional responses over time. This inquiry aligns with reflective practice literature that emphasises the diagnostic and transformative potential of structured reflexivity (Brookfield, 2017; Dodson, 2021; Moon, 2004).

Together, these research questions provided conceptual orientation throughout the project, bridging lived studio practice with broader pedagogical discourse. They functioned not as destinations, but as thematic frames that facilitated inquiry into the dynamic interplay between teacher habit, student response, and shared agency.

3. Planned Programme of Study

This project adopted a reflexive-practitioner methodology rooted in the traditions of critical pedagogy, adult education theory, and post-positivist reflective inquiry. At its foundation lies a constructivist epistemology – an understanding that knowledge is contextually constructed through practice, interaction, and iterative reflection, rather than objectively “discovered.” This epistemological stance positions the practitioner not as a neutral observer but as a meaning-maker embedded within the pedagogical ecosystem (Moon, 2004; Brookfield, 2017).

Aligned with this, the methodological framework was informed by practitioner research, action-reflection cycles, and reflexive ethnography. Reflection was treated not as a passive postscript but

as an ongoing, active method of inquiry – allowing for adaptive decision-making and responsive pedagogical shifts in real time (Schön, 1983). The project did not seek to produce generalisable findings but rather to generate situated professional insight – what Kemmis and McTaggart describe as praxis-oriented knowledge.

3.1 Theoretical Influences

Several intersecting theoretical perspectives informed the project's design and reflective tools:

- Brookfield's (2017) critical reflection model, which encourages teachers to uncover habitual assumptions through the use of multiple lenses: autobiographical, student, theoretical, and peer.
- Moon's (2004) work on experiential and reflective learning, which highlights how structured reflection transforms experience into knowledge.
- Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as drivers of intrinsic motivation—relevant to both teacher and student agency.
- Knowles' andragogical model (Knowles, 1980), which underpins the view of learners as self-directed, goal-oriented adults whose engagement deepens through meaningful choice.
- Carey and Grant's (2014) articulation of "co-agency" within 1 to 1 teaching, which served as a conceptual foundation for exploring shared power dynamics in pedagogical encounters.

These perspectives provided the framework for developing the three thematic lines of inquiry: vocal load management and marking culture; teacher language and learner autonomy; and reflective diagnostics for practitioner development.

3.2 Methodological Framework

The methodological approach was reflexive, recursive, and entirely embedded in lived studio practice. It was characterised by three interlinked processes:

1. Action and observation – Teaching across one-to-one and rehearsal contexts while consciously observing language use, student response, and vocal behaviours.
2. Structured reflection – Using a practitioner-designed rubric and accompanying journal to interrogate instincts, triggers, hesitations, and teaching choices.
3. Thematic refinement – Extracting emergent patterns and connecting them to theoretical constructs already under review, which in turn influenced subsequent action.

This process mirrored elements of action research but remained fluid, favouring interpretive insight over interventionist structure. It drew on Schön's notion of "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" to maintain live responsiveness, and was underpinned by a belief in practitioner reflexivity as a driver of ethical, situated pedagogy.

3.3 Reflective Action Plan (Phased Progression)

Rather than a fixed research plan, the project unfolded in three broad, overlapping phases, shaped by continual reappraisal:

- Phase 1 – Diagnostic Noticing: Initiated with informal journaling and voice notes, focusing on points of dissonance, repetition, or discomfort. This included teacher language, rehearsal norms, and student compliance patterns.
- Phase 2 – Rubric Implementation: Development and application of a structured, self-generated rubric to scaffold reflection across daily teaching activity. Prompts explored themes such as permission-giving, default cues, embodied cues vs. linguistic instruction, and reactions to unexpected student choices.
- Phase 3 – Thematic Patterning and Literature Integration: Regular collation of reflections to identify emerging patterns. These were aligned with relevant literature, which provided both validation and challenge. This phase shaped the articulation of research questions and the construction of the written assignment.

Although the practical implementation occurred over a short time frame, the intellectual and pedagogical groundwork for this project had developed over several years of cumulative teaching practice. This allowed for a high level of professional immersion and fast-cycle meaning-making once reflective tools were formally deployed.

3.4 Evidence of Learning

The project did not seek to evaluate student outcomes but rather to track and analyse shifts in teacher decision-making, language use, and cultural scaffolding. Key forms of practitioner evidence included:

- Increased deployment of permission-giving language regarding marking and rehearsal participation.
- A shift from closed to open prompts in lessons, often replacing direction with diagnostic questioning.
- Observable increase in student co-agency, especially in repertoire co-selection and reflective dialogue.
- Alterations in how silence and uncertainty were handled during lessons (e.g., allowing more processing time, resisting the urge to “fix”).
- Emergence of a heightened self-awareness around pedagogical triggers, assumptions, and coping mechanisms

These insights were not extracted as “data” but synthesised into a reflective, thematic narrative—integrated into the portfolio’s critical review and the literature-based argument of the written assignment.

3.5 Ethical Protocol

As a practitioner-facing inquiry, the project did not collect or analyse student data in any form. All reflective documentation was anonymised and used solely to explore the teacher’s perspective. No recordings, observations, or surveys were conducted. The students mentioned in reflective notes were not research subjects but catalysts for teacher noticing. Care was taken to obscure identifying features, and the tone of all reflection was developmental, not evaluative.

Additionally, the project engaged in transparent and ethical use of AI-assisted tools for reflective and linguistic synthesis. Software was used exclusively by the practitioner to:

- Clarify the articulation of emerging insights.
- Structure reflective commentary into coherent academic form.
- Refine language and syntax during the editing phase of written outputs.

AI was not used to generate teaching content, student responses, or critical analysis. All reflections were authored by the practitioner, with AI functioning as a dialogic tool to support metacognitive processing and academic clarity. This aligns with ethical scholarship practices in evolving digital contexts.

3.6 Projected Theoretical Contributions

Though small in scope, the project aims to contribute meaningfully to three interlinked pedagogical discussions:

1. Vocal health as a culturally mediated construct – Reframing vocal load not only as a technical issue but as an embedded behavioural norm shaped by permission, modelling, and ensemble culture.
2. Teacher-student co-agency as pedagogical design principle – Highlighting how prompts, choices, and repertoire co-construction can become micro-sites of autonomy, with implications for motivation, engagement, and professional formation.
3. Reflective diagnostics as a tool for recursive professional learning – Demonstrating how structured but flexible tools (e.g. rubrics) can surface embedded pedagogical patterns, enabling sustainable, real-time practitioner adaptation.

These contributions may serve others engaged in voice pedagogy within conservatoire and drama school environments, particularly those working across both private and institutional contexts where teacher agency and curriculum design often exist in tension.

4. Critical Review

4.1 Theme 1: Vocal Load Management and Rehearsal Culture

The following thematic analyses are structured through Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984), which offers a dynamic framework for interrogating professional practice. Each theme is approached as a recursive learning arc, encompassing concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptual synthesis, and active pedagogical adjustment. This model aligns closely with the reflective methodology employed throughout the project and supports the transformation of experience into pedagogical insight (Moon, 2004; Brookfield, 2017).

The first theme centres on the dissonance between vocal health rhetoric and rehearsal realities in musical theatre education. While literature on voice care provides robust guidance on technical strategies – such as semi-occluded vocal tract exercises and vocal pacing protocols (Titze et al., 2018) – these tools often fail to take root in student behaviour without corresponding cultural legitimisation. Concrete experiences within group rehearsal settings revealed recurring patterns of student overuse, apologetic marking, and reluctance to pace themselves, even when physically strained. This reflects Hunter et al.'s (2020) findings that performance expectations frequently override vocal care, particularly within institutional hierarchies where ensemble culture discourages self-regulation.

These experiences triggered a cycle of reflective observation. While students possessed technical knowledge of vocal conservation, many expressed uncertainty about whether marking was “allowed.” This sense of conditional permission pointed not to a pedagogical gap, but to a cultural one. Despite verbally advocating for vocal health, my own behaviours – such as singing full-voice demonstrations, accepting rehearsal schedules without challenge, or prioritising musicality over sustainability – were inadvertently reinforcing the very norms I sought to question. Brookfield (2017) warns that unexamined teaching patterns can silently uphold dominant ideologies, while Moon (2004) emphasises the need to identify discrepancies between stated values and actual practices.

From this point of observation, conceptual integration began to occur. Drawing on self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), the issue came to be understood less as a technical failure and more as a deficit in learner autonomy. Without institutional or interpersonal affirmation, students were hesitant to take ownership of their vocal health. This aligns with Evans's (2015) argument that learner agency is contingent not just on individual capacity, but on structural and

cultural conditions. In this light, marking was re-conceptualised not as a remedial workaround, but as a professional, pre-emptive strategy – worthy of explicit teaching, modelling, and reinforcement.

The final phase of this cycle involved active pedagogical experimentation. Rather than simply encouraging students to mark, I began to embed marking into the design of lessons and rehearsal simulations. Students were invited to discuss when and how they might mark, reflect on their internal hesitations, and identify external cues that might discourage them. In line with Carey and O'Bryan's (2018) call for co-agency in performance pedagogy, these sessions were structured collaboratively, reframing vocal pacing as a professional responsibility rather than a personal weakness.

Student feedback and behaviour gradually shifted. One student reported feeling "more legitimate" in rehearsal after our discussion, and another described using a "code" with peers to subtly agree on marking during taxing group numbers. These small but meaningful shifts suggest that cultural change begins at the level of shared discourse and teacher modelling, not just policy. This observation echoes Welch and Howard's (2020) assertion that sustainable voice use requires institutional and relational change – not merely individual adaptation.

The rubric played a critical role in maintaining awareness of my own complicity in rehearsal culture. Repeated entries surfaced subtle tendencies, such as deferring to musical directors even when voice use was excessive, or demonstrating in full voice despite signs of student fatigue. These were not oversights of knowledge, but indicators of embedded assumptions about authority and professionalism – what Brookfield (2017) refers to as "implicit teaching scripts." The ability to diagnose and dismantle these habits marked a significant phase of professional growth within this theme.

Ultimately, this theme deepened the understanding that vocal load management cannot be addressed through technique alone. It requires shifts in language, modelling, and cultural permission. This directly addressed RQ1, reframing marking not as a passive choice but as a collaborative practice of vocal autonomy, embedded within a broader pedagogy of sustainability.

4.2 Theme 2: Learner Agency and Teacher Prompts

This theme explores how learner agency in one-to-one singing pedagogy is shaped by the language choices of the teacher and the structural design of repertoire selection. Drawing again on Kolb's experiential learning model (1984), this theme is articulated through a recursive cycle of observed moments, reflective interrogation, theoretical integration, and pedagogical response. The

role of teacher prompts emerged as a potent site of co-agency, where subtle linguistic shifts appeared to either enable or inhibit student autonomy and reflexivity.

The concrete experience driving this line of inquiry was a recurring pattern of compliant vocal attempts in lessons that lacked lasting clarity or student investment. When students were given specific, prescriptive cues – such as “add more twang” or “try grounding your breath” – they often nodded and complied, but did not always retain or independently reapply the strategy. In contrast, when they were asked open-ended questions – such as “What did that feel like?” or “Would it help to go back to the siren?” – students paused, reflected, and often articulated their own adjustments. This mirrored findings by Carey and Grant (2014), who observed that agency flourished when teachers reduced verbal density and allowed space for learner-led direction.

Reflective observation of my own practice revealed habitual tendencies toward over-supplying solutions, especially under time constraints or when students expressed frustration. This mirrored what Brookfield (2017) describes as a “default to rescue,” where teachers unconsciously adopt the role of problem-solver, thereby removing the learner from the diagnostic process. The discrepancy between my espoused value of co-agency and the lived experience of overly directive sessions prompted the development of a more structured reflection on language.

In response, I used the reflective rubric to track the phrasing and type of prompts issued during each lesson. Over time, patterns emerged: closed prompts were more frequent during repertoire work; open prompts during technical warmups; neutral prompts were rarely used at all. By surfacing these tendencies, the rubric allowed me to examine the implicit pedagogical scripts I was operating under – scripts that often conflated efficiency with clarity, or assumed comprehension without checking for understanding (Moon, 2004).

Through abstract conceptualisation, these insights were mapped onto theoretical frameworks of adult education and motivational psychology. Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential for intrinsic motivation. From this lens, overly prescriptive prompting – while technically accurate – may compromise a student’s autonomy and thus reduce ownership of the learning process. Knowles’ (1980) andragogical model similarly holds that adult learners thrive in environments that are self-directed and choice-rich. Within this framing, prompts serve not only as technical suggestions but as discursive acts that position the student either as agent or recipient.

The issue of repertoire choice also emerged as a structural component of learner agency. In the early stages of the project, students were often presented with repertoire options based on technical need or stylistic range. While this was pedagogically sound, it did not always invite co-construction. When students were instead given frameworks within which to select their own pieces – guided by thematic or technical parameters – engagement increased, and lesson flow improved. This reflects Zarrin et al.'s (2022) comparative analysis of teacher talk, which found that collaborative repertoire decisions strengthened both student ownership and vocal self-awareness .

Active experimentation involved refining both my lesson structure and language use. I began each lesson by asking students what they wanted to focus on, what they were noticing in their own practice, or whether anything from rehearsal needed attention. During repertoire sessions, I used prompts that asked students to name what they heard, felt, or intended – rather than directing their adjustments outright. Feedback became more dialogic and reflexive, often opening new lines of inquiry. As Moon (2004) suggests, the act of reflection can itself become a learning moment when it is scaffolded by generative questioning.

The effects of these changes were notable. Students began initiating technical suggestions based on previous lessons, referencing the tools rather than the outcomes ('I think I need to do the sirens again'). In repertoire sessions, they increasingly led interpretative choices, sometimes altering phrasing or dynamics without prompting and explaining their reasoning in musical or emotional terms. These developments echoed Carey and Grant's (2014) description of "co-agentive teaching," where student-led learning is not only permitted but structurally enabled.

Crucially, this theme also prompted a re-evaluation of teacher vulnerability. As Brookfield (2017) argues, fostering student agency requires teachers to relinquish control in favour of collaboration – a move that often reveals the teacher's own uncertainties. By allowing space for student reflection and co-construction, I had to resist the instinct to fill silence or over-correct. The rubric entries during this phase often revealed moments of tension: the urge to provide "the right answer" versus the patience to wait for a student's emergent solution.

In synthesising these reflections, the theme addressed RQ2 by illustrating how the wording of teacher prompts – and the structural design of choice – can profoundly shape the development of learner agency. Prompts are not merely instructions; they are pedagogical signals that shape power, identity, and responsibility in the voice studio. Through recursive cycles of noticing, reflection, theoretical engagement, and adaptation, this theme affirmed that learner autonomy is

not a byproduct of good teaching – it is a co-created condition that emerges when space, structure, and dialogue align.

4.3 Theme 3: Reflective Diagnostics and Teaching Assumptions

The third theme of this inquiry concerns the role of structured self-reflection in surfacing hidden assumptions and catalysing change in pedagogical decision-making. This theme was explored through repeated reflective cycles, where the use of a private rubric became both a mirror and a microscope: a tool for capturing habitual practice and for examining the beliefs that sustained it.

The concrete experience initiating this theme was a subtle discomfort during a sequence of lessons in which I found myself repeating the same technical cues across different students – despite mixed results. While the techniques themselves were valid, the uncritical repetition of certain prompts signalled a reliance on ingrained patterns. At times, I caught myself correcting a student before fully hearing their attempt, or filling silences with “quick fixes” rather than sitting with the discomfort of process. These moments aligned with Brookfield’s (2017) assertion that reflective teachers must learn to “see their teaching through four lenses” – student, self, theory, and peers – to avoid unconscious reproduction of ineffective norms.

Reflective observation began through journaling but gained clarity with the self-reflection rubric. Unlike performance evaluation tools, this rubric was qualitative and narrative in style, inviting responses to open prompts such as: “What did I default to?”, “What did I avoid?”, and “Where did I follow rather than lead, or lead rather than follow?” By completing this rubric daily, I began to notice consistencies: a tendency to over-praise hesitant students, a reluctance to challenge confident ones, and an overuse of anatomical language regardless of student response.

These patterns prompted a phase of abstract conceptualisation, in which I began connecting my rubric responses with theoretical literature on teaching beliefs and instructional habits. Moon (2004) argues that reflective processes move practitioners from surface-level analysis toward conceptual reframing – especially when guided by structured tools. Similarly, Carey and Grant (2014) describe how teacher agency is not just enacted through technique, but shaped through internal narrative – what a teacher believes “works,” “matters,” or “must be done.” Through this lens, my recurring teaching scripts revealed not only pedagogical habits but philosophical positions about voice, authority, and learning.

The rubric also uncovered how my actions were being shaped by emotional and relational undercurrents. On days when I felt uncertain or under-confident, I was more likely to over-correct

or provide excess technical explanation – perhaps as a form of professional self-protection. This observation echoed Brookfield's (2017) claim that teachers often perform "compensatory competence," projecting authority to mask internal vulnerability. These insights challenged the notion that reflection is merely evaluative; instead, it became diagnostic – a way of engaging with the affective and relational dimensions of teaching.

Active experimentation involved consciously altering both my internal mindset and my external choices. I began approaching lessons with a self-set intention: "Observe more than correct," "Ask twice before answering," or "Let the student name the solution." These internal cues were then evaluated against rubric responses to track consistency and outcome. Over time, changes became visible: students offered more independent vocal problem-solving; they began referencing previous lessons without prompting; and in several cases, they introduced terminology or frameworks I had not used – evidence of ownership and internalisation.

The reflective rubric itself became a co-participant in the inquiry. Its regular use trained my attention, much like Brookfield's (2017) emphasis on using critical incidents to develop teaching insight. Even on days when nothing overt occurred, the act of writing deepened my awareness of tone, pace, and response. As Moon (2004) suggests, structured reflection does not only record practice – it actively transforms it.

Crucially, this theme also invited broader contemplation of teacher identity. While earlier themes focused on learner agency, this one repositioned the teacher as a developing agent within a complex relational system. The rubric did not "fix" my teaching; rather, it allowed a space to interrogate the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural threads that wove through my practice. In this sense, the project answered RQ3 not by producing a template or model, but by demonstrating how a simple tool – used consistently and critically – can function as an ongoing site of learning.

This phase of inquiry also reinforced the notion that change does not always require new knowledge, but often a new way of seeing familiar actions. One particularly transformative insight was the recognition that my teaching was most effective not when I was most articulate, but when I was most responsive – when my choices emerged from observation rather than anticipation. This shifted my pedagogical posture from one of performance to one of presence.

This theme demonstrated that reflective diagnostics – when embedded into daily teaching – can illuminate pedagogical assumptions, unlock adaptive strategies, and sustain an ongoing process of

development. The rubric, though simple in form, became a significant artefact within the project, modelling what Carey and O'Bryan (2018) describe as "self-authoring teaching practice" – where decisions are shaped not only by training and experience, but by active, intentional noticing.

5. Conclusion: Towards Shared Agency and Forward-Looking Practice

This portfolio has documented a sustained period of critical reflection on professional practice, centred around three interwoven themes: vocal load and rehearsal culture, learner agency and teacher prompts, and the diagnostic power of teacher reflection. Each began as a site of discomfort or friction – moments where something felt off in the teaching room, in the rehearsal process, or in myself as a practitioner. What followed was not a fixed plan or research intervention, but a recursive, responsive inquiry that deepened with each reflective turn.

What has emerged most clearly across the project is a rebalanced sense of agency. While my initial focus was on enabling more student autonomy, the process has revealed that teacher agency – our capacity to re-author our language, choices, and assumptions – is just as vital. In learning to give students more control over their vocal process, I found myself reclaiming my own: not in the sense of more authority, but in stepping out of well-worn habits and into more spacious, co-created learning environments. At its heart, this portfolio has been about creating permission – for students to mark, to choose, to question; and for myself to listen, to pause, and to evolve.

The use of a reflective rubric was pivotal. Simple in form but consistent in use, it helped me move beyond vague introspection and into meaningful pattern recognition. It became a place where I could be honest, curious, and strategic – sometimes all at once. Through it, I learned to notice not only what I was doing, but why. That noticing changed everything.

As I look ahead to the final module of this MA, the focus will shift toward another layered and under-explored area of voice pedagogy: vocal code-switching. This next phase will investigate how singers adapt – physically, stylistically, and psychologically – when moving between styles such as legit musical theatre, contemporary musical theatre, and pop/rock. It will build on the relational and diagnostic frameworks developed in this module, but now turn the lens outward: toward the body-mind-voice interface, stylistic identity, and the pressures and freedoms of versatility.

In that sense, this portfolio doesn't close a chapter – it opens the next one. What began as a focused reflection on language, permission, and rehearsal health has grown into a much broader inquiry into the ethics and artistry of voice teaching in contemporary performance training. The

questions now are even more complex – but they are rooted in a much clearer sense of practice, purpose, and pedagogy. And that, ultimately, is the most valuable learning of all.

Assessment Two – Written Assignment

1. Introduction

Musical-theatre training today continues to evolve in response to shifting performance demands and learner expectations (Turnbull and Yu, 2023). Across both drama schools and freelance studios, singing teachers are engaging more actively with questions of vocal health, learner autonomy, and reflective practice (Brookfield, 2017). While many institutions promote holistic development, the structural realities of rehearsals, assessment, and teaching routines still raise important questions about how pedagogical decisions shape vocal outcomes and learner agency (Equity, 2023).

The rehearsal room, in particular, presents a complex landscape. Singing in ensemble contexts can place significant vocal demands on learners, especially where extended rehearsal durations or repeated full-voice performances are involved (Hunter et al., 2020). Research into rehearsal practices in musical theatre suggests that structured marking protocols – planned alternations between full-voice and reduced-intensity singing – may offer protective benefits without compromising artistic output (Bourne et al., 2016). Titze (2006) supports the physiological rationale for semi-occluded vocal tract (SOVT) work as a strategy to manage vocal load and reduce collision forces during high-repetition contexts.

Alongside these physical considerations, the question of learner agency continues to be a central concern within voice pedagogy (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In adult education theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness are considered essential conditions for deep learning and self-motivation (Knowles, 1980; Deci and Ryan, 2000). When learners participate in repertoire decisions or contribute to goal-setting in lessons, studies suggest increased levels of engagement, retention, and self-efficacy (Evans, 2015). Brookfield (2017) notes that teaching language – such as the framing of prompts and feedback – can either reinforce or redistribute power in subtle but meaningful ways.

In parallel, there is increasing attention to how teachers reflect on their own practice, particularly through structured self-assessment and diagnostic tools (Schön, 1983). Reflective instruments such as lesson rubrics, feedback journals, or co-written action plans are intended to make implicit choices more visible and adaptable over time (Moon, 2004). Ellis (2016) highlights that the design of such tools must themselves be subject to reflection, as they inevitably carry embedded assumptions about teaching, learning, and authority.

This literature review therefore explores three interrelated themes within singing pedagogy: rehearsal-based load management, learner autonomy in technical and artistic decision-making, and the role of diagnostic reflection in practitioner development. The guiding research questions are:

- RQ1. What new insights about vocal well-being and style preparation are gained by planned marking in rehearsals?
- RQ2. How do the wording of teacher prompts and a repertoire self-selection framework shape learner agency during lessons?
- RQ3. In what ways does using a private self-reflection rubric help surface hidden assumptions and refine a teacher's day-to-day choices?

Section 2 outlines the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the review. Section 3 presents a thematic analysis of the literature aligned with the research questions. Section 4 offers a critical evaluation of the field, and Section 5 concludes with reflections for future pedagogical development.

2. Literature and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Overview

This section outlines the conceptual and theoretical foundations that inform the inquiry. Each of the three research questions is supported by a corresponding area of scholarship: rehearsal-based vocal load management; learner agency and learning; and reflective tools for teacher development. Drawing on voice science, self-determination theory, and reflective pedagogy, the discussion below provides a scaffold for the thematic literature review that follows.

2.2 Load Management and Vocal Health in Musical Theatre

The concept of vocal load refers to the cumulative physiological demand placed on the voice during sustained or repeated phonation, particularly under performance conditions (Hunter et al., 2020). Load is determined by multiple variables, including subglottal pressure, duration, pitch range, and environmental context (Echternach et al., 2014). In ensemble rehearsal contexts, where singers may work across long sessions with limited rest, vocal load can become a significant health concern (Titze, 2006).

Bourne et al. (2016) argue that although voice health is often referenced in institutional rhetoric, few rehearsal schedules embed practical structures to manage cumulative load. Their study of West End rehearsals showed daily phonation time regularly exceeded 90 minutes, with peak days surpassing 120 minutes. Similar concerns appear in Equity's (2023) industry guidance, which emphasises that workload planning is an ethical as well as pedagogical responsibility.

Planned marking – purposeful modulation between full-voice and lighter singing – has been suggested as a practical intervention. LeBorgne and Rosenberg (2021) define marking as ‘a pedagogically sanctioned reduction in vocal intensity used to maintain stamina without compromising task rehearsal’ (p. 146). This concept aligns with Titze’s (2006) advocacy for semi-occluded vocal tract (SOVT) exercises, which reduce vocal fold collision while preserving proprioceptive feedback. More recently, LeBorgne and Rosenberg (2021) call for greater collaboration between voice practitioners and production staff to integrate vocal pacing into rehearsal design.

2.3 Learner Agency and Autonomy in Voice Pedagogy

Learner agency refers to the capacity of students to make meaningful decisions about their own learning processes (Carey and Grant, 2014). In education, this is closely linked to andragogy, which emphasises autonomy, goal orientation, and the integration of prior experience (Knowles, 1980). When learners are involved in choosing repertoire or co-setting lesson objectives, motivation and retention tend to improve (Evans, 2015).

Self-determination theory (SDT) provides a psychological lens for this discussion. Deci and Ryan (2000) propose that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the three basic psychological needs required for optimal motivation. In music settings, environments that support these needs have been associated with stronger technical outcomes and reduced anxiety (McPherson and Renwick, 2011).

Repertoire choice is one area where agency can be directly enacted. Traditional models in musical theatre training often assign repertoire based on voice type, casting profile, or curriculum mapping (Welch and Howard, 2020). However, giving students a voice in selecting material has been shown to increase investment and interpretive ownership (Heidemann, 2016). Carey and Grant (2014) found that even the phrasing of teacher prompts can shape student perception of control, suggesting that power is often exercised through subtle linguistic choices.

Brookfield (2017) encourages educators to “hunt assumptions,” noting that even well-intentioned prompts can imply a preferred response. Meanwhile, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) supports a scaffolded approach, where teachers help learners stretch into new capabilities but gradually release control as competence grows (Chaiklin, 2003). This interplay between structure and freedom is particularly relevant to technical development in singing.

2.4 Reflective Diagnostics and Iterative Practitioner Learning

The idea that teaching practice can be refined through reflection is well established in pedagogical literature. Schön (1983) distinguishes between reflection-on-action (reviewing practice after the fact) and reflection-in-action (adjusting mid-process), both of which are relevant to dynamic teaching contexts such as singing lessons. ‘A reflective practitioner,’ Schön writes, “thinks about what he is doing while he is doing it’ (p. 54).

Moon (2004) suggests that structured tools—such as journals, rubrics, and lesson logs—can help externalise internal thought processes, creating opportunities for pattern recognition and iterative refinement. Brookfield (2017) argues for a critical approach to reflection, encouraging teachers to surface not only technique but also the values and assumptions embedded in their routines.

In voice teaching, reflective diagnostics may take the form of co-written feedback, holistic voice audits, or personalised learning plans (Dodson, 2021). These tools not only guide teaching decisions but can also create shared language between teacher and student. Importantly, Ellis (2016) reminds us that tools are not neutral; they carry embedded philosophies. ‘Every template,’ she writes, ‘contains an epistemology – it encodes a particular way of knowing’ (p. 89). For this reason, reflexivity must extend beyond behaviour to include the instruments we use to document and assess it.

When learners are invited into this process – whether by contributing their own reflections or shaping feedback formats – reflection becomes a site of shared agency, not just teacher analysis. In this way, reflective tools can mirror the values they intend to uphold, including inclusivity, empowerment, and adaptability.

2.5 Summary

These three conceptual lenses – functional load management, autonomy-supportive learning, and iterative reflective practice – together frame the inquiry into how power, decision-making, and well-being are distributed in singing training. This scaffold now supports the thematic literature review that follows, where current discourse and practice are evaluated through each of these lenses.

3. Thematic Analysis

3.1 Load Management and Vocal Health in Musical Theatre

Vocal load – the cumulative stress experienced by the vocal folds during extended use – remains a defining challenge in musical theatre education, particularly during ensemble rehearsals. While vocal health is now a widely endorsed pedagogical concern, structural rehearsal norms often conflict with best-practice recommendations for vocal pacing and recovery (Nix, 2021). Rehearsal

periods in drama schools are frequently characterised by long blocks, frequent repetition, and expectations of full-voice singing, which can cumulatively compromise vocal function, especially in younger, developing singers (Sataloff, 2017).

Hunter et al. (2020) propose a consensus distinction between vocal load and vocal fatigue, noting that while the former refers to cumulative phonatory demand, the latter describes the perceptual and physiological outcomes of that demand. In practice, the line between the two often blurs. When rehearsal structures privilege volume, repetition, and choreographic multitasking, performers may lack the recovery opportunities necessary to preserve vocal efficiency (Gates, 2022). This is particularly relevant in the musical theatre context, where singers are often expected to shift between legit, speech-based, and belt styles within a single session or track.

One of the most widely discussed strategies to mitigate rehearsal-based strain is planned marking – a deliberate reduction in vocal intensity during early or non-critical rehearsal phases. Marking practices vary from silent mouthing to octave displacement or half-voice phonation and have long been used informally by experienced performers (LeBorgne and Rosenberg, 2021). However, institutionalising marking as a rehearsal strategy within training environments remains inconsistent.

In my own teaching practice, many students – particularly in group or ensemble contexts – expressed uncertainty about whether marking was allowed, especially in high-stakes rehearsals. During my time as head of one-to-one singing at a UK drama school, I observed that even when students privately acknowledged vocal fatigue, they often avoided reducing vocal effort publicly for fear of being perceived as disengaged or unprofessional. Several students shared that they only felt comfortable marking once I had explicitly modelled it myself or provided verbal permission in the room. One student, for example, said, “I didn’t know we were allowed to sing it gently,” despite having previously experienced vocal strain.

However, when marking protocols were openly legitimised – through rehearsal schedules that named low-effort passes, or through voice staff affirming their value – students became noticeably more confident in pacing their energy across the day. In one rehearsal block, I suggested optional marking into the choreography rehearsals, inviting students to lip-sync or switch to semi-occluded gestures unless full-voice singing was necessary for musical reasons. Over the course of the term, students began proactively checking in with each other about vocal tiredness and asking, “Is this a good one to mark?” Their musical and dramatic engagement did not drop; in fact, several reported that the ability to “drop in and out” vocally gave them more energy for emotional intention. The

reframing of marking not as a retreat but as a skilled choice seemed to deepen their self-regulation and confidence.

In practice, this points to a reframing of rehearsal participation from “full-out by default” to “strategic intensity.” When students are empowered to modulate their vocal output without fear of judgment or penalty, the rehearsal space becomes both more inclusive and more sustainable.

Importantly, research suggests that load management cannot be addressed through technique alone. As Sataloff (2017) argues, ‘Technique matters – but rehearsal structure, recovery protocols, and psychological pressure matter just as much’ (p. 214). Indeed, singers’ vocal habits are often shaped less by what they know and more by what they feel is socially permitted. Peer perception, assessment anxiety, and implicit behavioural modelling from staff all influence whether students feel empowered to mark or request rest.

Voice educators therefore play a vital role not only in teaching technique, but in shaping vocal culture. This includes modelling vocal pacing, reinforcing the legitimacy of marking through language and feedback, and collaborating with production teams to ensure that rehearsal design aligns with vocal safety principles. Nix (2021) recommends the inclusion of “marking literacy” in voice curriculum, helping students understand when, how, and why to reduce load. He further suggests that fatigue tracking – using brief daily check-ins or self-assessment logs – can cultivate awareness without pathologising tiredness.

The literature thus supports a pedagogical shift toward shared responsibility for vocal health – one in which students, teachers, and rehearsal staff collaborate on pacing, protection, and performance. This aligns with wider discussions in performing arts education around co-agency, consent-based artistry, and trauma-informed practice. Load, in this sense, is not simply a technical parameter but a relational one, shaped by context, communication, and care.

3.2 Learner Agency and Autonomy in Voice Pedagogy

The development of learner agency in voice pedagogy hinges on how power and decision-making are shared in the lesson space. Across 1 to 1 and ensemble contexts, agency is shaped not only by the structural opportunities students are given to choose or direct their learning, but by subtler cues such as the language teachers use and the emotional atmosphere of the studio. When students experience autonomy in a scaffolded way – where choices are guided but not controlled – they tend to demonstrate greater motivation, engagement, and personal investment in their vocal development (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Evans, 2015).

In my own teaching practice, I have observed that the way prompts are framed often determines whether students feel they are being invited to explore or instructed to comply. For example, asking “What would you like to try next?” typically yields more exploratory and self-directed responses than “Shall we try that again, but with more support?” While both might be pedagogically valid, the former frames the student as co-director of the process. Interestingly, even minor linguistic shifts – such as replacing “You need to...” with “Would it help if...” – frequently lead to changes in the student’s affect and vocal response. One advanced learner once commented, “I didn’t realise how much more confident I’d feel just having the choice to stop and reflect.”

Carey and Grant (2014) examine this interactional space through teacher and student perspectives on 1 to 1 pedagogy. They argue that ‘students often expect a more authoritarian model but flourish when allowed to shape their own development’ (p. 212). Their findings highlight the complexity of negotiating authority in teaching, and caution against assuming that autonomy is always received as empowering unless it is carefully introduced and modelled.

Andragogical models further support this emphasis on negotiated autonomy. Knowles (1980) argues that adult learners benefit from teaching environments that validate their prior experience, support relevance to goals, and encourage co-construction of learning pathways. In a musical theatre training context, this might involve co-creating a repertoire arc over a term, aligning technical focus with audition preparation, or discussing song choices in terms of character development rather than just vocal category. When agency is embedded in these ways, students often feel more ownership over their progression.

Repertoire selection offers a particularly vivid site of agency. In traditional musical theatre pedagogy, repertoire is often chosen for students based on casting type, vocal classification, or institutional expectations. However, several students in my care – particularly those with non-normative gender expression or cross-style interests – reported that they felt disconnected from assigned material. When I began offering repertoire menus that included classical MT, contemporary MT, legit, folk, and pop/rock options, students responded with enthusiasm. One non-binary student described the process as “the first time I’ve felt like my voice wasn’t being forced into a box.”

This approach is supported by Renwick and McPherson (2002), who found that student-selected repertoire correlated with increased motivation and more frequent, deliberate practice behaviours. Their study demonstrates that choice in content – not just technique – can serve as a powerful

vehicle for learner engagement. Repertoire agency also allows for what might be termed affective ownership: the sense that a song becomes not just a learning tool, but a personal expression of identity.

Evans (2015) reinforces this perspective through the lens of self-determination theory, arguing that when students feel autonomous, competent, and related to the material, they show deeper emotional investment and greater resilience. In my own lessons, this was evident when students were given space to return to older repertoire and apply new technique to familiar material – often resulting in a sense of mastery that reinforced their sense of progress. One student, after revisiting a previously challenging song, said, “Now that I chose to do it again, it feels like it’s really mine.”

Agency is not a fixed trait but a dynamic process shaped by context, language, and relationship. As Welch and Howard (2020) note, pedagogical practices that foster shared responsibility tend to correlate with greater risk-taking, deeper rehearsal focus, and more durable technical outcomes. The challenge for educators is to remain alert to the small moments – phrasing, repertoire suggestions, response to resistance – that either reinforce hierarchy or invite collaboration.

3.3 Reflective Diagnostics and Iterative Practitioner Learning

Within the context of voice pedagogy, reflection is not merely a tool for self-improvement – it is the mechanism by which assumptions are surfaced, habits are interrogated, and pedagogy evolves. The process of reflective diagnostics, particularly through structured tools such as rubrics or journals, can enable singing teachers to examine not only student progress but their own moment-to-moment decision-making. Schön (1983) distinguished between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action, noting that the former typically occurs after teaching episodes, while the latter demands real-time adaptation. In the studio, both are critical: reflection-in-action enables pedagogical responsiveness, while reflection-on-action supports longer-term recalibration of approach.

During a recent lesson in my private practice; I implemented a private self-evaluation rubric to capture my own pedagogical instincts and evolving thinking during lessons. This rubric prompted questions such as: “Did I offer too many cues too quickly?” “Did the student’s response shape my next move?” “Was the repertoire choice co-constructed or inherited?” Over time, patterns emerged – not only about what was or wasn’t effective for students, but about my own cognitive defaults. For instance, I realised I often reverted to anatomical explanations when I felt uncertain, even when those explanations didn’t seem to facilitate better outcomes. One week, after reviewing three lessons where I had leaned heavily on technical language, I wrote, “This isn’t what helped them

sing better – it's what made me feel more in control." That small recognition shifted how I offered metaphors the following week.

Moon (2004) argues that reflective learning becomes transformative when it transcends evaluation and moves toward interpretation – when teachers begin to ask not "How did it go?" but "What does this say about how I teach?" This distinction resonates with Brookfield's (2017) claim that critical reflection must seek to uncover the assumptions that underlie habitual practice. In my case, the rubric enabled these questions to be raised iteratively, and privately, without the external pressure of peer review or formal observation. The privacy of the tool seemed to enhance its honesty.

Aggett (2022) proposes a rubric-based model specifically for singing teachers, suggesting that structured reflection creates a feedback loop between instinct and evidence. In my own experience, this looping process has been particularly helpful in addressing the dissonance between what I thought I had taught and what had actually been internalised by the student. After one lesson, I noted that a student "got it" vocally but couldn't explain what they had done. The following session, I used the rubric to pre-plan moments where I'd ask them to teach it back to me. The results were enlightening – not only did the student clarify their understanding, but I realised how often I was assessing success by sound alone.

Voice teaching is a complex domain in which intuitive, affective, and sensory feedback loops often outpace language. This makes reflection essential – but also slippery. As Ellis (2016) notes, the risk of reflective writing is that it becomes a retrospective rationalisation, smoothing over the uncertainty that defines live teaching. To avoid this, I sometimes made a voice note immediately after a lesson, capturing the ambiguity in real time. These notes, when paired with rubric entries, gave a more holistic view of my process – what I knew, what I guessed, and what I avoided.

3.4 Summary

The iterative use of these tools led to subtle but important shifts in my teaching: fewer prescriptive prompts, more scaffolded silences, and greater trust in the student's capacity to self-diagnose. When a student once said, "I knew what I wanted to do but I wasn't sure if you'd let me," I realised my verbal space-filling had been counterproductive. Since then, I've built intentional "choice points" into lessons – moments where I explicitly offer the floor back to the student. Reflective diagnostics played a vital role in uncovering these blind spots, not because the tools held the answers, but because they made the questions visible.

4. Critical Evaluation

Across the preceding themes, a recurring tension emerges between institutional rehearsal and teaching norms and the ideals presented in the scholarly literature. While there is considerable agreement that vocal sustainability, learner agency, and reflective teaching are all desirable aims, the ways in which these are practically achieved – and structurally supported – remain inconsistent and often under-theorised in practice (Hunter et al., 2020; Welch and Howard, 2020). In the case of load management, for example, the literature makes clear that planned marking and fatigue-aware rehearsal design are both effective and well-understood strategies (LeBorgne and Rosenberg, 2021; Nix, 2021). Yet anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that students still struggle to implement such strategies without explicit permission or modelling (Sataloff, 2017; Stone, 2022).

This dissonance is mirrored in the realm of learner agency. While self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and andragogical principles (Knowles, 1980) underscore the importance of choice and relevance, institutional voice teaching often reverts to top-down decision-making in both repertoire and pedagogical language (Carey and Grant, 2014). Even well-intentioned prompts can subtly reinforce teacher control, particularly when phrased in directive terms or linked to assessment pressure (Brookfield, 2017). The research by Evans (2015) and Renwick and McPherson (2002) clearly supports the motivational and affective benefits of student-led learning, yet the uptake of such strategies in musical theatre settings still appears to rely on individual teacher ethos rather than embedded policy or training frameworks.

This discrepancy may reflect a broader gap between reflective ideals and institutional realities. Brookfield (2017) and Moon (2004) both highlight the danger of assuming that reflection automatically leads to transformation; in practice, without structure or support, reflection can remain superficial or self-congratulatory. My own use of a private rubric aimed to counter this by scaffolding self-questioning and surfacing patterned assumptions. But this too depends on teacher commitment and self-awareness – qualities that are not always foregrounded in teacher training or recruitment.

Interestingly, each theme reveals the significance of shared agency – not just between teacher and student, but among teaching colleagues and across departmental structures. Vocal load cannot be managed by voice teachers alone; it must be coordinated with musical directors, choreographers, and rehearsal staff (Welch and Howard, 2020; Nix, 2021). Similarly, agency cannot be fostered in the singing studio if it is undermined elsewhere in the curriculum. As Carey and Grant (2014) suggest, co-agency requires alignment across pedagogical culture. Reflective practice, too, gains

depth when embedded in collaborative contexts. Schön (1983) and Brookfield (2017) both emphasise the importance of peer feedback and critical dialogue in deepening teacher learning. Yet most of the strategies discussed in this paper – including my own – remain personal rather than collective.

At the same time, the literature does suggest ways to bridge these gaps. One is through the legitimisation of practice shifts via explicit modelling and language. As Stone (2022) and LeBorgne and Rosenberg (2021) point out, students often know what would help them vocally – they simply lack permission to enact it. This is echoed in agency research: students frequently flourish when given structured but meaningful choices (Evans, 2015; Renwick and McPherson, 2002). Reflective practice can similarly gain traction when it is framed not as a moral imperative but as a diagnostic curiosity – a way to notice, rather than prove (Dodson, 2021; Moon, 2004).

Across all three themes, the role of teacher language is particularly significant. Whether legitimising marking, offering repertoire options, or prompting reflection, the words used can either open or close space for student agency and shared learning. As Brookfield (2017) notes, our habits of phrasing often reflect our deepest pedagogical assumptions. By becoming more conscious of these choices – through tools like rubrics, peer dialogue, or simply slowing down – we may move closer to the shared-agency models the literature champions.

Ultimately, the critical throughline in this body of literature is not just about techniques or frameworks, but about culture. Vocal health, autonomy, and reflective practice all depend on a culture that supports risk, values co-construction, and treats both student and teacher as active learners. As Welch and Howard (2020) remind us, pedagogy is a collaborative art. Its evolution depends not just on individual teachers doing better, but on institutions making space for that better to take root.

5. Conclusion

This review has explored the interconnected themes of vocal load, learner autonomy, and reflective practice, using literature and practitioner reflection to investigate how voice teaching might evolve toward more collaborative, sustainable models. What becomes increasingly clear is that these are not separate concerns, but overlapping dynamics rooted in how power, responsibility, and awareness are distributed in the teaching space.

While student agency was a focal point throughout, the literature also highlights the importance of teacher agency – the freedom and confidence to adapt, respond, and resist institutional pressures

when needed. This dual agency, when mutually respected and reflexively enacted, becomes a mechanism for co-constructing learning that is both technically rigorous and emotionally safe (Evans, 2015).

Theme 1 made visible the gap between vocal health rhetoric and the realities of rehearsal culture. Marking, though often discussed, remains inconsistently modelled and under-permitted. The literature confirmed that without staff validation and cultural permission, students are unlikely to pace themselves effectively. But equally, teachers must have the agency to reshape rehearsal norms – to advocate, plan, and model protective strategies without being marginalised or overruled by production pressures (Welch and Howard, 2020).

Theme 2 revealed how autonomy arises not from leaving students to their own devices, but from guided choice, clear language, and respect for personal and artistic identity. Yet these opportunities for learner ownership also require the teacher to feel free from rigid scripts or performance expectations. When teachers are trusted to respond intuitively – to shift a prompt mid-sentence, or to co-select repertoire that stretches rather than categorises – they exercise a professional agency that legitimises student choice in turn.

Theme 3 explored the diagnostic power of reflection, not as a post-hoc evaluation, but as a live and evolving practice. Structured reflection, such as the rubric used in my own work, allowed me to recognise how often my “teaching instincts” were masking deeper biases or assumptions. This iterative noticing gave me greater autonomy in how I shaped sessions – both moment-to-moment and over time. In that sense, reflective tools became not only a mirror, but a permission slip (Brookfield, 2017).

Taken together, these themes suggest a shift in voice pedagogy toward a shared-agency framework. In such a model, students are empowered not simply through technical mastery, but through meaningful collaboration, and teachers are similarly supported to teach responsively rather than performatively. Power is not relinquished but redistributed – fluidly, ethically, and in response to context.

This reframing has practical implications. It calls for rehearsal schedules that include vocal pacing agreements, lesson designs that prioritise choice without losing clarity, and institutions that create space for teacher reflection to be taken seriously. Perhaps most importantly, it invites teachers to

reclaim their own voice – not just as technicians or deliverers, but as learners, advocates, and agents of cultural shift.

In this light, the most sustainable voice pedagogy may be the one that treats both teacher and student as dynamic, reflexive participants – each shaping the studio, and being shaped by it, in turn.

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