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DIGITAL RESOURCES TRAINING AND VOCAL PEDAGOGY: BUILDING BRIDGES

A JOINT REPORT OF SLOVENIAN PARTICIPANTS ON THE PROJECT SESSION IN LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

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The goals of the project session were set out in a loosely broad manner, which turned out to be most productive, as the scope of knowledge and experience working with digital technology resources on the part of participants was broad as well.

The primary aim, as is aptly indicated in the project title syntagm “*building bridges*” was to harmoniously blend the traditional ways of vocal pedagogy with the use of the developed or emerging technological means to maximize the efficiency of vocal pedagogical process. Another aspect referring to the title was reaching out to voice students belonging to the new generation of learners, for whom the use of digital technology resources comes most naturally and are at the same time increasingly dependent on visual input.

Yet another aim associated with the project title was establishing common grounds for learning, training and exchanging information about digital resources, encouraging the related research projects; efforts which could eventually lead even towards a standardization of applying digital resources to vocal pedagogy in voice studios across Europe.

As much as it was difficult to define what we had expected before the beginning of the project session, all three of us can upon the conclusion of the week confidently state that we got the maximum out of the five days training.

We had all been using the digital resources for teaching purposes to a limited extent prior to our project session, but hadn't really come to explore the possibilities more in the depth. Besides acquiring a general knowledge and awareness about the subject matter, having participated in our project session made us inspired, determined and highly motivated to use the various digital tools in our teaching, to share our acquired knowledge with our students and colleagues respectively.

This was the first such session on the European level and in our case on the national level as well, so there was clearly no way the program or the schedule details could have been specified in a fixed way in advance. The outline of our working sessions was clear enough to give us the efficient framework of activities, while leaving enough maneuver space for adapting and coordinating our activities according to the varying levels of the participants' digital knowledge and awareness. We have to point out that the organization and coordination team was extremely flexible and upon the start of the project session proved highly professional and competent in that they effectively responded to the specific situation brought about by the diversity of the participants' knowledge, experience, expectations and needs. No precious time was lost and the efficient structure of activities was promptly established.

The resource teachers were very well chosen and highly appreciated.

It quickly became apparent that among the participants there were also a few teachers who were well able to easily take on the task and responsibility of the additional resource teachers, which facilitated the training process as far as the digital voice analysis tools were concerned. Working in small, flexible groups was an excellent experience, particularly for most of us, who were not so well versed in running voice analysis programs or were complete beginners. Despite of these various backgrounds, our project session came to its full run already in the course of the first day, because the participants were extremely eager to train and were all learning fast. The exchange of our understandings or suggestions led to vivid experimenting and prompted always new learning situations.

We learnt to run the above mentioned voice analysis programs and were introduced to the different parameters that can be explored by the visual aid and acoustic feedback of such programs, e.g. maintaining the legato line, vowel identification and unification, establishing the preferred vibrato rate, projection of consonants, managing crescendo and decrescendo, unifying the registers, determining the desired tone quality, formant tuning etc.

It was a great and very instructive experience to work with the Slovenian students in small workshop groups. This was the best way of directly putting the findings and our newly acquired skills to a test and to use. The students were very cooperative and the resource teachers leading the individual working groups were extremely successful in managing the learning process most efficiently. We acquired the basic insight into the various means of applying the use of voice analysis programs to teaching process in the voice studio. The students reacted very well to the visual feedback of their vocalizing and some of them came to entirely new concepts of understanding their own vocal production. They were fascinated, as well as we were, by the usefulness of the information that a voice analysis program can give them. The value of such digital aid in a voice lesson was quickly and uniformly recognized. In our case, each participant, encouraged by the group leader, with his/her individual input contributed enormously to the overall success of the workshop's outcome.

We all found that individual lessons with the resource teachers were an excellent way to go into the subject on an empirical, more focused or detailed level. We exchanged the impressions and found that a lot of priceless information we have since already shared with the colleague members of our national association, came from these individual sessions. These lessons covered various aspects of using the various voice analysis programs (*voce vista, sing&see, madde*).

It has been consistently pointed out that such programs cannot serve as substitutes of voice teachers, but indeed complement other different forms of voice teaching. It takes a well trained ear, extensive technical knowledge, artistic depth and great pedagogical skills to make a good voice teacher and in this view the value of a dedicated teacher's experience is in no way threatened by the use of voice analysis programs.

In the course of the week it became obvious that there is a need of training courses on how to develop and encourage innovative approaches to using voice analysis programs for pedagogical purposes. This field remains insufficiently explored and our project session proved to be an effective start of the structured, focused and strategically steered development into this direction on a transnational level.

Another aspect of the project session that we thought was largely instructive was the fact that its subject matter referred to both, voice teaching in the classical and CCM manner. In Slovenia there is an apparent lack of tradition or skills of CCM voice training. There are only a few noted teachers with proper competence in the field, among them being

Irena Vidic, one of the Slovenian participants. Therefore the session on format tuning, aided by the use of digital tools in classical and CCM singing was richly informative. It was enlightening to see what there is in the tone quality we have to look for to achieve a stylistically proper vocal performance. On the basis of the visual feedback information, we were led to recognize the specific tonal qualities as desired for different vocal styles. The parameters shown by a voice analysis program were adequately clarified and their use well explained. Various teaching techniques and examples of proper teaching instruction for the two respective vocal styles were shown and applied.

Further exploration made us much more confident about how to go about teaching the CCM singing style, which has, especially in my own case already proven prolific. One of my students namely comes from the CCM background and wants to stay in this style. Up to our project session I had felt inadequate to give her a proper non-classical vocal training, so for the sake of staying "on the safe grounds" we stuck to the classical singing style, which clearly hadn't been working out all that well for her voice type. What I learnt about the CCM singing style and the respective teaching methods in the course of our project session was absolutely enlightening to me and I have already put the acquired skills to good practice in the case of this particular student, who after a few lessons has already shown great improvement, not to mention that she is much more pleased about her own singing.

Group lessons with the resource teachers in the second half of the project session brought about yet a deeper insight into the use of the digital tools for teaching purposes. We learnt in a more detailed way how to recognize the various parameters of *voce vista* and how to apply them to a teaching process. We could compare and analyze the visual feedback information directly through our various vocal contributions.

In addition to individual and group lessons with the resource teachers, group work with the Slovene students, individual lessons set up by the participants themselves, teaching one another there were also several presentations by the resource teachers and some of the participants on the digital recording technology, creating instrumental playbacks and resources available on the internet (piano playbacks, music scores, recordings, etc.). Some of the presentations referred to Apple computers software exclusively, which we felt was not very useful, as the majority of the participants were MS users.

What would have been very useful (and welcome as well by the fellow members of our national association) was to have had workshops about how to install and run the different software equipment, such as recording or transposing applications, software for editing recordings or perhaps any other useful applications. We also missed some more instruction about what, for instance, to look for buying a microphone (in the flood of all available equipment, it is very hard to make what would be the best choice of purchase), what makes a microphone a quality one, which microphones perhaps have the best price performance, etc. On this note, Dr. Michael Büttner's introductory presentation was excellent; it encouraged our interest in finding out more and learning more about the acoustics, basics of recording engineering and the related subject matters. We noted such interest among the fellow members of our national association as well.

We have as well already experienced the benefit of the digital tools available on the internet, which were presented during our project session. We referred our students to internet pages, where they could download the piano accompaniment of the songs they were working on and they were very excited and together we found the accompaniments greatly useful.

We all thought the presentations of the finished and ongoing doctoral research were absolutely enlightening. The research subjects and findings were excellent and it was a shame the presenters weren't given more time to produce their presentations in a more detailed way and perhaps to take on the possible questions and discussions.

In the scope of our annual association meeting we presented the activities of the EVPW #4 to the fellow members of our national association (DSPP). We shared with them our learning experience and gave the account of our participation in the project session. The possibilities of using voice analysis programs for teaching purposes are very much undiscovered among the members of our association; therefore the basic information about the advantages of using *voce vista*, *madde*, *sygyt* or *sing&see* was embraced with great interest. None of us has yet installed our own version of any voice analysis programs on our computers, due to financial limitations, but have agreed that when the upgraded version of *voce vista* is available, we will make the investments and hold a workshop on using it as a teaching tool for the members of our national association. We stressed that using voice analysis programs can contribute to good quality teaching and that it is not there to replace the voice teacher.

Our fellow members found it very useful to get acquainted with the different internet resources, particularly the availability of piano playbacks, downloadable music scores and recordings and ways of translating the You Tube recordings into audio files.

There has also been a pronounced interest in the issues of format tuning aided by the use (feedback) of voice analysis programs, so this is a subject that we see needs to be explored and presented separately, perhaps as well in the form of a workshop.

Another impulse we got from participating in our project session and which is a subject matter of keen interest on the part of the fellow members of our national association was to explore the different approaches to teaching classical and CCM style of singing, again supported by the use of voice analysis programs. So in our future work on the level of our association and individually we would like to include exploring the various teaching techniques and approaches that are common to or differ methodologically in the case of classical and CCM singing respectively.

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