

# COMMUNICATING VOICE

SUMMER 2022  
VOLUME 22, ISSUE 2

## BREAKTHROUGHS & BOUNDARIES

Exploring multi-disciplinary voice work

The journal of the British Voice Association



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## Editorial



*Geraldine McElearney*

Summer greetings! I hope you are well and enjoying the lovely weather we've been experiencing in much of the UK recently (and apologies if you're in a part of the country not so blessed by sunshine...).

As we move into the second half of the year, it's particularly exciting to look forward to this year; AGM and study day. For the first time since February 2020, the BVA will

be meeting in person, at Goodenough College in central London (Bloomsbury). The theme is **'I am my voice: the art and science of vocal identity'** and will explore ideas around how and why we use our voice the way we do. The headline speaker is **Trevor Cox**, Professor of Acoustic Engineering at Salford University. Prof Cox is an academic, author and broadcaster on human communication, acoustics and sound phenomena and leads what promises to be a fascinating day. Please save the date – Sunday 4th September – further details will be out soon and we really hope to see as many members there as possible.

In the much nearer future, on Sunday 17th July, we'll be holding another wholly online event. **'Breakthroughs and Boundaries'** is a new format for the BVA. The entire event is a forum for discussion on the subject of multidisciplinary voice work, led by some of our foremost practitioners, with contributions from the audience much encouraged. See page 8 for more information. Please do consider capturing your experience of this or any other BVA event in the form of a review for this newsletter! I'm grateful as ever to this issue's contributors, **Molly Parker** and **Gerard Thong**, for their reports on spring events.

The pages of this newsletter are always open for contributions from members so please do contact me with any suggestions (and offers!) for content. You do not need to be a published author; however, I am especially pleased that our esteemed colleague, **Christina Shewell**, has generously shared with us in this issue her reflections on the process of supervision in professional voice practice. With personal experience of both sides of the relationship, Christina makes the case for incorporating supervision into the ongoing professional development of voice teachers and therapists of all stripes.

Hope to see you on September 4th. Have a great summer!

*Geraldine*



# Supervision – a gift for voice practitioners

Christina Shewell



**Christina Shewell, MA, FRCSLT ADVS**, is a spoken voice teacher, and speech and language therapist. She has worked with a wide range of clients in both voice therapy and voice development, and has particular expertise in working with professional voice users. She has special interests in the use of mindfulness and imagery in voice work and well-being, and in the links between voice, neuroscience, body and emotions. Her book **Voice Work: Art and Science in Changing Voices** (2009) is a core text for a wide range of voice practitioners.

For several years I have had the pleasure of offering supervision sessions to a range of voice practitioners – speech and language therapists, spoken voice teachers and singing teachers, and have come to recognise the value of such a work-related relationship, for both supervisee and supervisor.

This article looks briefly at the nature of supervision, and what this valuable form of continuing professional development can offer those who work to mend or develop the voices of others.

The sessions provide the support needed at the beginning of my voice teaching career, giving me insights into complex voice pedagogy aspects, and the opportunity to go back to the basics of voice work. We explore new exercises to expand my vocabulary as a practitioner and provide me with new ideas to implement in my own classes.

## Spoken voice teacher

In the voice practitioner world, reflecting and learning in supervision sessions is uncommon for spoken voice coaches and singing teachers. However, for speech and language therapists (SLTs), it is explicitly and strongly recommended by the 2012 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists guidelines. All members should have clinical supervision to discuss cases and practice with a more experienced colleague at least every 12 weeks. This is only four times a year, and in their RCSLT Bulletin article, Sparkes and Simpson (2013) point out that this minimal standard for supervision is too low. And although good quality supervision is increasingly valued in the SLT world, it is not always available, either within the NHS or privately.

The word 'supervision' derives from medieval Latin, with the literal meaning of 'looking over'. Nowadays, it refers to a process whereby a more experienced professional deeply listens to a less experienced colleague, offering personal attention, support and ideas in a 'contained space' for development in a work context. Supervision

takes place in the business, educational and other worlds and has long been a mandatory part of the professional standards for psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors.

It is recognised that these groups are specifically dealing with the emotions of sensitive human beings; such work carries a huge responsibility of care, for both the client and the professional, and the supervision process offers a much-needed safety support. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy states that a minimum of 1.5 hours per calendar month is a compulsory requirement for all their members. This is most usually on an individual basis, but it is also possible to be part of a supervision group. The UK Council for Psychotherapy defines supervision as 'a formal process in which a psychotherapist or psychotherapeutic counsellor regularly

At college we had good teaching about voice disorders, but very little on the range of possible practical therapeutic techniques. None of us had a voice therapy specialist; we watched videos and saw one example of an SLT doing voice therapy 'live', in a group. Supervision sessions have hugely extended my understanding of how to work in voice, and what to do with people with voice disorders. And it's great to talk honestly about my own feelings.

**Speech and language therapist,  
specialist in voice therapy**

presents their client work to a supervisor, as a way of enhancing their practice through careful reflection on the process.' As a therapist talks about a case story, their supervisor can 'take a wider view' of the feelings of both client and therapist. They may reflect back, ask questions, make suggestions and generally encourage the practitioner to find their own insights, as they move forward with a specific issue, and grow their skills and sensitivities in general.

Voice practitioners work with voice, with a prime focus on techniques, suggestions and ideas for vocal modification and change. However, whether working with an individual

In previous years, if I sometimes thought I'd made an error of judgement with a student, I would continue to worry and feel guilty - often harshly judging my professional competence. Supervision sessions allow me to air my fears and doubts knowing that my supervisor will not judge me and give me confidence to see things in a more positive light. That empathic relationship helps me to be kinder to myself, and being treated as an equal increases my self-esteem as a professional. Sharing openly with a voice specialist in a safe space is stimulating, as we bounce ideas when problem solving, and celebrate successes.

**Singing teacher and  
SLT voice specialist**

or a group, all voice practitioners will meet some clients who will feel and show strong emotions. "The atmosphere of trust and 'encouraged' voicing that develops within an individual session enables some people to release deeper feelings - about their voices and indeed about their lives.... In individual work we may find ourselves hearing some very painful or disturbing stories." (Shewell 2009)

Voice practitioners do not need to be trained counsellors or psychotherapists, but along with extensive knowledge of the theoretical and practical aspects of voice work, we do need to deal in the best possible way with what comes up emotionally. This is enhanced and made safer by supervision with a senior colleague experienced in dealing with a wide range of clients, who understands the nature of supervision, and can create an atmosphere of trust and respect.

The supervisor listens with deep attention as the voice practitioner describes the story of a client, the work so far, and any particular challenges that are arising. These may be to do with the way that work is going for a client, and the specific techniques that may be useful, but it also may be concerned with the way the voice practitioner is feeling. The supervisee may want to talk about their work in general, or their ponderings on career and direction (aspects which would be included in the slightly different relationships of mentoring or coaching).

The tools of a voice supervisor include the ability to encourage self-reflection and learning, and to ask the right questions, along with a willingness to share references, resources, and practical voice work techniques and experiences in an appropriate way. It's important for a supervisor to acknowledge that they cannot know the actual client being described, and to be honest about when they don't know something. Counselling type skills such as reflecting back content or meaning, summarising and allowing silence are all as relevant in supervision as they are in actual client work.

Insights and thoughts on the cases that I bring to our sessions not only provide technical solutions but also encourage me to see voicework and the people we're discussing in ways that I hadn't previously considered. It's as if during and after our sessions I'm able to see the cases we're talking about through a pair of glasses that bring out bright and vivid colours that I had missed myself. The sessions help me to focus my attention and thoughts, enabling me to help my clients in succinct, enjoyable and creative ways.

**Singer and  
singing voice rehabilitation coach**

In the voice world, supervision is a voluntary relationship and I always encourage my supervisees to select their own timeframes for how often we meet. It might be a 'one-off', every month, every week for a while, or just when the person feels they might like a session. Usually they select their own topics, though occasionally I suggest that we continue discussing a particular issue at the next session, if I feel there is unfinished business,

Supervision is a valuable contribution to my development as a practitioner. Sessions give me the opportunity to reflect on my work with a diverse mix of clients. In this held space I'm able to share and process how my coaching is going from my own perspective, with the mirror of an outside and importantly hugely experienced witness.

**Voice and communication coach  
and voice artist**

important for that practitioner's development. Fees are agreed beforehand and I negotiate a lower fee for a practitioner in their first year of work or who is in any financial straits. For those who are self-employed, the cost of supervision is tax allowable.

Supervision sessions offer voice practitioners a personal and tailor-made opportunity for responsible continued professional learning. I would encourage those interested to explore the possibility of working in this way with a more experienced colleague – in a one-to-one relationship, or within a small supervision group. I would also urge experienced colleagues to consider offering such supervision connections to younger colleagues in this kind of relationship – bearing in mind the skills that are needed.

We go on learning forever, and as a supervisor I continue to learn from my supervisees, and to be enriched by their own process of learning.

I am grateful to five supervisees for allowing me to share their experience of the supervision process.

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## REFERENCES

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# Voice Clinics Forum

## Neurolaryngology: Tricky Cases and New Approaches

11<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Gerard Thong



I write this report as a newly qualified otolaryngology consultant with a special interest in laryngology and airway stenosis. For the majority of otolaryngologists, neurolaryngology is a super subspecialist area and thus does not feature heavily in our training. Therefore, I was hoping to gain a deeper understanding on these topics and the BVA certainly delivered.



The morning session was entitled 'Multidisciplinary Management of Neurological Cases' and presented by the multidisciplinary team at **Nottingham University Hospitals**; one of only a handful of neurolaryngology MDTs that exist in the UK. The team talked about the evolution of the MDT into its current form, which is a one stop shop where patients can have their initial consultation, diagnostic EMG and botox injection, all in their first visit.

Consultant Neurologist, **Miles Humberstone**, gave an illuminating talk on dystonias in general. He described the aetiology of these conditions including the autosomal dominant inheritance pattern. I was surprised to learn that dystonias are the third most common movement disorder after essential tremor and Parkinson's disease, having a prevalence of 1 in 900. He also neatly explained the trilogy of muscle spasm, abnormal posture and tremor while using video examples to illustrate how one would come to this clinical diagnosis when faced with a patient in a hospital setting.

**Julian McGlashan**, Consultant Otolaryngologist, spoke authoritatively on the use and interpretation of laryngeal EMG. He also used a superb range of voice recordings demonstrating mild, moderate and severe spasm and I felt my familiarisation with the vocal characteristics of these conditions improve throughout his talk.

Lastly, I found Clinical Lead SLT **Cathy Gass**'s talk on patient experiences before and after treatment highlighted

the devastating impact these conditions can have on patients' lives. This is a reminder of why we as healthcare professionals strive to continuously educate ourselves so that we can provide the best care for our patients.

After coffee, **Dr Yoon Irons** and **Trish Burrows** gave a talk on 'Applying Evidence-based Singing for People Living with Parkinson's' detailing the results of their research. They have demonstrated many benefits including increased loudness and respiratory support in this patient cohort following a course of their

singing therapy. This was followed by a rather fun demonstration of the kind of songs used, which was very enjoyable.

The free paper session showcased some engaging and relevant research projects. On the whole, the quality of the studies was impressive, especially given the constraints that the pandemic has had on research activity. The most salient for me was the case series on the use of the blue laser for recurrent respiratory papillomatosis. This development will have a huge impact on the healthcare burden of this condition on the NHS, as well as on the patients themselves.

Overall, I found the morning well pitched to my level of knowledge and would like to congratulate the BVA on an engaging and well-run study day.

*Gerard Thong is a Locum Consultant Otorhinolaryngologist at South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital, Cork, Ireland*



# Singing for Health and Wellbeing

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2022

Molly Parker



It was such a pleasure to attend the BVA's 'Singing for Health and Wellbeing' conference in April. The day began with **Natalie Watson's** presentation on dispelling

Covid-19 myths surrounding the larynx, a well overdue topic for a voice coach like me. Natalie gave a brilliant perspective on how we can keep our classrooms safe, what we need to look out for as pedagogues when our students have suffered with Covid and who we need to contact when a student has been impacted by Covid. I was shocked to learn that Covid is actually one of many viruses that can cause both a sensory and a motor neuropathy to the vocal folds and I feel so much more equipped now to handle any student worries regarding long Covid.

This was suitably followed by **Rachel Goldenberg's** session on singing for lung health. Rachel used her research and expertise to detail the impact on the nervous system within patients with respiratory issues. This left me with an even stronger empathy for those suffering with such issues and I was excited by her emphasis on singing/voice work being much more than just breath work but also on resonance and phonation. The short clips of patients helpfully demonstrated 'laboured breath' and her conversation with Natalie gave useful tools on how far we can help said clients but also when we should advise them to seek further help.

Probably the most impactful session of the conference for me was **Dean, Sophie and Georgina's** presentation on 'Live Music Now': a charity using music to create impact for communities. As a sister of two non-speaking autistic

brothers, I was very humbled and inspired by Dean's story of how much beatboxing aided his own experience of Tourette's syndrome and how he can direct that energy into the work he is doing now. It was a beautiful reminder of how endless this field is and just how impactful it can be to those beyond performing.

**Ann Coxhead's** presentation on therapeutic application of osteopathy to singing started with a beautiful expression of laughter to demonstrate diaphragmatic breathing – something my students also adore! Ann was extremely clear in her presentation and used many anatomical diagrams and videos to really demonstrate the rib movement in both vertical and horizontal breathing. It was also a pleasure to witness her work in a video where she demonstrated taking a client through a journey from autonomic nervous system to sympathetic into parasympathetic, all to treat the larynx and any trauma that had been built into the body. A rare opportunity to watch this practice in action!

I was very keen to see **Rebecca Moseley-Morgan's** work on the mature female voice. I too have been perplexed and disappointed in the notion that the voice tends to decay with age but, it was very empowering to hear about Rebecca's fantastic case studies and just how impactful singing can be for the mature female.

Ending with **Emily Foulkes'** bridging research and practice was extremely fitting. I felt as though her presentation neatly summed up the day, emphasising the importance and need for practitioners and researchers to work closer together. I ended the conference feeling very inspired to do just this, keep my curiosity high and 'research hat' on - something I haven't done since my Masters training. As always, the BVA held an incredibly insightful conference with accessible material that practitioners can apply new knowledge to their everyday teaching. Thank you for once again having me!

***Molly Parker** is a voice, accent and presentation skills coach based in London.*



# BREAKTHROUGHS & BOUNDARIES

Exploring multi-disciplinary voice work



Graham Welch



Guri Sandhu



Jacob Lieberman



Jenevora Williams



Tori Burnay



Paul McKenna



Dawn Estefan

## The benefits and limitations of multidisciplinary solutions to vocal issues

Central to the ethos of the **British Voice Association** is its multidisciplinary reach across professions that deal with the spoken and singing voice. The BVA was set up to bring together scientists and artists, researchers and voice practitioners, specialists in their respective fields, to share knowledge, promote research and to collaborate in solving real life issues related to vocal identity, function and communication.

In 'Breakthroughs and Boundaries', we'll spend a day reviewing the landscape of multidisciplinary voice work in the UK in both private practice and within the NHS. We shall hear about the subtle solutions that multidisciplinary approaches allow, while also examining the limitations and tensions of working across professional boundaries. The event takes on three particular challenges: 1) the lack of shared vocabulary across disciplines; 2) the research and practical application divide; and 3) boundaries of professional specialism, certification and authority.

To enliven and guide our discussion we are delighted to welcome several leading lights in multidisciplinary practice: Professor **Graham Welch**, Mr **Guri Sandhu**, **Jacob Lieberman**, Dr **Jenevora Williams**, **Tori Burnay**, **Paul McKenna** and **Dawn Estefan**. Alongside this fantastic lineup will be presentations from BVA members on their experiences and perspectives on the challenges outlined above, as well as discussion amongst the panel in response to questions submitted by members.

The day should be a great opportunity to hear differing perspectives, with lively and respectful discussion and hopefully, a few nuggets of knowledge to re-invigorate our (multidisciplinary) practices and thinking. Ideally, we'll find some agreement on shared concepts and vocabulary to enable us to talk with one another across voice disciplines. We look forward to seeing you!



**Breakthroughs and Boundaries: the benefits and limitations of multidisciplinary solutions to vocal issues**

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2022 for our summer forum  
11.00-13.00 and 14.00-16.00 online**

**<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/breakthroughs-and-boundaries-tickets-365676116107>**