Article:
Meissner, H.G. orcid.org/0000-0001-8566-8461 (2017) Instrumental teachers' instructional strategies for facilitating children's learning of expressive music performance: An exploratory study. International Journal of Music Education, 35 (1). pp. 118-135. ISSN 0255-7614

https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761416643850

Instrumental teachers' instructional strategies for facilitating children's learning of expressive music performance: An exploratory study

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Doi: 10.1177/0255761416643850

http://ijm.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/04/23/0255761416643850.abstract?rss=1

Article

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from an action research project that investigated instrumental teachers' strategies for facilitating children's learning of expressive music performance. Nine teachers and fourteen pupils (aged 9 - 15) participated in this project, which consisted of ten weeks of teaching. At the beginning and end of this period pupils' concerts were held and performances were audio-recorded. Participating teachers used various strategies for improving students' expressive performance: *teacher's enquiry, discussion, explanation of expressive devices, gestures and movements, singing, imagery, modelling, 'projected performance'* and *listening to own recordings.* According to teachers these strategies had been useful in lessons. However, analysis of assessments of students' performances did not show a significant improvement. Four out of five pupils who did improve their expressiveness were taught by teachers who used *enquiry* and *discussion of musical character* and *instruction about modifying expressive devices.* This project influenced the practice of participating tutors as they focused more on teaching expressive performance.

Keywords

Action research, instructional strategies, instrumental teaching, musical expressiveness, performance pedagogy

Introduction

From the literature it appears that expression in performance is hardly taught in the early stages of music learning, and only to some extent at conservatoires (Juslin, Friberg, Schoonderwaldt & Karlsson 2004; Juslin, Karlsson, Lindström, Friberg & Schoonderwaldt, 2006; Karlsson & Juslin, 2008; Laukka, 2004; Lindström, Juslin, Bresin & Williamon, 2003; McPhee, 2011; Woody, 2000). Some studies indicate that expressivity is not taught systematically and that instruction in music lessons tends to focus on technique and reading from notation (Karlsson & Juslin, 2008; Rostvall & West, 2003; see Hallam, 2010). As expression is an essential element of music performance, it is important to develop our understanding of teaching and learning expressivity (see Laukka, 2004; Williamon, 2014; Woody, 2000), and this exploratory study could provide information for future research.

Literature review

Expressiveness in performance

Music can be seen as a representation of some aspect of the extra-musical, 'human' world of emotions[1], characters, and ideas (DeBellis, 2001). Music can thus convey personalities, a variety of emotions, atmosphere (Brendel, 2011), ideas, memories, body movements or patterns of sound (Gabrielsson, 1999). It depends on the personality of the performer and the style of the music which of these ideas is appropriate. In this article 'musical character' relates to the emotions, characters or atmosphere represented in a musical work. In an expressive music performance the musical character is communicated convincingly by the performer to the listener. Additionally the structure of the music is conveyed using a variety of expressive devices, thus generating understanding or impressions in the listeners (Friberg & Battel, 2002; Juslin, 2003; Lehman, Sloboda & Woody, 2007). An expressive performance can induce emotions in the listener, or an aesthetic response, 'but such a response is not required for a listener to hear the music as expressive' (Juslin, 2003, p. 276, referring to Davies, 1994).

Juslin (2003) postulated that performance expression is best conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon consisting of five components, abbreviated to the acronym GERMS: *Generative Rules, Emotional Expression, Random Fluctuations, Motion Principles,* and *Stylistic Unexpectedness*. *Generative Rules* mark the structure of a piece in a musical manner (Clarke, 1988). The

[1] In this article *emotion* is used in a generic sense, including mood, feeling and affect.

performer can clarify cadences, metrical accents and harmonic structures (Juslin & Timmers, 2010) by manipulating various performance parameters, e.g. tempo changes, dynamics, articulation and 'ensemble timing' (Friberg & Battel, 2002). *Emotional Expression*, which serves to convey emotions to listeners, is often seen as the most important element of expressive performance (Juslin, 2003; Juslin et al*.,* 2004). To express emotions the musician modifies various auditory cues, like tempo, timing, articulation, dynamics, timbre, attack, decay (Juslin & Persson, 2002), intonation (Johnson, 2004), vibrato (Juslin et al*.,* 2004), ornamentation (Timmers & Ashley, 2007) and ancillary gestures[2] (Davidson, 1993, 2005; Davidson & Correia, 2002; Dahl & Friberg, 2007; Wanderley & Vines, 2006). Cue utilization varies among performers, instruments and musical styles (Juslin & Timmers, 2010). *Motion Principles* are tempo changes that follow natural patterns of human movement, or 'biological motion' (Juslin & Timmers, 2010; Shove & Repp, 1995). *Random Fluctuations* reflect the limitations in human motor precision (Gilden, 2001). Although this seems to contribute to the 'living' character of the music, musicians will aim to limit such fluctuations. *Stylistic Unexpectedness* is an interesting aspect of performance expression. Musicians deliberately deviate from stylistic expectations to add tension and excitement to their recital. This is probably the most subjective aspect of expressiveness, and it depends on the personality and taste of the performer, teacher and listener what they will appreciate or find acceptable.

According to Nusseck and Wanderley (2009) expressive performance is characterised by *intensity* and *tension*. They believe that 'expression in performance' is often confused or combined with 'emotional expression'. In their view, Juslin (2003) sees expressiveness as present or absent in a performance, whilst they perceive varying levels of *tension* and *musical intensity* as parameters of expressive performance. Nusseck and Wanderley describe high musical *tension* as a 'feeling of excitement and involvement, whereas low tension refers to uncertainty and unsteadiness' (2009, p. 338). Nusseck and Wanderley's *expressive intensity* relates to the expressiveness of the performance, and is what Davidson (1993) describes as *performance manner*. Davidson distinguishes three expressive manners, namely deadpan, projected and exaggerated performance manner. According to Fabian, Timmers and Schubert (2014) expressiveness in music performance relates to the effect of auditory parameters, such as loudness, intensity, phrasing, tempo, and frequency spectrum. Additionally, expressiveness 'refers to the variation of auditory parameters away from prototypical performance, but within stylistic constraints'

[2] Ancillary gestures can be defined as those gestures that are part of a performance, but not produced in order to generate sound (Wanderley & Vines, 2006).

(p. xxi). Furthermore, these authors perceive music performance as expressive to various degrees, not necessarily expressing emotions.

Consequently, it seems that some scholars view music as expressive of aspects of the extra-musical world of emotions, feelings and characters (Brendel, 2011; DeBellis, 2001; Gabrielsson, 1999; Juslin, 2003; Juslin & Laukka, 2000; Juslin & Persson, 2002) whilst others see expressiveness as characterized by varying levels of musical tension and expressive intensity (Fabian et al., 2014; Nusseck & Wanderley, 2009). Authors seem to agree that expressiveness is communicated through variation of auditory expressive devices (Fabian et al., 2014; Juslin, 2003; Juslin & Persson, 2002; Lehman et al., 2007) such as tempo, timing, dynamics, articulation, timbre, attack, decay, intonation, vibrato, ornamentation and ancillary gestures which shape the 'microstructure of a performance and differentiate it from another performance of the same music' (Juslin & Persson, 2002, p. 220).

How do children learn to perform music expressively?

All human communication is rooted in infant-directed (ID) speech and song (Trevarthen, 2002), in which the caregiver attunes to the infant's behavioural state, modulating behavioural-emotional states (Trehub, Hannon & Schachner, 2010). Parents' speech to infants is music-like, exhibiting a variety of musical features that reflect its emotional expressiveness (Trehub & Nagata, 2002). ID-speech and song could thus be the foundation for children's ability and skill to perform expressively (Juslin & Timmers, 2010).

From a young age children create songs and enjoy playing with musical instruments (Hargreaves, 1986; Moog, 1968; Moorhead & Pond, 1942; Tafuri, 2008). Young children's spontaneous songs are experimental in character (Moorhead & Pond, 1942), expressing thoughts, emotions and feelings (see Campbell, 2003; Moorhead & Pond, 1942). Davies (1986, 1992) found that children have an intuitive understanding of music as a symbolic representation of emotions and feelings. Additionally, Adachi and Trehub (1998) found that children can use gestural, vocal, linguistic and musical cues to portray contrasting emotions in songs.

Sloboda and Davidson (1996) proposed that a repertoire of expressive gestures is required for communication of emotion in music performance. Therefore children need to build up a repertoire of appropriate expressive intentions and acoustic gestures in order to learn communication in performance. Davidson, Pitts and Correia (2001) suggested that children need to experience music within their bodies; physical movement could help children to understand the music they are learning.

In summary, it seems that communication of emotion in music is rooted in children's experience

of ID-speech and song. From an early age, children use expressive musical improvisation in their vocalizations and musical play, thus building up a repertoire of expressive intentions and gestures. Consequently, teachers can expect their students to be able to learn to express feeling and emotion in their instrumental playing (see Sloboda, 2005).

Methods for teaching expressive performance

Over the last two decades researchers have investigated strategies for teaching expressive music performance. The most common strategies for teaching expressiveness are *verbal teaching using metaphor*, *verbal teaching explaining concrete musical properties* and *aural modelling* (Woody, 2000). *Verbal teaching using metaphor* uses imagery to describe what the music should sound like. Contrastingly, *verbal teaching explaining concrete musical properties*, aims to describe how to use technical devices to produce specific effects. *Aural modelling* can be described as listening to expert performances from teachers or other professional musicians, in order to build up internal aural representations of the music (Hallam, 1998) and to develop an expressive style (Sloboda, 2005). Woody found that all these strategies were effective; none of these instructional methods was consistently more successful for improving expressiveness (Woody, 2006a).

Brenner and Strand (2013) found that teachers used *modelling*, *verbal instructions* and task repetitions for teaching children expressiveness. Broomhead (2006) observed that *teacher's enquiry*, encouraging students' initiative and providing problem-solving opportunities (Broomhead, 2005), can be used to stimulate expressiveness in junior high school choir rehearsals. According to Broomhead singers must actively construct their understanding of how to perform expressively, and students need opportunities to make expressive decisions. Additionally, Broomhead, Skidmore, Eggett and Mills (2012) found that the use of positive mindset trigger words before a performance may bring improvement in singers' expressivity.

Effective *feedback* is also an important instructional tool for facilitating expressiveness (Woody, 2003). Teachers can give constructive feedback, addressing technical and musical issues (Hallam, 1998), possibly through recordings of students' performances (see Juslin et al., 2004; Woody, 2000, 2001) or through feedback from computer software (Juslin et al., 2006). Although it seems possible to improve performers' expression of emotion using computer software (Juslin et al., 2006), musicians were reluctant to embrace this technology (Karlsson et al., 2009). Whilst Broomhead (2005, 2006) worked with

teenagers, most other studies investigating strategies for teaching expressivity were conducted with adults (see Lisboa, Williamon, Zicari & Eiholzer, 2005; Persson, 1994, 1996; Rosenthal, 1984; Schippers, 2006; Woody, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2006a, 2006b). Results obtained from these studies should not automatically be extrapolated to children as it might be possible that the acquisition of expressive performance skills by young musicians is accomplished by other means, depending on their age, development and ability (Woody, 2006a). Consequently, it would be worthwhile exploring the effectiveness of various methods for teaching children expressive music performance.

Aim and research questions

The aim of the present study was to explore instrumental teachers' strategies for facilitating children's learning of expressive music performance. The following questions formed the basis for the project: How do tutors teach expressivity? What is an effective method for improving children's expressive performance? Is teacher's enquiry about the musical character particularly effective compared to other teaching strategies?

Methodology

An action research (AR) project was initiated to explore methods for teaching expressivity, and to investigate the effects of these methods on teachers' practice and students' learning of expressive performance. As AR can be described as 'An orientation to knowledge creation that arises in a context of practice' (Bradbury Huang, 2010), this seemed an appropriate tool. Cain (2012) describes AR as

> a process in which practitioners (including teachers) examine an aspect of their own work in order to improve it. The process is usually described as a recurring cycle: after an examination of the existing situation, the researchers plan and implement interventions, monitor the intended and unintended consequences of the interventions and reflect on these consequences. They use their reflections to plan further interventions, thus starting the cycle again (p. 410).

Ten lessons were planned for the present project (five lessons before and five lessons after an Easter break) and a written update was sent halfway through the project to provide participants with information about colleagues' findings and reflections. Teachers could use this update to reflect on and inform their practice. Consequently the second half of the project could function as a new cycle in the developmental process. As researcher I was also a participant in the project, as I thought it essential to

collaborate with colleagues and to reflect on my practice (see Hartwig, 2014). Various data collection instruments were used: questionnaires for teachers and students; semi-structured interviews with two students; notes from teacher meetings; research journal containing notes from informal conversations with teachers, observations during lessons and pupils' concerts; assessments of students' performances. Data from the questionnaires, interviews, teacher meetings and research journal was analysed and coded using the constant comparative method and theme mapping as described by Thomas (2009).

Participants

This AR project was organized in the music departments of two private schools[3] (School X and Y) in an English university city. School X provides education for children aged 4 – 13, while school Y caters for students aged 3 – 18. All the visiting music teachers (VMTs) in these departments are professional instrumental teachers and students receive one-to-one lessons. Nine teachers took part in the project: two pianists, two flautists, one violinist, one singer, one percussionist, and a recorder teacher (the researcher). 14 students (aged 9 – 15) took part, playing flute (4), piano (3), recorder (2), violin (2), voice (2), and percussion (1). These students were at the level of Grade 1 – 6 (Mode and Median level: Grade 3) of the ABRSM exam system used in the UK[4].

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained through the standard university review process. Participants and parents received invitation and information letters and signed consent forms. The project consisted of 10 weeks of teaching on expressive performance during students' weekly instrumental lessons. Teachers' meetings and informal pupils' concerts were held at the beginning and end of the project in both schools. In the initial meetings the research objectives were explained and the participating teachers suggested and discussed various methods for teaching expressivity. After these meetings the tutors received a list containing all their suggested instructional strategies. Students of all levels of playing were welcome to take part, but it was recommended that teachers select students without known learning difficulties (i.e. not on the school's special educational needs list). Additionally I asked teachers to choose pieces for their students that were not too hard for them (i.e. appropriate for their technical abilities). Each teacher

[3] Private schools in the UK are independent fee paying schools, regulated by a board of governors.
[4] Most music exam boards in the UK have eight grade levels, ranging from grade 1 to the most advanced grade, Grade 8.

chose two students for the project. As not all students took up the invitation, tutors participated with one or two students. An overview of all participating students and tutors can be found in Table 1. In the final meetings tutors evaluated the instructional strategies used.

Throughout the project many informal conversations between participating teachers took place during break times. I kept notes of these conversations in a research journal, and also noted down my observations during the lessons of my own students, and during pupils' concerts. I wrote the update for participating tutors based on observations from the research journal and feedback from colleagues during the first half of the project. This update was sent to teachers on the first day of week 6.

Questionnaires[5] were used to gather information about teachers' and students' experiences. Additionally two students (BS11 and BS12) were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview, as their answer to one of the questionnaire questions was missing.

In the initial concert students played their first piece, 'Piece A', while in the final concert all participants played 'Piece A' again and a newly learnt 'Piece B'. Performances were audio-recorded and assessed by an external adjudicator, a professional musician and qualified music teacher. Assessments of expressive intensity were made on a scale from 1 – 7: 1-deadpan, 2-very little expression, 3-some expression, 4-a performance containing expressive as well as less expressive passages, 5-quite expressive, 6-good expression, 7-very expressive. This method was chosen because it seemed a practical system for measuring expressiveness, given that participants played a variety of instruments, in various musical styles, and at different levels. As the performances varied in length between one and four minutes, the first minute of each recording was assessed. Performances were marked 'blind'; recordings of each student were presented in random order. To ensure participants' anonymity, codes were used for each contributor and research method (see Pitts, 2005) as follows: participating teacher (T followed by a number), student (S followed by a number) and school (X and Y). Where applicable, codes included the research techniques used: Conversation (C), Interview (I), Questionnaire (Q) and initial and final VMT-Meetings (M1 and M2).

Findings

Instructional strategies suggested by teachers

At the initial meetings VMTs suggested the following methods for teaching expressive performance:

[5] Supporting material can be found online:

Firstly, *singing* to improve students' phrasing: singing through a piece can help a student to develop their awareness of the phrasing. This is similar to findings by Ward (2004). Secondly, *imagery* or *metaphor* to explain what the music should sound like. This is in line with findings from several writers (Lindström et al., 2003; Laukka, 2004; Woody, 2000, 2006a; Schippers, 2006). A special form of metaphor is describing *music as a conversation:* 'Play as if you are speaking to someone.' Likewise, several tutors suggested asking children to *'make up a story'* to explain musical meaning. Thirdly, *improvising* was recommended for improving expressivity. Children can be invited to improvise music with a theme or character, such as a lion chasing a mouse, or improvising a sad or a happy tune. This can enable children to explore how to communicate characters and emotions without having to read notation. Fourthly, *movements* were recommended to improve expressivity: children can learn to express phrasing, rhythm and emotion by shaping music through gestures and movements. This idea is in line with recommendations by Davidson et al. (2001) as mentioned above. Furthermore, one teacher mentioned *modelling* for improving expressivity. Moreover, several teachers emphasized that students should 'own the performance'; students should learn to think independently about the interpretation of their music. This is in line with recommendations by Broomhead (2005, 2006). Teachers can facilitate students' thinking by asking questions and discussing the musical character or interpretation. Thus students can develop their interpretation, and 'own the performance'.

Finally, a teacher observed that some students immediately understand how to translate a metaphor into sound, but others do not. Teachers should provide children with technical tools to express emotions or metaphors in music. This is in line with Schippers (2006) who observed that the use of metaphors can be confusing if students do not understand how to translate these into sound.

After the initial meetings participating teachers were given a list of all the suggested instructional strategies and tutors were asked to encourage students to think about the phrasing and character of their pieces. Additionally, it was suggested that teachers could explain how emotions can be communicated in music performance. As this was an exploratory AR project, participants were free to explore various instructional strategies they considered effective for facilitating their students' learning of expressiveness.

Update halfway through the project

Because of the participants' busy schedules it was not practical to organize a teachers' meeting halfway through the project. To provide participants with information about colleagues' findings and ideas, an

update was sent, based on feedback from participating VMTs. Teachers could use this to reflect on and inform their practice in the second part of the project. The following thoughts and findings were included in this update: One teacher had observed a positive effect of *teacher enquiry* on students' expressivity; when he had asked pupils about the musical character this had improved their understanding of their music and reduced anxiety about making mistakes. Additionally the positive effect of students listening to own recordings was mentioned; students who had listened to their own recordings were able to evaluate and improve their playing.

Instructional strategies used in the AR project

Conversations, final teacher meetings and questionnaires provided information about the instructional strategies employed by teachers during the project. In the final meetings I asked the participants which methods they had used, and whether they had found these methods effective for improving their students' expressiveness. From these data it appeared that the following instructional strategies had been used to develop students' expressiveness: *teacher's enquiry and discussion of musical character, explanation of the use of expressive devices, gestures and movements, singing, visualisation and imagery, modelling, 'projected performance'* and *listening to own recordings.*

Teacher's enquiry was used by four teachers (AT40, BT10, BT40, ABT60) and could be described as asking open questions about the music encouraging students to develop their interpretation. Several teachers observed that a metaphor found by a student could be very effective for eliciting expressiveness, as was illustrated by the following description:

> Rosie[6] was playing *Chanson de Matin* by Elgar. I asked her to imagine a story with this piece. Initially she couldn't think of anything.
>
> Then I said to her 'well let's think very basically: is it a happy or a sad piece?'
>
> Rosie: 'It's a happy piece.'
>
> Teacher: 'Well let's play it then.'
>
> Rosie: 'This may sound a bit random ...but...'
>
> Teacher: 'Yes, go on....'
>
> Rosie: 'It sounds a bit like a reunion.'
>
> Teacher: 'A reunion?'

[6] All names are pseudonyms.

> Rosie: 'Yes, like… imagine a father has gone off to war and has been in a very dangerous situation and survived, and then returns home and meets his wife and children... that sort of reunion.'
> Teacher: 'Wonderful! Let's play then.'
> She played... It was unbelievable! Her whole playing had changed so much! (BT20-C)[7]

Discussion about the musical character flows from the teacher's enquiry, and can help students to construct their understanding of how to perform expressively. Enquiry and discussion can thus stimulate expressiveness. One teacher (AT40) who had used enquiry and discussion wrote the following, to describe what he saw as the most effective method for teaching expression:

> Engaging the student in the emotional meaning of the music in ways that they respond to. Asking open but leading questions about the meaning of music. (AT40-Q)

Three teachers (AT40, BT40, ABT60) had used *explanation of the use of expressive devices;* they had explained how to use technical tools to express metaphors in music. Flute teacher BT20 had primarily used *movements and gestures* to develop students' understanding of phrasing and musical character. She had used arm movements to teach phrasing and dance movements to express the musical character. According to the teacher this had worked well in the lesson, leading to an expressive performance, but she thought that this had disappeared after the lesson.

> Zoe has a lot of strength and energy in her playing, but it is a struggle to let her play anything slow expressively. Zoe played *Tambourin*. We had a very good lesson on this. She had to say what each section was about. She had to show how to dance and move to each section of the music. She did all this, no problem. Zoe doesn't feel embarrassed, she'll act out, dance and move to the music. This changed her playing enormously. It was extraordinary, but just in that lesson. The next lesson it was all gone. (BT20-M2)

Piano teacher BT50 used discussion of musical character in combination with imagining *gestures and*

[7] Teacher BT20 had not used enquiry during the project lessons but she experimented with this immediately after the final teacher meeting.

movements in drama. This seems a combination of metaphor and movements, as this teacher asked students to reflect on a 'character on the stage' to draw out expressive performance. She described this as follows:

> To try to communicate an idea or mood to the listener, just as an actor uses different tones of voice, gestures etc. This might involve experimenting with different touches on the piano keyboard for maximum effect. (BT50-Q)

Besides discussing the use of articulation and dynamics, flute teacher BT10 had used *imagery* and *imagining a story.* He had asked student BS11 to 'paint a picture' with the music; to express the musical character as if she were making a painting.

The percussion and the singing teacher had used *singing* to facilitate students' understanding of the musical structure. The singing teacher asked students to sing their songs without words, while the percussion teacher found that adding pitch to rhythms helped students to improve phrasing.

Two tutors (BT40 and ABT60) had employed *modelling* to show students how to achieve an idea or to demonstrate several options of interpretation, thus enabling students to develop their own interpretation. Teachers seemed concerned that modelling would lead to students simply copying them instead of developing their own interpretation.

Several teachers indicated that they had talked about *'projected performance'*, projecting the sound towards an imagined audience. This had not been mentioned as a teaching strategy in the initial meeting but had been used by three teachers (AT44, BT40 and ABT60).

In my own teaching I had mainly used *enquiry, discussion of musical character*, *explanation of expressive devices* and *modelling*. During this project I realised that *listening to own recordings* was also effective for improving students' expressive performance. Pupils who listened to themselves, heard aspects of their playing they wanted to improve. Teacher AT30 had also observed this effect:

> I found that listening to their own recording was the only way to convince the pupils to play softly, really piano. Eve didn't realise how different her playing sounded from what I wanted her to do. (AT30-M2)

In summary, participating teachers had used a variety of strategies to develop students' expressivity:

teacher's enquiry, discussion, explanation of the use of expressive devices, gestures & movements, singing, imagery, modelling, 'projected performance' and *listening to own recordings.* According to the teachers these methods had improved their pupils' expressiveness during lessons.

Participating teachers

All participating VMTs had enjoyed taking part and sharing ideas, and several had adjusted their teaching by using new methods and applying these at various stages of learning. Most tutors indicated that the project had influenced their practice positively as they had been thinking about instructional strategies, and had put more emphasis on teaching expression.

> The project prompted me to think more about how I discuss expression with students and use a wider range of strategies. (BT40-Q)
>
> It made me think about how expression can be taught from the very beginning of learning a new piece of repertoire and how that can be incorporated within the technical demands of a piece, and how all the different aspects of performance are linked. (BT10-Q)

My practice was influenced by this project, when I realized that I tend to give students my interpretation of the music, instead of giving them time to develop their own ideas. Additionally I used listening to 'own recordings' and was impressed by the positive influence of this on students' playing.

Just two tutors (AT20 and AT30) indicated that the project had not changed their teaching. The percussionist (AT20) acknowledged that he had forgotten about the project after a few weeks and the violinist (AT30) was convinced that a 'lack of expression is a lack of technique'. This teacher thought that technical problems take up all a child's concentration, and hinder their ability to listen to their own playing. The idea that a limited technique hinders expressiveness was shared by other teachers too:

> It depends though on how much technique pupils 'know'. If they have the technical knowledge they can also use this for expression. (AT44-C)

These observations are in line with findings by Broomhead (2001) who noticed that technical and expressive skills are interrelated. It seems that students' technical skill will influence their ability to perform expressively. In the concerts some children struggled with the technical aspects of the

performance, and these students also lacked expressive intensity (AS31 and AS32). However, increased technical skill does not automatically lead to a more expressive performance; students BS22 and BS52 were technically more in control in the second than in the first concert, but despite their increased technical skill their expressiveness had not improved.

'Independent thinking' was an important theme for teachers in school Y. Tutors in this school emphasized the importance of students developing their own interpretation of musical works, making their own decisions about the use of expressive devices and thus 'owning the performance'. These teachers saw enquiry and discussion as important instructional strategies for facilitating students' thinking and enhancing expressiveness. Teachers who used enquiry and discussion were impressed with the results, as students came up with original ideas and felt more confident when they concentrated on expressiveness instead of technical issues.

> They can come up with very surprising and deep thoughts and ideas. (BT20-C)
> She feels more confident and isn't as worried about making mistakes. (AT40-C)

In the last week of the project it suddenly appeared that some teachers found it very difficult to teach expressive performance, and to explain the use of expressive cues:

> How do you turn the emotion into physical action? How you transfer an emotion, how you convey that in the music....? I don't know for the life of me how you do that! I still don't know. (BT50-C)

It is possible that by reflecting on their practice during this project tutors realized that this was a crucial problem for teaching expressive performance.

Assessments of students' performances

Assessments of students' expressiveness were made on a scale from 1 (deadpan) to 7 (very expressive). The assessments of all performances are presented in Figure 1.

[insert Figure 1]

Piece A-1 is the piece the student played in the first concert. This same piece was performed again at the end of the project (A-2), together with a newly learnt piece (B-2). From these scores it appears that there were considerable individual differences; some students improved their expression in performance, while others did not. Overall there was no significant improvement, as the average score for A-2 and B-2 was the same as the average score of A-1 (3.71). Interestingly, some pupils already performed with quite good expression (score 5) at the beginning of the project, while others played with very little expression (score 2) even in the final concert. Although some students improved their expressivity in A-2 and B-2, and others just in A-2, none of the students had only played B-2 with more expression. This could be an indication that students who improved their expressiveness in both pieces (A-2 and B-2) had really developed their expressive skills, as they had been able to improve expressive aspects of their playing in both an 'old' and a 'new' work. Improvement of expressiveness in both pieces could be considered a hallmark of a student's improved expressive skills. Just five students had improved expressive aspects of their playing in both pieces. Interestingly, four out of these five students had been taught by teachers who had used *enquiry*, *discussion of musical character* and *explanation of the use of expressive devices*. The differences in expressive development might partly be explained by the following unforeseen variables: some students had been ill; in school X there had been an unfamiliar pianist in the second concert due to illness of the regular pianist; school exams had taken place in the final week in school Y; most students received nine or ten lessons during the project, but students BS11 and BS12 had seven lessons. Additionally some children might have become bored with piece-A, which they knew from the beginning of the project. Finally, some students might have been confident in lessons, but not in a performance situation and might have suffered from performance anxiety. From the student questionnaires it appears that two pupils had suffered from performance anxiety (BS12 and BS52, see below). One flute teacher commented in the final meeting:

> Some play very well in the lessons, but you don't know what it will sound like on the stage... Others come up and they *own* the platform. They really communicate with the audience. (BT10-M2)

Because of the small sample size and the range of variables, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions from these assessments. Table 1 gives an overview of students' scores and teachers' instructional strategies.

Table 1. Overview of participants, assessment scores and methods.

Code	Age	Year	Instrument	VMT Code	Methods	A-1	A-2	B-2
AS11*	11	7	Recorder	ABT60	E&Disc**, ExpD, M, Rec	4	6	6
AS22	12	7	Percussion	AT20	S	2	3	2
AS31	9	5	Violin	AT30	Rec, Tech	2	3	2
AS32	11	7	Violin	AT30	Rec, Tech	3	4	2
AS41*	10	6	Piano	AT40/AT44	E&Disc, ExpD, PrP	2	4	3
BS11*	13	9	Flute	BT10	E&Disc, Im	3	4	4
BS12	15	10	Flute	BT10	E&DiscArtDyn, Indep	5	3	3
BS21	13	8	Flute	BT20	E, M&G	5	4	3
BS22	10	5	Flute	BT20	E, M&G	5	4	5
BS41*	13	8	Voice	BT40	E&Disc, ExpD, M&G, S, PrP, M	2	3	3
BS42	13	8	Voice	BT40	E&Disc, ExpD, M&G, S, PrP	5	3	5
BS51	12	8	Piano	BT50	Drama	5	4	4
BS52	11	7	Piano	BT50	Drama	6	5	3
BS61*	11	6	Recorder	ABT60	E&Disc, ExpD, M, PrP	3	5	4
					Average score:	3.714	3.92	3.5
					Average score final concert:			3.714

* Students who improved in both pieces.

** Art = Articulation, Disc = Discussion, Drama = Drama to explore musical character, Dyn = Dynamics, E = enquiry, ExpD = Explanation of the use of expressive devices, Im = Imagery, Indep = Student thinks independently about interpretation, M = Modelling, M&G = Movements and gestures, PrP = Projected performance, Rec = Listening to own recording, S = Singing, Tech = Work on technical skills.

A-1: Piece 1 performed in pupils' concert 1.

A-2: Piece 1 performed in pupils' concert 2.

B-2: Piece 2 performed in pupils' concert 2.

Findings from students' questionnaire and interviews

From the questionnaire answers it appears that eight students had reflected on their interpretation and learnt about the use of expressive devices. The following replies indicate that students have learnt how to communicate their interpretation of the musical character:

> When I play music, I try to imagine what the piece is about, and vary the dynamics and speed accordingly. (BS22-Q)
>
> I have learnt that you can change the feeling of a piece by altering a variety of different aspects e.g. dynamics. By doing this I have made my pieces sound more interesting and unique. (BS61-Q)

Two students (BS11 and BS12) were interviewed as their answer to the question 'What have you learnt about playing expressively?' was missing. In the interviews I asked these students 'What have you learnt about expressive performance?' Both students indicated that they had been thinking more about interpretation and expression. BS12 had concentrated on articulation and dynamics to enhance expressiveness, while BS11 had used imagery to develop her expressiveness.

Students' views on performing in concerts varied considerably; most participants had enjoyed performing despite feeling nervous.

> I like performing and people enjoying my music. (AS31-Q)
>
> I like hearing what I sound like in a big room and I enjoy hearing other people's performances. (BS21-Q)

Two pupils indicated that they did not enjoy performing and these girls seemed to suffer from performance anxiety:

> I worry about going wrong and not being able to recover. (BS52-Q)
>
> I dislike playing badly and dressing up. I can sometimes get quite nervous if I feel I have not practised enough. (BS12-Q)

I wondered whether learning about expressiveness would make musical participation more enjoyable. Eight students enjoyed music making 'as much as (…) at the beginning of the project' (BS21-Q). Five students did find musical participation more enjoyable, and three of these students had improved expressive aspects of their performance in both pieces:

> I have enjoyed playing the recorder more than at the beginning of this project, because experimenting with different characters/feelings in pieces has made it more fun. (AS11-Q)

Just one violinist (AS31) found playing less enjoyable at the end of the project. She had not improved her expressiveness and was a student of the teacher who had concentrated on teaching technique (AT30).

Discussion and implications for pedagogy

As this was an AR project I found it important to take part with two of my students (one in each participating school). It was useful to be both participant and researcher as I could discuss ideas and findings with colleagues more readily. It was also a challenge, as I noticed that some colleagues seemed concerned that they might be criticized about their teaching. It was therefore important to emphasize the aims of the project regularly; exploring instructional strategies for teaching expressiveness.

The most interesting result of this project was finding such a wide variety of instructional strategies for teaching children expressive music performance. Teaching strategies described in the literature had been used, such as *modelling*, *imagery, gestures* and *movements,* and teachers' *enquiry*. Additionally some innovative methods for teaching children expression emerged in this project, such as the use of improvisation to explore the use of expressive devices, the notion of 'projected performance', and the idea that students should develop their own interpretation and 'own the performance'.

These findings can provide instrumental teachers with new ideas for facilitating children's expressiveness. Tutors can explore the use and effectiveness of *modelling*, *imagery, gestures and movements, enquiry, 'projected performance'* and *listening to own recordings* with their students. It could be that the effectiveness of these methods is dependent on musical style (Brenner & Strand, 2013), students' age, level of playing or perceptual learning style. Further research should provide more information on the effectiveness of these strategies.

Data from this project seems to suggest that participating teachers did view music as representing aspects of the extra-musical world of human feelings and emotions. Even though music

might not always be expressive of emotions, it could be useful for tutors and students to think of music as expressive of characters and emotions for educational purposes. Some of the aforementioned instructional strategies, such as *imagery* and *discussion*, can be helpful if expression is understood in this way. The notion that music performance is expressive in various degrees can be useful for giving feedback and for assessments of expressiveness in performance.

In the final week of the project some colleagues remarked that they found it hard to teach the use of expressive cues. Several writers have suggested that musicians often know intuitively how to perform expressively but are not always aware in what way they do this, and find it difficult to express this verbally (Lindström, et al*.,* 2003; Juslin et al*.,* 2004). This might explain why there seems to be little systematic teaching in this area.

Because of the participants' busy schedules it was not possible to organize a teachers' meeting halfway through the project. For a future AR project it would be useful to schedule a meeting after a few weeks of teaching in order to evaluate data to inform and plan a new cycle in the research process.

An important theme for teachers in school Y was encouraging independent thinking, students 'owning the performance'. During this project I realised that I often expect pupils to form the same idea about the musical character as I had myself. Examination of the data shows that some colleagues might have worked along the same lines. One teacher had emphasized in the meetings that students should 'think for themselves' but his student said in the interview:

> In my last few lessons Mr Z was teaching me how to almost paint a picture with music and he described what I had to make it look like when I was playing. It's just someone walking through a meadow, and it's all peaceful and then something happened, I wasn't quite sure what, in the middle section, that was less peaceful. (BS11-I)

Although this student said she now thought more about the interpretation, and the teacher had used *enquiry* and *discussion*, it is obvious that the student had to make the music sound the way the teacher intended it. Likewise, another teacher observed:

> Eve didn't realise how different her playing sounded from what I wanted her to do. (AT30-M2)

The teacher had an idea about the target performance, but his pupil might have had a different concept of the music. It might be difficult to encourage students to think independently and to accept their interpretation if this is different from our own. It could well be that a student's own interpretation is more effective in eliciting an expressive performance than is the teacher's suggestion.

Although the group of participating pupils and teachers was small and several variables affected students' development of expressiveness, it seems that some teaching strategies might have been effective: four out of five students who improved their expressiveness in both pieces were taught by teachers who had discussed the musical character and how this can be communicated in performance by modifying expressive devices. It might be that teacher enquiry and discussion together with the explanation of expressive devices are at the heart of teaching children expressive music performance. If the focus of instrumental lessons is on reading and technical skills (see Hallam, 2010; Karlsson & Juslin, 2008; Rostvall & West, 2003) then children might not consider issues of interpretation and expressiveness. It could be that young musicians perceive playing from notation as a reading and/or technical exercise: something they have to decode and play using technical tools. By asking questions and discussing the musical character teachers can help their students to consider the meaning of their music, enabling them to develop an interpretation. By explaining the use of expressive devices, tutors can describe how students can communicate their interpretation in performance. The other instructional strategies used in this project, *gestures and movements, metaphors*, *visual imagery*, *modelling*, *singing* and thinking about *'projected performance'*, could be used to clarify the musical character and further explain the use of expressive devices. More research is required to shed light on this fascinating aspect of instrumental learning and teaching.

Conclusion

Tutors in this preliminary study used various instructional strategies for teaching children expressive music performance: *teacher's enquiry, discussion, explanation of expressive devices, gestures and movements, singing, imagery, modelling, 'projected performance'* and *listening to own recordings.* Participating teachers emphasized the importance of students' thinking about the interpretation, and 'owning the performance'. The project influenced the practice of participating tutors as they reflected, and concentrated on teaching expressive performance. Future research should provide more information

on the effectiveness of these instructional strategies. It would be worthwhile to explore whether the usefulness of these methods is dependent on students' age, level of playing or perceptual learning styles. If we can develop our teaching, enabling young musicians to improve their expressive performance, tutors will probably find their work more rewarding, while students might find musical participation more enjoyable. Effective teaching in this area could thus increase the motivation and enjoyment of students and teachers.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on my unpublished master's dissertation (Den Otter Meissner, 2011). I am grateful to all the teachers and students who took part in this study. I thank Dr Victoria Rowe for her support and advice during the research project and Dr Renee Timmers for her comments on previous drafts of this article.

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Supporting material

Questionnaire for participating students

1. What is the most important reason for you to learn a musical instrument?
2. What have you learnt especially over the last few weeks in your music lessons?
3. What have you learnt about playing expressively?
4. Has your practice changed during this project? If yes, how?
5. Has your playing changed during this project? If yes, how?
6. Can you remember how much you practised per week before the first concert? If yes, how much?
7. Can you remember how much you practised per week before the last concert? If yes, how much?
8. Do you enjoy performing in concerts?
9. What do you like/dislike about it?
10. Do you like playing your instrument more, less or the same as in the beginning of this project?

Questionnaire for participating teachers

1. How many lessons did your pupil have during this research project?
2. What was your experience in taking part in the action research project on teaching expression?
3. Did taking part in the project change or influence your teaching?
   If so, how?
4. What is in your experience the most effective way for teaching expression in music performance?
5. Some colleagues had a special reason for entering their pupil in this project. (For example: a student who really needed to improve communication in performance, or a student who seemed to be very able.) What was your reason for entering this/these student(s)?
6. How did taking part in the project affect your students' practice, performance and progress?
7. Which methods did you use for teaching expression?
8. What was the effect of these methods?