

# Popular musicians and instrumental teachers: the influence of informal learning on teaching strategies

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*This article explores the relationship between how popular musicians learn and how they subsequently teach, and considers the extent to which they incorporate their own informal learning practices into their work as teachers. A group of eight UK teachers was recruited and data collection, involving interviews and lesson observations, took place between January 2006 and December 2008. Findings are reported here in relation to two teachers in particular, whose learning histories were similar but whose teaching practices were very different. The ways they valued the results of their informal learning practices seemed to determine the extent to which they sought to replicate them in their teaching. There is evidence for the significance of learning histories, and implications for training and professional development.*

## Introduction

I was working as a drum teacher in 2003 when I began teaching a new student, an experienced player in his mid-thirties. After about ten minutes of his first lesson, he brought proceedings to an abrupt halt by announcing, somewhat sheepishly, that he had a ‘confession’ to make. He explained that as a musician he was completely self-taught, and did indeed want to come for lessons to develop his own playing; however, he had a more pressing problem. He had recently become a drum teacher himself, and was due to give a lesson the next day to a promising student who wanted to start a new piece. He was not confident that he knew this well enough to teach it: could I go through it with him?

The piece was part of a Grade 4 exam syllabus for drum kit, and he was most reluctant to volunteer any attempts at playing what was written. He was unable to identify note names or their relative duration, and could only hazard guesses at what particular phrases might sound like. In short, while he was easily capable of *playing* the piece, he couldn’t actually read it. I asked why it was that he was trying to teach in this way, using notation and grade exams, when he was unfamiliar with the material and couldn’t read the parts himself. He replied:

Well it’s what you’re supposed to do, isn’t it?

This story raises several issues concerning instrumental teaching, in particular the relationship between learning histories and teaching practice. This article considers the

significance of informal learning histories for popular musicians who teach; that is, whether they 'subscribe to the cultural default' (Finney & Philpott, 2010, p. 12) of traditional, classical pedagogy, or instead find ways to reflect their own musical life histories in their teaching.

### **Informal learning and instrumental teaching**

How popular musicians learn is now reasonably well-documented. Bennett (1980), Cohen (1991), Berliner (1994), Lilliestam (1996) and Green (2002) show that such musicians are often largely self-taught, typically employing 'informal' learning practices such as listening to and copying recordings, watching – and getting advice from – other more experienced players, as well as joining bands, rehearsing and performing with peers.

Many researchers and educators advocate the potential benefits of introducing aspects of these informal learning practices into the classroom or the conservatoire (see for example Boespflug, 1999; Allsup, 2003; Jaffurs, 2004; Davis, 2005; Finney & Philpott, 2010; Feichas, 2010); attempts to do so are variously reported by Bjornberg (1993), Evelein (2006), Gullberg (2006) and Green (2008).

It is not immediately obvious whether or not popular musicians who become instrumental teachers themselves use these informal learning practices as part of their own teaching methods. The commonplace idea that musicians tend to 'teach as they were taught' is debatable (see for example Mills & Smith, 2003), and in any case is not necessarily relevant for popular musicians who have largely taught themselves through self-directed informal learning. What research there is into instrumental teaching is overwhelmingly concerned with the teaching of classical music, and even prestigious classical performers may be surprisingly reluctant to reveal the details of their teaching practices (Purser, 2005, p. 296). Most instrumental teachers are isolated (Burwell, 2005, p. 199) and thus tend to devise teaching methods individually and in private. How musicians from a popular music background might teach is a subject almost completely undocumented by music education research.

There is ample research to suggest the significance of personal biography to the working practices of teachers (Goodson, 1992; Thomas, 1995). Lortie (2002, p. 79) argues that personal experience and judgement are more profound influences on teacher behaviour than statutory teacher training. If this is true for classroom teachers, it is likely to be even more so for instrumental teachers, who generally enter the profession with little or no training in pedagogy (Baker, 2006, p. 39) and often have considerable freedom as regards syllabus, or at least the manner in which they deliver it. Therefore one might assume that the choices popular musicians make about how and what to teach would, in some way, reflect their own learning histories.

However, much popular music learning is solitary, self-directed and apparently indiscriminate, and thus hardly forms an obvious model to base teaching strategies upon. Lucy Green interviewed 14 popular musicians about their learning histories, and found that they tended to undervalue the ways they themselves had learned; some of them 'did not consider their own informal acquisition of musical skills and knowledge to even "count" as learning at all' (Green, 2002, p. 184). Accordingly, she suggests that popular musicians who become teachers may be reluctant or unable to draw on their own experiences as

learners, and instead adopt traditional, formal methods of instrumental teaching; the story recounted in the introduction is one such instance. Certainly, the stereotypical image of the traditional, 'conservatoire' model of instrumental teaching – based on reading notation, learning technical exercises and performing notated pieces – still represents many people's idea of what an instrumental lesson should be (West & Rostvall, 2003, p. 19; Mills, 2007, p. 140). Even popular music grade exams (such as those offered by Rockschool) broadly follow this familiar structure. Yet this approach to teaching hardly reflects the typical learning practices of popular musicians as suggested in the literature. The research reported here attempted to establish how learning histories related to teaching practice within a selected group of popular musicians.

### Research methods

A number of instrumental teachers were invited to take part in an investigation into how popular musicians teach, involving interviews and lesson observations. Teachers were contacted through a variety of means; some advertised on notice boards and in listings magazines, while others worked at private music schools and publicly funded colleges. Friends and acquaintances of the researcher were also contacted. Some teachers were simply unwilling to take part, while others disqualified themselves as *not* being 'popular musicians' who had learned to play 'under their own steam' (as the participant's introductory letter put it) but rather had begun learning through formal tuition. Ultimately, eight popular musicians were recruited, mainly from the Bristol and Bath area; seven were male and one female. They ranged in age from 30 to 52, and taught a variety of instruments: there were two piano teachers and two saxophone teachers, one who taught guitar and singing, while the others taught respectively harmonica, 5-string banjo and double bass.

The interviews and lesson observations took place between January 2006 and December 2008. Each participant was interviewed at length on a wide range of topics concerning their learning histories and their teaching practice. Semi-structured interviews were employed, allowing issues to be explored in depth as they arose; equally, given the personal and potentially intrusive nature of the research, it was important to adopt a form of investigation which encouraged a good rapport between researcher and interviewee (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 57). Questions covered a range of subjects, such as how and why they learned their chosen instrument, their experience of being taught (both at school and in instrumental lessons), and the extent of musical participation among their parents and siblings. They were also invited to give as much detail as possible about their teaching practice; for example, where their teaching materials came from, to what extent they relied on listening to recordings in their lessons, how they approached the use of notation, and their attitude towards grade exams. The interviews lasted on average around one and three-quarter hours.

Seven of the eight teachers were also filmed at work (one teacher was happy to be interviewed but reluctant to be filmed). The teachers themselves chose the students to be filmed, and in most cases this resulted in around an hour of one-to-one teaching, though in one case four shorter lessons were observed.

The coding and analysis of the interviews was based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003), a form of grounded theory (Strauss

& Corbin, 1990). This resulted in the data being grouped into three major themes: how these musicians learned to play, how they teach, and their role as teachers and the attitudes and beliefs that this entails. The lesson observation videos were initially transcribed as a 'timeline', a form of event coding (Robson, 2002, p. 334), and were subsequently analysed in terms of their 'fit' with the interview data – that is, the extent to which they confirmed or contradicted the interviews. The personal 'style' of the teachers, including for example their manner towards their students and their levels of expectation, was also considered. For more details of methodology, and the project as a whole, see Robinson (2010).

### **Learning histories: Bill and Frank**

All the interviewees seemed willing to discuss their musical life histories, and in particular their learning careers, in considerable detail. Much of their talk supported existing accounts of how popular musicians learn, though these histories were surprisingly complex and varied. Despite agreeing to a description of themselves as 'popular musicians', several of them had in fact also drawn extensively on more 'formal' resources, such as having lessons and using notation. This group was certainly unusual among popular learners, since they had all gone on to be teachers; however, it may be commonplace for more serious or committed players of popular styles to consciously study technique and theory, albeit after their aural acuity has been well established.

Similarly, all the participants spoke at length about their teaching practices, which also demonstrated a range of formal and informal strategies. For example, one teacher never used any notation in his lessons; others used notation as a matter of course from the first lesson. Some began teaching 'by ear', through listening to recordings and demonstrating, before introducing matters of technique and theory as lessons progressed. I will focus on two teachers in particular, referred to here as Bill (double bass) and Frank (harmonica). A comparison between the two is helpful for the purposes of illustration since their learning histories are in many ways quite similar, yet their teaching practices very different.

Frank had a long and not particularly successful history of music learning at school, mainly on the trumpet. He recalled his lessons as being 'dry and dusty', and 'hated' the tutor book he was expected to study: 'What I really wanted to do was become Louis Armstrong . . . I didn't really want to play classical music'. The teaching he experienced at school simply didn't allow him to develop into the jazz trumpeter he longed to be. It was only several years after leaving school that his interest in playing music again was re-kindled by (repeatedly) seeing the film 'The Blues Brothers', and listening to a recording which accompanied the film:

That had lots of harmonica on it, and I just thought: 'That is such a sexy sound, I really want to do that', and they were playing this bluesy jazzy stuff that I wanted to do but could never do on trumpet. [Frank]

As a result, he decided: 'I have to get a harmonica, it's very simple, the road ahead is now clear'.

Meanwhile, Bill volunteered for the cello when he was 'about eight or so'; as far as he could remember, this was just out of 'curiosity'. He took both shared lessons at school and individual lessons with a private teacher, and studied for grade exams: 'I think I got

up to about grade 5 on that, did the theory exam'. However: 'I pretty soon figured out that the cello wasn't the instrument for me'. Much like Frank he couldn't make the music he wanted to on the instrument he was being taught:

Bill: I could see that playing the cello led into an orchestra really, and I did play in several youth orchestras in the area . . . and that was, you know, that was good, but it wasn't music that I liked listening to, it wasn't music that I was particularly excited by, and I wanted to play that music instead.

Interviewer: Which was what, at the time?

Bill: Punk rock [laughter].

He gave up the cello and started playing electric bass instead, learning entirely by ear: 'I just used to listen to records and play along, pick the bass line out, and play along with it'. He stressed the excitement of being in a band and making up one's own music.

Similarly, Frank began 'tootling around' by ear on the harmonica. He 'went to see some bands, getting more into music, and saw some people playing harmonica live, and thought: "A-ha, this is interesting"'. He had some lessons with a well-known blues harmonica player, which were of limited help in practical terms but 'very inspirational': 'I went out and bought some other harmonicas, I think he lent me a record, so I started playing – and then I just really didn't put it down at all'. Within a year of starting to play he was in a band, a situation in which 'you're forced to learn'. He described using his ear to pick out suitable blues riffs from recordings and emphasised how motivated he was: 'I was driven to achieve my aims, and my aim was to be in a band, be on a stage'. Frank regarded listening, experimenting, having periods of tuition with various teachers and playing in bands as being all 'parts of the picture, I can't say which is more important'. He described his playing and, subsequently, teaching career as 'very eclectic': 'it's been a very wide, a very broad learning'.

Bill also described a powerful urge to master the electric bass. After his punk band split up, his bass guitar playing continued to develop as a result of determined practice. In particular, the distinctive sound of Mark King from the band Level 42 was a major inspiration: 'How on earth is he doing that on the bass? I want to do that, I've got to find out how to do that'. His new band was heavily influenced by listening to 'proper "muso" music':

Bill: It was way, way beyond – you know what I mean, don't you? [laughter]

Interviewer: I know exactly what you mean!

Bill: Way beyond what we could accomplish, but it didn't put us off you know, and I spent hours and hours and hours listening to these Level 42 records, getting it off, and I did actually do it.

Although he went on to be a full-time double bass player in musical theatre, he was very aware that the skills he needed for his career could only have developed through learning in complementary ways:

I had experience in the orchestra of watching a conductor, that's quite important, and reading music obviously, you know, I can do that. So it's the two things, but it's having the rhythmic feel for show music, it's not the same as orchestral playing in the rhythmic

sense, you've got to be a band player with an orchestral mentality almost, you know, it's a combination of things. [Bill]

The determination to master his instrument transferred from electric to double bass. Hearing a solo recording of Ludwig Streicher was to prove another major inspiration: 'Again, it's this thing about: "Ooh, I want to be able to do that, ah, that's such a nice sound, gorgeous"'. However, the informal approach that had seemed to work for electric bass, such as 'watching other people play' and 'listening to some records', no longer served; he was unable to correct specific technical issues, such as bowing technique, without expert advice. He seemed driven by his own dissatisfaction ('never really been happy with what I could play') and had studied with a series of increasingly prestigious teachers to improve his playing.

We can see from this brief summary that the learning histories of Bill and Frank are in many key respects quite similar, and have much in common with existing accounts of popular musicians' experiences, particularly in their negative reports of classical tuition and in the self-directed learning strategies they adopted (see in particular Green, 2002, for similar accounts). They both had a history of formal tuition which involved learning (that is, being taught) instruments and playing music that were not what they wanted at the time, and which were abandoned. Each had moments of revelation when they heard a particular *sound* which captivated them and thus determined the musical direction they would take. They both started learning their chosen instruments by ear from studying recordings, but they also sought tuition to help them, and both believed that how they had ended up as musicians was the result of a wide range of influences and experiences, both 'formal' and 'informal'. One might imagine, if learning histories do indeed have a powerful influence on teaching strategies, that these similarities between Bill and Frank might result in broadly similar approaches to teaching.

### **Teaching strategies: Bill and Frank**

Frank's teaching career began when, despite his misgivings, he was persuaded to take over the running of a series of evening classes on the harmonica: 'I really didn't know what I was doing at all'. As a result he enrolled on 'a two-year course in how to run music workshops' at Goldsmith's College in London:

I realised I needed to do that, so during that course, which was absolutely brilliant ... we were given all these different games, and warm-up games and stuff, and things to try out, projects and placements and assessments and all that, and I steered it all towards the harmonica. [Frank]

This (among other training courses) was to prove invaluable to his teaching.

Frank subsequently started work for his local music service in Bristol, and was confronted by the lack of suitable syllabus material for teaching the harmonica to primary school children, some as young as five years old. While he didn't like the tunes on offer in the existing 'harmonica books', the problem was more profound than one of musical taste. Given their physique and level of motor control, such young children 'couldn't access

single notes, they couldn't play melodies'. As a result, he began creating syllabus material himself:

Frank: I figured that on that instrument they can't play single notes, to begin with, so melody is out of the question, so we're left with chords and rhythms, so I use a thing called "chugging", which is teaching them chords and rhythms and articulations, they just say crazy words into the harmonica.

Interviewer: Can you give me some examples?

Frank: "Choo chacka-choo chacka-choo chacka-choo", breathing out and then breathing in, and this is stuff I got from trumpet actually, you know that "ta takka-ta takka-ta", that kind of thing; so just rhythms, rhythms and saying these words, you build up – some of it sounds like "chugga-lugga chugga-lugga", it sounds like trains or whatever you like, so it's playing games with music. [Frank]

He subsequently found a harmonica with only four (large) holes, and used these with a system of hand signs he devised:

I found that with these [four-hole] harmonicas I can give these to complete beginners of pretty much any age and so long as they know which hole that means [holds up one finger to indicate hole one], which they can all understand, and that's [gestures] breathing out and breathing in, once they've understood that, any tune that they already know, they can play. [Frank]

At first his lessons were based on listening and watching ('of course they're all staring at you . . . there's nothing written down') though this system was subsequently backed up with notation ('they get it written down to take home'). As learners progressed they moved up to a standard ten-hole harmonica, and he had produced a series of increasingly challenging play-along CDs, much of which he had recorded himself, using a wide range of musical styles spanning 'blues, jazz, funk, rock . . . film and cartoon themes'. In establishing his teaching methods he had founded a minor empire in a nearby local authority, with nine teachers (whom he had trained) using this material to teach 500 children in 30 schools.

Meanwhile, although he had occasionally taught more advanced pupils, Bill had mostly taught beginners, and it may be useful to quote in some detail (although edited) his answer to the question: 'Can you give me some idea of how you teach?':

It really is a case of getting a note out of the bass, getting the hand to hold the bow in one hand and the finger to press down hard enough to get some notes, and that is hard work to start with, if you're only little, even with a scaled-down instrument they still find it hard to press the strings down hard enough to get the note, you know to sound pure . . . I start by saying that they're going to use the bow to start with, I don't start by pizzicato which would actually be easier I think . . . but with "pizz" you don't actually hear the notes so well, the intonation . . . and that's very important when you're learning, you need to learn where to put your, your hand down to get the right, get it in tune sort of thing. So I start with the bow . . . it's all, start with your hand-shape really on the neck, how is it, 'cos if it's wrong, you won't be able to move your hand up and down the neck in an efficient way and you won't be able to play the things that you want to play. So where, yeah, how, what, what, you know, how to press the

notes down, where the notes are; I'm assuming that these, you know, can they read music? If not, you have to do that as well. [Bill]

Bill himself seemed somewhat overwhelmed with how much a novice double bass player needed to do. Whether starting to teach beginners or more experienced players, his attitude was the same: 'The only level you can attack on is like technique, how do you actually play the bass'. This focus on technique led directly into the Associated Board syllabus, and he taught the same pieces he himself had studied with a teacher some 15 years earlier.

### Discussion

Throughout the account of his teaching, Frank's own skills and experiences as a learner were evident. The initial emphasis in his teaching was on listening and performing from the start and his approach was built, not just on the physical realities of what his pupils could do, but also on the psychological realities of what they would enjoy. A wide range of musical styles were on offer. Although in later life this emphasis on listening, performing, variety and, above all, enjoyment was exactly his approach to musical learning, it was very different from his own initial experiences of tuition.

Yet not all of Frank's teaching was drawn from his later, more successful informal learning. The notation and theory which first figured in his trumpet lessons re-appeared in his harmonica teaching, though now preceded by ear-based learning. He also found a constructive role for the tonguing and breathing patterns he learned on the trumpet, as these were re-imagined as 'chugging' and combined with 'different games' and 'things to try out' – ideas he brought from his course in workshop skills.

However, it seems that Bill's history as an informal learner did not figure in his approach to teaching. When explicitly asked if he thought it was important for his pupils to be, for example, 'learning things by ear, by listening, by picking out the bass line in a piece', he replied: 'Er, yeah, when they get to that stage'. While he had a relatively short history of teaching, that stage had evidently not yet been reached with any of his students. Bill acquired considerable technique on the electric bass, and subsequently on the double bass, by persistently trying to copy music that, at the time, was initially unplayable. For his pupils however, technique had to come first, 'before there's any question of playing any music'. He made a point of demonstrating technical issues, but there was no evidence that learning by ear or using recordings featured at all in his teaching. He was no more than lukewarm about studying for grade exams as a learner, yet he adopted the same exam syllabus to use as a teacher. In short, Bill seemed to have done exactly what Green (2002) predicted such musicians might do; he had overlooked all his own informal learning practices and adopted a traditional, classical model of teaching, albeit one that was familiar to him from his own experience of being taught. Frank however took elements from throughout his learning history, although his teaching was firmly based on listening and playing familiar tunes from the first lesson.

The learning histories of Bill and Frank do not run perfectly in parallel; for example, while Frank learned the harmonica through a wide variety of methods, Bill learned the electric bass more or less solely by listening, copying and performing, and subsequently relied more on tuition to develop on the double bass. Nevertheless, it would appear that



they had a great deal more in common as learners than they did as teachers. How might we explain the very different relationships between their learning histories and their teaching practices? How can such similar histories produce such different teachers?

Perhaps it seems understandable that technical issues should govern Bill's initial approach; it would appear easier for a young beginner to produce musical sounds on a harmonica than on a double bass, particularly given Bill's insistence on learning classical repertoire using a bow. However, Frank also encountered fundamental problems of technique teaching very young children who were at first unable to access single notes, yet he did not respond by insisting that they keep trying until they could play as the existing syllabus (and existing pedagogy) demanded. In fact, just the opposite: he wrote a complete syllabus to accommodate what they *could* do easily and enjoyably. Moreover, it is clearly possible to approach learning – and teaching – instruments in different ways, as Finnegan (1989, pp. 141–142) suggests. Other teachers in the present study also show that good technique may be established while learning by ear rather than from notation, and while learning a variety of musical styles.

These two teachers were not just responding to the circumstances they found themselves in: they each made an active personal choice to teach in the way that they did. Even Bill was not 'teaching as he was taught'; throughout years of tuition with a series of double bass teachers, he never felt that he found the expert technical advice that he really needed to play the classical music he aspired to. He had gone on to emphasise in his teaching precisely what he *didn't* get from tuition, and what he couldn't learn on his own. This may give us a clue as to the kinds of teachers these two have become.

One question discussed in the interviews is particularly relevant here. When asked whether they had any regrets about the way they learned, the responses were very different. Bill immediately replied: 'Oh god, yeah', and went on:

Bill: I wish I had started on double bass . . . I've wasted a hell of a lot of time . . . I mean there is still stuff that I just don't know, actually, that I would have learned if I'd gone through more conventional music training.

Interviewer: Do you wish you'd had a more conventional music training?

Bill: From that point of view yeah, definitely, 'cos I haven't got the time now to go back to go into all this stuff that I kind of skipped over or didn't learn in the first place.

When Frank was asked the same question, he replied: 'I would much prefer to have just learned jazz from the start . . . [but] I don't particularly regret that it didn't happen because I've come to it later, and that's the way it goes'. Frank might have wished for the 'short-cut' that good teaching can offer, but was clearly more positive about his own past. Bill on the other hand seemed to wish he had had a fundamentally different learning history.

It seems the ways in which they 'valued' their learning histories is central to how these musicians approached teaching, and can help explain the differences between them. Bill did give at least some credit to his informal past; he described 'playing in bands and rhythm sections early on' as being 'absolutely invaluable', but saw neither the possibility, nor the necessity, of incorporating any such elements into his teaching. He was dismissive of his informal achievements: '[Electric] bass guitar playing is just a doddle really . . . no special talent needed, you know [laughter]'. Similarly, he was most reluctant to acknowledge

the value of his 'informal' approach on double bass. Despite a career of over a decade performing classical music, jazz and musical theatre, he said he had only 'figured out enough to get by on'; and had to be prompted to admit just how far he got:

Interviewer: Well, you got to be a professional double bass player pretty much under your own steam.

Bill: Yeah, I did, I never really, I didn't really [pause]; that's true I suppose.

Yet while Bill was miserable 'making a terrible sound', and even contemplating giving up his instrument in frustration, Frank was celebrating the results of his learning experiences which – at last – allowed him to make the music he wanted: 'I could play all these minor thirds, and I could do all the stuff that I really wanted to do . . . and it sounded great!'. No wonder, given this feeling of satisfaction, that he was keen to include as much of his own varied experience as possible in his teaching practice. Bill dwelled on the most significant fact of his learning experiences – his inability to correct his technique without expert help. If Bill viewed his informal learning as inconsequential and inadequate, it is understandable that he would *not* wish to reflect this in his teaching. One could say he was trying to give his pupils what he didn't have himself: expert technical help from the very start.

Thus Bill's teaching strategy represents what he might have wished for himself as a learner. The same can be said for Frank; while satisfied with where he has ended up, he still wished he had found good advice to get there sooner, and had had the chance to study different kinds of music: exactly what he now offers as a teacher. He was clear that he would have benefited from studying with 'as good a teacher as I think I am'. In short, these musicians have ended up teaching, not as they were taught, but as they *wish* they had been taught.

There is no correlation here with how apparently 'successful' they were. Frank never came anywhere near to being a full-time player, yet thought his playing sounded 'great'; Bill had a thriving career as a performer yet thought his playing sounded 'terrible'. This sense of themselves is not based on validation from the outside world, but is about their own sense of value and personal satisfaction.

## Conclusions

The evidence here shows that, for these popular musicians at least, learning histories are central to the development of teaching strategies, and that the latter may well be as individual and idiosyncratic as the former. However the relationship between how these teachers learned and how they subsequently taught is complex.

It is clear that Frank and Bill did not set out simply to teach as they were taught; as it transpired, neither did the other teachers who took part in this project. It may be that popular musicians are typically not influenced greatly by teachers, since being taught is less important than self-directed learning in this cultural world; this in turn may encourage a certain freedom to create original pedagogy, particularly for instruments and musical styles for which little or no established syllabus material or grade exams exist. However, it should be noted that popular music performance is now widely taught to degree level in the UK, while tuition books and DVDs in all manner of popular styles continue to be published.

This, together with the advice and demonstration available over the internet, may well be changing the ways popular musicians are currently learning and, subsequently, teaching.

Equally Bill and Frank, in common with all eight participants, did not simply attempt to replicate how they learned. Quite apart from the impossibility of recreating for their students the 'informal' circumstances under which they acquired their instrumental skills, they also seemed very clear about the strengths and weaknesses of their own learning careers, and did not necessarily want their students to learn as they had. Instead they had devised teaching strategies to compensate, as it were, for their own shortcomings as players, while adopting in some form methods which had been effective for them.

This research suggests that, while musicians have to learn how to play, teachers have to learn how to teach. Only two members of the group (including Frank) had sought training to improve their teaching; in both cases this was highly valued and effective, not in supplying a 'syllabus', but rather in developing a sense of strategy which could be applied throughout their teaching. However, experience was also an important factor: some of the eight participants had, over time, completely transformed their ideas about teaching. It is suggestive that the teacher who had been teaching for the shortest time (Bill) had adopted a teaching strategy which both closely reflected the teaching he had himself received, as well as incorporating the least of his own past; it may be that experience and further self-reflection will influence his approach. Other members of this group (in particular the two piano teachers) also began teaching with what appears to have been a kind of stereotyped version of the classical model in mind, only for this gradually to mutate into strategies based initially on listening and watching rather than reading notation. Another member of the group (who taught guitar and singing) had completely rejected the example of his own teachers, and had devised a method of teaching entirely based on listening and demonstrating. In trying to make their own teaching relevant and enjoyable almost all of these teachers encouraged learning music by watching and listening rather than relying primarily on reading notation. In doing so they were (albeit unwittingly) following the advice and example of many recent writers and researchers who advocate the introduction of 'informal' music learning practices into 'formal' contexts (several are mentioned at the start of this article). Further research into the ways that personal learning histories influence the work of instrumental teachers (of whatever background), as well as into how their teaching strategies develop over time, would be welcome.

It would not be surprising if all instrumental teachers seek to draw on what they see as the best of their own experience. However, this study suggests that they might also usefully examine and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of their own learning histories, particularly since the abilities and aspirations of their students will not necessarily match their own.

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