

Metaphor in Music Pedagogy and Its Connection to Embodiment Consciousness

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ABSTRACT: This paper provides a commentary on “Embodiment Consciousness in Music Performance Pedagogy” by Alves and Nogueira, developing the notion that metaphorical language and extra-musical information can allow expert teachers to convey various teaching strategies. I expand upon some of the themes that are addressed in the article and the concept of metaphor in particular. This opens up some interesting ideas around how metaphors are culturally understood phenomena, ones that expert teachers can use to their advantage. The authors provide a framework in which this can be understood in terms of embodiment consciousness. However, there is room for more nuance as it relates to process.

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INTRODUCTION

MUSIC has an uncanny power to connect mind and body, or, to quote the famous tune, *body and soul*. There is a growing canon of evidence that suggests that our physical bodies play an important role in how we process music (Zatorre et al., 2007) and this interdisciplinary academic field of embodied music cognition leans upon disparate fields. Neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, pedagogy, linguistics, and physiology all have relevance here. This field of research has implications for both music education and performance, and it is through this lens that Alves and Nogueira (this issue) offer a focused account of how expert teachers in music performance pedagogy have used the imaginative leap toward analogy-making to act as a bridge between mind and body for their students. Overall, the research on embodied music cognition provides us with a better understanding of how our physical bodies interact with music (Jackendoff & Lerdahl, 2006; Phillips-Silver & Trainor, 2007). This understanding can help us create more effective and engaging musical experiences, both in education and performance. In this commentary I shall expand upon some of the themes above, but particularly upon how the notion of metaphor plays a pivotal role in connecting both mind and body, and also thinking and consciousness.

METHODS AND MODES OF UNDERSTANDING

In their paper, Alves and Nogueira use a straightforward methodology and gather data from semi-structured interview data and a related method described as *joint protocol analysis* (JPA), in which a selection of expert teachers describe their thoughts and actions to video, rather than in real-time as is in the Ericsson (2006) paper which the authors lean on. This changes the method to a post-analysis rather than a concurrent one – a fundamental change, requiring further reflection.

BEYOND METAPHOR

In music aesthetics, one of the fundamental problems involves the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic musical metaphors. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is more than merely a stylistic figure that occurs as a special, decorative, or poetic use of language, and that it constitutes the basic mechanism that allows us to think, not just a stylistic figure. Therefore, in the view of these authors, linguistic



utterances are only surface manifestations of cognitive processes, while conceptual metaphors, as a result, can be inferred from the linguistic expressions.

Attempts to comprehend a metaphor can only be made within the confines of a shared cultural community or reference group. It is therefore imperative that the person who is using a metaphor and the audience to whom it is addressed share the same experiences, languages, and contextual meanings implied by the metaphor, as well as the same experiences, language, and other norms (Leatherdale, 1974). It is interesting to consider how, therefore, music may cut across cultures acting as a bridge between culturally relevant metaphor.

What Alves and Nogueira show is that the expert teachers (at a high level) use metaphor rather than mirroring in their pedagogical practices. It is interesting to consider how the use of metaphor might be applicable in different ways to novice musicians to help them understand fundamental musical concepts, and again how it is used for elite musicians. Indeed, music is generally thought of in terms of something else, usually something visual. A note is thought of as high or low, rather than fast or slow, which would more accurately represent the fast or slow vibration.

In the Suzuki technique memory plays a key part in the pedagogical method, as the method starts with repetition and memorization before moving on to the printed page.

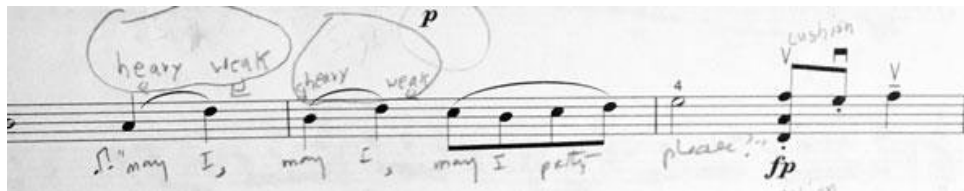


Fig. 1. A “marked up” passage of music for a beginner using the Suzuki Technique, from Duncan (2017).

In this example [2] the “pleading child” provides a rhythmic structure which aids memory, but, more than that, the meaning allows the performer to exaggerate the musical gesture. In some way, the musical phrase combined with the text now has an association with a “cheeky grin”, a visual image. Why is that important? Because the phrase now has a larger associated intention. To put it another way, the musical source has now become a component of a larger framework of imagery, one that can support memory, trigger interpretation and expression, and perhaps convey some essence that can be experienced by an audience.

Metaphor may be a mechanism that allows extra-musical intentions to transfer into the texture of the music. The process of *Authophony* (Whalley, 2021) is one in which an intention is transferred into the music, often through the pre-compositional processes undertaken by the composer, but also through the interpretative process of a performer – or in this case the teacher too. In general terms, music theory describes what is there; it is a normative practice. However, by using metaphorical language we step outside a technically descriptive mode of teaching and into an interpretive mode.

An important aspect of the way in which topic and source domains (for instance, the underlying musical materials) are juxtaposed is through the metaphorical use of verbal descriptors: the topic domain. Each domain is associated with its own set of “images”, or image schema. In music, these are often already codified in the literature, so much so that the underlying metaphor is lost – a high note really is just high. As a result of the distinct meanings and connections attributed to the terms in the topic domain versus those in the source domain, the terms in the topic domain are perceived in a divergent manner compared to the terms in the source domain. Hence, the related subjects are influenced by those in the source domain.

Returning to Alves and Nogueira’s paper, the invitation of one of the teachers to “play like a cloud” is a good example of the concept outlined above. It is first understood at an intellectual level and not through demonstration or memetics, but rather through the inherently understood associations. As a result, a cohesive musical metaphor is formed by mapping concrete elements from the “source” domain on to more abstract elements in the “target” domain. Extra-musical material, or instructions that do not usually appear in a score, introduce the need for a performer to task-switch more regularly. More research into the implications of this from a pedagogical standpoint may be fruitful. (Whalley, 2016).

PEDAGOGY AS PROCESS

Alves and Nogueira state that “Expertise in music performance is the goal of its pedagogy” However, there is another way to look at pedagogical goals. Rather than the experience of music education being the

biproduct of the goal of expert attainment, it can be seen the other way around: the process of learning and creating music is the goal, rather than the end. In community music settings it is clear to see this reversal. Even at the conservatoire level a change or shift in emphasis may be beneficial to students in the long-term. Whatever the case, performative and didactic skills are essential to music performance pedagogy; however, there is room to expand upon the “soft skills” or interpersonal intuitions that an expert teacher possesses. This is the point where cultural context converges with individual personality. It is of utmost importance for educators to uphold their teaching practices based on the diverse patterns of knowledge acquisition observed over time, recalling what has proven effective in similar situations and adapting accordingly. Examined in this light, there are interconnected processes at work. Firstly, there is the process of a student learning a specific piece of music, serving as the primary source. Simultaneously, there is the parallel process of teaching. Beyond that lies the realm of the "pedagogical context," and extending even further, the encompassing cultural context.

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NOTES

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[2] Kind thanks to Alan Duncan for the use of the Suzuki notation example.

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