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Symposium

International Comparison of Music Lessons on Video

3rd to 5th September 2014.

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International Comparison of Music Lessons on Video, 3rd to 5th September 2014. Symposium Report by Daniel Prantl and Simon Stich, Hochschule für Musik und Theater “Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy”, Leipzig

Idea of the symposium¹

“I never saw something like that!” This was the spontaneous reaction of an English scientific music educator while watching a music lesson on video from Saxony, Germany. The situation itself sounds rather ‘strange’; that a music educator, who had seen many lessons in her life, could not recognize what was happening in this lesson. This opened up the idea for the symposium “International Comparison of Music Lessons on Video“, which took place from the 3rd to the 5th of September 2014 at the University of Music and Theatre “Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy“ Leipzig under the direction of Christopher Wallbaum. In order to translate the ‘strange’ into music educational terms, 19 music education researchers came together, presenting their cultural-bounded points of view on eight music lessons on video from seven countries, discussed similarities and differences between them and tried to explore categories of comparison.

Preparation and procedure of the symposium

The preparation of the symposium started three years ago by gathering ‘good’ music-lessons from different countries on DVD. The teachers were asked to give a lesson, which they themselves considered a good one. It should not be an extraordinary lesson but, in their own eyes, typical for a good lesson in their curriculum. All videos were recorded through a similar procedure (at least three video angles and subtitles in English, mastered on DVD) relating to the kind of school, age group and way of recording. Additionally, interviews with the teacher and the students were conducted and further material like worksheets etc. was raised. The result was that we collected one music lesson from Estonia, Sweden, Spain (Catalonia), Scotland, China (Beijing), USA (California) and two lessons from Germany (Bavaria and Lower Saxony). All the material was sent to the speakers in order to prepare the symposium.²

For the symposium, one or two ‘national experts’ with good knowledge of the concepts and practice of music education in their country were asked to present their view on the lesson of their own country and on another lesson in which they found a ‘strange’ aspect. Each presentation at the symposium included two short extracts from the videos of maximum 3 minutes –

¹ Minor parts of chapters 1 and 2 in this publication are taken from other reports and proposals in connection with the project “International Comparison of Music Lessons on Video”. We kindly thank Prof. Dr. C. Wallbaum for giving us access to this material.

² It is important to point out here that the huge effort in the collection of the music lessons in the standardized setting, especially in regard to technical and juridical issues was a big challenge.

showing certain aspects of the lessons that the researcher wanted to show and to comment on – combined with a written verbal text, which should explain the short film³. After two or three presentations, the speakers met in moderated ‘fishbowls’⁴ in order to discuss whether the presented national and international aspects could be useful as categories for comparison of music lessons on video. In order to fix the first results, the symposium concluded with the meta-reflections of two speakers who observed the symposium the days before, a short summary based on the presentations and a final plenary. The whole symposium was documented for later analysis⁵. For an overview of the presentations, the chosen music lesson with the ‘strange’ aspect and the structure of the symposium, please consult table 1. To prevent the misleading thought that the collected music-lessons are per se country-specific, they are not titled Swedish, Scottish, etc. lesson. But to reflect the institutional frame, they are called Sweden-, Scotland- etc. Lesson.

³ A so-called “Analytical Short Film” (ASF), called “Music Pedagogic Shortcuts” (MPS) during the symposium.

⁴ Discussions with a number of fixed active participants and an open chair where passive participants can join the discussion for a short while.

⁵ Audio- as well as partial videorecording, photographs/scans of board writings and other material.

Table 1: Overview of the Symposium

| Wednesday 3 rd | Thursday 4 th , morning | Thursday 4 th , afternoon | Friday 5 th |
|---|--|---|---|
| Introduction (Prof. Dr. Christopher Wallbaum, Hochschule für Musik und Theater Leipzig) | | | |
| Presentation 1 Catalonian Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the Sweden-Lesson (Lluïsa Pardàs, University of Otago / Mercè Rigau, secondary school in Catalonia) | Presentation 4 Swedish Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the Scotland-Lesson (Tommy Lindskog, Lund University Malmö Academy of Music / PhD Olle Zandén, University of Gothenburg) | Presentation 7 Scottish Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the California-Lesson (Maira Summers, University of Glasgow / Monica Marshall, secondary school in Scotland) | Supervisor Presentation 1 Hypotheses about Categories of Comparison (Prof. Dr. Christian Rolle, Hochschule für Musik Saar) |
| Presentation 2 Estonian Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the California-Lesson (Ene Kangron, Estonian Academy of Music and Theater) | Presentation 5 Chinese Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the Sweden-Lesson (Prof. PhD Zheng Li and Guo Hua, Music college of Capital Normal University Beijing) | Presentation 8 German Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the Scotland-Lesson (Prof. Dr. Andreas Lehmann-Wermser, Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover) | Supervisor Presentation 2 Beyond Comparison: Internationalization, strange experiences and the power of discourse (Prof. Dr. Alexandra Kertz-Welzel, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) |
| Presentation 3 Californian Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the Lower-Saxony-Lesson (Christiane Lenord, University of California / Brad van Patten, School district coordinator Irvine Unified School District) | Presentation 6 German Ideas of Music Education in relation to an ‘own’ and to the Beijing-Lesson (Prof. Dr. Christopher Wallbaum / Yoshihisa Kinoshita, Städtische Musikschule Wolfratshausen & Hochschule für Musik und Theater München) | Open Fishbowl C Search for possible categories of comparison (Summers/Marshall & Lehmann-Wermser, Chair: Sarah Hennessy) | Summary of the presentations Retrospective view (Daniel Prantl & Simon Stich, Hochschule für Musik und Theater Leipzig) |
| Open Fishbowl A Search for possible categories of comparison (Pardàs/Rigau, Kangron & Lenord/van Patten, Chair: Sarah Hennessy, University of Exeter) | Open Fishbowl B Search for possible categories of comparison (Lindskog/Zandén, Zheng Li & Wallbaum/ Kinoshita, Chair: Sarah Hennessy) | | Fixing results plenary Formulating categories of comparison (Prof. Dr. Christopher Wallbaum) |

Example of the procedure

In the **introduction**, Wallbaum explained the proceeding of the symposium and clarified some main points. Especially, he emphasized the focus not being on nations but on specific music lessons and the special nature of comparison in this symposium: “At the end we compare our ways of speaking about music lessons” or in other terms our “cultural contexts and meanings”. For reasons of space and clarity, we will not attempt on an overview of the whole symposium but will describe one presentation (no. 4) and the following fish bowl discussion B in detail in the following section.

In their **presentation**, Tommy Lindskog and Olle Zandén first refer to the music-educational background in Sweden in relation to the Sweden-Lesson. Afterwards, the analytical short film of the Sweden-Lesson⁶ is presented and explained. Among others, it highlights aspects such as the teachers relaxed posture, the control of the lesson through the use of worksheets, the focus on “handicraft, not earcraft” and the “faked freedom” for the pupils to “choose when, but not what”. In contrast, the short film of the Scotland-Lesson⁷ highlights the set-up of the room (big tables, many posters, etc.), the framing of the lesson with the statutory learning intentions (in a quite pointed way: “is the naming of the goal the actual goal?”), the reflection of the musical performance and the emphasis on the use of technical terms (not “in time” but “right tempo”). Besides, the speakers point out that in the Sweden-Lesson, which consists mainly of instrument playing, only 4 minutes of ensemble-playing happen at the end whereas in the Scotland-Lesson with its multiple goals, there is a segment of about 8 minutes of whole-class-performance.

These very different aspects, all showing a specific perspective upon music lessons, together with the aspects presented of the Beijing-/Sweden-Lessons and the Bavaria-/Beijing-Lessons, were then discussed in the following **‘fishbowl’-session B** with Hennessy, Kinoshita, Lindskog, Wallbaum, Zanden, ZhengLi and on the “open chair” Prantl, Rolle and Lehmann-Wermser. Sarah Hennessy as moderator channeled the main subjects of the discussion into possible categories of comparison for music lessons. We want to demonstrate this process for one specific category: Throughout the discussion, musical classroom-performances are addressed with different aims. For instance with regards to the training of skills (Wallbaum: “... Scottish and ... Swedish lesson are close to each other because they are more looking to the

⁶ To give a crude orientation, the Sweden-lesson can be described as being centered on the learning of band instruments in groups.

⁷ To give another brief glimpse, the Scotland-Lesson is centered upon the learning of theoretical facts about Scottish dances in plenum, group and individual work and upon a short whole-classroom-performance.

skills” [B:85⁸], or ZhengLi: “... But the final goal is to improve the student’s ability” [B:137]) or, with regards to the heritage of a specific culture (ZhengLi: “In our country we believe ... the goal is to ... teach the student to a good audience” [sic, B:141], or Hennessy: “with all these lessons – maybe apart from the Swedish one – there is, I think, a shared consensus that the music in school that we are aspiring to is classical art music” [B:15]) or in correspondence to the specific experience that music-making brings (Zanden: “...there's possibilities to... sing Mozart's requiem with hard rock fans and they perhaps will never listen to it, but they really had this strong musical experience when they did it.“ [B:19] or Lindskog: “To experience music, is that a personal meta-goal?” [B:57]). Thus three *aims of musical classroom performances* (‘training of skills’, ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘musical experience’) can be identified. The question of aims can be applied not just to musical classroom performances, but also to the possible category of comparison *goals of music lessons* as proposed by Rolle (B: 147).

Towards the end of the discussion and also later in the **final results plenum**, this is being summarized to the category *effects, aims and roles of performance in the classroom* (B:177 and writing on the blackboard). In a later grounded-theory-inspired analysis of the fish-bowl-discussions, this proposal can be validated and whole-classroom-performance is identified as a method that seems to be present in different practices of music lessons that can be differentiated by its effects⁹. Apart from this, categories like the establishment of control and the conceptualization of culture in the classroom were also addressed in this ‘fishbowl’-discussion.

It is important to point out here that the kind participation of all symposium speakers in the above process also served in addressing the language problem, especially in regard to the differing use of theoretical languages. The different vocabularies for the description of music lessons as well as the complexity of the whole setting made the discussions of the symposium a big challenge that was overcome by all participants.

In between the last fish-bowl discussion and the final discussions, the **supervisor presentations** were held by the participating observers Christian Rolle and Alexandra Kertz-Welzel, both of them presenting their own hypotheses about categories of comparison for music lessons. In their talks, both went quite different ways. While Christian Rolle tried to bring a first parentheses around the huge amount of material that resulted from the discussion of the prior days, Alexandra Kertz-Welzel thoroughly reflected on the method of the symposium. In this, she referred to the power of the discourse, by asking the question whether lessons themselves or the discourse about them were compared in the symposium.

⁸ The numbers refer to the paragraph in the corresponding Fish-Bowl. Transcriptions will be available in the proceedings.

⁹ The effects found here are: “Cultural Heritage”, “Development of Skills” and “Experiencing music”

Conclusion

The project was an exploration into unknown area of music educational science in different ways:

- The project had the goal to explore categories of comparison for music lessons on video. So, it made a contribution to the research field of comparative and international music education.
- The data, the music lessons on video and interviews with the participants, provides a rich material and opens up valuable insights into classroom practices around the globe and has potential for further use in research as well as in teacher training.
- The symposium claimed music lessons on video as the core of music educational reflections and represented a meeting in order to entail understandings of classroom practices for a global community of music educators.

The publication¹⁰ will include the papers and analytical short films of the speakers explaining the short films and reflections about them. Also, further contributions introduce into the field of comparative music education, present a grounded-theory-based analysis of discussions within the symposium and a further study based on the videos. The book concludes with final hypotheses about categories of comparison. Next to the papers, the book will be complemented by the Multi-Angle-DVDs including the complete material as well as the eight music lessons with the interviews. As a future vision, it might become a starting point for a more extensive collection of music lessons worldwide and their publication.

¹⁰ Wallbaum C. (In Press): *International Comparison of Music Lessons on Video*. Veröffentlichung in Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Olms, incl. DVDs.

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