EMBODIMENT OF MUSIC THROUGH SEMI-STRUCTURED IMPROVISATION

A creative approach to instrumental teaching

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Abstract

Contemplating music as an art implies considering music performance as a way to experience the sound (e)motionally, with the whole body, and a way to develop aesthetical appraisal, by going beyond technique and relating the sound with personal experience through imaginative processes. Therefore, I found the need for developing a model that not only takes repertory and technique into account but also considers the performers' values and appreciation of music, in order to raise the possibilities of achieving positive aesthetical experiences. A group of violin students (ages 6-8) was set two creative tasks, which had the purpose of incentivating the experience of sound through the body, by combining expressively musical patterns to construct and design a personal musical discourse. The tasks opened the possibility for a multi-directional musical conversation, where teacher and students interact, create and share a inter-subjective and at the same time personal music experience. Integrating improvisatory tasks with the repertory seemed to be a successful strategy to stimulate creativity and develop different musical competences. These tasks demanded personal, bodily-based, imaginative, performative involvement and therefore revealed performers' musical values.

Resumen

Disfrutar de la música como un arte implica considerar la ejecución o performance como una forma de experimentar el sonido emocionalmente, con el cuerpo. Es también una forma de desarrollar la apreciación estética, trascendiendo la técnica y relacionando el sonido con la experiencia personal a través de procesos imaginativos. Partiendo de esta idea, sentí la necesidad de encontrar un modelo que desarrollase la creatividad que no sólo tuviera en consideración el repertorio y la técnica de los alumnos, sino que también aumentara las probabilidades de alcanzar experiencias estéticas gratificantes. Se dieron dos tareas a un grupo de estudiantes de violin (con edades comprendidas entre los 6 y 8 años), con el propósito de incentivar la experiencia del sonido a través del cuerpo, combinando patrones musicales de forma expresiva, con el objetivo de construir un discurso musical. Las tareas abrieron la posibilidad para una conversación musical multi-direccional, en la que el profesor y los alumnos interactúan, crean y comparten sus experiencias musicales de forma inter-subjetiva. Integrar tareas de improvisación con la enseñanza del repertorio dio como resultado una estrategia interesante para estimular la creatividad y desarrollar diferentes competencias musicales. Las tareas estimularon una implicación personal, corporal, imaginativa y ejecutiva de los alumnos de la performance, sirviendo de indicador para sus valores en la apreciación musical.

Background

In previous research, the author concluded that the performer has better chances of embodying musical meaning and enhancing musical communication if he or she connects meaningful, personal experience to the music that is to be played (Gonçalves 2010a). Embodying meaning corresponds to the process of storing our experience in the body creating a stock of knowledge and affections. Personal meanings are intermodal, kinaesthetically and symbolically charged and imagination always plays an important role in the process of meaning production. The construction of a Musical Narrative – based on the performer's personal, subjective, embryonic amalgam of experience – seems to be very important for an expressive, meaningful, communicative performance (Cf. Correia 2007).

Musical meaning production is also related to what performers’ appreciate in the music they play and listen. These considerations result from a former study carried by the author (Gonçalves 2010b) concerning the development of performers’ values on music appreciation: 50 violin students from a classical background aged between 5 and 29 years old were interviewed about their personal
values and meanings in relation to the pieces they had played and were playing at that time. The values performers pointed out to be important in their aesthetical appraisals evolved and were influenced by different variables such as: time of contact with the violin, age, personality and socio-cultural context. In this study, it was found that students’ values could be grouped into five categories - Representative, Sensorial, Challenge, Expressivity and Informed Interpretation - which evolved in a sequential order. More than being static, stages of music appreciation are groups of values which change along with the subjectivity of each individual and its personal, unique experience. So, this study is useful as an indicator that there are groups of values for music appreciation, which change over time. After doing this research, the results were compared to other studies on art and music appreciation (França & Swanwick 2002; França 2004 and Parsons 1987; Hargreaves 1992) and from this triangulation a kind of a model-synthesis of the three models was worked out into the following result:

**Development of Violin Performer’s Values for Appreciation**

1. **Pleasurable Experience of Sound**: Almost every piece stimulates a pleasurable experience. Extra-musical denotation is valued: Performers value the direct association of the subject of the piece (title of the music, or the pictures in the book) to their personal experience of everyday life, making free associations. Other subjects’ point of view is not taken into account. Performance is erratic and inconsistent. Musical flow is unsteady and variations in sound colour and intensity don’t seem to have expressive or structural significance.

2. **Beauty and Perfection**: In this stage starts the ability to separate the elements, which are relevant for aesthetic judgement from those that are not important. Beauty and mastery of perfection are also privileged for the appreciation in this stage: Performers like to play beautiful, pleasing and cheerful pieces. They also reveal a special liking for fast and rhythmic pieces. Narrativity or extra-musical references are sometimes referred. They gradually start to appreciate contrasts in dynamics, tempo, tessitura and character. They also like to observe how melodic lines develop and modify. Gradually, the taste for technical perfection and mastery of a style, originality of the piece as well as the taste for technical and interpretive challenge starts to emerge. More control is shown by a consistency in tempo and repetition of patterns. Priority is the (technical) mastery of the instrument and there is no evidence of expressive contour or structural organization.

3. **Challenge, Style and Originality**: The interest on the style and realism of its performance, within the comparison to other interpretations, are mostly appreciated. In this stage starts the development of the idea that what the observer interprets, likes and feels does not necessarily correspond to others’ point of view. Adding to contrast and narrativity, performers like to overcome new challenges – such as fast and high-pitched passages on the violin, as well as double stops - to be able to master acknowledged repertoire, representative of a style in music history. Performers appreciate a challenging piece that is representative of a musical style, with contrasts, like the Baroque, which is appreciated for its lightness, contrast and for fast rhythmic passages with semiquavers – in fast movements – and for big contrast between the movements of the piece (concerto or sonata). This kind of repertoire is usually given to performance students because it is more challenging and representative of a style, as well as it enables an approach to articulation and phrasing. It is also an approach to more-than–one-movement pieces. Finally, the fact that young performers are playing the same repertoire professional musicians play is highly valued. Expressivity finds its evidence in a thoughtful choice of tempo and intensity levels, but the overall impression is of an impulsive performance without structural planning.

4. **Expression**: Beauty, Subject, Realism and Mastery of Perfection are now not so relevant characteristics compared to the expression of feelings and emotions: the piece is judged according to the intensity of the emotions it induces in the individuals’ subjective experience during performance. Performers like to feel the music they listen and play, and they also make effort to communicate these emotions to the public. Young performers in this stage like to learn new techniques and explore new expressive possibilities on the instrument. They also like to know and explore new and different things, such as difficult pieces. They admire virtuoso and well-known performers and dream that some day they will be able to perform like that. They also feel the need to master the piece inside out in order to be free for communication with the public during performance. Romantic and Ultra-Romantic Style are preferred in this stage. First, performances show fluency and are conventionally expressive. Melodic and rhythmic patterns are similarly repeated and the performance is predictable. Gradually, performances turn to be more expressive, reflecting stability and some touch of
imagination. Dynamics and phrasing are deliberately controlled or modified with the intention of making evident the structural relations in the piece.

5. **Idiomatic accuracy**: Mean of Expression, Form and Style accuracy are highly valued in this stage. There is a clear distinction between the emotions induced by the subject on the individual and the musical interest of the piece. Performers have a more informed discourse about what they value in musical performance. Characteristics of previous stages combine with an analytical approach to interpretation, taking style and historical context into account. Expression of emotions is not so important as the clearance of the text and emotions are not interpreted from a personal point of view, but they are more described as an intrinsic characteristic of the music in itself. Different Styles and Periods of History of music are integrated, as well as different interpretation techniques and traditions: the performer has the ability to compare different interpretations of the same piece of music and judge it according to ‘aesthetical tradition’. How the performer deals with the unexpected during a performance is highly valued, as well as interpretive variations and communication with other fellow musicians on stage during the performance. Performance reveals a clear idea of style and an expressive characterization based on clearly identified musical traditions. Technical, expressive and structural mastery are consistently presented.

6. **Communicative Musicality**: Appreciation in this stage is subtler and takes into account the values and concepts that were historically established. Judgment is both more personal and social, which means that personal opinion is constantly compared with a community that enables inter-subjective discussion. The perceiver transcends the traditional, cultural established opinion and questions what is considered as a general truth. This attitude requires a global and deep perspective, understanding arts inside its cultural context. Performance shows technical mastery and is convincing in style. There is refinement of stylistic and structural details and the impression of a personal commitment of the performer with the music. Gradually, technical mastery totally serves musical communication. Form and expression merge into a coherent and personal outcome – a true musical statement. New musical insights are systematically explored with imagination (cf. Gonçalves 2011).

The implications of these studies for education are that teachers should consider the adequacy of repertory according to the students’ stage of music appreciation - along with their personality and taste - because it is directly related to the nature of the performers' musical discourse. Selecting the repertoire in this way seems to offer to the students better chances of embodying musical meaning and of communicating more musically and expressively.

According to the research referred above, performers in the first stage will be more interested to learn the music which will be directly related to their everyday life. For example, a popular music about balloons or about eating all the soup is something children with 5 years old usually like, not only because they already know the music, but also because its words and meaning are related to their own experience. This could be the reason why many pedagogues choose traditional childrens' songs for violin beginners, such as for example, Azzara, Gordon et. al. (2002) choose ‘Hot cross buns’, or why Suzuki asked the parents to play repeatedly the tape of the music their children would learn before they started to actually play them on the violin. If we take into consideration the role of music in childrens’ play, then we can understand that expressive sounds and melodies are present in their lives as a meaningful way to express their feelings. Children are enthusiastic to learn new pieces that they will absorb into their daily life and play, repeating endlessly the same tunes and jingles, and creatively making variations and deviations from the theme (Campbell 1998).

Official programs in Portugal prescribe that teachers should evaluate childrens’ criativity, but tasks demanded in methods don’t usually take into consideration improvisational skills at all. The USA MENC Association (2011) has proposed some practical ways of introducing improvisation and composition among other skills, in general music. It is interesting to observe that they take into consideration many aspects of musical language into teaching criteria, such as singing expressively, playing repertoire, improvising, composing and arranging, reading and writing, listening to, analysing and describing music, evaluating music, music performances and justifying musical preferences, as well as understanding the role of music in relation to the other arts, history, culture and behaviour. Such curriculum takes musical language into consideration as a whole, adopting a perspective of music as a cultural practice, imbedded and related to everyday life and culture.

The analogy between music and spoken language has been referred by pedagogues such as Suzuki (Starr 1976), Gordon (1997). The spectrum of this analogy goes beyond the language as an idiom and takes also emocional and social aspects into consideration in the teaching metodologies developed by these pedagogues [cf. Jump Right In (Azzara, Gordon et. al 2002) and Suzuki Methods (Suzuki 2000)]. Musical language has not only been compared to the aquisition of spoken language, as it has also been to computers’ artificial intelligence processing of information. **Hardware** would be in
In this case the group of basic elements and basic knowledge, which the software would combine freely and spontaneously. In the case of language, words and grammar rules would be learned first, and then multiple possibilities for combining and applying words and grammar rules would be rehearsed and applied to each specific situation. In the case of music, and in the specific case of improvisation, hardware would be equivalent to patterns, chord progressions, modulations, counterpoint, among other musical aspects. Software would work at a second instance, where systematical rules would be learned, for the construction of a melody, phrases and more complex musical ideas, working with patterns and making different relations between different parts of the musical discourse of improvisation. The more knowledge and expertise in music's equivalent to hardware and software, the richer the performers’ improvisation will be. (Kenny and Gellrich 2002).

In what concerns music teaching, spoken language can, effectively, change the way we feel the music (Kivy 1990), but musical communication requires specific acculturation - a practice related to the domain of non-verbal language, that is, an intermodal, imaginative activity. Above all, meaning in music is embodied, and the act of communication happens through the senses, recalling past bodily experiences and creating new ways of feeling, listening and producing meaning with the body (Correia 2007). Thinking musically, feeling music is not equivalent to thinking about music and for this reason I suspect that as soon as performers start to explore creative tasks, they will start to discover a personal way of expression, cultivating musical taste and relating their personal values and lived experience with musical meaning. In my perspective, music can have a deeper impact on the performers’ bodily stock of experience, if they master music creatively as if they were leading a conversation or discussing on a theme. If we think about Bach, Mozart or Beethoven, all of them were great improvisers at that time. So why has this practice almost disappeared from the classical music educational context? To my understanding, creative exploration of sound seems to open the possibility of revealing performers’ aesthetical values through music experience, and this perception of personal appraisal in music could possibly be applied later to the repertoire.

Aims

The aim of this research was to find out a way to integrate expression and musical appraisal, exploring a way to develop technique on the violin with the target of expressing personal values, through bodily experience of sound, explored in imaginative play. By stimulating the students to make their own compositions, based on semi-structured improvisations, as well as improvisations based on call-and-response, hopefully technical and expressive aspects of the musical experience would be embodied, integrated through the use of non-verbal language. Another goal was to make their spectrum of musical language wider, stimulating creativity and improvisation while exercising musical discourse.

Method

A model for improvisation was designed having the goal of developing students ability for communicating musically. The participants were violin students, aged between 6 and 8 years old. The model was developed by, first, selecting and analysing violin methods - considering the technical and musical competences that students are expected to achieve in the first 2 years of instrumental practice. Second, these methods were compared with jazz improvisation methods as well as ideas and games from a selection of contemporary music improvisation practices. MENC (2011) coordinates for general music teaching were also taken into account. This model for improvisation was designed, taking into consideration technical skills and the development of performer's values.

Students were led to rehearse patterns on a daily basis, based on technical exercises related to the repertoire. These patterns, structured in a model, worked as a memory recall for the competences to be acquired during the year - hardware and software - which could then be used during improvisation. Last, two simple tasks were set, one for improvisation and another for composition. The experience was set and results were recorded and analysed. A brief, informal, interview was made to have a personal feedback on the activities done. This research combines literature review and narrative enquiry developed from my participant observation as a teacher of these violin students. Five case studies will be presented and discussed in this paper, which is a preliminary study for my PhD research.

Selected violin methods


3. Azzara, Gordon et. al. (2002). *Jump Right In: The Instrumental Series. Book 1 and 2*. Chicago: Gia Publications. This is an approach to Gordon’s theory of music learning, where some of the techniques of jazz pedagogy are applied to classical instruments, such as the violin. Knowledge of tonal and rhythmic patterns are some of the demands of the book. A selection of popular pieces in the United States is arranged for violin beginners, with the option of piano or group accompaniment.


5. Krucek (2004). *Etuedenschule fuer Violine: 1.Lage. Heft 1, Heft 2. Praha: Editio Baerenreiter*. This is a book of etudes for beginners, adapting and extending Sevciks’ technique methods for the violin, which takes finger patterns into consideration as well as other patterns for the rhythm, tonal content, position changes, as well as other competences. These are summarised in a series of 6 tables with pattern-exercises, which can be applied for the study of the repertory.

6. McKay, Neil (1965). *The First Year Violin Tutor*. London: Stainer & Bell. This book takes different competences into account, introducing them gradually through pieces and exercises with accompaniment of the teacher, or a second violin. It is usually a pleasant method for beginners, mostly because it introduces contents through, with pleasant, short melodies in duets, which children easily achieve to play with expression.

7. Suzuki (2000). *Suzuki Violin School, Vol.1*. USA: Dr. Shinichi Suzuki. I used these pieces independently from the Suzuki method itself, because this series of pieces are interesting for their content learning sequence.

**Selected improvisation methods and books**


4. Lockwood, D. & Darizcuren, F. (1998). *Cordes & Âme*. Paris: Éditions Salabert. This violin method suggests ways of acquiring the language of jazz through rhythmic and melodic pattern exercises, specifically for the violin. It also introduces phrases and solos by other violinists and jazz musicians, in order to develop accuracy in style. The interest of this book for this research was the schematic way to simplify harmonic patterns and fingerings, also suggesting articulation patterns.

**Model for Improvisation**

**Contents**

Based on the methods described above, I adapted contents to violin technique, which would be both suitable for learning the repertoire and for improvising. My strategy was to set simple exercises in the form of patterns that would be recognised in the repertoire. These simple tasks and patterns could easily be changed and worked out as material for improvisation. If we can compare it to language acquisition, then these patterns would be the words, which would be combined and put together fitting into a style and structure, or grammar, making sense through phrasing and expression. These ‘words’, or *hardware*, would then be used in a musical dialogue with the teacher, concentrating...
each time on a topic and then starting to turn the focus of attention wider, coordinating different aspects of the musical speech.

Technical guidelines

1. Textures
   1.1. Dynamics: f, p, cresc. dim.
   1.2. Attack and articulation: Bow strokes: up and down; detaché and staccato/martelé; legato; slurs, string crossing.
   1.3. Timbre: Bow Speed (fast, slow, combined); Sound colour near and far from the bridge (sound points).

2. Time
   2.2. Rhythm and Figures and pauses. Patterns: Gamala Taki: A-Takademi; B-Taki-kitaki; C-Ta-demi; D-Gamala; E-Takademi.
   2.3. Meter: Duple, Triple.

3. Structure
   3.2. Tonal Content: Major/Minor; Tonic, Dominant, Subdominant; Finger patterns: first 1-23-4 and second patterns 12-3-4 (Major and minor), 1st position.
   3.3. Melodic line and phrase – movement exercises, articulating and breath between phrases.
   3.4. Form: ABA, ABACA.

4. Style and Expression
   4.1. Musical Gestures: Dance, Movement
   4.2. Musical/Extra-Musical References: other interpretations and musical styles; Title/ Story/ Narrative
   4.3. Metaphorical/Symbolic Referents: Personal Experience

N.B. Gamala Taki is an adaptation of indian ragas to jazz improvisation, simplified to duple and triple meter. Gamala is triple, Taki, or Takademi, will be duple meter. They can be easily combined with one another. Pauses will swallow the correspondant syllable, for example, in Ta-demi, instead of Takademi. I learned this in a jazz workshop with the portuguese guitarrist Pedro Madaleno, and it turned to be the most efficient method in my teaching experience for children to learn rhythm patterns.

Lessons were designed based on the following sequence

1. Daily Basis Exercises - Warm-ups and technical exercises for developing specific competences. They were inspired on the technical guidelines, on the repertoire and literature about violin teaching, as well as literature on patterns for improvisation (cf. Selection of violin and improvisation methods).

2. Repertoire - Learning the repertoire usually followed these steps, in the form of tasks:
   2.1. Sing expressively, with appropriate dynamics, phrasing and interpretation. If the children can sing their repertoire, they will be able to develop a clear aural picture of what they will perform, as well as give a feedback of their learning to the teacher. They can also embody expression easier, due to the lack of technical problems while playing the instrument.
   2.2. Play the melody in tune, with the correct rhythm and with appropriate dynamics and timbre as well as maintain a steady tempo. Focus of attention changes frequently, embracing different competences, in order to maintain concentration of the young students.
   2.3. Play in groups/ with the teacher, blending timbres, matching dynamic levels and expression.

3. Creative Tasks - The following tasks were designed to develop creativity:
3.1. **Improvise an answer to a melodic or rhythmic question, played by the teacher. Carry a ‘conversation’.** Inspired on the repertoire, the teacher picks up a critical passage and invites the student to carry a musical conversation, in a structure of question and answer. Expression and timbre should always be present.

3.2. **Improvise a short song or melody, using freely a variety of patterns (cf. techniques provided on the technical guidelines).**

The experience

The lesson plan described above was followed during 6 months. Five students having one-to-one instrumental classes, from ages from 6 to 8, were taught the curricular exercises and pieces during three months. After this period of time, they were asked to do the creative tasks described above on the lesson plan, which were carried during the lesson for a maximum of 10 minutes. The aim was to speak musically and appropriate musical language naturally, through improvisation and variation. A second task set was to make a melody on their own, completely new, based on their aural and practical experience of music. Compositions were analysed and a written register of the composition was made. Finally, technical details would be refined and memorised to prepare for the concert. The chosen method was narrative enquiry, reporting the situation as their teacher and not as a mere observer.

**Task a: musical conversation**

*Matilde Simões, 7 years old.*

Matilde is a very interested student that has always demonstrated a good ability to sing in tune and learn new pieces. She studies violin since she was 5. When asked to improvise a musical dialogue, she found it a strange but fun way to play and ‘talk music’. In the beginning she hesitated about what she should play and the tempo of her answer was not completely coincident with the one we had begun with, but soon she assimilated the beat and her ear recognised very easily the notes I was playing. Her first impulse was to copy my notes and intentions. Gradually, she became accustomed to explore an answer in the style of my question, but not necessarily the same, choosing different notes keeping a steady pulse. After these moments of ‘musical talk’ and variations on melodies that were going to be played in class, when Matilde started to learn the new piece she was more comfortable with that particular technique and style. Style, tone and intonation developed along with expression. Body movement and eye-contact were important facilitators of musical communication in this task.

*Luis Miguel Durães, 8 years old.*

Luis is a very interested student which started taking violin lessons at the age of 7. He is able to sing and play in tune with a good quality of sound and he memorises every piece he plays in a short period of time. When the task of making a musical dialogue was set, Luis accepted the task with enthusiasm. He was able from the start to listen carefully to what I was playing and reproduce, as well as make variations and introduce new ideas in a free musical conversation. This non-formal way of teaching enabled Luis to take the risk of experimenting new sounds and techniques on the violin that he had never tried before (these techniques do not belong to the program of the first year of violin), as for example trills, glissandos, bow movements on the four strings, among other techniques. These new techniques appeared spontaneously in the course of our musical dialogue, emerging from the need of expressing musical ideas. Short patterns and melodies previously learned came during the improvisation naturally. The freedom for trial and error opened the possibility for acquiring new skills and improving musical communication. Luis became motivated with this kind of musical play and adapted it for his home study.

**Task b: improvise a short song or melody, using freely a variety of patterns. Repeat and memorise**

*Mariana Saldanha, 8 years old.*

Mariana started to learn the violin at the age of 7. At the beginning, she was very enthusiastic about learning the violin, but as soon as she understood that it is a difficult instrument to begin with, she started to lose motivation. At home, she used to listen to metal and rock, a musical language completely different from the classical tradition that is taught to violin beginners. When the task of making a new piece by herself was set, she was very enthusiastic and creative. Mariana’s compositions enabled her to explore the musical influences she had at home and adapt them to violin technique. Incredibly, she discovered new ways of sound production, as well as techniques that are usually not taught in the first year of violin tuition. The reason for learning new techniques came from the need of expression through sound. The first piece’s title was ‘Água e Pedra’, which means ‘Water and Stone’. Mariana searched the way to produce sound inspired on a metaphorical referent, and for
In her second composition, ‘Música Eléctrica’ she was inspired on electric guitars and heavy metal, with composed rhythms and untypical accents for classical music, which were then adapted to the violin idiosyncrasies. She picked up a rhythmic pattern and repeated it as an ostinato through different pitches and strings. Its structure was Introduction, A, Coda. She also introduced a new technique by herself: double stops in open strings, which sound reminds electric guitars. In her third composition, ‘Tutti Frutti’, Mariana developped the ideas she had started in the other two pieces and introduced a new rhythm, with double stops, this time with fingers on one of the strings. Its structure is Introduction, Theme, Coda, combining different rhythms and accents in triple meter, but with accents which produce an irregular meter.

Within this tasks, Mariana suddenly started to be very interested in learning the violin by herself in order to be able to play her own compositions. Composing her own music enabled Mariana to connect her personal experience with practice. She played her own pieces in concert meaningfully and these moments were recalled by her a rich musical experiences, when compared to the other auditions, where she played only the repertoire from the methods. What I found most impressing in Mariana’s pieces was the fact that she picked up motives and patterns in her music that had not previously been taught in class, but that had directly to do with her way of liking and living music at home. She was fulfilled by exploring new melodies creatively on the violin, as well as by learning new techniques to express musical ideas.

Inês Lourenço, 8 years old.

Inês Lourenço started to learn the violin at the age of 7. She has a good ear and memory, but she tended to dedicate less time to the violin because she has lots of different activities. She listens to some classical music at home, but the most music that is heard at home or in the car is from the radio. She likes to play in tune and to feel that she can master technique and she likes every piece she has played since she started. When the task was set, she felt lost because she didn’t know exactly what to do. After giving her an example of a piece from the book Strings in Step, which fulfilled the task, as well as the Technical Guidelines with ideas for patterns in her music, she started to feel more confident. The task was to use different rhythms, fingers in the second pattern and different strings. Her composition, ‘Passeio no Campo’ is very interesting, because it really combines different rhythms in a cheerful way. Children’s pieces usually don’t combine duple and triple meter, but Mariana took this option easily. In her second piece, ‘Dança dos Bonecos’, Mariana introduced herself to playing fifths with the first, second and third fingers, in a sort of mechanical melody, a technique that is not usually demanded on the second year of violin tuition. She achieved to explore new techniques expressively, because these had the goal of fulfilling a musical idea she had set creatively on her composition.

Maria Combo, 6 years old.

Maria has been studying the violin for 2 years and a half, although she has only started to be my student in her second year of violin lessons. Maria has always had many difficulties to sing in tune, to hold the bow, to set the fingers on the fingerboard and, especially to memorise. My approach to Maria has been adapted to playful, music games. When she was asked to compose a piece by herself, her engagement in the classes changed drastically and she started to play more meaningfully, in tune and with a good pulse, something that she had never achieved before with the pieces suggested by the books. The grade of difficulty was exactly the same for the pieces on the book as well as those invented by her, but still the pieces she had made on her own had another meaning, were more connected to her identity and creativity. All the pieces had a title set by her, and explored different contents from the ‘Technical Guidelines’. When performed in public, she felt the meaning and value of her piece of music, and the enthusiasm of the public. It was her best performance. The pieces were performed in public and were appreciated by the family and members of the audience. Maria remembers these moments as unique and special, because she felt able to create ‘real’ pieces of music. I could observe that her engagement on playing her own melodies was deeper in technical mastery and expression.

Analisy of the results

The task musical conversation enabled students to have the opportunity for trial and error and explore their musical ideas with a musical feedback from the teacher. Allthough these moments of improvisation lasted for a maximum of 10 minutes, weekly, during each lesson, in a period of 6 months, they were invaluable for having a feedback of the students’ musical values and musical intentions. Students explored new techniques and made citations and variations on melodies of the repertoire. Style, technique and expressive communication were enhanced when playing the repertoire.
The second task, **improvise a short song or melody, using freely a variety of patterns. Repeat and memorise**, had also a very positive impact on the students, especially on those who were not emotionally connected to the violin. Composing melodies based on semi-structured improvisations explored the need of making a connection with their inner self, values and knowledge, in order to create a new melody. Like the task of musical conversation, students explored new techniques that had not been taught during the lesson, in order to express their musical intentions. It was interesting to observe that these students didn’t show any problems in acquiring new techniques since they felt a need for expressing something musically. Techniques that were not contemplated in the repertoire found the need to be taught in order to fulfill musical expression.

As a teacher, I was able to detect what students liked to play, which were their musical values and which technical abilities they were needing to explore in order to achieve their goals for musical communication. Cultivating musical dialogue opened the space for interaction and feedback, a multi-directional musical conversation, where teacher and students create and share an inter-subjective and, at the same time, personal musical experience.

**Conclusions**

Music is a way of expressing personal values, which remain in the domain of pre-verbal language, and are intermodal, symbolically and kinaesthetically charged. Imagination always plays an important role in the process of meaning production, which in turn demands an active role of the bodily stock of knowledge and affections. In this view, values are personal and subjective to each individuals’ experience. In previous research, it was concluded that there should be a way of exploring musical communication taking into account performers’ personal values, within the use of non-verbal, musical language. Adding to the technical demands of the repertoire, creative tasks were set to enable students to explore their subjective experience of violin performance.

In the particular case of musical conversation, this multi-directional way of musical communication stimulates acute listening and creative answers within a context, where each student is given the opportunity to express his/her personal ideas through music and be influenced by the inter-subjective negotiations with the teacher. Improvising and composing melodies based on improvisations enabled students to put the **hardware** of musical language into practice, combining it freely within a context, in a way comparable to the **software** of artificial intelligence. After these tasks were set, students appeared to be more engaged with learning the violin, and they referred that they liked to improvise and compose new melodies, along with learning the repertoire. Another positive aspect was the social interaction, support and enthusiasm between teachers, students and their families, who were very interested in listening to the compositions, because students were not merely reproducing well known melodies on the violin, but they were also expressing themselves creatively.

If performers’ values develop depending on their personal experiences, social interaction and time of contact with instrument, and if creative tasks stimulate exploration of personal meanings through music, it would be interesting to understand the impact of these tasks on musical expression and musical communication on a larger number of music performers.

**References**


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