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What is Musical Knowledge? Piano Students'Perceptions of Musical Knowledge and Musical Performance in a Chinese Context

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Abstract

This essay focuses on reflections on the value of different types of musical knowledge, important forms of knowledge and models of knowledge, and key activities in performance. In these questions, I will focus on what musical knowledge is, what it brings to the performer, and what challenges we face from a professional musician's point of view, in addition to mastering a large number of propositions or knowledge? As well as exploring the pros and cons of a certain model of music education in China. What should learners and pedagogues do? What lessons can we learn from this as teachers, and what can we learn as students.

Keywords: music knowledge, music performance, piano education in China

'An important part of what aspiring music educators need to learn—namely, how "to music" and how to teach others "to music"—is just what too many professional music schools have the most difficulty teaching (Elliott, 1991, p. 24)…'We are no strangers to music and it is closely related to our lives. For example, listening to music can regulate unpleasant emotions such as sadness (Kahn et al., 2021). Listening to music during surgery can also optimise patients'stress and pain (Blichfeldt-Ærø et al., 2019). When music is taught as a subject in school, however, listening becomes not just an important part of the curriculum, but also the foundation for all forms of musical expression. Furthermore, it is an important component of performance, improvisation, composition, and arrangement (Cavner & Gould, 2003). The composer's biopic expresses the view that 'listening to music is as important as performing'(Heldt, 2021). Colwell's (1966) essay Music: Both a Performing Art and a Listening Art also illustrates this point. However, Elliott (1991) argues that knowledge is acquired primarily through listening and that performance is secondary. Dahl (2017), on the other hand, suggests that knowledge can also be gained in performance practice. Talking about knowledge, Osberg and Biesta (2008) claim that knowledge emerges in interaction, either with peers, teachers, resources or other influences. The purpose of this article is to discuss perspectives on the utility of various types of musical knowledge, as well as important forms and models of knowledge and key performing acts. In these inquiries, I will focus on how to distinguish between 'propositional knowledge'and 'acquaintance knowledge', what do the different kinds of knowledge bring to the performer? And what might be overlooked in performance? What is musical knowledge? From a music educator's perspective, what challenges do we face beyond acquiring a great deal of propositional knowledge? Finally, using the piano as an example, we explore some of the advantages and disadvantages of the Chinese model of piano education. What can we learn as teachers from this, and what can we learn as students?

Swanwick (1994) claims that musical knowledge is multi-layered and that understanding music involves multiple levels of knowledge. 'Propositional'or 'factual knowledge'is the most obvious and immediately recognisable form of knowledge. However, propositional knowledge is not all there is to know, and the absolute core of knowing music can appropriately be called 'acquaintance knowledge'. Zagzebski (2017, p. 92) gives the example in the text, 'Knowing Roger is acquaintance knowledge while knowing Roger as a philosopher is a propositional knowledge'to distinguish the difference between acquaintance knowledge and propositional

knowledge. ‘Many writers on aesthetics have stressed acquaintance knowledge as being absolutely fundamental in the arts’ (Swanwick, 1994, p. 17). However, Weinberg (2021), in his exploration of Locke’s conceptual knowledge, suggests that Locke seems to have contradicted each other in the idea that we know what individuals think and that all knowledge is propositional. Duncan (2018) claims that certain knowledge is not constituted by propositions, but by the knowledge of properties and objects. Eyesight is not believing but knowing. The distinction between ‘knowing’and ‘believing’and, more fundamentally, between ‘knowledge of acquaintances’and ‘propositional knowledge’(Tomasello, 2021). However, Iaquinto and Spolaore (2018), in understanding the verb ‘to know’, indicate that it can be used for both the attribution of propositional knowledge (second-hand knowledge) and the attribution of acquaintance knowledge. In other words, when ‘know’is used as a verb it is an active state and both types of knowledge can be included. When ‘know’is used as a noun to subdivide the categories of knowledge, a distinction can be made between ‘acquaintance knowledge’and ‘propositional knowledge’. Swanwick (1994) argues that propositional knowledge is easily acquired in a non-musical way and is taught orally. For example, the tempo needed to guide the student’s repertoire, the use of sustain pedals and the degree of key touch are all referred to as propositional knowledge, i.e. ‘second-hand knowledge’. However, this is not the essence of musical knowledge (ibid) and music is not as simple as an oral presentation (Swanwick, 1797). Musicians and teachers need to relate secondary knowledge to the rest of musical knowledge (Swanwick, 1994). In Russell’s philosophical problem, acquaintance knowledge is the basis of thought and empirical knowledge (Sainsbury, 1986). Russel argues that all knowledge of truth ultimately depends on the knowledge of acquaintances (Fumerton, 1998).

Learning is defined as when a student’s behaviour, attitudes, or values change as a result of the acquisition of various sorts of musical information (Philpott, 2016). Reimer (1991) divides musical knowledge into four categories: ‘knowing of’, ‘knowing how’, ‘knowing about’, and ‘knowing why’. He spoke of the ‘knowing how’that is essential to the musical experience, i.e. the self-involvement in creating music, whether through composition, performance or improvisation. ‘Knowing how’requires feeling and depends on the necessary condition of ‘knowing of’. At the same time, he believed that listening requires a special kind of ‘knowing how’, which can also be regarded as creative. The latter two categories, ‘knowing about’and ‘knowing why’, involve the same knowledge, but also cultural and historical belief systems, i.e. the need to know why music is the way it is (ibid). Music is a type of knowledge, and the ‘art of music,’as expressed in musical performance, is both a type and a source of knowledge (Elliott, 1991). In other words, musical performance can present musical knowledge. This is in line with Reimer’s (1991) expression of ‘knowing how’in which knowledge can learn through the experience of performance.

Bauer (2020), in discussing concepts and skills related to music performance, pedagogy and technology, notes that technology may contribute to the development of knowledge skills, while modelling performances and performer models, and feedback on performances can also be enhanced through technology. However, Swanwick (1994) points out that musical skills are important in some music (not all music), such as deciphering notation, arranging chords, organising fingers, etc. Skill can lead us quickly into musical pathways, but if it is used as an end in itself, it can divert us from further musical understanding (Swanwick, 1994). The vast majority of teachers are used to assessing students’learning outcomes using tests or competitions (Goel et al., 2021; Abubakar & Adeshola, 2019). Chinese tutors, for example, require their students to practise their technique over and over again in preparation for piano competitions and examinations. In what is known as an inverted U-shaped pattern, repetition boosts the student’s appreciation of the music at first, but eventually, it decreases (Hargreaves, 1984). This means that students may develop an aversion to music after over-intensive practice. Of course, repeated practice will allow students to develop their skills and become better at exams, but most students just play like machines without expressing any emotion. Zhang (2021), in discussing the recent history of piano performance in China, argues that the current model of education is unbalanced in that it over-emphasises technical ability at the expense of aesthetic depth. In the case of the performers, the appeal of their playing lies not only in their technical mastery but more importantly in their ability to communicate and express themselves. Swanwick (1797) emphasises that the performer is more than just a relay station connecting the composer’s powerhouse to the listener’s reception device; he or she must also communicate the actor’s own interpretation of the work to the audience. Huang and Thibodeaux (2017) wrote after a visit to a Chinese university that students lacked an understanding of the lives and ideas of composers and believed that piano performance did not require much cultural background. This is a departure from the ‘knowing about’and ‘knowing why’that Reimer (1991) talks about, i.e. the need for students and teachers to focus on the historical and cultural systems of music and to know why music is the way it is. In the meantime, Huang and Thibodeaux (2017) point out that students are totally focused on muscle memory and play too rigidly, and that teachers fail to recognise that creating and presenting a beautiful piece of music is more than mere muscle memory. As a teacher, it’s critical to consider what distinguishes technically capable young musicians from those who are actually able to speak and express themselves. What can teachers do to assist students to strengthen these skills so they can

communicate and express themselves more effectively and achieve better? According to Swanwick (2012), one's philosophical perspective influences curriculum selection, course organisation, and teaching materials. This means that to a certain extent teachers need to improve and enrich their own understanding of music and to avoid subsequently teaching students to practise skills at the expense of how to express the music. How, then, should the performer express the music? I think it is important to learn to listen creatively, i.e. to have a special 'knowing how'(Reimer, 1991).

Learning to listen to music is not the same as directly reproducing it; rather, it is a process of developing emotional awareness (Elliott, 2005). Music is a basic kind of communication that allows people to express their feelings, intentions, and meanings (Hargreaves et al., 2005). Pay attention to the specific sensations that can be found in music, in the sense that they are objective, embedded in our musical experience, and resulting from our perception of the musical object (Swanwick, 1994). According to Elliott (2005), to hear the expressive sound, the listener must first understand the musical context in which the image is placed, as well as the image's relationship to the music. This is in line with Reimer's (1991) focus on the historical and cultural systems of music, i.e. 'knowing about'and 'knowing why'. Lamont (2021), in distinguishing between hearing music and listening to music, concludes that the functions that listening can evoke and how attentive listening can be facilitated through explicit and implicit methods. Music instructors frequently employ guided listening tactics to increase involvement in music listening exercises, according to Diaz (2014). These tactics have been demonstrated to assist create some type of cognitive and emotional engagement in studies. However, little mention is made of how these tactics operate for other musical styles. Different age groups have different musical style preferences (Lebedev et al., 2021) and therefore their adapted teaching strategies differ (Binderkrantz, 2008). I believe that teachers need to develop creative listening for different types of musical styles and different categorical groups of students.

Music educators usually associate music education with formal schooling; however, schools are not the only location where music education can take place, and the educational profession's focus cannot be limited to school-aged children (Bowman & Frega, 2012). The Full-time Compulsory Education Music Curriculum Standards have been announced by the Chinese Ministry of Education(2011 Edition), which is considered the official music curriculum for school education (Yu & Leung, 2019). This Curriculum Standard is intended to increase the investment in music and to foster the all-around development of students in all subjects. However, more attention is still paid to core subjects such as mathematics and English. When music education is seen as aesthetic education, music may not be valued because it is considered to have only an 'aesthetic'value (ibid). In contrast, there are a large number of institutions and workshops for out-of-school education. According to recent estimates, there are currently 40 million children in China who are learning to play the piano (Montefiore, 2014; Fawcett, 2015), and the piano enjoys unprecedented popularity in the country (Bai, 2021). According to surveys, the vast majority of parents and students believe that learning a musical instrument has become fashionable and necessary (Huang & Thibodeaux, 2017). The extra credit policy for art students has led a large number of parents to choose to have their children learn a musical instrument as a way out, a way to get into a major high school or university (Huang & Thibodeaux, 2017). Parents'and students'motivations for music are considered to be 'utilitarian', as reflected in a motivational study (Xie & Leung, 2011). So, what about what the child thinks? Are they willing to learn an instrument? If the state repeals this rule at some point in the future, I believe the number of people learning instrumental music will drop dramatically. This is the major difficulty that Chinese music education is facing right now. As a result, it is critical for parents to fully comprehend their children's interests. Interests play an important role in promoting academic achievement, curriculum choice and career decisions (Harackiewicz & Hulleman, 2010). For teachers, there is a need to foster a love for music and change the way students are taught to repeat boring repertoire (Huang & Thibodeaux, 2017). To better teach students about music, teachers need to master the four types of musical knowledge discussed by Reimer (1991). It is important for students to discover their interests and to express their ideas. However, most parents, teachers, and even students lose sight of the attractiveness of music itself in this alluring extra credit paradigm. In fact, music has a therapeutic effect. It can improve one's sense of belonging, self-confidence, or personal identity, and in rare cases, it can even bring fame and money (Bowman & Frega, 2012). And it is because of this minor circumstance that the majority of individuals choose to learn music to improve their grades, get into a good university, or have a better quality of life. Viewing music as merely a source of benefit, while superficially attractive, may undermine the more difficult and substantive rationale (Finney, 2016).

The one-to-one classroom makes it easier for students to decide when and how to learn, which is an integral part of smoother learning (Bergström & Mårell-Olsson, 2018), but the one-to-one model also has some drawbacks. Piano teaching in out-of-school training institutions is usually done in one-to-one classes. In this model, the student's attention is maintained at a high level (Harris, 1986) and the teacher has the opportunity to adapt the content taught to the needs of the learner (Gordon, 2003). Swanwick (1994) noted that the teaching in the instrument studio made him feel most anxious because of the teacher's absolute control in a one-to-one teaching

environment. Spruce and Odena (2012) claim that the hierarchical structure that underpins the construction and transmission of appropriate knowledge is parallel to the power relations between teachers and students. Where categorisation and framing are strong, students are weakly empowered to decide what is important to them in terms of musical knowledge and practice. Furthermore, giving time and space for teachers and students to process concerns in the teacher-student relationship, as well as creating trust and rapport in a one-to-one setting, is critical to classroom well-being (Littlecott et al., 2018). Absolute power for any one party is not a virtuous trend. The 'basic conceptual framework'of weak student power and strong teacher power needs to be fundamentally changed to focus on building democracy in education to achieve an equal power relationship (Spruce & Odena, 2012). Traditional Chinese educational techniques, such as the top-down, teacher-centred paradigm of curriculum and teaching practise (Offutt, 2013), need to be reinforced, with music education becoming a teacher-centred endeavour and students operating as passive 'receivers'. To improve this situation, Ellis (2004) suggests that teachers and curriculum planners need to develop 'learner-centred curriculum'and that curriculum that focuses on individual needs, such as interests, emotions and personal growth, is considered to be learner-centred (ibid). I agree with this, especially in a one-to-one model where teachers need to listen to students'ideas and aspirations for learning. Information can only be better absorbed when learners are involved in their learning and have the power to decide what to learn and how to learn it (Vella, 2002). To further the growth of music education in China by promoting equality between the two sides in the teaching and learning process.

In China, popular and fundamental piano education has entered a period of fast growth (Guo, 2017). However, in comparison to Western countries, China's piano instruction paradigm is partly problematic due to the deliberate nature of learning instrumental music and the fact that China is not the origin of classical music. For example, children in Western countries have the opportunity to play in an ensemble, with professors arranging for students who have studied piano for two years to play with students of similar levels of violin, viola and cello. Ensemble playing is considered an important aspect of learning music (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007), but Chinese students have little opportunity to do so. In China, you only have the opportunity to play in an ensemble when you enter university and declare a major in an instrument, so my first exposure to ensemble lessons was during university. Zhou (2019) states that ensemble playing, collaboration, and learning experiences creatively are important to students. Individual initiative, independence, and responsibility are fostered by ensemble playing, which is defined as "an artist who seeks for the unity of effect as a whole" (Evans, 2013). For the sake of unity in the overall effect, children need to listen to their voices as well as learn to listen to the instruments of others when playing in an ensemble, and the essential problem in music education, according to Swanwick (2012), is to focus on listening to the music, whether the performer, the artist or the listener. To some extent, the music each person hears is indeed different and unique, but the response to it is not entirely unique and cannot be shared (Swanwick, 1994). Students can discuss their perspectives on music and how they play their instruments to foster mutual learning, and others may provide suggestions that they have overlooked, all of which can help students enhance their musical understanding. Classroom teaching is an important way of imparting knowledge (Routley, 2016), but is it necessarily true that more is learned from teachers than from peers? Cooke and Spruce (2016) claim that music teachers are models of student learning, while students can also be models of music for learning (by their peers and teachers). Schools and teachers can be seen as a community of music learning in which students can bring a lot of social learning. Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) is a nationally recognised model of teaching and learning and research by Upmacis (2021) has shown that the implementation of PLTL facilitates interaction between teachers, peer leaders and students, which further increases interest in learning and enhances students'sense of community. This means that peer support models are also an important way to promote learning, and teachers need to create opportunities for children to play together to share their learning and develop a sense of cooperation.

Music survives in our educational system because music is an ancient kind of human conversation, a medium through which we may express our thoughts about ourselves and others through sound (Swanwick, 1997). If students want to truly communicate and express themselves through music, it is important to understand the four types of musical knowledge proposed by Reimer (1991). This article discusses how to distinguish between 'propositional knowledge'and 'acquaintance knowledge', what musical knowledge is, and what the different types of musical knowledge bring to the performer. For example, when a performer concentrates on skill to the exclusion of listening to the music and understanding its context, the music produced is only highly skilled but does not express anything. Contrasting the development of music education in and out of school in China, where the implementation of aesthetic music education in school education is not given much attention, while out-of-school studios have a large number of parents and students choosing to learn a musical instrument for extra credit policies (extrinsic motivation), and discussing the benefits and drawbacks in a one-to-one piano teaching model, concluding with the idea that students lack ensemble opportunities in China's piano teaching model.

As students, we should experience a wide range of things to understand our interests. Parents should let their children choose their favourite musical instrument or other categories such as painting, dance, etc. once they have discovered their hobbies. Children who learn willingly have been proved to be more effective, according to research (Lei, 2010). Music learning is something that can happen formally as well as in informal situations (Welch et al., 2020; Philpott, 2016). And Welch (2005) argues that informal music education happens all the time and that people do not need formal music education to be purposefully exposed to music and to exhibit musical behaviour. The exchange of ensemble skills between students, as discussed above, is one form of informal learning.

Listening is a vital activity in performance, according to Reimer (1991), and we must understand a wide spectrum of music to give a broad and balanced performance, however, pupils are rarely taught how to listen to and compose music and related musical works by their teachers (Elliott, 1995). As a teacher, you need to ask your students to practise their skills while developing their ability to express the music in their performance. I think it is important to understand the musical context and to learn to listen. Teachers need to (1) give more lessons on the history of the music, its development and the life of the composer. (2) Reduce the number of repertoire exercises as needed and give pupils more listening assignments. Listening is divided into two categories here: first, one listens to one's music, and second, one listens to other people's music (peers or musicians). People develop certain emotions, or patterns of preference, for specific genres of music, according to a psychology study on music listening, and these patterns appear to be common to most people and most music (Cain & Cursley, 2017). In other words, if students listen to music regularly, they can learn whether they like music and what kind of music they like. In addition, teachers should create more opportunities for students (especially beginners and amateurs) to play in ensembles, which not only develop a sense of cooperation but also provide a way to learn from each other. The one-to-one education model, in my opinion, offers significant advantages, although it could be more comprehensive. Performers learn just as much from ensemble playing. If this could be promoted, the development of players could be further expanded and enriched, and music education in China might be further improved. According to Dewey and Boydston (2008), developing education entails developing capacities that support long-term growth, and expanding education entail promoting even more growth.

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