Advantages and Limits of Video-Recording as a Tool for Students, Teachers and Researchers in Music Conservatoires

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Abstract

This paper addresses the advantages and limits of video-recording in music conservatoire contexts as a learning strategy for students, as a pedagogical tool for teachers and as a tool for pedagogical research. An example of good methodological practice used to analyse and interpret five hours of video-recorded lessons given by Latvian conservatoire students is presented in order to illustrate the advantages of video-recording for pedagogical research in conservatoire settings.

These reflections can help to better understanding of the decisive importance of video-recording to help students to become reflective practitioners and in their identity-making process; to improve conservatoire teachers' skills and to implement more efficiently their different roles; and as a tool for pedagogical research in conservatoire in data gathering and analysis processes and to increase the reliability of the interpretation of the results. The theoretical perspective and the innovative methodology presented in the study should contribute to develop effective learning, teaching and pedagogical research in the conservatoire.

1. Introduction

In pedagogical literature there is a significant support for the use of video recording in general education as well as in music education. As Daniel reports [1], several authors refer to the benefit of this procedure in a range of areas of practice. Also the use of video-recording for teacher professional development and for research on effective teacher training programs is gaining in popularity [2].

Drawing from recent literature and from the authors' experience as a music instrument learner, teacher and researcher, this paper addresses the advantages and limits of video-recording (i) as a learning strategy for conservatoire students, (ii) as a pedagogical tool for conservatoire teachers and (iii) as a tool in pedagogical research in a conservatoire. A study using video-taped lessons given by Latvian Music Academy performer-students is used as an example of good practice, in order to illustrate the methodological advantages of video-recording for pedagogical research in a conservatoire.

In this paper the term 'conservatoire' refers to all the institutions, such as conservatoires, Musikhochschulen and Music Academies, that offer higher music education, understood as musical studies undertaken in the context of higher education that have a primary focus upon students' practical and creative development [3].

2. Advantages and Limits of Video-Recording as a Learning Strategy for Conservatoire Students

Conservatoire students use a wide range of learning strategies, including personal practice, one-to-one tuition, rehearsals, music listening, research, teaching, etc. The pedagogical potential of video appears clearly when considering how difficult it is for performer-students to assess themselves. While

they play, several simultaneous activities require their attention: they must combine kinaesthetic activity, such as skilfully coordinated movements, reading notes, listening to themselves and to possible partners, using short and long term memory, communicating emotions and managing stress. Even if many of these activities become automatic, it is nevertheless difficult to listen well to different parameters, such as, for example, intonation, tempo regularity through difficult passages, dynamics, expressiveness, etc.

One possible solution is to record oneself and listen to the audio-recording afterwards: as the assessing activity is no longer disturbed by the playing, it is easier to focus on individual parameters. However, making music is not just an affair of producing the right sound at the right moment. The facial expression, the position of the body and the movements of arms and fingers are an important part of the performance. Especially nowadays the art of performing is tied to visual arts, even to choreography. Moreover, some modern composers give explicit indications about the movements that performers must carry out while playing. In this context, using video-recording becomes a necessary learning strategy for student-performers.

There are some limits to video-recording. For example, recording and watching videos takes time and it can seem not so interesting for students, as they can think that they have already heard *grosso modo* what was wrong or right in their playing. It may be also difficult or expensive to do a recording of reasonable quality, considering that these students are very demanding regarding sound quality.

However, the benefits of this learning strategy compensate for these difficulties. To see oneself on video sometimes can be the only way of becoming aware of inappropriate postures or involuntary movements, and this awareness is necessary to get rid of them. Another reason is the potential of video-recording as a tool for reflection. Helping conservatoire students to become *reflective practitioners* [4] is one of the main tasks of conservatories. Watching video-recordings with others also helps the conservatoire to become a learning community where teachers and students are involved in collective discussion and reflection. Moreover, using video-recording also can help students in constructing their self-image, which is one of the personal and professional identity-making process elements [5].

3. Advantages and Limits of Video-Taping as a Tool for Conservatoire Teachers

There are a number of possibilities of using video in teaching-learning processes in conservatoire, as for example piano methods with video support or video master classes. This section addresses the use of video-recording as a tool for improving conservatoire teachers' skills and for implementing more efficiently their different roles.

There are several difficulties that can make music instrument teachers hesitate to use video-recording. They often have too little time allocated to their one-to-one lessons. Furthermore, most of them will find it hard to use teaching tools that they have not used themselves when they were students.

Nevertheless, using video-recording should help them to improve the quality of their work, allowing them to observe and assess their own teaching practices: their attitudes, the quality of their diction, the filler words they use, the time management of their lessons, etc. In addition, video-recording also can be a good support for one-to-one lessons. For example, working with a digital video camera equipped with a foldable screen allows the teacher to record and show immediately to the student the default or good position that is in the centre of a sequence of teaching. As teaching practices and learning strategies are much related, some other advantages of video-recording for teaching had already been addressed in the previous section.

It is important to note that nowadays music instrument teachers are expected to be not only pedagogues and artistic role models, but also facilitators, advocates, networkers, and organizers of the learning processes [6]. In their role as *facilitator*, one of the possibilities for creating supportive and collaborative learning environments is the elaboration of short publicity films with the students that

would foster students' participation in a common project outside of the strictly musical sphere. As an *advocate and networker*, a way to contribute to the musical life of the school, the community and the society, is to record students' concerts or class recitals that can be disseminated appropriately. In their role as a *planner and organiser,* watching videotaped lessons or students' concerts together with them appears as an effective way of formative and motivating assessment, and allows teacher and student to make plans and set goals together for effective teaching and learning.

4. Example of Good Methodological Practice Using Video-Recording for Pedagogical Research in a Conservatoire

To illustrate the application of video-recording in research in a conservatoire setting, an example can be useful. Recently video-recording was used in a study that was undertaken in Latvia between March 2010 and January 2011. The objective of the study was to address the needs of Music Academy students that are going to start teacher training, in order to suggest improvements in teacher training practices [7]. A detailed description of this study and its results is outside the scope of this paper. This section presents the main methodological advantages of video-recording for this study (i) in data gathering, (ii) in the data coding process, (iii) in the analysis and interpretation of results, and (iv) in the dissemination of results.

(i) Five hours of one-to-one lessons given by five 19 to 21 year-old Latvian Music Academy students were videotaped. During the observation of students' teaching, the presence of a little camera in a discrete place allowed to gather very rich and reliable information while requiring little time from the participants and without disturbing the students' teaching work. (ii) All events relevant to the research questions were coded using the qualitative analysis program AQUAD 6.8.2.2 [8]. The use of video-recording allowed watching several times the observed sequences. The researcher could go back to the original observation data at different moments, focussing successively on one of the relevant aspects of the teaching activity of students at a time (wording, contents, movements, etc.), and coding it. The first step of the analysis consisted of establishing a quantitative overview of the students' teaching [9], and characterizing their time management. The second step was the qualitative analysis of the students' teaching activity. It addressed, for example, their didactic listening style (as conductor or as public), the percentage of time they used musical actions during their explanations, the average number of assessment events per minute, etc. Video-recording also made it easy to involve several researchers in the coding process, as they didn't need to be present during the lessons and they could work on the coding of the video-files at different moments. This allowed using the Cohen's kappa to check the reliability of interobserver coding. (iii) It was also easy to involve the participants themselves in the analysis of data and in the interpretation of the results. The possibility to watch their own lesson attracted them, and this was a very natural way of forming focus-group discussions, where students reflected on their teaching activity and commented on and modified the conclusions of the researcher, thus improving the reliability of the study. (iv) Finally, in the presentation of the results, showing the video excerpts of the most relevant events, with the consent of participants, made interventions in conferences and seminars more interesting than just commenting numeric figures and graphics.

Among other findings, the positive reactions and interest of students in the way this study was conducted suggests the utility of using video-recording not only for pedagogical research in conservatoire contexts as a way of facilitating data gathering and improving the reliability of research, but also in music teaching and learning, as a way of offering qualitative guidance to young student-teachers, helping them to reflect on their own teaching experience.

5. Discussion

This study addresses the decisive importance of video-recording (i) to help students to become reflective practitioners and in their identity-making process; (ii) to improve conservatoire teachers' skills and to implement more efficiently their different roles, and (iii) as an irreplaceable tool for

pedagogical research in a conservatoire in data gathering and analysis processes and for increasing the validity and reliability of the interpretation of the results.

Young conservatoire students often already possess an advanced multimedia culture: for example, they are used to video-record everyday life situations with their mobile telephones, and deal with video regularly in the Internet as users of You Tube or other similar interfaces. However, video remains for them more a tool for entertainment. The main pedagogical challenge is to introduce them to the use of video-recording as a learning strategy. Regarding conservatoire teachers, the main challenge is to increase their media competence and their understanding of the possibilities that video-recording opens in the pedagogical process in higher music education. For researchers in conservatoire settings, one of the main issues is to develop a reliable and efficient methodology that allows exploiting the immense potential of video-recording, not only in pedagogical research but also in the field of Artistic research [10].

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