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How do instrumental teachers communicate musical ideas in performance teaching?

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Abstract: This study aims to understand the phenomenology of instructional communication in performance teaching. In order to reach the research aim, an exploratory case study on the interpersonal communication of one-to-one violin lessons was conducted. Such study involved observations of sixteen one-to-one violin lessons and four semi-structured interviews. From a thematic analysis, preliminary results suggest that each teacher had a pedagogical multimodal vocabulary used according to the student's individual characteristics. Moreover, this vocabulary was embodied in eight communication strategies identified by an analysis of the dataset. We hope this study can contribute to a further understanding of the instructional communication in performance teaching in instrumental lessons.

Keywords: one-to-one instrumental lessons; instructional communication; performance teaching; communication' strategies; violin teaching.

To communicate and express ideas around musical meaning has been established as one of six Instrumental/vocal teacher roles from the large research done by the '*Polifonia*' working group for instrumental and vocal teacher training in Europe (2007-2010) (Lennon and Reed 2012). During an instrumental lesson, teachers need to use technical vocabulary, in order to explain and demonstrate specific skills, which typically are conveyed by a teacher through verbal instruction (Sloboda 2000). The problem is that frequently, technical vocabulary contains many words applied to common concepts, sometimes totally unrelated to the meaning of the technical concept (Novak 2010). If the instruction is too complex, the students may become confused and have difficulty remembering the details (Konukman and Petrakis 2001). Moreover, one of the teacher's challenges while teaching an instrument is to musically demonstrate technical, musical and artistic concepts and skills using effective and creative communication, which can be understood and recalled by the student later.

Research on pedagogical communication has increased with greater interest into instrumental teachers effectiveness. Several authors have emphasized the premise that "good communication" is a *sine qua non* element on effective teaching (Siebenaler 1997; Carlin 1997; Colprit 2000; Duke and Henninger 2002; MacGilchrist, Reed, and Myers 1997; Kurkul 2007). In the same line of thought, the quality of teacher's communication has been highlighted as a key factor that distinguish expert teachers from their less-expert counterparts (Colprit 2000; Duke and Henninger 2002).

Despite the recognized importance in investigating the phenomenology of interpersonal communication in musical context, the increasing interest in conducting research into this topic has lead mainly to observational studies. The principal results suggest that nonverbal communication clearly plays an important role in the teaching of music performance (Kurkul 2007). However, the literature review made by Hallan (2006) suggested a scenario where teachers used much of their time talking, technique is often emphasized and questioning

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represents a small proportion of time. Furthermore, students' activity in the lessons is mainly about playing (Hallam 2006).

In addition, the nature of the teachers' feedback "is not always provided in the most systematic fashion, wherefore much of the information might be lost during lessons" (Karlsson and Juslin 2008, 329). As music teachers, we are interested in understanding the phenomenology of communication in one-to-one instrumental lessons. Such interest has emerged from several talks with colleagues, where frequently the following statements were presented: "why for some students, do I need to repeat so many times some instructions?" "Why sometimes the students do not remember what I have said in the last lesson?" Therefore, this study aims to understand the phenomenology of instructional communication in performance teaching. In order to reach the research aim, an exploratory case study on the interpersonal communication of one-to-one violin lessons was conducted.

In other areas rather than music, interpersonal communication has been understood as a process of information transmission, where "one participant in a social interaction receives a verbal or nonverbal communication from another, interprets its meaning, construes its implications, and then decides how, if at all, to respond to it" (Wyer and Gruenfeld 1995, 7). Such conceptualization of interpersonal communication requires:

- (a) an understanding of the processes of information acquisition, (b) the interpretation of information in terms of concepts and knowledge that are retrieved from memory and brought to bear on it, (c) a construal of the implications of this information, and (d) the generation of an overt response that will attain one's immediate or long-range objectives (Wyer and Gruenfeld 1995, 7).

As the phenomenology of interpersonal communication is broad and this research is interested in the phenomenology of pedagogical communication, we are going to use the concept of "instructional communication" as our theoretical model of analysis. Instructional communication is the study of communication's role in the teaching and learning process in classroom settings, corporate training settings, mediated settings, and other applied contexts (Myers 2010; Mottet and Beebe 2006). Research in this area focuses on the ways in which concepts can be communicated effectively by the tripartite field of research conducted among pedagogy, educational psychology and communication studies (Mottet and Beebe 2006). This tripartite field focuses on:

- (i) the learner in how students learn affectively, behaviourally, and cognitively; (ii) the instructor - the skills and strategies necessary for effective instruction; (iii) the meaning exchanged in the verbal and nonverbal communication; and (iv) mediated messages between and among instructors and students (Myers 2010, 149).

This study is part of a large research that investigates the optimization of instructional communication in one-to-one instrumental lessons. In this paper, we will be focus on the teachers' role in instructional communication.

Research method

Participants

Four teachers from different venues accepted to take part in the study. After the acceptance, all teachers were asked to invite two students to participate in the research. The final participants (n=12; 7 females and 5 males) were four teachers (aged between 41 and 62) and 8 violin students (aged between 9 and 15), namely two for each teacher. Table 1 describes the details about each teacher and their students.

Teacher code	Teacher gender	Age	Qualifications	Positions	Years of teaching violin	Venue	Pupil code	Pupil age	Pupil Grade	Years of study violin	Weekly practice
T1	Male	62	BMus, ARCM, AGSM, PGCE	String tutor	16	Junior Conservatoire	S1	10	6	6	6 to 7 times, 45 min.
							S2	12	3	9	4 to 5 times, 1/2 hour
T2	Male	41	PGAP	Violin tutor	10	Saturday music service provision	S3	14	7	6	6 to 7 times, 3 hours
							S4	11	5	5	2 to 3 times, 20 min.
T3	Male	42	BMus, PhD	Director and violin teacher Professor of string pedagogy	24	Private studio	S5	9	5	4	6 to 7 times, 1 hour
							S6	9	5	6	4 to 5 times, 1 hour
T4	Female	52	AESM	Violin tutor CYM	30	Saturday music service provision	S7	15	4	9	4 to 5 times, 20 min.
							S8	14	6	7	2 to 3 times, 25 min.

Table 1. Summary of participants

Data collection

An embedded single-case study (Yin 2009) with eight units of analysis (teacher-student' pair) based on observation of sixteen one-to-one violin lessons, at different venues in UK, and four "focused interviews⁵⁶" (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1990) were conducted. Two sequential lessons of each teacher-student' pair were videotaped and the interview was conducted after the first lesson observed.

Material

The material used in the data analysis was: (i) sixteen video recording of one-to-one violin lessons; (ii) transcription of four interviews; and (iii) field notes.

⁵⁶ This type of interview is conducted for a short period of time following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol (Yin, 2009).

Data analysis

A thematic analysis supported by the qualitative package NVivo 10 has enabled to identify perceptions regarding instructional communication used by teachers to communicate musical ideas. Afterwards, the video recording was used as a complement to understand the instructional communication in the teaching and learning environment.

Results

Instructional Communication - Teachers' Perceptions

Four themes have emerged from the teachers' interviews: (I) *Contextual elements*; (II) *Demands of instructional communication*; (III) *Pedagogical vocabulary*; and (IV) *Strategies to improve instruction understanding*. Figure 1 illustrates the thematic map that emerged from the thematic analysis.

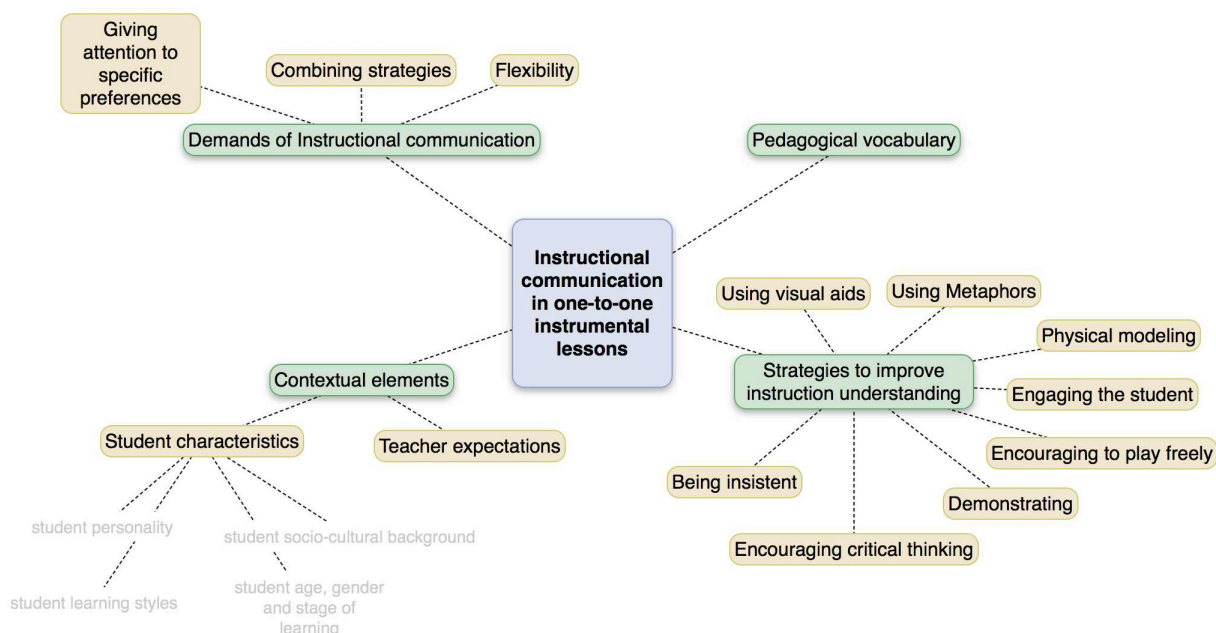


Figure 1. Thematic map - Teachers' perceptions

I. Contextual elements

According to the participants, two aspects might have influenced the ways that musical ideas were expressed: (a) *student characteristics* and (b) *teacher expectations*.

(a) *Student characteristics*

All the teachers interviewed emphasized the importance of taking into account the student's individuality. Apparently, there are some individual characteristics of paramount importance in the instructional communication, namely: (i) student personality (ii) student socio-cultural background; (iii) student learning style; and (iv) student age, gender and stage of learning. Table 2 illustrates the teachers' report on how student characteristics may not

only shape the instructional communication, but also the teaching and learning environment.

Student characteristics
<p><i>(i) student personality</i></p> <p>Teacher 1: I mean the shy pupil you can see that, you know S2 she is very in the way she plays, so a lot of is just about encouraging to play more and again.</p>
<p><i>(ii) student socio-cultural background</i></p> <p>Teacher 1: Culturally they [students] are not expose to this sort of music that they work on very often, you know S1, and pop music. Although if you see she is in a Saturday orchestra she absolutely loves it. So I think it's kind part of general thing that makes things more amusing.</p>
<p><i>(iii) student learning styles</i></p> <p>Teacher 3: Some children learn better listening and children learn better visually by examples, but I try to..., even with other who are more visual, for example, I try to send oral instruction or to put examples, and also one of them who are more oral, I used try to send visual stimuli.</p>
<p><i>(iv) student age, stage and gender</i></p> <p>Teacher 2: I personally I use the daily language and I try to relate to what the child, depends on the age. The only experience of life so far, say for example when I use hold the bow, at beginning as if to hole as you are holding a twiggy or a branch of the tree, like for the boys I say hold the sword, they know exactly what to do, and then that's contrasting to be bow hole. I say do you must not hold the bow like the way you hold the sword. Relate everything to their own interest and with the violin then you have to teach them to understand the body as well, this is very important to start right from beginning. So I tell them this is the shoulder's rest, you put it in your shoulder, that is a chin rest, you put in your chin, is pretty clear and so I show them where the chin is and tell them which way and all of this you can relate it to what they really know. There is, yeah, so nothing really to specify for the beginners. (...) It depends on the age. If I teach older person, like a grown up then I would use totally different language, different way of explain. This all depends on experience in life, how much they can understand.</p>
<p><i>(v) student stage</i></p> <p>Teacher 3: And when we're working from the scratch something, yes, I think what I touch more, is executed depends on the skill, if is bow stroke, is shifting, depend it. Usually at the beginning of a process it is more talk, more explanation because I want them to understand what they are doing, ah, kinesthetic and I touch more.</p>

Table 2. Contextual elements: student characteristics

(b) Teacher expectations

The second emergent sub-theme from the teachers' interview concerned two kinds of expectations: teaching and/or students' outcomes. According to Kaplan and Owings "teachers form expectations for student performance and tend to treat students differently depending on these expectations" (Kaplan and Owings 2013, 146). This sub-theme was identified by the use of linguistic connectors as "I wish and I just hopefully". Table 3 exemplify such expectations from the teachers' point of view.

Teacher expectations
Teacher 4: I am not aware that I write on the pupils music to create a memory or legacy for them, I wish to give guidance and clarity.
Teacher 1: First of all it's so that they understand what the passage in the music is there for. So that then they can use their own imagination, once you said oh that's what it is, you know, they will think, and just hopefully that will mean they'll better produce better result when I come to play it and also they might wonder what this sounds a bit funny. what's this for?

Table 3. Contextual Elements: Teacher expectations

II. Demands of instructional communication

The teachers suggest that instructional communication demands the following skills: (a) flexibility; (b) combining strategies; (c) and giving attention to specific preferences. Table 4 illustrates how teachers dealt with each demand described.

(a) Flexibility

Apparently, there is an agreement among teachers concerning the importance of flexibility when information is conveyed. Such flexibility has to do with the necessity to be adaptive to student needs, as shown in table 4 item (a) first example. Moreover, they express this point of view through the instructions used in the lesson, as presented in table 4 item (a) second example.

(b) Combining strategies

Teachers have described their capacity to combine different strategies in instructional communication. In the table 4 item (b), teacher 3 describes how this aspect can influence the success of the communication process.

(c) Giving attention to student's preferences

This skill is related with teachers' ability to make sense and explore student's background. For example, in the table 4 item (c) teacher 2 is talking about the source of this preferences and the importance to relate the information to their student's interests.

Demands of instructional communication
<p><i>(a) Flexibility</i></p> <p>Teacher 1: I tend to be different, I think with different students probably like I would be with people. I am not saying that is convenient but it is not always appropriate to use the same feedback, because the student might not respond so well to it. (...) I mean as I have said earlier, it depends who the student is. Because you tailor what you do to each person.</p> <p>Teacher 2: Full bow, if you say full bow all the time they ignore you, so you say, you find other word to express the idea, or I say swing your arm, that's another, it's more visual, moving to the same thing.</p>
<p><i>(b) Combining strategies</i></p> <p>Teacher 3: I try to combine different strategies and try to balance. Everybody has a tendency into focus in one strategy some people tends to talk, some people tend to give examples, some people prefer touching, but I try to combine all of them, not at the same level, but I try to increase a lot them to the more strategy you combine, the more you use, the more useful and successfully you can be sending information.</p>
<p><i>(c) Giving attention to specific preferences</i></p> <p>Teacher 2: [The content of the communication] could be the own experience in school and that would maybe trigger their own way of thinking and expressing meaning. For example with S3 he is very musical and he likes a certain type of music, so I choose a few pieces that's to in to keep he's interests in music, (...) Relate everything to their own interest and with the violin.</p>

Table 4. Demands of instructional communication

III. Pedagogical vocabulary

The teachers reported in their interviews the use of a common vocabulary with their students in order to make an instruction understandable. All teachers demonstrate to have a pattern of interaction with their students saying, for example, that they can use the same strategy with all students - see in table 5 first example, an excerpt from the interview of teacher 3. Moreover, teachers have brought some examples of common phrases used in their lessons. In table 5, second example, teacher 4 talked about the behaviours that come from her previous teachers and that have been an influence in her teaching. These results seem to contradict the apparently recognized need of individualized approaches to teaching.

Pedagogical vocabulary
<p>Teacher 3: Yes, yeah, you can send information talking or give examples, or kinaesthetically, touching physically the students, so transmitting information for their body's. I try to use this with all [my students], and also depends on where you are teaching. In private lessons let apart from oral instructions and examples, I try to establish, like a code, of extra, so they know what I mean, what I do extra, for example, when we start reading something, or when I copy something, or instead of talking their performance I show my fingers, show a finger pattern, or they know if this is high it is low, or the finger pattern should be higher they need to shake the hand, so I like to combine also gestures, I need to stop, then to play.</p> <p>Teacher 4: I might say, 'Get into your body, how does it feel to play this stroke? (...) I would use such things with other students. I do write on music just like my teacher did on mine. I know like seeing my old teacher's handwriting. It felt as though they were looking after me. These are my thoughts.</p>

Table 5. Pedagogical vocabulary

IV. Strategies to improve instruction understanding

Thematic analysis brought to light eight different strategies used by teachers to convey information and make the instructions understandable, they are: (i) *Being insistent*; (ii) *Demonstrating*; (iii) *Encouraging critical thinking*; (iv) *Encouraging to play freely*; (v) *Engaging the student*; (vi) *Physical modelling*; (vii) *Using Metaphors*; (viii) *Using visual aids*. Following, a description of each strategy is given:

- (i) *Being insistent* - this strategy, was characterized as the emphasis of some important aspects of the violin lesson.
- (ii) *Demonstrating* - Demonstration involves playing, gesturing, singing or talking. Teachers prefer demonstration as the quickest way to convey information.
- (iii) *Encouraging critical thinking* - To promote student's critical thinking, teachers explored the students' awareness of learning, for example, by asking questions. In the teacher's point of view, such strategy facilitates the understanding of "what is going on" in the lesson.
- (iv) *Encouraging to play freely* - This strategy was recognized as a source to connect technical and interpretative skills. Some participants suggested that this could encourage students "to give more of themselves" and also to develop confidence in performing skills.
- (v) *Engaging the student* - It's a strategy characterized by the way that the teacher conveys information through motivating the students to believe in themselves.
- (vi) *Physical modelling* - Some teachers demonstrate a concern during the interview on unnecessary tensions in the student's playing. A strategy to communicate information regarding changes in the physical behaviour is physical modelling, assisting the students to perceive how their bodies should perform
- (vii) *Using Metaphors* - Some teachers used metaphorical language to make the instructions understandable. This strategy facilitates the understanding of a given explanation even in technical issues
- (viii) *Using visual aids* - Some teachers have described the use of visual aids to optimize communication. According to them, this strategy contributes to memorization and retrieval of information.

Table 6 presents examples of each described strategy taken from the teachers' interview.

Strategies to improve instruction understanding
<p><i>(i) Being insistent</i></p> <p>Teacher 1: I found if you don't insist you let something technical go, it's terrible for you later on and it's terrible for them.</p>
<p><i>(ii) Demonstrating</i></p> <p>Teacher 4: Singing and using hands, being demonstrative, it is another means by which to get a message across.</p>
<p><i>(iii) Encouraging critical thinking</i></p> <p>Teacher 3: I try also to ask the students to observe themselves, and to decide what really right and wrong. So I usually to ask question. I tend to know what is happening before I give the answer (...) I ask questions, so they can be aware of the feedback and they can analyze what they are doing.</p>
<p><i>(iv) Encouraging to play freely</i></p> <p>Teacher 4: I wanted her to give of herself. Play out. I want her to be encouraged to play out even when she is unsure of herself, I think this takes a leap of faith.</p>
<p><i>(v) Engaging the student</i></p> <p>Teacher 1: I don't like to say something is wrong I think that is the wrong way to do, I like to be encouraging, so if that's as far as she's got with it. (...) I don't want to nag at it because it might upset her, or she might think, you know, the best I can and he keeps saying no, no, no, wrong, wrong, wrong. I think that's how I taught.</p>
<p><i>(vi) Physical modeling</i></p> <p>Teacher 3: I try to transmit what I want them to do on the violin (...) As you know, I was just sending information touching, kinesthetically.</p>
<p><i>(vii) Using Metaphors</i></p> <p>Teacher 2: say for example when I use hold the bow, at beginning as if to hole as you are holding a twiggly or a branch of the tree, like for the boys I say hold the sword, they know exactly what to do, and then that's contrasting to be bow hole. I say do you must not all the bow like the way you hold the sword.</p>
<p><i>(viii) Using visual aids</i></p> <p>Teacher 1: I have pictures, I have publications, photos so that they can put it inside the violin case and look at it, so that they've got a visual, because this is going to be great difficult to remember, you know half of our lesson is gone.</p>

Table 6. Strategies to improve instruction understanding

Instructional Communication - Teaching and Learning Environment

In order to understand instructional communication in the teaching learning environment, the eight strategies identified through the thematic analysis of the interviews were scrutinized through video analysis. Field notes taken in the lesson observations allowed the identification of twenty-eight highlighted instructions. Each instruction was associated with the eight strategies previous discussed.

Concerning the use of the strategies, figure 1 shows that embedded in the twenty-eight instructions selected, the most used strategies were *Demonstrating* (9); *Encouraging to play freely* (7); and *Using metaphors* (4).

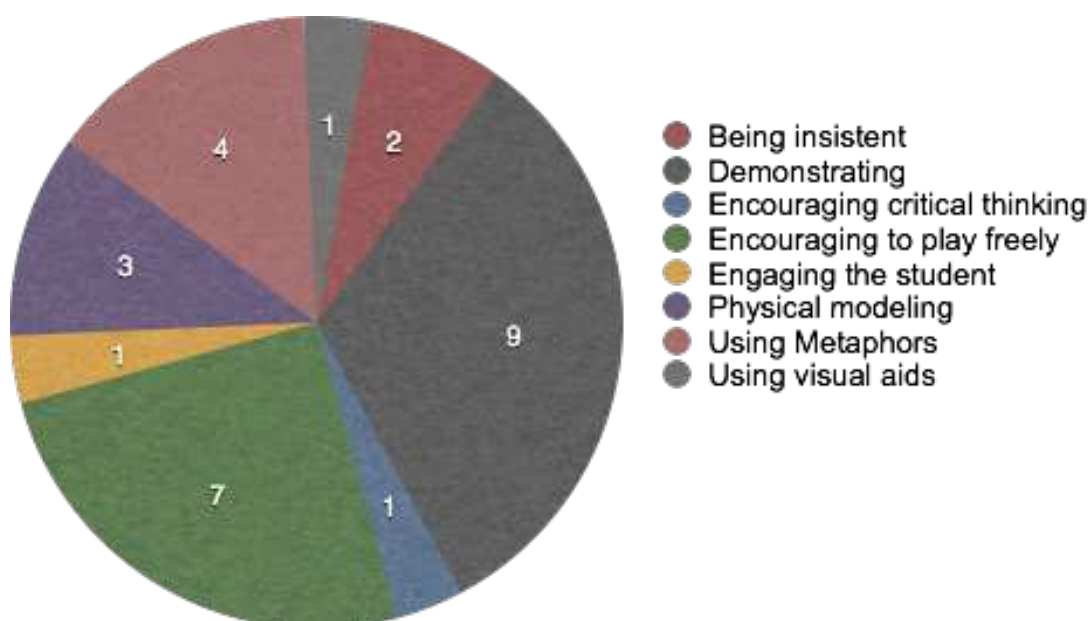


Figure 1. Strategy use by teachers embedded in the twenty-eight instructions

In summary, the teachers used *metaphors* supported by verbal and non-verbal language to communicate information concerning interpretative and technical issues. When teachers have approached ways to promote less tension or avoid excessive tension on the students playing they were using *physical modelling* as a strategy. Moreover, when teachers have explored self-evaluation on the students, trying to develop meanings and awareness, they have at the start of the task communicated verbally and have used the strategy *encouraging critical thinking*. When teachers had the intention to encourage students to play out and develop bowing skills, they have used the strategy *encouraging to play freely* supporting student by snapping the fingers, singing, count the tempo or moving the arm imitating the bow.

Discussion

Several authors suggest that teaching an instrument requires the demonstration of technical, musical and artistic concepts and skills using effective and creative language, which can be understood and recalled by the student later (Lennon and Reed 2012; Sloboda 2000). The results presented brought to light perceptions and strategies used by violin teachers to communicate musical ideas in one-to-one instrumental teaching. The adopted study design allowed the conversation with participants and the observation of teaching practices in the teaching and learning environment. Such means of data collection provided an opportunity to corroborate opinions and practices concerning instructional communication in one-to-one violin lesson.

The triangulation of data involving the results from thematic analysis of the interviews and video observations provided the means to understand the phenomenology of instructional communication in performance teaching. However, the results are not liable of generalizations by the small amount of participants, namely teachers.

Thematic analysis suggested that teachers emphasize the need to be flexible in the ways that they conveying information. Apparently, such teachers are aware of each individual students differences and the necessity to be adaptive to the student needs. On the other hand, teachers reported to have a common vocabulary used with all the students. These results suggest a dichotomy between a teacher intentions and established behaviours, based on personal experiences from previous teachers, as suggested by this participant teacher: “I do write on music just like my teacher did on mine. I know like seeing my old teacher's handwriting. It felt as though they were looking after me. These are my thoughts” (Teacher 4). According to Kennell, the current practice comes from an important oral tradition:

Applied musical teachers are members of an important oral tradition in which personal experience and historical anecdote form the basis of contemporary common practice. Performance expertise is passed from one generation of performers to the next through the lineage of personal experience and the applied lesson (Kennell 1992, 5).

Such contradictions, sometimes makes a challenge to the development of innovative approaches and the respectful negotiation between teacher and student concerning the meanings of the pedagogical vocabulary used in the lessons.

Conclusion and future research

The results presented in this paper have suggested that each teacher has a pedagogical multimodal vocabulary to communicate musical ideas. Teachers reported the use of such vocabulary according to student individual characteristics such as: student personality; student socio-cultural background; student learning style; and student age, gender and stage of learning. The vocabulary was recognized as embodied in eight communication strategies, namely: (i) Being insistent; (ii) Demonstrating; (iii) Encouraging critical thinking; (iv) Encouraging to play freely; (v) Engaging the student; (vi) Physical modelling; (vii) Using Metaphors; (viii) Using visual aids.

New directions for future research emerged from this exploratory study, are namely: (i) to discover what features make an instruction understandable for students and why; (ii) to evaluate a used strategy effectiveness; and (iii) to find out ways to optimize the interpersonal communication in performance teaching.

Even if more research in the field of interpersonal communication in instrumental lessons still needs to be developed, we hope this study has contributed to a further understanding of the instructional communication in teaching performance in instrumental lessons.

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