

## **Exploring the Narrative: Voice Practitioner Research and the Literature Review Process**

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# Exploring the Narrative: Voice Practitioner Research and the Literature

## Review Process

This paper explores the dilemma faced by voice practitioner-researchers when working with literature. Within voice practice, researchers stand at the intersection of science and art and face philosophical conflicts due to the multi-disciplinary nature of their position. The paper explores the different literature review types and gives guidance on their paradigm roots and stylistic devices employed. It aims to provide an accessible framework by providing clarity and facilitating choice.

**Keywords:** practitioner research, literature review, narrative review, systematic quantitative review, qualitative evidence synthesis, scoping review, integrated review

## Introduction

This commentary explores how voice practitioners can engage with the literature review process. Winter (2021) identified the role of the practitioner-researcher as pivotal to the development of voice studies. She explored the extent to which the discipline is caught between the incompatible demands of rigor and relevance, arguing that Practice Researchers require a pragmatic approach to “tooling up” for the task.

Candy (2006) delineates two types of practitioner research: practice-led and practice-based. The former refers to research that generates knowledge that impacts the operational significance of practice. It typically takes the form of a traditional research format (Costley and Armsby 2007), is text-driven, and does not include creative work. Within practice-based research, new knowledge is gained through practice and demonstrated through creative outcomes such as theatre pieces, performances, and exhibitions.

This paper aims to equip practitioner-researchers with methodological devices for bridging the rigor relevance divide when working with literature. It disentangles confusing terminology and highlights the paradigm influences of each literature review type. Its primary

objective is to enable researchers within the voice field to make conscious choices, highlighting examples of good practice and valuable resources. Its purpose is threefold:

- (A) To assess the importance of the literature review process within the multi-disciplinary field of voice studies,
- (B) To examine the different types of literature review and their significance for the practitioner-researcher within voice studies,
- (C) To guide those who stand at the intersection of art and science in the selection process.

### **Literature Review Importance and the Multi-Disciplinary Nature of Voice Studies**

For this paper, *voice studies* can be understood as “an interdisciplinary framework from which to explore voice” (McNish 2016). Crossing boundaries results in competing paradigms, concepts, and processes. According to Eidshem and Meizel (2019), the term “voice studies” acts as a moniker to bring together disparate perspectives and methods and facilitate further transdisciplinary dialogue. Literature review analysis is a core component of developing a discourse, and the practitioner-researcher must grapple with potential conflicts alongside the challenge of producing credible, rigorous, and relevant research.

Compiling a literature review is integral to fusing interdisciplinary worlds and bridging the gap between practical relevance and academic rigor. It is the primer for methodological and theoretical sophistication whereby the researcher summarizes existing literature, identifies areas for further examination, and offers new insights (Boote and Beile 2005). In terms of Postgraduate and doctoral research, Mullins and Kiley's (2002, 377) study showed how the literature review formed a persuasive first impression. The literature review was “a good indicator” of the extent to which the student grasped the complexity of the

problem. A poor review resulted in a negative perception that was difficult to alter.

Onwuegbuzie and Daniel (2005) examined 52 manuscripts submitted to an education peer-reviewed journal and discovered that 40% of authors were likely to have their manuscript rejected on the grounds of a problematic literature review. In their view, literature reviews are “legitimate and publishable scholarly documents” (Le Compte et al. 2003, 124), and it is essential to view literature as data (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins 2012; Boote and Beile 2005). In relation to voice studies, interacting with literature as data unlocks a range of possibilities that include and move beyond conventional literature sources.

Stricter adherence to processes could improve publication opportunities, and it is crucial to consider methodological approaches to organizing and analyzing literature data. Boote and Beile (2005) similarly argue that a thorough literature review is a precursor to undertaking sophisticated research because it identifies the study's scope and context. It situates the existing literature within a broader scholarly context. It should not solely report the claims but instead critically examine the research methods employed to undertake the research. The author should consider the existing nature of the field and what needs to be contributed with an emphasis on synthesizing literature to present a new perspective.

Developing disciplines engage in transdisciplinary analysis challenging the practitioner-researcher (Costley and Armsby 2007) to negotiate competing, incompatible paradigms. A paradigm view consists of the philosophical beliefs that underpin a study. *Ontology* considers the nature of reality and interacts with epistemology to examine whether it is objectively knowable or perceived through the limits of consciousness (Creswell 2009). Combs, Bustamante, and Onwuegbuzie (2010) stress the importance when conducting a literature review for a researcher to scrutinize their paradigm perspective before selecting a methodological approach. Examining the interrelationships between the researchers'

worldview, research outlook, and discipline-specific philosophy can heighten awareness of commonalities and tensions, enabling the navigation process to be less fraught.

It is necessary to examine some of the paradigm perspectives that have filtered into voice pedagogy to explore some of these ideas further. Sansom (2019) acknowledges the interdisciplinary nature of voice pedagogy and draws on a range of specialisms to pinpoint historical landmarks. These include singing, acting, public speaking, and voice science. Within his series of multi-disciplinary reflections, this collection conveys a multi-lensed view rooted in differing and, at times, opposing paradigms.

Sansom (2019) notes that singing pedagogy is well-documented in voice pedagogy. William Vennard's 1967 publication represented a landmark movement toward the science tradition, developed by Richard Miller's seminal text *The Structure of Singing* (Hoch 2018). This shift toward the positivist paradigm has observed a quest for scientific truths and accuracy, culminating in an Evidence-Based Vocal Pedagogy (Maxfield and Ragan 2021). Positivism values an objective, impartial approach where the researcher is dispassionate and neutral. Validity is a central tenet of the research process, and the methodology must be systematic, replicable, and generalizable (Kawulich 2012).

In contrast, Oram's (2021) work on anti-discrimination in accent training captures subjective realities. His research structure departs from the conventional layout, and reflective narrative intercepts literature with theoretical exploration used to probe practice analysis. He interweaves literature to capture the essence of the practice story. Practice evaluation remains the central focus rather than the research outcomes generated, veering toward relativism on the ontological continuum. These competing paradigm influences can stultify the researcher, who can feel paralyzed by philosophical incompatibilities (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Practitioner researchers must meet standards of rigor while meeting the demands of relevance (Winter 2021). Consistent ideas increase publication opportunities (Onwuegbuzie and Daniel 2005), but they also create additional, burdensome layers of complexity when selecting an appropriate literature review methodology. It is, therefore, necessary to explore the different types of literature review and evaluate their relevance to voice as a multi-disciplinary practice.

### **Literature Review Types and Significance**

There are eight potential types of literature review within the field of voice studies:

- The Commentary
- The Lineage of Practice Review
- The Narrative Review
- The Quantitative Systematic
- Semi-Systematic Review
- The Qualitative Systematic Review/Qualitative Evidence Synthesis
- The Scoping Review
- The Integrative Review

The author will explore each one fully, linking each section to highlighted examples and analysis.

#### ***The Commentary***

Scholastic debate is integral to developing discourse, and this section will explore the role of

the commentary within voice studies. Within meta discourse (the study of written discourse), the delineation between a commentary and a narrative review has barely been discussed. The author contends that voice studies is a field rich in philosophical and artistic influences. Understanding this sensitive boundary line aids a greater sense of “knowing” in the writing process, thereby increasing its possibilities. Within this section, the author draws on applied linguistics and methodology to explore the differences, stylistic devices, and the potential role within the study of voice. It builds on Sansom (2019), who briefly explores these issues. It also posits a new framework and rationale for improving transparency and accountability.

Green et al. (2001) is one of the few articles to acknowledge the close relationship between the commentary and the narrative review. Within voice studies, Sansom (2019) refers to the commentary as a theory paper and recognizes the similarities with a narrative review. With the former, a particular opinion is expressed, and the author demonstrates bias in the synthesis of the articles, whereas the latter has a greater degree of formality. According to the authors, the commentary can be journalistic, informal, comprehensively researched, and impeccably referenced. The latter hovers on the boundary of a narrative literature review, and it can be challenging to discern the two. The former revolves around the expertise of the commentator, and its purpose is to “provoke scholarly dialogue amongst the readers of the journal” (Green et al. 2001, 103). Maxwell (2006) favors an approach that rejects over-systemization in favor of theoretical and conceptual development. He argues that relevance is a crucial factor and that it should take precedence over breadth. A thoroughly researched commentary is highly valuable to the practice community as it harnesses philosophical and creative arguments to elucidate practice strategies. They are also useful when an author is cross-synthesizing from various disciplines to present new lines of inquiry (Green et al. 2001, Sansom 2019). In this instance, it is impossible to engage in exhaustive searches, and the authorial voice is needed to highlight academic areas of research and practice dialogue.

According to Sansom (2019), theory articles reframe ideas in some way and act as a springboard for further research.

Hyland (2019) refers to a commentary as a “popularization,” highlighting how they employ different stylistic devices. They are often discernible by the use of an engaging title. Within voice studies, Sansom’s (2016), “The Unspoken Voice and Speech Debate [or] the Sacred Cow in the Conservatory” is an example of a peer-reviewed commentary that illustrates this. Hyland (2019) describes academic writing as a “balance between the researcher's authority as an expert knower and their humility as a disciplinary servant” (108). He argues that different writing genres exist between humility at one end of the spectrum and originality at the other. Within the commentary, the author is less subservient, and the authorial voice is dominant. In Sansom's (2016) article, the author explores voice and speech pedagogy tradition alongside traditional learning theory. The article highlights the conflicts and tensions between art and science, and the purpose of the paper is to explore ideas and provoke discussion. His dominant authorial voice is of paramount importance to this process.

At its least formal, there may be less attribution or research may be referred to without a standardized referencing format. A rigorous commentary may reference thoroughly, but the citation style may differ. Hyland (1999) examines the difference between integral and non-integral citation. With integral citation, prominence to the cited author is granted, a common approach adopted in Philosophy. It enables arguments to be developed, and it can facilitate scholastic dialogue. Within the sciences, non-integral citation appears at the end of the sentence, thereby downplaying the role of the author. Both types can be employed within the commentary depending on whether the writer wishes to emphasize the author's eminence.

The commentary is more likely to employ attitude and engagement markers (Hyland



2019). An attitude marker imposes a value judgment, throws caution to the wind when interpreting research, and fearlessly states the significance of the claims with emotive language (Fahnestock 2011). Within the practice field, practitioners navigate the swampy lowlands (Schon 1983), and application is required to navigate an ill-defined roadmap. Attitude markers convey conviction and expertise, which are necessary when guiding practice.

Engagement markers are also employed within the context of the commentary (Hyland 2019). These draw the reader into the text and are persuasive by design. They can be subtle, conveying the notion of the community, such as: *for most teachers*, or they can be direct such as *we all agree that*. Rhetorical questions and asides are also used, for example, *Is Vocal Fry something to be discouraged?* (Sansom 2016).

For this reason, this paper emphasizes the value and importance of the commentary within the field of voice. Practitioners reside within a tacit territory of experience and uncertainty. They must engage in decisive on-the-spot judgment, and a well-written, thoroughly researched commentary can aid the navigation process.

That said, there is a need to question its role and scope, especially as peer-reviewed literature forms the bedrock of an evolving discipline. Perhaps an author employing this model could be transparent about their process, facilitating greater rigor. The persuasive nature of the writing can impact practice, and with this should come a degree of responsibility. This paper argues that voice studies should pioneer good practice by including a transparency statement that lays bare authorial intent and inherent bias. For example:

- Is the purpose to promote scholastic debate?
- How important is this debate?
- Has the author fused multi-disciplinary strands, and if so, for what purpose?

- Has the author substantiated their claims with rigorous referencing?
- Does it have the capacity to shape practice, and if so, are the claims appropriately substantiated with evidence
- How exhaustive were the searches for substantiating literature? Is this limited because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the work?
- If the research was not exhaustive, did the author reach a point of theoretical saturation where further reading elicited little new material?

### ***Lineage of Practice Review***

If the commentary excels at communicating practice evaluation, then it is highly appropriate for Practice-Based Research (Candy 2006), or Practice as Research (PaR) (Nelson 2013), where the written component is presented as an exegesis. This section considers whether the commentary could be adapted to form a lineage of practice review developed by Nelson (2013).

The terminology for PaR across the arts is diverse and evolving. It has been referred to as *Studio Based Design* (Marshall 2010), *Arts-Based Educational Research*, *Artography* (Sinner et al. (2006)), *Arts-Based Research* (Blumenfeld Jones 2015; Bridges 2020), *Creative and Production Based Research* (Milech and Schilo 2004), *Practice Led Research* (Douglas and Gulari 2015), *Practice-Based Research* (Coady and Webb 2016). With the diversity of the terminology comes nuanced debates about how practice research should engage with the written word. For example, Sinner et al. (2006) explain the relationship:

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings. (1224)

Within this definition, the interconnected relationship between the written word and the artistic practice is central to the definition. In contrast, Marshall (2010) acknowledges the separateness of these two components:

Studio-based research within the academy typically involves the production of a cohesive body of work and a written component referred to here as an exegesis. (78)

The above definition highlights the relationship between the creative outcomes and the written component. While the need for the written word is acknowledged, it emphasizes the importance of creative works.

While these definitions share commonalities regarding the importance of artistic inquiry in all art forms, they raise fundamental questions regarding the communication of the research outputs. The concept provided by Sinner et al. (2006) suggests an interwoven dialogue between the written word and artistic process, while Marshall (2010) emphasizes a dichotomy. For Nelson (2013) and Candy (2006), the artifact acts as “substantial evidence of a research inquiry with words acting as no more than a supplement to the engagement with the artifact” (5).

The varied vocabulary and the subtle shifts in the definitions highlight a tension between the creative outcome known as an artifact and the written analysis referred to as an exegesis. To encompass practice-based research (Candy 2006), the literature review categories must be adapted to serve the voice community fully. Rather than a formal literature review, Nelson (2013) suggests exploring the researcher's *lineage of practice* as the traditional narrative review examined below, with a reliance on peer-reviewed literature, may be insufficient to serve the needs of the practice-based researcher identified by Candy (2006).

Building on this further, a lineage of practice review requires not only an

interdisciplinary lens but also the use of a range of non-peer-reviewed sources (Nelson 2013). This potentially raises a conflict between rigor and relevance (Winter 2021) as the researcher needs to consult material beyond peer-reviewed conventions. Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) refer to this as *fugitive literature*, which gives color to the much-debated concept of *grey literature* explored within the leadership and management field (Sharma et al. 2015). Cross extrapolating innovative frameworks from other disciplines could add to Nelson's (2013) lineage of practice review.

Lawrence et al. (2014) define grey literature as knowledge artifacts that are not peer-reviewed. They cite discussion papers, newsletters, power-points, dissertations, book chapters, webinars, and speeches as a potential list of grey literature artifacts. If the list is to serve voice studies, it needs to extend to include scripts, music notation, lyrics, live theatre, and digital media.

Selecting fugitive literature/data raises challenges of quality and validity. Kepes et al. (2012) suggest grading the literature into three tiers. The framework applies to the field of Management, but it could be adapted to suit voice studies. The first tier is reserved for material with significant credibility. Examples include books, book chapters, and government reports. The second tier is for sources with moderate credibility, including annual reports, news articles, and video presentations. Finally, the third tier is for blogs, emails, and tweets.

The Adams Framework (2017) adds to the Kepes tiered system by introducing *fit-for-purpose* quality criteria. It asks a series of questions to justify inclusion, such as what is the relevance of each artifact? What is the potential impact of each artifact? What guidance can we take from the field of experts? How does the grey literature supplement the peer-reviewed material? In addition to this, Adams (2017) suggests reporting grey literature separately from the peer-reviewed white literature.

Document Analysis (Bowen 2009) could also prove useful when crafting a lineage of practice review. Rather than tiering the documents, it divides them into three distinct types. These are public records, personal documents, and physical evidence (O’Leary 2014). An eight-staged process is suggested:

1. Gather relevant texts.
2. Develop an organization and management scheme.
3. Make copies of the originals for annotation.
4. Assess the authenticity of documents.
5. Explore the document’s agenda and biases.
6. Explore background information (e.g., tone, style, purpose).
7. Ask questions about the document (e.g., Who produced it? Why? When? Type of data?).
8. Explore content.

O’Leary (2014) suggests treating the document like an interviewee by asking consistent questions and using a rubric. Locating and evaluating a lineage of practice is a challenging task, and the above frameworks could build on Nelson (2013) and stimulate further debate.

### ***The Narrative Review***

As stated earlier, the line between the Narrative Review and the Commentary is less than clear. According to Green et al. (2001), the literature presented within the Narrative Review is often incomplete, based on a subjective selection of articles, and lacks inclusion and exclusion criteria, but this is also true of the Commentary. The distinguishing factor between the two is the increase in rigor and the difference in the authorial voice.

Doyle (2003, 234) identified the key characteristics of a narrative/traditional literature review. The primary purpose is to engage in “a progressive linking to form a chain of

reasoning.” They may be conducted thoroughly to the point of being exhaustive, and they forge links through the process of “bridging summaries” with the outcome of providing “logical rationalizations.”

Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) and Onwuegbuzie (2018, 176) emphasize the importance of the narrative literature review within the dissertation process. They acknowledge its capacity to inform and narrow a topic, provide a new lens, explore methodology, and make internal and external connections with the subject of choice. They also emphasize the importance of reviewers communicating with diverse audiences and not assuming a shared knowledge of the topic or the underpinning methodologies. It is, therefore, “essential for researchers to maximize communication in their literature review narratives” (Onwuegbuzie 2018, 178). In this study, the authors examined 52 manuscripts submitted to a peer-reviewed journal over two years. They concluded that the most common reason for a rejected manuscript was shifting the responsibility for making sense of the manuscript to the reader.

When synthesizing literature, the analysis consists of within-study literature and between-study analysis (Combs, Bustamante, and Onwuegbuzie 2010). According to the authors, a within-study evaluation in its most rigorous and comprehensive form does not involve solely analyzing a study’s findings but examining every component, including the literature review section, the conceptual/theoretical framework, methods employed, and the results and discussion section. A between-study literature analysis involves comparing and contrasting two or more literature sources with every component open to evaluation.

A narrative review engages in some recognition of rigor and process, although a complete methodology may be missing. They are useful for researchers who have extensively researched an area but cannot engage in exhaustive searches due to time constraints.

Applying Hyland’s (2019) linguistic devices, the balance between humility and originality

lies toward humility. The author is likelier to engage in extensive attribution, thorough research, and thematic organization (Green et al. 2001). When evaluating evidence, author dominance is minimized with a combination of integral and non-integral citation structures, and the emphasis is on the literature explored rather than the author's opinion. In the *Voice and Speech Review*, Bartoskova, (2022) "The Role of the Psoas Major Muscle in Speaking and Singing" is an example of a narrative review. It does not contain a discernible methodology or inclusion/exclusion criterion. The literature is organized into key themes, the authorial voice is downplayed to convey exploration, and potential application is explored.

### ***The Quantitative Systematic Review***

The systematic review arose in response to the inherent bias and flaws within the narrative review process. This section will explore the evolution of the systematic quantitative review before examining the implications for voice studies. There is confusion regarding the terminology used (Booth et al. 2009), and this section provides some much-needed clarity and identifies examples of good practice within voice research.

The notion of evidence-based practice may be new to voice studies, but it is firmly established in other disciplines. Understanding its historical evolution could inform the study of voice as practical approaches, frameworks, and resources are ripe for cross-application. Initially rooted in the health care sector, the evidence movement arose in response to Archie Cochrane's 1971 critique of health care intervention and insufficient evidential rigor (Arbor 2010). Glass (1976, 3) also called into question the traditional narrative review referring to them as "casual, narrative discussions of research studies." He pioneered the process of meta-analysis, a strategy that has evolved significantly since its initial conception. Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) explore how reviewers working with the narrative approach could not contend with the volume of research studies available and focused on too narrow a range, producing

unsound, subjective, and biased reports. They further highlight the historical significance of Antman et al. (1992), which contributed to the demise of the traditional narrative review as a respected form of evidence. Within this paper, the authors demonstrated how informal reviews and single case studies lead to ineffective treatments for myocardial infarction. They argued that many lives could have been saved if care provision policies had been formed on the best available evidence.

In response to Antman et al. (1992), the Evidence-Based Working Group was established in 1992, and the notion of Evidence-Based Practice made its way into research and practice. The Cochrane Collaboration was founded in 1993 under the leadership of Iain Chalmers. The rise of the Randomized Controlled Trial assumed a dominant position in the rationalist systematic review framework within the health sciences. The pioneering work of Anne Oakley in 1992 culminated in the EPPI-Centre in 1993, focusing on well-designed interventions in social welfare and Education (Oakley, Gough, and James 2005). The Campbell Consortium, emphasizing social science interventions, was formed in 1999. This thinking has filtered into social theory and Education, and it could be argued that it has found its way into voice pedagogy due to the fundamental importance of vocal health and emotional wellbeing. These consortiums aimed to develop the systematic review process so that high-quality, standalone randomized controlled trial studies could be collated together and viewed as a whole. Through meta-analysis, the credibility and significance of the evidence are assessed, enabling policy decisions to be formed on rigorous systemized processes rather than on variable narrative reviews based on unsound methodologies.

Voice practitioners who share a positivist paradigm view can train to apply these clear and logical frameworks to assess research and inform practice. Postgraduate study programs offer a valuable starting place for this methodological journey but with disciplinary pressures



weighing heavily on the learner, how to engage with methodology and to what extent is an important discussion point. Strategically, understanding the philosophical standpoint of an approach is a valuable starting place for exploring those connections offering a useful springboard upon which to build knowledge. The systematic literature review embodies the positivist paradigm, and those with a clinical background could adopt aspects of this approach. Positivism values objectivity over subjectivity and is the dominant paradigm within the sciences (Crotty 1998).

According to Martinic et al. (2019), accepted definitions of the systematic review are contained within the Cochrane Handbook and the Prisma Statement. Available online, the Cochrane Handbook states that Systematic reviews seek to collate evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question. They aim to minimize bias by using explicit, systematic methods documented in advance with a protocol (Higgins et al. 2021). The recently updated Prisma Statement defines systematic reviews as a review that uses explicit, systematic methods to collate and synthesize findings of studies that address a clearly formulated question (Page et al. 2021).

Systematic reviews can form part of a dissertation, but they emerged as standalone research papers published in peer-reviewed journals (Rhoades 2011). Within Education, systematic reviews have provided a bridge between theory and practice by scrutinizing the evidence that informs policy. Within voice practice, particularly singing pedagogy, there has been this shift toward evidence-based practice and curriculum design informed by science (McCoy 2019). Researchers who adopt a positivist viewpoint, particularly those from a speech and language background may be drawn to the systematic review process for its structure and rigor.

Systematic reviews require a meta-analysis, which involves a statistical formula to

measure research outcomes. They are lengthy, complex, require considerable expertise, and researchers often work as teams. They also need a pool of studies that can be cross-compared as they aim to evaluate the consistency of results (Rhoades 2011). Within voice-related studies, we have seen an increased use of Meta-Analysis in Singing for Well-being and Singing for Health. Daykin et al. (2018) is an example of a systematic review employing meta-analysis. The study exemplifies a rigorous process by including a communicated purpose and research question. It harnesses a team of researchers, conforms to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, and conveys explicit inclusion, exclusion criteria, and a transparent search strategy that is replicable.

### ***Semi-Systematic Review***

It is important to note that lone researchers would not be able to undertake a systematic review due to the need to work within a team, register the study, and work within a timescale of 9 – 24 months (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination 2008). Systematic reviews are nonetheless beneficial for providing rigorous guidance, and other review frameworks adopt a semi-systematic approach drawing on some of the strategies developed (Cooper 1988; Torraco 2016; Randolph 2009). The wealth of resources and useable templates can be a helpful guide even when undertaking other review types. Database searches such as Pubmed, MEDLINE, EMBASE, SCOPUS, Cochrane Library, Web of Science, and CINAHL can prove helpful for searching quantitative literature.

Although systematic reviews based on a meta-analysis can influence funding allocation, the Evidence-Based Practice Model is not without its critics. Within the field of Education, Hammersley (2019, 1) rails against the ideological dominance of evidence-based practice claiming that “anyone who raises doubts about it is regarded as either mad or bad.”

Research is not the only source of evidence; it cannot provide all the evidence required to make decisions. According to Hammersley (2019, 3), randomized controlled trials and systematic reviews “exaggerate the capabilities of particular quantitative methods.” As a result, the role of professional judgment, experience, and tacit knowledge is undermined. The practitioner-researcher within voice studies may rely heavily on tacit knowledge and skilled artistry (Schon 1983). Adopting a systematic approach may feel alien and akin to wearing a straitjacket. The emphasis on statistical analysis stands in stark opposition to the artistic process, and this form of review should not alienate practice researchers within the field.

A meta-analysis requires studies to be homogenous, which poses challenges for voice practice lacking in randomized controlled trials with similar methodologies. A meta-synthesis is undertaken when an insufficient body of comparable studies or a mixed-methods approach is adopted. The results from the primary studies are summarized rather than presented as an aggregate statistic. This departure from a traditional meta-analysis has opened up an entirely new theoretical debate about meta-synthesis and how it should be approached. Grant and Booth (2009, 100) acknowledge the “considerable confusion” caused by the role of meta-synthesis as it arises within the quantitative arena when meta-analysis is not possible due to the heterogeneous nature of the studies. It creates a category between a Meta-Analysis and a Qualitative Review. Although it has become associated with the qualitative tradition (Finfgeld 2003), a meta-synthesis can remain firmly rooted in the positivist paradigm. Kenny (2005) is an example of a quantitative meta-synthesis as her review of available treatments for Music Performance Anxiety strictly adheres to a rigorous systematic approach. The breadth of the studies evaluated made it impossible to conduct a meta-analysis, but Kenny (2005) engages in other forms of statistical analysis and remains true to the quantitative paradigm in her evaluation of efficacy.

Thematic summaries of quantitative data are congruent with positivist ideas. They are also referred to as meta summaries (Sandelowski and Barroso 2007), and this distinction provides a bridge between a quantitative and qualitative synthesis. It may be helpful for voice practitioners who may draw on quantitative data to develop practice strategies.

The meta-synthesis approach is also associated with the systematic qualitative review, and this indistinct terminology exacerbates confusion within the field (Grant and Booth 2009). Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) define a meta-synthesis, highlighting its key features. The cumulative nature of the synthesis process enables the integration of findings that move beyond microanalysis to something greater than the sum of its parts. The emphasis is placed on “novel interpretations” and “interpretative transformations” (Sandelowski and Barroso 2007, 18). Knowing how to synthesize is essential in building a discipline within voice practice. These concepts fit well with voice practice that is steeped within an inherently creative narrative tradition.

Within the quantitative literature review, the author is subservient to the academic discipline, and the authorial voice is subtle and nuanced (Hyland 1996). Hyland (2019; 1996) refers to the Hedge as the dominant linguistic device employed within quantitative research analysis. According to Hyland (1996, 433), hedging is a way of presenting “unproven propositions with caution and precision.” They are characterized by phrases such as this may suggest, or it could provide evidence. There is an element of uncertainty and skepticism regarding the proposition, and the author distances themselves from the claim. The Hedge represents politeness aimed at minimizing the threat of critique to scientific claims (Myers 1989). To develop a critical through-line, an author will harness the boost where evidence is presented as incontrovertible or overwhelming. Still, overall the interplay between these two devices favors intellectual humility.

Within voice pedagogy, Singing for Health is emerging as a body of evidence, and the systematic review has proven integral to forming the basis of a future research agenda. The lung health study by Lewis et al. (2016) is a good practice example of how to carry one out.

### ***The Qualitative Systematic Review/Qualitative Evidence Synthesis***

A Qualitative Systematic Review is an emerging concept, and The Cochrane Collaboration has only begun to hone the systematic qualitative approach over the last five years. An expert panel has published consecutive papers leading to an accessible handbook entitled Chapter 21 (Noyes et al. 2021). Referring to such a review as a Qualitative Evidence Synthesis (QES), this evidence-based body recognizes the capacity of qualitative research to provide rich interpretive data (Flemming et al. 2019). It is designed for qualitative reviews to supplement quantitative studies or to be combined within an integrated mixed methods review. Such an approach further subordinates the status of qualitative analysis, but this aside, the recent work undertaken could provide a rich array of resources for new researchers to utilize.

Although there are examples of mixed methods reviews in singing for health research (Glew et al. 2021), there are no standalone qualitative systematic reviews to date. In Glew et al. (2021), the qualitative review formed only a minor part of the study, and no qualitative methodology was applied. The purpose of this section is to highlight valuable tools and provide an example of how Hermeneutics could be used in this type of review.

Some qualitative researchers have rejected the concept of a systematic qualitative literature review. Although now a significant contributor to the Cochrane approach Booth (2001, 1) initially dismissed the notion and accused the Cochrane consortium of “Institutional Quantitativism.” Ontologically, the qualitative approach sits closer to relativism on the continuum, and Booth (2001) highlights a commitment to a multiplicity of realities.

Evidentially, it is non-hierarchical and is the antithesis of the systematic quantitative approach, which interrogates quality in search of measurable truth. Bochner and Ellis (2003, 509) describe the artistic process as a social science that “resists abstraction and jargon and blurs the line between researchers and participants, writers and readers, performers and audiences.” Artists often remove boundaries, challenge hierarchies, and are antithetical to a systemized approach. Voice researchers rooted within an artistic practice may reject this approach favoring non-systemized qualitative methods aligned with creative endeavors.

Practitioner researchers often approach research through a pragmatic lens (Lester and Costley 2010) and accept the ever-changing nature of reality. They are keen to work toward speedy problem resolution, and methodology is used adeptly to provide practical working methods. Practitioners engage in complex transdisciplinary research. They are bricoleurs (Kincheloe 2004), creatively mixing and matching methods to guide them through their practice problems (Helyer 2016). With this in mind, elements of the Cochrane Initiative could prove invaluable, enabling voice researchers to extract features that suit their project needs and timescales. For example, Booth et al. (2016) consider qualitative research methods to be a conceptual and technical minefield. The literature review question is an essential aspect of this type of review. Boothe et al. (2016) distinguish between fixed questions that can act as an anchor and emerging questions that evolve as part of an exploratory process. Voice researchers influenced by positivism and the use of the hypothesis may adopt a fixed question. Practitioners synthesizing unknown territories may adopt an exploratory approach whereby the question emerges and adapts as the study evolves. The emerging question is synonymous with a constructivist approach, and Booth et al. (2016) refer to this as an interpretive intent. The authors also suggest a range of useful templates to aid question formulation such as SPICE, SPIDER, PCOC and CHIP.

Epistemology is granted primacy within the systematic qualitative reviews, which can influence a study in two ways. Firstly, reviewers are guided to consider the philosophical foundations of the primary studies under investigation (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins 2012). Secondly, adopting a methodological strategy can provide guiding parameters to an otherwise seemingly daunting task (Booth et al. 2016). Regarding the first issue, the extent to which the conceptual roots of the primary sources studied should be accommodated within the synthesis process is a moot point. Some argue that ideological congruence must exist between the primary studies explored and the synthesis process, whereas others consider this to be potentially paralyzing (Booth et al. 2016). Voice practitioner research often involves the synthesis of multi-disciplinary strands, and the heterogeneous nature of the field does not lend itself to philosophical purity. Nonetheless, ontological positioning can provide a review with solid foundations or, at the very least, deepen awareness of potential tensions and inconsistencies.

Harnessing a methodological approach to scaffold the review process is a core epistemological device. An extensive exploration of a range of methodologies is beyond the scope of this paper, but a singular examination of Hermeneutics should demonstrate how a methodology can provide both guiding parameters in terms of methodological choices and data presentation. It can also offer philosophical depth to the QES process.

Hermeneutics is compatible with voice studies because of its historical emphasis on textual analysis. Knowledge is constructed through dialogue; meaning emerges through a hermeneutic conversation between the text and the inquirer (Koch 1999). This can shape the strategy from the outset as it points to the need to declare the researcher's position and context within the methodology section of the QES. The interpretive nature of hermeneutics justifies an espousal stance rather than a neutral one (Cooper 1988), as a prominent analytical

voice facilitates critical engagement. Transparency of the author's voice through declaring the researcher's position enables open dialogue.

Hermeneutics can also be used to guide the search strategy. According to Boell and Cecez Kecmanovic (2014), it allows understanding to build as one article/document can be analyzed in terms of its relevance to another. The need for the part to always relate to the whole is a defining aspect of the hermeneutic circle (Lavery 2003). The qualitative QES approach requires inclusion/exclusion criteria, much like its quantitative counterpart. A well-designed search strategy is, therefore, integral to a rigorous process. Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) highlight the difficulties of searching qualitative studies citing poor indexing, obscure titles, and multi-disciplinary studies as critical problems for researchers.

The range of studies also transcends peer-reviewed white primary research drawing on fugitive literature, including reports, master's and PhD thesis/dissertation, and other documentation such as video and digital media. As voice practice is a physical domain, extracting data from less conventional sources is necessary. Fugitive literature is also known as grey literature and may form an essential section of practice writing (Sandelowski and Barroso 2007).

Applying hermeneutics to the search strategy avoids the pitfalls of searching for qualitative data systematically through keyword searches alone. The hermeneutic circle provides a fluid process of interpretation as the researcher moves between the parts and the whole (Crotty 1998). The research question provides the anchor that guides the search strategy. Where a relevant article is identified, a "backward chaining" method identifies literature that could not be found through a systematic keyword search. It can enable the incremental building of related sources. Citation searches can mitigate the retrospective search trap caused by backward chaining. Author searches can further facilitate a pearl



growing strategy, which can occur in an iterative circular motion (Bates 1989).

Hermeneutics as a methodology can also guide the presentation of the data contained within a qualitative literature review. Booth et al. (2016) examine the issue of analyzing findings by placing them on a continuum between description and interpretation. Different review processes position themselves somewhere on this continuum. A descriptive approach reports the outcome of the data factually, whereas an interpretative finding will form a judgment about an aspect of the data. The former places the burden of interpretation on the reader, whereas the latter commits more firmly to the analysis process and aids the reader by providing insights. The former approach is less impactful, and in the case of practitioner research, it is less able to guide practice judgments.

In contrast, the latter is open to being contested and criticized for bias (Barnett-Page and Thomas 2009). Hermeneutics allows for a dominant authorial voice, and when presenting literature data, it fuses with Braun and Clarke's (2006) concept of thematic analysis. Clarke and Braun (2017) stress the need to place thematic analysis within a theoretical framework. Hermeneutics enables data to be presented as “key characters in the story” (Clarke and Braun 2017, 108).

In terms of data presentation, Crowther's et al. (2017) approach of “crafting stories” could be used to present findings. Key themes are viewed as characters in a story, and the subjective, interpretative approach of the researcher is harnessed as a resource. The application of Crowther's et al. (2017) approach treats the textual data as stories that provide glimpses of a phenomenon. It actively alters the verbatim transcripts to offer and capture the essence of the experience. The selected articles are treated the same way as research subjects in the literature review process. Extraneous detail is removed, and only the sentences that hold the meaning remain. The fluidity of the story is an important aspect of this approach,

and interpretation links one section to the next. Regarding literature review interpretation, it could facilitate highly interpretive, artistic work presenting only the essence of a body of work in creative and unexpected ways. It could translate to PaR, with crafting stories applied to theatre, live art, voice practice, and digital media.

### ***The Scoping Review***

Where voice researchers are synthesizing an emerging field, it may be more appropriate for them to conduct a scoping review. These are particularly useful when a heterogeneous body of literature has yet to be reviewed (Peters et al. 2015). Such a review may seek to identify the types of available evidence within a given field, identify key concepts and definitions, highlight how research is conducted on a topic, or explore and analyze knowledge gaps (Munn et al. 2018). A scoping review often acts as a precursor to the systematic quantitative review, and they are based on the same ideology but on a much smaller scale.

### ***The Integrated Review***

An Integrated Literature review mixes qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and at first glance, this form appeals to multi-disciplinary voice practitioners. It can be observed in Glew et al. (2020), where evidence relating to group singing on the wellbeing and psychosocial outcomes of children and adolescents was conducted. It is a source of confusion among students/researchers who believe themselves to be conducting a mixed methods review because they explore qualitative and quantitative studies. Invariably, this is not the case, and the practitioner will most likely engage in either a commentary or a narrative review.

According to Booth et al. (2016), a mixed-methods review uses two methodologies or one overarching methodology that synthesizes qualitative and quantitative data. These are extremely challenging to undertake and require a team of experts to execute effectively. It is an emerging sub-type with minimal information on carrying one out effectively (Whitmore

and Knafl 2005).

## Conclusion

Voice practitioners stand at the intersection of art and science (Shewell 2009), and those engaged in research are faced with presenting rigorous but relevant research to the practice field. Dealing with literature is the first stage of developing an evidence base. The literature review process may form the prelude to a dissertation, thesis, or research report highlighting the theoretical framework and gaps within the research field or as a scholarly document in its own right. It is hoped that an accessible framework has been presented to facilitate rigor during the quest for a relevant, applicable body of knowledge embracing a rich multi-disciplinary field.

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