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AFTER THE EXPERIENCE :
INTERVIEWS AFTER THE 5-DAYS Masterclasses
focused on THE STUDY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR SINGERS
RUSSIAN/ITALIAN

(Parma, Conservatorio A. Boito - ISP: Russian Week - February 2020)

(Riga, Jazepa Vitola Latvijas Muzikas akademija ISP: Italian Week -September 2021)

ANNEXE with Model for blended teaching activities in opera language learning

Collecting feedback at the end of each experience, especially if it is "experimental", is essential to be able to evaluate the results, and possibly calibrate and recalibrate the chosen model.

At the end of the first experience of 5 intense days of masterclasses focused on deepening the study of a foreign language in singing (**RUSSIAN WEEK**- in Parma- February 2020) the testimonies of a group of participants were then collected by an external expert evaluator (Susanne van Els). In this way it was possible to collect valuable feedback from both students and teachers, understand their expectations and results, their comments and above all evaluate how great the impact of such an intense and out of the ordinary experience was for the institutions that have hosted.

The specific focus for the interviews was the learning & teaching aspect, specifically because of the role the (incoming) students from Riga were to play, tutoring and teaching side by side with their own teachers. Also, the teachers from Parma said beforehand that they would be acting as learners. We were interested in whether this had functioned at all, and if so, what effect this had had on the atmosphere, and maybe on the learning 'vibe'.

All the comments collected were really important to better refine the second experience made on the Italian language in singing (**ITALIAN WEEK** - in Riga - September 2021). Even after that second experience, interviews were taken by Susanne van Els, confirming the effectiveness of such a module.

The result is extremely positive and interesting not only for those who designed the model itself of these intensive Masterclasses, but also for anyone who wants to repeat similar experiences in the future, or develop new ones.



After the 'Russian week in Parma'

12 interviews were conducted:

Students from Parma: 14

Students from Riga: 3

Teachers from Parma: 3

Teachers from Riga: 3

The interviews were conducted on the last day of the ISP and the day after. Some were solo interviews, most were (very small) group interviews. The students from Riga, all the teachers and 4 Italian students will be in the 'Italian week in Riga', later on in the project. All the interviews can be found in the Annex.

The interviews got the character of enthusiastic brainstorming. It was undeniable that the past week had been a celebration of learning, which was also very clear from the wonderfully open and passionate atmosphere in which the final concert was presented. It was remarkable that no one mentioned specifically the fact that there were many different ways of organising the lessons and sessions; there was a maximum variation in lessons, one-to-one, one-to-one with active audience attendance, group work with the whole group and a great variety of break-out groups, duo work etcetera. Also, there was explanation, demonstration, home-work, video and audio material, copying, developing methods and tackling problems together, etcetera. All this seemed, after a week of experimenting which was all perceived as 'just learning', normal.

These are **the elements that all the interviews touched upon**, and the unified observations and commentary about what was helpful for learning:

Group work (small groups, practical work)

- *It is intense because you can't hide, you have to be an active participant*
- *Being so active and busy all the time keeps you away from negative thoughts and the usual fears*
- *Doing (instead of telling) creates connection, between teacher and student, and with the material*
- *It is helpful to see each other's struggles, mistakes and more: Usually there are barriers to show your own search, and this defensive attitude is not helpful*

Mixed levels (not just on the specific topic which is being taught)

- *This is a normal aspect in professional life*
- *It is actually not so natural to think of 'the same level' because there are so many sides to skill sets and talents, this situation gave insight in the multi-dimensional aspects of 'a level'*
- *The concept of 'the best' simply doesn't exist, there are many 'bests', and 'the best' as a concept is not helpful for learning either*
- *Measuring (level) kills motivation (to learn, to sing)*



- No monotonous approach and diverse repertoire
- More room for different teaching styles and learning strategies
- *El Systema*

No worries

- Connected to having several teachers or different classes in the room; everyone was in it for her specific role in this project
- A free sharing of expertise
- *Trying, and trying again*
- *We were in this together*

No judging

- *We just want to work and be helpful*
- *Now I understand that it is not about judging, and that I created pride in myself about myself which is more like fear...*

No burden of expectations

- *You can reinvent yourself in a lesson with someone who doesn't know you*
- Peers also have very clear images about grouping and division amongst themselves
- *Expectations are so limiting... and this is something you have to learn to cope with, your own expectations for instance*

No fixed behaviour or attitude

- The students did not “act as students”: they were active
- Students levelled and connected, as a group, *so we could be incredibly critical and direct - safety AND challenge*

Different teachers, different teaching

- Lots of input which can vary greatly (information, method, etc.) leads to being aware of options

Searching together

- The ‘student teachers’ were very open about not knowing everything, and about trying to find the best ways to teach; this made the students think along even more: *This was the most active teaching and active learning that I have ever been involved in*
- This also enhanced the trial and error feeling which was experienced as very beneficial for learning: *...being relaxed and therefore more eager to learn...*
- You don't have to have or be an authority to be teaching: like when you ask a friend for help
- *Without hierarchy, the effect is that you are more a teacher in the lesson yourself!*



- *Learning and teaching were mixed, or maybe, they were the same?*
- The ‘learning question’ was heard and seen and adapted towards
- A more holistic approach which was perceived as very positive, due to lack of method
- Teachers see themselves as coaches and facilitators, and *now the students recognise this too*

Teachers as learners

- The incredible effect this has, when *a teacher is openly learning, making mistakes, having fun and being serious in trying out things*

Artistic chaos

- *Would it be possible to create this artistic chaos in my own institution? Maybe not with the teachers, but maybe amongst the students??*
- *Why are not all the lessons open?*

The week started with the ‘student teachers’ from Riga singing a concert

- *Usually teachers just teach*
- *This was not just showcase, it was immediately a sharing around the topic to be studied*
- A gesture of companionship
- *A gathering of friends*

The final concert was a celebration

- ... not a prestige thing
- All levels mixed, again, and since *everyone knew each other so well, there was no fear of failing or stage-fright, just happiness when someone did something beautiful*

It is very remarkable that there are different versions of the little scene when two tenors with the same song were working together, in the presence of the ‘student teachers’ and their own teachers. Everyone remembers themselves pointing out to the other to not interfere – not to teach is hard...

Conclusion

This setting, with a **focus on learning and less on status or position**, created an incredible atmosphere, and created space for optimum learning. The fact that different levels (in Italian/Russian, but also in main subject level) joined in the same classroom seemed to contribute to the lively atmosphere as well: instead of fixed standards as measures for learning, a shared striving for excellence was the driving force in the classroom. The not too surprising choices to start and to end the week with a concert became landmarks of this learning and teaching approach: the fact that students who were visiting as part of the teaching faculty sang for the group of teachers and students who were the ‘learners’ created an openness for learning and wonderful comradeship. The finishing concert became a celebration of learning, because all the participants performed, independent of (study) level.



It could well be that this openness of the participating teachers and students - changing roles, welcoming all levels – originated in the fact that they were aware of their joint project: working together, during two weeks in the two different Conservatoires, on creating a sustainable model for future use within the EOA. It could also be that the connection because of the EOA membership, which requires contact between institutions, also involving teachers, was helpful in this. Shared education depends on this kind of curious and enthusiastic sharing of expertise, and a joint commitment to learning.

After the ‘Italian week in Riga’

4 interviews were conducted.

- students from Parma: 4
- students from Riga: 1
- teachers from Parma: 3
- teachers from Riga: 1

The interviews were conducted a week after the ISP finished, online. Two solo interviews, two group interviews.

All of the interviewees also participated in the Russian week in Parma.

The specific focus for the interviews was, again, the learning & teaching aspect, now looking into the last exchange of roles: from learner or teacher in Parma to teacher or learner in Riga.

Expectation and adaptation

- Many of the innovative elements of the previous experience were not just welcome, but also expected: visiting teachers and students acting as tutors and co-workers, teachers open to taking a learning attitude next to their students. It was normal that even when one student ‘took the lesson’ everyone else participated in the learning process.
- Such was the anticipation in these settings and the appreciated atmosphere from the previous meeting, that there was disappointment when new participants didn’t attend all the workshops but only came to have their own lesson.

It was seen that newcomers needed some stimulus to also work with the tutoring students, not just with the visiting teachers.

- To overcome this reticence, duet singing was organised: always a Riga/Parma couple. This was a wonderful experience for the participating students in particular. It was mentioned that culture clashes and real cultural exchange was the quick result of working closely together. And, everyone started to reflect intensely on their own institutional culture.
- At a certain moment it was noticeable that the setting was a bit confusing for a student whose teacher visited the lesson without actively connecting with or participating in it. Students stated clearly in the interviews that creating a safe learning environment is the responsibility of teachers and the institution.

No strict definition of the learning content

- Rigan students already have a certain proficiency in Italian language, of course. The content of this course therefore focused on the next step; a broad understanding of the inner metrum and structure and the deeper meaning and poetry of Italian and the operatic texts. Another slight difference between students who had already participated and newcomers was the initial reluctance of the newcomers to open up for this wider range of lesson content: they had expected a more



‘normal masterclass’. • Students from Riga who had participated in the Italian week as teachers, thoroughly prepared for this experience by collecting material and defining learning questions. Still, they also expressed that they were open to learning more, to take in a large variety of information as shared in the different sessions.

Learning attitude – professional skill

• Again, students felt very encouraged to take on a more vulnerable and daring learning attitude. Also, asking questions, trying, and sharing uncertainty were not only seen as more effective for learning but also as helpful for professional collaborative work, for instance in opera productions. • Teachers in the interviews were very outspoken about how this kind of learning and teaching is directly related to requirements of the profession. Being able to collaborate, to have an open attitude to others and to be able to be vulnerable and curious are vital skills. 'When a lesson or a masterclass is always a showcase, how can students ever cope with life long learning?' • 'There is too much teaching around which focuses on short term success – only when teachers feel institutional support and trust in each other, will they dare to really work on sustainable success for their students.' • Teachers reflected on how motivated the students were in these weeks. 'No strict subject descriptions, differentiated student levels and learning outcomes, no assessment... this is actually exactly like professional life!' Students said that it was both a relief to not be assessed, but at the same time a booster for their motivation. 'The exam is usually determining how much we do in a lesson...'

The role of the teacher • Teachers expressed happiness about this ‘normal way of working together’. 'Can we please break with the image of the omnipotent teacher?' 'Anyway, I as a teacher can contribute to a student’s learning for only 20%, the other 80% are in their own hands.' • An interesting effect: students told about how they experienced how difficult teaching is and how this made them realise that their teachers can’t always be capable of solving everything, which made them say that they, as students, need to play a much more active role in taking a lesson. • There was a new element this time: a teacher from Parma sang with his students in the opening concert of the week. His own students especially showed gratitude for this gesture, and also told about how much fun it was.

Sustainable innovation • Both students and teachers showed doubts and inspiration, being asked how they could continue all this. Students talked about small initiatives as extras to the conventional way: sitting in lessons of peers, taking lessons with other teachers or instrumental teachers, regularly singing together and for each other. Teachers thought about starting every school year with such an intense week together, the teaching section and all the students. Everyone was convinced that simply bringing in nice, human actions to enhance the learning, as a learning community, would create a ‘soft revolution’. conclusion It seems that all this opened up an experience beyond student-centeredness. Everyone was ‘into learning’ and involved in each other’s learning. Everyone was trying to maximise the learning potential of the sessions. Everyone was looking at sustainable learning goals and imagined possibilities to continue to learn (together) after the week would be over. Learning was central.



ANNEX: all the interviews
Parma – February 2020
ISP: ‘Russian Week’

Interview 1

Who are you?

- Names: D.T. -A.C.- C.G. - A. M .
- Function in home institution: Vocal Students – M1 – B3 – B1 (2X)
- Role in this ISP: Italian student, learning Russian

What exactly did you participate in?

Full participation.

Could you say something about taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside (as a student)?

Beautiful – you are in your comfort zone with your own teacher, but this other teacher does not know you so they approach you in a soft way, they were so kind. With your own teacher you always feel guilty – now there were no expectations so you can reinvent yourself. We felt really free, even in the presence of our peers who do have expectations, but it was as if there was a new open playing field.

We also loved it that we worked in small groups all the time. So intense. It made us play an active role constantly, maximum participation. You learn so much more.

That we mixed different levels was no obstruction because none of us know Russian; so, we were with all kinds of vocal and study level, but actually that was very nice because we learned a lot from that. Differences are no problem when you are working and learning, it’s actually normal. And in everything we did we connected what we learned to singing and performing, so then the different levels are not so one-dimensional. We brought in a range of repertoire, which was also nice; usually, in one class, you concentrate on one thing with students from the same level, and this is livelier.

Maybe the teachers were so kind because they are colleagues now with our teachers – sometimes, as a student, you worry about how the teachers relate to each other, now everything was open and



nice. And also, everyone, students and teachers, was learning all the time. There were no 'walls', we were a little family.

How free or restricted did you feel?

Immediately very free. This is also the style of teaching in our conservatoire, we love to sit in on lessons and we have group lessons with our vocal teacher. There is one teacher who only does one-to-one lessons in solitude, but her students also seek these kinds of occasions.

What did you do or what happened that was helpful in this?

A very important moment was that the students from Riga started the week with singing for us! So nice, this created an open situation. Also, they showed things that they did not find easy, it was not just a showcase, so learning was immediately central in the approach.

Also: we changed teachers during the days. They said different things, both technical and on interpretation, which opened us up and also it created the option that I make my own choice!

How was it to learn from students of the visiting institution? (as a student)

We worked with the girls from Riga, both text and pronunciation. It was not like 'teaching', but more like practicing or studying together, although they were the ones that were the specialists.

A very special thing is that they were honest about not being teachers. They did not have a prefixed method. And there is a lot that they did not know too and they were honest about it (both in the material and in the method). This made us relaxed but at the same time more eager to learn.

As students together, we level more and therefore you learn easier. Without hierarchy, the effect is that you are more of a teacher in the lesson yourself!

How would you describe this experience of a mixed group of teachers and learners?

How did it affect or change you?

We loved it. We felt free and were more active than usual, not just in the classroom situation, but also in considering our own learning and development. Learning and teaching were mixed, or maybe, they were the same?



What suggestions can you share for improvement?

- *Would it be nice to start the week with a joint activity, to get the group process going?*
- *It would have been useful to have pointed out in the beginning that the moments that you listen are almost the most active moments for learning in the week – so, for instance, if the listeners were asked a question beforehand this would be helpful.*
- *It made such a difference when our own teachers took on a learning attitude! The way our piano teacher did this was a lot of fun (his mistakes were hilarious!) – it would be good when the teachers are completely aware of this.*

Anything else?

Well, we want to take this experience with us, personally, but also in our conservatoire. How can we do that?

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: ‘Russian Week’

Interview 2

Who are you?

- Name: L.P.
- Function in home institution: Vocal Student - M2
- Role in this ISP: Riga student, teaching Russian

What exactly did you participate in?

Full participation – I worked specifically on pronunciation with the Italian students

Could you say something about teaching in another institution (as a student)?



The workshop atmosphere, just being together and being focused on 'doing', made that we leveled and connected. It was also important that there were no expectations, all of us went into this with a very open mind – although when you grow older in this job you understand that in our working field hierarchy is nonsense and not productive...

It was also so good that all of us were exhausted at the end of the day, it was so intense!

To be teaching without being a teacher... what can I say, it was so wonderful, we just looked for whatever would be helpful... This was the most active teaching and active learning that I have ever been involved in.

How free or restricted did you feel?

To teach was not the hardest part, but because we are officially no teachers we did things differently. And because it was all so practical we 'just did'.

We put two tenores with the same repertoire together and made them work, we were there but didn't interfere which was hard - most teachers will agree that it is hard to let them work and learn by themselves, but they cannot do this, because they are teachers!

We students as teachers did not go into being judgemental: you just want to work and be helpful.

What did you do or what happened that was helpful in this?

It was all very natural: the Italian students did not really act as students. You know, we are used to having teachers teach in an old-fashioned way, like a masterclass, 'with a stage', with 'an attitude'. We were all just working so hard! We were so active! Very physical teaching. Artistic chaos. I loved it. And I would like it as a student too!! For myself!!

We immediately experienced a situation in which we could be incredibly critical and direct.

I am sure that there is a connection with being daring as a student. Just failing when learning but also step forward and just say what you want to do.

Would it be possible to create this artistic chaos in my own institution? Maybe not with the teachers, but maybe amongst the students??

The elements for such a wonderful learning situation are: no expectations, a mix of cultures, no awareness of roles and levels.

The supportive attitude amongst all of us was just incredible!! Safety AND challenge.



The active teaching attitude is not about having the answers because that makes the students passive. It is about taking on an active learning attitude yourself, in the lesson, towards the material and the methods.

A teacher can ask students for input, or tell them to make their own choices, but it won't work because they are already passive, thinking their teachers are gods.

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: 'Russian Week'

Interview 3

Who are you?

- Name: 4 japanese female students
- Function in home institution: 2 pianists M2, 2 singers M1
- Role in this ISP: Italian students, learning Russian

What exactly did you participate in?

Almost full participation.

Could you say something about taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside (as a student)?

It was okay: we want to learn, it doesn't matter if the teacher is known.

How was it to learn from students of the visiting institution?



With the students from Riga it was completely different, because they are close to us, we chat, we talk, we laugh. And we become more teachers ourselves, at the same time, when the students teach us, you know, teaching ourselves while learning!

What was really new and special in these days?

We were much more active.

Also, all the levels were different and we just were one learning group!

And the tutors adapted to the learning question each student had.

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020

ISP: ‘Russian Week’

Interview 4

Who are you?

- Name: R.M.
- Function in home institution: Pianist, IRC , researcher in Parma
- Role in this ISP: Italian member of WG3

What exactly did you participate in?

Everything

Could you say something about taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside (as a teacher)?

This is the only way to approach something (a different culture) so close: you have to really live it together, so it is normal that the other teachers came really close, not like in a masterclass.



One of my students noticed that I was in a learning mode, that was so nice. I didn't have to push them towards learning, because they could see that I was learning and that opened the gate wide to their learning!

I prepared the Russian material together with my students, and we did so many things wrong! And we found this out together in the workshop. This created such an incredible learning atmosphere. In fact I did not do anything different, I always learn and take on a learning attitude, but all of a sudden the students noticed and now it functioned!!

Students teaching students creates space for failure in a natural way: they laugh about stuff, they joke and try.

I love this artistic chaos – we discuss Le Boeuf sur le Toit, an artist's bar in Paris – I am so sorry that in many classes with many colleagues, this is NOT the ideal. When I was educated, all the lessons were open. And we came together, at night and discussed, and played. This is IT!

How would you describe this experience of a mixed group of teachers and learners?

How did it affect or change you?

My relationship with my students could maybe improve if the students understand better how I am a teacher, that I am really learning all the time...

The model is already there; it is the master apprentice workplace - this is how I am with my students. I also do projects with them.

What suggestions can you share for improvement?

We had an opening concert and a final concert – to do practical work together is helpful. Group work is good. I will have to think about the organization of regular education...

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: 'Russian Week'



Interview 5

Who are you?

- Name: A.V.
- Function in home institution: Vocal student of Parma, B2
- Participation in this ISP: the morning sessions

Taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside (as a student): how free or restricted did you feel?

It was different because of the interaction between tutors and students: the tutors were more patient (it is in between an masterclass which is not intimate at all and the relation you have with your teacher which is very intimate) and they used all kinds of methods. In a classical masterclass there is an enormous gap between master and students. Because there was no wall here with the tutors this played no role.

About all the group work and the fact that we were mixing levels: I sang the same repertoire as another student and then we worked together. We are very different on level but it worked so well! Also everyone was of different levels and this made me more free. I matched with the great level of the others. I am inexperienced but I felt free to step in, no burden of expectations.

How was it to learn from students of the visiting institution?

The teachers used more methods. The students used all kinds of ways to discover what would work. I was even more active in these sessions, because together we found out how to do it.

How would you describe this experience of a mixed group of teachers and learners?

How did it affect or change you?

You learn much more when you work with a group.

I could think of many ways to incorporate group work in my school work.... But it is not happening...



Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: ‘Russian Week’

Interview 6

Who are you?

- Name: A.P. - A.E.
- Function in home institution: Vocal students Parma, B1 - B2
- Participation in this ISP: whole days

Taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside (as a student): how free or restricted did you feel?

It was very natural to allow the teachers from Riga to work in this intimate way, closer to the daily teaching than masterclass teaching. It was very intense and dense. Very concentrated. It was no problem to open up and just jump into it, maybe because we were together with a group and everything was group work.

Actually, we are not so used to doing group work., but we liked it! it is more like ‘just do it’.

It was so nice to have a mixing of levels: we could listen to all the others of higher level while learning and working together!

One way or another, we weren’t focused too much on expectations, which was nice. Because everyone was a beginner (in Russian) so everyone was open to learning which made the barriers of expectations disappear. The way we worked, in group work, made us share more, so there was no time and no position to take on a judgemental attitude!



How would you describe this experience of a mixed group of teachers and learners?

How did it affect or change you? How was it to learn from students of the visiting institution?

We were very very active in taking lessons. Especially the Riga students were trying everything they could think of, and so we started to 'try' as well. All this created an incredible learning atmosphere.

No expectations, no judging, just doing and trying to find the best method for everyone.

The best experience was that we worked in small groups. We could also move in between groups, you would meet another teacher and other students, and this was exceptional!! We were our own bosses, we were much more active than usual, we learned and shared.

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020

ISP: 'Russian Week'

Interview 7

- Names: G.W. - A.C.
- Function in home institution: students in Parma, M1 - B3
- Participation in this ISP: all mornings and one afternoon

Taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside; how free or restricted did you feel?

We were very okay with opening up to everyone from Riga. With the students it was friendship, immediately. With the teachers of Riga it was easy going and warm, they were so kind.

How was it to learn from students of the visiting institution (as a student)?

Together we were looking for answers, this created an incredible shared learning attitude. I was as much a teacher as they were! Also they were learners, one of them was working until 4 am to find a trick to teach something specific!!!



They could also be much more direct with us because we all know that we are vocal students, we are the same age, we are members of the same group. Also, that they sang for us in the opening concert created a great companionship.

The group work: great!!! We never do this, and I would have not thought beforehand that I would like it this much.

How would you describe this experience of a mixed group of teachers and learners?

How did it affect or change you?

You are right to ask about the diversity of the group. We were all of different levels in our studies, and it was really nice to experience all the differences in our own group of Parma students. One thing which was helpful was that we did not know how good they were, teachers and students from Riga, hahaha! If I would have known I would have been a bit intimidated because expectations play a role.

That we could change groups and teachers also made us the boss of our own learning and made us more active.

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020

ISP: ‘Russian Week’

Interview 8

- Name: J.L. - V.K.
- Function in home institution: Vocal students in Riga, B4 - M1
- Participation in this ISP: full participation, as tutors

Teaching in another institution (as a student), how free or restricted did you feel?



I was an Erasmus student here in Parma, and my fellows from before immediately gave me the 'position of teacher'! For me, a kind of a superior position for a teacher is not what I like, I like a friendly atmosphere. The setting of a workshop created a level playing field.

I am much younger than the rest, but soon I didn't notice anymore.

We were looking for ways to teach and for ways to find out what we needed to be teaching. We didn't need to present ourselves as an authority to be able to teach. Also, at moments a native Russian speaker worked together with a Latvian speaker, as tutors, and we had a great combination of methods. There was no hierarchy there. This openness that we felt created an incredible learning force on the learners' side. You know, the same as when someone asks a friend for help, the help works much better.

With our opening concert we greeted the Italian students. You know, usually teachers don't sing for you. We showed them what we can, but we also opened up about the problems of singing in Russian, so we created openness for the rest of the week.

It was so interesting to find that they weren't afraid to fail. In my own study, I don't want other students to come to my lesson. I am always afraid to step forward and sing because I am afraid of being judged and compared.

The effect of not having expectations towards the Russian singing was also affecting the other expectations, around singing level for instance, so many fears disappeared.

In usual teaching things are separated, it is either technique or expression etcetera, and we just wandered around, connecting different elements of the material and of methods, which was really very helpful.

How was it to teach teachers of the host institution? (as a student)

I come from a culture of subordination towards teachers, this might be the traditional Russian way. After a few days I realised that the Italian teachers really present themselves basically in a completely different way – I am not sure whether this is because of a general cultural difference, or whether it followed this untraditional and free teaching and learning setting of this week...

How would you describe this experience of a mixed group of teachers and learners?



How did it affect or change you?

- we had a long talk about the great effect of group work (support, diversity, maximum learning) and why it is not incorporated in 'the system'. -

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: 'Russian Week'

Interview 9

Who are you?

- Name: J.M. - S.I.
- Function in home institution: Vocal students in Parma, exchange as well, B4 - B1
- Role in this ISP: full participation

Taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside (as a student), how free or restricted did you feel?

No problem. The contact with the student tutors was immediately great, because we are the same age, we can be friends, so we can party, haha. Usually it is like this: this singer is a diva, she accepted me in her class, so I can learn from her – now this whole system is mixed up!! The lack of hierarchy made it much easier for me to learn, you know.

Also, because we had no idea about all the Russian stuff, the expectations and comparing attitude was sort of swept away for all the rest as well, the singing. Also, because we were so busy and active there was no time nor the position to judge.

How was it to learn from students of the visiting institution? (as a student)

I like to have a lot of exchange of information with others because I learn from it so much.



There is this fear to face your own flaws, that is why you do not share with other students, while everyone could be so helpful for the others...

We knew the final concert would be great because we had created a group atmosphere. I wanted to sing well because they gave me their best instructions and energy.

One of us is part of a class in which other students always sit in at the lessons of the other students, the other comes from a culture where it doesn't happen at all. Opening up about your problems is horrible. Now I understand that it is not about judging, and that I created a pride in myself about myself which is more like fear. I am going to suggest it to my teacher when I go back to my regular main subject lessons... It makes your problems much more normal, and it creates opportunities for different learning strategies. I would then also be so helpful when we could go to classes of the others.

There are many more beneficial effects from working in a group, like becoming more courageous and less frightened for the stage.

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: 'Russian Week'

Interview 10

Who are you?

- Name: L.K. - A.J. - K.G.
- Function in home institution: Vocal teachers and Piano accompanist
- Participation in this ISP: Full participation, teachers from Riga and members of the Working Group

Teaching in another institution: how free or restricted did you feel?



This depended also on the students. You try to create trust and find the boundaries of the learning capacity. How much focus and concentration can they give? The students were incredibly active this week. They were on time, they worked really hard, they did their homework. They were also very active in the lessons – we think it was because they wanted to be selected to come to Riga.... But, the others (like Erasmus students who cannot be part of the week in Riga) were as active!! All of them took on a more active attitude which was helpful because they also took the position as teachers, their own teacher, you know?

With the teachers from Parma: they are very open. We are colleagues, we are friends. They really participated, they made notes, they repeated things, etc. They were very eager, also the vocal teacher! This had a strong effect on the students.

We also see ourselves in a different way then how it used to be in the old days, more as a coach, a facilitator, not someone who knows everything... Our classes in Riga are already open for every audience.

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: ‘Russian Week’

Interview 11

Who are you?

- Name: R.F.
- Function in home institution: Drama teacher in Parma conservatoire
- Participation in this ISP: full participation



Taking lessons in your own institution with teachers from outside: how free or restricted did you feel (as a teacher)?

It didn't feel intruding at all! It was absolutely a contribution to what is going on in the institution and what we can offer our students.

What did you do or what happened that was helpful in this?

That we began with the student concert was a gift in that sense. We chose to start with it, just to enjoy the sound of Russian language and create a relaxed atmosphere. If we would have started with instruction and then have them singing, it would have been more of a demonstration. Also, the way we presented the concert was in a very informal atmosphere, as between friends, a house concert, no dressing up (literary). So the concert expressed the atmosphere that we wanted for the work sessions.

How was it to learn from students of the visiting institution (as a teacher)?

I wanted to follow the path, to discover how it was going to be! The three of us, teachers from Parma, were part of the group all the time, we weren't checking! we were participating. We tried and we failed.

At one moment I interphered a bit: there were two students with the same repertoire and I suggested that they would teach each other. Then it was so hard for the student tutors from Riga to restrict themselves and wait with giving instructions.

It is clear at this moment that when we talk about role change, it is a fundamental thing which was maybe contributing most to what happened this week!

How would you describe this experience of a mixed group of teachers and learners?

How did it affect or change you?

This 'just do it' vibration also had a positive effect on the rest of the stuff, the singing, it was not just about the Russian, all this had a beneficial effect on the whole of what the students learned and did. And it worked so well for literally everyone! Finally they started to be able to fail, and therefore learn...

We also decided to open the final concert for everyone, not to select the best!! And this had an incredible effect on the learning potential: all of them were motivated.



Another element: to have different levels in one group is so helpful! No reason to cover up and hide. Also, that we invited others than just Italian students to participate at moments, this is a professional reality.

At first, I thought of the incoming students from Riga as examples. Puppets for demonstration. This has changed! The student as a tutor is vital.

Also, think of the master apprentice model, not as the one-to-one lesson but as El Systema! So, for this work, we really need the student input.

Thank you!

Parma – February 2020
ISP: ‘Russian Week’

Interview 12

Who are you?

- Name: A.C.
- Function in home institution: Vocal teacher in Parma conservatoire
- Participation in this ISP: Full participation

This is what teaching is about. These kinds of adventures. It was incredibly productive for our students.



How much can you endure that your (own) students are in some situation or training that you have some second thoughts on? I am completely okay with this. I learnt such a lot from the final concert of this week. I am like this. I am so sorry that my colleagues from the vocal department were not there. We should all attend all kinds of events. And students should sing at every possible moment.

I noticed that students of different levels worked and performed together. The concept of 'the best' simply doesn't exist, there are many 'bests', and 'the best' as a concept is not helpful for learning either.

Many things that one could have thought beforehand to happen did not! Like, a student of Adriana has a lesson of Antra or Kristina in the presence of Adriana, and can't take the lesson with a free spirit because of this. Or, the Parma students wouldn't accept the authority or presence of the Riga students. Nothing like this happened.

Sometimes I can cry about how we, as the arts, in our education, so much are harassing human values.

Thank you!