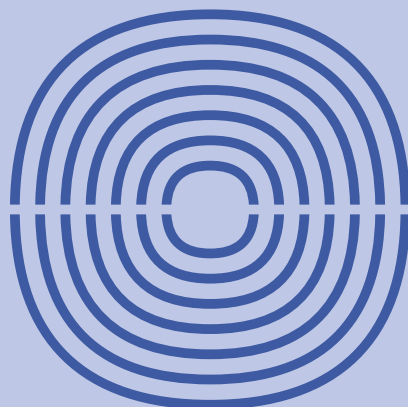


Ingrid Maria Hanken (Ed.)

Learning together



**Norges
musikkhøgskole**
Norwegian Academy
of Music



CEMPE
Centre of Excellence in
Music Performance Education

Learning together

Trialling group tuition as a supplement
to one-to-one principal instrument tuition

Ingrid Maria Hanken (Ed.)

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Preface

The six group tuition trials described in this report were conducted by the *Centre of Excellence in Music Performance Education (CEMPE)* at the Norwegian Academy of Music. One of CEMPE's key priorities is to investigate how principal instrument tuition in higher education can be further enhanced. The six development projects are part of this initiative.

Principal instrument tuition plays a fundamental part in music performance education. It is normally conducted on a one-to-one basis during weekly lessons and supplemented with occasional masterclasses where one student is coached in front of an audience of students or other interested observers. It is less common for students to be taught in groups on their principal instruments. It is true that some principal instruments teachers do teach their students in groups, but it appears that this normally involves the teacher teaching one student at a time while the others observe. There is no doubt that observing others while they are being coached by a gifted teacher is a good opportunity for learning, but it leaves less scope for drawing on the resources that the group of students represents. On the CEMPE project "Group tuition on principal instruments" we therefore want to explore the potential in having students learn *together* and from *each other*.

The CEMPE project builds on the experiences with group tuition of a number of teachers at the Norwegian Academy of Music in recent years, where the students have played a more active role in each other's learning. These experiences have been described in the publication *Instrumental group tuition at conservatoire level*¹. We are aware that some principal instrument teachers at other institutions also provide group tuition where student input is encouraged, but there is limited literature available describing and discussing their experiences. In other words, it is necessary to develop new knowledge about group tuition and then to disseminate this knowledge. CEMPE's mandate is to develop new knowledge about higher music education and to share this knowledge with others. This report, in which the teachers describe and discuss their experiences, is intended as a contribution to this process.

1 Bjøntegaard, B. J. (2014) *Instrumental group tuition at conservatoire level*. Norwegian Academy of Music, NMH Publications 2014:6

The group tuition project will run for three academic years starting in 2014–15 and with new participants every year. In this report we describe and discuss our experiences from the first year.

Oslo, December 2015

Ingrid Maria Hanken
Professor, Project Manager

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Learning in a team

Julius Pranevičius

Introduction

During the 2014–15 academic year my horn students and I participated in a CEMPE project looking at principal instrument tuition in groups as a supplement to one-to-one tuition. The aim of my project was to try out a format with small groups that Frøydis Ree Wekre has previously used in her teaching and which has been described in Bjørg Bjøntegaard's report¹. Although I have studied under Frøydis, I had no first-hand experience of her model for small groups.

Before the project began I had a few hypotheses about the benefits that small group lessons might bring to my teaching. I hoped that the introduction of small group tuition would:

- reinforce a good class environment and an inclusive culture
- ensure more effective instruction on topics that are usually raised individually
- give the students an arena in which they can get used to providing good and effective feedback in a safe environment
- create motivation in that the less experienced students will hopefully be inspired by those with more experience
- increase awareness of important issues through observation, reflection and discussion
- create an opportunity for learning things that are best learnt in groups, e.g. orchestral excerpts that can be performed by the group
- encourage reflection on how to learn by observing how fellow students learn and by being observed themselves
- provide additional opportunities for performing in front of others

With this project I was interested to find out how the following two aspects could help elucidate my hypotheses: Firstly, I had to address how to organise this type of tuition, i.e. group size and make-up, duration and time allocation during the lessons, content and forms of communication, the teacher's role etc. Secondly, I

1 Bjøntegaard, B. J. (2014) *Instrumental group tuition at conservatoire level*. Norwegian Academy of Music, NMH Publications 2014:6

wanted to look at how these group lessons could be integrated and consolidated with the rest of the timetable. Although the focus of this article is on small group lessons (3–4 people), I should also like to share some of my thoughts on how instrument classes had to be adjusted as a result of the small group lessons and on how it changed the one-to-one lessons in terms of roles and dynamics.

About horn tuition before the start of the project

My teaching schedule has normally comprised weekly one-to-one horn lessons and weekly horn classes allowing the students to perform for each other and get feedback from their peers. The classes were also intended to help create a safe and inclusive class environment. Initially all the horn students were obliged to participate. I took the view that many of the students benefited greatly from the classes, in terms of both performing in front of others and giving feedback to their fellow students. The atmosphere in these classes was good, even when there were students of different principal instrument teachers present.

Description of the project and outcomes

About the model

The small group lessons were intended to build a bridge between the one-to-one lessons and the horn classes. The horn students were divided into groups of three or four and would meet once a week. All horn students, both bachelor and master students, were involved in the project, which started at the beginning of the 2014–15 academic year. The groups were initially organised according to year of study, but this changed as we had to adjust to the students' timetables. Three groups met regularly every week, while the fourth group of two master students was to agree a time from week to week. The way of organising the master group did not work well and was quickly changed to allow the master students to join one of the other groups as and when their schedules permitted. As with Ree Wekre's model, the weekly 60-minute lesson was shortened to 45 minutes in order to allocate time to the group lessons. The surplus 15 minutes were pooled to create a longer group lesson.

During the autumn semester the students were asked to complete diaries with a few questions from me. The questions varied from lesson to lesson depending on last week's input. Project manager Ingrid Maria Hanken interviewed some of the students after the project had ended. I do not know, and should not know, which students were interviewed. I have only had access to anonymised transcripts of the interviews. This was to allow the students to express themselves freely about the tuition. In this article I will be citing comments from both diaries and interviews.

The first lessons

The aim of the first group lessons was to get to know each other better and to familiarise ourselves with the new tuition format. The students were told about the project and how to provide feedback. As with Ree Wekre's model, the students should start by giving positive feedback followed by constructive feedback. Each student was given 20 minutes that they could spend as they pleased. They would usually perform something first and then ask for comments. The students gave their comments first, and I offered my input at the end. Ideally, the comments would lead to a discussion. On a few occasions the students chose to spend all of their allotted time performing. Depending on the situation, I would sometimes ask the performing student to provide a self-evaluation and share their thoughts first. The idea was to give the performing student a chance to set the agenda for the subsequent discussion.

The teacher's role and learning objectives

At the start of the project I had given little thought to which role I should play during the group lessons. There was a vast range of options: everything from student-led groups where the teacher is primarily an observer to very teacher-dominated groups where what the teacher has to say is the most important. I originally planned to take part in the discussions at the same level as the students – as a member of the group. After a bit of experimentation I found that the most natural thing would be to assume the role of moderator, as I saw a need for moderating the lessons. I realised it was important to moderate the flow of the lesson, the comments, who speaks when, ensure that everyone gets to speak, ask questions in order to illuminate a topic or to elaborate on vague comments. One student says:

It's good to have someone moderate, someone who keeps track of the time and decides whose turn it is to speak.

Although I usually took on the role of moderator, I also needed to be flexible. Sometimes I felt the need to be the “master” and to instruct them, while at other times I felt confident enough to leave the work to the students and just be an observer. Some of the groups managed to moderate themselves for the most part.

In the interview one student suggested I could have spent some time teaching them how to give feedback:

Sometimes I think ‘why do we have a teacher sitting in the room giving the same kind of comments as the others?’ In a way it’s good, because it places the teacher on the same level as the students. On the other hand, the teacher could perhaps have spent that particular lesson giving feedback on how we should give feedback, for example.

This is interesting, because it articulates the students’ need for learning how to think and communicate effectively.

It was predominantly through my questions (sometimes leading questions) that I attempted to give my feedback. However, this is not always how the students perceived it. It is interesting to read the transcripts of the interviews and to learn how the students perceived my role in the group lessons. I think this highlights the need for even more proactive and deliberate moderation on my part.

Student: I normally think he takes a fairly passive role, not all that active.
Not: ‘What did you think about the intonation, what did you think about the sound?’

Ingrid: Do you feel he should have challenged you more?

Student: Yes, I think he could’ve done. For instance, some people are very good at hearing rhythms, while others are not. It seems that these group lessons are focused mostly on the people performing. I wonder whether we could shift focus towards those who are listening. I think that could be really interesting, because if you force someone who doesn’t have good intonation to listen out for just that, then it will improve that person’s ear. But if you always let people comment on what they want, then they tend to comment on what they’re good at and what they can hear.

This comment addresses several important aspects of the group lessons. You could ask what the learning objective of the group lessons should be. Where is the focus? On those performing or those commenting? Should you be learning to speak or to

play? Or maybe they are two sides of the same coin? One student says in the interview:

[Thinking about how to solve other people's problems] has helped me. If I can think about other people's problems, then that gives me a new perspective on my own problems. If I see my problems in others and how they solve them, that is a help to me.

Another student also notes how this turns you into your own teacher and describes the relationship with the one-to-one lessons and the group lessons:

It's good that we get both one-to-one and group lessons so that we can develop a critical ear, because we have to be able to teach ourselves. It's good to have to give feedback to others, because that's what we have to do to ourselves as well, in a way.

In my view, being able to articulate your thoughts and assume a teacher role are perhaps the most important learning objectives for the group lessons.

Another central learning objective for the group lessons is to learn to perform in front of others. As one of the students remarks:

The fact that there are others present makes the situation feel like a proper performance. It allows us to practise just that.

Another wonders why not more people actively take the opportunity to perform in front of others:

But I think that's strange. I wonder whether they have failed to understand how lucky they are to be given the chance to perform for people this often. The opportunity to play in front of others every week is so valuable that I think everyone should take it.

For my part, moderating the groups was a new and interesting challenge. I employed two key strategies: I would either choose a theme that all the students had mentioned in their comments and then try to investigate it further either by talking to them about it or by asking questions. Alternatively I would pick a topic that the students had different opinions on. This was rather fascinating, since it revealed the different backgrounds of the students. Sometimes it was a matter of taste, other times they were issues that the students had clearly misunderstood. I

do believe, however, that this resulted in greater respect for the views of others and, according to one student, it can also help develop your own voice as he puts it in his diary:

We need input from all sides in order to see what we like and to develop our own voice. This project makes that possible, I think.

Another student says in the interview: “Sometimes we agree, other times not, and it’s good to be able to put forward your argument sometimes.”

Giving feedback

In the first group lessons the students were instructed to begin their feedback by saying something positive about what they had just heard. Next they could say something constructive. Any guests attending the group lessons were given the same instructions. One student says that the atmosphere was one of goodwill:

We say something positive and something constructive, but it doesn’t feel like a competition – there’s always goodwill behind the feedback.

One early challenge was the quality of the comments. Sometimes they were too tentative and vague, especially those of the younger students. Some students had to be encouraged to speak up. One student reflected on this during the interview:

But when I receive comments from the others I sometimes feel that they don’t know what to say, or that they’re holding back on their criticism.

Conversely, some comments were too long and ambiguous. I occasionally had to ask the students to express themselves more concisely and explicitly. It was important to me that those performing must be clearly told what they can *do* to put the feedback to good use. When it was time to give constructive feedback, I would sometimes ask the question: “What can the performer *do* to improve [the aspects you picked up on]?” One student comments on the quality of their own feedback in their diary:

I personally think I made some good comments, but I have to work on being more articulate and helpful in my comments.

I do not see the quality of the comments as a problem but as an educational opportunity to ask questions and get thought processes going. It is often tempting to avoid situations with superficial comments and pauses that occur when the students are struggling to find something to say, not least because this can be seen as ineffective use of time. Both students and teacher have to go through a slightly uncomfortable and scary learning phase, but I feel that effectiveness increased and learning became deeper over time.

I found that the students eventually learnt to articulate what they heard and thought, and the feedback became more meaningful. They also increasingly began to use more of a shared vocabulary. I believe that is a good thing, because it shows that the students are developing certain frameworks and structures in their thoughts. They also get to experience several manifestations of the same phenomenon, something which strengthens and broadens their understanding. One student writes in their diary:

I can listen to people around me, and I have several tools to help me understand. For example, if I want to change someone's articulation, I can now better communicate how to go about it. Perhaps we've also become a bit more diplomatic.

One student puts the practising of constructive communication in a broader perspective in their diary:

We want to become performers, of course, but many of us will also be teaching music in the future, so it's interesting. It's important to know how to give feedback to each other so that the recipient receives the message.

On developing listening skills and critical thinking

The students develop their listening skills through observation and by articulating their thoughts. They become more conscious of what they are hearing. They are able to discuss things that were both good and less good and to justify their opinion. One student says in the interview:

You have to actively listen during the group lessons, because Julius will be asking for your opinion. You have to actively listen and think: 'If I were the teacher, what would I say?' As a result I'm now more critical in my listening, so I think my listening skills have improved. I'm much more in a

problem-solving mode now: 'What does this person need?' I'm being challenged to think about what is needed to help him or her improve their playing and really make progress.

Many students are positive about assuming the teacher role and putting themselves in that problem-solving mode. One example is this student, who said in the interview:

It's the first time I've had to think about how to solve other people's problems. I'm not studying pedagogy and I have no teaching experience, so this was the first time I've had to put myself in a teaching mode. It was great fun to see how my problem-solving can help others, too. It was a genuinely nice experience.

By being part of a group, the students get clearer feedback. One student says:

It's good that there are many people listening. If someone says there is a problem with your intonation, then you might just think to yourself that it's no big deal, but if seven people are saying the same thing...

It is also useful for the students to see the progression in each other's development, both for those performing and those listening. One student puts it like this: "It helps when people can compare my playing with last week's." I hope this gives the students an insight into how the learning process works; that it takes time, and that it is small improvements over time that make all the difference.

The fact that the students get to listen to their peers' experiences can also be beneficial. One student describes in her diary how she feels it is important for her to talk about and share her experiences.

You have a group of people with multiple experiences that can be shared. We can use the group lessons for more than just listening and commenting. It can be important to discuss things. I think we learn when we perform music, when we listen to music, and when we talk about music. I don't mean like chatting in the canteen, but a proper debate. I think that's important.

Class environment

I think we have succeeded in creating a good environment, something which is reflected in the students' feedback. Most of them write in their diaries that the atmosphere in the group lessons felt open and safe. In the interviews they also say

that the group lessons have resulted in more co-operation with each other outside the lessons:

We can knock on each other's door and say 'hi, have you got five minutes to listen to me?' So we're quite close to each other as a class. I think the group lessons have done much to encourage this, and that's something I've really appreciated.

Another student says:

It's been really useful to get an insight into what other students think about their playing and whether I can learn from that. I wouldn't have had that opportunity if I'd only had lessons with my teacher. I've had good one-to-one lessons with my fellow students, and we have warmed up together. That has been very, very valuable; like a lesson with a professional teacher.

The students have also been working in groups without the teacher present. One of the students said the following in their interview:

Student: We overran, and Julius had to leave. The rest of us stayed, and things became much more interactive. One girl picked up her horn, and we started playing together. I was working on my fortissimo, and we had a fortissimo competition. We didn't give each other feedback, but the students came up to me and showed me instead. It worked really well; it was really interactive. It wasn't just four people sitting in the sofa and one up front. The others also had their horns and showed me how they did it. It was a magical lesson.

Ingrid: Was it more like a workshop?

Student: Yes, we had a workshop together. It was the most interactive group lesson. It wasn't the usual feeling-sleepy-sitting-in-the-sofa-yawning and then saying something or other. The more interaction there is – like getting feedback and then performing again based on that feedback – the better. It was something that really made it work; more interaction.

This statement also offers some ideas about how the group lessons can be conducted, also when the teacher is present. Running a workshop can be very interesting, but at the same time it will require a certain framework in terms of organisation.

Relationship between one-to-one lessons, group lessons and horn classes

The introduction of the group lessons had an impact on the entire timetable. There are two things that I feel are worth mentioning: Firstly, the students were able to use the group lessons to work on the feedback they had received in their one-to-one lessons and to make improvements, and they were able to perform what they had been working on in front of an audience. Secondly, the students became better and more effective at giving feedback during horn classes, too.

In the interview one student talks about what it is like to be given homework for the group lessons:

I like it when Julius gives me homework, like “you’re going to play this in the next group lesson”, because it makes me take it more seriously. I’d prefer him to be even more particular about homework, because if I’ve been lazy and not warmed up before a group lesson, I will just play some scales and get less out of the lesson. So perhaps slightly clearer ambitions in terms of what the students should perform would be good.

I find it very useful to be able to say to a student that “you’ll be playing this piece again tomorrow in the group lesson or horn class”. Sometimes it is only a case of making small corrections, something that does not take a week to perfect. As a teacher you also quickly establish whether the students have understood what is being said in the one-to-one lessons.

With regard to the larger horn classes, you could ask whether it is appropriate to use the same activities (perform – give feedback) as in the group lessons. One student says in the interview:

We also have horn classes, and Julius uses the same system in these as in the group lessons. In reality that means you have twelve people in the audience who all have to say something positive and something constructive. It’s too big a group, because everyone just says ‘it sounds nice, I liked your sound’. It’s not always easy to find something substantial to say when you’re asked to say something positive, so it gets a bit boring after 10–11 people have said ‘sounds nice, sounds good’.

Identifying the most appropriate activities for use in the horn classes remains a challenge, since the previous purpose of these classes is now addressed in the group lessons.

Practical aspects

45 versus 60 minute one-to-one lessons (or “See the teacher often v. See the teacher for long”)

I believe in frequent meetings with my students. I feel that if you only meet the student once a week, it puts a great deal of pressure on those lessons, and you have to perform and be effective, both as a student and as a teacher. With up to three meetings a week it is much easier to monitor the students’ progress, answer questions etc. One student says in the interview:

In a good week I will see Julius three times, because we have the one-to-one lessons, the group lessons and the horn classes, and on all three occasions I can quickly ask for advice on whatever it may be. So being in contact with him several times a week is more valuable than having a slightly longer one-to-one lesson.

Group size

Each group was initially meant to have 3–4 members, but over the course of the project group sizes have varied between 2 and 6 students. There were several reasons for this: sometimes people were off sick, others would forget the lesson or oversleep, so that the group was not complete. Other times there were more people present because the master students without their own group joined in, or because we had outside guests.

The group dynamic has very much to do with the different personalities in the group, but regardless of personalities, it was clear that the groups with 3–4 students were the most productive. This number gives you enough individual views to spark a discussion, and there is less pressure on each participant than in a group of 2. The sessions with the smaller groups were often similar to the one-to-one lessons where I would instruct the student performing. There was not enough energy for a discussion. The lessons with 5–6 students always generated numerous interesting opinions and enough energy and content to hold a meaningful discussion, although moderating these groups was difficult. The students speaking the loudest also spoke the most. These lessons also resembled the horn classes since there was often not enough time to go into much detail.

Group composition and dynamics

The original idea behind the way the groups were put together was, in addition to year of study, to create a good mix of proactive students and students who may have a tendency to hide a little; those who always have something to say and those who are less outgoing. This was difficult to achieve in practice due to timetable clashes, and we eventually ended up with groups based on timetable availability. This turned out to be an adequate solution. It was more important that the groups were of the right size.

Although I had hoped that all the students would be part of a regular group, the result was both regular and more loosely composed groups. The dynamics in the groups differed greatly. The students in the regular groups got to know each other well, came to feel safe, found their roles in the group and communicated effectively (often without the need for moderation). The loosely composed groups were less effective because many of the “guests” had far less experience of this format and had to learn how the communication should be conducted. The atmosphere was possibly a bit more tense, but on the other hand we uncovered many new opinions and new ideas. The students in the permanent groups developed a shared understanding and repertoire and were able to go into more detail on topics that could be discussed several weeks in a row. It is difficult to say which of these formats worked better, but I believe that a mix of regular and loosely composed groups would make the most out of both set-ups.

Challenges when organising principal instrument tuition in groups

One of the biggest challenges when organising principal instrument tuition in both groups and classes is that it is difficult to find a time when all the students are able to attend. The classes are the more difficult of the two: you have to wait until the academic year starts (when all other subjects have been timetabled) before you can start planning principal instrument activities (finding times and rooms, arranging for accompanists to attend etc.). The same is true for the group lessons, but perhaps less so due to their size.

During the group lessons one of the biggest challenges for me personally is how to make best use of the time. There are significant variations in group sizes, and two

consecutive group lessons (one with 2 and one with 4 students) will have very different dynamics. I have learnt that I often have to be strict with timings even though it is tempting to get involved in some interesting discussions. Sometimes the students have complained in their diaries that the time was not evenly distributed (e.g. some got 30 minutes and others 15 minutes of performance time in the same lesson). The solution to this was that the students and I agreed that the duration of the group lessons would vary between 60 and 90 minutes depending on how many people were present.

It is not always easy to be clear about what is expected of the students in a group lesson or horn class. This was often left to the students themselves, but that is not always effective. One student admits in the interview:

I would've got more out of the group lessons if I'd prepared differently. I know that they're not one-to-one lessons, so I have a tendency to not put in as much work with the preparations, since it's not as serious and because I know that Julius won't say much in a group lesson because the time is usually spent listening to the students.

Many of the students mention how tasks and communication could have been handled better. Again, they often shift focus away from the performer to the listeners, saying:

It could perhaps have been interesting to know one week in advance what will be performed in the group lesson: 'OK, I've never heard that piece before; I should listen to it or look at the music so that I'm prepared.' We should prepare for the group lessons. After all, we prepare for the one-to-one lessons, and if we prepared better for the group lessons, we could've got much more out of them.

Another touches upon the same subject:

Student: We get so much better input when we play orchestral excerpts, because everyone knows them and practises them, but when it comes to solo pieces I feel that it's worthless in a way, and that's a shame.

Ingrid: So you think that the students prepare less for the group lessons?

Student: I don't think they prepare at all. It's the same with me; I just sit there and wait to see what happens.

Summary: How did it all work out?

I feel that the project has confirmed my hypotheses: the students were able to communicate freely and feel safe in the groups. Some important topics were raised during the group lessons, which meant they did not have to be addressed individually. The students were able to practise how to communicate constructively in a situation where I was always present and could guide them towards being more constructive in their feedback if necessary. The students learnt a great deal through observation and were able to identify bad habits in their own playing by observing the same problems in others. Although it was still important for the students to be able to perform frequently, many of them appreciated the feedback from their peers and declared a desire for more in-depth discussions.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the group lessons is that the students have become more confident in their own thinking, but also that they have gained the ability to articulate things and express themselves constructively. These are important skills when working with other musicians or future pupils, but also when you are working on yourself. It continues to surprise me how smart the students are when you give them the opportunity to speak their mind. The diversity of opinion during the group lessons has also helped make me more open to alternative views.

What I found with this project is that there is a great need amongst the students for something more than “just performing”. I take the view that there is a broad range of learning objectives that can be achieved with group lessons and a variety of activities that can be tried out. Identifying and further developing these is important.

Organising group lessons calls for some extra effort on the part of the teacher in terms of putting together the groups and finding time in the schedule, but it does not take much to make it work.

The group lessons should not be considered a substitute for one-to-one lessons, and one could ask whether they leave too little one-to-one time with each student, but in my opinion the allocation of resources was acceptable.

This model worked very well with my horn students, and I can only recommend that others try it. The consequence of the project is that group lessons are now a permanent fixture in the timetable.

Learning in a team

I think the students learnt a great deal during, and as a result of, the group lessons. It was not only the students who learnt from them, however; I got a huge amount out of both the lessons and my students. I worked with 3–4 groups, and it was varied, challenging, interesting and inspiring. Giving the students an opportunity to think out loud was educational for both them and me. I learnt about a great many new things: about how the students think, but also about things they may have misunderstood or need help with; something that is not always immediately obvious when you just listen to them play.

I also learnt from being part of the CEMPE group of teachers involved in various group tuition projects. Having an arena where we could discuss what we were doing on our respective projects meant that I learnt a great deal from, and together with, my colleagues.

Relevant reading:

- Bjøntegaard, B. J. (2014): *Instrumental group tuition at conservatoire level*. NMH Publications 2014:6, the chapter “Frøydis Ree Wekre’s horn tuition model”
- Luff, P. & Lebler, D. (2013). Striking a balance in brass pedagogy: Collaborative learning complementing one-to-one tuition in the conservatoire curriculum. In: Gaunt, H. & Westerlund, H. (Eds.) *Collaborative learning in higher music education*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Group tuition in improvisation for classical singers

Mona Julsrud

What was the project about?

The project involved teaching a group of classical voice students free vocal improvisation. The concept is based on a method developed by the Estonian singer and educator Anne-Liis Poll. She has designed a methodology aimed at classical voice students / singers where acoustics, classical singing techniques and the use of the voice are key. Using simple and comprehensible exercises, the participants build a repertoire of musical techniques to create a “toolbox”.

As well as improvisation being a genre in its own right, I also think that this method enriches the performer’s relationship with the repertoire. Classical musicians often have huge respect for what the notes on the page say and will ask themselves what the composer meant, how he/she wants it to sound etc. Improvisation can help make singers feel freer and more confident in their instrument and dare interpret the piece in a more original and personal way. They develop their spontaneity, musical intuition, communication and listening skills.

Who took part?

There were four students in the group: three performance bachelor students in Years 2 (A), 3 (B) and 4 (C) respectively, as well as an external singer who had just completed her bachelor exams in music education. One of the students had done a fair bit of improvisation already; the other three very little. They all knew each other from before. C and D were particularly good friends and shared a flat. I was curious as to whether D would feel like an outsider since she was no longer an integral member of the NMH community, but I needed not have worried. I knew all

of them fairly well. A, B and C had all been my voice students at some point. Sometimes we were joined by a composition student (E), who plays the piano and sings. He had done a great deal of improvisation already and became a highly valued addition to the group.

How?

We held five seminars during the year. I had envisaged more than that, but it proved difficult to find a time when everyone could attend. The sessions usually lasted 90 minutes. I spent some time during the first seminar going through some of the principles of this type of improvisation. It is closely linked to speech sounds, and we worked systematically on voiced and unvoiced consonants, then vowels, then syllables. We did this in each session as a warm-up. I always took part in this as a sort of leader/tutor. Whenever I introduced new improvisation elements I would participate, before gradually stepping back over the course of the lesson. I usually gave them some parameters such as duration, affect, dynamics etc. Other times I left it to them to decide. After each improvisation I would first let the students comment on what had taken place before saying anything myself.

As they began to master the basic skills and had gained a certain overview of their “toolboxes” (something which happened surprisingly quickly), I introduced them to five factors that are important to be aware of when improvising in a group:

- Imitation
- Variation
- Contrast
- Solo/lead
- Silence

By consciously using these parameters it becomes easier to give the movements form, and it results in more variation. I stressed that for novices the last point is perhaps the most difficult: just listening, gathering your thoughts and actually waiting until you have something to say.

It was interesting to observe how the group dynamic changed during the course of the seminars. Each and every one of them made their mark on the improvisations and found their natural place in the group. D could be very expressive and enthusiastic. I could often see on her face what she was thinking before she even made a

sound. C was proactive and never afraid to start an improvisation or introduce new elements. B was very open, attentive and reflective in respect of what took place in the lessons. She felt very comfortable improvising, especially when it drifted towards theatre/opera. A would frequently introduce new elements. He used his mother tongue (not Norwegian) when he improvised. He also liked to use melodies and lines to contrast with what was going on around him. E was very good at listening and being creative. He blended right in with the group and had a broad repertoire of improvisational elements. As a composer, he was of course familiar with structure and form. His improvisations reflected this. All in all, it was a group with good dynamics. It never became awkward or uncomfortable, and the communication was good.

What did I want to explore, and what did I achieve?

I wanted to investigate how this form of free improvisation would work for our classical voice students and whether group tuition is an appropriate model. This form of music-making places great demand on the participants' listening and communication skills, and I was curious about how it would work out when they did not have printed music to relate to.

Although A and B had done some improvisation previously, none of the four had worked on improvisation using this particular method before. Nor had they worked in a group of this size (4 students). Some had received obligatory instruction in improvisation at the start of their studies, but that was in a much bigger group coached by jazz teacher.

My initial idea was to have a few one-to-one lessons with them first to practise some of the basic principles. For various reasons that never happened, so we went straight for the group lessons. This turned out just fine, and doing all the exercises as a group proved to be unproblematic. The students were quicker to acquire the skills than I had expected. They were undaunted by the task and put their creativity to good use right from the start. Communication was good, they responded well to each other and were good at listening. The fact that they already knew each other was of course a big advantage.

What are the students saying?

Along the way the students said they found it liberating and constructive to be able to use their instrument for free improvisation. They saw it as a breathing space in a timetable full of repertoire and notes, and they found that their own creativity and intuition guided their learning. They also found the basic exercises with speech sounds, pitch, dynamics, articulation etc. to be useful, as they gave them a feeling of system and order in something that could easily descend into chaos.

Towards the end of the academic year project manager Ingrid Maria Hanken interviewed two of the students. For the students to be able to express themselves as honestly as possible, it was agreed that I was not to know who was being interviewed, and I have only had access to anonymised transcripts of the interviews.

Both students state that they found it useful and constructive that the improvisation lessons were given in a group. One of them highlights the fact that you can be more creative in a group:

I see it as the best way of working: working together so that you can draw on each other and on your creativity and do things that you wouldn't have thought of by yourself.

The second student notes that the group lessons also helped teach the students to co-operate:

I actually think it's a very nice addition to the one-to-one tuition, because you learn to co-operate in a completely different way, and you also have to focus on things other than the musical aspect. Of course you focus on your technique, too, but that's not the main thing. You make music together in a way that you don't normally do during one-to-one lessons and accompanied lessons. You learn to co-operate and communicate through music in a different way. Normally it's the "I" that is the centre of attention. That's not the case in the improvisation lessons, and I think that's a good thing.

They also say it is useful to hear how other people perceive what they do and that it gives them a sense of achievement to get responses to their ideas:

But it's brilliant to get that response if you have an idea and it's actually picked up on. That in itself gives you a sense of achievement. It's fun coming up with ideas that are picked up on, as is supporting the others.

When asked what is required for this form of tuition to work, they say that everyone must approach it with an open mind, "...that anything goes and will work out well – or that it's a bit daft, but will turn out just fine anyway". You have to trust each other, and "...the teacher [should] set an example to show that anything is possible rather than curb our creativity".

In the interviews the students were also asked about my role. They say they saw me as "...having a leading role, but not the role of teacher as such", as one of the students puts it. The other student is saying something similar: "She provides inspiration, and subsequently also more guidance." They appreciate my setting them tasks and a few frameworks within which to solve them. They say this kind of clarity is good, especially since I did not force any particular solution on them, instead "asking the right questions at the right time", as they see it. They appreciate the fact that I do not talk too much but mostly leave it up to them to reflect on what has taken place. One of them also notes that the teacher's role should change over time: "But as we become more and more confident, the teacher could begin to step back – or participate."

How can the model be continued and further developed?

This was my first time teaching improvisation and my first time teaching a group. I would have wanted more hours to be able to go into more detail and spend more time on the basic exercises. We moved swiftly because we did not have many seminars, and I wanted to cover as many aspects of the topic as possible. Of course, it would be good if the students practised improvisation by themselves, too, but I do not know whether they did so on this particular project.

I now run a non-compulsory group with 2–3 students, meeting every fortnight. It is working well. The regularity and consistency mean that there is steady progression. The students practise well on their own and are making tangible progress. I would be interested in working with a classical instrumental teacher and eventually form an ensemble with both singers and instrumentalists. I would like to teach the singers on their own for a few lessons (as a group), and for the instrumental

teacher to do the same with 3–4 instrumentalists. We would then come together for regular rehearsals where all the students improvise together. It would be so enriching for all parties. The improvisation would be even more varied and nuanced in a mixed ensemble.

I am also interested in working with the jazz department to see whether we can identify common areas of interest. I am convinced that we have a lot in common even though we come from different traditions. The classical approach to improvisation is still very important to me and always will be, because it is about our identity as singers and the fundamental relationship with our instrument. However, within the free improvisation genre I believe that we could experience some exciting meetings.

Playing each other better

Jens Harald Bratlie

Why group tuition?

Traditional tuition in music performance has always been a combination of individual guidance and instrument classes / masterclasses. For some reason, tuition in small groups has been less common. But for a performer it is of course patently necessary to perform chamber music – not just solo and orchestral – in order to become a complete musician and artist. The question is therefore whether group tuition should also form part of the students' training – a kind of academic equivalent to chamber music.

What can be achieved with this model? All tuition should aim to create dedicated and mindful musicians with a desire to convey their art; artists who understand and respect both their own style and distinctiveness and those of others. It is therefore important to give the students both room and encouragement to get to know and develop their own potential, while at the same time acknowledging and appreciating the potential of others. This will make them more aware of other perspectives and of the hugely diverse landscape they are part of in a different way than if they were left to their own devices. And this is where I think group tuition can be an important supplement to other forms of tuition.

About the project

On this project I began with the idea that the group had to be small – yet larger than two people. I wanted the group to be performer-led, whereby the students themselves took control and responsibility as much as possible. I hoped that throwing them in at the deep end would create a stimulus (as often happens in concerts). When there is no other way to go but forward, then your ideas, emotions

and capabilities get a kind of “boost”; thoughts and insights you perhaps did not know you had in you find their way to the surface.

So the setting became thus: I asked three students whether they wanted to meet once a week for a 60-minute session in my office. Each of them was to perform (repertoire of their choice) and be coached by the other two – 20 minutes each. As their teacher, I would on this occasion act as an observer and become as little involved as possible.

I felt three students was the optimal figure. Two would not be dynamic enough, while four could easily mean that some of them are overshadowed by the others.

How far each student had progressed in their studies was of lesser importance to me. The main thing was to bring together personalities that would complement each other.

I also made a point of being present in the room to give the lesson a sense of focus and “seriousness” – similar to a public performance situation. At the same time I made it clear that I felt they had what it took to make the lessons meaningful and inspiring and that I would give them free reign to express themselves. The way I saw it, it was essential to show them this level of trust right from the start – otherwise they may have become concerned about always saying the “right” thing rather than what they actually thought. *Equally important was the fact that I should never give the students the impression that I felt they were saying something wrong.* My only involvement was on the rare occasions when I asked them to elaborate on issues that they had raised, or when I provided supplementary information.

Both the students and I kept diaries throughout the year, and project manager Ingrid Maria Hanken observed some of the lessons and conducted interviews with both the students and me.

Outcomes

To what extent were the above-mentioned wishes and objectives met?

I was pleased to discover that the students seemed motivated to get stuck in and work on the music in great detail. The lessons never or rarely ground to a halt; the students were both keen and professional. Incidentally, I never felt the need to correct anything they did.

After a few lessons they realised that there was not enough time for everyone, so instead they had only two people perform each time. This allowed them to go into more depth, something they were clearly satisfied with.

Communication between the students was not optimal in the beginning, but it was with great satisfaction that I saw them slowly “getting it together”. Tacit corrections were made to approaches and ways of speaking/teaching. The atmosphere was nothing other than positive for the duration of the project.

During the year I encouraged each of them to take turns to run a whole lesson – to hold a masterclass for the other two. It was interesting to see how personality plays a part in how much they enjoyed being in that position. The differences were clear to see. But all of them felt at home in the everyday group dynamic.

At the evaluation meeting before Christmas the students expressed delight at being offered the opportunity to take part in the project. Phrases such as “development, confidence, communication, professional skills, realising one’s potential, having more to give” were used frequently during the meeting. I would say that this form of tuition is of great value – for several reasons:

- The students become more aware of their own playing and intentions.
- They gain an insight into the thoughts and perspectives of *others*.
- Such processes make the students more independent in terms of which artistic choices to make.
- Giving and receiving feedback becomes a natural part of the process – without any underlying uncertainty or fear – exactly because they learn to develop a fundamental respect for each other. Only then can they fully trust their own convictions.

The students’ conclusions after the project

What do the students themselves have to say about the project? Here are some of the final thoughts of the students at the end of the academic year as written in their diaries:

Student A:

Now that I’m going on a year’s leave, the group lessons are one of the things I’m going to miss. Performing and giving feedback during these lessons has been very motivational.

It's my impression that this is useful for a number of reasons. There are two aspects to giving feedback: One is to gain some teaching experience and experience of how to word the feedback to ensure that it's being understood. The second is to practise listening for your own benefit and to identify what is working well and less well and, in the case of the latter, establish what can be improved and then work out how. Working out *why* something is not completely perfect, i.e. identifying specific reasons why something might sound strange, is not always easy. The group lesson concept focuses on practising this. Such skills must be practised just like technical performance skills. I therefore feel that group lessons like this are a good form of tuition. It assumes that the group dynamic is good. I felt our group worked well together and that all the members complemented each other. Some are more talkative than others, but that's how it should be.

Personally, one of my recurring challenges has been to articulate the *wholeness* in the music. I don't find it difficult to point out specific things that could have been done differently, but to articulate holistic observations after somebody has performed is challenging.

Performing is of course useful and inspiring in itself, but I have increasingly come to appreciate the listening bit, too. Not just, as I mentioned, in order to get teaching experience, but also to learn to listen and to take that on board in my own playing. It has also been interesting to get input from the others when it was my turn to perform. This has given me perspectives on my own style of playing, and it makes you more conscious of what sort of pianist you are. It's been interesting to hear what the others are saying about my playing, especially since I was rarely given feedback before starting at the NMH. Before the auditions I practised for years without a piano teacher (although I also think this has allowed me to develop my own playing technique undisturbed – one that works for me and my fingers). It's been really interesting to leave behind my isolationist attitude from the past and allow people to give me feedback. This has helped forge my identity and played a part in my development as a performer. A good project.

Student B:

...[I] can without a doubt say that CEMPE has had a big impact on me and is a good reflection of my development as a musician. The younger you are, the more likely you are to feel that you're right and that you know everything. I've thought that, too. Everything was full of analysis, justifications, opinions. [...]

I struggled with communication in the beginning. They didn't know who I was, how I was. They were also different kinds of people to those I normally associate with. They seemed vulnerable, kind and... soft. I then realised that I had to adjust the way I expressed myself. I've been working on that up until now.

Another thing was that I had to work on being more specific. The more abstract my feedback, the clearer and more specific I had to be when describing what I wanted to hear. My understanding of good teaching changed over the course of the lessons, and that meant I had to change the way I *teach* as well.

I started thinking much more about the things [my fellow students] asked me to change or try. Although, it wasn't really a big problem. Most of their ideas I agreed with without having to think about them. But in any case, these lessons helped me understand how arbitrary our and everyone's ideas can be sometimes. Or, at least, how easy it is to rework thoughts and ideas. It inspired me to become more open to other people's ideas, and eventually to take a short break from studying classical music.

These lessons were some of the most challenging and inspiring events during my five years at the NMH. And at the same time, some of the most enjoyable and friendly. It probably is the perfect formula for a lesson!

Student C:

... I feel that we're getting increasingly used to the situation and often have things to say. The masterclasses were exciting, too, and if it were up to me, I would make every second lesson a masterclass. There is a greater burden of responsibility when there's only one of you, and that heightens your senses. The more such lessons we have, the more convinced I am that you don't have to be on the same level technically to make a contribution as a teacher. Musical understanding goes far beyond the individual instrument, and I notice that I get a bit sad/disappointed when other people say "well played, but I don't really have much to say as I don't play the piano". Music is music, and if you listen, you should be able to use your musical expertise to form an opinion on the choices the performer has made and which choices he or she perhaps should've made, alternatively things that he or she is not conscious of. The same principle applies to group tuition: even though I might not have heard or played a piece before the lesson, I can always listen and then evaluate the impression I'm left with. The first impression of a piece can be just as important as comments from those who've heard it several times before, since you then often listen out for different elements in the music being presented.

Another important thing I learnt was in the lesson when [name] performed the first movement of the Rachmaninov and [name] commented that the tune lacked a consistent/conscious line. Jens Harald stepped in, not because [name] and I had failed to identify a genuine area of improvement, but because we had struggled to explain to [name] what he should do to overcome the problem. Realising that something isn't quite as it should be is not the same as being able to articulate what the performer can do to achieve the result we as teachers know he is capable of. Teaching music is very much about being able to do both.

Teaching singing technique in groups

Svein Bjørkøy and Bjørg Julsrud Bjøntegaard¹

About the project

The transfer of knowledge between singing teacher and student has traditionally been an individual undertaking and very much involves passing on tacit knowledge. As an instrument, the voice encompasses the entire body, and singing technique is all about controlling posture, correct relaxation, breathing and support, range etc. Most of these skills can only be partially observed. They are hidden and therefore not easily accessible in the form of unambiguous, clear feedback.

Many singing teachers develop their own vocabulary and definitions. This “language” can work well between a given teacher and student but will often be less than adequate in professional discussions on a more overarching level. The “individualisation” of terms and definitions can restrict or even put a stop to discussion amongst both teachers and students. Good tuition and guidance therefore requires precise language and clear definitions.

On this project, which was conducted in the 2014–15 academic year, we wanted to establish whether it is possible to provide tuition specifically in vocal techniques – something which has primarily been given during one-to-one lessons in a dialogue between teacher and student – in a group setting. We wanted to investigate whether group tuition can help make the technical vocabulary used in the students’ feedback more precise, improve learning outcomes for the students, and also give us a better understanding of and insight into the complex instrument that is the human voice.

1 The project was conducted by Professor Svein Bjørkøy. Associate Professor Bjørg Julsrud Bjøntegaard observed the project and interviewed the students and Svein Bjørkøy.

Objectives

The project took as its starting point the statement: “To teach is to learn twice” (Joseph Joubert 1754–1824)².

One of the aims of the project was to give the voice students an opportunity to identify, discuss and verbalise technical challenges together with their peers.

We wanted to examine and test:

- models for improving one-to-one principal instrument voice tuition and help improve learning outcomes by supplementing the regular one-to-one lessons with a certain amount of group tuition
- how the students can get involved in the tuition by providing guidance to their peers in a systematic manner
- how to develop a constructive vocabulary when giving feedback to fellow students
- specialist singing terminology and definitions
- how guiding others has an impact on own reflection, practice and technical development

One might not have expected the challenges associated with the lack of a common vocabulary when giving precise feedback on singing techniques and artistic expression to be particularly pronounced on this project, since all the participating students had the same teacher. However, it emerged that the students expressed themselves very differently about specific technical challenges, which in turn helped spark interesting discussions during the group lessons.

Organisation

Nine of Svein Bjørkøy’s students on the music performance and music education programmes made up the project group:

- One master student
- Three fourth-year bachelor students
- Three third-year bachelor students
- One second-year bachelor student
- One first-year bachelor student

2 Joubert, Joseph (1896/2014) *Pensées of Joubert*. London: George Allen.

A total of 11 group lessons lasting 75 minutes each were held during the 2014–15 academic year, evenly spread across the year. These group lessons were an addition to the weekly one-to-one lessons.

The content of the lessons was agreed before each lesson, including who would present or introduce the specific, agreed topics. All the lessons primarily focused on singing technique. It could be issues such as breathing, sound, vowel equalisation, range etc. Two double lessons with an accompanist every semester were dedicated to interpretation. During these lessons the students looked at the relationship between specific musical challenges in a given repertoire and technical approaches to performing that repertoire. The students prepared concrete topics and were expected to use technical terminology when giving feedback to each other. A master student was given the main responsibility for organising each session and for ensuring that all the necessary information was published in a dedicated Facebook group. The students took collective responsibility for the lessons, i.e. they had collective responsibility for ensuring that each student performed their prepared repertoire and that the comments on each performance were constructive. The teacher was present during all group lessons but only offered comments when he or the students deemed it necessary. Attendance varied between four and six students in each lesson since group tuition was not part of the ordinary syllabus and the lessons had to be held in the afternoons.

The group lessons were conducted as follows: The students sat in a semi-circle. Each performing student had approximately 20 minutes at their disposal. The students would select their own repertoire based on an agreed technical topic and would often introduce the performance by saying something about the technical challenges they were experiencing, how far they had progressed with learning the piece, and which kind of feedback they were looking for on their performance.

The more experienced bachelor students and the master student in charge of organising each lesson were initially intended to mentor the less experienced students. This meant that they would have particular responsibility for giving constructive feedback to the less experienced students so that they felt looked after. However, the mentoring scheme was not systematically adopted since the students found it more appropriate to be equal “colleagues” during these lessons.

The students kept a diary of the lessons. Bjørkøy also kept a diary and frequently carried out brief evaluations of the project together with the students. He also held planning meetings with the master student in charge of organisation. The project

was monitored by Bjøntegaard, who observed the group lessons and interviewed Bjørkøy and five of the participating students.

The students' assessments

Learning outcomes

Group discussions during the project and individual interviews afterwards showed that the students were very satisfied with the content of the group lessons and with the execution of the project. They found that the issues being discussed in the topical lessons were clearly articulated and that the objective of each lesson was clear to everyone. The students concurred that it is important to be able to discuss singing technique and interpretative challenges with their peers in a regular forum.

In their feedback the students emphasised the benefits of seeing how their peers were working on the same challenges and that together they could work out how to solve these challenges in different ways. Many of them said that the inclusion of students of different ages and years of study enriched communication within the group. The newest students would often use metaphors in their feedback, while the more experienced students used specialist terminology in their descriptions and assessments. The experienced students found the feedback from the less experienced students exciting because they sometimes expressed themselves in unexpected ways.

The students were particularly pleased with the interpretation lessons with a pianist.

The importance of being able to articulate technical challenges was deemed to be significant in this context. The students reflected on their peers' performances and said these reflections made them more self-aware as singers. They say that putting into words things that are perceived as abstract and complex is challenging in itself, and they point out that there is a great deal of learning to be gained from being able to express themselves verbally about other people's performances as well as their own. In this context a common vocabulary means fewer misunderstandings.

The teacher role was new and unfamiliar, especially to the music performance students. Through discussions with their peers, the students' own challenges

became less “frightening”. The students got used to talking about technical challenges in their repertoire, and that openness became an integral element in their learning. The students also say that the camaraderie amongst the singers was strengthened during this period, that they got to know new people and have become more confident about their studies. The platform that they have managed to build during the group lessons has helped enable a form of communication between the students where constructive and productive feedback is a natural element. The students say that the opportunity to discuss technical challenges with their peers is something completely new to their course. The less experienced students in particular say that it is both motivational and dispiriting to see the older students struggle with the same challenges as themselves, even after several years of study. The students also say that this type of co-operation makes it easier to ask each other for advice in other settings.

Challenges

The situation was unfamiliar to most of the students. They were not used to receiving feedback from people other than their teachers, and they were not used to giving constructive feedback to their fellow students. Some stated that they felt insecure at the start of the project. We therefore introduced a routine whereby the performing students would state how far they had come with learning the piece. This information would define the level of detail in the feedback.

The students would have wished for more time for each performer during the group lessons, since there was little time to try out concrete suggestions from the others.

The students worked actively to find their place in the group. They made it clear that if a group is to work well, each participant must be willing to leave their comfort zone and present themselves without necessarily being in full control of the situation. Many of them enter the situation “as the person they are”, but they also have a responsibility for how they act vis-à-vis their fellow students. Everyone was expected to look after each other and create a good, safe climate, while also being able to provide constructive criticism.

The balance between teacher-led and student-led tuition

Bjørkøy was present during all the lessons but rarely got involved. The students ran most of the process themselves and were satisfied with the level of teacher involvement. Some stated that perhaps the teacher did not even have to be there every

time, while others felt secure in the knowledge that he would step in if individual comments veered off-course.

The teacher's assessment

Bjørkøy considers the project and its execution to have been successful in view of the intentions behind it. The project confirmed that a combination of one-to-one and group tuition – with a significant degree of student control and participation – has a positive effect on singing tuition. In particular, he found that the least experienced students benefited greatly from being teamed up with the more experienced. Bjørkøy considers much of the students' feedback during the one-to-one lessons to be of general interest to other voice students and could therefore just as well be addressed in a group setting. He believes it can be educational to hear how fellow students deal with challenges that are common to most of the students.

The project has also had a positive impact on the social climate amongst the students, and the threshold for discussing technical issues with other voice students has become lower. Bjørkøy also discovered how the students' ability to articulate themselves and to reflect on voice and singing technique improved during the course of the project. He can see great potential in this concept with regard to group make-up and topics.

At the same time, he also identifies challenges associated with articulating clear objectives for each lesson and dealing with issues regarding varying ability levels when students from different years of study are in the same group. The varying ability levels had a positive impact on this particular project, however, partly because the less experienced students eventually became fairly confident with the situation while the experienced students provided good and positive support.

Regular attendance was an issue, since the project was voluntary and took place in the afternoons. A future challenge would be to schedule the group lessons at a time that suits everyone – and to make the content so compelling that the students prioritise systematic and regular attendance.

Conclusion

The feedback from both students and teacher is positive and gives grounds for considering whether the concept should be more systematically incorporated into the study programme. Experiences from the project obtained through observations and interviews show that this type of project can encourage more openness surrounding technical challenges in a safe learning environment. The project complemented the one-to-one lessons well, and the students did very well coaching each other. The feedback gradually become more precise, and the students appeared more confident with giving and receiving feedback. The students themselves admitted how the group concept had had a positive impact on their own capacity for reflection.

The students all agree that a forum like this should be a permanent element in their studies, but as an add-on to the one-to-one singing lessons. The interviews with the students revealed that the group tuition has resulted in the students' finding competition between them to be less prevalent and "healthier". The forum they have created has laid the foundations for a good peer partnership that could serve as a useful preparation for the various types of co-operation awaiting them when they have completed their studies, either as performers or as teachers. This type of forum does not exist anywhere else in their study programme, and many of the advanced students say they would very much have liked a forum like this in the early stages of their studies, perhaps as a permanent part of the bachelor course for at least two years. Although there is great enthusiasm amongst both students and teacher, research shows that enthusiasm does not necessarily lead to action³. One-to-one tuition is so established in the students' and teachers' conscience that a concerted effort is needed for a project of this nature to be established on a more permanent basis. A discussion between both students and teachers will therefore take place to determine whether the implementation of a project in a more permanent form can justify a slight cut in resources for one-to-one tuition, if reassigning time from the one-to-one lessons becomes an issue. Several projects, including Seipp⁴, show that students who are taught in groups make quicker progress on their instruments than those who are taught individually. In his well planned project with piano students in groups of three and four, Daniel also found that the

3 Gaunt, H. (2008). One-to-one tuition in a conservatoire: the perceptions of instrumental and vocal teachers. *Psychology of Music*, 36, pp. 215–245.

4 Seipp, N. (1976). *A comparison of class and private music instruction*. PhD thesis. West Virginia University.

students became more and more independent of their teacher as exchanging experiences with their peers became a natural part of the learning process⁵.

In this context the teacher's role is to set the scene for a good atmosphere that inspires co-operation and learning in a safe climate.

There is reason to conclude that the project has generated outcomes that will inspire further investigation into developing an organisational structure whereby principal instrument tuition for singers can be provided as a combination of one-to-one tuition and group tuition with the students as active participants in the teaching process.

Relevant reading

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Jørgensen, H. (2000) Student learning in higher instrumental education: who is responsible? *British Journal of Music Education*, 17, pp. 67–77.

5 Daniel, R. (2004). Innovations in piano teaching: a small-group model for the tertiary level. *Music Education Re-search*, 6, pp. 23–43.

In the same boat

Morten Carlsen

Nine violin and viola students in Years 1 to 6 have gathered in Room 454 at the Norwegian Academy of Music. A couple of accompanists stop by – sometimes staying longer than they strictly have to. Occasionally I have to call for order so that we can concentrate on the task at hand; we only have 75 minutes at our disposal. Instruments are quickly removed from their cases, and the order of the day is improvised with special consideration given to the accompanists. The first student performs his piece – a movement from a sonata or concerto, or perhaps an étude. Then follow some comments before it is the next person's turn. Everyone is expected to give feedback, but I probably take charge of proceedings to an extent. A new first-year student does not necessarily *have to* comment on the performance of a master student performing a concert-ready piece. I try to stay in the background – this really should not be a masterclass! Still, the informal atmosphere is accepting of nerves and intensity, laughter and tears...

This is how a typical weekly string class works. I have organised such classes for several years; sometimes shorter classes twice a week on technique and repertoire respectively, but one of these classes can now cover a range of issues. If there are few of us, or the participants feel that they are badly prepared, then we do scales. Even scales are popular sometimes, strangely enough. All in all these classes have proved to be very popular, and in the written evaluation carried out in 2014 the enthusiasm was almost overwhelming – to my surprise. What could the reason be?

This is an apt question, because my past experiences have not been exclusively positive. As a younger teacher (with less authority?) I could sometimes find that a single student not following the rules of the game was enough to sabotage a lesson. It might be that she did not care about making the necessary preparations, or that her social antennae were simply not tuned in. Perhaps I was unclear about what I wanted to achieve, too. In any case, group dynamics do not create themselves. The string classes have probably changed a little, too. Along the way we have attempted to merge two classes with students of different teachers, but that was not exactly easy to organise. We now have occasional guests: other students, guest teachers, or even colleagues from other departments. One of them, the music educator Ingrid

Maria Hanken, was kind enough to alert me to the fact that these string classes had certain qualities, and that this could in fact be down to me. How so?

These are sensitive students enrolled on a demanding course: you have to be both talented and dedicated to win a place in one of our professional orchestras – something most of them dream of. Sometimes a student will declare that these classes are *the* worst arena to perform in. On one occasion a newly enrolled student literally became rigid with fear, and I carefully had to ease the viola out of her hands and guide her to a chair. Luckily it passed, and four years later she was in a job. She, too, came to appreciate the string classes.

It must have something to do with the framework, somehow. A form and tone have eventually developed which existing class members use to integrate new students. We do not have explicit rules on what we can say and do; I am very much a believer in spontaneity. This way the sessions vary in shape and form, although there are a few principles I insist on sticking to:

The classes are a partnership between the student(s) and me. In fact I think this applies to most forms of tuition: I have experienced how difficult it can be to give a lecture while some of the audience are asleep in the auditorium. An awake and motivated crowd does of course make me a better lecturer. Obviously, that particular form of tuition differs in that the listeners are usually passive recipients. With regard to one-to-one tuition, I always tell new students that *they* must actively take responsibility for the quality of the tuition. “You must teach me to teach you. Make demands and don’t make me have to repeat things. That’s how you make me a good teacher!” I used to find it challenging to have to make tough demands within the safe framework that I want to give to both one-to-one lessons and string classes. I was such a nice guy, they would say. Luckily I haven’t heard *that* for a while.

We learn better together than alone; rather with each other than against each other. Classical musicians spend a great deal of time alone in any case – or at least they should. The class fellowship is based on the understanding that everyone has challenges to deal with and something to learn from the others. You can support and challenge each other at the same time. In other words, we are *in the same boat*. During my own student years in Vienna there was a pronounced hierarchy amongst the students, and I am still hearing about such structures at conservatoires on the continent. In many cases these students barely know each other, but yet they quickly work out who has special status.

Musical practice should be exploratory. It is about exploring the music, the instrument and yourself. Instrument classes and other lessons can be seen as elements in the practice process. Eureka moments and questions and situations that result in a new sense of understanding are central elements. The exploratory aspect probably becomes increasingly important as our performance skills improve, and for NMH students it should be of the utmost importance. The acquisition of basic skills – what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls drill (or even obedience training, *Abrichtung*) – is probably of a slightly different nature. But sadly the drill aspect often haunts us classical musicians for far too long. I aim to make the string classes into such an arena for joint exploration – this allows *me* to learn something, too. The students are able to spot things that I cannot. That would not happen if I were too authoritarian and domineering. Bluntly put, I think overly domineering teachers result in a dumbing-down!

I must assume that these fundamental principles help create a framework of unwritten rules for my instrument classes. The students observe the framework and the rules, they are proactive, always say something positive first – sometimes a little too formulaic, perhaps – and rarely overstep those invisible lines. Although it can happen: A non-Scandinavian student was at first perplexed when asked to comment on one of her fellow students' performance. She then threw herself at it in the most merciless manner. Refreshing, indeed, but we had to have a little chat afterwards. As much as I would love to just be Morten, there are certain aspects and modes of expression that should be left to me; that is what I get paid for!

The camaraderie within the class must be balanced. I am fond of my students and try to see them as individuals, but sometimes people will voice their discontent. Let us say one student is making sensational progress in a short space of time, while her fellow students feel musically and technically left behind. This can generate a feeling of guilt both in the person succeeding and in the others, and I have to help them process those feelings. It can take them some time to understand this, but there is competition in this profession, and it must be okay to be good! Ambiguous comments are a different thing and can at worst lead to awkward misunderstandings. Not only do the students have to show respect for each other (and me) by performing close to their very best; they also have to give feedback in a way that is courteous and generally comprehensible. Is it not the case that in order to *speak* clearly, you first have to *think* clearly? I want to help my student with this. I frequently ask students to elaborate on a comment or rephrase it so that even *I* can understand it. And if there are non-Scandinavians present, the students are more

than happy to express themselves in English. I will sometimes set them specific tasks and let different students look at different issues such as intonation, rhythm, sound and phrasing, for example. If the playing or comments are not good enough, I may have to rely on the measure of last resort: humour. In any case I hope that attitudes are being shaped by the string classes and by the way in which we give each other feedback. For example, suggesting changes is much preferable to pointing out errors! Is this perhaps also a good way of giving ourselves feedback? Similarly, when someone performs well, the other students just have to deal with that and tap into it as they work on themselves: if others are setting a good example for you, then you are expected to set a good example back. This has worked reasonably well for a number of years without having to be explained.

But then there are also situations in which I take over, of course. Just before auditions, exams and solo concerts there may be comments that I do not want to leave up to others. Other times it may be necessary to speak words of truth while there are others present – there are superbly talented students who are also utterly lazy. The last resort is to ask them to leave at the start of the lesson or call them to account in front of the class. On these occasions the silence is often palpable. I have come to understand and eventually also appreciate this! But, as I said, it does not happen often.

Some important aspects of the classes are so obvious that I will just mention them briefly. They help the students get used to performing regularly in front of an audience. It makes auditions much easier, for example. They also give me an opportunity to address technical or musical issues collectively, thereby mitigating that parrot feeling I get when I say the same thing a bit too often. And, of course, the students are at least superficially introduced to repertoire that they are not familiar with. If they have been working on the same piece themselves, they may be able to view it in a new light. I hope that the relationships between the students become so trusting that they will perform in front of each other outside the classes, too. I know that it is happening.

It might seem that all is fine and everyone is happy. If so, it could easily become a pretext for inaction. Because it is clear that the concept can be further developed and systematised. Why not let a wind or piano colleague take over one time? Do I really need to be there every time? Perhaps the students would feel freer without me? There have been occasions when I have been unable to attend, and the students have run the class by themselves. They were very satisfied afterwards; something I admit I am proud of. The classes could be expanded, new students

recruited and places given to those who want them, for example. However, the string classes could also have been something that everyone looked forward to with dread! Of course you can enjoy and appreciate a given form of tuition without achieving any significant learning outcomes, but I choose to ignore that possibility. Come and see for yourself!

Observations from the sideline¹

In the above Morten Carlsen has shared his thoughts on his string classes. As the project manager, I should now like to elaborate and comment on some of what Morten says based on the interviews I conducted with him and two of his students as well as my observations of three of the classes.

Morten uses the metaphor “in the same boat” as the title of his article. In many ways this illustrates the very core of his idea behind the classes: that teaching and learning is a communal project where everyone is expected to contribute and support each other. In the interview he expands on what he calls his ideal: “...it can be summed up in sentences such as ‘We learn better together than alone; rather with each other than against each other.’” The students I interviewed say that they feel Morten has a clear vision of the sort of arena the string classes should be. They see it as crucial that the teacher has a vision and that he communicates this vision in order for everyone to pull in the same direction. The classes are given a clear framework and a shared purpose. The success of Morten’s ambition that the students should feel they are learning together is clear from the interviews with the students. One of them says:

I think everyone in our group has great respect for each other, that we are part of a process and want to help each other. At least I feel that there is great camaraderie. Nobody sits there and wants the others to do badly, that’s not how it is. We all know what it’s like to stand there: sometimes you’ve prepared and things might go great, but you’re there for each other in good times and in bad.

The students point out how important it is to create a supportive atmosphere: “you lower your shoulders a little”, and it’s acceptable to play things that you haven’t perfected yet: “It’s OK to fail and try again”. This view is supported by Bandura’s

¹ Written by project manager Ingrid Maria Hanken.

research² into how to experience mastery: by observing others work through their challenges and gradually improve their achievements through sustained effort, the observer begins to understand that learning is a gradual process and that the key to success is hard work. Realising that an unsatisfactory performance is caused by limited experience or inadequate effort rather than lack of “talent” can prevent despondency and encourage hard work. One of the students puts it like this: “Of course, it inspires me: ‘I can do that’, or ‘I want to learn that, too’”

A supportive atmosphere and “lowered shoulders” do not mean that demands are not placed on the students. In his interview Morten says that

I’m looking for the sort of temperature where one is challenged by another, while at the same time ensuring that things are not too rigid and stilted, obviously. It’s OK to fail – but not *too* often.

He is clear that he wants his students to make an effort, both in terms of their playing but also with providing clear and constructive feedback to the person performing:

It’s about trying to create an atmosphere, I think, that is open but also reflective; you shouldn’t just be able to say whatever.

He expands on this later in the interview:

It’s important that they learn to articulate themselves, but not necessarily in the first year. However, they need to learn to think clearly for the sake of their own practising.

Much of the time in the lessons I observed was taken up by the students giving feedback on each other’s performances and by discussions ensuing from that feedback. This is in line with Morten’s intention of involving the students and giving them responsibility for the content of the lessons. The students I interviewed greatly appreciated this. Both had experience of string classes where only the teacher provides feedback, and they welcomed the fact that in Morten’s classes it is “more important what the students actually have to say, that we are taken seriously”. During my observations I also noted that Morten was never the first to comment on a performance; he always let the students take the floor first, and he would often limit his comments to emphasising and summing up what the students

2 Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-efficacy. The exercise of control*. New York: WH Freeman and Company.

had already said. This could be one of the reasons why the students feel they are taken seriously.

In the interview the students said that they always have to be prepared to give feedback, and that this teaches them to listen proactively and critically. "Somehow you have to sit there and practise being a teacher." The students also stress that they are mindful of Morten's demand that they must be able to express themselves verbally. "Everything has to be crystal clear", as one of them puts it. Otherwise they will be asked to explain what they mean, and they have to be prepared to justify their comments. If we define practice as a teaching activity in which you are your own teacher – as Jørgensen³ does – then these demands placed on the students whereby they have to be able to listen proactively and give clear and constructive feedback will also help turn them into good teachers of themselves in the practice room.

The fact that the students see the benefits of the classes both to themselves and to others is clear from the attendance figures: practically everyone turns up every week regardless of whether or not they are performing. One student made the following observation about why she attends the string classes:

I see it as my second weekly lesson. I give it almost as much priority. It's part of the tuition I receive, so I attend.

This shows that the classes can be a very important arena for the students' learning, but they require a clear vision and a conscious strategy on the part of the teacher in order to succeed.

3 Jørgensen, H. (2011) *Undervisning i øving. En innføring for sang- og instrumentallærere*. Oslo: Norsk Musikforlag

Peer learning in a group of voice students

Kristin Kjølberg

The love of the art is so great that we can put up with any kind of critique, right or wrong, in order to develop as artists.¹

Introduction

The music education bachelor programme is a four-year performance course with an integrated teacher training module. The students study performance subjects such as principal instrument, piano, singing and band instruments along with pedagogical and theoretical subjects. Because of the broad curriculum, the students can occasionally find themselves with less time and focus on their principal instruments. With this CEMPE project I wanted to gather the classical voice students on the music education course in one group. The group was to be an arena where they could work together on performance development. I wanted each student to explore various performance opportunities through peer learning based on Liz Lerman's method Critical Response Process (hereafter referred to as CRP). The method involves giving feedback on artistic performances through a structured and dialogic four-step process. I will provide further details of CRP later in this chapter.

The aim of the project was to explore ways in which peer learning in general and CRP in particular can help the students become more conscious of their own artistic identity and artistic ownership. During the project the students were to practise and learn CRP, and explore how this method can be used as a tool in their artistic development. For my part, I wanted to assume the role of CRP facilitator in order to gain more experience of providing inquisitive rather than instructive tuition.

1 Quote from Liz Lerman – noted down during a course with Lerman at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, 1 September 2014

Ten voice students – three male and seven female from all four years of the bachelor course – participated in the group project. The project ran for the duration of the 2014–15 academic year, and we held nine sessions each lasting two hours. All the students participated both as performers and as collaborating and equal participants in the group. The voice students were accompanied by outside co-performers at several of the sessions. The guests would participate only at the one session but were then assimilated into the group just like the students attending the entire project.

Many of the music education students have broad repertoires in terms of genres. This was reflected in the choice of repertoire during the seminars. There was classical music such as romances, church music and arias as well as self-penned songs, pop, ballads and folk music. Some performed their songs with an accompanist or accompanied themselves on the piano, while others performed with other musicians on guitar, accordion or trumpet. We practised CRP as described in Liz Lerman and John Borstel's book *Critical Response Process. A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert* from 2003. One process would take 40–45 minutes, and there were two processes (with two singers performing) at each session.

The project was documented in a variety of ways such as diaries written by the students after they had performed as well as video and audio recordings. Halfway through the project I conducted group interviews. I interviewed them in three groups: Year 1 (three students), Year 2 (three students) and Years 3 and 4 (four students). During the interviews the students were asked about how they found the CRP concept and how the project was having an effect on their artistic identity and ownership.

Collaborative learning is not a new approach amongst music students and performers. Musicians develop musical material through ensemble and chamber processes. Students work in informal arenas as peers, practising and making music together. They discuss problems, perform for each other and give each other feedback. Peer learning also takes place in organised fora such as instrument classes and masterclasses. Teachers maintain varying degrees of control during such lessons, ranging from strictly teacher-led tuition at one end of the scale to learning activities where all the participants – both students and teacher – are equals and have the same opportunity to set the agenda and provide input and feedback. In situations where all the participants are equal, a learning community develops based on the principle that learning takes place through sharing and democracy. This community

encourages involvement and motivation, which can lead to a higher degree of ownership of own artistic processes.

The Critical Response Process

Even in the early stages of her career, the American ballet dancer and choreographer Liz Lerman was reflecting on how different types of feedback had different effects on her. Some feedback would be inspiring and make her want to get back in the practise room to try things out, while other types of feedback had the opposite effect. The tough critique culture that she claims is prevalent in artistic communities eventually became a problem for her – both as a recipient and as a conveyor of criticism. As a recipient she often found feedback to be insufficiently specific or meaningful, or it felt brutal. As a teacher, or a participant on judging committees and panels, she felt uncomfortable giving feedback without first gaining a better insight into the performing artists' own processes and ideas:

I even began to question the basic premises underlying my teaching of dance composition because I was troubled about the nature of my response to the work being created by my students. I had plenty to say. That wasn't the problem. But I kept wondering why I was saying it: Was I truly helping my students find their individual voices or was I just trying to create clones of me?²

Lerman therefore developed a method for giving and receiving feedback based on the idea that everyone acts as peers, as equals in the process. Together with her colleague John Borstel she wrote a book describing CRP, and she has since both used the method herself and taught it to others. I was introduced to the method at an ICON seminar³ in the spring of 2014 and then participated in a week-long course with Liz Lerman at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in autumn 2014. I have since met and kept in contact with her about my process to become a competent practitioner of CRP.

CRP is a method whereby a group of people work together to focus on an artistic performance or other form of presentation with a view to giving the person(s)

² Lerman and Borstel (2003), p. 6

³ ICON (Innovative Conservatoire) is an international collaborative forum for teachers working in music education institutions aiming to explore different practices through sharing, reflection, research and innovation. <http://www.innovativeconservatoire.com>

performing new ideas, making them see new opportunities, further developing their material, enriching their creativity or acquiring new skills. The process involves four steps, and the participants assume one of three different roles: artist, responder or facilitator. The artist is the person or persons performing the artistic material that is the subject of the process⁴. The responders can be friends, colleagues, fellow students or an audience, and they may be experts or beginners. Which kind of responders to choose for a CRP seminar depends on what you want to get out of the process. For the process to work as intended, a facilitator is required to manage the feedback, comments and questions. The facilitator ensures that the dialogue is within the parameters of each step. The facilitator ensures that the participants stick to the topic at hand and steers the process towards the next step. The facilitator, who has been trained in CRP, can also guide the artist or the responders, help clarify ambiguities or gently put a stop to any feedback that does not benefit the process.

CRP is based on the learning principle that you learn better and become more motivated by discovering for yourself than by being told what to do. Dialogue will uncover opportunities, and when you ask for advice you are more receptive to learning than when you simply receive instructions. Through peer learning the artist should learn to discover and reflect and become motivated to work deeper and broader on his or her artistic expression.

Peer learning using the Critical Response Process

The group met every three weeks for a two-hour seminar. Not all the students knew each other at the start of the project. The three first-year students, who do not have mandatory master classes during their first year of study, met many of their fellow students for the first time.

These sessions were not singing classes since the students have different vocal teachers, and only one of the students in the group had me as their principal instrument teacher. However, all the students were or would soon be in my *vocal pedagogy* class – a key topic when training to become a vocal teacher – and I therefore knew all of them. I was conscious that I was not to assume the role of vocal teacher in this group but that of a CRP facilitator. At the first seminar we

4 In this text I have opted to refer to the artist in the singular, even though the project frequently involved several performers.

spent some time learning the basic principles of CRP by introducing each of the four steps.

The process began with one artist performing a song. Next, the artist would sit down next to me (the facilitator) while the responders sat in a circle around us. One of the responders acted as secretary and wrote down everything that happened during the process. We then went through each of the four steps – sometimes linearly, although we often also slid dynamically back and forth between the different steps. We would sometimes spend most of the time on a single step, which meant that we had less time to spend on the other steps.

Step 1

Thus, step 1 of the process begins with the artist performing his or her artistic material. During the performance the responders listen and try to engage in a dialogue with the artistic material so that they can give feedback with depth and sincerity afterwards. Their task is to give the artist feedback on what was *meaningful* to them. The aim is to go beyond vague descriptions such as *good, beautiful, nice, well played* etc. Meaningful means being able to describe rather than simply judge something as being good or bad. One can describe the meaningfulness of a performance in a variety of ways, such as inspiring, engaging, surprising, interesting, different, thought-provoking or provocative, and the audience are asked to justify their responses. The value of such feedback lies in the fact that the artist gains new perspectives and a deeper understanding of the effect the performance had on the responders. This step creates a platform of confidence and trust. The responders must ensure that they do not make the type of statements that are all too common when making assessments: “It’s nice, but...” By avoiding the *but* word – which implies direct or indirect criticism – the artist is in a better place to take on board, trust and remember the descriptions of meaningfulness. Potential alterations should only be suggested later in the process.

At step 1 the students found themselves having to dig deep in their own experiences to describe things that gave meaning to themselves. In the beginning we would hear phrases such as: “Your sound is really nice”, “I love the brightness in your voice”, or “I thought it was a really musical performance”. Eventually the students were able to give feedback that described how the artist touched them, created or expressed something, or managed to convey a mood. At one of the sessions a student performed a folk tune a cappella, and the responders gave feedback addressing the artist’s presence during the performance:

Responder 1: It was as if you were absorbed by the mood. And then you looked up, took a breath, and started singing. And that was just perfect. The length of time between *that* [the responder mimics the in-breath] and when you started singing. And it meant that when you started you had really ... [long pause] uhhh... I was really moved by that. When I start talking about it... well, it was so incredibly touching. I don't quite know what it is, I can't put my finger on it, it was just so... so genuine in a way. And natural – both in terms of the characters and the use of the voice.

Responder 2: I want to pick up on it being so natural. I felt as if I were in a church; that I could hear the church acoustics when you sang.

Responder 3: You looked down at one point. Looking down can often seem a bit negative, but in this case it felt as if you just withdrew thoughtfully, and it worked really well.

Responder 4: A voice issue I was thinking about before I got lost in my own emotions... I noticed there were some phrases starting with “awww”. It was so sorrowful. Your attack had a sort of creakiness about it, and that really gave it a lot of meaning.⁵

As the quotes above illustrate, when talking the responders would take long pauses in order to try to be precise in their feedback. They looked for the phrases that best described the feeling or thoughts they had during the performance. With practise it became easier to describe meaningful elements of a performance. According to the students, this was because they started feeling confident that they had something to contribute. Many of them said that they had often been wary of saying what they thought about a performance because they were uncertain whether their opinions were right. As we began to move away from the right/wrong way of thinking towards a line of thought that allows for different possibilities, they began trusting their own experiences. When in the role of the artist the students said that this step was greatly beneficial. Although the feedback at this stage was about being positive, it was perceived as being heartfelt. The fact that the responders made great efforts to articulate themselves and justify what they found meaningful meant that the artist began to believe that the feedback was more than just dutiful praise.

Step 2

At step 2 it is the *artist's* turn to ask artistic questions. These can be questions or issues that have arisen during practise, during the performance, or as a result of the feedback during step 1. The responders must give honest answers to the

⁵ From CRP group seminar 26 January 2015

questions, but they must also stay on topic and not give feedback on anything other than what the artist is asking about. It is important that the artist practises how to ask specific questions and that he or she prepares questions with a clear focus. This will give them constructive feedback that can help them make progress. The facilitator can help rephrase unclear questions, make the artist be more straightforward about the questions he or she wants answered, and help “translate” between artist and responders. At this step there is room for follow-up questions from the artist in order to drill down even deeper into an issue. The responders become the artist’s tool for broadening his or her understanding and insight.

The artists had few artistic questions during the first sessions. It seemed that they did not trust their own ideas. This was confirmed during the group interviews:

I feel uncomfortable when I have to make decisions. I’m so used to being told what to do that when somebody asks me what I want, I become uncertain. I don’t know what to say.⁶

This eventually began to change, and when in the artist role the students became more conscious of their choice of repertoire for the seminars and of what they wanted to get out of the process. They said they appreciated having a forum that allowed them to put forward their own ideas, as illustrated by one of the students:

As a student I don’t think I’ve ever been in a situation where I’ve had such an opportunity to discover my own tacit musical knowledge. Here I’ve been able to show how capable I actually am.⁷

The artists asked questions about ensemble play and interpretation. Many of them performed music they had arranged or developed into personal versions. This led to discussions about issues concerning musical arrangements, finding your own personal version of a song, and liberating yourself from other people’s versions. Since the students were accompanied by their peers rather than their regular teacher accompanists, issues surrounding ensemble play also became a topic for the participants in the process. As a response to the artist’s questions about ensemble play and chamber music, they were encouraged to take on a bigger role in the soundscape. They got feedback on how to listen to each other and how to give and take during a performance. Other issues brought up by the artist – and

6 From a group interview with the project participants 26 January 2015

7 From a group interview with the project participants 28 January 2015

which were also topics addressed at step 3 – related to communication, e.g. presence, style of presentation, body language and use of the eyes.

Step 3

Step 3 also involves questions, but it is now the responders' turn to ask them. The questions must be open and/or neutral. Open and neutral questions are questions that cannot be answered by yes or no, instead opening up for different answers and solutions. Good interrogatives and formulations include *what, how, in what way, what is the connection between* and *which*, while questions starting with *why* or *have you thought about* may make the artist feel insecure or embarrassed, or it may cause them to feel a need to defend themselves, as pointed out by Lerman and Borstel in their book: "When defensiveness starts, learning stops."⁸

The responders often had ideas for improvements that they wanted to offer the artist. The questions at step 3 will often be based on the responders' having a particular opinion on the performance, but they must take care not to dress up their questions as suggested changes. Initially the students found asking open and neutral questions somewhat laborious and difficult, while the closed questions asked at the beginning of the process were considered to be more straightforward in terms of meaningful content. The closed questions were specific and to the point, but eventually the students came to realise that these types of questions could be seen to exert influence on the artist. They found that questions such as "Have you understood the German lyrics of this song?", "Why did you choose to sing pianissimo in that section?", or "Could you sing with a more open sound?" gave the artist the feeling that there was something he or she had failed to understand or master. Thoughts such as "I should've thought about that myself" or "it's so embarrassing not to be able to do this" created an imbalance in the relationship and dialogue. The responders could come across as knowing better than the artist. According to the students, the reactions to the closed questions could sometimes compel the artist to try to solve the problems implied in the questions, since music students are so used to have to deal with closed questioning in their training. As the issues were discussed in more detail, and the students became clearer about what artistic identity can involve, many of them adopted Liz Lerman's view that closed questions can cause embarrassment or shame to get in the way of motivation and learning.

8 From a group interview with the project participants 28 January 2015

If the questions were to encourage reflection and help the artist develop the performance further, we found that it was often not enough to ask wondering and neutral questions such as “What is the song about?” or “How did you work on the phrasing?”. This line of questioning usually just made the artist account for their choices, and the answers became more narrative than wondering. We therefore set out to find ways of phrasing open questions that went into more depth. Examples of such questions were: “Which different interpretations could be applied to these lyrics?”, “What is behind your choice of dynamics in this song?”, “Which choices did you make in terms of sound?”, or “How can you work to fulfil your intentions with this song?” These questions posed opportunities and allowed the artist to explore his or her tacit knowledge.

During the first session we also worked on asking open questions containing opportunities and challenges. The responders would often ask for a time-out from the process in order to discuss the essence of their questions before rephrasing them. They sought to ask questions that challenged the artist to find trigger points. We noted that the best questions meant the artist was unable to find answers there and then, instead saying that this was something they wanted to take on board as they continued to practise.

Topics such as ensemble play, interpretation and communication were also subject to questioning at step 3. The students asked questions about the positioning in the room, body language and eyes, and they addressed issues such as creating something in the moment, finding one’s presence and touching the responders. The artist received direct feedback when they managed to create something particularly interesting – something that is difficult to both achieve and to notice yourself in the practise room.

In the group interviews it emerged that the students found discussing these issues less scary than discussing sound and singing technique, for example. They felt that issues surrounding communication are based on right/wrong thinking to a lesser extent than singing technique. They avoided technical issues since they felt they did not possess an adequate vocabulary to discuss it in detail. They also considered singing technique to be something highly personal. The students worried about talking about each other’s techniques and could not find a way to create a dialogue about technique without it coming across as criticism.

Step 4

Specific suggestions and opinions on the performance are presented at step 4. But even here it is the artist who defines what kind of input should be given. Most trained musicians have experienced being given feedback or direct instructions at inappropriate times. Perhaps they were not in a position to act on the instructions and make progress at that particular point in time, or maybe the suggestions were subjective and therefore less constructive at the time. Lerman allows the participants to reserve themselves against suggestions or opinions to an extent. The responder must make it clear what the opinion is about, so that the artist can decide whether or not to hear it. This serves as a kind of ritual which on one hand makes the responders focused and unambiguous in their suggestions, and on the other prepares the artist for what is to come: "I have an opinion on/suggestion for... Do you want to hear it?" Usually the artist wants to hear it, because it has been presented in a respectful manner. Still, being able to say no creates a feeling of having control of one's own development.

This step is more similar of the working processes that the students are used to. It often feels good to finally get to a point where you can make concrete suggestions. The questions at step 3 could often be a bit unclear, which meant that both responders and artist needed to seek clarification. The artist was keen to receive suggestions on working methods or solutions and would ask for the experiences and knowledge of the other students. The different approaches at the first three steps along with the descriptions, questions and answers from both artist and responders meant that the responders developed good and relevant ways of presenting their solutions. They never *assumed* but were aware of the artist's mindset and had respect for the artist's ownership. The artist, on the other hand, had gained confidence and self-assurance through the first three steps of the process. This meant that he or she was motivated to be challenged even further.

However, there was not always a need for the responders to present their suggestions, and step 4 was therefore not necessary. Many issues could be discussed at step 2 or 3 because the artist used the questioning to identify challenges that he or she had not previously been aware of. One of the students said it felt good to not always have to say something or impose your opinions on others. The dialogues and open questions could result in change processes and outcomes that were unexpected or that took a different turn than anticipated. These were fascinating discoveries.

Other experiences

The students eventually became adept at executing the process. Their feedback early in the project suggested that they found CRP to be very technical and somewhat rigid. The processes were slower than they were comfortable with in the beginning, since they had to think carefully before being able to formulate relevant questions. However, one of the students also said it was good that they were working slowly, because that helped her structure her thoughts:

It's easy to try to focus on too many things at the same time. That can quickly trigger five or six processes simultaneously. This process allows me to practise discipline and concentrate on one thing at a time.⁹

During the interviews we heard that CRP allowed issues to be discussed in a different way than the students were used to elsewhere on their course. They were able to put into words things they had not thought about before but that they felt they had encountered on a non-verbal level. This made them conscious of new and different aspects of music-making and communication. They pointed out that this allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of what quality can entail, and they greatly appreciated how their fellow students highlighted qualities in their own playing that they had not been aware of themselves. This way CRP became a supplement to conventional performance studies at the Academy.

Often the process would not be linear: we slid back and forth between the different steps. As the facilitator, I might suggest going from step 3 back to step 2, or the artist, or responders would ask me to do so. This made the process dynamic. We worked on what we found conducive to the artist's artistic development.

In their book, Lerman and Borstel recommend that the artistic product be performed before starting the dialogue. Many of the students wanted to be able to try out the suggestions several times during the process. Although the book does not suggest such an approach, I discussed it in a meeting with Liz Lerman halfway through the project. I wanted to investigate the possibility of expanding or adjusting the process to make more room for musical exploration. Lerman was open for us to experiment and add elements. The group therefore tried out different ways of working in order to let the artist dig even deeper into the issues that arose during the process.

9 From a group interview with the project participants 28 January 2015

This made the process more varied in form. We might concentrate on steps 1 and 2 and go back and forth between the two several times, or we might merge steps 3 and 4 and let the open questions sit side by side with the suggestions. Once a certain number of issues had been raised we might also let the artist decide which of them to address in more detail. We would then work on that particular issue and cover all steps at once by providing descriptions of meaning, open questioning and suggested changes, all relating directly to the artist's own artistic questions. This way the artist controlled most of the process and received different kinds of feedback that could be tried out.

Artistic identity and ownership

One of the aims of the project was to establish whether peer learning in a group of students would make the students more conscious of their artistic identity and artistic ownership. This is in line with the NMH's strategic plan *I samspill – strategi 2025*, which states that "the NMH puts the development of the students' independence and artistic identity at the centre".

Developing artistic ownership is also about taking ownership of your own learning. This means being involved and having a say in the learning process by exercising influence over which issues to work on and which direction to take. For music students this could involve choosing repertoire and managing technical priorities but also being able to make own decisions on which artistic identity they wish to adopt, developing within a given tradition, or experimenting with and perhaps challenging or criticising stylistic norms within a tradition. The ownership belongs to both the teacher and the student. Because of his or her expertise, the teacher will be able to provide meaningful guidance on which direction the student should take based on an assessment of the student's overall talent. The student "negotiates" the ownership with the teacher to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how pronounced the artistic identity is at the different stages of the student's development.

I had the preconception that some classical voice students do not have the courage to take ownership of their artistic development. For various reasons, many of them leave it to their teacher to set ambitions. During their studies the students are too passive in terms of choosing an artistic direction and repertoire, and they are insufficiently curious about which processes they should undergo to develop their

technical and artistic skills. My preconceptions were soon confirmed after meeting the students.

At the start of the project the students were challenged to formulate their artistic ambitions by describing their anticipated work situation four years after graduating from the NMH. A couple of the students voiced clear ambitions of an opera career; some were uncertain what they thought of pursuing a career as a singer, while others still were undecided as to which genre(s) they should go for. Finally, some were modest and felt scared to tell their fellow students about their ambitions. Many of the students were very unsure because they had not been trained to make conscious decisions. This discussion triggered various processes, which made some of the students more conscious about having to make artistic decisions:

Setting your own goals is incredibly difficult, because I've always been given feedback by my teachers on what is best for me. I've just followed my teachers' instructions, really, and the fact that I sing classical is just down to my teachers pointing me in that direction. Deep down I feel that what I want to sing is slightly at odds with what my teacher thinks. I've been thinking since you asked that question in the autumn... I don't tell my teacher, of course, but I'm thinking that the things I'm working on now are things that *I* want to do.¹⁰

Many of the students have a background from genres other than classical and were introduced to classical singing in their teenage years. Most of them felt less confident about their classical expertise than about music from other genres. They found that there were more *absolutes*, more rules, in classical singing than in other genres and that they were not familiar enough with stylistic facets and norms in classical singing to be able to trust their own preferences. They therefore relied greatly on their vocal teachers and accompanists. The students stressed that these were choices they had made themselves and that it was not a case of their teachers' imposing them on them. One student put it like this:

It's very comfortable being told what to do and then just go and do it. You can easily get a bit too relaxed about it instead of being challenged to turn up to the lesson with your teacher and say: 'I'm struggling with this. Could we work on it, please?'¹¹

10 From a group interview with the project participants 26 January 2015

11 From a group interview with the project participants 28 January 2015

Many of the students preferred being told what kind of repertoire they should sing or what they should work on during lessons and practise:

I feel uncomfortable when I have to start making decisions. I'm so used to being told what to do that when somebody asks me what I want, I become uncertain and think: 'I should've thought about this'.¹²

During the project the students discussed the teacher-student relationship surrounding ownership. Many of them said they would like to see more opportunities for developing additional vocal styles and working on a broader repertoire, because they had realised that this is what their work will involve after graduating from the NMH. Several students also pointed out that after working with CRP they now want to make a greater contribution to the discussion about *what* and *how* in their singing lessons: "I can really feel it when a teacher becomes overly controlling. It has become so ingrained in me that I now react when a teacher takes full control."¹³ They became clearer about wanting a balance, whereby on one hand it is important to listen to and learn as much as possible from their teacher – who possesses the expertise – while on the other they assume more ownership of their own development, partly because it gives them more motivation to practise and partly because they were becoming more conscious of what kind of singers they want to be after leaving the NMH.

One student said that you do not just take ownership *after* you have mastered something you have been working on. You need to be aware of where you are going long before you have acquired the skills to perform specific tasks. The student felt that during forum lessons, for example, the teachers assume that the students are unaware of a problem because they have failed to accomplish a task:

In the group I'm actually given the opportunity to show that I can, not just by singing but also by reflecting and saying that "yes, I know this is a challenge or problem". [...] Because even if I'm not able to sing it yet, I can still understand it and talk about it: "This is what I'm working on, but I haven't quite got it yet. But I know where the challenges lie." About owning the problem: When teachers who don't know you point out problems to you, I think: "I know that, I'm not stupid." That's what ownership is about.¹⁴

12 From a group interview with the project participants 28 January 2015

13 From a group interview with the project participants 26 January 2015

14 From a group interview with the project participants 26 January 2015

The impact of the facilitator role on the teacher's competencies

The facilitator's responsibilities are numerous. He or she should guide the participants back and forth between the different steps, "translate" when things are unclear or there are misunderstandings, help the participants stay within the CRP framework, and predict strategies for engaging in meaningful dialogues. This requires communication skills and professional insights.

It is important to go into detail and create processes that touch upon important aspects; you do not want a process that serves as a "pat on the back" where everything is rosy and no progress is made. When going into detail, the processes can move in less desirable directions, however. In classical principal instrument tuition there is much focus on making changes, corrections and perfecting skills. Both teachers and students have been trained to receive or offer suggestions for change at any time. It is such an ingrained part of the culture that when engaging in CRP you have to practise not being so direct and explicit in your feedback. Taking a step back, allowing for different opportunities and acknowledging that all the participants in the process can contribute to the artist's development are at the heart of this method. The facilitator's key responsibilities in this context are therefore to ensure that the focus is always on the artist and that the feedback, questions and suggestions being offered are presented in a dialogic form. As facilitator I had to practise how to foresee where a statement or question would lead before adjusting, gently guiding or interrupting. Since everyone, the responders included, must be met with respect, I had to acquire a diplomatic persona that made everyone feel valuable in the process.

Because the open and neutral questions are so central to CRP, I spent a great deal of time both during and outside the seminars practising how to identify the differences between closed and open questions. I had to rehearse how to detect what was behind a question, whether it was a criticism, a personal agenda or "hobby horse", or whether it was down to right/wrong thinking. As facilitator I practised how to help the responders formulate their questions. I had to understand the thoughts behind the questions and give them a form that benefited the process.

The professional insight I have gained as a performer and teacher means that I possess knowledge that helps identify solutions to various problems. I often felt the urge to contribute with my own solutions. The students were proactive and

provided good input, but occasionally they would struggle to articulate good questions or to pick up on questions that I deemed to be essential. They might scratch the surface, or they might appear to skirt certain issues. In these situations I had to “have a discussion” with myself. These discussions could be about whether I, as the facilitator, should guide them towards topics that I felt were relevant or important. They could also be about whether I should formulate questions for the responders and artist in order to initiate processes that would move *them* along in the dialogue. Sometimes I successfully guided them without being explicit about where I – in light of my specialist expertise – wanted them to go. This made the processes meet the objective of allowing the artist in collaboration with the responders to make new discoveries and get enough motivation to explore the issue further. Other times I became too eager and direct and stepped out of the facilitator role and into the singer/teacher role. Since the group dynamic was good and we had established a platform of equality, I would find that the students were correcting me. They pointed out that I was being unclear in the facilitator role and that the equality that the process was built on had broken down. When I exercised my professional role in this way, we crossed over into a masterclass tradition that is less appropriate for CRP. I appreciated their honest feedback, and my own reflections afterwards have also helped make me clearer about my roles when teaching: whether I am a problem-solver or whether I should be working with the students to explore issues in other ways.

In the vocal teaching tradition that I was trained in it was largely up to the teacher to offer solutions and stake out a course for the student’s technical and musical development. Teachers are protectors of a tradition that the student should be introduced to and inducted into. Although the teaching culture in Norway is less authoritarian than in many other countries in the world, it still involves a tacit “contract” which stipulates that the students should take in the instructions they are given, and work on them before potentially asking questions about how to go about it. This mindset was, and partly continues to be, a part of my teaching. The students do not always know what they need to learn, where they are going, or how they are going to get there. However, taking on the facilitator role in a group project like this, has challenged and broadened my perspective on how I can apply my expertise as a vocal teacher. I felt frustrated at not being able to offer solutions while acting as a facilitator, even though these solutions were so obvious to me. My task was to let the students step up and to use my expertise in ways that allowed them to articulate the feedback, be it questions or opinions. I became aware that I do not always take the time to investigate what they want to get out of their singing lesson or to ask the

students how they perceive my instructions. I became more conscious that I have a tendency to talk too much, and I realised that I often asked too many and too complex questions at the same time. This project has made it clearer to me when questions and dialogue can be more effective than instructive tuition, and there is now more breadth and variation in my methods and approaches.

Summary

Group lessons like these can help the students along on the path towards becoming independent and self-aware performers with ownership of their artistic identity. The bulk of the work still takes place in the practise room, in the singing lessons, together with various music coaches and accompanists, and in masterclasses. Yet the group lessons allow the participants to act as equals, as peers. The focus in collaborative learning situations is on contributing to each other's growth and development. The students on this project said they enjoyed being in a situation where they could focus on other artistic and communicative elements than those they were working on in their more traditional vocal training.

They said that peer learning had allowed them to build a trustful learning community that helped improve their self-confidence as singers. The fact that positions and status were equalised – both between teacher and students and between new and more experienced students – was a key element in this context. The group project also resulted in better social relationships between the classical voice students on the music education programme and has made them support and encourage each other in other performance settings such as concerts and masterclasses. At the same time the students stressed that such group lessons can never replace the lessons with their principal instrument teacher and accompanist:

But I wouldn't have swapped my singing lessons for these lessons, because there are some things I want to work on one-to-one. It's a good forum for sharing experiences and giving each other tips, but if we were to... if it were about specific, technical things, then that would be too personal.¹⁵

It was pointed out that learning CRP was a challenge but that the process, once they had entered it, offered a respectful space in which to work. They came

¹⁵ From a group interview with the project participants 28 January 2015

together to share something, and the students were greatly appreciative of being able to help their peers make progress. They found it equally meaningful to be both responders and artist, and many of them said that it was good to not always have to offer suggestions and say straight out what they were thinking, and that asking questions was a good way of approaching the others. They felt that they also learnt from *not* having to say something:

I've benefited a lot from the lessons because I'm learning to keep quiet. I tend to talk a lot, including when I teach. I can take this on board in my own teaching. I'm in a process where I'm learning and developing as a singer. Things can get very muddled until I find the answer. Then I need to talk about it in order to learn. I can't bring that to this process. It's good for me to finish the thought process before entering into a discussion.¹⁶

They found that the attitudes enshrined in the method are also a way in which to interact with other people in general. CRP thus became important to them in their own artistic work, when they taught others, and when they were spending time with friends and family.

The project has been very significant for me as a teacher. My teaching, both one-to-one vocal teaching and in larger groups on other topics, has changed. I have gained a broader repertoire in terms of how I approach the students. In some contexts, it is clearly appropriate for me to take an instructive approach, provide clear feedback and work systematically on making technical and musical changes. However, I have come to realise that open questioning can take the student both closer and faster to their desired goal. When I am able to ask questions based on my expertise, yet give the students permission to be equal partners in the process, it engenders stronger motivation and greater belief in their own abilities. It makes the students ask relevant questions back and creates a space in which we can make new and unexpected discoveries.

Relevant reading

Lerman, Liz & John Borstel (2003): *Critical Response Process. A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert*. Tahoma Park: Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

Gaunt, Helena & Heidi Westerlund (Eds.) (2013): *Collaborative learning in Higher Music Education*. Farnham: Ashgate

¹⁶ From a group interview with the project participants 28 January 2015

Summary: What have we learnt?

Ingrid Maria Hanken

We have just presented six different trials involving group tuition. They are not large-scale scientific studies, but we still believe that there are things to be learnt from the experiences garnered by the six principal instrument teachers and their students. We will now sum up some of the key findings and what we can extract from them.

Good group tuition can be a great many things

The six projects involving principal instrument tuition in groups are different in several ways:

They differ in terms of who manages the process and sets the agenda. We have seen examples of strongly student-led tuition such as on Jens Harald Bratlie's project, where the students took overall responsibility for the tuition. We have also seen examples of a more teacher-led approach such as on Mona Julsrud's improvisation project, where she sets out a clear framework and gives the students defined tasks which they then solve together. Good group tuition does therefore not mean that the teacher has to play a passive role. Still, we would argue that there must be a strong element of *student involvement* in the lessons for them to be considered good group tuition. Only then can you exploit the potential of having students learn together and from each other.

We can also see how the content of the group lessons differs somewhat from project to project. Some of them focus on the students performing repertoire for each other and giving each other feedback, such as in Morten Carlsen's string classes. On other projects the emphasis is more on joint evaluation and discussion surrounding different topics, such as in Svein Bjørkøy's lessons. In other words, it is not a given that group lessons on principal instruments must have particular content or mirror the one-to-one lessons.

There are also differences in terms of process or product focus. On some of the projects the process itself was the main concern, such as Kristin Kjølberg's work on the Critical Response Process. Other projects place emphasis on polishing the finished product, such as when Julius Pranevičius' students work specifically on audition repertoire.

Although the six projects are very different, they can all be said to be examples of well-functioning practices – all in their own way and on their own terms. This illustrates the fact that there is no single answer or given model as to what constitutes good group tuition on principal instruments. The key is rather to achieve *concordance* between what we wish to accomplish with group tuition and the frameworks we have to relate to on the one hand, and the choices we make in terms of content, activities and organisation on the other. As a consequence of this we also have to choose which role we should assume as teachers and which roles to offer the students. This means that a number of options are available to us, but it also demonstrates that it requires a great deal of thinking and experience in order to identify what would work in a given context.

Potential benefits of group tuition

The experiences from the six projects suggest that you can achieve some benefits from supplementing one-to-one principal instrument tuition with group lessons.

Efficiency and time use

One benefit concerns *efficiency and time use*. The group lessons are an arena in which general topics can be presented and discussed, and the teachers save time and energy as they do not have to repeat themselves to each and every student. This can also create a clearer focus on important topics, and the students develop a shared knowledge base that makes technical communication easier.

Another aspect of efficiency and time use is that group tuition can give the students more tuition time overall. It must be emphasised that the teachers participating in the group tuition project were not allocated additional teaching hours but chose to redistribute their existing, allotted hours. For many of them this meant curtailing some of the one-to-one lessons and putting the time saved towards a group lesson.

For the students it meant more tuition overall and more frequent lessons with the teacher, something that allowed the teacher to provide closer supervision.

The opportunity for making efficiency savings is often used as an argument when discussing instrumental group tuition, especially in relation to Norway's Municipal Arts and Music School system where there are long waiting lists of children who want to attend but limited resources available. On this project it was therefore important to underline that the goal was not to save resources but to utilise them in the best way possible. We believe that these projects have demonstrated that redistribution can actually give the students *more* tuition time overall.

A richer learning experience

Having the students learn together in a group gives them a richer learning experience, and it is possible to accomplish a broader range of learning objectives than what is possible with one-to-one tuition.

When the students perform repertoire for each other during the group lessons, it creates a much more realistic performance situation for the student performing, thus providing important volume training in performing in front of an audience. For the students listening it also improves their repertoire knowledge.

When the students are asked to provide feedback to their peers, it sharpens their listening skills. They become more conscious of what they are hearing, they learn to give concrete and constructive feedback and to justify their views. These are important skills when they come to work with their colleagues in various settings as professional musicians. Being able to listen, analyse, find solutions to problems and then communicate them constructively are also important skills to have when the students act as their own teachers in the practice room.

One challenge in music performance education is that the students can become too dependent on their teachers and that they therefore do not take ownership of their own learning and artistic development. Having to form an opinion on their own playing and that of others and to articulate this opinion make it easier for the students to develop a capacity for reflection, independence and confidence in their own judgement.

The fact the several people offer their feedback also creates a greater abundance of ideas and solutions, both technical and musical, and it makes the students acknowledge that opinions differ and that they must respect that.

We have also seen that group tuition can provide increased opportunities for developing the students' ability to engage in different forms of musical interaction, which is a key learning objective in performance education.

A better learning environment

Music performance education has some inherent challenges with regard to the learning environment. Unhealthy hierarchies and a competitive environment with envy and suspicion amongst the students can occur, since they will eventually be competing for the same gigs and jobs. The students can also easily begin to feel lonely and isolated, since they spend much of their time alone in a practice room. That can make it difficult to maintain motivation and belief in their own abilities.

Well managed group tuition appears to be able to counteract these challenges; the students experience having colleagues who are interested in their progress, who wish them well and who can act as supporters and sparring partners. Particularly interesting is the fact that group tuition seems to help make the students draw on each other's resources to a greater extent outside the lessons.

As the students are able to follow each other's progress over time and observe that they all have their personal battles to fight, they may realise that they are not alone in struggling at times and gain the confidence that they can overcome their problems by making a concerted effort. Having to give respectful and constructive feedback can also help create a healthier and more supportive climate amongst the students.

Challenges

The completed group projects have also taught us something about the challenges we may encounter when supplementing one-to-one tuition with group tuition.

Organisational challenges

Many of the teachers and students who participated in the project have mentioned the practical challenges associated with gathering groups of students with individual timetables and commitments. Group tuition requires a different level of planning compared with one-to-one tuition, and it can be challenging to embed the

group lessons as a regular part of the tuition – both in the timetable and in the students’ conscience.

Involving the students

We have seen that the students were fairly unanimous in saying that the group lessons were valuable. Yet there appear to be variations in how much the students involve themselves and invest time and commitment in preparing for the lessons, for example. Weighing up demands and expectations against how much time and effort the students should invest in something that is additional to their “ordinary” tuition is a challenge. This is something that could benefit from being discussed with the group of students in order to reach a consensus on what is expected of each of them.

Another challenge is to ensure that all the students make an active contribution to the lessons. Some are reserved and shy, and especially students at the start of their studies may need encouragement and assistance to speak up. The experiences garnered from this project suggest they could benefit from structuring the tuition in different ways, e.g. by making everyone take turns to perform, by having the teacher set specific tasks in turn or ask named students to give feedback instead of a free-for-all. We have also noted that it can be difficult for the teacher to wait long enough for the students to put forward their feedback or input. Since the teacher is responsible for the substance and progression of the lesson, it can sometimes be difficult to sit and wait for the students to say something, and it can be tempting to butt in. However, this could serve to reinforce the students’ hesitance: they know that the teacher will take over if they only wait long enough.

Providing comprehensive and constructive feedback

Our experiences suggest that the students find it challenging to give feedback to each other beyond vague and tentative comments such as “nice” and “good”. The same can be said for the process of moving away from feedback focusing solely on the good/bad aspect towards making constructive contributions to each other’s continued progress in the form of ideas and shared problem-solving.

Providing comprehensive and constructive feedback is something that can and should be learnt, both in order for the students to get the most out of the group lessons and because it is an important skill for any professional musician. The teacher can play a key role in this, partly by modelling how to give nuanced and constructive feedback and partly by asking the students follow-up questions to

help them elaborate on their feedback. They can also demonstrate to the students the kind of quality they should aim for in their feedback by complimenting them and continuing to build on the constructive and nuanced feedback.

The flexibility of the teacher

As previously mentioned, group tuition can take place in a number of ways and with a variety of objectives. The challenge is to create a teacher role that fits the objectives in question as well as the content and activities, which can of course vary from lesson to lesson. This could mean that the teacher needs to be fairly domineering in certain situations, while other times he or she will primarily act as an organiser or moderator. It also means that the teacher will sometimes be the one issuing instructions, while at other times the teacher's role is to ensure that the students give guidance and advice to each other. This requires a broader repertoire of lesson management techniques and approaches than we may be used to in one-to-one tuition. Experience and training are undoubtedly necessary in order to adjust the role to different situations.

Testing uncharted waters

The six teachers who participated in the group tuition projects all have years of successful teaching practice behind them based on one-to-one tuition. Yet they have had the courage to test out uncharted waters and challenge themselves and their role. They have encountered challenges along the way, but they have concluded that the group tuition trial has been successful; they are noting that the students are benefiting greatly from the group lessons in a number of ways. The students are saying the same. All the participants have had such a positive experience with group tuition that they have continued to work with the format. In other words, they have found that both they and their students can benefit from daring to try something new and unfamiliar.

We believe there is great, and partly unexploited, potential in giving the students an opportunity to learn together and from each other. By sharing our experiences from the six different group tuition projects, we hope that we can give other teachers inspiration and courage to explore this potential.

Principal instrument tuition in higher music education usually takes place in a one-to-one setting. This report presents the outcomes of trials conducted by six teachers at the Norwegian Academy of Music involving principal instrument tuition in groups. The aim was to establish whether allowing the students to learn together and from each other can aid their musical development.

The project is one of seven schemes run by the Centre of Excellence in Music Performance Education (CEMPE).