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A common challenge in arts education is posed by overview courses with tight deadlines and heterogeneous student groups. This article presents a productive encounter of two educational cultures in arts education, namely, an approach in music education with-in the acting programme: musical composition tasks that are conceptualized individu-ally and performed collectively by actor students. The impact of this approach on stu-dents' individual development has several aspects. Among learning outcomes that seem particularly interesting and potentially transferable to various disciplines are confidence, communication skills and the ability to jointly manage a creative process.

Introduction

Different art forms arguably carry with them different educational cultures. Notwith-standing, courses in arts education in general will often encounter the same two kinds of challenges: (1) the purpose of a course is to present an overview of a large field in the arts where the amount of potentially relevant content for such an overview heavily ex-ceeds the course format and time available; and (2) the students' knowledge and experi-ence in the field are very heterogeneous.

The aim of this article is to suggest that there may be positive potential for learn-ing processes in such circumstances and that an open, inclusive approach with regard to different arts educational cultures may prove fruitful. The argument is based on a presentation and an interview evaluation of a concrete example from a specific con-text. The approach in question has proven successful in music courses in the act-ing programme at Malmö Theatre Academy (Lund University, Sweden) where musi-cal composition tasks are conceptualized individually, then carried out collectively by the actor students. Within the narrow frame of this article, no attempt is made to sit-uate these experiences in a context of global comparison; but it is suggested that this approach may be transferred successfully to other fields of arts education, especial-ly to learning situations that include encounters between art forms (such as in the present case, the encounter between the culture of theatre and the culture of music).

Higher Education and Practitioner Knowledge: A Conceptual Framework

Musical learning at university level is still relatively unexplored (however, cf. Zhuk-ov, 2004). According to a national conservatory project in Sweden, "systematic knowl-edge formation regarding learning processes is almost completely missing" (SOU, 2006, p. 641; my translation). Schyberg (2007) notes in general "a large degree of unawareness with regard to higher education teachers' pedagogical practice" (p. 113; my translation); according to Schyberg the teacher's interest is generally focused on content rather than on the student, and there is a clear pattern of teacher instruction and student reproduc-tion (pp. 147-148).

A significant portion of research and theory in the field of higher education relates to various ways of viewing practitioner knowledge (Kim & Olstedt, 2003; Schyberg, 2007):

- as personal and tacit knowledge: e.g., Polanyi (1967);
- as socially situated cognition: e.g., Lave and Wenger (1991);
- as practical mind: e.g., Bourdieu (1990, 1999), Molander (1993).

The communication, teaching and learning of practitioner knowledge emerge as rele-vant and important perspectives. Barnes (1978) distinguishes between several contrast-ing concepts with regard to the communicative aspects of learning. Are the *ways of talk-ing* in the educational situation based on presentation or participation? Do the *structures of speech* consist of presentational or exploratory talk? Is the *manner of presentation* dog-matic or hypothetical? Is the *teacher role* focused on assessing or on understanding, the *student role* on transmission or on interpretation? Trigwell, Prosser, Marton and Runes-son (2002) focus on variations in the learner's level of activity and relation to what is be-ing taught. They distinguish between three perspectives on learning and teaching: a *cog-nitivist* perspective where the learner is a passive recipient; a *constructionist* perspective where the learner is active; and a *constitutionalist* perspective where both the learner and what is taught are crucial: from this perspective, the learning process is a process of in-tervention in which the learner's understanding becomes an aspect of the object itself.

Composition Didactics

As an exemplification of the encounter of arts educational cultures, this article focuses on a music course for acting students. The starting point for the course in question may perhaps seem paradoxical: music for actors in spoken theatre. Several features of thea-perhaps seem to suggest that musicality is of great significance to actors' work (Bjer-stedt, 2010), and the concept of music subjects within a theatre course is certainly not new. Music, however, is not the students' main field; acting students represent a high-ly heterogeneous group in terms of musical experience and musical self-confidence. To deal with such perceived differences is important from both a collective and an individ-ual point of view, and this aim has been central to the educational approach described here.

A wide range of different fields of knowledge and learning outcomes can be identi-fied as relevant to music education for actors (Bjerstedt, 2009). However, allocating pro-

portionate time to each of these is difficult; consequently, a kind of "holistic" approach has emerged as appropriate. Composition tasks that include an individual phase of conceptualization and a collective phase of performance have the advantage of providing opportunities to work towards both individual and collective goals within narrow time frames.

Composition as a way towards learning and understanding is a growing phenomenon in music education (Folkestad, 1996; Sundin, McPherson & Folkestad, 1998; Vesterlund, 2001, Nilsson, 2002). In most Western curricula composition is a cornerstone of the subject of music. This is based, among other things, on the notion that the urgency to learn will increase when learners themselves are the creators of the material: to perceive a subject from the artist's eyes will arouse curiosity as well as a personal approach (Andersen, Espeland, Husebø & Husebø, 1997). Furthermore, composition tasks, like creative writing, call for holistic and pragmatic approaches where theoretical and practical questions are dealt with in due course as they appear.

To Sing a Haiku

The approach that will be presented here is founded on the basic assumption that everyone can become a composer, in a simple and restricted sense of the word, without extensive preparation. Here is an introductory example.

The acting students' composition tasks take their point of departure in a couple of their home fields, as it were: *text* and *collaboration*. An introductory exercise is based on haiku (Japanese short poems) in Swedish translation. Students are encouraged to choose a haiku, to learn it, internalize it, and eventually sing it. When they present their results, it is emphasized that the task is not to have written down the melody, but to know it so well that you are able to teach the rest of the group to sing it correctly. In brief, you must present your haiku song so distinctly that pitches, rhythms, pauses et cetera are clarified to everyone in the group.

The actual transition from text to music is central: when the haiku-reading students become haiku-singing, they importantly bring something of their own to what they have read. Teacher instructions completely avoid theorizing or problematizing this transition; rather, they consist entirely of almost naïve instructions, such as to "read" the haiku, to "taste" it, to "love" it (!) and, eventually, to "sing" it. Over two hundred students have performed this task, with as many songs as a result. In no case does the shift from text to music seem to have posed any considerable difficulties (Bjerstedt, 2012).

Musical Setting of Poems by Individual and Collective Projects

Later on, the students perform more extensive composition tasks. Each one of them individually sets music to a text. The music is then learned and rehearsed collectively by the group. Finally, the students record a CD where they together perform their compositions.

At the first course meeting, everyone presents the material they have chosen. In some cases, to select the material is a long and difficult process. The ensuing course meetings always begin with a brief resumé of everyone's process: what has been done so far, and what should be done next? The students then work individually on their projects, with or without teacher dialogue as desired. Their compositional activities may be facilitated in different ways (e.g., notation, chords, arrangement, accompaniment) by the course instructor as well as by fellow students, depending on the students' abilities and needs. When the compositions begin to take shape, the group sets out to learn and rehearse them collectively. A rehearsal schedule is established in order to structure the work as fairly as possible with transparent allocation of time. The rehearsal phase ends with an audio documentation.

To establish schedules for creative processes may appear problematic, paradoxical even. Most students work with their composition projects also at other times. Both the work on the composition and the rehearsal work can develop in quite different ways. A number of individual differences are obvious:

- different musical references, preferences and choices;
- varying degree of autonomy as music creators;
- different choices of work methods.

Every student will make a series of procedural choices:

- choice of text to set music to;
- choice of work methods;
- level of ambition;
- independence/cooperation.

A few typical composition processes may serve as illustrations of different procedural choices:

- a student creates music using a musical instrument as a tool;
- a student presents a song by singing it, and the arrangement emerges as the product of a team effort;
- a student presents a song in musical notation with clear ideas about how it should be performed, but the accompaniment details emerge as the product of a team effort;
- a student instructs a comp group to play a repetitive pattern, a "groove", over which s/he works out a melody by improvising over the accompaniment.

For two decades, composition projects of this kind have been conducted on a regular basis at Malmö Theatre Academy. To date, several hundred students have managed to produce musical compositions within the frames of this project, and no one has failed. To some extent, their heterogeneous conditions, processes, results and experiences are reflected in the qualitative interview investigation presented in the next section.

The Interview Study

First year students completed their composition project by audio recording the material they had developed. The day after the recording, four students were interviewed (45 minutes each). Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed shortly afterwards. The interviewees were given the opportunity to review the printouts. Later on, follow-up exchange of views has taken place.

My way of understanding and applying the research interview is closely connected to the view expressed by Steinar Kvale (1997). Through an interview, I want to arrive at descriptions formulated by the interviewee in order to interpret and describe the meanings ascribed to certain phenomena. The exploratory interview is open and not structured very strictly. It is not intended to test hypotheses, but to understand the topics in question from the perspective of the interviewee. The interview produces knowledge as conversation, as narrative. It may expand and transform the researcher's perception of the phenomena that are investigated. One of the main purposes of an exploratory study is to discover new dimensions of the subject under investigation.

Kvale (1997) points out the difficulties to validate qualitative research of this kind. *Ecological validity* may largely be about judgments of validity *before* the investigation: to present the background of the research project, to define concepts, to present the research strategy and methods, to disclose the researcher's relationship to the objects of investigation. But ecological validity may also be about *bringing back* the research results to the investigated reality in order to see whether the understanding communicated by the researcher does resonate with those who represent the field of study: to see how relevant, credible and useful the results are there. The first of these tasks is performed within the frame of this article; the latter in continuing educational practice.

Every conversation began with a brief explanation of the purpose of the interview. The interview participants' anonymity was guaranteed. They were told that they would have the opportunity to read and approve any interview excerpts where there might be a potential risk of identification. The interviews followed a list of general issues, including perceived changes in students' relationship to music; perceptions of the project's objectives and learning outcomes; and experiences regarding confidence, cooperation and communication. All interviews were conducted with reasonable room for individual impressions and reflections.

In an overall analysis of the transcribed interviews a number of themes emerge, corresponding to the headings in the following presentation. One group of themes regards the educational method, while another relates to the individual acting student's musical development.

Results: Students' Experiences and Reflections

The project's purpose. From a teacher perspective, it has seemed like a good idea not to specify a particular purpose with the composition task too strictly; a universal formulation of the project's learning outcomes might face the risk of limiting the individual feats and learning outcomes. The interviews indicated that the students themselves had for-

mulated objectives both of the project as a whole and of their individual work. One student had come to perceive the aims of the project as a way to *become familiar with music*, among other things through experiencing the similarities with other art forms such as theatre. For another student, the project's overall purpose was about *cooperation*, including psychological gains with regard to work ethics. A third student mentioned first and foremost the *practical musical achievement* as the project's purpose.

Progression. To begin with smaller composition tasks (like the haiku exercise) was an efficient way to make the larger task seem less intimidating. Furthermore, the smaller tasks provided the students with useful experiences regarding strategies and approaches; these proved beneficial for the larger task.

Documentation. The students were positive to both audio and text documentations, which were said to strengthen both their musical confidence and their musical understanding. They also emphasized the preservation of results. One student pointed out that the student group was still singing together now and then a haiku song that was created six months earlier by one of the students.

Teacher role. The role of supporting and stimulating creative processes was not perceived by the students as a typical role for teachers; rather, the teacher in relation to the students' creative process could be perceived as a mentor, critic, friend, secretary, accompanist, driver and an issuer of orders. A teacher who is confident with the organization and outcome of the project may take a more passive role. The interviews confirmed that such permissive or passive attitudes were perceived positively: they strengthened the students' self-esteem as music makers.

Increased self-confidence. It is not an easy task to summarize, from a teacher perspective, the learning outcomes in terms of the students' musical development as individuals and as a group. The overarching aim of the project is to strengthen all acting students' self-confidence with regard to an art form that is familiar to some of them but that may to others initially seem mysterious, difficult, or even intimidating. All interviewees perceived how their own musical self-confidence had been strengthened to an extent as a result of the composition project, in comparison to their perceived musical self-confidence a year earlier, before the teaching began. One student formulated the main learning outcome as *a potential* for continued musical activity. Another student emphasized musical confidence and the discovery of one's own *individual musical voice*. Several students testified that their anxiety about playing for others and with others had been significantly reduced.

Dynamics of cooperation and communication. Usually during the rehearsals, the composer of a song rules with absolute sovereignty when it is rehearsed, and the other students take on roles as obedient (but co-creative) participants, a little like the relationship between director and actor in theatre. Such a "power relationship" was perceived as beneficial to the composer's self-confidence. Furthermore, it provided good training for all students to communicate both in and about the music.

Synergies. Students perceived similarities between musical and theatrical work, benefits that one could carry to other contexts: first, a stronger *work ethic;* second, an opportunity to *get to know each other* in new ways; third, an opportunity to simply do something *pleasurable* together.

Summary

Projects including composition tasks that are conceptualized individually and performed collectively are shown in this interview study to have positive effects on students' experiences with regard to well-functioning *musical interaction*. This is favored in this context by parallel interaction training on the theatrical stage. The interviews also indicate that these composition tasks typically facilitate the growth of a strong *musical confidence* in the sense of preparedness for musical tasks in the theatre, as well as a readiness to carry out their tasks as actors with approaches that have been musically inspired in a broad sense of the word.

In brief, the concrete examples presented here focus on students' active approach to their learning at both an individual and a collective level. Speech structures may be said to be *exploratory* (Barnes, 1978) and the learning processes seem to be in accordance with a *constitutionalist* perspective (Trigwell et al., 2002). Both the learner and what is taught are emphasized, the learning process is a process of invention, and the learner's understanding becomes an aspect of the object itself.

To summarize, the methods described and examined above may be seen as a very productive *encounter between educational cultures* in art education. They have emerged as a way to deal with the circumstances that apply to the subject of music within the curriculum of the actor programme. These circumstances include the need to meaningfully manage and structure a very rich amount of potentially relevant content within a restricted course format, as well as the heterogeneity in student groups regarding musical experience and musical confidence. But the circumstances also include positive factors such as students' strong interest and clear aptitude for working with *text* and working *collaboratively*. The choice of focus on composition tasks might perhaps be termed a "holistic" approach to meet these conditions. The interview investigation indicates that the impact and learning outcomes of this educational approach on students' individual development have several aspects in terms of positive consequences with regard to acting students' *confidence* in the field of music as well as their *communicative abilities* and their ability to participate in *collective creative processes* in this field.

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