

New Approaches to Individual Instrumental Tuition in Music Education

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Individual instrumental tuition has been the focus of some new research in musical scholarship during the last two decades. The main conclusions that appear to be shared by scholars in this field such as Gerald Jones, Knud Illeris, John Heron, Andrea Creech and Helena Gaunt is that a combination of modern social circumstances together with rapidly advancing technological innovations have considerably widened accessibility to music experience of different kinds and as a consequence has affected individual instrumental tuition. Based on a considerable analysis of new teaching approaches to individual tuition on a conservatoire level, this paper will endeavor to suggest that the traditional mode of instrumental tuition, which encompasses a hierarchy and mostly directive mode of teaching, has shifted significantly towards a responsive mode of teaching and a more autonomous, self-directed mode of learning. This paper will conclude with a consensus that one-to-one instrumental tuition is shifting dramatically and new approaches whose aim is to facilitate the best possible learning outcomes need to be taken into consideration by music instrumental tutors.

Keywords: directiveness and responsiveness, effective feedback, evolutionary mentoring, individual instrumental teaching, reflective dialogue.

Introduction

Individual instrumental tuition had been, traditionally, based on teaching practice that had passed on from teachers to their students. In this way, a mostly directive teaching approach had prevailed in this domain with routines and patterns that mainly aimed to the acquisition of specific technical and interpretative skills of primarily western art music. Pedagogical literature produced over the past two decades, had severely challenged conventional teaching practice as being incompatible with the overwhelming contemporary cultural and social environment and thus, in some cases, completely unsuccessful.

In an effort to overcome obstacles that occurred in teaching and learning such as lack of motivation and progress and appearance of anxiety symptoms, we have encompassed evolutionary mentoring techniques in our teaching practice and subsequently evaluated learning results in different situations. After a few years of experimentation, evaluation and reconsideration of particular teaching routines and patterns, we suggest that the implementation of developmental or evolutionary mentoring techniques in instrumental tuition, provides a comfortable teaching and

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learning environment that facilitates students to overcome obstacles and improves learning outcomes.

Through a literature review of modern educational theories in this field and reflecting on personal piano teaching experience of the past ten years, this paper will examine new approaches to individual instrumental teaching. The paper will draw on literature reviews of recent research on one-to-one instrumental tuition, focusing on ideas taken by evolutionary or developmental mentoring approach. It will also encompass discussion of an innovative approach developed by Liz Lerman, called Critical Response Process (CRP). The paper will, finally, exemplify ideas of evolutionary mentoring and CRP through three examples taken from the author's teaching experience with individual piano tuition.

Directiveness Vs Responsiveness in One-to-one Instrumental Tuition

As Creech & Gaunt (2012) have rightly pointed out, "traditionally, instrumental tuition has been conceptualized predominantly in terms of the master-apprentice model [...] which premised fundamentally on the acquisition of practical skills" (p. 5). In this respect, the prevailing approach to instrumental tuition focused mostly "on the immediate context of the particular music and specific instrumental points of technique" (Creech & Gaunt, 2012, p. 5). This approach might have, in the past, produced some very brilliant results in the music domain; however, it has proved insufficient in response to changes in the modern social and cultural world. Active teaching practitioners of instrumental tuition have begun to indicate highly directive approaches as being problematic in terms of effective learning.

The questions about how directive and how responsive a teacher should be and in which cases certain elements of each approach can be effective for teaching and learning have often been the subject of concern in modern pedagogical literature. Many authors have come to the conclusion that elements of both approaches can prove more or less appropriate under certain conditions. It is a general consensus that, usually, there is a complexity of reasons which could prevent a student from experiencing satisfactory learning. Illeris (2004), has identified a number of dimensions that should be examined in this respect. According to him, an important aspect that should be taken into account is the "emotional dimension" of non-learning which identifies as the "mental defense" against an overwhelming number and complexity of impulses and influences that learners are exposed to every day. Also, Illeris points out that, in some cases, there is a matter of "identity defense", when learners get into a situation in which they feel their identity is threatened. This second dimension that the same author notes is the "social dimension" which is defined as a mental resistance being revealed as an active non-acceptance and objection with strong personal forces and engagement (Illeris, 2004, p. 85).

Heron (1999), defines the role of the teacher as "the facilitator" who relies on the desire of each learner to implement the purposes which have meaning for them. Examining different modes of facilitation in teaching and learning, he

discusses this subject under the scope of "the politics of learning" (p. 9-10). He distinguishes three modes which he deems appropriate in different levels of the learning process as follows: (1) hierarchy early on; (2) co-operation mid-term; and (3) autonomy later on (p.10). Although his general argument focuses on group teaching, there are elements that can be well-applied to individual instrumental tuition in which a hierarchical framework may be needed in the first stages in which the teacher takes responsibility over teaching in order to create conditions within which learners can soon exercise full self-determination in their learning. Finding the balance between hierarchy and autonomy in learning is in Heron's view the classic dilemma in all educational reform: "Students have the need and the right to be released from oppressive forms of education and should be encouraged to participate in educational decision-making. But they are conditioned and disempowered by these forms and may not have the motivation or the personal, interpersonal and self-directing skills required, to break out of them" (1999, p. 11).

Elements that relate to the above dilemma in terms of different teaching modes have also been discussed by Jones (2005). His very inspiring perspective focuses on different kinds of learning alignments between the teacher, the learner and the material which lead to three distinct teacher's roles termed "the gatekeeper", "the midwife" and "the fellow traveler". According to Jones analysis in the "gatekeeper alignment" the teacher is closely aligned with the material. He/she is the gatekeeper to it. The learner is expected to digest the material and regurgitate it. In this respect, the learners "quickly realize that they are there to learn from the person standing at the front of the class" (p. 5). Some learners enjoy the passivity of their role in this alignment since there is no compulsion to contribute to the class and therefore, they remain safely within their comfort zones. Within the worst deployments of this alignment, the learner is not allowed to question the material and there is a little room for critical discussion (p. 4-5). In the "midwife alignment" the teacher takes the position of the facilitator whose role is to enable the learners to discover the material for themselves. Learners take the position of participants who are offered stimulating activities and material to experiment with and they have the chance to contribute to discussions (p. 5-7). Finally, in the "fellow traveler alignment" the teacher steps down from his/her role as teacher and becomes a fellow learner in a class of learners who are out to analyze, refine, or discover the material (p. 7-9).

Depicting a quite conventional debate on teaching domains, this symbolic distinction of existing teaching roles often challenges a variety of traditional pedagogical ideologies and also stimulates further awareness regarding teaching practice. Concluding his discussion of essential arguments of this debate, Jones points out the view on this issue taken by the ancient philosopher Aristotle, who considered the skill of the teacher in aligning the three elements as "an ability to make the optimum and most appropriate decision in every circumstance" (quoted in Jones, 2005, p. 10). Contributing to the alignment debate, Jones (2005) emphasizes that "conscious shifting of alignments by an expert practitioner enables her to reap the benefits of each alignment, whilst avoiding their potential pitfalls" (p. 10).

The Concept of Evolutionary Mentoring in Teaching Situations

A number of modern innovational teaching theories have recently turned their attention to the concept of evolutionary mentoring as a method that challenges the traditional highly directive teaching approach. Several ideas and elements taken from the concept of evolutionary mentoring have been proved to respond well to modern instrumental teaching practice and facilitate the teaching and learning progress. Responding to the changing face of modern societies, Creech & Gaunt (2012) have suggested that modern instrumental teaching practice should consider the concept of mentoring where "the mentors help the mentees to make their own decisions by fostering and encouraging independence, help to remove fear of failure by building confidence, prioritize creating an environment of trust, commitment, and active involvement between mentor and mentee" (p. 6).

Brockbank & McGill (2006) have defined evolutionary mentoring as a person-centered process that leads to transformation (p. 75). It offers the person a chance "to identify the prevailing discourse and challenge it, through reflective dialogue" (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 14). The same authors have pointed out that a dialogue form in which "the speaker's intention is to hold forth in order to convey his or her knowledge is unlikely to lead to some new understanding. This form of dialogue is often characterized by one party claiming to be expert in interaction with another who may not be" (2006, p. 45). On the other hand, "reflective dialogue engages the learner's realities and subjective experience, giving space for the learner to consider and reconsider without haste" (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 57). Applying the concept of "reflective dialogue" to instrumental tuition as part of evolutionary mentoring can sometimes prove painful and difficult to maintain. Nonetheless, "it may generate new learning, forged from the discomfort and struggle of dialogue, which emerges as the reflective learning we seek as an outcome of the mentoring relationship" (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 57-58).

The concept of reflection has been identified by several educational theories as essential for deep and significant learning (see Boyd & Fales, 1983; Boud, Keogh, & Walter, 1985). A method that has been promoted by theorists such as Whitmore (1996 [1992]), Rogers (2012 [2004]) and Brockbank & McGill (2006) as facilitative for reflective learning is the use of thoughtful questioning. Applying questioning for raising "awareness and responsibility" (Whitmore, 1996, p. 39-41) and consequently improvement can be a very powerful mentoring technique for instrumental tuition. Crucial elements for developing skillful questioning techniques relate to the choices of the place and the type of questions. As Brockbank & McGill (2006) pointed out, "the place of questioning comes after listening [...] without judgement so that some trust and confidence have been established" (p. 184). Furthermore, considering different types of questioning is also important in raising learning potential. In most cases, questions which do not include judgments and advice but instead encourage active thought prove more effective in reflective process (Whitmore, 1996 [1992]). Hence, a "defensive response" to a question in a teaching situation is often evidence of a failed attempt to develop the skill of questioning (Whitmore, 1996, p. 39-40).

Another element that is often linked to the concept of evolutionary mentoring in instrumental tuition is the teacher's role in giving effective feedback. The development of a skillful feedback technique can be a powerful element that contributes to the creation of a balance between directive and responsive teaching. For many learners the prospect of receiving feedback often inspires fear, "as most people expect negative feedback and are not in a receptive listening mode" (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 190). Moreover, giving feedback in a teaching process is indeed of little worth for the recipient unless he or she can understand it and of course use it. According to Brockbank & McGill (2006), "effective feedback [...] increases self-awareness and offers us more options and the opportunity to change" (2006, p. 190). Moreover, it is a common consensus that "destructive feedback is unskilled feedback that leaves the recipient simply feeling bad with little to build on" (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 191). Brockbank & McGill (2006) focus their discussion on, specifically, the development of certain skills and methodology on giving effective feedback. According to them, first and foremost, the person offering feedback must make a judgment about appropriateness by answering questions such as: "Is this the right time? Is it a good place? Am I the right person to give it? How can I do it most effectively?" (2006, p. 191). Moreover, a number of key elements for giving effective feedback can be summarized as follows: 1. Begin with the positive. People need to know when they are doing something well. Do not take the positive aspects for granted, 2. Be specific and not general, 3. Own the feedback by using phrases such as "I believe (...), In my view (...)", 4. Leave recipients with a choice, 5. Limit negative feedback to one or two areas if you're giving feedback on weaknesses (Brockbank & McGill, 2006, p. 193-195).

In an effort to develop a feedback system that emphasizes the values of dialogue, the choreographer Liz Lerman (2003) has designed a four-step, group method known as the "Critical Response Process (CRP)". The main aim of this inspirational feedback system is to make the recipient eager to go back to work. In this respect, principles of Lerman's method can prove very valuable to instrumental tuition. There are three roles assigned within CRP: the artist, the responders and the facilitator. The artist is the person who is prepared to present his/her work to the group of CRP, discuss their work openly and be in a position to receive positive and constructive comments. Responders are the CRP group which may include friends, public, peers or strangers, experts or novices. The group of responders should be invested in the potential of the artist to do their best work. The facilitator is the person who is in charge to lead the whole process, ensuring that the four-step method is going as appropriate. In this regard, the facilitator ensures that all participants understand the sequence of steps involved in the process and intervene when opinions or suggestions are given too early in the process. It is also the facilitator's role to check that the artist is comfortable with the direction of discussions throughout the process, to help the artist break down questions if needed, and to encourage participation from the responders (Lerman & Borstel, 2003).

The CRP begins with the artist presenting their work that they would like feedback on. This presentation is followed by the first step of the process, called

"statements of meaning", in which the facilitator invites positive feedback from the responders. This feedback may include comments about what was meaningful for the audience including elements that they perceived as exciting, memorable, challenging, unique, different, surprising, touching etc. Meaningful thoughts are followed by the second step of the process in which the facilitator invites the artist to comment on an aspect of their work and to request feedback from the responders asking questions on specific matters of their work. Responders should answer honestly, staying within the topic of the artist's question. The process is most fruitful when artists are open to learning something of value from others that may apply to the future evolution of their work. In the third step of the process the facilitator invites responders to address questions to the artist about their work. These questions should remain neutral and avoid being leading or opinionated. In fourth step, with the artist's permission, responders can offer opinions on what they have seen or hear. Responders can articulate opinions on chosen matters relating to the artists work or performance only if the artist wishes to hear their opinions on the particular subject. In case the artist is not open to hearing an opinion, it is not useful to continue a discussion around it. In fifth step which is optional, depending again on the artist's agreement, the artist is invited by the facilitator to share with the responders what was helpful in moving him/her forward with their learning, or what they will take away from the session (Lerman & Borstel, 2003).

CRP is a stimulating practical illustration of the most fundamental principles in developing a skillful feedback technique, underpinned by theorists such as Whitmore (1996[1992]), Brockbank & McGill (2006), and Rogers (2012[2004]). The value of Lerman's ideas for the instrumental practitioner is the development of responsive skills with regards to learners' concerns expressed in the form of questions. At the same time, through the practice of stating meaningful thoughts focusing on the positive elements as well as asking permission to express any opinions foster conditions where directiveness can be applied in a non-traditional way that contributes to learning improvement.

Blending Directiveness and Responsiveness in Piano Teaching Practice

Our personal attempts to shift between directive and responsive modes in our piano teaching practice have led us to apply ideas drawn from the concept of evolutionary mentoring for which we have worked toward developing further over the past few months. Applying elements drawn from the concept of evolutionary mentoring is, in our opinion, a powerful method that creates conditions of balance between directiveness and responsiveness in individual instrumental teaching and facilitates learning improvement. Appreciating the importance of reflection in teaching and learning, we strive to engage our students in reflective dialogues bearing in mind ideas and concepts that we believe to be essential for the development of their musical and technical skills in piano learning.

One example is the idea that deeper levels of learning and understanding occur when we move "beyond our current skills with small and attainable steps", an idea that is embraced in the more general concept of scaffolding learning

(Creech, 2012, p. 389). Given the fact that contemporary social relations move at an extremely high speed, and modern societies focus more attention on the final product/spectacle (Debord, 1995 [1967]), modern students often rush to achieve the final performance, giving little appreciation to the fact that there is a process which precedes it.

Andreas¹ is a charismatic 18-year old student who studies piano as a second instrument. He is a brilliant lauto player, engaged with traditional forms of local music, but he struggled with piano learning. Andreas showed great unwillingness to follow any conventional scaffolding strategies, that included separate-hand practice focusing on the articulation, dynamics and phrasing, and he followed a completely self-directed learning approach aiming directly to the final performance. After a few weeks of piano lessons, Andreas was disappointed by his lack of progress and revealed anxiety and frustration when he came to class. At the same time, his refusal to follow any of our scaffolding suggestions together with the little progress he was making also made us anxious and frustrated. So, instead of insisting on a primarily "hierarchical mode" (Heron, 1999), we chose to engage him in a "reflective dialogue" (Brockbank & McGill, 2006). This dialogue focused on giving him space to consider his piano learning experience without haste and challenge the idea of skipping the process and pursuing, from the outset, the final performance.

Drawing ideas from evolutionary mentoring approach, we applied the tool of questioning. In doing so, our main concern was to avoid defensive responses from Andreas so we tried to give some thoughtful consideration to our questions beforehand. Thus, we started our dialogue by focusing on his lauto playing, showing interest in his recent repertoire and concert performances. It was obvious that talking about his lauto playing made him feel strong and confident since he showed great willingness to share his ideas and opinions with us. So, after a while we tried to focus our dialogue on issues about the lauto learning process: When did you start playing the lauto? How long did it take you to learn your first piece? What do you remember from the first few months of lauto lessons? Our aim was to create parallels between the learning of the instrument that he obviously enjoyed and the piano learning. Answering these questions, we observed that Andreas started reflecting on his piano learning approach and identified similarities and differences between the two instruments, something that has proved very important for his progress. After this first honest conversation, our communication during the lessons greatly progressed and even now reflective dialogues intervene in many lessons as a tool to facilitate improvement. In terms of teaching and learning approach, we ended up applying some scaffolding strategies found in conventional directive models while embracing Andreas' innovative ideas and experimentation at the same time. In this way, both of us often find ourselves out of our comfort zones, as we shift between the "midwife" and "fellow traveler" alignments with a few moments of "gatekeeping" (Jones, 2005), thus making our lessons much more effective and stimulating.

Encouraging students to build "awareness and responsibility" (Whitmore, 1996 [1992]) in their learning is also a significant element that embraces the idea

¹Student names are not real.

of skillful questioning in evolutionary mentoring. Ioanna is a 15-year old student who has recently been focusing on the technical aspects of piano learning such as posture, shoulder and wrist position. A conventional practice concerning the above kinds of technical skills gives full responsibility to the teacher, who builds on previous common consensuses on the domain. Pursuing a questioning model that encourages building awareness and responsibility for posture and hand position proved extremely effective for Ioanna. Instead of using common language such as "keep your wrist straight!" (because this is the way it should be!), we pursued a reflective dialogue with the student that included questions such as "Which hand position feels more comfortable for you? What do you think would help you achieve this allegro speed considering the wrist position? What quality of sound can be produced with a high wrist/low wrist? How does wrist movement affect the shape of the melodic lines?" At the end of this process that went on for a few weeks, we were impressed to see that Ioanna started building awareness of the importance of the wrist position in achieving faster tempos and better sound quality and took responsibility for correcting her wrist movement while playing as a way to achieve improvement, showing interest in possible suggestions on this issue from our part. Teaching and learning, in this case, was clearly shifting from a predominantly hierarchical mode to a more co-operative relationship, while at the same time setting the groundwork for the student to develop autonomous and self-directed learning. In this regard, directiveness and responsiveness, illustrated by Jones (2005) and Heron (1999), were blended with regard to Ioanna's specific needs.

Another powerful tool that we drew from evolutionary mentoring concept and applied to our teaching is the idea of effective feedback. Maria is a 20-year old student who studies the piano as a principle instrument. She is preparing a demanding repertoire for her final recital next year. She is a hard-working person and devoted to piano performance; however, she is exhibiting low confidence linked with increased anxiety, a situation that led to her giving some poor performances. Appreciating that the student could be significantly helped by receiving the appropriate type of feedback, we drew on Brockbank & McGill's ideas (2006) while also incorporating practical examples taken by Lerman's system (2003). Hence, we ensured that our first response to listening to her work in progress started with meaningful thoughts that pointed out the positive elements. So, we began with statements such as, "I liked very much the way you emphasize the main subject every time it occurs. It shows the great amount of independence that you have achieved between your two hands!". Another comment was: "There were moments that I was overwhelmed by the musical sensitivity that you reveal in terms of sound quality, variety of dynamics and phrasing". Starting with meaningful thoughts by pointing out the positive elements in a specific and not general way, with us owning the feedback by using phrases starting with "I" or "In my opinion" as suggested by relevant theories, proved extremely useful in Maria's case. She became more talkative and we could see in her facial expression that she felt happy and confident. We were also impressed to find out that Maria responded to this feedback in an honest and open way, sharing concerns about what she considered as weaknesses. She seemed more aware of

aspects of her performance, and she developed more responsibility in her performing choices. In most cases, her concerns were so reasonable and straightforward that our role in responding to them with appropriate suggestions and problem-solving strategies had become extremely significant. This approach increased the effectiveness of our lessons since Maria felt eager to go back to work on elements that we discussed, making essential improvements not only for her performance but also her life in general.

Conclusion

Applying evolutionary mentoring and CRP techniques in one-to-one instrumental teaching is an approach that incorporates a number of ideas which foster a human-centered music pedagogy. As shown by the three teaching examples above, this approach facilitates individual learners to overcome concerns, remove obstacles and achieve their potential. In doing so, the combination of traditional and modern educational methods and the consequent blending of directiveness and responsiveness in teaching and learning process is essential.

It is apparent that the teaching approach proposed by this paper requires an on-going thoughtful consideration and evaluation of each teaching and learning situation separately. This approach also requires more time. But it is the time that should not be denied a learner as soon as he has been placed in the center of teaching concern. It is the time that leads to essential and deep levels of understanding, progress and real learning. It is definitely worth it.

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