

Reflections Rineke

The project Rhythm for Life has had a parallel project in Groningen, with the projects Learning to play an instrument at an elderly age and Creative workshops for the elderly. These were carried out in Groningen at the PCC in the framework of the research line HAMA of the research group LLMA, of which Rosie is a member. The second project has nearly finished, the first one will have been finished in August.

Looking back on the past two years I think that international collaboration in these kind of projects is key. The projects are innovative, certainly seen from the perspective of the conservatoire, I will come back later to that. The way we have given shape to our research collaboration was twofold: in the first place, preceding the start of RfL and our project, there was a literature research, which was carried out by Rosie and a member of our research group. That led to a theoretical framework which could underpin what we undertook. We had a number of moments where we could collaboratively share the outcomes, amongst other things during the annual meeting of the AEC last November in Valencia.

There is so much to learn from each other, not in the least because London is a totally other place than Groningen, with a totally other social structure. Besides we did not only work in Groningen, within the creative music workshop framework we were actually working throughout the northern Netherlands. But also there is a lot to learn because the project here took other angles than the one in Groningen did. RfL aimed at a.o. generating knowledge on effects of learning to play an instrument at an elderly age and provided students with the opportunity to extend their teaching skills and learn to realize what it means to work with elderly people, this in a more or less holistic sense, entailing the whole social interaction, not just the didactics.

In Groningen we did not work with students but we worked with recently graduated musicians and with teachers in the northern region that were very experienced in working with the elderly. They collaborated as a CoP. The first year was spent first and foremost to generating knowledge, the 2nd year was dedicated to putting knowledge into practice together and develop it further.

I think that 2 schools taking a project like this on board and work on it each from a different angles, constitutes an enormous richness on data and approaches.

The results of both projects, that will not be surprising, are partly as we envisioned them. But what I found striking all in all was the huge commitment of the elderly people who took part (and still take part). In Groningen we had a few press releases and as a result elderly people who play an instrument or who sing, would come to our dissemination seminars to tell their own story. Or they would ring us up: I am 77 years old and would like to learn the bass guitar! I am a nurse in a residential home, can we work with you?

Four remarks I would like to make about the impact of the projects: on the musicians, on the elderly learners, on the conservatoire and on societal change.

1. There is a lot to say about employability of our graduates in this matter. Most graduates have a portfolio career, they perform and teach, sometimes amongst even many other things. There is so much interest of elderly people, who live longer to pursue a dream that earlier has perhaps not come true, or become aware of it at a higher age. Our graduates get wonderful chances through this as long as we teach our elderly learners well how to do it. This project creates an important step in that.
2. A project like this can be empowering for elderly learners. We always use to say, based on research, that we should discourage everybody who wants to learn to play an instrument, when embarking on it as an adult. We give

evidence of at what a young age one should start the violin and the piano, slightly later with wind instruments due to the teeth and we tend to say: too late? I'm sorry, forget it.

But research also shows that motivation is the most important thing that needs to be in place, and elderly people who still want to start do this without exception from a strong intrinsic motivation, and that is important. No-one has the right to discourage any learner on an instrument, the joy of taking it one is the only thing that counts, not the speed with which things are learnt and not everybody has to be in the spotlights as a young talent!

3. When taking the lead in such projects, the conservatoire shows that the institution is based in the midst of society and really acknowledges the role of music being beneficial for many people, and not just for a small group of people. The conservatoire reflects what is going on out there and can play an important role in a way which goes beyond that of just being an institution of outstanding training and education of performing musicians. They take up their role in society.
4. Societal impact is important. As Rosie's research shows: playing an instrument can be very important for people for many reasons. It can also be an important for a decreasing feeling of loneliness. Many of our elderly learners in Groningen were very keen to learn in a group and to improvise together. This is one of the reasons behind that.

All in all, I think that we have made the case for the richness of this project, the accessibility for elderly people and the advantages of international collaboration. I hope that RCM's graduates will find their way as well informed musicians/teachers to many elderly in London, making them part of a society that makes music, no matter one's age.