

An Interview Analysis with the Teaching Applied Studio Student, Jazreth-Gaile Digao: “My Voice Didn’t Change, but What I Can Do With it Did”

A Teaching Applied Studio Interview Project
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Background and History

Jazz is a twenty four year old female student who is in her second year of masters at Teachers College. She has never taken voice lessons before this, and never really sung formally either, so she was a complete beginner. She is interested in singing pop, jazz and folk music, so we were a great match as student-teacher. We have completed eight 45-minute lessons together, and actually an additional 30 minutes over facetime the night before our performance. Since the beginning, Jazz had a super strong sense of rhythm, but not really of pitch. In fact one of her main goals was to “be able to sing more in tune” and to “be able to perform better and with a ukulele”.

She is one of the most hard-working and ambitious people I have ever seen in my life, too. During the first lesson she was a little “shy” and “afraid” (according to her own journals), and quickly she became very comfortable, and asking lots of great questions during our lessons. She always took extensive notes, recorded the full lessons and kept her practice log consistently. She practiced for about twice every week, which is incredible for a student who isn't trying to become a professional singer. I believe the amount of effort, work and care she put in for this shows how motivated she was throughout.

In her journals and practice logs, she was able to pick out every “concept” we have talked about during lessons, such as: head voice, chest voice, breathing, tongue tension and more. While working with her, I have seen a vast amount of improvement in her vocal technique and overall singing, as well as the way *she assesses* her own singing. To me, it looked like she was always very motivated and engaged, especially when we would sing the repertoire together to “jam”. During warm-ups, she was incredibly focused (yet not stressed), and during singing, she was always smiling and moving. As we spent more time together, and as we built rapport, she ‘sang out’ more, and trusted the exercises more. She always sounded more natural when she was not stressing or over thinking. I believe semi occluded exercises such as rolled rr’s and gestures/movement helped most with her sound. At times, the exercises I had picked was a bit hard for her, even though they were very basic exercises we use with beginner singers. As a conclusion I’ve definitely learned/used scaffolding

techniques, which helped immediately. By the end of the semester, things were absolutely different, improved and much more balance on both of our ends, and doing this interview with her was a great way to check-in: to see if we were on the same page, to see if I had missed anything in my own reflections, any feelings I may have not picked up on, and more.

During her interview, other than a suggestion on how to manage our time a little more efficiently during our lessons, she only talked about what worked for her, and what she liked. For instance even when I directly asked : “what were your least favorite exercise?”, she said “I actually really enjoyed all of it, I’m not even kidding”. However, in a follow up question section, she mentioned that the ‘gala gala’ was not my favorite one because it was too hard”. Jazz has quite a lot of tongue and jaw tension, so I thought this exercise would have been helpful, but she really struggled with it so it was a bit demotivating for a few minutes, so I moved on from it quickly. It was interesting that in her interview, she didn’t use the words “hard” and “challenging” interchangeably like most of us might. This reminds me of healthy (just the right balance) vs. unhealthy challenges (too hard) and the impact of flow and importance of Z-P-D. When she found an exercise “challenging” she said she enjoyed rising up to it.

Each category below was inspired by the themes we have covered in class this semester, and is assigned a color that ties back to the brief color-coding system I have used to analyze my interview question and answers. All of the results and “ideas” were directly pulled from her own spoken interview, and/or her written bi-weekly journals/weekly practice logs unless mentioned otherwise. I simply grouped and organized them in relation to our course modules afterwards. All “quotes” are by her, unless cited.

Themes/Interview Analysis

Effective Teaching in The Applied Studio

- **Successful Strategies:** (again, pointed out by her in interviews and journals).
 - Creating Exercises based on the repertoire. (Jazz picked her own repertoire, and we’ve modified keys so everything was in her comfortable range, while

pushing out of the comfort zone a little too. As Duke and Chapman also discusses: “it is important that the repertoire assigned students is well within student's technical capabilities; no student is struggling with the notes of the piece” (chapter 4, p.31). I believe that letting the student pick the repertoire is a good example of student-centered approach, and “students with agency” (Carey, Coutts, Grant, Harrison, Dwyer, 2017).

- **Flexibility:** Being able to stay in the moment and coming up with strategies as we go/depending on the needs of the student in the moment.
- Finding Alternatives to the same issue, depending on what is working for the student. She was referring to being creative with exercises when something isn't working, being flexible among strategies X,Y,Z to fix “issue of A”.
- Effective **Modeling** : “sometimes I don't hear it or get it until you do it”. She constantly complimented my teaching during modeling.
- Effective Assessment: Recordings and Journals were both very helpful.
 - Instructions felt even clearer when listening back in recordings, and she could identify the differences much more clearly.
- Singing for a little while first : “not cutting me right away”, she reported that it:
 - Builds confidence
 - Creates flow, which is “a state of consciousness where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions” (Jackson, Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.6), which then in return as focus, concentration, and interest. In fact, “flow is the state in which performers perform to their optimum” (McPherson, Parncutt, 2002, p.182) .
- **Positive Education Approaches:**
 - Treating the lessons as an ongoing, complex process. Each student is different, and each student's needs are different, even from one moment to another. “Essentially, students suggested that the teaching interactions could be entirely focused on an individual, and his/her particular needs” (Gaunt, 2011, pg. 11)

- Building on top of what the student can do already. “I enjoyed how you’d figure out based from how I can do something better”. One out of the four pillars of Positive Instruction in Music Studios is **strength spotting** and using **signature strengths** (through VIA survey). (Patston, Waters, 2015)
- Meditative Practices/Mindfulness Activities During Lessons (from her journal reflections) : “I like that you make sure I’m healthy, even asking me to close my eyes and take the moment in- to just sing, no pressure- and you letting me take the time to respond to your questions”.
- Encouragement (often!)
 - In the PIMS model, three out of the four pillars are: **positive priming**(talking about what went well in the previous practice/during the week and starting with enjoyable activities), **positive pause** (stopping the process to appreciate the positive outcomes) and **process praise** (encouraging and appreciating not only the outcomes but also the efforts during process). (Patston, Waters, 2015)
- Focusing on the Positive feedback first
 - Specific and Genuine Compliments
 - “You never exaggerated”
 - “It was ‘moment-specific’ and not general boasting.”
 - Abeles also discusses how “positive reinforcement increases music achievement”and that a balance of negative and positive feedback is important (p.25)
- **Helpful Strategies:**
 - Hand movements and gestures are helpful “as they help me not to ‘think’ so much about the scale but just follow my sound”.
 - Imagery: things such as “sing how you’d sing to a baby” helped.
 - During vocal warm-ups, giving clear directions such as “we’re going up/down, a bit more volume, a little lighter” etc helped.

- **Things That Can Improve:**

- **Time Management**

- We discussed how sometimes plans need to change depending on what is needed at the moment, but I shall practice when to be more sticking to the plan vs when to let it free flow.

Comments on Expertise

- Student felt I was resourceful in general (especially about vocal health, performance and stylistic options).
- Student felt that me incorporating “health aspects of vocal instruction” was important and useful.
- Student was impressed that I was able to teach in a language that is very unfamiliar to me, and still be able to figure out what was going on vocally.

Zone of Proximal Development

- **Vocal Technique and Warm Ups:**

- “They were challenging, but good, I’ve enjoyed all of them”. “I like that you’d have me try challenging things”. Explaining and discussing ZPD, Richard Kennell (1992) says: “students should always be challenged by material that is not too easy or too difficult” (p.9)
- Scaffolding: Jazz said: “thanks for breaking down the exercises”, “Each technique per line was helpful” - referring to analyzing things sentence by sentence, when needed.
- Didn’t Enjoy: Gala Gala (she mentioned it was too hard, and I remember from our lessons that I sensed a little bit of self-criticism, impatience and frustration in our lessons, it was too challenging for her)
- These were “challenging but good”:
 - Panting
 - Lip Thrills
 - Relaxing the Tongue and Jaw

Rapport

- Student felt they progressed more, faster and better as rapport was built. And “as we were more comfortable with each other”.
 - “Because of the rapport and communication we developed, I could bounce ideas off you very quickly”
- Positive and Encouraging Feedback : “You always started with positive feedback but were also honest with me”. “You were always positive, but not exaggerating”.
- Asking appropriate and good questions- She had mentioned she really appreciated them: “Thank you for asking me how I feel while we try the exercises, and making sure the sounds I make are healthy”. Continues- “It’s still a new feeling for me to be asked how I feel when I’m singing, as when I was growing up the usual concern was just the pitch”.
- Shared experiences
 - Us both being internationals in the United States created a special bond between me and the student both on a personal and musical aspect. “Both of us being internationals worked best, and you understood better that the way my mouth may develop certain sounds”

Motivation

“ Learning motivation and satisfaction are both important factors in successful learning”.
(Hsieh, 2003)

“Motivation is a critical factor in acquiring new skills” (Leborgne, Rosenberg, 2019)

Jazz: “I am getting more excited as we progress each week, definitely, even more practice is needed on my end, I know I should do it everyday for at least an hour”. (I told her that was not necessary and too much, but shows me how motivated and willing she was)

“I am so encouraged by listening to how I’ve improved compared to the first lesson.”

- I didn’t specifically ask her about motivation during the interview, but according to her journals:
 - Allowing her to pick her own repertoire that meant something for her was motivating to her because it was important for her to share that with others. “my favorite thing was the repertoire, I always wanted to sing Usahay to others and not just myself”.

- Working for a performance really motivated her. She says “I definitely enjoy socializing and I respond to social pressure well”. “I get soooo motivated with people around me!”.
- My assessment assignments were reflective and therefore she was able to look back, hear that she sounds “better” or “different” and that was motivating to her. Carey, Coutts, Grant, Harrison, Dwyer (2017) also discovered that “student’s participation in reflective activities has the potential to impact positively on their learning, dependent on a student’s reflective capabilities” (p.9). Jazz’s analytical skills were very advanced, so it worked!
- Building realistic expectations kept up the motivation levels. The student was made aware that things take time to develop: “It takes a while to get used to being aware of how certain body parts feel while singing, but I’m trying to be aware of it now”.
- Signs of expansion and anticipation : “We also started to get to the point where I would know how to follow your instructions, sometimes even without you finishing the actual words!”
 - In the last two lessons, Jazz would anticipate the flow of the lesson better, and she’d do things before I even asked her to. She was able to apply ideas from previous lessons into the current one.
 - Even when I thought it was time to move on from something, she would be so focused and expanding on that idea- which could be indication of flow.
- Practiced twice a week on average!
 - Mostly warm ups
 - Mental practice of songs, and not always full out (space/apartment noise problems)
 - “I progress better when I am with you, of course. Since you have an instant reaction... When I practice alone I can only refer to the recording and no one can actually correct me”. However, I still think her independent practices were very helpful and effective since we were working towards a performance in a time crunch: “Practice is more effective when it is goal-oriented (Locke and Bryan, 1965), especially when the goals are directly related to the task being practiced” ((Locke and Bryan, 1965; Barry, McArthur, 1994).

Music Performance/ Anxiety

- The interview was before the interview, but in her final journal she wrote:
 - “I was very nervous and shaky before the performance, more than expected”.
 - Pre-performance traditions: “we initiated a handshake, calms the nerves”. I think pre-performance routines and traditions are important and helpful, and can help people feel safer. “A pre-performance routine might include a warm-up on the instrument, the use of positive self talk, a focus on performance goals, the use of a relaxation strategy...,” (Parncutt, McPherson, pg,181). We did warm up, did a mindfulness exercise on positivity with breathing, and set one and only goal: decided to have fun and be musical, whatever happens). I think private studio teachers often neglect building this kind of a relationship with students, but I treat my students like they are a part of a team, and I am glad to hear it helped!
 - Jazz: “I am not a worst-case scenario person, but I want to appreciate you for saying what’s the worst that could go wrong and that you’d have my back. I took this to my heart and when I made a mistake confidently sang the wrong part knowing you would play along either way!”.
 - This also could be categorized under “positive education” or motivation, however, the Student said that they listened back to some recordings comparing the final lessons vs the actual performance and mentioned she was NOT happy with how she sounded during the performance, but she was able to rephrase her thoughts and say : “I’m my own worst critic, so i know I’m focusing on this and it was just a first performance, but you only get better with more practice!”. This clearly shows that the student was able to build resilience skills in our lessons and was prepared for this feeling!
 - Building trust and rapport reduced irritability and performance anxiety, and enhanced creativity and confidence. “Even if I was slightly irritated at myself for forgetting the words, I had full confidence that you’d have my back and catch the song”.

Hints of Critical Thinking:

- In her journals, I can see that the student is questioning her skills and choices and what the next step could be throughout, which tells me that she is a very attentive, observant critical thinker. Brookfield (1987) - adapted from our slide on canvas under unit 4, claims that critical thinking could also be symbolizing student **motivation!**
- Frey (2010) says: “Since the majority of the time that the student will spend practicing during a week will be independent of the instructor, the student must learn how to independently diagnose and solve problems that arise.” and I believe Jazz was able to critically think and reflect on her practices, problems, and coming up with solutions!

Musicality

Jazz: “It’s good to associate music with feelings of wellness and whole-roundedness”

- Student enjoyed the repertoire a lot:
 - Being able to share the music that means something to me with someone else, and an audience was precious.
 - Being able to sing in her native language even if it wasn’t something I am familiar with.
 - Student highly enjoyed singing together, and not alone all the time. “I like singing with you!”.
- Ear Training:”You were right- it’s not that I don’t hear it, but I didn’t know what to look for” - JGD. .
- She claimed that she felt like her goals were met (singing in tune more often and performing ‘better’), as well as enhanced- she learned new things about the voice such as tongue and jaw tension. (Jazz’s initial goals were very general and not voice-specific, but now they are more informed) :
 - “I can hear things better, and I am more in pitch”.
 - “It (her goals) changed- in the beginning I just wanted to be in pitch. Now I wanna expand my range and try different repertoires.”. “I didn’t know I couldn’t hit all those high notes”

General Things/Other Notes (feelings and thoughts)

- Enjoyed/loved:
 - Disproving myths about singing. “Diaphragm” or “can’t sing while you sit”

Resources / References (13 total)

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Q&A Notes (Loosely Color Coded)

What was your favorite thing about this semester's voice lessons?

My favorite thing is that I loved the repertoire. I always wanted to sing Usahay to an audience and not just me.

She enjoyed sharing it.

What did you enjoy during lessons the most?

I enjoyed how you'd try to figure out how to make an exercises based on the repertoire and based from how i can do something better. It's an ongoing process that you have to think of in the moment, and that is cool.

What did you enjoy the least?

I think only in the beginning I was very awkward because I was very shy so I didn't enjoy feeling like that but there was more progress with my voice as we got more comfy with each other.

What felt easy? What felt hard?

I like that you'd have me try challenging things. Panting and lip thrills are hard, but you made it easy with finding alternatives.

Did you have fun in your lessons?

I did have fun. I want to mention how you copy what i just did. For example the “hfjkdhkfjnd”, It’s perfect. It’s funny cuz you do it so perfect that I feel like I do that but I don’t hear it until you do it, and then I detect it in myself too.

Modeling

Do you feel like you have learned something new? If yes, examples?

Tongue and jaw tension. “My tongue is my enemy” . I sound so much better.

We just got to work with it, just need to relax it!

I always thought you can’t **sing sitting down**, but you disproved that for me, so that was great. In the Philippines, we have a saying “oh wow, look at her, she can even sing sitting down”.

Actors, songwriters, different cultures.. finding a more natural breath

Do you feel like you have improved/achieved some or most of your goals?

I think yes. I heard the last lesson the other day, so I think so.

I can hear the notes better, more in pitch.

Do you think your voice changed?

I dont know if my voice changed, my voice is still my voice, but the way I released it changed, and I didn’t know I could hit all those high notes.

Did you practice outside of class?

On average twice a week. Mostly warm ups and then singing very little but not often full out.

I **used recordings**, and even my roommates keyboards.

How did it go?

I progress better when I am with you since you have an instant reaction because when I practice alone I can only refer to the recording and no one can correct me, but I still was able to work on things.

What were your favorite exercises? What were your least favorite exercises?

What I thought I knew about my voice and my goals at the beginning of the semester... umm, you make it into a professional assesment. You were right that it's not that I don't hear it, but I sometimes don't know what to hear/ what to look for. And then, but now I hear the difference when I can use the diapghram.

Favorite : mimicking without thinking/imitating

Least: "i actually really enjoyed all of it, I'm not even kidding".

Did you feel that I was resourceful?

Yes I definitely think so. First off, you taught in a language you didn't know and you were still able to teach it. Also you were very good with coming up with different strategies on the spot.

Were instructions clear?

Yes. Your modeling especially is great.

Was I prepared?

Yes.

What strategies worked well?

I like that you have me sing first. And you don't cut me right away, and I feel more confident that way. And now that we are more comfy with each other I don't mind being cut off sentence by sentence. I liked breaking it down after singing for a while.

What do you like most about me as a teacher?

I really love you are very encouraging, especially for adult singers who are shy. It's very good to have a positive teacher. You don't exaggerate but specific compliments in the moment that are honest.

What do you think can improve about me as a teacher?

If we time the lessons 10 min warm up, 20 min repertoire. But we also have to let it flow, so I dont know.

(We had discussed)

Was I able to plan well for our lessons?

Yes.

Anything else you may want to add?

Nothing really. I like the recordings a lot. I miss things in the moment sometimes because I am in my head a lot in the lesson, and I realize the instructions better and hear myself better later on. Keeping a journal also helped. I'm very helpful.

FOLLOW UP Q&A

In what ways were the journals helpful/not helpful?

Umm the journals were helpful because it forced me to listen to the recordings. It makes you practice because you need to write something down that makes sense.

The questions were easy going to answer.

What would your goals be today? Are they the same? Different?

It changed- in the beginning i just wanted to be in pitch. Now i wanna expand my range. Try different repertoires.

The amount of repertoire was a good for the short time we had. But I'm ready to move forwards.

You had mentioned that you enjoyed the fast mimicking exercise that included slides glides stacatti, etc. Why do you think these were your favorite?

I guess because there was instant feedback on both our ends.

The one exercise where we sat down zzz's . Release exercise.

Gala gala I did not enjoy much because — its hard , didn't feel good. 67899y

Slides were easier so i enjoyed them