

The music performance student as researching artist? Perspectives on student-centredness in higher music education

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Abstract

In this chapter, we present a status after the AEC Learning and Teaching Working Group's first year of activities. Since February 2018, the AEC Working Group has been examining, investigating and discussing issues of learning and teaching in music performance education under the lead of LATIMPE, the Platform for Learning and Teaching in Music Performance Education (www.latimpe.eu), which is jointly operated by AEC and CEMPE. This has been done through a dialectical researching process going back and forth between practice and analysis, always striving to keep the balance between a know-how gained through empirical experience and a knowledge based on research findings in order to ensure a structured approach to how to deal with the topic in a scholarly appropriate way. The starting point of investigation were practices that were familiar to members of the group. Key learning perspectives that have arisen from this analysis are student ownership, students' responsibility and freedom, a safe environment, opportunities to experiment, projects that evoke the 'learning muscle' of students and projects that build on students' strengths. In the chapter, we discuss some basic questions, such as: What should students learn? Who and what decides on what they should learn? How to encourage students to take ownership of their learning agenda? To what extent and how can all this be reflected in the curriculum? How can an institution ensure the viability of individual and diverse ways of learning? We end with an argument in favour of seeing the student as a researching artist, as this conceptualise an active, artistic student with professional agency, who is curious, and takes responsibility for his or her learning process. LATIMPE is pursuing this process of collecting practices.

Introduction

This chapter presents a status update after the first year of the discussions, initiatives and outcomes of the AEC Learning and Teaching Working Group, since February 2018 coordinating LATIMPE, the AEC & CEMPE *Platform for Learning and Teaching in Music Performance Education* (www.latimpe.eu). The Learning and Teaching Working Group (WG) consists of eight members (the authors of this chapter) from six countries, including a student member and a designated advisory coordinator. The aim of this chapter is to present the ways in which the WG has been working so far, to present central questions and perspectives that have emanated from this work, and to invite the field of higher music education to join the discussion on student-centred learning and teaching in music performance education.

The goal of LATIMPE is to strengthen opportunities for higher music education institutions to explore and discuss learning and teaching paradigms, ideas and models that could meet the demands of the 21st century through active collaboration between students, teachers and researchers in all relevant fields of higher music education (www.aec-music.eu). Moreover, LATIMPE is committed to following a student-centred approach to learning and teaching. The platform organises events and disseminates material online, and it aims to (www.aec-music.eu):

- facilitate institutional networks in the global field of music performance education
- gather information on and investigate learning and teaching practices in music performance education
- share knowledge through workshops, conferences, presentations, publications and online media
- collaborate with existing projects on learning and teaching carried out by AEC member institutions
- stimulate the development of new projects on learning and teaching in music performance education

Background

Learning and teaching music performance in higher music education is a complex and broad issue and involves a number of context-specific parameters and factors (see Jørgensen 2009 for an overview into research on higher music education). Firstly, higher music performance education takes place in different types of institutions,

from independent music institutions to departments and schools embedded in large universities. Secondly, the knowledge bases for educational practices of learning and teaching range from practice-based to research-intensive forms of knowledge (see for example Godlovitch (1998) about musical performance and Bernstein (1999) about the difference between practical and scholarly knowledge). Thirdly, in a European context and beyond there probably exist a number of 'schools' of music performance learning and teaching, such as the 'Russian school' described by Isabelle Wagner, which build on culturally situated traditions, musical practices and assumptions about learning and teaching and the relationship between teachers and students (Wagner, 2015). There is also reason to believe that practices of music performance learning and teaching differ considerably within the confines of individual institutions (Nerland, 2004). Moreover, the issue of learning and teaching involves a number of participants and viewpoints, e.g. students, teachers, leaders, stakeholders such as orchestras, festivals, educational institutions and organisations as well as researchers both external and internal to higher music education.

Learning and teaching music performance is also related to the broader fields (and theories) of learning, pedagogy and philosophy of education and music education. As in most educational practices, there are a number of educational factors and questions impacting the selection of content, methods of teaching, ways of learning, assessment forms and procedures, student and teacher background, and the learning environment (frameworks, time and resources) of and around the learning and teaching practice (Dartsch, 2014).

Working Group approaches and activities

Taking the students' perspective

The WG has had to find a way to start exploring this complex network of components in order to become a working group with a certain direction (without losing its openness) and not 'just' a facilitator and organiser of events. The entry point turned out to be the concept of student-centred approaches to learning and teaching (see Nerland in chapter 3 in this publication for a general discussion of this concept). The concepts of student-centred, student-oriented, learner-oriented and student-active approaches to learning are all somehow related to the general shift of focus in educational practice and theory from teaching to learning and the shift from teacher-oriented

to student-oriented education (see Mascolo, 2009; Hoidn, 2014). Furthermore, the concepts seem to share beliefs with socio-cultural (and socio-cognitive) theories of learning (Woolfolk, 2015) and with the tradition of progressive education.

To nourish the discussions on these topics, the WG group decided to spend its first year searching for interesting student-centred learning and teaching practices in higher music education and initiating explorative analyses of these practices from a learning perspective. Following on from this, the WG has discussed different ways of conceptualising the future music performance student from a student-centred perspective. The WG has in other words initiated investigations of several overarching questions: What do we understand by student-centred? What are key characteristics of current student-centred practices in higher music education? What do the students in student-centred practices do?

Fieldwork: Interesting practices

During its first year the WG has explored issues of learning and teaching in music performance education through a dialectical research process going back and forth between practice and analysis, in effect following an approach resembling anthropological fieldwork with descriptions, interviews and ongoing analyses and discussion. Social anthropologists such as American professor emerita Jean Lave (2011) suggests anthropological fieldwork to be improvisational in character, and we have been inspired by this approach. WG members have searched for, collected information about (from staff and students), analysed and discussed interesting practices with the aim of identifying and understanding key learning characteristics of the practices and searching for conceptualisations of the active, creative, reflective and communicating music performance student.

The WG has collectively tried to analyse the practices, all of which have been practices familiar to the WG members, from a single case and cross-case perspective (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In other words, we have discussed both the central characteristics of each case and what they have in common. The discussions in the WG have led to further questions regarding the examples presented, influencing the written accounts presented on the LATIMPE webpage. This dialectical research process has resulted in a deeper understanding of the practices at hand and, equally important, of additional questions and perspectives related to student-centred learning and teaching.

The WG's interesting practices

Among the practices that have been analysed, the first is *The Galata Electroacoustic Orchestra* (GEO), a ten-day intensive course included in an Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme, which included the music academies in Genova (coordinator), Istanbul, Barcelona and Cagliari. The project's general objectives were to found an orchestra devoted to live collective composition, merging the Western Classical tradition of score-based music with improvisation techniques, in particular those of Ottoman Turkish *makam* music and Anatolian folk music. Improvisation was chosen as a paradigm for the GEO as it is the most widely practised among all musical activities, and it is present in every kind of music, in all cultures and countries (see Bordin, in this publication).

A second practice is the *Artistic Research Critique Classes* (the KUA class) at the Rhythmic Conservatoire in Copenhagen (<https://latimpe.eu/the-kua-class/>), in which curricular aims centre around developing the students' ability to initiate, develop, and perform artistic ideas and productions, contextualising their work and critically discussing and reflecting on their artistic work processes and products. The group (often referred to as the 'critique class') holds six to eight students meeting weekly for three hours with their KUA-teacher or tutor, as some students title the professor. The typical KUA class activity is a vibrant mixture of project presentations, collective critique, responses, reflections and contextualisation.

A third practice is the student-led jazz festival *Serendip* at the Norwegian Academy of Music (NMH), which is organised by bachelor jazz students in their second year. The festival is part of the mandatory subject *EXMUS*. The subject was created in 2013 to bring together curriculum topics related to music history, music philosophy, interpretation and business and entrepreneurship. For the jazz students, this subject is divided into two modules in their second year: jazz history and festival/concert production.

A fourth practice is the *Lied project* at Conservatorium Maastricht (<https://latimpe.eu/the-lied-project/>), an elective module that lasted six weeks and involved four groups of 14 students in total. The project was interdisciplinary and included a music theory teacher, a choral conductor, an organist and a composer from the conservatoire as well as a performance teacher from the Theatre Academy. During the process the students first studied the lieder of Schumann and Schubert and then moved on to composing their own lieder, using a German text and ten compositions by Kurtág as musical building blocks.

A fifth practice is the Hammerfest project at the Norwegian Academy of Music (NMH) (<https://latimpe.eu/the-hammerfest-project/>). This is an elective collaborative project embedded in the mandatory subject *Music in Perspective* within the Master in Music Performance at the NMH. For one week in January, fifteen to twenty master students visit Hammerfest, a small city in the northernmost part of Norway. The only information they get before they leave Oslo is to bring along a varied repertoire, as they will play quite a few performances. In Hammerfest they plan and perform a range of concerts in very different venues. The students do school concerts, performances in public places such as the shopping centre and the library, in private homes as well as concerts that are more traditional, and they meet every day to discuss and reflect.

Student-centred practices: A preliminary analysis

Key learning perspectives

All cases are different in a number of ways, for example regarding organisation, scope, participants, relation to curriculum, content, aims and so on. However, the practices seem to share a number of perspectives and characteristics when it comes to learning.

Many of the common characteristics concern the role and position of the music performance student. One is the sense of *student ownership* (of content, learning and development) in some of the practices. This is perhaps at its most obvious in the student-led festival Serendip, where students are in control of the entire artistic and managerial process and in which they possess all roles. On the Lied project there is a different kind of ownership, where students through active, compositional work enter the terrain of the Lied with a new kind of ownership which also feeds back to the performance of the masterpieces of for example Schumann and Schubert. Accordingly, the practices seem to give the students a great deal of *responsibility and freedom*. The students involved in the Hammerfest project state that the freedom (combined with responsibility) is simultaneously a great relief, a challenge and a somewhat new experience compared to regular on-campus studies (Brøske & Sætre, 2017). They are also encouraged to take risks but within a *safe environment* created by student comradeship and continuous reflective sessions. A common feature of all of the practices is the *opportunity to experiment*. On the GEO project the students are given the opportunity to experiment musically through cross-genre improvisation in an open artistic practice. On the Lied project the students experiment with a traditional

cornerstone of the classical, romantic repertoire, and in the other practices students experiment with artistic project development (the KUA class), festival programming (Serendip) and with music performance venues and audiences (Hammerfest). As a result, the practices seem to evoke the '*learning muscle*' of the students, and some of the practices seem to *build on the strengths of the students* (e.g. the Serendip project in the sense of designating students to roles that fit the particular interest and competence of the students).

A second set of characteristics concerns the ways in which students work and study. In all of the practices students learn and collaborate in a *community of practice* (see Lave & Wenger, 1991). All cases are highly collaborative, and what unites the participants is in many cases actual work. Students and staff are also collaborating in a number of ways other than the typical one-to-one or lecturer-listener formats. Moreover, some practices are *interdisciplinary*. The KUA class is perhaps the best example, in which students reflect on, analyse and develop projects using tools and perspectives from different forms of art, theory, philosophy and more. Many of the practices also try out a *holistic approach* to learning and an *authentic context* (organising a festival or a concert and developing artistic projects) and work towards *tangible outcomes*. In this sense the practices also may share a common approach to assessment, one that is holistic, focusing on tangible outcomes, and reflective, formative and qualitative rather than strictly criterion-based, graded and summative. Lastly, all the practices seem to depend on teachers who are willing to be *facilitators and supervisors*, rather than teachers having and giving the right answers.

In sum, the cases are similar and different in a number of interesting ways, and they represent a fruitful point of departure for discussion and further exploration of learning and teaching in music performance education. The number of practices is still quite limited, and there are fields of interest that are not yet included, for example technology and digital learning.

Curricular models

Several basic questions emanate from the analysis above, including:

- What should the students learn?
- How can we conceptualise the role of the active, responsible music performance student?

- Which curricular consequences result from different conceptualisations, or what questions around the curriculum do student-centred approaches raise?
- What are consequently promising ways of learning, and which learning environments, teaching methods and approaches stimulate these ways of learning?

The first question concerns the outcomes of music performance education, and the relationship and even power relation between student learning and curriculum. Should all students learn the same? Is there something students need to learn that they will learn by themselves? Where do students learn? Is there a mutual literacy, or a shared but not exhaustive content, relevant for all students? To paraphrase curriculum theorist Brian Holmes (1981), are curricula designed in order to provide knowledge, skills and experiences that are essential in music (*essentialism*) which cover the whole range of musical subjects (*encyclopaedism*) or which cover what must be studied in order to cope with everyday musicianship (*pragmatism*)?

There is reason to believe that encyclopaedism is a common rationale for curriculum structure in higher music education, although there is little research on this issue, according to Jørgensen (2009, pp. 46-47). The encyclopaedic music curriculum would consist of a number of subjects (disciplines) focusing on teaching students specialised and specific knowledge and skills (e.g. principal and second instrument, chamber music, orchestra, music history, music theory, harmony, ear training, arranging, composing, improvisation, entrepreneurship and so on). There is also reason to believe that the encyclopaedic rationale is both subject and teacher-centred and that the power relation between teachers and students is in favour of the teacher. Possible challenges and problems in such a curricular model is that programmes may become fragmented and overcrowded (which was found to be the case in Norwegian music teacher education, according to Sætre, 2014).

A project-based or problem-based curriculum rationale could serve as a contrast to encyclopaedism (Aditomo, Goodyear, Bliuc & Ellis, 2013; Margetson, 1993). Instead of starting from a pre-described list of mandatory disciplines, a problem-based curriculum would centre on a selection of projects and questions that give the students a *need* for specific knowledge and skills and open up a broader student-led space of inquiry. The project-based rationale is often described as student-centred, as opposed to subject-centred. Potential challenges and problems with such models are that they risk being coincidental, both concerning learning outcomes and study structure and progression. There is also a risk of handing over too much responsibility to the students at the expense of guided instruction (Kirschner, Sweller & Clark, 2006).

The music performance student as a researching artist?

There are a number of conceptualisations of the music performance student in the field of higher music education, all of which shed light on how to understand the role of the music performance student and the future musician. For example, Susanne van Els (chapter 6) argues the importance of giving students the opportunity to be a *designer of learning* and an *artistic explorer*. Dawn Bennett (2008) uses the notions of the *portfolio musician* and the *protean musician* to describe what musicians face in the modern workplace, while others argue the importance of understanding musicians as *musical entrepreneurs*.

The role of the student is not necessarily entirely clear in the encyclopaedic or in the project-based model of curriculum thinking. During the discussions of the interesting practices, the WG started considering an alternative conceptualisation of the music performance student: the music performance student as a researching artist, which means a student able to ask questions and autonomously use his or her knowledge and skill to seek answers. Understanding music performance students as researching artists is fruitful in a number of ways, not the least since it at the same time captures the *active* student working in and with *the arts* in an *inquiry-based* manner.

The notion of the researching artist relates to the concept of artistic research, which is itself a broad and ambiguous concept. We use the concept of the 'researching artist' to underscore that the student is seen primarily as an artist and not primarily as a researcher. We also use it to emphasise that what we picture is not increased 'academization' in higher music education programmes. We believe the benefits of the concept of the 'researching artist' is that it combines four important elements. 1) The active role of students in their everyday study practice. 2) The idea of a researching attitude in, and curiosity-led forms of, student work. 3) The necessity to develop in harmonious ways creativity and research abilities as two faces of the same artistic identity. 4) The idea of research as something that can be deeply rooted in artistic work and which can have artistic aims.

The fourth point is central in the many debates on what artistic research is 'really about'. In a discussion on these topics Borgdorff argues that artistic research could be defined as art-based and artist-based research and development, as research *in the arts* (Borgdorff, 2006). The work of the artistic researcher thus focuses on artistic processes, products and contexts and aims towards artistic results but includes reflection and contextualisation.

Crispin (2015) discusses the relationships between artistic practice and artistic research and argues that artistic research requires a 'rigorous methodological framework' (p. 58). If so, there is an additional fruitfulness of discussing the differences between a researching artist and an artistic researcher, and to us that is another reason why we prefer the former. The main point, we think, is to discuss the mutual synergies between a researching attitude in the arts and learning to become an artist in musical practices, which is also a main point in Crispin's reflections on artistic research:

The core premise of Artistic Research is that there is a special mode of functioning as an artist that goes beyond the natural and intuitive enquiring of the artistic mind and encompasses something of the more systematic methods and explicitly articulated objectives of research. [...] In Artistic Research, the unique attributes of the artist-researcher, especially as they are articulated within their artistic practice, are not to be excluded from the research process but, on the contrary, form a vital touchstone for testing and evaluating the evidence generated by that process (Crispin, 2015, pp. 56–57)

An important benefit of artistic research, according to Crispin, is that artistic research has 'the potential to resituate the practice of performance within a *continuous, developmental trajectory*, as opposed to its emerging quasi-numinously at the endpoint of the process (Crispin, 2015, p. 57, italics added). The developmental trajectory is a particularly interesting point, since it focuses on the temporal aspects of musical practices, of becoming an artist, just as much as it concerns the process of becoming an artistic researcher.

The conceptualisation of the music performance student as a researching artist captures, in our view, the active, artistic student with artistic and professional agency, which is in the absolute centre of her learning process. The conceptualisation is therefore interesting from the viewpoint of student-centred approaches to learning. It is more in line with a holistic curricular logic than a strictly encyclopaedic logic but does not rely on project-based curricula. The main reason for this is that the conceptualisation changes the relationship of power between student work and curriculum design. It puts the music student's learning process and working methods at the centre instead of the 'never-ending' discussion on what knowledge and skills music students should develop. It underlines the active, crafts-based, explorative, curious, innovative, reflective, methodical, improvisational, questioning, knowledge-seeking, powerful role of the student. Besides, it validates the strong wish and will of students to become musicians, to develop their skills while feeding their own artistic drive. A learning

environment where young professionals make their artistic dreams come true in a connected and informed way can invite students to act as designers of learning and thus serve as a laboratory for art and the profession. Lastly, the concept of the researching artist has additional metaphorical impact in the sense of giving hints as to how to approach music and performance through a number of artistic research procedures, including:

- acquiring musical knowledge and skills
- exploring art through performance
- composing
- improvising
- using digital technology
- contextualising music in wider fields of theory
- doing field work in the profession
- experimenting and testing
- looking for new ways of working and understanding in and with the arts

Further work

In this chapter the WG has given an account of some of the central challenges, questions, analyses and discussions that have taken place in the WG's first year. The analyses of interesting practices have proven fruitful in the sense of suggesting ways of understanding key characteristics of student-centred practices, in the sense of identifying tensions between different curricular rationales, and in the sense of identifying conceptualisations of the music performance student that reshape the relationship between students, curricula and ways of learning in higher music education. The analyses and discussions have also proven useful in identifying additional questions and perspectives that can form the basis for further work in the WG. A central element of the methodology of the WG is to look for new interesting practices and perspectives that inform and challenge the discussions in the WG. The WG therefore invites the field of higher music education to share their interesting practices, that is, interesting from a learning perspective (through www.latimpe.eu) and to think along with the WG.

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