

CONCLUSIONS

My initial motivation for doing this research was to develop my own teaching practice. In particular, I was interested to see how singing can be used more in the music theory classroom. The background for my interest in singing was based upon my own experience with singing as a young student and with the use of singing in the school classroom as inspired by the Kodály philosophy of music education.

In order to answer the question –

What model can be created to show how singing can be used as a primary tool for the teaching of music theory?

I set myself the task of trying to develop material and activities that would be appropriate for a music theory classroom. The result has been as follows:

Repertoire

There is, of course, a large body of vocal repertoire available, however, books that have been published for use in the classroom tend to focus on developing sight-reading as an isolated skill. The material tends to be, in my opinion, unrelated to other repertoire (even unmusical in my taste) and designed to develop one particular, isolated skill. This concurs with Rogers (2004, p.19), who states that ‘although dozens of analysis and ear-training textbooks are available, few of them include the kind of integration discussed.’ (He refers back to his discussion on the pedagogical approach to the integration of music theory subjects)

If singing is to become central to my lessons, then the first task is to collect good quality music that encourages singing and gives students a good introduction to the gamut of musical material. This repertoire should be analysed, catalogued well and cross referenced to larger works so that single lessons and series of lesson plans can be created that help to lead students to knowledge of repertoire and to develop skills.

The Book of Canons has gone a long way to achieving this. The success of the book has been that students have asked me for copies so that they can use it at home and other teachers have asked to use it in their lessons too. There has been a general rise in interest in singing in the lessons. Also a wide range of skill development exercises have resulted from the creative use of the canons.

Elsewhere in this research I have presented examples of small choral works, which extend the experience of vocal repertoire into larger pieces with a richer harmony and range of styles. These pieces have been invaluable for approaching larger works of art music.

I realise now that the repertoire presented in this paper is only enough for the model lesson that I have written about. In order to teach effectively for all situations, the research and collecting of vocal music cannot stop here. It is my intention to continue this work by editing and publishing further volumes of material for use in the classroom. An online resource would be an ideal solution for an ever growing body of material that everyone can access.

The models

These models have shown me that a lot can indeed be done in a music theory lesson whereby singing is the central activity. The practical activities have helped students to conceptualise a sound by hearing it and experiencing it. What I have found from this is that in order to achieve the goal of the music theory lesson – to understand a concept or to develop a skill – a large amount of planning is involved. It is not enough to merely present pieces to students for them to sing and then to expect them to ‘magically’ make a connection to something else. The activities that I have developed in these model lessons have been carefully sequenced and are supported by exercises and games that help to ‘join the dots’. This, perhaps reopens the discussion on the constructivist approach as discussed in part 1 of this paper. Quoting Hansen again, he writes that ‘if we accept the constructivist position we must follow a *pedagogy* that provides learners with the opportunity to interact with sounds and construct their own relationships.’¹⁷ (p.7). I see now that in this quote the focus should be just as much on pedagogy as it could be on giving opportunities to students. What I propose is that any teacher who wishes to use singing in the lesson in the way that I have will need to not only analyse repertoire for its musical content but be able to analyse in a pedagogical way. That is to mean that material should be sequenced carefully and exercises are created in such a way that the difficulty of a piece can be overcome if the previous material was sung well and the experience is such that skills can support one another.

In addition, I have found that singing is not always enough. I have found that movement has become part of many activities. Singing is a physical activity and movement will support that by helping to improve the quality of the singing and will help to draw attention to concepts (particularly rhythmic concepts, although even the concept of high and low pitch can be reinforced by movement as can be seen with the use of hand-signs for solfège names). For me, this relates back to Elliott’s (1995) ‘praxial’ and Hansen’s (2005) comments on the ‘physical’ in education.

I feel that the models presented here are only some examples of many possibilities. I have shown how certain concepts that have presented themselves as challenges within a piece of music can be tackled with singing activities, however, every piece of music has its own challenges and each teacher will have their own interpretation of a piece. The focus must therefore be on developing a range of models and a range of activities that can be adapted for many possible situations. The sharing of ideas has been of utmost importance to the development of my work. I have been able to observe many inspiring teachers and I have been able to take away an activity and adapt it for my own use. This should continue through out my work. It is often the case that seeing it in action is the best way to understand how to

¹⁷ My own italics.

use something. It may be useful in the future to develop more model lessons with videos of it in action or to have more demonstration classes where teachers can show their best practice.

Final thoughts on singing

When singing becomes the norm in a lesson, I have experienced that students sing with confidence and joy. Even students who find singing difficult or embarrassing will overcome their inhibitions when singing becomes a routine where everyone is expected to be involved at all times. If the whole class is singing and enough opportunities are given in a safe and friendly environment, then even the most shy will eventually 'give it a go'. As with any practical subject, regular practice is required and so, for anyone who wishes to involve more singing in their lessons, enough material must be provided to allow this to happen. In addition, if the point of the singing becomes clear – that is that they will see improvements in their understanding and skills across other areas – then the motivation to sing becomes higher. However, this statement can work the other way too. The joy of singing is something in itself and the joy of making music in a lesson can motivate students to become more interested in a subject like music theory and they will become more motivated to improve their knowledge and skills if the result is a beautiful performance. This reflects both Gordon (2004, p.13) ('The more we audiate, the better we learn to sing, and the more we sing, the better we learn to audiate') and Hansen (2004, p.5) ('[in this] kind of cyclical process both the thinking and listening aspects of ear training and analysis can nourish one another: the more that music is studied, the more there is to hear; the more that is heard, the more there is to learn.') Patience may be needed from the teacher at the start but the end goal will be achieved in good time if time is taken to develop the quality of singing at the start. The work shown in the models, presented in this paper, and through my teaching experience over the last few years has shown that a deep understanding on musical concepts can be achieved in a practical way where singing is the teaching tool.

As a final conclusion, I return to my original title and hypothesis. Firstly, I have been able to create two types of models which have both been highly effective in teaching practice. These models offer different possibilities for approaching a theoretical problem. By analysing the work that the students have done I have been able to see that, indeed, students were able to process information aurally and were able to apply it to analysis (study of a score by annotation after listening) and to performance (The choir's performance of Peñalosa).

Singing has always been a joy for me and I am pleased to find that more and more students and teachers are finding way to use singing in many different situations. In my opinion, and I feel that this is backed up by this paper, music must be made and heard, and singing is one effective way to make that happen.