

Project Presentation

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The significance of communication in individual vocal education

I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant. (Anonymous in Brown 1996).

This quotation is a take-off point for this presentation.

The purpose of this study is to highlight the significance of communication for the learning in individual singing education.

The questions of issue that has emerged are the following:

- How do teacher and student communicate in the individual teaching/learning situation that takes place face-to-face?
- What perceptions do they have of the impact of communication for the learning process of singing?
- What significance does the interaction between teacher and student have for the pedagogical meeting?

Delimitation

In this essay only individual singing tuition at a music teacher education programme has been studied. To get a deeper knowledge and understanding of the subject, observations of lessons were made and also open interviews with one vocal teacher and two of her students. Both of the participating students are prospective vocal teachers, which gave further perspective on the study. It turned out that they already had begun to be shaped into their future teacher role. The teacher and the students were contacted in good time and were informed of the purpose and procedure.

Method

The intention of this study is to gain new insight and deeper understanding of the importance of communication for learning, both from the perspective of the teacher and the student, in the specific meeting that takes places face-to-face. By observation, it was possible to see and experience the communication between teacher and student in real time during the lessons, and then get their individual views on the importance of communication through open interviews. During the observations, my pre-understanding as a vocal teacher and supervisor was a valuable asset. With my experience it was possible for me to see and understand certain concepts and processes during the lessons. My pre-understanding even made it possible to look beyond vocal technique and repertoire and instead let my focus and attention be directed toward what happened *between* the student and the teacher in the *communicative room*.

The interviews were made in direct connection to the students' lessons. All data were recorded on Dictaphone and then transcribed to text material that has been processed and analysed.

Background and previous research

The literature has been chosen based on the focus of the study, to highlight various forms of *communicative processes*.

The themes highlighted in the literature review are:

- Verbal kommunikation (Verbal communication)
- Ickeverbalkommunikation (Non-verbal communication) (Gelang, 2008)
- Interaktion (Interaction) (Aspelin, 1999; Von Wright, 2003)
- Dialog (Dialogue) (Buber, 1993; 2004),
- Intersubjektivitet (Inter-subjectivity) (von Wright, 2003)
- Relation mellan lärare och elev (The relationship between teacher and student) (Birnik, 1999)
- Sångpedagogisk litteratur och rapporter (Vocal teaching literature and reports) (Arder, 2005; Brown, 1996)

The presented literature provides an understanding to form a theoretical conceptual framework for the inquiry.

Results presentation

The two lessons had its given form that everyone seemed to be confident with. The teacher and the student stood in front of each other most part of the lesson, and their eye contact was intense. The verbal communication was a theme running through both lessons, and often reinforced by gestures, facial expressions and body language. The visual part of the lesson was also evident in that they drew, looked in the mirror, and took photographs with their cell phones. Everything was done to increase the understanding. Throughout the lesson was a frequent and intense dialogue that emerged between the participants, and everything seemed to be in mutual understanding.

One of the students says in the interview that *personal chemistry* is very important to her. She wants to be able to *fully rely* on her teacher. The means of communication she prefers is the verbal part, as specific as possible, without any element of flowery language. At first it was difficult for her to understand the language that the teacher used, but eventually she began to understand.

The other student highlights the *importance of body language* to get a *good dialogue* with her teacher. It is important how *people are* she says, and she wants to be able to have faith and confidence in the teaching situation. She also experienced difficulties with communication during some time. She felt as if the teacher thought she was being passive, while she herself felt that she listened, took notes and did everything she was supposed to do. They talked to each other about the situation, which since have made their communication more profound.

The teacher tells at length about her views on education, and how important it is to know *who* the student is that she meets. From a basic concept she communicates with her students, and the *singing student is always in focus*. She asks many questions to get a vivid dialogue. The verbal part is important, but when words do not suffice, she and her student draw or use other means to explain and understand each other. The most important thing for the teacher is *the*

meeting with the person/student. *“It takes great commitment from both Me and this person, if we are to succeed during these years”*.

Analysis of results

What lights up strongly throughout the study is the significance of *dialogue*. During one lesson, the teacher asked 62 questions. Both teacher and student took an active part and contributed with themselves. The *interaction* made clear there was never any doubt about how the dialogue would be further developed. It was obvious that they knew each other well in this situation and that they built their dialogue on a safe and stable platform. They had built up a *common language* – verbally, non-verbally, visually and musically - that they were familiar with. They both shared understanding and experience from a *common framework of understanding* and were able to take on the *perspectives* of each other. I perceive that they have acquired an *inter-subjective understanding* of the subject – **singing**.

Abstract

The structure of communication in the individual teaching session is a continuous process in which the concepts of *dialogue, interaction and inter-subjectivity* are in a dependent relation to each other. *The dialogue is entirely dependant on its two legs - interaction and inter-subjectivity. Without any of these parts the dialogue will “die”, and without dialogue the lesson will “die”*. (Buber, 2004)

Literature:

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Keywords:

Vocal teaching, teacher training, interaction-face-to-face, dialogue, intersubjectivity.