Gesture and Body-Movement as Teaching and Learning Tools in the Classical Voice Lesson

A Survey into Current Practice

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Abstract

This article contemplates the use of gesture and body-movement in the teaching of singing and reports of a survey amongst professional singing teachers in Germany regarding their use of gesture and body-movement as pedagogic tools in their teaching. The nomenclature of gestures and movements used in the survey is based on a previous study by the author (Nafisi 2008, 2010) categorising movements according to their pedagogical intent into Physiological Gestures, Sensation-related Gestures, Musical Gestures and Body-Movements. The survey demonstrated that Gestures were used by a significant number of voice teachers to enhance explanation and/or demonstration, that a significant number of voice teachers encouraged their students to carry out similar Gestures whilst singing to enhance their learning experience and that another type of essentially non-expressive Body-Movements was also encouraged by a significant number of voice teachers to enhance students' learning. The paper validates the author's system of categorizing some movements encountered in voice teaching practice and offers some hitherto unpublished insights.
Introduction

Teaching singing

Voice lessons are traditionally a rather ‘private’ affair; regardless if held within a Conservatory, a music school or in a private singing studio, voice lessons are to a large degree shaped by the teachers’ individual approach and style. Just like instrumental teaching and unlike classroom teaching one-on-one voice teaching is neither strictly regulated nor under scrutiny by any authority. The very nature of its subject however sets voice teaching apart from any other instrumental teaching and makes it particularly challenging: the vocal instrument cannot be bought or borrowed and the very ‘building of the instrument’ constitutes a large part of learning - and teaching - of how to sing. The voice relies on a delicate mechanism that is substantially internal, not readily seen, and poorly innervated for sensory feedback. Moreover virtually all organs used for singing have multiple and often vital other functions that compete with their singing function and can hardly be consciously controlled.

In order to influence this elusive instrument, which is also closely connected to psyche and emotions, the singer has to learn how good singing sounds and, more importantly, feels. The teacher on the other hand has to be able to explain the desired physiological functions, sound concepts and sensations guided by ears and eyes as well as knowledge and experience in a way that is meaningful to the student. There is a palpable controversy between different approaches to teaching singing namely between advocates of factual teaching (Miller, 1996, 2004) and users of imagery (Hemlsey, 1998; Patenaude-Yarnell, 2003).
However, Bunch (1993, p.82) points out that “adequate verbal description for a sensory experience…is nearly impossible through strictly scientific and mathematical terms as certain vocal qualities simply defy quantification”, so that imagery and metaphor have long played a vital part in the teaching of singing. And a lack of acoustical adjectives in the English language means that sound is often described in terms borrowed from the worlds of spatiality (e.g. “broad”, “narrow”, “spread”), shapes (e.g. “round”, “sharp”, “flat”), texture (e.g. “hard”, “silky”, “velvety”), color (e.g. “bright”, “dark”, “white”) or temperature (e.g. “warm”) (Thurman & Welch, 2001).

Whilst there are recommendations and guidelines as to the content and structure of voice lessons (e.g. Miller, 1996, Caldwell, 2001, Schmidt, 2003; Dayme, 2006; Nair, 2007) there is surprisingly little material about the ways all this may be communicated to a student - it is silently insinuated that the teacher will teach using a combination of verbal explanation and demonstration.

The majority of publications on voice pedagogy acknowledges that “body alignment affects all aspects of singing” (Callaghan, 2000, p.52) and most publications (e.g. Bunch 1995; Miller, 1996; Davis, 1998; Hemsley, 1998; Thurman & Welch, 2000; Callaghan, 2000; Caldwell, 2001; Kayes, 2004; Chapman, 2006; Nair, 2007; Smith, 2007) dedicate a chapter or two to ‘posture’, ‘body alignment’ or ‘postural alignment’. Although descriptions of the ideal posture vary considerably, methods like Alexander
Technique\(^1\), Yoga\(^2\), Tai Chi\(^3\), and Feldenkrais\(^4\) are regularly commended as helpful ways to increase body awareness.

**Gesture in choral work**

Gesture and movement are increasingly used as instructional tools in conducting and particularly choral work, where they appear to go hand in glove with spoken language and imagery (i.e. metaphors, analogies and similes, Skoog, 2004). Uniquely suited to transport musical concepts, not to speak of the necessary of communicating over a noise level, conducting gestures play a large role in expressing and communicating musical ideas (Skadsem, 1997; Stollak, 1998; Peterson, 2000 Durrant, 2009; Mathers, 2009).

Whilst the majority of material on gesture in a choral context focuses on gestures employed by the conductor or choral instructor, there is also a number of studies investigating gesture and body movement as learning tools. Wis (1993) explored the practical use of gesture in a choral context and coined the term “physical metaphor” (p.107) to denote gestures, taken from other life spheres (e.g. sport) that can be used to describe musical and vocal concepts. Hibbard (1994), Chagnon (2001) and Bailey (2007) found that movement could be used to modify musical qualities such

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\(^1\)Educational discipline developed by F. Matthias Alexander in the 1890s promoting the: “the good use of the self” through body alignment and awareness  
\(^2\)Traditional physical and mental disciplines including deep breathing originating in India  
\(^3\)Traditional Chinese soft martial art technique rooted in philosophy  
\(^4\)Educational system developed by Moshé Feldenkrais around the middle of the 20th century centred on movement, aiming to expand and refine the use of the self through awareness.
as dynamics, rhythm, tempo, articulation and intonation as well as to improve vocal skills such as breath management, posture for singing, and the projection of tone; movement also helped to refine qualities associated with choral singing such as diction, balance, blend, timbre and textual interpretation. Rao (2005) successfully incorporated Tai Chi movement practices into her choral teaching and Crosby (2008) found great benefit in applying Jaques-Dalcroze\textsuperscript{5} Eurhythmics to choral rehearsal concluding that “teachers must encourage movement in the rehearsal! Kinesthetic movement of the external creates a positive connection to the internal” (ibid. p.31).

**Gesture in music education and other contexts**

These findings are also reflected in the field of music education whose pioneers like John Curwen (1816 – 1880), Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865 – 1950), Zoltan Kodály (1882 – 1967) and Carl Orff (1895 – 1982) all found, each in their own individual way, that learning was most effective when based on a physical experience; developing each their very own methods, they all used gesture and/or movement as key elements to teaching music with the benefit of that practice still evident in recent studies (Crosby, 2008; Liao, 2008)

Research in neurology suggests that the brain does not simply manage or execute the body’s activities but that we literally ‘think with our bodies’. Seitz (1993) directly challenges Descartes\textsuperscript{6} with the statement “I move - therefore I am” and says “...it's

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\textsuperscript{5} Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865 – 1960) was a Swiss composer and music educator. In the Dalcroze method, also known as Dalcroze Eurhythmics, the body is the main instrument. Students listen to the rhythm of a music piece and express what they hear through movement. Simply put, this approach connects music, movement, mind, and body.

\textsuperscript{6} French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650) sees the mind as the only reliable existence (‘I think - therefore I am’), the body as a machine, entirely ruled by the mind and the world as a mere extension of the mind.
time to jettison antiquated ideas about the relationship between mind and body. Your body "thinks" just as much as your mind." (Seitz, 1993, p.50). This is confirmed by psychological studies which suggest that, apart from conveying information, gestures indeed “help us think” (Goldin Meadow, 2003, title).

*Gesture in voice teaching*

Considering the body of evidence on benefits of gesture and movement-use, it comes as a surprise that only a very limited number of publications on vocal pedagogy seriously consider, let alone document the incorporation of gesture and/or body-movement into the training of solo singers; Lloyd (1986) reports of the effect of continued Alexander-technique work on singing students, Rao (2005) and Chapman (2006) incorporate Tai-Chi and Accent-method. The only direct use of gesture as a tool to visualize a physiological function was found in Kayes (2004, p.45). Here she recommends to “use you thumbs to create an image of the false vocal folds" and illustrates this with three photos in which we see two folded hands; in picture (1) the thumbs are held slightly apart denoting a "neutral" position of false vocal chords, (2) touching each other (= "constriction") or wide apart (="retraction"). Although she does not elucidate the fact, it is implied that the gesture is not only used to illustrate an internal mechanism, but that miming the mechanism will also help to control it. This is a prime example of what will below be defined as "Physiological Gesture".

Due to the private nature of one-on-one voice teaching little is known about actual teaching practice, and so the notion of gesture as a deliberately employed powerful tool for the communication of vocal and musical concepts in the voice lesson is still
mainly based on evidence borrowed from related fields of study (i.e. choral rehearsal, music education, motor learning) as well as empirical and anecdotal evidence. In order to investigate if and how voice teachers used gestures to enhance and/or illustrate their explanations and/or demonstrations and if these gestures could be categorized with some coherence, the author conducted a pilot study at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (Nafisi, 2008, 2010).

A pilot study

Taking into account that people are often not aware of the way their body communicates (Beattie, 2003; Goldin-Meadow, 2003; Kendon, 2004) and with no existing appropriate nomenclature, both interview and self-reporting questionnaire had been found unsuitable as methods of investigation; instead, the study was carried out as a non-participant observation with video camera (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006); over the course of five days, eighteen university-level singing lessons given by five different singing teachers were observed and filmed. Simple digital video editing software made it possible to slow down and replay relevant scenes ad libitum and to distill still pictures of various gestures. The relatively small scale of the study was offset by the authenticity and great depth of the data.

Analysis of the video footage showed that four out of five observed teachers had deliberately and consciously used gesture in their teaching and although the observed gestures as well as the way and context in which they were used was somewhat characteristic to each teacher there was sufficient common ground to identify three gesture types. Taking the pedagogical intent behind the observed gestures as determinant resulted in a surprisingly clear and coherent system of categorization: The first distinction between the observed gestures was rather
obvious – they either stood in relation to a technical or a musical phenomenon. Therefore, gestures which were employed to assist the explanation of a primarily physiological mechanism or an acoustic phenomenon and which occurred during the warm-up and technical phase of the lessons were named Technical Gestures.

Gestures which were deliberately deployed by the teachers to communicate musical elements like phrasing, emphases and articulation, using hands to give visible forms to musical phenomena, have been called Musical Gestures.

An analysis of the Technical Gestures however revealed an initially puzzling fundamental difference between some gestures whose pedagogic intent seemed rather similar.

On one side there were gestures which were representations of real physiological mechanisms, that is gestures which mirrored the teachers’ knowledge and perception of what was happening invisibly inside his/her body when singing or preparing to sing. Although the mechanisms in question were necessarily presented in a rather simplified way, the pedagogic intention behind these gestures was clearly to make those very physiological actions known and understandable to the student. These types of gestures have been named Physiological Gestures.

On the other hand there were gestures related to acoustic phenomena like vocal timbre and tonal quality which did clearly not represent real physiological mechanisms. Those gestures invariably represented a particular sensation or a thought deemed helpful by the teacher for the production of a particular tone or phrase. The types of gestures in which the hands were used to give a visible form to a thought or sensation have been called Sensation-Related Gestures.
The study which yielded this neat categorization of gestures used in the singing studio had however only concerned itself with gestures used by the teachers as communication aids while any employment of gesture or other movements by the students had been completely ignored. Yet there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that many a voice teacher instructs and/or encourages their students to move in a variety of ways whilst singing in order to enhance their learning experience. Informal observation of the ‘movements’ carried out by singing students revealed that the previously found categorization into *Musical, Physiological and Sensation Related Gestures* could in many cases still be applied; and where the movements fit neither of these groups, a new category was found: movements that do not have an intentional expressive component and which cannot be employed by the teacher as a means to enhance explanation or demonstration have been called *Body-Movements*.

This pioneering system of naming and categorizing the movements encountered in the one-on-one teaching of singing (Nafisi, 2010), although able to withstand theoretical scrutiny, was still limited in its credibility by being based on a relatively small scale study. The best way to demonstrate that the categorization into *Musical Gestures, Physiological Gestures, Sensation Related Gestures and Body-Movements* was valid and coherent was to have them contemplated, recognized and accepted by a wider audience of voice teachers.

**A survey**

Prior to the existence of a coherent system of distinguishing and naming the specific gestures used as deliberate teaching and learning tools a survey would have been
pointless as the want of such a system had made clear and unambiguous wording impossible. Yet, once such a categorization system had been found a survey became not only possible but it also appeared to be precisely the tool to test this system’s validity.

The survey concentrated explicitly only on gestures and movements that were used intentionally. The in all likelihood also present and doubtlessly equally interesting aspect of the respondents’ body-language and gesticulation ("idiosyncratic spontaneous movements of hands and arms accompanying speech", McNeil 1992, p.37) was completely disregarded. This distinction was made clear to respondents as the new categorization system of gestures and movements was introduced in the questionnaire.

Apart from testing the validity of the categorization system the survey sought to confirm the following hypotheses: (1) *Gestures* of various description were used by a significant number of voice teachers to enhance explanation and/or demonstration, (2) a significant number of voice teachers encouraged their students to carry out similar *Gestures* whilst singing to enhance their learning experience and (3) another type of essentially non-expressive *Body-Movements* was also encouraged by a significant number of voice teachers to enhance students’ learning. Should these rather clear cut hypotheses be confirmed, the survey hoped to further explore (4) for what reasons voice teachers were utilizing *Gestures* and *Body-Movements*, and if (5) some favourite and universally applicable *Gestures* and *Body-Movements* could be identified?

Having gained ethical approval and taking advantage of the author’s bilingualism, a questionnaire was designed in German and English and consequently distributed in
Germany to voice teachers sourced through the Bundesverband Deutscher Gesangslehrer (Federal Association of German Singing Pedagogues). 301 registered singing teachers across Germany received an email with the subject line Survey: gesture and movement in the voice lesson. The body of the mail explained who the researcher was and outlined the purpose of the study. Recipients were invited to take part in the anonymous survey by clicking on a link which opened the survey page on a web based survey site. Recipients were invited to leave their email contact at the end of the on-line questionnaire, if they wanted to be informed of the result of the survey and the study as a whole. In designing the questionnaire, care had been taken to allow greatest possible freedom in responding whilst achieving greatest possible clarity. The majority of questions were closed, some requiring a rating on a 4 point scale. Many questions had an option for an own response/comment.

Survey Part 1: General Data

Within four weeks of mailing out the invitations, there were 71 responses, bringing the response rate to just over 23%. The first section of the survey sought to gain some data about the respondents which could potentially be correlated with the overall results. There were significantly more female respondents (80%) than male (20%), ranging in age from 25 - 88 with a median age of 48 years. Respondents had been teaching singing since between 4 and 63 years with a median of 25 years. (It should be noted however that one 88 year old respondent who has been teaching since 63 years will have had an impact on those median numbers).

The majority of respondents (82.9%) stated that they had been trained equally well as performing artists and as singing teachers/voice pedagogues (with 10 % having
trained primarily as performing artists and 7.1 % primarily as singing teachers/voice pedagogues)

In regards to professional training, options allowed for multiple answers. The great majority (79.1 %) held Diplomas with “Privately trained” being the next most prevalent with 25.4 %, followed by Magister (9.%, a German University degree roughly equivalent to a Masters degree), Master (6 %), Self-taught (6. %), Bachelor (3.0%), Doctorates (1.5%). 17.3% of respondents also named additional various other German performance and/teaching degrees.

The relatively high number of privately trained respondents suggests that private lessons play an important role in singer/teacher education, often in addition to institutionalized training. The importance of the private studio is also supported by responses to the next question (professional employment) which showed that the great majority of respondents was “teaching singing privately”, either to “beginners and amateurs” (50.8%) or “on a professional level” (46.2%) with also strong numbers “teaching at tertiary level (41.5%) or “at a music school” (38.5%) and 12.3% “teaching at a secondary school”. These numbers suggest that most teachers run private teaching studios alongside teaching in a variety of institutionalized settings.

Notably only a minority of respondents maintained an active performance career alongside their teaching with 16.9% singing professionally in “opera/oratorio/concert” and 9.2 % in “contemporary popular music”. And although 35.4% identified as “professional opera/oratorio/concert singers, not currently active as such” (and a further 3.1 % as “music theater singers not currently active”) there remains a discrepancy between the number of self-identified professional performers (64.6%) and the number of respondents who identified above as having trained as
performing artists (92.9%). It appears that not all who have trained as professional singers actually start, let alone maintain, professional singing careers.

*Survey Part 2: Definition of Gesture and Body-Movement*

The core part of the survey started out with the following brief definition of the key terms used in the questionnaire:

The term *Gesture* is used here to describe particular movements of hands and arms with head and torso as reference points. The *Gestures* relevant in this context are deliberately carried out to illustrate and/or visualize mechanisms, thoughts or concepts related to the singing process. *Gestures* can be employed by the teacher to intensify explanations and illustrate demonstrations.

*Gestures* can also be carried out by the student to enhance understanding and facilitate the functioning of certain mechanisms.

Based on their pedagogical intention *Gestures* used in the singing lesson have been distinguished as *Musical Gestures*, *Physiological Gestures* and *Sensation Related Gestures* (Nafisi, 2008, 2010).

*Musical Gestures* visualize musical concepts. Examples of Musical Gestures are

- conducting gestures

- a hand describing a horizontal line to depict “legato”

- showing the inflection of a phrase with the hands
- beating a rhythm in the air

- hand-signs used in the Curwen, Kodály or related methods

**Physiological Gestures** visualize actual internal physiological mechanisms. Examples of Physiological Gestures are:

- moving a hand palm-down downwards in front of the upper abdomen to ‘show’ the descent of the diaphragm during inhalation

- a hand held palm down and curved next to an ear to ‘show’ the elevated soft palate

- pushing both opened hands palm-out in chest height as if leaning against an invisible wall to illustrate ‘appoggio’

**Sensation Related Gestures** illustrate singing metaphors, imagery and/or acoustic phenomena. They visualize subjective thoughts and/or sensations connected to a desired vocal sound but do not reflect actual physiological occurrences. Examples of Sensation Related Gestures are:

- fingers pointing forward to illustrate ‘forward placement’ of a vocal tone

- touching one’s forehead and eye sockets with the fingertips to illustrate resonance in the ‘mask’

- all hand gestures that visualize the ‘shape’ of a vocal tone (e.g. ‘open’, ‘round’, ‘pointed’, ‘focused’)

**Body-Movements** are in this context distinguished from Gestures in that they do not have an intended ‘expressive’ component and cannot be employed by
the teacher as a means to enhance explanation or demonstration. Body-Movements are used as learning-tools for the singing-student. Examples are:

- walking
- swinging arms
- bending knees
- any posture that deviates from the default upright standing

The thus defined movements will henceforth be referred to as Gestures (Musical, Sensation-Related or Physiological respectively) and Body-Movements.

Survey Part 3: Gestures as Tools of Communication (Teaching Tools)

This section began with the question if respondents used Musical, Physiological and/or Sensation Related Gestures to enhance and/or illustrate their explanations and/or demonstrations? All (100%) respondents answered “Yes” to this question, (with the other options being “No” and “I am quite unaware of what my hands are doing when I am talking or demonstrating but I certainly do not use them deliberately”). As to the extent to which respondents used the respective Gesture-types in their teaching, respondents were asked to rate their use from “regularly (several times in most lessons)”, “sometimes (once or twice in every second or third lesson)” , “rarely (once in a while, in special cases)” to “not at all”. For greater clarity, all positive ratings (regularly, sometimes and rarely) have been combined in one figure, with the breakdown given in brackets.
Musical Gestures were used by 97.2% of respondents (52.9%, 31.4%, 12.9%) and “not at all” 2.9%. Sensation Related Gestures were used by 95.9% of respondents (53.9%, 31.9%, 10.1%) and “not at all” by 4.3%. Physiological Gestures were used by 95.5% of respondents (73.5%, 19.1%, 2.9%) and “not at all” by 4.4%.

This response shows firstly that all invitees who answered to this survey were active users of Gestures and confirms the first hypothesis of this study: a significant number of voice teachers use Gesture as communication tools. The differentiated responses regarding the Gesture-types are significant in two ways: they suggest that the above explanations of the three Gesture-types have been accepted and understood; whilst all three Gesture-types feature prominently in the respondents’ explanations and/or demonstrations, it is is notable that Physiological Gestures have by far the highest number of regular users (73.5%) reaffirming Kayes (2004) Psychological Gesture use.

Why do teachers use Gesture?

In order to learn about the teachers’ reasons for using Musical, Physiological or Sensation Related Gestures, a number of possible reasons were put to the respondents with the request to rate their level of agreement from “agree completely”, “agree mostly”, “agree partly” to “disagree”. The reasons given for Gesture-use highlighted rather obvious advantages like the capacity of a Gesture to encapsulate meaning, its capacity to communicate also over a noise level or respondents’ possible tendency to ‘talk with their hands’.

Only the three most agreed-upon examples are given here and, for greater clarity, all positive ratings (“agree completely”, “agree mostly”, “agree partly”) are shown combined in one figure, with the breakdown given on brackets. The statement “One
can communicate through gestures whilst the student is singing” was to some point agreed upon by 98.5% (67.7%, 26.5%, 4.4%) and 1.5% disagreeing; statements like “A gesture can simplify a complex mechanism/concept” and “A gesture can encapsulate and bring across a point much clearer than words” got similarly high approval rates. This question also invited respondents to name their own reasons for using Gesture in their teaching, an option that was taken up by 21% of respondents making points like: “Gesture comments on or complements the verbal explanation or the sung example”, “non-verbal communication is communication on a different channel”, “Gesture complements speech and is a natural part of communication – gesture also predates speech”.


*Which Gestures do teachers use?*

The next question aimed to gain information which Gestures respondents used and if there were specific Gestures used predominantly; a number of examples of Gestures were given and respondents asked to rate the frequency with which (if at all) they used these. In the following are presented the two most accepted and the most controversial statements. For greater clarity, all positive ratings (regularly, sometimes and rarely) have been combined in one figure, with the breakdown given in brackets: “Conducting gestures” were in some capacity used with 86.2% of respondents (12.3%, 36.9%, 36.9%) but 13.8% used them “not at all”. The Gesture “One or both hand(s) at eyes’ height, fingers pointing to and/or touching forehead, eye-sockets and cheek bones, depicting resonance in the ‘mask’” was used by 79.7% (33.3%, 23.2%, 23.2%) and used not at all by 20.3%
Most controversial was the Gesture “One hand next to head usually in ear-height with a downward facing rounded palm illustrating the elevated soft palate” which was used by 65.2% (24.6%, 18.8% and 21.7%) but rejected (used “not at all”) by 34%. The option of adding their own Gestures was taken up by 30.5% of respondents naming for instance “thumbs and index fingers of both hands form a big circle illustrating a wide pipe (open throat)”, “a hand illustrates an upward scale upward-forward (with a downward facing rounded palm) and a downward scale downwards with the hand turning palm up in the passaggio”, “hand signs illustrate the mechanism of the larynx”.

It is notable that the selected or added Gestures represent a mix of Musical (the horizontal ‘legato’-arm movement), Sensation-Related (fingers pointing to ‘mask’) and Physiological Gestures (“thumbs and index fingers of both hands form a big circle illustrating a wide pipe (open throat)”, “hand signs illustrating the larynx”). It appears however, that apart from well established Gestures like conducting gestures, it will prove difficult to name specific Gestures which would be regularly used by a majority of teachers.

**Survey Part 4: Gestures as Learning Tools**

The next part of the survey dealt with the potential capacity of Gestures to act as learning tools when carried out whilst singing. The opening question if respondents encouraged and/or instructed their students to carry out (Musical, Physiological and Sensation Related) Gestures whilst singing was answered in the affirmative by a clear majority (88.4%) of respondents (“No” by 11.6%). The three respective Gesture types were encouraged as follows (or greater clarity all positive ratings (“regularly”, “sometimes” and “rarely”) have been combined in one figure with the breakdown
given in brackets): *Musical Gestures* were encouraged by all (100%) of respondents (25.4%, 58.7% and 15.9%). *Physiological Gestures* were encouraged by 93.7% of respondents (46.0%, 39.7% and 7.9%) and “not at all” by 6.3%. *Sensation Related Gestures* were encouraged by 91.9% of respondents (33.9% 40.3% and 17.7%) and “not at all” by 8.1%.

This response shows firstly that a significant number of voice teachers make use of various *Gestures* as learning aids by encouraging and/or instructing their students to carry out *Gestures* confirming the second hypothesis of this study. The result is however not as emphatic as is was in regards to *Gesture* as teaching/communication tool with a significant 11.6% not encouraging them at all. It is notable that *Musical Gestures* were, at least in some capacity, encouraged by all respondents (who encouraged *Gesture* at all); it can also be seen that *Physiological Gestures* were encouraged most frequently which correlates with the above finding that *Physiological Gestures* were most frequently used in communication. The prominence of this type of *Gesture* both in communication and as a learning tool seems to reflect Kayes (2004) usage of it.

*Why encourage Gesture?*

In order to learn about the teachers’ reasons for encouraging and/or instructing their students to use *Musical, Physiological or Sensation Related Gestures*, a number of possible reasons were put to the respondents with the request to rate their level of agreement from “agree completely”, “agree mostly”, “agree partly” to “disagree”. The reasons given for encouraging *Gestures* highlighted the obvious advantages of *Gesture*–use like the capacity of a *Gesture* to visualize hidden mechanisms, to illustrate musical concepts or to provide an external attention focus. For greater
clarity all positive ratings ("agree completely", "agree mostly", "agree partly") have been combined in one figure, with the breakdown given in brackets. The highest level of agreement was given to the statement "Carrying out specific gestures deepens the understanding of musical phrasing by giving is a visible form" which was agreed with by all (100%) respondents (46.8%, 41.9%, 11.3%). Similarly high levels of agreement were given to the statement "Carrying out gestures whilst singing, aids the invisible singing mechanism by linking it to a visible action" which was agreed with by 98.4% of respondents (54.5%, 36.4%, 7.6%) with just 1.6% disagreeing. Most controversial was the statement "Carrying out specific gestures achieves greater expressiveness" which was disagreed with by 14.3%, but still agreed with by 85.7 (17.5%, 38.1%, 30.2%).

Only a relatively small number of respondents (13.6%) used the option to state their own reasons for encouraging Gesture in students with statements like: "a gesture has the capacity to provide visible feed-back of students perception of a phrase; body and hands show me what the student is (unconsciously) thinking and with which inner image he guides his voice. Synchronizing his movement with the desired gesture changes voice placement and breath management. The effect of the connection between mind and hand remains astounding”. “A gesture can help to commit a voice-technical mechanism to the physiological/kinesthetic part of the brain so that it can later be called upon. Also – very importantly – a gesture can (particularly when used to replace useless, tense, habitual gestures) help to get rid of faulty old habits". “Carrying out gestures creates greater awareness of the singing mechanism”.

These responses tie in with findings in the field of neurology and motor-learning (Seitz, 1993; Wulf, 2007) and also reflect the advantages of Gesture-use in the
choral rehearsal as reported by Wis (1993), Chagnon (2001) and Bailey (2007). This suggests that respondents were either aware of the relevant science or, more likely, their experience and intuition told them what is only being reconfirmed by research.

Which Gesture to encourage?

The next question aimed to find out which Gestures respondents encouraged and if there were specific Gestures encouraged more than others; a number of examples of Gestures were given and respondents asked to rate the frequency with which (if at all) they used these. Here the answers became suddenly much spread. Again, all positive ratings (“regularly”, “sometimes” and “rarely”) have been combined in one figure, with the breakdown given in brackets. Most commonly recognized and in use were the Gestures “Describing a horizontal line with one or both hands“ which was encouraged by 94% (25.8%, 53%, 15.1%) and “not at all” by just 6.1% and “Clapping or beating time” which was encouraged by 77.4% (12.2%, 43.9%, 30.3%) and “not at all” by 13.6%. Alien to many were the Gestures “Tapping with fingertips of one hand into the open palm of the other hand to learn ‘staccato’” which was encouraged only by 40.7% (7.5%, 16.4%, 26.9%) of respondents and “not at all” used by 49.3%; nearly as controversial was “Mimicking a tone shape with one’s hands, e.g. ‘round’, ‘pointed’“ which was encouraged by 49.1% (10.6%, 30.3%, 18.2%) and “not at all” encouraged by 40.9% of respondents.

The discord visible in the wide spread of answers points to the difficulty of finding and describing universally applicable Gestures is further highlighted by the relatively large number of respondents (25.8%) who added their own gestures/comments. These included: “from self-awareness and close listening which are at the core of all voice-work (as opposed to permanent correctives from the outside), arise many
possibilities of gestures that are not mentioned above”, “there are hundreds, if not thousands! Enough to fill three books; a Gesture is always individual and to be used for the moment”.

It appears that the choice of Gesture depends to a large part on the students’ (and the teachers’) individuality as well as the situation at hand; many teachers might have a certain ‘repertoire’ of possible Gestures whose efficacy has been proven in similar situations, yet any attempt to schematise these runs the danger to forfeit what seems to lie at the very core of any Gestures’ power: to render visible the hidden connections between mind, body, voice and emotion so that these may be influenced by modifying the Gesture. (Seitz, 1993. 2002; Goldin-Meadow, 2003)

**Survey Part 5: Body-Movement as Learning Tool**

The next part of the survey was concerned with the implementation of Body-Movement as a learning tool. The opening question if respondents encouraged and/or instructed their students to carry out Body-Movements whilst singing received an emphatic “Yes” by 98.6% (“No” 1.6%) thus confirming hypothesis number three which propounded that Body-Movement was used by a significant number of voice teachers as a means to enhance students’ learning.

There is a notable difference between the number of respondents encouraging Body-Movement (96.4%) and those encouraging Gesture (88.4%) suggesting that the distinction made between the two types of movement seems to have been easily understood and accepted by respondents. As to the frequency with which it was used, it was found that Body-Movement was encouraged “regularly” by 43.3%, “sometimes” by 43.3% and “rarely” by 13.9% of respondents.
**Why encourage Body-Movement?**

In order to learn about the teachers’ reasons for encouraging and/or instructing their students to carry out *Body-Movements* whilst singing, a number of possible reasons were put to the respondents with the request to rate their level of agreement from “agree completely”, “agree mostly”, “agree partly” to “disagree”. The reasons given for encouraging *Body-Movement* use highlighted its obvious advantages like achieving relaxation, release of tensions, postural improvement, raising body awareness and physical energy. For greater clarity all positive ratings (“agree completely”, “agree mostly”, “agree partly”) have been combined in one figure, with the breakdown given in brackets.

All offered reasons met with high levels of agreement with “Carrying out Body-Movements whilst singing helps achieve relaxation, releases tension” and “Carrying out Body-Movements whilst singing raises body awareness” both being to some level agreed with by 100% of respondents (47.1%, 39.7%, 13.2% and 45.5%, 42.7%, 12.1% respectively). Most controversial was the statement “Carrying out Body-Movements whilst singing distracts from the actual singing process” with still 91.3% agreeing (26.1%, 30.4%, yet a strong 34.8% agreeing only “partly”) and 8.7% disagreeing.

A small number of respondents (12.5%) added their own statements which for the most part reiterated aspects already covered in the offered reasons above, namely the capacity of *Body-Movements* to release tension. One respondent found the “absolute” wording in the offered reasons “problematic” suggesting that statements like “carrying out certain body-movements can under certain conditions help to raise body-awareness, etc” would have been easier to agree to.
Whilst this suggestion appears reasonable, the author deliberately chose her “absolute” wording, leaving the choice to differentiate agreement to the rating scale. Generally can be said that respondents’ reasons for encouraging *Body-Movements* in their singing students reflect the advantages found in choral rehearsal (Wis, 1993; Chagnon, 2001; Bailey, 2007)

*Which Body-Movement to encourage?*

The next question wanted to find out which *Body-Movements* were encouraged and is there were any specific *Body-Movements* encouraged more than others. A number of examples of *Body-Movements* were given and respondents were asked to indicate to what extent (“regularly”, “sometimes”, “rarely” or “not at all”) they instructed/encouraged their students to carry any of these Body-Movements whilst singing. For greater clarity, all positive ratings (“regularly”, “sometimes” and “rarely”) have been combined in one figure, with the breakdown given in brackets.

It was found that “Various ways of walking” and “Spreading of arms” were to some extent encouraged by 100% of respondents (24.6%, 53.6%, 21.7% and 53.6%, 36.2% 10.1% respectively). Most controversial were “Assuming the "monkey" position (feet hip-wide apart, slightly bent knees, the upper body tilts slightly forwards from the pelvis, arms hang freely)” which was to some point encouraged only by 69.6% (14.5%, 24.6%, 30.4%) and “not at all” by 30.4% and “Letting one's tongue hang out” which was to a point encouraged by 79.2% (16.7%, 34.7%, 27.8%) and “not at all” by 20.8% of respondents.

The option to add their own *Body-Movement* and comments was taken up by 19.4% of respondents. Two respondents recommend “dance movements” and there is repeated reference to postural adjustments like “putting one foot behind the other and distributing one’s weight equally between both legs helps to feel a diagonal
(forwards upwards- backwards-downwards) in the body and the tone is better connected with the body”; “energetic/dynamic standing, shifting one’s weight from one leg to the other similar to awaiting a serve in tennis – high energy, elasticity, flexibility”. This particular comment correlates to the notion that “posture is not a static or fixed position, rather it is an active stillness or a physically quiet attitude” (Sell, 2005. p.71) also mirrored in the dynamic posture mentioned by Bunch (1982, 1993) or Chapman (2006). The difficulty in pinpointing ‘generally applicable’ Body-Movements, apart from the more generic walking, swinging/spreading of arms etc appears to lie here, as with the Gestures above, in the sheer number of possibilities and the dependence of their efficacy on the individual case.

_Influence of ‘body-schools’_

The next question addressed the possible influence of various body-awareness/body awareness methods like Feldenkrais, Jaques-Dalcroze7, Alexander-Technique, Middendorf8, Yoga and Accent-method 9 on respondents’ teaching. Respondents were asked to rate the role of the respective methods within their teaching method from “strong” to “palpable”, “superficial” and “no role at all”. For greater clarity, all positive ratings (“strong”, “palpable”, “superficial”) are shown combined in one figure

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7 Emille Jaques-Dalcroze (1865 – 1960) was a Swiss composer and music educator., In the Dalcroze method, also known as Dalcroze Eurhythmics, the body is the main instrument. Students listen to the rhythm of a music piece and express what they hear through movement. Simply put, this approach connects music, movement, mind, and body

8 Ilse Middendorf (1910 – 2009) developed her work, Der Erfahrbare Atem, known in English as the ‘Perceptible Breath’, over a lifetime of working with breath. The work encompasses many different areas of health, well-being, sports, creative, and spiritual practice.

9 The Accent Method was developed by the Danish professor Svend Smith (1907-1985) who taught and researched at The Danish Institute for Speech and Hearing. It is a rational voice therapy that was developed to treat people with pathological or weak voices. The Accent Method helps the student to coordinate breath, vocal function, articulation, body movement and language.
with the breakdown given in brackets. Feldenkrais was the most influential with (78.8%) reporting some influence (7.6%, 34.8%, 36.4%); Alexander-Technique played a role for 74.2% (3.2%, 33.9%, 37.1%) and Yoga played a role for 68.3% (7.9%, 28.6%, 31.7%). Least influential was the Accent-method which had influenced only 11.5% (0.0%, 7.7%, 3.8%) and played no role for 88.5%. Jaques-Dalcroze shows similarly low ratings with only 14.5% acknowledging his influence (0.0%, 7.3%, 7.3%) and 85.5% feeling no influence at all. A possible reason for these low ratings might be that the Accent-method is still very much perceived as belonging to speech pathology and is only slowly taking hold within the singing and voice teaching community; Jaques-Dalcroze on the other hand might be more associated with music education and might also not be known by name even by those who would have benefitted by his far reaching influence on generations of music educators. It is also notable that even the methods whose influence was generally rated highest (Feldenkrais, Alexander and Yoga) played a “strong” role only to a minority.

Survey Part 6: Gesture and Expression

As had been briefly touched upon above, Gestures can also be used to connect to and express the dramatic content of a song or aria (Chekhov, 1953, Stanislavsky, 1960, Balk, 1985). Although the main focus of this survey was explicitly the use of Gesture and Body-Movement as teaching and learning tools with a focus on the technique of singing, expressiveness is often deeply connected to vocal technique. The next question asked if respondents encouraged their students to use Gestures to enhance their expressiveness and was answered in the affirmative by 75.4% (“regularly” by 23.8%, “sometimes” by 45.4% and “rarely” by 24.8%) and in the negative by 24.6%. It is notable that the use of Gesture as a means of enhancing
expressiveness in singing students was considerably less prevalent as the use of
*Gesture* as tool to improve tonal quality and musical phrasing.

*Which expression-enhancing Gestures?*

In order to find out what kind of *Gestures* were most prominently used to enhance expressiveness, a number of examples were given and respondents were asked to indicate to what extent, “regularly”, “sometimes”, “rarely” or “not at all” they instructed/encouraged their students to carry any of these *Gestures*. For greater clarity, all positive ratings (“regularly”, “sometimes” and “rarely”) have been combined in one figure, with the breakdown given in brackets.

“Moving about the room whilst singing, letting the body language ‘paint’ the mood of the song or aria” and “Acting out a sung scene as if it were a spoken monologue” were both to some extent encouraged by 86.2% (12.1%, 44.8%, 29.3% and 20.7%, 50%, 15.5% respectively) and “not at all” by 13.8% of respondents. “Carrying out a "psychological gesture" (after M. Chekhov: a bodily posture/gesture that visualizes an emotion is carried out to evoke that very emotion)” was encouraged by 75.4% (17.5%, 31.6%, 26.3%) of respondents and “not at all” by 24.6%.

The gestures/comment that were contributed by only a small number (8.7%) of respondents mostly pointed to the blurred line between ‘expressive’ and ‘technical/musical’ *Gesture*, e.g: “Moving about the room incorporating functional exercises increases vocal self-regulation”, “stretching of the whole body in heightened expression”. One respondent pointed out the importance of each student finding their own gesture saying: “Sometimes I challenge my students to discover own gestures. Having taught in China a great deal, I am very aware of instances of copying. I like to see my students’ own gestures rather than having mine copied”.

At the end of the survey respondents were invited to add a general comment or suggestion and 31.5% took up this opportunity. Many of these comments (41%) simply thanked and encouraged the researcher for the "interesting survey “ into an “exciting field” and in one way or the other commended further discussion of this subject. There were also a few critical voices, emphasizing the complexity of the subject matter and the problems potentially arising from any over simplification. Some respondents ventured to give their own perception of and approach to the matter for instance: “The hands elucidate an inner mechanism and betray the real, unconscious aspiration”. “Just like the gesture itself, one must also practise to reduce a gesture to the point of mere thought”. “In my experience incorporation of gesture and movement in the lesson helps to eliminate arbitrary ‘arm waving’ etc; The endeavour that singing must be internalised and guided by intention and emotion is not contradicted by movement in the lesson and gesture in expression”. “I like to take up spontaneous movements and gestures of the student as they originate in him/her and elucidate something that the student might otherwise not be aware of. We then question and at times modify these movements until they become a natural part of the whole. Prescribed gestures should always just be a first impulse (much in the sense of Feldenkrais)”. In general it is fair to say that the comments were testimonies to the importance that respondents assigned to the survey’s subject matter and to the depth of thought they had given it.

The avid interest and positive response to the survey is also reflected in that 79.1% of respondents left their email contact on a provided list, thus indicating their interest in the result of this study.

*Discussion*
The survey had been distributed to a preselected group of recipients that is members of the largest German association of teachers of singing. The relatively low response rate of just over 23% (71 responses out of 301 mail outs) might be partly ascribed to a general reluctance of busy professionals to spend 20min on a survey sent out by someone they do not know. Furthermore, with the subject line of the email invitation reading “survey: gesture and movement in the voice lesson” only teachers who had an outspoken interest in this subject were likely to be inclined to respond. That this kind of self-selection had indeed taken place became clear when all respondents identified themselves as actively using Gesture and the overwhelming majority as encouraging Gestures and Body Movement in their teaching.

Heartening as this positive response may be, it would certainly have been interesting if also a number of teachers opposed to the use of Gesture and Body Movement into their teaching praxis had responded; the questionnaire had in any case been laid out to accommodate negative responses in every question, including offering reasons for this rejection and inviting comments and discussion.

The fact that no respondent explicitly rejected the use of Gestures and Body Movement – although many called for greatest caution and differentiation, can be interpreted in two ways: Either virtually every teacher of singing uses Gestures and Body Movement in one way or the other – as one respondent commented: “I find this survey rather superfluous as I have never encountered a single voice pedagogue who did not employ gestures and movements to illustrate physiological mechanisms, bridge technical problems or express emotion. It is simply totally natural!” This notion is however contradicted by substantial anecdotal and empirical evidence of unmoving teachers and apart from the author’s above mentioned observational study (Nafisi 2008, 2010) in which one out of the five observed teachers remained
completely stationary, with her hands either playing the piano or invisible behind it. Despite there being no statistical data there can be little doubt that a substantial number of singing teachers neither use Gesture deliberately in their explanations and/or demonstrations nor encourage their students to use Gesture or Body-Movement. It appears therefore that the surprisingly unanimous positive response to the survey is due to the above mentioned self-selection of invitees: only those teachers who were actively using and encouraging Gestures and Body Movement in their teaching actually responded. However, it would be wrong to conclude that only 23% of German voice teachers use Gesture and Body Movement because it is impossible to say if non-response to the survey implied a rejection of the notion of the use of Gestures and Body Movement in vocal teaching or if it is simply an indication of a teacher’s unwillingness to complete the survey.

Although it is thus unfeasible to put even a vague percentage on advocates or rejecters of Gesture and Body Movement in vocal teaching, the still significant number of responses of professional voice teachers means that the three hypotheses have clearly been confirmed: (1) Gestures of various description are used by a significant number of voice teachers to enhance explanation and/or demonstration, (2) a significant number of voice teachers encourages their students to carry out similar Gestures whilst singing to enhance their learning experience and (3) another type of essentially non-expressive Body-Movements is also being encouraged by a significant number of voice teachers to enhance students’ learning. Responses to the survey have also demonstrated that the categorization into Musical Gestures, Physiological Gestures, Sensation Related Gestures and Body-Movements as conceived in the initial study by Nafisi (2008, 2010) has been unquestioningly accepted as valid and coherent by a large audience of highly trained
voice teachers in a country with a long tradition of music education of the highest standard. It will therefore henceforth be legitimate to refer to movements encountered within the context of the teaching of singing according to this nomenclature.

This study had also set out to explore if voice teachers were utilizing *Gestures* and *Body-Movements* for similar reasons and if prevailing *Gestures* and *Body-Movements* could be identified. The first of these questions can be answered in a cautious affirmative: despite a palpable hesitancy towards some offered reasons, the majority of respondents appeared to see similar advantages in the use of *Gestures* (namely the capacity of a *Gesture* to visualize hidden mechanisms, illustrate musical concepts or to provide an external attention focus) and *Body-Movements* (namely achieving relaxation, release of tensions, postural improvement, raising body awareness and physical energy). These reasons are backed up by findings in the context of choral rehearsal as well as motor-learning (Wis, 1993; Seitz, 1993; Cofer, 1998; Skadsem, 1997; Stollak, 1998; Peterson, 2000; Chagnon, 2001; Goldin Meadow, 2003; Bailey, 2007; Wulf, 2007; Durrant, 2009; Mathers, 2009).

The quest for favoured *Gestures* and *Body-Movements* however shows a rather patchy picture: there appears to be a limited number of, one might say ‘obvious’ *Gestures* and *Body-Movements* like “conducting gestures” which were used by a majority of voice teachers. This confirms Cofer’s (1998), finding that conducting gestures consist to a large part of emblems (universally understood non-verbal acts that have a universally understood verbal translation, Ekmann, 1969); being for the most part able to be spontaneously understood makes conducting gestures a likely tool to communicate musical concepts. Simple forms of *Body-Movements* particularly generic ones like “walking” or the “spreading of arms” were widely
accepted as useful and there also seems to be a consent regarding the validity of ‘posture enhancing’ movements/stances, reflecting the importance assigned to posture in the voice teaching community (Callaghan, 2000, p.52) and most publications (e.g. Bunch 1995; Miller, 1996; Davis, 1998; Hemsley, 1998; Thurman & Welch, 2000; Callaghan, 2000; Caldwell, 2001; Kayes, 2004; Chapman, 2006; Nair, 2007; Smith, 2007). Regarding more specific Gestures and Body-Movements however it was found that the majority of examples met with equal numbers of frequent users and rejecters. It becomes clear that, even within the group of voice teachers who generally subscribe to the advantages of Gesture and Body-Movement use, there exists a high level of individuality regarding which specific Gestures and Body-Movements are used. This tendency towards personal preference is also reflected in the finding that no body-awareness method was a clear favourite giving rise to the conclusion that a number of different ‘body/breathing/alignment - schools’ might actually have equal validity.

It is notable that the use of Gesture as a means of enhancing expressiveness in singing students was, whilst still significant, considerably less prevalent as the use of Gesture as tool to improve tonal quality and musical phrasing, suggesting that Gesture and Body-Movement are valued more as tools for singing technique than artistic expression. This may however also be due to the fact that work in the voice lesson is often predominantly focussed on voice production and musical issues whereas the combination of expression and movement becomes more important once a singer is on stage. It is thus usually dealt with at a later stage in a singer’s career and not necessarily by a voice teacher, but rather a director or acting coach.
In conclusion one can say that the survey has yielded a large amount of hitherto unavailable quantitative and qualitative data which could hardly have been acquired in any other way; the unthreatening nature of an anonymous self-reporting questionnaire persuaded respondents to offer some insight into their teaching practice thus granting access into the intimate space of the singing studio without risking disturbing that very intimacy. The survey has confirmed the significant role of Gesture and Body-Movement in the teaching of singing, consolidated the author’s way of denoting and distinguishing these specific Gestures and Movements and given an initial and partial insight into actual teaching practice. On the other hand it is evident that a survey is by its very nature but an accumulation of subjective perceptions and herein lies the main limitation of this paper. There still remains a want of data on the actual effect Gestures and Body-Movements have on a student’s learning, vocal quality and performance. Clearly only direct observation, recording and analysis of Gesture and Body-Movement in action would give the researcher the opportunity to gauge each situation and measure the actual effect of each Gesture or Body-Movement. Specific parameters linked for instance to the notion of ‘improvement’ of vocal tone could be defined and the obtained data analysed regarding these parameters. Yet, as the survey has emphasised, the greatest strength of Gesture and Body-Movement lies in their capacity to mirror and capture each individual singer’s need in each changing situation. And exactly this sheer endless adaptability of Gesture and Body-Movement which makes them valuable teaching and learning tools translates into a sheer endless number of variables making reliable and repeatable measurement extremely difficult. Even so the author is currently in the process of conducting an experiment which will hopefully shed more light on some of the questions left open in the present study.
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