

# A longitudinal observation of one-to-one singing lessons: The effects of personality and adult attachment

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Instrumental and singing teaching has previously been studied with particular focus on pedagogical, cognitive, technical, and developmental aspects. However, the relationship and interactions that take place between the teachers and students in that setting deserve more extensive exploration. This study approaches the singing teacher-student relationship with a particular focus on the observation of personality traits and the levels of attachment identified between teacher and student. Eleven singing teachers with 54 students were observed in one-to-one singing lessons through video observations made during one academic year. Additionally, teachers and students completed the questionnaires NEO FFI-R and Adult Attachment Scale to evaluate personality and attachment. The interaction between teacher and student include a wide list of variables: personality combination, the individual background, kind of attachment felt toward each other, and many other singing aspects, suggesting that the relationship with the student could have major impact on other aspects of singing.

*Keywords:* singing; relationship; adult attachment; longitudinal; personality

Instrumental and singing teaching has previously been studied with particular focus on pedagogical, cognitive, technical, and developmental aspects. However, the relationship and interactions that take place between the teachers and students in that setting deserves extensive exploration.

Teacher-student interactions have powerful potential to improve and facilitate learning (Siebenaler 1997), with relationships playing a role in student's development. Burland and Davidson (2002) suggest that the teacher in

a “master-student” relationship plays a “vital role” in the development of the student’s performance, as well as in their overall artistic personality, and that students who do not find the ideal teacher may have consequences reflected in their professionalism and artistry. The interaction of teacher and student may constitute an important base for the students’ knowledge building. With the purpose of exploring these interactions between the teacher and student, this study aims to (1) identify behavior in a longitudinal relationship of singing teacher and student, (2) analyze the effects of personality and adult attachment on singing teacher and student relationship outcomes, (3) distinguish combinations of singing teacher and student characteristics.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants in the current study were 11 singing teachers and 54 undergraduate and postgraduate students from six colleges and universities in the UK and Portugal. All students were studying singing as their main instrument. From the same sample, 35 participants completed personality and adult attachment scale measures.

### Materials

The study had three stages where participants were video recorded during one academic year. These recordings were complemented with existing psychological questionnaires in order to access the personality types and the levels of attachment in each dyad. For the personality identification, the NEO FFI-R by Costa and McCrae (1985) was used, and adult attachment was measured using the Adult Attachment Scale by Collins and Read (1990).

### Procedure

Six higher education institutions (universities and colleges) from the UK and Portugal were contacted through their heads of vocal studies. These two countries were chosen to allow a wider range of comparison and a diverse cultural environment. The head of vocal studies were asked to choose several singing teachers who were seen as being different or contrasting in relational terms, and these staff were approached for a longitudinal video collection of their singing lessons. The teachers who agreed to participate were then asked to choose at least two contrasting students that would follow these differences: (1) age, (2) academic year, (3) levels of development, (4) that the teachers felt they related to in different ways, and/or (5) students they felt

approached their teaching differently. No reference to gender was stipulated. At the second and third stages of video recordings, the teachers and students completed the personality and attachment tests.

## **RESULTS**

Ongoing analysis illustrates that the interaction between teacher and student includes a wide list of variances: personality combination, the individual background, kind of attachment felt toward each other, and many other aspects suggesting that the relationship with the student could have major impact on other aspects of singing. The longitudinal observation indicated that the relationships develop into becoming more personal and often include elements from the personal lives of both teacher and student. These elements of students' lives are often used toward interpretative development and become interesting strategic tools for the singing teachers. The relational interactions between teacher and student are in all cases conditioned by the academic year's schedule and there is a noticeable peak of relationship approximation during the middle stage of the year in relation to the beginning of year (where participants are getting to know each other) and the last stage (where the pressure of examination normally drives the lesson).

The observational part of the study presented fluctuations of behavior and adaptability between teacher and student during the course of the one academic year. Particularly interesting to note is the teachers' adaptability to each student, making the relationship unique. The personality and attachment types of each participant seem to play an important role in the individuality of each relationship.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study observed the psychological involvements of the teacher-student relationship and the effects of those in the behavior in each lesson and from a longitudinal perspective. The personality combination between teacher and student, and the kind of attachment that is implicit in this relationship, may be a predisposition for successful or unsuccessful relationships.

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