

Challenging Conformity in Higher Music Education

Exploring Cross-Instrumental Collaborative Workshops on Musical Interpretation as a Way to Cultivate Becoming Musicians' Professional Judgement

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ABSTRACT

To challenge conformity and foster explorative and transformative pre-service arts education, students' reflections and informed choices should be central. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's concept of professional judgment, this philosophical study explores how such judgment might be cultivated among becoming musicians in the Western classical tradition. We propose cross-instrumental collaborative workshops on musical interpretation as a way to challenge conformity in higher music education from within. These workshops aim to foster reflective, imaginative, and socially engaged musicianship. Challenges and possibilities of implementation are discussed, with forward-looking reflections on how pre-service arts education might resist institutional inertia and embrace change from within.

KEYWORDS

professional judgment; higher music education; Western classical music; workshop; conformity

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Introduction and Background

Pre-service arts education tends to focus on reproductive practices, which can limit students' exploration of their artistic expressions and identities. To foster genuinely exploratory and transformative education, it is insufficient to merely present pre-service arts educators with ideas about how to conduct such teaching. Instead, pre-service arts education ought to focus on developing students' reflective capacities and informed decision-making, grounded in their experiences of artistic practices as adventures without predetermined goals—embracing uncertainty, and recognizing and problematizing the broader role of the arts in society.

Such adventures should involve not only the artists themselves but also participants and society at large in collaborative processes of exploration, dialogue, and transformation. Through these shared experiences, the role of the arts can be critically examined and reimaged in relation to contemporary societal needs, fostering a deeper understanding of their potential to contribute to both individual growth and social change.

This artistic-pedagogical approach could prepare becoming artists to engage meaningfully with diverse audiences and communities in settings such as schools, care homes, correctional facilities, and marginalized communities. However, higher music education (henceforth HME)—particularly within the Western classical tradition—has long been characterized by conformity and tradition, with monologic, teacher-dominated methods that emphasize unreflected imitation, and narrow conceptions of students' learning trajectories and professional futures. Such conventional models often overlook the potential of instrumental tuition to cultivate holistic, autonomous, and reflective human beings. With limited opportunities for critical engagement, students are left with few means to make sense of their personal artistic growth or to understand the broader societal functions of music-making—underscoring the importance of cultivating such reflection within educational practices.

In response to longstanding critiques, numerous initiatives have emerged since the 1980s, aiming to change and improve learning approaches in HME and acknowledge the arts' broader function in society. An early example is the work at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, from 1984 to 1987 (see Renshaw, 1986). In 2006, the national “The Reflective Conservatoire Conference” was launched, eventually leading to the establishment of “The Innovative Conservatoire” (ICON) (see Duffy, 2016). From a more recent Scandinavian perspective, the Norwegian Academy of Music's Centre for Excellence (CEMPE) operated from 2014 to 2023 (CEMPE, n.d.). Additionally, two ERASMUS+ funded European Strategic Partnerships have contributed: the REACT (Rethinking Music Performance in European Higher Education Music Institutions) project from 2019 to 2022 (REACT, n.d.), and the RAPP Lab (Reflection-based Artistic Professional Practice) from 2021 to 2023 (RAPP Lab, n.d.). Lastly, the international initiative Musethica (n.d.), established in 2012, strives to enhance young musicians' communicative skills through

project-based performances outside traditional concert halls, reaching audiences not typically engaged with Western classical music. Despite their progressive aims, these projects tend to be conceived as add-ons rather than integrated transformations, and thus rarely reach the core structures of HME or result in lasting change in how the musician's role—and its development—is fundamentally understood.

Partly related to these initiatives—and the academisation of HME following the Bologna Declaration (European Ministers of Education, 1999)—several books have been published since the turn of the millennium exploring why and how the conservatoire should develop (e.g., Bull et al., 2023; Encarnacao & Blom, 2020; Gaunt & Westerlund, 2013; Lawson et al., 2025; Minors et al., 2024; Odam & Bannan, 2005; Sarath et al., 2016; Stepniak & Sirotin, 2020). Nonetheless, in the concluding chapter of the most recent book, the authors suggest that conservatoires should broaden their views on excellence, embrace diverse viewpoints, and foster inclusive environments (Perkins et al., 2025). While these visions echo the forward-looking paths outlined nearly four decades ago (see Renshaw, 1986), it is evident that much of this ambitious agenda remains unrealized—highlighting a persistent gap between visionary ideals and practical implementation, particularly in what is commonly assumed to be the core area of HME, namely instrumental tuition.

Striving to reach the core of HME—often described as resistant to change—this philosophical article begins from within, using the case of how developing the teaching practices of instrumental tuition in HME could contribute to providing students with exploratory experiences that broaden their artistic and civic perspectives. Such development may serve as one way to challenge conformity from within and, in turn, support students and teachers to work more in line with Gaunt et al.'s (2021) conceptualization of musicians as “makers in society”.

Previous Research

Since the turn of the millennium, research in HME has continuously argued for a shift away from the traditional master-apprentice model toward more collaborative and peer learning (e.g., Ferm Thorgersen, 2014; Gaunt & Westerlund, 2013; Hanken, 2015, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2018). Scholars have highlighted the need for musical and verbal dialogues (Holmgren, 2022a, 2022b), diverse learning trajectories (e.g., Bennett, 2008, 2012, 2016; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2021), and a broader understanding of what it can mean to be a professional musician within the Western classical tradition, including the competencies required (e.g., Gaunt et al., 2021; Holmgren & Ferm Almqvist, 2024; Westerlund & Gaunt, 2021).

Although HME in Western classical music is mainly organized as preparation for a soloist career, research shows that few graduates actually pursue this path (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). In response, scholars have proposed a broader

conceptualization of HME, emphasizing portfolio careers regardless of genre. This approach prepares students for diverse activities, including ensemble work, engagement with other genres, accompaniment for pianists, and preparation for teaching (Bartleet et al., 2019; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020).

A key concept in this reimagining is that of musicians as “makers in society” (Gaunt et al., 2021), which emphasizes the dual role of musicians: not only as artists but also as active contributors to society. This perspective argues for a framework in which musicians engage deeply with their communities, using their artistry to address social issues and foster cultural engagement—thereby embodying a broad understanding of performing arts education. Such an approach demands holistic aesthetic experiences, which traditional Western classical music programs seldom offer. Similar suggestions have been posed, stressing the importance of Socially Engaged Arts (SEA) practices in the higher education of the arts (Lehikoinen & Siljamäki, 2023). These approaches align with the broader civic mission of HME institutions and emphasize the potential of arts education to foster artistic citizenship and social responsibility among students (Gaunt et al., 2021), not merely focusing on “their interests to musical expertise only” (Gaunt & Westerlund, 2021, p. xvii).

Enacting the musicians as “makers in society” vision (see Gaunt et al., 2021) in HME could cultivate artists who are more socially engaged and integrated. One illustrative example is a project where musical theatre students collaborated with young adults with intellectual disabilities, demonstrating the profound impact of integrating artistic practice with community engagement (Ferm Almqvist & Hentschel, 2024). The findings revealed that the challenge was not the interaction with individuals with disabilities but in meeting the unfamiliar demands placed on the students as musicians and human beings in collaborative, boundary-crossing creation of music and text—demands for which their prior education had not prepared them. This project illustrates how such initiatives can enrich both students’ educational experience and the lives of community members involved, highlighting their relevance for HME and their potential to challenge deficit-based models of widening participation (see Fox, 2023).

Despite these initiatives and a growing body of research in HME advocating for the benefits of challenging and changing traditional structures, educational practices appear to have remained largely unchanged, as manifested in the findings presented above. Gaunt and Westerlund (2021) even frame change as a necessity, stating that “there is no guarantee that long-lasting traditions will continue to thrive without new engagements, collaborations, and social innovations” (p. xxiv). Howard Becker’s (1995) concept of inertia offers one explanation for this persistence, highlighting the resistance to change that arises from the comfort and familiarity of established norms and routines. This resistance is further reinforced by narrow recruitment practices within HME, where hiring often favors conformity to existing preferences (e.g., Cox, 2014). Such tendencies mirror broader patterns in academia, where institutions have been described as behaving “like self-replicating organizations” (Lombardi, 2013, p. 4).

Another barrier to change is the reported inadequacy of generic professional development offered by institutions for HME teachers (Mitchell, 2020, p. 113). The unreflected master-apprentice approach—previously identified as characterized by teacher dominance and imitation—remains prevalent in HME, as it is deeply embedded in institutional culture. Thus, resistance is not merely a matter of individual teachers' or students' preferences but is sustained by structures and relationships that make exploratory deviations from the norm difficult. As a result, even when clear evidence supports innovative educational practices, implementation tends to be slow, often treated as an add-on rather than a fundamental change of the core, and frequently met with significant resistance (e.g., Duffy, 2016, p. 378). This underscores the powerful role of inertia in maintaining the status quo in HME and highlights the need for progressive development in both research and practice—from within.

Situating the Study

This article contributes to research that challenges traditional teaching practices in HME by presenting a philosophical study that draws on Hannah Arendt's (1961/2002, 1971) concept of *professional judgment* in relation to the development of becoming musicians' capacity to make informed choices regarding musical interpretation. In doing so, the study also contributes to a broader understanding of the musician as an active, reflective agent in society—capable of engaging with diverse audiences and contexts beyond the traditional concert stage.

In a previous study (Holmgren & Ferm Almqvist, 2024), Arendt's concept was used to reanalyze findings from two research projects on Western classical music educational programs. This led to a philosophical elaboration on the importance of developing professional judgment in relation to musical interpretation in HME and an argument for its significance. These foundational cases are: the *Conservatory Cultures* project, funded by the Foundation of Baltic and East European Studies and led by Werner and Ferm Almqvist, and Holmgren's (2020, 2022a, 2022b) action research project, which aimed to develop a more participatory approach to instrumental education.

First, findings from *Conservatory Cultures*, based on interviews with 23 students from The Sibelius Academy, The Liszt Academy, and The Estonian Academy for Music and Theatre, show that some students engaged in border-crossing situations where diverse musical actions are intertwined with thought and reflection. These students' experiences were reflected upon and offered new perspectives on themselves, others, and the musical world, allowing them to change and transform their life worlds (Ferm Almqvist & Werner, 2023a, 2023b; see also Werner & Ferm Almqvist, manuscript submitted for publication). However, the findings also emphasize that the responsibility for creating such transformative situations often seems to fall on the students themselves, highlighting the importance of teachers actively assuming a more central role in this process.

Second, Holmgren's (2020, 2022a, 2022b) participatory action research project involved piano students in collaboratively developing the format of response-guided workshops on musical interpretation, emphasizing analytical listening and constructive feedback. The students noted a tension between this approach and their regular instrumental lessons, highlighting a lack of preparation for such collaborative work. They stressed the importance of a shared understanding and suggested that newcomers be systematically introduced to the philosophical foundation and research base. A fertile learning environment, they proposed, should be "characterised by collaboration, openness, humility, honesty, and understanding" (Holmgren, 2022b, p. 579), encouraging both synchronous and asynchronous responses between teachers and students.

In this philosophical study, we further develop the concept of professional judgment among becoming musicians within the Western classical tradition, in relation to an imagined, border-crossing educational situation. The aim is to philosophically explore how cross-instrumental collaborative workshops on musical interpretation could be a way to develop professional judgment and, in doing so, challenge the conformity of HME from within.

The remainder of the article is organized into three main sections. First, we establish the philosophical foundation for professional judgment through a close re-reading of Arendt's writings on the topic (Arendt, 1961/2002, 1971). Second, we propose an imagined teaching practice—cross-instrumental collaborative workshops on musical interpretation, incorporating two complementary models—developed from our close re-reading, aimed at challenging conformity and fostering reflective, aware, informed, and socially engaged musicians. Finally, we conclude with a discussion and forward-looking reflections on challenges and possibilities related to the practical implementation of such workshops.

Professional Judgment

Drawing on Hannah Arendt's (1961/2002, 1971) thoughts about thinking and judgment, we will explore what professional judgment is, or could be, and thereafter what musicians' professional judgment could be, to be able to discuss how it could be cultivated. We develop our reasoning in interaction with Arendt, who stresses that humans must be aware of and engaged in the world, as sensible beings, to be able to judge. She defines judgment as the ability to assess, as a basis for action, in interplay with the ability to imagine the consequences of specific actions. With a sensible, experiencing subject as a starting point, assessment can be viewed as a process that, in turn, includes observation, perception, analysis, and response in action. Judgment is a broader process that also involves imagining the consequences of action as possibilities and challenges in relation to pluralistic settings.

According to Arendt (1971), judgment entails assessing the particular, transcending mere adherence to societal norms. It operates beyond the constraints of time, at the intersection of an approaching future and a progressive past. Arendt underscores the importance of historical understanding and foresight for sound judgment. To engage with the world as it exists in the present, judgment relies on sensory experience. Furthermore, Arendt emphasizes the interplay between action and thought, what she terms “common sense” or “*sensus communis*”—a shared, collective understanding. This interplay serves as the foundation of her judgment framework. Choices stem from common sense, not the other way around. Judgment, therefore, is not dictated by rigid rules or laws but requires ongoing negotiations that challenge conformity and are grounded in practical action, aiming to construct shared knowledge within specific social and political contexts. Therefore, the ability to judge necessitates the capacity to empathize with others, adopt different perspectives, and exercise imaginative flexibility to move between the general and the specific. In this sense, imagination emerges as a central element in transforming one’s subjectivity and empathizing with different social positions.

Professional judgment, then, can be defined as profession-specific evaluation and anticipation rooted in reflective practice, bridging the past and the future. Therefore, it is crucial to possess a comprehensive understanding of the profession’s historical evolution while remaining receptive to diversity and innovation. Each professional choice should be grounded in a blend of experience and imaginative foresight concerning the outcomes of that choice. This encompasses the capacity to recognize and address professional challenges, the skills to observe, analyze, and articulate appraisals, and the ability to navigate ethical dilemmas in the context of potential future scenarios. Each profession presents its unique set of dilemmas. However, when overarching dominant conventions foster routines that obscure the distinctive aspects, there is a risk of rendering these dilemmas invisible, perpetuating professional homogeneity.

Arendt (1961/2002) also emphasizes the profound influence of cultural endeavors in capturing human attention and inciting action. Consequently, the primary objective of Western classical musicians should be to engage, motivate, and challenge their audiences’ and communities’ expectations. This necessitates that professional judgment among musicians in the Western classical tradition extends beyond musical expression to encompass broader dimensions of musical performance, generating a range of professional dilemmas.

This understanding of professional judgment raises several pedagogical questions: How could cross-instrumental workshops encourage students to reflect on key aspects of planning, performing, and assessing musical expressions? In what ways could such workshops provide a platform for reflecting on chosen actions in relation to historical legacies, the future, cultural heritage, the expression per se, the score, the instrument, the physical environment, personal identity, collaborators, composers, the audience, the situational dynamics, and society, among other factors? How can the dialogues between teachers and students deepen students’ awareness of the responsibilities tied to their artistic choices? What transformative potential lies in skilled musicianship

informed by comprehensive professional judgment? How might these workshops cultivate professional judgment differently from the conventional master-apprentice tradition? And to what extent could their implementation enable both teachers and students to participate in challenging the past and change the current conformity of HME from within? These are the questions we will strive to address in the following presentation of cross-instrumental collaborative workshops on musical interpretation.

Exploring Cross-Instrumental Collaborative Workshops on Musical Interpretation as a Way to Cultivate Professional Judgment and Challenge Conformity

Drawing on research on text seminars and response strategies aimed at enhancing student engagement (Cronqvist & Maurits, 2016; Dysthe et al., 2000/2011; Ferm Thorgersen & Wennergren, 2010; Rikandi et al., 2010; Wennergren, 2007), a response-guided workshops model for musical interpretation was developed and implemented in a participatory action research project involving four piano students specializing in Western classical music at a Swedish HME institution (Holmgren, 2020, 2022b; see also Holmgren, 2022a). The workshops integrated both practical and philosophical aspects of musical interpretation and response strategies.

The findings revealed the following four key insights (Holmgren, 2020, 2022a, 2022b):

1. The students had difficulty verbalizing their thoughts about musical interpretation, often focusing on isolated details. An adaptation of Rolle's (2013, 2014; Rolle et al., 2015) seven-stage competency model—ranging from favouritism to aesthetic discourse—was identified as a valuable pedagogical tool for enhancing their music-related argumentative competence.
2. The workshop leader's openness, non-judgmental attitude, and lack of prestige were essential in creating a fertile learning environment.
3. The students expressed a desire to integrate such workshops into their regular curriculum.
4. A notable limitation was the absence of the students' main instrument teacher, which meant that existing teaching practices remained unaffected. Nevertheless, the students were keen to engage in their teachers' interpretational processes.

Building on these insights and the outlined philosophical view of professional judgment, we propose four key enhancements to these workshops:

1. Involve students' regular main instrument teacher(s) to bridge the gap between workshop and curriculum.
2. Expand the participant pool by not limiting the selection of students to one instrument, thereby including a broader spectrum of experiences.
3. Expand the workshop structure by incorporating the *Laboratory Workshop Model* (see suggestion in Holmgren, 2022b, pp. 582–583; see also the argument for an exploratory laboratory in artistic practices in de Assis, 2018 and Spatz, 2020), which emphasizes collaborative, open-ended engagement and complements the *Prepared-response Workshop Model*.
4. Emphasize a broader view on musical performance and the arts in society, situating students' interpretational work within wider cultural, social, and professional frameworks.

These enhancements aim to further strengthen students' development of professional judgment and to foster a more supportive institutional culture. This approach aligns with Arendt's thinking about the importance of being rooted in the world, the intertwinement of action and thinking, and continual negotiations based on practical actions that lead towards agreed-upon knowledge in specific social contexts.

The workshops offer students opportunities to explore and develop performative, historical, social, and contextual aspects of professional judgement. For instance, students might reflect on how a piece could or should (not) be performed in relation to its historical origin, imagined performance settings (e.g., a school event, wedding, or funeral; see Holmgren & Ferm Almqvist, 2024), or spatial contexts (e.g., an island in an archipelago or a prison cell block). These aspects can be discussed in relation to both pre-recorded performances (if provided) and live performances during the workshop. In line with Arendt, plurality is essential; in this context, it implies communication, response, and interaction between staff members and students from different instrument departments. Implementing such workshops should, at a fundamental level, help challenge and change the traditional conformity of HME from within.

Based on our close re-reading of Arendt, we propose implementing cross-instrumental collaborative workshops on musical interpretation. Each workshop would consist of groups of approximately 4 to 8 students, one or a group of teachers, and a dedicated workshop leader. Lasting at least 2 hours with a suitable break, the workshop would involve work on two participants' musical interpretations (approximately 45 minutes each), alongside three sections: (a) the philosophy of musical interpretation, bridging theory and performance; (b) methods for providing and receiving responses synchronously and asynchronously, focusing on models and formats of interaction; and (c) models and tools for giving and receiving responses that offer conceptual and practical frameworks to support the process, such as the adapted text triangle

(Holmgren, 2022a, p. 535) and the adapted version of Rolle's argumentative levels (Holmgren, 2022a, pp. 539–541).

Prior to each workshop, presenting participants select one of two complementary models: the *Prepared-response Workshop Model* or the *Laboratory Workshop Model*:

1. Prepared-response Workshop Model:
 - a. At a negotiated time, approximately one week before the workshop, presenters scan their scores, record their performances, describe their interpretational progress, outline their intended audience and performance setting, and include questions for desired responses. These materials are then shared with all participants, ensuring equal access for preparation and reflection.
 - b. At a negotiated time, all participants annotate the scanned scores or provide written responses, guided by the presenters' stated questions and desired areas of feedback. These responses are then made available to the entire group.
 - c. Based on the feedback and annotations received, presenters select topics to focus on during the workshop beforehand.
2. Laboratory Workshop Model:
 - a. At a negotiated time, approximately one week before the workshop, presenters send instructions for preparation. These may include listening to different interpretations (either provided or self-selected), studying artworks, reading texts, exploring societal issues, or reflecting on specific audiences and performance spaces.
 - b. During the workshop, presenters outline their objectives and, with support from the workshop leader and active participant engagement, collaboratively explore aspects of their current interpretation in relation to the intended performance context through performance and dialogue.

Each workshop should conclude with an evaluation aiming at refining both the format and the role of the workshop leader. Anonymous reflections are collected through handwritten or digital one-minute papers (Angelo & Cross, 1993, pp. 148–153; Wilson, 1986), complemented by verbal discussion. A more comprehensive evaluation is recommended at the end of each semester or academic year, incorporating feedback from participating students, teachers, and workshop leaders. This evaluation should examine both the challenges and possibilities associated with implementing the workshops, as well as their perceived impact. Insights from these evaluations should ideally be shared at the beginning of the next workshop cycle and reported as research, fostering collegial discussion and improvement. Organizing the workshops in this way allows ongoing discussion and negotiation with participants regarding the definition of musical interpretation, the development of their musical interpretations and

artistic practices, professional judgement, and the disposition of the workshops themselves.

Interpretational work occurs both asynchronously—before and after the workshops—and synchronously during them, facilitating deep reflection and contemplation often lacking in traditional instrumental education. When materials are provided, participants can study and listen multiple times, enabling more informed responses and empowering students and teachers to reflect on their own and others' performance levels and areas for improvement in a broader perspective. This process helps balance the power dynamics related to knowledge and status, enhances students' philosophical grounding in musical interpretation, and offers a training space for refining professional judgment. The workshop design thus strives for multivoicedness, in line with Arendt's thinking, by embracing diverse perspectives and experiences, promoting equal participation.

Cultivating becoming musicians' professional judgment could thus be understood as centering on profession-related assessments and imaginations, based on reflected actions, in the meeting between the past and future. For example, students could develop a deepened awareness of the importance of repertoire choices, performance styles, and relational approaches when working with, for example, children on specific themes, such as peace. The workshop model offers opportunities to develop professional judgement by exploring what music to use (or not) in relation to a specific group of children, how its historical origins could inform interpretation, how imagined settings might influence possible musical expressions, and what kind of experiences and actions the musician aims to offer the specific participants and broader community. This approach fundamentally challenges the traditional conformity of HME—a topic we will return to in the discussion and forward-looking reflections below.

Discussion and Forward-Looking Reflections on Challenging Conformity

This discussion explores the challenges and possibilities of implementing cross-instrumental collaborative workshops on musical interpretation within HME, addressing key considerations related to society, institutional organization, collegium, teacher competence, and relational situations. The concluding section offers forward-looking reflections on interdisciplinary collaboration and the evolving role of pre-service arts education in engaging with broader societal contexts. Furthermore, we consider how the proposed model may support higher arts education in preparing students for working in various artistic and educational situations, striving to enable transformative learning experiences across diverse groups of people.

By fostering a multivoiced environment that embraces diverse opinions and experiences, these workshops aim to promote equal participation and

enhance students' professional judgment, thereby fundamentally challenging the traditional conformity of HME, as manifested in the teacher-dominated master-apprentice tradition. We hold that implementing such workshops could provide students opportunities to deeply engage with musical interpretation and develop their professional judgments, encouraging reflection on history, society, audience, and imagined spatial context, while also broadening their conception of themselves as artists and human beings connected to and intertwined in society. This process could broaden students' self-conception as artists and individuals embedded in society, opening for them to conceptualize themselves as makers in society (Gaunt et al., 2021), and better preparing them for futures in line with portfolio careers that encompass a wide range of professional activities (Bartleet et al., 2019; Ferm Almqvist & Kiilu, 2024; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2020). Reflective writing on potential future professional activities as musicians in society—and their implications for themselves and their (imagined) collaborators, audiences, and broader community—could form one component of this portfolio.

However, before discussing the institutional, collegial, and relational demands of implementing the proposed workshop model, it is essential to acknowledge that the model has not yet been implemented. Nevertheless, we believe that discussing the model and its philosophical foundation at research conferences (Ferm Almqvist & Holmgren, 2023; Holmgren & Ferm Almqvist, 2025), as well as disseminating it in writing to researchers and practitioners, can spur valuable discussions and comments. Such feedback may help refine the model further prior to implementation and contribute meaningfully to the broader field of HME research and practice.

Societal, Organizational, and Collegial Demands

Implementing the proposed workshops within HME involves navigating a range of challenges and possibilities across several interdependent and intertwined areas, including societal context, institutional organization, collegium, teaching competence, and the relational situation.

At the societal level, factors such as political decisions and “winds”, policies, employer expectations, and steering documents can either support or hinder the implementation. Institutional leadership plays a critical role in managing logistical aspects—such as scheduling (time and space), access to appropriate facilities (e.g., suitable lesson rooms and instruments), and the coordination of individual and collective working plans—as well as formulating goals, visions, and strategies. Here, tensions often arise between flexibility and control, seemingly guided by inertia (Becker, 1995), stemming from strong, longstanding traditions. The ambition to create collaborative situations for cultivating professional judgment could be one way to overcome such tensions and open up for an educational organization that challenges and changes the conformity of HME.

Within the collegium, classical music education's history intersects with possible futures, revealing tensions between conservation and renewal—again connecting to the concept of inertia (Becker, 1995). Crucial questions arise regarding whose histories and future(s) are to be negotiated and reached. Who has the authority to define the goals for HME, and what mandate do individual staff members possess on the floor? And how are students' views and goals taken into account? By continuously and openly listening to participants' experiences of the proposed workshops and discussing these findings in relation to previous research, we believe that the case for these workshops could grow organically from within. This bottom-up approach is supported by students who participated in an earlier iteration and expressed a desire for such workshops to be integrated into the core of the curriculum of their Bachelor of Music program (Holmgren, 2022a, 2022b), rather than being perceived as a top-down implementation from researchers.

Teacher Competence and Institutional Responsibility

The competencies required of instrumental teachers leading and participating in such workshops are a crucial issue to reflect upon. Facilitators must possess both a solid philosophical and practical foundation on what musical interpretation is, can, and could be, as well as a foundational openness towards this understanding, opening for an acceptance and a quest for exploring multiple positions, regardless of instrument, not merely focusing on the transmission of long-held beliefs regarding how something “is” or “should be”. This openness to the unknown and the capacity to avoid making quick judgments are clearly linked to personal characteristics. However, implementing these workshops presupposes that participating teachers, beyond being interested in and convinced that it is possible to challenge and change the conformity of HME, also subscribe—at least to some degree—to the principle of openness. Without this commitment, fruitful collaboration is unlikely, and the conditions for cultivating professional judgment will fail to materialize, ultimately risking limiting HME institutions' possibilities for contributing to broadening the conception of what a musician is and can be. Therefore, teachers need to be grounded in both the music and teaching professions, and capable of imagining varied teaching scenarios—each with implications for how teaching may be planned and assessed. Given the previously identified limitations of generic professional development offered by such institutions (Mitchell, 2020, p. 113), we advocate targeted training through courses specifically designed to challenge and expand teachers' skills and attitudes. We believe it is an institutional responsibility to address this issue, including managing potential initial skepticism, to create prerequisites for the development of professional judgement and broad musicianship among students. However, it is essential that these courses avoid becoming overly prescriptive or establishing new hegemonies. Instead, they should remain flexible, dialogic, and responsive to the evolving needs of both students and teachers. The aim should be to foster critical reflection and

openness rather than to impose fixed pedagogical frameworks, thereby avoiding the reproduction of conformity under a different guise.

Relational Pedagogy and Dialogical Practice

The relational situation of the proposed workshops demands openness and awareness, curiosity and respect, and a willingness to dwell in the unknown together with the participants. The workshop leader must create an educational environment that enables all participants to explore their personal understandings and feel safe when contributing to the discussions and while performing. Thus, the environment needs to support multiple perspectives and focus on the collective search, not striving to reach so-called truths. We believe that such pedagogical situations should adhere to the Socratic *elenchus*, with a focus on inquiry rather than a more eristic outlook centering on winning the debate (see discussion in Holmgren, 2022a, p. 211).

This implies a significant shift from the master-apprentice model, in which the master is, at least to some extent, conceptualized as the holder of the truth—the one with access to the “holy grail” and, in the context of musical interpretation, to, “secret knowledge mediated in writing [i.e., scores]” (Holmgren, 2022a, p. 176). In contrast, the proposed workshops encourage students to perceive, analyze, and respond to each other’s (recorded) performances based on an analysis in relation to the imagined consequences of chosen actions. Consequently, implementing such workshops represents a fundamental challenge to the traditional conformity of both the formats for and the learning allowed for in HME. The next step is to involve HME teachers in this practice to further embed these principles in institutional culture.

Balancing Expertise and Innovation

To avoid being perceived as overly optimistic, we must address the risk of losing instrument-specific expertise traditionally provided through one-to-one tuition and group lessons led by an expert on the same instrument. To be clear, we do not propose replacing all such teaching with the workshops suggested here. Rather, these workshops aim to address specific issues related to the master-apprentice tradition that, on a structural level, appear to be missing from current one-to-one and group lessons in HME and that seem to limit students’ learning while reinforcing an asymmetrical teacher-student relationship.

Experiences from these workshops could also enrich traditional teaching models, not least in fostering the development of professional judgment. Moreover, we argue that long-standing axiomatic assumptions about the benefits of one-to-one teaching and the conservatory model warrant critical scrutiny, as they exemplify how stakeholders within HME contribute to structural inertia (Becker, 1995) in maintaining educational conformity. Traces of such assumptions appear in relatively recent conference calls, where individual provision is described as “rightly seen as the essential core of conservatoire training” (J.

Sloboda, public communication, November 22, 2021), and questions such as “how can we create change without losing the quality inherent in the traditions and culture of the conservatoire?” (Stabell, 2023) are posed. These formulations contrast with current discussion in both academia and public forums. For instance, Andrew Lloyd Webber stated in *The Guardian* that “[t]here is no need for one-to-one tuition to continue” (Thorpe, 2023, October 7, n. p.), suggesting that “groups of three are the best size now for any lesson. It would mean there was much more openness and accountability” (Thorpe, 2023, October 7, n. p.). While Webber’s utterances emerged in the context of misconduct claims, we find it encouraging that a public figure is willing to question the conformity of HME and highlight the potential benefits of group tuition. Nevertheless, as noted above, the proposed workshop model should be continually assessed, evaluated, and refined to prevent it from solidifying into a new static or hegemonic educational practice that lacks critical reflection.

Resisting Inertia, Embracing Change: Towards Participatory and Interdisciplinary Arts Education

We believe the time is ripe for fruitful collaboration among researchers, teachers, musicians, and philosophers. Developing and implementing more participatory forms of instrumental education—drawing on Hannah Arendt’s philosophy and aiming to offer audiences and communities meaningful artistic experiences—could represent a viable path forward, one that challenges and changes traditional HME structures from within.

To further challenge educational conformity, we suggest considering extending the scope of the proposed workshops to include students and teachers from other art forms that unfold over time, such as dance and theatre. These disciplines share music’s temporal and performative nature, where the act of performance is inseparable from the performer. Their inclusion could offer valuable perspectives and methodologies that should enrich the educational experience. By opening up for inter-artform collaboration, the proposed workshops could foster a broader and more holistic approach to artistic education and practice. This, in turn, would encourage students to explore the interconnectedness of various artistic expressions and their roles in society—an endeavor that resonates with Arendt’s emphasis on the development of judgment in pluralistic contexts.

By embracing this interdisciplinary and participatory approach, it would be possible to cultivate a new generation of artists who are not only highly skilled in their craft but also deeply engaged with their communities and the broader societal contexts. This vision aligns with the concept of musicians as “makers in society” (Gaunt et al., 2021), emphasizing their dual role as artists and active societal contributors—a perspective that resonates with Arendt’s thinking on judgment. One aspect of being a maker in society as an artist could be to work

professionally in schools, offering pupils transformative and exploratory arts educational experiences (see Eisner, 2004).

While the exploration of relationships between and within various performing arts—and how they may enrich each other in an educational context—lies beyond the scope of this article, it remains a promising direction for further inquiry. Likewise, a thorough and empirically grounded investigation into the potential limitations of these workshops falls outside the present scope and should be conducted collaboratively with practitioners in the field. Accordingly, our focus here has been to present the workshop model and discuss the demands placed on arts education in its implementation.

Finally, we look forward to exploring these philosophically based workshops in collaboration with those interested in reconceptualizing higher arts education. By engaging in efforts—both in small and large steps—to challenge and change the traditional conformity of such education, we ultimately aim to resist the power of inertia. We invite the reader to join us in this endeavor.

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