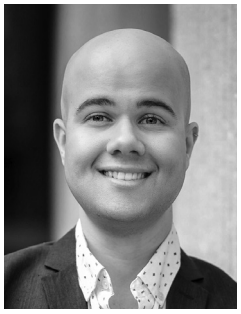
Intergenerational Mentorship

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The voice studio is a uniquely personal educational environment that fosters both artistic and pedagogical growth through one-on-one mentorship. This article explores the cyclical nature of mentorship in voice pedagogy, where teachers and students continually shape one another as learners and future educators. Drawing on the authors' shared mentor–mentee lineage, it outlines four key components of effective voice mentorship—sharing knowledge, encouraging accountability, offering positive reinforcement, and fostering professional connections. The discussion expands to include reflective teaching practices and intergenerational mentorship, emphasizing how reciprocal learning, self-reflection, and collaboration sustain pedagogical legacy and ensure the continued evolution of the voice teaching profession.

Associate editors' note: This column marks our start as associate editors for the Voice Pedagogy column in the Journal of Singing. *We are honored to serve the association and the profession in this capacity and are humbled by the tradition of excellent pedagogical writing in this column, knowing the people who have held this role before us. —Jeanne Goffi-Fynn and John Nix*

The voice studio is a unique and intimate educational space. Unlike academic settings that rely on group instruction, the teaching of private voice lessons centers around a one-to-one format that fosters not only individualized growth but also the development of future educators. This setting creates a virtuous cycle of mentorship: teachers learn from their students, students evolve into teachers, and today's mentors shape tomorrow's colleagues. The personal nature of voice instruction relies on mutual rapport, trust, and respect to foster a successful learning environment.[1] In this model, one of the primary goals is to equip students with the tools to become their own best voice teacher, which in turn makes the mentor–mentee relationship especially influential. The voice studio thus becomes not only a place of personal vocal development, but also a training ground for pedagogical legacy.

The authors—Sarah, Paul, and John—share just such a pedagogical legacy; Sarah and Paul received their MM degrees in voice pedagogy under the tutelage of John at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). Their professional relationship has since evolved from mentor–mentee to colleague and collaborator, exemplifying the cyclical nature of intergenerational mentorship in voice pedagogy. Throughout this article, we will explore four key components of effective voice mentorship—sharing knowledge, encouraging accountability, offering positive reinforcement, and fostering professional connections. We then explore the importance of self-reflection by the teacher/mentor, how to teach self-reflection as a skill in the voice studio, and assess the importance and evolution of intergenerational mentorship. The authors will

use both personal experiences and generalized mentor/mentee examples to illustrate these principles.

FOUR COMPONENTS OF VOICE MENTORSHIP

The four components of voice mentorship emerged from the authors' combined studio experiences and observations across applied voice instruction, pedagogy coursework, and professional mentoring programs. These pillars focus on the direct teacher-to-student mentoring relationship, beginning with the foundation of sharing vocal technique knowledge, followed by teaching skills that foster independence and self-determination in practice.[2] They then evolve to encompass the importance of positive encouragement and the fostering of long-term professional networking and career growth. Together, these four components form a framework for cultivating vocal skill and professional and interpersonal habits that sustain mentorship throughout a singing teacher's career.

The primary component of voice mentorship is the fundamental teaching of voice technique or more simply, the sharing of knowledge. One of the most critical aspects of private voice teaching is equipping students with a vocabulary and conceptual framework that allows them to self-diagnose and solve vocal challenges in their individual practice time. This skill is crucial, considering that college-level singers spend up to 92 percent of their intentional singing practice alone in a practice room without their mentor's direct input.[3] This often begins with clear and consistent explanations of functional technique—posture, breath management, registration, resonance, articulation—and the physiological and acoustic principles behind them.[4] Rather than simply telling students what to do, effective teachers guide students toward understanding why certain adjustments produce better results.

A helpful part of this process can be encouraging a student to verbally describe their understanding of a new concept, as well as their experience while they apply the technique. This verbal explanation ensures that students begin to build a recognition of how to apply the knowledge on their own and encourages them to build the language that they may use with their future students. The student's unique articulation of concepts also serves a reciprocal mentorship purpose by providing new insights and language that the mentor/teacher may choose to adopt. This is an experience that the first author, Sarah, knows to be true. While studying at UTSA, she began to build the vocabulary she now uses daily in her studio. Sarah has since had the pleasure of witnessing the cyclical nature of mentorship with her own students through the experience of teaching one of her private students, George, in a supervised studio teaching course.[5] Through this course, Sarah witnessed firsthand how George translated and applied his own experience and knowledge from lessons to teach his own students.

Mentoring students in a way that supports the development of independent musicianship in their individual practice brings us to our second component of voice mentorship: encouraging accountability. This can take the form of jointly created practice plans and reflection tools.[6] Rather than prescribing a set number of repetitions or minutes, the teacher works alongside students to design weekly goals tailored to their schedule, repertoire, and vocal development. These goals are then documented in a practice journal, which the student submits each week. The journal includes space for students to write what they practiced, what felt successful, what challenges arose, and what strategies they used to work through them. Journal reflections encourage metacognition and cultivate self-reflection habits.[7] Over time, students begin to recognize patterns in their practice, anticipate technical and scheduling hurdles, and experiment more proactively, thus contributing to an empowering sense of self-efficacy.[8] This is a concept and skill that Sarah gained from her voice teacher and mentor, Diana Allan, professor emerita at the UTSA. Sarah has since adapted her practice journal template to best suit her current students' needs.

The third component of voice mentorship is affirming what the student is doing well. While technical instruction involves addressing problems, we must be equally vigilant in naming progress and strengths. Positive reinforcement not only builds confidence—it reinforces the student's ability to recognize success in themselves and helps students avoid leaving lessons dwelling on what did not work. By taking time to point out moments of artistic expression, technical ease, or emotional authenticity, voice teachers can encourage students to notice and trust those moments. This helps build excitement

and momentum in their learning and growth. To use a personal example of positive affirmation from the authors' experience, John has allowed Sarah to read the recommendation letters that he has written for her. John's letters have not only been encouraging to Sarah but have also served a mentorship purpose by giving Sarah a stunning model of how to write recommendation letters for her own students.

Finally, mentorship in the studio includes connecting students with the larger professional community to support a mentee's long-term professional development.[9] This might include encouraging students to participate in masterclasses, referring them to graduate programs or summer festivals, or facilitating introductions to trusted colleagues. These connections help students see themselves as part of a larger network of artists and educators, and open doors for future collaborations. This type of support is not explicitly part of the standard voice teaching curriculum, but it is a crucial part of encouraging students to take the next step in their careers. An excellent example of this is John and Diana Allan inviting Sarah to collaborate with them on her first National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) presentation for the Texoma Region Conference in 2023—an opportunity that Sarah is incredibly grateful for! Sarah has likewise taken pride in making similar connections for her student, George, who, upon graduating from New Mexico State University, wanted to pursue a master's degree in performance. Sarah was able to connect George to his next teacher. Providing George with this next step gave him the tools and confidence he needed to audition for, and get accepted into, graduate performance programs at Carnegie Mellon University, Boston Conservatory, and Northwestern University.

SELF-REFLECTION AS A MENTOR

A deep understanding of the four components of voice mentorship provides the foundation of voice study from which students/mentees can begin to build an awareness of reflective practices in their own teaching. Transitioning from student to teacher and mentee to mentor requires the development of observation and reflection skills of one's own singing and teaching. In this section, we will address self-reflection techniques through a more general mentor-mentee framework. Self-reflection is a vital part of adapting to each individual in the applied studio. It can be helpful for mentors and mentees to frequently rest, reflect, and revisit their relationship with their teaching practice. This process, known as reflective learning, is credited to educational philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) and shares characteristics with the scientific method.[10] Data gathered through the description of experiences via observation, self-reflection, and teaching itself is then interpreted in context and community through the mentor-mentee relationship. These observations and reflections serve as a foundation for developing adapted teaching practices for testing. Teacher-educator Carol Rodgers helpfully distilled Dewey's dense writing around this concept and asserts that effective reflective thinking practices utilize four primary tenets:

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with a deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.
3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.
4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.[11]

Rodgers goes on to narrow the process of reflective learning into four primary steps that focus broader philosophical goals into actionable items: presence to experience, description of experience, analysis of experience, and intelligent action/experimentation.[12] These tenets can serve as a guide when developing a reflective learning practice, both as a mentor and as a mentee, to encourage and maintain a flexible and adaptive mindset during a mentorship relationship. Ultimately, despite the focus of reflective thinking on the educator's development, this process will benefit learners by encouraging educators to adapt their teaching and facilitate student growth.

Teaching observation is a prime example of this philosophy in practice. In a hypothetical situation, a

mentee ("Mentee") might ask their mentor ("Mentor") to observe them teaching a voice lesson and provide them with feedback. Mentor requests that Mentee ask for permission from a student to video-record their next lesson for personal use, with the promise to delete the video after review. With permission, the Mentee records their next lesson and immediately reflects on how they felt about their teaching in a brief journal entry. Mentor and Mentee independently watch the video a week later and describe what happened during the teaching video. Together, Mentor and Mentee review the video a second time, discuss their descriptions of the lesson, compare these descriptions to the Mentee journal entry, and begin to assess thematic strengths and weaknesses in the lesson. Mentor and Mentee ultimately develop a plan of action to experiment with in the next lesson and repeat this process.

The lesson observation scenario contains some critical connections between the method organized by Rodgers and the philosophy developed by Dewey. First, Mentee notes their "first emotional reaction" to the experience and does not disregard any emotional responses, while also continuing to reflect after the initial interpretation.[13] Second, there is a purposeful interval of time between the experience itself and the description of the experience, which allows Mentee to move from involuntary reactions to voluntary descriptions of the lesson without completely disconnecting the two. Mentor and Mentee both describe, rather than immediately interpret, the experience on their own to observe what happened in the teaching itself. Third, Mentor and Mentee analyze the lesson together, in community, using data from the experience and their descriptions of the video to glean emerging themes from the teaching episode. Finally, the mentorship team collaboration develops actionable items for Mentee to implement in their next lesson and later reflect on. Paul (second author) experienced a similarly reflective process during their studies with John and in the NATS Intern Program with mentor-teacher Cindy Dewey. They still use the feedback and advice offered on their teaching to reflect and reassess their practice at the end of every academic semester.

Mentors can use open-ended questions and nonjudgmental language in this process to facilitate the Mentee's development of reflective learning skills without eliciting a reversion to the immediate emotional responses. Answers are then positively reframed to guide Mentee toward thematic action items for testing in the next lesson by asking, for example, "How do we know?" after each one. The sample questions below are designed to facilitate conversation between Mentor and Mentee from the hypothetical situation above and are not prescriptive. Questions prefaced with an "I" statement or observation, such as "I observed . . ." or "I noticed . . ." can help Mentee connect observation data to the reflection process.

1. Who determined the goals or outcomes of this lesson?
2. What did the student learn during the lesson?
3. When was the student engaged or interested in their learning?
4. Where in their musical selection did the student sing with the most artistry?
5. Why did the student struggle to apply a technical concept to their artistic singing in the lesson?
6. How did the student connect vocal exercises to their musical selections?

Mentors can use reflective thinking practices with their mentees to encourage an ongoing and intentional process of growth through self-evaluation. Rodgers importantly asserts that reflective learning ". . . is an iterative, forward-moving spiral from practice to theory and theory to practice."[14] Stated differently, the reflective thinking process encourages lifelong learning and development of educational practice and can also benefit mentors. Mentors can adapt tools borrowed from reflective thinking to challenge and assess themselves in their role as a mentor, while also fostering self-reflection in their mentees that encourages goal setting, positive development, and critical self-assessment skills.

INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORSHIP

If the four components of voice mentorship form the foundation of individual mentorship and techniques of self-reflection focus on the dialogue between mentor and mentee, mentorship gains even more value when considered as part of larger intergenerational relationships. Mentoring is the process through which one person fosters the professional development of another. This implies that anyone with knowledge and experi-

ence in a particular field has the potential to mentor another person who seeks access to that knowledge and to learn from another's experiences, regardless of roles or seniority. In this model of dynamic intergenerational mentorship, mentors and mentees flexibly switch roles with each other as situations warrant. Judy Waight and Consuelo Waight wrote in their scoping review of intergenerational mentorship and learning literature that:

> . . . intergenerational mentoring is an intergenerational learning strategy and is a conduit for intergenerational knowledge sharing, collaboration, and cohesion. Intergenerational mentoring involves creating environments where individuals from various generations participate in reciprocal learning, benefiting their organizations, communities, and society as a whole. Intergenerational mentoring acts as a catalyst for understanding, respect, relationships, collaboration, and cohesion across all generations.[15]

In a virtuous teaching cycle, students are mentored to become new colleagues, who then take up the joys and challenges of mentoring not only new students entering the cycle, but also their colleagues. For the more experienced people in the teaching cycle, this cyclical learning depends upon listening to and soliciting feedback from the people they mentor; a humility to acknowledge weaknesses and deficits in knowledge, whatever one's role; a respect for all persons; and an openness and desire to continually understand, learn, collaborate, and improve. This reciprocal process functions on both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, mentors refine their pedagogical language and understanding through the experiences, phrasing, and contemporary perspectives their mentees bring—whether through new vernaculars, evolving vocal styles, or cultural references. At the macro level, these intergenerational exchanges broaden into the professional sphere, fostering a more adaptive and inclusive community of practice.

This has been true for the authors, as the following two examples demonstrate. Several years ago, John had a talented student who, nevertheless, was paralyzed by performance anxiety, especially when it came to singing with any sort of characterization. Seeking assistance, he reached out to Sarah whom he had recently seen perform in a stage production of *Steel Magnolias,* and who has successfully worked on addressing anxiety issues in her own performing. John sent Sarah a video of the student, Della, performing with a description of the issues of concern. Sarah replied with a lengthy email full of strategies to try, which encompassed performance anxiety and character study work. John has continued to use those strategies in his studio ever since. Della has gone on to sing such roles as Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. In the second example, John was revising his syllabus for his undergraduate and graduate second-semester pedagogy courses, with a particular emphasis on the repertoire portion of the two courses. He wanted to feature the work of underrepresented composers in this discussion. Knowing Paul to be active in reassessing the canon of Western classical academic vocal literature, he invited Paul to give a guest lecture on the topic to each course. The lecture was so successful that it has been repeated every year since that time.

Intergenerational mentoring requires traditionally top-down, vertically aligned power structures to be put aside, as they can restrict the ability of students and junior colleagues to provide mentoring to their more senior colleagues.[16] It also requires a clear understanding of the different characteristics, values, and expectations that the four cohorts currently in the workforce (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z) bring to their professional interactions.[17]

The 2018 American Academy of Teachers of Singing (AATS) survey on mentoring revealed that most mentoring within the voice-teaching profession remains largely informal and requires more in-depth research to further expand the benefits of mentorship.[18] Professional organizations continue to play an essential role in fostering intergenerational mentoring opportunities. NATS, the Pan American Vocology Association, the New York Singing Teachers' Association, the Voice Foundation, and the AATS all provide mentoring opportunities and resources.[19] Institutions of higher education can also create opportunities for mentoring through programs like the Fulbright Fellowship, academic sabbaticals, and residencies for visiting scholars.

CONCLUSION

The potential for constant growth and renewal in intergenerational mentoring is tremendous. In this model, mentoring becomes an intergenerational dialogue, where younger colleagues assist their veteran mentors

in staying current in the field, while seasoned members of the team provide perspective and an appreciation for broader relationships with their colleagues. Each cohort contributes value to the whole enterprise and to the advancement of knowledge and teaching. As voice teacher Don Simonson wrote about the value and urgency of embracing this kind of mentorship, "There is so much to learn and so little time."[20]

Knowledge sharing, accountability, reflection, and intergenerational relationships are crucial components of the virtuous cycle of mentorship. They each inform a living pedagogy that fosters vocal technique and collegiality. By embracing the reciprocal nature of voice teaching, we ensure the evolution of the craft across changing times and generations. In today's digital age, it is especially important for voice teachers to engage in mentorship and continual self-reflection, adapting our methods to new modes of communication, shifting colloquialisms, and evolving vernaculars. In doing so, we remain connected to our students and colleagues and preserve the relevance of teaching for the generations to come.

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