

Panel Discussion – The Bonn Declaration on Music Education

Contribution of Sonja Greiner,

Secretary General of the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat

The recommendations of the Bonn declaration mentioned by Simone Dudt are not only addressed to politicians and governments, they are also addressed to the organisations in the music field, thus to ourselves.

Since the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat has been involved in the process of the development of the Bonn declaration, attending the different meetings and conferences, we have tried to “translate” it and adapt it to our sector, which is informal music education (outside schools and conservatoires) in the field of singing – choral/vocal music. However, we also cooperate with the field of formal music education – more about this later.

We have to adapt the Bonn declaration at different levels:

- We first have to see what are the needs of our specific sector
- We then may also need to advocate for specific issues in connection with our sector, in our case for example for singing in music education
- However, we also need to join forces with other music associations to advocate for music education at large, since without music education there can be no singing in music education, thus no singing

The Bonn Declaration is already reflected in some of our past activities, and especially also in the project VOICE – Vision on Innovation for Choral Music in Europe (see www.thevoiceproject.eu) in the frame of which we dealt with issues connected to music education and singing. Our Flemish partner Koor&Stem did a research on “A Voice for Vocal Training”, which was presented this morning, and which looked at increasing cooperation between the choral sector and music teachers in school, collecting examples of good practice (including the Sing Up project from the UK mentioned by Mary before). And of course this whole symposium is in a way the result of the Bonn declaration.

The Bonn Declaration is also reflected in our plans for the future, in our strategy for the coming years and in the new multiannual cooperation project we are currently preparing – you will hear more about this later.

Now looking at the concrete goals

Goal 1 (Access)

Of course here, at this symposium, I will be “preaching to the converted” when I say that we believe that the voice is an ideal tool for a broad access to music education. Basically everyone has a voice (with very few exceptions) and can use it to sing (even if some may sing better and others less good, basically everybody can sing by using the voice). Though this seems logical to us, it is not a fact recognized by everybody and often the voice is not accepted as an “instrument” – for example there are a number of projects similar to the one Mary presented, where it is offered to all children in a class in school to learn an instrument. If they say they want to sing, they are told that the voice is not an instrument and this is not possible (in Germany there is the project “Jedem Kind sein Instrument” – an instrument for each child – and since they did not accept the voice as instrument, an initiative called “Jedem Kind seine Stimme” – a voice for each child – had to be created).

- So we are trying to work on the recognition of the voice and on the benefits of singing together, and we are planning a campaign with research supporting this
- Also we believe in life-long learning, making offers for all ages
 - Starting with babies, since we published a lullaby collection which will be presented at the symposium on Saturday – people sometimes ask us why we as choral organisations collected lullabies that are not in choral arrangements; the answer is that we need to also advocate and work for more singing in families, because if the children do not learn to sing at the beginning of their lives, they may not sing later (as Kodály says: Music Education starts 9 months before the birth – or as some say, 9 months before the birth of the mother)
 - Offering activities for children, young people, adults but also for the generation of “60+” or the Third Age or the Golden Age as they are called – this will become more and more important but we have to admit that our offers to this aim group so far have not been very successful, maybe because people from this age group do not want to be identified as such and do not like to be separated from others
 - We therefore also offer activities bringing different generations together, and there are also family offers at some events
- We support the demand for music education as compulsory aspect of the curriculum (since as Mary said, otherwise, if they are not “forced” to do music, many young people may not even try), and within music education, singing as important participatory activity
- We are working on an increased cooperation with the formal sector (music schools, music teachers in schools, conservatoires and universities) – more about this under the next goal
- In our new project we will have a focus on incorporating changes in society and the choral world (societal issues such as inclusion – also see goal 3 and technical issues such as new technologies, using lighting and amplification and other techniques for performances etc.). We will also focus on a diversity of styles and on cooperation with other art sectors

Goal 2 – Quality

However, we probably all agree that it is not enough to offer music education or to sing with people, the quality of the education is also very important.

For us this concerns:

- The training of music teachers on how to sing with pupils

- The training of elementary school teachers and kindergarten teachers who in many countries also have to teach music, teaching them how to sing properly (for example often Kindergarten teachers sing too low for the children, thus doing something positive by singing with them, but at the same time doing something negative, i.e. damaging their voices) – they are often not trained well enough

- The training of conductors
 - Training conductors in all fields
 - In formal education (here we are planning to cooperate with the European Association of Conservatoires – AEC) and in informal education (*one of our German members has just published an article about the fact that the training offered by choral associations within Germany is not standardized enough and often one region or one association does not accept the exams offered by another region or association*)
 - For professional choirs and amateur choirs
 - For children’s choirs, youth choirs, adult choirs, 60+ choirs (with specialized training since different types of choirs also require specific skills)

- Conductors training needs to be modernized / adapted / specialized (*including new technologies, crossover between different music styles, combination with other art forms, the use of light and sound techniques and staging etc.*)

- In this field, of course, we are especially seeking the cooperation with the formal music education sector

Goal 3 – Social and cultural challenges

We have been discussing singing and inclusion for many years and have been supporting and organising projects for:

- The inclusion of cultural minorities through singing
- The inclusion of disabled singers
- The use of singing as a bridge between cultures and conflicting groups (e.g. with the “Singing the Bridge” events, of which the first one took place in Debrecen, Hungary, another one was organised in Cyprus and there are plans for further editions, e.g. in Turkey)

Our Hearts-in-Harmony projects, originally focused on bringing together disabled and non-disabled singers, have become more open, dealing with inclusion at last, e.g. also the inclusion of singers with learning abilities, people in prisons etc.

A topic that will become more and more important in Europe since the population is growing older, is singing with people with dementia (where the lullabies can play a role again since they are often the earliest musical memory people have, so they can be used in this work).

Our Flemish member Koor&Stem has been working on this issue and we want to expand this to the European level.

In our strategy for the coming years, we are planning to develop a more strategic approach, a proper inclusion strategy, taking these aspects further.

And yes, coming back to Mary’s questions concerning quality – quality needs to be defined in a different way when you talk about music education and even more so about events with a social aim.

Points raised in the discussion

Changes “imposed” from the outside, in our case for example from the European Union, can be seen as challenges but can also be seen in a positive way – they force you to reconsider your own actions / strategy – and in some cases you will find out that you only need to redefine some issues, use new names for something you have already been doing.

Concerning the difficulty to getting the changes down to those who may still be sticking to their “old ways”, we try to use inspiration as much as possible, presenting examples of good practice and encouraging the direct exchange of experience and knowledge. We have found out that “innovation” is difficult to define, because what may be innovative for many, may already be “normal” for some (e.g. the use of movement, staging, light, amplification in concerts). Also we should look at other sectors, other art forms and see what we can learn from them – maybe what is new and challenging for us, is normal and easy for them.

Coming back to the issue of quality – in music education, yes, you have to distinguish the quality of music (of the “product”, the result) from the quality of education (the quality of the process). ECA-EC has a focus on the process (“the path is the way”)