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Abstract of Poster

The Role of Improvisation in the Teaching of Baroque and Jazz-Pop Harmony

This poster presentation reports the result of a current study conducted as a part of a PhD research, through teaching baroque and jazz/pop harmony to university students. Action research methodology was implemented in two cycles aiming to develop the classical and jazz-pop tertiary music curriculum. Based on the results of the first research cycle, emphasizing the need for the aural and practical training in harmony studies, this study investigated whether improvisation had a positive effect on the development of baroque and jazz-pop harmony knowledge and was able to improve the aural skills.

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a whole-year course of 2011-2012, teaching baroque and jazz-pop harmony at the Music Department of University of

Jyväskylä, in Finland. 9 students learnt the same material through an aural-practical approach with keyboard in two parallel groups: Experimental Group and Control Group. The Experimental Group practiced also the improvisation in both styles, while the Control Group did not. The groups changed the methods in the midway of the course: the Control Group became the Experimental Group learning through improvisation. The same 3 harmony tests consisting of both baroque and jazz-pop styles were administered in the beginning, midway, and at the end of the course. Statistical methods (repeated measures design) were applied to measure the learning outcomes of harmony tests and the improvement in aural skills. Students' improvisation in both styles was recorded at different stages of the course and was evaluated by experts of the University of Jyväskylä by rating the tasks on a 7 degree scale, and statistical methods were used to compare these results to each other. Qualitative content analysis method was applied to analyse the questionnaires about students' opinion about their development of knowledge in harmony, challenges in aural and practical skills and the video recordings about students' improvement in improvisation during the course.

Results showed significant differences in the Total Test scores between the Pre-, Midway-, and Post-Harmony-Tests. Also, there was an interaction between the groups and the 3 measurement-times: the group that gained lower scores in the Pre-Test generally improved more during the whole course than the other group, which started with higher knowledge and musical skills. Similar tendency was found in Aural-Tasks-results and in both Baroque and Jazz genres. Concerning the Aural- and Jazz-Tasks the improvement was greater when harmony was learnt with improvisation (Experiment Group). In contrast, in

Baroque-Tasks no interaction regarding the groups was found. The qualitative analysis, and data regarding the students' previous education, individual development of studies, and improvement in improvisation in both styles, further indicates that students were more motivated to learn harmony with piano improvisation. Finally, based on the continued development of second-part Experiment Group, which started with lower theoretical knowledge at the beginning of the course, it can be concluded that improvisation helps to improve the harmony-knowledge in both genres, particularly in jazz, as soon as the theoretical knowledge in harmony is consolidated.