

Empowering the Creative Voice: Promoting Creative Self-Efficacy in the Vocal Studio with Acceptance and Commitment Training

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PART ONE: PORTFOLIO

1.1 Introduction and Rationale

I am a popular music voice teacher in California, US. I specialize in pop, rock, and soul and teach adults ranging in experience from beginner to semi-professional. While they regularly see profound technical and musical improvements in their singing, subtle challenges unrelated to knowledge and skill seem to persist for many of my students.

Some students leave their lesson each week with a clear and exciting practice strategy, only to report in the next session that they were not able to make time for their practice at all. Others relate feeling confident and knowledgeable in other areas of their life, but doubt their ability to engage with singing in an artistic or meaningful way. Some singers make excellent technical progress during lessons, but feel unsure about the feedback they give themselves at home. Among songwriters and working performers, a host of doubts and discomforts arise about writing blocks, marketplace stresses, and whether their work is good or worthy.

Up to this point, my research has focused on evidence-informed strategies for teaching popular music vocal technique, and this emphasis on anatomy, physiology, and function has served me and my students well. However, these persistent issues lead me to wonder how, within the scope of my practice as a voice teacher, I might help students address these more internal matters.

In this review I will examine the potential of Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT), a non-clinical adaptation of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy used in educational and coaching settings (Shaw et al., 2020), as a tool to improve creative self-efficacy among adult voice and songwriting students. Self-efficacy is a “key factor in performance success” (Gill et al., 2022, p. 1), including performance in musical and creative domains (Chen, 2024; Stone and Hess, 2020), but few studies outline distinct interventions to improve creative self-efficacy (Puozzo and Audrin, 2021). As the following literature review will discuss, psychotherapeutic applications of ACT have been shown to improve self-efficacy in a variety of populations, but as self-efficacy is domain specific (Bandura, 2018), a direct link between ACT and creative self-efficacy cannot be drawn. As few studies have been conducted on non-clinical ACT applications, this review connects clinical ACT self-efficacy research with research into creative

self-efficacy to explore how educators and coaches might employ a non-clinical ACT intervention to encourage greater creative self-efficacy among students and clients.

Why Self-Efficacy?

When considering ways to encourage creative engagement, lay understandings of creativity can be misleading. Implicit theories of creativity often comprise lists of defining traits that creative people are expected to possess (Hass et al., 2016), or assume that creative thoughts arise as “sudden insights”, rather than resulting from mindful cognitive processes (Nijstad and Wronska, 2019, p. 346). From these perspectives, a lack of creative engagement may be blamed on personal shortcomings, feelings of self-consciousness, or a lack of inspiration. These implicit theories reflect how people engage with and assess creativity on an everyday basis, and differ from the explicit theories developed by experts and scientists in the field of creativity theory research (Weisberg et al., 2021). Explicit theories have long considered creativity to be an “intra-psychological property of the person”, but newer studies take a sociocultural view that explores the link between individual creative outcomes and the cultures and social environments in which they occur (Glaveanu, 2020, p. 348).

Reading a preliminary selection of theoretical papers led me to the concept of creative self-efficacy, or the “belief in one’s ability to be creative” (Hass et al., 2016, p. 438). According to Bandura’s (1977) seminal work on the topic, self-efficacy is “the foundation of human aspiration, motivation, and accomplishments” (p. 133), as a personal belief in one’s capability improves resilience and makes one more able to overcome the necessary setbacks that arise on the road to success (Stone and Hess, 2020). I chose to focus on creative self-efficacy because this attribute is well established as changeable and measurable (Zielinska et al., 2022).

In my initial reading, several papers described the internal and external influences on creative self-efficacy, including social and cultural beliefs about creativity (Huovinen, 2021; Pavlovic and Maksic, 2019), educational background (Artigau et al., 2023), and past positive experiences with creative pursuits (Stone and Hess, 2020). One study found a “moderate positive correlation between growth creative mindset and creative self-efficacy”, but clarifies that while “mindset indicates a future orientation”, “self-efficacy indicates a present orientation” (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2021, p. 565, 576). In other words, while a student’s mindset may include a belief in their potential for future growth and development, self-efficacy may serve as the mediator between this future-focused mindset and taking steps toward the fulfillment of that potential in the present

(Royston and Reiter-Palmon, 2017). This distinction rings true when considering students who clearly believe that they can improve their skills, but have difficulty prioritizing their practice week after week. They may possess a growth mindset around learning music, but perhaps their self-efficacy is lacking in that particular domain. For students who shy away from pursuing their goals, the mechanism or driver of creative self-efficacy may be the difference between having a temporary, non-committal hobby and enjoying a meaningful lifelong connection with music.

The question became how best to improve creative self-efficacy within the construct of a voice or music lesson. While many papers outlined the qualities and antecedents of creative and musical self-efficacy among certain populations, including adolescent musicians (MacAfee and Comeau, 2020) and collegiate vocalists (Lewis and Hendricks, 2022), few studies considered specific interventions for the improvement of creative self-efficacy in educational settings (Puozzo and Audrin, 2021). This lack of directly relevant research led me to refer to the theory of self-efficacy as originally conceived by Albert Bandura (1977), which is outlined in depth in the second part of this paper.

In this theory, personal and vicarious experiences of mastery comprise two of the four sources of self-efficacy information (Bandura, 1977). Given these sources, one way for educators to encourage creative self-efficacy is to provide opportunities for students to succeed in creative pursuits. However, although creativity is highly valued in education and generally considered to consist of a set of teachable skills, specific teaching strategies to encourage creative thought and action have not been clearly identified (Malinin, 2019; Lee, 2023). As one author starkly remarked, “you cannot simply tell students to be creative” (Luckert, 2019, p. 61), especially in an educational system that prioritizes testing and quantifiable achievement, and where creativity is not always recognized or rewarded (Sternberg and Karami, 2021). Education, as well as theoretical literature, emphasizes the development of creative skills (Van Deurzen-Smith, 2014) rather than the development of mental and attentional habits and an understanding of the creative process itself (Haase et al., 2023).

No matter what the undertaking, cognitive functions such as “synthesis, analysis, evaluation, and fluency” comprise only one facet of creativity (Luckert, 2019, p.63). These functions occur within a sociocultural context and in conversation with the perspective, personal history, and distinct skills of the individual (Fitzpatrick, 2014). Due to the complexity and individuality of the creative process and the personal and cultural nature of implicit beliefs (Katz-Buonincontro et

al., 2021), interventions to improve creative self-efficacy should be designed with respect for psychological and affective factors, including the connection to one's body and environment (Philippe et al., 2022; Malinin, 2019). It may be sensible to use a framework extended from an evidence-based psychotherapeutic approach to meet these needs. Given the adaptability of ACT (Arch et al., 2023) and the model's effectiveness in improving self-efficacy in other domains, it follows that a non-clinical iteration of ACT may prove a helpful tool in educational settings.

In addition to helping private voice and songwriting students overcome self-consciousness, doubt, and creative blocks, ACT is well suited for application in group classes and workshops (Clarke et al., 2020), which I plan to resume offering at the completion of my master's degree. ACT has been successfully adapted for delivery to groups of university and postgraduate students, both in-person and through online platforms (Katajavuori et al., 2023; Lai and Strevens, 2023; Viskovich and Pakenham, 2020). In one pilot study, ACT showed promise as a treatment for music performance anxiety (MPA) when delivered as a six-week group course, with results suggesting that a supportive group environment may be more beneficial than individual psychotherapy for students experiencing MPA (Mahony et al., 2022). These applications inspire confidence in the possibility of using ACT in group settings in the future.

ACT for Self-Efficacy

ACT is a widely used and extensively researched "psychotherapeutic approach that uses mindfulness and acceptance, and a focus on committed, values-based action" to help patients and clients make desired changes in their lives (Hill and Oliver, 2019, p. ix). Rather than trying to control distressing thoughts or emotions, ACT is a process-oriented approach that "aims to increase psychological flexibility in the presence of unwanted symptoms by promoting mindfulness and acceptance of those symptoms" (Juncos et al., 2017, p. 2). By practicing six foundational skills, participants learn to observe their thoughts and emotions rather than identify with them, and to take action toward core values rather than away from unpleasant or unwanted internal experiences (Mahony et al., 2022). The six processes used to improve psychological flexibility are outlined in the diagram below. A thorough examination of these processes will follow in the second part of this paper.

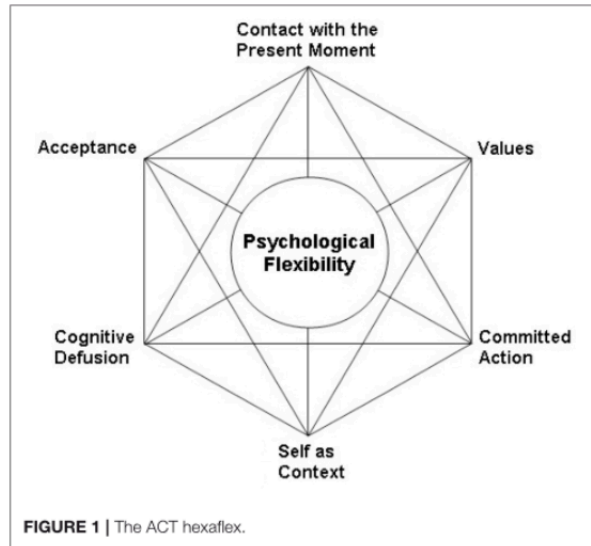


Figure 1. The ACT “Hexaflex” (Juncos et al., 2017).

This six-pronged model has also seen promising outcomes when used outside of the psychotherapeutic context, in behavior analysis (Berkout, 2022; Cihon et al., 2021), workplace wellness, and coaching for sports and music performance (Shaw et al., 2020), to name a few. While only a few studies examine the efficacy of ACT when used outside of psychotherapy, pilot studies in music education show promising results (Shaw et al., 2020; Mahony et al., 2022).

While most performance psychology interventions focus on reducing anxiety, recent studies take the more positive perspective that “optimal functioning cannot be attained solely when there is an absence of pathology” (Cohen and Bodner, 2021, p. 522). Increased psychological flexibility may enhance and optimize performance beyond simply reducing negative symptoms (Chelkowska-Zacharewicz and Baran, 2023), indicating ACT as a potential evidence-based model aligned with the positive psychology perspective. One systematic review and initial meta-analysis views ACT as a “positive psychological intervention” when used to enhance the well-being of university students, in that it focuses on the proliferation of desired psychological states (Howell and Passmore, 2018, p. 1995). A wellness-oriented approach may better align with the goals of educators, who seek to encourage positive internal attitudes toward creativity in the absence of specific psychological or affective dysfunction.

The magnification of positive internal states may also impact the creative process itself. Engaging with inspiration “requires one to be comfortable with nothingness and uncertainty”, especially when approaching a new project or idea (Van Deurzen-Smith, 2014, p. 81). ACT may

help artists acknowledge and accept the anxiety that comes with facing the unknown, allowing them to more fully experience creative inquiry and experimentation. As a process-based model (Juncos et al., 2017), ACT skills require practice in order to engender change, and this practice itself may enhance the awareness and habits of mind required to fully engage with the creative process (Haase et al., 2023). Distinct elements of the ACT model also connect to themes in creativity theory research. For instance, it could be argued that increased psychological flexibility would lead to increased cognitive flexibility and improved divergent thinking ability, both essential functions of creative thought (Glaveanu, 2020). In addition, individuals who are less fused with their own ideas may more easily take the perspective of others, a critical component of both individual creativity and collaboration (Artigau et al., 2023). On the emotional level, interventions to increase self-acceptance can “reduce feelings of doubt, shame, or incompetence”, thereby improving creative self-efficacy (Tromp and Glaveanu, 2023, p. 6).

Along with changing one’s relationship to unpleasant internal experiences, the ACT model focuses on taking actions congruent with one’s values (Juncos and de Paiva e Pona, 2018). Committed action turns values into behavior, “intentions and ideals into action” (Hill and Oliver, 2019, p. 40). As the value an individual places on creativity influences their likelihood to participate in or seek creative activities (Sternberg and Karami, 2021), students who are in touch with their musical and creative values are more likely to engage meaningfully with their creative process. A voice teacher or performance coach may use this part of the ACT framework to help students define their music performance values, which may result in more frequent home practice, a greater number of mastery experiences, and greater creative self-efficacy in turn.

Helping students improve their musical and creative self-efficacy may have positive impacts in other parts of their lives. Creative self-efficacy is viewed as valuable both within and outside of artistic fields, with several studies suggesting the positive impact of creative self-efficacy on academic and workforce performance, as well (Stone and Hess, 2020). As a process-oriented framework, ACT requires practice to fully understand. In undertaking this research I intend to incorporate this model into my own creative practice, and to reflect on how my own experience helped to shape my understanding.

1.2 Planned Program of Study

Aims

- Expand my understanding of self-efficacy and the creative process, both theoretically and experientially.
- Explore potential connections between psychological flexibility as promoted by the ACT model, self-efficacy, and engagement with creative activities.
- Strengthen my ACT skills for self development and for supporting my students.
- Consider the possibility of including more coaching-oriented work in my professional practice, including further education in ACT and general coaching skills, as opportunities to serve students in this way have already arisen.

Objectives

- To identify current contributors to the study of self-efficacy, teaching for creativity, and ACT by consulting peer reviewed journals, books, videos, and other available media.
- To determine relevant search terms and aggregate recent research.
- To maintain a working document of my literature review process.
- To organize, annotate, critically analyze and compare research from various sources.
- To present a thorough, organized literature review that identifies relationships, conflicts, and conversations between self-efficacy and ACT.
- To consider possible ACT applications in my teaching studio, and how this framework might be used in group settings in the future.

Expected Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this project, I expect to be able to:

- Relate current theories of self-efficacy and teaching for creativity.
- Articulate the rationale, structure, intention, and application of ACT as it may be used in a vocal studio or group workshop setting.
- Describe current ACT research, especially as it is used in non-clinical settings.
- Discuss how the impacts of ACT on self-efficacy might be researched in a future participant study, including challenges and ethical considerations.

Activities, Methods, and Resources

- Gather peer reviewed resources using relevant search terms.
- Assemble additional resources including books, dissertations, articles, and other media.

- Review and annotate all resources in a research journal, building an understanding of individual topics, their applications, and how they intersect.
- Select a reflective model and critically reflect on the entire research process.
- Present my findings and evaluations with an emphasis on application and opportunities for further study.

Timescale and Review Dates

The proposed timescale for all research and writing activities is illustrated in the chart below.

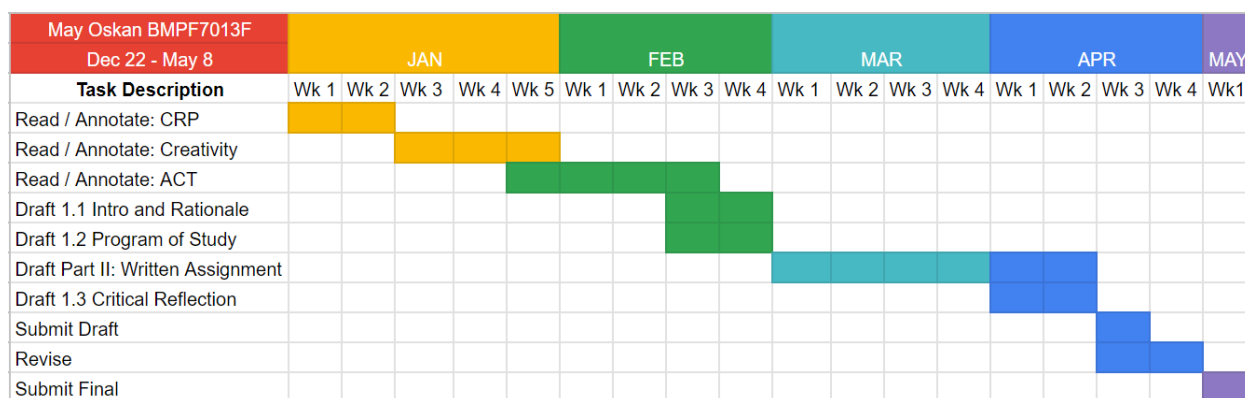


Figure 2. Project Gantt Chart

This process will be reviewed periodically with my tutor. Review dates are as follows:

- January 23rd, 2024
 - Initial module meeting. Review the topic and generate research ideas.
- March 1st, 2024
 - Review draft sections 1.1 and 1.2 and draft outline of written assignment.
- April 23rd, 2024
 - Review draft in process, including inline comments from tutor.

Literature Review Process

I formed questions about how ACT might contribute to creative self-efficacy and built a conceptual structure for this paper (Torraco, 2005) based on my initial notes. I decided to proceed with an integrative review methodology, which examines literature representative of the topic, and can reveal opportunities for synthesis that may not have been previously apparent. When conducted thoughtfully, an integrative review can bring together the work of multiple communities of practice (Cronin and George, 2023) and “yield provocative, new perspectives on key issues” (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). These new perspectives have the potential to lead to new

frameworks and pedagogies (Torraco, 2016). As the impact of ACT training on creative self-efficacy has not yet been specifically studied, bringing these two topics into phase may illuminate opportunities for the development of new adaptations of the ACT model, as well as directions for further research (Cronin and George, 2023). I consulted Cooper's (1988) taxonomy to aid in clarifying the structure and purpose of this literature review, as I found this process helpful in my previous independent study. The categories of Cooper's taxonomy appear in boldface below.

Practice is the **focus** of my review, as I will emphasize possible applications of ACT in voice lessons and workshop contexts throughout this research. As in most integrative reviews (Cooper, 1988), my **goal** is synthesis, drawing together relevant, recent research on ACT, creativity, and self-efficacy and looking for points of friction and conversation between these sources. Given my experience with ACT as a therapeutic intervention and my observations about its influence on my own creativity, my **perspective** cannot be entirely neutral, though I do not intend to espouse a strong position and will acknowledge conflicting arguments as they arise.

ACT has been the subject of hundreds of randomized controlled trials and many meta-analyses and shows promise in improving self-efficacy in a variety of domains (Hill and Oliver, 2019), as I will discuss in the second part of this paper. I found no peer-reviewed literature linking this model directly to creative self-efficacy, though the book by Juncos and de Paiva e Pona (2022) makes strong suggestions to this effect. As specific literature is lacking, the **coverage** of this review will be selective, focusing on resources that contribute to or challenge the research question: how might the use of ACT as a performance coaching intervention improve creative self-efficacy in voice and songwriting students?

The **organization** of this review will be conceptual, with ideas grouped by theme and connected with a narrative throughline. My **audience** consists of fellow teachers and coaches, as well as singers and artists who are interested in the effect this model may have on their practice.

This literature review began with an observation. I noticed that using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) workbooks and receiving ACT-based counseling for my general well-being had a positive impact on my creative habits, reducing resistance to practice and improving my confidence in my creative abilities. Questions arose: what, specifically, had

changed about my relationship to creative practice, and how had engaging with ACT perhaps facilitated that change? I was familiar with research about ACT as an intervention for music performance anxiety (MPA) (Juncos and de Paiva e Pona, 2018), but what I experienced was not related to public performance. This sparked my curiosity about other ways that ACT might enhance creative practice, and how I might apply the non-clinical version of ACT in my vocal studio.

As a relative newcomer to the study of performance psychology and related disciplines, the first task in my review process was to develop an understanding of general concepts and terminology so that I could narrow my topic and formulate research questions. I used the “successive fractions” search strategy, which is “useful for someone who is unfamiliar with a topic” (Schlosser et al., 2006, p. 571). I conducted a broad initial survey of the literature including search terms such as “music performance psychology”, “teaching creativity”, “creative coaching”, “creative agency in music students”, and “creative theory”, which returned papers from various fields. My general process was to filter my search to papers published in the past five years and read abstracts from the first ten pages of results.

Within my initial reading I located keywords that would help restrict my search to more relevant terms (Schlosser et al., 2006). Two studies proved particularly helpful in clarifying how individuals may engage in creative thought and action, and which terms best represent what I planned to study. The first study disentangled the separate but interrelated factors of creative identity, creative self-efficacy, and creative mindset, concluding that for the purposes of measurement, creative identity and creative self-efficacy are essentially the same (Hass et al., 2016). The second drew an important distinction between creative mindset and creative self-efficacy, stating that “creative mindsets...” are “perceptions about the malleability and fixedness of creative ability in the general population”, while “creative self-efficacy is measured in regard to one’s own capacity to be creative” (Royston and Reiter-Palmon, 2017, p. 474). There is indeed a difference between a student believing that people in general can improve their creative abilities and believing that *they* can improve their creative abilities.

To gain a stronger understanding of how creativity theory relates to practical applications in educational settings, I also read several articles on how to foster creativity in classroom teaching. Creativity is highly valued in educational discourse but is insufficiently supported in educational systems (Karwowski et al., 2022), where a lack of training leaves teachers

inadequately prepared to teach for creativity (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2021). Ambitious educators are left to design their own approaches (Artigau et al., 2023), but constructing evidence-based strategies may prove a challenge. Theories of creativity do not emphasize application, creating a disconnect between theory and practice (Maksic and Spasenovic, 2018). This disconnect led me to include only practice-based articles that referred specifically to self-efficacy.

Given the breadth of research available about ACT, I narrowed the scope of my search and gave preference to papers that were either especially recent or especially relevant (Cooper, 1988). I collected studies that concerned at least one of my key terms of “self-efficacy”, “ACT training” and “ACT coaching”, and included all of the ACT studies related to music education.

By the end of my search I had downloaded just over one hundred papers: thirty-seven about ACT, including fifteen about the impacts of ACT therapy on self-efficacy in clinical and general populations, and twenty-eight on self-efficacy. I also kept eighteen papers on teaching for creativity, sixteen concerning creativity theory, and three on performance psychology in general. I kept an annotated bibliography throughout my research process but in order to keep the document to a manageable, searchable size, I did not annotate foundational or peripheral studies.

As no papers addressed my exact research question, using ACT to improve self-efficacy in music education, my inclusion criteria focused on the intersections of these topics. For instance, I included papers about ACT and self-efficacy, ACT in music education, self-efficacy in music education, and creative self-efficacy in general education. Using the annotated bibliography, I themed papers by assigning them keywords according to the intersection they addressed, then looked for language and ideas that linked papers across thematic groups. Once I had a thorough understanding of existing research on ACT and self-efficacy, I searched specifically for papers critical of ACT research and the model itself.

1.3 Critical Reflection

I chose to employ Schön’s model of reflective practice because this perspective “has been used to frame professional development in a variety of teaching contexts” (Linder et al., 1997, p. 821), and emphasizes that practitioners can gain insight from reflections made in the moment of action as well as afterward (Schön, 1983). Schön also underscores “the key role of tacit

knowledge in a professional's life" (Shah, 2022, p. 299) and how this knowledge is accessed, challenged, and potentially expanded in moments of puzzlement or uncertainty. As opposed to relying on purely rational and intellectual resources, practitioners may "intelligently respond to a situation at hand based on an intuitive feeling that has been cultivated through experience" (Hebert, 2015, p. 364). In the case of voice teachers, technical skills acquired through training are utilized alongside "mastery acquired through practical experience" (Ragan, 2018, p. 159). Such intuitive, experiential responses may also guide the research process.

When reading about and engaging with ACT skills and exercises, reflecting "in-action" (Schön, 1983) helped me relate to and understand the impact of this learning on my internal state and creative process. By objectively asking 'what is happening?' and 'how am I feeling?' in the moment, I connected with my reading in a mindful way, while also considering how my previous experiences with ACT may influence my responses. Acknowledging personal and emotional aspects allowed me to experience research as a creative practice, and by accepting the unpleasant parts of the process, such as uncertainty and time pressure, my mind was able to engage in a less judgmental, more playful way (Van Deurzen-Smith, 2014). To borrow from ACT literature, practicing at the edge of my academic ability required me to connect with my experience, instead of the "busy, worrying, problem-solving mind" that "is likely to interfere" (Hill and Oliver, 2019, p. 23). This openness and enthusiasm for experience led me to enjoy my initial reading.

Unfortunately, the breadth with which I studied at the beginning of this project resulted in a series of misdirections that impacted both the scope and depth of the resulting review and brought up disconcerting emotions, which often serve as a catalyst for reflection (Marshall et al., 2021). These early difficulties necessitated later reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983), during which I reviewed the actions taken during the course of this research and analyzed how they could have been taken differently (Shah, 2022). This reflection follows below.

The most significant pitfall in the course of my research was spending too much time reading and annotating literature that ended up being only peripherally relevant. Though it was soon clear to me that ACT research would provide more than enough material for the scope of this project, my interest in feedback as an essential and under-researched element of creative practice (Hass et al., 2016) drove me to additionally evaluate Critical Response Process (CRP), a feedback model designed to encourage creative self-efficacy and inspiration (Lerman and

Borstel, 2022). Attempting to assess two models in a single project led to a feeling of fragmented focus, where I spent time trying to justify fitting CRP into my review instead of taking the opportunity to study ACT in greater depth. Committing to a single model at the outset would have potentially opened up opportunities for experiential study, as well. I would have liked to take advantage of online and in-person training in ACT and general coaching skills as part of this project. I plan to do so as part of my final participant research study, as I continue to explore my fairly nascent interest in performance and creativity coaching.

Due in part to these initial challenges, some ideas and realizations about my topic arrived too late for me to include them. For instance, the benefits of psychological flexibility may extend beyond the remediation of negative states by encouraging optimal functioning, or the state referred to as “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is characterized by “focused concentration..., merging of action and awareness, [a] sense of control,” and a “lack of self-consciousness”, in an experience that is “intrinsically rewarding” and where time may seem to stand still (Cohen and Bodner, 2021, p. 27). Attaining flow in performance can be seen as a mastery experience that also impacts the performer’s affective state, making flow a potentially powerful marker for the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Unfortunately, I began reading research about flow only as I wrote the final sections of this paper. I am interested in how ACT skills may encourage or heighten this creative state, and I may make space in my final participant study to address this curiosity.

Positive insights and innovations also emerged in this research process, the most helpful of which was my use of an annotated bibliography. I compiled quotes, key elements, and personal impressions about each paper as I read. I also formatted citations right away, which saved me time when I came to build my reference list. This searchable document proved invaluable, especially for the purposes of thematically grouping my sources and further coding them as I worked. I will continue to refine this strategy for my upcoming final project. False starts and misdirections notwithstanding, I did well in gradually steering and tailoring this review toward my future study interests.

Reflective practice can inspire “greater understanding of self and awareness of [one’s] own beliefs” (Anderson, 2020, p. 481). As Fitzpatrick (2014) describes in her creativity framework that maps with the “Cycle of Experience” used in Gestalt therapy, I noticed a “natural propensity” for some parts of my research process and “varying levels of resistance” to others (p. 166).

Specifically, I found it easy and enjoyable to generate new ideas, search terms, and relationships between materials, and found my energy flagging when it was time to assess and condense my topic and argument. Overall, this process taught me the importance of knowing when to approach study broadly and when to narrow focus. With the knowledge gained from this research experience, I will be better able to read generally while my ideas are still forming, and then return to the most relevant literature in more depth. I will also take care to set aims and objectives that are reasonably ambitious and appropriate to the scope of the project.

PART TWO: WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Empowering the Creative Voice: Promoting Creative Self-Efficacy in the Vocal Studio with Acceptance and Commitment Training

Introduction

Self-efficacy is a primary predictor of performance success of any kind (Orejudo et al., 2021, p. 2), and creative performance is no exception. Creative self-efficacy motivates the creative process, helping those engaged in creative activities navigate the pitfalls of negative feedback, and allowing them to self-regulate and persist through disappointments and setbacks in their practice (Hass et al., 2016). One's creative self-efficacy is impacted by "implicit theories of creativity, as well as one's understanding of creativity" (Royston and Reiter-Palmon, 2017, p. 474), and these beliefs and thoughts are influenced by distinct social and cultural factors (Tromp and Glaveanu, 2023). Due to the unique construction of each person's sense of their creative ability, improving self-efficacy among students presents a challenge for teachers in creative domains.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a process-based psychotherapeutic model (Juncos et al., 2017), has been shown to improve self-efficacy among many clinical populations, including patients with spinal cord injuries (Abedini et al., 2020), patients recovering from stroke (Ismoyowati and Adiyasa, 2021), and individuals struggling with substance addiction (Bahramabadian et al., 2021), chronic pain (Miyazaki et al., 2023), and fibromyalgia (Trainor et al., 2019). ACT-based interventions have also been effective in improving self-efficacy behaviors around workplace health (Brassey et al., 2020; Schopp et al., 2015).

This integrative review explores the non-clinical adaptation of ACT, called Acceptance and Commitment Training or Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (ACC) (Mahony et al., 2022), as a potential tool to improve creative self-efficacy among voice and songwriting students. This discussion begins with a definition of creativity, relating recent sociocultural perspectives on how it is thought to arise, and exploring how students of voice and songwriting may engage with creative thought and action in their lessons and beyond. An introduction to the study of self-efficacy follows, including research on various creative populations. The four sources of self-efficacy information proposed by Albert Bandura (1977) are explained, including how they may relate to the experiences of voice students. Bandura's four sources serve as a central

framework to examine how ACT may be used in the vocal studio to improve student self-efficacy. Application is critically assessed, including the practical and ethical implications and potential limitations of the model.

Creativity in the Vocal Studio

Though the field of creativity theory is well established, many current papers agree that theories of creativity are limited in scope or overly simplify a complex phenomenon (Sternberg and Karami, 2021; Artigau et al., 2023; Weisberg et al., 2021; Malinin, 2019). For instance, a commonly cited definition of creativity is “the ability to make productions that are both new... and appropriate... to the contexts in which they occur” (Bonetto et al., 2022, p. 254), but this focus on creative achievement and product limits the study of creativity to quantitative terms, leaving little room for the study of creative ideation, behavior, or process (Glaveanu, 2020). There is also some disagreement surrounding the relationship between the factors of novelty and usefulness. Some newer perspectives suggest that creativity can take various forms depending on how these parameters interact (Harvey and Berry, 2023). Put simply, creative thought and action may arise differently depending on whether ideas are being generated, refined, chosen between, implemented, judged, or revised (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Van Deurzen-Smith, 2014).

Vocal students engage with creative thought and action in every part of their process, in a generative sense through creating original melodies and interpretations, in organizational processes like choosing repertoire and designing performances, and in acts of revision and clarification as they absorb and respond to feedback from their teacher, their audience, and themselves. Like other creative activities and learning processes that encourage creativity, music practice and performance are embedded in the physical, social, and cultural environments in which they occur (Sawyer, 2022). As such, the sociocultural perspective of creativity is especially resonant. This viewpoint seeks “to understand the creative process as more than the expression of individual talent and abilities”, and evaluates “the person as a whole, within his or her context, co-developing [with that context] over time” (Glaveanu, 2020, p. 350). Contextual elements also contribute to a person’s belief in their abilities, including their ability to be creative (Huovinen, 2021; Pavlovic and Maksic, 2019).

Like creativity itself, creative self-efficacy is generated through a complex composite of experiences and influences. The role of personal, social, and experiential factors in the

formation of self-efficacy are discussed in more detail below, as a baseline understanding of self-efficacy is necessary in order to assess effective strategies for its improvement.

An Introduction to the Study of Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura (1977) hypothesized that self-efficacy is the determining factor in behavioral change, predicting the likelihood that a person will persist in their efforts toward achieving a goal and effectively cope in the face of adversity. Bandura “identified four sources of information that contributed to the development of self-efficacy beliefs” (Zelenak, 2010, pp. 31-32), and suggested that the more reinforcement an individual receives from these four sources of experience, the greater their potential for the development of self-efficacy and subsequent behavioral change (Bandura, 1977).

Although it is an older model, Bandura’s theory has been used in more recent literature to explore how preservice teachers gain self-efficacy through practicum experiences (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016), how the self-efficacy of principals influences teachers in the schools they serve (Alshaikh and Bond, 2019), the variability of how individuals cope with problems (Poluektova et al., 2023), how implementations in educational policy impact teacher self-efficacy (Lawrent, 2024), and the mental, emotional, and behavioral factors involved in the development of self-efficacy among new parents (Cao et al., 2023), to name a few. In some cases, the model has been expanded or adapted, but the four sources of self-efficacy remain intact in each study.

Interventions to encourage self-efficacy should be customized based on the specific domain, as “perceived self-efficacy is not a global trait but a differentiated set of self-beliefs linked to distinct realms of functioning” (Bandura, 2018, p. 133). Based on Bandura’s guidance, scales have now been constructed and validated to measure perceived self-efficacy in a wide array of domains including healthcare, education, and the workplace. More specific to the contexts discussed here, scales to measure self-efficacy in creativity (Zielinska et al., 2022), music performance (Zelenak, 2010), and singing voice function (La et al., 2023) have also been devised.

“Self-efficacy beliefs are, by definition, task-specific... even within a given field” (Ritchie and Williamon, 2007, p. 311) and among music and vocal students the differentiation between domain-specific self-beliefs can be extremely granular. For instance, a student who is confident in their ability to learn and perform complex riffs verbatim from recordings may have no belief in their ability to learn to improvise these same kinds of melodies. In the discussion of Bandura’s

model below, general thoughts about application in the voice studio are offered, but strategies to improve distinct measures of self-efficacy will require customization on an individual basis.

These four sources are described in the sections below: **Performance Accomplishments and Mastery Experiences**, **Vicarious Experiences**, **Verbal and Social Persuasion**, and **Physiological and Affective States**. Throughout the remainder of this review, Bandura's model will serve as a framework to explore the potential impact of ACT on creative self-efficacy.

1. Performance Accomplishments and Mastery Experiences

Positive experiences motivate positive behavior, and "people with more positive creative experiences develop more creative self-efficacy" (Hass et al., 2016, p. 444) through evolving a personal relationship with the form in which they are working (Malinin, 2019). For a voice student, a performance accomplishment or mastery experience can be as small as singing an accurate scale in a lesson or as large as garnering widespread acclaim for a performance. Exposure to positive experiences may be especially important for voice students, as the instrument is part of the student's body and technique adjustments or corrections are more likely to be taken personally (Lewis and Hendricks, 2022) and discourage or demoralize the student.

Recitals, open mics, and community music events can present valuable opportunities for students to experience performance accomplishments (Gill et al., 2022), but lack of access or financial constraints may prevent students from taking part. In these cases it is especially important for students to encounter and recognize moments of mastery in lessons and home practice. The value of positive experience is compounded as students become able to "locate and use past creative experience as a resource" (Tromp and Glaveanu, 2023, p. 7) in future creative pursuits.

2. Vicarious Experiences

Students may develop higher expectations for their own improvement by witnessing the efforts of others, and these efforts do not need to be particularly successful in order to have a positive impact on self-efficacy. It is enough to see "others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences" (Bandura, 1977, p. 197). In other words, seeing other vocal students perform, even if the performers make mistakes, can encourage students to participate in future opportunities. In order for students to derive these benefits to their self-efficacy, however, it is essential to maintain an environment of support and non-judgment, as "formal and informal

competition, comparison, and critique among creators may lower a person's confidence in their creative potential" (Stone and Hess, 2020, p. 374).

Lessons and workshops also present opportunities for vicarious experience. In masterclass formats, where a group of students take turns working with a teacher one-to-one in front of their peers, students can learn from observing others' creative processes. In one-to-one lessons, teachers can create collaborative structures that may also bolster student self-efficacy, whether through demonstration and listening to recordings (Gill et al., 2022), or singing together. Improvisation is a powerful driver for the development of creative skills, as the "generation of ideas coincides with their implementation and creative ideas unfold in real time" (Harvey and Berry, 2023, p. 518). Improvisation can also serve as a framework for vicarious experience, encouraging students to take risks through seeing others do the same.

An unwillingness to take risks makes it hard to be creative, and situations where there is little room to experiment or innovate can stifle creative thought and action (Sternberg and Karami, 2021). Resilience is a hallmark of self-efficacy (Stone and Hess, 2020), and students who learn through observing others that it is safe to fail will learn to welcome failure as a necessary part of the creative process (Sawyer, 2022).

3. Verbal and Social Persuasion

Verbal encouragement, feedback, and instructions are the most readily available way to influence behavior and are a central feature of music lessons (Gill et al., 2022). This source of self-efficacy information is weaker than information gained through direct experience, however, as "whatever mastery expectations are induced by suggestion can be readily extinguished by disconfirming experiences" (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). Put simply, verbal assertions of creative ability cannot take the place of firsthand experience, and a disastrous experience is not remediated by the heaping on of praise.

Still, it is important for teachers to acknowledge the role their language plays in the development of student self-efficacy, as an excess of negative feedback can lead to students discontinuing their creative pursuits entirely (Paek and Sumners, 2017). Teachers must also examine their own self-efficacy, as a teacher or facilitator's beliefs about their own creative capacities and those of their students have an impact on the learning process (Katz-Buonincontro et al., 2021). If a teacher does not believe in a student's ability to progress, or in their own ability to teach

them, the student is less likely to improve.

Social exchange outside the music studio also contributes to creative self-efficacy (Hass et al., 2016). From amateur engagements to professional successes, musical achievements “always rely on the existence of certain people who are relevant and key in supporting the artist’s training” (Orejudo et al., 2021, p. 3). Underscoring the importance of social exchange will help students establish and value social support systems in their future creative endeavors.

4. Physiological and Affective States

Unfamiliar or disconcerting circumstances, such as singing for an audience or a teacher, can cause tension and agitation that may impede a student’s success and affect their sense of personal competency (Bandura, 1977). As in the case of problematic music performance anxiety (MPA), unpleasant physiological symptoms can lead to avoidant behavior, from refusing performance opportunities to sabotaging one’s own practice (Shaw et al., 2020). In addition, as the voice is particularly vulnerable to emotional and physiological conditions that affect its function (Lewis and Hendricks, 2022), unpleasant internal experiences may be especially disturbing to vocalists and lead to feelings of worry, fear, and shame that only compound the problem (Mahony et al., 2022). Conversely, feelings of empowerment, openness, and the freedom to express emotion can lead to greater self-efficacy (Juwita et al., 2023).

Instead of trying to diminish negative symptoms, ACT focuses on establishing a more workable relationship with internal experience so that values-oriented actions can be taken, helping individuals organize their behavior toward long-term goals and cope with short-term discomfort and aversive internal experiences that may arise in the process (Berkout, 2022). In the language of Bandura’s model, ACT may help students develop physiological and affective states that will allow them to pursue accomplishments and mastery experiences. A discussion of ACT skills and their potential to improve creative self-efficacy follows below.

Acceptance and Commitment Training for Self-Efficacy

An increasing number of studies explore performance psychology interventions intended to help music students reach their goals, but the specific design and deployment of these interventions has received less attention. When interviewed about their experiences and preferences, students in one study related a need for “practical, individually tailored” interventions that were conducted “in a safe space” (Suzuki and Pitts, 2023, p. 1). The flexibility of the ACT model speaks to these needs, especially since the structure and basic application of ACT can be

taught in the matter of a few hours to a previously untrained music teacher (Shaw et al., 2020). Examples of ACT exercises that can be adapted for music performance coaching can be found in Appendix A, page 39.

Music students struggling with difficult internal experiences are more likely to seek assistance from music teachers than from therapists or other professionals, but teachers may not feel adequately prepared to address these concerns (Shaw et al., 2020). The focus of teaching is to instruct and impart information, and teachers tend to rely on preparation and skill mastery rather than cognitive and psychological skills that are also essential to successful performance (Gill et al., 2022). This distinction is important, as while high-quality performance experiences are likely to increase self-efficacy and reduce the incidence of MPA, technical mastery is not enough to ensure optimal performance (Philippe et al., 2022). The performer's overall emotional health and current affective state in the moment of the performance will also impact success (LeBlanc, 1994), both in the short-term and throughout their career.

In contrast to teaching, "coaching involves unlocking one's potential in order to maximize... performance" (Mahony et al., 2022, p. 3). As such, it may be beneficial for teachers to acquire coaching-specific skills to supplement their instructional expertise. As an emerging discipline, coaching benefits from the strong evidence base and formal structure of the ACT model, giving coaches a theoretical foundation upon which to build their skills (Juncos et al., 2017). The six components of psychological flexibility as identified in the ACT model are discussed in more detail below, with consideration for how they may influence self-efficacy among voice and songwriting students.

1. Acceptance Skills for Self-Efficacy

In ACT terms, acceptance is "an active and ongoing, unfolding stance towards thoughts and feelings that promotes a reduction in unnecessary struggle" (Hill and Oliver, 2019, p. 27), and is considered to be the opposite of experiential avoidance. It takes effort to suppress emotions and sensations in the body, and these avoidant efforts arising from psychological inflexibility can cause students to become distracted, anxious, or depressed (Katajavuori et al., 2023) and potentially to miss out on opportunities for growth (Shaw et al., 2020). Rather than trying to avoid unpleasant internal experiences, ACT encourages the development of acceptance through practicing these three skills: **defusion**, **acceptance**, and **contacting the present moment**.

A key understanding in ACT is that thoughts are not the same as what they represent, and that being caught up in the mental process of relating ideas and concepts to one another impinges on a person's ability to be present. Defusion is the process of stepping back from thoughts and considering them as the mental representations they are, while acceptance promotes a willingness to experience a full range of emotion and sensation (Juncos and de Paiva e Pona, 2018). This willingness to experience may carry over into external experiences as well. As Bandura (1977) pointed out, persisting through threatening experiences that are actually safe increases self-efficacy, making it easier to persist through similar challenges in the future. For instance, a vocal student who thinks their voice sounds terrible when they practice, but who accepts this unpleasant thought and practices anyway, is likely to improve both their relationship to practice and their vocal skills. In this way, along with encouraging greater self-efficacy, increased psychological flexibility may also improve the quality of creative output.

Creative performance benefits not only from the reduction of distraction and distress, but from the cultivation of a mindful, present quality of attention. While lay understandings of creativity tend to place too much importance on random moments of insight and may stereotype creative people as absent-minded, research shows that creative ideas require “effort, concentration, and focused attention” (Nijstad and Wronska, 2019, p. 347) to “facilitate information selection” and “the generation of original ideas” (Carruthers et al., 2018, p. 370). Creative thought encompasses convergent and divergent thinking, imagery, reasoning, and analysis (Malinin, 2019), and is increasingly respected in the literature as an extremely complex cognitive process. As one writing instructor suggested, creativity may not be a personality or a set of traits as much as a set of “habits of thinking that can be developed” (Luckert, 2019, p. 64) in a variety of ways.

In one meta-analysis of methods to enhance creativity in adults, mindfulness meditation was one of the top three most effective strategies, along with diverse cultural exposure and in-depth training courses (Haase et al., 2023). ACT offers a wide variety of simple exercises to practice mindfulness, and may help students develop “an open, curious, and overall positive attitude toward creativity” (Tromp and Glaveanu, 2023, p. 6), an important predictor for future engagement.

The three remaining ACT skills focus on defining performance-related values and the actions one might take in the direction of those values (Juncos and de Paiva e Pona, 2018). They are:

self-as-context, values, and committed action.

2. Commitment Skills for Self-Efficacy

Identifying thoughts and feelings as separate from the self is an essential first step in adopting a workable relationship with internal experience. By learning to separate the content of their creative challenges, ideas, and beliefs from the context of themselves, a student can develop an observant perspective that allows them to view and assess the content of their experience (Chelkowska-Zacharewicz and Baran, 2023) rather than identifying with it.

In her exhaustive book on the topic of MPA, Dianna Kenny interviewed many musicians for whom being a musician comprised their entire identity and sense of self-worth (Kenny, 2011). Songwriters exposing emotionally sensitive material may feel especially vulnerable, and vocalists may hold particularly tightly to their musical identity, since their instrument is part of their body. As a result they may take feedback personally, interpreting comments about their performance as personal attacks (Lewis and Hendricks, 2022).

Even students who have positive experiences may hold self-perceptions that hinder further learning (Zelenak, 2020). Attachment to positive self-stories, such as 'I am an excellent singer' or 'I write interesting music' can be equally debilitating, as acute experiences that conflict with these self-stories, such as giving a poor performance or receiving ambivalent feedback, can bring a musician's sense of self uncomfortably into question (Lewis and Hendricks, 2022). By learning to experience the content of their thoughts as separate from the context of themselves, vocalists and songwriters can take a more objective view of their performance and the feedback they receive. In addition, by holding self-stories more lightly, creative people can become "more agile... in taking the perspective of others" (Hill and Oliver, 2019, p. 36), a critical skill for collaboration that can also ignite creativity in general (Artigau et al., 2023).

Instead of being steered through life by thoughts, feelings, and self-perceptions, psychologically flexible individuals take actions congruent with their values (Chelkowska-Zacharewicz and Baran, 2023), or deeply held guiding principles. In the ACT model, values-oriented action becomes the standard for success, whether or not external circumstances have allowed a person to reach their goal.

Values can play a role in goal-setting, as well. From a voice teacher's perspective it could be

argued that goals based on comparison, like ‘I want to sing just like this person’, or on achievement for its own sake, like ‘I want to riff really fast and belt really high’, may be unlikely to inspire the dedicated practice necessary for accomplishing them. Students may lack the experience or specific language to connect these goals with deeper values. By helping them define the underlying values beneath these goals, such as ‘I want to inspire others with my singing’ or ‘I want to feel free and powerful when I sing’, students may be more likely to honor, explore, and practice these goals from one lesson to the next. By recalibrating the measure of success, students can experience accomplishment and mastery based on their values rather than on factors beyond their control, to the benefit of their creative self-efficacy.

Following valued actions into unknown creative territory or new practice habits may be uncomfortable at first, but the rewarding feeling of moving toward values will likely encourage further exploration and the willingness to encounter future discomfort (Berkout, 2022). Creativity, too, is not a goal but a process of unfolding which holds the possibility for discomfort, failure, and missteps along the way (Sawyer, 2022). Remaining open to surprises and accidents is necessary to the creative process, and for even the most methodical creators there is an assumption of risk and an acknowledgement of the unknown (Glaveanu, 2020). The practice of taking values-oriented action may also extend into other facets of life. For example, a singer acting on the value of inviting musical collaboration may also become more open to collaboration at home, at work, or with friends.

Of the four sources of self-efficacy information suggested by Bandura (1977), ACT may most obviously impact students’ physiological and affective states, as it promotes overall well-being and feelings of satisfaction (Katajavuori et al., 2023). In one systematic review and initial meta-analysis, ACT showed a significant, small pooled effect size in improving the well-being of university students, providing initial evidence of its efficacy toward this purpose (Howell and Passmore, 2018). By mitigating anxiety, negative thoughts, and problematic self-stories, students are more likely to engage in opportunities where they may experience performance accomplishment and mastery, and exposure to performance environments increases the chances of vicarious experience and social connection as well. By engaging with values and developing mindful presence, students may also derive greater satisfaction from home practice.

Another potential benefit of the ACT model is the focus on “direct, experiential learning” through the use of “creative exercises, metaphors, and interactions” that help participants understand

how their inner thoughts and feelings influence their outer actions and habits (Hill and Oliver, 2019, p. 8). As verbal persuasion is a lower performing source of self-efficacy information, it may be helpful to de-emphasize purely verbal instruction in this way. Centering student values through flexible teaching approaches shows a positive impact on student well-being, and allowing students to define and communicate their needs within the boundaries of a clear structure can encourage autonomy (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2020). ACT may provide both the needed structure and flexibility to derive these benefits.

Differentiating ACT from Other Modalities

Some critical evaluations argue that the treatment mechanisms of ACT appear similar to those of other modalities, such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) (Sewart et al., 2019), and assert that ACT has not been sufficiently studied in comparison with other models. One systematic review and meta-analysis found that active control conditions are rarely used in ACT research and vary from study to study, and concluded that further high-quality studies are necessary to determine whether ACT is more effective than other interventions (Han and Kim, 2022).

It is also unclear to what extent, if any, ACT is more beneficial as a complete system than any one of its component parts. For instance, the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills identifies the following four skills based on existing mindfulness literature: “observing, describing, acting with awareness, and accepting without judgment” (Baer et al., 2004, p. 191). These four skills could be interpreted as analogous to the ACT skills of self-as-context, defusion, valued action, and acceptance, calling into question whether the entire ACT model is necessary to derive the desired benefits. Developing and rigorously validating methods for measuring ACT processes, as well as improving statistical transparency and increasing the use of robust experimental controls, would further ACT research (Cihon et al., 2021; Arch et al., 2023) to the benefit of both therapeutic and coaching applications.

Opportunities for Future Research

ACT therapy, as delivered either by licensed clinicians or via online interfaces designed by psychologists (Howell and Passmore, 2018; Viskovich and Pakenham, 2020; Katajavuori et al., 2023), has been the subject of over nine hundred randomized trials (Arch et al., 2023).

However, accurate evaluation of ACT may be undermined by issues of measurement and research design (McKay and O’Donohue, 2023) such as missing data, a lack of experimental controls, or the provision of insufficient information to successfully replicate studies (Cihon et al.,

2021). The efficacy of ACT in non-clinical applications is not widely researched. According to one meta-analysis, it is difficult to differentiate non-clinical ACT training from therapeutic ACT interventions in the literature currently available (Cihon et al., 2021), identifying the need for more specificity and rigor in the study of both applications.

Methods of data collection in ACT studies have also inspired critical scrutiny. For instance, some studies determine participants' psychological flexibility through coding narrative data. Once a statement is coded, the context in which the comment occurred is effectively removed, so the same statement could be interpreted as demonstrating psychological flexibility in one situation, and inflexibility in another (Chelkowska-Zacharewicz and Baran, 2023). Self-reported data of other kinds can also be misleading, as individuals may not accurately evaluate their own competence (Hass et al., 2016) or performance.

In addition, some of the concepts highlighted in ACT, such as values, are difficult to measure with the psychometric tools currently available (Barrett et al., 2019). As ACT focuses on a core of theorized processes, improving the measurement and evaluation of these processes would advance the implementation of ACT and contribute to the field's understanding of the model (Arch et al., 2023). The need for the development and validation of improved tools and methods constitutes an additional array of research opportunities.

Questions of Application

As an individual whose psychological health and creative practice have directly benefited from ACT therapy and training, it is especially vital that I turn a critical eye to this model. I have worked to counteract confirmation bias by making reasonable efforts to find contrary evidence that challenges my research question (McSweeney, 2021), as discussed above. Additional questions have arisen with regards to practical application in the voice studio.

Based on current literature, the ideal duration of an ACT intervention is unclear. Programs directed at university students varied, from a four-week self-paced online program (Viskovich and Pakenham, 2020), to weekly two-hour group sessions for six weeks (Clarke et al., 2020), to a full college course (Katajavuori et al., 2023). As I teach in a private studio, I would need to determine how to adapt the ACT model to suit the cadence of weekly one-hour lessons.

There may also be a need to determine whether individual students are candidates for working

with the ACT framework, as the practice of accepting unpleasant internal experience may have emotional consequences that some students are not prepared to face. Since ACT is based on a therapeutic model, ethical practice would require my staying within a teacher's scope of practice. Further training in performance coaching and ACT may be necessary in order to fully understand the similarities and differences between teaching, coaching, and therapeutic intervention (Mahony et al., 2022). In addition, it may be a good idea to generate resources to educate students on the difference between coaching and therapy, as well as a structure to refer students in need of therapeutic support.

Conclusion

By examining the role of creativity in the vocal studio and considering how self-efficacy is thought to develop, I established a context for considering ACT as a tool to improve creative self-efficacy among voice and songwriting students. Using Bandura's (1977) original model, I explored where my students may find opportunities for gaining self-efficacy information. I then provided a thorough outline of ACT, drawing on recent research to identify how this framework may benefit my students. Some questions regarding the efficacy of ACT and best practices for its application remain unanswerable at this time, which is understandable given that ACT is a newer therapeutic model adapted to the emerging field of coaching. Gaps in existing research and the flexibility of the model itself present exciting opportunities for further study, adaptation, and application.

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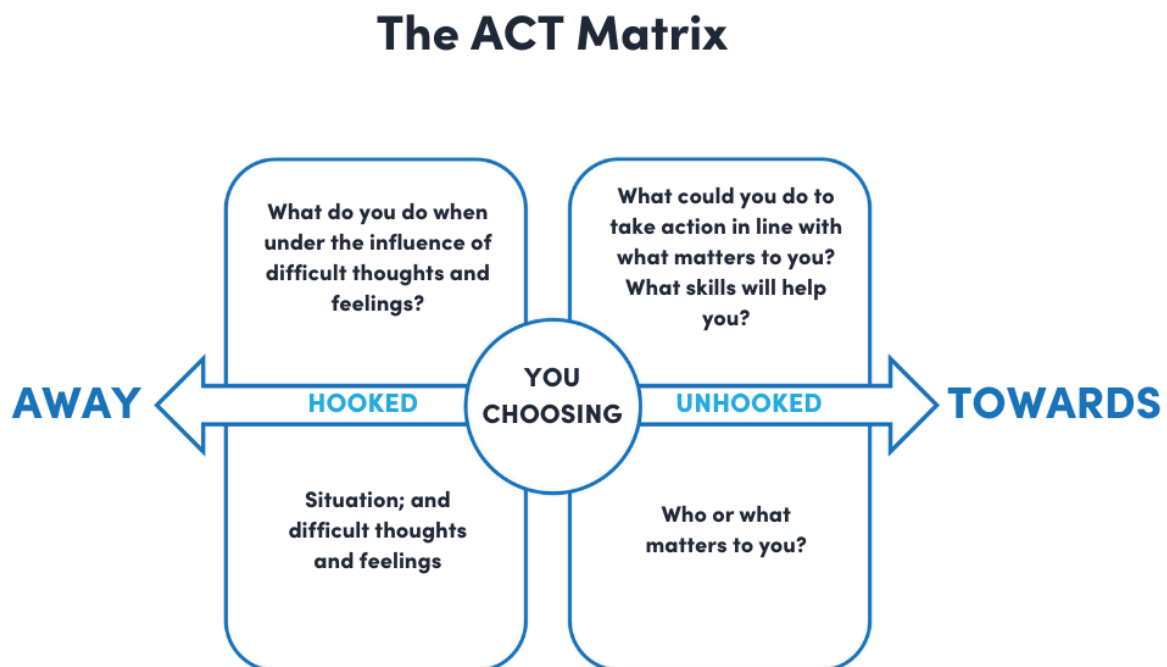
APPENDIX A: Some Examples of ACT Activities

These activities can be adapted to focus specifically on music practice or performance.

1. The ACT Matrix

Contextual Consulting (2024) *The ACT Matrix*. Available at:

<https://contextualconsulting.co.uk/resources/the-act-matrix> (Accessed: 7th May 2024).



2. Informal Mindfulness Practice

Harris, R. (2009) *ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Informal Mindfulness Practice

1. Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you're doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what's happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you'll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2. Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors—something mundane that you have to do to make your life work—and do it mindfully. For example, when ironing clothes, notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand. When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you're doing. Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

3. Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you're doing.

3. A Quick Look at Your Values

Harris, R. (2011) *The Confidence Gap: A Guide to Overcoming Fear and Self-Doubt*.
Toronto: Trumpeter.

A Quick Look at Your Values – page 1

Values are your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are not about what you want to get or achieve; they are about how you want to behave or act on an ongoing basis.

There are literally hundreds of different values, but below you'll find a list of the most common ones. Probably, not all of them will be relevant to you. Keep in mind there are no such things as 'right values' or 'wrong values'. It's a bit like our taste in pizzas. If you prefer ham and pineapple but I prefer salami and olives, that doesn't mean that my taste in pizzas is *right* and yours is *wrong*. It just means we have different tastes. And similarly, we may have different values. So read through the list below and write a letter next to each value: V = Very important, Q = Quite important, and N = Not so important; and make sure to score *at least ten* of them as Very important.

1. Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc
2. Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences
3. Assertiveness: to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
4. Authenticity: to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself
5. Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc
6. Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc
7. Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve
8. Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering
9. Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others
10. Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others
11. Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations
12. Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others
13. Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
14. Creativity: to be creative or innovative
15. Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover
16. Encouragement: to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others
17. Equality: to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa
18. Excitement: to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling
19. Fairness: to be fair to myself or others
20. Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing
21. Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
22. Freedom: to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise
23. Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others
24. Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself or others
25. Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
26. Generosity: to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others
27. Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life
28. Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
29. Humour: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life
30. Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves

A Quick Look at Your Values – page 2

31. Industry: to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated
32. Independence: to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things
33. Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself -- emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships
34. Justice: to uphold justice and fairness
35. Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others
36. Love: to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others
37. Mindfulness: to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience
38. Order: to be orderly and organized
39. Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from other's points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.
40. Patience: to wait calmly for what I want
41. Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
42. Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others
43. Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organizing
44. Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking
45. Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard
46. Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions
47. Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection
48. Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others
49. Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions
50. Self-care: to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met
51. Self-development: to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.
52. Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals
53. Sensuality: to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses
54. Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality
55. Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself
56. Skilfulness: to continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them
57. Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others
58. Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable
59. Insert your own unlisted value here:
60. Insert your own unlisted value here:

Once you've marked each value as V, Q, N (Very, Quite, or Not so important), go through all the Vs, and select out the top six that are most important to you. Mark each one with a 6, to show it's in your top six. Finally, write those six values out below, to remind yourself this is what you want to stand for as a human being.