

# Transformative Singing Engagement (TSE): Developing a Measure Using Retrospective Assessment

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## Introduction

An over-focus on assessing “high-stakes” performance outcomes has overshadowed attempts to develop measures that are capable of providing important indicators about the impact of singing pedagogy on:

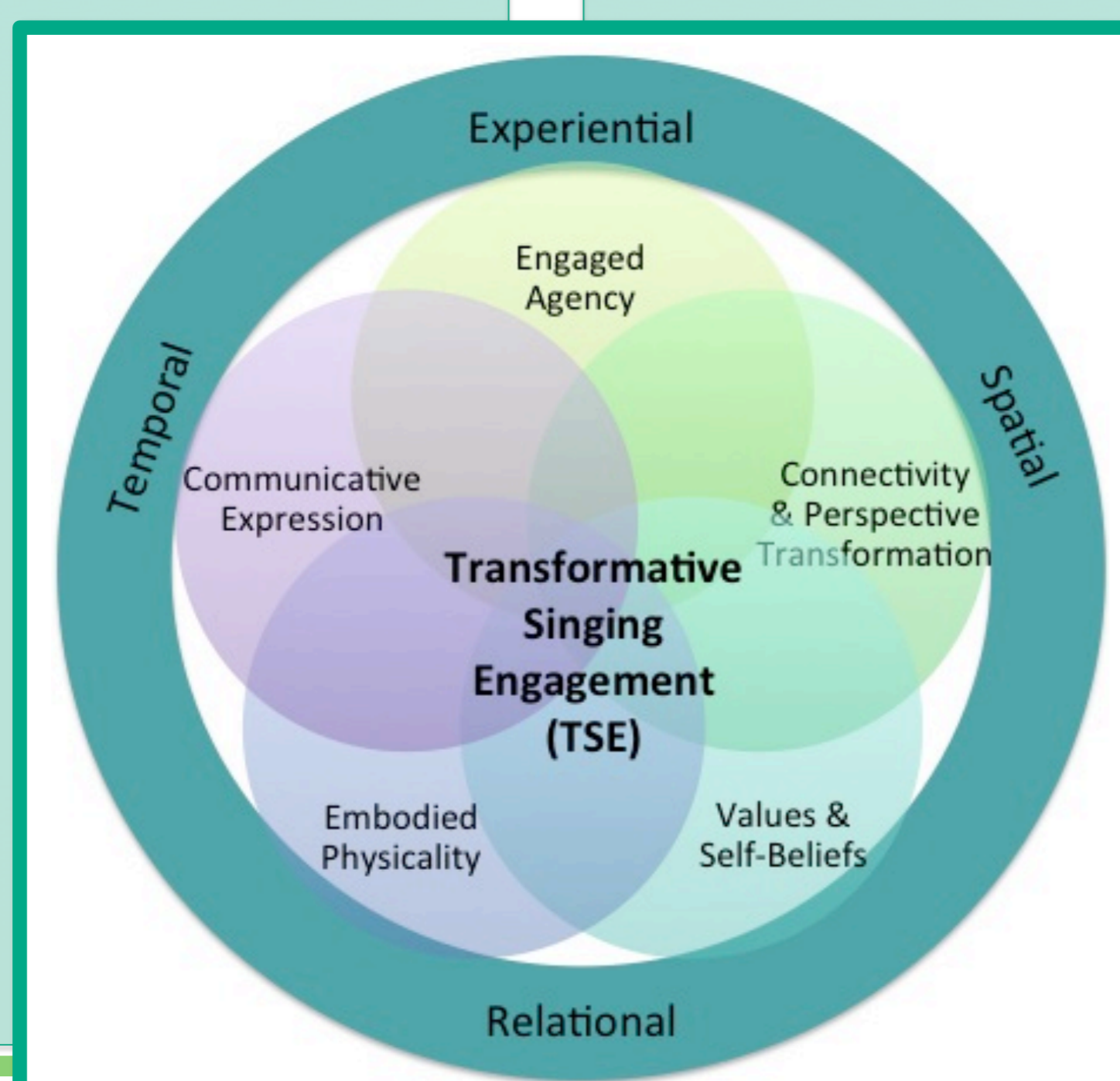
- how learners think and feel about themselves
- how they perceive their capacity and engagement in the learning process
- energy for learning and benefits learners derive from singing
- their developing conceptual understanding of the physical and communicative aspects of singing

We refer to learners’ perceptions of these context-dependent features that are embedded within interrelated personal, social, and systemic cultural ecologies as **Transformative Singing Engagement (TSE)**.

## Theoretical Framework

TSE derives from a psychological-philosophical braiding of the nuanced, contextualized, and fluid nature of meaning making and the intricate webs of connection that take place within learning ecologies that are capable of bringing about learners’ perspective transformations (Mezirow, 2000) and a sense of engaged agency in an activity where learners derive a sense of value and can make a contribution (Stetsenko, 2010).

These concepts have origins in constructivist theory and the pedagogical implications of theorists such as Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Freire. Meaning making, symbols, social interaction, values and action are viewed as: **dynamic, relational, experiential, temporal, spatial.**



## Key Constructs

**Transformative singing engagement (TSE)** is an extension of transformative music engagement; it provides a framework for creating reflection, experiential and action-oriented learning opportunities and evaluating students’ sense of agency, connection and values (O’Neill, 2012).



TSE is conceptualized as a holistic framework; there is a degree of overlap and interrelatedness among the key concepts:

1. **Embodied Physicality** – The singer connects breath energy with physical motion and resonance in the body when singing.
2. **Communicative Expression** – The singer is aware of consciously or unconsciously emitting precise expressive aspects of his or her “musical authenticity” to an audience (Green, 2005).
3. **Engaged Agency** – The singer has a sense of empowerment or “voice” that make sense or meaning making possible in relation to purposeful engagement in singing (O’Neill, 2012).
4. **Connectivity and Perspective Transformation** – The singer engages in actions (dialogue, inquiry, reflection) that connect texts, music, self and others with past lived experiences (Mezirow, 2000).



5. **Values and Self-Beliefs** – The activity of singing contributes to a sense of self-identity and intrinsic value that fulfills personal needs, confirms central aspects of one’ self-schema and affirms and/or elicits personal values (Eccles, O’Neill & Wigfield, 2005).

## Measuring TSE

A key concern in using traditional pre-post measures is that the individual has not yet experienced the activity and/or gained a conceptual understanding of what it means to engage in the activity at the time of the pre measure; **they don’t know what they don’t know**. What is needed is a measure that draws on learners’ knowledge/ understanding once they have experienced the activity and are able to make an informed comparison with prior experience.

## Retrospective Assessment

Hiebert and his colleagues developed a “post-pre assessment” that combines decision-making with a form of retrospective assessment used only after a program or unit of learning is completed. It creates “a common measuring stick” for comparing self-perceptions before and after learning (Hiebert, Domene, & Buchanan, 2011).

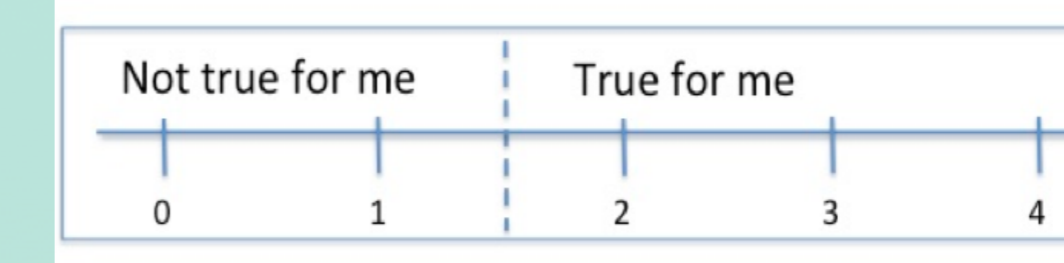
### A two-step decision-making process:

**Step A** – Decide if the activity or concept is “not true for me” or “true for me”

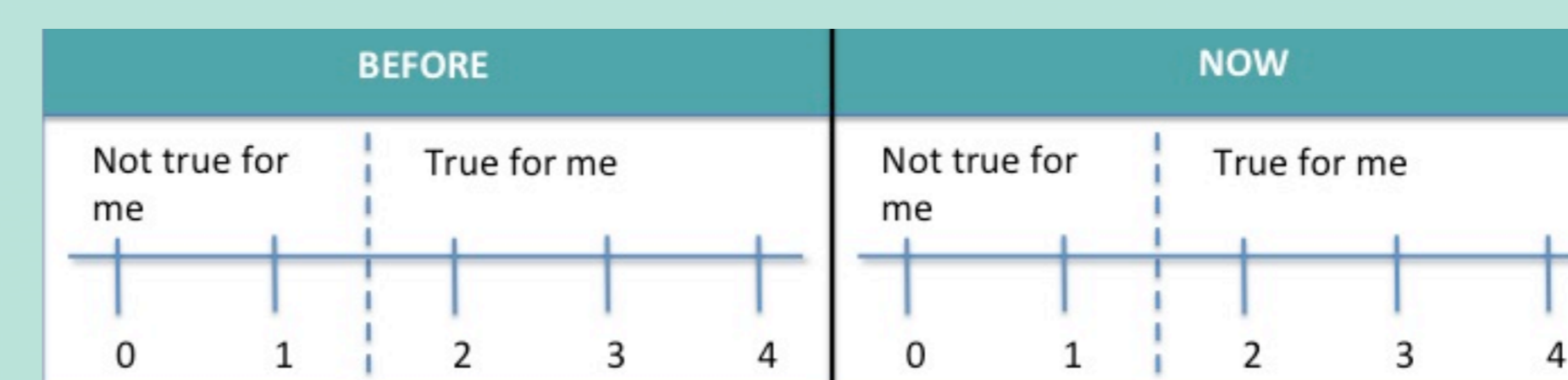


**Step B** – Decide if the level is “not true for me”:

- Not at all true for me (=0) OR
  - Not very true for me (=1)
- If the level is “true for me”, is it:
- Sort of true for me (=2)
  - Mostly true for me (=3)
  - Very true for me (=4)



**Step C** – Repeat Steps A and B thinking about “Before” and “After”:



### SAMPLE ITEMS FOR THE FIVE TRANSFORMATIVE SINGING ENGAGEMENT (TSE) CONCEPTS:

- During rehearsal I think of the physical aspects of singing. [Embodied Physicality]
- I apply the knowledge I’ve learned about the communicative aspects of singing to enhance my singing performance. [Communicative Expression]
- My [singing] helps expand my thinking about things that matter to me. [Engaged Agency]
- I think [singing] helps students in my class feel connected in some way. [Connectivity and Conceptual Change]
- Singing in the choir is an important part of my life. [Values and Self-Beliefs]

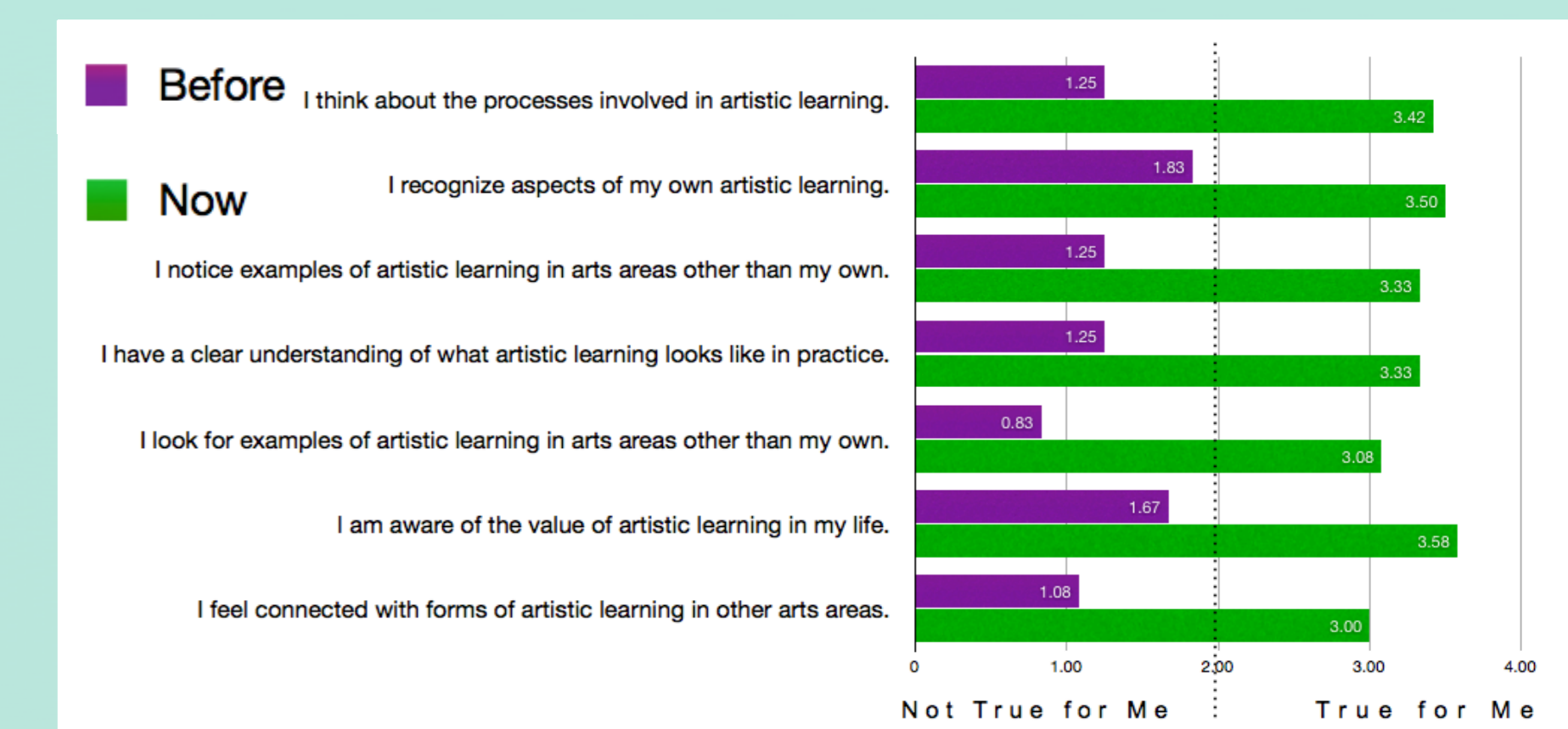
## Discussion

Retrospective assessment provides a detailed diagnostic tool and formative feedback that educators can use to determine the effectiveness of pedagogical

approaches to singing on student learning and engagement, such as:

- professional development/reflective practice
- understanding the perspectives of particular learners better
- gathering knowledge about the affordances and constraints on learning to inform future pedagogical decisions
- improving teaching practice.

In a recent study of students’ transformative arts engagement using retrospective assessment, we found it to be effective in demonstrating change in students’ perceptions (Sparks & O’Neill, 2013).



**Next steps:** Develop TSE as a pedagogical approach to singing with retrospective assessment to measure change in the perceptions of youth singers at a Fine Arts school.

## References

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