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History of Western Music: An Interactive and Multi-media Website to Enhance Learning

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Abstract

This project was to develop a set of multi-media materials to be put on the web for students' use during and outside class. The resources package included score examples, audio recordings of music, video clips of performances, narration, and educational materials related to music, as well as links to other related web resources. Students were encouraged to take part in the virtual learning environment, to use the materials uploaded, to take part in the chat rooms and discussion groups, and explore various music-related resources on their own to enhance their learning experience.

Key words

Use of multi-media in the music classroom, interactive teaching and learning

Introduction

Music history has always been a challenging subject to teach in Hong Kong. A lot of students come to college with a pre-conceived notion that history is a 'boring' subject with a lot of information to remember. Lack of familiarity with the Western world, Western culture, and the Western music repertoire makes learning music history seem a daunting task. The objective of this project was to create an interactive website in which students could explore the various facets of music history – including the culture, the art, the architecture, the composers, the sound, the notation, and the issues concerned, etc. Through a detailed guide, students go through various music-history related resources on a weekly basis. Through the resources on this interactive and multi-media website, it is hoped that students' interest in music history will be raised and their learning thus enhanced. Part of the materials used for the website will be used in class, which I hope will enhance teaching as well.

Aims and Objectives

Most of our students come to college with minimal knowledge of Western culture and a disdain for history. They lack the necessary language skills to handle the reading materials for such a subject, which is often seen as having little relevance to them. The objective of this project is to make teaching and learning of music history relevant, meaningful, and fun. To accomplish this, the Principal Investigator of this project wanted to create a virtual learning environment in which students could chat with the instructor and their classmates, while having easy access to various resources about music, and to change the lecture format to a very intense but effective multi-media presentation, thus leaving class time for activities such as discussions, outside visits, quizzes, etc. It is hoped that through the implementation of this new approach to teaching music history, students will be more motivated and will as a result find the study of music history fun, easy, and - most important - relevant to their careers. Also the resources developed could be shared by music history teachers in other local universities or universities of Asian countries.

Methodology

WebCT was used to deliver the virtual learning environment.

1. Through the WebCT calendar, the instructor of the class announced local musical events as well as drawing attention to events abroad.

2. For each teaching topic, there was a folder of resources to enhance learning:
   (a) lecture notes;
   (b) reading materials of various levels of difficulties to accommodate students with different abilities;
   (c) music scores of representative musical works for students to study;
   (d) sound files of music recordings for students to listen;
   (e) websites related to the topic.
   For each lecture, there was a set of highly sophisticated Powerpoint slides (with sound and video clips).

3. For each teaching topic, students had to complete a web test to reinforce learning.

4. Key concepts and technical terms were singled out to make sure that students reach the minimum standard.

5. For the discussion list, the instructor put up threads for students to share their views with each other.

Results/Findings

A CD Rom was produced which was used during the semester. Students found the materials helpful for their learning. Of the 26 students who took part in the survey (5 students short of the class size), 8 strongly agreed with the statement that "the multi-media resources as a whole have enhanced your learning), whereas 17 agreed with the statement. Only one answer was neutral.

Regarding the components in the resource kit, 10 and 11 each agreed strongly and agreed to the statement that "the powerpoint slides (images, key terms, and notes) have enhanced your learning." 14 and 12 each agreed strongly and agreed to the statement that "the sound files (recordings and scores) provided have enhanced your learning." 11 and 14 each agreed strongly and agreed to the statement that "the videos incorporated into the power-point presentation have enhanced your learning" whereas one's pick was neutral. 7 and 11 each agreed strongly and agreed to the statement that "additional web-resources provided have enhanced your learning, whereas 7 were neutral and one disagreed.

Discussion

There is no question that the advent of the internet has changed our way of life, our approach toward knowledge, and our method of learning.

Students' feedback was all very positive with regard to whether the multi-media resources had enhanced their learning. They largely thought the images and notes provided on the powerpoint were helpful, and they particularly thought highly of the usefulness of the sound-recordings and the videos (all digitized), whereas they thought less useful some additional resources such as websites.

I also asked students' opinion on what they thought most useful in helping them to learn. Interestingly, the instructor's teaching style and the multi-media resources are rated about the same in their role in enhancing one's learning – all rated as strongly important. Then, students tended to think peer influence had very little part to play in enhancing their learning. Examinations as a way of learning enhancement were not highly favoured by students. Assignments, both reading and writing, were not considered as important as the instructor's teaching style or the multi-media resources concerned. The finding suggests that students preferred multi-media web-resources to traditional teaching materials such as books and articles.

The experiences of producing the CD Rom and creating this Web-based learning environment have been rewarding for my professional growth. Seeing that some of my friends are running web-classes, I feel like the project has prepared me to take the next step – to run classes on the web.

Enhancement on Teaching and Learning

I myself find the web resources very handy for classroom teaching and students did find the approach more interesting than the traditional one. As students were unfamiliar with European culture as a whole, the multi-media resources (providing visual and aural input) were a very effective way of enhancing their learning.

Limitations/Difficulties

The gathering of materials and the preparation of materials to be put on the

web were extremely time-consuming and as a result, the web-resources created covered only the Romantic period.

Conclusion

The web resources created were perceived as useful to enhance teaching and learning both by the instructor and students respectively. There is no doubt that modes of teaching are changing and students are more and more dependent on web-resources. Thus, it is necessary to up-date one's teaching approach to address students' needs. Nonetheless, the humanistic aspect of teaching and learning, the person-to-person and one-to-one interactions between student(s) and instructor, should not be neglected, even at the university level. As the questionnaire has shown, while students thought highly about the usefulness of Web resources in enhancing their learning, equally, they also thought the same regarding the instructor's teaching style.