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**Teacher-student communication  
during instrumental lessons**

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In chapter 1, the background of the study is outlined. Instrumental music lessons are explained as activities that engage hundreds of thousands of Swedish children and thousands of music teachers. Almost every Swedish municipality has its own music school for school age children. A large part of the teaching is organized as private lessons. Traditionally music schools have no written curricula. What goes on behind the classroom doors is often something that is entirely between teacher and student. Many students drop out from music school after only a year or two. Other students are not able to rehearse and perform music without the support of their teachers.

Music instrument teachers often work alone and have limited opportunities to meet and discuss their work with colleagues. There is little research about music instrument teaching, and very little is known about the interaction between teachers and students or about which factors in the interaction affect students' possibilities to learn. One of the reasons could be the traditionally strong view that the outcome of music teaching primarily is a consequence of students' musical aptitude. Therefore, little effort has been made to analyze the actual situations where musical teaching and learning takes place. The strong emphasis on musical talent as an explanatory model could also be a reason for not discussing the relatively high rate of dropouts from music schools.

The main object of this research project was to increase our knowledge about how different interaction patterns during instrumental music lessons affects the students' as well as the teachers' opportunities to learn. The results of the analysis are discussed and interpreted from a wider historical and sociological perspective.

Eleven brass instrument and guitar lessons, with four teachers and 21 students aged 9-35, were videotaped, transcribed and analyzed.

Two were group lessons and nine were private lessons. One of the group lessons took place in an evening school for adults, with nine students aged 20-35. Three out of four teachers had a college degree in music or music teaching.

The institutional perspective served as an interpretive framework for the study. The lessons were viewed as social encounters and performances (Goffman 1959/1990) where the participants act to create and re-create social orders at different institutional levels, by means of communication routines employing speech, music and gesture (Fairclough 1995). The actions of the individuals were understood not primarily as results of individual choices, but as routinized actions with traditions and legitimization as a part of the history of the institution (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1991, Douglas 1986).

In chapter 2, we discuss how instrumental teaching as an institution (Douglas 1986) has evolved in relation to different musical traditions. From earlier research on music education and musicology we conclude that instrument teaching is very much influenced by musical traditions. Instrument teaching has a history that differs from education in the compulsory schools, and the teacher training program for instrument teachers is separate from other teacher training programs. The teachers' ways of apprehending music is very influential for their teaching, and teachers are trained within the traditions of classical music (Green 1997). Within the wide institution of music, four discernible smaller institutions are discussed; classical music, popular music, instrument teaching and research on music and music education. In a description of music as an institution, significant characteristics that have influenced the institution of instrument teaching are outlined.

The concept of music construed as a specific corpus of musical works (Goehr 1997, Cook 1998) has influenced the ways music is treated in society and in education. In education, music is treated within this tradition of musical objects, something that affects the ways in which popular music, music making and music as a matter of action, is treated (Elliott 1995, Green 1997).

Swedish municipal music schools (*kommunala musikskolor*) developed in the 1940s and 1950s, to provide interested children with

an opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. During the 1960s the activities expanded due to reforms of the compulsory school system, and many teachers without formal training were employed. These teachers were more influenced by the traditions of music and the informal ways they themselves had been taught, than by traditions from the educational system. The tuition was shaped by the teachers' personalities, without any written curricula (Gustafsson 2000). The music schools, as opposed to the compulsory schools, were an initiative of the municipalities that were unconstrained by governmental concern or legislation.

The federation of municipalities (*Kommunförbundet*) published a guide on education in the music schools in 1984, where playing by ear, improvisation and creative activities were emphasized as a foundation for instrumental tuition. The playing of a musical instrument was suggested to be guided by mental representations of music, rather than by the reproduction of notation symbols, with tuition taking place in small groups. The guidelines also stressed the importance of the early establishing of an adequate musical and technical foundation in learning an instrument. There is no research on if and how these goals and guidelines have been implemented or what effect they may have had on instrumental tuition.

Then follows a presentation of the theoretical background for the analysis and the discussion. The analytical concepts are developed out of educational genres of speech and music use. This provides an analysis of the use of speech, music, gesture and method books according to a perspective based on traditions and needs in the specific music-educational setting. In combination with cognitive concepts of experiencing and learning music by developing internal schemata (Bartlett 1932, Arbib 1995), we compare the focusing of attention on different concrete targets and different forms of knowledge during the music lessons, with different ways of using language, music and gesture in interaction. The use of analytical concepts constructed out of field experience, rather than concepts drawn from the empirical data, made it possible to also discuss what is absent from the observed lessons as well as to compare these to other studies.

Previous research in music education have not focused on what goes on in individual instrumental music lessons, and very little is known about the ways in which instrumental music teachers and students interact. Earlier studies have shown how instrumental teaching focuses on written music and motor skills, sight-reading and performing rehearsed music. Very little attention has been given to improvising and playing by ear or from memory, although many studies indicate that experiencing sound before interpreting signs would benefit thinking in sound and musical learning. Earlier work also shows how instrumental teachers tend to teach the way they have been taught (among others Hallam 1997, McPherson 1993).

In chapter 3, the research method and the design of the study are presented. The lessons in the study were videotaped with two cameras to capture both teacher and students. The researchers left the room after starting the video recording, and were not present during the lessons.

Data were derived from micro-ethnographic transcriptions (Green & Wallat 1979, 1981) of speech, gesture and music of a total of five hours of videotape, supplemented by text analyses of 14 method-books. The transcripts were analyzed as text from the perspective of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995). On the first level of study, the actions of the teacher and students in the lessons were described.

On the second level of study, the description was analyzed using the cognitive schema concept (Bartlett 1932, Arbib 1995) of experiencing and learning music (Dowling & Harwood 1986), as well as concepts of educational genres of speech and music use. We differentiated five educational functions of speech and music use during the lessons; testing/inquiring; instructional; analytical; accompanying; and expressive functions. Each utterance from the teacher or students was coded with one of these concepts, and the frequencies of the different functions of speech and music use were registered for each lesson, divided between teacher and student.

At the third level, the analyzed data were interpreted and discussed from the perspectives of interaction-theory (Goffman 1959/1990) and institution-theory (Douglas 1986, Fleck 1935/1997). The lessons were viewed as social encounters in which the action of

participants creates and re-creates social orders at different institutional levels, by means of communication routines using speech, music and gesture. From a perspective of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995), the patterns of interaction are discussed in relation to the opportunities for both teachers and students to learn.

In chapter 4, the results of the study are presented on the three levels outlined above; the first is a relatively thick description of the actions during the guitar lessons and the brass instrument lessons. The description contains extracts from the transcriptions. The combination of different forms of representation enables the reader to follow parallel actions in different modalities; teacher and student speech and music performance, as well as other forms of actions like gestures and eye contact.

The analysis follows in the second section of the chapter. We used various analytical concepts to provide a picture of the actions during the lessons: five educational functions of language and music; testing/inquiring; instructive; analytic; accompanying; and expressive functions.

The music during the lessons and the way teachers and students play is also analyzed. For example how, and in which manners they play a pop song, or which genres were played during lessons.

The next part of the analysis concentrates on the focus of attention (Treisman et. al. 1973, 1980, Allport 1972, 1980) which was differentiated in five different types; motor, cognitive; social and expressive types of attention. The analysis shows how teachers' and students' focus of attention change during different phases of the lessons and that they often have different focuses.

The interaction during the lessons and which consequences different modes of communication have for the students' possibilities to learn is discussed. Special emphasis is placed on the distribution of power (Fairclough 1995, Giddens 1984) and who is controlling the definition of the situation (Goffman 1959/1990). After a short summary follows an analysis of 14 method books. They are analyzed with the same concepts as the actions during the lessons.

The third section consists of the interpretation and discussion of the data derived from the description and analysis. Here the historical background described in chapter 2 is used as a framework

to show the historical development of the institutions, which have shaped and influenced the studied activities.

The results show how music during almost all of the lessons was addressed as sight reading exercises. Music was generally broken down into separate notes, or chords, as read from the sheet. The teachers treated the printed score as if it was a complete representation, providing all information about all aspects of music performing.

Music was not addressed as phrases, rhythms, or melodies. Expressive qualities of music performance were not discussed or performed. We question whether the music played during the viewed lessons really could be perceived as music – in its traditional meaning – in other than school contexts. The manner of performing might be described as rehearsing single notes and putting them together without rhythm and phrasing. This might be compared to a manner of reading a text that focused solely on single letters, without addressing words, phrases or meaning.

The repertoire during the lessons, as well as in the method books, mainly consisted of what we call school music. Such melodies are made for and performed almost exclusively in school contexts. The melodies are often deprived of many musical qualities in order to focus the students' attention on specific notes in the score. A few melodies in other music styles were played. Those were treated in the same manner as the school music, with a strong focus on single notes.

The students' manner of playing was generally described as testing/inquiring. The teachers seldom played their instruments as a means of instruction, for accompanying or to introduce a new melody. When playing together, teachers quite often were following the students, rather than leading or supporting them. By focusing all attention on the score, teachers gave students few opportunities to listen and form mental representations of the melodies they were going to learn. Rhythm was not an important issue in verbal instructions. Teachers spent most of their time addressing the pitch of separate notes. They used pencils to point out and follow single notes in the score.

When students played in a stumbling way, so did the teachers, without commenting on it. The result was an often non-rhythmical

manner of playing. Their instructions generally referred to the printed sheet and not to the music being played by students. The teachers did not seem to be musically prepared and when playing they frequently made mistakes. As a consequence, students often imitated the teachers and made the same mistakes. When hearing the students play, the teachers perceived the problem and commented on the student's error, without mentioning that they just had copied the teacher's original mistake. The responsibility for the mistake was put on the student.

The teachers' attention was often focused on the printed score, when playing together with students. This had negative consequences for the teachers' possibilities to focus on the students' actions. Students – in a very obvious way – had to shift their attention back and forth between a cognitive and a motor focus, as they had not internalized adequate motor schemas. Such schemas would have provided the possibility of simultaneously reading and playing music from the score. It can also be questioned if the students did get enough auditive experience to be able to form mental representations of the music they were learning to play, as the music was treated as single notes and not as musical phrases. Students' attention was divided between the printed score and complex motor control learning. Teachers seldom addressed the motor skills verbally. They often identified student's problems as deficient sight reading capacity. The manner of using the printed score instead of playing by ear or memory seemed to have negative consequences for students' opportunities to learn. One reason for this could be that the students' attention had to shift back and forth between different aspects of musical performance, something that could delay the process of schema internalization.

Speech during the lessons consisted predominantly of short utterances that referred directly to the previous or upcoming actions. The teachers were more verbally active than the students were. Their utterances had to a great extent an instructive function. Very few had an analytic function. We found no utterances with an expressive function. To a great extent, the teachers were talking ad hoc about what the students should do next. A very common utterance was "ta det en gång till" (play from there once more). The students'



utterances were often very short and had accompanying functions, for example “mm” or “ja” (yes).

The teachers controlled the definition of the situation and they often ignored, and sometimes ridiculed students’ verbal initiatives with sarcastic comments, and decided what was going to happen, what was the issue and how to address it. Teachers showed little or no interest in students’ perspectives. When teachers asked a question they often answered it themselves. In situations where students’ integrity was harmed they did not confront the teachers verbally. Instead students tried to change the focus of attention, for example by starting to play.

Interaction during the lessons had an asymmetric distribution of power during 10 out of 11 lessons. The lesson in the evening school with nine adult students seemed more equal and the teacher listened to a greater extent to the students’ perspectives.

The asymmetric interaction was shown to have negative consequences for the students’ opportunities to learn. When teachers ignored students’ perspectives they lost many opportunities to obtain adequate or enough information about the students’ problems. The lack of information made teachers unable to analyze many situations when students had problems. As a consequence, teachers were unable to provide their students with the help and support they needed. Students were left alone with many aspects of their musical learning, especially motor learning and expressive aspects of musical performance. Instead teachers focused their attention almost exclusively on the method books and printed score. From the results of this study, as well as earlier research, we argue that playing by ear and improvisation would give the students greater opportunities to develop musical knowledge.

The method books were used as guides and the teachers did not deviate from the text in the books. The studied method books correspond to the actions during the lessons in several ways, for example the repertoire and the manner in which music is discussed and represented. We therefore argue that the method books could be seen as legitimated as well as legitimizing objects of the institution. The teachers point to the book when confronting the students with why they have not understood or fully accomplished a task that they

have set for their students to learn. In this way the content of the lesson was not music as a sounding phenomenon, but music as symbolic objects. The method book legitimized by the institution rather than the teacher's playing or a recorded piece of music provides the musical model. The conventions of performance that the symbolic notation triggers in an experienced musician are not addressed.

These forces work to make the student dependent on other sources of information such as parents, relatives, and school or from earlier exposure to music. Students who do not have, or have had earlier, access to musical experiences complementing the instrument lessons have fewer opportunities to understand the notation symbols. This also affects their ability to understand the teachers' fragmentary use of language and music, as well as the notation in the method books that seldom have any explanations for the symbols or any information on how to interpret the signs for producing the sounds on the instrument. Students that are left without additional information or experiences, and thus fail in their tasks, are often regarded as untalented or unmotivated. Since the tuition is not compulsory, students who feel unsatisfied with their own accomplishments have the option to cease tuition, perhaps blaming themselves for failing. Many students do leave the music schools within their first year of playing an instrument without any follow-up of the reason for this. The asymmetric interaction is discussed as another cause for students ending their tuition, while their other options are to accept or to challenge the teacher's preferential right to define the situation (Goffman 1959/1990) and thereby take the risk of getting involved in a conflict with the teacher.

The organization of the instrument teaching where one teacher often meets one student is also discussed in relation to the concept of "region behavior" (Goffman 1959/1990). Instrument teaching often tends to be a lonely profession, where the teacher has little opportunity to meet with colleagues in a back region where they can share and reflect upon common experiences. This is also true for the students, with no opportunity to share with peers their experience from the short weekly lesson, like they often do in school and sports activities. A question arises concerning the often-discussed

importance of music activities as a way for young people to develop their identity if they do not have any peers to reflect their experience. This highlights the relationship between how the tuition is organized and the opportunities for students as well as teachers to learn and develop their abilities.

Chapter 5 reflects on the research process of the study, and discusses the consistency and compatibility of the different theories and perspectives that were used on different theoretical levels. Similarities between the theories of schema, institution and interaction are discussed, and it is argued that a common ground between the different theories is provided by their description of networks of experiences and actions at different individual and societal levels. Ethics, reliability and validity are discussed, and further research is proposed.

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