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Choral singing in a social movement as a tool of adult education: 'Warszawianka 1905' as a teacher

Aleksandra Hołubowicz
University of Hradec Králové, Czech Republic (aleksandra.holubowicz@uhk.cz)

Piotr Kowzan
University of Gdańsk, Poland (piotr.kowzan@ug.edu.pl)

Abstract

This paper examines how choral singing functions as a site of adult education within social movements through a case study of 'Warszawianka 1905' as performed by the Prague Revolutionary Choir. Combining dialogical autoethnography, new-materialist diffractive analysis, and autophenomenography, we conceptualise the song as actant, historical witness, and teacher. We propose a 'pedagogy of redundancy', i.e., the use of purposeful cycles of listening, choral recitation, rhythmic chanting, humming, and iterative performance which lowers shame, builds affective and social reserves, while enabling translanguaging, improvisation, and rapid public uptake. Framed as 'strategic deep andragogy', we offer a 4R heuristic: Repeat, Relax, Reframe, Resound, showing how the collective voice binds bodies, memories, and political imagination across languages and generations. Productive tensions between nostalgia/critique and canonisation/improvisation animate identity work. In addition, we note the limits of a single-song regional focus and outline pathways for comparative research.

Keywords: adult education, choral singing, social movements, pedagogy of redundancy, strategic deep andragogy

Introduction

In contemporary education, literacy – both writing and reading – has long been considered a foundational skill (Freire, 1970; Jacobs, 2002). Recently there has been a shift in literacy research turning to multiliteracies and multimodalities with a view to recognising a

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plethora of ways in which people engage with the world around them and construe meanings (Brown & Zhang, 2025; Zapata et al., 2023). We note that this still does not seem to be a widely explored perspective. While oral traditions have received some attention from social movements (Augusto et al., 2024; Srigley et al., 2018), they are often associated with distant cultures or the fading memories of older generations (Bornat, 2002; Tańczuk, 2024). Yet the experiences of collective singing, discovering one's own voice, and harmonising with others are just as fundamental (cf. Hołubowicz, in press). These acts are about expressing oneself, selecting the right words, and creating a shared vocabulary. However, at the same time there are vibrant developments in indigenous studies retrieving oral traditions from obsolescence thus reestablishing their potential: this manifests itself, for instance, in the growing popularity of storytelling in pedagogy (Lawrence & Paige, 2016). A song too tells a story, as argued by Alberhasky and Durkee (2024) in their research examining lyrics and the way a narrative is created, in which the scholars use a large data set of pieces from various musical genres. The power of a song, however, exceeds the message that the actual words carry. Thanks to the music – the rhythm, the melody, the particular instrumental rendition – it is possible for a song that we hear with our inner ear to take control of us, thanks to the affect it generates. This usually occurs when we like the composition but also at times seemingly against our will. This is likely the reason why songs have been used amply in education; this approach is frequently advocated in language learning in particular. However, nowadays singing is often evaluated through a professional lens, linked to career-making, rather than being seen as a natural form of communication (Small, 1999; Turino, 2008).

Developing a liking for a song and a willingness to share it with others as well as hearing it reverberate with a multitude of voices has inscribed itself into recent educational theory in which teaching is increasingly understood as an act of generosity rather than merely one of transmission. For Vlieghe and Zamojski (2025), teaching involves placing before others something one cherishes in the world and inviting learners to contemplate it. This act of educational generosity goes beyond integration or hospitality: it is a formative gesture that exposes the next generation to the world as gift, while also shaping them in relation to it (cf. Kowzan, 2025). Within adult education, and especially in the arts, such generosity often takes the form of a shared presentation rather than a finished product to be contemplated or consumed: instead, it is an offering to be reenacted together.

Choral singing exemplifies this gesture with particular force. The choir does not merely display a song to an audience; it first has to 'tear the song from the self' (cf. pl. *trzeba się wydrzeć*) in a gesture that is both vocal and communal. Here the choir functions as a collective teacher – albeit one that emerges through the prior constitution of a community. As Esposito (2011, 2015) suggests, community is not a fusion without cost but a relation of mutual exposure and obligation: each member must contribute, even if only by opening their mouth and lending their breath. Participation demands a relinquishing, a giving-up of something of oneself and subjecting it to music so that something greater may resound. In this sense, the educational power of choral singing lies in the voices torn from ordinary speech, raised above mere noise and offered back to the world as a renewed presence of the cosmology embedded in a particular song (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998).

By combining dialogical autoethnography (Harada, 2013), new materialist diffractive analysis (Kotze et al., 2018) with its focus on affect rather than discourse as well as autophenomenography with its flows of experience-based meanings in time (Kowzan, 2022), our study promises to show how a single revolutionary song torn from committed individuals can become an assembled teacher in adult education. This teacher

is capable of leading learners into histories of struggle, mediating multilingual and plurilingual collaboration, as well as producing affective bonds across generations and borders. Dialogical autoethnography consists of both authors' conversations interpreting the reports and data brought by the participatory observer. Its strength lies in first-hand in-depth experience of the phenomenon under scrutiny by one of the authors of this paper Ola Hołubowicz, accompanied at the stage of interpretation and analysis by the other researcher, Piotr Kowzan, who was not directly involved in the observation. In this instance, dialogue has a potential for being more productive, as the person with an insider's perspective can discuss her reflections with an 'outsider' relying only on the empirical material able to preserve a critical distance from the issue. Here we use autophenomenography to trace variation in one person's experience of the same phenomenon across time (Kowzan, 2022; Shu, 2020). It is not a separate dataset but a temporal reading of Ola's first-person material, especially where present-day singing reactivates childhood memories and earlier affective attachments. Diffractive analysis was used as a reading strategy for tracing how voices, bodies, languages, tools, and historical associations intra-acted in particular episodes.

We also aim to incorporate a methodological innovation by writing part of the article from the song's perspective, echoing trends in post-qualitative research with its aversion to only discursive aspects of language (Le Grange, 2018). Finally, acknowledging the contradictory impulses around 'Warszawianka 1905' – nostalgia versus critique; canonisation versus improvisation – we hope to enable readers to see how adult learners negotiate their political and musical identities in practice. This gesture situates our approach within arts-based and creative nonfiction educational research traditions in which aesthetic form is treated not as ornament but as a mode of reporting and inquiry (Barone, 2008; Eisner, 2017; Greenwood, 2012).

We begin with the assumption that collective singing is processual and participatory. It is not confined to the final product: the act of learning and rehearsing the song is itself a site of adult education. Its participatory character resonates with the pre-twentieth century notions of music as music-making; in other words, each rendition is a unique temporally situated experience rather than a material artefact such as a vinyl record or music CD (Turino, 2008). In practical terms, our fieldwork involved participatory observation during the rehearsals and performances of the Prague Revolutionary Choir which is comprised of singers from many countries. It is a small non-professional collective with a varying number of members whose main objective is to engage in activism in a joyful way by singing songs associated with the broadly understood leftist heritage: in other words, songs celebrating transnational civil rights and revolutionary movements. The musical quality is not irrelevant but it plays a secondary role. The chorists strive to improve their technique, but the guiding principles rely on radical inclusion irrespective of vocal experience or skill, relying on the notion of participatory art that presumes active engagement (Turino, 2008).

Methodology

Data was collected through participatory observation during rehearsals and performances of the Prague Revolutionary Choir, supplemented by fieldnotes, selected audio/video recordings, and document analysis concerning the song's circulation and historical uses. The material discussed in this article was selected because it captured the full learning sequence through which a new song enters the choir's repertoire: collective listening, phonetic negotiation, rhythmic recitation, humming, harmonic distribution, and public performance. Our aim was not exhaustive documentation of the choir's activity but rather

to pay analytical attention to episodes that illuminated how learning, coordination, and affect were co-produced in practice.

Our objective is to trace the biography of one song rendered by the choir, 'Warszawianka 1905', personify it and treat 'her' as a teacher of the choir. We see a song as a cultural artifact which owing to its rhythm and melody can become embedded in people's minds. Music is a product of human activity which is capable of escaping conscious control and holding power over people at a physiological level. We aim to explore the ways in which one song can function as a teacher both in adult education and in a social movement. We also aim to demonstrate how this approach can be transplanted to other learning contexts.

As for our methodological approach we approach the role of the song from three different perspectives. First, we view it as an actant (à la Latour, 2017), i.e., a force capable of bringing people together. Second, we regard it as a witness carrying sedimented histories (leftist: social democratic, socialist, communist, anarchist and antifascist), along with worldview assumptions and organisational strategies that at the time were regarded as innovative (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). Finally, we treat the song as a teacher, enveloping participants in a cosmos of collectivity. Its rhythm and melody instruct bodies, evoke tears, and demand participants be together in the moment until the last verse – the completion of the performance. This triadic lens allows us to see how 'Warszawianka 1905' (female, approximately 146 years old) operates simultaneously within rehearsals (as a welcoming learning space), performances (as a form of public pedagogy), and individual memories (as autophenomenographic testimony).

At the level of methodology, there are similarities between our core idea of giving voice to song and the practices of deep ecology (cf. McClaskie, 2023). The Council of All Beings ritual involves participants removing their human identity for a moment and 'speaking on behalf of other-than-human Beings' (Hindhede, 2023), cultivating an ecological self and encouraging the development of compassion across species and generations. This fundamental principle of treating all beings as having inherent value, however, derives not from modern ecology but from Indigenous worldviews. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes in *Theory of Water*, the world is composed not only of animals and plants but also of ancestors and stories; water and 'the other living beings in the network of Anishinaabeg life are teachers and co-creators' (Simpson, 2025, p. 161). The analytical point here is circulation. Water circulates like the blood of the planet, bearing information about past and present, carrying memory, and teaching resilience through its changing forms.

The bridge to song is therefore empirical as well as metaphorical. Both water and choral singing can be understood as media of memory and relation. The comparison may be made on three levels: by analogy, insofar as both water and song serve as carriers of history; by homology, insofar as both instantiate a deeper phenomenon of memory-bearing and communal binding; and by morphology, insofar as both share forms of flow, rhythm, and resonance that shape how communities perceive themselves. These three levels correspond to what we trace empirically below: historical transmission, collective binding, and embodied rhythm. In this sense, to sing together is to place oneself within the currents of history just as a river does. This makes the song an active teacher of collectivity.

To translate this orientation back into adult education, we use strategic deep andragogy to name a methodological-pedagogical orientation in which adult learners provisionally decentre themselves and allow a more-than-human cultural actant carrying sedimented histories to organise attention, memory, and collective response (Latour, 2017). *Deep* signals both an attentiveness to more-than-human voices associated with

deep ecological thinking and the reactivation of inherited cultural resources under changed conditions, extending Bendell's (2018) notion of deep adaptation beyond material and social resilience towards a cultural dimension of recovery and re-use. *Strategic* draws on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's sense of strategic essentialism: the deliberate and provisional treatment of a complex entity such as the song as if it could speak with sufficient coherence to become a teacher, while remaining aware that this coherence is analytically constructed rather than ontologically given (Spivak, 1990). Strategic deep andragogy therefore concerns who or what is provisionally allowed to take pedagogical initiative; the pedagogy of redundancy, developed below, describes how this learning proceeds in practice.

In practice, this methodological orientation takes the form of three interrelated gestures:

- Writing sections of the article in the first person of the song, allowing a polyphony of voices to emerge
- Using fragments of the lyrics as mottos introducing subsequent sections, granting the song space to 'speak for herself'
- Creating new verses in response to what we uncover about its history and context

These gestures are not acts of historical reconstruction; rather, they deliberately suspend fidelity to factual detail in order to reanimate the spirit of the song. At the same time, we remain attentive to the song's sociological force. Thus 'Warszawianka 1905' does not merely reflect political history but actively addresses and shapes a group. Even though we do not engage in textual analysis of the lyrics, the song's title, its collective address, and its cultural embedding matter profoundly. Our approach thus acknowledges this specific sociological agency while opening space for the song to act as a teacher in the present. Throughout the article, we distinguish three textual registers: empirical material (fieldnote-based description and autoethnographic testimony), interpretive commentary (our analytical claims), and experimental writing (passages voiced by the song and the newly written stanza). The experimental passages are not presented as historical evidence; rather, they function as arts-based analytical devices that condense relations, affects, and tensions disclosed through the empirical material.

As researchers of social movements, we are embedded in the present. However, despite this we sometimes overlook how not only the conventions of protest have changed but also their force. What was once experienced by thousands – from the ominous silence of slaves (Bijsterveld, 2008) to striking workers singing together (Lynch, 2009) – now often unfolds on a smaller scale (Eyerman, 2019). This paper focuses on the role of collective singing in such modest events in Central-Eastern Europe, examining how repetitive and participatory practices generate social integration and function as a form of adult education.

Analysis

With this methodological framework in place, we now turn to our analysis, examining how the song operates across rehearsals, performances, and personal memories.

Śmiało podnieśmy sztandar nasz w górę!
/ˈɕmja.wɔ pɔdˈɲɛɕ.mɨ ˈʂtan.dar naʂ v ˈgu.rɛ/
Choć burza wrogich żywiołów wyje,
/xɔ͡tɕ ˈbu.ʐa ˈvrɔ.gix ʐɨˈvjɔ.wuf ˈvɨ.jɛ/

Choć nas dziś gnębią siły ponure,
/xɔt͡ɕ nas d͡ʑiɛ ˈgɲɛm.bjɔ̃ ˈɕi.wɨ pɔˈnu.rɛ/
Chociaż niepewne jutro niczyje…
/ˈxɔ.t͡ɕɑ̃ ɲɛˈpɛv.nɛ ˈju.trɔ ɲiˈt͡ʂɨ.jɛ/
(‘Warszawianka 1905’, female, age 146)

Rather than provide a full translation at this point, we offer only a rough semantic orientation: the stanza calls on singers to raise their banner despite hostile forces, present oppression, and an uncertain future. In the choir, an unfamiliar song is initially approached through sound: participants listen, repeat, and negotiate pronunciation before receiving a provisional translation. We reproduce something of this sequence here, preserving linguistic unfamiliarity as a brief part of the reading experience.

Choir - led by the song

Every member of Prague Revolutionary Choir can suggest a song of their choosing, or to look at it inversely, suggest being led by a song that has chosen them. The person advocates for the song by presenting its history, extolling its merits, enumerating the reasons why it should be included in choir performances or sharing their enthusiasm. As soon as the group has agreed to work with a given piece, the choir initiates the process by listening to the song collectively. The lyrics are already there to be found on shared files that are accessible courtesy of the Krakow Revolutionary Choir; if it is not part of their repertoire, the Prague counterpart searches for lyrics on the phones. Alternatively, Marti Składanek (The Prague choir’s founder) or Janí Heinová (one of the conductresses) print out the lyrics before the rehearsal using the resources of the corporations that employ them.

The next step is to read the text out in unison. The person ‘chosen by the song’, or someone proficient in the language the song ‘speaks’, reads one verse and then the other members repeat it chorally; this process continues through the entire song. Special attention is paid to words which are difficult to pronounce. Any issues regarding atypical pronunciation found in the song are clarified; sometimes non-standard alterations are introduced to keep the desirable rhythm in the rendition. This approach is often applied when a song has non-English lyrics. A highly proficient or native speaker of the target language guides the process at the phonetic level as this procedure entails additional repetition at this initial stage. The person also spontaneously translates the song to English so that the choir members can become aware of the content and the message.

We, the authors of the paper, deliberately reject the word ‘master’ the language and choose ‘settling into’ instead, as we do not believe that ‘mastery’ is either possible, relevant or desirable. This position follows Freire’s conviction that learning begins in dialogue, not control (Freire, 1970; Stańczyk, 2021). To settle into a song is to inhabit its history and listen to what it teaches, rather than to dominate it. Becoming masters of some content contradicts the approach promoted here – it is the learners who let themselves be led by the song, listening avidly to the meaning it carries. Participants derive meaning not only from the actual lyrics but the song’s vibrant history and internationalism. Fidelity to past renditions would seek an alternative form of ‘perfection’ as a goal – one working with a multitude of voices possessing a varying degree of musicality, a plethora of dialects, languages and native languages; this embodies the inclusive ideology behind it.

The next step involves rhythmic reading line by line with participants repeating the lyrics after the song guide to familiarise themselves with the text. Finally, the whole song is read out rhythmically and chanted chorally, functioning as an intermediary phase

between recitation and singing. After a few repetitions, once the chorists feel that they have become sufficiently acquainted with the linguistic layer to try producing it musically, the collective moves on to learning the main melody line by line through humming or fully vocalising the text. At this stage practicing the song begins: singing the lyrics stanza by stanza without any differentiation into separate voice parts. Unless the song is particularly simple, the choir members may manage to sing only the first stanza by the end of the rehearsal: it usually requires further practice, but the end outcome is perceived as a reward which offers a motivation boost.

During the following rehearsal after the warm-up and vocal exercises work on the piece is resumed. At each meeting the singers might take all the steps described above; the process can be somewhat faster but this depends on the number of participants who were absent from the first practice of the new song. The choir tends to cover the whole song phonetically and vocally on multiple occasions. As soon as everyone feels comfortable with the main melody, the choir proceeds to learn to sing in harmony. A highly proficient or native speaker of the target language guides the process at the phonetic level since settling into it entails more repetition to become familiar with it. This stage is much shorter as the choir have already become acquainted with the song. Once they feel ready, each member volunteers to sing the voice of their choosing. If there is a substantial imbalance in numbers, more advanced and experienced singers – usually the conductresses Janí or Sofia, or Marti (the founding mother) – join the less numerous group. The collective also make sure that each group has at least one singer who is capable of holding the voice line to steer the others who may be more susceptible to drifting into another melodic line. As opposed to professional choirs, Prague choir members are not forced to remain in their voice categories (e.g., soprano, alto, tenor, etc.) but are free to choose the melody they feel most comfortable with producing, which might mean that a person with a deep voice opts to sing the soprano line as they find it more appealing or easier to internalise.

In the following exchange, the song is personified and given a voice:

‘Warszawianka 1905’ (female, age 146):

> When I was requested by the choir to share my knowledge, I advised the group to begin by listening to an existing recording performed by the Krakow Revolutionary Choir. Then they read out my lyrics in unison, discussed difficult phonetic passages and translations, chanted the text rhythmically, hummed the melody, and only then did I encourage them to sing – first in unison and later harmonising with or without voice categories.

This process, summarised by Piotr and Ola in their notes as ‘la la la → singing in another language’, takes place at a decreasing distance from the content and is essentially a pedagogy of redundancy: repetition, mutual facilitation and rhythmical reading (often aided by metronome or piano apps on phones) thus allowing adults to learn by doing, listening and repetition. Within this ecology, the song is treated as a living companion: she ‘guides’ novices, demands attention to her story, and gradually reveals her affective power. The song is a hub in a network of people, their specific skills or lack thereof, and their social roles or needs or the tools employed (Latour, 2017). Even an undefined social context must be taken into account when assessing the potential of the particular song to be performed in future (cf. Hołubowicz & Kowzan, in press).

> El bien más preciado es la libertad
> hay que defenderla con fe y valor.
> Alza la bandera revolucionaria

> Que lleva el pueblo a la emancipación.
> Alza la bandera revolucionaria
> que lleva el pueblo a la emancipación.
> ('Warszawianka 1905', carried on a Spanish current: 'A las barricadas' (1936))

Comrade 'Warszawianka 1905'/'A las barricadas':

> I chose Ola to become my disciple. I met her when she was an elementary school student and I was still invited to schools as part of curricular music classes. It seemed that Ola and her classmates used to enjoy accompanying me in singing.

Ola:

> I was carried away by the song and I observed that my classmates were also, thanks to her marching pace and the rising melody, creating a sense of explosion, but I was not able to put my finger on this as a child.

Comrade 'Warszawianka 1905'*:*

> I became *persona non grata* later. They banned me from schoolbooks a few years after the systemic transformations in 1989, when decommunisation and desovietisation ideologues directed their focus onto the school curriculum. This occurred even though I was born long before Poland adopted socialism as its official regime. Over a century earlier my father, Wacław Święcicki conceived me while imprisoned, which is perhaps why my birthday is unclear. It was either in 1879, (Stojek-Sawicka, 2022), or in 1880, when my second father, Józef Pławiński, composed music (Alonso, 2021) or in 1884 (Ossa Martínez, 2009). Yet I must have been considered a relic of communism, the eradication of which was deemed 'a return to normality' (Janowski, 2007, p. 83). The fact that I was rejected as a schoolteacher felt incomprehensible. Why?

Ola:

> The sudden marginalisation of an eagerly performed composition was not explained to us: the teacher in our final year just dismissed our request to sing it with the remark, 'You can sing this one at home'. It occurs to me now that we probably did not give too much thought to the issue since we were used to being given no explanations as to why some course of action took place at school, and in the world around us. Nonetheless, Comrade 'Warszawianka 1905' somehow did not disappear from my life. She was there, hummed every now and then in my childhood, lyrics internalised, accompanying me in my pompous desire for something intangible and revolutionary through my adolescence, but then she slowly started growing silent, ousted by contemporary punk rock and indie music.

After approximately two decades of so-called decommunisation and desovietisation, a process which in practice involved attempts to erase all symbols, histories, intellectual traditions, political ideas, and key figures associated with the broadly defined left – the campaign gradually lost momentum in the public sphere, despite the endeavours of the Institute of National Remembrance (Polish acronym: IPN) to promote such policies (Kałużna, 2018). The aesthetics of martyrology under the oppressive regime of the past seemed to lose its grip as the new generations without any first-hand experience of the former system came of age. Thanks to this shift, leftist activists increasingly began reclaiming their heritage. Krakow Revolutionary Choir is a collective that epitomises this trend: they have resumed public renditions of the songs that fell out of favour post 1989 including 'Warszawianka 1905'.

One such performance of 'Warszawianka 1905' was held on June 24, 2023. The piece, which was considered the anthem of the 1905-1907 Revolution, was sung by the Krakow Revolutionary Choir and the Warsaw Revolutionary Choir in Łódź, Poland, as part of the celebrations marking the 112th anniversary of the Łódź Uprising (irk, 2023). The workers, who demanded an eight-hour working day and the right to receive an education in their own national languages, were brutally suppressed by the Tsarist authorities. To commemorate the event the leftist circles of Łódź, Warsaw and their allies organised a march with many participants wearing outfits that were typical of the working class in the early twentieth century.

After joining the Prague Choir, I became familiar with more leftist anthems recognisable and sung all over the world. It was then I realised that the Spanish 'A las barricadas!' was a close relative of 'Warszawianka'. I deduced that the song must have reached Spain thanks to the Polish division of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War, carried by the *Dąbrowszczacy*, alternatively known as the Jarosław Dąbrowski units. The two songs share strikingly similar lyrics and an almost identical melody. It would make sense that a substantial group – Polish soldiers constituted approximately 4000 to 5000 out of a total of 35 000 international volunteers fighting with the Republican Army (Pietrzak, 2021) – might well have brought the robust and seductive comrade 'Warszawianka 1905', whose appeal would generate her Spanish variant.

In fact, however, the melody reached Spain before the Polish International Brigades did. It was introduced by Otto Mayer (now known as Otto Mayer-Serra), a Berlin Jewish communist who moved to Catalonia after the fire of the *Reichstag* in 1933. Mayer-Serra was a Marxist musicologist and a conductor of the workers' choir in Berlin. He saw the need to establish a similar group in Barcelona in order to activate workers through music; in this way he hoped to prevail over the passivity-inducing bourgeois culture by raising awareness among his project's participants. Comrade 'Warszawianka 1905' – of course a Polish proletarian anthem – under her German alias ('Auf die Barrikaden') migrated to Barcelona together with other revolutionary songs by German and Soviet composers, sent to Mayer-Serra by his friend and comrade from Berlin, where 'Warszawianka 1905' yet again shifted her identity to work in the Spanish context. Owing to her appeal and power, she was acclaimed the 'hymn of the Spanish confederation of anarcho-syndicalist labour unions Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) […][and] the anarchist hymn' (Alonso, 2021, p. 464); she was also sung with Catalan lyrics.

This testimony illustrates how 'Warszawianka 1905' operates as what Deleuze and Guattari (2005) call a rhizome. Its radicalism recalls the Latin *radix* (*root*), although its historical circulation resists precisely such a rooted genealogy: rather than following a single line of descent, it proliferates backward, sideways, and across struggles that local 'farmers of history' have been unable to eradicate. In the classroom, as Niesz (2022) reminds us, schooling often reflects the victories of one movement at the expense of another; the result is that when regimes change, the curricular decoration changes with them. Songs once endorsed as part of collective memory are suddenly dismissed as inappropriate and relegated to the private sphere with the suggestion that they may be sung 'at home'. What is lost in such a move is not only a political symbol but a formative sociological experience.

The song's removal from collective practice functioned less as an erasure of text than as an act of silencing. What had once been encouraged in unison became marked as improper, almost recalcitrant, if sung aloud. For children, the constellation of connotations behind the collective singing was rarely conscious; it was simply the pleasure of voices rising together. For teachers and curricular 'farmers', however, the very timbre of 'Warszawianka 1905' carried unwanted resonances, aesthetic and political

alike. Yet the song did not vanish. Through humming, memory, and later its migration into new contexts, ‘Warszawianka 1905’ continued to move – between solitude and collectivity, between Poland and Spain – resisting efforts to silence it.

Chorus:

> Ha!... zemsta straszna dzisiejszym katom,
> Co wysysają życie z milionów!...
> Ha!... zemsta carom i plutokratom!
> A przyjdzie żniwo przyszłości plonów!
> (‘Warszawianka 1905’, female, age 146)

Given the international nature of the choir, ‘Warszawianka 1905’ was a perfect candidate to become their new teacher. There were some initial doubts about singing in Polish as it is quite challenging even for Czech-speakers, even though Czech is closely related to Polish. Nonetheless, Polish diacritics, phonetics and a lack of familiarity with the language rendered it difficult to articulate for some. Collectively the chorists decided to simplify the process by combining one stanza in Polish with one in Spanish and keeping the Polish chorus ‘*Naprzód Warszawo...*’. The merging of those two linguistic versions also underscores the choir’s heterogeneous membership and its allegiance to internationalism. Additionally, it allows the Polish original to re-enter the leftist activist scene, where its Spanish counterpart has long dominated owing primarily to the far wider use of Spanish over Polish.

Once ‘Warszawianka 1905’ was elected the new guide, the group listened to existing recordings in Polish and in Spanish, read the lyrics aloud in unison, discussed difficult phonetic passages and translations, chanted the text rhythmically, hummed the melody, and only then began to sing synchronously. Singing in another language, which causes the gap in understanding to close, is essentially a pedagogy of redundancy: repetition, mutual facilitation and rhythmical reading (often aided by metronome or piano apps on smartphones) allow adults to learn by doing and listening, adding another dimension to learning through repetition. Thus, bad habits formed by many choir members as a result of immersion in the prevalent mode of education can be overcome. By education-induced ‘bad habits’ we mean those that demonise mistakes and convince students to strive towards perfection alone, erroneously seeing the learning process in binary terms: either one ‘has learned’ the skill/material or not, without any nuanced distinction between different levels of ability. One way to overcome this binarity might be inspired by indigenous pedagogies, more specifically by Māori practices of collective oral and aural learning through repetition described by Paringatai and Wharerau (2021). This would involve approaching the song as if it were a living companion: it ‘guides’ novices, does not pass judgments, allows for ‘mispronunciation’ or replacing parts of lyrics with ‘lalala’ as the multitude of voices do not expose the imperfect rendition of individuals. Through the embodied experience of producing sound collectively which vibrates through the chorists, the song reveals its affective power, enhanced by the attention to its history.

The stanza below is not presented as empirical material or as a historical continuation of ‘Warszawianka 1905’. It is an explicitly marked experimental writing device, developed to reframe and test how the song’s pedagogical logic might be carried forward into the present.

Chorus:

> Forward we march, through silence and scorn,

la-la-la, new generations are born.
Songs once discarded return with more might,
voices together rekindle the fight.

Raise up the banner of learning once more,
The chorus of many will open the door.
Each repetition, a weapon, a shield,
waste turned to power, the future revealed.
('Warszawianka 1905', anew[1])

Performance as educational generosity

We read the following account autophenomenographically because it juxtaposes Ola's childhood experience of the song with its present reactivation in the choir:

> I do not remember the circumstances in which 'Warszawianka 1905' was performed for the first time or how often the choir has rendered it since. What I do recall is the emotion: I felt moved and I verbalised this while announcing the piece. Despite my allegiance to internationalism over nationalism I experienced a sense of being moved at an affective and bodily level that I could accompany the song in public. Retrospectively, I see it as a coming-out of sorts, which occurred in a public yet semi-intimate space; generally the choir is invited to sing at small-scale events with a maximum turnout of a few hundred participants. This publicly visible relationship with Comrade 'Warszawianka 1905' was manifested in a welcoming space permeating with acceptance. I felt somehow solemn and grateful that chorists were willing to struggle with fricatives and other intricacies of Polish phonetics to synchronically vibrate and sway under the guidance of the song. Shifting between Polish and Spanish – a real challenge given that the latter is not spoken by all the members – offered everyone an opportunity to relax the speech apparatus and functioned as an important link to the song's international legacy. This enabled me to recontextualise my private 'Warszawianka 1905' as relevant to a much wider audience, many of whom probably believed the song to be of Spanish origin, ignorant of the complex history behind this cultural artifact.
>
> It is likely that my reaction was not unique, but that many of those present of Czech, Slovak, Polish or other Slavic descent also shared my sentiment, locating in the song a text of Slavic Central-Eastern European ancestry that connoted a peripheral perspective in the tradition of international movement and marked a significant contribution.

This episode supports our argument in three ways. First, it shows how multilingual performance can produce affiliation without requiring full linguistic equivalence. Second, it demonstrates that the song's public force depends on the rehearsal-based accumulation of confidence and bodily familiarity. Third, it illustrates how personal memory becomes politically recontextualised through collective enactment.

What is the result of this para-artistic analysis?

The fact that Ola does not have an accurate memory of the Prague Revolutionary Choir's public premiere of 'Warszawianka 1905' is pregnant with meaning. It leads to our conclusion that the forgetting itself can be described as a specific pedagogical practice. The value of this educational process lies not in a final outcome but in participation itself: the choir keeps learning to sing with emphasis placed on the activity and the social gathering rather than the musical piece itself. The boundaries between rehearsals and performances are blurred and porous with each public rendition lending an opportunity to become an open practice. This strategy begins with simply learning a song but its reach

exceeds its musical aspect. Repetitive vocal production does not only allow for work on singing technique but induces a bodily-synchronisation of the members of the choir – through simultaneous breathing, nodding, swaying or stamping. At public events, the vibrant assemblage grows larger transiently, dispersing right after the end of the performance to reassemble at the following event.

Every shared song carries the latent potential to become a protest song (cf. Kowzan, 2023). By altering a word, repeating a line, or inserting a verse, communities can reframe familiar melodies into immediate commentaries on unfolding events. Redundancy is thus not mere practice: it is the reservoir that allows collective voices to intervene when history calls.

The individual words of the lyrics, which are at the same time comprehensible and foreign linguistically, historically or politically to all concerned, are not as relevant as the whole, which is more than just a sum of particular elements. What matters is less the semantic content of the individual words than the act of collective singing the lyrics. What bears significance is the encounter, the affect, and the repetitive character, where the main goal is the continual recreation not only of the specific cultural artefact, but invoking its spirit as a way to pay respect to the past and embed it in the present with the future in view. From a higher vantage point, the cyclical nature of the practice helps to sustain the activist community around the choir, which resembles a ritual pledge of allegiance to certain values realised in a more playful manner given the form of art in question.

To describe the practice, we propose a term *pedagogy of redundancy* – it involves rote-learning, recitation of words where not all individual ones are understood and where their approximation suffices with possible and frequent modifications or omissions. It entails a deliberate resignation of one's own individual agency and a willing subordination to the collective. In a way it reaffirms many educational approaches that are now considered obsolete and dubious both by the modernist project and by neoliberal technocratic tendencies.

Discussion

By pedagogy of redundancy (pol. *pedagogika nadmiaru* or *pedagogika powtórzeń*) we mean a learning arrangement in which purposeful repetition, overlap, approximation, and surplus participation create the conditions for collective uptake. Its unit is not the individual act of correct reproduction but the accumulation of shared reserves: phonetic familiarity, rhythmic confidence, affective safety, and readiness for public enactment. The pedagogy of redundancy we propose is about the conscious cultivation of abundance and repetition in the learning process. It is not a new direction, though we firmly believe it is worth retrieving from neglect and recognising anew. In educational literature, the concept of *redundancy* most often appears as a principle of avoiding unnecessary information, for example, in cognitive load theory (Sweller et al., 2019). However, in arts education, there is a tradition emphasising that repetition is a condition for coherence and the foundation of musical beauty. Redundancy pedagogy is the deliberate building of a richness of experience: we repeatedly listen, read, recite rhythmically, translate, hum, sing, divide into parts, and return to the song in subsequent rehearsals. Each iteration adds a new layer of understanding and embodiment.

Redundancy here grapples with the concept of waste: on the one hand it is in opposition to waste, but rather suggests the creation of an interaction-rich safe learning environment in which adults can experiment, make mistakes, laugh, and experience the power of the choir/the voices synchronised in unison and/or harmony. At the same time,

it recycles a type of waste: a song that was 'dumped'. Drawing on Greg Kennedy's *Ontology of Trash,* we view waste as uniquely ambiguous:

> no object in itself is immune to becoming waste, while, on the other hand, no object is in essence waste […] waste is, most simply put, our failure to preserve our values. […] Waste, then, is not just matter out of place; it is matter without place. (Kennedy, 2007, p. 7)

Redundancy is thus the opposite of waste; it is stored social energy.

In information theory, redundancy stabilises signals under noise (Shannon, 1948), and in resilience thinking it creates slack that enables systems to improvise under stress (Taleb, 2012). In singing practice, the repeated cycles of reading, humming, and chanting create precisely such reserves of familiarity: they are not 'wasteful' but generative. Adult learners, often navigating utilitarian pressures and time scarcity (Illeris, 2018), here discover that redundancy produces capacities beyond the moment – to improvise, to insert new verses, or to reclaim discarded songs when a crisis or opportunity arises. Under conditions often described as polycrisis, overlapping disruptions and information saturation, such redundancy provides low-latency readiness to speak publicly and collectively when circumstances demand it.

'Warszawianka 1905', irrespective of its significance preceding the so-called communist regime, was discarded in an ostentatious gesture of ritual purging from all spheres of life because of its former ideological allegiance. Envisaged as pregnant with meanings inimical to the ensuing 'apolitical' neoliberal system, she was gradually pushed from public circulation by another 'Warszawianka (1831)' which no longer had a competitor. Supposedly, one of the reasons for eliminating the 1905 version from the school curriculum was that students were confused by having two songs with the same title in the repertoire. Now 'Warszawianka 1905' is both out of place – incompatible with the commonsensical and naturalised conceptualizations of capitalism and liberal democracy – and without a place – anachronistic, propagating a militancy that today's activists (at least in Europe) would prefer to pursue through peaceful struggle. She is reborn through reemployment and reembodied by the collective via this pedagogy of redundancy.

It is important to emphasise that this concept has no established literary origin; rather, it is our working term, derived from observations of choral practice. This 'mnemonic recitation of information' (Paringatai & Wharerau, 2021, p. 49) emerges in some indigenous traditions. This phrase is used with caution: 'indigenous traditions' encompasses a wide range of practices found in very different societies and is often employed in an attempt to avoid describing them through negation as non-Western. For instance, Karyn Paringatai describes a pedagogy she uses while teaching her students ''*waiata* (songs) and *haka* (chants) and the subsequent performance of these items [which] all are in the Maori' (Paringatai & Wharerau, 2021, p. 49), the majority of whom are from abroad and thus have no prior familiarity with the language. Paringatai relies on the Maori traditional pedagogy which relies heavily on repetition and memorisation along with learning in the dark without the aid or distraction of notes. This darkness recreates conditions associated with pre-colonial forms of learning in which long hours without visual aids made oral and aural transmission central. Long winters with many hours of darkness were used to acquire esoteric knowledge by aural exposure, and as the authors of the chapter claim, the indigenous could not rely on writing and thus excelled at memorising the songs/chants after hearing them only once. The students of today do not usually rely on this type of memory given their immersion in a multimedia culture that

provides numerous external aids to remembering, making such a practice even more challenging.

Repetition also resonates with Heidegger's notion of dwelling (Creely & Waterhouse, 2024). Settling into a song is not about 'mastery' but about inhabiting it long enough for thoughts to gather within its form, enabling singers to move beyond faithful reproduction towards an attuned transformation of the song. The improvised verse we include earlier in this article would not emerge if the song were treated as a relic to be faithfully reproduced. It arises only when redundancy has made the form liveable, flexible, and open to transformation.

In the Prague Revolutionary Choir, members do rely on written sources. They must, given that they are often reading languages they speak only partially or not at all. Yet this dependence on the written word is only part of the story. The choir's familiarisation with songs in an unfamiliar language still significantly resembles the process of memorisation found in the Maori example. Singers may not understand every word they utter, but the song's broader political and emotional address remains legible through context, melody, and collective delivery. Occasional failures of pronunciation, memory, or comprehension are absorbed into the choral texture: reciting the lyrics or replacing them with 'lalala' to sustain the volume if one cannot pronounce, read or remember them, does not detract from the song's power. 'Warszawianka 1905' – already translated into many languages – can be performed in any language, including those into which it is yet to be translated; its emotional force would remain for those who sing it. In this way it plays a function similar to that of prayer, creating a sense of ritual incantation invoking past gatherings of workers, activists or combatants as well as people who struggle for the betterment of working or living conditions around the world today.

Strategic deep andragogy names an orientation in adult learning in which participants temporarily redistribute pedagogical initiative towards a cultural form, allowing its accumulated histories, material affordances, and demands to reorganise collective attention and action. In this case, our orientation extends rather than rejects thing-centred pedagogy (cf. Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019): the song is not only attended to and studied but collectively voiced, and participants provisionally allow it to organise what is attended to, repeated, remembered, and publicly professed. The collectively sung song is therefore not merely a 'thing' held in shared attention and study; it becomes a professing presence, a medium through which claims on the world and on the group can be voiced. Strategic deep andragogy thus concerns how pedagogical initiative can be provisionally redistributed towards such cultural forms; the pedagogy of redundancy describes the learning mechanism through which this becomes possible, while the 4R heuristic introduced below renders that mechanism portable beyond this particular case.

'Warszawianka 1905' is a demanding teacher. By letting the more-than-a-thing resonate and guide the learning process, it is possible to hear echoed the struggles of past generations and their histories. This approach resembles some indigenous pedagogies in which a bricolage of stories plays an educational role, with no one unique narrative establishing hegemony. In the bricolage model, different stories do not clash or conquer one another; they add more detail or vantage points, thus enriching the collective tale. There are various stories about 'Warszawianka 1905', including unreliable accounts of the date of its creation, as the different sources contain discrepancies. This approach is reminiscent of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's acount of Nishnaabeg cosmological narratives. Simpson describes a plurality of origin stories rather than a single explanation of the world's creation. Their diversity reflects the capacity of each individual storyteller to shape and reinterpret the tradition using their own voice. What is important is not a single origin story but the way the stories can teach how to live with each other (Simpson,

2025). This redistribution of agency also resonates with Rancière's (1991) egalitarian hypothesis that intelligence appears in shared forms rather than credentialed transmission. The resulting 4R heuristic can be expressed as Repeat–Relax–Reframe–Resound. We repeat to relax our self-protective shame reflex; we relax to reframe our understanding (for example, by inventing a stanza); we reframe so the song can resound outside the rehearsal as a public voice.

Drawing on indigenous pedagogies does not mean the mindless recitation of particular stories and 'playing Indians' as is common at children's camps in the Czech Republic. On the contrary, it encourages attention to local circumstances and thus offers insights into how stories can be reaffirmed and how personified cultural artefacts can be employed for educational purposes (Lawrence & Paige, 2016; Simpson, 2025).

Conclusions

Our study shows that choral singing within a social movement constitutes a distinctive milieu of adult education in which 'Warszawianka 1905' functions simultaneously as actant, witness of history, and teacher. We propose a pedagogy of redundancy, purposeful cycles of listening, choral recitation, rhythmic chanting, humming, and repeated performance that build affective and social reserves, lower the shame of error, and enable rapid, situated uptake, including translanguaging and verse-making. Framed as strategic deep andragogy, this practice provisionally redistributes pedagogical initiative towards the song as a cultural form, using its coherence strategically rather than treating it as ontologically given. The 4R heuristic: Repeat, Relax, Reframe, Resound – captures a pathway from rehearsal to public voice. Crucially, the song does not merely invite; it demands breath, attention, and synchrony from performers. It calls potential participants to step from listening into joining, answering a collective address that binds bodies and memories across languages and generations. Productive tensions (between nostalgia and critique, canonisation and improvisation) do not weaken but rather animate this pedagogy, thus allowing adult learners to negotiate political and musical identities in the present.

The limitations of this study stem from its focus on a single song, a particular choir ecology, and an Eastern European context. Our approach privileges affective and relational dynamics over textual analysis and therefore cannot account for all dimensions of learning within other musical or social settings. Future inquiries might compare multiple songs, languages, and activist formations, trace how redundancy scales in larger publics, or examine how the song's call can sometimes be resisted, silenced, or appropriated. These limits also open a path forward: by foregrounding the song's agency and its demands on both singers and listeners, the study suggests that education through art depends not on mastery, but on sustained, collective responsiveness.

Notes

[1] This stanza is an author-generated experimental addition, developed with the assistance of ChatGPT in a structured multi-perspective prompting process. It is not treated as empirical material, historical evidence, or part of the original song; its function is heuristic and illustrative. The final wording was selected and revised by the authors, who take full responsibility for its interpretation and inclusion.

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