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Meissner, H., Timmers, R. and Pitts, S. orcid.org/0000-0003-1430-5801 (2021) 'Just notes': Young musicians' perspectives on learning expressive performance. Research Studies in Music Education, 43 (3). pp. 451-464. ISSN 1321-103X

https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X19899171

‘Just notes’: Young musicians’ views on learning expressive performance

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Abstract

Expressiveness is an important aspect of an excellent music performance as it adds quality and interest to the playing and listening experience. Although several studies have investigated tertiary students’ learning of expressiveness, little is known about effective approaches for teaching children to perform expressively. In the present project 16 young musicians (aged 9-16, Pre-Grade 1 – Grade 8) took part in a video-stimulated recall interview after an experimental investigation which had featured methods for teaching and facilitating expressiveness. The interviews explored pupils’ views on that instruction, which included practice of difficult sections, scales practice, improvisation, and questions and dialogue regarding musical character. Participants who had been taught via dialogic teaching indicated that the questions relating to musical character and expressive tools had been helpful for their understanding of the ‘musicality’ of their pieces and thus for their learning of performance expression. The questions regarding musical character were seen as helpful, as this had facilitated pupils’ reflection on, and understanding of the interpretation, thus contributing to their learning of expressiveness. This demonstrates the importance of teachers’ enquiry and pupils’ reflection for young musicians’ learning of expressive performance.

Keywords

dialogic teaching, expression, instrumental pedagogy, music performance, young musicians

Introduction

The aim of this study was to understand more about young musicians’ learning of expressive performance by exploring their views on the instructional strategies that had been used for teaching and facilitating expressiveness in an earlier experimental study (see Meissner & Timmers, 2019). For this project an ‘expressive music performance’ is defined as a performance in which the musician communicates their interpretation of the compositional structure and musical character convincingly to a listener (Meissner, 2018). ‘Musical character’ relates to the emotions, feelings or character represented in a musical work (Shaffer, 1992; 1995). ‘Dialogic teaching’ can be defined as teaching that is characterised by asking questions and dialogue rather than teacher presentation (Alexander, 2008). ‘Teaching methods’ or ‘instructional strategies’ can be described as actions used by tutors to facilitate student learning. ‘Pupils’ refers to young musicians aged 8-16 years old.

Teaching expressive performance

Children explore the expressive possibilities of music from a young age through their musical vocalizations and improvisatory musical play (e.g. Davies, 1986, 1992; Moog, 1968; Moorhead & Pond, 1942; Tafuri, 2008). Despite this musical start, some research suggests that for children who then embark upon instrumental lessons, the focus tends to shift to reading and technical skills at the expense of expressiveness (Karlsson & Juslin, 2008; West & Rostvall, 2003). McPherson, Davidson, and Faulkner (2012) reported that they did not find evidence of teaching aimed at musical communication or expression in their longitudinal study with 157 young musicians. For most students in their study, instrumental music lessons focused on the technical side of playing which, according to the researchers, was unconstructive for their musical development. Although playing expressively is generally seen as an important aspect of instrumental performance, little is known about effective

approaches for facilitating young musicians’ (aged 8-16) expressivity within one-to-one or small group instrumental lessons.

Some small-scale studies have used lesson observation to investigate how tutors worked with their pupils on expressive performance. Kondo (2019) observed some of her own piano pupils (5-6-year olds) during their small group lessons in a year-long study. Based on her observations she proposed that ‘improvisational musical communication can engender and develop children’s inherent communicative potential and expressive power’ (Kondo, 2019, p. 12). Brenner and Strand (2013) observed lessons of four tutors and found that aural modelling, verbal instructions and task repetitions were used for facilitating children’s expressiveness. McPhee (2011) interviewed two tutors and analysed video-recordings of one-to-one brass and cello lessons with teenagers and noted that teachers used various strategies: Verbal metaphor; Work on dynamics and articulation; Consideration of phrasing; Expressive markings in the score; Listening to recordings of own performances; Giving pupils some choices regarding expressive characteristics of the music. McPhee observed that various strategies achieved the same outcome as long as pupils had a clear understanding of how their playing changed. McPhee suggested that teachers could allow teenagers some responsibility for making interpretative decisions. Likewise, Graham (1998) recommended that teachers and pupils discuss the interpretation of a musical work to encourage students’ creativity. Although these observations and ideas might be useful for practice, these studies did not investigate the effectiveness of the proposed teaching strategies on young musicians’ expressiveness, and the studies were generally conducted with just a few pupils, leaving scope for further investigation of this topic.

Other studies have investigated the effectiveness of instructional approaches during short experimental sessions. Vandewalker (2014) examined the effectiveness of aural modelling, concrete verbal instruction (through marking in the score and verbal explanation),

and instruction using metaphors, on wind-band students' (aged 12-13) expressive performance during a short (6-8 minutes) experimental session. Vandewalker found that aural modelling and teaching using metaphors were significantly more effective than concrete verbal instruction for changing students' use of dynamics, tempo and note duration. Contrastingly, Chester (2008) found no significant differences between aural modelling, concrete verbal instruction, verbal explanation using metaphors, and no instruction, on middle school instrumentalists' expressiveness. Instruction time had been very short, and her participants consisted of a mixed ability group which might explain these divergent findings.

Lisboa (2000) compared the effect of several instructional conditions on the practice and performance of three cello pupils: 'no instruction', 'analytical' instruction and a 'multi-modal approach' which included singing; colouring the score; watching a video of a professional; and discussing musical issues. Lisboa found that the multi-modal approach led to the most expressive performances. However, it is not possible to determine which element of the multi-modal approach had been effective, as four new strategies were introduced at the same time.

In previous work by the first author, instrumental tutors in an exploratory study used various instructional strategies for teaching expressiveness, including enquiry, discussion, aural modelling, gestures and movements and listening to 'own' recordings (Meissner, 2017). Results of this study suggested that especially teachers' enquiry and discussion is helpful for improving pupils' expressive performance.

Following this exploratory study, we compared the effectiveness of two different teaching approaches on children's expressiveness in an experimental study. The experimental group instruction consisted of a dialogic teaching approach, while the control group teaching focused on accuracy and technical skills. Two short contrasting musical extracts were used in the lessons; one with a happy and one with a sad character. Findings demonstrated that the

experimental teaching had been significantly more effective for improving emotional expression and overall expressiveness scores in the ‘sad’ extract than the control teaching, and that there was a trend for the control teaching to improve more for technical fluency and accuracy scores in the performances of the ‘happy’ extract (Meissner & Timmers, 2019). No significant correlations were found between pupils’ age or level of playing and improvement of emotional expression or overall expressiveness scores, suggesting that age did not affect learning of expressivity in this study (Meissner, 2018).

Subsequently, for the current study, we decided to investigate pupils’ views on the methods that had been employed for teaching and facilitating expressiveness in the experimental study using video-stimulated recall interviews. It is important to explore young musicians’ evaluations of instructional strategies as this can provide valuable information about the learning and teaching process. To our knowledge there have been no published studies that have investigated young musicians’ views on methods for facilitating expressivity.

Aim and research questions

The aim of the present study was to understand more about young musicians’ learning of expressiveness, by exploring pupils’ views on various instructional strategies that had been used for teaching and facilitating expressiveness in an experimental study. Therefore, the main research questions were: What were the participants’ views of the instructional strategies that had been used for teaching expressiveness? And how might these views inform future methods for teaching and learning expressive performance?

Method

Participants

16 pupils (11 girls and 5 boys, aged 9-16) at the level of Pre-Grade 1 – Grade 8[1], playing violin (4), recorder (3), clarinet (2), flute (2), cello (1), cornet (1), double bass (1), trumpet (1) and piano (1) took part in a video-stimulated recall interview (VSRI). Participants were invited via the music departments of schools where the first author was teaching, and additionally via two local village schools and a local church youth band. None of the participants were studying with the first author (nor with the other authors).

Research Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained through the standard University review process. Participants and their parents gave their informed consent.

Research context

The lessons that were filmed for the VSRIs of this study were part of an experimental study that explored whether discussion of musical character is effective for improving pupils' expressiveness (see Meissner & Timmers, 2019). Each participant had one lesson in this experimental study. Control group teaching focused on basic technical and music reading skills which may also facilitate expressiveness. Playing scales and arpeggios in the key of the extract, clapping rhythms and practising difficult sections, were used to practise challenging passages or rhythms. Furthermore, extemporization was used to improvise tunes with melodic or rhythmic patterns similar to those in the extract. Modelling was only used if this was necessary to indicate pitch or clarify a melodic or rhythmic pattern. Musical character or interpretation was not discussed in control group sessions. Contrastingly, the musical

[1] Grades as used by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music exam system in the UK. Most music exam boards in the UK have eight grade levels, ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 8 (most advanced).

character was discussed in experimental group lessons after work on basic technical and music reading skills. Pupils in the experimental group were asked *'What is the character of this music?'* The use of expressive tools such as articulation, dynamics and tempo to convey the musical character was explored through dialogue, and participants were given the opportunity to try out various ways of playing the music. Like in the control group modelling was used sparingly (Table 1).

Table 1. Teaching content of the experimental and control group lessons (reproduced from Meissner & Timmers, 2019).

Experimental Group	**Control Group**
Basic technical skills	Basic technical skills
Notational accuracy	Notational accuracy
Scales and arpeggios	Scales and arpeggios
'What is the character of this music?'	Improvisation
'How can you show this in your playing?'	

Immediately after the control/experimental lessons questionnaires were distributed to investigate participants' views on their learning during the research sessions and their approaches to practice. Analysis of the questionnaire data demonstrated that most participants thought that they had learned something in the research sessions or that they had improved their playing. Most experimental group participants (13/15) reported that they had learnt to think about feelings or emotion in pieces and how to show this in their playing. Additionally, some participants wrote that they had learnt that it can be useful to practise scales and arpeggios in the key of a piece before playing it (Meissner, 2018).

However, this data did not reveal pupils' views on the instructional methods that had

been used. Therefore, 16 participants (of the original 29 participants) were invited for a video-stimulated recall interview to investigate this aspect of the teaching and learning process.

Procedure

10-12 months after the experimental study the semi-structured video-stimulated recall interviews (VSRI) were held to gather in-depth information about pupils' evaluations of the methods that had been used for teaching expressiveness. A varied group of pupils were invited for the VSRIs: eight experimental and eight control group participants; some had made improvements in their expressiveness in both extracts whilst others had improved in one extract but not the other.

Video-recordings of the lessons in the experimental study were used as a stimulus to remember the research session of the previous year. Since the video-recordings were used to recall the lesson, to reflect on the methods that had been used, and to stimulate discussion, it was not necessary to have the interviews immediately after the lessons had been held (c.f. Rowe, 2009). It might well be that a time lapse has some benefits, as it is possible that participants were not concerned any longer by learning or technical challenges that might have hindered them a few months previously. As recommended by Rowe (2009), pupils received a link with the video-recording prior to the interview so that they could view the recording in the safety of their own home, and reflect on the main research question; *'what was helpful for your learning during the special lesson we did last year?'* Participants were asked to select a passage from the recording that they would like to watch during the interview, to give them a sense of ownership of the interview procedure. As pupils might feel self-conscious or embarrassed about watching or discussing the video material it was emphasized that we would not be evaluating their performance but rather the teaching methods used during the lesson.

The interview started with general questions (Appendix 1), asking whether the interviewees had watched the video and whether this had helped to remember the research session. We watched the video extract they had chosen, or, if they had not selected anything, a section that the first author had selected beforehand. Participants were asked which parts of the lesson they had found helpful, and whether there had been any elements in the lesson they had found difficult or not so helpful. Interviewees were also asked which element of the lesson had been most enjoyable. Finally, participants were invited to choose a pseudonym for the written report, to give them more ownership of the research process (see Rowe, 2009). Interviews lasted between 4-24 minutes (M = 15 minutes) and were audio-recorded.

The first author conducted the control and experimental lessons, carried out the interviews and was being advised by the other two authors from music psychology and educational perspectives.

Analysis

The data in this study was analysed with the 6-step thematic analysis procedure as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012). Step 2 of the analysis procedure, finding and labelling codes, consisted of three parts (2a, 2b, 2c). In phase 2a 'nodes' were labelled in NVIVO for all concepts that could potentially become a theme. Subsequently, these basic nodes were assembled into 'codes' (step 2b). Afterwards codes were revisited throughout the data set (step 2c) as coding had developed whilst going through the material (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Phase three consisted of searching for themes.

A mainly 'top-down' deductive approach was used as the analysis was driven by research questions. Additionally, some inductive, bottom-up data analysis was applied when ideas that seemed relevant to the topic (learning expressiveness) were voiced by several participants. Coding in NVIVO was conducted by the first author and emerging themes were discussed in debriefings with the other two authors.

Findings

Reflecting on the musical character and how to convey this

All eight participants who had been in the experimental group reported in their interviews that they had found it helpful to think about the feeling, or musical character, of the pieces and how to convey this in their playing. Their reflection had been stimulated by the question in the research session: *'What is the character of this music?'* 'Thinking about the feeling' and 'how to convey' this were the main themes running through their responses, regardless of age group. Some of the older participants were quite articulate in their answers whilst some of the youngest found it a little harder to express their views:

> I found that where we spoke about…the… how sad the piece was, and how happy it was, I thought that helped, because it meant I could put a bit more.., well…I thought I could make the piece sound a bit better, because it wasn't just playing it, it was a bit more...I could make it feel more sad or happy. (Alex10_Violin_Gr1)[2]

> I think particularly when we did [i.e. talked][3] about... the different type of the pieces, what the mood of the piece was, the different things you could do. Like if it was a sad piece you can have it soft and legato... and for more bouncy pieces loud and staccato. (April10_Flute_Pre-Gr1)

> Thinking about… the mood of the piece, and how you convey that, was helpful. So, then you knew how you wanted the audience to feel, when you performed it. (Jessy14_Trumpet_Gr7)

These answers demonstrate that the open question had helped these pupils to think about the interpretation, so that they were not 'just playing it' as Alex put it. These students had found

[2] Participant codes consist of a pseudonym, followed by age, instrument and Grade level at the start of the study.

[3] [text] is used to clarify what the transcriber thought that the child meant or if the transcriber added a word.
(text) is used for utterances that were difficult to understand. The brackets indicate that this is the most likely possibility of what the child said.
(...) indicates that the authors have left something out, usually because it is impossible to hear what is being said, and occasionally because the complete text does not make sense or would be too long to cite.

it helpful to first consider the musical character and then work out how they could convey this in their playing by adjusting expressive tools such as articulation or dynamics. The score of the test pieces had not contained directions for the use of expressive tools, therefore pupils had to think of their own interpretation and how to convey this in their playing. During his interview Jack explained what he had found helpful in the experimental session by watching and discussing part of the video recording:

> So I think we talked about ehm the character of the piece and then articulation and dynamics, so leading on from that. (…) Here we're discussing the mood of the piece. (That's a bit of a) celebratory and then, and then we're saying, how, what, so, what *therefore* should you do to the articulation and dynamics…to show the mood. Which is, yeah, not something I'm always used to doing. That was quite helpful. (Jack15_Piano_Gr8)

This suggests that reflecting on the interpretation of a piece and how this can be communicated had been a new approach for him, even though he was already a fairly advanced pianist. Several answers suggested that pupils did not normally think about the musical character, and that they were inclined to concentrate on reading and technical aspects instead:

> I think I found helpful looking at the musicality of the piece...more in depth, because focusing on that rather than actually focusing on, on the movement of the bow (…) and the technicalities... because… I've never really done that in my music lessons and I never really considered it before, so I found that helpful... If now I look at a piece of music, I try and consider the mood of the piece as well, whereas before I just considered it a technical exercise. (Lydia15_Cello_Gr5)

This illustrates how Lydia considered playing from notation a technical exercise; she usually focused on technical aspects of playing and said that she did not normally reflect on the interpretation. However, the research session had influenced her approach to practice, as she had started working on the 'musicality' of her pieces, although she still worked on the

technical aspects first. Explaining her approach to practice she said:

> Well, I think to start off with, I try to get the, the positioning and technicality right, and to kind of just play out the tune in a generic kind of way… Once I've got the hang of the, yeah, the technicalities… I can go on to looking at the musicality a bit more. So... I think that I probably still consider the technical part first, the musicality is kind of half of it, but I consider that afterwards. (Lydia15_Cello_Gr5)

Furthermore, Lydia mentioned that she had reflected on the musical meaning in singing lessons but never in cello lessons. This contrast between interpretation approaches in singing versus technical approaches in instrumental playing was also mentioned by Jessy:

> That was sort of a new thing, I mean… I sing as well, I’d always sort of done that in singing, but I’ve never thought about it for trumpet I guess, because I suppose... I never thought it was telling a story with what you’re playing, because it’s just notes… (Jessy14_Trumpet_Gr7)

There is a similarity between Lydia’s and Jessy’s comments. Both girls have had instrumental lessons for several years and have reached an intermediate level of playing (grade 5 and 7 respectively). Jessy said that she used to think of her trumpet playing as ‘just notes’; she did not think that her trumpet music ‘was telling a story’. Lydia observed that she had always considered her cello playing as ‘just a technical exercise’, but she had now learnt to consider the ‘musicality’ of her pieces. Although both girls had reflected on the interpretation of songs, they had not considered the interpretation of instrumental pieces because there was no text to trigger their thinking. This highlights the need to discuss the interpretation during lessons, as pupils might not otherwise consider the musical character of instrumental music. These data suggest that tutors can shift young musicians’ attention from a focus on the ‘technicality’ to an increased awareness of the ‘musicality’ of pieces by asking open questions about the musical character and the use of expressive tools which may enhance their expressiveness.

Instructional strategies for improving accuracy and technical fluency

The second theme that came up in over half the interviews (9/16 responses) was that practising scales and arpeggios in the keys of the pieces had been useful, as it had helped to improve accuracy and tuning. Pupils thought they could 'get into the key' by playing the scale of the piece; they knew which notes they should be playing, what it should sound like and for string players it helped to improve their tuning. This was mentioned by violinists, brass players and flautists, and by students across both age groups.

> The scale was quite helpful, so you know what, what notes you're doing, what sounds right. (Kim9_Violin_Gr2, whilst moving her fingers to illustrate)
>
> I remember doing the scale or the arpeggio before (I) started (to) get into the key, helped. Because… you kind of knew what you were doing...rather than just kind of playing it cold. (Jessy14_Tr3E)

For some pupils this had been a new approach:

> I always sort of play scales at the start, but not necessarily to do with the tune. (Josh13_Cornet_Gr3)

Although it seems likely that most of these pupils were used to doing some form of scales practice it appears that for several it had been new to apply scales practice to their pieces (c.f. Harris, 2006).

The rationale for playing the scale and arpeggio in combination with the test piece had not been completely clear to all participants. Initially, Alex, a 10-year old violinist, said that he was not sure 'what the scales were about', but later added that playing the scale had helped him to play the F-sharps better in tune. Similarly, Lily, a 10-year old recorder player, said that she was not sure why she had to do the scales during the lesson and mentioned scales as

something she had not found helpful for improving her playing of the pieces. However, she did think that practising scales had been useful for improvising in a particular key.

Additionally, several participants (6/16) mentioned that practising difficult sections had been useful. Some had used this approach before, while others indicated that they did not normally do this:

> I think before I kind of always just play through [a] piece, and just kind of play through it many times (…) and just sort of skimmed over the bits that I couldn’t play. But yah, I definitely started to, like, take sections and just play them over again until I got them right. (Jessy14_Trumpet_Gr7)

As Jessy was already a fairly advanced trumpet player it seems likely that her teachers had told her that she should practise difficult sections. Her answers indicate that she did not normally do this during practice, and that she had now realised how effective this strategy can be.

During the research sessions led by the first author, the use of modelling had been limited in order to avoid influencing pupils’ expressiveness via this method. In the research sessions of five of the interviewees some modelling had been used to clarify a rhythmic pattern, the pitch of a note or pattern in a scale, or to explain legato tonguing. According to the participants this had been useful.

> I think I'm a lot better with sort of, aural sound than notation to be honest. I think it's…I can sort of, I can copy everything quite well as I can hear it. (Josh13_Cornet_Gr3)

> I think when you sang it, I think that helped. Watching it back I think when you like sang me the rhythm that really helped me. Because I, I find that, I find it quite easy to hear things, and then I find that easier, than just reading off the music. (Jessy14_Trumpet_Gr7)

It seems that pupils thought that it is easier to copy a teacher than to read from notation. This

is in line with other research findings that modelling can be a useful instructional tool for various aspects of music learning (Dickey, 1992; Ebie, 2004; Sang, 1987).

The only method that had been controversial was improvisation. Two girls said that this had been helpful for their learning and that it had been their favourite activity. Although these girls reported that they had never improvised prior to the project they had enjoyed the activity. It seems likely that the novelty of the activity and the fact that they could make up their own tunes, initiating and carrying out their own musical ideas had been enjoyable:

> I think the improvisation helped me quite a lot because (…) I could kind of just play something (…) once I played it, it would sound good, and I would understand it. (Emily9_Violin_Gr1)

Contrastingly, three participants thought that improvisation had not been helpful, and one boy added that he was not good at improvising. Interestingly, one of the participants who said that improvising had not been useful for his learning during the session did say that making up tunes had been the most enjoyable part of the lesson.

McPherson (2005) observed that improvisation is often overlooked in instrumental tuition, but that working on improvisation can be useful for children's musical development. Data from our study shows that pupils can initiate and carry out their own musical ideas in improvisations. Whilst improvising, they will also be practising their technical skills, thus improving their technical fluency.

Overall, several participants thought that practising scales and difficult sections, had been useful, as this had helped them to improve accuracy, tuning and technical fluency. The results of the experimental study indicated that the control group's improved accuracy and technical fluency had contributed to increased expressiveness in their performance of the 'happy' test extract (Meissner & Timmers, 2018).

Summary and implications for teaching

This study asked young musicians for their views on the effectiveness of several instructional strategies that had been used for teaching and facilitating expressiveness, to understand more about young musicians' learning of performance expression. Some studies have investigated pupils' views on the use of information technology in music lessons (e.g. Karlsson, Liljeström, & Juslin, 2009; Lango, & Kafol, 2015), but to our knowledge there have been no published studies that investigated pupils' views on the use of improvisation, modelling, scales practice, or questions and dialogue. Participants indicated that they thought that the instructional strategies had been useful for improving their playing. The findings of the experimental study (see Meissner & Timmers, 2019) confirm that the teaching had improved pupils' playing as most assessment scores, including scores for emotional expression, overall expressiveness, accuracy and technical fluency, had increased significantly after teaching.

The most important finding emerging from this data is that all the pupils who had participated in the experimental teaching session reported that questions regarding the musical character had helped them to think about the musical meaning and to convey this in their playing. Participants reported that the questions had facilitated their reflection on the 'musicality' or interpretation of their music and this had helped them to 'show feeling' in their playing by adjusting expressive tools. These data suggest that this had been a novel approach and that these students had not been in the habit of reflecting on the interpretation of instrumental pieces.

Reflecting on the musical character had been an eye-opener; some pupils said that they had started reflecting on the 'musicality' of their instrumental pieces since the research session, whereas previously they had perceived these as 'just notes'. Therefore, they tended to focus on the 'technicality' of pieces and had not considered issues of interpretation. Thinking about the feeling of the music and how this can be communicated by adjusting

expressive devices had led to enhanced expressiveness, especially in the piece with a ‘sad’ character (Meissner & Timmers, 2019).

Regardless of their age or level of playing, participants reported that they had found the questions about the musical character useful as this had helped them to think about, and convey feeling in their playing. Findings from the experimental study confirm that there was no significant effect for age or level of playing on pupils’ difference scores (Meissner, 2018).

As several participants reported that thinking about the feeling of the music had been new, it seems that this was not a normal procedure during their lessons. This finding indicates that some tutors might assume that young musicians cannot focus on expression if they are still learning the notes and technicalities (c.f. McPhee) because of the high cognitive load. According to the cognitive load theory all learning tasks have an inherent difficulty or cognitive load (Sweller, 1988). Various aspects of instrumental performance, including music reading, motor control and matters of interpretation, may contribute to cognitive load (c.f. Owens and Sweller, 2008; Stambaugh, 2013). Therefore, expressiveness might not be integrated into teaching in the early stages of learning. Based on the findings of this study we propose that it is possible to work on expressive performance at every level. Alternatively, it could be that tutors tend to work on expressiveness via modelling or by describing what the music should sound like. Such approaches might not stimulate pupils' thinking about the musical character and this would explain why the dialogic teaching approach was new and effective for these participants.

Furthermore, participants in this study were positive about the methods that had been used for improving accuracy and technical fluency, such as scales’ practice in the key of the extracts and working on difficult sections. Several pupils reported that these had been new approaches for working on accuracy and technique. Although one would expect that playing scales in the key of a piece, practising short sections and clapping rhythms would be normal

activities in lessons, and likely to be recommended by instrumental teachers for effective practice, it seems some participants had not come across these, or they might have forgotten about them.

These findings have several implications for instrumental music education. It is important that teachers explain, model and practise efficient practice strategies regularly during lessons (e.g. Hallam, et al., 2012; McPherson & Renwick, 2010; Pike, 2017). Moreover, teachers can help their pupils to improve their performance expression by asking open questions about the interpretation. Questions about the interpretation will raise pupils' awareness of the musical meaning thus facilitating their thinking and improving their expressiveness. From the beginning pupils can learn to think about their music and what they would like to communicate through their playing. Children can explore how to express basic emotions even in simple pieces and short improvisations. Additionally, tutors can provide pupils with tools to communicate musical ideas by explaining how expressive devices such as articulation, dynamics and tempo can be employed to convey musical character or structure in performance. Consequently, teachers can provide young musicians with the opportunity to make their own interpretative choices, thus supporting their musical agency as pupils experience that they can initiate and carry out their own ideas in music (see Wiggins, 2016).

As recommended by Rowe (2009) participants were given the opportunity to watch the video of their lesson at home prior to their interview. Most participants reported that they had done this and had reflected on the main research question, '*What was helpful for you, during the research session last year?'* This led to productive interviews, as pupils confidently offered their views on the teaching and how this had been helpful, or not so helpful, for their learning. Obviously, we should bear in mind that the participants were talking about the lesson with the person who had taught it, which might have affected their answers. Overall, the VSRIs were useful, especially when participants had watched the

material prior to the interview, as this provided a rich description of pupils’ views on the instructional strategies used during the research sessions and of their learning of expressive performance.

Some participants indicated in their VSRI that watching the video had helped them to realise that a particular teaching or practising approach had been helpful for their learning. Watching and discussing video material of one’s own practising, learning or teaching activities can provide a valuable tool for self-reflection and feedback for tutors and students alike (c.f. Fuller & Manning, 1973; Rowe, 2009).

More research is required to explore a longer-term approach for teaching performance expression. Based on these research findings, the question arises how dialogic teaching can be implemented in weekly instrumental lessons and whether questions regarding the musical character are sufficient, or whether learners need supplementary methods to support dialogic teaching of expressiveness. An action research study during a full school term explored these aspects of teaching and learning expressiveness further (see Meissner, 2018). Thus, these studies contribute to the development of a pedagogy for facilitating children’s learning of expressive music performance.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by a scholarship for the first author’s doctoral studies from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Research Councils UK (grant number AH/K503289/1) and an additional stipend from The University of Sheffield. Preliminary results of this study were presented in abbreviated form at the 2016 Performance Studies Network Conference and the 2016 International Society of Music Education Conference. This research was reported in the first author’s doctoral thesis (Meissner, 2018), which is

under an embargo until February 2020. The authors want to thank the schools and pupils who participated in this study, and Dr Stephanie Bramley for her help with NVIVO.

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Appendix 1: Questions for the semi-structured video-stimulated interviews

1. Did you have time to watch the video recording? Did the link work?
2. Did watching the video help to remember the research session?
3. Was it distracting to have a video camera in the lesson?
4. What was helpful for you, during the research session last year?
   What worked for you? What helped you to improve your playing?
   Why? Can you tell me a bit more?
5. Was there anything in this lesson that was unhelpful for your progress?
   Why? Can you tell me a bit more?
6. Which passage of the video recording would you like to watch today?
7. Which element of the lesson was most enjoyable?