

EOALAB

European
Erasmus+
Strategic
Partnership
Project

manual on shared education



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This introduction displays the objectives and the outline of the project, and also underpins the possibility to transfer valuable insights from the project to other networks and Higher Education Institutions.

introduction

EOALAB a European Erasmus + Strategic Partnership project

The European Opera Academy is a growing network of conservatoires which collaborate by opening up parts of their education to each other's students, thus making additional sources of expertise and areas of specialisation available to each other's students.

In doing this, the partner institutions create added value for their institutes, for all stakeholders and on all levels. To understand these benefits better, and to explore how the network can further improve, the EOALAB project was undertaken. Within the project, three working groups were formed, tasked with working on different aspects of this theme.

Working Group 1

a manual about the opportunities and challenges of a shared education network like EOA.

Working Group 2

new developments in opera making and on 'the opera singer of the 21st century'.

Working Group 3

'programme-based teacher exchange', as a new approach to exchange possibilities within a shared education network.

This introduction displays the objectives and the outline of the project, and also underpins the possibility to transfer valuable insights from the project to other networks and Higher Education Institutions.

The European Opera Academy (EOA) is a network of music (and drama and/or dance) academies from all over Europe which offer an opera specialization. What binds these academies is that they acknowledge that opera training, in which students develop themselves to technically skilled and artistically driven musicians, is a long and winding road: working as a versatile opera artist is incredibly demanding, opera training therefore is a

combination of becoming very specialized plus having all-round interdisciplinary skills. Besides, the development of both the music-technical (vocal) and the artistic side of this profession takes time.

The European tradition of the art of opera is long and strong: its heritage is the best that classical music has to offer, opera is the playing field in which all the arts meet and co-create, and, throughout the ages up until the 21st century, opera is the musical art form with the strongest societal voice.

The labor market in opera is developing. In the traditional opera houses, which play a major role in preserving and re-enacting the opera canon, more and more contemporary repertoire and new productions are to be seen and heard. Next to this, there are new initiatives, new companies, new festivals and settings that embrace opera as an appealing and exciting innovative art: all kinds of smaller productions, with contemporary societal connections, combining new music with new visual media or re-creating traditional repertoire to reach out to diverse audiences are an exciting manifestation of the fact that opera is still a leading, meaningful and attractive art.

Due to this development in labor opportunities, the incredibly comprehensive skill set that opera singers and other musicians working in the field of opera need, is balancing more to the side of what higher music education understands as 'entrepreneurial'. Singers need to be able to collaborate and co-create in innovative productions, and they need to manage their own artistic development while working in short-term contracts, while constantly delivering the highest quality of vocal and expressive skills. Their understanding of the other arts and the use of multimedia should be up to date. Their communicative skills, including a broad and good command of languages, a general curiosity and openness, and their potential to be flexible and stress resistant are even more vital.

In this European project, EOALAB, **Working Group 2** (partners and EOA members from Maastricht, Porto and Vilnius) focused on these new developments in opera making and on 'the opera singer of the 21st century', so that music (and drama and/or dance) academies can adapt their programmes to the demands of the current labor market.

In education, and especially in training for such a multi-faceted art as opera, next to transfer of knowledge and pure technical training, practical experiences are essential. This is the main basis for the EOA to exist: opera students need many opportunities to experience what opera is about, how to be traveling and networking while keeping the own vocal development on track, how to engage in a new artistic environment, how to commit to a creative process etcetera. In this, not every academy can offer all the specific experiences every single student would like to encounter – and the individual needs of opera students can vary strongly. The EOA offers the possibility to collect a variety of experiences, in other academies of the network, by making use of the Erasmus + exchange programme for students – this could be framed as 'programme-based student exchange' because of the strong driver that the specific, supplemental programme in the other institution is.

However, the EOA programme is not a supermarket full of shopping fun; education is about providing guidance, 'being there' while students experiment and develop their skills, identity, profile – tutoring and guiding while these young professionals are defining what success means to them and finding their way in a dynamic labor market. Therefore, the network is important: students receive guidance from their home institution and the host institution, and there is extensive contact between International Relation Coordinators, main subject teachers and programme leaders of both. In this process, there is much to gain for everyone involved: teachers widen their scope and network, and receive inspiring input from international colleagues, programme leaders get deeper insights in other practices and

organizations and connect around practical everyday challenges and visionary perspectives from connected academies. The opportunities for learning in such a network are abundant, on all levels, including on institutional level.

Because of this openness and the mutual commitment to strive for the best education possible for students, we qualify all this as 'shared education'. Working Group 1 (partners and EOA members from Antwerp and Stockholm, and project partner AEC) describe the opportunities and challenges of such an educational model and innovative institutional network.

As said, the opportunities for learning and development within such a network for shared education are numerous. Working Group 3 (partners and EOA members from Parma and Riga) focused on 'programme-based teacher exchange', as a new approach to the possibilities exchange within a network as the EOA offers to teachers, connecting to programme more, and aiming at professionalisation, both of the individual teacher and of the programme.

In opera, languages are key, speaking, for an international career, singing for deep understanding of text and music. All academies provide language training for their opera students, and all opera languages (Italian, German, French, Russian, English) are represented in the EOA, by EOA member academies with native speakers. This is why Working Group 3 chose to take the subject of language training and develop a teacher exchange programme to bring language teaching to a next level. The examples of the structure of and the material for such a short-term language training programme will be followed up by other EOA members (Hamburg, Geneva, Cardiff) for the other opera languages; this way there are programmes available which can easily be organized in between academies, using Erasmus+ teacher exchange, as an impetus for language training. And, obviously, there are more subjects that could be interesting to offer this way. Blended Intensive Programmes (Erasmus+ 2021-2027) are a perfect fit for what this working group developed.

Inspired by the strong focus on learning that a shared education environment provides, teachers of the working group decided to participate 'as learners' too, when the original language of the partner institution was subject. Then, it was inevitable to understand that participating students could change roles as well, depending on which language was taught. So, both the teachers and the students who were involved in the project acted as both students and teachers: the Parma group of learners in 'a Russian week in Parma' were teaching, all together, in 'the Italian week in Riga', and vice versa for the Riga group of teachers and students.

This setting, with a focus on learning and less on status or position, created an incredible atmosphere. The joy of learning and working together, which is supposed to be the heart of the educational master-apprentice model in music training, was overwhelming. Everyone involved was committed to learning, to sharing their expertise, to trying, and trying again. The fact that different levels (in Italian/ Russian, but also in the main subject level) joined in the same classroom seemed to contribute to the lively atmosphere: instead of fixed standards as measures for learning, a shared striving for excellence was the driving force in the classroom. This experience came up as an unexpected extra asset of shared education, where trust is the basis for joint, continuous learning and collaboration on all levels.

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01.

Context for the manual for shared education

The Bologna process was a turning point for students because it made international exchange possible. Erasmus and other programmes give students the opportunity to follow part(s) of their educational programme in another Higher Education Institution (HEI).



Some observations on the current exchange practice:

Based on 'Bologna', students can study abroad and transfer the result of their studies to their own home institution – for a differentiated / customized study path it would be interesting to go on exchange for more than just a similar replacement programme. Exchange programmes could/should be more than a copy-programme in another HEI.

Going on exchange is still quite complicated: students face financial and administrative challenges, and study programmes (or institutional cultures) aren't always flexible enough to make exchange possible. There remains room for improvement when it comes to administrative flexibility and the procedures.

The set of skills requested from young professionals is growing to an amount where it is sometimes no longer possible for one institution to cover them all. A platform for collaboration could allow HEIs to better communicate their specific programmes and offers to a target group, allowing them to enrich their student population with specific student and teacher profiles. It also allows partner institutions to offer their students and teachers what could not be offered at home, through exchange.

Having acknowledged that students and teachers benefit from a variety of exchanges which provide **supplementary or different training and experience** alongside their regular studies and courses, thus creating, to a certain extent, their individual programme or professionalization, the European Opera Academy started working on establishing a network which would provide smooth exchanges, fitting personal needs. Obviously, the fact that the modules which students can pick in the EOA programme are specific subjects and projects, different from what their home institution offers, makes exchange more problematic, both from an educational and administrative perspective. There are significant benchmarking and professionalization benefits from close collaboration between institutions, but the administrative side is, still, not a simple fix.

In this manual of shared education, both the educational, idealistic, conceptual perspective and the pragmatic, practical approach are present.

The way the EOA practices shared education, and why, is an example of how such a network can function to the benefit of students, teachers, and institutions. This approach can be copied, for other subjects and programmes, by HEIs which believe in the student as an active, researching artist, with agency over their own learning pathway, finding out what success means to them.

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1.1.

Educational context

The Learning & Teaching Working Group of the Strengthening Music in Society project wrote, in their anthology *Becoming Musicians* (Gies & Saetre, 2019): *'The conceptualization of the music performance student as a researching artist captures, in our view, the active, artistic student with artistic and professional agency, which is in the absolute center of her learning process. The conceptualization is therefore interesting from the viewpoint of student-centered approaches to learning. It is more in line with a holistic curricular logic than a strictly encyclopedic logic but does not rely on project-based curricula. The main reason for this is that conceptualization changes the relationship of power between student work and curriculum design. It puts the music student's learning process and working methods at the center instead of the 'never-ending' discussion on what knowledge and skills music students should develop. It underlines the active, crafts-based, explorative, curious, innovative, reflective, methodical, improvisational, questioning, knowledge-seeking, and powerful role of the student. Besides, it validates the strong wish and will of students to become musicians, to develop their skills while feeding their own artistic drive. A learning environment where young professionals make their artistic dreams come true in a connected and informed way can invite students to act as designers of learning and thus serve as a laboratory for art and the profession. Lastly, the concept of the researching artist has additional metaphorical impact in the sense of giving hints as to how to approach music and performance through a number of artistic research procedures, including: acquiring musical knowledge and skills, exploring art through performance, composing, improvising, using digital technology, contextualizing music in wider fields of theory, doing field work in the profession, experimenting and testing, looking for new ways of working and understanding in and with the arts.'*

From this text, an image of the student as an active and curious developer of their own trajectory, both in education and as young professionals, arises. This is exactly what the EOA has in mind: students can, in an open dialogue with their teachers, enhance their academic programme by choosing extras from the EOA offer. This requires a specific approach towards teaching, and it leads to a special relation between student and curriculum: expert teachers facilitate learning and students take more responsibility - together they function as a learning community, developing new practices, understanding learning goals, creating collective resources and artistic engagement. This concept of a conservatoire as a learning community, where teachers and scholars join their students in learning, together developing their art, facilitates an open attitude between HEIs as well. Other academies have other traditions, backgrounds, historically formed specializations etcetera. The EOA is a playing field where students can explore all this, through the EOA offer. The guidance around student choice for the EOA programme comes from both the home and the host institution, in dialogue; students are more or less guided into the exchange institution and programme, instead of just being assessed for their entrance. Students receive much more information around their options, which is helpful in making choices, and their exchange is more likely to become a success because of realistic mutual expectations. And, because of this open, collaborative attitude of the connecting academies, there is much more opportunity to learn from each other's practices, arrangements, ideas, in a very practical way, while connecting around students. Teachers and staff are involved in a student's exchange, and they learn from this. In the end, there is institutional learning involved, if internal processes are arranged accordingly. The EOA, as an example of shared education, is based on a strong belief in student-centeredness and is a best practice of what the Learning & Teaching Working Group of the SMS project pictures for up-to-date education. As a facilitator of exchange, of students, teachers, ideas, and practices, the EOA is also a good example of internationalization.

1.2.

Internationalization & mobility

1.2.1. Erasmus+ mobility in general

The impact of an exchange by students and teachers on their professional development plays an important part in all Higher Educational Institutions (HEI). Temporary study and teaching abroad is expected to have a positive impact on personal and academic development, but also to be conducive to transition to employment and career development. Erasmus teaching assignments often do not last longer than a few days. Nevertheless, mobile teachers report a positive impact on their career.

That being said, there is a clear shift of focus from mobility to how internationalization can improve the core business of a HEI. The introduction of Strategic Partnerships in the Erasmus+ programme in 2014 was a clear signal that the focus of modern higher education institutions should now be on developing new content and tools for education, instead of just bringing students and teachers together. Many Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership projects aim at developing and sharing innovative practices and promote cooperation, peer learning, and exchanges of experiences in the fields of education.

The Erasmus+ Programme strives for inclusiveness and accessibility with simpler application processes as well as enhanced international mobility and cooperation. The programme invests in innovative fields of study such as environmentalism, sustainability, and artificial intelligence. As the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us the importance and the necessity of technology in our modern working lives, there is a significant amount of funding allocated to the digital sector as recent experiences have shown us the possibilities offered by virtual learning and cooperation. However, physical mobility remains essential to the Erasmus+ programme.

1.2.2. Erasmus+ Blended Mobility

With the introduction of Blended Mobility in the Erasmus+ programme in 2021-2027, all mobility activities of staff and learners can be combined with virtual components, thus contributing to more flexible mobilities.

- **green incentives** for participants who choose to travel by train or bus rather than by plane and higher participation targets for non-EU countries;
- **promoting innovation** in curriculum design, learning and teaching practices;
- **promoting green and digital competences.**

The programme focuses on inclusion through increased financial support to raise accessibility and awareness among participants with fewer opportunities. Equal opportunities and access of underrepresented organizations and participants as well as dismantling barriers related to e.g.: disabilities, socio-economic status, discrimination, geographical location.

In Key Action 1, groups of HEI have the opportunity to organize short Blended Intensive Programmes of learning, teaching and training for students and staff. During these blended intensive programmes, groups of students or staff learners will undertake a short-term physical mobility abroad combined with a compulsory virtual component facilitating collaborative online learning exchange and teamwork.

The virtual component must bring the learners together online to work collectively and simultaneously on specific assignments that are integrated in the blended intensive programme and count towards the overall learning outcomes.

In addition, Blended Intensive Programmes are open to student and staff learners from HEIs outside the partnership. Blended Intensive Programmes build capacity for developing and implementing innovative teaching and learning practices in the participating HEIs and provide added value as compared to existing courses at the participating HEIs.

In Key Action 2, partnerships for cooperation are divided into 2 sub actions; Small-Scale Partnerships (only available for school education, adult education, vocational education and training, youth and sport) and Cooperation Partnership (former Strategic Partnership). Both actions are monitored by the Erasmus National Agencies.

By creating Blended Intensive Programmes like the language short-term courses in this project, the EOALAB acted as front-runner of the latest developments in international collaboration within the Erasmus+ programme.

1.2.3. AEC

An essential bridge in implementing these cooperation projects is the AEC (The Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen), a European cultural and educational network with around 300 member institutions for professional music education in 57 countries. AEC works for the advancement of Higher Education in the performing arts, primarily focusing on music.

AEC is also involved as a partner for dissemination, communication, and evaluation in several European EU funded projects to take advantage of its unique network of contacts, international events, and list of experts in the field of higher music education. Through these projects AEC is a driving force for innovation, always envisioning the future of higher music education within society. AEC is a partner of this EOALAB Strategic Partnership project. Especially the aims to facilitate student and teacher mobility and to develop networks which make smart use of Erasmus+ possibilities that suit AEC's innovative agenda.
www.aec-music.eu

1.3. Professional context: bridging the gap with the professional field

1.3.1 The synergy between education and profession

The professional field is a complex and continuously evolving context, which is mostly addressed upon on a local institutional level by collaboration in artistic projects and teachers who are active in the local or international profession. On top of this concrete level of collaborations, the input of the professional field is also present on a quality assurance level, suggesting changes in development and innovation of higher education programs to better meet the needs of the evolving and changing professional context.

Within a shared education network, institutions can easily interchange information on the local professional field -differing from country to country-, which helps students entering the profession in foreign places. Apart from participating in existing local collaborations within the profession and introducing students to local partners, the institutions can share specific knowledge on e.g. tastes in terms of artistic choices and colors, which differ from north to south and east to west.

The network can also facilitate contacts beyond the local level in a wider European or international context, dealing with the theme of the shared education network. e.g. Opera Europe. In addition, the collective bargaining power of a network could facilitate in applying for international grants e.g. for collaborations with the professional field.

1.3.2 Bridging to the opera field

Working Group 2 of the EOALAB project examined the specific bridge between the professional field and HEI in the opera field. It can however be easily translated to other fields and other shared learning networks.

The arts have always been a mirror of and engine to continuous change in society. This also applies to opera. Though some may associate tradition and standstill with operatic productions, as they currently exist, there have been many shifts within this artform, including the search for new repertoire and the definition of different artistic goals. These shifts need to also be reflected in the education of opera professionals, evolving curriculum, content, aesthetics and presentation forms.

To ensure that the singing artists within the professional field can spark new artistic streams and react to diversification and aesthetic fluctuation, opportunity needs to be created very early in the educational process to communicate and meet all parties' needs. Clearly, it is essential to involve the professional world in the creation of new and the adjustment of existing curricula, thereby answering to the highly specialized, exclusive and unique needs of professional opera singers. Therefore, it is essential to involve the professional world in any form of educational innovation or development designed to meet these needs, as well as to react to new challenges.

Within the framework of the EOA Strategic Partnership and EOALAB SP, the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp and their specially founded „Klankbordwerkgroep' (Sounding Board) created an open dialogue with local professional connections from the opera scene. Their feedback to the following catalogue of central questions on the European Opera Academy project and the manual at hand is in accordance with the findings of Working Group 2 about today's Opera Market and its demands and consequences for young singers.

Chapter 2.8 covers tips and tricks for HEIs on how to collaborate with the professional field and how to bridge the gap between education and the professional field could be addressed via shared learning.

1.4.

A shared education model: European Opera Academy

The European Opera Academy (EOA) is an ambitious platform of Higher Education Institutions which open up best practices in opera education for young professionals. Since opera training has to incorporate a large skillset which is broad and specialized, and because of the large individual variety in both the professional qualifications and the developmental pathways for young professionals, the EOA-programme is based on the need to give more options to students than one academy or conservatoire can provide. Entrepreneurial skills are core in opera training, so student exchange fits well as a way to organise this.

By offering special short-term modules, the EOA partner institutions enlarge the educational offer for their students. Throughout the following chapters the term module or modules will be used. Within EOA, modules are student exchange-projects offered every academic year between the partner institutions. For the readers of this manual a 'module' may mean any type of exchange project with a specific target or for specific students.

Collaborating closely within such a thematic network is a driver for quality enhancement. The academies participating in the EOA offer additional possibilities, new courses, and production facilities to students within this network and to visiting students. The partners are open to development, exchange, and innovation – they also have connections with opera houses, vocal competitions and festivals, aiming to provide students with the best possible environment to prepare for their careers. This way, the EOA is a meeting point for international benchmarking in professional opera education, considering the personal talents of each individual student. Participating academies are Antwerp, Cardiff, Florence, Hamburg, Geneva, Łódź, Maastricht, Novara, Oslo, Parma, Porto, Riga, Stockholm, Valencia, Reykjavik and Vilnius. (Status 2021-10-18)





The European Opera Academy invites students to participate in this initiative: the modules are designed for Bachelor-, Master-, or third cycle students and recent alumni from the partner institutions. The collaboration between EOA partners can be characterized as practical, trustful, and open. To keep it at this level, and to reflect a balanced geographical spread and variety in curricula and learning/teaching approaches, the EOA aims to keep within a maximum of 20 partner institutions.

The financial restrictions of students and institutions is a reality we must work with. Students search for the best education-offer at the best price. Institutions face the challenge to offer the best possible education within their financial means. Being part of a thematic network like EOA is a major USP for a conservatoire and for its students and teachers.

In short

Students

- can specialize in specific aspects of opera training
- strengthen their position on the market and extend their network
- benefit from the exchange of best practices in professional opera education in Europe
- choose from a wide range of modules

Teachers

- can share their personal, specific expertise in professional opera education
- strengthen their position on the market and extend their network
- benefit from the exchange of best practices in professional opera education in Europe
- develop their expertise further in modules and productions

Conservatoires

- can offer a wide(r) range of specific aspects of opera training
- strengthen their position on the market and extend their network
- benefit from the exchange of best practices in professional opera education in Europe
- can optimize investments in staff, means and time by focusing on specific modules and productions

The organization, communication, process, responsibilities, and decision making in the EOA is explained in chapter 5.3.

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02.

Creation and development of a shared education network

This chapter is the result of the research on the set-up and further development of shared education networks, using the experience from the EOA network as a reference.

2.1.

Benefits of shared education for the stakeholders

2.1.1. Student exchange within a shared education network is good for students

Any exchange experience adds to the skills that one needs as a professional musician. In addition to the development of skills related to the student's main subject, it will also result in a personal level of growth, cultural knowledge, language, and communication skills. On a deeper level, the student will gain skills regarding tolerance, co-operation, adaptability, networking ability, self-knowledge, problem-solving ability, and persistence. The creativity, analytical ability, empathy, efficiency, skills of flexibility and adaptive capacity of the student will be triggered. Studying abroad is an asset on the student's CV, as it implies that the student is entrepreneurial, independent, and open to other cultures.

Because of the close contact between the institutions and teachers in a thematic **network** like EOA, the approach can be **tailored** according to the specific needs of a student at a certain point in his/her learning trajectory. **Modules** can be supported by Erasmus mobility grants, which also opens possibilities for exchange to students with limited financial means.

2.1.2. Student exchange within a shared education network is good for teachers

Exchange will always broaden the scope of the pedagogical and artistic input and will be a source of information to reflect on the teacher's own methodology. Through students going on an exchange, the teacher can gain new knowledge on other methods and approaches. This keeps the teaching dynamic, energetic and evolving through adopting, synthesizing or actively rejecting ideas.

Moreover, thematic networks like EOA could act as an **intensive learning community** and provide a circle of **trusted experts** that help teachers to develop themselves in certain areas of expertise.

2.1.3. Teacher exchange within a shared education network is good for students

Teacher mobility paves the way for student mobility: teachers from different institutions get to know and trust each other and get growing acceptance towards the student learning in a new environment.

Teacher exchange offers a possibility for international learning experiences for students who are unable to go on exchange. Teachers familiar with mobility will easily encourage their students to go on exchange. Outgoing teachers will come back with a lot of best (or worst) practices from other conservatories. By involving teachers in curriculum development, these best practices can be incorporated into the home curriculum and thus benefit the students.

In a shared education network like EOA, teachers have a **close understanding of the benefits and offerings of the partner institutions** and their partner colleagues thus they can give more **specific advice** to their students and will have a closer follow up with the teachers in the host institution.

2.1.4. Teacher exchange within a shared education network is good for teachers.

Teacher mobility is an ideal way as a teacher to professionalize. By working in the classes of international colleagues, teachers can measure themselves in an international context and gain additional inspiration, knowledge, and pedagogical competence.

Exchange can enlarge the teachers' professional network. Teacher mobility means meeting other cultures and belonging to a European community, increasing the prospects of employment of a teaching artist outside of the institution-context.

Exchange within a shared education network entails being part of a **network of specialised experts**. Sending out teachers on exchange gives them an experience of trust, it **validates** their qualities and helps them grow as a teacher, as an artist, and as a cornerstone in the home institution.

2.2.

Curriculum design and planning of courses

2.2.1. Curricula and transfer of results

International learning and teaching experience is not an optional feature anymore but has become a key factor for a successful career and the development of a mindful global citizenship. Accordingly, the focus of internationalization in higher music education institutions needs to shift towards the curriculum, which needs to become more student based with room for individual choices for the student. The curriculum connects the broader institutional strategy with the student experience, thus playing a paramount role in the success or failure of the institution's internationalization agenda as well as on the global employment opportunities of future professional musicians.

Within a context of shared education we aim at new learning activities and courses in addition to the home curriculum. So **extra flexibility** regarding the curriculum is essential to ensure student-centered learning, and offer possibilities for internationalization at home.

The circumstances of HEIs differ, e.g. with respect to the national standards for curricula. In some cases, the curriculum is an overview of all courses in a week and the number of credits and study hours. Other HEIs have more open curricula: the courses are not defined with concrete study hours or semester planning; it only says which courses are in the curriculum.

As a result, educational institutions have different spaces in the curriculum, suitable for international exchange. Some have real semester mobility windows, freeing the curriculum totally in a certain semester. Some institutions created space in the curriculum through optional subjects. Most institutions however have a fixed curriculum and replace part of the home institution's courses to enable exchange modules.

In a shared education network, students will come from different kinds and levels of programmes, varying from bachelor to traineeship after graduation. Despite this, exchange can be realized with the tools provided by the Erasmus system, but **flexibility is crucial to make shared learning work.**

tips & tricks

Under here some tips and tricks how to use the curricula in a more flexible way for exchange and student-centered learning:

The principle of exchange is based on the equivalence of curricula and acquiring common skills. A certain flexibility regarding equivalences of subjects is definitely needed. It is wise to check if the learning outcomes are compatible with the courses in the home institution and not only consider the specific content of the courses.

Dedicated ECTS space for projects, electives or international mobility could facilitate international exchange, although it should not be regarded as necessary. Open spaces in a curriculum might look an evident solution but could on the other hand be unattractive to incoming exchange students. A designated optional subject for international projects might be a good alternative to validate well-defined, short term exchanges through project-based partnerships. But in many cases, current course(s) can be determined as a course that can be (partially) completed within an exchange context.

Part of the exchange involves assessment. In exchange situations assessment and the transfer of results should be both flexible and transparent and clarified on beforehand, esp. with the recognition of specific score-systems which are not used in the home institution (pass/fail system versus A-B-C-D-E system versus a system with points out of 20, ...)

Involvement of all major stakeholders of the programme is strongly recommended when developing or renewing a curriculum. Stakeholders who have experienced first-hand what an enrichment international mobility is, will be extra enthusiastic in contributing to curriculum design and processing their feedback in curriculum design is advised. (See chapter 2.7 Learning from exchange). Teachers, student representatives, student counselors, peers, IRC, administrative staff ... It is important to keep all stakeholders well informed about the workflow and steps in the process of curricular change.

Part-time study or spreading the curriculum over several years of study may provide additional scope for international exchange. This approach is also beneficial for working students.

Offering students the possibility to customize the home programme can help to arrange their mobility programme.

Smart scheduling of classes and projects are also helpful when it comes to teacher mobility. Especially in smaller HEIs, teachers face difficulties to leave for a full week. Long-distance learning and digitalization or a simultaneous teacher exchange could solve this barrier.

2.2.2. Planning of courses

Every partner institution has its own planning system.

The following could be helpful for more frequent exchange between the HEIs, also outside of a shared education network:

tips & tricks

Aligning the internal planning calendar with the deadlines of Erasmus+ mobility and the deadlines of the network is advised.

Organizing certain courses twice during one academic year helps students in exchange in a certain semester to catch up with the classes in the other semester.

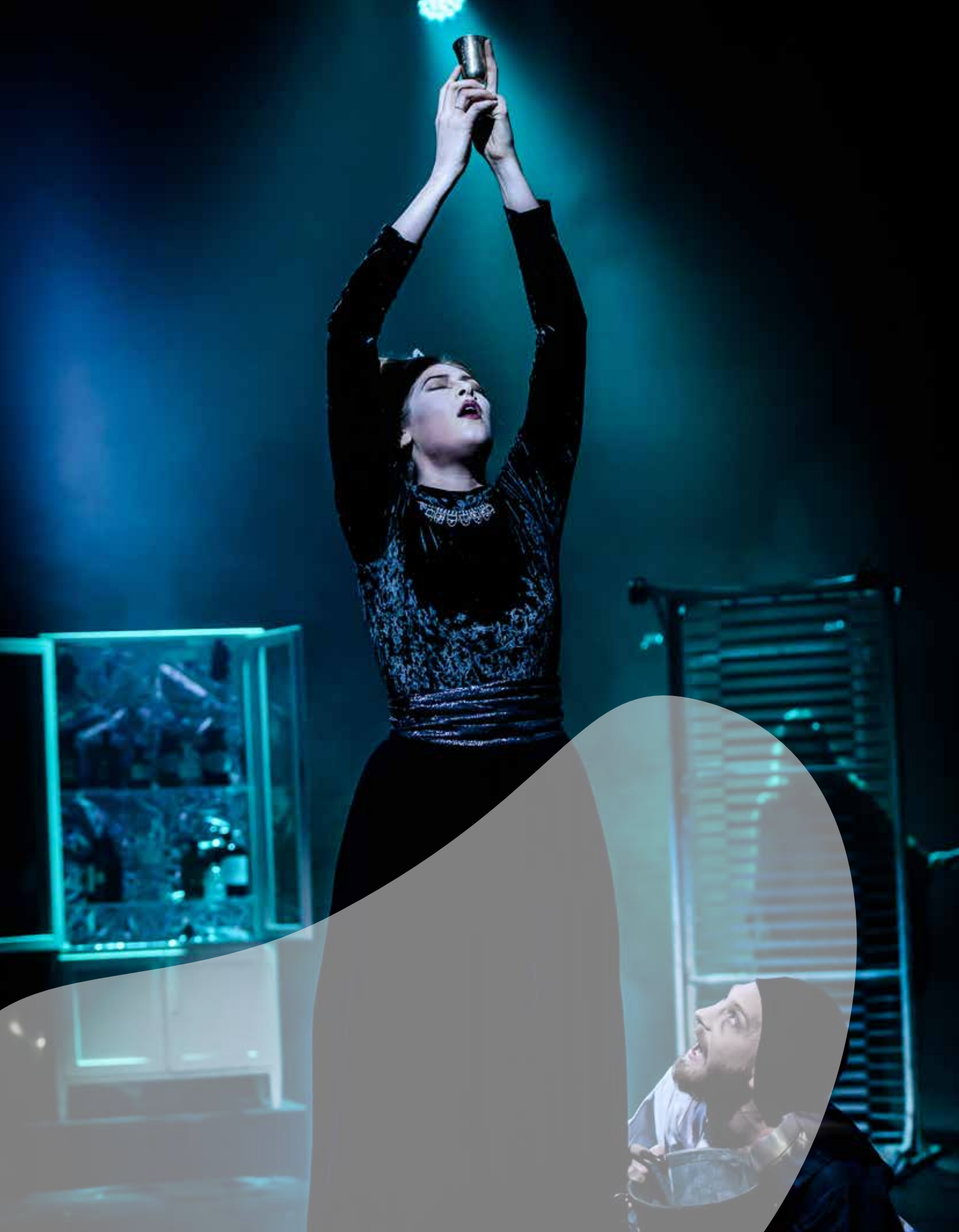
A more modular planning of the classes at both the home and host institution instead of year-long weekly lessons make exchange much easier.

Long-distance learning could be a solution to problems with partly completed classes and similar problems. Streaming of the lessons at home and the availability of registrations of classes via the online learning platform of the home institution are possible solutions when an exchange interrupts a course in mid-term and there is no good replacement for it in the receiving HEI.

Digital information on the lessons and modules does not only benefit the incoming students, it also facilitates the IRCs in their guidance on equivalences in the Learning Agreement.

Some lesson-free weeks might be an option when missing weekly classes during a short exchange is not an option.

Doubling courses e.g. in English is beneficial both for incoming exchange students and local students.



tips & tricks

The challenges of an exchange based on a production module can be faced with the following tips and tricks:

The student's preparation can be enhanced by involving additional teacher mobility between the two institutions in advance.

Do discuss the preparation for a production exchange in depth with and between the teachers involved and the student before the exchange takes place.

The receiving institution could consider developing blended activities to prepare the exchange.

Coordinate interaction between staff members to prepare the exchange/project and/or invite teachers through teacher mobility to prepare students before their exchange

Explore what kind of collaboration or exchange of information could facilitate the planning of modules/projects with exchange

Consider the actual planned teaching and the learning outcomes of the module in the receiving institution as the basis for approval of the LA (Learning Agreement) instead of the actual title of the course/module.

2.2.3.

Planning of production modules

Recreating the professional context during the educational pathway is a crucial part of the students trajectory. Not all HEIs can offer productions meeting the needs of the entire student population. This is why joining a shared education network can partly help.

Planning and preparing modules, dealing with a production, like an opera production, requires a specific approach. They often do not necessarily fit within a semester and can often not meet the requirements of the Erasmus+ exchange grant. These kinds of modules can be very popular among (graduated) students doing an internship or traineeship.

A student going on exchange in a production module may need specialized preparation in advance that the home institution cannot offer.

2.3.

Student's perspective on hindrance to exchange

In the research of the working group 1, it became clear that students experience three major barriers to international mobility:

- financial obstacles
- insecurity
- thinking the home institution is the best

Conclusion

A shared learning network like the EOA helps students to overcome the three barriers mentioned. Many of the tips and tricks are easily implemented in a shared education network, due to the **tight relationship** between the partner institutions and **the guidance** provided. The experiences from the EOA supports this.

Shorter exchange possibilities can provide new solutions in regard to the **short timeframe** of a master programme. Also, modules in a shared learning network are more specific and **add an extra to the master programme** (instead of replacing the education in the home institution). Therefore short exchanges like in the EOA can be effective.

Also, the possibility of **exchange after graduation** could be more promoted. The specific funding programme 'traineeship after graduation' within Erasmus works perfectly for modular exchange, as well as for longer training, and can **bridge the gap** between studying and working in the professional field.

2.3.1. Financial obstacles

Lack of clarity about the financial cost of an exchange program is number one on the list of obstacles. Part of the costs will be covered by an Erasmus bursary for student mobility, but this grant is in most of the cases not enough to cover all the costs. This depends on where a student comes from and where the host institution is located, as Erasmus grants differ per European country.

Accommodation is another barrier: not all institutions possess free student rooms for incoming students, which means the student needs to rent accommodation independently. Students are also hesitant because they do not have sufficient insight into living costs in the host country, which can vary considerably.

2.3.2. Insecurity

Fear of isolation and a lack of language skills can cause emotional insecurities, preventing a student from going on an exchange. During exchange, a student can feel like they are left hanging in the middle, not belonging to the new community of the host institution and missing the daily support and the communication in the home institution. Cultural differences may cause confusion, misunderstanding or conflicts. Students may be uncertain whether their language skills are sufficient for their studies.

Both in the sending and receiving institution conditions that promote a tight community feeling are recommended. Communication and networking are essential and having contact on an institutional level on the following tips and tricks is beneficial.

2.3.3. Thinking the home institution is the best

There is a widespread view, both among students and among teachers, that the home institution is the best and that an exchange may interrupt the student's progress. Some teachers feel a need to be in control during a student's entire education. Students may be overly focused on the local perspective and simply lack experience and information to appreciate the worth of international exchange about cultural values and educational gain.

Some of these problems arise from the basic timeframe of academic life: a two-year master study can be perceived as being too short for long exchange, at least if the student has not completed bachelor studies at the same institution. Also, until recently, the shortest Erasmus exchange for students was three months, making the clash with a two-year master programme even more palpable. Recent developments in Erasmus, making shorter student exchanges possible, have addressed this. Some schools have large communities of students from abroad registered as regular students. These students may be unlikely to shorten their stay in their chosen school by going on an exchange, having already invested a lot in going there.

When communicating an exchange module it's recommended to publish financial information such as:

- the average living costs for a student
- the required material
- possible additional study costs
- any financial benefits e.g., concert tickets and reduced prizes

It is also useful to provide information about the specific practical living costs and some solutions:

- publish a list of own student rooms or subsidized accommodation
- make a database containing the network of students in your institution who are willing to sub-rent their apartments
- provide information on local shops and markets, laundry, student restaurants, transport etc.
- give information on practicing facilities
- create a student buddy group that can give support and information to incoming exchange students

-
- **a student buddy group** giving support and connection to life in the school and introducing newcomers to the social life in the country
 - **student ambassadors** who get in touch with the incoming student before arrival
 - **connect the incoming students** to local social media groups
 - **establish personal contact with teachers** in the host institution before arrival
 - **provide regular contact with teachers** of home institution while the student is on exchange
 - **provide means for the student to keep contact** with the class group in the home institution while on exchange
 - **make a communication plan** on how to share experiences from students on exchange in the social media of the home institution
 - **establish and keep good contact with the IRC and the student counselor** in the home institution
 - **provide regular debriefing opportunities** where students that have come back from exchange, can talk to other students and teachers about their experiences
 - **consider activities that build cultural exchange** eg. a class concert with students, performing songs from the home country in their mother tongue

tips & tricks

-
- **sharing experiences:** testimonials from returning exchange students; information meetings with the IRC, an infomarket with students who went on exchange, ...
 - **creating a collegial and joint approach to teaching** and sharing information on the educational system of teaching
 - **inviting international teachers** (via Erasmus Teacher mobility) e.g. for masterclasses could broaden the international perspective of the students
 - **starting small:** intensive one-week exchange projects are great try-outs
 - **establishing a close** contact with the stakeholders of the host institution beforehand through e.g. an online chat with students or teachers, through video clips or through student ambassadors
 - **project-based short mobilities** on specific themes are less disruptive of the students' progress with the home teacher
 - **main subject teachers** in the home institution play a key role: they should encourage students to go on exchange and take the opportunity to prepare the student for a period of independent learning
 - **exchange after graduation in an Erasmus traineeship** can also serve as a solution

2.4.

How to design new modules and develop existing modules or projects?

Based on the experience within the EOA and the research done in the SP, recommendations on several aspects of how to design modules in a thematic educational network have been assembled:

- network members need to define their **specific expertise** within the network's field of interest.
- the **educational needs** of the students connected to the network should be clarified among the institutional partners.
- **sharing this information** forms the basis of the design of suitable modules.
- the **teachers' team** should be closely involved when setting up the modules, so they become co-responsible.
- the network could consider offering **templates** for modules to the HEI members, to make sure all aspects of the module are described in a similar order.

In this chapter we share information and recommendations on modules, both for traveling students and travelling teachers, regarding the length and the content of the modules. In the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027, blended modules (virtual and physical) are possible.

2.4.1. Modules for traveling students

Length of the modules

Ideally, in a thematic network like EOA, a variety of modules should be offered, ranging from short intensive courses to longer modules of three months or more. The length of a module will depend on the pedagogic method and the artistic content. One has to consider the financial consequences of short modules, as exchange for less than 3 months is not possible within the Erasmus+ funding programme, unless it's organised in a hybrid format with minimum three partner institutions. As soon as the exchange exceeds one week, a clear learning agreement and assessment is needed.

1-3 weeks

Short modules give the opportunity to focus on a single subject or a specific short production. This could challenge institutions to present a specialization, diving deep into a subject. These immersions are sometimes missing in our education and can become eye-openers for students, pointing them into new artistic pathways. Short mobility can address the specific needs of a student, without interfering with the education at home. It also allows the combination of student and teacher simultaneous mobility and fosters collaboration on modules between institutions. Shorter modules can be a stepping-stone to overcoming the resistance to longer exchanges later.

6 weeks

Staged production modules, like opera or music theatre modules, can benefit from a six-week long exchange. Six-week exchanges give the possibility to combine being away with taking courses in the home institution, if necessary. Both for the main discipline and for the subsidiary courses in the home institution, six weeks of distant learning or independent study is feasible. A six-week mobility may encourage the student to consider a longer exchange of one or two semesters later on. Institutions should consider however that the preparation of the six-week modules should for a large part take place in the home institution or in a blended format, with collaborative teaching in both institutions.

3 months or longer

In a three-month exchange period, students can really experience the local cultural life in the host country. A longer exchange period enables them to make personal contacts. A longer stay could also cover both the preparation and the production time of a production-oriented module. Longer modules give more flexibility for adjustments during the course. On the other hand, three-month modules might be more difficult to integrate with the study plans of the students in the home institution, it's a long gap but not a real semester. This length of exchange is covered by the regulations of Erasmus+ funding for students.

Content of the module

A shared learning network should offer a variety of content in the modules, going from broader topics over collaborative or creative modules to specific niche modules. In most of the cases, modules are offered by one institution. Modules however, can also be created by several institutions together, using teacher mobility. This might make it easier for smaller institutions in the network to offer modules and attract student mobility. It's important to analyze the specific needs of the student and teacher population in the network and to match the offer to the effective needs. E.g., in many voice faculties there are more female voices than male voices. In this case, it is wise to provide sufficient modules with repertoire for female voices in the offer.

2.4.2. Modules for travelling teachers

Joined modules with travelling teachers are beneficial and easy to set up in a shared education network. It is a useful way to share and develop specific knowledge among all students and teachers in the network. Experience gained in teacher mobility is useful in the development of the curriculum design and improvements in the home institution, as explained in chapter 2.7 Learning from exchange.

Teacher mobility is an excellent tool for professionalizing the teaching team. The exchange of expertise at the highest level internationally gives a boost to the knowledge and commitment of the teaching team and generates a change of perspective. Thus, the basic learning unit is no longer just the classroom with its teacher but becomes the group of teachers from the entire network of institutions involved.

Teacher mobility within a shared learning network could take numerous forms and topics. Several teachers could also offer a joint course during a longer period, to student groups in the respective institutions. The combination of teacher and student mobility provides interesting learning and teaching opportunities. Examples of and models for these types of exchanges can be found in chapters 3 and 6 of this manual. The network could also consider inviting external specialists from the professional field, sharing the resources in a joint module or in an online or hybrid context.

tips & tricks

Analyse the specific teacher expertise and student needs within the network

Consider exchanging teachers simultaneously or establishing team teaching in the home institution to solve planning and schedule issues

Consider inviting incoming teachers in a module at the home institution, using teacher mobility

For travelling teachers of theoretical subjects: consider sharing your courses and lectures online so students in the home institution can practice and work independently during the mobility period

2.4.3. Modules with combined student and teacher mobility

Modules, using combined student and teaching mobility, are a third interesting way of setting up modules. In this format, the pooling of teacher resources and students from several institutions together in one place creates unique opportunities for learning.

The format can be the basis for a great variety of courses and programme subjects, offered within a shared learning network.

Adding a virtual part, the model fits the structure of Blended Intensive Programmes as being subsidized by the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027.

Working Group 3 of the EOALAB has been using this format in two Intensive Study Programmes, involving groups of teachers and students, in this case from two conservatoires. A full description of this activity (in opera language learning), including two examples, is provided in chapter 6: Optimising shared education with programme-based teacher exchange.

The working group was very happy to find that the new Blended Intensive Programmes offer an opportunity to combine teacher and student exchange, resembling the model that was tested: a five-day course with the participation of incoming teachers and students, working together with home institution teachers and students. As described in the introduction of this publication, incoming students and teachers both act as teachers, while the receiving teachers and students both function as a group of learners, and vice versa. This turned out to be a great success, a key driver for learning.

In chapter 6, a description of a five-day course structure and schedule, and a database including all the material used in the Russian and Italian language courses can be consulted. This database is accessible for all EOA students and teachers, as the material functions as a library for everyone learning opera languages. It can be supplemented for each future language learning and teaching activity, and, depending on the needs of the learners, new kinds of material and demonstration videos can be added. The database will also be enlarged to other languages.

2.5.

Application process for modules in a shared learning network

tips & tricks

Have one central person in charge per institution for the administration of the application process.

Align the application process with the regulations in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), including the deadlines for the specific calls.

The use of EASY (European Online Application System) in the network is recommended, it fosters clear communication between coordinator, IRC, and student and is a flexible system for different kinds of applications.

Provide the partners in the network with an overall perspective on the status of applicants, containing details on outgoing and incoming applications and a geographical overview.

Auto notification helps to keep all partner institutions informed on the different steps and status of candidates in the application process. This is easily done in EASY.

Actively involve teachers in the setup of the application process (and the preceding module design) and in the approvals within the application process, both in the sending and the receiving procedure.

The network may provide standard feedback evaluation form for judging the applications, although it should not be imposed. More important is that candidates get feedback on their application, especially when rejected.

Consider multiple deadlines for application for short modules.

Limit the number of modules an applicant can apply for and ask them to make an order of preference.

Create a pool of potential applicants and work with a waiting list.

2.6.

Information and communication within the network

2.6.1. Website

The website should serve as a central point of reference and communication and contain the official presentation and profile of the network. It should have several chapters:

exposure of the modules

It is crucial to provide a complete, clear, and attractive module description on the website of the network. Students need to be able to assess the whole picture of what each module entails, both regarding the concrete teaching content as well as practical issues.

Aspects of the description:

- period and duration
- description of general theme and aim
- description of the activities and courses in the module
- target group
- the information regarding the selection process: deadlines, material, motivation letter, entrance programme and evaluation.
- participating professors
- extra possibilities linked to the module
- number of credits and teaching hours
- language requirements
- expenses

a section describing each school, including student life and living costs in the city

An introduction on the school and on the practicalities like travel, accommodation, and practice facilities for self-study for example, could be beneficial. Offering information in a contemporary format makes the module and the life in the host institution more concrete and immediately creates a closer connection. As private accommodation is often expensive and offered in the local language, institutions could list good places where to stay. Within the network, a database of student rooms could be set up, where students may sublet their student flat to other network students.

system for application

Administrative simplicity is recommended. The EOA registration format would function as a good example on this aspect.

tips & tricks

Standardize the type of documents

that the candidates should send. Of course, specific requirements for certain modules can be applicable.

Provide templates for e.g. CV, repertoire list, video.

Ask for a motivation of the applicants

Use multiple choice bullet systems instead of prose, so statistics can be easily made

Foresee the possibility for the applicant to have direct contact with the artistic contact person of the module in the receiving institution.

a chapter on upcoming events and specific calls

A timeline on the modules offered and a focus on upcoming modules or events in the partner institution are optional but recommended. Besides the regular information on the new modules, also specific calls within the network could be included in the communication.

a presentation of stories of former participants

Videos and short stories about the experiences of students and teachers in the network make the website more lively and attractive and offer additional information to the applicants. This should be supported by communication via social media channels.

an intranet

Via a log-in area for member institutions, the framework documents, lists of applicants and other relevant information could be easily shared. Once accepted, students could be also helped with additional tailored information, provided in an internal part of the website. This part could however also be covered in a shared drive on the internet.

links to the websites of the partner institutions

All partners in the network should promote the network activities on their local website and link to the international network website and vice versa. The contact details of the local anchor person for the network and the IRC should be included on the website.

2.6.2. Sharing information

How can institutions smoothly and effectively communicate to support students and teachers in their mobility?

tips &
tricks

Before the exchange

Documents among the partners should be shared in a convenient way via a shared drive or an intranet on the website.

Offer an overview document that describes exchange possibilities in the institution. Mention structured, short mobilities as a first experience.

Start informing students early about choice options in their studies. If they have a course like 'portfolio' or 'personal development plan' or 'individual profile' or 'entrepreneurship', a specific information session could be integrated.

Organize information sessions by IRC and head of department.

Involve teachers and IRCs to examine the modules and give advice on which module would be appropriate for which student. Students need to understand that they can make personal decisions in the composition of their study trajectory.

One can consider an internal selection in the home institution: students who want to go abroad first need to discuss this with their (main) teacher, who needs to endorse the candidacy.

Stimulate students to take active and direct contact with the chosen institution(s) and teachers.

Guidance on the paperwork at the home institution will be needed, usually a task for the IRC.

During and after the exchange

Welcoming and orienting upon arrival should be included in the information process.

Incoming students or teachers will need information on practice facilities in the host institution, on the local communication platforms and on study materials.

Specific English courses on terminology are useful for students as well as teachers. An English-local glossary could be developed to make the student aware of local terminology.

In addition to the standard Erasmus+ programme questionnaires, it is useful to conduct a complementary questionnaire, inquiring about specific issues per module or per group of modules.

A buddy system could be helpful for the communication and exchange of information during the module.

It's strongly recommended to keep contact between the home institution and exchange-student during the module, starting shortly after arrival. Continuing communication between the exchange student and the teacher team at the home institution is important for the continuity in the student's development.

Communication between the IRCs of both institutions should be continued, so practical difficulties or other issues can be quickly handled and solved.

In case that the communication between two partners in the network is troubled, the network coordinator could have a role in the process as facilitator and intermediary.

Encouraging exchange students to communicate with the wider society at the home institution keeps the bond between the students alive. Vlogs, blogs or e-mail journals could be useful formats and integrated in the social media channels of the home institution.

After the exchange a debriefing session in home HEI with the IRC, the network contact person and the main teacher is strongly recommended. See chapter 2.7 on 'Learning from exchange'.

2.6.3. Administrative communication

Glitches, familiar to the administrative side of the exchange process, will also be a fact in a shared learning network, but can however be more easily addressed.

If possible, it's recommended to **register the incoming students the same way as the regular students**, so they appear in all class lists and mailings from teachers and have access to all information.

Institutions use different types of grades (points on 20, pass/fail, ABCDF) which need a translation into another type of grade for the administrative system in the home institution. Within a network, the **recalculation of grades** can be agreed upon on a network level, so teachers, students and staff are informed beforehand. The kind of grade needed should be clarified upon arrival of the exchange student.

Registration of the subjects and ECTS in the Learning Agreement and the administrative system: courses abroad do not necessarily need to perfectly match the subjects in the home institution, although that is the standard routine. Subjects could be added in the study contract as electives or extra-curricular activities. Also courses elsewhere or a deviating study-path could be approved. Partially granted ECTS can be a solution as well: the receiving institution can equal short exchanges as a part of a subject. Occasionally, a confirmation letter can be a solution, explaining the content of the courses and confirming the student's attendance, even though they don't receive credits.

2.6.4. Communication with the wider world

Setting up a network website is not sufficient; it is the basis for communication, but it should be **accompanied by other information channels**. This means that both the network umbrella organization and all partners in the network should undertake actions to spread the information on the network possibilities. This could be done through newsletters and social media. Teachers and students should be included in these activities. They can serve as ambassadors, as many of them have a personal website and social media channels.

The network coordinator can function as a **communication hub**, creating content from the info provided by the partner HEIs and producing suitable material for the network's communication channels. The network could produce joint visual and audio material to share with all the partners: a compilation of the recorded highlights of the exchange modules of the previous year is an attractive format. Testimonies of students during and after attending a module can be interesting, as well as a deeper focus article on some of the partner institutions. Strong visual branding material such as logos and banners (digitally or physical roll-ups) strengthen the communication of the network.

2.7.

Learning from exchange

2.7.1. Learning from exchange at an institutional level

Can an institution also act as a 'learning place', besides a place where one comes to learn? The interexchange between teaching and learning within the classroom is clear for everybody. But can this approach become broader, something more and all-inclusive for the entire HEI? How, where, when and from whom can an institution receive feedback so it can learn? Adopting an open attitude towards learning as an institution is equally essential as it is for students and teachers. Operating within shared education is essentially recognizing that your institution is a learning institution.

tips & tricks

- take a critical look at the programme and offer in the institution. There will inevitably be **items missing in the programme**. Take up the challenge to identify them and explore if collaboration within an international project can be an answer. Collaborations with other local programmes, the professional field or external partners can also be explored
- create an ongoing discussion in **smaller communities** in the school which are close to the students and teachers, generating a permanent learning attitude
- determine and **discuss the quality and best practices of partner institutions** through feedback after staff, teacher, and student exchange
- use this knowledge for **programme development and innovation** of the curriculum
- implement feedback from international exchanges in a structural way in the **quality enhancement** cycle of the institution

Learning from student exchange

To learn from student exchange, we need to **debrief** the returning students and assemble valuable information. This could be done in interviews, via evaluation forms or via reflection papers. A clear **debriefing structure** helps to organize the feedback process. As the feedback from the official student inquiry in the Erasmus system often doesn't reach the institute and doesn't cover all aspects, it's wise to use a more specific feedback guide for the debriefings. Make sure you debrief on all possible aspects and involve both IRC and programme coordinators in the debriefing process.

Operating within shared education is essentially recognizing that your institution is a learning institution.

Analyzing, synthetizing, and spreading the information, thoughts and experiences within the home institution's network is the next step. All echelons should get informed: peers, teachers, international office, heads and coordinators of departments, study leaders, head of education etc. One could use the institution's newspaper and online communication platforms and put the topic of exchange feedback on the agenda of fixed meetings with committees or boards.

Consider organizing **public events** with returning students, so they can share their achievements and reflect on their experience with the school public: performances presenting what they learned, and interviews or talks about the experience. Communicating about exchange will surely motivate teachers and other students to go on exchange.

Reflections will generate **active learning by the student** and might also show more appreciation to the organization, facilities or educational offer at home institutions.

Learning from teacher exchange

It is recommended that conservatoires consider teacher mobility as a very strong **asset for innovation**, as mentioned in chapter 2.1. Like student exchange, an institute can also gain valuable information, good practices and concrete tips via this route and use them to improve the activities or processes within the institute.

Also here, a **debriefing structure** should be set up via a feedback document and/or a meeting to disseminate the experiences during the exchange.

Sending out teachers on **targeted exchanges** might also be considered. Once one has clearly identified the needs for innovation of the institution, teachers can be sent out with a specific extra mission as explorer or pathfinder for best practices. Including IRCs and teachers through the different levels of policy/curriculum development can contribute to this.

As mentioned before, international exchange could be a good tool within the **'professionalization offer'**. Some institutions do not have sufficient financial means and human resources to create a professionalization offer towards teaching and artistic skills. Through exchange this need could be partially met.

2.7.2.

A learning network

Being part of a network of shared education has a deep and positive impact on the organisations involved. Not only can a network of shared education provide valuable (peer) feedback about exchange to all stakeholders. It can also provide valuable insight on the educational offer, administrative services and institutional culture.

tips & tricks

A network can provide essential knowledge about its partner institutions. This way it creates an easy flow of information between institutions, which results in trust between partner institutions.

A network can provide standardized pre-briefings, debriefings and pulse checks during and after the different types of exchange within the network.

A network can send out a more objective survey to participants in activities within the network. The bottom up feedback by international peers will provide institutions with a broader perspective and valuable data for their quality processes.

A network can be a facilitator and driver to implement policy changes on political level into institutional policies and activities. Examples of this are the transition of STEM into STEAM (adding the arts), as initiated by the European commission, the urgent discussion on interculturality, diversity, identity and inclusion, and the adaptation of programmes to meet today's societal challenges.

A network can stimulate innovation of educational and pedagogical advancements, offering up-to-date information and workshops on new methods, techniques, processes and other actual topics.

Partners within a network could also look into a joint professionalisation-offer or open up their professionalisation programmes to partner institutions.

In a network exchanges on the level of leadership and senior management can be established more naturally and easily, as a result of the trust and the familiarity between the institutions. Exchange of administrative staff in the network helps convince them of the benefits of exchange and might take away thresholds.

2.8.

Learning from and collaborating with the professional field

As mentioned previously in chapter 1.3, the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp organized a sounding board with professional connections from the local opera scene within the context of the main Learning-Teaching-Training week-event (see chapter 5.6), to provide feedback on the future objectives of the European Opera Academy project and this manual. This and further discussions with the professional field by EOALAB resulted in an analysis of the profile of the current entry level opera singer. Adding the information, gathered in Working Group 2 of the EOALAB SP, this resulted in the following glossary of recommendations in opera education. They can easily be translated to other forms of education.

Central questions were

- what does the future profile of 'the entry level opera singer' look like?
- how can a curriculum be adapted or completed in relation to the professional field?
- how do we develop curricula according to the local needs, constraints and working culture?
- how do we manage and balance the academic offer with alumni employability?
- how to involve the teachers?

The professional field confirmed that the core competences remain excellent singing, strong acting, and intelligent musicianship. Graduating students should be experts for their own instruments: vocally, physically, psychologically.

Requested profile

- a **perfect classical technique**, supported by a reliable, sustainable, and knowledgeable vocal approach
- intelligent and creative musicianship with **linguistic proficiency**
- strong **acting and performing skills**: stage presence, timing, charismatic and authentic performers
- **self-knowledge**, keeping the **balance** between artistic flexibility and personal convictions or limitations
- **entrepreneurial** aptitude, using digital media and social interaction in **branding** oneself with a balance between market-oriented and artistic-identity-oriented strategies
- acquaintance with the **professional code of conduct**

tips & tricks

To better achieve this profile, an institution could consider the following tips and tricks to bridge into the profession. The recommendations are formulated for opera education but will be applicable in other kinds of art education as well.

- create a **semi-professional environment**, not purely academic
- stimulate **healthy competition** within a counterbalanced climate of merit versus nurture
- involve **professional conductors and directors**, bring them in for school productions and projects
- create opportunities to gain **experience and 'kilometers on stage'**, thereby enabling the singers to acquire skills like pacing, timing and self-care in several opera related projects per year
- create **additional modules** of extended vocal techniques and styles and bring in **non-Western repertoire and new opera pieces**, so alumni are better equipped to keep the opera artform alive and evolving
- **collaborate** with **regional opera companies and theaters** (also within the EOA network): understudy, double-casting, masterclasses
- introduce the **professional code of conduct** including communication skills, rights and responsibilities, contract negotiation, make-up etc.

3.1.	Institutional perspective and best practices from Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (RCA)	39
3.2.	Institutional perspective and best practice from Uniarts	40

03 ■ **Best practices and case studies on shared education**

A better educational offer to students can be reached through shared education and collaboration programmes. The teachers and the development and innovation of the programmes gains a lot from shared learning.



3.1.

Institutional perspective and best practices from Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (RCA)

The Royal Conservatoire Antwerp keeps looking for ways to enrich the educational offer through interdisciplinary collaboration and co-creation. The institution is fortunate to offer programmes in dance, theatre and music and on top of that a close collaboration with the sister-academy for visual arts within AP University of applied sciences and arts have been set up.

But also on an international level, the music programme is active in thematic networks, to deepen and enlarge the educational offer for both students and teachers. Networks as METRIC and EOA give additional chances for performance, creation and professionalization.

The Conservatoire believes that a better educational offer to students can be reached through shared education and collaboration programmes. And the teachers and the development and innovation of the programmes gains a lot from shared learning.

Two examples of shared learning in the RCA:

They say:
'It takes a village
to raise a child'.
Or ... it takes
a network of
higher education
institutes to provide
the students
the education
they need.

Shared education between programmes within one institution: NextDoors

NextDoors is the annual interdisciplinary project week at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp, during which students can explore the advantages and difficulties in collaborating with other artistic disciplines and the research at the Conservatoire. Students can work on personal interdisciplinary projects as well as subscribing to other interdisciplinary workshops given by teachers and researchers of the Conservatoire and the Academy.

During this week all doors stay open, so everyone is free to visit all the varied projects and workshops. Students receive full logistic and technical support (within the staff's limits and possibilities) and are assigned a room or hall for the duration of the whole week. During the final day of NextDoors week, they have the possibility to show their work at a festival.

NextDoors is the result of a collaboration between all programmes within KCA, the Academy of visual arts and some external partners in residence. On top of the student projects, researchers (of 3rd cycle) and teachers offer modules and workshops. Often, external professional organizations are invited in residence (in 2020 this was UN-label), they hold workshops for students and teachers and give performances. Rooms that are not used for the productions can be used for personal study, all regular classes are suspended, however.

www.ap-arts.be/en/nextdoors

Best practice on teacher exchange in the shared education network METRIC

Improvisation is a central element in several music colleges and conservatoires, not only within classical music programs but also within dance, theatre, and jazz. To this end, the Erasmus+ Strategic partnership project 'Modernizing European Higher Music Education through Improvisation - METRIC' was developed in 2015-2018 by, among others, the conservatoires mentioned further on in this chapter. The project focused on curriculum development and on promoting and enabling intensive cooperation in the field of

improvisation in higher music education. This Strategic partnership project was preceded by ERASMUS Intensive Projects on Improvisation, initiated by Royal Conservatoire of The Hague (2011-2014), which resulted in, among other things, 3 ten-day intensive improvisation projects, a film and a publication entitled "Improvisation? Just do it!"

At the end of the Strategic Partnership project, a group of former members of the METRIC Project, forces in the Metric network, with the support of AEC, joined forces to further develop the initiatives started during the Erasmus+ project. Aim is to give more visibility to improvisation and enhance its positive effects on the education, as well as contributing to the development of the existing curricula.

The classical improvisation (tonal and tonally-free) and its various applications are embedded in the curricula in performers' training and practice. Taught in both solo and group contexts from undergraduate to Masters', the practice of improvisation, (including its teaching and learning) regains its place as an integral part of the art-music performance. This includes real-time harmonic, stylistic and structural awareness, improvising in the different classical styles and genres as well as active listening and expression. A number of institutes (such as the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp) do not limit themselves to Classical Music and also strongly draw the map of cross- and interdisciplinary projects, in which improvisation often takes a central place.

Four institutes from the METRIC network have joined forces to teach a Joint Module METRIC since 2018-2019. Part of the lessons are given by the home teacher and part of the lessons by the teachers of the other institutes, who travel between the music colleges through Erasmus mobility means. Each conservatoire is responsible for its own costs.

In concrete terms:

Partners:

Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (Belgium)

Guildhall School of Music & Drama (UK)

Royal Conservatoire The Hague (The Netherlands)

ESMUC Barcelona (Spain)

Eight sessions are organized throughout the year, each lasting 2 x 2 hours within one student line. Four of those eight sessions are given by the home teacher. He also gives the students the framework within which they will improvise. The other four sessions are given by the traveling teachers of the other partner schools.

The exam consists of a group improvisation, in the form of a theme with variations, in which all the ideas and working methods of the sessions are presented. The exam is co-evaluated by the guest teachers.

www.metricimpro.eu/joint-modules/joint-module-on-tonal-improvisation/

3.2. Institutional perspective and best practice from Uniarts, Stockholm

NordplusMusic is a cooperation between the networks and institutions of higher music education in the Nordic and Baltic countries, including 40 music academies, universities, colleges and universities of applied sciences. The aim of NordplusMusic is to coordinate the member institutions' joint activities within internationalisation such as mobility, curriculum development, funding and strategic development. The Nordplus Programme offers financial support between partners in the area of lifelong learning from the eight participating countries and three autonomous regions in the Baltic and Nordic area.

Within NordPlusMusic, the member HEIs with opera programmes have created the network NordOpera.

In the NordPlus network, shorter mobilities are possible, for students this is already possible from five days. The NordOpera network has benefitted from these possibilities, making pedagogic gains through international collaboration. The shorter mobilities allow the creation of intensive courses focusing on a specific theme, i.e. a composer or a type of repertoire. This allows the HEIs to cooperate and pool their teaching resources together around the chosen theme, creating a base of expertise not available in any of the single HEIs. Gathering students from several HEIs together around a theme in a shorter time-frame also allows the students to benefit from being part of a larger group of peers focusing on the same theme, and meeting teachers from other HEIs, with different traditions and complementary expertise to the teachers of their home institution.

The shorter mobilities have also facilitated creating student peer groups in subjects where the student groups in each HEI are very small. For example, the HEIs of both Stockholm, Helsinki and Oslo have Master programmes for Opera Coaches, but the classes in each HEI are made up of one or two students due to the specialised subject. By creating intensive courses for these students, using mobilities for bringing them and their teachers together for a few weeks each year, these students can have a group of peer students with whom they can share their learning process.

www.nordplusmusic.net/



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04. ■ **Added values and benefits, a summary**

The concept of shared education can be viewed as resting upon three principles, that reinforce each other: the student-centered viewpoint, the shared education network as a learning community and the pedagogical opportunities.

4.1.

The student-centered viewpoint

The student-centered viewpoint: students can make personal choices in their education and build their education through modular international exchange.

The shared education network as a learning community: the close connection between the partner institutions results in benefits for the institutions themselves, as well as for their management, teaching and administrative staff.

The pedagogical opportunities shared within the network and by the creative use of international exchanges, generate content and pedagogical methods that are unique and innovative.

In shared education, students are central. They have a voice in their education, lessons and assessment can be perceived as an ongoing dialogue, and they will create their own practice and reform their art. Through the use of Erasmus+ exchange, students can build and adapt their education by choosing specialized modules in partner institutions in the network. To realize this, it is necessary that this increased freedom of choice for the student is facilitated by flexible solutions for transfer of results and other educational- administrative issues. These solutions will differ locally due to varying national educational policies and frameworks, and may take the form of curricular changes or simple administrative flexibility. The network provides a student-centered environment informed by guidance and safety, where the students can take a stronger position in which daring to experiment and where making personal choices are possible.

Added value and benefits for the student

- the international thematic network offers the student a wide range of specific content and specialized courses. The choices available are clearly visible to the student through the information channels of the network, much more so than in general Erasmus+ exchange, where the student would have to seek out an exchange independently.
- the student can incorporate courses with specialized content not offered in the home institution into his/her education.
- the visibility of alternatives and choices available in the network, as well as the trust and close collaboration within it, facilitates the teacher's dialogue with the student about their choices.

4.2.

The shared education network as learning community

Shared education, with its implications of exposure to other cultures, languages and customs for both students and teachers, will also be a strong and natural driver towards increasing diversity and inclusiveness.

By creating a network of HEIs sharing a common educational theme or subject, the partners will be able to offer the best education they can provide to the students. For most HEIs it is difficult to provide for all educational needs within their own learning community. Cooperating through a shared education network allows them to collectively offer opportunities for their students to build individualized education through modular exchange.

The network strengthens the relationship between the partner institutions as well as the connections between staff members within the institutions through the focus on the shared responsibility for the students' education. The network provides a communication platform for making the choice of possible exchange modules visible to the students, reaching all the students of the network and even beyond.

Shared education, with its implications of exposure to other cultures, languages and customs for both students and teachers, will also be a strong and natural driver towards increasing diversity and inclusiveness.

Added value and benefits for the institutions, management, teachers and staff:

- the strong relationship between teachers, IRCs and institutional leaders within the network creates a safe environment for the students, where all these people around the student are engaged in his/her choices.
- the student acquires entrepreneurial experience from planning and executing his/her international exchange.
- the student will get experience of meeting and working with colleagues and associates of a different cultural background from the international exchange, broadening the student's perspectives.
- students are in dialogue with the institutions and the teachers, putting them more in charge of their own pathway. They thus become their own teachers, preparing them for lifelong learning.
- within the network, the role that teachers, heads of departments, IRCs and external partners from the professional field play in the cooperation around the student's education becomes clearer and stronger.
- shared education is an excellent tool for professionalizing the teaching team. Expertise at the highest level is exchanged internationally and gives a boost to the knowledge and commitment of the teaching team.
- through the implementation of a shared education network, the role of IRCs within the learning community is empowered to take greater part in the development of the students' education. IRCs act as intellectual, emotional, and social capital by forging relationships across the multifaceted learning community of a HEI.

- the close collaboration in a thematic network promotes trust, generates valuable peer feedback and creates opportunities for new partnerships.
- institutions can rely on a network of expertise that can provide input on how to develop programs. The development of an attitude of learning can lead to personal growth in leadership.
- feedback from peers in the network can provide a broader perspective for quality processes.
- being part of an international network can open the institution to other cultural contexts and heritage.
- the strong relationship between teachers, IRCs and institutional leaders within the network creates a safe environment for international mobility actions of the teachers, paving the way for Erasmus mobility in general.
- the possibilities for collaborative teaching offer new ways for teachers to acquire knowledge and skills, and can give them opportunities for trying out innovative teaching methods.
- in forming a network, the communication between the partner HEIs and the professional field is facilitated, as any professional organization can reach many HEIs through a single point of contact.
- through the network, interested parties from the professional field can access a pool of alumni for job offers on an international level, going beyond the contacts of each partner institution.
- the network can facilitate a dialogue with the professional field on an international level on the development of the educational programmes, keeping the connection to the labour market up to date.

Shared education starts in the local learning community, but expands into an international network of peers that allow students to investigate, create and develop in a learning community based on expertise where interactions between all stakeholders are initiated by a shared desire to excel.

4.3.

Unique pedagogic opportunities and pedagogic innovation

In a shared education network, unique possibilities exist for courses and pedagogic innovation due to the shared thematic interest of the partner institutions. It allows teacher resources to be pooled from several partner institutions, making shorter courses with specialized focus that demands equally specialized teacher competence possible. Also, students from several partner institutions can be pooled together, benefitting from each other's varying cultural and artistic outlook. For some highly specialized disciplines, where the number of students studying the subject in each institution is very small, this form of shared education may be the student's only chance of meeting their peers. By creating short intensive courses, HEIs can offer these students a peer group to work and reflect with, and pedagogic processes that are simply not possible with the handful of students present in each partner institution.

- the pooling together of both teachers and students in a shorter timeframe through short-term mobility affords pedagogic gains by allowing the use of complementing teacher competence.
- the cultural and linguistic differences inherent in international cooperation opens up new possibilities for pedagogic invention.
- through the opportunities offered by shared education, students and teachers can explore alternatives to their traditional formal and distinct roles. The opportunities to explore interchanging dynamics - meaning students become teachers and vice versa – can create an open learning culture and contribute to a vivid learning community.

'It takes a village to raise a child' and it can be argued that it takes a network of higher education institutes to provide students with the education they need. It is simply not possible for many HEIs to offer all educational settings to their students within their own learning community. By creating a network of HEIs, cooperating through shared education, they will be able to offer the best education they can provide to the students. Each of the partner HEIs fulfills a unique and essential place within this community. Shared education starts in the local learning community, but expands into an international network of peers that allow students to investigate, create and develop in a learning community based on expertise where interactions between all stakeholders are initiated by a shared desire to excel.

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05. ■ Research and detailed work by Working Group 1

We gathered input from other institutions within the AEC network to get a better understanding of the challenges IRCs and programme developers face when it comes to shared education and curricula.



5.1.

Workshops on shared education and the questionnaire on student and teacher exchange

In some cases, we used the example or context of the EOA project to go into detail. The answers and input of all workshops, questionnaires and interviews were analyzed, transformed into themes for the in-depth discussion sessions of the Learning-Teaching-Training week-event in February 2020 and implemented in chapter 2: Creation and development of a shared education network.

At the AEC's International Relations Coordinators annual meeting in Prague 18-19th September 2019, two sessions were held by Working Group 1 of the EOALAB, jointly with the working group on Learning & Teaching in the Project Strengthening Music in Society of AEC. The umbrella topic for the sessions was internationalization in HEI-curricula. It was decided that the two working groups should collaborate, as several aspects in this topic were relevant to both: student choice, student guidance and quality enhancement through institutional collaboration.

As a point of departure, the session leaders started from the model of the European Opera Academy. Elements of shared education were presented, such as:

- including student and teacher exchange in the heart of the education
- giving students more flexibility while providing guidance in this process
- clearing obstacles to student exchange
- programme-based teacher exchange
- enhancing the (educational) value of exchange for an institution
- deepen institutional collaboration

Secondly the session dealt with flexibility in the study programmes. Student choice implies student exchange as an individual, flexible learning experience. Therefore, the sessions dealt with the desire for flexibility in study programmes and with learning environments which allow students to make independent choices in the design of their education.

Following that, the group shared thoughts on how institutional collaboration could improve the quality and development of education. Also, the growing awareness of the environmental impact of travel led to a digital shift and the need for new models for internationalization and exchange. The Covid-19 crisis, which took place after these sessions, has sped up this change.

5.2.

Netigate Survey to IRCs in AEC

The IRCs present talked about the educational value of exchange for students and how to maximize the benefits from it.

All participants filled out a questionnaire during the workshop, using Mentimeter*. Afterward, outcomes were immediately shared with the group and discussed in detail.

* App used to create presentations with real-time feedback.

As the working group could not reach all IRCs during the live sessions in Prague, an additional questionnaire on exchange was prepared and distributed in November 2019 throughout the AEC and EOA network to reach those IRCs who were not present at the conference. 37 additional responses were gathered by this channel.

In the questionnaire, IRCs contributed with their vision on and experiences with exchange from different viewpoints: student, teacher and HEI. The information turned out to be crucial in determining the themes for the Learning-Teaching-training week-event.

Several answers proved fruitful, such as:

- most exchanges are based on the choice of a certain main course teacher, which is not the focus in a network like the EOA
- many students find significant barriers in financial issues and travel
- attachment to the home institute often prevents students to go on exchange
- in many institutions, there is no good system in place to gather the student's experiences and use them to improve the education at home and encourage future applicants.

5.3.

Information from the EOA

We received valuable information on the current way of working of the EOA, as well as on the future developments that were planned. The coordinator of the EOA e.g. shared information on the number of applications and exchanges and feedback from students and teachers.

www.europeanopera.academy

The information was too incomplete to conduct a conclusive analysis as it was not clear who was finally accepted in the modules and communication on the selection of the candidates was conducted by the partner institutions, without involving the EOA-coordinator.

Sources:

- analysis of numbers 2018/19
- EOA applicants for 18-19
- analysis of numbers 2019/20

To track the success of the modules and adapt the choice of modules to the interested students, it's necessary for the network to assemble and analyze data of all steps in the process. This could be done e.g., by drafting a survey asking all partners about applications granted and finally exchanges realized. Under here we sum up in detail how the EOA is organized and which procedures the network handles.

5.3.1. Detailed information on the responsibilities in the organization

The EOA is coordinated by Conservatorium Maastricht and organized with two executive bodies, the Artistic Council (AC) and the General Assembly (GA). These not only provide the possibility to jointly run the platform, but also to create circumstances for best-practice sharing and benchmarking.

The Artistic Council (AC) consists of five members with the coordinator having a permanent seat. The AC-members originally served for a period of two years, which changed to a period of three years in 2019. A rotational system on the mandates was implemented, to ensure greater continuity within the AC. The AC represents the EOA and prepares for the General Assembly decision making: the AC advocates for the new partners, controls the external presentation, curates the modules, provides artistic feedback and examines the feedback results from

the participants. Every academic year partner institutions suggest (new) modules they would offer in the upcoming year, the discussion process (in the AC) is informative and instructive.

The AC acts as the face of the EOA and thereby avoids centralization of EOA identity in the figure of the coordinator. It is important that the AC has regular communication with the coordinator. To get more involved in assisting to guide the strategic direction of the EOA and to enhance communication channels the AC set up a system whereby each Council Member becomes a close contact for a group of institutions, helping to provide clarity and encourage active exchange of ideas. It is also recommended that AC members visit the partner institutions.

The **General Assembly (GA)** consists of representatives of all partners and meets annually. Ideally, this meeting is hosted in a different partner-city every year, as it helps to better know the partners, and could be combined with teaching sessions, related to the content of the modules that the hosting institution is offering. The GA determines the new or updated modules, budgets, policies, main processes and presentation on the website. The analysis and statistics of application is an ongoing task for the GA. The GA meeting also decides on the acceptance of possible new partner institutions for the EOA. The EOA network will expand to a maximum of 20 partners. Important criteria for joining the network are the specialization of each partner, the geographical spread and the complementarity of the modules offered.

The **coordinator** is responsible for operations of the platform, communication in general and in facilitation of the meetings. A cloud drive serves as a tool to share information, promotional material, marketing tools and a database of student applications. The coordinator notifies when new and relevant information is added and is, as webmaster, responsible for the creation and update of the website. Keeping a clear timeline of publication of modules, as well as of the application process also belongs to the duties of the coordinator.

The **financial support** of the EOA is done by contributions of all partners, beside an extra staff investment of the coordinating partner. We see similar funding in the Metric Network, coordinated by KonCon The Hague.

5.3.2.

Detailed information on the annual timeline of the process

From February on the EOA website displays the module offer for the upcoming academic year, and, in close collaboration with the EOA Coordinator, the partner institution's anchor persons and the International Relations Coordinators, the application process starts. Key word for this process is 'guidance'; this concerns the discussion of students with their home institution on their learning choices, and the contact from the home institution with the potential host institution.

October/ November: development of the modules

- partners adapt and fine-tune existing modules if required.
- new modules are developed by partners.

December: feedback on the proposed modules

- preliminary versions of modules are submitted to the coordinator, who examines them for completeness, edits them and presents them to the AC.
- the Artistic Council reviews the modules on the artistic and pedagogical value and formulates eventual changes.

January: decision on the modules and publication

- the General Assembly decides and approves on the final module catalogue for the upcoming season.
- the module catalogue for the next season is published on the EOA website. The coordinator informs the partners that applications are open and provides them with promotional material to communicate about the EOA modules in their institutions.

February till April 15th:

- the anchor persons of the partner institutions promote the new season of EOA modules within their home institutions. It's recommended to address the faculty members and students through emails, info screens, personal or general meetings, physical posters, flyers and social media.
- the communication department and administrative staff should also be informed about the application process for the new modules.
- both the institutions and the EOA coordinator provide counseling to prospective student applicants, regarding the application process and any further questions related to the exchanges.
- students apply through the EOA website and collect all required documents. Upon upload, students receive a confirmation, informing them about the further process of their application.

- the coordinator consolidates the received applications, checks them for completeness and prepares the communication to the hosting partner institutions.

After April 15th

- the coordinator sends the applications and respective documents to the anchor person in each hosting institution, who confirms receipt of the applications.

May-June and further on

- hosting institutions screen the applications and communicate the results back to the coordinator.
- the coordinator consolidates the results of applications (approved / not approved / still on the waiting list) and communicates the results back to the individual students.

Hosting institutions tend to communicate directly with the applicants already at this step, while it is crucial that the coordinator gets this information, enabling them to track the application approval and the final decision on student exchanges.

Having passed the application round successfully, each student receives a formal invitation from the host institution. The actual exchange is facilitated between the student, the IRC of the host institutions and the anchor person and IRC of the home institution.

Remark: When the network started, participants had one round of application. In the fall of 2020, the EOA introduced a second round of applications for the fall semester, due to the measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic the program offering was strongly limited.

5.3.3. Information & communication within EOA

The EOA website is a rich source for information for students and candidates as it serves as the official presentation, profiling, and central point of reference. Information on the partner institution, the modules offered, upcoming events, and the application tool are the core. There are plans for a newsletter, and livelier content on the website.

For internal communication a shared cloud drive is currently being used. Future includes an intranet, to have permanent access to the status of the applicants and promotional materials. Also, a GDPR statement, practical information on the host city and stories and testimonies of past participants and alumni should be added to the website.

At this point most information between the members of the network is shared by email. The EOA plans to reduce the amount of correspondence by adding a bi-monthly internal newsletter in which the status and summary of current modules are shared, as well as feedback on the discussed topics and agreements after AC meetings.

The application tool includes a list of general documents that could be helpful for the application process, such as templates for CV's or repertoire lists and details on the selection process and materials needed for the specific modules. Candidates will also upload a motivational statement and the necessary video material. They can apply for several modules but need to specify a ranking of preference.

Gathering and including qualitative student feedback is important to the development of the EOA. Therefore, a standard questionnaire is developed, which all partner institutions share with the participants after the modules have ended. It includes additional questions to the general Erasmus questionnaire. The use of standard questionnaires could also be useful for gathering other types of information, such as alumni stories or future fundraising. Gathering feedback is crucial and feedback should be discussed on the highest levels in the network (AC and GA).

5.3.4. How do partner institutions maximize the benefits from the EOA collaboration?

Partner institutions promote the EOA opportunities on several occasions and through different channels, actively encouraging students (and teachers) to apply. They foster the contact between individual participating students and the host institutions to enhance the experience for the participants. Since partner institutions know each other, the EOA can act as a safety network for learning and experimentation.

By maintaining contact with the AC-members and the coordinator, partner institutions will be informed of upcoming events and invitations to projects and productions. The EOA partner network actively offers additional opportunities to students, such as urgent casting roles for productions, and involving own voice faculties in the EOA functions fosters exchange of teachers for masterclasses and workshops between partners.

Of course, not everything is a bed of roses in the EOA. Financial obstacles might occur, such as travel and accommodation costs, as well as remuneration for the teachers' working days.

Erasmus policies are potentially processed differently within each institution and might cause organizational barriers. Improved communication can solve some of these problems.

5.4.

In depth interviews

Interviews with executives from conservatoires that do not operate in the EOA network also revealed valuable information. The survey and interviews zoomed in on international mobility in general and the possible application of the EOA model within the institution in particular. The basic idea is whether student and staff mobility within a thematic network such as EOA can cover additional needs that are difficult to meet through the regular curriculum. If so, which types of modules could be interesting for both student and staff mobility? What problems can be foreseen for the current system? And how would you embed this modularity in the training programme? How could you make the current organization of student guidance and communication on mobility more effective? Do you see difficulties in transferring results and credits?

In these live interviews, it became clear that international exchange, both for students and for teachers, is valued for many reasons. At the same time, the dialogue partners indicated that there are many chances for optimization of the experience by making it more programme based. This provides the student with a stronger notion of choice and the teacher with more knowledge from the field, and it opens their scope more towards the international world of music making.

Another element that was discussed in all these interviews was a wish for more connection and communication on exchange, internally and between institutions. There is a feeling that both the personal possibilities and the benchmarking opportunities could be enhanced greatly.

The interviews confirmed several facts on exchange and possible thresholds that keep students from going on an exchange, e.g., the lack of entrepreneurial attitude, being caught in a full and fixed curriculum, thinking the home institution is the best place to study, and, most of all, practical issues like housing and lack of financial means. The interviewees thought many of these barriers could be

overcome better with shorter term mobility, ranging from one to six weeks.

We have established that several institutions create some kind of 'mobility window' in the curriculum and that every institution takes on a very practical attitude in adapting to the problems that transfer of results can provide.

The follow-up on return, especially within the institution, could be improved in several institutions: possible ideas for improvements and tips often remain with the teacher or student who initiated the mobility. Their feedback to the international office is useful but does not always find its way to the heads of training or education support staff. Several institutes pointed out the interesting exchange variety of the joined subject of the joined module. It enables short mobility in a clear and practical way.

Finally, the numbers for both student and teacher mobility vary greatly from institute to institute.

5.5. Professional field committee in Antwerp on EOA

Antwerp organized a 'klankbordgroep' (reflective committee, literally translated 'Sounding Board'), to feed the SP, composed of teachers, alumni, students and representatives of the local professional field. A first meeting took place in May 2019, a second one during the Learning-Teaching-Training week-event. The aim was to inform the professional field about the SP and gather input from alumni and professional field on the elaboration of the SP and on vocal programmes in general.

Present were Opera House Transparent, the Opera Ballet Flanders, alumni of the classical music programme of RCA and a number of teachers from the vocal section of the institution.

The feedback resulted in concrete advice, tips and reflections which have been implemented in this manual.

5.6. Activities during the Learning-Teaching- Training week-event

One of the core activities of the first working group of EOALAB was the organization of a Learning-Teaching-Training week-event, where previously collected information could be checked and bounced with a group of representatives of the participating institutions in EOALAB. Teachers, curriculum developers, IRCs, programme heads and coordinating staff were present. The week would become crucial for collecting additional input for this manual.

In order to establish a maximum of interaction and inspiration, we decided to organize the LTT week-event from 17-20th of February 2020 in the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (RCA), during the RCA's interdisciplinary project week 'NextDoors'. Open doors, respect for each other, and a healthy interest in the other disciplines are the keywords of this festival week. Students are invited to find each other from all disciplines and together discover and develop new interdisciplinary concepts, whether or not accompanied by an expert coach.

During this same week, RCA also held her yearly professionalization-event for teachers INSPIRE!, which could be partly attended by the participants of the LTT week-event. In between the official discussions and 13 LTT- sessions, representatives participated to INSPIRE! sessions and acted as a coach for the opera-like interdisciplinary student projects of NextDoors. Interviews with LTT-participants were broadcasted on Radio NextDoors, the festival radio run by the theater students of RCA.

LTT Session 1

Student perspective as a student

In a combination of questionnaire results and real-life conversations, information was gathered about the long- and short-term difficulties that students see when going on an exchange. Common difficulties were expenses, thinking the home institution is the best and social and artistic insecurity. This session tried to delve deeper into understanding the students' thought processes and finding solutions for these difficulties.

LTT Session 2

Student perspective as a teacher

To achieve the EOA aim of accessible international exchange we first need to encourage students to apply. Several hindrances to application for student mobilities have been identified that stem largely from anxieties that students face in the application process or anticipate facing during their mobility. Our survey revealed that the three main anxieties are: finances, emotional insecurities, and the mentality that 'the home institution is the best.' This discussion addressed how we, as teachers, can alleviate these anxieties to increase application numbers. What avenues of communication between teacher and student can be used to disseminate information and how can these lines of communication be kept open during mobility? Would testimonials from returning EOA participants prove useful in presenting possible solutions? In what ways can we promote a change in teachers' thinking when entrenched in the idea that their HEI is the only (good) HEI?

LTT Session 3

Module design from the student perspective

A key strength of the EOA is its broad portfolio offering both specialization and variation, enhancing and complementing the curricular offering of each partner. Partners design

modules based on their expertise and fitting to their strengths. The coordinator and the artistic council support and advise partners in module design. How can current educational discussions, for example regarding student choice, flexible programmes, and internationalization, be reflected in module design itself? How can student perspective take a place in the development or the adaptation of modules? What opportunities do the new Erasmus rules offer in this respect, which will allow exchanges of shorter duration and pave the path for short, intensive programs? This session explored these topics in a collaborative manner.

LTT Session 4

Curriculum design

The institutions participating in the EOA network have their own specific voice and opera curricula. Some institutions are purely focusing on opera education, others have a general vocal bachelor and/or master programme with a strand for opera. How do we find space in the curricula to foster short term mobility? How can the curriculum design facilitate short student and teacher mobility? Can the institutions easily change curricula? Are IRCs, teachers and students involved in the process of curriculum development? How flexible can study counsellors or heads of programmes be in the composition of the study programmes? What could be advised regarding equivalences, evaluation, and transfer of results? This session explored all these questions in a dialogue format.

LTT Session 5

Learning from exchange at an institutional level

Participation in exchange can not only enrich the individual student's learning path, but also generate new ideas at the home institution for curriculum design, practical organization, teaching methods and other benefits. This implies that

the home institution has a system in place for gathering, sharing, and reflecting on the experiences of the exchange student.

Currently this is generally achieved by surveys and personal debriefings. This session explored how to improve on this process. The session was based on a presentation, followed by a group discussion.

LTT Session 6

Planning/organization of courses

This session was held as a group discussion focusing on how practicalities in the planning and scheduling of courses influence and relate to both the design of modules and on the flow of mobilities. It also explored differences in how the curricula mirror the actual planning of courses in the different HEIs.

What aspects of the planning of courses and the academic year could hinder or foster student exchange? What is the most beneficial length of an exchange module in relation to the home courses? Are possible obstacles mostly of an administrative nature, or, of a content-oriented nature? This session explored these questions in a group discussion.

LTT Session 7

Application process within EOA

The application process is one of the core processes in the management of the EOA. It is one of the first touchpoints that EOA participants have with the EOA organization, as well as the first contact between EOA administrators and candidates. The process has been subject to constant improvement and streamlining. Going forward, which adaptations would be required for the process to make it smoother for all parties?

How can the application process be adapted to the new Erasmus idea of shortened module durations and intensive short-term courses? This session explored these topics in a collaborative manner.

LTT Session 8

Added value for all stakeholders

In this session the idea of learning from exchange on an institutional level (session 5) was further developed and broadened. Besides the participating students, teachers and the programme heads, other stakeholders could also benefit from the experiences and feedback from student and teacher mobility. How could institutional leaders, IRCs, curriculum developers and professional field representatives learn from international mobility, and how can these benefits be improved upon? How can exchange contribute to quality enhancement and benchmarking?

LTT Session 9

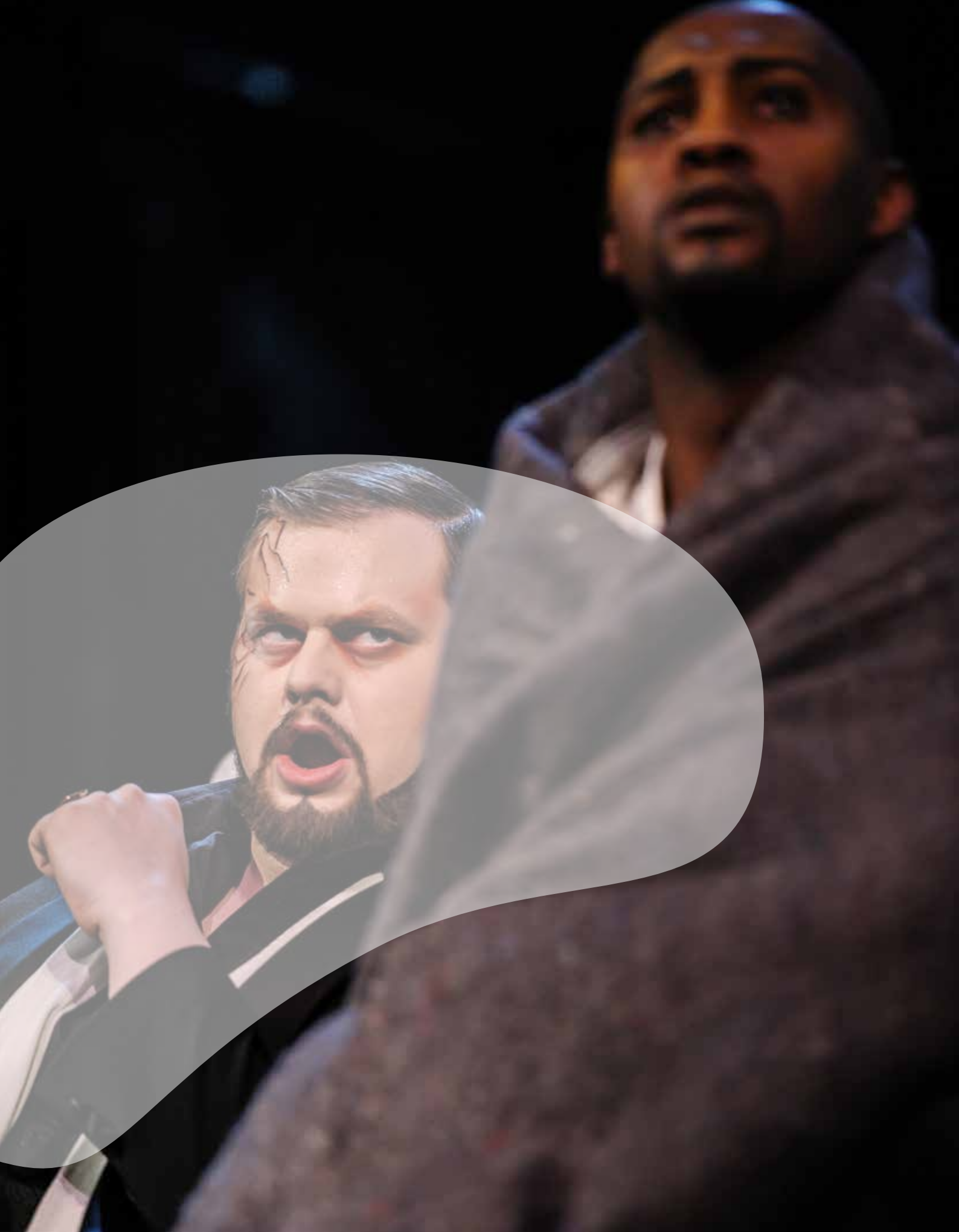
Diversity in Learning & Teaching: Re-imagining success

When can we speak of a successful learning experience? What does it mean to be a successful artist? Is a young singer successful primarily in having a full agenda, being active on the big stages and having a broad professional network? Or is success more linked to doing what you're good at, the feeling of belonging to a group and being able to engage in fruitful interaction as an artist in society? Can we embrace diversity in the students' artistic goals in exchange situations? What does inclusion mean in a mobility situation? How can the uniqueness of exchange students best be welcomed in the host institution? This session was performed with a small group of participants in a format of open discussion, with a lot of personal reflections.

LTT Session 10

Student guidance for exchange

The exchange students require good guidance both from the home institution and the host institution. This session looked at the question of guidance in the three phases: before - during - after an exchange. Before an exchange, how can students be guided through the sometimes-



complicated administrative process and the practical and logistic problems of preparing for the exchange. During the exchange, how can we provide administrative or educational guidance and help students integrate in the host community? After the exchange, how can the home institution best guide students in the post-exchange administrative process, as well as reconnect with them about their exchange experience to retrieve their feedback? This session also shed a different perspective on several topics handled in the first session.

LTT Session 11

Communication within EOA

The communication workshop focused on which communication channels are needed in a shared education network on many levels, starting from the current communication strategy in the EOA.

How is the workflow for EOA within the institutions? Who is involved in developing the opera modules in the HEIs? How to communicate with the participating students during the exchange, both in an informal and structured way? What communication is advised upon return? How can we communicate amongst the HEI partners in a smart way? And how do we connect the work and outcome of EOA to the outside world? We examined the current EOA website and subscription system and added a lot of ideas for improvement of the communication with the stakeholders. The setup for this workshop was participative and informal.

LTT Session 12

Teacher exchange

Due to the structure of Erasmus funding for teacher mobility versus student mobility, e.g., reimbursement for mobilities start at three days for teachers, as opposed to 2 or 3 months for students. Because of this, valuable shared learning might be more available to a wider student population with the concept of 'taking the module to the students', that is, using teacher exchange to create

short intensive courses. In this discussion, two models were discussed:

- **one-way exchange:** Project based teacher exchange: teachers are sent to another HEI to coach a specific competence in a short course of about a week's length. Working Group 3 is working on this.
- **two-way exchange:** Teaching and learning exchange: Teachers learn specific competences and teach in the same activity, through interaction and from sharing best-practices.

LTT Session 13

Meeting of Working Group 1 with the professional field in Antwerp

The workshop meeting with the professional field in Antwerp focused on the intersection between learning to be an opera singer and becoming one in the professional field. The meeting went deeper into the current programmes for opera singers at the HEIs and how they relate to what is needed in the professional field. The participants of the LTT activity were joined by members of the Opera Ballet of Flanders and Opera House Transparant, active alumni in the field of opera in Flanders and by the voice teachers of the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp.

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06. ■

Optimising shared education with programme- based teacher exchange

This part of the manual is the model for blended teaching activities on opera language learning. EOALAB Working Group 3 organized two Intensive Study Programmes. A group of teachers and students from Riga visited Parma for a week of Russian language training, and vice versa for Italian.



6.1.

Learning & teaching in blended intensive programmes and within the EOA

The opportunities for learning and development within a network for shared education are numerous. Working Group 3 (partners and EOA members from Parma and Riga) focused on 'programme-based teacher exchange', as a new approach to the possibilities exchange within a network as the EOA offers to teachers, aiming at professionalisation of the programme, with internationalization and broadening scope as benefits for the teachers involved.

This part of the manual for shared education is the model for blended teaching activities on opera language learning. The working group which created this output organized two Intensive Study Programmes. A group of teachers and students from Riga visited Parma for a week of Russian language training, and vice versa for Italian. They decided to kick-start the week with a concert by the visiting faculty, as a warm-up to create enthusiasm for the repertoire and the specific sounds and colors of Russian / Italian. A concert to finish the course was an obvious choice, and during the course all kinds of working formats were used, and material for learning the languages in all facets was tested.

The Intensive Study Programmes within a Strategic Partnership project like the EOALAB involve groups of teachers and students, in this case from two conservatoires. As described in the introduction of this publication, these two groups functioned as a unit of teachers, when visiting, and as a group of learners when receiving. This turned out to be a great success, a key driver for learning. The working group was very happy to find that the new Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) offers an opportunity to combine teacher and student exchange in the Blended Intensive Programmes, and the model that was tested, a five-day course with incoming teachers and students, fits this structure perfectly.

Chapter 6.3 describes the outline of these Blended Intensive Programmes and provides two directions for the great variety of courses and programme subjects that could be offered within the EOA - obviously, the model is also useful for other networks and other subjects. Chapter 6.4 reflects the outcomes of questionnaires sent out to EOA member institutions, asking about the intensity of language teaching in their curriculum, focusing on Italian and Russian. This, and further inquiry, can be the basis for the development of the model for blended teaching activities on opera language education: other EOA member institutions will develop courses for German, French and English according to the model for Italian and Russian. Chapter 6.5 consists of a description of the five-day course structure and schedule.

All the material to be used in the Russian and Italian language courses are in a database: <https://eoalab.org/>
<https://eoalab.org/io3-model-for-blended-teaching-activities-on-opera-language-teaching/>

This database is accessible for EOA students and teachers. The material is of use as a library for everyone who wants to use it while learning opera languages. It can be complemented for every new event of a language learning and teaching activity, and, depending on the needs of learner's material (like short demonstration videos) will be added. The database will also contain the new material for German, French, and English.

Chapter 6.7 describes how this specific format for intense training, where teachers and students are involved actively, both, alternately, as teachers and as learners, is a setting which maximizes learning possibilities. This also touches upon how all this is beneficial to a network for shared education like the EOA, in the context of internationalization.

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #1

Who are you?

- 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 are so kind. With your own teacher you always feel guilty – now there are 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, with maximum participation. You learn so much more.

That we mixed at 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?

6.2.

Programme-based teacher exchange

6.2.1. In general

The essential value of the exchanges offered by Erasmus mobility, both for students and teachers, has shown its effectiveness and potential throughout the years. The Music and Opera sector - international by its very nature - is certainly a sector that can benefit optimum from this mobility. However, in many cases it is still not used to its full potential.

The network of Institutions of high-level musical education gathered in the EOA has in fact highlighted once again how vital the exchange between institutions is, focusing on a specific sector (the Opera), each Partner institution offering highly specialized learning, traineeship, study and production modules.

As shown earlier in this manual, which also describes the functioning of the EOA, each institution has created specific modules, enhancing their strengths (from baroque opera, to the nineteenth-century repertoire, to new contemporary productions etc.). The aim is therefore not to offer only the generic, albeit splendid, opportunity to do a semester of study abroad. But above all to broaden the range of usable activities, alongside normal didactic exchanges, also the opportunity to participate in opera productions, experiment with new didactic approaches, and substantially integrate the repertoire and learning methods of one's own country of origin. This is for all those interested in the world of Opera, and therefore mainly singers, but also accompanying pianists, conductors etc.

The more specific and targeted the modules offered are, the more effective the result. Furthermore, opening up to new approaches has proved to be fundamental and vivifying, both for the students and for the teachers involved. And - in doing so - we all find ourselves in constant openness and endless learning, including teachers.

Fostering the mobility of teachers means ensuring that the exchange between different approaches can reach a much higher number of users. But, more importantly it guarantees a change of perspective. The basic learning unit is therefore no longer just the classroom with its teacher but becomes the network of teachers from the entire network of institutions involved which becomes an effective tool and resource for all the institutions connected to each other.

It is with this change of perspective in mind, that the module on the exchange of teachers between Riga and Parma was conceived with the aim of addressing a very specific problem: the approach of foreign languages in singing. It is not simply a question of 'learning a language', nor of becoming a philologist, but it is a question of getting to the heart of interpretation, through the study of the complex relationship between music and speech, a relationship unique to each language. All this in the most practical, concise, and effective way possible: an 'Intensive program' of maximum 5 days.

In addition to the main goal (the effective approach to a foreign language in singing), the 'secondary' goals, remain fundamental, and always valid in every Intensive Program:

- allowing members of the teaching staff to exchange views on teaching content, new curricula approaches, to test innovative teaching methods that could eventually become part of a newly devised joint course or curriculum in an international classroom environment
- bringing teaching of specialist topics to a higher level
- enabling students and teachers to work together in multinational and multidisciplinary groups and so benefit from special learning and teaching conditions not available in a single institution, and to gain new perspectives on the topic being studied

The 'joint work' of students and teachers has really proved to be particularly enlightened and stimulating for everyone, inevitably also causing a radical change in the perception of the student-teacher relationship. Who teaches whom? Also in this sense, a real 'change of perspective'!

It was vital that the students participated in the mobility and supported the teachers in this exchange module, playing the role of 'tutor' for the students of the host Institution. And this turned out to be absolutely winning, as depicted in chapter 6.7.

6.2.2. A reflection on languages in opera

Could we sing in a language we don't speak? Or, on the contrary, could we perfectly speak a language and not

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #2

Who are you?

- 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 tenors 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.

This was
the most active
teaching and
active learning that
I have ever been
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The elements for
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sing in the right way? When you study a language, usually you learn grammar rules, how to use words and the meanings of the words. This is surely useful, but this is not the only goal to reach if you learn a language to sing it. Learning a foreign language to sing it, does it demand a peculiar didactic way or special attention to some details that a normal learner usually doesn't focus on? Should our linguistic approach be different?

Surely, many singers can sing in a language they don't speak: imitation and a special ear training, which should be among the skills of a musician, could help, as well as the finding of the keywords and the recognition of the interaction between music and words, which is different in each language. Nonetheless, you can perfectly express yourself in foreign language having no idea of how to give the right energy to the phrasing, which is the right distribution of the stress in order to make your speech understandable, clear, touching and impressive to a large audience in a wide room. Sometimes, even native speakers have no consciousness of the expressive potential of their own language and which nuances and subtleties it can receive from music. You have to enter the sound of the language. Every language has its own 'music', or, if you prefer, its own way to organise words and sounds to suggest a melody. In fact, the music settles on the text following a path of stresses and distresses, declamation suggestions already offered by this text.

In fact, we have not only to understand what we are singing or accompanying but also to feel the fluency of the text. And to grasp the special rhythm of the words.

Don't forget that the original aim of the opera was to amplify a declaimed text - as they believed that happened in the classical Greek tragedy- with its climax and anticlimax, emotions and rhetorical figures. To do that, you need to focus on the right rhythmical framework of the text, to identify highlights and distentions. This vision has never been lost during three centuries of opera. Music seems to be born from reading aloud with a correct feeling of a sort of pressure curve generated by the combination of rhythm, sounds, meaning, keywords.

Still in the full age of Bel canto, Bellini wrote a famous letter to his friend Francesco Florimo, head of the library of the Conservatory of Naples: 'As I receive a text to set in music, I walk up and down in my room reading it aloud. I capture its rhythm and try various solutions, emphasizing now one, now another word or concept. Little by little, I feel the right melody coming up in my voice. Only then, I sit at my cembalo, I play and start to note the music down'.

Singing-focused language learning should pass through three basic steps:

Phonetic: correct pronunciation of sound units. The ear must focus on the single sounds, vowels and consonants, search the right position of the tongue, the right width of the mouth. The facial muscles are concerned in this phase, physical training is as useful as careful listening. The use of the IPA is important as well as the living example of a specifically trained native speaker. This first phase could easily be held online to allow the student to be ready for a more stage-focused work in presence.

Prosody: correct pronunciation of a phrase (or a verse). Since 90% of texts for music are poems, first we should understand how prosody works. 'Prosody' is the pattern of rhythm and sounds in poetry (Cambridge dictionary). But, of course, even a continuous prose text, when declaimed on the stage, hides prosody.

Every language has its own prosody, its own particular organization of a verse, due to a combination of its peculiar sounds and historical literary traditions. The music rests on the text differently if you work on a strongly accentuated language (as Italian is) or in a weaker and flexible system of accents (like in French); if the prosody is built on the number of syllables or their length, if the text engenders a fix or different and flexible rhythmic pattern.

Vocal application: finally, we must find how to shape our singing on the combined text and melody. First, a good singing teacher should adapt an appropriate emission of the sounds of the language to a vocal technique. As the singer, focusing on a vocal technique, often goes back to the sounds of his/her native language, the teacher should clean up and improve sounds, avoiding a lazy pronunciation, too linked to the starting language of the student. In this last phase, the singer should actively work on every nuance of the relationship between text and music. The prosody being for chance not stiff, the composer is faced with many choices. The phrase can focus on a word or overfly others. Melodic and harmonic sensibility is now joining to a fluent pronunciation and fulfilling the path of a good singer. Furthermore, the processing of a text is changing through time and the singer should fully understand those mechanisms to render the music in the right taste.

In this phase, the awareness and culture of the teacher are crucial factors. The teacher can awaken the sensitivity of the student, helping him/her to understand the reasons of the composer's choices and the related nuances: the top of a melody, a more intensive harmonic density or a changing rhythm. Putting in valor a word or a phrase rather than another can change the substance of a character.

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #3

Who are you? Riccardo Mascia

- Function in home institution: Pianist, IRC , researcher in Parma
- Role in this ISP: Italian member of Working Group 3

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 closely: you have to really live it together, so it is normal that the other teachers come 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...

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.

6.3.

Blended Intensive Programme in Erasmus+ 2021-2027

Blended Intensive Programmes could be easily planned within the EOA network. Taking into account that Erasmus projects for the next year must be submitted in February, plans for the next academic year could be discussed during December and January, including planning of Intensive Programmes: prospective coordinating institutions invite potential partners and agree about thematic modules. Two examples (out of many) that could be designed and performed easily:

6.3.1. Intensive Phonetics course

Latvian and Lithuanian Academies of Music together with the Georgian Conservatory can provide academic staff and students as teachers for 'Russian weeks' in any of EOA partner institutions or in Riga/Vilnius/Tbilisi.

The Intensive Phonetics course is prepared in advance (virtual component): at least 1 month in advance the 'teaching' institution sends material and methods for the participating partner institutions. The responsible coordinator takes care that material is received by the participating students and teachers. Possibly also virtual consultations previous to live meeting are planned.

Recommended: **3 teachers (2 singers + 1 pianist/coach) and 3-4 students** from each partner institution (more students from the hosting institution). The schedule of the course: welcoming session, presentation, joint group lessons in the first half of the day, individual or small group lessons in the afternoon. The 'Teaching institution' representatives work in parallel sessions in the afternoon to include the max number of 'learners'. The performance of the 'teaching institution' students at the beginning of the course, the performance of the students-'learners' at the end of the course. The repertoire is based based on the thematic material of the course.

This model of blended Intensive Programme can be used also for other languages – Italian, German, French, English. **Recommendations for various additions to such blended intensive courses:** lectures in relation to the language and culture in question, interaction of the language and music (a poem by Pushkin/ Goethe/ Heine Appolinaire and all the compositions created by different composers on these lyrics).

Specific workshops can be added, like Articulator Mapping:

- experiments on how the tongue and lips work in the native language and foreign language in question
- common and differences in sound making, prosody, accents; tongue as a muscle with all the components
- various tongue exercises
- learning language by sensations in the articulators, not by hearing.

Recommended is the organisation of two Intensive Phonetics courses per academic year in the frame of the EOA network with different partners. One of those should be Russian course, because questionnaires prove it is a serious problem for opera studies.

6.3.2. Thematic Intensive Programmes + Audition training

The same model can be used for thematic intensive programmes dedicated to opera fragments of one composer (Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti, Mozart etc.). Virtual component: material previously agreed upon between partners is prepared before the live meeting. Upon arrival individual masterclasses and joint rehearsals take place, followed by a closing performance: a concert or stage performance (this depends on extra financial means). In case of a stage performance, it is recommended to invite experts from the local opera theatre, because teaching staff in the Intensive Programmes can also be professionals outside the HEIs.

Recommended is the combination with audition training. At the end of the Intensive Programme, a mock audition with representatives of the local professional field is advised. After the audition students receive immediate feedback and advice. The submission of a CV, in accordance with the professional requirements and the audition repertoire (2 or 3 arias) is part of the mock audition.

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #4

Who are you?

- Function in home institution: Vocal students Parma, B1 - B2
- Role in this ISP: Italian students, learning Russian

What exactly did you participate in? 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.

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!

6.4. Surveys

Both EOALAB questionnaires – teachers` and students` – reflect huge contrast in the practical realization of the language tuition for singers between 'traditional' Italian language and 'difficult' Russian language.

Operas of such Russian composers as Glinka, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich are standard repertoire in most of the opera theatres. The heritage of 20th and 21st century Russian composers in the opera genre is practically unknown, but that includes such outstanding composers as Mieczysław Weinberg, Edison Denisov, Sergey Slonimsky, Rodion Shchedrin, Alfred Schnittke, Nikolai Korndorf. The reason for this anonymity and oblivion first of all is the language, with strange alphabet and difficult pronunciation. The absence of native vocal coaches in the opera theatres often is the main obstacle for performance of the Russian operas, especially contemporary, although music itself is extremely interesting and attractive.

Conclusions: the only solution to this situation is the change in the attitude to the Russian language in the education of young singers in the HEIs. HEIs should provide at least basic training programmes in Russian language and phonetics – in various forms: regular course, optional course, short intensive courses – at least one per year, regular workshops provided by guest-teachers.

Teachers

If 42% mentioned Italian as a regular mandatory course (others with different variations), then **53% respondents acknowledged they don` t have any Russian course.** 41% respondents confirmed that the Italian language course helped to improve students` performance/ interpretation, only 17% admitted the same in the case of the Russian language course, but 33% mentioned that the Russian language course improved the understanding of different cultures.

88% students are actively involved in the Italian language studies, **67% students are not involved in the Russian language learning.**

94% students are motivated and interested in mastering Italian, **58% students are motivated and interested in learning Russian!** This demand proves the necessity to include this language in study programmes for singers. Almost the same number of respondents indicated the necessity to add more lessons/hours to the Italian and Russian language courses (46% Italian and 44% Russian). Interesting and important response to the question 'Did you

ever avoid giving students some repertoire because of the language obstacles?' 91% 'no' regarding the Italian repertoire, **56% 'yes' regarding the Russian repertoire.**

Students

Information for reflection: 20% of the surveyed students admitted they know only one foreign language, 46% know two languages. But good singers should be multilingual. According to students, the most useful languages in their professional career would be Italian (38%), German (30%), French (20%), English (8%), Russian (6%).

Responses to the question about **main difficulties** in both languages:

Italian: double consonants (24%), open and closed vowels (24%), pronunciation (16%), accents (14%), legato (12%)

Russian: pronunciation, reading, understanding (38%), no links with other languages (32%), combination of many strong unfamiliar consonants (8%). 20% admitted they avoid Russian repertoire due to the language obstacles.

If the Italian language teaching is very well organized in different forms in all respondents` institutions with compulsory examinations at the end of the course, 76% acknowledged there is no option to learn Russian. 14% responses mentioned advice from the teacher or piano coach.

Responses to the question 'How effectively does a language course improve your performance or interpretation?' reflect students understanding:

- the more you know about the language, the better is your performance
- understanding language and correct pronunciation help to express the message
- it's easier to sing, learn and understand music when you know the language

40% of respondents wish more Italian lessons, besides 20% would like to add also speaking and understanding. Some students pointed out the necessity to include in the study offer also German and French lessons. 20% acknowledged that a regular Russian course would be necessary. Information for reflection: some HEIs have no native speakers as language teachers! They don't fully understand difficulties and are not able to explain them. 84% of the respondents are going to study Italian deeper (privately, Erasmus studies, masterclasses in Italy, books, movies, duolingo). 26% expressed a wish to learn Russian deeper.

The full results of the survey can be consulted online at **<https://eoalab.org/io3-model-for-blended-teaching-activities-on-opera-language-teaching/>**

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #5

Who are you?

- Function in home institution: students in Parma, M1 - B3
- Role in this ISP: Italian students, learning Russian

What exactly did you participate in? 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.

That they
sang for us
in the opening
concert created
a great
companionship.

6.5.

The model and the one-week schedule

6.5.1. The schedule of the Russian language working week

At the beginning of the working week, it is good to make a schedule for the individual lessons and give an opportunity to have a lesson with both vocal teachers.

Before the working week participating students receive the handouts:

- the alphabet
- examples of pronunciation for all the letters of the alphabet
- details of some letters or symbols
- differences of pronunciation affected by stress
- online database

Welcoming session

At the beginning we introduce students with the course's weekly schedule, it is also important to understand a students' knowledge level - are they absolute beginners or do they have some previous knowledge about the basic rules of Russian language. It would save some time if the students had made some prior the course, got familiar with the basic rules and prepared some questions already. It would be helpful and good if the students had one level of knowledge.

If it is possible, do work together with Russian language speaking students as tutors from the guest music academy. The guest Russian speaking students are giving a concert for local students at the end of the welcoming session. This welcoming session could last 30-60 minutes depending on the group size.

Work in large group

This part of the process is based on a theoretical class for students about Russian language. We use Ida Losberga's presentation Fonetica Russa and handouts. If the level of students' knowledge is quite basic we repeat the alphabet,

read simple Russian words, spell names of digits from 1-20 and read short Russian poems used in well-known romances. Helpful exercises for beginner students are to read well known international words written in Russian language, like music, sport, opera, aria. Also good practice is when the teacher reads words in Russian language and students try to find which is the right written word from the list. We get through the basic language rules and start to discuss deeper language problems like word stresses, letters which are difficult to pronounce, old Cyrillic writing style, different Russian language dialects, different editions for notes, differences between speaking and singing in Russian etc.

In this session we go through our advised database – online sites and helpful videos about language practice, books about singing in Russian, books about the use of Russian language, recordings of romances, arias and we explore which records to listen to and to which details pay attention to. We give advice on how to work with resources and where to look for the information.

At the end of the session students get homework: the romance(s) to prepare for the role play. The work in large groups is organized in two sessions approx. 60-90 minutes each, but if the level of students' language knowledge is basic then it would be good to reserve one more session in the morning of the 2nd day.

Work in small groups

Very important factor in those small group lessons is teachers' rotation every hour between groups because every teacher has different working methods and based on experience it will improve the amount of knowledge. In this session we repeat the alphabet if it is necessary, read some texts and poems, do some pronunciation exercises and at the end of the session will have time for questions and answers.

In these small group sessions, we work with the homework which is based on acquired knowledge: we read or sing the romance they have prepared after a large group session and work with pronunciation details. After that is the role play - students check each other's mistakes in the prepared romance and work in pairs. If it is difficult for students to sing this romance, they can read it. The work in small groups is a good time to discuss some topics from the database. The planned working hours: 1st day approx. 60 -90 minutes, 2nd day two sessions approx. 60 minutes each.

Individual lessons

At the end of the second day there will be individual work with students. Here are many ways to do that - together with a vocal teacher and pianist, only in pair with a vocal teacher or pianist. It depends on the students' level and

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #6

Who are you?

- Function in home institution: Vocal students in Riga, B4 - M1
- Role in this ISP: Riga students, teaching Russian

What exactly did you participate in? 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 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'.

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.

specific problems. Usually at the beginning the student reads the text from the romance or aria which she/he has prepared from his repertoire, then the teacher corrects mistakes and then solves the problems which occur in the singing process. During these individual working lessons we have time to improve the stylistic and characteristic of the composition.

It would be good to have at least 2 lessons (30-45 minutes) with each student and a dress rehearsal before the Gala concert.

The Gala-Concert

It is a great opportunity for students to show their progress and get self-confidence in the work they have done.

Individual work of the students (the role play)

The Role play enables students to get deeper in the language specifics and open their mind for more questions because one student reads the prepared poem and another student becomes a teacher and corrects the mistakes.

6.5.2.

Italian language

The path on the language in singing must always have as its main goal not only a good pronunciation but a **good pronunciation within the musical interpretation**.

It is therefore a goal with at least three main steps:

- **step 1: phonetics:** the sounds, phonemes and words (the basis: discovering the specific range of sounds of a language)
- **step 2: prosody:** the correct phrasing, with focus on accents, rhythm and keywords (that may often correspond to key musical points)
- **step 3: vocal Application** (ie singing and interpreting) which includes the mastering of the vocal technique of course, but also the comprehension as complete as possible of the relationship between music and text

So, we are never just talking about a simple 'language course'.

Depending on the starting point of the students' knowledge of the sung language, it's possible to reach different levels.

The experience of the 'Russian Week', started from step one, and arrived, during the week, to reach step two: the students needed to start from the decryption of Cyrillic, and its 'translation' into sounds, to find, through different, guided practical experimentations, the right key points within the arias, in the required style. The 'Italian Week' in Riga, on the other hand, allowed us to experience the next step: from Prosody (accents and rhythm), arriving at the final most complete comprehension of the relation between music and text.

Peculiarity of Italian language and music

In fact, Italian stands out, among other languages, for the strength of the tonic accents in the words. A good didactic project to sing in Italian should never forget this.

All Italian poetic tradition (and so do librettos) is based on two simple principles:

- every verse has a fixed number of syllables
- following the number of syllables, every kind of verse has its specific way of distributing the stresses

This is the framework on which an Italian composer sets his music. This is the pattern of the Italian melody. And this we have to understand to correctly sing a musical phrase with text in Italian. If we know that, a lot of ideas will arise in our brain and ears to manage Italian opera.

This is what we have done in this experience: discovering with the students the internal mechanisms of Italian prosody and their strict relationships with music, to reveal **the richness of opportunities that the Italian prosody offers to music**.

Same schedule, different content

The schedule (practical organization) of the 'Italian Week' remains the same as the 'Russian Week', which had proved its effectiveness:

- **a welcome session** of presentation and collective introduction to the work (plenary session), with a small welcome concert to introduce Italian in singing
- **5 days of intensive work**, in parallel sessions with individual or small group lessons, in which each student had the opportunity to study the chosen operatic scene with different approaches (three different teachers and tutors)
- **a final concert** of all students

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #7

Who are you?

- Function in home institution: Vocal students in Parma, exchange as well, B4 - B1
- Role in this ISP: Exchange students in Parma, learning Russian

What exactly did you participate in? 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 of facing 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 on 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 the 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.

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.

6.6.

The material: database Russian / Italian

Both the welcome concert and the final concert were accompanied by projections of the sung texts (ppt surtitles)

Given the specific characteristics of the Italian language, the Italian Week presented these **differences from the Russian Week**, mainly concerning the content:

- **the lessons were mainly centred on Prosody** in relation to music.
- **the chosen repertoire often included scenes with Recitativo:** this is in fact the best field for the effective study of the music-text relationship (and the most complex)
- **not only arias, but also duets** (made up of an Italian student/tutor and a student from Riga) were used with particularly effective and fruitful results.

Individual lessons or in duo, with the different teachers and tutors were the main teaching tools. **Learning by doing** was essential. But also **several handouts and support materials** were provided to the students (and teachers) of the host institute:

- handouts on Italian diction by prof. Roberta Faroldi (sent in advance)
- presentation and handouts on prosodia by prof. Riccardo Mascia
- database with basic bibliography and useful links on the pronunciation of the Italian language (see chapter 6.6)

This experience was not only revealing about the contents, but also truly enlightening and inspiring with regards to methodology and possible best practices on teaching and active learning, as chapter 6.7 clearly shows.

All the material, used in the Russian and Italian language courses, can be consulted in a database:

<https://eoalab.org/> <https://eoalab.org/io3-model-for-blended-teaching-activities-on-opera-language-teaching/>

This database is accessible for EOA students and teachers. It makes studying and preparing material in advance of the workshop days possible and is also the basis for the online part of the blended intensive programme. The material is of use as a library for everyone who wants to use it while learning opera languages. It can be complemented for every new event of a language learning and teaching activity, and, depending on the needs of learners, additional material (like short demonstration videos) will be added. The database will also contain new material for German, French, and English.

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #8

Who are you? Liga Karklina, Antra Ugis Jankavi, Kristine Gailite

• Function in home institution: Vocal teachers and Piano accompanists from Riga and members of Working Group 3

What exactly did you participate in? Full participation

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, including the vocal teacher! This had a strong effect on the students.

We also see ourselves in a different way than 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.

The Italian teachers were very eager, including the vocal teacher! This had a strong effect on the students.



Interview on the Russian week in Parma #9

Who are you? Roberta Faroldi

• Function in home institution: Drama teacher in Parma conservatoire

What exactly did you participate in? 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 the 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 while 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.

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!

6.7.

Learning & Teaching: a best practice

6.7.1. Focusing on Learning & Teaching 1 Russian week in Parma

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 3 Italian students can be expected to be present in the 'Italian week in Riga', later on in the project.

The specific focus for the interviews was the learning and teaching aspect, specifically because of the role the (incoming) students from Riga had 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'.

Soon, the interviews took on 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.'
- Feeling like family: 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 a pride in myself about myself which is more like fear...'

Interview on the Russian week in Parma #10

Who are you? Adriana Cicogna

• Function in home institution: Vocal teacher in Parma conservatoire

What exactly did you participate in? Full participation

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 so much 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.

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

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 of 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 aren't all the lessons open?'

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

- 'Usually teachers just teach.'
- 'This was not just a 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 but can be very effective.

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 the main subject level) met as equals 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 choice 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 comradery. The concluding 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, facilitated by the fact that there is trust and a long-term relationship between institutions.



6.7.2

Focusing on Learning & Teaching 2 Italian week in Riga

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.



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Association Européenne des
Conservatoires, Académies de
Musique et Musikhochschulen

Colophon

Responsible publisher
Royal Conservatoire Antwerp
Desguinlei 25, 2018 Antwerp

Editor in chief Inge Simoens
Editors Stina Ancker, Roberta
Faroldi, Christofer Frederiksson,
Martin Hellström, Gary Jankowski,
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Cover image Martin Hellström
Design Lies Schrevens