

Circumvention

On judgement as practical action

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Abstract The article is based on material from a series of Dialogue Seminars conducted with teachers at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. Descriptions of processes within the master/apprentice relationships serve as an empirical base for further reflections on the nature of practical knowledge and how practical and artistic judgement can be developed. Problems of performance cannot always be attacked head-on by discussing them directly, so a linguistic circumvention of the problem often takes place. The creation of a language agreement where metaphors and figures acquire a situation-bound meaning is an example of this kind of circumvention. This situational language agreement is created within a field of tension between teacher and student. The teachers' judgmental process of how and when to use language within this tension field is seen as a general example of a practitioners internal balancing in the actual moment of performance. The article argues that personal judgement involves an ability to balance several incompatible extremes of approach. To gain an overview of the forces affecting a practitioner, it may be helpful to see the practitioner as handling an array of mutually exclusive poles. The image of 'paradoxical fields' is offered as an expression of the practitioner's movement between these poles. Examples of paradoxical fields include planning/spontaneity in a musical performance, breadth/depth in a students' development and the tension between lyrics and music of a song.

Keywords Practical knowledge · Judgement · Music · Metaphor · Paradoxical fields · Skills research · Dialogue seminar · Music education · Research in the arts

1 Introduction

A recurring theme within the Scandinavian tradition of research on professional skills is judgement. Judgement in this context means the ability to skilfully handle situation-bound problems where the outcome cannot be predicted with certainty. Examples from arts education, in this case music, may possibly contribute to the discussion.

One reason for courses in higher musical education to take place within a master/apprentice relationship is that the practice the student aims to master also involves a capacity of judgement. Using an instrumental praxis, a composers' specific language, a genre or a historic musical style in a creative way does not only require an awareness of the traits of the style, but also an ability to spontaneously use them with the judgement developed in the training. Since this ability defies expression in general terms, but rather resides as a trait of personality, the intertwining of personalities within the master/apprentice relationship offers a possibility to enhance individual artistic ability.

How does this creation of judgement occur? What happens between a teacher and student in private lessons is difficult for an outsider to grasp; it may involve long processes extending over several years, where a situation that may appear commonplace to an observer can have deep significance for the parties involved.

One way of addressing the question is to use the verbal descriptions teachers and students can give of what happens in the teaching studio. Since 2004, seven series of Dialogue Seminars have been conducted at the Royal

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