

# A combination of one-to-one teaching and small group teaching in higher music education in Norway – a good model for teaching?

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*Instrumental teachers in higher music education in Norway and elsewhere traditionally organise their teaching as individual lessons with one teacher and one student. This paper takes a closer look at how a horn teacher at the Norwegian Academy of Music has organised her weekly teaching in individual, small group and master class lessons with all her students. The project being described in the paper has since been extended to other instruments, but this paper concentrates on the horn model. The main focus is on small group lessons where the students themselves play and comment on fellow students' performances. The evidence suggests that a combination of teaching in individual, small group and master class lessons is the best way of educating students as responsible, reflective and professional musicians.*

## Introduction

Instrumental teaching in most Western countries relies on the age-old master-apprentice tradition. In this tradition there is tacit knowledge that the master makes use of his or her personal strengths and superior knowledge in the teaching process and the apprentice comes to the master to learn (Koopman *et al.*, 2007, pp. 391–392). The master is usually regarded as a role model and a source of identification for the student (Persson, 1994; Jørgensen, 2000; Gaunt, 2009; Creech, 2012), and the dominant mode of student learning is imitation (Jørgensen, 2000, p. 68).

Alongside this, master class lessons involving teaching and learning in public with several students together emerged in the 19th century, brought about by a number of composers who wished to disseminate their knowledge to as many learners as possible at the same time (Uszler *et al.*, 2000, p. 289). In this tradition the students, one by one, perform a piece of music which they have studied, and the master gives comments and suggestions based on the performance. The students then try to incorporate the comments and suggestions in a second performance and the master gives new feedback. All this is done in front of an audience (Hanken, 2008, p. 27).

Today, master classes are used as an additional form of tuition to the one-to-one model.

In both these traditions the teacher's approach determines whether the one-to-one lesson or master class lesson is to be a 'follow me' lesson, as described by Donald Schön (1987, p. 208), or a lesson developed as a dialogue between the student and the teacher.

Accordingly, we can speak of two master-apprentice models:

1. A traditional master-apprentice model where the teacher has the answers and the student is the learner.
2. A dialogue-based master-apprentice model where the teacher is an adviser/mentor to the student.

There are studies showing that the identity the teacher brings to his lessons and his degree of professional specialisation influence the way the teacher approaches his students (Kennel, 2002; Triantafyllaki, 2010). The positions of teacher and student seem however in many ways institutionally regulated and thus shaped by the culture of the institution in which the activity takes place. There seem to be certain rules, standards and expectations related to what it means to be a teacher and a student in a conservatoire (Nerland & Hanken, 2002), and this can also be the case concerning how the teachers organise the instrumental lessons.

The cultural dimensions of professional music education, with the institutionally regulated positions of teacher and student, are widely recognised (e.g. Kingsbury, 1988; Froelich, 2002). However, studies of advanced instrumental teaching have mainly discussed individual teaching models (e.g. Persson, 1994; Gholsen, 1998; Young *et al.*, 2003; Triantafyllaki, 2005), and little attention has been paid on how different teaching strategies can be activated in instrumental teaching (Nerland, 2007). Recent studies into one-to-one teaching have concentrated on lesson content, time devoted to talk in the lesson and the balance between technical and expressive issues (e.g. Young *et al.*, 2003; Laukka, 2004; Gaunt, 2006; Koopman *et al.*, 2007; Karlsson & Juslin, 2008).

The few reports published on master class teaching, (e.g. Hanken, 2008; Creech *et al.*, 2009; Hanken, 2011) emphasise the students' positive reactions on the opportunity to perform in master classes, receiving advice from a teacher in front of peer students and to engage with own ideas about interpretation and style.

Instrumental teaching in small groups has traditionally been used mostly for the teaching of basic skills to beginner students, and most studies concerning the efficacies of group teaching have also concentrated on students at this level. Research on group teaching at advanced levels, particularly in higher education, is limited. West and Rostvall (2003) investigated 11 brass and guitar lessons, nine of which were one-to-one and two of which were group lessons with nine students in the group. They found that the teacher had greater power and control in the individual situation. This is also confirmed by Jørgensen (2000) and Persson (1994). West and Rostvall found that the students were more involved in the lessons with comments etc. in the group situation. In Gaunt's project (2008) on the perceptions of instrumental and vocal teachers on one-to-one tuition in a conservatoire, many of the teachers were enthusiastic about the learning potential in group teaching in terms of peer learning, but they seldom used group teaching as a regular part of their instrumental teaching. The few teachers who did organise group lessons, ran the lessons in the style of a master class with minimal student-to-student interaction. Gaunt (2009) also interviewed students in her project, and many of the students emphasised the importance of interaction and working with other people in professional music-making. Even so, the students were not particularly proactive in seeking out opportunities for group work and learning from each other. The peer group was more perceived as 'a fact of life than as

a learning resource' (p. 200). Seipp (1976) compared the progress of advanced trumpet major students taught in groups and trumpet major students taught individually over one academic year. He found that group-taught students progressed more rapidly than students taught individually. Nevertheless, some of the group-taught students doubted that group applied instruction could be as effective as individual instruction. Daniel (2004) researched piano majors at his university and allocated them to small groups of three and four on the basis of ability level. One of the goals was to avoid recreating the traditional master class environment for these students. The activities of the week were planned in detail for each lesson. The programme was progressively differentiated and advanced as the students reached higher levels, and the students became more and more independent of the teacher in the lessons as they got more experience. Peer interaction became part of the teaching situation. Hallam (1998) refers to peer teaching as 'extremely effective for those teaching and those learning' (p. 260). Daniel (2004) suggests that the group model offers a more holistic learning environment and a considerably greater level of interaction compared with the traditional apprenticeship model.

### **The holistic approach**

Research shows that the traditional teaching and learning model in conservatoires where the teacher is expected to have the correct answers, is being reassessed by some teachers. Johansson (2013) states that against the background of the Bologna process, curricula for different bachelor and master programmes in music especially emphasise aspects connected to independence and the students' ability to be conscious about their own competence development.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is a result of participating in social practices more than a result of teaching, and full participation is necessary to do justice to the diversity of relations involved in varying forms of community membership. Learning involves the whole person.

Brew (1999) suggests that knowledge is seen as a product of communication and interpretation, with an emphasis on life-long learning. This implies that students must take part in the discussion and negotiation of their skills and competencies and learn to justify their ideas and give helpful feedback to each other. Jørgensen (2000) follows the same line of thinking when he argues that teachers

who dominate the instrumental lessons seem to give their students limited possibility to assume responsibility for their own learning and musical development, and they seem to disregard or neglect highly accepted theories about the importance of active participation from the student for an optimal outcome of learning. (p. 70)

Gaunt (2008) expresses the same when she argues that 'one-to-one tuition may inhibit the development of self-responsibility and an individual artistic voice' (p. 240). Gaunt (2009, 2011) implies that students may become too comfortable and passive in the one-to-one situation. Wöllner and Ginsborg (2011) argue through their project with team teaching, that students should be 'exposed to a variety of approaches, to acquire collaborative skills' (p. 302). Gaunt *et al.* (2012) emphasise the importance of enabling creativity, the ability to collaborate and the flexibility to meet changing demands of professional work (p. 26).

Nerland (2007) describes how a teacher has chosen a strategy where the students are made accountable for their own advancement. This strategy is generated from engaging the students in taking extensive responsibility for their lessons. This teacher suggests that the students may learn just as much from a peer student as from the teacher. This way of teaching shows an approach where the students are expected to take care of their own growth. Brand (2004) implies that students should be expected to express individual goals and become independent of others to improve their self-esteem.

Burt and Mills (2006) found that music students entering a conservatoire had high expectations about being able to work with like-minded peers. However, students were concerned about the skills level of others, and the competition this implied; linked to this was anxiety about performing in front of peers. Juuti and Littleton (2010) also show in their research that practicing can be constructed as laden with fear and anxieties of being overheard by fellow students. Burt and Mills (2006) suggest that opportunities for the students to perform in informal situations need to be provided, stating that the nature of the feedback given for these performances is of tremendous importance. They argue that the informal comments that often accompany a performance are of equal – and for some even greater – significance than the more formal feedback. They state that a small group scenario may be very useful in implementing a feedback process in more secure environments (p. 70).

In a study of students' self-assessment of skill and expertise, Papageorgi *et al.* (2010) suggest that teachers should help the students produce personal interpretations of music and try to convince the students that each performance should be conceived as an opportunity to improve performance skills (p. 58). The students should learn to be independent and rely on their own interpretations.

Haddon (2011) concluded, when studying instrumental/vocal learning with more than one concurrent teacher, that students should understand their own learning processes and identify and take responsibility for reaching their own goals. Communication and a collaborative approach between all parties in the teaching process should be emphasised. As one of her informants said: 'Teachers should teach students how to explore their styles, their musicianship rather than teaching them how to play' (pp. 76–77).

This change in attitude towards more emphasis on the students' independence and self-respect as part of a more holistic view on education is experienced in institutions where the old paradigm of teaching is being replaced by a new paradigm (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). In this new paradigm the teacher is expected to create a framework within which students can actively construct their own knowledge. Learning is perceived as something the learner does, not something done to the learner. According to this the students do not passively accept knowledge from the teacher, but activate their existing cognitive structures or construct new ones to incorporate the new input. Learning takes place when individuals cooperate to construct shared understanding and knowledge. This means that the teacher must lay the foundation for an atmosphere that enables students to build caring and committed relationships to each other (p. 171). The pedagogical approach reflects, according to Nerland (2007), a concern for meeting the students as individual beings who are capable of taking care of their own growth. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are students who may not be ready to be given the responsibility of structuring the learning experiences themselves (e.g. Brändström, 1994; Burwell, 2005; Gaunt, 2009, 2011).

## **Project outline**

My project involved examining whether models for the lesson framework at the institutions and the manner in which teachers and students take part in, and communicate, during the different kinds of lessons, can play a significant role in the development of reflective, independent and secure musicians.

The project was carried out among the instrumental teachers at all levels at the Norwegian Academy of Music. I found that all the teachers at the Academy give individual lessons, about 65% give lessons in a master class setting and roughly 20% give weekly or monthly small group lessons. This corresponds to Daniel's research (2004) on innovations in piano teaching where he comments that master classes are occasional additions to the learning process and group teaching is seldom used as a model of learning for advanced piano students (p. 23).

One of the horn teachers at the Academy made greater use of small group lessons in addition to individual and master class lessons than the other teachers, and considering Daniel's (2004) conclusion that the group model offers a more holistic learning environment than the one-to-one approach and generates a three-way interaction: teacher to student, student to student and student to teacher (p. 35), I chose to examine the horn teacher's group classes more closely.

I observed her groups three times during the same semester, and I also observed each group member at some individual lessons. This allowed me to study whether the students demonstrated different types of involvement in the two different teaching situations. Finally, I interviewed both the teacher and the students about their experiences with this model of main instrument teaching. I was particularly interested in finding out how, and in what ways, the teacher and the students were active in the teaching activities in the different types of lessons. Daniel (2006) found in his research that students in small group lessons assume greater responsibility for the shaping of the learning environment. He also found that the small group context increased students' awareness of the importance of providing feedback and taking responsibility for learning (pp. 200–205). Gaunt (2008) found that a group teaching model could bring increased knowledge about technical and interpretational ideas through constructive critical evaluation of other students' performances.

## **The horn model**

At the Norwegian Academy of Music most students are assigned 60 minutes a week for individual lessons on their main instrument. In addition the students have 90–180 minutes a week with master class lessons in different group settings.

For the past two years the horn teacher has chosen to give all her students weekly individual lessons of 45 minutes instead of 60 minutes. The minutes saved, plus 15 minutes from the teacher's preparation time, are combined into weekly group lessons of 60 minutes, with three students and the teacher constituting a group.

A weekly teaching model for horn is shown in [Figure 1](#).

The teacher chooses to act as the master in the individual lessons. Here she gives advice, suggestions, many of the answers etc. In the small group lessons all participants, including the teacher, discuss the different performances as equal members of the group.

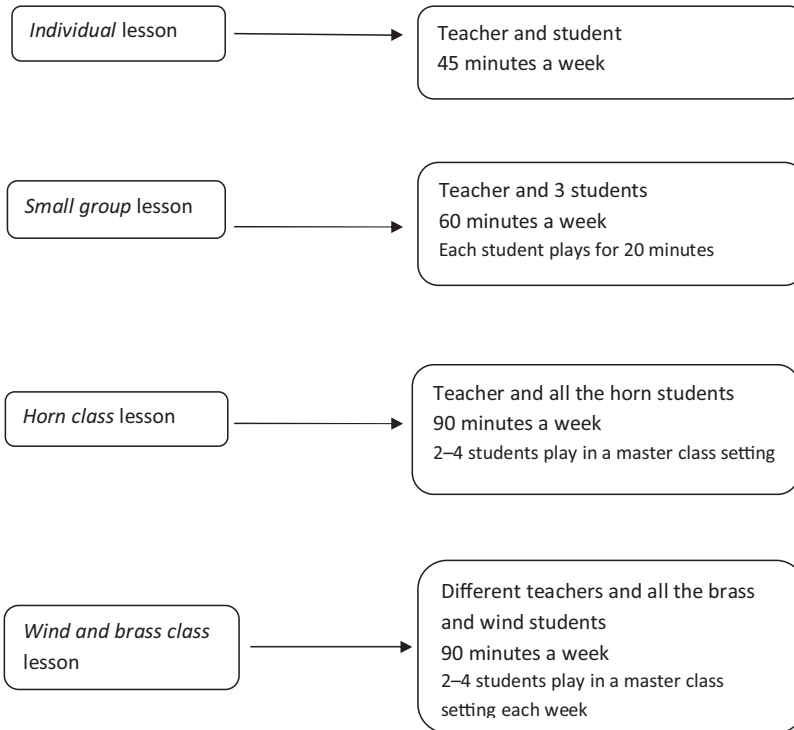


Fig. 1 Weekly teaching model for horn

The student group members may be on the same or different educational levels, depending on what the teacher finds to be most relevant and rewarding for each student. For instance, one group may comprise two bachelor's students and one master's student. Another group may comprise only first-year students. Johnson and Johnson (1999) claim that what determines a group's productivity is not necessarily the educational level of the students, but rather how well the students work together. In this way the students are exposed to a variety of ideas and different perspectives which stimulate learning, creativity and social development. Heterogeneous groupings are, according to Fischer (2006), considered to be the most preferred type of group composition. The advantage to this figuration is the resulting diversity of personalities, abilities, experiences, interests, perspectives and reasoning strategies (p. 23).

All the students have 20 minutes at their own disposal in a group lesson, and all three students in the group are expected to play every week and comment on their fellow students' playing.

The horn teacher has established a few 'rules' to make the groups function as smoothly as possible:

- Each student is expected to formulate at least one supporting positive comment and one supporting improving comment for the student who is playing.

- All group members are to be on an equal footing within the group.
- The teacher shall always be the last to give comments.
- The group lessons are to be different from the individual lessons in their structure and content.

Johnson and Johnson (1999) call this kind of grouping a ‘cooperative learning group’. It is a group whose members are committed to the common purpose of maximising each other’s learning. The focus is on both group and individual accountability. The group members give whatever assistance and encouragement is needed to promote each other’s success (pp. 70–74).

Bruner (1996) states that this kind of community is a place where learners help each other to learn. This does not, however, exclude the presence of the teacher. It simply implies that the teacher is not always confined to the role as a teacher, but supports the students in other ways (p. 39). The same kind of cooperative learning is also seen in groups with students in composition. Teaching strategies allow freedom and space for compositional ideas to develop, and learning activities include presenting work-in-progress, peer feedback and reflective practice (Lupton & Bruce, 2010).

The horn group I studied consisted of students at different educational levels: one first-year bachelor’s student (Norwegian student, boy – StudN1) and two fourth-year bachelor’s students (Norwegian girl – StudN4 and Russian boy – StudR4).

I audio recorded three lessons and found that the content of the lessons was on average organised as shown in Table 1.

The students presented their plan for the 20 minutes at the beginning of the lesson. They usually chose to play repertoire they were working on in the individual lessons, repertoire for auditions in orchestras or technical exercises of general interest to the group as a whole. All the students chose to audio record their lessons, stating that they used the recordings actively in their practice sessions. The horn teacher gave no more comments than the other students and most of the communication/discussion took place in plenum in the group. The atmosphere in all the group lessons was positive and constructive, exemplified in these quotes after one of the student’s (StudN1) performance:

StudN4:

How do you do it? It was really nice, I think. You have a very good sound. I just wish you could have warmed up and that the music flowed a bit more in some places.

Table 1 *Content of the horn group lessons*

<i>Content</i>	<i>Minutes</i>
Performance	20 min.
Comments and advice exchanged between students and performer	18 min.
Comments and advice from teacher to performer	8 min.
Conversation between all the students and the teacher	16 min.
Total	62 min.

StudR4:

I totally agree. The sound is so nice. You have not even warmed up; it is quite impressive . . . It is a nice sound, but it sounds a bit tense. Try to think that the music is easy to play. If you don't *show* that it is hard to play, this can be really great, I think.

The students were relaxed in the situation. They all made comments and each student clearly cared about the progression of the others. This positive support was evident also when the students played music prepared for auditions for the same jobs in the same orchestras. They showed that they were part of a cooperative base group whose primary purpose was to give each group member the support, help and encouragement needed to progress in the best possible way (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 59).

In the individual lessons the teacher was conscious of her role as a master. She gave advice as well as suggestions for solutions. In the group lessons she was part of the group on an equal footing with the students. On the rare occasion when she felt it was necessary to act as a master teacher in the group situation, this was clearly expressed as: 'Sorry, folks, now I have to be a teacher for a moment . . .'

*The horn students' and teacher's comments on the lesson framework*

The model in which individual and group teaching were combined with fixed groups on a permanent weekly basis was new to all the horn students.

In response to the new model of grouping the lessons, all the students clearly pointed out how they appreciated the opportunity to have both individual and group lessons every week. They focused on the importance of building confidence in students and giving them faith in their own abilities. They all agreed that commenting on fellow students' playing was a good learning experience and that the opportunity to play for more listeners than their teacher every week was very valuable. In addition to this they stated the following:

StudN1:

I am always critical to the comments from my fellow students, since they are not from my teacher, but that is a good thing in itself.

StudN4:

I see my teacher in different settings every week and because of this I feel I am under continuous observation. The pressure I feel – and should feel when playing for people – becomes part of the education . . . It can also be challenging to be well enough prepared for so many lessons every week, but because of all the 'meeting points', I don't always need a full individual lesson every week. In that way I get more independent of my teacher.

StudR4:

There is more variation in the way I learn. I both receive and give comments and I learn to teach. The whole teaching situation is more open-minded and I see things



from different angles. I learn to be a listening 'teacher' by listening to different personalities.

The students comment that they learn from teacher, fellow students and themselves. The group lessons give them greater responsibility as they serve as 'teachers' for fellow students. They all comment that they learn both from receiving and from giving comments. By listening to other students, they learn to appreciate different ways of playing and different kinds of interpretations. This is similar to Brew's (1999) perspective when he discusses peer assessment, and how to prepare students for life-long learning. He states that assessment and learning must increasingly be viewed as one and the same activity, and assessment must become an integral part of the learning process:

When teachers share with their students the process of assessment – giving up control, sharing power and leading students to take on the authority to assess themselves – the professional judgment of both is enhanced. Assessment becomes not something done to students. It becomes an activity done with students (p. 169).

The horn teacher, who has long experience as an instrumental teacher, has only employed the combination of individual and small group teaching for two years. She comments:

I am very pleased with this way of organising the teaching, and I am rather surprised I didn't think of it earlier. The students don't just learn from one teacher, but from many other sources as well – and ultimately from themselves. They learn how to express constructively what they think could be improved to their fellow students. This makes them more conscious about their own playing. And they clearly get inspired by one another. The students are supposed to be 'helpers' and not 'critics' in the teaching situation. It is similar to sports: They train together, but compete in the end. The students get used to playing for each other, which makes them tougher.

The students and teacher agree that:

The teacher must:

- plan and organise the group
- ensure a positive atmosphere in the group
- respect the students' comments
- take part as a group member on the same 'level' as the students
- accept that the students may suggest the best solutions
- 'forget' the role as main instrument teacher in the group session.

The students must:

- choose repertoire of interest to the whole group
- be well prepared
- be open-minded
- show respect and interest for each other
- be constructive in their remarks

- show interest in each others' playing
- be responsible group members.

This echoes the findings of Johnson and Johnson (1999) who state that in cooperative learning groups the students give each other whatever support is needed to promote individual success for each group member (p. 72).

Some similarities may be seen between the horn project and Brändström's project (1994), in which a group of piano students were involved in developing self-formulated goals, self-activity and self-evaluation of their own learning process. In Brändström's project one weekly group lesson was timetabled by the teacher, and the individual piano lessons were scheduled by the students themselves when they were ready to have a lesson. The most noticeable effects of this project were connected with the development and growth of the participants. Words such as 'self-confidence', 'independence' and 'responsibility' were used in several of the evaluation comments. Brändström suggests that the most important role of the teacher is to create an educational environment and to awaken and stimulate the inner motivation of the students to take more responsibility. This is also what happens in the horn group lessons and also what we find in Jerome Bruner's theories about learning as a process and not an end (Bruner, 1996). According to Bruner, 'learning how to perform skilfully does not get a person to the same level of flexible skill as when one learns by a combination of practice and conceptual explanation' (p. 54). This supports the idea that the relationship a teacher establishes with students in different teaching situations has an effect on the learning process and the subsequent ability of students to become independent, reflective musicians. Further support can be found in the project on strategies in instrumental teaching of Young *et al.* (2003). Here we find that the recent move by some institutions to challenge the dominance of one-to-one teaching has not merely been introduced for pragmatic or financial grounds, but also because it promotes effective teaching and learning.

#### *The ideal way to organise the lesson framework*

The horn students and the horn teacher had positive experiences with this way of organising the teaching. They all express that they want to continue with the same model:

StudN1:

I like all the opportunities to perform for different people in formal and more informal situations. I also like being in a time squeeze with a lot going on in a week. I work more effectively then, and thanks to experience from the group situation, I am now not so nervous playing for people.

StudN4:

I like the good mixture of playing opportunities and the good balance between pointing out what is good and what needs correction.

StudR4:

It is very boring to have only one-to-one lessons. I prefer changing groups every semester to meet more fellow students.

Horn teacher:

The ideal way for me would be to continue with this combination of individual teaching and small group teaching. The intensity of each lesson increases when the lessons are organised in different ways. I am convinced that a sole concentration on individual lessons does not necessarily make students better musicians. I believe that the way you organise the lessons is essential for the students' development as musicians. By organising lessons in different ways you also highlight new elements in different settings.

### **Conclusion**

To make a model like this succeed, with all its different elements, it is important that the participants realise that not only do they learn from their own playing, but also from listening and commenting on the playing of fellow students. It is essential for the students to feel that their contribution to the group is of importance.

Harald Jørgensen raises the question:

Is the student given the opportunity to develop his independence and active initiative in learning or is he restricted to develop his ability to receive, absorb and transform teacher influences? (Jørgensen, 2000, p. 68)

Jørgensen argues that the institutional leaders are obliged to put student independence on the agenda for institutional work. The fact that students are seeking alternatives to one-to-one teaching should alert those in charge of organising instrumental tuition to question whether different learning contexts should be formally provided or even compulsory for the students (Haddon, 2011, p. 82). Gaunt *et al.* (2012) show in their research that teachers and students are on a more equal footing than some years ago and learners find themselves taking on new roles. They also found that students highly valued being part of a community and the contribution this could make to the learning process (p. 31). The challenges in all organising models appear to involve the support shown for the chosen model. A compulsory model is no success if it is not supported by teachers and students. The institution, the teacher and the students must believe in the advantages of organising teaching in different ways and establish a collaborative culture that makes it easier to introduce new models. This may be part of the answer to the success of the horn model. The students and teacher must develop the model together and they must know the role of the student and the teacher in the different settings. In this way teaching and learning are regarded as a combination of performing, listening and commenting in different kinds of teaching and performing situations, and the students are given much responsibility in a positive group atmosphere.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Harald Jørgensen and Frøydis Ree Wekre for their helpful advice and support in this project.

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