

Student Choirs and Virtual Social Practices by LivePBL: Linking Vocal Education with Project Based Learning

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Abstract

The focus of this research is to find out, how teaching and learning choir can develop all-round skills for students. LivePBL stands for Linking Vocal Education with Project Based Learning. Based on cases at Capital Normal University in Beijing, China, this paper reports the research in progress by applying LivePBL framework to enable undergraduates to explore choirs in training music teacher students. The paper argues that a good range of research can be seen by demonstrating choir activities that can develop "all-round" skills for the choir activity participants and music performers; however, there does not seem to be much addressing training students in social practices, who study music education as a major in a higher education institution and need to develop their social skills. Conceptual framework and case studies are presented in respect of teaching and learning vocal knowledge and performance art techniques, and more critically, the life skill developments at various levels, e.g., in self-esteem, self-confidence, reflective communication, self-efficacy, collective leadership, and consultative coordination.

1. Introduction

It is well known that a choir is a form of collective vocal singing [1]. There have various focuses on training choir participants' skills during such a comprehensive art of coordination performed by groups of people, or coordination divided into several parts which are relatively independent and cooperate with each other groups. Much research has been done on developing the skills of harmonious performance to meet the most basic requirements and the highest standard. As an example, "Harmony" does not just include sound harmony, sound harmony, and affection harmony; Harmony also refers to the accuracy of pitch, rhythm, speed, and dynamics. Harmony, texture, and structure must be clear; the rhythm must be consistent [2]. This paper raises issues concerning harmony to be a unity of the social singing state, where harmony refers to the collective understanding of the choir and the grasp of the choir's style in social practices, from image shaping, artistic conception, and atmosphere creation to social music thinking.

A choir can be effective to enable all participants including organisers, conductors, singers, and music performers, to all-round skills, because the group members must strictly obey the command, pay attention to cooperation, use skilled singing skills, and naturally integrate the individual with the collective, not only to sing their own parts but also to take into account other parts [3].

Moreover, to coordinate the relationship between oneself and the whole, the participants must have self-control and with high cooperation spirit. The famous Hungarian composer Kodaly said it well:

What better signifies the unity of society than a choir?

Indeed, many people join forces to do what one person cannot do alone, and in this regard, everyone's work is equally important, one mistake can ruin everything. Therefore, rigorous choir training is a good form of collectivist education for students [4].

However, how to teach students whose study major is in music education not only the knowledge about a choir, but also about choir-orientated developments of all-round skills in, e.g., self-esteem, self-confidence, reflective communication, self-efficacy, collective leadership, and consultative-coordination? To achieve this, what is the sustainable, critical, and cost-effective pedagogy?

This paper reports the progress made by students who led the research and development of the pre-service music teaching programme, based at Music College, Capital Normal University. The programme has also been platformed to collaborate with school teachers across China and cross-cultural teaching exchange with Nepal and UK.

2. Conceptual Framework

Defined by Jones and Bouffard [11], social and emotional learning is the process to enable learners to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to manage their emotions effectively. To achieve this, learners need to formulate their "positive goals, to feel and show empathy for others, to establish and maintain functioning social relationships, and to make responsible decisions" [11].

2.1. Social and emotional practices

Váradí [12] reviewed a range of comprehensive literature on the topic of social-emotional learning in education with the pedagogical theories and practices focusing on:

- Knowledge and skills for socialisation, such as social integration about themselves, through their environment, by their social ethics, values and norms.
- The individual role to play to create a sense of community, so as to enable learners to practice socialisation.
- Personal developmental skills on experiencing happiness, establishing trust, being able to balance, doing good things, showing kindness, building self-confidence, and sustaining wellbeing including health.
- Social developmental skills on enabling learners to integrate themselves into society, during which individuals learn about themselves, their environment, their communities, social ethics of coexistence, socially acceptable behaviour, values and norms.

Music education methods to learn social and emotional knowledge and skills have been developed in centuries. However, as mentioned early in this paper, research and developmental questions are emerging:

Can teaching and learning such social and emotional practices take greater advantage of hybrid pedagogical technologies to scale and sustain cost-effective projects, where across cultural and community-based communication skills, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, reflective community learning, community collective leadership, and consultative-coordination, can further be developed?

To achieve this, what is the sustainable, critical, and cost-effective pedagogy?

The current social and emotional practices for students, who are trained by universities to become music teachers, are very limited; they are not only limited by the relevant social project funding, but also by the mobilities necessary to undertake their project assignments, in particular, for international students [12].

2.2. In China's contexts

In China, it is necessary for students to feel the connotation of music works from the perspective of cultural and emotional experience. Therefore, in the process of music teaching, students need to have music practice ability, as well as skills to study social and cultural concepts. With the rapid advancement of

education reform, domestic colleges and universities have begun to reform and explore in the practice of music teaching. Colleges and universities have started from the actual development of students led music societies according to the practice of teaching, innovate the concept of teaching, and at the same time take students' learning interest in developing students' professional ability in music.

In theory, social and emotional practices are specific curriculums of music education in colleges and universities, which often are designed as projects combined with students' development plans, to meet the actual demands arising from a social organization that can be a school or social club. Students can be divided into different groups, actively engaging with their music societies, and being involved with social organizations, enterprises, etc., so that students can face the challenges or problems in the "real world". However, colleges and universities often only promote the construction of a social practice platform for music education. Teachers actively guide and promote the construction of a social practice platform, starting from the government's policies and regulations to the resource supply of social enterprises, and the corresponding music resources.

Combining the music education resources of colleges and universities with social development is according to the collaborative mechanism and regulations agreed upon between colleges and society. Students often use art performances and concerts to carry out their social and cultural developments.

3. Research-in-Progress

The research has been undertaken by an exploratory research approach in nature to frame the research initiatives. Focused groups and cases are developed by undergraduate and postgraduate students at Music College, Capital Normal University, Beijing, China. Projects have been developed in Hybrid Mode.

3.1. LivePBL pedagogy

A Project Based Learning pedagogical approach has been adapted. The research in question jointly established the framework named LivePBL, which stands for Linking Vocal Education with Project Based Learning. Project Based Learning (PBL, [5]) is different from Problem Based Learning. As the jointly LivePBL research group pointed out: Students complete Project Based Learning by meeting the project's objectives, while students complete Problem Based Learning by providing a solution for the problem [6]. China has introduced PBL at the end of the 20th century. PBL transfers students to situate in the real world of teaching practice [6] (see Table 1 illustrates LivePBL Principles). LivePBL is also a collective pedagogy that is layered to coordinate research, teaching, learning, education administration, and social development, as in Figure 1 illustrates.

Table 1. LivePBL Principles

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| <p>LivePBL Principles in line of Project Based Learning that include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empirical real international situations to enable students to have teaching and learning experience, where global engagement, global social presence or social belonging are often difficult to augment in traditional classrooms. • Empirical real effectiveness of adapted pedagogical for maximising the learning experience and social presence of remote participants across different countries. • Empirical real cost-effective international mobility of scalable training approach with regard to technical and pedagogical capacity and limitations. • Combining with traditional vocal music pedagogies to enable interactive teaching and learning, as well as cooperation between teachers and students. • Crossing international cultures by workshops or forums where teams of students report their learning outcomes by setting up commonly interested teaching plans. • Sharing internet access points or computers by groups for presentations, while carrying out the project tasks offline. |
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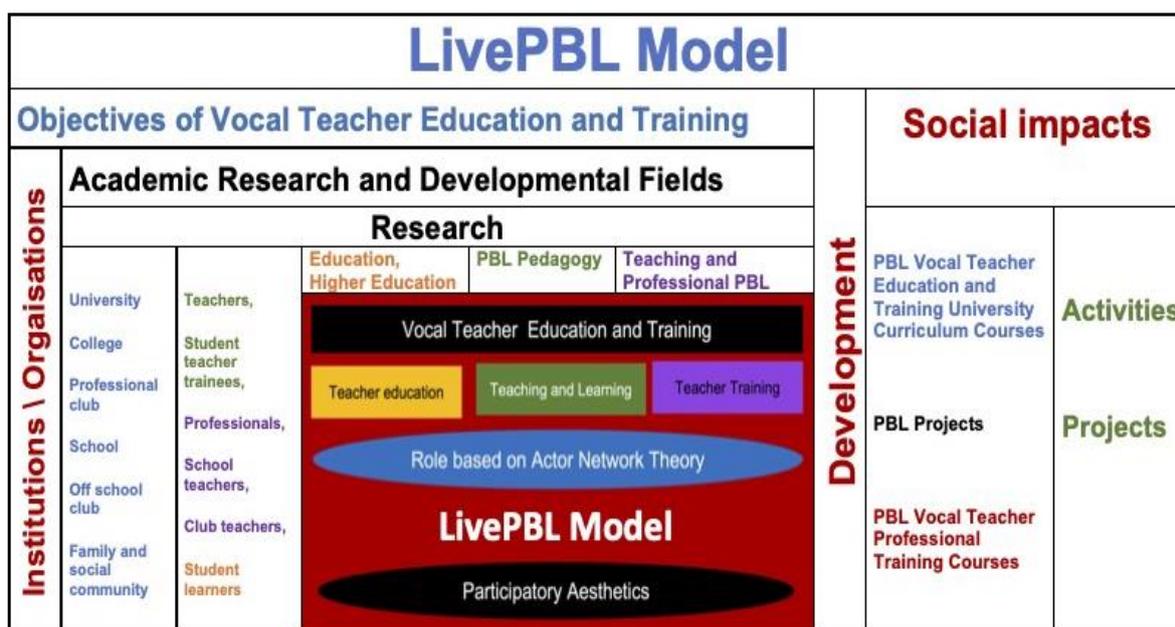


Figure 1. LivePBL Model

3.2. Project case in supporting a secondary vocational school student

Choir training was set at a secondary vocational school education in China. Because of the rapid educational reform policy implementations in recent years, the pursuit of employment rate has become a common educational goal of secondary vocational schools. This kind of educational motivation is highly likely to make the school's teaching activities away from the purpose and principles of music art performance curriculums. Evidently, music and art

enthusiasm and initiative projects should greatly make critical impacts on the awareness and ability to cooperate with vocational schools' all-around skill development for the 21st century.

Guided by LivePBL framework, choir project teaching courses had been carried out effectively to enable students' music literacy and all-around skill development. Observational scenarios had been set up on learning awareness and a sense of participative belongingness, and at the same time being stimulated and motivated to learn.

The age group of secondary vocational students is

between 15 and 18 years old. Obviously, the development of self-awareness will make students of this age pay more attention to their social sensitivity. For example, there can be often a small external change triggering their extremely sensitive social emotions.

Choirs were based on local well-known folk songs. They seem to agree that since ancient times, music has been the spiritual food of human beings. People use music to express their emotions, sorrows and sorrows, and use it to express their feelings. Farmers have field songs; children have nursery rhymes; mothers have lullabies and soldiers march heroes and prosperity; lovers have a soft spot for love songs... Choirs were

organised by groups simply singing together by teaching the use of important musical elements such as rhythm, melody, and harmony. Arrange music according to certain music rules, showing learners the music characteristics in their nature of culture and life.

Students expressed their innermost feelings through music and contributed to the improvement of the music aesthetic ability of secondary vocational students. Learning journals were used under supervision with guided learning entries to enable students to reflect on their own individual learning experiences. Padlet tools were also used to hold their forums for collective thinking and teamwork skills (see Figure 1).



Figure 2. Chior performance organised and conducted by LivePBL Research and Development with secondary school teachers and students in China

3.3. Project case in over 3000 participants choir at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China

Another project case was to organise 3000 participants singing together at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China. There were 70,000 spectators and 3,000 choir members, led by 50 student conductors, who sang 9 popular songs to celebrate the communist party's 100th anniversary, including "Sing a Folk Song for the Party", "Unity is Strength", etc.

The programme was training 50 music student conductors with a sense of skill development in missionary and honourable responsibility, leadership, music and art understandings, and teamwork under pressure. As one student experienced:

"I clearly remember that when I returned from the training camp, I was still in a daze and could not adapt to normal school life, because during that training period, we seemed to live by our will and reborn".

The student team from Music College, Capital Normal University participated in conducting the massive choir. The team had been trained to conduct by the same conducting commands. In addition to commanding actions to be uniform, emotional expression is also a very important link. The emotional expression also happens to be crucial in vocal singing and performance. Some songs were more difficult to sing in such form of choir because the changes in tone, speed, and intensity created a solemn sense of ritual. The performance must be conducted to express the spirit of endeavour and modernity that embodies contemporary youth. The audience should be engaged too, singing together, and creating a sense of solemnity and participation for the performance of the day. The Figure 3 illustrates the training scenario.

3. Findings

To further explore LivePBL to develop all-around

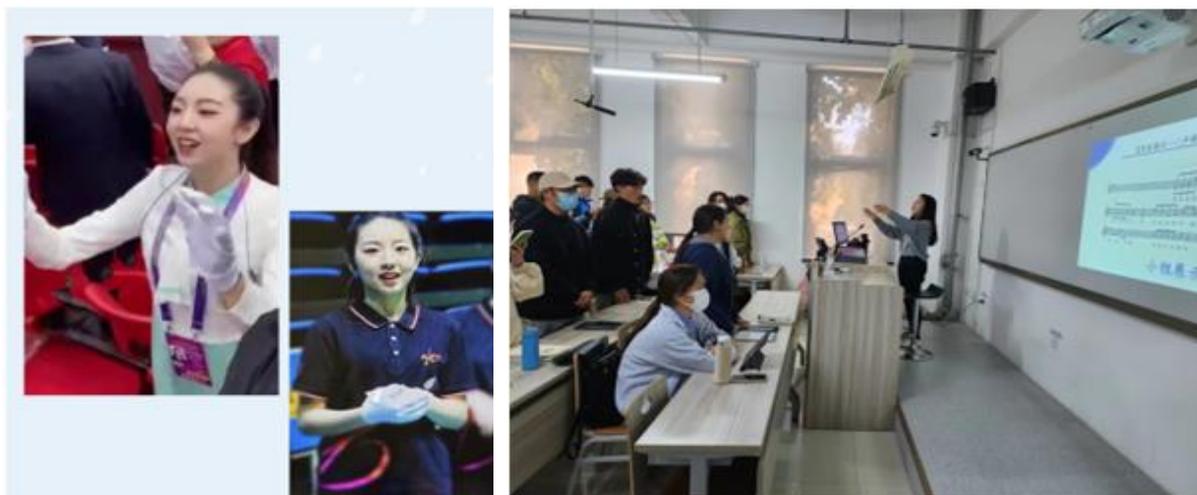


Figure 3. Student choir training based in Music College, Capital Normal University, Beijing, China

skills, research, and development have been carried out in two phases. The first phase has been to establish a conceptual framework on the literacy of choir education and training; the second phase has been student-led and organised choir projects to enable students to observe how the all-around skills are situated within the choir projects.

Vocal art is a musical language art. Singing is actually a clear and beautiful language to express people's thoughts and feelings, so language has become an important part of singing [10]. The language in the song, that is, the lyrics, is a poetic language. The lyrics in the chorus are full of passion. It has an amazing artistic effect [10]. The excellent choral works of ancient and modern China and foreign countries are the crystallisation of musical culture. They are beautiful in form and content, which can only be reflected through singing. When students sing choir, they are "immersed in the scene", their emotions are infected, and resonance occurs along with their spiritual realm. Psychological research [7] points out that those who have experienced beauty, have been emotionally moved, have the deepest impression of interest, and have the strongest memory. So, when working with students, leadership is required to dissolve oneself in the group during the chorus.

With the main research focusing on current music education to pay attention to the development of students in all-around skills, classroom-based pedagogies are not sufficient and effective for students to learn choirs. The students need to have various situated learning environments to develop their artistic thinking skills. Otherwise, many other critical learning objectives cannot be met, such as students' sentiments, students' aesthetic ability and appreciation ability, and students' exploratory ability to discover the beauty, appreciate beauty, and create beauty [9].

A project case has been established with a

secondary school in China. It has been found that all-around skills can be developed and observed through choir music educational activity to shape the characters with skills for students, students led choir projects. The elements that constitute vocal singing in contests of all-round skills during voice practice training with emotional expression and so called second creation with art directed singing.

In addition to the flexible performance and emotional foreshadowing, the second creation of the singer and the piano accompaniment plays an irreplaceable role in the perfect interpretation of the work. The second creation is based on the composer's first creation, correctly grasping the style of the music, plus the singer's own understanding of the music, and the cooperation between the piano accompaniments.

The unity and coordination of the vocal state of each individual singer in the chorus, the unity and coordination of the vocal parts, the unity and coordination of the timbre, and the unity and coordination of the emotional expression of the works, etc., these are the basic arts for chorus members to achieve. Require. Learn to listen to other members' singing tones in uniform. Solo singing is a form of performance that reflects individual singing skills, and it is a form of vocal performance that focuses on expressing individuality.

To differentiate voice states, chorus requires the control of the sound lines of each part to achieve a clear, soft and emotional effect so that the sound can flow naturally under the control of the breath, and it is necessary to freely control the size and volume of the breath.

4. Conclusion

Art education is a neglected part of the current normal colleges and universities, and choir education is a good form of art education. Choir education can not only mentor students' sense of cooperation and

improve students' cooperation ability but also promote the healthy development of students' comprehensive abilities in all aspects. However, at present, choir education has not been well developed in normal colleges and universities.

Research on music-led social and emotional practices has been in centuries. Formal educational institutions have established and adapted curriculums engaging students with social practices. However, such institution led social practice curriculums and actual students' activities are limited to the projects' scalabilities and students' mobilities.

LivePBL has been established as an innovative pedagogical approach to lead normal colleges and universities to innovate choir educational concepts, to innovate students led cost-effective project organisational platforms, enhance students' artistic accomplishment, and at the same time strengthen students' social and international mobilities in exchanging learning experiences, and lastly but not least, cost-effectively and sustainably motivating students to develop themselves in all-round skills.

In order to achieve choir education student led projects can be as an educational activity to shape the characters with skills for students. Student led choir projects can experiment on:

- i. the elements that constitute vocal singing in contests of all-round skills during voice practice;
- ii. in addition to the flexible performance and emotional foreshadowing, the second creation of the singer and the piano accompaniment plays an irreplaceable role in the perfect interpretation of the work; and
- iii. differentiating voice states, where chorus requires the control of the sound lines of each part to achieve a clear, soft and emotional effect.

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