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Learning classical instruments in a group setting: Swedish art and music school teachers' strategies for collective and individual progression

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Abstract

For centuries, teaching classical instruments has exclusively relied on one-to-one tuition also when teaching young children. While this form of teaching has dominated Swedish Art and Music Schools (SAMS), lately there has been an increasing political, economic, and educational interest in group tuition. SAMS are publicly funded by the municipalities to be affordable also for children whose parents have limited economic resources. Since group teaching requires fewer teacher resources it may reduce the fee. However, teachers have raised concerns of how to make musical progress when teaching multiple students simultaneously. The aim of this article is to investigate how instrumental teachers teach in group lessons, and how they verbalise their actions. This qualitative, multiple methods study (stimulated recall, observations, and interviews) investigates teaching in an instrumental group through the theoretical framework Communities of Musical Practice. The results show that musical progression such as skills development and adding songs to the repertoire is made possible by extensive play and by applying different strategies to keep all students active during group lessons.

Keywords: classical instruments; extracurricular music education; group tuition; musical progression; Swedish Art and Music Schools.

Introduction

Teaching classical instruments has for centuries relied on an exclusively one-to-one tuition within the framework of the established "master–apprentice" tradition of Western music conservatories (e.g., Burwell 2013; Gaunt, López-Íñiguez & Creech, 2021), also when teaching young children (Carey & Grant 2015). This traditional approach, where the teacher is expected to individualise and optimise the tuition, has steered the music pedagogy at Swedish Art and Music Schools (SAMS) since its inception (Tivenius 2008; Rostvall & West 2003), which will be explained in the next section. Lately, however, there has been an increasing political, economic, and educational focus on group tuition as a way to better incorporate the inherent social aspects of music (SOU 2016:69; Burnard & Dragovic 2015). In 2019, it was reported that 69% of SAMS teachers and leaders agreed that group teaching was the most common need for in-service training (Swedish arts council 2019), indicating that the profession might not be prepared for the transition from individual tuition.

The aim of this article is to investigate how instrumental teachers teach in group lessons, and how they verbalise their actions. The following research questions were formulated:

- What kind of pedagogical strategies do instrumental teachers use to develop collective and individual musical progression in their group instruction?
- How do teachers evaluate musical progression?
- How do teachers value the importance of progression?

This study has investigated students solely taught in group. By group teaching, this study refers to four or five students together with one teacher, excluding ensemble playing insofar as it is complementary to individual teaching. This is in contrast to teaching in masterclasses which sometimes is labelled as "group teaching", despite being mostly one-to-one teaching, and as a consequence knowledge is transferred unidirectionally (Hanken 2016; Long et al. 2014; Pozo et al. 2022), while other students listen and supposedly absorb what the master conveys.

With no individual lessons, the goals for group teaching include not only collective progression regarding musical interplay but also individual progression, e.g., regarding instrumental skills.

Background and previous research

The Swedish art and music schools (SAMS) were founded in the 1940s with the aim of giving all children the possibility to learn an instrument or to sing, regardless of socio-economic conditions. Although it is a non-legislated activity, 287 out of 290 municipalities in Sweden do provide this opportunity (Swedish Arts Council 2020) albeit with different tuition fees and education content. In 2015 the Swedish government issued a commission of inquiry (SOU 2016:69) with the aim of making SAMS more inclusive and accessible to all children in Sweden. One of the recommendations from this commission was that group tuition should be the new norm for teaching. Even though group tuition in SAMS became more frequent in the 1990s, due to financial cutbacks (Holmberg 2010), in 2016 individual teaching was still dominant in SAMS (SOU 2016:69).

Already in 2003, Rostvall and West had criticised individual tuition in SAMS for the asymmetric interaction between the young student and the teacher with fragmentary note-by-note playing, reading from the instrumental method book, and the teacher not playing much during lessons. According to Brändström and Wiklund (1995), the students in SAMS who stated that they enjoyed the teaching in SAMS, did so partly because of the social dimension, which supports Rostvall and West's (2003) suggestion for group tuition.

Teachers' attitudes to group tuition

In the referral responses to the inquiry (SOU 2016:69), many SAMS teachers seemed quite negative to group teaching as the only method for teaching. In previous Swedish studies (on a master's level), instrumental teachers argue that individual tuition is better for developing technical skills, while group tuition is better for social skills (Englin & Lindell 2020; Widing 2019).

A group of students that differ in levels of competency can pose challenges for keeping them in the activity. Students who struggle with learning an instrument (McPherson 2005) or experience physical issues from playing (Kaladjev 2000) have a lower continuation rate. Measuring the continuation rate is one way to evaluate how successful the tuition is (Hallam 2019). It can be difficult to find the optimal level of challenge fitting all group members; learners are unlikely to learn if the workload is too heavy or if there are no challenges. Butz (2019) describes the complexity of teaching in the string classroom since the teacher must assess multiple students' problems and find strategies in situ to help them improve. Thus, it is important to investigate how teachers adapt their teaching to enable individual progress in a group, and not only provide access but also possibility for success. Due to the individual needs

within a group, e.g., different abilities and pace of work, the tuition may be adapted, so called *pedagogical differentiation* (Kotte 2018). One strategy for music education is to offer different levels of difficulty through simplified or elaborated parts (Dehli, Fostås & Johnsen 1980; Hallam 1998).

According to Schiavio et al. (2020), teachers who report enjoying group teaching, state that they can share the pedagogical functions dynamically across the whole group, relieving them from some of the responsibility to keep the group going. Other factors for successful group tuition are suggested by Hallam (2019) and Ashton and Klopper (2018). Hallam (2019) states that teachers who are successful in Whole Class Ensemble Tuition in English primary schools, are those who are engaged and committed, well prepared, and have good rapport with students. These teachers also offered opportunities for improvisation and composition. An Australian study shows that successful string instrument teachers agree that the pace of progression in group teaching should be slow and steady (Ashton & Klopper 2018). However, SAMS teachers have expressed that rapid progression is traditionally regarded as a measure of how successful the tuition is (Knutsson 2023).

Extracurricular music teaching as a school activity or leisure activity

Previous research indicates that there are two competing discourses in SAMS—namely the *art and music school as a school discourse* versus the *art and music school as a leisure activity discourse* (SOU 2016:69; Swedish Arts Council 2019). The inquiry (SOU 2016:69) suggests that SAMS, despite the word *school* in the title, is primarily a leisure activity. In the school discourse, progression is central (Jordhus-Lier 2018) and only a few students are expected to go on to higher artistic studies. This may be seen in relation to concerns about the declining quality of Swedish musicians compared to international standards, where SAMS are mentioned as one important actor striving to reversing the trend (The Royal Swedish Academy of Music 2023). The inquiry (SOU 2016:69) argues that group teaching could lead to more students staying in the activity and that more frequent as well as longer lessons could increase students' instrumental and musical skills.

It is suggested that teachers' skills should be relevant to the level they work on (Jordhus-Lier 2018; SOU 2016:69), indicating that different competencies are required to teach beginner versus advanced levels. There is a widespread view that music educators are failed performers (Bernard 2005), and previous research indicates a tension between the identity of musician and music teacher (Pellegrino 2009; Roberts 1991). Bernard (2005) accounts for three different approaches to the relationship between music teacher and musician: 1) choosing teaching over

making music, 2) seeing them as opposites that must be balanced, or 3) resolving the opposition and conflating music-making and teaching, which Bernard (2005) terms "musician-teacher-identity". In her study, all musician-teachers described experiences of making music as fundamental to their identities and to their teaching. Ihas (2006) concluded that having both teacher and artistic education seems to have an impact on teachers' ability to detect errors and correct their students. Guiding students through their instrumental and musical problems is one of the teacher's most important tasks.

Theoretical framework and methodology

To investigate teachers' teaching in a group setting, the sociocultural theory of *Communities of Musical Practice* (CoMP) was applied (Barrett 2005; Kenny 2016). It aims to explain how a community collectively creates knowledge. From this perspective, the community is understood as a way to include the students more actively than in the master–apprentice model. Learning in a CoMP is multidirectional (participant to participant) rather than unidirectional (master to apprentice) (Barrett 2005). Membership in a community makes the individual develop, but at the same time the community changes through negotiation between its members; thus, the transformative potential goes both ways (Wenger 1999). The aim to develop and progress is one of the things that keeps the community together and the members create a positive environment where they can push each other's limits (Kenny 2016).

The data collection techniques were a combination of interviews, observations, field notes, stimulated recall interviews and one focus group interview (see Table 1). Data were collected in April–May 2022. The participants were three instrumental teachers from the classical music tradition at one SAMS. All three have an artistic as well as a pedagogical education, although one of the participants never finished the artistic part of the education. Two of the teachers are actively freelancing as musicians. Due to ethical guidelines and to avoid possible identification of participants, gender, age, and instrument are accounted for separately. Pseudonyms for them, given by the researcher, are Anna, Liam, and Nora. Two participants are female and one male, and the age span is 27–42. One informant teaches string instruments, one brass, and one woodwind. One participant has 5 years of artistic and pedagogical post-secondary education, one 8 years, and one 9 years. Nora's group consisted of five eight-year-old students in their first year as instrumentalists. Anna's group of four nine- and ten-year-old students was in its second year of teaching and displayed a strong group cohesion, even though this was their first year as a group. During the weeks of observation, they were, among other activities, collectively writing their own song, which they were also to play on their instruments.

Liam's group of five eleven- and twelve-year-old students had played in the same group since the very beginning four years ago. This group was interesting since one of the five students was on a noticeably higher level regarding instrumental skills than the others.

Table 1. Research design

The interviews prior to the first observed lesson focused on information on the participants and their description of the group, as well as expectancies regarding the study. Three consequential, weekly lessons were observed and filmed, and each stimulated recall interview was performed before the next lesson.

The stimulated recall method usually consists of using video recordings to remind and stimulate the respondents regarding their thinking and decision-making (Bloom 1953; Lyle 2003; Rowe 2009). Thus, the teachers are taking an outsider's perspective, but with the insight of an insider; a combination that can provide a more complete picture of the event than merely interviewing the teachers, since it can be difficult to remember what happened during the lesson. My observations were used for additional analytical interpretation, to confirm or question the teachers' statements. I made fieldnotes (1–2 pages) with time markings that I sent to the teachers. Due to time limitations, a selection of the material was necessary. The teachers could choose what section of the recording to watch and discuss, making sure that the content would be of maximum relevance to them. In each of the teacher's third and last stimulated recall session, I briefly explained the CoMP theory, which gave a new spark to the discussion. The study concluded with a focus group interview (Kitzinger 1995) with the three teachers.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and the analysis was performed using the software program NVivo 12. Qualitative content analysis was chosen due to its systematic yet flexible approach (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Krippendorff 2018; Schreier 2012). Main categories were created from the theory and previous research while sub-categories were derived from the data material in an abductive procedure. The full text was analysed in Swedish, but teachers' quotes presented in the result have been translated into English and slightly edited (e.g., omitting pauses and repetitions) to facilitate reading.

Methodological limitations and ethical considerations

All methods for collecting data in this study have some limitations. The scarcity of research has made it necessary to include also grey literature (Dehli et al. 1980; Hallam 1998) as well as Swedish masters' theses (Englin & Lindell 2020; Widing 2019). As the mere presence of an

observer and a camera disrupt the naturalistic setting, it can risk making both teacher and students change their behaviour and perhaps work harder than they usually would. Talking to people gives access to what they say, but not what they think (Säljö 1997). Interview participants could create explanations in hindsight to present themselves more favourably. As in all qualitative research, there is a risk of subjectivity when analysing and reporting the result. To avoid this, I performed member-checks throughout the process consisting of sending all notes and transcriptions to the teachers as well as asking follow-up questions in the stimulated recall interviews.

It can provoke anxiety to be filmed and to watch oneself on video, and being observed can be experienced as being evaluated and assessed. A reflective, thoughtful research design and anticipation of feelings of discomfort were therefore crucial. The recording was used as a tool for collecting the participants' thoughts on the event. The teachers often elaborated on their accumulated experiences and beliefs in the stimulated recall interviews, indicating that they had no negative feelings of watching themselves on video. In the concluding focus group interview, the participants could develop their general thoughts on group teaching based on each other's statements. Despite the risk of peer pressure or unequal disposition of space to speak, the teachers discussed vividly and openly their thoughts and experiences which points to a reciprocal sense of safety.

The strategic selection of choosing only one SAMS was deliberate since it is located in a larger city with many students which makes it easier to form larger groups. Since SAMS have such a strong local touch, it would be difficult to compare two or more schools. The teachers in this particular SAMS share the same school culture. Even though I invited all classical music teachers in that SAMS, due to unfortunate, external circumstances, only three out of eleven interested teachers were able to partake in the study. Despite the small population, the teachers represented a variety, for example regarding gender, age, and musical instruments. The strategic selection, such as turning to only one SAMS, could pose questions of validity. However, the benefit of participants already knowing each other is considered to be a strength in this case because they could express themselves more freely in the focus group interview. The diversity of the groups enriched the focus group discussion, since the teachers could draw from experiences from other groups than the ones in this study. Threats towards the validity of this study may be minimised by triangulation as a way of taking different perspectives (the teachers with the insight of an insider while simultaneously observe as an outsider, as well as my interpretation as an independent observer) and transparency throughout the process.

I have received approval for the study from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. Information about the purpose of the project and how personal information would be handled was handed out to teachers, students and their parents, and letters of consent were signed.

Findings

In the following section, I will describe the findings from the study regarding what strategies the teachers use in group teaching, and how they verbalise their actions. The most significant result is that the teachers strive to engage all students throughout the lesson and to offer a meaningful experience for all by *keeping the music going.* The teachers' reports of *collective* and *individual progression in group teaching* will be presented. I will account for the *teachers' views on and evaluation of progression* and why they consider progression important. The teachers' personal beliefs and previous musical experiences affect their teaching to a large degree, which will be described under subheading *a community of musicianship*. Abbreviations are used to denote on which occasion the statements were made ("SR-teacher's initial-occasion" for the stimulated recall interviews and "FGI" för the concluding focus group interview with the three teachers).

Keeping the music going

To keep all students active and meaningfully engaged throughout the lesson, the music must keep going, and repetition is reported as a successful strategy. To maintain interest Liam uses a recorded backing track. According to Liam, even the ones who are struggling eventually get the hang of it after a couple of play-throughs [SR-L-1]. The fact that the teachers group lessons are longer means that there are more opportunities to play the same piece of music repeatedly than in individual lessons. A strategy to make it possible to play through the song multiple times without being tedious is reported by Nora: "Basically, we do the same thing, but they [the students] don't perceive it as the same because you add some tasks or alter something in the conditions" [SR-N-1].

Nora describes some of these tricks. For example, in the game "Circus" they add some physical challenge to the playing, such as standing on one leg. Sometimes an invisible "Wizard" comes by and magically makes a tone disappear; when playing a music piece, that particular note must not be played. When watching one film sequence [SR-N-2], Nora described how she there and then realised that one student was having a hard time keeping up and that multiple play-throughs were demanded. While playing, she thought through possible strategies and when the song

finally ended, she called “Fruit Salad”, a game where everyone switches seats. Suddenly the atmosphere had changed. Nora states that this spatial movement makes the students forget they just struggled. After each play-through she called “Fruit Salad” (five students and five possible seats meant five play-throughs) and eventually, everybody could play the song through without any obvious problems. As an observer, I did not notice that anyone seemed to think it was boring or repetitive.

Collective progression in group teaching

According to the teachers, there are elements of teaching that are more suitable in a group setting. All three teachers favour that the students clap to enhance the sense of pulse and rhythm but also to take a break from the instruments. Clapping in individual lessons may make students feel exposed or intimidated but, in a group, the student “adapts to the herd” [SR-L-1]. As an observer, this was evident when the students in the first observation clapped a rhythmically difficult bar as an ostinato. Every repetition improved their rhythmic accuracy. Another “herd-effect” is mentioned by Liam: if someone is playing a bit out of tune, the common sound of the group will make this “even itself out” [SR-L-1]. In Anna’s group, the students wrote a song together, building on each other’s musical ideas. One video sequence from lesson 2 shows an interesting collective process where the result grew out of one fragment to which all students contributed.

When the aim is to keep the music going and keep all students active, teaching needs to be modified in comparison to individual tuition, e.g., regarding reading music. In an individual lesson, Liam states that he works hard to teach the student how to read music and the name of the notes, but in a group setting, this is not possible, in his opinion. To allow the students to play right away, he instead writes numbers above the notes before playing, as well as letting the students play by ear and make short improvisations.

One common strategy to increase the level of difficulty, is to alter the tempo on the recorded backing track with the help of a mobile application. Liam says that the students are motivated to increase the speed step by step; this was also visible in Liam’s and Nora’s groups. According to Liam and Nora, often the students suggest altering the tempo, preferably to the extremes in both directions [FGI]. According to Nora, they could play the same song for 40 minutes if she just changed the tempo back and forth while playing.

The students often suggest ways to increase the level of difficulty by other means. Anna elaborates on a moment from the recording where they are to play a scale in rounds, as a canon.

The students then suggest a three-part canon: “It was obvious that they were saying “we want a tougher challenge” sort of” [SR-A-2].

This indicates that the students appreciate challenges, and Anna takes advantage of their proposals. Another recurring strategy is to give the group members different parts, usually with differing levels of difficulty. All three teachers state that the students must choose for themselves what part they want to play. To assign students to the easy part can cause feelings of inferiority. Anna points out that she never labels the parts as “easy” or “hard”; however, Nora adds that older students will quickly recognise and evaluate the level of difficulty [FGI]. Liam also problematises teaching that requires different parts, since the teacher can only play one part at a time, leaving the other students to “fend for themselves” [SR-L-1].

Individual progression in group teaching

The teachers agree that you cannot teach individually in a group of four or five students unless there is a need for individual help [FGI]. They do not individualise the tuition but rather give general instructions; differentiating level of difficulty is more a way of keeping the group together.

A potential problem with group tuition, raised by the teachers, regards how to establish correct instrumental technique. An inaccurate playing technique may be strenuous and make the playing more difficult. The fact that several peers are watching may be uncomfortable which is why Liam does not act upon the impulse to correct individuals in front of the others. The teacher must let inaccuracy slip through in favour of keeping the music going. Often these things would have been corrected in an individual lesson, according to Liam [SR-L-1].

The teachers’ views on and evaluation of progression

All three teachers emphasise the importance of visible progress and mention the instrumental method book as a motivating factor for students, even though Nora and Anna say that it has for a long time been considered as old fashioned to simply follow a book [FGI]. Traditional instrumental method books usually have an increasing level of difficulty. Anna finds classical music’s view on progression narrow and problematic; progression can also include dimensions that are difficult to measure or define.

Whether the teacher can or should push progression depends on their personal relationship to the students. According to Liam, it can take longer to get to know the students when they are taught in a group than individually [SR-L-2]. The teacher must know where their

limits are regarding musical skills but also how they react to pressure. Progression should be connotated with a positive expectation of success every time, which is, according to Nora, a basic human need. Nora quotes the saying of the Swedish children's book character Pippi Longstocking: "I have never tried that before, so I think I should definitely be able to do that" [SR-N-1]. The method book for Nora's instrument has, in her opinion, a way-too-fast pace of progression regarding the level of difficulty of the songs. That is why she does not introduce the book until the students have played at least 20 songs with a narrow tone range, often from other instruments' beginning repertoire. The feeling of accomplishment is important, and Nora argues that students getting stuck on the first page for months feel discouraged. The musical pieces in the method book Liam uses, however, are so basic that the students can easily play one new song each week, which, according to Liam, appears to be satisfying to them.

Nora tries to make the students have fun, but the endgame is to raise good instrumentalists. Liam agrees and says that children notice clearly if there is no progression, which could make students discontinue tuition altogether [FGI]. Another aspect of the importance of making progress, mentioned by the teachers, is on a higher level: it regards the legitimacy of the activity itself. Nora states that if no progress is made, the students could just as well turn to some other leisure activity.

A community of musicianship

The teachers frequently return to their experiences as musicians—rather than their teacher training—as the basis for their teaching strategies. Both professional ensemble performance and group teaching means working together towards a musical goal. Group tuition thus comes naturally to the participating teachers. They agree upon having a serious attitude to music-making. Nora argues that it is the same thing to play a symphony at the concert hall as when students play simple songs in the school cafeteria—it is only different levels [SR-N-3]. The teachers often end the lesson with something easy and well-known, to bring the feeling of having made music during the instrumental lesson. According to Nora, the students come to the lesson to make music—not to hear a lecture on how to play: "Because this is what music is. The small signals. Someone makes a small ritardando and the whole ensemble follows. We sit down, we play, and we listen carefully. Then it works, one communicates on a different level, without words" [SR-N-3].

Nora thus advocates less talk and more music-making during lessons. All three teachers play a lot together with their students to set a good musical example. According to Nora, too much

focus on teaching the craft may make one forget why the students chose to learn the instrument in the first place: probably from hearing and enjoying its sound. That motivation and vision are important to keep alive. According to Nora, the beginners' repertoire (short basic songs with few notes) is not musically inspiring and probably not what they expected when they chose the instrument. Therefore, she often takes the opportunity to play something for the students during lessons.

The findings show that these teachers consider progression as an important aspect of classical instrumental tuition for many different reasons. Making progression visible to the students often means counting the number of songs learnt, since this is easy to measure and can thus be a motivator to the children, but the teachers also value immeasurable dimensions of progression. The students often suggest ways of increasing the level of difficulty, signalling that they appreciate development. To have clear and visible progression also sends a signal to the students that this activity is to be taken seriously although it is extracurricular.

Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the findings in light of previous research and through the theory of community of musical practice (CoMP). First, I will discuss the participating teachers' competencies. The second point of discussion is how the teachers assess individual and collective progression. Third and lastly, teachers' and students' creativity within the music lesson will be highlighted, as well as the teachers' intuitive and improvised actions.

The teachers' competencies

The fact that children have experiences from other formal learning communities (e.g., compulsory school) may enhance their peer-learning abilities in music. Both students' and teachers' experiences from other communities affect how the community of musical practice is shaped through negotiation and how the teacher designs the lesson. A formal setting with strict time limits (40–50 minutes per week) can make it more difficult for a well-functioning and self-reinforcing community to emerge. Teachers are responsible for the musical and social development in a group, and viewing it as a CoMP may facilitate the focus on mutual and reciprocal learning. Liam's group is one example of a group that works fine, both musically and socially, despite differing levels.

Even though the teachers in this study graduated several years apart, neither of them state that music teacher education prepared them for group tuition. Rather, they point to similarities to working as a professional ensemble musician. As teachers, they are musical role

models and invite their students to join their community as musicians. Additionally, they seem to enjoy group tuition, displaying engagement, self-esteem, and competency, while utilizing a high degree of self-reflection as tool for professional development. These factors are coherent with what Hallam (2019) and Schiavio et al. (2020) has found contributing to successful group tuition. Contrary to the teachers in Rostwall and West's (2003) study, these teachers play much during lessons, and use the instrumental method book to make music; not as note reading exercises. Anna's students compose and Liam's and Nora's students improvise, which are two success factors according to Hallam (2019).

This study agrees with Bernard (2005) that musicianship does not stand in the way of effective teaching, but rather is an important aspect of it. The teachers display no tension or balancing act between identities as musician or teacher; instead, these identities complement each other. Based on this, I would like to problematise the view that there should be different teacher competencies depending on the student's level (Jordhus-Lier 2018; SOU 2016:69); one type of teacher for lower levels (presumably in group), and another type on a higher level (presumably individually). According to this argument, teachers who teach on a higher level should be more skilled musicians. However, downplaying the role of artistic competency for teachers teaching younger children may send signals to them and society that such tuition is not to be taken seriously. As these teachers show, it is possible to have a playful approach to meet the needs of the children, while still having high artistic ambitions in the long run. Additionally, the concept of *quality* must be addressed. What is perceived as quality or successful teaching depends on the dominating discourse. In the school discourse, quality equals progression as increasing the level of difficulty. In line with McPherson (2005), according to the teachers, the students need to get a sense of accomplishment and competence; group tuition may contribute to their continuation rate. However, equating group tuition with inclusion (SOU 2016:69) is not unproblematic, since the students may feel exposed in a group setting. Based on this study, making students continue and feel at ease in a group depends on the teachers' competencies and personal values, but also on their professional reflection and ability to take the child's perspective.

According to recent reports (The Swedish Royal Academy of Music 2023) there are concerns regarding a decrease in the quality of Swedish musicians. Since SAMS are part of the educational path for high-quality musicians, it is important that the activity provides a high level of quality to enable students to go all the way to higher music education. The musician-teachers in this study are artistically competent, which clearly affects their teaching: to motivate the students, they choose to keep the music going in favour of adjusting individual details and

to end lessons by playing something easy together. Considering the music group more as an ensemble informs their teaching.

Attaining and assessing progression

Finding the optimal pace of progression is said to be difficult due to the students' different needs and abilities (Kotte 2018). An in-depth analysis of the teachers' verbal reports and my observations show that both slow and fast progression are present, although not explicitly expressed. A rapid, visible, and measurable progression (such as being able to play many songs) may increase the children's motivation. At the same time, the approach is slow since multiple play-throughs give everyone a chance to keep up. Playing many songs on the same level of difficulty is also a strategy that could be viewed as a slow and steady approach. The teacher's concern for the success of the weaker students does not mean that the rest of the group stands still and ceases to develop. They can still develop on the same level of difficulty, gaining a surplus in learning such as automatised motoric skills and refined tone production. In Liam's group, the more advanced student still seemed to be motivated and challenged during the lessons. However, the idea of a possible collective progression through multiple play-throughs must be problematised. There is no guarantee that all students ever catch up with the more advanced. Even if the group progresses collectively, there are still differences in individual progression. Individual and collective progression can be seen as two parallel processes, containing both measurable and immeasurable dimensions. Voluntariness is key, according to the teachers, but they also point to the importance of knowing their students to determine how much they can push collective and individual progression.

One of the cornerstones in the theory of CoMP is the fact that there must be some sort of progression. The teachers in this study agree that progression is a motivator for children to stay in the activity, which is supported by the inquiry's report on SAMS (SOU 2016:69); in the report, many children said that they refrained from the activity because they felt that they did not learn anything. To legitimise SAMS, it is important to stress students' musical progression. Otherwise, it can be difficult to defend heavily subsidised instrumental tuition just on the ground that the children think it is a fun activity.

Creativity and intuitive decisions

Group tuition may be rendered difficult by students' differing levels of competencies (e.g., regarding reading and technique), but the teachers in this study display ways of addressing these difficulties creatively when planning, performing, and evaluating lessons. Students also shape

the teaching through creative suggestions and initiatives in order to increase the level of difficulty (increasing the tempo, dividing a canon into additional parts), which signals a strong CoMP.

These strategies may make students realize that playful creativity is an important part of making music (e.g., Barrett 2005). According to previous research presented in Swedish masters' theses, teachers may view individual teaching as superior to group teaching in order to convey musical skills to students (Englin & Lindell 2020; Widing 2019). Even though the teachers in this study detect inaccuracies in their students' playing, they refrain from correcting them since it is not their primary concern. The teachers state that their intuitive decisions are based on their interpretations of students' implicit signals. During playing, the teachers actively evaluate what to do to help the students align. There are multiple needs and wishes to balance which forces the teachers to be more creative. They experience this as a positive force since it provides an opportunity for professional reflection and development.

Implications

Many of the referral responses to the inquiry (SOU 2016:69) were quite negative toward group tuition. The teachers in this study, on the contrary, display satisfaction when teaching groups of students. The inquiry (SOU 2016:69) stipulated that group tuition is one way to include more students in SAMS. However, students who do not follow the average pace of progression in a group risk either falling behind or becoming bored (and eventually quitting in both cases). So, how to *keep* the students included, and how to provide room for everyone in extracurricular group tuition in SAMS? This depends largely on the teacher's pedagogical competencies and philosophical standpoints. Teacher training programmes perhaps need to address group teaching more thoroughly and emphasise its value, as well as to provide competence development for active teachers. Parts of the methodology for this study (stimulated recall combined with focus group interview) shows potential for in-service training within the teaching staff.

Analysing a group of children and their teacher as a community of musical practice has revealed insights into the possibilities of group teaching as a pedagogical approach more than merely a method, for example, to teach the group as a group instead of multiple individuals. More research is needed to investigate how the students' progression go hand in hand with creating a healthy environment and increase the children's well-being. The children's own voices would be a good contribution to that kind of student-centered research (Pozo et al., 2022).

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