

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The role of the parent during a whole-class beginner instrumental programme: an investigation into the attitudes of pupils and their parents towards parental support in relation to different models of practising

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the parent as a supporter of practice during a whole-class beginner violin programme and whether it is considered most beneficial for practice to be undertaken at home, at school or in no formal manner. This mixed-methods research project involved a year-group of 31 pupils aged 6–7 years from a preparatory school in an affluent area of the south of England over a 10-week period. Two parent questionnaires were administered at the start and end of the programme and analysed together with pupil focus groups and teacher assessment. It was discovered that most pupils played at home only once a week, and this was only with parental help. Many challenges to practising at home were identified, and by the end of the programme parents considered that their children could have made as much progress without practising at home. Pupils considered the most desirable ways for their parents to support them were to watch and listen, and to play together. Parents were unsure what to do except for offering encouragement. Pupils were very clear that playing together at school was preferable to playing at home, and it was evident that finding a way to establish school practice sessions between lessons would be the most enjoyable arrangement and support the most progress.

**Keywords:** Learning; music; instrumental; practice; parents

## Literature review

Over time, all primary pupils who want to will be able to learn a musical instrument. (DfES, 2001: 12)

In the current climate of declining numbers of British secondary schools offering formal music education from year 9, recorded in recent research (Daubney & Mackrill, 2018), as well as the worrying exclusion of all arts subjects from the EBacc (English Baccalaureate) suite of GCSEs, it is important that the preceding 'Wider Opportunities Pledge' is fulfilled and all whole-class instrumental programmes have a successful outcome (DfES, 2001: 12). Henley (2011) recommended that these Wider Opportunities programmes become compulsory in all primary schools throughout England, and the current National Curriculum for Music (2013) states that all children of primary age should 'have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument' and 'progress to the next level of musical excellence'. However, there is very limited research into how best to execute whole-class programmes, and more investigation is needed in order to make sure that every child's experience of learning an instrument is advantageous. With this novel approach to instrumental learning in the classroom, it is essential that we explore further, and possibly

'challenge' (Evans, 2011), existing expectations of the model of solitary, concentrated practice at home in order to increase enjoyment and motivation.

This article considers the value of the role of the parent within a whole-class instrumental programme: whether or not progress can be made without direct input at home, ways in which parents influence their child's musical development and the most valuable role for a parent to play. Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the 'zone of proximal development', the many benefits of group work promoted by the SPRinG project (Blatchford, Kutnick, & Baines, 1999) and Green's (2008) pioneering approaches to classroom learning have set the scene for group practice or rehearsal sessions at school being a valuable way to support pupils through a successful whole-class instrumental programme. If we can find ways to establish whole-class models of instrumental learning with new effective approaches to practise which enhance the instrumental programmes, we can give every child a chance to become a thriving musician.

The most significant development in conceptualising practice was the idea of 'deliberate practice' (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993) also regarded as 'formal practice' (Sloboda et al., 1996). 'Deliberate practice' was clearly described by Ericsson as 'solitary practice in which they work to master specific goals determined by the music teacher at weekly lessons' (2006: 693). It is based on the previously established and still-prevalent form of instrumental learning with one-to-one instrumental tuition where the pupil practises daily in preparation for a weekly lesson. With different ways of teaching, it is also necessary to have divergent approaches to practise:

The long-established conservatoire model of musical tuition being all about developing a virtuoso solo performer who develops technical proficiency through regular practice has been challenged. (Evans, 2011: 16)

In Hallam's (2016) recent large-scale report on Whole Class Ensemble Teaching (WCET) which investigated the programmes offered in 22 state-maintained schools, it was found that 'parental support is crucial in supporting continuation' (2016: 2). It is surprising that there are no further comments on the role of the parents other than to say that they were more engaged with the school generally after 'high-quality performances'. Hallam does comment that 'given the lack of opportunities to practice it is surprising that the children reached the standards that many did' (2016: 26). Further investigation into whether or not parents are influential to their child's progress during the early stages of learning an instrument in this way would be useful.

A handful of studies have linked parental support with achievement specifically in music (Davidson, Sloboda, & Howe, 1995; McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002; Sloboda & Howe, 1991) but have either not been looking at beginner instrumentalists or been looking for links with high-achieving learners. There are many different skills which pupils should have the opportunity to develop during a whole-class ensemble programme, and these need to be identified so that it is not solely technical proficiency on an instrument which is supported. Sloboda and Howe's (1991) study of pupils who attended a specialist music school found that parents were usually involved with practice and often sat with their children during practice sessions, and a paper by Davidson, Sloboda, and Howe (1995) found that 'initial motivation for the persistent learners was extrinsically provided by the parent' (1995: 44). All the research appears to corroborate the inference of this study: 'The results reported here support that family involvement is vital to child progress' (1995: 44). However, as Creech and Hallam (2003) pointed out, 'difficulties nevertheless exist in assessing the impact of parental involvement, not least of which is a lack of a precise definition of the term' (2003: 31).

McPherson and Renwick (2001) identified different parental behaviours during practice as teaching, guiding, distracting and listening, and MacMillan (2004) also observed different kinds of parental assistance during practice. She found that the most common reason, according to parents, for them to attend practice was to provide encouragement but other less frequent behaviours they identified were structuring practice, listening, playing together and checking.

The children in MacMillan's (2004) study reported that their parents mainly helped by correcting mistakes but the children also identified different parent behaviours during their practice sessions from those identified by their parents.

Spera (2005) highlights the difference between 'parenting practices' and 'parenting styles' (2005: 127): parenting practices refer to behaviours used by parents to support with socialising their children such as helping with homework, or practice, or attending school events. Parenting styles are concerned with the emotional climate in which parents raise their children (Spera, 2005). Although Spera is particularly focused on the involvement of parents around adolescents and not directly about music, he draws interesting conclusions for parenting practices and styles in relation to school achievement; 'the research reviewed indicates that parents have a significant influence on the school achievement of their children' (2005: 141). Music practice is also often compared to homework in many respects, and studies relating to influences on homework are often relevant to music practice. A study of homework by Xu and Corno (1998) shows that parents can be influential in supporting their children in developing the important skills needed for 'self-monitoring, motivation, controlling attention and handling emotional difficulties' (McPherson & Davidson, 2002: 154). However, controlling environments too closely by either parents or teachers can have a negative impact and can damage pupils' feelings of autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

McPherson (2009) presents a model of parent-child interactions in children's musical learning (2009: 94) which shows how parenting goals lead to types of parenting styles; parenting practices are mediated by these styles and then mediated again by the child characteristics and other factors and can finally lead to a number of child outcomes. Within the child characteristics section, he includes self-monitoring, motivation, self-belief and personal feelings which are similar to the skills identified by Xu and Corno (1998), and which are also closely connected to influences from parental practices and styles.

McPherson (2009) hypothesises that the belief parents hold of their children's competence as a musician can shape their development, as they will support their children to achieve that level and seek out the necessary supports. However, as parental views on competence are usually fixed, this can have a negative impact, as shown in McPherson and Davidson's (2002) report of mother and child interactions at the initial stage of learning. They found that very soon after the children had commenced with formal instruction, their mothers had decided whether or not to encourage practice based on their assessment of how their child was coping with their practice, as well as their willingness to devote energy and time to the practice schedule (McPherson & Davidson, 2002). McPherson and Renwick's (2001) study also noticed a decline in parental involvement after the first year of learning, observing that during the first year 'one or both parents were in the room for 65.2% of the time' but by year 3 this had dropped to '23.4% of the time' (2001: 182).

There have been some studies which have considered that parental involvement does not always correspond with musical achievement (Dregalla, 1983; Hallam, 1997; Mitchell, 1985; Zdsinski, 1991). MacMillan (2004) postulates that there is strong evidence in literature 'that musical achievement is linked to high levels of parental involvement' (2004: 296) but found no links between parental involvement and pupil achievement in her research project, possibly due to it being a small-scale survey. Davidson et al. (1996), in a further report of an earlier research project, stated that 'it is not possible to conclude from previous findings that children's musical success is directly related to the degree of parental involvement observed' (1996: 3), but they did conclude that 'all children required some parental assistance in order for practice to be undertaken' (1996: 17). They concluded that it was a number of factors, together, which impacted most on the level of achievement of the individual student: they require parents to attend lessons; support practice but 'follow rather than lead their own child's growing sense of musicianship' (1996: 24); have an interest in music but not necessarily be musicians; and have a supportive family situation with siblings who also play a supportive role in development (1996).

In her research, O'Neill (1997) identifies a clear link between the quality of practice and progress, between the amount of practice undertaken and progress, and between parental support and

progress. In addition, O'Neill hypothesises that motivational processes play an important role in musical development and identifies goals and personally challenging tasks as of particular importance to teachers. Griffin claims that 'intrinsic interest sustains motivation' and is 'strongly linked with higher quality learning' (2013: 67/8). McPherson, Davidson, and Faulkner (2012) agree with this to some extent but make the point that this is dependent on the development of self-regulation. Identifying intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for beginner instrumentalists in a whole-class setting is the key to formulating an explanation of the influences on motivation. When looking at 'novice' musicians in particular, both Hallam (1997) and Sloboda and Howe (1991) found considerable variation in motivational patterns: 'It may be intrinsic or extrinsic, self-generated or supported by other' (Hallam, 1997: 189). Davidson, Sloboda, and Howe (1995) found that 'with time, however, the children's motivation became increasingly intrinsic and self-sustaining' (1995: 44) and therefore, this is agreeing with a viewpoint that children's motivation develops and changes as they mature (Harnischmacher, 1997; McPherson & Davidson, 2006). O'Neill suggests that 'far more emphasis should be placed on motivational issues in future if we are to have a better understanding of why some children are more successful than others in the initial stages of formal instrumental training' (O'Neill, 1997: 66). Hallam supports this viewpoint and explains the complexity of music motivation in her study of the current and historical theories of motivation:

It may be intrinsic, self-generated or supported by others. Different patterns of motivation may lead to similar outcomes. High levels of intrinsic motivation may lead to lengthy periods of practice for the sheer enjoyment of playing. Those motivated by external factors may adopt time-effective practice strategies to optimize learning and reduce time spent in practice. Both may achieve similar levels of performance. Further research is required to explore the interplay between types of motivation, enjoyment, time spent practicing, the effectiveness of practice and subsequent learning outcomes. (Hallam, 2002: 237)

The links between motivation and musical development are complex and include intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, self-regulation, parental support, enjoyment and determination as well as other environmental factors. Green (2008) found that pupils experienced 'high levels of enjoyment' (2008: 66) when given the freedom to direct their own learning. Giving learners the freedom of choice over repertoire and creative activities within their practice, as well as supporting the development of self-regulation skills, leads to increased intrinsic motivation and creates a feeling of autonomy and enjoyment which in turn leads to more effective practice.

Although it has been found that high-achieving student musicians usually receive high levels of parental support, it is not always observed that student success is linked to parental involvement. At all stages of a child's musical development it appears necessary for a child to be reminded to practise but the influence of additional considerations such as the influence of the home environment and the characteristics of the individual child need further investigation. McPherson's (2009) model shows clearly some of these connections, and it would appear that although parents are very influential, it is ultimately the motivation, self-belief and self-regulation of the child that has the largest impact on outcome. Other supportive actions by parents which can influence musical progress are the parent attending lessons, having a general interest in music and providing a supportive environment. Hallam (2002) concludes that 'while the literature as a whole indicates that having a highly supportive and encouraging home background is important, it is clearly not essential' (2002: 235).

## Method and participants

The participants in this research were aged 6–7 from two year 2 classes (class A and class B; 31 in total). Both classes learnt the violin as part of a whole-class instrumental programme for 10 weeks

during the summer term 2018 with twice weekly 40- min lessons. The school is a large preparatory school for children aged 4–13 on the South Coast of England with approximately 300 pupils attending. It is located in an affluent area, all pupils are from advantaged backgrounds and tests are taken prior to entry in the school. Parents are supportive of academic achievement but are often slow to respond to correspondence, which is relevant to mention as response to my communication relating to this research was often slow, and impacted on data gathering. As the school has only one class set of violins, it was necessary for the two classes to share them. Pupils were allowed to take the violins home, but I decided that one class would take them home every weekend for the first half of the term and then they would swap over. Throughout the school, pupils receive one or two weekly class music lessons and receive a firm grounding in all aspects of music education. As well as class music there are visiting instrumental teachers for most instruments, but due to issues of space and time only about one quarter of pupils learn an instrument in the one-to-one and small-group classes.

The focus of the study was to investigate the attitudes and views of pupils and their parents towards practice over the course of the whole-class violin programme. It sought to uncover the importance of practice at home for progress at this early stage of learning and whether progress can still be made with very little or no practice. I investigated the aspects of learning within the class situation which have the most influence on motivation and made suggestions for integrating these within practice to enhance learning. Finally, I explored the role of the parent within a whole-class programme and specifically the value of their role as a supporter of practice. The final investigation is the focus of this article.

The study used mixed-methods, combining the use of questionnaires with group interviews/focus groups and recorded assessment. Sample questionnaires were sent to four parents at the start of the project and then the final questionnaires to all sets of parents in weeks 3 and 10. The questions used were dichotomous, rating scale and open questions to gather the data needed, and the group interviews/focus groups were completed during week 6. Using my knowledge of the classes and how the individuals interact with one another, I carefully selected combinations of pupils of varying abilities who I knew would feel confident to speaking with one another. I initiated the sessions with interview-style questions and completed them with a short discussion once they had relaxed more in the situation.

## Results

Parents initially had strong views about the importance of practising at home, with several making sweeping statements such as ‘Practice is essential to learning any new skill’ and ‘Practice is the key to everything’. However, even though 95% of parents initially considered it necessary for their children to practise at home in order to make progress on the violin, by the end of programme most considered it only ‘a little beneficial’. This was based on an experience where parents had reported that most children had either practised ‘once a week’ or ‘not at all’ even when they had the opportunity to take the violin home.

In the group interviews, pupils were completely open in stating how much they had played the violin at home and corroborated their parent’s view that most had played just ‘once a week’. It is interesting that they were uncertain whether or not playing at home helped them to improve, particularly as analysis of the assessment data showed that the majority of pupils progressed very well throughout the programme. Hallam (2016) also revealed similar contradictions in her findings, where she stressed the importance of practice between lessons but was surprised that without opportunities for this, pupils still managed to progress. O’Neill (1997) and Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) found links between amount of practice undertaken and progress, but my study shows clear progress with hardly any practice being undertaken. According to several studies (Davidson & Scripp, 1992; Hallam, 1997; McPherson and Davidson in McPherson, 2006; McPherson & Renwick, 2001), it is only when pupils have acquired a variety of skills and have

reached a higher level of expertise that they are able to develop the 'effectiveness' of their practice. Therefore, at the age and level of participants in my study, practice at home may not be effective without careful guidance. This uncertainty over the need for practice at home once again highlights Evans's (2011) suggestion that with changing models of teaching different approaches to practice are also needed.

Some parents identified reasons why they thought it 'a little beneficial' for their children to practise at home, such as 'opportunities for parents to encourage' and pupils 'to show learning', but more challenges to practising at home were identified. Both at the start and the final stage of the project, parents revealed that time constraints and tiredness were the main problems. Two comments from parents suggested a link between tiredness and motivation which were of particular interest. According to Harnischmacher's 'Maturational processes' (1997), these pupils are at the 'activity phase' of their development and, although at this stage learners will be very keen, they require support to practise effectively and do not yet have sufficient levels of self-regulation to be motivated without help.

At the start of the programme, 81% of parents thought that their children would benefit from support at home. When asked for details of why, the main point parents stressed was that for them 'to encourage' was important but 'listening' and 'helping with note-reading' were also mentioned by a few parents. Several parents were not sure of what they could do, as they did not have specific knowledge of the violin. Responding to a question on their views on 'the most useful role' at the end of the programme, several again felt that encouraging was the most useful but also included support and listening. Similarly, MacMillan (2004) found that according to parents the most common reason for them to attend practice was to encourage, and MacMillan (2004) and McPherson and Renwick (2001) identified guiding and listening as parental activities during practice. It is interesting to note that only one of these parents had mentioned encouragement before, and this may mean that parental attitudes changed through the course of my research.

There is a more prevalent negative attitude felt in the responses by parents to the question about their views on the 'most useful role' they could take at the end of the programme. Several parents mentioned difficulties encountered: 'It would take active participation on our part for our son to do it regularly and that's not feasible with the time pressure when parents work'. McPherson and Davidson (2002) found that soon after children had commenced formal instruction their mothers had decided whether or not to encourage practice and this change in parental attitude could also be interpreted from some of the comments found in this study, although further research would be required to gain a more well-founded picture.

Pupils reported that they were all helped with their practice at home, and this was usually by their mothers although in some cases grandparents, fathers, nannies, friends or siblings helped. Children's home environments are complex (McPherson, 2009), and within their responses the pupils identified other key figures influencing their practice. As in MacMillan's (2004) study, pupils revealed different viewpoints from their parents and when asked about the 'best way' for someone at home to help them they listed 'to watch and listen', 'to give a concert' and 'to play together with friends' as their top ways. These activities are not specific to the violin and require the children to be in control of what and how to practise: in other words to have autonomy over their practice. Therefore, the pupils involved are asking for support with the intrinsic motivators in Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory model (1985): they are asking for support in order to feel competent; to be watched, listened to and perform concerts; they are asking for relatedness by playing with friends; and they are not requesting anything further which could mean a desire for autonomy. However, once again this is a fragile connection and would require more rigorous investigation to present a truly valid argument. McPherson, Davidson, and Faulkner's (2012) view that it is necessary to support the needs presented in Deci and Ryan's (1985) model in order to keep pupils interested in continuing their musical activities (McPherson, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2012) is of value and has been expressed here by the pupils themselves.

Both pupils and parents considered learning a new skill, the ensemble playing and social aspects of the programme to be the most enjoyable throughout. Given the freedom to identify

more aspects, pupils also considered 'helping each other' and the musical aspects of 'playing with backing' enjoyable. These findings show that 'enjoyment' of learning the violin is not influenced by extrinsic rewards which concurs with several studies which have shown intrinsic motivators to be the most valuable (Griffin, 2013; Hattie, 2009). Most pupils acknowledged that they enjoyed taking the violins home to practise which could also help cement the relationship between the child and the instrument (Bamford & Glinkowski, 2010). This shows the eagerness of the phase which Harnischmacher (1997) describes, but they are dependent on support to undertake practice. Many studies have shown the complexities between motivational issues and practice, but few have explored children of this age, and none through a whole-class programme. The findings only show sparse connections, and therefore this area would require further investigation.

The activities pupils would like their parents to support most at home are closely connected to the ones they enjoy most in class and are also the ones which their parents consider they most enjoy. Ninety per cent of parents also felt that it was 'very important' their children enjoyed practising. Therefore, enjoyment must be a crucial aspect of the learning environment whether at home or at school. Hallam and Creech (2010) concur with this view that a major part of the aim of music teaching should be 'to make the musical experiences enjoyable' (2010: 101).

When pupils were asked during the group questioning whether they preferred to practise at home or in class, the response was almost universally in favour of practice in class, which makes complete sense in light of the activities they identify as the most enjoyable during the programme. The activities which pupils identified as 'the best ways' for parents to help also predominantly involved activities which would be easier to do in a class setting. When parents were asked in the first questionnaire if they thought that pupils could still make progress if they only had practice sessions at school, 65% responded that they would. When asked at the end, parents appeared even more supportive although the approach to the question is different. In the final questionnaire they were asked 'how beneficial' practice clubs at school would be and all parents thought they would be beneficial to differing degrees. In support of this view, Cope (1999) found that 'practice groups' were a 'highly effective' alternative to solitary daily practice (1999: 68), but further exploration of the impact of practice clubs would be needed in the context of a preparatory school. The success of immersion in music (Matthews, 2011; Hallam & Creech, 2010), modelled by In Harmony Sistema Projects, can be achieved more easily in a class situation. The activities enjoyed most by pupils in my project, and identified by their parents too, can most easily be actualised within the classroom. Green (2008) found that with 'informal' learning within the classroom, progress was often haphazard, but noticed that pupils were mostly enjoying the activity. In my study, pupils all made good progress without exception and were always observed to be enjoying all activities during the project at school.

### Limitations and discussion

The findings of this investigation are quite clear and quite surprising. With the wider introduction of new models of group instrumental teaching, it is vital that new approaches to practise and supporting progress are implemented. This area needs large-scale investigation before a model could be suggested for use in different kinds of school settings.

In this study, there were concerns that parents responding to the questionnaires were those who always respond to school correspondence and supported their children in all aspects of school life. The response rate was slow, but after several reminders as well as targeting of individual parents, the level of response was 'acceptable' (Mangione, 1995). Finding the right language and structuring the questionnaires in a user-friendly way was essential, and the issue of 'prestige bias' was carefully avoided. The questions where the 'power relationship' (Thomas, 2013) was changed and advice was sought from the parents were particularly useful for promoting honest replies.

Those involved in this project did not consider that practising at home had any more than an insignificant impact on progress. Nevertheless, the analysis of the assessment data shows that every child made good progress, and parents and teachers alike were impressed with this at

the final concert, and amazed how much progress had been made by all in such a short time. With hardly any practice being undertaken but clear progress observed, the findings of this study show that there is no doubt that at this early stage of learning, and within a whole-class programme in this setting, practice at home is not essential within this short time scale. It was commented by one parent that the violins were not taken home frequently enough for any kind of routine to be established, and this is a clear limitation of a whole-class programme such as this, also found in many of the WCET programmes investigated by Hallam (2016). Also, all family environments are different, and some may be more influential over a child's development than others. Therefore, the level of 'importance' of practice in this situation is very difficult to establish and is particular to each individual. A particularly keen or highly motivated child may wish to practise, and he or she could possibly further develop his or her playing beyond the limited range of even the most challenging whole-class repertoire; or it may be that a parent who plays too and participates in music making could have a strong influence over development, as Cope (1999) found. Parents in my project considered it 'great to be able to encourage' at home but also identified many problems with fitting in practice. The conclusion is therefore that practice at home is not essential at this early stage of learning in a whole-class programme, but it has varying degrees of importance for each individual.

At the start of the programme, most parents posited that support at home was beneficial. An identical question was not asked at the end, but at this stage the attitudes of several parents were felt to be more focused on the challenges involved with practice. In responses to both questionnaires, parents considered that it was principally important for them to 'encourage' and 'support' their children with practising at home, but pupils reported different viewpoints and listed 'to watch and listen', 'to give a concert' and 'to play together with friends' as their top ways. All pupils were helped with their practice at home.

Nearly all pupils expressed a preference to practise at school and thought that playing together in class helped them progress most. The activities they listed as those which would be the 'best ways to help' are also the ones they enjoyed most in class, and easier to facilitate in the school environment. Parents were very supportive of the idea of 'practice clubs', and they appeared to be even more keen on this idea at the end of the programme, after experiencing some challenges to practising and realising their child could progress with very little work at home. Therefore, the role of the parent as a supporter of practice at this stage is not crucial. However, supportive actions by parents, such as attending concerts, having an interest in their children's learning and music in general, as well as providing an encouraging environment, may have an influence on musical progress. This interpretation, expressed also by Hallam (2002) and McPherson (2009), depends on the characteristics of the individual child as well as the family environment and parenting styles.

Parents were genuinely amazed at how well their children could play by the end of the programme: there are many positive quotes from the final questionnaire, including 'I was amazed how far they came in such a short time, the concert was fantastic' and 'I imagine everyone is surprised how well they all got on in such a short space of time'. Hallam (2016) mentions that 'high quality performances are crucial for engaging parents' (2016: 2); however, as parental input is not essential, according to my study, as well as Hallam (2002) and Cope (1999), it is not the parents we need to engage primarily. Swanwick's view that 'it is our responsibility to keep the various roads clear and not insist that there is only one narrow avenue, perhaps the one we took ourselves' (Swanwick, 1979: 42) always stays in my mind, and it is essential to continually try different approaches, but from my experience supported by the findings of this study, it is the enjoyment of creating music together with others that is the most influential of all.

As a musician, violin teacher, parent and, more recently, class music teacher, I am an interpretivist, post-positivist researcher. I have recently gained a broader picture as a class music teacher encompassing the behaviour of pupils and parents as well as other key figures such as form tutors and head teachers. I have been questioning my attitudes towards practice and have been searching for ways to support my own children as well as my pupils.

## Recommendations

From the results of this study the following recommendations can be made to help facilitate the success of whole-class instrumental programmes and support pupils to develop their musical skills to a highest level possible within the early stage of learning:

- Practice clubs are set up regularly at school so that pupils can reinforce their skills and enjoy playing together. These are either run by the teacher, another familiar teacher or teaching assistant, who has joined in with the instrumental learning project and attended lessons, or a small group of older students who play the instrument and have taken instruction from the teacher.
- Parents are invited into school several times a term for informal performances and practical tips on the learning taking place. Discussion can take place with the parent and child to see if they would like to have experience of taking the violin home to show the family and enjoy playing more.
- Pupils are offered input into the choice of repertoire they play, as well as creative activities.
- Regular informal concert sessions are organised so that pupils can show their learning to other pupils and teachers in the school, as well as their parents.

Further investigations are needed to understand how best to implement practice clubs at school: whether these can be effective as an exclusive way to execute practice or whether they need to be combined with different approaches; and whether they can be extended successfully beyond the time frame of this study. Reflecting on these research findings, I will set up ‘practice clubs’ to endeavour to achieve progress towards a ‘practice-changing practice’ (Kemmis, 2009: 464).

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