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# **HOW POPULAR MUSICIANS TEACH**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD**

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## ABSTRACT

The present study asks how musicians who have learned outside the classical tradition teach others to play. A group of eight instrumental teachers were studied, all of whom grew up playing ‘popular’, vernacular styles of music. While most of them had at least some experience of being taught classical music, they spent their formative years committed to largely self-directed learning, acquiring the skills they needed in order to play the styles that appealed to them at the time: namely rock, blues, jazz or folk.

The teachers were interviewed about their learning histories and their teaching practice, and were filmed teaching a total of eleven students. There was a wide range of instrumental teaching strategies in evidence, from the orthodox teaching of classical music to lessons based entirely on listening and copying. However, in exploring the relationship between how this group learned to play and how they teach others to play, it was evident that they were not ‘teaching as they were taught’, nor were they necessarily re-creating their own ‘informal’ learning practices. Rather they were creating their own idiosyncratic teaching strategies, drawing on those elements of their own learning histories which they valued, and supplementing these with aspects of musical learning which they felt they had missed out on; in short, they were attempting to teach as they would have wanted to be taught themselves. Their teaching practice, and their sense of identity, was strongly influenced both by the economic realities of trying to survive as musicians, and by the nature of their students, who were generally viewed as relatively unmotivated.

The study addresses an under-researched area of music teaching, and the findings are relevant to course designers, syllabus consultants and instrumental teachers generally, as well as music education researchers, in particular those interested in popular music and informal learning.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	vii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	viii
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	1
1.1 A story	1
1.2 Lack of regulation	3
1.3 The conservatoire model	5
1.4 How musicians teach	7
1.5 Popular musicians and the classical tradition	9
1.6 Popular musicians as teachers	10
1.7 My own history as a learner and teacher	15
1.8 The structure of the thesis	17
<b>CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY</b>	21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.1.1 Project design	21
2.2 Participants	24
2.3 Procedure	34
2.3.1 Interviews and lesson observations	34
2.3.2 Data collection	38
2.3.3 Saturation	42
2.4 My role as researcher	45
2.5. Analysis	57
2.5.1 Interviews	57
2.5.2 Lesson observations	62
2.6 Methodology: conclusion	65

<b>CHAPTER 3: LEARNING</b>	67
3.1. Introduction	67
3.2 Informal learning	68
3.2.1 Self-recruitment	69
3.2.2 Learning without pedagogy	79
3.2.2.1 Use of recordings	79
3.2.2.2 Peer-group learning	83
3.3 Formal learning	87
3.3.1 Being taught	89
3.3.1.1 Giving up instruments	92
3.3.1.2 Giving up lessons	95
3.3.2 Using notation	101
3.3.3 Learning through teaching	108
3.4 Learning practices: summary	111
3.5 Relevance of music education research	112
3.6 Musical categories	118
3.7 Learning: conclusion	124
<b>CHAPTER 4: TEACHING</b>	127
4.1 Introduction	127
4.2 Research literature on instrumental teaching	128
4.3 Formal teaching	132
4.3.1 Notation	133
4.3.2 Technique, theory and grade exams	139
4.4 Informal teaching	149
4.4.1 Getting started: looking and listening	149
4.4.2 Playing with others	157
4.4.3 Improvisation	162
4.5 Teaching practices: summary	164
4.6 Lesson observations	165

4.6.1 Introduction	165
4.6.2 Fit	166
4.6.3 Style	174
4.6.4 Lesson observations: summary	178
4.7 Teaching: conclusion	179
<b>CHAPTER 5: BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES</b>	<b>182</b>
5.1 Introduction	182
5.2 Learning histories	182
5.2.1 Learning: Bill and Frank	183
5.2.2 Teaching: Bill and Frank	187
5.2.3 Learning histories and teaching strategies: the other participants	196
5.2.4 Learning histories: summary	202
5.3. Identity	203
5.3.1 Becoming teachers	204
5.3.2 Identity work	208
5.3.3 Identity: summary	212
5.4 Role	213
5.4.1 Flexibility as teachers	214
5.4.2 The attitude of the students	218
5.4.3 Refusals	221
5.4.4 Other views about student motivation	224
5.4.5 Motivated pupils	227
5.4.6 Role: summary	229
5.5 The politics of popular music	231
5.5.1 Institutionalising informal learning practices	232
5.5.2 Participants' views on musical politics	239
5.5.3 Participants' political position	246
5.5.4 The politics of popular music: summary	247

5.6 Beliefs and attitudes: conclusion	248
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS</b>	250
6.1 Introduction	250
6.2 Validity	251
6.3 Research into instrumental teachers	252
6.4 How teaching strategies evolve	254
6.5 Motivated teachers and apathetic learners	255
6.6 Training and experience	256
6.7 Methodology	258
6.8 Studying motivated learners	259
6.9 My own perspective as a practitioner and researcher	262
6.10 Relevance of this research	264
<b>APPENDIX 1:</b> Consent Form	266
<b>APPENDIX 2:</b> Participant Information Sheet	267
<b>APPENDIX 3:</b> Interview Questions	268
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	270

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>TABLE 1:</b> Age and experience (2.2)	28
<b>TABLE 2:</b> Chronology of data collection (2.3.2)	39
<b>TABLE 3:</b> Lesson observations (2.3.2)	40
<b>TABLE 4:</b> Learning and tuition (3.3.1)	90
<b>TABLE 5:</b> Overview of lesson observation activities (4.6.2)	167
<b>TABLE 6:</b> Regrets about learning (5.2.3)	197
<b>TABLE 7:</b> Do you think the way you teach is better than the way you learned? (5.2.3)	199

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A story

The present study is concerned with a selected group of instrumental teachers who grew up playing ‘popular’, vernacular styles of music. While most of them had at least some experience of being taught classical music, they spent their formative years in largely self-directed study, acquiring the skills they needed to play the styles that appealed to them at the time: namely rock, blues, jazz or folk. Using in-depth interviews I consider how this group learned to play their instruments, and both discuss and observe how they teach others to play. I question how their learning histories have influenced their teaching practice, and describe both how they see themselves, in terms of their role and identity as teachers, and how they regard their students. I begin, however, with a story that introduces some of the issues affecting instrumental teachers at work in the UK.

I had been working in Bristol as a drum teacher for several years when, in the autumn of 2003, I received a telephone enquiry from someone interested in coming for lessons. My prospective student was in his mid-thirties and had, by the sound of it, been playing for some time. He said he wanted to work on his reading skills, as well as doing some ‘jazzy stuff’. We duly arranged to meet.

After around ten minutes of his first lesson, it was clear that he was certainly an experienced and accomplished player with strong listening skills and no little technique. However, he brought proceedings to an abrupt halt by announcing, somewhat sheepishly, that he had a ‘confession’ to make. He explained that he was completely self-taught, and did indeed want to come for lessons to develop his own playing; however, he had a more pressing problem. He was himself a drum teacher, and he was due to give a lesson the next day to a promising student who wanted to start a new piece. He was not confident that he knew this well enough to teach it: could I go through it with him?

The piece was part of a grade 4 exam syllabus for drum kit, and he was most reluctant to volunteer any attempts at playing what was written. He was unable to identify note names or their relative duration, and could only hazard guesses at what particular phrases might sound like. In short, while he was easily capable of *playing* the material, he couldn't actually read it.

As his teacher I was unsure how to proceed, since he was not going to acquire the reading skills - literally - overnight to be able to teach this piece the following day. He certainly needed help, however. Finally I asked why it was that he was trying to teach in this way, using notation and grade exams, when he was unfamiliar with the material and couldn't read the parts himself. He replied:

Well it's what you're supposed to do, isn't it?

This story, I think, illustrates two crucial issues in instrumental teaching. Firstly, there is no regulatory body which acts as gatekeeper to the profession, and no statutory requirement for specific qualifications. As a result, musicians with a wide range of experience and abilities are at work as teachers, generally with no pedagogic training, and with little more to guide them than their own experience as learners, and their assumptions about how to teach. Secondly, while this lack of regulation means that, in theory, instrumental teachers have a choice about how to teach, the traditional 'conservatoire' model of one-to-one teaching probably still represents most people's idea of what instrumental music lessons will consist of. Both of these issues have profound consequences for instrumental teachers and in this chapter I consider these first, before addressing the question of how musicians in general, and popular musicians in particular, might approach teaching others to play. Finally I explain how I became interested in the question of how popular musicians teach, and thus how this research came about.

## 1.2 Lack of regulation

Instrumental teaching in the UK operates as a largely unregulated market. There are certainly many teacher training courses available: for example, both the major examination boards (the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music - henceforth ABRSM - and Trinity Guildhall) offer a series of teaching diplomas, as do various further and higher education institutions, such as the Access to Music colleges, the Brighton Institute of Modern Music and many others. However, these teaching courses differ in several important respects. Some are more or less explicitly aimed at those teaching classical music, others at those involved in popular genres. Some bring considerable status, and tend to require the applicant to have already passed various exams; others serve as no more than a general introduction to anyone interested in becoming an instrumental teacher.

However, learning to play an instrument is only compulsory at a basic level as part of classroom music lessons; specialised instrumental teaching falls outside both the National Curriculum and the system of training and assessment which applies to learning in the classroom. Some institutions such as schools or Local Education Authority (LEA) music services may require (or prefer) their teachers to possess a certain level of musical or teaching qualifications, though personal experience and anecdotal evidence suggests that such expectations vary widely. Instrumental teachers themselves are often ambivalent about the value of teacher training. Janet Mills found that undergraduates at two conservatoires and one university, who were 'little more than children themselves' (Mills, 2006: 389), commonly had experience of giving instrumental lessons without any training in teaching, even though they felt they needed it. Nevertheless, instrumental teachers even at conservatoires (Purser, 2005) and universities (Burwell, 2005) often lack training or qualifications in pedagogy, being employed instead on the strength of their musical accomplishments. Taking lessons with a 'qualified' teacher is not a prerequisite for achievement; many outstanding musicians have developed under the guidance of those with no training as teachers.

Moreover, instrumental teaching serves different functions in a wide variety of settings. While some of this teaching is aimed at honing the skills of future professionals, much more is intended to bring pleasure and satisfaction to those playing music as a hobby. Students at a conservatoire may need to give a recital to a certain standard for their learning to be judged ‘successful’; an adult beginner, having one lesson a week, may simply need to feel that they are making progress, and enjoying the process, to want to continue. Accordingly, some may need expert coaching from accomplished professionals; others simply want to find a teacher that they like, and whose teaching style suits them. Learning an instrument has much in common with activities such as studying life-drawing, or having tennis coaching; these are predominantly leisure activities, although some people make a living in sport or art (or indeed music). These kinds of voluntary learning may take place in formal institutions, with teachers who are accredited or trained in some way, but may also occur in much more casual, informal settings. Someone wishing to become fluent in a foreign language might enrol in classes run by a qualified teacher, yet equally may prefer to learn from regular, informal conversations with a native-speaker. Where learning is a voluntary activity, much depends on the learner: their personality, their circumstances, and their individual goals all affect how they choose to learn. Given such a range of contexts and intended outcomes, it is perhaps not surprising that there is no universally accepted (or required) training or qualification for instrumental teaching.

The diverse and, in a sense, fragmented nature of instrumental teaching as a profession, combined with the absence of regulation, means that all kinds of instrumental teachers are at work in Britain. Some work in relatively ‘visible’ settings; for example, in schools or universities. However, a glance at the notice board in any music shop (or a brief search on the internet) will hint at the vast range and extent of private, freelance tuition going on all over the UK. The only statutory requirement for a teacher is that they must have a disclosure certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau, to ensure they do not have convictions which would render them unsuitable to work with children. However, at present even this only applies to those working for an institution such as a school or local authority, and is not mandatory for the self-employed. In terms of

musical ability, qualifications or experience, there are no requirements at all; in effect, anyone can pronounce themselves a teacher, and advertise themselves as such to those wanting to learn. If a student has a lesson with them they are, *de facto*, an instrumental teacher.

### 1.3 The conservatoire model

Instrumental teachers, therefore, need not be trained or accredited by institutions or regulatory bodies, do not have a nationally-agreed curriculum to deliver, nor are they or their pupils necessarily subject to formal assessment. This would seem to suggest that they can teach in whatever manner suits them best. However, their approach may be tempered by a variety of external factors. For example, since having instrumental lessons is a voluntary activity, the most significant influence on a musician's approach to teaching may be the preferences and expectations of their pupils, and the financial implications of keeping (or rather, of not keeping) their customers happy. Equally, a peripatetic may need to comply with specific requirements or musical preferences at the institutions where he or she works. Teachers in further or higher education may well have a syllabus to deliver, or at least standards that their pupils need to attain. Even so, they may have considerable discretion as to how this is achieved.

Anyone embarking on a career as an instrumental teacher in Britain has to accept the cultural significance of the traditional conservatoire model of instrumental teaching. This mode of learning is typically based on reading notation, learning technical exercises and performing excerpts from the classical repertoire, generally leading to formal assessment in a grade exam. I am aware that this may not be an accurate description of all classical instrumental teaching; not all teachers of classical music necessarily teach initially from notation or emphasise technique from the first. Nevertheless, I would argue that this stereotyped view is how 'classical instrumental teaching' is generally understood.

As I have already suggested, this model exerts a powerful influence over the expectations of learners and teachers alike. Graded performance exams were first introduced in the UK in 1876 (Pitts, 2000a: 12), and embody a system which has come to symbolise the learning and teaching of at least classical if not all forms of instrumental performance. Indeed for many teachers, grade exams form a kind of syllabus for their teaching (Harris and Crozier, 2000: 111), and represent an attractive and obvious resource. Repertoire, technique and theory are all well-established, and assessment is sanctioned by unassailably influential and internationally renowned examination boards. Large numbers of students take such exams every year; for example, in the UK in 2009, around 270,000 people took a classical, practical exam with the ABRSM (ABRSM, 2010).

To return for a moment to the story which began this chapter, the example of my drum student-teacher acts as a demonstration of the influence of this stereotyped traditional teaching model. At the time of our meeting he had only just begun his career as a teacher, and had only taught relative beginners. He had no personal experience of receiving any kind of instrumental tuition, had - clearly - not worked his way up through graded exams as part of his own learning, and was evidently ill-equipped to teach others to do so. Yet his first instinct in his new role as a teacher was to reach for the ABRSM syllabus for drum kit, complete with notated pieces and technical exercises. It seems in part he simply assumed he would teach in this way, even on such an obviously 'non-classical' instrument; as he later explained, his colleagues in the schools where he worked expected this, as did the parents of his students, and even the students themselves. As a result of these expectations (including his own), he found himself teaching in a way which, unfortunately, highlighted his own limitations rather than his abilities as a player, abilities which his students would surely have been very happy to have passed on to them. As this example suggests, I would argue that for almost any kind of instrumental teacher, the traditional model of classical music teaching, embodied in the grade exam system, is hard to ignore.

The gravitational pull of this traditional model can have a powerful influence even over a teacher who has received training in pedagogy, and has practical experience of other ways of teaching music. Mills, looking back over a lifetime of teaching, recalls her earliest days as both a classroom and instrumental teacher:

By day, classes of 30 secondary-school students worked with me on creative projects that required them to use their memories, or perhaps - in the way of some professional composers of that time - graphic scores. By night, staff notation, rather than music, became the centre of the musical life of my growing private practice of violin and viola students. I had not been trained as an instrumental teacher, and thought simply that this is what one did in instrumental lessons. (Mills, 2007: 140)

West and Rostvall suggest that the assumptions and expectations surrounding instrumental learning need to be challenged if other possibilities are to emerge:

The teaching of musical instruments has a long tradition that in many ways shapes the boundaries that constrain the possible actions of teachers. Lacking a structured curriculum, these traditions have a strong influence on teachers' actions. If the norms and values established through history remain unchallenged by reflective thinking, they can restrain conscious development of teachers' repertoire of actions. (West and Rostvall, 2003: 19)

Thus while it would appear that instrumental teachers have a free hand to teach as they wish, they work in a profession dominated by a tradition of teaching which may serve as a resource to draw upon, but may also be an obstacle to overcome.

#### **1.4 How musicians teach**

There is no general agreement how best to teach, or indeed learn, an instrument, nor even as to the intended outcomes of teaching an instrument. Susan Hallam argues that:

the effectiveness of teaching can only be understood in relation to particular learning goals. As there is currently no consensus regarding the purpose of instrumental tuition, it is impossible to define an ideal model of teaching. (Hallam, 1998: 229)

Universal notions of what instrumental teaching should be may need to apply equally to a seven year-old beginner on the violin, an adult taking up rock guitar for fun, or a jazz saxophonist already playing professionally. Instrumental teaching can involve so many different kinds of pupils that any general principles of teaching can only be phrased in the broadest terms. Individual teachers - whatever their personal preferences - may need a range of teaching strategies to suit different situations.

However, little is known about the current working practices of instrumental teachers in Britain. Hallam states that instrumental teaching is an essentially conservative profession, and that the methods used by teachers 'tend to be those that were used by their teachers in teaching them' (Hallam, 1998: 241). She does accept that 'some teachers may experiment with new methods discovered through reading, studying or contact with other teachers' but that not all teachers believe it is important to adopt any particular 'method' at all (*ibid*: 241). However, the idea that teachers 'teach as they were taught' is disputed by Mills and Smith who, after eliciting the views of 134 instrumental teachers working for various education authorities, state that this idea is 'a myth, at least in the context of LEA music services' (Mills and Smith, 2003: 22). Instead, the teachers who responded to their questionnaire seemed to have created their own teaching method, through analysing the strengths and weaknesses of how they were taught, as well as drawing on other influences, such as discussion with other teachers and any training they may have received.

To date, surprisingly few researchers have intruded into the privacy of one-to-one instrumental lessons to see what kinds of teaching materials and methods teachers use. Instrumental teachers are generally isolated (Burwell, 2005: 199) and thus tend to devise teaching methods individually and in private. Even well-established, highly prestigious classical performers may be

surprisingly reluctant to reveal the details of their teaching practices (Purser, 2005: 296).

What research there is into instrumental teaching tends to focus on those working in higher education or in specialist music schools, and is overwhelmingly concerned with the teaching of classical music (this is discussed in greater detail in sections 3.4 and 4.2). Specific questions of repertoire and pedagogy are not generally addressed in any detail, but it would seem that a great deal of classical instrumental teaching adheres closely to the grade exam syllabus, and still relies primarily on the study of notation (West and Rostvall, 2003), despite the well-known advice to put ‘sound before symbol’ (McPherson and Gabrielsson, 2002; Odam, 1995). Peter Cope (1999: 62) argues that instrumental lessons tend to be based on a ‘traditionally classical, high-culture approach’ driven by the dominance of the ABRSM as a source of certification; this approach may well be reinforced by other examination boards such as Trinity Guildhall and the London College of Music. How musicians from a popular music background might teach is a subject almost completely undocumented by music education research.

### **1.5 Popular musicians and the classical tradition**

In 1963, the Ministry of Education's *Half our Future* report noted that ‘out of school, adolescents are enthusiastically engaged in musical self education’ (Ministry of Education, 1963: 139). Many musicians have learned to play their instruments out of school, away from formal education, and outside the classical tradition. The ways that popular musicians have acquired their skills has until recently attracted relatively little interest from music education researchers. However work by, for example, Bennett (1980), Cohen (1991), Berliner (1994), Lilliestam (1996) and Green (2002) has mapped out a terrain largely or at least initially unfamiliar to those from a background in classical music. What emerges is a surprisingly consistent picture, albeit of a somewhat haphazard process. These writers (and several others) find autonomous and highly motivated learners, thoroughly engaged with learning a certain style of

music which they know well and like. Much of this learning is solitary and based solely on listening to recordings, which are used as ‘texts’ to copy by trial and error, and which serve as models of playing to emulate. However, watching, and getting advice from, other more experienced players is often helpful. Also central is the process of joining bands and rehearsing together, usually with the aim of performing in public. This collective music making is important as an opportunity for the exchange of information as well as for developing other skills, such as improvising, arranging and composing together as a group. Formal knowledge of music theory, notation and technique may follow, but this method of learning is preceded by informally acquired aural skills.

The learning practices of popular musicians, and the literature associated with this, will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3, but it will hopefully be clear from this brief sketch that these practices differ in fundamental ways from the traditional model of learning to play classical music. In particular, popular musicians use (initially at least) listening rather than reading skills, studying recordings rather than notation, and tend to learn with and from their peers rather than from a teacher. They also tend to structure their learning in different ways; for example, graded exams present an ordered, sequential series of pieces of gradually increasing difficulty, accompanied by the requisite technical exercises and theoretical knowledge. In contrast, popular music learners tend to start with the ‘finished product’ as it were, studying tunes not because they are easy but because the learner likes them, even if they have no idea, initially, how to play them and no sense of the theoretical basis of what they are attempting.

## **1.6 Popular musicians as teachers**

These profound differences in learning practices have implications for popular musicians who take on the role of teacher. Indeed, for musicians who emerge from a world of informal, self-directed learning, and who have largely developed through their own independent efforts rather than through the guidance and prompting of a teacher, there may even be a certain ambivalence to overcome, whether consciously or not, in order to teach at all. Paul Berliner

(1994: 51) suggests that, in the jazz tradition, the student must take responsibility for learning, and has to ‘absorb and sort out musical knowledge’ for themselves. The expert players who become teachers are primarily concerned with their own music, and typically are not interested in assuming exclusive control over a student, nor do they expect that their teaching will be enough for a complete musical education. As a result:

aspiring jazz musicians whose educational background has fostered a fundamental dependence on teachers must adopt new approaches to learning. (Berliner, 1994: 51)

Similarly, the rock tradition (or at least, rock mythology) prizes its independence from formal education; Stephen Davis for example quotes the guitarist Jimmy Page:

The good thing about the guitar was that they *didn't* teach it in school. Teaching myself was the first and most important part of my education. (Davis, 2005a: 13)

The relationship between informal learning and formal education is discussed further in chapter 5 (see, in particular, 5.5).

It may well make perfect sense for orchestral players to teach more or less as they were taught: if the system based on notation, technical exercises and grade exams demonstrably worked for them, why not for others? Their intention as teachers may well be to produce musicians largely in their own image, in which case it would seem reasonable to attempt to replicate, for their students, the circumstances of their own learning. Indeed, in the upper reaches of the classical world, much store is set by the pedagogical lineage of players and teachers (Kingsbury, 1988: 45), with the teaching styles of past masters explicitly adopted and passed down from one generation to the next. However, this tradition is not shared by musicians who have pieced together their own musical education informally. In extreme cases, as we have seen, the inappropriate adoption of a traditional approach based on notation may result in teachers employing syllabus material they can play but not read.

Some teachers of popular genres use the various rock and jazz versions of grade exams currently offered by the major examination boards. To date, such exams attract relatively small, though growing, numbers of entrants: the Rockschool board reports (in personal correspondence, 2009) that just under 19,000 students took their exams in the UK and the rest of Europe in 2008, while the ABRSM jazz syllabus accounts for only around 1.5 per cent of the total number of their exam entrants (personal correspondence, 2009). However, these 'popular' syllabi seem to have borrowed the logic of traditional exams, largely retaining the requirements of sight-reading and technical exercises, and replacing classical pieces with notated, idiomatic pastiches or covers of popular 'classics' (though they include recorded versions on CD to play along with). While more flexible than their classical counterparts, these exams hardly reflect the learning practices of most popular musicians.

Many initially self-taught musicians have subsequently acquired formidable technical skills and theoretical knowledge, yet might hesitate as teachers to adopt the formal, structured approach to learning embodied in the grade exam system. A teacher may be wary, if not uneasy, about introducing notation or technical exercises to beginners, and steering them towards exams, when they themselves began learning their instruments entirely by ear and by jamming with friends. A popular, informal pedagogical lineage is at stake here. Popular musicians tend to value intuitive, ear-based skills such as the ability to improvise and compose with others, over the notation-based skills of reproduction and interpretation prized by the classical tradition. While learning from recordings is a relatively recent adaptation, vernacular musical styles have always been transmitted through listening, watching and playing with others (Lilliestam, 1996). A teacher may have to tread carefully if he or she is to pass on this tradition, but surely risks breaking it altogether by depending on notation and graded exams. Moreover, the instrument or style of music in which the teacher specialises may not be catered for by examination boards. A musician who is expert at playing Irish fiddle tunes or 'extreme' heavy metal guitar (or, as we shall see, the harmonica) will have to find teaching material elsewhere. However, if a teacher is unable, or unwilling, to use existing grade exams to

provide a syllabus and a structured progression for students in their formative years, there are no immediately obvious alternatives.

Popular musicians may well find it difficult to reflect their own learning practices in the ways that they teach. Learning to play an instrument in the context of a lesson will inevitably be fundamentally different in many ways from the solitary, self-directed learning typically undertaken by popular music learners (see section 4.1 for more discussion of this issue); apart from anything else, the presence and guidance of a teacher fundamentally changes the learning environment. Equally, much autonomous popular music learning seems, in retrospect, somewhat indiscriminate - if not random - to those who engaged in it; hardly a ‘model’ to base teaching strategies upon. The popular musicians in Lucy Green’s study tended to undervalue the ways they themselves had learned; some of them ‘did not consider their own informal acquisition of musical skills and knowledge to even “count” as learning at all’ (Green, 2002: 184). Accordingly, she argues that popular musicians who become teachers may be reluctant or unable to draw on their own experiences as learners:

It is not necessarily the case that just because a person learnt to play by informal means, they will then translate their informal *learning* practices into their formal teaching practices. It is one thing to experience a way of learning, and another thing to recognize its feasibility as a teaching method. (*ibid*: 178)

As a result, Green suggests that popular musicians may adopt traditional, formal instrumental teaching methods rather than try to find alternatives, despite the contrast with their own learning histories. The story recounted earlier (see 1.1) is a good example of this.

Certainly, for the teacher seeking to step outside the grade exam syllabus, there is a wealth of educational material upon which to draw, including books of general advice and guidance for both teachers and learners, articles in specialist magazines, ‘play-along’ CDs, instructional books, DVDs and so on; the internet also teems with free lessons, subscription sites and demonstrations.

Personal experience and discussion with other teachers would suggest that, while there is a great deal of help and advice available, it varies wildly in terms of quality. For an individual teacher to piece together a teaching repertoire from such disparate sources implies a considerable investment of time and money. Perhaps even more significantly, it also requires a sense of strategy in choosing which material to use, and how to use it. A clear understanding of what will be effective and enjoyable for both student and teacher does not necessarily appear simply as a result of deciding to teach; the ability to justify, pedagogically, one's choices as a teacher may only arrive after years of experience. This is surely part of the appeal of the grade exam system: fundamental decisions about what constitutes effective learning have already been made, and an impossibly wide range of musical options reduced to a manageable set of tasks. The cultural status of classical music validates the educational system used to reproduce it, and teachers who adopt such a well-established, prestigious system scarcely need to justify their decision to do so; rather they borrow the credibility that comes with it. The responsibility for any subsequent failures must, by implication, lie with the student. The grade exam system, whether in its classical or 'popular' guise, has the inestimable virtue of being *already there*. One may rail against its limitations, but the instrumental teacher must work hard to replace it.

It is worth distinguishing here between repertoire and strategy. The Rockschool grade exams show that it is possible to adopt a 'classical' approach to popular music; in other words to use notation, technical exercises, sight reading and ear tests to foster the playing of, say, rock, blues or funk. Conversely, Green (2008) shows it is possible to adopt a 'popular' approach to learning classical music; that is, to attempt versions of classical pieces (albeit carefully chosen) through listening and copying. However, novice instrumental teachers have choices to make about both repertoire *and* strategy. The lack of regulation may mean that they have something like a free hand in choosing how to teach, yet for popular musicians this may almost be a mixed blessing. They are faced with a choice, either to adopt a system of grade exams that does not typically reflect the most important aspects of their own learning histories, or create, probably in isolation and with no experience or training, a teaching

syllabus of their own. To date, it would seem that no empirical research has been carried out into how such musicians teach.

### **1.7 My own history as a learner and teacher**

I began this chapter with the story of a teacher who had chosen to use grade exams despite his own background (and strengths) as a musician; yet his situation as a novice teacher was not so different from my own. I had initially approached drum teaching in a manner that largely reflected my own formal tuition on the trumpet rather than my self-taught, informal learning on the drums.

As an informal learner I behaved very much as the literature suggests: I copied records I liked through trial and error, carefully studied the drummers miming on BBC's 'Top of the Pops', and started playing in bands. Playing by ear seemed easy and natural, though as a learning process it was somewhat arbitrary: abruptly switching from one task to another, or obsessively practising the same thing for weeks. In contrast, my trumpet lessons progressed in an orderly, sequential fashion; I worked through a tutor book, page by page, the exercises and pieces growing gradually more challenging, and when I finished one book my teacher presented me with the next. Though concurrent, these forms of learning seemed to have little relationship to each other. Ironically, when I did eventually go for drum lessons, these were if anything still more 'formal': based entirely on notation, and concerned exclusively with matters of technique.

Without making a conscious decision to do so, this formal approach was the model of teaching which I tried to reproduce. In the late 1980s, when I began teaching, there were rather fewer options available (for example, the Rockschool examination board was not founded until 1991), but I bought a series of tuition books, hoping to find something resembling a syllabus I could use. I taught almost entirely from notation, tried to entice my pupils to practise abstract technical exercises, and used no recorded music in my lessons for several years. It didn't occur to me that this way of learning had hardly suited

me as a child; I hadn't particularly enjoyed my trumpet lessons, didn't become an especially accomplished trumpeter, and gave up the instrument as soon as I left school. While I enjoyed playing the trumpet in the school band and orchestra, I enjoyed playing the drums in (mainly rock) bands outside school a good deal more. The kind of trumpeter I became also did not seem to belong to the informal world of learning the drums and playing in bands. From the first I was completely dependent on notation, and my attempts to 'cross over' - that is, to play along with records on the trumpet by ear - were fruitless. I could 'hear' melodic lines I wanted to play on the trumpet, but could not imagine how to play them without seeing them written down.

As a novice teacher it simply didn't occur to me that it might be possible to reflect my own informal experience of learning in a formal setting. Even if it had, I think initially I would have seen no obvious way to structure and present, within the context of 'giving a lesson', the largely solitary, self-directed and haphazard approach I had taken in learning the drums. In retrospect, one might say that much of my behaviour as an informal learner exhibited characteristics in common with the often fragmented, obsessive nature of *play* rather than that usually associated with learning (Sutton-Smith, 2001: 27). If this apparently random and arbitrary collection of activities amounted to anything like a 'method', it was a method of learning, surely not of teaching.

However, over time I became increasingly dissatisfied with the lessons I was giving. To judge by the considerable attrition rate among my students, particularly young beginners, they felt the same. I began to read on the subject of education in general, and instrumental teaching in particular, and came across ideas by influential figures such as Suzuki and Kodály; I also undertook a course in instrumental teacher training, the Certificate of Teaching from the ABRSM (CT ABRSM), which was to prove a turning point. I gradually came to see that I could in fact teach in a way that, to some extent at least, reflected how I myself had learned, and eventually this served to make my lessons more enjoyable and successful. However, the transition from, as it were, 'formal' to 'informal' teaching was disconcerting, since it meant largely abandoning the safety, structure and credibility of tutor books and grade exams, and replacing

them with a syllabus that, in effect, I had to make up myself. Some comparisons between my own teaching and those of my sample appear at the end of the thesis (6.9).

After some years of experimenting with my own teaching practices, I realised that my interest had been provoked into wanting to find out how other teachers in similar situations had responded. I wanted to know if all musicians from the world of popular music were teaching as they were ‘supposed’ to, using a model drawn from the classical world, or whether they had found other ways to pass on their skills and encourage others. In particular, I was interested to see how their own learning histories related to their teaching practices; in other words whether they had, deliberately or otherwise, found ways to reflect their own experiences of learning in their teaching, as I had, slowly and painfully, in my own. Since I could find no existing research to answer these questions, it seemed I would have to do my own. This thesis is the result.

## **1.8 The structure of the thesis**

Chapter 1 (the present chapter) offers an introduction to the subject of instrumental teaching, and highlights some of the key issues which affect teachers. In particular, I consider that both the lack of regulation, and widespread assumptions about the importance of the traditional model of teaching classical music, have implications for teachers entering the profession. I argue that, while little is known generally about how instrumental teachers work, almost nothing is known about the teaching practices of popular musicians, who themselves learned to play in largely informal, self-directed ways. While the system of grade exams does not reflect their own learning practices, there is no obviously congruent model of teaching for them to adopt. My own experiences of learning and teaching provoked a wider interest in how popular musicians teach, with this research project being the result.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology of the project. I explain how, and on what basis, informants were recruited to the project, and how data were

gathered. I attempt to justify my decisions to use semi-structured interviews, and to film lesson observations with the teachers I recruited. I discuss problems of access, my role as researcher, and the extent to which I ‘intrude’ into the data. I also outline how I approached analysis of both the interview data and the video footage from lessons.

Subsequent chapters largely integrate discussion of empirical data with existing literature, an approach which I felt to be more appropriate than a separate literature review. The thesis covers a range of different subjects, each with its own research literature: informal music learning, instrumental teaching, the politics of youth culture, and so on. To group this research together would have created a collection of diverse accounts, each referring to a separate part of the final thesis. As a result I decided to ‘draw upon the literature selectively and appropriately as needed’ (Wolcott, 1990: 17), and discuss relevant literature as the thesis proceeds.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the learning practices of my sample. Drawing on the interview data, I offer an account of how my informants initially became instrumental learners, and how they learned to play their chosen instruments. This account includes their various histories of being taught by others as well as teaching themselves, and describes paths of learning that were abandoned as well as those that were followed. Some aspects of these histories seem to reflect the image of informal learning typically presented by the research literature, and much of this chapter supports existing knowledge. However, there are also several ways in which the learning practices of my sample seem to have had much in common with a more ‘formal’ world of traditional instrumental learning. I question the relevance to popular musicians of research based on classical music learning, and go on to discuss, based on the interview data, the problem of categorising different kinds of musicians and musical activities.

Chapter 4 describes the teaching practices of the popular musicians I interviewed (and filmed at work) and thus this chapter presents largely new data. Continuing the approach of chapter 3, these practices are presented in

terms of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ activities, although it is accepted that this division is somewhat arbitrary. Thus I describe the different ways these teachers approached the teaching of notation, technique, theory and grade exams; I also describe how they used recordings in their lessons, and the extent to which they emphasised listening and watching, playing with others, and improvisation. Almost all these teachers had found ways to reflect significant aspects of their own learning histories in the way they teach, in particular emphasising aural acuity over the use of notation. However, a wide range of strategies was in evidence. I then turn to the lesson observations. I consider these in terms of how well they ‘fit’ with the interview data; that is, the extent to which they confirm, contradict, or elaborate on the informants’ verbal accounts. In most cases the lesson observations support the verbal accounts, though occasionally there are significant discrepancies between the two. I also present evidence of their various ‘styles’ of teaching, information which, realistically, could only be gathered from visually witnessing a lesson in progress.

Chapter 5 considers the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers in this study, and has four main sections. The first section is concerned with the relationship between learning histories and teaching practices, and attempts to reconcile the many apparent inconsistencies between the two. I focus, for illustrative purposes, on two particular teachers, and suggest an underlying rationale behind their choices as teachers which, by extension, seems to apply to all the teachers in the study. I argue that their teaching strategies are based on beliefs about their own learning histories, and that the extent to which these histories are viewed as ‘successful’ determines the extent to which they are reflected in their teaching. The second section is concerned with the self-identity of the members of the group, and the cultural assumptions surrounding the apparently contradictory notions of ‘teacher’ and ‘musician’. The informants’ descriptions of how they became teachers is contrasted with their accounts of becoming musicians, and I outline various ways they attempt to resolve the tensions between their image of themselves as teachers and as musicians. The third section gives an account of their sense of ‘role’; that is, how they see their function as teachers, and what they find themselves doing given the reality of their working lives. I argue that their attitude is prompted by that of their

students, whose approach to learning seems, on the whole, relatively apathetic and thus fundamentally different from their own. Finally, in section four I consider the politics of popular music learning. I acknowledge the appeal of both popular music and informal learning practices for educators, but also the problems associated with attempting to transfer forms of music and styles of learning from one cultural context to another.

In Chapter 6 I discuss some of the implications of this research. I emphasise the significance of these teachers' learning histories and the idea that in part their teaching strategies might be designed to 'compensate' as it were for perceived weaknesses in their own musical education. I also stress that the nature of their students - mostly unmotivated compared to their teachers - plays a part in the way they teach. I make several suggestions as to what further research might be appropriate, including studying specific groups of teachers with similar backgrounds or levels of experience, the effects of teacher training, and the significance of the environment in which instrumental lessons take place. Finally I make some observations about my own teaching in relation to that of the participants, and consider who might be interested in this study.

The interviewees have been given pseudonyms intended to reflect alphabetically the order in which I interviewed them. Thus they are referred to as Andy, Bill, Carl and so on. Where my comments appear they are labeled 'Q' to indicate myself as the questioner.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Introduction

By the time I began this project I already had experience of both playing and teaching different styles of popular music, as this had been my full-time occupation for several years. As discussed in chapter 1 (1.7), it was my own history of learning and teaching which prompted this study. Thus, in planning the initial stages of my research I knew for example that I would focus on popular musicians who had become instrumental teachers, with their learning histories and teaching practices at the heart of the project. At the most basic level I had some idea of where to look, and what to look for. This chapter is concerned with how I designed the study, how I recruited participants, and how I approached collecting and analysing data.

#### 2.1.1 Project design

The form of this study is heavily influenced by Green's seminal book *How Popular Musicians Learn* (2002), to which I am indebted, and whose title I have adapted for this study. Green's work suggested at least a 'rudimentary conceptual framework' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 17) consisting of general ideas about sampling, research questions and data-gathering. Green investigated how popular musicians learn to play their instruments; to do so, she identified several such musicians and interviewed them at some length. A similar investigative approach seemed appropriate for my research focus. To rely on existing research into how popular musicians teach was out of the question, given the dearth of published material on the subject. Long-term observation was impractical due to the time constraints of a doctorate. Other methods of data gathering seemed equally inappropriate; a written questionnaire, for example, would have been extremely long-winded and, to be effective, would have involved the participants writing lengthy essays on

personal and complex issues. As such I felt that interviewing a suitable sample of instrumental teachers would be the most effective method of exploring their experiences of learning and teaching.

I did not ‘enter the field’ with a hypothesis to test, a specific idea that I wanted to prove or disprove. Therefore it seemed that some form of ‘grounded theory’ would be most appropriate for the project; that is, a form of investigation where possible explanations and analyses arise from the data rather than being predetermined (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 491).

As the design of the project developed, it became clear that, if I was going to use interviews as a primary source of data, rigidly structured talk would not be suitable. I wanted to know in considerable detail what these musicians thought and felt about their current practice, as well as about their own histories. I had very little idea what they were going to say, and I wanted the freedom to explore topics in depth as they arose during the interviews. Moreover the subject matter was quite personal and potentially sensitive; to be effective the interviews would, I believed, require a degree of personal empathy between researcher and interviewee. Therefore I decided to employ semi-structured interviews.

No method of gathering data is without its disadvantages. Simply by virtue of being a social interaction, interviews inevitably involve behaviour which may affect the quality of the data gathered. As in any other dialogue, researcher and informant may for example misunderstand each other, indulge in role-playing, or attempt to control or manipulate the conversation. Cohen *et al.* (2007: 349-351) offer a helpful introduction to some of the issues surrounding interviews as a form of data gathering. Semi-structured interviews in particular are prone to concerns about reliability and bias, due to their flexible nature and the extent to which the interviewer may ‘intrude’ into the data (Robson, 2002: 273). However, this flexibility allows semi-structured interviews to go into novel areas; they also tend to encourage rapport, and to produce rich data (Smith and Osborn, 2003: 57). Many of the issues surrounding both grounded theory and semi-structured interviews will arise throughout this chapter.

My intention was not to rely solely on the verbal accounts given by the participants. The central research question I was addressing - how these musicians taught - involved current practice as well as reminiscence and discourse; it seemed valid, if not essential, to see some of this teaching taking place. This I regarded as a useful counterweight to the interviews. Direct observation can complement interview data, for example by highlighting the discrepancies between what people say and what they do (Robson, 2002: 310). Lesson observations might provide concrete examples of what had been talked about, or indeed illustrate something else altogether, and thus provide a form of 'triangulation' that could enhance the reliability of the interviews. However, the lesson observations provided additional data in a different form; while the interviews were certainly filmed, the data they produced was primarily verbal and thus relatively easy to transcribe, discuss and analyse. The lesson observations were essentially visual records of behaviour and activities. Michael Bloor (1997) argues that although there are practical and theoretical problems in treating as equivalent data gathered using different methods, this kind of triangulation is at least relevant to issues of validity, since it can prompt re-examination of existing findings as well as providing valuable new material for analysis. However, in generating additional information the lesson observations inevitably made for more complicated data and, consequently, more complicated analysis (Silverman, 2000: 45).

Throughout this project I was relying on the willing participation of volunteers for the collection of data, and adhered to the ethical guidelines to be observed in conducting such research. All the teachers who agreed to take part were assured that they would remain anonymous in the final thesis, and that they could withdraw at any time. All the students who took part in lesson observations were recruited on similar terms, and were required to read and sign a consent form explaining this (see Appendix 1) before filming could take place. Where children were involved in the lesson observations, consent was granted by their parents. Before I began collecting data I submitted the details of my research to the music department ethics committee at the University of Sheffield, who granted approval to the project.

## 2.2 Participants

In considering who I might approach as potential participants, I was clear that they would all have to agree to a description of themselves as ‘popular musicians’ who had learned ‘under their own steam’ (as my Participant Information Sheet put it: see Appendix 2). My own musical acquaintance spanned a wide range of genres and I wanted to include as many suitable volunteers as I could; therefore I did not specify that they should come from any particular musical background other than ‘popular music’ in the widest sense. However, some discussion as to what this consists of may be worthwhile here.

To use the term ‘popular music’ (and thus ‘popular musicians’) without qualification is to invite considerable debate and misunderstanding, since the phrase may serve to include or exclude many kinds of music (and musicians) depending on the context and the cultural assumptions of the reader. Indeed, ‘popular music’ is notoriously difficult to define (see, for example, Jones and Rahn, 1977). The word ‘popular’ in its literal sense could be applied to all music that is listened to and enjoyed, and so is practically meaningless. Opera, for example, was once popular across all social classes in Italy (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 4), while in 2006 classical music was more ‘popular’ (in terms of UK album sales) than jazz and folk music combined (BPI, 2007). Robert Cantrick suggests that ‘everyone talks about popular music but no one knows what it is’ (Cantrick, 1965: 100), and goes on to include the products of Tin Pan Alley and European folk music as examples of the ‘portmanteau term “popular music”’. Green (2002: 9) uses the term to indicate a distinction from jazz, classical, traditional and world musics, and focuses on musicians involved primarily in ‘Anglo-American guitar-based pop and rock’, though accepts that the more experienced musicians in her study have in fact played many different styles such as jazz, soul and country. Perhaps inevitably, the term popular music also has specific associations with ‘pop’ which may be unwelcome or inappropriate for those involved in, for example, rock music (Campbell, 1995: 12).

While a list of parts does not define the whole, it is at least tempting to outline the boundaries of popular music in terms of genre; even so, it is increasingly difficult to find any boundaries worth the name as ‘the culture continues to divide and mutate enthusiastically’ (Peel, 2008: 240). Roy Shuker lists around 60 popular music genres (such as heavy metal, dub and salsa) but points out the difficulty of finding a definition to encompass such a wide range of styles (Shuker, 2005: xvi-xvii). Elsewhere he uses the term ‘popular music’ as ‘shorthand’ for a diverse range of genres ‘produced in commodity form for a mass, predominantly youth, market, primarily Anglo-American in origin (or imitative of its forms), since the early 1950s’ (Shuker, 2001: 9). However, one might point out that since the early 1950s several generations have grown up enjoying various forms of popular music, and thus listeners may no longer be predominantly young (Huq, 2006: 157). Moreover, it is currently so easy to make music available for distribution, for example as CDs or downloads via the internet, that practically any form of music may be produced in ‘commodity form’ for a mass market. Thus a concise and widely acceptable definition of popular music remains elusive; Shuker accepts that ‘it is misguided to attempt to attach too precise a meaning to what is a shifting cultural phenomenon (*ibid*: 9).

Many cultural commentators and music critics have sought to draw a distinction between popular music and ‘serious’ or ‘art’ music (see Abbs, 1979, or Adorno, 1941, among many others), for example by pointing to qualities supposedly inherent in different forms of music, or by arguing for their relative aesthetic value. One may debate such issues, but this distinction may be useful in shaping a definition of popular music, though in terms of music as process rather than as product. I would agree with Gatien (2009: 20-21) when he suggests that the problem of trying to categorise different kinds of music (and, I would argue, musicians) is perhaps best considered from the point of view of how music is composed, learned and played: in other words, how it is transmitted rather than what musical or cultural characteristics it has. In this light it is possible to make a reasonably clear distinction between two Western forms: ‘art’ music, characterised by a tradition of composition and pedagogy based on notation, and popular music, the aural tradition of largely Anglo-American styles which rely initially on learning by ear, using recordings either as

a primary or supplementary source, and which require at least some facility at improvisation. This broad definition of popular music would then include, for example, rock, pop, jazz and folk music. I included in this study musicians who played these styles (among others), though more by virtue of their learning histories than through any particular association with specific genres: that is, I was looking for musicians who had begun learning their chosen instruments by, for example, listening and playing along to records and joining bands rather than by having ‘formal’ lessons. However, the range of their musical activities and the complexity of their careers as learners (described in chapter 3) served to illustrate the problem of categorising musical styles and activities, a question we shall return to (see 3.6).

I included some musicians who played instruments which thrive in both the ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ musical worlds such as the piano and double bass, as well as instruments typically associated with certain genres. For example, the saxophone is usually seen as primarily a jazz instrument, while the 5-string banjo inevitably suggests bluegrass. The history of teaching and learning these instruments is equally diverse. For the piano there is a vast body of pedagogic material and a long, illustrious tradition of teaching; the guitar has a relatively minor role in the classical tradition but is the cornerstone of popular musical culture. The banjo typically belongs in a tradition of acoustic folk music with its own musical culture and pedagogy. Even within my limited sample there was some duplication; I spoke to two saxophone teachers and two piano teachers, allowing for some comparisons. I was thus in part hoping to see how these players reconciled their own learning experiences with the traditions associated with their particular instrument. I was also hoping to see whether, despite the differences in the nature and history of these instruments, there was common ground between these musicians in their approach to teaching.

Participants were recruited in a variety of ways, and it took some time to find suitable and willing volunteers. I approached (in person, by telephone, by email and by post) several musicians who taught instruments often associated with ‘popular’ styles (for example, saxophone, guitar and drums) but who ruled themselves out of the project as having initially had formal tuition. Some agreed

to think about it but subsequently avoided communication. Two institutions involved in music education (one a private music 'school' and the other a publicly funded further education college) either did not reply to my letters and calls or were not willing for their employees to take part.

I also asked around among friends and acquaintances, and this proved - perhaps not surprisingly - by far the most successful strategy. Throughout my attempts at recruitment I was aware that I was asking underpaid and overworked instrumental teachers to take part in a potentially challenging and certainly time-consuming project. For those to whom I was a complete stranger I could see even less appeal. In the event I found eight musicians who agreed to participate. There were various reasons mentioned for cooperating; some thought that it sounded like an interesting and worthwhile project, and there was a suggestion from some that they themselves might benefit from taking part, perhaps through being invited to reflect on their teaching practice, as well as seeing a video of themselves at work (I offered to give each of them a transcript of their interview, and a DVD copy of their lesson observation). At the end of the project I also offered to email each of them the finished thesis as originally submitted (in other words, before corrections); three of the eight said they would be interested to read it, and I duly sent them a copy. None have subsequently commented on the findings (though two did remark on how *long* the thesis was).

Although I encountered frequent refusals it may be that, among those who did agree to take part, there was an element of gratification in being asked to contribute to a PhD research project, particularly for those with no qualifications as musicians or formal training as teachers. The fact that a representative from this 'official' academic world was so interested in their ideas and practice could be seen as endorsing or accrediting their teaching; rather than being on the margins, they are now the 'experts' in a field evidently little known or understood by academia. Being studied at work perhaps also validates their teaching in the eyes of their students, and would make them 'look good'.

While issues such as confidentiality may be important factors in taking part, participants are often more interested in what the research is *for*:

Interviewees want to know that what they have to say matters. They want to know what will become of their words. (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 131)

There was some evidence of this in the interviews: both Carl and Graham expressed hopes that the research and their own contribution to it might serve to challenge assumptions and accepted practice in the musical ‘establishment’. The implication was that one reason they were taking part was to ‘make a difference’.

It’s also reasonable to think that they were simply doing me a personal favour. Four of the musicians I had known for some years, while three were acquaintances I had met before, although I knew very little about them. Some I knew as fellow-performers, with whom I had shared a stage or recording studio. One I had never met before the interview, but was recommended by someone I did know.

I interviewed a total of eight teachers; seven were based in the South-west of England, and were part of the substantial musical community in the area around Bristol and Bath. Only one was from elsewhere, namely Dave: an old friend from South Wales who I thought might make a suitable informant (as indeed he proved to be). Table 1 gives some basic biographical information.

**Table 1: Age and experience**

Teacher	Starting Age	Experience before teaching	Current teaching activity	Musical activity
Andy - Piano Age 47 Male	Piano lessons age 7	Playing 30 years, 20 years full-time performer (solo/bands) playing piano/ singing	Busy schedule, around 25 hours a week; piano, group keyboard lessons, band workshop leader, all private	Frequent function/ corporate gigs

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Starting Age</b>	<b>Experience before teaching</b>	<b>Current teaching activity</b>	<b>Musical activity</b>
Bill - Double bass Age 41 Male	13-14 on electric bass, early 20s double bass	Playing 15 years, 12 years full-time performing	Very limited; 1 private student, 3 beginners in schools	Full-time performer; musical theatre (national/local), orchestras, jazz groups
Carl - 5-string banjo Age 37 Male	16-17 on banjo	Playing 2 or 3 years	Private lessons, around 10 hours a week, also part-time school music technician	Regular performer, owns/runs recording studio and record label, composer for film/ theatre
Dave - Piano Age 42 Male	16 on piano	Playing 10 years, music degree	Full-time peripatetic in schools	Very limited performing
Ed - Guitar/ singing Age 30 Male	Singing early 20s, guitar soon after	Singing in bands for 2 years, recently taken up guitar	Private singing/guitar lessons, group guitar lessons	Solo performer, singer/songwriter
Frank - Harmonica Age 46 Male	Trumpet in school, late 20s on harmonica	Playing for 1 year	Part-time private lessons, manager of 9 peripatetic teachers working for him, writing syllabus	Limited performing; some presentations in schools, workshop leader for corporate/private functions
Graham - Saxophone Age 52 Male	Various instruments in school, saxophone from 17	Playing for over 20 years	Full-time, mostly peripatetic in schools but some private lessons	Fairly regular function/covers gigs
Helen - Saxophone Age 30 Female	Recorder from 5 or 6, clarinet: 9, saxophone: 16	Playing for 10 years	Part-time in the evenings	Limited performing, function/covers gigs

All but one were full-time musicians. Ruth Finnegan (1989: 12-18) offers a useful discussion about what it means to be a 'professional' musician and the different occupations this may include. Among the present sample, Helen worked in an office by day and taught in the evenings, as well as performing regularly. All the others had music as their sole occupation, though this typically included a range of activities. At one extreme, Bill was a full-time performer who did relatively little teaching; in contrast Dave was a full-time teacher and did very little performing.

To some extent - inevitably - my sample was limited simply to those who would agree to take part. As Green says about her own research: 'clearly my own social class, gender, ethnicity, geographical location and so on affected the sampling' (Green, 2002: 12). The same is of course true for my project, particularly since the sample was largely recruited either from my own acquaintance or from among 'friends of friends'. At the time of most of the interviews I was 45, while the interviewees ranged in age from 30 to 52. There may be a generation of popular music instrumental teachers who are younger still, though it seems plausible that, in the absence of widely accepted teacher training, most musicians will want to accumulate at least a reasonable amount of musical experience before starting to teach (a statement I will later need to qualify: see section 5.3.1).

Five of the sample were white and British, as I am myself. Two were of mixed parentage, one being half British, half Dutch and the other half British, half Greek. One was a white American who moved to the UK as a teenager (some 35 years previously). Of those who agreed to take part in principle but were not interviewed, two were from ethnic minority groups. One was Asian, a guitar teacher with a hectic schedule and two small children, who said he was willing to take part but simply didn't have time. The other was an African-American singing teacher whose circumstances are discussed below.

Seven of the interviewees were male, one was female. The issue of gender seemed to become particularly important as I proceeded and is worthy of some discussion here. I knew, and indeed asked, several female teachers

working in popular idioms but they all excluded themselves as being unsuitable, having learned initially through regular formal tuition. All my attempts to contact female teachers who were unknown to me were fruitless. For example, I found a website of a local female teacher who, from her description, appeared to teach largely by ear; I emailed her but without reply. I subsequently left a follow-up message on her answerphone, also without reply. I spoke by telephone to another female teacher who was advertising in the local listings magazine, and initially she seemed cautiously prepared to consider taking part. I sent her my standard Participant Information Sheet (as I had said I would) which, among other things, attempts to reassure potential volunteers that they would be participating in legitimate research, under the auspices of a well-known university. However when I contacted her a few days later she said she had received it but not yet read it. In subsequent attempts to contact her I only reached her answerphone, and I left messages without receiving any response. With both of these teachers, and others, I clearly had to respect their silence, since to persist further in trying to contact complete (female) strangers who were evidently not enthusiastic would soon begin to border on (male) harassment.

Only two female teachers agreed in principle to take part. Both were unknown to me, but were suggested by other female musicians whom I did know. One of them, a singing teacher (mentioned above), felt that her individual singing lessons, entirely with women, were too private and personal to be intruded upon by a researcher with a camera; she didn't say so, but I imagined that my own gender was relevant here. She was though willing for me to film a weekly singing workshop that she ran. However, she described her role there more in terms of providing the opportunity for a group of around a dozen singers to express themselves (accompanied by a live band) rather than 'teaching'; this I felt would not be directly comparable with the other one-to-one lessons I was filming. When I also considered the issue of consent for such a large group, I decided not to take up her offer. Thus the only female who appeared in the project was Helen, a saxophone teacher recommended by a mutual friend.

I had intended to interview more women, and initially it seemed to me a weakness that I had only interviewed one, while recruiting seven men. This situation partly reflects the fact that I am male, and so are most of my musical acquaintances. There are, no doubt, many female teachers who would fit my criteria, and had I continued my attempts at recruitment, I would surely have found, eventually, more who were willing to take part. However, the simple fact is that while I found it relatively easy to recruit male teachers, I found it very difficult to recruit female teachers - so much so, in fact, that gradually I came to see the difficulties I was having as data in their own right.

Very little is known about the total number of 'informal' musical learners, and no figures are available for the relative numbers of boys and girls learning in this way. Considerably more girls than boys have instrumental lessons at school (O'Neill, 2001) and women are very well-represented in the traditional, classical world as teachers: for example, research by the ABRSM indicates that over 70 per cent of teachers on their applicant register are women (ABRSM, 2000: 26). However, popular musical culture is overwhelmingly 'gendered' as a male area (see for example McRobbie, 1980; Dibben, 2002; Green, 1997; O'Neill, 1997) in which women are notoriously *under-represented* (except, perhaps, as singers). Mavis Bayton (1990) argues that confidence is a particular problem for female instrumentalists stepping into this 'masculine' world. If this is true for performers, it is not unreasonable to think it may be especially true for teachers. The relatively few women who *are* self-taught may be still less confident about describing themselves as 'teachers' (and, by implication, experts) in a cultural area dominated by men. Perhaps a ratio of one female to seven male 'popular' teachers is not as unrepresentative as it may at first appear.

However, even if the true figure is higher, I would suggest that access remains a major problem, particularly for male researchers. This might be out of a concern for personal welfare; only two females were willing to take part in this project, and in both cases I was 'vouched for' by another female. Moreover if (as I will argue) the very idea of putting one's teaching up to the scrutiny of

another is threatening enough, this may be magnified when the subject is female, and the apparently expert gaze of the researcher is male.

More research is required before one might speak with any confidence of different gender roles and attitudes in informal learning, the relative numbers of boys and girls who teach themselves to play an instrument, and how confident and assertive they subsequently feel as adults about their musical abilities, whether as performers or teachers. If the world of ‘informal’ teaching and learning is obscure, the role of women in this world is even harder to examine; it would be illuminating to see what further research might discover, in particular that carried out by women.

The question then of whether my sample was representative of the community of self-taught popular musicians who teach is not easy to answer. As far as I am aware, there is no published data about this population, nor even speculation as to the numbers of musicians involved, quite apart from their age, gender, ethnic background and so on. As I have already suggested, I could have made a point of including, for example, more women, or younger teachers, or those from ethnic minorities, but in the absence of any data regarding this population as a whole, it’s difficult to say if this would have made my (very small) sample any more representative. Moreover, there may be specific factors which might affect how ‘typical’ the participants were; for example, it may be that only relatively confident and articulate teachers would be willing to take part in a study based on interviews and lesson observations: potentially intrusive methods which I discuss later in this chapter. My sample may also be limited to those who would acknowledge the value of music education research; even among those who did agree to take part, there was a certain wariness towards ‘academia’ and what was perceived as the musical ‘establishment’. Above all, since some degree of personal contact was in every case involved in recruitment, the sample was limited to the kinds of people I knew at the time, or their acquaintances: people who I liked or at least felt I could strike up a rapport with. I cannot claim, then, that my sample ‘represents’ the population of self-taught musicians, though it may do; perhaps this project would be more accurately called ‘How *some* popular musicians teach’. The question of how far

one may generalise from such a limited sample is one we shall return to in chapter 6 (6.2).

## 2.3 Procedure

### 2.3.1 Interviews and lesson observations

I needed some method of data collection that would allow me to convert the interview dialogue and lesson observations into a form I could use. Given that I was going to be conducting interviews, some kind of recording seemed inevitable; this would not only allow me subsequently to transcribe the interviews accurately, but would also let me concentrate fully on the dialogue at the time (Robson, 2002: 290). The decision to film the interviews was partly based on practicalities; the only audio recording apparatus I had was an old cassette tape machine, whereas I also had a camcorder which would record in a digital format, thus making backing up and transcription much easier. I therefore used this to film all the interviews, with the built-in microphone recording the conversation. It may be that using an audio recording device for the interviews might have been less intrusive than a camera; however, it transpired that on several occasions gestures and body language proved to be important sources of data which would have been lost without a visual reference.

As for witnessing the teaching practice of these musicians, it was obvious that I would have to see as well as hear what was going on in a lesson. This would inevitably involve a degree of intrusion, since covert access was out of the question for ethical reasons. I briefly considered asking to sit in on the lessons, but I felt that, for both teacher and pupil, a camera sitting in the corner of the room would be easier to ignore than a person. Moreover I was concerned that I might not be able to 'record' fully the lesson I was witnessing, and that I would be stuck with my fieldnotes in whatever form I made them at the time (Silverman, 2000: 126). Film has the immeasurable advantage of being

available for repeated viewings. Thus I decided to use the camcorder to film both the interviews and the lesson observations.

I devised a set of questions to ask my potential participants, covering a range of subjects concerning music teaching and learning (see Appendix 3). The form of the interview was based on a familiar sequence (see Robson, 2002: 277) of easy, non-threatening ‘warm-up’ questions, followed by the main body of the interview, with more open-ended or potentially ‘risky’ questions left until later, by which time rapport would hopefully have been established. A few straightforward questions were left until last to signal the end of the interview approaching, and to allow any tension in the situation to ‘cool off’.

The content of the questions was partly a straightforward response to the nature of the enquiry; thus asking, for example: ‘Can you give me some idea of how you actually teach?’ was a direct attempt to inform my central research question. Other areas for investigation were suggested by my own experiences of learning and teaching and the process of reflecting on this, particularly during an instrumental training course with the ABRSM. The interview questions were also influenced by my initial reading of, for example, Green (2002), Hallam (1998), O’Connor (1987), O’Brien (1995), Bailey (1992), Holt (1969), and Spruce (1996), whose research, experiences and opinions alerted me to many of the issues relevant to music teaching and learning.

Some of my questions were concerned with biographical details, the musical background of my informants, and how it was that they became involved in making music. I invited them to talk about how they learned to play their chosen instrument, and whether in the process they had experience of being taught in formal instrumental lessons. This might suggest what examples or ‘models’ of learning they had personally experienced in their own background, with a view to comparing their experiences as learners with their subsequent behaviour as teachers. This comparison was to be explicitly invited during the interviews, though it would also be the subject of later analysis.

Having invited the participants to reflect on how and why they learned their instruments, I also wanted to find out, in as much detail as possible, what they actually did in their lessons. This involved asking them, initially, how they began teaching; I meant to compare what they said about starting to play an instrument with what they said about starting to teach it. I asked about the practicalities of teaching - for example, where did they find material for teaching, did they use notation, grade exams, instructional CDs or DVDs and so on - but also about more personal aspects of teaching; for example, what were their 'best' and 'worst' experiences as a teacher, and did they remember specific moments that had a profound impact on how they taught. Thus I was hoping to get as full an impression as possible of their teaching practice.

I was also interested in teaching and learning in a wider context. In my own background the cultural context of music had always seemed a crucial aspect of its appeal, and indeed its meaning. Working as an instrumental teacher myself (particularly during a spell as a peripatetic in a rather strict Catholic school) I could see that even after several generations of 'rock'n'roll' and modern popular culture, certain forms of popular music continued to fascinate rebellious teenagers, and excite disapproval and even outrage among parents and other adults (including classroom music teachers). As such, an instrumental teacher working in popular genres is often liable to be in a somewhat ambivalent position. I was interested to know what my participants thought about their role as teachers, and the politics of teaching and learning popular music.

My list of questions thus addressed the central focus of my research, and in the broadest sense this focus was consistent throughout the interviews. However, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews was evident in the approach that I took, and in the data that resulted. The participants themselves were diverse in terms of their interests and opinions, and proved forthcoming, or reticent, on different subjects. For example, the issue of cultural 'ownership' of popular music provoked lengthy and even passionate discourse in several informants, while for others it seemed to warrant little more than a brief acknowledgement. I was generally happy to explore ideas at length when the

participants were so inclined, and in some cases this resulted in unexpected data which, in turn, enriched existing data or suggested novel areas for analysis. Where new ideas did appear in the data, these were often incorporated into subsequent interviews; for example, what Dave had to say about his experience of school as a site for learning raised issues which were subsequently developed in later interviews (in particular with Ed and Graham), and which are discussed in chapter 5 (5.4.4). Equally, certain questions and accompanying ‘prompts’ which I had written in advance seemed, in the context of the interviews, irrelevant or inappropriate. For instance, I never actually asked: ‘Where did your “learning strategy” come from?’, since in conversation with working musicians this seemed to be a needlessly pompous and ‘academic’ way of discussing how someone learns to play an instrument. On the other hand, in the first interview I happened to use another prompt I had written, and asked, almost in passing: ‘Do you have any regrets about the way you learned?’. This produced such an interesting response (and, initially, a four-second pause) that I made a point of asking it in the next interview, and ultimately this question became central to a major strand of analysis (see section 5.2). Although the basic core of questions remained consistent, the interview structure was to some extent flexible and itself developed as the interviews progressed ‘through the interplay of data collection and analysis’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 178).

Thus the design of this study incorporated elements of ‘purposive’ or ‘theoretical’ sampling in terms of both people and data; firstly, in the sense that I hand-picked cases to be included on the basis of what I judged to be their suitable characteristics (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 114), and secondly in that the results of my initial data-gathering and analysis informed subsequent investigation (Robson, 2002: 265). I was attempting throughout to maintain a balance between being consistent in gathering data central to my research focus, while still allowing for new ideas to emerge (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 182).

Potential volunteers were made aware from the outset that, in agreeing to take part in the project, they would be filmed at work. The Participant

Information Sheet, which they all read (see Appendix 2), tried to suggest that nothing exceptional was expected:

I'm looking to record ordinary lessons, with nothing in particular required of either teacher or pupil, other than getting on with it.

My intention was to intrude as little as possible and observe a lesson that would be 'typical' or 'representative'. How successful I might have been will be discussed later in this chapter (2.5.2) as well as in chapter 4 (4.6).

While I did not know what my participants would say in their interviews, I did at least have a basic set of questions to ask them. As far as the lesson observations were concerned, I had no idea what they would show me, and I made no specific demands at all, other than to film around an hour's worth of teaching. If I was actively involved in the interviews, I was relatively passive as regards the lesson observations, and dependent on the teachers concerned for their choice of students, and the circumstances of the filming. Realistically I was in no position to specify what kind of lesson I wanted to see; as will be discussed later in this chapter, I felt that they were doing me a considerable favour merely by agreeing to let me witness any kind of lesson at all. As such I gratefully accepted whatever and whoever they were prepared to show me.

### **2.3.2 Data collection**

Starting in early 2006, I conducted eight interviews and seven lesson observations, all of which were filmed. As table 2 shows, most of the data gathering took place in 2006, although eventually it extended over a period of almost three years.

**Table 2: Chronology of data collection**

Date	Event
<b>2006</b>	
13 Jan	Andy's interview
20 Jan	Bill's interview
23 Jan	Carl's interview
3 Feb	Andy's lesson observation
14 Feb	Carl's lesson observation
17 Feb	Dave's interview part 1
31 March	Dave's lesson observation, followed by interview part 2
12 June	Ed's interview
20 June	Frank's interview
23 June	Frank's lesson observation
13 July	Graham's interview part 1
17 July	Graham's interview part 2
<b>2007</b>	
25 April	Helen's interview
4 May	Helen's lesson observation
<b>2008</b>	
17 October	Graham's lesson observation
11 December	Ed's lesson observation

The interviews were arranged either in person or by telephone, and took place in a variety of settings. These included where I lived (Ed and Helen), where the participant lived (Andy, Bill and Frank) and a teaching studio (Carl). Two interviews (Dave and Graham) took place over two sessions, and in both cases these were divided between my home and theirs. The interviews lasted on average around one and three quarter hours. However, they varied in length

considerably, from just over an hour for Helen to over three and a half hours for Graham. The interview tapes were backed up onto both hard drive and DVD and then transcribed.

Several of these teachers were involved with various forms of group teaching (this is discussed more fully in section 5.4.4); however, in every case they chose to be observed teaching one-to-one lessons with individual students. In most cases the lesson observations lasted for around an hour, which generally meant a single lesson with one student, though in one case (Dave) I was shown four shorter lessons of around 20 minutes each, while Frank's lesson observation was the longest, lasting one and a half hours. These tapes were also backed up as soon as possible. The lessons being filmed took place in a range of settings: see table 3 for details.

**Table 3: Lesson observations**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Lesson location/duration</b>
Andy - Piano	Adult female	Teacher's studio; 45 mins
Bill - Double bass	No lesson observation	
Carl - Banjo	Adult male	Teacher's studio; 50 mins
Dave - Piano	4 Primary school children, 3 girls, 1 boy	Assembly hall/music room at school; each lesson around 20 mins
Ed - Singing	Adult male	Empty office where student worked; 60 mins
Frank - Harmonica	Teenage boy	Teacher's home; 90 mins
Graham - Saxophone	Adult female	Student's home; 60 mins
Helen - Saxophone	Adult female	Teacher's studio; 60 mins

Dave's observation took place in a school, and in this case I sought prior permission to film from the school itself; consent forms were sent by Dave in advance for parents to sign and return before filming took place. Otherwise students agreed verbally to take part after being asked by their teachers. Typically when filming took place I would be present in advance to meet, thank and hopefully reassure the student (and indeed the teacher), to give the student a chance to read the information sheet, and to sign consent forms. Once these formalities were completed, I would set up the camera in a mutually acceptable position and retire from the room, leaving the teacher and student to get on with their lesson.

There were practical problems in filming lessons. The teachers themselves had to find students who were willing to take part, and in one case parents who were willing for their children to take part, and we had to find times and places for the filming to take place. As table 2 indicates, in most cases the interview was quickly followed by the lesson observation, and I regarded this as the ideal scenario. However there were notable exceptions. In the two cases where this didn't happen (Ed and Graham), the momentum generated by the initial contact and the interview was lost. Ed proved difficult to contact for some time after his interview, and subsequent personal and work commitments on my part meant that his lesson observation was left until late in the project, some two and a half years after his interview. There was a similar gap between Graham's interview and lesson observation. It may be that this time lag created something of a divergence between these interviews and their corresponding lesson observations; these teachers' ideas and practices may well have developed and changed over this interval, and thus the talk no longer relates in quite the same way to the practice. I have no way of knowing if this is the case, and can only acknowledge that the reality of data gathering is very much 'the art of the possible' (Robson, 2002: 377).

My intention was to interview the participants first and film the lesson observation at a later date. This was partly based on the assumption that I might be able to gain the trust of the participants over the course of the interview and thus make the lesson observation feel less like an intrusion by a

stranger into their work, and perhaps less threatening to the one-to-one relationship between teacher and pupil. This sequence was followed in all cases with the partial exception of Dave; we did not have enough time to complete his interview at the first attempt, and since he lived an hour's drive away we agreed to film his lessons in the morning and finish his interview in the afternoon during the same visit.

One problem I did not foresee. Bill agreed to take part in the project, and was apparently perfectly happy to be interviewed - indeed he was eloquent and interesting, and spoke at some length. However he subsequently seemed reluctant to discuss the arrangements for filming one of his lessons. Each time the subject was raised he made agreeable noises but declined to offer any suggestions for a possible student volunteer, nor for when filming might take place. Eventually I concluded that he was not, for whatever reason, happy to be filmed while teaching, and after several approaches I felt uncomfortable pressing the issue further. The interview was carried out however in the expectation (certainly on my part) that a lesson observation would take place, and I decided to use the material from his interview regardless.

### **2.3.3 Saturation**

Howard Becker considers both the appeal, and the impossibility, of 'getting it all'; in any field of social science, one might wish to collect and potentially study everything concerned with a given subject. Quite apart from the conceptual problem of what 'everything' might consist of, there are also more pragmatic issues at stake:

We can't have everything, for the most obvious practical reasons: we don't have the people to collect it and we wouldn't know what to do with the mass of detail we'd end up with if we did. (Becker, 1998: 74)

He acknowledges that, inevitably, researchers have to limit the size of their samples, but suggests strategies that may compensate for this; for example,

paying particular attention to cases that contradict one's assumptions and thus challenge 'conventional' thinking (see section 6.2).

In grounded theory, the quality of analysis is dependent on the data that is gathered and thus the sample size could, in principle, be infinitely large:

Since the researcher will not know in advance how much, or what range of data will be required, it is difficult, to the point of either impossibility, exhaustion or time constraints, to know in advance the sample size required. (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 116)

In practical terms, sampling continues until categories of data are 'saturated' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 188); that is, until the theoretical explanation of what is happening is no longer advanced or altered by new data.

Obviously I could not interview every popular musician who teaches, whether in the UK, the South-west of England, or even in North Bristol (where I live), as even the least of these tasks would far exceed the scope of one researcher completing a doctorate. However, I did not decide in advance how many teachers would be involved, but let the quality and quantity of data suggest the sample size.

In the event, the first three months of data collection proved the most significant in terms of emerging theory. Between January and March 2006 I conducted four interviews and three lesson observations, and between them these largely suggested the theoretical outline of the project. After initial attempts at coding and analysis, a wide range of conceptual categories had emerged, whether on the subject of how these teachers had learned, how they taught or what they thought and felt about these activities. After only four interviews, there was already a significant body of data, some of which confirmed existing research literature on how popular musicians learn, as well as novel ideas and opinions (in particular about how such musicians teach) which were not evident in the literature at all. There was a good deal of talk on the same recurring themes, yet much of this was contradictory.

Perhaps the most significant development during this early period of analysis was (after considerable confusion) a sense of the way these teachers, as it were, 'agreed' and 'disagreed' with each other, and a growing awareness of underlying commonalities. Thus it was around this time that ideas concerning, for example, their identities as teachers, and the different ways they valued their own learning histories, first emerged (these are discussed in chapter 5).

Subsequent interviews did not significantly affect the conceptual outline that had thus been established. Certainly, the later four interviewees made important contributions to different categories of data; for example, Frank spoke at length on the subject of teaching strategies for younger children, as did Graham about the politics of learning popular music. Nevertheless, while this was valuable detail with which to inform different themes or categories of data, it did not fundamentally change the nature of those categories, and served in fact to confirm analytical approaches which had already been developed. Moreover I felt that, had the interviews been conducted in a different order, the data would - inevitably - have soon suggested the same conceptual approach. As such I felt satisfied after eight interviews that I had data of sufficient richness and depth to be able to address my research focus in a valid way.

This process of data gathering thus resulted in fifteen hours of interviews which, after transcription, amounted to around 130,000 words in total, as well as over seven hours of lesson observations. It could be argued that a larger sample would have strengthened the validity of the data, although the teachers I interviewed generated a considerable body of rich and detailed data. Equally more lesson observations with each teacher may have drawn the focus of the investigation away from what they said about their teaching and rather towards their teaching itself: that is, what they were observed doing in lessons. I can only accept that gathering more data may well have strengthened the project, though even with a relatively small sample I felt at times in danger of being swamped with more data than I could use: 'the major problem we face in qualitative inquiry is not to get data, but to get rid of it' (Wolcott, 1990: 18).

## 2.4 My role as researcher

I was aware from the outset that by inviting musicians to participate in this project I was asking a considerable favour, not just in terms of the amount of time it would take but also in the level of intrusion implicit in being interviewed and filmed, particularly while teaching. Even if the interest of a researcher does enhance the credibility or self-esteem of a teacher, it is still hard to overstate how uncomfortable it can be having one's teaching witnessed by an outsider, particularly if this is a novelty. Where this occurs in the context of teacher training and development it is 'all too often...viewed with hostility and even fear' (Quirke, 1996). Certainly, my project carried none of the professional implications associated with, for example, an inspection by OFSTED (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) a procedure once described by a former Chief Inspector of Schools as a 'weapon of terror' (Woodhead, quoted online by Boustead). However, regardless of the consequences, the possibility of an 'authoritative' observer witnessing a difficult or ineffective lesson is surely alarming for any teacher. Generally, lesson observations only happen when they must: for example, as a form of compulsory assessment in a teacher training programme. Any study where participation is voluntary has to address the intrusive nature of such research. It may be that relatively little is known about what happens in instrumental lessons simply because teachers are in general unwilling to let others observe them at work.

Even the idea of *discussing* teaching practice can be profoundly threatening. David Purser interviews six 'well-known performers' teaching at London conservatoires, and the response to one of his questions is telling:

"Would you be interested in participating in a seminar or other forum to explore questions of teaching practice?"

The first and instant reaction to this enquiry was a universal and emphatic "no". For most, the thought of sharing the techniques which they have developed privately, often over a period of many years, in the intimacy (one referred to it as the "secret trade") of one-to-one teaching was simply intimidating. The word "scary" was used by two, both of them seasoned principal players and soloists, as well as experienced teachers.

Another teacher felt that the fear of humiliation would deter prospective participants. (Purser, 2005: 296)

These are prestigious teachers at the top of their profession; yet even *their* instinct is to conceal. Several years previously I had myself undertaken a teacher training course, and had had my own teaching observed, filmed and discussed. This experience alerted me to the anxiety generated by having one's private teaching space intruded on in this way, and thus to the extent of the favour I was asking. The lesson observations appeared to me to represent a particularly threatening intrusion, and Bill's passive refusal might be seen as evidence of this. My reluctance to impose on their teaching practice in this way may have been a contributory factor in the limited number of lesson observations.

It seemed to me therefore that perhaps the central problem of data gathering, quite apart from finding teachers willing to subject themselves to investigation, was how to overcome the defensiveness that they were inevitably going to experience, whether talking or being observed at work; I wanted them to feel secure enough to expose the details of their own 'secret trade'. This I attempted to do in a variety of ways.

On a purely practical level, I made sure the camera was always set up across the room and at some distance from the interviewee (and, in the context of lesson observations, from the teacher and student under observation), with the intention of reducing the feeling of being under scrutiny. I was deliberately unfussy about camera positioning and lighting, since it seemed to me more important to be relaxed about the technicalities than try to capture the best image possible; in all cases the resulting audio and video quality was perfectly acceptable. Equally I made a point of continuing to chat informally as the tape began to record, to demonstrate that the recording itself was not sacrosanct.

Meanwhile, the fact that I knew several of these teachers, and came recommended in some way to the others, was obviously an advantage (if not a prerequisite for their recruitment). The Participant Information Sheet reinforced

that fact that I was looking to interview musicians ‘like myself’. In both my initial contact with potential volunteers and in the interview itself I was concerned to present myself as a ‘fellow-musician’ and ‘fellow-teacher’; my role as a performer was known to most of them in some way, and if they had not heard me play, they all at least knew that I *did* play. There was a suggestion from Frank that he was impressed by my performing activities (‘I want to go and work with bands of the calibre that you’re working with’) but in general my status as a performer was seen, I think, as on a par with that of the interviewees. I generally did or had done the same kinds of gigs that they did, and in some cases had performed alongside them; like them, I knew what it was like trying to piece a career together out of a range of musical activities. Equally they all knew that I was an instrumental teacher working on terms, and in situations, similar to themselves. As such I believed that my identity, or what they knew of it, as someone they could empathise with might help them feel relatively secure.

Nonetheless, merely claiming at the outset to be ‘like them’ was not enough to generate the kind of rapport and confidence that the situation required. No matter what I did, my interviewees were not going to be completely relaxed, open and honest in a conversation with a sympathetic peer. Tom Barone (2001: 168) points out that an informant, being asked to reminisce about their own past, will inevitably adopt a ‘discursive costume’ suited to the context of the interview, and is in some sense engaged in an act of ‘self-reconstruction’. Central to this process is the persona of the researcher and the perceived power relations between interviewer and interviewee.

The relationship between interviewer and interviewee is inevitably ‘asymmetrical’ (Barz and Cooley, 1997: 7); I was there to take information and the respondents were there to give it. However, power is not necessarily in the hands of the interviewer alone; an informant can control significant aspects of an interview, for example by withholding information, and choosing how seriously to take the interview, as well as when and where it will take place, and what will be discussed (Limerick *et al.*, 1996).

While identifying myself as an ‘insider’, in other words a member of the cultural group I was studying (Rice, 1997: 109), I was also acting (at least in principle) as part of a very different world of formal academic research. In presenting myself as someone ‘studying for a PhD’, my perceived role may not have been that of fellow-practitioner doubling as a ‘student’ (as I might have wished) but rather that of ‘outsider’, an ‘expert’ or (worse) someone masquerading as such. The fact that I was conducting research created a ‘frame’ for our interactions which inevitably distanced me from my informants, and involved a scrutiny that was bound to be somewhat uncomfortable.

It may be that there are, in fact, benefits to gathering data as an ‘outsider’, assuming that rapport can first be established, since this position may elicit explanations which would not be thought necessary for those of insider status (Taylor *et al.*, 1995: 36). Nevertheless, even if I had wished to, I could not very well pretend to be completely unfamiliar with the world of informal learning. Thus inevitably I had to some extent a dual role; partly fellow-practitioner, partly academic researcher, and this ambivalence suited my purpose. Rather than align myself with any particular viewpoint or vested interests I wanted the interviewees to feel able to tell whatever ‘story’ they wished (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 130). Too close an identification between interviewer and informant might result in a ‘reciprocal return of information’ (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 167), consisting simply of each saying what the other wants to hear.

Thus my own persona as an interviewer was crucial. David Silverman points out how easy it is for a researcher to appear judgemental, and cautions against what he calls the ‘divine orthodoxy’, whereby:

the social scientist is transformed into a philosopher-king (or queen) who can always see through people’s claims and know better than they do. Of course, this assumption of superiority to others usually guarantees that access will not be obtained or, if obtained, will be unsuccessful.  
(Silverman, 2000: 199)

I felt that to attempt the role of neutral interviewer who, while trying to be reassuring, avoids ‘appearing to share or welcome’ the views of their subjects (Robson, 2002: 275) would be to appear as an outsider surely passing silent judgement on their ideas and practice. Jerry Wellington suggests a wider range of options:

There are various metaphors for the interviewer: a sponge; a sounding board; a prober; a listener; a counsellor; a recorder...; a challenger; a prompter; a sharer...Interviewers will need to reveal something about themselves (and their motives and purposes) but should surely not treat the interview as *their* platform rather than the interviewee’s. (Wellington, 2000: 72)

I did not intend to treat the interview as ‘my’ platform, but I could see how being a ‘challenger’ a ‘prompter’ and, above all, a ‘sharer’ could be useful. In revealing something about myself, I could encourage a similar frankness, while in challenging their opinions, perhaps I could also challenge their opinions about me; I was not there as an impartial judge, nor a silent witness, and if I didn’t always treat their talk with deference, perhaps they didn’t have to be ‘polite’ with me either: ‘we get to know other people by making *ourselves* known to *them*’ (Kisliuk, 1997: 27).

There are various ways of questioning the status of the data which resulted from these interviews. For example, there are passages in the interview transcripts that, with a little editing, would read like friends having a chat, or musicians reminiscing about their life histories, rather than a subject responding to a researcher’s questioning. Jeff Titon indeed suggests that there are advantages to completely open discussions as opposed to formal attempts to gather data. He uses as an example a meeting with the blues musician Son House, who at first was happy to reminisce without prompting:

When House stopped telling stories from his life, I steered him through a series of oral history questions, hoping to get more stories; but now I was directing it by the questions I asked, and House no longer felt free to move in his own direction. And so began a long process in which I pondered the different kinds of knowing that arose from the structured interviews that were a part of the old fieldwork, versus those life stories told to sympathetic listeners or friends in a “real life” situation that could not, then,

be described as fieldwork, but whose resultant texts I maintained ought to be valued, not as a form of data gathering, but as a means toward understanding. (Titon, 1997: 89)

Insofar as I was attempting to present myself as a ‘sympathetic listener’ I can identify with this approach, and I would certainly agree that stories told under these circumstances can generate understanding. However, I would argue that, quite apart from anything else, the presence of a camera in my interviews made the situation far from ‘real-life’, and although the subjects had considerable leeway, the fact that the interviews were at least semi-structured meant that, whatever their digressions, they all, at least, answered the same questions. In short, my interviews should indeed be ‘valued...as a form of data gathering’ rather than simply as chatting.

There are further methodological issues that require acknowledgement at this point. It should be said that relying on interviews in which people give accounts of what happened to them at various stages of their lives is ‘not an optimal research technique, since human memory is notoriously unreliable’ (Davidson, 2004: 59). In these interviews I was often asking about events of many years previously, and indeed the interviewees themselves confessed to lapses of memory (‘is that right, am I getting this in the right order?’ [Bill]). On the other hand, the very act of trying to remember brought up buried memories of details which had been forgotten (‘so I had some kind of, a little bit of knowledge, I’d forgotten about that, yeah’ [Frank]).

While they may well have forgotten or distorted some details of their past, I would argue that they were unlikely to have deliberately invented factual claims. Clearly, the assumptions that research subjects make about the researcher can affect what they say:

In educational contexts the incoming researcher may be assumed to be a “teacher”, with the result that pupils try to give the “right” answer, or, more mischievously, impose their own agenda. [One] student admitted that he had himself some years earlier been a research subject in an investigation into talented young musicians at a specialist music school. Neither he nor his classmates had taken the research project seriously, he claimed, and

they had vied with one another in faking data about the amount of practice time they had put in. (Stock, 2004: 22)

However, I was talking to adults, recruited on a basis of mutual trust, and they were well aware of who I was; I was friends with some, acquaintances with others, and had taken some trouble, as already mentioned, to present myself as being ‘like them’. Consequently, I had some basis for supposing that they would not deliberately mislead me. If for example one of them said that, as a child, they had lessons on the violin, I would believe them. Any fabrication would surely be more subtle, and generally inadvertent. If the same musician described how they *felt* about those violin lessons, I was certainly at least willing to believe them; however, I had to be aware that they might have expressed themselves differently had they been talking to, say, a classically-trained orchestral violinist rather than a self-taught drummer (like myself). Equally I can imagine that instrumental teachers might give different accounts of their work, depending on whether they were addressing a prominent music professor or a fellow musician considering teaching as a career. This is not misrepresentation, just an inescapable aspect of social interaction, and part of the process by which ‘our shared versions of knowledge are constructed’ (Burr, 2003: 4).

Thus while I was largely prepared to trust them as informants, there remains the question of whether they could trust me as a researcher. Eliciting personal histories of other people’s lives creates something of an ethical dilemma for the researcher, in deciding how to use the data:

If a researcher has developed a warm rapport with a teacher who is prepared to communicate a life-history, it is difficult, and perhaps morally indefensible, to go “public” with an interpretation which is other than celebratory. (Thomas, 1995a: 171)

This dilemma is perhaps even more pronounced when, as in the present study, several of the informants were known personally by the researcher. Nevertheless Thomas argues that, in analysing such personal accounts, ‘there has to be room for scepticism as well as celebration’ (*ibid*: 171). Limerick *et al.* suggest a helpful metaphor for the researcher to keep in mind:

It is useful to conceptualize the interview as a *gift* of time, of text and of understanding, that the interviewee gives to the interviewer...this gift is being entrusted to the care of the researcher as there is an ingredient of trust, on the part of the interviewees, that the researcher will not betray them, abuse their power, or misuse their words. Adopting the metaphor of a gift compels the researcher to treat data with a degree of respect and to be continually sensitive to the giver. (Limerick *et al.*, 1996: 458)

As such, in attempting to show myself as open and honest as an interviewer, I was trying to establish not just rapport but trust, and to make the participants feel their stories were 'safe' with me.

I will give one verbatim excerpt taken from Dave's account which I hope will illustrate the kind of talk that went on and the nature of my persona in the interviews. Here Dave had just been asked about creativity and experimentation in the context of instrumental teaching. In response he described some very talented young pianists he had encountered, suggesting that learning pieces 'off by heart' rather than looking at 'a sheet of music' is part of the way they developed so fast, this being a strategy he used with his own pupils:

- 1 Q: So it's working from ear rather than working from eye?
- 2 Dave: Yeah.
- 3 Q: Is the key to -
- 4 Dave: Well yeah, but when you say, say they miss staccato, or they miss 5 rests, they play through a tied note or whatever, you then show them how 6 it goes, and say that's what you got wrong, can you get that right; and then 7 you show it on the music and say, looks that's that, and that's a rest, you 8 should be doing - there's a gap there look, and then go back to the music, 9 when they have more understanding.
- 10 Q: But that sense of playfulness, of experimentation, is kept alive in your 11 view by working by ear rather than looking at dots?
- 12 Dave: Oh definitely, but I assume they are going to do that anyway.
- 13 Q: That they are going to fool around?
- 14 Dave: Yeah, I assume that.
- 15 Q: Like to believe it, wouldn't you; I wonder how many of them actually do.
- 16 Dave: Oh I think a lot of them, 'specially the younger ones.
- 17 Q: Yeah.
- 18 Dave: I think the older, you know once they get into their teens I think 19 they're more likely to stick to the prescribed lessons unfortunately, it's 20 drummed out of them by then, they've lost it by then.

To look in some detail at this extract, we could say that, at line 1, Q tries to sum up Dave's answer for him, which Dave at first seems to agree to (line 2). However he interrupts at line 4 to make a rather different point (lines 4-9), namely that having a written reference can be helpful. Q reiterates the point he is trying to establish at line 10. Dave agrees at line 12, but in a way that rather dismisses the question; the answer is, he implies, both taken for granted and beside the point. Q openly challenges his assumption at line 15, but Dave stands his ground, while qualifying his statement in a way supported by Q at 17. At 18, Dave does partly concede to Q's challenge, but begins to make what turns out to be an interesting (and unexpected) point about the institutionalising effects of school as a context for instrumental lessons (which is quoted more fully in section 5.4.4).

There are different ways of viewing this kind of exchange. For example, one could say that I was trying to put words in his mouth at line 10 by trying to make him agree to the point which I thought he himself had made; on the other hand I could claim I was also trying to keep the discussion 'on track' and establish his opinion clearly. I should say that, of all the interviewees, I probably knew Dave best on a personal level, and I feel this long acquaintance is evident in my somewhat confrontational approach. Something this extract certainly shows is that Dave was not submissive as an informant, any more than I was as an interviewer; neither is afraid to question (or indeed support) each others' statements. There was conversational give and take as the discussion was negotiated, but Dave did not seem awed by the presence of the 'expert' interviewer; rather, he had his own experiences and opinions which he was not afraid to offer, regardless of how well they addressed the question supposedly at issue. This pattern is repeated consistently throughout the interviews: Q challenging, prompting and attempting to establish 'answers'; the informants conceding, resisting and frequently launching into rich veins of digression. In this way I felt the interviews were conducted in a candid atmosphere where disagreements, confessions and diversions were encouraged. This would, I hoped, go some way towards counteracting the tension inherent in the situation. One way of judging 'rapport' is the extent to which the interviewee feels confident and competent enough to interrupt, label particular issues irrelevant,

and correct the interviewer (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 134). The interviews show abundant evidence of this.

There is also some evidence in the interviews that I was more deferential with the subjects I knew less well, and that they were more reserved and polite in return. Ed was particularly reticent, and gave almost the shortest interview. However, I felt much of this was down to the individual. I was no better acquainted with Graham, yet he clearly felt at ease to talk at some length: he produced an interview three times as long as Ed's, even after editing out lengthy personal anecdotes and digressions of no possible interest to the project. As he said himself when considering the length of his interview transcript: 'Don't I go on!' [Graham].

Colin Robson considers it the interviewer's responsibility to conclude the interview on schedule but does acknowledge that the researcher may come across an interviewee 'so glad to have a willing ear to bend that you can't escape' (Robson, 2002: 273). However, he continues:

Just as you are hoping to get something out of the interview, it is not unreasonable for the interviewee to get something from you. (*ibid*: 273)

In general therefore, where the interviewees were inclined to talk, I was inclined to give them the opportunity, indeed to encourage them; a great deal of valuable data resulted from this approach. The length of interview did not necessarily relate to how well I knew the subject, nor to where the interview took place or the order in which they occurred; however, the two shortest interviews were with the two youngest teachers, while the two longest were to be found among the three oldest teachers. This might suggest, not unreasonably, that those with the most experience had the most to say.

My intention was thus to give these teachers the confidence, and the opportunity, to 'open up' about their pasts and, particularly, about their current teaching practice. My efforts must have been at least partly successful, to judge by the quantity of data that resulted; all of them spoke at some length, and often

in great detail, about their teaching. Moreover I asked some quite personal questions about, for example, disasters or regrets in their pasts which invited the revelation of potentially embarrassing experiences; these were generally addressed with considerable candour. There were several disclosures involving feelings of inadequacy or failure that were unprompted:

I'm a fraud! I don't know what the notes are called! They're going to see through me! [Helen]

I panicked, I thought oh I can't do this. [Andy]

There are also examples in the interviews where I made it clear that I have been in similar situations, and empathised with them which, I hoped, helped foster a feeling of security:

Dave: I admit I was probably one of these fools -

Q: Same.

Dave: That thought they could teach [laughter] and got thrown into it.

I felt that this mutual frankness largely resulted from me treating the interviewees as far as possible as people rather than 'subjects' who I was conducting my research '*among* rather than *on*' (Wolcott, 1990: 19). In other words: 'human relationships rather than methodology determined the quality and quantity of the information gathered' (Beaudry 1997: 68).

Despite my best efforts at reassurance however, the fear of humiliation was nevertheless evident in the interviews:

I'm nervous about the filming to be honest...I'm thinking god, you know, I've started observing myself now, thinking what if that was being filmed? [Dave]

Such comments suggest that taking part in research may well prompt critical self-awareness among the participants; research may also provide examples of teaching for others to benefit from through 'critical analysis of teaching and the sharing of reflections' (Young *et al.*, 2003: 151). Quite apart from the sensitive

nature of the subject, the simple fact of being interviewed, particularly on film, was recognised as being a contrived and potentially nerve-wracking situation. At one point in his interview Carl pointed to the camera and said: 'I've never been so nervous talking to you, it's that thing!'

It is worth noting that the teachers who confessed to being nervous (namely Carl and Dave) were those perhaps best known to me on a personal level. This suggests that a certain level of trust is required even to admit to being intimidated. Helen remarked on the novelty of being invited to talk about herself:

It feels really weird talking that much d'you know what I mean, someone asking you loads of questions about yourself, it's a bit strange but no it's been great, good old natter. [Helen]

However this was her last remark on camera, made only after the talk was safely concluded.

Equally, the artificiality of the situation was acknowledged by some of the participants. Andy concluded his interview by referring directly to the camera:

Could you turn that off - and I'll tell you the truth [laughter]. [Andy]

Similarly, Dave ended his interview with an apparently throwaway remark ('Anything I didn't answer correctly?'), which acknowledged the fact that an interview is to some extent an act performed with and for the interviewer.

Thus inevitably these interviews were not simply conversations, but were staged events for the purpose of gathering data, and as the researcher I am 'in' the data that results. Another researcher, in a similar situation asking the same questions, would no doubt have provoked other responses. Attempting to account for the differences that a researcher's identity *may* have made in any given situation is always, to some extent, speculation: 'even in hindsight we can't always tell' (Babiracki ,1997: 121).

## 2.5 Analysis

### 2.5.1 Interviews

Clearly there are different ways of viewing the same data, depending on one's interpretive 'stance'. For example, the 'naive realism' of early ethnography believed that:

The phenomena studied were independent of the researcher, who could make direct contact with them and provide knowledge of unquestionable validity. (Robson, 2002: 189)

There are still abundant examples of this kind of 'realist' approach to be found in recent published research. For example, Randall Allsup investigates the process of composing and the collaborative nature of learning among an after-school group of young musicians in upstate New York. He reports that:

As a researcher, I was placed within a particular social order experiencing events as a temporary member - all the while chronicling observations, taking field notes, and recording personal reflections. (Allsup, 2003: 29)

He goes on: 'the findings - firsthand accounts - presented moments of authenticity, of what Maxine Greene (1988, 2001) calls "lived life"' (*ibid*: 29). He implicitly asks us to accept that simply by being present he is an 'insider', although he is an adult and a teacher among schoolchildren; he was there to document what he saw, yet apparently this did not affect the behaviour of those around him. Moreover, since the accounts he produced were 'first-hand', evidently we should not question their status as 'authentic'.

However, at the opposite extreme, there are those who would say that the kind of interaction found, for example, in an interview can have no concrete relationship with 'real life':

Radical social constructionists suggest that no knowledge about a reality that is "out there" in the social world can be obtained from the interview, because the interview is obviously and exclusively an interaction between

the interviewer and interview subject in which both participants create and construct narrative versions of the social world. The problem with looking at these narratives as representative of some “truth” in the world, according to these scholars, is that they are context specific, invented, if you will, to fit the demands of the interactive context of the interview, and representative of nothing more or less. (Miller and Glassner, 2004: 125)

If we accept this stance, then there may be advantages in adopting an analytical approach such as, for example, Discourse Analysis, a procedure which focuses on language itself as a social performance rather than as a way of discovering ‘knowledge’; thus:

when people state a belief or express an opinion, they are taking part in a conversation which has a purpose and in which all participants have a stake. In other words, in order to make sense of what people say, we need to take into account the social context within which they speak. (Willig, 2003:161)

Silverman (1984) considers a series of consultations between patients and doctors in both the NHS and private clinics. However, rather than view these interactions in terms of, say, how accurate or helpful the doctors’ advice is, instead he focuses on how doctor and patient present themselves to each other and the different ways they uphold the ‘ceremonial order’ of the clinic. By studying, for example, ‘interaction rights’ and ‘territorial control’, he highlights the social context of these consultations and demonstrates both advantages and disadvantages to buying private health care.

An interview is therefore a social interaction, and there are profoundly different ways of regarding such talk and the transcripts that result. At one extreme, an interview may represent verifiable ‘facts’ about the outside world; at the other, it may be locally-organised talk, contingent and context specific. However, some suggest one may not necessarily have to choose either one or the other exclusively:

Between these two positions, one may consider that what the respondents say does have some significance and “reality” for them beyond the bounds of this particular occasion...the talk will probably also have some relationship to a world outside. (Smith, 1995: 9-10)

There are various ways of demonstrating that knowledge may not be entirely dependent on context. For example, Herbert Blumer argues that:

the empirical world can “talk back” to our pictures of it or assertions about it - talk back in the sense of challenging and resisting, or not bending to, our images or conceptions of it. This resistance gives the empirical world an obdurate character that is the mark of reality. (Blumer 1969: 22)

The responses of an interviewee are not directly comparable with, for example, the unexpected results of a scientific experiment. Nevertheless the fact that interviewees can literally ‘talk back’, and resist the assumptions and expectations of both the society around them and the interviewer in front of them, may be at least suggestive of a world outside the context of the interview.

Miller and Glassner (2004: 138) also argue against the ‘dualistic imperative’ to classify interview data as either wholly ‘authentic’ or entirely local and context-specific; rather they maintain that ‘realities’ can indeed be found in interview data. As an example they report a study involving in-depth interviews of young women who claim membership of local youth gangs, and describe how these women deliberately seek to ‘talk back’ and refute widely held stereotypes about gangs. However, they go on to show that sensitive reading of the data can reveal incongruities and contradictions within these ‘collective stories’ which undermine the credibility of the accounts, and which may in turn suggest useful, unexpected directions for analysis, and a path out of the confines of the interview and into the ‘realities’ of these women’s lives. The various ways interview subjects may be seen to resist or accept ‘cultural narratives’ (and the beliefs or assumptions of the interviewer) is an idea I return to in section 5.3.3.

However we choose to address it, the status of interview talk is therefore not to be taken for granted, and there are certainly parts of my interviewees’ accounts where the language used draws attention to itself and away from what it supposedly ‘means’. In an oblique way the interviewees themselves were aware of the questionable ‘reality’ of what they were saying (‘turn that off- and I’ll tell you the truth’ [Andy]).

However, I felt that to focus solely on ‘language and its productive potential’ (Willig, 2003: 160) would be to overlook the ‘world outside’; however careful we may need to be about their talk, these people *were* musicians and teachers, and I did want to know about their ideas and practices. Given some awareness of the context of the interview, how I presented myself, and the situation the participants were in, I will cautiously be treating these accounts as the subjects’ best efforts at reliable reports, which do indeed have ‘some relationship to a world outside’.

As such I felt that an analytic stance drawn more from relatively pragmatic approaches such as ‘grounded theory’ (see, for example, Strauss and Corbin, 1990) would be more appropriate for examining these accounts. In particular, aspects of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (henceforth IPA), a specific form of grounded theory, offered the chance both to examine in detail the accounts at ‘face value’ and also to adopt some critical ‘distance’:

IPA is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants, to take their side. At the same time, a detailed IPA analysis can also involve asking critical questions of the texts from participants, such as the following: What is the person trying to achieve here? Is something leaking out here that wasn’t intended? Do I have a sense of something going on here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of? (Smith and Osborn, 2003: 51)

This approach offers a good deal of latitude in interviews, since the aim is to allow the subject the chance to influence the direction of the interview or introduce ‘novel avenues’:

The respondents can be perceived as the experiential expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell their own story. (Smith and Osborn, 2003: 57)

However, having been told that story, the researcher is not looking to test or measure an idea or hypothesis against it; rather, close study of the text itself suggests possible interpretations:

The procedure involves examining transcripts and other forms of data for themes. The researcher does this pragmatically, making summaries of interviews, lists of associations and potential connections between them. Main themes and subthemes are created and discussed, the aim being to produce a “grounded analysis” - that is, an analysis based in and emerging from the data. (Davidson, 2004: 65)

I will give an example of the kind of coding which took place, and the ways that themes began to emerge from the data. The following are two short verbatim extracts from Ed’s interview, each with my initial coding in italics. In the first extract, Ed is recalling his experiences of learning the cello at school and rehearsing in an orchestra:

I suppose I must have learned quite a lot of stuff from it, but I didn’t remember particularly enjoying it, in fact I do remember actually [laughter] just not going to my lesson and going off [Ed]. [*Reluctant, learning by default, formal lessons associated with lack of enjoyment, avoiding formal tuition*]

In the second extract, Ed was asked about the relationship between his cello lessons and his earlier memories of being ‘touched by music’:

I couldn’t link the two things together, that was the weird thing, I didn’t link that enthusiasm I had for music, which I was actually getting probably when I was about 13, 14, I started listening to a lot more music, but I didn’t join the two things together [Ed]. [*Being taught doesn’t relate to teenage enthusiasm, formal learning and playing distinct from informal spontaneous enjoyment, separate musical worlds*]

Through repeated readings of all the interview texts it became apparent that many similar ‘subthemes’ could be grouped together, collectively addressing broader themes of the participants’ experiences of formal tuition, and the ways that being taught might overlap or conflict with a more informal, enjoyable and spontaneous urge to make music. At a higher level of abstraction, these particular themes can be considered, together with many others, as aspects of the ways these musicians experienced learning to play their instruments. Through this process of coding, a considerable number of such themes emerged, which have largely determined how the data is presented and analysed. These themes have ultimately been grouped into three

'super-ordinate' themes; firstly, as already mentioned, how these musicians learned to play, secondly how they teach, and thirdly their role as teachers and the attitudes and beliefs that this entails. These are presented as chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

Thus the themes that structure this writing were not established before the research began. What I take to be the 'meanings' of their talk was suggested by the participants themselves, and emerged from the data 'through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation' (Smith and Osborn, 2003: 64).

### **2.5.2 Lesson Observations**

As well as interview transcripts, I also had around seven hours of lesson observations to consider. Many of the issues surrounding the audio recording of interviews also apply to video evidence, albeit in somewhat modified form: for example, how the sample was selected, what effect my self-presentation might have had on proceedings, and the extent to which the resulting data is a local 'performance' or truly representative of the 'reality' of their teaching.

It could be said that, since I didn't personally know any of the students, and barely met most of them (two of Dave's students I didn't meet at all), I am therefore scarcely present in the lesson observations and cannot have significantly affected the interactions between teacher and student. However, I would offer two qualifications to this notion.

Firstly, although I was not present in the room while the lesson was going on, my camera certainly was, and it is impossible to tell what difference this might have made. There is clearly a logical problem here: 'how do we know what the behaviour would have been like if it hadn't been observed?' (Robson, 2002: 311). Both teacher and student would inevitably have felt some pressure to 'perform' while being so obviously under observation.

Secondly, while I asked to see 'ordinary lessons', I cannot know what they took that to mean. As already mentioned, I left the choice of students up to the teachers themselves. Inevitably all the participants will have thought carefully about who to show me and what they wanted me to see; they were surely unlikely, for example, to have chosen their least able or interested pupils for observation. When I thought about who I would select from among my own students for observation in a similar project, I realised that I would want to choose pupils that I liked, and who I could be fairly sure would 'behave', pay attention, make reasonable attempts to do what I asked them, and so on. On the other hand, if I were invited to take part in a project explicitly investigating, for example, the problems and frustrations of instrumental teaching, I would pick different students to display. Indeed, several teachers remarked on their choice of students for the observation in terms that made it clear they were consciously choosing exceptional or unusual lessons to show me (see section 4.6). Moreover, given that an instrumental teacher's work involves personal interaction with a variety of students with different abilities and ambitions, there can surely be no such thing as a typical lesson. A single hour of teaching is obviously a limited example, but it would take a longitudinal study beyond the reaches of the present project to observe anything like every aspect of someone's teaching practice. Inevitably I was viewing a very brief glimpse of a much bigger picture.

The fact that video evidence includes non-verbal cues presents added complexity, and early attempts at analysis showed that it was certainly possible to code or categorise the films in different ways. For example, it would be possible to analyse the video tapes in terms of, say, the physical interaction and body language of teacher and pupil. However, while such issues are certainly relevant to teaching practice, it seemed to me that to focus on such 'local' interactions would be to distract from issues both more mundane and more far-reaching: for example, how much time they and their pupils spent practising scales, picking out parts by listening, or using notation. This information is to some extent interesting in its own right, since so little is known about the specific teaching practices of popular musicians. Moreover, the participants may have talked about a particular teaching practice in the interview: now we can

see them actually do it. Certainly, to map such activities and the extent to which they occurred directly onto the interview data would be to afford undue weight to a single example of teaching practice. Nevertheless, the ‘fit’ between interview and lesson observation demands at least some attention.

Equally, the manner in which these teachers go about their work - for example, how demanding they are, how they deal with mistakes, or how they offer advice - may be data which cannot be gleaned from the interviews, and should also not be overlooked. Thus some of the problems in dealing with my interview data apply equally to the video data; am I witnessing an ‘authentic’ example of what they really do as teachers, or rather a context-specific performance enacted for my benefit? I would argue that, just as in the interviews, the research ‘frame’ around the data collection cannot and should not be ignored; nevertheless, the films do record instrumental lessons, and there is undeniably some teaching, learning and playing going on. Moreover, every social interaction has some kind of frame around it; a ‘lesson’ is always to some extent a performance, even if the audience is usually just the teacher and student themselves. Certainly a single one hour film cannot completely represent a teacher’s working practice, and must be to some extent ‘staged’ for the purposes of observation, but this does not mean it should be disregarded.

Each video was initially transcribed as a timeline, a form of event coding (Robson, 2002: 334) which outlined the durations of the various activities on display. These activities were coded thematically in a very similar way to the interview transcriptions, and in many cases using the same themes that had emerged from the interviews. For example, the films offer examples of the way notation and recordings were used, and some indications as to whether the teacher or student was in control of the learning agenda. Thus direct comparisons can be made between the videos and the interviews. Themes also emerged from the lesson observations which had not arisen in the interviews; for example, the pacing of lessons, or the standards of playing (or effort) expected by the teachers, and these are considered as data in their own right. Since the activities on film took place within the confines of lessons, the video data are considered as teaching practice and are discussed in section 4.6.

## 2.6 Methodology: conclusion

This study has limitations which should be acknowledged. For example, the sample is small: only eight musicians took part. It would surely be inappropriate to generalise too widely about the learning and teaching practices of popular musicians from such a small group. As I suggested in earlier (2.2), this study can only describe directly how *some* popular musicians teach.

The study was based in the relatively affluent South-west of England around Bristol and Bath, and those taking part were mainly white and indigenous to the UK. Those from different socio-economic groups or ethnic backgrounds may have provided different data. All but one of the teachers taking part were male. Female musicians and teachers may well have different experiences and opinions from their male counterparts but again, this study involves such a small sample it would be inappropriate to generalise about gendered behaviour and beliefs from these data.

Although the research focus was on the teaching practices of these musicians, their pupils are largely absent from the study, except in a relatively passive role as seen in the lesson observations, or as described by their teachers in the interviews. There was also no formal attempt to gather feedback from the teachers about their interviews or lesson observations. My offer to send them the finished thesis was only taken up by three of them, and prompted no remarks as to its content. As we have seen (2.4), several participants remarked on the experience of being filmed and interviewed during the interview itself, but asking for their subsequent reflections some time later might have been helpful.

The way I presented myself will have prompted certain kinds of responses rather than others. The participants were mostly friends or at least acquaintances who might have responded differently to a stranger. I also could have asked different questions which might have produced useful data. For example, the literature on teachers' life histories suggests that all manner of formative experiences may influence subsequent beliefs and behaviour as

teachers (see, for example, Thomas, 1995b, or Goodson, 1992b). Thus in asking only about musical experiences and interests I may have cast my net rather narrowly. Equally I only saw a very limited example of their teaching (one chosen by the teachers concerned). Many more lesson observations with different pupils over a considerable length of time would be required before I could say with any confidence that I had seen a fair representation of how these musicians teach.

The project might also have benefited from a more focused sample. Initially I was slightly concerned that I would not be able to find enough teachers to take part; by using such broad criteria ('popular musicians' who had 'learned under their own steam') I was attempting to include as many potential participants as I could. The teachers who volunteered had, as we shall see, a great deal in common; however, they not only taught several different instruments, but were also of varying ages and, perhaps most significantly, at very different stages of their careers. While this certainly provided a wide range of data, more telling conclusions might have been possible from studying a more homogenous group.

I have considered here the methods by which verbal, and visual, data were gathered. Chapter 3 presents an account of the ways these musicians described their own experiences of learning, and relates this to existing research literature on the subject of informal, or popular music learning.

## CHAPTER 3: LEARNING

### 3.1 Introduction

The world of classical music has tended to dominate music education research; interest in the ‘more informal, collective and “open”’ (Bjornberg, 1993: 76) kinds of musical learning found, for example, in rock and pop music is relatively new. As recently as 2004, Hallam and Lamont wrote:

Whilst much attention has focused on learning in music in the past 30 years, there are still areas about which we know little. Generally, the research has been undertaken in relation to the development of skills within a classical music tradition. There has been relatively little research into the development of generative skills in world or popular music. (Hallam and Lamont, 2004: 251)

Such activities typically happen away from the world of traditional academic interests fostered in schools and universities (Lilliestam, 1996; Stålhammer, 2003) and while anecdotal evidence suggests that informal instrumental learning through self-tuition occurs in almost all forms of music, by their very nature such practices inevitably remain ‘undocumented in any systematic way’ (Cope, 2002: 95). It may be that, to outsiders, the activities of popular musicians do not appear to constitute a coherent system of learning and are not worthy of study. Roger Scruton famously claimed that while expertise in classical music required ‘disciplined study...expertise in pop, on the other hand, can be acquired by osmosis’ (Scruton, 1996). In recent years a limited body of literature has accumulated, most notably Green’s *How Popular Musicians Learn* (2002), which has generated widespread awareness of informal learning practices.

Obviously, any piece of research into how people behave draws our attention towards certain activities and away from others. To label as ‘informal’ one set of music learning practices is to imply a ‘formal’ equivalent. In this context, formal music learning is generally taken to mean the conventions

associated with the instrumental study of Western classical music: that is, the widely known tradition based on specialised instrumental teaching, notated music, graded exams and so on. ‘Informal’ learning is then a contrasting tradition, wherein:

young musicians largely teach themselves or “pick up” skills and knowledge, usually with the help or encouragement of their family and peers, by watching and imitating musicians around them and by making reference to recordings or performances and other live events involving their chosen music. (Green, 2002: 5)

This chapter is concerned with the learning practices of my sample. Initially I consider the literature on ‘popular’ or ‘informal’ learning, both in terms of activities which seem to be typically informal and those which appear to be from the formal world. I consider the accounts of the musicians I interviewed and how they compare with the existing research on the subject; much (though not all) of the data in these accounts supports published findings on the subject. I go on to argue that research findings are specific, and often only relevant, to the cultural context that produce them, and therefore what applies to groups of learners studying classical music at prestigious institutions may not apply to self-directed informal learners. Finally I discuss the problems of trying to find satisfactory terms to describe different musical activities.

### **3.2 Informal learning**

One of the first and most influential researchers to study contemporary informal music learning was Stith Bennett. *On becoming a rock musician* (1980) is more sociological than pedagogical in approach, and he is obviously writing specifically about ‘rock’ music rather than other popular forms. Nevertheless in many ways his analysis established how popular music learning would be portrayed in subsequent research.

Bennett interviewed and spent time with a number of American rock bands in the mid-1970s. To invoke the identity of a rock musician, he says, is an act of self-invention, since such musicians do not follow established paths:

The way in which rock musicians are made does not correspond to the traditional institutional careers which are typical of other kinds of musicians. Rock music is exemplified by the processes of *self-recruitment* and *learning without pedagogy*. (Bennett, 1980: 18)

His ideas of ‘self-recruitment’ and ‘learning without pedagogy’ suggest a helpful framework for discussion, and I will consider these ideas both in relation to the work of other researchers, and in relation to the interviewees in the present study, before turning to other aspects of popular music learning.

### **3.2.1 Self-recruitment**

Many music education researchers have noted the fact that children often become passionately interested in music that they themselves have chosen, while remaining a good deal less interested in what formal music education has to offer (see, for example, Stålhammer, 2003; Lamont *et al.*, 2003; Campbell, 1998). This enthusiasm may be limited to singing in the playground, listening to music or going to concerts, but may also extend to instrumental learning. Young people frequently choose to engage in musical learning of their own volition, and often dedicate enormous amounts of energy and enthusiasm to it. It is perhaps not surprising that researchers such as Sheri Jaffurs (2004) are interested in informal learning; the musicians she sees rehearsing demonstrate just the kind of engagement and commitment to music learning that she is trying to generate in her classroom.

The voluntary nature of this interest is a defining feature of the literature on popular music learning; the desire to take up an instrument is self-initiated, rather than at the suggestion of parents or teachers. Green (2002: 26-28) gives several examples of this kind of ‘self-recruitment’, combined with very high levels of motivation, among the popular musicians she studies. It is common in

the literature to find reports of high levels of motivation among popular music learners, resulting in long hours of dedicated practice, occasionally bordering on the obsessive and anti-social (Walser, 1993: 99).

Similarly, the group I interviewed recruited themselves to the world of popular music learning, most feeling compelled to learn, regardless of the consequences. Some of them recalled a situation, even a certain moment when, due to a chance, informal encounter, they were spontaneously 'seized' by the sound of an instrument, even though at the time there was no apparent explanation for this interest:

I saw some people busking in Bath, and it just - looking back on it I can't imagine what must have been going through my head at the time but it grabbed me...; it drove me to go and buy a banjo immediately. [Carl]

The desire to play and to learn was frequently attributed to a certain *sound*, a word which kept appearing in the interviews. Carl described himself 'listening to music, getting fired up about the sound I was hearing and just becoming fanatical about achieving that'. Bill was already learning the electric bass when he heard the distinctive sound of the band Level 42:

I just put this on, and I thought - how on earth is he doing that on the bass, I want to do that, I've got to to find out how to do that; it took ages, every day I used to come home from school and get my bass out and try and do it, you know, and before I went to school I'd like get 20 minutes in, you know, ah, man! [laughter] [Bill]

At '16 or 17', Carl had left it relatively late to start learning in comparison with most musicians, while Ed was 20 before he started singing in bands; he didn't take up the guitar in earnest until even after that (see table 1 for biographical details).

The youngest was Andy whose attempts to copy his favourite record were among his earliest memories, and the start of his musical learning:

My little treble voice at the age of two or three or four by this time could copy it and I just thought this was wonderful, that I could sound like something that I looked up to and adored. [Andy]

The sounds they reported hearing which made them so ‘fired up’ seemed to engage them in some cases on a profound, even sensual level: ‘ooh, I want to be able to do that, ah, that’s such a nice sound, gorgeous’ [Bill]. The appeal could also be partly visual; Graham moved on from flute to saxophone partly ‘because it was noisier’, but also recalled going to a concert: ‘I just remember seeing the saxophone *glowing* on stage’.

Levels of application clearly varied among the group and thus learning outcomes, and perhaps intentions, varied. For example, Ed’s decision to commit to music in a serious way seemed conscious and deliberate rather than compulsive and inevitable, as it had been for the rest of the group. He avoided using words like ‘fascinated’ and ‘wonderful’, and made it clear that he never became obsessive about practising the guitar:

I think I learned pretty quickly, and easily as well, I didn’t particularly - I wouldn’t say I slogged for hours and stuff, I haven’t done that you know. [Ed]

He also didn’t claim to be a technically brilliant guitarist; his commitment to making music was as a singer and songwriter, and playing the guitar was about performing songs rather than being a dazzling instrumentalist. On the other hand Carl was perhaps more typical in his determination to master the technical aspects of his instrument, and he was prepared - in fact, ‘driven’ - to put the time in to achieve this: ‘I was spending most of my waking moments questioning every aspect of my playing and everyone else’s playing’. This intensive practice continued for several years and he is now widely regarded as an outstanding player in the world of traditional acoustic music. Even though their levels of commitment to instrumental practice clearly differed, the passion for music expressed by all the group proved strong enough to fuel years of engagement and, ultimately, a career.

Except for Ed, they all reported a period of concentrated practising which seemed to take over their lives, and in several accounts there was a degree of ambivalence towards this obsessive behaviour. Words like 'driven', 'fanatical' or 'addict' suggested they were in the grip of something too powerful to resist, and which was not necessarily healthy. For example, Dave said, perhaps only half-joking:

I was determined if I heard something I wanted to play it, I wouldn't sleep until it was done you know [laughter], with my arms were aching and my fingers were bleeding, you know, I'd get there in the end. [Dave]

On the whole, the group I interviewed spoke with some pride of their determination and commitment to practising and learning, feelings so strong they could only submit and accept the consequences. Yet they were not entirely positive about their careers as musicians and teachers. The only 'part-timer' was Helen, who professed to want a career as a musician but couldn't understand how one could make a living. Indeed, there were frequent references in the interviews to how insecure and badly paid their working lives were ('I wouldn't recommend it to anybody' [Dave]), as well as how the desire to just play was so often compromised by the need to earn money doing other things (especially teaching); this is discussed further in section 5.3.1. However, the misgivings or reservations they expressed were much more to do with the *results* of their obsession - in other words the careers they had subsequently ended up with - rather than with the initial desire to become musicians, and the process of doing so. The reservations and regrets they expressed could be seen as validating the strength of their motivation to learn.

As I have suggested, the high levels of motivation often shown by musicians who have themselves chosen to learn is obviously of interest to music education and music psychology researchers. Much research in the world of classical music learning also seeks to discover what influences might be at work among persistent and successful learners. For example, a study of five distinct groups of young learners by Davidson *et al.* (1997) suggests a number of key influences which might affect musical learning. For instance, starting with a warm, supportive instrumental teacher can encourage children to

progress to a more able and challenging teacher. Their study also indicates that parents have a ‘crucial influence’ on progress in musical learning: ‘the most successful children had parents who were most involved in their lessons’ (Davidson *et al.*, 1997: 198). Howe and Sloboda (1991) report that, out of 42 highly talented youngsters at a specialist music school:

only 14% of the children appeared to be entirely self-motivated, requiring no parental pressure to practise, and over half the children required considerable parental encouragement to maintain a regular practice schedule. (Howe and Sloboda, 1991: 57)

Green also gives examples of the positive influence that teachers (instrumental teachers in particular) can have on informal learners, and repeats the idea that ‘the likelihood is that parents play a prominent role in the formation of popular musicians’ (Green, 2002: 24). Similarly, David Baker studies young instrumental teachers whose own interest in music seemed typically to have ‘resulted naturally from conditions at home. Music-making was an ingredient of family life. It was a matter of being born into a family setting of musical pastimes’ (Baker, 2006: 40). They believed that parents played a role ‘of cardinal importance’ (*ibid*: 41) in encouraging consistent practice. O’Neill and McPherson (2002) do accept that, while environmental factors are relevant, a child must be interested in learning in order to persevere:

There is little doubt that motivation to continue instrumental training is inextricably linked to the social and cultural environment, and so it is also important to consider how motivation for playing an instrument might be influenced by external factors such as parents and teachers. Important as these factors may be, no amount of parental support is likely to make a child without some intrinsic interest engage in the long-term effort required to succeed at even modest levels of musical competence. (O’Neill and McPherson, 2002: 43)

None of the musicians in the present study mentioned being inspired or encouraged by teachers at school, and where instrumental teachers were discussed it was generally in negative terms (as we shall see in section 3.3.1). Several members of the group speculated about what might have led them to the kind of instant attraction to a certain sound or instrument which they almost all reported, and how this could translate into years of commitment and hard

work. Bill spoke at some length about different kinds of musicians, some of whom were evidently devotees who would be 'doing it anyway' regardless of rewards since it fulfilled a 'basic need' in themselves, whereas others had:

no imagination about music, they don't, it doesn't fulfil any kind of fundamental need in them I don't think, playing...; I've met people who are like that who are brilliant players, technically speaking but, you know, ain't got the blues, man! You know what I mean? [Laughter] [Bill]

He denied that this was genetic in origin, but was rather to do with one's 'psychological makeup, to do with your development, you know, the way you grew up, things like that really' [Bill]. However, he gives no account of the way his own background might have generated this 'fundamental need' in himself, nor even how he became interested in music at all:

Q: Were there other people in your family who were playing or singing?

Bill: No.

Q: Was there music around you in any way?

Bill: Not really, no, we used to listen to the radio, had a radio in our house, didn't have a record player, until later, didn't have a telly either, so.

Q: Looking back, do you know where that interest came from, do you know why you stuck your hand up? [to volunteer for cello]

Bill: [5 second pause] Not really, no. Just curiosity I think.

As with Carl, his initial motivation to become involved in music learning is a mystery. Andy and Frank reported very similar backgrounds, without either parents or siblings actively involved in music, and with no particular emphasis on music in their home lives.

All the others had either parents or siblings or both who played or sang (if only round the house). For example, Ed had parents who both played and listened to music at home, and encouraged him to go for lessons on the cello, though he subsequently gave this up. Dave's entire family (mother, father and two brothers) all played the piano; this was the source of a limited amount of advice and help and presumably inspiration, though the musical path he took was very much his own. Helen grew up listening to music, and had a supportive musical father:

Q: Could you say something about how you first started getting interested in music?

Helen: I was very young, I think it was a mixture of being offered a recorder at infants' school and just listening to music around the house, my dad played the clarinet and sax.

Helen's father offered her his old clarinet and practised with her occasionally. Yet even from her earliest memories as an instrumental learner, her enthusiasm and energy is tangibly her own. She 'badgered' her mother even to get a recorder, which she 'got really into', and by the time she wanted a saxophone, she remembered 'badgering and badgering and badgering' her parents to get one, and 'being a right pain in the arse' in her insistence. This does not sound like someone relying directly on their parents for support and motivation. Obviously, these musicians have mostly gone on to a full-time career in music, and thus one might expect to find unusually high levels of motivation in their early years.

In contrast to Bill, Carl suggested that there might indeed be a genetic basis to becoming a musician; his parents were both jazz players but he was adamant that this did not mean there was music round him as he was growing up, merely that 'I had lots of baby sitters cos my parents were going out doing lots of gigs'. In general any attempts to explain their levels of motivation were half-hearted at best. More typical was Graham, at a loss to account for his solitary devotion:

Q: So how come you sorted all this stuff out? I mean, huge amounts of learning?

Graham: I don't know, I mean I really seriously don't know.

There is then some evidence here to support the idea that parental influence may have played a part in fostering musical learning, if only passively. In the event, not one of them sought to give credit to their parents for actively promoting their instrumental learning, although of course this does not necessarily mean that family background was irrelevant. Teachers, parents and students all have vested interests in the ways parental involvement in children's education is reported, and the attribution of responsibility may depend upon

outcomes; for example, children who drop out of school may well blame their behaviour on a lack of involvement from their parents (Baker and Soden 1997: 14). Instruments and lessons were presumably paid for by parents, although in several cases these musicians only took up their chosen instruments in earnest in their late teens and even early twenties, when they were more independent of their parents than a school-age learner would have been. Equally, there may have been a tendency here to underplay the influence of others and to claim the responsibility for successful learning themselves. This claim of sole ownership also reflects beliefs, widely held by and about musicians, concerning the ‘authenticity’ of talent and motivation which appears to spring, perfectly formed, from nowhere (see, for example, Lilliestam 1996: 201).

It is perhaps remarkable that hardly any of these musicians attributed *any* significant part of their achievements to encouragement by their parents or to any obvious influence in their backgrounds. However, the role of ‘family background’ is complex. Baker and Soden (1997) review a wide range of research concerning parental involvement in children’s education, and highlight the difficulty of separating the effects of parental action from that of other adults. They also show that parents can influence their children’s education in many different ways. For example, parent aspirations or expectations for success, help with homework or attending parent-teacher meetings, parenting style or patterns of family interaction have all been studied as possible factors in the educational outcomes of children.

Henry Kingsbury argues that:

The nature-nurture question with regard to talent and musicality is poorly dealt with when the “nurture” side of the issue is conceived in terms of such issues as the presence or absence of stereo equipment or musical instruments in the home, or the performance skills and musical tastes of the parents. (Kingsbury, 1988: 72)

Kingsbury goes on to suggest that instrumental learners, and children in particular, are largely at the mercy of others when it comes to creating and sustaining ideas about how ‘musical’ they are: ‘both the manifesting and the

assessing of musical talent are to a great extent matters of social power and authority (*ibid*: 77).

In such matters children are at an ‘insuperable disadvantage’. Most pertinent to the development of talent is the ‘emotional vulnerability’ of the potential learner, and the level of support and encouragement they receive, since:

when musical performances result in rejection or ridicule, one response will be a strategic avoidance of comparable performances in the future. (*ibid*: 74)

Thus ‘parental involvement’ takes various forms, and may include ‘parental pressure to practise’ (Howe and Sloboda, 1991: 57), paying for lessons, or simply not criticising a child’s attempts to make music. If the development of musicality is indeed dependent on a complex brew of social power relations and sensitive parenting skills then any serious attempt to account for musical ‘talent’ or motivation would require a considerably more intimate and prolonged research project than this.

By contrast, there were suggestions from some of the group that *disapproval* from parents (and teachers) may have been a motivating factor in learning, at least at certain stages of their interest in music. At school, Bill appeared to be a ‘successful learner’, playing in the orchestra and taking grade exams. However he subsequently abandoned the cello and took up the electric bass instead in order to play punk rock, music he was ‘excited’ by:

When I started playing bass guitar, one of the things that I secretly liked about it was the fact that none of the older people that I knew liked the kind of music that I was listening to. My mother was dead against it, my music teacher...was really crusty, and he described it as a “racket”, and it “wasn’t music”, you know...I didn’t care, you know it was like - great! [laughter] It sounded good to me! [Bill]

Roger Horrocks makes a relevant point:

Many popular cultural forms seem associated with the pleasures of the taboo...the songs 'your mother wouldn't like' are exciting because she wouldn't like them. (Horrocks, 1995: 23)

Most of these teachers belonged to a certain generation that was growing up in the late 1970s when punk rock was in its heyday, and several (in particular Bill, Carl and Dave) identified to varying degrees with its 'DIY' ethic and 'resistive' stance, as well as having been (and continuing to be) fans of the music.

There were several references from the group to the appeal of exciting adult disapproval through music; Andy referred with some glee to the 'hellish noises' he used to make in his first band, while Frank remembered:

All the musicians in the school used to get together in a room and all play our instruments very loudly all at the same time, that was really cool, I liked that a lot...maybe just making a noise is cool, making a loud noise is a good thing to do. [Frank]

Helen instinctively avoided mainstream formal tuition as a way of defending her musical independence; she described herself as 'a bolshy little teenager' who was 'absolutely convinced that no, it's fine thank you', she didn't need music theory, or even to know to the names of the notes she was playing:

I think my attitude was - no, I don't know what the letters are called and I don't want to know, and I've been told I can do it by ear well enough so I want to do that. [Helen]

At the time she believed that having to study music theory and notation 'would kill it for me'.

The ability of music to embody the feelings and frustrations of adolescence is well documented; see for example Tarrant *et al.* (2002), Huq (2006), Bennett (1999), or Williams (2007). There is evidence in this study that the teenage instinct to find a musical identity away from adults allows instrumental ability to develop alongside a sense of autonomy. The

'oppositional' potential of music, and the way this interacts with music education, is a subject we will return to in chapter 5 (5.5).

Thus we may conclude that the musicians in the present study did indeed recruit themselves to the world of informal learning, often with an enthusiasm which at times bordered on obsession. They themselves could not explain this enthusiasm, and did little to credit their parents, siblings or teachers with encouraging them.

### **3.2.2 Learning without pedagogy**

The second idea of Bennett's (1980) that I wish to consider in the context of informal learning is that rock musicians learn 'without pedagogy'. Instead of a formal system of education, he identifies two learning practices as crucial to becoming a rock musician, namely the use of recordings, and the kinds of interactions which take place in band rehearsals.

#### **3.2.2.1 Use of recordings**

Firstly, Bennett stresses the importance of recorded music as a resource, in particular the ability to play parts of a recording 'over and over again', thus allowing specific segments of a song to be identified and copied aurally. This concentrated listening tends to happen in private, and thus at a pace that suits the learner: 'It is the conjunction of naive determination and the controllable repetition of recordings which makes an individual's song-getting skills possible (Bennett, 1980: 134-5). He argues that commercial recordings serve as 'formal notation systems', texts which have shaped the way contemporary popular musicians listen and play.

Others researchers take a similar stance. For example, in her study of teenage garage bands, Patricia Shehan Campbell (1995) points out that initial

'song-getting' from a recording is a private interaction with music one likes and is familiar with. Lars Lilliestam is not studying rock music specifically, but rather making music 'by ear'. He too identifies recordings as a key source of songs and, more generally, of musical 'building blocks' - 'riffs, solo phrases, chord sequences and rhythms' (Lilliestam, 1996: 204) - that can be used in a variety of contexts. Green draws on her own interviews of 14 'popular' musicians and acknowledges that copying recordings by ear is 'by far the overriding learning practice for the beginner popular musician, as is already well known (Green, 2002: 60). Like Lilliestam, she sees this practice as generating, not just basic technical facility, but also 'fundamental building-blocks in compositional skills' (*ibid*: 75). However, she also emphasises the importance of different kinds of listening in the making of a popular musician. In several cases the musicians she studied, while deliberately listening to and copying recordings:

Also emphasized a less conscious approach...which has more to do with enculturation into and enjoyment of music than with any disciplined or systematic learning practice. (*ibid*: 67)

She points out too that musicians have always learned by listening and copying; the solitary use of recordings has become commonplace as widespread communal music-making has disappeared as a social context for learning.

In line with existing research, the idea of copying recordings was evident among the musicians I interviewed. Recordings played a crucial role in the learning histories of these musicians, in the specific sense of being a 'text' or 'score' that they could use as a source of musical material to copy and play along with, and also as a way of hearing music and finding styles and songs that appealed.

Some of their enculturation occurred simply through hearing music during their childhoods. Ed grew up 'hearing Beatles songs' around the house: 'my dad...used to listen to a lot of music, and still does listen, my mum does as well'. Andy was more active in seeking out music to listen to:

Mum and dad had a record player, a radiogram, huge old thing and a number of records, and I was absolutely fascinated by it, and my dad was good enough, or trusted me enough, even as a kid of two, he taught me how to use the record player, and I just loved it. [Andy]

Two years old seems very young to be using a record player, but clearly this is among Andy's earliest memories. This again is an example of a strong early engagement with music and autonomy as a learner, as well as an instance of a parent being at least a facilitator in this interest. Hearing music as they were growing up may well have given these musicians a taste for listening, but the styles they were hearing at the time did not seem to be reflected in the music they subsequently became passionate about; only Dave, Andy and, to a lesser extent Ed and Graham, became involved with the kind of music they heard around them at home. As I have already suggested, the fact that some kinds of music were explicitly not approved of by parents or teachers was in some cases part of that music's appeal.

Often the specific listening that they engaged in when they were old enough to choose was guided by a sound or a style which was completely new to them, or which had been half-heard but not consciously identified, and thus their subsequent listening served as research as much as enjoyment. For Frank as an adult, exploring the history of blues harmonica is what convinced him that he must learn himself. Having heard some examples almost by chance, he started investigating the sources of this style:

I could see that they did this song by Willie Mabon, so okay, I went to the second-hand record store, oh there's a Willie Mabon I'll take that, find out, so just researching some of the origins, and then I found all these old guys, Sonny Boy Williamson and Sonny Terry and all those guys, and I just thought "I have to get a harmonica". [Frank]

Carl did things the other way round. He bought a banjo first at the age of '16 or 17', purely on the basis of seeing some buskers performing in a style which he only later discovered was called bluegrass. In retrospect, the 'very cool musical scene' in films like 'Bonnie and Clyde' and 'Deliverance' apparently may have had an effect: 'I think it was kind of lurking there and then I saw it on

the street and it triggered something' [Carl]. To begin with, his listening was more about developing an awareness of a style of music than learning to play it:

I bought some records, and made a little bit more - not kind of, what would be the word, not definite kind of things, but you know I got more of a feel for what I was trying to do rather than actually how to do it. [Carl]

Even when he did find someone - his first teacher - to help him get to grips with the instrument, the most useful aspect of that help was not so much teaching him how to play, but in showing him what the music was about:

The best thing he did for me really was he gave me lots of tapes, he'd record tapes for me of players, so I got a real strong feeling of who was playing what, you know what kind of banjo, cos it's like anything else, you get into five-string banjo and you realise it's not just bluegrass banjo, there's lots and lots of different types of bluegrass banjo, there's eras and there's kind of - so I got a real feel for that and I developed my own kind of opinions as to the kind of player that I wanted to be, just from listening to music. [Carl]

There is a sense here that, to begin with at least, being able to play what you are listening to is less important than absorbing it, to use as a reference point or a goal. Bill spoke in similar terms; after initially playing punk rock, his tastes began to change:

I was getting into like, a lot of Level 42, you know, Mark King and that sort of thing, so it was more, we were listening to Tower of Power, proper 'muso' music, it was way, way beyond, you know what I mean don't you [laughter]...; way beyond what we could accomplish, but it didn't put us off, you know. [Bill]

Recorded music then served as a source of inspiration and an aural guide to the kinds of musicians they wanted to be.

Copying and playing along to records is often seen as the archetypal informal learning activity, and certainly several of this group (though by no means all of them) mentioned it as an important part of their learning. Ed conceded that playing along to records was 'quite helpful', while Bill primarily learned the electric bass by just such a method: 'I just used to listen to records

and play along, pick the bass line out, and play along with it'. Dave began 'playing by ear' and using a variety of recorded music as a resource; as another fan of punk music he attempted to copy the keyboard parts from The Stranglers, although at the time this was 'a bit out of reach'. He also 'got interested' in blues and boogie-woogie and 'developed a lot of, you know, doing boogie-woogie bass lines', picking them out from records by ear. Helen recalled:

Playing along with my mum's records, like - really embarrassingly... Nic Kershaw and stuff like that [laughter]. Just playing little, you know working out harmony lines to it, and always just being allowed to play this recorder, is what I was doing. [Helen]

However, while they all stressed that learning by ear was fundamental to how they became musicians, I was slightly surprised at how little emphasis they placed specifically on copying and playing along with records. This could be because at the time this was so natural and obvious as to not, now, be worth mentioning; as Green (2002: 60-61) points out, young people seem to have spontaneously adopted this approach to learning world-wide without anyone suggesting it to them. Moreover, for most of them it was a long time ago; they may have been overlooking an early stage of their musical learning that they now take for granted. Yet copying recordings may be only one aspect of developing the ability to play by ear; using recordings as 'texts' surely does develop a musician's aural acuity, but one needs to have a certain level of aural discernment in the first place to be able to take advantage of recordings in this way. If this was indeed the participants' 'overriding learning practice' (*ibid*: 60) they did not emphasise the fact.

### **3.2.2.2 Peer-group learning**

Bennett identifies the second aspect of 'learning without pedagogy' as being the way members of rock bands interact with each other in rehearsal. He describes group practice as 'a uniquely constructed system of discovering, demonstrating, and talking about music', involving trial and error, critique and repetition:

Given the insight that there is no formal or informal training institution, and therefore no paradigm of rock practice, the practice site becomes the focus for the experience which replaces pedagogy. Musically, local rock band practice is a case of the blind leading the blind. (Bennett, 1980: 70)

A rock musician's most important source of skills is then the group interaction involved in learning to play together. This idea has become one of the central tenets of the literature on informal music learning.

Campbell states that band rehearsals are crucial for developing individual and collective skills. She also suggests however that rehearsals may be influenced by a musical 'leader' - not exactly a teacher, rather a guide 'who appears to draw the others toward greater musical accuracy' (Campbell, 1995: 18) a finding replicated by Jaffurs (2004). Sara Cohen (1991) gives detailed accounts of the ways musicians in rock bands discuss and experiment with ideas for songs during rehearsals. Lilliestam stresses the importance of group learning, not just as a way of developing individual skills but also as a site for 'collective composing' (Lilliestam, 1996: 209) arising out of band improvisation. Allsup focuses on the way members of a rock band cooperate democratically in rehearsal and finds that those taking part 'discovered more thanks to the input of their peers' (Allsup, 2003: 33).

Green also gives examples of how musicians can learn from others (often peers or siblings), not just by being told or shown things they don't know, but also by simply watching more accomplished players. Like many other researchers, she sees the group rehearsal as a key site where knowledge is exchanged and skills developed through jamming together and learning songs:

Performance, composition and improvisational abilities are thus acquired not only as individuals, but, crucially, as members of a group, usually from very early stages. (Green, 2002: 82)

Several musicians in the study gave examples of this kinds of autonomous interaction. Some recalled how they had learned informally from others with whom they were not in bands; for example, Bill remembered learning simply by 'watching other people play', while Dave said: 'my brother showed me

something to play, I'd play it'. Carl had been helped enormously by meeting people who had been 'very free with information'.

The experience of being in bands was described in overwhelmingly positive terms, such as 'fantastic' or 'brilliant'. However, there was not a single mention of band rehearsals, nor of more experienced band members helping less experienced ones, nor of how skills developed individually and as a group through collective improvisation. This is not to say that such activities did not go on, and it seems reasonable to assume, in most cases, that they did. All of them had been in bands at some point, several playing in covers bands, and often original bands as well; Bill, for example, said the 'exciting thing' about being in your own band was that 'you just made it up didn't you, you write your own songs'. The literature may be right to focus on how much musicians develop through learning covers, jamming and writing songs together. There is every reason to think that the musicians in the present study too had benefited from such activities. However, they did not specifically recall them as being especially educational.

Rather than emphasising the importance of rehearsals, my sample generally had rather more to say about how much they learned through performing live with (and in front of) other people. Within a year of starting to play harmonica Frank was in a band, and going out gigging meant he was 'forced to learn'. For Helen the 'best experience ever' was being in a band playing jazz with a group of teachers from her school: 'that was- "come on then, we're out", and you're out gigging'. Andy said his piano playing 'did really well' while performing regularly in a band, though he attributed this to simply playing a lot rather than learning from others. Performing for Carl was to become a spur to improve; he recalled how he would occasionally return home after a gig and set about practising there and then to correct aspects of his performance that he was dissatisfied with. However Carl's earliest experience of performing live was rooted in the kind of 'session culture' described by Cope (2002):

Carl: The great thing about traditional music and acoustic music is there's a culture of sitting around and just playing, and there was always a session that I used to go to, to watch, and at the time I was living at home

with my parents, and they forced me after I was playing for about a year to go to the session with the banjo.

Q: And actually sit in.

Carl: Yeah, and I sat in back and just joined in with what I could and sat there looking gormless with the bits that I couldn't.

Q: Yeah, so that's a big influence, gets you into performing live?

Carl: Looking back on it that was almost certainly the single biggest part of my development as a player.

Similarly, Berliner (1994: 45-55) refers to the experiences of jazz musicians 'sitting in' on a live session as both alarming and inspiring. Although Carl's learning history has much in common with both the literature on informal music learning generally and the other members of the group, this particular communal, participatory aspect of it appears to belong more to a folk or jazz tradition, rather than to rock and pop genres. Sitting in on a session is perhaps not directly comparable with the 'peer-group learning' of budding rock bands, though John O'Flynn argues that there are nevertheless many similarities 'between traditional music and other musical styles when it comes to modes of production and other socio-musical contexts' (O'Flynn, 2006: 142). Frank described regularly taking part in a jazz workshop group (albeit not on his main instrument) where he developed his improvisational skills; it is doubtful however if this was the same *kind* of collective improvisation, or indeed the same kind of group, as those referred to by, say, Bennett (1980). The problem of how to categorise musical activities is one we shall return to (see section 3.6).

Overall my participants reported a range of learning experiences which took place as part of a group. While they tended to stress the significance of performing rather than 'group-learning' in rehearsals, it could be argued that performing is an integral part of being in a band, and generally the result of individual and collective practice; without the rehearsal there may be nothing to perform. Nevertheless, the kinds of interaction and communal learning which feature in, for example, Cohen (1991), Bennett (1980), and Jaffurs (2004) are not evident. This is not to say that the musicians I spoke to denied the importance of these activities; they simply didn't mention them in response to general questions about their learning histories. Meanwhile, much existing research does acknowledge that performing plays a part in the development of

popular musicians, but does not emphasise this to the extent that the musicians in the present study did.

### **3.3 Formal learning**

It might appear from what has been said that informal learning is a discrete system, characterised by self-selected and highly motivated learners, who play entirely by ear and whose musical education is made up solely of activities which would be extremely unusual in traditional classical learning: namely, the copying of recordings by ear, and the kinds of peer-group interaction which take place in band rehearsals. In reality of course popular musicians and their informal learning practices have all kinds of connections with their more formal counterparts, and this is acknowledged in different ways, though perhaps to different extents, in the literature.

Finnegan (1989: 141) points out that musicians can belong to more than one musical tradition. She gives examples of brass band players who also performed in operatic productions, as well as in classical or jazz concerts (and occasionally, rock gigs too). She finds musicians who began learning in the classical tradition but who later switched to rock, jazz or folk, and vice-versa, and sees considerable interplay and exchange of both musicians and ideas.

The same is true of learning practices. While Bennett (1980) claims that rock music is exemplified by lack of pedagogy, in most of the literature there is considerable evidence of activities which in principle belong to the ‘opposing’ classical system, such as instrumental tuition, using notation, and acquiring formal technique and knowledge of music theory. Bennett himself (1980: 5) points out that rock musicians frequently have instrumental lessons from private teachers, and that they may well acquire some knowledge of ‘formal art music’ at school. He does not attempt to assess how much of an impression these activities make. Campbell however suggests that classroom music lessons may support informal learning:

Contrary to what it may seem, there may well be a considerable relationship between aural skills honed in school and those utilized on copying a song. (Campbell, 1995: 20)

Robert Walser goes further, and draws explicit links between two apparently discrete musical traditions by focusing on the ‘intersection of heavy metal and classical music’ (Walser, 1993: xv). He sees the rehearsal spaces where heavy metal guitarists practise as being akin to the practice rooms of a conservatory:

The decor is different, but the people are similar: musicians in their late teens and early twenties, assembled for long hours of rigorous practice. There is a parallel sense of isolation for the sake of musical craft and creativity, a kindred pursuit of technical development and group precision. And like conservatory students, many of these heavy metal musicians take private lessons, study music theory, and practice scales and exercises for hours every day (*ibid*: ix).

Green also acknowledges that the boundaries between musical worlds are in fact fluid. She states that ‘formal music education’ and ‘informal music learning’ are not mutually exclusive; rather, they can be conceived ‘as extremes existing at two ends of a single pole’ (Green, 2002: 6). Indeed the musicians she studies regularly move between these extremes. As well as developing their skills informally, all but one of Green’s subjects had had instrumental lessons at some point, some for several years. Some of this was traditional classical tuition on instruments that were subsequently dropped, but most of them had also actively sought formal tuition on their chosen instruments, acquiring technique, notation skills and theoretical knowledge in the process. Green distinguishes between ‘classical’ and ‘popular’ instrumental lessons, though she accepts that the pedagogy involved may not have been particularly different. If the musicians generally spoke more highly of their ‘popular’ lessons it was because they identified more closely with the kinds of music being studied.

Green finds that popular musicians who do seek out formal tuition tend to do so only *after* they have chosen to learn a specific instrument and already spent some considerable time and effort trying to do so. In this way, formal tuition is seen to build on aural skills which are already in place (for a discussion

of the early acquisition of aural skills, see McPherson and Gabrielsson, 2002). However, it did not always prove easy or obvious to transfer knowledge and skills gained in instrumental lessons (particularly classical lessons) into the popular realm of music her sample wanted to play. The younger musicians in her study seemed to find it easier to make these connections between the formal and informal, as well as finding classroom music more relevant and enjoyable than their older counterparts. This seemed to be largely due to changes in curriculum and teaching strategy which allowed for a much greater inclusion of popular styles in the classroom, and which encouraged active performance and composition. Nevertheless, even the younger musicians continued their informal learning independently of the various kinds of teaching they received.

I now consider the more ‘formal’ ways that the musicians in the present study learned to play their instruments.

### **3.3.1 Being taught**

All eight participants had at least some tuition, although the extent of this varied widely. For example, Bill had several different teachers on two different instruments over many years, while also learning another instrument without any lessons at all. Graham didn’t have any one-to-one lessons on his chosen instrument, though he had attended courses and workshops; meanwhile as a youngster he had had several periods of tuition on a range of different instruments. Table 4 gives an overview of their various learning histories.

**Table 4: Learning and tuition**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>First active involvement in making music</b>	<b>Tuition on instruments now taught</b>	<b>Tuition on instruments given up</b>	<b>Instruments learned with no tuition</b>
Andy - Piano	Singing along with records aged '2 or 3 or 4'	Piano lessons at school from age 7, passed grade 6	Brief spells on violin & viola; lessons on double bass, passed grade 8	Guitar
Bill - Double bass	Volunteered for cello aged 8	First lessons aged '23 or 24', several teachers, passed grade 8, still having lessons	Cello in school plus private lessons up to grade 5, then abandoned	Electric bass
Carl - 5-string banjo	No serious attempt at playing anything until '16 or 17'	Several episodes over first few years	One piano lesson	None
Dave - Piano	'Mucking around' as a child, then more seriously from age 16	Effectively none until after grade 8, then lessons at University	None	None
Ed - Guitar/ singing	Cello aged 10	Singing/guitar/ piano tuition on Access to Music course	Cello, passed grade 2, then abandoned	None
Frank - Harmonica	Experimenting on harmonica aged 5	Series of lessons with 3 different teachers	School trumpet lessons from age 9	None
Graham - Saxophone	Guitar lessons when 'really young'	Some workshops but no one-to-one tuition	Guitar, cello, oboe, all at school (in USA)	Harmonica, flute

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>First active involvement in making music</b>	<b>Tuition on instruments now taught</b>	<b>Tuition on instruments given up</b>	<b>Instruments learned with no tuition</b>
Helen - Saxophone	Recorder at school aged '5 or 6'	One episode of lessons as a teenager	Minimal guidance on recorder, handful of lessons on clarinet, passed grade 5	None

Their accounts of having lessons served to highlight the importance of their autonomy rather than the influence of their teachers. To illustrate this I will consider the tuition they received on instruments that were given up as well as on their chosen instruments.

I would distinguish here between instrumental tuition and classroom teaching. The latter certainly results in students being 'taught', but not in the same sense: this is seldom instrument-specific, and is compulsory as part of the National Curriculum until Key Stage 4 (in other words, around age 14), when students can choose to drop the subject. However, classroom music lessons may well have an influence on instrumental learners, perhaps in providing exposure to different musical styles, as well as an awareness of musical theory or notation. Classroom lessons too may offer a chance to use one's chosen instrument in a novel context.

Andy went to Wells Cathedral School, a specialist music school, but only recalled lessons on specific instruments, although he enjoyed performing in the school orchestra on double bass (an instrument he later gave up) and singing in the choir. Graham was educated in the USA until he was 16, and benefited from his school's band programme in that it gave him a chance to try several different instruments (though not always the ones that he wanted). This did give him some formal knowledge of theory which he was later able to transfer onto instruments he was learning by ear. Only two of my sample (Helen and Ed) were young enough to have experienced the changes to music education

brought about by the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988; like the others, they seemed to regard classroom learning as irrelevant to progress on their chosen instrument. Helen did get the chance to play recorder in her Church of England primary school, albeit with minimal guidance:

I remember having a piece of paper with B A G, I remember the B A G bit, and I'm presuming we then did the F E D as well! We didn't just stop at one hand, but I don't remember - it certainly wasn't something we did weekly, or anything like that, I think most people probably weren't that interested. [Helen]

School assemblies offered her the chance to practice in public, as she was allowed to play recorder rather than sing along with the hymns. However, Helen and Graham were the only ones in the group to describe the effects of music teaching in schools in positive terms. Most didn't mention it at all. At the time of the interview, Carl was working part-time as a technician in a secondary school music department; the classroom teaching he witnessed served merely to make him more grateful that he had learned aurally rather than 'coming up through the [tradition of] reading and writing'. These musicians may have forgotten or be downplaying their experience of music in school, but among this group at least classroom teaching was barely mentioned as having an influence on their musical development. Much present-day classroom music teaching may well be rather different from the image presented in these accounts (see 5.5).

### **3.3.1.1 Giving up instruments**

Almost all the group had lessons learning classical music on instruments that were later abandoned. The only ones who didn't were Dave - who had in effect no instrumental lessons at all until university - and Helen, who had only minimal tuition on instruments she had chosen. Several recalled having lessons on an instrument that they didn't really like or that they soon realised was not for them. The reasons for lessons being viewed as unsuccessful appeared to vary widely; in every case though, these lessons were certainly not associated with the passion for sound which drove their practice on their chosen instruments.

For some, the memories of not enjoying music lessons were accompanied by negative remarks about the personal qualities of their teachers. Ed viewed his first teacher as ‘a bit mad really, and she was very, very inflexible’. He didn’t really enjoy his cello lessons, avoided them where possible, and gave up the instrument after somewhat reluctantly passing grade 2. He certainly disliked his first teacher on a personal level, but it’s difficult to judge how significant this dislike was, since he claimed he ‘wasn’t particularly into’ playing the cello in the first place.

Similarly, Carl was simply not very interested in learning the piano. Prompted by what appeared to be some interest in playing keyboards, Carl’s parents ‘sent’ him for one very unsatisfactory piano lesson. He also disliked his teacher (‘she was old and horrible’) but he accounted for the failure of the lesson by saying that, while he enjoyed experimenting informally on keyboards, there wasn’t any ‘fun to be had’ in ‘sitting down and making sure my fingers were doing the right things in the right order’. One could say that this ‘traditional’, formal approach might have been off-putting; however, it is worth pointing out that later in the interview he used almost the same words to describe what happened during his first - very successful - banjo lesson: his teacher ‘made sure I was kind of holding my hand properly and it was all the preliminary stuff and just got my fingers moving’. Thus the approach of his piano teacher was beside the point; he was simply ‘fired up’ about playing the banjo and keen to learn everything he could, including the kind of technical formalities that were tedious on an instrument he was only mildly interested in. Davidson *et al.* (1997) emphasise the importance of having a sympathetic, friendly teacher with whom to start learning an instrument; however, while both Carl and Ed clearly did not warm to their first teachers, the reason they gave up lessons appears more musical than personal.

On the other hand Frank certainly *was* interested in the trumpet, and was explicit that the failure of lessons was not due to the personal characteristics but to the teaching style and repertoire of his teachers; in fact, he described his first teacher as a ‘lovely chap but...really in the dark ages about teaching’. He recalled plodding through his trumpet tutor book, which he ‘hated’, and was

clear - at least in retrospect - that he might have continued playing the trumpet if he had had the chance to play the music he already loved:

What I really wanted to do was become Louis Armstrong, really, I didn't really want to play classical music, and I remember sitting at home age ten or eleven wading through Haydn's E flat trumpet concerto, and it just didn't sound like music at all to me. [Frank]

The teaching he experienced at school simply didn't allow him to develop as he would have wished, and he still regretted not finding the opportunities he yearned for at school: 'it could have happened...I would have loved to have been a jazz trumpeter' [Frank].

Bill also took part in local youth orchestras and, like Andy was positive about the experience (Frank and Ed were rather less so). He recalled taking up the cello on his own initiative - mainly out of 'curiosity' - and played for several years at school before abandoning it; much like Frank he couldn't make the music he wanted to on the instrument he was being taught:

Bill: I could see that playing the cello led into an orchestra really, and I did play in several youth orchestras in the area...and that was, you know, that was good, but it wasn't music that I liked listening to, it wasn't music that I was particularly excited by and I wanted to play that music instead.

Q: Which was what, at the time?

Bill: Punk rock [laughter].

For him, the nature or quality of tuition was not the point; it was equipping him - perfectly adequately - to play music that he didn't really want to play. While Frank, at the age of ten or eleven, didn't find the guidance or encouragement he needed to become a jazz player, Bill as a young teenager found he was able independently to learn to play the music that excited him.

### 3.3.1.2 Giving up lessons

It is perhaps not surprising that the group had on the whole negative things to say about the tuition they received on instruments that were subsequently given up. However, their accounts are often no more positive when describing tuition on instruments they persisted with and clearly felt passionate about.

Some encountered teaching that was simply inappropriate, and which attempted to make them learn things that they weren't ready or willing to learn. While Ed was still a relative beginner on the guitar, he was well aware that his teacher was aiming much too high: 'I said to him: "You're teaching me too complex stuff, you need to go simpler" but he wouldn't simplify it...so I didn't learn anything'. He nevertheless continued to learn the guitar, but on his own terms, primarily to accompany himself as a singer.

Andy was unique within the group in that he had lessons on his chosen instrument from an early age, which continued throughout his school career. He recalled his earliest memories of listening to music as a very young child, singing along and 'imitating' what he heard, as well as experimenting on the piano at home. His 'ear' was sufficiently developed that when formal piano lessons began at the age of seven, there was already a conflict of interest between himself and his piano teacher:

I can remember thinking, discovering for myself that as soon as I knew how the tune went, I was fine, I didn't need to bother, borrow, bother with this stuff written down on paper any more, thank goodness...But I was always persuaded that I really should know what was going on on the paper. [Andy]

He also, if inadvertently, made a distinction between the enjoyment of performing and entertaining, as opposed to the tasks associated with lessons:

I used to practise in the dining hall where there was a piano, where we used to have our little junior school assemblies, and when I went there straight after school, and there'd be the sort of dinner ladies still clearing

up and tidying and cleaning and I used to entertain - I used to do my bit of practice and then I'd entertain them with chopsticks and they thought that was great [laughter]. [Andy]

Neither he nor his teacher regarded piano lessons as particularly successful, though he has subsequently gone on to a career as a pianist and singer, working almost entirely by ear.

Helen, having got to grips with the recorder, progressed onto clarinet when she was around 9 years old:

Helen: My mum took me to a teacher, a private teacher; don't think I went for very long, probably five or six times, just to this guy's house. I would have needed that cos of the difference fingering-wise and all these extra keys, but then I just went for it, just got really into it.

Q: So you didn't carry on having lessons after that?

Helen: No...I mean, to get the technique for sure, initially I had that little run of lessons, and then I think to be honest I got a bit bored of what - there was the Associated Board route, that I really wasn't interested in. I'd sort of learned how you can read music off a stave by this point but wasn't interested in theory in the slightest, and I think I was kind of a bit "anti", if I'm honest, because the way I liked to play things was picking it out by ear...You know, once I knew where all the notes were, and I knew that you're not supposed to puff your cheeks out cos you look like an idiot, and no you don't need a strap for it, once I knew all that then I was happy to go off and do it by ear.

She seemed to have taken what she wanted from lessons to help her learn in a way that suited her rather than her teacher. Her teacher's agenda - 'the Associated Board route' - did not appeal at all.

It could appear that these are typical examples of classical teachers trying to force 'popular' musicians to abandon learning by listening and imitating, and instead learn in a traditional, 'formal' way - that is to say, by studying technique, scales and exercises, and pieces from the classical repertoire. This does indeed seem to have been partly the case (Green, 2002: 134-135 gives similar examples). However, the 'formality' of music lessons was occasionally not the reason why lessons were reported negatively, nor why they were abandoned; indeed, some gave examples of tuition that wasn't, as it were, formal *enough*.

Dave and Bill both struggled long and hard with the technical aspects of their instruments (piano and double bass respectively) and both tried repeatedly to find appropriate help. Bill was already a full-time professional double bass player before, at the age of '23 or 24', he first went for lessons. Despite attempts with a series of teachers, no one seemed to be able to give him the advice he needed to improve his sound, and in particular his bowing technique. Eventually he reached a point of despair where he even considered giving up playing altogether: 'I was having a rotten time playing...didn't know what I was doing wrong'. Bill was the only musician to express any suggestion that they might give up playing for any reason. Only relatively recently had he been able to find an excellent teacher with the expert advice that he was looking for.

Dave also felt adrift; being unable to afford regular lessons he taught himself with occasional help and advice from friends. On the one occasion he went to a recognised piano teacher, she took one look at his home-made technique and said: 'it's too much work, I can't teach you'. He subsequently passed his grade exams (up to and including grade 8) without ever having had a 'formal' piano lesson, but:

Even at university no one told me how I should play the piano, there was no technical element to it...No one said, you know, you should flatten your fingers, or round your hands..., had to work it all out yourself. [Dave]

Both Bill and Dave felt they missed out on a solid, technical grounding in their instrument that good formal tuition might have provided.

Frank reported going for lessons with a well-known harmonica player to learn how to play the blues. These lessons were 'informal' to the point of comedy, and offer an example of the idea of 'authenticity' referred to earlier:

I was pleased to get away from the formal side of things, but it doesn't really help if you go around for a lesson and the chap says: "Right, you want a beer?" [laughter]...And my questions to him were: "That's brilliant, how d'you do it?" And he would just say: "I don't know man, I just do it"; so: "Okay, what shall I - how do I play the blues?" "Well just play what you feel, man, play what you feel". [Frank]

This was certainly more entertaining, and perhaps more inspiring, than his ‘formal’ trumpet lessons, but was not particularly helpful in practical terms.

There were therefore implications that some teachers might be very good at playing but not very good at teaching. There were also suggestions that teachers might not be equipped to teach everything their pupils needed to know. For example, Bill had vast experience of working with drummers in a rhythm section, whether performing rock, jazz or in musical theatre, playing which required a particular kind of awareness of the nuances of rhythmic ‘feel’. All the double bass teachers he had been to see were classical, orchestral players and he felt that none had any experience, or even awareness, of this particular kind of listening and playing.

It is also noteworthy how willing these learners were to seek tuition. Some of them increasingly felt the need for expert advice as they developed (and wanted to develop further), but others looked for teachers for help right from the start. Carl described how he initially had no idea what to do with his new banjo, which sat in his bedroom for ‘three or four months’: ‘I didn’t know how it was tuned, I didn’t even know what the style of music that I was listening to [was called], I didn’t know any of that’. Trying to learn from a book was not a success, while listening to records gave him a better ‘feel’ for what he was ‘trying to do’ rather than ‘actually how to do it’; it was only through a fortunate meeting with a teacher that he got the ‘kick start’ that he needed. Similarly Frank bought a book along with his first harmonica, but went for lessons as soon as he could.

In discussing the group’s experiences of being taught, it is important to stress how little tuition, on the whole, they received. Most of them reported occasional, short phases of tuition, interspersed with periods of intense and largely solitary practice. Since I was expressly looking to interview ‘self-taught’ players, it is hardly surprising that these musicians had on the whole minimal experience of lessons. On the other hand, since they all agreed to this description of themselves, I was somewhat taken aback to find that they had all had at least some lessons - several had had a significant amount. It could be

suggested that some of them might have misunderstood my invitation to take part in the study.

However, the question of what it means to be ‘self-taught’ is a complex one, and members of the group expressed a variety of opinions on the subject, occasionally contradicting themselves in the process. For example, Dave described himself as ‘self-taught’ on the piano; however elsewhere in the interview he denied that that he taught himself to play ‘because you’re constantly watching and getting ideas off other people’. If we agree with this view, then no one is truly self-taught, since we all rely on others for information and inspiration. The group’s accounts certainly included talk of learning by watching and listening to other musicians. In contrast, both Ed and Frank explicitly stated that teaching is only to help a process of self-tuition ‘cos a teacher doesn’t teach the person, they teach the person to teach themselves when the teacher’s not there’ [Ed].

Purser (2005: 293) finds similar opinions being expressed by the teachers he interviews. The implication of this idea is that, to a considerable degree, everyone is self-taught. Moreover, as these accounts strongly suggest, simply because one is being *taught* does not necessarily mean that one is learning anything.

It could be argued that the idea of being ‘self-taught’ is ambiguous, and was perhaps not the best criterion I could have chosen to select volunteers for this project; nonetheless I think they were all justified in including themselves. They were not self-taught in the sense that they had no tuition whatsoever, but they were certainly in charge of their own learning, and decided themselves what and how to learn. I would suggest that the phrase ‘self-directed learners’ describes this group better. The tuition they received, whether helpful or not, seemed to be only part of a process which was going to happen anyway.

It is therefore important to distinguish between successful learning and successful teaching. All the musicians in this group could be said to be ‘successful’ learners in that their persistence in playing an instrument has

resulted in high levels of competence and indeed some form of career. However not all the *teaching* they received - even on their chosen instruments - was reported as successful; far from it. In fact, in some cases it could be said that they persevered with learning their instruments *despite* the tuition they were getting rather than because of it. Where the experience of having lessons was not giving them what they wanted, these learners gave up the lessons rather than the instrument.

The importance of choice is evident in the group's experiences of both learning and being taught. Typically, lessons on instruments that were given up began at an early age, perhaps before they had any particular passion to learn. While none of them reported being forced to go against their will, there was a sense that in many cases the decision to start learning these instruments was not made actively by the learners themselves. Only Bill described making a conscious choice to volunteer for lessons; they generally reported simply having lessons without necessarily accounting for how or why this happened. The implication was that, although presumably willing, they were to some extent 'sent' by their parents. Moreover, the act of going to a teacher signified the start of learning; on these instruments, learning was from the outset inextricably linked to being taught.

This contrasts sharply with their reports of taking up instruments they persisted with. In almost every case, this was described as a conscious decision, and the expression of a powerful urge to learn. This often happened at a later age, when they were perhaps more able to make such decisions autonomously, and resulted in learning which seemed independent of the tuition they received. Some of this tuition proved very useful, some of it no help at all, but only Bill suggested that lack of good teaching might influence his decision to continue playing his instrument. Moreover, apart from Andy all of them actively sought tuition *after* they had chosen the instrument they wanted to play and had already started to play it, in some cases for many years. If the experience of these learners is typical, being taught an instrument that one has not chosen oneself leads to very low levels of interest and motivation. Conversely, actively

choosing to learn, and doing so on one's own terms, is associated with very high levels of enthusiasm and a long-term commitment to music making.

### **3.3.2 Using notation**

As I have tried to suggest, the literature makes it clear (if only in passing) that popular musicians, while they may start learning their chosen instruments by ear, often adopt more formal practices as well. This may include learning to read notation, whether it be standard stave notation, chord charts, guitar 'tab' or other forms of visual guides. This ability may be acquired in classical or popular instrumental lessons, classroom lessons, or be self-taught. Green stresses more than once that, in terms of her interviewees' learning careers, reading notation was 'secondary' to copying by listening, and goes on:

For all of them, printed materials were used as learning resources in the early stages only and in all cases any form of written resource appeared to have been dropped during the first months or first couple of years of learning. (Green, 2002: 73)

Those that did not read felt this as 'a lack', though 'they all valued the ear-training which their lack of reading ability had forced on them (*ibid*: 71).

However, this view is not unanimous among researchers. Other writers suggest that, while starting to learn by ear is crucial, many musicians in, for example, the fields of rock music (Walser, 1993) and jazz (Berliner, 1994) go on to acquire reading skills. The use of notation varied considerably among the musicians I spoke to. For many learners, their first instinct when acquiring a new instrument may be to buy an instruction book. As I have already mentioned, this was the case for both Carl and Frank. Frank had had several years of classical trumpet lessons, working through a tutor book, so reaching for notation to learn the harmonica is understandable; he makes no mention of actually using it though, and found a teacher who worked by ear instead. Carl compared starting to learn an instrument with exploring a new piece of computer software; he described himself as being 'rubbish with manuals',

preferring to learn through trial and error and through guidance from a teacher rather than from written instructions.

Andy was introduced to notation right from the start of his learning career on the piano. The constant emphasis on notation in lessons seemed to run counter to his musical strengths: 'I found things so easy to play by ear I had little motivation to be bothered with all the stuff that was written down'. He may have passed grade 6 before his piano lessons were abandoned but he clearly valued his ability to play by ear considerably more than his ability to read.

Ed was the least interested in using notation. He had learned the cello up to grade 2 at school, but there seemed to be no connection between these lessons and the enthusiasm for other forms of music which he developed as a teenager: 'I couldn't link the two things together'. As such he initially learned to play the guitar and sing entirely by ear through trial and error. His aversion to notation led to a revealing misunderstanding when discussing positive influences on his progress:

Ed: What else has been helpful - reading as well.

Q: Learning to read?

Ed: No, reading biographies [laughter].

Q: Oh, right, not reading music?

Ed: No, not at all. I'm not really concerned about the small details, it's the, I dunno, it's just some things people said in some biographies about how they approach music.

As an example of the irrelevance of notation he cited Bob Dylan's approach to songwriting:

I think he's quite similar in the way that he learned the guitar to me, actually...his kind of approach is that he'll just create the vessel which he needs...for its purpose, and that's exactly what I do as well. [Ed]

Thus the learning agenda is defined by the music one is trying to play, and tunes become the vehicle for acquiring technique. However, while notation might have been a 'small detail' for Ed it was central to the way Dave learned

the piano. After his brother had showed him the chords for some Beatles songs, his next project was Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor:

Dave: I got the full score, the organ score out of the library, and sat down and learned it note by note, every single part of it.

Q: How old were you?

Dave: About 16 or 17, I think.

He used recordings and notation in tandem, each explicating the other:

I think my mum told me “E(very) G(ood) B(oy) D(eserves) F(ootball)”, how to work out the notes, didn't know much about timing, so I just figured that out from records, and if there was a classical piece I wanted that I didn't know how it went, I'd get the record out of the library and just listen to it, and work out how it went. [Dave]

Listening to jazz, rock and blues were all major influences on his playing, and he while was learning riffs and songs from records and performing in bands, much of his facility on the piano was acquired in the process of passing Associated Board exams on his way to grade 8 and, subsequently, university. This was a goal he set himself when still a teenager at a time when lessons were not available: 'I didn't have any lessons...I just got the books and learned the pieces from the books' [Dave]. While his technique may have suffered from a lack of guidance, notation was a crucial resource throughout his learning career and one which he adopted on his own initiative.

In fact notation was seen as an important learning resource by several members of the group. Graham had tried several instruments and learned some basic notation skills before getting a saxophone. His playing mainly developed through 'a lot of just jamming', playing live with others and learning 'to fill really well and play behind people'. However, much of his proficiency was also acquired through dedicated study of written material: 'I remember being on the dole for a year and that was eight hours a day of practising, that was my thing'. At the time he was working through the Charlie Parker 'Omnibook' (which consists mainly of transcriptions of Parker's solos) as well as a book by Otto

Langey: 'old-fashioned manual, something with fingering charts and exercises' [Graham].

Helen also mentioned the Charlie Parker 'Omnibook' as a key resource; though certainly not for beginners, it seems to be a seminal text for budding jazz saxophonists. This was introduced to her by a teacher, just as she progressed onto the saxophone after many years of playing the clarinet largely by ear:

She was like well you've been playing clarinet for years, and I was like yeah, and she was like well, come on then, and just plonked in front of me the Charlie Parker "Omnibook", and I was like earghh [whimpering noise] but she was like no, no, no, come on. And I just dived straight into it, and just started, that's when I really focused on reading as well, was nailing his solos, learning them off by heart, for muscle memory as well, just cos it's so handy to have all that stuff. [Helen]

She is thus suggesting that notation can be an aid to playing by ear, in that it can develop 'muscle memory' and the ability to learn pieces 'off by heart'.

Bill however took a different view. He learned notation while playing the cello at school, and was the only one of the group (with, to some extent, Graham) to deliberately transfer his reading skills from formal tuition directly onto an instrument he was learning by ear (the electric bass). This was not to help him learn however; he was invited to perform in a play (for which he would be paid) and thus consciously 'worked out where the notes were' on the bass. Being able to read notation played an important part in his subsequent learning career on double bass, as it allowed him to draw on the well-established pedagogical material available, and this skill was in any case essential for his professional career. However, he suggested that reading may not in fact be an aid to memorisation:

I find it difficult now, I mean if I hear something and learn it by ear first of all then it's there pretty much permanently, normally, keep refreshing it occasionally, if I read something in a piece of music I don't learn it, I can look at it 100 times and I still won't learn it. It's very odd. I don't know why that is. [Bill]

Graham suggested a complex relationship between improvising, memorising and using notation. If he was working out a part from a record, he might use notation ‘as a crutch’ specifically so he didn’t have to memorise it; this would also keep his natural tendencies in check, since he was liable to ‘get lazy half way through working out something by ear, and start jamming again’. However, different skills could influence and offset each other: ‘I think because I read well I don’t memorise as readily as I should, and because I jam quite well I don’t read as well as I should’ [Graham].

Thus opinions differed as to how useful notation was. However, one thing on which they all agreed was the value of being able to play by ear rather than being dependent on notation:

I’ve got no problem with notation, my problem lies with the order in which it’s done, you know, I’d love to be able to read music now...I think it’d be a very valuable tool - it’s the tail wagging the dog thing, you know, I’m glad that I learned to become a musician without reading it. [Carl]

Several examples were offered of musicians that they had met or played with who were unable to function without notation, and these were viewed with a mixture of sympathy, respect and scorn. Helen had relatives who ‘went to Cheetham’s and...did everything incredibly “by the book”’:

I used to try to play with them sometimes and just think: “you can’t do that without the music can you?”, and like, literally: “go on, play Happy Birthday! [laughter] Go on, you know the tune, no, don’t look at it”. [Helen]

Andy referred, somewhat disparagingly, to ‘the sort of people that if they’re going to go and buy a piano they’ve got to take a sheet of music to read to play on it when they get there’.

While several of the group had learned primarily by ear and gone on to acquire formal skills ‘retrospectively’ as it were, there was a sense that when one starts by learning from notation, the effects may be irreversible:

I think it's easier to come from our way and then fill in the gaps than it is to learn things mathematically, rely on theory, reading, and then try and pick up an ear at the end of it, I don't think that you can really do that, do you? [Helen]

Berliner offers an example to support this familiar idea. He cites the situation of a would-be jazz player who gradually realises the importance of listening to recordings as a method of ear training:

One older jazz student, upon recognizing the importance of this skill, realized that his early training in Western classical music had emphasized the supremacy of reading skills. It had never occurred to him, and certainly had never been pointed out, that a recording could serve as a viable alternative to a written score. It was not until he was immersed in his jazz training that he discovered that his exclusive dependence on written music had, in fact, undermined the development of his aural skills. As a result, his retention of material learned from recordings greatly lagged behind that of musicians who had grown up in the jazz tradition. It required years of experience with the jazz community's methods for him to close the gap. (Berliner, 1994: 111-112)

Both Carl and Frank were scathing about the attempts of classically-trained 'stars' such as Yehudi Menhuin and Nigel Kennedy to attempt popular styles, though Carl suggested that musicians might move more successfully in the opposite direction; Bela Fleck for instance was primarily known as a bluegrass player, but had recently won a classical Grammy award. On a more personal level, Frank contrasted his own abilities as an improviser with the abilities of a fiddle player on a forthcoming gig:

She will play every single note as it appears on the page, and will never deviate at all from that, and you can absolutely guarantee 100 percent that she will catch all the repeat signs and all the things and it will be exactly in the right pitch...Now she will not improvise at all, it is completely outside her ability levels, is to improvise, if it's not written down, if she's not reading it she cannot conceive of what to do at all...I'm going to be all over the place, scrabbling around trying to keep up with the tunes, swapping harmonicas and, you know [laughter] it's going to be a lot of fun...She's very rigid and I'm very open, and I will struggle to do what she's doing, and I'll give it my best shot, and she would not want to *consider* doing what I'm doing. [Frank]

Andy and Carl both recapitulated another familiar idea, in likening the relationship between playing and learning to read music to that between talking and learning to read (see, for example, Odam, 1995: 35-46); thus learning from notation the works of ‘great’ composers from an early age was akin to reciting works of literature without knowing what the words meant. For Carl, music ‘at its sort of root level’ was about communicating. He was full of admiration for highly skilled classical sight-readers, but said ‘I think it’s more important to have a nice little chat, musically, than to be able to recite Shakespeare’.

This group of musicians then, like the ones in Green’s study, were unanimous as to the value of being able to play by ear. By contrast, they certainly did not stop using written resources ‘during the first months or first couple of years of learning’ (Green, 2002: 73); far from it. If anything, they tended to turn to notated material after they had been playing for some time, in a bid to develop further perhaps than their ear alone could take them. Some of them certainly did their best to avoid notation altogether, while others wished their reading was better than it was. However over half the sample spoke of written notation as an important and valued resource throughout their learning careers.

For this group, the experience of taking grade exams seems to have had little effect on their own estimation of their ability to read. Bill took grade 5 on the cello (and the accompanying theory exam), and was quite capable of transferring his reading skills, firstly onto electric bass and, subsequently, double bass, on which he later took grade 8. By then he was already a professional player and was using his notation skills on a daily basis. Dave also took grade 8 (on the piano) but, even after three years at Leeds College of Music, said he ‘wasn’t a comfortable reader’. Helen passed grade 5 on clarinet evidently without knowing the names of the notes she was playing:

I was never reading it by letters cos I never learned the letters, I knew the shapes of it, and the intervals...Letters is something I've learned [voice drops to a whisper] in the last couple of years [laughter]. [Helen]

Graham saw himself as a good reader without having taken any grade exams at all; rather this skill developed as a result of his obsessive practice regime. Thus strong reading skills seemed to be the result of necessity (Bill) or preference (Graham), rather than the result of formal education; all of them preferred to emphasise playing by ear rather than from notation, and their skills developed accordingly.

However, theoretical knowledge did not seem to be necessarily tied to notation. Ed and Carl had only minimal reading skills, and had learned their instruments almost entirely without notation. Nevertheless, Ed had studied music theory on his Access to Music course, while Carl had expanded his theoretical understanding through teachers he had encountered; both said that studying music theory had been very useful and even enjoyable.

### **3.3.3 Learning through teaching**

One other factor in the learning practices of these musicians should be mentioned here. Almost every member of the group spoke of the effect that teaching itself had had on their learning. Finnegan (1989), Green (2002) and Bennett (1980) all suggest that musicians may form bands very early in their learning careers (in some cases, before actually having an instrument to play); in the same way, several of the musicians I interviewed became teachers quite early in their learning careers, long before even they believed they were competent to do so (this will be considered in more detail in section 5.3.1). As a result, teaching itself became part of the process of developing as a player. Even those who were already very experienced and highly skilled musicians when they started teaching were aware of the effect that teaching had had on their playing.

The effect of teaching on their playing took different forms. Ed's ability to play was not expressly founded on the desire to master a certain sound; instead he spoke of the practicalities of teaching and the need to find a vehicle for his own musical ideas:

Q: Where do you feel like your “prowess”, if you like, on guitar, where’s that come from? How did you get it?

Ed: Through teaching, and through learning stuff, and sort of inventing stuff to teach people, and through my own songwriting as well.

Teaching in fact served as a substitute for solitary practice:

Ed: Teaching can be classed as practising, so I suppose I do practise quite a lot, but other than that I haven’t sat down and like practised a lot - I’ve done bits here and there and stuff but I don’t do that.

Q: You haven’t locked yourself away in the wood shed for months on end?

Ed: No, never done that.

For Bill the benefits were more theoretical:

The teaching is something that is related to me becoming a better player I think, because it forces you to focus on explaining what you’re doing, making sure that you know why you’re doing what you’re doing, so you can tell someone else how to, and that’s really good for me, so I’m getting quite a lot out of it actually. [Bill]

Helen made a similar point. Starting to teach had led her to fill in gaps in her own theoretical knowledge, for example by having to be explicit about musical choices she otherwise made instinctively:

It’s only now I’m trying to impart information to other people that I’m - jesus, yeah but *why* is it like that?! I know it sounds fine but how did I work that out? And that’s quite hard to do. [Helen]

Carl gave an example of how working with a pupil who was ‘extremely good’ could benefit his own playing:

Carl: He comes to me saying can you play such and such a tune, could you teach me such and such a tune, so I’ll either work through it off of a record, which helps me cos it’s a good bit of ear training...or he’ll come to me with something he’s already worked out for himself and he needs to sort of de-bug it if you like...So I spend quite a bit of time with him doing that sort of thing, and then working on variations, which is great fun for me.

Q: So lessons like that are kind of a treat?

Carl: Oh very much so, because I often think I learn as much out of doing those as he does, so that's great for me.

Frank described as 'really, really good experience' the process of recording syllabus material for several tuition CDs. This took place under the watchful eye of his demanding musical collaborator, who acted as producer for the recording sessions: 'I have to do it over and over and over again, and he will not let it go unless it's spot on...; he's really stretched what I can do a lot'.

The effects of teaching on playing ability were not unanimously seen as positive however. Andy admitted 'I'm far better, far far better at sight reading since I've been teaching than I ever was before'. Yet overall he felt that his 'musical skills' had suffered during his time as a teacher 'because I think I've got the balance wrong'; in other words, he had spent too much time teaching and not enough time practising and playing. Graham yearned for the challenge of teaching a 'really high level pupil' and felt that with most of his students he spent too much time within his 'comfort zone' as a player: 'I have to remind myself I have a level to maintain even if I'm playing with people who don't'.

The idea that teaching might be, in itself, a learning practice is not one that has attracted much attention in the literature on informal learning, though Walser (1993: 79) does mention that the heavy metal guitarist Randy Rhoads attributed much of his initial prowess on the guitar to teaching. In part this is because informal popular music teaching has attracted so little interest to date, and the number of teachers involved will be small compared to the total population of informal learners, but also perhaps due to cultural assumptions about teaching. The commonplace view is that to become a teacher one must already be an expert, and thus unlikely to learn anything from students less able than oneself. There is also a common fear among teachers (as expressed by Graham, above) that teaching those less able than oneself is likely to have a damaging rather than beneficial effect on one's playing; among the teachers Purser interviews, two express the fear that, through demonstrating in the lessons 'the result could be that they would end up sounding like their students rather than the other way round (Purser, 2005: 297).

There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that instrumental teachers may be more effective if they are only slightly more skilled than those they are teaching (Barry Green, 1986: 147-148 describes an instance of this). The musicians in this group started teaching at different stages of their development as players, but offered some interesting examples of the ways teaching had benefited their own playing.

### **3.4 Learning practices: summary**

The popular musicians I interviewed were inspired to learn by a passion for sound, in particular for the sound of their chosen instruments. They listened in depth to the styles and techniques they aspired to, they played along with records, joined bands, and sought help and advice from teachers. They used tutor books and notation, developed their skills in performance, and stressed how important it was that they acquired listening skills before reading skills. The conservatoire model of formal tuition - of which they had all had a taste - was not on the whole reported positively by them, and in almost every case the instruments on which they initially had lessons (using notation from the start) were subsequently abandoned. Classroom learning seems to have made little impact on them, although most were too old to have experienced school music lessons since the introduction of the National Curriculum. Whatever their interaction with established pedagogy, these players were highly motivated self-directed learners, who largely devised their own learning 'syllabus', though not always coherent or systematic, by using the musical resources available to them. These musicians were firmly in control of their own learning agenda. These findings are similar to those of other researchers of informal music learning; the musicians in my sample have much in common with those studied by, for example, Green (2002).

The present study would suggest that informal learners come relatively late to instrumental learning, and engage in periods of solitary devotion to their chosen instrument and style of music quite apart from the influence of parents and teachers. Obviously, the way children are brought up will no doubt affect

their beliefs about themselves and their abilities, but the participants did not seem to need any encouragement, nor to rely directly on parental support at all, other than in practical terms such as paying for instruments or lessons, or providing transportation. Music in fact offered many of them, as teenagers, a private space away from adults.

Most of the group, building on their ear-based learning, had gone on to acquire considerable ‘formal’ technical skills and theoretical knowledge. The participants did not on the whole emphasise the importance of playing along with records and rehearsing with bands to the same extent that the research literature does. They tended to stress instead the experience of performing live, and the importance of mastering the technical aspects of playing. It may be that they simply remember most vividly the most enjoyable, or the most challenging, aspects of their learning. However, the musicians in my sample were certainly exceptional learners, in that they went on to become full-time musicians and teachers; such individuals might be expected for example to have performed more, and worked harder on their technique, than those regarding music merely as an enjoyable hobby.

### **3.4 Relevance of music education research**

I have tried to situate this study in relation to the modest body of literature which is concerned directly with informal music learners and the ways they acquire their skills. This is not to dismiss the much greater amount of research into the world of formal music education and classical instrumental pedagogy. Just as musicians may learn in ways which belong to both formal and informal musical worlds, so research on formal, classical music learning may be relevant to informal learners too.

For example, if we consider the idea of self-recruitment, there is a considerable body of research on motivation and choice in music learning; O’Neill and McPherson (2002) offer a helpful overview of recent findings. Informal learners are not alone in being highly motivated; Elizabeth Haddon for

instance interviews a wide range of working musicians and finds that ‘somehow, often as a result of a particular experience, music becomes a passion, even an obsession’ (Haddon, 2006: 3). David Corkhill quotes a brass player who went on to teach in a conservatoire: ‘like all musicians...when I was 17, 18, 19, I just had to do it’ (Corkhill, 2005: 8). These comments could easily have been made by (and about) the informal learners in the present study. Equally, on the subject of tuition, the informants’ experiences find an echo in more general research. Susan O’Neill suggests a disparity between the instruments that many young people want to learn and those that they are taught. Many children in her study who started lessons did not continue: ‘less than 35% of those children who played instruments in Y6 remained playing by the end of Y7 (O’Neill, 2001: 4). According to O’Neill, the children reported that:

the main reasons for giving up were that it became boring, and priorities moved elsewhere. Children also rated practising and lessons which were not enjoyable as strong reasons for giving up (*ibid*: 12).

Again, this sounds very much like the musicians I interviewed.

I have already suggested that being in control of what and how they learned was crucial to the success of my sample, and this is an idea which resonates in much research literature about music education and beyond. In a major recent study involving 21 secondary schools and over 1,500 pupils at Key Stage 3, Green introduced elements of ‘informal music learning practices’ into classroom music lessons, and found strong evidence to suggest that allowing pupils to make significant choices about repertoire and working methods greatly increased their levels of engagement and motivation:

The ‘normal’ approach [to learning] was seen to be both less enjoyable and less pedagogically effective, precisely *because* it involved carrying out instructions given by teachers. In other words, one of the reasons why pupils indicated that they benefited from the project, in relation to both motivation and educational achievement, was that they were granted the autonomy to direct their own learning practices. (Green, 2008: 102)

Admittedly, pupils voluntarily learning instruments in their own time (and on their own terms) are not directly comparable to those who have been ‘granted’

autonomy within compulsory school music classes. Nevertheless, Green's study is at least suggestive of the idea that 'being taught' may in itself have a negative effect on motivation.

Other writers suggest a similar relationship between autonomy and motivation (Hallam, 1998; Renwick and McPherson, 2002), and this relationship surely extends beyond the confines of music learning. For example, in what amounts to an intriguing social and educational experiment, the teacher and writer James Herndon recalls his first year as a teacher working at a 'problem' school in California in the 1960s. One class in particular, the dreaded 9D, proves simply unteachable, and indeed uncontrollable. He settles instead (contrary to school policy) for letting them amuse themselves within agreed, if modest, boundaries of behaviour. However, after several months of this regime, a substantial number of students become spontaneously seized by a series of fads which, as it happens, involve considerable amounts of reading, writing, and discussion: the very activities Herndon, as their English teacher, was initially trying to encourage. At one point he observes them arranging themselves (in just five chaotic minutes) to read a play together, a feat of classroom organisation which he doubts would have been possible even for 'an experienced teacher with a machine gun' (Herndon, 1997: 167), and which leads to exactly the kind of 'educational' activity he had never been able to force on the class himself. Although Herndon's circumstances are very different to those discussed by Green, his conclusions are similar: telling children what to do is always liable to provoke 'some impulse of protest in the tribe' (Opie and Opie, 1969: 11). However, when children feel themselves to be in control, and can actively choose what and how to learn, they can bring considerable energy and enthusiasm to their own education.

Thus there are occasions when research into classical, formal instrumental learning *is* relevant to musicians learning outside this tradition. However this relevance is often by coincidence, rather than by design. Most research does not concern itself with such musicians who are often, in effect, invisible:

One of the most striking features of music, and one which sets it apart from most other educational activities, is the occurrence of informal learning outside the formal system, although it has to be said that one could be forgiven for missing this aspect, if one relied entirely on the research literature. Although there has been significant research interest in factors related to learning musical instruments, the highly selective nature of the samples involved is often unacknowledged...Much of the instrument tuition in the UK is concerned with Western classical music and so almost all research into teaching and learning with musical instruments is located within this cultural domain. Few writers feel the need to acknowledge this constraint and to discuss the factors that such specificity might assume. (Cope, 2002: 93-94)

This selectivity can indeed be misleading if not made explicit. To take one example which has already been referred to, 'Environmental factors in the development of musical performance skill over the life span' by Davidson *et al.* (1997) seems largely preoccupied with highly able students at prestigious institutions. This is not unusual; recent examples would include Reid (2001), Burwell (2005), Purser (2005) and Presland (2005), among many others. In this case, Davidson *et al.* consider five groups of learners, one of which is studying at a 'specialist music school', another which is composed of students who had applied to this school but were rejected, while a third include children whose parents had merely enquired about entry to the school. It appears that all the learners they refer to are having lessons; indeed it seems that 'being taught' is implicitly synonymous with being a 'learner'. Those who give up lessons are seen as having given up playing altogether. Moreover assessment is entirely through classical examinations:

Objective differences in musical competence between the five groups were confirmed by examining their achievements in Associated Board and Guildhall School of Music Grades. (Davidson *et al.*, 1997: 191)

Thus being a successful learner equates to being taught and passing grade exams. It seems that Davidson *et al.* were looking for (and indeed found) very different kinds of learners from the ones I studied. If we map their criteria for musical success onto my sample, the results are somewhat misleading. Several of my participants did not have regular lessons at the relevant age and thus may well not have registered as musical learners at all; others who stopped having lessons would have been classed as 'given-up instrumentalists' while in

fact being highly motivated and successful learners. The group's record of taking grade exams would also have led to conclusions about their 'musical competence' that would have been far from 'objective'. Such assumptions about what constitutes successful musical learning may well exclude a whole community of aspiring musicians.

Naturally enough, most music education research has tended to focus on dedicated and highly skilled performers, often those grouped together in well-known schools and universities. This certainly simplifies the problem of gaining access, while focusing on high-profile learners in renowned institutions also adds a certain authority to the research; such gifted musicians surely have more to teach us than only mildly interested learners and mediocre players. Becker conceives a 'hierarchy of credibility' which leads researchers to talk only to the most highly ranked members of organisations (since they must know 'more') and to study the most prestigious institutions (since they must be the 'best'). This 'uninspected credo', Becker argues, held that:

when you studied one of the major social institutions, you studied a really "good" one so that you could see what made it good. That would make it possible for other institutions of that type to adopt the good practices you had detected, and that would raise the standard of that segment of the organizational world. (Becker, 1998: 94)

The rationale for studying unusually gifted learners is not generally made explicit. However, the 'environmental factors', 'practice strategies', 'teacher characteristics' or other influences which seem to have conspired to produce a highly able student at a specialist school, or a professional musician teaching in a conservatoire, may not, unfortunately, have the same effect on everyone.

For example, Davidson *et al.*'s research, amongst other things, emphasises the role of parents in supporting learning and encouraging practising, while suggesting that the personality of a child's first teacher may well be important in motivating the child to continue having lessons. These findings were not replicated in the present study, but may in fact not apply in the same way to all musical learners. Where a learner apparently has both their

instrument and their learning strategy chosen for them, often at a very early age, considerable encouragement and support may be required to persevere. Similarly, Gembbris and Davidson give an account of the environmental influences currently thought to be important to the success of instrumental learners. While they also stress that parental support is crucial, teachers too play an important role:

not only because teachers transmit musical abilities but also because they more or less influence musical tastes and values and are role models and hold a key position with regard to motivation - for good or for bad.  
 (Gembbris and Davidson, 2002: 23)

Again, the idea that music teachers serve as important role models finds little support in the present study. However, the environmental factors which lead to success in formal, classical instrumental tuition and the passing of grade exams may not necessarily be relevant to autonomous, self-directed learners who choose to study on their own terms.

This kind of unacknowledged specificity can take many different forms. To give another example, Victoria Rowe (2008: 331) suggests that music teaching is generally viewed as a ‘feminine’ profession. Male musicians may well be ‘confident professional performers, a stereotypically “masculine” role, and yet may choose or need to adopt the feminised role of instrumental teacher’; this, she suggests may account in part for a certain reluctance among men to become teachers. However, I would argue that music teaching only looks like a feminised profession to someone teaching classical music. As mentioned in section 2.2, it certainly seems that the majority of classical instrumental teachers are women, yet the cultural world of learning, playing and teaching pop and rock is overwhelmingly male. There is widespread evidence for this beyond the present study; for example, the Bristol Institute of Modern Music ([www.bimm.co.uk/bristol](http://www.bimm.co.uk/bristol)) teaches aspiring performers in contemporary styles to degree level, and its website currently lists 26 instrumental and vocal tutors, of whom only four are female (all of whom teach singing). I would suggest that, among popular musicians, instrumental teaching is in fact a masculine

profession, and that if anyone is disadvantaged here by their gender it is women rather than men.

Therefore I would suggest that music education research needs to be specific and transparent in acknowledging what kind of learning, what kind of achievement, and what kind of musical world is being studied. Considerable caution is required when trying to extrapolate the results of research from one musical and cultural context to another.

### **3.6 Musical categories**

In her ethnomusicological study of musicians in Milton Keynes, Finnegan (1989) largely accepts the merits of adopting Becker's (1982) concept of different 'art worlds', established systems that are taken for granted within their own particular social settings (Finnegan, 1989: 180). As an example of different musical worlds, she rehearses the stereotypical view of two evidently opposing systems of musical education that she encountered among local musicians:

The contrasts were indeed quite striking. One the one hand there was the hierarchical and highly literate classical music training, with its externally validated system of grades and progress, entered upon primarily by children and strongly supported by parents, schools and the local network of paid teachers, with the aim of socialising children into the traditions of classical music theory and compositions through instruction in instrumental skills via written forms. Against this was the other mode: embarked on as a self-chosen mission primarily by adults and teenagers; not necessarily approved or encouraged by parents or schoolteachers; lacking external official validation, central bureaucratic organisation or any "career" through progressive grades; resting on individual aspiration and achievement in a group music-making and "oral" context rather than a hierarchically organised examination system; leading to skills of performance and variation by ear rather than the execution of already-written-out works; and finding expression in performance-oriented rather than written forms. (Finnegan, 1989: 140)

Here one method is set 'against' the other and each presented as mutually exclusive. There is surely some truth in this model. In the literature on informal music learning, and in the present study, there is ample evidence of activities

which would be extremely unusual in traditional classical music learning and which have until recently been somewhat overlooked by music education research: namely, the copying of recordings by ear and the kinds of peer-group interaction which take place in band rehearsals. Equally, those setting out to write, rehearse and perform their own rock songs do not generally use notation to do so. It can be helpful, then, as a descriptive device, to describe musical learning practices as belonging either to one world or another.

However, Finnegan goes on to qualify this impression. While it may be revealing to focus on musical worlds separately, following Becker she stresses that in reality:

they do *not* have clear boundaries around them, that they vary in their independence, and that people can be members of more than one such 'world'. (Finnegan, 1989: 188)

This is true not just of musicians, who may play many different styles of music, but also of learning practices. It is not always possible to maintain a clear distinction between the worlds of traditional classical pedagogy and the ways popular musicians learn to play. As the literature suggests (and as I have found in the present study), informally-trained musicians often do, in fact, adopt practices generally thought to belong to an opposing system of learning and may well, for example, rely heavily on advice from teachers, or use notation extensively in their practice regimes. If classroom music lessons are universal (in Britain at least) and instrumental lessons apparently so commonplace among popular musicians, one might almost suggest that being formally taught should also be seen as a typical learning practice for such musicians.

Clearly, there *are* players who are entirely self-taught, have had no instrumental lessons, nor acquired any conscious knowledge of formal theory, technique or notation, and on whom classroom music made no impression at all. These musicians would indeed form a discrete group, though among more 'serious' or committed players they may be fairly rare; out of fourteen musicians, Green (2002) interviews only one who might qualify. The present study (albeit of teachers rather than solely musicians) would not include any. Thus aspects of

'formal' learning are often perfectly normal among popular musicians and can have a profound influence on their learning.

Learning practices, then, are not confined to one or another musical world, and this is evident in a range of different settings. Jazz improvisation has been analysed in exhaustive detail (Berliner, 1994) and is now studied at conservatoire level, leading to some debate as to how best to assess formally an essentially spontaneous, communal form (Barratt and Moore, 2005). Indeed, the entry into higher education of forms of music other than classical may represent something of a shift in 'traditional' teaching methods. Heloisa Feichas (2010) studies first-year students from various musical backgrounds in a Brazilian university and finds that, while those who have learned informally feel the lack of reading and technical skills, conversely those who were classically-trained seek to develop their aural ability and individual creativity. She suggests that universities could and should develop an integrated model of learning which draws on both formal and informal approaches. Finney and Philpott (2010) report on a course of teacher training in England which seeks to incorporate informal learning into the pedagogical repertoire of future classroom teachers, of whatever background. Meanwhile, the format of the classical instrumental exam has migrated into the world of popular music. Since 1991, 'Rockschool' has offered a graded exam syllabus, employing contemporary styles of music but using a familiar structure of notated pieces, sight reading, technical exercises and so on. We have to acknowledge the possibility that an over-reliance on this exam syllabus might generate musicians who have learned to play popular styles of music, yet are dependent upon notation and are unable to copy recordings or participate in group improvisation. Whether or not one would describe such a player as a 'popular musician' is debatable.

We can accept then that the musical worlds sketched by Finnegan may in practice have flexible and, to some extent, overlapping boundaries. However, while there does seem to be general agreement as to what constitutes traditional, classical instrumental pedagogy, there is as yet no satisfactory way of labelling activities which fall outside this system (Lilliestam, 1996: 195). We have seen that the task of defining of 'popular music' in terms of genre is

problematic (see section 2.2); similarly, the learning practices typically associated with different genres of popular music can vary significantly, and these differences are not always obvious from terms such as ‘popular music learning’, ‘informal learning’, ‘learning by ear’ and so on. In practice, there is often some confusion about what such terms mean.

For example, Green (2002) refers to how musicians typically learn to play rock and pop with the term ‘informal learning’, yet Cope (2002) uses the same phrase in referring to how traditional Scottish folk musicians acquire their skills. In many ways these practices appear similar, but may have significant differences. Often traditional music is learned within a community of musicians of varying standards of playing and experience (Cope 1999). As Lilliestam (1996: 208) points out, this may result in forms of ‘vertical’ learning, with knowledge being passed ‘down’ from a more experienced or accomplished player to a less advanced one. This might not happen in the context of a formal lesson, but in some ways nevertheless resembles the ‘master and apprentice’ situation (Westerlund, 2006: 120) common in learning, say, classical music. Carl learned within this kind of environment, watching more experienced players, joining in when he could, and taking advice and help where he could find it. In contrast, archetypal rock bands (such as the one Bill was a member of) tend to adopt ‘horizontal’ forms of learning among peers of a similar age and standard who exchange ideas and learn from each other (Allsup 2003). My own sample included jazz, folk and blues players who had learned in a variety of settings; I would argue that the similarities among musicians who learn initially, and primarily, by ear outweigh the differences, but it is certainly possible to discriminate between the ways such musicians learn. Musical learning is not homogeneous simply because it takes place outside a formal lesson.

The term ‘informal learning’ seems to imply more about the tone, or perhaps the *context* of learning rather than the content of what is learned; the phrase suggests a relaxed setting rather than a ceremonial one but says little, in itself, about the activities which take place there. As Goran Folkestad points out, it is:

a misconception and a prejudice that the content of formal music learning is synonymous with Western classical music learned from sheets of music, and that the content of informal music learning is restricted to popular music transmitted by ear. (Folkestad, 2006: 142)

Moreover, it is not always easy to characterise learning practices as being one or the other. We have seen, for example, that Graham spent many solitary hours at home learning to play written transcriptions from the ‘Charlie Parker Omnibook’; here the setting is ‘informal’ but the material appears ‘formal’. Meanwhile Helen improvised descant parts by ear on the recorder (‘informal’) in school assembly (‘formal’). Dave used both recordings *and* the written score to work out how to play specific classical pieces. Thus musical practices may be a mixture of what appear to be ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ activities, a subject I return to in the next chapter (4.1).

Other common terms used to categorise musicians and their learning practices present similar problems. As I suggested earlier, to describe a musician as ‘self-taught’ is problematic, not least since this rests on assumptions about how people learn, and about the effects that different forms of tuition may have had. Thus we are reduced to saying *largely* or *initially* self-taught, and have to be specific about how important or extensive tuition was in particular cases.

The idea of learning or playing ‘by ear’ is equally ambiguous. Philip Priest (1989: 174) defines ‘playing by ear’ as ‘all playing that takes place without notation being used at the time’. However, McPherson and Gabrielsson state that:

Playing by ear is quite distinct from playing music from memory, which involves performing a piece that has been memorized as a result of repeated rehearsal of the notation. (McPherson and Gabrielsson, 2002: 100)

Lilliestam (1996: 195) accepts that ‘we do not even have a generally agreed term for what I call “playing by ear”’, which he defines as: ‘to create, perform, remember and teach music without the use of written notation’ (*ibid*: 195).

Lilliestam’s definition certainly delineates a specific kind of musical activity, yet

even so may be misleading. He points out that people do not stop talking simply because they have discovered how to write; thus we may speak of oral or literate ‘strategies’ as a way of approaching musical communication. Lilliestam goes on:

It is a fact that today's hard practicing and ambitious heavy metal guitarist faces the same problems that the Swedish folk fiddler Hjort-Anders faced a hundred years ago, and that musicians who play by ear always confront: how do you identify and copy what someone else is playing, how do you remember a piece of music and how do you get your fingers to do what you want them to do? (Lilliestam, 1996: 197)

However, as Walser (1993) points out, today's heavy metal guitarists may well confront these problems in different ways, in particular by using explicitly ‘classical’ pedagogy while appropriating and adopting notated classical forms. We know what Lilliestam means when he says: ‘rock music is in its whole character a music that is played by ear’ (Lilliestam, 1996: 198); ironically, Walser's guitarists (glancing up from their notated exercises) would probably agree. As I have already suggested, traditional pedagogy may be adopted *after* extensive ear-based learning, and thus will not necessarily limit the ability to play without notation and to improvise. Equally, musicians within the classical tradition may well be encouraged to develop the ability to play by ear, or develop it autonomously alongside formal tuition. ‘Playing by ear’ is then a *strategy* which may be adopted by all kinds of musicians, a phrase which in itself merely describes particular musical activities rather than expresses some defining characteristic of particular musicians.

Even where music *is* made purely ‘by ear’, this description may not tell us everything we need to know about it. As Christopher Small points out, some folk singers strive to re-create as precisely as possible the singing style of the person from whom they learned a particular song, thus keeping alive and passing on an ‘authentic’ tradition (Small, 1987: 42); African-American gospel singers on the other hand may use the call-and-response format of singing in church to develop embellishments and improvisations which are different every week (*ibid*: 104). All music that is made ‘by ear’ does have something in common, yet may also have profoundly different practices and outcomes.

O'Flynn (2006), also referring to Small's *Music of the Common Tongue* (1987) suggests the term 'vernacular' to describe a tradition of aural, informal, often amateur music-making, though he points out the problem of trying to sustain distinctions between 'classical', 'traditional' and 'popular' genres. For example, he accepts that his sense of the word 'vernacular' could apply to many informal music groups who are often thought to be closer to the classical tradition, such as amateur orchestras, choirs or brass bands.

To complicate matters further, the same musician, viewed at different stages of his or her musical career, may appear in quite different guises. For example, Bill began his musical learning by having lessons on the cello, then started playing the electric bass along to records, consciously transferred his classical reading skills from the cello onto the bass, began learning double bass by ear, went for lessons and took grade exams, played jazz and classical music, and continued to take lessons at the time of the interview, while teaching others himself. He could thus appear under virtually any label we care to devise, depending on what we are looking for, and under what circumstances we encounter him: rock musician, classical musician, jazz musician, formal learner, informal learner, teacher, student. Personal histories may then serve as helpful adjuncts to studies like those by Jaffurs (2004) or Campbell (1995); research focusing solely on certain aspects of learning which appear unique to informal or popular styles (such as the way 'garage' bands learn and rehearse songs) may well find useful and interesting data about these specific practices, yet only catch a glimpse of the way many popular musicians develop over time. By studying the often complex biographies of popular musicians we can see learning practices which different musical worlds have in common, as well as those which distinguish them.

### **3.7 Learning: conclusion**

The literature I have been discussing implicitly compares the kinds of players found in, say, rock band rehearsals with the stereotypical 'classical' musician, who is unable to function without notation written for them by

someone else. I would acknowledge, of course, that improvisation has a long and honourable history in ‘classical’ music making. Ironically, while much traditional instrumental pedagogy implicitly views improvisation as ‘a frivolous or even a sacrilegious activity’ (Bailey, 1992: 67) some branches of classical music have always fostered this activity, while many of the ‘great’ classical composers were well-known as superb improvisers (Small, 1987: 285). Equally, many classical musicians are perfectly capable of playing by ear. Nevertheless classical pedagogy is rooted in the performance of music which has already been composed elsewhere; Kingsbury likens the nature of a musical score to that of a will: a set of specific instructions to be carried out faithfully after the death of the writer (Kingsbury, 1988: 167). Over-dependence on notation can indeed lead to ‘the tradition of Pavlovian exactitude found in orchestral playing’ (Bailey, 1992: 30).

When considering their own musicianship, the participants in this study particularly emphasised their ability to listen and copy, to make something up, to improvise - in short, to function as musicians without notation; this, they felt, distinguished them most clearly from other musicians (particularly those from a classically-trained background) whom they had met. Certainly, popular musicians are not alone in this ability, but I would argue that any definition of a popular musician must include this criterion.

The musicians in my sample had done most of the things described in the literature on informal learning: they had copied records, joined bands, listened to and performed music they loved. However, they had also had lessons, learned to read, studied technique and theory, and several of them had taken grade exams: activities more usually associated with ‘formal’ learning. It may well be perfectly normal for popular musicians (albeit unusually motivated ones) to have such varied learning histories. Given the spread of informal learning into schools and universities, the formal study of jazz and the growing popularity of rock and pop grade exams, it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate precisely between musical practices, and between different ‘kinds’ of musicians. In part this explains the problem of trying to find a suitable descriptive label for musicians who have not grown up in the stereotypical ‘classical’ tradition.

Ultimately it may be simpler and more satisfactory to suggest that there is, historically and globally, a tiny minority of musicians who are dependent on notation and unable to improvise; outside this group is everyone else, including those in my sample: a host of musicians who all privilege the ear rather than the eye.

## CHAPTER 4: TEACHING

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the teaching practices of the musicians in my sample, both in terms of how they reported these practices in their interviews, and what was observed in the lesson videos. This is obviously at the heart of my research focus, and since this appears to be the first study of popular musicians at work as instrumental teachers, it offers novel data. I also consider the research literature on instrumental teaching, and the extent to which this is relevant to popular musicians who teach.

We have seen in chapter 3 how the musicians in my sample used elements from both the formal and informal worlds of musical learning to develop as musicians. Here I broadly follow this distinction in considering their teaching practices, and distinguish between activities based, particularly in the early stages of learning, on listening to and playing along with recorded music (and other musicians), and acquiring instrumental facility by watching and copying others, as opposed to activities based on notation, direct instruction on matters of technique and theory, and studying for grade exams. Thus here the term ‘informal teaching’ refers to teaching which embodies or reflects the informal learning practices typical of popular musicians, while ‘formal teaching’ refers to the stereotypical image of traditional, classical instrumental teaching. In making this distinction I am in part following Cecilia Hultberg (2002) in her description of two distinct traditions of instrumental teaching. She sketches an older, ‘practical-empirical’ method of instruction, based on learning through doing, which emphasised aural awareness and improvisation before learning to read music, and contrasts this with a more recent ‘instrumental-technical’ approach (dating from around the mid-nineteenth century) which was based on following printed instructions in the form of notation, and emphasised technical skills. Though Hultberg is describing methods of teaching rather than self-directed learning, the practical-empirical method seems to have much in

common conceptually with how popular musicians learn, while the instrumental-technical approach is effectively the commonplace view of orthodox classical instrumental teaching (regardless of how accurate this may currently be).

Inevitably this distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ teaching will occasionally appear arbitrary and not always sustainable. An instrumental teacher may well physically demonstrate *and* refer to notation in teaching the same piece of music; ‘formal’ knowledge, such as scales, may be learned ‘informally’, being taught by ear and practised from memory. Nevertheless, there are enough characteristics which distinguish these modes of learning for these definitions to be useful. Equally, it could be seen as a contradiction in terms to describe any act of teaching as ‘informal’, since it is precisely the protocol of the music lesson which makes the situation ‘formal’. However this is to emphasise the *context* of teaching; that is, to describe the circumstances as, say, casual or ceremonial. I wish to focus instead on the *content* of the lesson: what is being taught, and how.

Certainly, no matter what teachers do, lessons can never reproduce exactly the solitary, self-directed practices of informal learners, nor the peer-group learning of the archetypal band rehearsal. The teacher may offer themselves as a ‘model’ player to emulate, but this is not necessarily the same as the learner seeking out admired performers or experienced friends. Thus the learning experiences of this group cannot be directly mapped onto their teaching practices; we cannot expect them to teach exactly as they *learned*, though there may be links with how they were *taught*. Given their backgrounds, with experience of both formal teaching and self-directed informal learning, it is reasonable to question which elements of their learning histories have found their way into their teaching practices.

## 4.2 Research literature on instrumental teaching

One may find much advice for all kinds of teachers, but rather less research into what they actually do. Most of the writing concerned with

instrumental teachers in particular seems to be *for* them rather than *about* them. Research into how popular musicians teach is, to date, virtually non-existent.

'Practical guides' for instrumental teachers abound (see, for example, Harris and Crozier, 2000; Mackworth-Young, 2000; Mills, 2007; O'Connor, 1987; Hallam, 1998), generally consisting of well-intentioned advice based on considerable personal experience. *A Common Approach* (Federation of Music Services, 2002) is an attempt by various educational bodies to offer a comprehensive guide to instrumental teaching, though it does so in very broad terms, encouraging the use of diverse musical styles and an approach which balances listening, reading, theory and technique.

The BERA Music Education Review Group (Welch *et al.*, 2004) offers a helpful survey of recent research into music education, albeit mostly concerned with classroom music rather than specifically with instrumental tuition. Some of the contributors to this review suggest that the focus of music education research has generally been on learners and the impact teaching has had on them, rather than on teachers and how they teach:

In searching for evidence of recent research on pedagogy, it was surprising to find little of real substance...the teacher's role is rarely the focus of attention in music education research. (Cox and Hennessy, 2004: 262)

Nevertheless there is a considerable amount of research which seeks to establish 'best practice' in instrumental teaching. For example, there has been much interest into the extent to which pupils are 'teacher-directed', and suggesting that lessons might be more effective if pupils were allowed greater creative input into their own learning (Hepler, 1986; Bryan, 2004; Persson, 1994). Hallam (1998) argues that teachers could profitably spend more time demonstrating (or 'modelling') and less time talking. Some studies seek to raise awareness of the significance of teachers in the success or failure of their students (Davidson *et al.*, 1995), their students' early lives (Howe and Sloboda, 1991), and how teachers structure the learning experience in relation to taking exams (Davidson and Scutt, 1999). Rowe (2008) examines how gender can

affect the process and outcomes of learning, while Burwell (2005) considers the extent to which learners in a UK university college learn ‘independently’ of their teachers. Mills and Smith (2003) investigate the beliefs of instrumental teachers primarily as to what constitutes ‘effective teaching’, finding that for example being ‘enthusiastic’ is perceived as most important for a teacher working in a school; conversely, being knowledgeable and focusing on technique were more important for those working in a university. Young *et al.* (2003) observe instrumental teachers at work in a university and argue that the process of observing and discussing the work of experienced practitioners can help student teachers in their own future careers. Madsen *et al.* (1992) find that student instrumental teachers who watch films of themselves teaching - even after training in self-observation - still tend to rate themselves more positively than experienced expert observers.

Some aspects of such research into instrumental learning may well apply to all instrumental teachers regardless of their approach and their background. However, as we saw in chapter 3 (3.4), the implications of research are often specific to the cultural and musical context within which it takes place. Virtually all research into instrumental teaching is concerned primarily with learning orchestral instruments (and particularly the piano) in order to play a classical repertoire, though this is seldom made explicit; rather this becomes apparent through what is *not* said. There is, for example, very little research which addresses the most simple questions one might ask about instrumental lessons: what kind of music is being studied, and why? Where do teachers find the material for their lessons, and how do they use it? Do pupils learn from watching and copying the teacher, from reading notation, from listening to recordings? The fact that such apparently obvious questions are not asked implies that we, as readers of music education research, are being invited to share an unspoken agreement about underlying issues of musical repertoire and teaching strategies; in other words, we all know what is being taught, and how. As a result, the focus of much research is merely to refine or improve the traditional, classical teaching model to which we all supposedly subscribe.

Even research which does address basic issues of pedagogy tends to do so from the point of view of the classical world. For example, McPherson and Gabrielsson's 'From Sound to Sign' (2002) reviews the beliefs of many influential musicians and educators, and offers persuasive arguments (and evidence) to support the idea that aural acuity should be encouraged among learners before notation is introduced. Their article rests on the claim that instrumental teachers generally introduce notation from the earliest stages of learning; indeed their advocacy only makes sense if we understand this to be the case. They are not looking to establish what teachers do, since this is apparently common knowledge; rather their role is to advise teachers what they *should* be doing instead. Certainly, it is the commonly held, stereotypical belief that the teaching of classical music is characterised by putting symbol before sound, and there are examples of research which support this view (such as West and Rostvall, 2003), though other studies suggest that classical teachers may adopt a more complex and varied approach (see, for example, Young *et al.*, 2003). Inevitably though, even when this kind of enquiry or discussion does take place, the teaching of classical music is usually the focus of investigation; fundamental questions of what might be happening outside this cultural world are generally not addressed.

Some research, however, does offer brief glimpses of a different musical culture. Green interviews several popular musicians who teach and, although their teaching activities are not central to her study, finds limited evidence to suggest that:

many popular musicians, even those who are by and large informally self-taught, tend to adopt teaching methods quite similar to traditional formal pedagogical conventions when they become teachers. Thus many of the central informal learning practices by which these musicians mainly acquired their own skills and knowledge, including purposive, attentive and distracted listening and copying, unconscious learning, peer-directed and group learning may be overlooked by much popular music instrumental tuition. At the very least, formal popular music instrumental teachers cannot be assumed to teach their students in the ways that they themselves learned. (Green, 2002: 180)

Green suggests that this may be partly due to the nature of formal instrumental lessons which places an adult in control of, and responsible for, the progress of learning. Equally, informal learners may not value the ways they acquired their skills as ‘learning’ at all, and thus not seek to replicate these in their teaching. They may also assume that their students are learning ‘informally’ away from lessons anyway. Green mentions briefly that one of her interviewees was responsible for designing a course specifically for popular musicians:

at one of the first dedicated popular music institutions in British higher education, the “Guitar Institute and Bass Tech” in Acton, West London. Here he ensured that versatility was emphasized in the organization of the course. (Green, 2002: 40)

However there is no detail offered as to what the course consisted of, nor of how this related to the musician’s own background. As mentioned in section 3.5, there are other more recent studies which suggest that the informal background of popular musicians may be valued within university music courses or some forms of teacher training, though there is apparently no research to date focusing on how such musicians subsequently approach instrumental teaching.

Thus from a reading of the available research into instrumental teaching it is not at all clear how popular musicians teach. Given Green’s evidence quoted above, together with anecdotal accounts (such as those in chapter 1), one might theorise a slight probability that many popular musicians will ‘subscribe to the cultural default’ (Finney and Philpott, 2010: 12) of the traditional, classical model of formal teaching.

### **4.3 Formal teaching**

In this section I describe the ‘formal’ teaching practices of my participants, including in particular their use of notation, as well as the extent to which they offered direct instruction on matters of technique and music theory. I also

present their opinions as to the value of grade exams, and the extent to which their students undertook formal assessment.

#### **4.3.1 Notation**

As I have already shown, notation was used voluntarily by several of these musicians in learning their chosen instrument; I also suggested that the stage at which notation is introduced is crucial. For these learners, reading was generally a resource that was adopted *after* their ear-based acuity was already well-developed and, perhaps as a result, none have become dependent on notation. Thus I will consider here not just the extent to which they used notation in their teaching, but also how early they introduced it to their students.

The use of notation differed widely within the group. At one extreme, Bill employed notation at the earliest opportunity; this was not just because he was steering most of his pupils towards classical grade exams, but also because he saw reading as a valuable memory aid and reference point amid the confusion of starting to learn an instrument:

Can they read music? If not, you have to do that as well...They do learn looking at music, because it helps to reinforce, because there's so much to take in at once, I think probably, to start with, to have some of it written down that you can just refer to and to remind you is probably a good thing actually. [Bill]

At the opposite extreme, Ed apparently never used *any* notation in his lessons. He only referred once to the idea of using any form of printed material:

I've got one tutor book which I bought for teaching in school which I didn't need anyway, it's got nice big chord charts in it, but it's just a little bit boring really. [Ed]

The others all used various forms of notation in their lessons, though to different extents. Carl didn't use standard stave notation, but occasionally used banjo tablature to 'sketch out' a tune for a pupil or when teaching groups in a

workshop, though in the latter case he would generally try to find a ‘secretary’ to write down what they were studying ‘cos I’m not terribly quick writing tab’. A tutor book he had written also consisted of tab as well as a play-along CD. However he was aware of a tendency for notation to establish, and in itself become, a fixed text, and he took steps to resist this. He mostly taught music based on traditional Scottish, Irish and American tunes, and used audio examples on the internet to illustrate to his students that there are no definitive versions:

iTunes is fantastic because you can call up a traditional tune, and you can have five or six versions of the same tune and it’s fantastic to be able to play, because what that does is it illustrates just how open to your own kind of interpretation it is, which is really useful I think, especially if you’re reading from a book, tablature or something, it’s quite easy to see this as kind of: “This is set in stone, that’s the way it is”. And it just *isn’t* the way it is, it’s just one person’s kind of take on it, with the sort of music that I play anyway. [Carl]

Both saxophone teachers (Graham and Helen) used some form of notation more or less from the start. Though I was not aware of the coincidence before the interviews, both had been influenced by the pedagogy of a local private saxophone ‘school’. The school’s founder (and owner) had recruited a team of saxophone teachers, of whom Helen was one, to teach a method apparently of his own devising. This was largely based on writing letter names in sequence to outline a tune, but without specifying the timing or phrasing; thus, while a knowledge of where to find the notes by name on a saxophone is essential, so is familiarity with the piece being attempted:

Basically what you’re giving them is visual aids, but they’ve got to rely on their ears, which is great cos they’ll never get enough information from the symbols they’re seeing. [Helen]

Helen was very positive about this system, not least because it allowed her to notate easily tunes that her students wanted to learn:

Often they’ve got a lot of tunes in mind already and luckily, cos I’m not having to notate every dot, it doesn’t take me any time at all to write it out for them, we can usually do it then and there. [Helen]

Using this approach she was able to recycle some of the material she herself had found effective as a learner:

Students who are technically getting really good I've gone and bought that Charlie Parker Omnibook, and notated it [in letter names] and given them the CD...: "This is the stuff that made me be able to play fast, this is what I used to love doing, have a go at that", and some of them get on with it really well. [Helen]

Thus some form of notation was generally present from the first lesson, and was consistently used to support the learning of new tunes. However she did not express any concerns about her students becoming dependent on notation; perhaps this was partly because the system only worked in conjunction with developing strong listening skills. It also seemed popular with students, promoting high levels of enthusiasm and rapid progress.

Graham did not teach under the auspices of this school, but rather had become familiar with this system of using letter names through teaching pupils who had already encountered it themselves elsewhere. He had mixed feelings about this form of notation; he did accept that pupils learning with this system could quickly become 'surprisingly fluent', but felt that not learning standard notation could be a disadvantage in the longer term:

Actually quite often they would get awesomely good, you know they could do Charlie Parker transcriptions and things and wow, this is really good, but I found that if they wanted to read [standard notation] they'd have to go back three steps and undo what they did, and it meant you couldn't put up a piece of music that they didn't know. [Graham]

Over time he had to come accept that, 'rather than fight it', this system did have merits, and he used it himself, while also teaching from normal stave notation. It was clear though that Graham consistently used one or other form of notation in his teaching from the earliest stages.

Several of these teachers had strong opinions as to when notation should be introduced to learners; Frank, Andy and Dave all spoke explicitly about this without prompting from me. Frank was very clear about the order in which his

lessons progressed, and notation was very much secondary to visual and aural demonstration. He had devised his own system of notation based on numbering the holes on a harmonica and indicating breathing rather than using letter names, and he used this to write down tunes that had already been played in lessons:

They get it written down to take home, and that's got hole one with an upward arrow and that means breathe out, the downward arrow means breathe in. [Frank]

Formal notation did follow, but was only gradually introduced to support learning rather than to lead it, and he encouraged children to produce their own graphic notation as a way of illustrating what they could already play and understand. He stressed that, particularly for younger students, reading was not central to learning to play ('those little guys, they're not really reading very much'), and was always secondary to listening and watching. Ultimately, notation skills were important, though not paramount, for the kind of musicians his teaching was intended to produce. He emphasised the enjoyment of playing by ear, whereas notation was associated with 'study':

I believe that it's really important to learn how to read and write music, and to read off manuscript, play from that kind of thing, and it's equally important, possibly more so, to be able to make it up as you go along, and sound good. For most people that I've come across it's more enjoyable to just close your eyes and blow the back off it, than study the dots. [Frank]

Dave had been thinking about how best to teach piano 'over the last ten years, which has been a solid block of teaching', and had acquired an extensive repertoire of printed materials:

I've been through loads - Bastion, Alfred, which are piano courses, John Shaw which is a piano course, I've used those, I've written a piano tutor myself with a play-along CD, which I don't tend to use very much either [laughter]. I've used the Associated Board syllabus, I've used the Associated Board jazz syllabus, and I've written out, I've got about 200 pop tunes on the computer that I've written out. [Dave]

However, the way he used notation had changed significantly over time:

Dave: The first thing I don't do which I used to do, is say: "This is a treble clef, this is the right hand, this is number one, off you go", you know.

Q: That thing there's called a crotchet.

Dave: Yeah, it's like that's what you *don't* do.

Interestingly, he saw this as a form of compensatory behaviour prompted by his own perceived weakness as a player: 'I wasn't a comfortable reader, and so I thought I just had to teach reading you know, cos it's what I didn't have' [Dave]. Experience, and perhaps increasing confidence in his teaching abilities, had led to a very different attitude to notation, in particular the way in which it was introduced; a beginner would first learn a piece 'off by heart' and only later see 'what it looks like written down'. Reading was central to his teaching practice but the point for Dave was that it followed listening rather than led to it.

Andy's first teaching job was not on his main instrument (piano) but rather on guitar (which he had learned entirely by ear), teaching BTEC courses in Popular Music and Jazz, and he commented: 'of course my interests rather neatly covered those areas, and the fact that I'd learned by ear was wholly appropriate'. Notation did not figure largely in the way these courses were run: 'there's plenty of notation kicking around, most of it's on the floor and nobody's taking any notice of it [laughter]' [Andy]. However, he took a very different approach when giving his first ever piano lesson, a 'really painful' episode which he recounted somewhat ruefully, though with considerable humour:

Andy: I think one of my worst [teaching experiences] was my very first ever piano pupil.

Q: Share this with me [laughter].

Andy: And I was so proud of what I thought I could teach him...I think he was seven years old, and I tried to teach him the most basic bit of notation, of maybe I think it was three notes [sigh]. I thought I would be able to [laughter] get him, not only to play some little things...I actually thought he'll be able to write it down! And he *was* able to write it down, but he was utterly unimpressed with that...that was not what he was there for...I'm sure it was my naivete at the time thinking that this is great, whereas in actual fact, you have the first few lessons, just - ears! Engage the ears! Clapping, playing!

This served Andy as a vivid illustration of the disastrous effect of putting notation before listening: 'it was the only ever lesson he came for [laughter] so I

can say that I categorically failed!'. He offered no explanation for initially adopting this approach, but one might suggest that his image of piano lessons had been influenced by his own, albeit not very happy, memories of tuition, which also began at the age of seven: 'when I was being taught the piano it was always to try and get me to read something' [Andy]. Like Dave, his teaching had developed over time to the point where he now tended to avoid teaching a piece straight from notation:

None of this staring blankly at a piece of paper trying to find one note: "Oh, there it is", that just seems to me...to be such a lengthy, arduous, desperate process. [Andy]

Instead, also like Dave, notation followed and supported aural knowledge:

You're going to hear all these [pieces] before you play them, so that the listening is always first, almost always first, and then...they'll see how it's notated, and that seems to have been successful because even though they're hearing it first and getting an idea of the tune in their heads they've always got the reminder on the page. [Andy]

He described his approach as 'trying to make sure that it's playable before it's readable'.

Thus the ways these teachers used notation differed widely. Some used almost no written material at all, others taught using notation from the first. Different forms of notation were in evidence, including tablature, letter names and custom-made notation. The most common attitude among the group (although not unanimous) was that reading music could be helpful as a reminder or an 'aid' but that it should follow aural learning rather than precede it.

However, it is not immediately obvious from their learning histories why these different teachers used notation in the ways that they did. One might suggest for example that Bill used notation as a matter of course because he was taught that way himself. Yet Ed also began his musical learning with formal lessons on the cello, but he went on to avoid notation completely in his

teaching. Helen did her best to avoid notation as a learner, yet used at least a modified form of notation as a normal part of her teaching. Both piano teachers reported a similar progression in their teaching, describing their earliest days of working initially from notation, before finding ways of putting listening first. Yet their backgrounds as learners were very different: Andy had regular lessons based (much to his dismay) on notation, while Dave didn't have any lessons at all, and used notation voluntarily to support his self-directed learning. These examples appear contradictory, and do not suggest any obvious link between learning and teaching. However, Dave's remark that he initially taught from notation because it's what he 'didn't have', may offer a clue to the ways learning histories may relate to teaching practice, a question which is discussed in section 5.2.

#### **4.3.2 Technique, theory and grade exams**

Studying music theory, acquiring 'correct' technique, and taking grade exams are activities at the heart of traditional classical pedagogy. All of these practices were evident to varying degrees in the talk about teaching.

The option was not available for Carl to put his pupils in for grade exams, since at the time of the interview there was no such exam for 5-string banjo. He recalled speculating with a fellow banjo teacher about what a grade exam syllabus might consist of, but had concluded that he probably wouldn't use it even if one existed; a learner would almost inevitably have to study music they didn't like or hadn't chosen, yet have to 'put all the work in' to pass an exam. He was much more in favour of students learning what they wanted to learn.

Nevertheless, technique and theory played a major part in Carl's lessons, though in different ways. Although some guidance might be required as to how to get around the fretboard in an efficient and effective way, he saw learning good technique as a process largely embedded in the tunes he taught: 'generally I use tunes as vehicles for techniques'. Technical facility therefore was mainly acquired passively, as it were, through playing particular pieces of

music rather than as a result of direct, specific instruction. However, he was more active in teaching theoretical knowledge. Although he found chord and scale theory 'quite good fun' he was aware that not everyone felt the same way, and deliberately taught this in small doses interleaved with tunes: 'a lot of people find it a bit heavy going and they sort of glaze over, and it's like ooh - music theory'. He was keen to make such theory relevant and usable as soon as possible:

Carl: I do it in very much an 'applied to the banjo' way, it's not kind of a hypothetical thing, it's very much, you know: "If you learn this set of things then it's going to help you play these tunes", I try and apply it as soon as I possibly can, or make it applicable as immediately as I can, so it doesn't seem like your wasting your time learning -

Q: Something that's abstract.

Carl: Abstract, that's the word I was looking for.

As an example of teaching 'applied' theory, he described in some detail the way he would show a student, even 'someone who hasn't done anything with chords', how to plot three inversions of any major or minor chord onto the fingerboard 'very quickly, it's not difficult'. He did this by using a system of visual anchors, mnemonics he had devised, and he demonstrated in the interview the shapes his fingers made as he played these inversions of a G major chord in order:

[First inversion] looks like a bridge, a kind of arch, so that's the way I remember it, this one [second inversion] looks like a ramp, like that, and that one [third inversion]'s a piece of piss, cos it's just a bar across, yeah? So that's the way I remembered it...Beyond that I hang all the extended chords from these, and scales in fact, from these very simple things to remember, so you've got these as a kind of root thing, then you can sort of calculate as far as you like beyond that, but you can always come back to the original thing, so there's very little to remember. [Carl]

He was also keen for the student to make these mnemonics personal to them: 'I always encourage the person I'm teaching not to take on board mine, but to develop their own'.

Frank also taught an instrument (the harmonica) for which there were no grade exams, and indeed very little syllabus material available. His teaching was consciously based on theoretical knowledge, though without necessarily making this knowledge explicit in lessons, particularly with pupils at primary school. For example, he recalled the impact of discovering the concept of modes:

That was a key moment for teaching because it opened up a whole series of books that I could write on that subject, and that was just a stage with “eureka” moments all the way along, and how it links up with the circle of fifths and how everything just ties up...The harmonica is so simple if you follow these rules, you can't play any wrong notes. [Frank]

However, the way he used this knowledge was applied to the learning of particular tunes; it enabled his students to play, for instance, a blues on a diatonic C harmonica in a series of different keys without having to bend any notes ('which is a tough thing for kids to be able to do'). Equally, awareness of music theory was demonstrated in practical ways: 'once you've played Scarborough Fair a few times then you just *know* how a minor key sounds, or a Dorian key sounds'. He was a great admirer of the Jamie Aebersold play-along CDs (see [www.aebersold.com](http://www.aebersold.com)), both as a teaching aid and as a demonstration of the principle that theoretical knowledge could and should be acquired in the process of playing music. Frank saw the role of teacher as a provider of shortcuts, particularly in terms of technique:

For example, let's take the aspect of developing good tone on your instrument. Most people would just say well, you have to play for thirty years, then it comes. Yes, but I have people who come in and if they've been playing for a few months or a year or something and they come in, when I hear the shrill little tone that they make, I give them five quick things to think about, and their tone is doubled in volume instantly. [Frank]

In teaching both singing and guitar, Ed had a choice of exam syllabi available to use, but had decided not to use any of them. He did introduce elements of music theory, although generally only if someone specifically requested it: 'as soon as you start saying that, "we'll do some theory", a lot of people just kind of get that glazed look in their eyes [laughter]'. His pragmatic

approach to theory and technique was certainly partly to do with how he saw himself as a teacher: ‘if they come along and go, “I want to be a guitar legend”...I’ll say: “well I’m not that kind of teacher, I’ll tell you that now”’. However it was also based on the kinds of pupils he tended to encounter:

I’m not kind of a teacher who’ll sit down and teach, you know, I’m going to teach you exactly how Jimi Hendrix played “Hey Joe”, cos most students aren’t up to that anyway. [Ed]

Indeed, at times he needed to explain theory of the most fundamental kind:

I had one guy in my workshop...he just didn’t know that all the notes, he thought that the notes on a guitar were different from the notes on a piano. [Ed]

In contrast, both Dave and Bill shared an overriding concern with technique. In particular Bill made it clear that, to begin with, the choice of repertoire and indeed the musical preferences of anyone learning the double bass, were rather beside the point:

The first things are technical and mechanical really, before there’s any question of playing any music you’ve got to be able to get a note out of the instrument. [Bill]

He used pictures in a tutor book as he himself had done as a beginner:

I’ve actually photocopied photographs of people playing that, you know, have good technique, just for their, to reinforce what they need to know...There are books just of exercises which are really beneficial but you have to have sufficient technique to be able to do the exercises. [Bill]

However, books alone were not enough, as he knew from his own personal experience; ‘technical things’ need an expert teacher: ‘you won’t learn it from a book!’. He was adamant that fundamental technical issues, for example: ‘how do you put your fingers down, you know, how do you hold the bow, what speed do you pull the bow across the strings’ require tuition: ‘can’t learn it yourself by

listening, you have to be shown'. He saw himself as passing on long-established technical skills:

There is a right and wrong way of doing it, and people, better people than me have spent hundreds of years figuring out how it should be done, so all I'm doing is I'm reinforcing a tradition really, technically. [Bill]

He felt he had progressed since teaching his first pupils. These initial lessons were evidently not successful, students typically having 'a couple of lesson and then they'd never come back'. This, he believed, was because the lessons were *too* focused on technique; not that this approach was inappropriate pedagogically, but most people found it too discouraging:

That quite quickly gets quite complicated and hard work, there's a lot of different things to think about at once...I possibly think that they just thought, oh this is too much like hard work, I'll give it a miss, so, I managed to put a few people off I think [laughter]. [Bill]

Since then he had learned to present information and advice in smaller, more manageable helpings: 'I want them to just focus on one thing at a time, cos there is so much to do, and that's the way to fix things, focus on one thing for five minutes'. In general, with most of his pupils and certainly with beginners, Bill based his teaching on traditional, classical pedagogy and the technical challenges that this presented. He was following traditional pedagogy in several ways; as well as using notation from the start, his pupils generally studied for classical grade exams as a matter of course; he found himself teaching the same ABRSM grade exam pieces that he himself had learned. He had in effect adopted the role of traditional, classical double bass teacher.

Dave also emphasised technique, though as with notation his attitude had changed over time. He said he:

Started off by going through the books, and thinking you have to do every page in the book, and doing scales, and then doing exams, and then [I have] ended up this end thinking it's all about technique and it's how can you play the piano is more important than particularly what you play...If

you can get the technique right they can suddenly learn a piece which looks pretty difficult, you know, quite quickly. [Dave]

He described in some detail how he would typically begin teaching a new piano student:

The first thing I do is technique and I do that in just simple exercises off by heart, and then scales, and then go through the grade 1 scale syllabus, Associated Board. But then if they look like they're getting technically all right with that, and they're looking quite comfortable, I'd go quite quickly from - I'd skip three levels of the Alfred books and pick on, like, "Ode to Joy", or "Alouette", you know, two-handed, and then from there, if they look like they're comfortable with that, I might put them in for the grade 1 exam; and then once they're in the exam system I'd give them pieces that they want to play or whatever, but stick to the scale syllabus, and then if they look comfortable...with the technique, I'd start putting them through the exams. I mean I start some pupils at grade 2, if they're older, 14 or 15 and they get through the early stuff quite quickly and they can do two-handed scales, I'd start them on the grade 2...Some people you push to grade 2 and they really don't like it, so you just pick on pieces they do like, maybe try the jazz syllabus. [Dave]

Thus Dave was quite prepared to mix the grade exam syllabus with pieces from elsewhere that his pupils liked, and to work from memory as well as notation, but said: 'I'm using the traditional syllabus, basically, working them up through that, and using that as a sort of guide'. While he did not feel himself necessarily tied to using grade exams he did accept that they followed a 'progression' and represented a 'good structure' for teaching.

Andy had a similar view, seeing grade exams as a 'consolidation, and a checklist of the skills that you've got', and he did broadly follow the structure they provided. He used the scales and exercises from the Associated Board syllabus, and in doing so he was consciously drawing on his own experience of being taught, as he had taken these 'from my own experience of learning, cos that's how it was for me, I've just taken that from how I learned really'. However, pupils were not always steered into taking exams; he said he put 'probably three or four out of ten' of his students into exams. He also introduced pieces from elsewhere, and was quite willing to overlook grades altogether: 'you'll find

that some pupils are very, very pleased to go and take exams, others really don't want to know'.

Andy hardly mentioned technique specifically, though he worked through a tutor book with more or less all beginners, particularly children, since he thought it was 'really important to cover the basic rudiments' of technique and theory. However, whereas Dave tended to teach only children in schools, Andy had a much wider range of pupils, with a variety of musical tastes and ambitions. Some were adults who only wanted 'to get a bit of fun out of the piano' and were 'really not bothered about any grades', others were children who had already taken several grade exams and now wanted to try something else. In the previous section (4.3.1) we saw Frank draw a distinction between studying 'the dots' and wanting to 'blow the back off it', and here Andy seemed to take a similar view of the potential conflict between playing purely for pleasure and studying for grade exams:

My sort of aim is to turn people out who will want to play and can carry on playing, not people who wave a piece of paper saying 'grade 7' and then never play again. [Andy]

Research opinion varies as to the effectiveness of setting 'extrinsic' goals such as studying for grade exams. Kemp and Mills warn that:

Inappropriate forms of extrinsic motivation may have the effect of reducing the child's sense of commitment and internal drive. (Kemp and Mills, 2002: 10)

On the other hand, Hallam (1995: 18) suggests that a child who does not enjoy practising 'scales, exercises and studies' might feel more motivated to do so if entered for an exam, since these are part of the requirements. Davidson and Scutt consider how studying for, and taking, exams affects the interaction between pupil, parent and teacher. They find that the experience is generally reported positively; exams:

Were seen to give feedback, structure and a sense of achievement, assisting teachers in motivating, but not dictating to, students of all abilities. (Davidson and Scutt 1999: 84)

Opinion was similarly divided within the group. Bill was the only teacher who talked of deliberately using an exam to generate motivation; one particular pupil was, he felt, prone to complacency and studying for an exam provided a valid goal for pupil and teacher alike: this was a 'sort of strategy that I've adopted really, *making* him do an exam'. Graham felt that:

Most people won't work for three months on a piece of music...unless they're doing an exam, unless they have a motivation like a GCSE performance. [Graham]

Graham in general took a similar attitude to Andy; he was willing to steer pupils towards grade exams if he thought they would enjoy and benefit from them, but saw these as an option rather than a requirement. However, he tended to put theoretical knowledge first. Unlike Carl, Graham saw 'abstract' technique and theory as a prerequisite for learning a piece:

I use techniques to get into playing the tunes more, rather than tunes to show the technique, so if you need to play in B major to play a thing then we'll work on that, if you need to. [Graham]

As an example, he illustrated how he would teach a specific piece:

I would bring in a tune, like 'Oom-pah-pah'...because a lot of schools are doing *Oliver!*, and a lot of kids know the tune...and I would say let's warm up, ok let's do a B major scale and then I might say ok, let's practise these fingerings there, and then they'd do that a little bit and then I'd say ok look at these two bars, what's that note? Oh that's a G flat, what's another name for a G flat? Er no, it's not A flat, yeah ok it's F sharp. Ok let's try, ba ba ba ba ba, see how that goes, then say ok, we've taken this apart a little bit, let's see if we can play it...I try to get them as good as possible on hopefully learning rhythms and fingering combinations and scales. [Graham]

Thus he used a combination of demonstration, theoretical knowledge, technical practice and reading notation to play a tune which, ideally, the student already knew.

Helen however did not put theory first, and indeed tended to avoid the subject if possible. She felt her own theoretical knowledge, though improving, was still lacking, and it was only through experience that she felt able to admit this to students asking difficult questions:

Helen: "Actually I haven't got a clue, if you want to know that, that's fine, that's not the way I learned, but we can work it out", and I've definitely gone away and memorised certain things.

Q: Swotted something for next time.

Helen: Yeah, definitely, I mean the one thing I'm still not up on is scales or anything like that, I just can't make it sink in...I know a lot more than I did, theoretically.

She could accept that some people preferred to understand intellectually what they were playing, though this was in contrast to her own intuitive approach:

Some people will always need...more of a crutch as in being able to read, or work it out mathematically, or however they need to work it out, whereas other people have more natural ability just to grasp it, to hear where things are. [Helen]

Thus while she was aware of her own limitations, she also saw the need to rely on reading or theoretical knowledge as a support for those who couldn't manage without. However, she made her attitude to theory very clear, and there is an echo here of her former self as a 'bolshy teenager': 'I think teaching that's too rigid, like too theory-based, can totally kill your interest, won't kill your ability but it can kill your interest in something'. Indeed this attitude partly explained her aversion to teaching grades; although there was a jazz syllabus available for saxophone, the idea of using it was alarming: 'that's what scared me, because that's going to be the theory, and the letters and the scales, isn't it?'. She had in fact bought the ABRSM jazz grades 1 and 2, and had found them perhaps closer to something she might use than she had expected: 'it's getting there, but...I don't know, it's just not got any balls, same as all their stuff you

know'. Her own experience of taking the ABRSM grade 5 on clarinet ('oh I hated it, hated it') perhaps explained her attitude; any reference to the Associated Board 'puts my back up to be honest'. She was not the only one to refer disparagingly to the ABRSM, but none of these teachers had apparently used any other exam syllabus with their students.

Thus in terms of technique, theory and grade exams we see a wide variety of practice. Grade exams were not an option for Carl and Frank, and only Bill and to some extent Dave expected to put pupils in for grade exams as a matter of course. Andy and Graham were happy to defer to the wishes of their pupils as far as grading was concerned, while Ed and Helen never had, and by the sound of it never would, put their pupils in for an exam.

Opinions were similarly divided on matters of theory and technique. Teaching an understanding of scales and chords was a normal part of lessons for most of them, but Ed evidently did not emphasise this, and Helen tended to avoid it altogether. Bill and Dave both said that good technique was the first thing a beginner should be learning and a prerequisite to playing anything; Frank and Carl concentrated on playing tunes as a way of developing facility. There was a telling difference of opinion between Carl and Graham; Carl said he mainly used 'tunes as vehicles for techniques', while Graham said exactly the opposite: 'I use techniques to get into playing the tunes'. They both, in practice, covered similar ground in their lessons. Carl's pupils did primarily learn specific pieces by ear, but also studied hand positions and practised scales and chords that would help them to play the tunes; Graham's pupils might begin learning a tune by practising the theoretical aspects required to play it, but he also gave them CDs to listen to, so they could learn it aurally as well: ideally, the pupils would already know the tune they were to learn. On the issue of theory and technique the difference between these two teachers is not so much what to study, but the order in which to do so.

Thus in terms of the extent to which the participants had adopted a 'formal' model of teaching, these findings present a most varied picture. One teacher (Bill) had almost exclusively adopted a formal mode, while another (Ed) seemed

consciously to avoid recapitulating any hint of the formal tuition he had received. There is no obvious or immediate explanation for why they drew on aspects of their own pasts in such different ways.

#### **4.4 Informal teaching**

In speaking of their own learning histories, these musicians stressed the importance of their 'informal learning practices': for example, listening to records and playing along, or watching and playing with other people. Central to my research focus is the extent to which such activities are evident in their teaching practice. As we saw in the previous section, these teachers chose to draw on various aspects of their experiences of formal tuition in defining their teaching strategies; however, their views on notation in particular would indicate that informal practices would also figure significantly in their lessons, and that these would emphasise in particular learning by ear. Of course, this practice is not confined to informal learning by popular musicians; nevertheless it is perhaps the central learning practice for such players and is almost invariably the first step with which they begin their musical path.

I have already suggested that these teachers see the order in which learning practices are adopted or encountered as crucial, and may have a profound impact on learning outcomes. Therefore I will first consider the ways these teachers report their initial and perhaps definitive teaching strategies, in other words what one might describe as their fundamental approach to teaching a new student, or indeed a new piece.

##### **4.4.1 Getting started: looking and listening**

In starting to work for his local music service, Frank was confronted by the problem of how to teach the harmonica to primary school children, some as young as five years old. Initially he was unable to find any suitable material: 'I

looked around for some syllabus I could use, didn't find any'. To some extent he simply didn't like what was on offer:

Frank: Most of the harmonica books, you've got 'Oh Suzannah' and 'When the Saints' and that kind of stuff [winces].

Q: You're pulling a face!

Frank: 'Banjo on my Knee', you know, 'She'll be Coming Round the Mountain' and all that shit; really, I didn't want to do that.

However, the problem was more profound than simply one of musical taste; given their physique and level of motor control, such young children 'couldn't access single notes, they couldn't play melodies'. He summed up the lack of appropriate syllabus material: 'I haven't found anything - if it was all done for me I certainly wouldn't bother, but I haven't found it all done, so I've got to do something'. As a result, he had 'ended up writing it'.

His syllabus emerged gradually over several years of trial and error in response to the particular set of circumstances in which he found himself, and was firmly grounded in the practical issues involved, as well as in the desire to have fun and play 'games':

Frank: I figured that on that instrument they can't play single notes, to begin with, so melody is out of the question, so we're left with chords and rhythms, so I use a thing called 'chugging', which is teaching them chords and rhythms and articulations, they just say crazy words into the harmonica.

Q: Can you give me some examples?

Frank: 'Choo chacka-choo chacka-choo chacka-choo', breathing out and then breathing in, and this is stuff I got from trumpet actually, you know that 'ta takka-ta takka-ta', that kind of thing; so just rhythms, rhythms and saying these words, you build up - some of it sounds like 'chugga-lugga chugga-lugga', it sounds like trains or whatever you like, so it's playing games with music [Frank].

It is noticeable how aware and explicit he was about where his ideas have come from; his experience of formal learning serves as source material for an aural model based on familiar sounds which are accessible to everyone:

Frank: I needed some 'chugging' stuff, so I took the idea from the trumpet and from tabla drumming as well, I'd done a tabla course.

Q: Rhythm syllables.

Frank: Exactly, I just thought this works really well.

He had also taken ideas from outside music altogether:

The breathing side of things is really important, with the harmonica particularly because you're actively breathing in and actively breathing out, so I've looked at some yoga concepts of breathing. [Frank]

He subsequently found a harmonica with only four (large) holes, ideal for young beginners, and had combined using these with a system of hand signs of his own devising to make simple melodies accessible to virtually anyone:

On the four-hole harmonicas, I get them used to the idea that *that's* hole one breathing out, breathing in [gestures, one finger moving away and towards], hole two, hole three [gestures]...I found that with these harmonicas I can give these to complete beginners of pretty much any age and so long as they know which hole that means [holds up one finger], which they can all understand, and that's [gestures] breathing out and breathing in, once they've understood that, any tune that they already know, they can play. [Frank]

Since this technique was used with familiar tunes it thus served as a way of supporting ear-based learning rather than replacing it. At first this was all done by demonstration ('of course they're all staring at you, cause they've got nothing - there's nothing written down') though as mentioned earlier this system was subsequently backed up with notation ('they get it written down to take home'), and the written aspect gradually increased as they grew older. He neatly summed up the primacy of listening as opposed to looking:

I think that the sound is the most important thing in music, really, it's much more important than the theory, if you can make a sound - I know so many musicians who can make a beautiful sound who have no idea how it's written down, I teach quite a few blind kids, you know, the sound is *it*, isn't it. [Frank]

He also stressed the need for 'product': immediate, tangible results which could generate enjoyment and motivation. Learning familiar tunes by ear was for him the best way to achieve this, and was where learning should begin:

Frank: Just playing tunes, just get them in the door, give them a bit of a product they can go home -

Q: Absolutely, saying: Mum, mum, listen to this!

Frank: Look, I can play 'Frere Jacques', extremely fast with no feeling! [laughter] But that's all right, that's a starting point.

As learners progressed they moved up to a ten-hole harmonica, and he had produced a series of increasingly challenging play-along CDs, much of which he had recorded himself. At the time of the interview he was in the process of devising a four-year schedule of work, lesson by lesson, term by term, for primary school children between the ages of six and ten, using a wide range of musical styles spanning 'blues, jazz, funk, rock...film and cartoon themes'. In establishing his teaching methods he had founded a minor empire in a nearby local authority, with nine teachers (whom he had trained) using this material to teach 500 children in 30 schools. His approach seemed not just pedagogically coherent but also effective and, apparently, instantly gratifying:

On the first lesson the head teacher came in and said: "Ooh, that's very good, how long have you been learning?" And they said: "It's our first lesson!" "What?!! Your first lesson?!!" I said: "Yes, let's play that again".  
[Frank]

Frank had devised a comprehensive set of teaching strategies aimed, initially, at getting beginners to play familiar tunes as quickly as possible, based on listening and watching, though it is worth pointing out that this was intended primarily for quite young children. In his more limited private tuition with older children and adults he was happy to use more notation and theory, provided their listening skills were already well developed.

Bill however took a very different approach. Whether starting to teach beginners or more experienced players, his attitude was the same: 'the only level you can attack on is like technique, how do you actually play the bass'. His

lessons began with pupils starting the Associated Board syllabus; since technique came first, the idea of learning a part by ear was only relevant 'when they get to that stage'. The introduction of other styles of music into lessons, while in principle being a teaching aim, was in practice also deferred:

When I get to the stage where we can actually choose what sort of music we're going to play with my pupils I'm going to suggest that we go down this road where we do a kind of hybrid thing where they don't just learn one type of music, one style of music, you know, we're going to learn some different things. [Bill]

While he had a relatively short history of teaching, that stage had evidently not yet been reached with any of his students. He made a point of demonstrating these technical issues, but there was no evidence that learning by ear or using recordings featured at all in his teaching. He certainly had experience of different models of learning in his own past, but had clearly chosen to adopt an approach to teaching that was far removed from his own informal learning, and much more akin to his experience of being taught.

None of the other teachers had devised quite so novel or comprehensive a teaching system as Frank. However, except for Bill, they all explicitly sought to put listening first in their lessons, and at the heart of their teaching. Recorded music was used by all of them as a reference and a guide whether in conjunction with notation or not. Dave seemed to use recordings the least, though he did give tapes of exercises and pieces for pupils to play along to. However, he demonstrated pieces to be learned from memory, subsequently backed up by theoretical understanding. Again, the order in which material is presented seems to be crucial; in teaching beginners, Dave sought to emphasise listening in conjunction with solid technique:

I would teach off by heart quite difficult pieces straight away, and then go back to the reading and say this is what it looks like written down, and bring the theory and the reading up behind the technical playing.  
[Dave]

Graham and Helen both gave out CDs of material for their pupils to listen to and play along with, usually backed up either with written letter names or

perhaps (in the case of Graham) standard notation. Typically these would be tunes they had worked on in the lessons, together with forthcoming tunes that pupils could familiarise themselves with in advance. While Graham described the constant effort of having to find new syllabus material - that is, new tunes - Helen was grateful for the fact that she was largely using an established syllabus, with dozens of tunes already compiled and notated, though she was also more than happy to work on tunes brought in by her students.

Ed used no written material at all, and seemed to work initially, and entirely, from CDs of familiar songs, though he would frequently adapt these, working out arrangements suitable for specific pupils. The process of teaching was also, in itself, a way of generating repertoire. He gave an example from a forthcoming lesson:

Last week we did this arrangement of 'Norwegian Wood' which I came up with, which involved playing chords and then - it's two things in 3/4...it's got strumming, 3/4 strumming, and it's got one bar of notes, of single notes, so it's kind of going from strumming to single notes, and it's about getting that fluid, being able to change from one to the other. I actually find that quite difficult [laughter] but, quite enjoyed that, and...often I come up with things in lessons, which I then...teach to other people. I came up with this...fingerpicking arrangement of 'Light my Fire', so I'm going to teach that to her, unless she says something like, I've got to do *this* for my GCSE, or she really wants to learn *this*, and then I'll say well stick on the CD. [Ed]

Although he did plan lessons, he was also happy for the pupil to take the initiative ('I'm quite flexible'), and was ready to 'make things up' or 'draw things out from memory' as required. Whatever material he was using, he tried to 'break it down' and 'make it as simple as possible for people'. Demonstration, copying and playing together were central activities: 'I constantly play, we play together, I kind of do loops, and repeat things over and over again'. Fellow guitar teacher Joseph O'Connor identifies a tendency for teachers to protect their own image as musicians in front of their students:

To be a learner in the presence of a teacher is a rather daunting prospect...the teacher can take on an almost magical aura of skill. The less you play your guitar to your students, the better player you will be

thought to be: do not touch the guitar throughout the lesson if you wish to appear a maestro. Most impressive of all is to play the piano instead.  
(O'Connor, 1987: 158)

Ed seemed to be deliberately disrupting this tendency in how he presented himself to his students. Part of his purpose in teaching was to put learners at their ease, and playing with them was one way of putting himself on their level:

As a teacher, I'm not afraid of not always looking good in front of the pupils, I'm not afraid of making mistakes, you know I don't give a veneer of the perfect musician, I give - I want them to see that I'm a developing musician just the same as they are, and there's nothing inherently amazing about what I've done. [Ed]

Ed saw the purpose of guitar playing as being largely to accompany singing, and thus learning songs was the central focus of his teaching practice:

Basically I'm best at teaching people who play the guitar, and are worried about their voice...or people who can't sing at all, I quite like getting people who literally can't sing a note to start with. [Ed]

Andy had developed an approach to individual teaching based partly on his experience of teaching group keyboard lessons. Looking for some kind of method or strategy which suited him, he approached Yamaha for some training: 'I have to say I really like their system because it is very much "ears first". This system is based on listening and demonstration, building up small excerpts of a piece initially modelled by the teacher into larger sections, and he had transferred this idea from group lessons into individual lessons:

I will generally make sure that the students have heard what it is they're about to learn to play, and not just once, but two or three times, and then I'll try and teach them little bite-sized pieces of it, two bars of music, get them to listen to this and copy...A lot of the lesson is all happening in rhythm...I do a lot of playing at the same time as the student, so we play together. Soon as they've got, say, an eight bar passage, pretty much nailed down with one hand I'll say right you play that, I'll play what the left hand is going to play, so then they're building up a picture of the whole piece, so they're aurally getting to know how this should sound. [Andy]

This method of listening and copying in rhythm, which initially avoids notation altogether, is in marked contrast to his own experience of learning from notation as a child.

Often Andy would record parts of the lesson on tape as a reminder, or to provide a piece to listen to for future study, while generally the pupil also had notation to refer to in conjunction with a recorded version. Very occasionally he might introduce a piece by sight rather than by ear, but this would be more as an interesting novelty than a normal way to approach learning a piece. Carl also recorded parts of his lessons as a matter of course, aural transmission being the essence of both his teaching and, as he saw it, the acoustic folk music tradition of which he was a part. As such, although pre-recorded versions of traditional tunes were used as a reference, he generally taught tunes that he already knew and played or, in some cases, had written himself. However, his teaching repertoire had been assembled with specific aims in mind:

I've got a set of tunes that work very well, you know, they kind of illustrate - you know, they use a particular technique more than most tunes, for whatever reasons...so I pick tunes to teach on that basis. [Carl]

Occasionally pupils would bring in tunes they wanted to learn, which he would then work out; this process was helpful for both teacher and student:

Someone came to me and they said can I play such and such a tune, and the answer was no, I'd never heard it before, but...I found a version of it...and I learned it there and then, which I think was helpful for him to see me, to see the way I'm learning it, from a record. So we did that and as a result of that I had this new tune that I thought other people might enjoy, so I've gone on to teach that to a few different people, and that's a way of me increasing my repertoire as well. [Carl]

In this instance, Carl's teaching strategy is prompted spontaneously by the pupil, and is another example of how teaching practice and repertoire is developed in the process of teaching.

These teachers all had practical experience of starting to learn an instrument simply by listening. In this sense their teaching reflected their own

ear-based learning rather than the notation-based tuition they had received. There was very little evidence of teachers and students poring over notation in what Andy had experienced as a ‘lengthy, arduous, desperate process’ (several examples of which are described in grim detail by West and Rostvall, 2003). ‘Sound before symbol’ is a well-known principle in music education: with the marked exception of Bill, these teachers had (at least by their own accounts) adapted, adopted or created ways to put this principle into practice. They had largely made it the defining characteristic of their teaching, and the starting point for their approach to learning.

However, although as teachers they emphasised the primacy of listening, they were not necessarily attempting to re-create the ways they had learned themselves. Listening may have been ‘first’ in their teaching, but they supported aural learning with a variety of other strategies (such as using various forms of notation, mnemonics or knowledge of good technique) which they had not necessarily used themselves, or which they had come to relatively late.

#### **4.4.2 Playing with others**

The experience of having lessons cannot replicate rehearsing and performing with a band, as all these teachers had done themselves. Although they all demonstrated and played together with their students as a matter of course, this is hardly informal learning. Certainly a teacher playing his or her instrument represents a model which may be invaluable to a learner, and learning from watching a teacher is in principle no different from watching a fellow band-member or a performer on stage; equally playing with a teacher may not look very different from doing so with a friend. However, the circumstances are significantly different. This cannot, by definition, be ‘peer-group learning’, since teacher and student are not peers; the teacher is in a position of responsibility, accountable for the well-being and progress of his or her students, and being paid for it. However much they seek to respond to the input of their pupils, teachers will, almost inevitably, tend to control the learning agenda, if only in an attempt to justify their perceived role as ‘teacher’. Learning

is seldom a joint venture, since the teacher will generally be significantly more experienced and accomplished than the student, and even if lessons appear to resemble rehearsals, teacher and student will probably not ultimately perform together on an equal footing.

Several members of the group commented on the importance for their pupils of joining bands and playing with other people (thus, incidentally, confirming the fact that playing with a teacher is no substitute). However, they generally saw this as being outside their remit. Bill for example could not see how he could provide this experience, nor indeed why he should:

You've got to want to do it yourself, I think. You know, I'm kind of hoping that they secretly might do that off their own back sort of thing, I can't arrange it for them, it's too much beyond my, I haven't got time, school wouldn't have it probably; all right, we're going to have our own jamming band and it's going to be after school, I've got to turn up, not get paid, for two hours, you know, they all make a racket, they should be doing that themselves really, if they're interested. [Bill]

He stressed that the double bass was a 'band instrument':

It's not something that you really want to spend all your time sitting at home playing, you want to be out playing with other people in whatever musical situation you find yourself in. [Bill]

However, while there were ample opportunities for those who were interested, he seemed to see these in terms of the classical repertoire he was teaching rather than the self-directed learning and playing he had initially engaged in himself:

There's a variety of things, there are workshops you could go to outside of school, I'd like to encourage them to do that...Once they can actually play a bit there's lots for them to do at that age, you know there's youth orchestras, there's school bands, they're all crying out for bass players. [Bill]

Though group playing appealed to Helen, it was equally impractical for her to arrange:

That's the one thing I regret that I can't do, at the moment, is I can't facilitate group playing for them, cos that's got to be the most important thing, I think, is playing with other musicians, but then I don't have the time or the premises to do that for them, so all I can really say is - there are these jam nights that go on, there are these workshops that go on, you really should go down and meet these people. [Helen]

In conjunction with other saxophone teachers, she did arrange for her pupils to play in a public concert twice a year with a live band, but was frustrated by how inadequate this was. The only teacher to organise regular band workshops was Andy, for whom group learning and playing was of fundamental importance. He saw the purpose of instrumental lessons as being to:

produce people who know how to have a lot of fun in a group of like-minded people...It's rather like going to learn to be an actor...I see it as mainly equipping people to be able take part in a group activity. [Andy]

Andy ran two groups every week, and staged regular concerts for them. However, while these bands took a familiar form, generally consisting of guitar, bass, drums and keyboards, these were very much 'taught' groups; Andy chose the tunes to be learned, largely passed down the knowledge of how to play them, and actively guided the rehearsals. Nevertheless he was positive about the success of these groups. Several of the teenagers who attended these workshops had their own bands as well, and there was some interplay between the different groups, which was welcomed:

These guys seem completely open to discuss what they're doing in their [own] groups...A couple of times I've had people come along and say "we're going to do this number in the group, but could you just check out these chords for us", and that's so nice. [Andy]

However, these links may not always be apparent; Andy was aware of the distinction for many pupils between what happened in their own bands and what happened in individual instrumental lessons: 'sometimes they don't think there's any connection at all between the piano lessons where we're learning grade 2 and they're playing in a band'. This disjunction could be pronounced, not just in terms of material but also attitude:

I do have a piano pupil who plays in a band, and I get the sense that playing the piano for him has little joy, I just don't think he's really into it at the moment, whereas I'm damn sure he's having a fantastic time with his band. [Andy]

This sounds similar to the accounts of several teachers in the group when they were younger (including Andy), thoroughly enjoying the experience of being in a band while finding lessons uninspiring.

Several of the others had experience of teaching groups of students in various forms. However, none of them offered any specific opinions as to the possible educational benefits for their students of learning alongside others. As teachers they were generally much more concerned with what one might describe as issues of 'crowd control'. Carl recalled one of his first experiences of trying to run a group workshop with a roomful of banjo players who kept playing and experimenting when he was trying to make himself heard:

I did the morning [session] and I came out, and the organiser of the day could see me, I was - my eyes were kind of doing this [makes rotating gesture] [laughter] and he gave me a *whistle* [laughter] and I thought no, I can't do this...I was only about 23, 24 years old, and they're all generally, you know, adults, and quite often they're professional people, they're doctors and lawyers and whatever, so for me to walk into a room with 35 of these people and start throwing my weight around, I struggled with, but by the second, afternoon session I was there with my whistle, you know, blowing away, and it worked, so I've got less of a problem with doing that now. [Carl]

Frank also had experience of large adult groups through teaching a blues band workshop; here the problem was rather different: 'everybody was really, really loud'. The solution was suggested to him by a fellow workshop-leader, who said:

Frank: "Ah it's very simple, what you do is you take the written music away from the horn section and give it to the guitarists" [laughter]

Q: I've heard that gag before!

Frank: It's not a gag! And he said do that...and I did it, and the volume went down by half...Absolutely serious...it did work!

However, when teaching boisterous children in schools, Frank had encountered rather different problems, which required different solutions. His skills in managing group lessons had developed over time, to the point where 'misbehaviour' was no longer such a problem:

I generally don't find it with my own lessons, I used to, I generally don't find it now, my - I've got various tools for dealing with this, one is humour, and the other main one is catching them off guard, surprise...To keep them interested, I get them standing up, get them sitting down, "right, could you two swap places"...Just to try and spark them up a bit, find something interesting, enjoyable. [Frank]

When pupils appeared to be getting restless or distracted, he had strategies which he knew would work:

I'm much better at handling it, because now I'm confident I'm going to be able to make it work...I've got quite a few set things that I know they love doing, and *they* know they love doing, so I'll bring some of those out. We might put on 'Love Me Do', they can all play the harmonica part to that and they can lark around and dance, and they can play and they can sing, they have a great time. [Frank]

He emphasised how hard he had to work to create a positive atmosphere:

I'm very enthusiastic, very encouraging, very nice with them, very supportive with them, with all teaching you have to pull them along, that's why it's so exhausting I think. [Frank]

Not everyone had found appropriate tactics for dealing with disruption, nor had the will to do so. Shortly before his interview Ed had made a conscious decision to stop teaching groups in schools. This was due to the behaviour of the children, though this varied considerably; 'some of them were nice', but others were 'very out of control...it depends on the school'. As a result, he saw these lessons as largely pointless, and echoed Bill's sentiment that 'you've got to want to do it yourself':

I pretty much said that to them, you know: "What's the point of me being here, because you're just not doing anything?"...I don't know, maybe you can coerce them into doing it, but I can't be bothered, it's not - I think, I haven't got time to do that. [Ed]

He had concluded that the whole idea of group lessons in schools was flawed and needed replacing:

It doesn't work as a system, really, I don't think. It needs to be changed really, and I know finance drives it, but in a way it would be better just to see each kid for ten minutes, five minutes, one-to-one, you get to learn more like that. [Ed]

Problems of behaviour in lessons, and the effectiveness of teaching in schools as opposed to privately, particularly in groups, are questions we shall return to in section 5.4.4.

#### **4.4.3 Improvisation**

There is perhaps one other aspect of their own learning histories which we might look for in their teaching practice. All of these musicians could reasonably be described as improvisers. All but one of them had considerable experience of playing jazz, and often other styles too (such as blues or bluegrass) which rely on the ability to play improvised solos. Ed was perhaps not a soloist, but could adapt and arrange tunes spontaneously (as they all could), as well as write his own songs.

The extent to which these teachers encouraged improvisation, and individual creativity in general, seemed to vary. Carl, as already noted, stressed the importance of interpretation, and used specific strategies to encourage the pupils themselves to come up with their own version of a tune or solo:

I always try to keep things as open-ended as possible, and quite a lot of the tunes that I teach, they might be sort of two-part or three-part tunes, and what I'll do is I'll teach a very specific part, and I'll leave one of the other parts as just a chord sequence, and I'll say look, find your way through. [Carl]

This approach rather neatly reflects both the folk and blues traditions which originally combined to form bluegrass as a genre: in part reproducing familiar tunes, while leaving space for creative input.

Frank had made improvisation a standard part of his teaching programme, and saw this as something all pupils should experience, though the lack of demonstrable ‘product’ could be a problem:

I had one parent complain about improvising, she said: “My kids haven’t learned anything, that stuff you were doing the other day - they just make it up as they go along!” [Frank]

Graham disapproved of what he saw as a ‘big mania’ for teaching improvisation, and had mixed feelings about the place of improvisation in lessons: ‘I think you need to teach the skills of improvisation but not how to do it’. He saw his role as to provide material to practice as preparation:

You want to get from there to there over twelve bars or whatever, there’s strategies...These scales will help you get through it, these scales and patterns...and rhythms you know, then the more options you have.  
[Graham]

However, he felt that ‘the whole purpose of it is as an individual expression’, and with too much specific guidance this personal creativity was lost: ‘somebody takes you by the hand and says this is how you do it...you might as well be reading a notated thing’. However, he was also honest enough to admit the limitations of his own skills and experience:

There is a point that I reach if somebody wants to *really* learn jazz improvisation I have to sort of say well I can’t do this, you’re going to have to go and I would even suggest get jazz piano lessons or something cos I can’t teach you be-bop, I can go through the book and read the phrasing and explain what it means...but I haven’t done that. [Graham]

Helen also emphasised the significance of improvisation as a vehicle for personal expression, and harnessed this in her teaching:

Sometimes if someone's come into a lesson and they're feeling hacked off about whatever it's like: "Right, well we'll play something really gnarly then and you can do a solo, get it out of your system", we do that a lot. [Helen]

Dave made little mention of improvisation, although he did occasionally put pupils in for the Associated Board jazz grades (which do involve a certain amount of improvisation as a matter of course). He also suggested that introducing improvisation might be one tactic he would use; a pupil's flagging interest might be revived: 'if you actually get them to do something different, you know play slightly differently, get a bit of improvisation'. Andy made no specific mention of improvisation or deliberately trying to encourage the individual creativity of his pupils. Bill recalled teaching one relatively advanced pupil who wanted specific help with jazz harmony and form, but in general improvising did not seem to figure in his lessons.

Ed took a slightly different view. Rather than improvisation, he spoke of personal creativity in terms of 'innovation', which he tried to encourage in the way he taught. This might take relatively modest forms:

It's not like...I'm going to write 'Imagine' or anything like that, it's just little things. Innovation to me means somebody personalising the learning process for themselves. [Ed]

There is an echo here of his remark that a teacher's job is to help people learn 'when the teacher's not there'. Ed thought it was possible to 'teach people to innovate' but 'I think it has to be taught, it's down to the teacher'.

#### **4.5 Teaching practices: summary**

All these teachers thought that playing with others was an important part of learning, but most of them saw this as being outside their remit as instrumental teachers. Several took active steps to encourage improvisation and creativity. They drew extensively on the traditional teaching repertoire of

notation, technique and music theory, yet had found various, often novel and memorable ways to put listening first in their lessons.

However, there was a remarkably wide range of teaching strategies on display. At one extreme, Bill had evidently adopted an entirely ‘traditional’ approach to instrumental teaching, based on technique, notation, and grade exams, and almost purist in its orthodoxy. By contrast, Ed never used notation or grade exams at all, and taught instead entirely by ear, through demonstration, listening to records and playing along with his students. Frank meanwhile seemed to have single-handedly created an original and comprehensive pedagogy for the harmonica, involving rhythmic games, hand gestures, and custom-made notation. While there was something approaching a consensus on the subject of putting ‘ears first’ [Andy], they had clearly arrived at a range of different conclusions as to how best to teach others to play.

## **4.6 Lesson Observations**

### **4.6.1 Introduction**

All the evidence of the teaching practices of these musicians has so far been drawn from their interviews. I now consider the audio-visual evidence provided by the films of lesson observations.

As I have already suggested (see section 2.5.2), we should not assume that watching a one-hour lesson will give us a representative picture of what a teacher does. There may be no such thing as a ‘typical’ lesson, quite apart from the impact of a researcher and a camera. Nevertheless, the lesson videos offer valuable, if limited, data; this is, after all, direct evidence of how they teach. It should be noted here however that the video record is incomplete, since (as has been discussed already in section 2.3.2) I did not film Bill at work.

I will consider the videos in two different ways. Firstly, I will examine how well the videos ‘fit’ with the interviews; that is, whether we see what we have heard about, and whether we also see other things that have not been mentioned. Secondly, I will discuss what the videos seem to reveal about the more intangible aspects of a teacher’s work which may not be apparent from their talk. I have called this ‘style’, by which I mean to refer to the personal manner of these teachers and the way they applied themselves in the lessons; this might include, for example, what they concentrate on, and how closely they focus on it, or what they seem to expect of their pupils.

#### **4.6.2 Fit**

The videos repeatedly confirmed many aspects of what these teachers said, with the activities described in the interviews duly in evidence (table 5 offers an overview). Thus, for example, several said they tried to put listening first while also using notation in much of their teaching, and therefore I was not surprised to find them doing so on film. Andy’s lesson began with ten minutes of scale practice, all by ear. The pupil performed, in total, three pieces she had been working on, all from notation; Andy then introduced a new piece initially by demonstration, using the ‘bite-sized pieces’ he had described in the interview, with the pupil copying by listening and watching. They then looked at the notated version of what they had been hearing, and both played using this. Andy also recorded a version of himself playing a new piece for which the pupil had notation already, so that she could listen to the recording in conjunction with the notation to aid her practice before the next lesson.

**Table 5: Overview of lesson observation activities**

<b>Teacher &amp; pupil</b>	<b>Notation/ listening</b>	<b>Demonstration &amp; playing</b>	<b>Pieces/ theory &amp; technique</b>	<b>Recorded music</b>	<b>Approach</b>
Andy - piano; pupil is adult female	Scales by ear, also opening of new piece, otherwise notation	Some demonstration, some playing together	Mixture, 10 mins scales, 30 mins pieces, hand technique discussed	Teacher records own performance of new piece for reference	Willing to linger on phrasing/ dynamics rather than correct notes
Bill - d. bass	not available				
Carl - banjo; pupil is adult male	No notation, all from memory or listening	Constant, teacher plays and demonstrates, some playing with pupil	Mixture, one piece, lots of chords/ scales (25 mins of each)	Pupil has recording of piece from previous lesson (though they don't listen to it)	Focuses on problems and mistakes, lots of theory
Dave - piano; pupils are 4 children of primary school age	Some playing from memory (incl. spontaneous) some from notation	Some demonstration, some playing together	Mixture, some element of theory in all four lessons, scales, ear tests, hand position, posture	One of the four pupils plays along to CD	Brisk pace, brief looks at several things, specific tasks deferred as 'homework'
Ed - guitar/ singing; pupil is adult male	No notation (written song lyrics briefly used)	Constant, teacher plays and sings throughout	Only two short extracts from pieces used	None	Extremely detailed, very little material in great depth re: voice production

Teacher & pupil	Notation/ listening	Demonstration & playing	Pieces/ theory & technique	Recorded music	Approach
Frank - harmonica; pupil is teenage boy	None (pupil is blind), though teacher refers to notation	None-teacher plays piano, doesn't play harmonica once	Almost all theory- brief extracts from pieces only as illustration	None	Extremely detailed, whole lesson is about scales/ keys/ modes
Graham - saxophone; pupil is adult female	Pieces all from notation, some improvising	Teacher plays a lot, whole tune/ sections of tune, also with pupil	Mixture, some discussion of scales/ technique, mostly pieces	Yes, CD played frequently for reference, and for play-along	They concentrate on getting through tunes playing the right notes
Helen - saxophone; pupil is adult female	Pieces all from (non-standard) notation	Teacher plays a lot with pupil, also demonstrates	All pieces, only theory is where/how to find/play notes on instrument	Yes, CD played frequently for reference, and for play-along	They concentrate on getting through tunes playing the right notes

Similarly, Graham's lesson featured a good deal of notation, as one might have expected from his interview. In this case, the pupil began by reading and playing a piece she had been practising. Graham then put a new piece on the stand, made some remarks about the notation and predicted that as soon as the pupil started playing it, she would recognise it (which she did). Thus although the pupil was initially reading the piece, Graham was well aware that her aural memory of a very well-known tune ('Bare Necessities' from *The Jungle Book*) would come to her assistance. Graham gave her a CD with several different versions of this tune, while the notated version he had given her (which came with a backing track to play along to) did not quite match her memory of the tune from the film. There followed an interesting discussion about this, since in playing the tune the pupil was relying partly on her aural memory, and partly having to override it with notation. Graham was keen to refer to recordings

throughout the lesson, and CDs were repeatedly played, listened to and discussed.

I filmed Dave giving individual lessons to four primary school children, each lasting around fifteen minutes. Only one of these lessons involved putting on a CD to listen and play along to, while notation was evident throughout, and frequently referred to. However, all the pupils played at least one piece from memory, and learning by listening and copying was clearly routine; Dave frequently played, either to demonstrate or to accompany the pupil. Interestingly, two of Dave's pupils obviously had favourite pieces they had learned in the past off by heart, and found opportunities to slip in a brief phrase or extract when Dave was busy making written notes or was otherwise distracted; thus, in these instances what appeared to be fidgeting or 'misbehaving' took the form of playing music from memory.

Helen offered perhaps the closest fit between the interview and the lesson observation. I filmed her second lesson with a novice student and, as she described in her interview, the lesson consisted almost entirely of listening and playing along to recorded music. The pupil had been given a CD of tunes featuring the saxophone, and both teacher and student agreed how helpful it was to know the tunes they were attempting; Helen stressed the importance of listening to the CD at every opportunity. There was some discussion - not surprisingly, given the pupil's inexperience - about embouchure as well as where to find the notes on her saxophone, and Helen's 'letter-name' notation was always on the stand to refer to.

In another sense, Ed and Carl also showed me lessons which matched their descriptions, in that neither of them used any notation at all. As if to confirm the importance of listening and demonstrating, Carl was playing as the filming began, frequently played solo and with the pupil, and in fact did not put down his instrument for the whole lesson. Carl's pupil had been learning by ear a tune previously recorded by Carl, and working on this took up around half of the lesson, with several attempts by the pupil and several demonstrations by the teacher. However, Carl spent the other half of the lesson on theory,

explaining and demonstrating various inversions of different chords for the pupil to copy; this was all done by ear, and the pupil came and went without a piece of paper in sight. This was not quite true in the case of Ed, since he did use lyric sheets, and on one occasion drew a diagram of the human body to illustrate aspects of voice production. He also did not use recorded music in the lesson, but frequently played the guitar to accompany both himself and his pupil singing. However, the lesson consisted of working on small excerpts from two Neil Young songs which both teacher and student knew intimately from recordings. Indeed, the precise vocal style and timbre of the original recording was the subject of lengthy discussion and was the focus of much of the lesson (see Chanan, 1995: 10-19, for an account of how recordings have become a vehicle for the transmission of such nuances).

However, there were also discrepancies between what they said in the interviews and what they showed me in the lesson observations. For example, several of them mentioned improvisation as an important part of their teaching, yet only one - Graham - showed me a lesson which involved any. Graham and his pupil spent over ten minutes discussing and attempting some improvisation over a backing track, and this was the only lesson to feature a pupil improvising. It could be seen as quite brave to risk such an unpredictable activity when one is being filmed. However, while it may have been a conscious decision by the other teachers to exclude improvisation from the lesson observations, I could hardly expect them to produce, to order, a lesson which involved every aspect of their teaching; just because I didn't see them or their students improvising didn't mean that it never happened.

Equally, Dave stressed in his interview the importance of technique, yet there was little emphasis on actively teaching it in the videos. However, there were brief references to fingering and hand positions with several of his pupils, so clearly they *had* been taught technique; I simply didn't see it happening on film. By contrast, Andy barely mentioned technique in his interview at all, and yet in the lesson observation spent quite some time discussing and demonstrating hand positions, and the precise movements required to achieve a 'gentle staccato'. To give another example, several of them said they

welcomed their students expressing particular interests or bringing in tunes they wanted to learn, yet there was no sign of this in the lesson observations; in all cases, the agenda for the lesson seemed to have been set by the teacher. There was also no obvious sign of anyone working on material for a grade exam. Given a limited amount of video evidence, it is not surprising that some aspects of their teaching should be spoken of but not observed; the interviews were also inevitably a partial view, and may not have included every detail of how, in practice, they taught.

However, there were some instances where the disparity between the interviews and the observations were noticeable. Graham for example spoke at length about the problems of teaching recalcitrant teenagers in schools (see section 5.4), yet showed me a lesson with an amenable and enthusiastic adult which took place at the student's home. This would surely have been easier to arrange, but he also told me in advance that he had found a pupil willing to be filmed who was 'quite tame'. The lesson observation revealed teaching practices very much as he had described in the interview, but Graham chose to be filmed in conditions that were perhaps more pleasant and predictable than his normal working environment.

To give a more extreme example, Frank's teaching in the lesson observation bore very little resemblance to his own account, in terms of both the circumstances and the substance of the lesson; though I asked to see a 'typical' lesson, he chose to show me a most uncharacteristic one. In his interview he went into great detail about the materials and methods he had devised for teaching groups of beginners of primary school age, and clearly this had been the essence of his career for several years. He mentioned in passing that he did have private students, but this fact was relegated almost to the status of an afterthought when considered alongside his invention of 'chugging', his use of hand signs, and his creation of a comprehensive repertoire of tunes in different musical styles which he had recorded, complete with strategies for teaching them.

In contrast, the lesson observation which he arranged was a one-to-one lesson with a ‘star’ pupil, a blind teenager with perfect pitch and impressive technical facility. The lesson, which lasted an hour and a half, consisted of a series of almost mathematical exercises, such as playing a series of pieces in twelve different keys, or in the same key but different modes, all - remarkably - using one diatonic harmonica.

Not only was this lesson utterly unlike anything Frank had talked about in his interview, it was evidently unusual even by the standards of his regular lessons with this pupil. As teacher and pupil chatted at the end of their session, Frank described the lesson as having been ‘quite a lot of bones of music, not much music’, and he vowed: ‘Next time we’ll get back to the other thing’, a comment which suggests that the normal routine of lessons had been temporarily suspended. The lesson observation offered more than just a ‘safe’ choice of pupil or environment; this was a display of talent, staged for my benefit.

There could be several reasons for this. When arranging the lesson observation, Frank remarked that he would show me this particular pupil as he knew I was interested in students who learned ‘by ear’; since the pupil was blind, this would certainly be a good example. He was clearly very proud (and fond) of this student, and said twice during the lesson that he didn’t believe there was anyone else in the country who could do what the pupil was doing; to some extent then, Frank simply wanted to show him off while, perhaps, basking in the reflected glory of teaching such a talented pupil.

There may also have been more practical reasons. Having trained nine teachers to work for him in local schools, he was doing very little group teaching at the time of the interview, and issues of access and consent were considerably easier when teaching an individual at home. Obviously, given the substance of the interview, I was expecting (and hoping) to see an example of ‘chugging’ in action with a group of boisterous schoolchildren, rather than a masterclass of note-bending and music theory. However, these were aspects of

his teaching too, and the fact that he did not fulfil my expectations served as a reminder to treat data as partial and provisional.

I suggested in section 2.5.2 that it would be possible to view the video data in terms of the physical interaction between teacher and pupil, and this perhaps deserves some brief attention here. Certainly this issue requires essentially visual data. The only teacher to mention this specifically in his interview was Ed, who remarked that the body language of a teacher could have a profound effect on a pupil. His intention was to 'set an example' through his own behaviour and 'show them that it is actually easy to do', the implication being that if the teacher can play in a relaxed, effortless fashion, this ease and confidence will be conveyed to the pupil. His physical manner was certainly calm, relaxed and positive throughout the lesson observation, and this was in marked contrast to, say, Graham who paced around the pupil's living room, picking up and putting down his saxophone, fiddling with CDs, remote controls and photocopies, and frequently disappearing out of camera shot altogether.

It had not occurred to me before watching the films, but different instruments and teaching environments imply different spatial relationships between teachers and pupils. For example, both saxophone teachers stood up to teach, and played alongside their students; the teachers using stringed instruments (Carl and Ed) sat at right angles to their pupils. Both piano teachers sat down to play, but whereas Andy had two instruments in his teaching room arranged side by side, one for him and one for his pupil, Dave had only one school piano to work on. Andy sat some distance to the right of the student, and was so far away that he needed his own copy of any sheet music they studied; when he demonstrated a particular phrase in the upper register of the keyboard, the pupil was looking sideways at a distance of perhaps two metres. By contrast Dave sat next to, and on the left of, the children he was teaching, frequently reaching over with his right hand to play the keyboard between the pupils' hands or even higher up the keyboard than the pupil. Frank spent much of his lesson at the piano, almost with his back to the pupil. Thus the spatial relationships, and physical interaction, between pupil and teacher varied considerably within the group. However, any particular effects that these

variations may have had is unclear, and further research into this subject would be helpful.

#### 4.6.3 Style

For all their talk, interviews cannot really capture the detail of pupil-teacher interaction. The videos offer a glimpse of how these teachers applied the principles they had talked about. They indicate not just the way teachers and pupils related to each other in lessons, but also the extent to which the teachers negotiated or controlled what went on. We see, in ways that an interview could not accurately describe, how these particular lessons unfolded, how much ground was covered and in how much detail.

These teachers were in all cases very clearly in charge of the progress of lessons. If there was no sign of pupils introducing their own agendas, there was also little sign of pupils becoming uneasy or bored, questioning what they were studying, or suggesting alternatives. The pacing of the lessons seemed entirely in the hands of the teachers, and their pupils seemed on the whole compliant.

Carl showed a willingness to focus intensively on particular problems in his lesson observation. During the first half of the lesson, they studied a tune which the pupil had been practising. This was clearly a work in progress, and this part of the lesson was occupied by simply trying to correct mistakes. One phrase in particular caused problems, and Carl offered some advice on technique and fingering, asserting that the pupil needed to re-learn how to play it correctly. Carl then established the goal of playing this phrase correctly five times in succession, and proceeded to count as the pupil attempted this; each mistake meant that he started counting from 'one' again. This went on for several minutes, the pupil reaching 'four' several times but never 'five'. Eventually Carl seemed to accept that this was not going to happen there and then, and recommended this goal as part of his pupil's practice regime. In the process he had asserted very clearly the level of determination, and mastery, he expected of his pupil.

Carl did not seem to have planned anything specific, however. At the start of the lesson he waited to be told what the pupil had been working on, and had to be reminded that the previous week he had been playing a harmony line to accompany the pupil (something he had evidently forgotten). Half way through the lesson there was a discussion about what they should work on next; Carl said: 'Do you want to start something new?'. With no immediate response, Carl then suggested they work on some chord theory, which the pupil responded to more strongly, and volunteered to demonstrate his current level of knowledge. At the end of the lesson he described what the pupil should practise, but kept no record of this. While Carl was very much in charge of the focus and progression of the lesson the pupil was clearly responsible in significant ways for his own learning. It is worth repeating here that Carl stressed in his interview that he belonged to a tradition of acoustic folk music, a tradition which is seen in the literature as separate from, say, rock or pop or jazz in its approach to learning. Certainly part of that tradition - what one might call 'session culture' - could hardly find its way into an individual instrumental lesson. Nevertheless, the lesson I filmed did not look necessarily different from the others. The musical culture to which Carl belonged might appear very different from, say, that of a rock or jazz musician, and he was clearly teaching 'folk' music, but his teaching strategies could just as well have been applied to learn rock or jazz tunes.

The teachers did largely direct the course of the lessons, but there were examples of resistance. Ed used hardly any material; in an hour, teacher and pupil only studied brief extracts from two songs. However, they studied this in great detail; indeed, they spent 35 minutes working on the opening four lines of the song 'Heart of Gold' by Neil Young, and much of that time working on a single line, "It's these expressions I never give", which at one point the pupil repeated seven times in succession, accompanied by Ed on guitar. The focus of the lesson was entirely on voice production, and the ways that posture, breathing, facial control and awareness of the larynx could change the minutest detail of vocal timbre. Ed demonstrated seemingly endless variations of vocal tone and quality, and discussed the physical actions involved, and the pupil made his own attempts to copy. Interspersed with this intensive repetition and

concentrated listening, pupil and teacher discussed their favourite singers, and the importance of emotion, self-awareness and experimentation while practising and performing. These discussions were generally concluded by the teacher steering the pupil back to the task in hand.

While the pupil seemed to have great respect for Ed, and was initially willing to follow his guidance, there came a point, after around half an hour spent largely repeating the same line, when the pupil seemed to baulk and suggested that, rather than continue, ‘I really need to go away and work on it’. Ed overruled this suggestion however, and they spent several more minutes working on the same phrase, before moving on.

Ed gave the shortest interview, and despite considerable prompting offered only limited detail about his teaching practices. As a result I had no particular idea what the video was going to show. Nevertheless, his talk suggested a relaxed, easy-going approach; claims that he wanted to make things ‘as simple as possible’ for his pupils, and that he particularly enjoyed teaching beginners or those who could barely sing at all, did not lead me to expect the level of concentration, attention to detail and high expectations evident on film. This lesson observation thus served as a good demonstration of how the videos could inform data from the interviews.

Dave’s lessons, all four of them with primary school children, were very different. These were brief, brisk episodes which involved a variety of tasks, none of which were lingered over. There was some modest evidence of practice having taken place, and some new work was introduced, but there was also an assumption that ongoing tasks would be touched on lightly and returned to the following week. Much of Dave’s teaching consisted of going over familiar ground to effect some improvement, while ‘completion’ was deferred to some future date. One drawback of keeping these bundles of tasks rolling along was the need to track who was supposed to be doing what, and Dave frequently broke off from active ‘teaching’ to write in notebooks or shuffle through paperwork. Thus despite the fast pace and light touch of these lessons, the pupils still found the opportunity to fidget or be distracted. The camcorder set up

next to the piano proved an irresistible attraction. Indeed, while almost all the adults being filmed studiously ignored the camera once the researcher had left the room, all of these children stared directly at it, talked to it and, in two cases, waved goodbye to it as they left. The intrusive nature of a camera is perhaps better represented by such frankness than by adult composure and apparent unconcern.

However, while all of Dave's pupils showed minor symptoms of restlessness, one of the four in particular was keen to find distractions, and on occasions did her best to resist what he was teaching. On attempting the opening of a new piece which she could not immediately play, she announced that it was hard, she couldn't do it and she didn't like it. She was also reluctant to try changing her hand position as the piece required, and as demonstrated by Dave. Nevertheless, Dave to some extent stood his ground by saying: 'Well, I want you try that one for next week', although he then moved on to something more immediately enjoyable.

These teachers created very different environments for their pupils. Helen's lesson was perhaps the liveliest. A CD was frequently running, she was constantly clapping, counting out loud and playing, and there was a good deal of chat and laughter. She was full of encouragement and praise for how well her pupil was progressing (in only her second lesson), and spent very little time dwelling on mistakes. Her lesson was based almost entirely on learning a series of melody lines for particular tunes, and the only digressions were about how to produce the notes required for the tune at hand. Andy's lesson was altogether a more serious affair, and the pupil spoke very little. It was also much more varied musically, featuring some technique, some theory, some aural copying, and some reading. The pieces were also in a variety of musical styles. Andy was prepared to be quite thorough; though willing to overlook simple mistakes (such as the occasional wrong note) he concentrated on the more expressive aspects of playing, and went into some detail concerning phrasing and dynamics. The lesson had evidently been carefully structured, with scales played by rote at the start, and a new piece, which Andy knew his pupil would enjoy, left till the end.

#### 4.6.4 Lesson observations: summary

If the interviews offered a partial, restricted view of teaching practices, so did the videos; on occasions these perspectives overlapped, at other times they diverged, but we should not make too many assumptions from how well the video data fitted with the interviews. During his interview Dave recalled being observed (and assessed) as a teacher some years previously, and gave a simple but telling example of the effect such investigation could have. Though on that occasion too he was able to choose the pupil for observation, the experience was still uncomfortable: 'I made a mistake in trying to teach him something new! [laughter]'. He argued that teachers under observation would inevitably be cautious and 'go over old stuff' for the benefit of the observer, even though that was 'not really teaching'. Ironically, during his lesson observations Dave tried some ear tests with one of his pupils (not very successfully), and despite insisting that they had done such tests before, the pupil denied this, claiming: 'Never done that with me'. Though this example of a teacher trying something unfamiliar appeared inadvertent, Dave's point may still be valid, and there may well have been an element of caution at work in several, if not all, of the lesson observations. The participants chose the circumstances for the filming and no doubt they will, as far as possible, have selected safe ground, in terms of the students, the environment for the observation, and the focus of the lessons. Perhaps partly as a result, the pupils generally seemed receptive, the teachers positive and encouraging, and everyone involved seemed to be enjoying themselves. We surely see these teachers, and their pupils, at their best.

Nevertheless it is still useful to see on film activities we have only heard described, as well as those that had not been mentioned. There was ample evidence of pupils learning by ear and working from memory as well as from notation. There was also a lot of music to be heard; certainly the pupils played a good deal, but so did the teachers, whether in demonstration or accompaniment, and if the teacher did not offer a musical model, then a CD or tape did. The lesson observations offered no more than a brief glimpse of how

these teachers work, yet provided rich data which certainly supplemented and at times contradicted their verbal accounts.

#### **4.7 Teaching: conclusion**

At the start of this chapter I suggested, on the basis of no more than anecdote and the admittedly research scant literature available, that one might cautiously expect popular musicians to overlook their own learning practices and adopt traditional, classical pedagogy. Evidence from the present study suggests that this is not generally the case. On the whole these teachers had not attempted to replicate their own experience of being taught, nor had they tried to recreate the circumstances of their informal, self-directed learning. Rather, they had taken elements from how they were taught *and* from how they learned, and combined them with their own imaginative strategies, and with ideas from elsewhere.

There were exceptions to this; Bill did in fact teach very much as he had been taught, and more or less completely disregarded his own informal learning in his approach to teaching, while Ed seemed to have taken virtually nothing from his experience of formal tuition to use in his teaching. All the others drew widely on their own learning histories in the ways they taught. Their selection of teaching materials was often eclectic, and most of them had assembled their own repertoire, consisting primarily of collections of songs or tunes. They were also very flexible, and seemed willing to accommodate specific requests from their students.

Perhaps most significantly, listening was seen almost unanimously as the primary activity in their lessons, the single most important aspect of their teaching and their focus in teaching both a new student and a new piece. Aural learning was not always used in isolation though, and was supported by a variety of memorisation strategies, hand signs, mnemonics and various forms of notation. Recordings were also widely used during the lessons themselves, as an aural guide for learning a new piece or as accompaniment for pupil and

teacher, as well as given out for later, solitary learning by a pupil or as a reminder of what had gone on in the lesson. Teachers demonstrated for their pupils to copy, often in novel and memorable ways. Knowledge of music theory was taught as a matter of course by most of them, though not all, and some laid particular emphasis on good technique. Grade exams were an option for several, though most deferred to their pupil's wishes on whether to take them. These teachers were apparently not employing a particularly 'formal' or 'informal' approach; rather they each seemed to be integrating elements of both to create their own, unique teaching style.

Evident in the interviews was the sheer variety of strategies employed by these teachers, and this impression was reinforced by the videos. The films demonstrated, even with such a small sample, how differently these teachers approached learning, and what different standards they set: they all seemed to direct the course of the lessons, yet some were meticulous in their attention to detail, while others overlooked mistakes and problems; some were clearly adopting long-term strategies, others aimed for instant gratification. These comparisons are of course only available from looking across a range of data from different teachers; one would not necessarily expect individuals to describe themselves in such terms since, as we have already noted, most teachers work in isolation and have no one to compare themselves to. The videos did not 'contradict' the interviews; rather they offered new data which helped to inform the impression given by talk alone.

Despite such a range of teaching strategies, there is also much common ground; many of these musicians reported similar experiences as teachers, and had arrived at similar conclusions. Yet, considering how much these musicians had in common as learners, there remains a series of nagging discrepancies in the data regarding their teaching practices. They are all, in principle, 'popular musicians', yet had ended up teaching in very different ways. Carl and Ed seldom, if ever, presented their pupils with notation; Bill and Graham almost always did. Carl saw learning tunes as a way of learning technique; Graham took exactly the opposite view. Bill and Dave, while having very different learning histories, both saw technique as the most important thing they could

teach. Perhaps the most blatant disparity between learning and teaching is the example of Bill, who had been so excited by, and committed to, informal learning as a teenager, yet went on to completely reject any attempt to incorporate such practices into his teaching. This example serves to highlight the fact that this group's teaching practices seem to bear little obvious or direct relation to how they learned. As I suggested earlier in this chapter (4.3.1), it is possible to find many instances where an apparently similar learning history results in very different teaching practices; conversely, very different learning experiences can produce quite similar teachers. Some suggestions why these teachers taught as they did are considered in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5: BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

### 5.1 Introduction

We have seen, in the previous two chapters, that the ways these teachers taught were not necessarily a reflection of how they were taught themselves, nor of how they learned away from lessons. Instead, they seemed to have assembled their own idiosyncratic collections of teaching practices from a range of different sources. In this chapter I consider the beliefs and attitudes of these teachers and I include a range of issues, such as how they see themselves as musicians and teachers, how they see their own pasts as learners, and how they regard their students. In examining these questions I offer some suggestions as to *why* they teach as they do.

### 5.2 Learning histories

Although the learning practices of these musicians do not relate in a direct or obvious way to their teaching practices, it seems almost inevitable that there must be some relationship here between learning and teaching, if only in the broadest sense. Certainly, there is ample literature to suggest the relevance of personal biography to the working practices of teachers (see, for example, Thomas, 1995b; Goodson, 1992a). Indeed, many researchers question the impact of statutory teacher training on classroom teachers, suggesting rather that personal experience and judgement are more profound influences on teacher behaviour:

Socialization into teaching is largely *self-socialization*; one's personal predispositions are not only relevant but, in fact, stand at the core of becoming a teacher...teachers say that their principal teacher has been experience; they learned to teach through trial and error in the classroom. They portray the process as the acquisition of personally tested practices, not as the refinement and application of generally valid principles of instruction. They insist that influences from others are screened through

personal conceptions and subjected to pragmatic trial. (Lortie, 2002: 79-80)

Lortie (*ibid*: 79) goes on to argue that, where teaching is concerned, there is no body of knowledge which amounts to the ‘state of the art’ and which can be passed on as it is in other professions such as law or medicine; rather, teachers acquire ‘tricks of the trade’ (*ibid*: 77) through personal experience. If this is true for classroom teachers who receive training in pedagogy and work under the auspices of an established curriculum, it is likely to be even more relevant for instrumental teachers, who often enter the profession with little or no training in pedagogy (Baker, 2006: 39) and generally have something approaching a free hand when it comes to adopting a syllabus.

Therefore it seems likely that the choices instrumental teachers make about how and what to teach are, in some way, expressions of their own experiences and beliefs about learning. In the present section I consider the link between the learning histories and the teaching practices of the teachers in this study, using what they say about their own pasts as a way of illuminating what they do in the present.

### **5.2.1 Learning: Bill and Frank**

Firstly I focus in some detail on two particular teachers, Bill and Frank. A comparison between the two is helpful for the purposes of illustration since their learning histories are in many ways quite similar, yet their teaching practices very different.

Frank had a long and not particularly successful history of music learning at school, mainly on the trumpet: ‘I had private lessons in school and played in the orchestra and sang in the choir and all that stuff, learned to read music’. He recalled his trumpet lessons as being ‘dry and dusty’, and ‘hated’ the tutor book he was expected to study; what he was invited to play in the school orchestra ‘didn’t sound like music’. He didn’t get the chance at school to be what he really

wanted to be, namely a jazz trumpeter. It was only several years after leaving school that his interest in playing music again was energised by (repeatedly) seeing the film 'The Blues Brothers', and listening to a recording which accompanied the film:

That had lots of harmonica on it, and I just thought: "That is such a sexy sound, I really want to do that", and they were playing this bluesy jazzy stuff that I wanted to do but could never do on trumpet. [Frank]

This led him to investigate 'where the music came from', and he tracked down early recordings of 'Sonny Boy Williamson and Sonny Terry and all those guys'. In doing so, he came to a conclusion: 'I just thought I have to get a harmonica, it's very simple, the road ahead is now clear'.

Meanwhile, Bill volunteered for the cello when he was 'about eight or so'; as far as he could remember, this was just out of 'curiosity'. He took both shared lessons at school and individual lessons with a private teacher, and studied for grade exams: 'I think I got up to about grade 5 on that, did the theory exam'. However: 'I pretty soon figured out that the cello wasn't the instrument for me'. As we have already seen, he was aware that playing the cello 'led into an orchestra', and while he did play in youth orchestras, he had reservations: 'that was, you know, that was good, but it wasn't music that I liked listening to'. He really wanted to be playing punk rock, and as such he abandoned the cello and started playing electric bass:

I think a friend of mine got one, my best friend who lived up the street from me, cos he wanted to play in a band, and I picked it up one day, and decided within about ten minutes that I could play this, this was quite do-able, so [laughter]. [Bill]

He emphasised both learning by ear and the excitement of making up one's own music:

At first...I just used to listen to records and play along, pick the bass line out, and play along with it. I think my friend he bought a tutor book, one of these 'learn to play rock' books, with a flexidisk in the front of it, so I looked at that, but that was in tab, and I wasn't, I just didn't see the point of

learning tab, cos the music the band I played in obviously, you never read any music you just made it up didn't you, you write your own songs, that was the exciting thing about it. So I didn't bother, at first I didn't bother learning to read music on it, for it specifically, I just learned by ear really. [Bill]

Similarly, Frank began 'tootling around' on the harmonica without having much idea of what to do. He 'went to see some bands, getting more into music, and saw some people playing harmonica live, and thought aha, this is interesting'. In the process he saw a well-known blues harmonica player, which was a revelation:

It was a bit like the scene from The Blues Brothers, I see the light! I see the light! I had to go and speak to him, and I booked some lessons with him. [Frank]

While the 'lessons' were of limited help in practical terms, the experience was 'very inspirational': 'I went out and bought some other harmonicas, I think he lent me a record, so I started playing - and then I just really didn't put it down at all'. Within a year of starting to play he answered an advertisement for a harmonica player, and found himself playing in a band, a situation in which 'you're forced to learn'. He described using his ear to pick out suitable blues riffs from recordings and emphasised how motivated he was: 'I was driven to achieve my aims, and my aim was to be in a band, be on a stage'.

Frank attributed his ability on the instrument to 'doing it a lot', and regarded listening, experimenting, having periods of tuition with various teachers and playing in bands as being all 'parts of the picture, I can't say which is more important'. He described his playing and, subsequently, teaching career as 'very eclectic':

I've been having to fit the harmonica into a huge range of different situations, completely different situations, it's been a very wide, a very broad learning. [Frank]

Bill also described a powerful urge to master the electric bass. After his punk band split up, his bass guitar playing continued to develop as a result of

determined practice. In particular, the distinctive sound of the bass player Mark King from the band Level 42 was a major inspiration: 'how on earth is he doing that on the bass, I want to do that, I've got to find out how to do that'. His new band was heavily influenced by listening to 'proper "muso" music', and although initially this was far out of reach of their abilities, his musical aspirations - based on learning by ear - clearly drove him on:

Bill: It was way, way beyond - you know what I mean, don't you? [laughter]

Q: I know exactly what you mean!

Bill: Way beyond what we could accomplish, but it didn't put us off you know, and I spent hours and hours and hours listening to these Level 42 records, getting it off, and I did actually do it.

Although he went on to be a full-time double bass player in musical theatre, he was very aware that the skills he needed for his career could only have developed through learning in different ways:

Right from that first gig in the theatre, I just realised I could do that, there was no problem about it...cos I had experience in the orchestra of watching a conductor, that's quite important, and reading music obviously, you know, I can do that. So it's the two things, but it's having the rhythmic feel for show music, it's not the same as orchestral playing in the rhythmic sense, you've got to be a band player with an orchestral mentality almost, you know, it's a combination of things. [Bill]

The determination to master his instrument transferred from electric to double bass. At around the same time as buying an instrument, he heard a recording of Ludwig Streicher playing solo double bass, which was to prove another major inspiration: 'again, it's this thing about, ooh I want to be able to do that, ah, that's such a nice sound, gorgeous'. However, his initial attempts to emulate the sound of Ludwig Streicher were not a success: 'I got a bow, and I was trying to fiddle about, making a terrible sound'. He adopted the same strategies that had seemed to work for electric bass: 'watching other people play', 'looking at photographs in a book, and listening to some records'. However, this approach no longer served; double bass proved 'a lot harder'. He seemed driven by his own dissatisfaction:

Never really been happy with what I could play, I'd just completely stopped bothering about bass guitar at all, I didn't do any practice on it, I wasn't interested in modern styles of bass guitar playing or any of that caper any more, it was just all double bass, really was interested in the sound of it and how could I get better at playing it. [Bill]

As such he had consistently looked for professional help to improve his playing, and after passing Grade 8, had sought out increasingly prestigious teachers.

Thus we can see that the learning histories of Bill and Frank are in many key respects quite similar. They both had a history of formal tuition which involved learning (that is, being taught) instruments and playing music that were not what they wanted at the time, and which were abandoned. Each had moments of revelation when they heard a particular *sound* that engaged them, in the process realising what musical path they should be taking; they pursued their goals with great energy and commitment. They both started learning their chosen instruments by ear from records, but they also sought tuition to help them, and both believed that how they had ended up as musicians was the result of a wide range of influences and experiences. One might imagine, if learning histories do indeed have such an influence on teaching, that these similarities between Bill and Frank might result in broadly similar approaches to teaching.

### **5.2.2 Teaching: Bill and Frank**

Frank's teaching career began when a teacher with whom he was having lessons persuaded him to take over the running of a series of evening classes on the harmonica. He was explicit about how unprepared he was: 'I really didn't know what I was doing at all'. Nevertheless, he taught the class for six months before he received some helpful advice from a sibling on the subject: 'My sister said: "Don't you think you ought to go to college before someone finds out? [laughter] That you don't know shit?"'. He was almost unique among the group in that, while being aware of his own ignorance, he undertook training

specifically in how to teach: he enrolled on ‘a two-year course in how to run music workshops’ at Goldsmith’s College in London:

I realised I needed to do that, so during that course, which was absolutely brilliant...we were given all these different games, and warm-up games and stuff, and things to try out, projects and placements and assessments and all that, and I steered it all towards the harmonica. [Frank]

This was to prove invaluable to his teaching. He subsequently took the ABRSM Certificate of Teaching, among a variety of other training courses, before returning to Bristol and embarking on what was to become his creation of a complete teaching syllabus. As I have already described, this consisted of a system of hand signs, rhythmic vocalising he termed ‘chugging’, and a series of personally recorded CDs (see section 4.4.1).

I would argue that, throughout the account of his teaching, Frank’s own skills and experiences as a learner were apparent. The initial emphasis in his teaching was on listening and performing from the start and his approach was built, not just on the physical realities of what his pupils could do, but also on the psychological realities of what they would enjoy. A wide range of musical styles were on offer. Although in later life this emphasis on listening, performing, variety and, above all, enjoyment was exactly his approach to musical learning, it was very different from his own initial experiences of tuition.

However, not all of Frank’s teaching was drawn from his later, more successful learning; the notation and theory which first figured in his trumpet lessons re-appeared in his harmonica teaching albeit in a more flexible form, and now preceded by ear-based learning. He also found a constructive role for the tonguing and breathing patterns he learned on the trumpet, as these were re-imagined as ‘chugging’ and combined with ‘different games’ and ‘things to try out’ - ideas he brought from his course in workshop skills.

Frank himself was very much aware that his own past had had a profound influence on the way he taught. Although the different worlds of classical, notation-based learning and that of learning and playing by ear are often seen

as conflicting and mutually exclusive, he was conscious of having a foot in both camps: 'now I believe that both are essential...I think the two forms of my own learning have given me that'. Frank seemed to have been able to resolve different elements in his own 'broad' learning experiences and incorporate them into a holistic approach to teaching in a satisfying, enjoyable and successful way. In the process of describing them in his interview he provided a comprehensive example of a teacher drawing on their musical background to create their own pedagogy.

Meanwhile, although he had occasionally taught more advanced pupils, Bill had mostly taught beginners, and it may be useful to quote at some length (although edited) his answer to the question: 'Can you give me some idea of how you teach?':

It really is a case of getting a note out of the bass, getting the hand to hold the bow in one hand and the finger to press down hard enough to get some notes, and that is hard work to start with, if you're only little, even with a scaled-down instrument they still find it hard to press the strings down hard enough to get the note, you know to sound pure...I start by saying that they're going to use the bow to start with, I don't start by pizzicato which would actually be easier I think...but with "pizz" you don't actually hear the notes so well, the intonation...and that's very important when you're learning, you need to learn where to put your, your hand down to get the right, get it in tune sort of thing. So I start with the bow...it's all, start with your hand-shape really on the neck, how is it, cos if it's wrong, you won't be able to move your hand up and down the neck in an efficient way and you won't be able to play the things that you want to play. So where, yeah, how, what, what, you know, how to press the notes down, where the notes are; I'm assuming that these, you know, can they read music? If not, you have to do that as well. [Bill]

Bill seemed somewhat overwhelmed himself with how much there was to do for a novice double bass player, and his account does not reflect his own first attempts with the electric bass: 'I picked it up one day, and decided within about ten minutes that I could play this'.

His approach to teaching may have had more to do with his memories of taking up the double bass ('it's a lot harder') but may also, perhaps, be a reflection of how he was taught the cello. He himself would have preferred to

teach the Trinity examination syllabus which he said was 'a lot more interesting for double bass', but due to the close links with the Associated Board in the schools where he taught he - somewhat reluctantly - used their syllabus, and steered his pupils towards their grade exams. Ironically, he found himself teaching the same pieces he himself studied 15 years earlier:

I did Associated Board when I was studying, and...the syllabus isn't very good I don't think, it's all, it's pretty dry to be honest, there's not much choice, and I looked at the Associated Board again and it's the same pieces [laughter]. [Bill]

There are marked similarities between his experience of tuition and how he went on to teach. This was his description of what his cello lessons were like when he was a boy:

Lessons at school, half an hour a week...and a teacher who always demonstrated, she had a cello and she used to play along with us or demonstrate how things ought to sound, and I imagine it was, I think we were probably studying for one of the grade exams. [Bill]

By the sound of it, this is very similar to the lessons he subsequently gave.

It seems then that significant parts of Bill's history as a learner did not figure in his approach to teaching. When explicitly asked if he thought it was important for his pupils to be, for example, 'learning things by ear, by listening, by picking out the bass line in a piece', he replied: 'er, yeah, when they get to that stage'. He spoke of himself listening to music that was 'way beyond' what he or his band could accomplish, but at the time this did not put him off: 'we couldn't begin to get near it, but you just carry on don't you and do your best'. In fact, Bill acquired considerable technique on the electric bass, and subsequently on the double bass, by persistently trying to copy music that, at the time, was initially unplayable. For himself as a learner, on both double and electric bass, technique was (at least initially) acquired through the practice of trying to play real music; for his pupils however, technique had to come first, 'before there's any question of playing any music'. Thus Bill's approach to teaching appears to be based on an idea of sequential learning, whereby the

'correct' way to play comes first, and selected musical tasks, graded for 'difficulty', follow. Technique is abstracted from music, and becomes almost a symbolic activity 'detached from any meaningful context' (Resnick, 1987: 15). Even when music did appear in his teaching, it was in notated form and seemed to be based on the same classical repertoire which he had abandoned as not exciting or relevant while learning the cello. He was no more than lukewarm about studying for grade exams as a learner, yet he adopted the same exam syllabus to use as a teacher.

His own background as someone who began learning music that excited him by playing along to records, joining bands and playing in public as soon as possible was simply irrelevant:

Bill: Whichever way you slice it they are going to have to go through the same hoops that you did when you were learning I think, you know.

Q: So do you feel like you're putting your pupils through the same hoops that you went through?

Bill: No I don't, cos I learned - a lot of what I learned about music I learned on the job, as it were, you know, playing in bands and things, and they're all, they are too young to do that, really, yet, so.

Bill seemed to have done exactly what Green (2002) predicted such musicians might do; he had overlooked all his own 'informal' learning practices and adopted a traditional, classical model of teaching, albeit one that was familiar to him from his own experience of being taught. Frank however took elements from throughout his learning history, although his teaching was firmly based on listening and playing first.

The learning histories of Bill and Frank do not run perfectly in parallel; for example, while Frank learned the harmonica through a wide variety of methods, Bill learned the electric bass more or less solely by listening, copying and performing, and subsequently relied much more on tuition to develop on the double bass. It also seems from Frank's account that a major influence on his ability to create original pedagogy was the course in workshop skills he attended; if this did not directly encourage him to draw on his own past as a source of ideas it certainly facilitated the process. Nevertheless, it would appear

that they had a great deal more in common as learners than they did as teachers. How might we explain the very different relationships between their learning histories and their teaching practices? How can such similar histories produce such different teachers?

There is a sense of dislocation in Bill's account between his past as a learner and his present as a teacher. Bill had a much shorter history of teaching than Frank, and far less experience; at the time of the interview he had only a handful of pupils, and had taught for only a few years, as and when his playing schedule allowed. Therefore it is perhaps tempting to suggest that, given more experience and time for self-reflection, he will start to incorporate more of 'himself' (complete with 'informal' past) into his teaching. However, this rather implies that by adopting classical pedagogy he must be 'doing it wrong' and that his teaching will inevitably be strengthened by including other elements from his own learning history. This may not necessarily be the case; if he has found a way to teach that suits himself and his pupils, perhaps he need look no further. Nevertheless, Bill's initial stance as a teacher may well be subject to fundamental change, as it had been for Andy and Dave; further research into the ways teachers develop over time would be welcome.

The kind of pupils which a teacher encounters can obviously have a profound effect on teaching strategy; one would not necessarily expect the same approach towards a six year-old and a teenager. One might also argue that the relative lack of syllabus material (and perhaps the absence of grade exams) for the harmonica left the way open for Frank to create a pedagogy to suit his situation, while the weight of established pedagogy for double bass is imposing for any player or teacher. There may well be some truth in this. Perhaps it is understandable that technical issues should initially govern Bill's lessons; it would appear easier in the first instance to produce musical sounds on a harmonica than on a double bass. However, Frank also encountered fundamental problems of technique in teaching very young children who were unable to access single notes, yet he did not respond by insisting that they keep trying until they could play as the existing syllabus (and traditional pedagogy) demanded. In fact, just the opposite: he wrote a complete syllabus to

accommodate what they *could* do easily and enjoyably.

Moreover, it is clearly possible to learn the same instrument in different ways. Finnegan observes that:

Organs, pianos and electronic keyboard instruments could be played and learnt in various ways, and the same applied to the many other instruments which appeared in both “classical” and “popular” contexts, like brass, clarinets, flutes, and the voice. It seemed to be social convention and vested interest rather than technical instrumental requirements that led to the specific learning and performance modes attached to particular instruments. (Finnegan, 1989: 141-142)

I would argue then that these two teachers were not just responding to the circumstances they found themselves in: they each made an active personal choice to teach in the way that they did. I would also argue that even Bill was not ‘teaching as he was taught’. The *format* of the lessons which he had received, and subsequently given, sounded very familiar, yet there is a crucial difference; throughout years of tuition with a series of teachers, he never felt that he found the technical advice that he really needed. He had gone on to emphasise in his teaching precisely what he *didn’t* get from tuition, and what he couldn’t learn on his own. This may give us a clue as to the kinds of teachers these two have become.

One question I asked in the interviews is particularly relevant here. When asked whether they had any regrets about the way they learned, I received very different answers, which I quote at some length:

Bill: It's taken years, years longer than it should have done really, if only x and y had happened.

Q: Yeah, one question I meant to ask along the way and I forgot, was: do you have any regrets about the way you learned?

Bill: Oh god, yeah.

Q: Do you?

Bill: Yeah.

Q: What are they? What do you wish you'd done?

Bill: I wish had started on double bass, first of all, somebody had come into the room and said do you want to learn the double bass when I was eight years old, and I would've said yes, you know...I think if I had

started on the double bass at that age at school I wouldn't have given it up, because the two things are completely complementary, electric bass and double bass, and it would have been pretty obvious to me that I could have carried them both on.

He subsequently made a related point:

Bill: I've wasted a hell of a lot of time, yeah, yeah, no, it's true [laughter]. I mean there is still stuff that I just don't know, actually, that I would have learned if I'd gone through more conventional music training.

Q: Do you wish you'd had a more conventional music training?

Bill: From that point of view yeah, definitely, cos I haven't got the time now to go back to go into all this stuff that I kind of skipped over or didn't learn in the first place.

When Frank was asked the same question, his response was rather different:

Frank: [7 second pause] If it had been done - I would much prefer to have just learned jazz from the start, which could have happened, it could have happened, it had been around for 70 or 80 years at that point, when I started playing, if I'd been living in America that might well have happened, here it didn't happen. I don't particularly regret that it didn't happen because I've come to it later, and that's the way it goes, so I don't exactly have any regrets; er, okay if I'd - good teaching is just a short-cut, you'll get there in the end if you live long enough, to the same place probably.

Q: Do think that's true?

Frank: Well, all right, say for example, let's take the aspect of developing good tone on your instrument, most people would just say well you have to play for thirty years, then it comes, yes, but I have people who come in and if they've been playing for a few months or a year or something and they come in, when I hear the shrill little tone that they make, I give them five quick things to think about, and their tone is doubled in volume instantly, so if I'd have had as good a teacher as I think I am at that point I can short-cut - I would have benefited from having a great harmonica teacher.

Seven seconds is a long time to think about a question, particularly when compared to Bill's instant 'Oh god, yeah'. Frank, reflective and measured, was clearly more positive about his own past. Though he might have wished for the 'short-cut' that teaching can offer, as well as the chance to play jazz, he stated twice that he had no real regrets: 'that's just the way it goes'. Bill on the other hand seemed to wish he had had a fundamentally different learning history,

though whether he would, in fact, have carried on playing the double bass alongside the electric bass as he imagined is surely a moot point.

I believe the ways in which they 'valued' their learning histories is central to how these musicians approached teaching, and can help explain the differences between them. Bill did give at least some credit to his informal past; he described 'playing in bands and rhythm sections early on' as being 'absolutely invaluable', but saw neither the possibility, nor the necessity, of incorporating any such elements into his teaching. He was also dismissive of his informal achievements:

[Electric] bass guitar playing is just a doddle really, it really is, on a basic meat and potatoes level, any one can do it really that's got a bit of an ear. I'm really convinced about that, [laughter] no special talent needed, you know [laughter]. [Bill]

Similarly, he was most reluctant to acknowledge the results of his 'informal' approach on double bass. After lessons with a series of teachers he still felt he had not found the expert technical help he sought. Despite a career of over a decade performing classical music, jazz and musical theatre, he said he had only 'figured out enough to get by on'; and had to be prompted to admit just how far he got:

Q: Well, you got to be a professional double bass player pretty much under your own steam.

Bill: Yeah, I did, I never really, I didn't really; [pause] that's true I suppose.

Yet while Bill was miserable 'making a terrible sound', and even contemplating giving up his instrument, Frank was celebrating the results of his learning experiences which - at last - allowed him to make the music he wanted: 'I could play all these minor thirds, and I could do all the stuff that I really wanted to do...and it sounded great!'. No wonder, given this feeling of satisfaction, that he was keen to include as much of his own experience as possible in his teaching practice. Bill dwelled on the most significant fact of his learning experiences - his inability to correct his technique without expert help. If Bill viewed his informal learning as inconsequential and inadequate, it is surely entirely

reasonable that he would *not* wish to reflect this in his teaching. One could say he was trying to give his pupils what he didn't have himself: expert technical help from the very start.

Thus Bill's teaching strategy represents what he might have wished for himself as a learner. The same can be said for Frank; while satisfied with where he has ended up, he still wished he might have found good advice to get there sooner, and had the chance to study different kinds of music: exactly what he now offers as a teacher. He was clear that he would have benefited from studying with 'as good a teacher as I think I am'. In short, these musicians have ended up teaching, not as they were taught, but as they *wish* they had been taught.

There is no correlation here with how apparently 'successful' they were. Frank never came anywhere near to being a full-time player, yet thought his playing sounded 'great'; Bill had a flourishing career yet thought his playing sounded 'terrible'. This sense of themselves is not based on validation from the outside world, but is about their own sense of value and personal satisfaction.

### **5.2.3 Learning histories and teaching strategies: the other participants**

The influence of personal biography can be seen in these accounts in various ways. To some extent, the ways Bill and Frank taught was indeed firmly based on their own experiences as learners, in the sense that their teaching may be seen as compensatory behaviour, making up in the present for what they had lacked in the past, as well as an affirmation of the learning practices they had employed which were effective and successful.

The accounts of Bill and Frank offer perhaps the clearest examples of teachers integrating or rejecting their learning experiences in their approach to teaching; nonetheless a comparison between the two suggests a more general principle at work: namely, that how musicians recall and value their learning

histories may predict how far they seek to recreate these learning practices in their own teaching. Using the idea of regrets as a guide, a similar relationship between learning histories and teaching practices is evident among the rest of the group (see table 6).

**Table 6: Regrets about learning**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b><i>Do you have any regrets about how you learned to play?</i></b>
Andy	No...I don't think I've got any regrets because if I'd spent lots of time doing great swathes of technical exercises and having the fastest fingers in the world my ears probably wouldn't work, so what would be the use of it?
Bill	Oh god yeah...I wish I'd started on double bass...I've wasted a hell of a lot of time.
Carl	No, not at all, no, I wish I'd learned <i>more</i> [laughter] but I don't wish - no, absolutely not.
Dave	Sometimes yeah...if I'd had proper teachers...I could probably be a better musician now.
Ed	No, no...as far as I can see, I've played with a lot of people who've played a lot longer, and I'm a lot more fluid than they are, and my timing's ten times better than they are...I don't know everything but what I do know I know really well.
Frank	I would much prefer to have just learned jazz from the start...I don't particularly regret that it didn't happen because I've come to it later, and that's the way it goes...I would have benefited from having a great harmonica teacher.
Graham	I do, but like regrets is a weird thing cos if I could have done it differently I would have...I probably could have saved five years having a good teacher.
Helen	Yeah, I do, in a way...I think really I just lost out on...making things easier for myself, if I had learned you know what's in a chord, or what's in a particular scale...but at the same time I'm quite glad I could do it without.

How they each responded to the idea of regret appears to indicate the extent to which they sought to re-create their own learning practices in their teaching - or at least, what they saw as the key elements of it that were

successful, and those which it was feasible to emulate in a lesson. Andy saw a kind of trade-off between technical mastery and listening skills, suggesting that to focus entirely on trying to get ‘the fastest fingers in the world’ he would inevitably have had to neglect his aural ability. He did concede that he had never reached ‘a very, very high standard of technical ability’, but by concentrating on learning and playing by ear he felt he was on the right side of the bargain. He seemed perfectly at ease with his own learning career and with the musician he had become. As such he included in his teaching substantial elements of his formal learning history, yet presented in a way that reflected his informal past.

Carl saw his basic approach as sound, but did accept that his own learning practices, including the tuition he had received, had not covered all the ground that it might have:

All the chord construction and the relationship between scales and chords, although I've got it now, it never came easily; I had to put in an awful lot of work, to connect the mathematics and the music. [Carl]

Thus his teaching combined using ‘tunes as vehicles for techniques’, as he had done himself, while including the music theory - the ‘mathematics’ - he felt he had missed out on.

Ed’s experience of formal tuition seemed to make no positive impact whatsoever on his own informal learning, and it is hard to see even a trace of it in his teaching. Given the fact that he talked of the tuition he had received in terms of boredom or exasperation, it is perhaps not surprising that he rejected the pedagogy he encountered; in other words, the rigid, notation-based learning of his cello lessons, guitar lessons which were too complex, and singing lessons which did not develop his voice. These experiences of formal tuition did serve as a guide to teaching, but in a negative way: ‘I learned more what *not* to do from them [laughter] than what to do’. Instead he was flexible, creative and responsive to people’s needs; above all he wanted make learning as simple and as easy as possible. He had become a musician through learning to play and sing songs, and this is how he approached teaching. Equally he felt his

own learning to have been relatively effortless and successful: 'I think I learned pretty quickly, and easily as well'; thus it is no surprise that he would want to include in his teaching as many aspects of his informal, self-directed learning possible. In fact, Ed was aware of using his own successful learning as a guide for how to teach others: 'I think to some degree if something kind of works for me I think it'll work for other people as well'.

Helen reflected her ambivalence towards 'formal' knowledge in feeling that her lack of theory had generated both problems and advantages. While she had consciously avoided learning letter names as a 'bolshy teenager' (and subsequently rather regretted it) this was an element of 'formal' learning which, happily, was built in to the system she had adopted. Thus, like the other teachers, she taught in a way that reflected the successful aspects of her own learning, while compensating for what she felt she had lacked.

The related question "Do you think the way you teach is better than the way you learned" also produced some helpful answers, in that it pinpointed in several cases what these musicians thought was wrong about their own learning - and, by implication, what they were trying to put right in their teaching (see table 7).

**Table 7: Do you think the way you teach is better than the way you learned?**

Teacher	<i>Do you think the way you teach is better than the way you learned?</i>
Andy	Oh, definitely, certainly this early part, because when I was being taught the piano it was always to try and get me to read something, and I think that music learning can be looked at as very closely represented by learning to speak, and learning to read, and...we don't learn to read things before we learn to speak.

<b>Teacher</b>	<b><i>Do you think the way you teach is better than the way you learned?</i></b>
Bill	In the sense that I do teach at all, yeah, I don't have to, I make money playing professionally, so...I could just say oh well I'm not bothered with that you know, but yes, I do think that actually, I think if somebody wants to learn to play the double bass, it's a hard instrument to learn anyway, you know, and not everybody wants to do it, so you have to cultivate these people don't you, make sure that they get on.
Carl	Oh definitely yeah, or, it would be to me...If I could have had me teaching me 20 years ago I'd have thoroughly responded to that.
Dave	I don't know if I'd like me as a teacher, but I certainly would have appreciated someone who was interested in my learning...As a child, I don't think I would have liked someone saying if you want to learn to play the piano you're going to have to do it exactly like this.
Ed	Yeah, I mean I've refined it, I want to make it as simple as possible for people, and so that people will pick up on the things which are the most important.
Frank	Oh yeah, absolutely, I'm hugely improving on it I think...It was very dry and dusty.
Graham	I've read a couple of other people's things that having a good teacher had saved them about five years of pissing around...Every once in a while I think oh I wish I'd had me as a teacher, because they would have opened up lots of things and saved me some time.
Helen	[3 sec pause] I don't know, I think that there are so many ways that you're learning all the time that an instrumental lesson isn't - I mean, it's a big part of it, but there should be other things simultaneously going on that are teaching you.

Andy's answer suggests that his most significant memory of tuition was the struggle to make him read rather than let his aural vocabulary develop. Dave implies a certain ambivalence towards teaching itself; while feeling that he had missed out on key aspects of learning, he was also proud of his own independence as a learner: 'I think that's probably why I went into teaching, cos I still wanted to prove - look what I can do, look what I know, I've had to do this all myself'. As I suggested in section 4.3.1, as a teacher Dave initially emphasised reading as it was what he 'didn't have' as a learner. However, this need to compensate, as it were, for what he had lacked led him to adopt a

teaching strategy that in practice suited neither him nor his pupils. He had concluded that beginning with notation is ‘what you *don’t* do’. Experience had shown him how best to balance the strengths and weaknesses of his own learning history.

Dave may have become the teacher he had needed, but ironically he was aware that his younger self might not have enjoyed meeting him. He had occasionally met pupils in whom he recognised himself, self-motivated learners who were ‘looking for answers’ but instinctively resisted being told what to do. Typically, pupils like this would briefly see what the teacher had to offer, but before long ‘they’re off again’. It may be that, at certain stages of their musical development, some people gain more than they lose from completely independent, self-directed learning; having control over one’s learning, and the sense of pride in one’s achievements that results from this, may be more valuable than sound professional advice. Dave’s teaching strategies did reflect how he valued his learning, yet he was still aware that learners may not always benefit from being taught.

Bill suggested here that he was almost trying to correct history simply by being available as a teacher. He recalled how hard it was to find the expert advice he needed; double bass players needed all the help they could get. Now, as a teacher, he could show them how to play with good technique, and the niceties of different teaching and learning strategies were almost beside the point. Helen made the modest but telling point (as did Dave) that being taught may not be all that important in the overall development of a musician; it hadn’t been for her. Similarly, Timothy Rice suggests that being taught is often not central to the development of cultural forms, and is only a part of how knowledge and skills are acquired:

All of us who grow up in culture and acquire its traditions do so only partly as a result of direct, pedagogical intervention of the sort commonly associated with scolding by parents, teaching by teachers, or informing by informants; culture and its traditions are also acquired by observing, mimicking, and embodying shared practices. (Rice, 1997: 108)

Graham repeated the gist of his answer to my question about regrets; he didn't seem to think that there was anything wrong with how he had learned or what his learning had led to; he merely wished he could have had some good advice to get there sooner. However his emphasis on using notation as a teacher - by the sound of it, rather more than he had himself as a learner - might be seen as a counterbalance to his natural, almost irresistible, tendency to stray from what he had intended to play and instead 'start jamming'. While he was proud of his abilities as an improviser, he used notation to help himself adhere to specific parts; thus he encouraged improvisation in his students, while also using notation to remind them of the tunes they were trying to play.

#### **5.2.4 Learning histories: summary**

Learning histories are then central to how these musicians approached their teaching. Seven out of eight of these teachers set out to include in their lessons crucial aspects of their own informal learning. Bill did not, and serves as the 'deviant case' which alerts us to the fact that these teachers were not necessarily teaching as they were taught, nor as they had learned. Instead they had each tried to become the teachers they would have wanted for their younger selves. The extent to which they valued different aspects of their own learning can be seen as a predictor of their approach to teaching: their aim was to make up for what they felt they missed, while including strategies which had been successful.

More research would be required to discover whether all instrumental teachers think they are creating an environment for learning better than the one in which they grew up; the teachers in the present study seemed to think that is what they were doing. In practice, of course, the students themselves also played a part in how these strategies were applied while, as Helen and Dave suggested, instrumental tuition is only a part of any musician's development.

All the teachers in the present study felt that the tuition they had received was at best seriously flawed. However, there may well exist a body of musicians

who are entirely happy with the way they were taught. As such, if the idea of ‘value’ universally operates as I have suggested, it would be reasonable to assume that such musicians would do their best to replicate exactly the lessons they received. Again, further research would be needed to confirm this.

It should also be noted that the evidence here suggests that, where instrumental teacher training is undertaken, it can have a significant impact on pedagogy. Both Andy and Frank, the only members of the group to receive training specifically for instrumental teaching, spoke highly of the influence this had had, and each gave specific examples of how ideas from their training had been applied directly to their teaching practice, to profound effect. Learning histories are certainly crucial as an influence on teaching strategies, but these two teachers in particular were also quite willing to introduce other people’s ideas alongside their own experience. However, Graham had also had some training in running music workshops, as a prelude to undertaking a PGCE in classroom music teaching (which he failed). Despite this, he claimed ‘I just don’t know what to do in workshops’, and he seemed to have taken little from his experience of classroom teaching which was any help in instrumental teaching. This suggests that high-quality training needs to be specifically aimed at instrumental teachers to be effective.

### **5.3 Identity**

In this section I argue that conflicting cultural narratives about musicians and teachers lead the participants to justify or explain their identities as teachers. On the whole they seem to have little relish for teaching, but they are in their own eyes variously compelled, persuaded or obliged to become teachers.

### 5.3.1 Becoming teachers

We have seen in section 3.2.1 that the musicians in this group tended to describe themselves as ‘driven’ or ‘fanatical’ about learning their instruments. These accounts therefore form part of a widely held discourse about how dedicated and obsessive musicians are (and how irresponsible and anti-social their occupation tends to be as a result). However, this kind of ‘involuntary commitment’ is not confined to music; there are similar narratives to be found in sport, visual arts and other activities which are essentially optional but which require considerable effort to master. These accounts suggest too that there maybe a price to pay for following one’s obsessions. The writer C.L.R. James gives a vivid portrayal of his childhood determination to play sport in the face of considerable opposition, moreover ‘not merely to play but to live the life, and nothing could stop me’ (James, 2005: 36). Like the musicians in the present study, he was at a loss to account for the stubbornness of his younger self: ‘I could not explain it...for I did not understand it myself. I look back at that little boy with amazement (*ibid*: 30). Despite endless upset and confrontation at the time, both at school and at home, he describes feeling enormous ‘gratitude’ towards his younger self for propelling him towards a much more fulfilling career than he might otherwise have had. Robert Stebbins (2004) describes as ‘occupational devotees’ those who have gone on to make a career in activities they feel compelled to pursue but which are, for most people, no more than hobbies. These devotees may thus find profound job satisfaction, although the financial rewards may be meagre. Whether the undertaking and outcomes of ‘occupational devotion’ are positive or not, those involved see themselves as almost powerless to resist the urge to do what they do.

However, there is little sign of any such enthusiasm in the group for their identity as teachers. None of these musicians revealed any particular ambition to teach, and none of them seemed to have planned or prepared for it. Frank had ‘never thought of’ teaching until he was asked, and in fact his earliest experiences of teaching consisted of free, informal guidance for friends, as it did for Helen. Generally these teachers ‘ended up’ teaching in response to circumstances: the opportunity presented itself and they took it, albeit mostly

with misgivings. Graham was typical: 'basically the teaching thing has just kind of developed from being offered it'. Dave felt he had been 'thrown into it'. We saw several examples of these players being prepared to put themselves - as learners - into uncomfortable situations where they simply had to play, however alarming the circumstances, and this apparent recklessness is also evident as they became teachers.

Ed recalled his hesitation about responding to an advertisement he had seen for a singing teacher. The extent of his vocal experience at this point was doing some gigs as a singer with a band, and six months of a part-time music course which included receiving some singing tuition:

Ed: I remember almost just not ringing the number, I remember just thinking, you know.

Q: I can't do this.

Ed: Yeah, I remember just thinking, this is insane! [laughter] [Ed]

He did in fact make the call, and started giving lessons:

I remember feeling very overwhelmed [laughter] and I remember thinking I don't know what I'm going to do next week, so one lesson a week at that time was more than enough [laughter]. [Ed]

Dave used practically the same words as Frank to describe his first efforts at teaching ('I didn't know what I was doing' [Dave]) and with hindsight did not view these attempts with satisfaction: 'I've been doing it ten years since then, and realise that the early days were probably pretty shockingly bad actually'. Andy, like the others, began with 'no formal training to teach at all', and when he was offered work at a 6th form college his reaction was predictable: 'I panicked, I thought oh, I can't do this...I didn't think I had anything like enough skills to go and be a teacher'. He admitted that at the time he was not 'even particularly aware' of what teaching skills might consist of.

Despite these understandable feelings of inadequacy, they all started teaching regardless, and since only Frank and Andy (and to a lesser extent, Graham) had any instrumental teacher training, their proficiency had generally

been acquired 'on the job'. But here there is something of a contrast between playing and teaching: Andy may have had lessons thrust upon him as a youngster, but all the others actively sought tuition on their instruments to get better at playing. Seeking expert help seems a reasonable response to feelings of inadequacy or a desire to improve, but in fact only two of them sought training specifically to improve their teaching.

This lack of training might be a result of the fragmented nature of courses and qualifications available, and ignorance about the choices on offer, which would in any case have been much narrower when most of these musicians were starting to teach - in several cases, many years ago. Financial constraints may have limited their opportunities for training, which generally costs money and involves taking time off work (Dave cited lack of funding as a reason for not having sought training). Also significant may be the fact that instrumental teaching is often viewed disparagingly, particularly among musicians themselves, as a poor substitute for performing; as such it is perhaps not worthy of the effort and commitment that formal study would represent. Baker (2006) found that young instrumental teachers felt their undergraduate training was aimed at producing performers, however unrealistic this might be as a career, and did not equip them to be teachers; Mills (2006) reports similar findings. The role of training in the careers of instrumental teachers is surely one which deserves more research; even after a wealth of training and experience, Frank still felt unsure about his approach to teaching: 'it's just at the beginning stages really, we've been winging it'.

If they all felt under-prepared for their role as teachers, they did not, on the whole, warm to the task. In talking about their work as teachers there was generally very little sense of the passion and engagement which they felt for learning or for playing. Dave was ambivalent about his career as a peripatetic. He did say that 'it's what I enjoy doing'; however he also said his career as a full-time teacher was 'a bit depressing I suppose...I've considered giving it up altogether'; this was mainly due to the poor financial rewards and high workload. Frank described his early experiences as a peripatetic in terms of

growing panic, wherein an impossible workload combined with high levels of stress:

I'm rather trapped by this job...I'm doing all the days in the week, I'm doing all the hours in the day, I'm doing all the weeks in the year that are available, and two things are happening: one is I can't make a living, and the other is I'm overworked, I'm going bonkers with it...I'm up to here [slaps the top of his head] with the ceiling and the water's rising. [Frank]

When invited to consider their future as teachers and musicians they all said they wanted to do more playing; *not one* said they wanted to do more teaching. Carl put it bluntly: 'I'd definitely like to be doing less'. There was no such ambivalence about being players:

Really I would prefer to just be performing...push out all this other bloody nonsense, all this writing and hard bloody work, and just play! [Frank]

I want to perform a lot more, I want to...record and promote CDs and do that kind of thing a lot more...I don't know if I'll teach - it depends how things turn out I suppose. [Ed]

The only one who said they might consider taking on more teaching willingly was Bill, but said he would only do this if he felt it would benefit his own playing; at the time of the interview he was not convinced this would be the case.

The degree to which these musicians were reliant on teaching financially seemed to affect how they felt about it. In most cases, the more teaching they had to do to survive, the less they enjoyed it, while the more positive attitudes were displayed by those who were also able to earn money in other ways, in particular by performing. Helen's ambition was to take up some kind of career in music full-time, although she would not abandon teaching altogether in favour of playing:

I absolutely desperately want a mixture of the two to pay my bills, basically, I would love to be just playing, just going out and playing and touring and working with bands...But actually now I've started teaching - at first I saw it as a compromise, [now] I really enjoy it and I would want to keep that going as well. [Helen]

Nevertheless, she could not imagine how she would survive financially, a wariness endorsed by the others' accounts. She was by far the most enthusiastic about teaching; it is at least suggestive that she was also the least dependent on teaching for her livelihood.

### **5.3.2 Identity work**

There is then a disparity between the participants' identities as musicians and as teachers: on the one hand passionate and committed about becoming musicians, and unanimous about wanting to do more playing and performing; on the other hand, largely ambivalent about teaching and keen to do less, while aware of serious limitations as to the viability of instrumental teaching as a career. The group therefore had to undertake a certain amount of 'identity work' (Fornas *et al.*, 1995: 210) to sustain these contradictory narratives. There were several ways this was addressed.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the reason given for teaching was, in almost every case, economic. Rather than actively seeking teaching work as a career choice, most of them accepted invitations to start giving lessons due to financial pressure to survive *as musicians*. There was little suggestion of any evident ability or desire to teach for its own sake:

Someone approached me at a gig saying do you give lessons, and I thought yeah because I haven't got any money, and that was how it started. [Carl]

Graham said 'I got into teaching when I was really broke', while Dave said he started 'just as a way of earning money'. As musicians, their sources of income were limited, and as Graham put it, 'I can't do anything else' (a remark echoed by an instrumental teacher in Baker, 2005: 147). For Dave, the only alternative to teaching was to get a 'desk job' which he didn't want to do. Even though teaching was not as highly valued as performing, it nevertheless allowed them to sustain their identities as musicians; it is well-known and widely (if reluctantly) accepted that many players have to 'resort' to giving lessons in order to survive.

The teachers in Baker's study seemed to view teaching for a music service as a temporary 'safety-net' (Baker, 2006: 45), even though the prospects for a full-time musical career as a performer were slim. For the teachers in this study, financial need acted as an unassailable argument whereby they became, as musicians, almost forced into teaching. Thus there was a sense of 'holding off' the responsibility for becoming teachers; rather than being an active choice, teaching seemed to have been foisted upon them by circumstances, and they resented it accordingly.

Secondly, there were attempts to look at teaching positively, despite the evident drawbacks. As mentioned above, Helen was enthusiastic about teaching, though she could only comment on this as a part-time job. Dave spoke at length about how unsatisfactory his teaching career was, but did find some sense of personal pride in what this represented:

There wasn't a music teacher at school either, I didn't have any music at school, which probably made me hungry for it, you know...I think that's probably why I went into teaching, 'cos I still wanted to prove - look what I can do, look what I know, I've had to do this all myself. [Dave]

Teaching thus served to demonstrate his achievements as a self-directed learner. Graham was more modest in finding job satisfaction, and appeared more relaxed than Dave and Frank:

I have been content with the fact that I don't particularly enjoy anything I'm doing but none of it kills me, and most people get killed by what they do, and so therefore if I can break even on it...that's a bonus, I have almost no stress. [Graham]

Bill suggested that he himself might get something out of teaching through having to explain to others aspects of playing that he may not have consciously articulated. These examples represented teachers seeming to say, as it were: 'perhaps it's not so bad after all', though it has to be said that their attempts to do so were mainly lukewarm.

Thirdly, I would suggest that a specific function is served in the interviews by humour - particularly that directed against themselves - on the subject of their identities as musicians. For example, when Carl took up his instrument he was training as a plumber, a future career which 'completely went by the wayside'. Instead, from the age of 'maybe 17 to 25' he was so obsessed with practising he said he was: 'no use to anybody for those years I would say'. After a moment's pause he followed this up with the punchline: 'some people would argue I'm no use to anybody now [laughter]'. I suspect that Graham was only half-joking when invited to consider his decision to pursue music full-time:

Q: What do you make of your younger self now, when you look back at that decision, do you think - well, what *do* you think?

Graham: How stupid is that?! [laughter]

Bill also looked back somewhat ruefully at the fact he had ended up as a musician:

I quite often ask myself, why - especially when I haven't got any work [laughter] - why did I ever pick this to do, why didn't I do something sensible you know, why didn't I learn to be an accountant or...I don't know...and the fact is the only thing that I was interested in when I was at an age where you can make those decisions, was playing music so, there you go [laughter]. [Bill]

Bill was repeating here the idea that, such was his obsession, he had little real choice of future career, despite the disadvantages. All the interviewees chose to laugh about this, presenting the consequences of their 'occupational devotion' (whether this be unemployment or having to teach) as comedy rather than tragedy. This kind of self-deprecating humour may be required to laugh off the sometimes painful or absurd realities of life as a musician, although it did not completely conceal the rueful tone evident in the interviews.

Fourthly, several of these teachers seemed to resolve the contradictions between their identities as musicians and as teachers by sounding a note of altruism. Bill for example was doing only a very limited amount of teaching (not enough 'to make any kind of living out of') but felt he almost had 'a duty' to

'cultivate' the few people who wanted to learn double bass, as it's 'a hard instrument...and not everyone wants to do it'. This was partly based on his own experience of trying to learn:

I remember how hard it was when I was learning to find a teacher, it was really incredibly difficult and so if I've got the time, and I can make a small commitment...and there are people who want to learn, then I think really, I feel almost obliged to provide them with some sort of help. [Bill]

Frank also saw his teaching as in part reflecting his own experience of receiving some very poor tuition: 'I want to try and redress the balance a bit, it's not right that people should struggle on', and there is a similar suggestion of teaching as a selfless cause: 'the books that I'm writing...some of those are really not very sale-able, but I am on a crusade'.

Graham felt that, for some of his pupils, lessons were a pointless exercise since they were not motivated to improve; he persevered with these pupils as he needed the money: 'I'm actually not brave enough to tell kids who shouldn't be there that they shouldn't be there, cos that's my income also'. Nevertheless he maintained an image of himself as a conscientious teacher who tried his best regardless: 'I'm not ripping them off, they're doing it'.

Several of the group, in particular the ones who didn't do anything else, referred to what hard work teaching was ('it's so exhausting' [Frank]). There were also implicitly favourable comparisons between themselves and other teachers working in schools that they had seen or heard about:

Schools buy from music services because of the perception of high and guaranteed quality; well it's a perception, but it's a facade, it's not there at all. [Frank]

I was thinking my god! What kind of people are the music service employing? [Ed]

By appealing to notions of altruism - expressed sincerely - they seemed to be constructing an image of themselves as selfless, conscientious, and dutiful. This calls to mind the idea of 'moral accounts' described by Silverman. He

considers a series of interviews with parents, and suggests that they can more usefully be seen as ‘moral tales’ rather than factual accounts, ‘local accomplishments’ which ‘display vividly cultural particulars about the moral accountability of parenthood’ (Silverman, 2001: 105). In the same way, the teachers in the present study can be seen to reflect the cultural obligations implicit in the term ‘teacher’ in the way they spoke of duty and hard work; in a sense, these obligations served as another justification for the lack of relish they expressed towards their role. The idea of moral accounts is one we shall return to in a later section (5.5.1), since it provides an interesting way to view the ‘helping language’ (Edelman, 1974) which is often used to describe teaching.

### **5.3.3 Identity: summary**

The group I interviewed saw themselves primarily as musicians, and their commitment to this identity seemed to absolve them of the responsibility for what followed, even though in most cases this was a career which did not entirely suit them. As players, the participants reported several instances of being ‘thrown in at the deep end’ (Priest, 1989: 179), and similar feelings were evident at the start of their teaching careers. If they saw themselves as passionate about becoming (and being) musicians, they were initially ill-prepared and remained largely reluctant teachers who would rather have been doing less teaching and more playing. In order to reconcile themselves to their situation they had adopted a variety of strategies; for example, telling themselves that while they didn’t want to teach, financial necessity meant they *had* to. They also tried to find positive aspects to teaching, along the lines of: ‘it’s all right really’. They told jokes about themselves, invoking laughter rather than despair, and drew on notions of duty as if to say that they didn’t really want to teach, but felt they should.

Laurel Richardson (1990: 25) suggests that interview accounts may be viewed to some extent as the telling of familiar ‘cultural stories’ largely based on stereotypes and shared narratives about what it means to be a member of a certain social group. However, there may be considerable contradictions

inherent in a career which involves being both a musician and teacher. The cultural assumptions about teachers rest on notions of responsibility, integrity and selflessness. Teaching may be seen as something of a 'higher calling', not necessarily rewarding financially, but enriched by the satisfactions of watching others (young people in particular) develop under ones' guidance. Being a musician, on the other hand, implies anything from single-minded devotion (if not obsession) to selfishness, irresponsibility, and wild living, as well as a tendency to be anxious, if not neurotic (Kemp, 1996). Thus a certain amount of juggling is evident in the participants' accounts to balance these contradictory narratives.

Richardson goes on to suggest that interviewees may, collectively, generate accounts which challenge common stereotypes, 'resist the cultural narratives about groups of people and tell alternative stories' (*ibid*, 1990: 25). I would argue that these 'collective stories' are also apparent in the present study. Certainly these teachers presented themselves as hardworking and conscientious, and put considerable amounts of imagination and energy into their work; however, this may be simply because they needed to succeed as teachers to survive as musicians. Overall there was little sense of teaching as a noble cause, or satisfying in its own right. Indeed, they had an overwhelmingly negative view of their of their own identity as teachers. This may in part reflect their opinions of their students (as is discussed in the next section). Only one of the group had a viable career solely as a performer - teaching, in fact, was for most of them the only way to sustain their identity as musicians, and they were prepared to make the necessary compromises to do so.

#### **5.4 Role**

I now consider the role of these teachers; in other words, what they found themselves doing, or having to do, in order to survive as teachers (and thus as musicians). I argue that in many ways, their role was defined not only by particular beliefs they had, but also in response to their students. For several of the group, the attitude and ambitions of the people they taught were crucial

factors in their approach to teaching, and there was much talk in the interviews about the nature of their students.

### **5.4.1 Flexibility as teachers**

Whatever specific teaching practices these teachers adopted, their ideas were in general the result of years of experience, and it may be tempting to assume that they would teach accordingly, imposing their hard-won beliefs on their students regardless. Anecdotal evidence and personal accounts suggest that there are many instrumental teachers who insist their students learn only, and exactly, as instructed (see for example Booth, 1999: 87-89, or Holt, 1991: 209-217). In practice however, the participants were far from dogmatic, welcoming suggestions from their students and expressing a sense of flexibility and a willingness to please.

There was generally an assumption within the group that their teaching should be based on what their pupils wanted to learn and the kinds of music they liked; moreover that this was central to the success of lessons. Several were quite prepared to hand over control to their pupils, or were ready to improvise according to circumstances:

I don't come in with an agenda for every lesson...I'm happy to just pick up on something. [Andy]

I'm not averse to them taking the initiative...I'm quite flexible. [Ed]

Some pupils did indeed come to lessons with an explicit agenda, and in all cases this was welcomed and encouraged; for example, some wanted to learn particular pieces of music and brought these into the lessons. While some pupils wanted to play certain kinds of music, others had discrete, limited goals. For example, Bill was approached by someone who already played electric bass, but 'his band wanted him to play a double bass':

I showed him enough to sort of get by on, so he could learn this set of tunes he had to play and that's all he was interested in doing, so once he'd got that he was off. [Bill]

Carl stressed the need to 'temper' lessons according to what the pupil wanted; learning an instrument may be no more than 'light relief' from an otherwise hectic lifestyle. Equally Andy was perfectly well aware - and quite happy - that many of his pupils only wanted to 'get a bit of fun out of the piano', to 'sit down now and again and play a bit of boogie-woogie' or to 'have a sing-along at home with some friends'. If this was the case 'it's very important to realise that, cos they're not actually interested in playing a Handel gavotte'. I suggested in section 1.2 that for many learners, playing an instrument was essentially a leisure activity, and this emphasis on enjoyment was evident in the way these teachers aimed to accommodate their pupils' wishes.

Thus, while they may have arrived at firm convictions as to how best to teach and learn music, they were also prepared to set these aside. I would argue that this element of modesty in their role as teachers, almost to the point of self-effacement, has three main causes.

Firstly, their pupils were not a captive population; rather they were customers paying for a service. We may describe instrumental teaching in the same language as classroom teaching, but while the terminology of lessons and pupils sounds the same, the politics are very different. Students are not compelled by law to learn an instrument, and if they are not enjoying the process they can simply stop; this may be somewhat influenced by parental pressure, though there was little evidence of this in the present study.

There seems to be a widespread assumption in the writing about instrumental tuition that teachers have to somehow persuade or coerce their pupils into practising things they don't like but which are 'essential' to learning. Harris and Crozier describe scales and arpeggios as:

perhaps the most difficult aspect of instrumental development to teach because young pupils tend to look upon them with anything from mild distaste to absolute loathing. (Harris and Crozier, 2000: 53)

Much advice to instrumental teachers seems to consist of strategies to 'help alleviate the daily grind of practising' (O'Neill and McPherson, 2002: 41). The teachers in the present study however were keen to avoid imposing onerous tasks on their pupils; they wanted to keep their customers (or their parents) happy, mainly for a very simple reason: 'got to pay the rent' [Frank]. Even if strategy was not driven by financial necessity, there was clearly little point in adopting an approach to teaching if it obviously put pupils off coming to lessons. Bill recalled that the first students he taught had 'a couple of lessons and then they'd never come back'. He saw this as a result of concentrating entirely on the finer points of technique:

That quite quickly gets quite complicated and hard work, there's a lot of different things to think about at once...and so I possibly think that they just thought, oh this is too much like hard work, I'll give it a miss. [Bill]

As a result he had changed his approach to make it more accessible to students. Graham talked of books of scales and exercises that he himself had benefited from, but was aware that they would be off-putting for the vast majority of his students. These teachers may have known what their pupils needed, but had to balance this with what they would enjoy, in order to keep them coming to lessons.

Secondly, their willingness to let their pupils steer the direction of the lessons was surely a reflection of their own sense of engagement and enjoyment as learners. Just as they themselves had, consciously or otherwise, brought an agenda to their own lessons, so they invited others to do the same. Helen said the first thing she would ask a prospective student was: 'what d'you want to play?', and went on: 'if they're not enjoying the tunes, if it's not the kind of music they would listen to, they're not going to want to do it are they?'

Dave said that it was important to talk to his pupils, to 'find out what they actually want', suggesting that teachers might not be able to appreciate or

predict children's musical tastes; in offering his pupils a choice as to which pieces they studied he reported that often 'it's surprising' which ones they chose. The group was more or less explicit that giving their pupils real choices in their learning would result in higher levels of motivation; Graham for example had found that 'really wanting to learn a piece' could provide a powerful incentive to study. Conversely they were also aware that if they forced their own agenda into the lessons, motivation could drop: 'you don't want to drive somebody into the ground if...they want to learn a couple of tunes and have a bit of a laugh' [Carl].

Several teachers emphasised that ideally their job was to facilitate the autonomy of others; not so much teaching as equipping people to learn for themselves. For example, Helen saw her role as 'to give people tools to be able to do something that they really want to do', while Frank told a group of students: 'I'm here to make it easier for you to learn something you've chosen to learn'. They all knew from their own experience how important it had been to be learning something they liked; not surprisingly, they sought a similar sense of enjoyment in their teaching.

Thirdly, and most significantly, the nature of their role as teachers seemed to be dictated by the characteristics of their students. As I have already suggested, they were not in a position politically to impose their own agenda on their students, even if they had wanted to. In any case, their own backgrounds had made them realise the importance of enjoyment and personal engagement in learning. However, their role as flexible and amenable teachers was also a response to their interaction with their pupils. They all had a good deal to say about the attitude of their students, and indeed this subject figured so prominently and so consistently in the interviews that some detailed discussion of this is warranted.

### 5.4.2 The attitude of the students

The members of the group were invited to compare themselves as learners with their students. In doing so they generally spoke very little about the relative abilities of themselves and those they taught. Carl and Helen suggested that some people (including, presumably, themselves) were 'naturally' more musically gifted than others, but overall the consensus was that they themselves had not done anything 'inherently amazing' [Ed]. Occasionally they might have encountered a particularly gifted student, or indeed one that seemed particularly incapable, and these presented their own pleasures and problems. On the whole though, their students (as one might expect) tended to be beginners or 'improvers', and only moderately able. This did not seem to trouble them particularly; what did concern them was the *attitude* of their students. The obvious and profound difference between themselves and their pupils was not so much in terms of 'talent' but their relative levels of motivation. Their role as teachers seemed defined largely by a perception of widespread apathy among those who professed a wish to learn.

There are some suggestions in the research literature that committed learners are relatively rare over the long term:

Only a minority of children actually begin learning musical instruments at all, and only a minute proportion of these learners persist to become skilled musicians. (Davidson *et al.*, 1997: 190)

Quite why some learners do persist is also not clear:

We know very little about how...cultural and societal factors mediate motivation to play and continue to play a musical instrument. (Hallam, 2002: 233)

Frank summed up the fundamental difference between highly motivated learners such as himself and the vast, relatively apathetic, majority with the phrase: 'there's just them and us'. Helen said her pupils had the 'potential' to be like her but:

I think if they were more like me they'd have already done a certain amount of it or they'd have done it earlier, if they'd been that passionate about it. [Helen]

Although her students might be reasonably motivated and aspire to play well, 'they don't want to do all the grafting...I don't think most of them want it like we wanted it'.

While Helen accepted that 'lots of people don't have the time' to devote to practising, Frank had remarked to one group of students that they seemed to be spending their time on other things: 'you are training yourself to be absolutely brilliant at watching television'. Similarly, Dave acknowledged that 'sometimes they just cannot be arsed to practice, it's the Playstation takes preference'. Both Graham and Helen recognised that their pupils were not looking to pursue a career in music, and accordingly had more modest goals than they had had themselves. Brian Sutton-Smith (2001: 97) argues that, as children's lives have become increasingly removed from the adult world of work, they have become 'small aristocrats of conspicuous leisure consumption'. Thus, if their parents can afford it, instrumental lessons are just one of a range of extra-curricular activities children may be expected and encouraged to take part in. In the same way, Graham sensed that many of his pupils were happy to flit from one leisure activity to another without particularly engaging with any of them: 'it's the same as they're going out and playing badminton for six months, you know, oh that's a neat sport, ok now I'll do something else'. This echoes Gary McPherson:

For many, learning an instrument was no different from participating in a team sport, taking up a hobby, or pursuing other recreational activities.  
(McPherson, 2000: 33)

Indeed, the reasons for coming to lessons might not even be particularly related to music: 'some people think they're counselling sessions...some people want to get out the house' [Helen].

Graham was not sure he knew what the saxophone lessons he gave were for, 'given that most people don't listen to the instrument that they want to play

and are not going to do anything with it'. For these teachers, the responsibility for learning lay, ideally, with the students and not the teacher; the teacher could help, but as Bill said, 'you've got to want to do it yourself, I think'. However, he went on: 'it's never going to happen really...they don't do enough of it'.

Frank used a practice diary with his students, complete with a written statement about practising and learning which explicitly aimed 'to put the responsibility back on to them', though he felt that this would probably not make any difference. It is hardly surprising that these self-motivated, independent learners should have sounded a note of exasperation. Graham gave an example of a pupil apparently needing to be told what to do:

I had a kid once come and say, oh I haven't practised because you didn't tell me what to practise [laughter]...So my response to this kid: you have a saxophone and a piece of music, and a book with 20 things in it, why do I need to tell you what to play? [Graham]

One may speculate why someone apparently chooses to learn an instrument, and evidently has everything they need to practise, but does not do so, instead passing the responsibility for practice (or the lack of it) onto his teacher. Such behaviour may be associated with 'helpless' children, who are reluctant to set themselves appropriate goals, since in fact they expect to fail (O'Neill 2002: 81). McPherson (2000) found that children were generally accurate and realistic at predicting, even before starting lessons, their own levels of interest and achievement, how long they would play an instrument for and how much practice would be required to improve. As far as these teachers were concerned, people who are genuinely interested in something will be doing it anyway, regardless of having lessons - as, of course, they had been themselves. They all acknowledged more or less explicitly that in general their pupils simply did not have particularly high levels of motivation to learn their instruments: 'most people don't have that and I think as music teachers we forget, so when we say "you should be doing this" it's like, you know, well, why?' [Graham].

### 5.4.3 Refusals

We saw some minor examples of dissent in the lesson observations, but the most dramatic examples of student ‘refusals’ were described by Graham. Of all the teachers, he seemed to have experienced the lowest levels of enthusiasm among the secondary school students he taught, and spoke of general apathy, tinged with open revolt. He was confronted occasionally with pupils who simply refused to play:

I look at these kids and think: I’m not going to *beg* you to play, why should I *beg* you to play a note, you know, it’s like I’m a good guy, I’m here doing something that’s not - it’s an easy-option class, *just play the fucking note*, you know? [Graham]

For a musician who was prepared to lock himself away and practice ‘eight hours a day’ for months on end to improve his playing, such a refusal even to *attempt* what he was trying to teach was clearly quite shocking, particularly coming from a student who had supposedly volunteered to learn. It may be that there are particular reasons for these refusals specific to Graham and the circumstances in which he was working, and these warrant some discussion here, although these factors may also be relevant to other teachers in the group.

Graham’s character may have contributed to the feeling of dissent among his pupils. He described his ambivalent attitude to authority (‘I think there should be rules, and I think they should be disregarded’) and a history of reluctance to impose discipline on others, often at the expense of ‘good behaviour’. Indeed he largely attributed his failure to gain a PGCE to problems of classroom management (‘I couldn’t keep the little fuckers quiet’). As such the very liberality of his approach perhaps invited a more defiant (one might say honest) response from his instrumental pupils, often adolescents. This also suggests that if a teacher leaves a ‘power-vacuum’ the pupil may fill it, not necessarily as the teacher would have wished. If we, as adults, invite children to engage with us freely and equally, ‘they simply reverse the power relationship and insist that they be in charge’ (Sutton-Smith, 2001: 172). This may sound familiar to teachers and parents alike.

In common with many teachers working as peripatetics in schools, Graham taught in groups (usually of two); this approach is generally adopted due to economic necessity rather than for educational reasons, though some would claim that group lessons can be just as effective as one-to-one tuition, if not more so (see, for example, Hallam, 1998: 251-271 and Mills, 2007: 191). It could be that these shows of defiance were largely displays for the benefit of peers, without the disciplinary sanctions of misbehaving in class. Graham was not alone in reporting behavioural problems specific to group lessons in school. Ed (as mentioned earlier) had abandoned working with unruly groups in secondary schools as being pointless; Frank described at some length the range of tactics he had developed to keep groups of learners interested, and tricks to use 'if things get nasty' [Frank]. However, none of the teachers reported any such problems in individual lessons, whether in school or not. Moreover, several of them had experience of group teaching outside school; Ed and Carl had taught quite large adult groups of mixed abilities, while Andy taught a regular band workshop for teenagers. None of them reported any hint, working outside schools, of the kind of dissent that Graham and Ed had experienced with teenagers inside schools.

Therefore it is tempting to suggest that at least some of Graham's problems stemmed simply from the fact that he taught in schools. Several researchers have considered the importance of the context in which learning takes place (see for example, Cope, 2002 and Lamont, 2002). Börje Stålhammer (2003) interviewed groups of Swedish and English school children and argues that listening to or making music is experienced and valued by young people differently depending on where this occurs:

Their descriptions of music are often contextualised either in terms of the school or in terms of life outside the school. (Stålhammer, 2003: 65)

It could be argued that, regardless of what or how he was trying to teach, Graham's pupils inevitably felt a certain alienation by being taught at school which they might not have felt in a different context.

There was evidence from others about the significance of school as a context for learning. As a peripatetic Dave spoke about the environment in which he worked, and how this could influence instrumental lessons. He felt that losing the urge to play for its own sake, 'muck around' and learn independently was part of an inevitable process of becoming institutionalised, simply by virtue of being at school:

Once they get into their teens I think they're more likely to stick to the prescribed lessons unfortunately, it's drummed out of them by then... You know, they are at school, and they are under a lot of pressure with exams, they've got syllabus work and course work, and so basically you tell them what to do and they do it. [Dave]

The school environment could also have a more immediate impact:

Some kids, schools I have worked in, kids come into your lesson in a big mood, flop themselves down and say "I hate that teacher", spend half the lesson just trying to calm down from the situation they've been in. [Dave]

Teaching in schools could also involve specific restrictions; for example, Bill worked in one school which required him to steer his pupils towards the Associated Board examinations, whose syllabus was, he felt, 'pretty dry'. Frank reported attempts from classroom teachers to interfere in his lessons, and impose a much more 'traditional' style of teaching on him - one which he felt would be a lot less enjoyable and successful than his own. Helen had made a conscious decision *not* to teach in schools; as a child she had 'hated' taking her one and only grade exam, and feared that schools would insist that she put her pupils through the same experience.

Many instrumental teachers have experience of teaching both privately and in schools, and it would be interesting to consider systematically how these experiences differ. The present research would suggest that schools might not be the best environment for instrumental learning, particularly as far as group lessons are concerned, with evidence of low levels of motivation and, occasionally, outright rejection.

#### 5.4.4 Other views about student motivation

For Graham, a particular combination of circumstances seems to have led to moments of open defiance, although these refusals may be seen as simply the most extreme form of a widespread pupil apathy which was reported by virtually all the teachers. There may also be other factors relevant to this low level of motivation.

The question of who chooses which instrument a child will learn may be crucial to levels of motivation. It is a widely held belief (see, for example, Harris and Crozier, 2000: 28) that many children are to some extent 'forced' to learn an instrument, a notion which if true might account for varying levels of enthusiasm. The Young People and Music Participation Project (O'Neill, 2001) studied the beliefs and values of over 1000 Year 6 and Year 7 pupils in nine English schools, and emphasised 'the importance young people place on choosing their own musical instruments, music, and musical activities' (O'Neill, 2001: 14). However, O'Neill finds:

a mismatch between the instruments children would like to play and the instruments they are actually playing in Y6 and Y7...For example, boys in Y6 report most wanting to play the drums (25%) or electric guitar (24%), but of the boys in Y6 who actually play instruments only 9% play the drums and 3% play the electric guitar. (*ibid*: 5)

The report subsequently notes a drastic drop in instrumental playing, particularly among boys, from Year 6 to Year 7. It would be plausible to suggest that at least part of the reason for so many children giving up instrumental learning was that they were not playing the instruments of their choice.

However common this may be, there is very little evidence in the present study that this was a reason for a lack of motivation. Dave did suggest that pupil apathy might be partly due to 'parents pushing kids to learn instruments', and said this might be caused by parents trying to live vicariously, making their children learn an instrument when they themselves had not. He was the only teacher to suggest this however. Andy gave one example of a pupil who was

'not really into' playing the piano, although he was 'damn sure he's having a fantastic time [playing the guitar] with his band'; it was not clear however whether the pupil was persisting with piano lessons at his parents' behest.

I have already mentioned that much research emphasises the role of parents in supporting instrumental learning (see section 3.2.1); however, in general, parents figured very little in these accounts. Frank was pragmatic enough to accept that he needed to keep the parents of his young pupils happy: 'they do need 'product'...something for the parents to hang on to - "my child can play Three Blind Mice, here's a cheque"'. However, he made it clear that he would have welcomed a far greater level of parental involvement in supporting their children's learning: 'I'm shocked by how disinterested the parents are...which I think is just tragic'. Baker similarly finds that teachers blame parents for failing to encourage their children to practise (Baker, 2006: 41-42). The other teachers in the present study did not mention parental involvement (or the lack of it) as a factor in their pupils' motivation. This of course does not mean it was irrelevant, though it may suggest that it did not occur to them as particularly pertinent, since they had relied on it so little themselves.

The different experiences of these teachers could be accounted for by considering, for example, the age of their pupils. Frank typically taught groups of four primary school-age children at a time. Reasonably enough he did not expect them to know, often at the age of six or seven, what or how they wanted to learn; rather they 'kind of do what they're told...they fit into a programme' [Frank]. Motivation was seen as particularly problematic when teaching children. There were several remarks about how flighty and uncommitted children can be; Dave said 'a lot of kids don't know what they want' and Helen said 'some kids just think they want to do it and don't, which we all know is true of kids anyway'. Young novice musicians may well lack the confidence to confide their musical preferences, or even have any awareness that choices about what and how to learn could be available; often children simply expect to be told what to do by adults. Graham suggested that children may have preferences and desires which they are reluctant to reveal: 'I'm an adult and they don't talk to me'; the idea that children's hidden, 'real' agenda

slips through the fingers of adults and teachers is one that runs throughout this research. Green suggests that secondary school pupils may ‘conceal’ their ‘private cultural identities’ (Green, 2006: 105) from teachers in the classroom, and this might also happen in instrumental lessons.

Children under the age of ten may well need to be ‘pulled along’ [Frank] by their teachers; adults tend perhaps to have ideas of their own. The highest levels of motivation were reported by those teachers who worked with adult learners, who were largely seen as much more confident and assertive about what they wanted:

Adults will often give you a very clear prescription of what is required, so then you can immediately tailor a syllabus, as you work with them, to fit. [Andy]

However, adults were also seen as generally less tolerant or patient, and more demanding. While one might expect children to be less assertive and have lower expectations of ‘lessons’, adults were described as wanting ‘tangible results’ [Helen] and ‘something that they can enjoy’ [Andy]. Graham specifically mentioned ‘adult males’ as being more difficult to teach ‘because they’re used to having results’. Generally though, adults were seen as better students to teach, more motivated and more likely to know what they wanted.

Throughout the interviews, this sense of relative disinterest among learners was pervasive. Given this overwhelming perception of apathy it is perhaps no wonder that these teachers were so ready to adapt themselves, in principle at least, to what might engage their students. Rather than setting any particular educational goals, Graham regarded the task of teaching as ‘almost a matter of keeping people, well, amused, or entertained’.

#### **5.4.5 Motivated pupils**

The participants' accounts certainly offered few examples of pupils being obsessed or 'fanatical' about learning, as they themselves had been. However, there were exceptions. Occasionally some of these teachers had come across a pupil who did 'actually want to be a great instrumentalist' [Carl], and there were occasional references to the pleasure of teaching motivated learners. In particular, Helen reported:

Most of the students I have are adults who've always wanted to play the saxophone, they know what they want to play, they know the tunes already that they want to play. [Helen]

She regarded her job as trying to make, and keep, her students 'really enthusiastic'. She was largely positive about teaching (albeit part-time) and enthused, for example, about 'that initial getting people buzzing...it's fantastic!'.

Several teachers also offered tantalising glimpses of apparently autonomous, highly motivated learners for whom regular formal tuition did not necessarily seem appropriate:

I've taught kids who are really interested in music...and don't stick at lessons. You teach them a few times, they're not really interested in what you're doing, you try and wheedle out of them what they want...They're looking for answers, and they may get a few from you, and then they're off again [Dave]

Dave was well aware that he was talking about learners who sounded rather like him, and was also well aware of the irony of the situation:

Dave: The people who do it like me, you know, I recognise myself in a few pupils, they don't stick to lessons...I'm trying to correct technique and they're not -

Q: Not interested.

Dave: No.

Q: So presumably when you were 13, or 14, or 15, you wouldn't have been interested either?

Dave: probably not! [laughter].

Similarly, though he did not draw an explicit comparison, Ed described one particular pupil much as he had earlier in the interview described himself: an autonomous learner having a brief taste of formal tuition before moving on. He thought he himself had learned 'pretty quickly and easily' with very little help and advice from elsewhere; he recounted going for a single singing lesson which, while not unpleasant, seemed to offer him little that he felt he needed. In the same way, as a guitar teacher he recalled a single lesson with an apparently gifted pupil:

One woman, she was amazing actually, but she'd been playing three months...She only came for one lesson and didn't come again, she just wanted to know I think...that she was learning it really quickly. [Ed]

On several occasions during his interview Graham bemoaned the lack of interest and motivation of his pupils, as well as stressing his own determination as an autonomous learner. However, trying to teach someone who was to some extent like himself proved a taxing experience. He was asked explicitly if he had come across pupils he identified with, and his response was: 'there's probably one actually, and he bugs the shit out of me'. This pupil exhibited an insatiable desire to improvise, much like his teacher:

Graham: I don't really quite know why he keeps coming back, but it's taken him three years to stop just jamming on everything...

Q: So is that kind of what you would have been like?

Graham: Probably.

Q: And he's doing it anyway, aside from lessons?

Graham: And so he's really hard to control.

As Kemp and Mills put it:

Strong-minded children who have a clear idea about how they want to learn and what pieces they wish to play, while perhaps being less comfortable for the teacher to deal with, may well be the very ones who succeed in the long term. (Kemp and Mills, 2002: 13)

The agenda of these highly motivated pupils was thus never made explicit and remained 'off-stage'; however it was evidently not being met, and was

clearly strong enough to resist any imposition from elsewhere. This suggests that the power relations inherent in the roles of pupil and teacher might not always be appropriate for determined and independent learners, whose path may intersect the world of formal tuition for a while, before their own agendas lead them elsewhere. It also suggests, ironically, that while these teachers may have invited their pupils to bring their own agenda to lessons, when this happened it was not always compatible with the protocol of the 'music lesson'.

#### **5.4.6 Role: summary**

The teachers in the present study therefore found themselves in a somewhat contradictory position. In principle they saw their role as facilitating autonomous learning among those who were voluntarily choosing to come to lessons, and yet found that most of their pupils were simply not very interested. While they themselves had been independent, self-motivated learners, they were trying to teach people who were *not like them*; on the rare occasions that they did encounter pupils they identified with, these often proved the most difficult to teach, and the least impressed by what they had to offer.

Interestingly, several of these teachers seemed to want to explain, and even make excuses for, their pupils' lack of engagement. Some suggested that their students were just kids who are, of course, notoriously fickle, and don't know what they want; or perhaps they wouldn't say what they really wanted. Maybe they were pushed into it by their parents, or their parents weren't interested enough to encourage them. Others said their students were adults, and so they just wanted to get out of the house, or have a hobby. Perhaps they were too busy, and didn't have the time to devote to playing; and in any case they didn't want a career as a musician. The impulse to excuse their pupils could be seen perhaps as an attempt to construct - or defend - an image of themselves as worthy teachers in the face of what might appear as failure; their pupils may not be motivated or ambitious, but it was not their fault.

The idea that learning an instrument is for most people merely a leisure activity had clearly been accepted, at least intellectually, by the group. As Mills puts it:

Having hobbies, and exchanging them for new hobbies, is part of growing up - children should be able to give up instrumental lessons, with dignity, simply because their interests have changed. When children give up collecting stamps, or roller blading, for example, they are not typically viewed as 'failures'. (Mills, 2007: 124)

However, music was much more than a hobby for these teachers; it constituted a vocation, a career, an identity. While the relative lack of interest among most of their students had shaped their attitudes to teaching, and made them flexible and keen to please, nevertheless several of these musicians found this general apathy difficult to accept.

While the nature of their students clearly affected their role as teachers, there were also indications that their characters influenced how they chose to work, although differences in personalities and preferences were generally implicit rather than openly discussed. For example, if we compare the two teachers featured earlier in this chapter (5.2.2), Bill clearly set himself the highest standards as a musician, and attempted to establish similarly high standards for his students. However his focus on purity of tone and the 'mechanics' of playing appear somewhat exacting alongside Frank's emphasis on fun and encouragement. Indeed, Frank made a conscious decision to work with primary school children, often at a very basic level, and spoke with enthusiasm about the psychology of entertaining young children; from the temper of his interview, one cannot imagine Bill making a similar decision, nor being satisfied working at such a humble level of musicianship. Equally, members of the sample reacted in different ways to similar situations. While working as peripatetics, Dave and Frank both spoke of the considerable pressure they were under, while Graham felt he had 'almost no stress'. The often slightly chaotic nature of group work provoked very different responses from Ed (who had abandoned group teaching altogether) and Andy (who seemed to thrive on it). This is not to judge one teacher as 'better' than another, but simply to acknowledge that different teachers have different personalities

and that this will inevitably find expression in where and how they choose to work.

### **5.5 The politics of popular music**

The present study offers some support for the idea that actively choosing an instrument - rather than being simply presented with it by a parent or teacher - greatly increases the chances that individuals will persist with learning. Choosing what kinds of music to learn may be equally important; the participants stressed their personal engagement with the musical styles they had wanted to learn, and encouraged their students to bring into lessons music they liked, in the hope of fostering similar enthusiasm. However, the question of what happens to the 'meaning' or personal associations of music when it is formally studied in a lesson is relevant to both classroom and instrumental teachers. Adolescents, in particular, may welcome the chance to learn music they identify with or, conversely, resent attempts by adults and teachers to intrude into their personal, private cultural space. Some forms of popular music are at the heart of mainstream popular culture, widely accessible and well-known, while other styles and genres remain on the margins. Thus popular music relates to formal education in different ways, and this relationship forms the social and political backdrop to instrumental as well as classroom music teaching.

Shepherd and Vulliamy (1994) offer a useful overview of the historical debate raging in the late 1980s in the UK about the introduction of popular music into the classroom, and the role music should play in the National Curriculum, an argument which at the time was often couched in political rather than musical terms. However, since the early 1990s, there is no longer any realistic debate about whether popular styles of music 'should' be studied in UK classrooms. The National Curriculum requires that children study and perform a variety of musical styles, and popular music - in the form of rock, blues, folk, jazz and more - is a routine element of music lessons both before and after Key Stage 3. Writing and research now tends to focus on issues such as whether

the musical background and training of classroom teachers equips them to perform and teach such styles (see, for example, Lamont *et al.*, 2003: 230-231, or York, 2002: 20, also later in this study, 5.5.2). Some educators describe the problems of trying to find music which pupils like and identify with; musical tastes can change rapidly among teenagers, and specific forms of music may attract tribal allegiances (Tarrant *et al.*, 2002) which classroom teachers (and, perhaps, instrumental teachers) negotiate at their peril. As a result, the music used in school lessons is often relatively old 'classic' rock and pop 'such as the Beatles and Queen' (Green, 2008: 12), though Byrne and Sheridan (2000) offer an example from Scottish education which suggests that recent chart hits may also be used. However, the image of the classically-trained classroom teacher struggling to come to terms with 'popular' music, and approaching the subject with the same pedagogical tools they acquired in relation to classical music at university, may be increasingly out of date.

### **5.5.1 Institutionalising informal learning practices**

Alongside the introduction of popular styles of music into the classroom, there has been growing interest in the ways in which popular musicians learn (see section 1.5 and chapter 3). It has been argued that since popular music is already in the classroom, the informal practices by which many popular musicians acquire their skills should follow; for example, Green (2003: 269) warns that 'if the learning methods of the relevant musicians are ignored, a peculiar, classroom version of the music is likely to emerge'. According to this argument, if 'outsiders' from a classical background (such as the majority of classroom teachers) are to engage with popular music, they should adopt the cultural practices of this unfamiliar musical world; pop music in school will be more 'authentic' if learned, for example, by ear and produced in peer groups rather than by being formally 'taught' by a teacher.

However, there are other implications of introducing informal learning practices into the classroom. The title of Jaffurs' (2004) article is, in itself, telling: 'The impact of informal music learning practices in the classroom, or how I

learned how to teach from a garage band'. She argues that the experience of watching a garage band rehearse made her realise how well young musicians can learn from each other without the need for a teacher. Similarly, Allsup calls for formal education to draw on aspects of informal learning in order to become more relevant and engaging for students. He argues in favour of a 'collaborative teaching environment' (Allsup, 2003: 27) where teachers and students learn with, and from, each other while rehearsing in groups. He considers this kind of democratic interaction a way to resolve the 'disconnection between the music studied at school and the hidden or private musical world of our students' (*ibid*: 25). Other writers, for example, Davis (2005b), Campbell (1995) and Boespflug (1999), offer similar arguments. Moreover, this kind of advocacy is not restricted to classroom music, but extends to instrumental learning; Heidi Westerlund criticises the traditional 'apprenticeship' model as it applies to university music departments:

In the light of many educational theories and practical examples, there seem to be sound reasons to think that garage rock bands - and popular music practices in general - can show music educators how to create knowledge-building communities and expert culture. (Westerlund, 2006: 123)

Attempts to introduce aspects of informal learning into formal education have taken various forms. For example, Alf Bjornberg (1993) reports on a Danish project in a university music department where students and teachers learn rock or pop songs alongside each other, as if in a band; similar experiments have taken place in the Netherlands (Evelein, 2006), Sweden (Gullberg, 2006) and elsewhere. Green (2008) describes a pilot study in British secondary schools which sets out to re-create the informal learning practices of rock bands within the classroom; students form their own groups, and (at least at certain stages of the project) choose music that they like, to learn by listening, and by collaborating with their peers. In this setting, teachers are available if called on for help and advice, but songs are learned rather than taught. Green reports generally high levels of enthusiasm for and engagement in such activities among both teachers and students, and aspects of this approach are currently employed in many UK schools (see, in particular, [www.musicalfutures.org](http://www.musicalfutures.org)).

Most educational research of course is primarily concerned with learning in the compulsory setting of classroom music lessons, and in this context the world of informal, self-directed learning often seems novel and attractive. Particularly compelling is the idea that children might voluntarily and enthusiastically congregate to engage in meaningful and effective music learning, the very activity which teachers try so hard to generate in the classroom. Thus informal learning may represent a somewhat ambiguous resource for formal education, since the successful autonomous learning of popular musicians appears to render teachers - at least conceptually - redundant. From his own experience of both teaching and learning, John Holt writes:

The trouble with most teachers of music or anything else, is that they have in the back of their minds an idea more or less like this: 'Learning is and can only be the result of teaching. Anything important my students learn, they learn because I teach it to them.' ...It is not enough for them to be helpful and useful to their students; they need to feel that their students could not get along without them (Holt, 1991: 209).

I would argue that it is possible to find in the literature a certain bewilderment, bordering at times on resentment, about the fact that young music learners are often able and willing to express themselves musically without any help. This in turn is coupled to an insistence that they would nevertheless be better off with the guidance of an adult or teacher. For example, Campbell celebrates the spontaneous, informal 'musical play' of young American schoolchildren which occurs in playgrounds and homes, but cannot resist the idea that she might be able to contribute:

At least some of this music is awaiting stimulation and development, I am certain, through the training and enrichment that we can provide to children. (Campbell 1998: 225)

Jaffurs also strikes a somewhat plaintive note at being left out of the informal learning which is evidently taking place outside her classroom:

I don't want to be in the way of anyone's enjoyment of music. I want my students' perceptions of me to change and for them to let me in...I want to

know what they know about music, and I want them to teach me. I want to know what they think is important. (Jaffurs, 2004: 199)

Meanwhile Paul Woodford advocates rock band programmes in American schools (supervised by adults) supposedly as a way of fostering feelings of respect and inclusion among disaffected teenagers:

Rock and alternative music groups, despite their obvious attraction to at-risk students, are seldom countenanced in schools or acknowledged for their potential for promoting musical development or other growth! In my own experience, when those groups are tolerated in schools, they are usually student-initiated and lacking in adult supervision and instruction...rock and alternative music may be about rebellion and instant gratification, but that is all the more reason why those children, too, require guidance and adult supervision. They have much to learn from adults, including parents, teachers, and experienced musicians, which implies communication and the exercising of self-restraint. (Woodford, 2005: 82-83)

Thus what Murray Edelman (1974) terms 'the political language of the helping professions' (in this case, teaching) may be employed to justify, almost as the moral duty of a teacher, a form of constraint and control.

In another telling use of language, Alexandra Lamont studies the ways that 'musical identities' are sustained in relation to the school environment. She considers a 'positive musical identity' to rest on the extent to which children seem to identify with school music lessons, whether they have instrumental lessons, and whether they regard themselves as playing a musical instrument (in or out of school). She states:

The evidence points to a decline in positive musical identity and in degree of identification with music lessons as children move through the first 3 years of secondary school...However, the decline in identification with music occurs only gradually, and there may be scope for interventions to work with "vulnerable" children as they move into secondary school to halt and eventually reverse this decline. (Lamont, 2002: 56)

She later refers to possible ways of identifying "at risk" children in terms of musical identity' (*ibid*, 2002: 56). Terms such as 'interventions', 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' would suggest that she is describing children in need of protection by

social workers, rather than teenagers who may be losing interest in music at school. As in the example from Woodford quoted above, such language is invoked to rally support for remedial action, although the only suggestion Lamont offers is for better music teaching. In both cases, what seems to be important is not so much the musical interests of the students, but the fact that these may be drifting away from the classroom.

It may nevertheless be possible for school to host musical activities which children can continue to identify with. Several writers have pointed out that schools can provide crucial opportunities for young bands, including rehearsal space, equipment and personnel, even if the resulting activities happen outside lessons (see for example Green, 2002: 79). Scott Seifried gives an example of how an optional guitar class in a Washington D.C. high school offers a social space where disaffected teenagers can, as he puts it, 'embrace the margin' (Seifried, 2006: 175). In this class, unlike the other music classes available, they can study music of their choice (including, particularly, rock), and their perception of themselves as 'outsiders' can find a positive expression within formal education. Seifried suggests that the class served to keep several members engaged with the school music programme who would otherwise have dropped out. Green argues that introducing mainly self-directed informal learning practices into the classroom:

can awaken many pupils' awareness of their own musicality, particularly those who might not otherwise be reached by music education, put the potential for musical development and participation into their own hands, open their ears, and enhance their appreciation and understanding of music (Green, 2008: 22).

Thus we may view the entry into institutionalised education of popular music in general, and informal learning practices in particular, as a way of widening participation and encouraging interest in music making; alternatively as an attempt somehow to commandeer the enthusiasm associated with informal learning in order to bolster the success of classroom music lessons; or even as an effort (whether conscious or not) to suppress a potentially subversive activity, or one threatening to the identity of teachers. This is not to

suggest that all popular music is necessarily about rebellion or resistance, nor indeed that all children are necessarily fans of pop music (Pitts, 2000b: 37).

However, educators may need to tread carefully if they are to enter the private cultural space of others; merely by their presence, teachers risk alienating their students from music which has meaning for them (Green, 2006: 105). To learn an instrument informally and on one's own terms is, in a sense, to take one's place in a specific 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). While it may be possible to isolate the musically 'educational' aspects of informal learning, this is to ignore the social context within which learning takes place (Folkestad, 2006), which in itself may be crucial to the appeal of such learning practices. Playing in bands is not just about learning songs. Fornas *et al.* (1995: 251) argue that, for teenagers, being in a band acts as 'a free space, separated from adults in family and school', and involves experimental and inquisitive forms of learning, not built on enforcement or oriented towards specific, institutionally-approved goals. They suggest this escape from adult domination can be crucial to an adolescent's testing of ideals and formation of identity. However, this autonomy will be lost 'if the world of rock becomes colonised by school-like, system-dominated structures' (*ibid*: 259).

Clearly the stated purpose of introducing informal learning practices into formal education is to encourage inclusion in and enjoyment of music making, and as a strategy this may prove partly successful; such practices are clearly effective ways of learning, as several studies - and indeed the history of many forms of music - would suggest. However, it is also possible to imagine that informal music learning might become just another part of school life, and be drained of its positive associations for teenagers by virtue of the formal context in which it is practised. It may be that the kind of classroom teaching and learning advocated by Green 'will be uncomfortable in institutions, which may prove poor substitutes for basements, garages, and clubs' (Gatien, 2009: 113). Finney and Philpott (2010: 11) warn of the risk that informal learning, through being implemented in a formal setting, may become 'formalised' and that this process would subvert 'the very process it aims to promote'.

Formal music education has always had an ambiguous relationship with the very activity it is, in principle, intended to encourage. As Green somewhat wryly comments:

The decline of music making has occurred in tandem with the expansion of music education. Whether this complementary process is a matter of mere irony, whether music education has developed as a response to falling participation levels in music making, or whether it has been a contributory factor in causing that fall is not possible to demonstrate (Green, 2003: 263).

The guitarist Derek Bailey (1992: 49) makes a similar point as he argues that jazz, once the ‘sound of surprise’, has become increasingly predictable and formulaic, and is now enjoyed mainly as a ‘reminder of yesteryear’:

As development comes to a standstill and the role for invention diminishes, the number of college courses, summer schools and text books devoted to it grows (*ibid*: 23).

Gatien argues that the transmission of jazz in educational settings, while ‘legitimising’ the music, has prompted a formalisation of jazz practices and the construction of a jazz ‘canon’. This codification has allowed jazz to sit ‘more-or-less comfortably alongside Western Classical methods of transmission’ (Gatien, 2009: 98), but, like Bailey, he suggests this has had the effect of homogenising musical styles and limiting personal creativity. Thus rather than serve as a challenge to the ways that music is taught and learned, jazz has itself been affected by its introduction into formal education. Equally, ‘one might wonder whether rock music is at present undergoing (or already has undergone) the same kind of stagnation’ (Väkevä, 2006: 128). Gullberg and Brändström (2004) suggest that rock music produced by music college students in an ‘educational’ environment is tame and predictable compared with that made by informally-trained musicians.

I would argue that the dramatic fall in the cost of audio recording over the last 20 years, combined with the rise of the internet as a means of distribution, has resulted in the partial fragmentation of popular music into a multitude of relatively self-sufficient musical constituencies, often independent of major

record companies and the mass media for promotion and sales. One could debate whether the musical worlds currently enjoying a surge of creativity - candidates might include some areas of folk music or underground dance styles - are indeed the very genres which remain largely unnoticed (or unsuitable for digestion) by formal education. The Opies (1969) offer a note of warning particularly relevant to independent, autonomous learners: 'nothing extinguishes self-organised play more effectively than does action to promote it' (Opie and Opie, 1969: 16).

### **5.5.2 Participants' views on musical politics**

The literature associated with music learning (and children's play) therefore variously advocates the introduction of both popular music and informal learning practices into the classroom, and warns of the results of doing so. However, very little writing or research considers the choice of music in the instrumental teaching studio, or the role of instrumental teachers as regards the politics of cultural ownership and appropriation.

There is some evidence from the present study that my sample, as learners, identified strongly with different forms of 'oppositional' music, or at least thought of music as a private cultural space to be defended in the face of adult disapproval (see section 3.2.1). This identification with certain forms of music was still vivid in the minds of several of these teachers, and there remained a certain wariness, even hostility, towards the idea of these styles being studied formally in school.

Graham spoke at some length about what he saw as the contradictions inherent in teachers trying to teach music which their students (and indeed, Graham himself) identified with: 'I feel threatened by it but also resent it a little bit, you know, "let's teach people to play pop music"'. He argued that all 'music of value' had come about through tension or conflict, and he was wary of the effect that teaching, and the official endorsement this implied, might have on forms of music which were produced in the face of opposition:

The energy of it comes from figuring out how to do something when you're not allowed to do it...That's partly my resistance to teaching improvising, or teaching rock'n'roll, or teaching songwriting...; once it can be taught then it's neutered. [Graham]

He referred to 'this grumpy old man part of me' that felt the process of teaching 'drains the energy' from powerful forms of personal expression. He felt that teachers could and should have nothing to do with the enjoyment and excitement of autonomous learning; 'fun is what people have when teachers aren't looking' [Graham].

I suggested in section 1.6 that a pedagogical lineage is at stake in the way popular music is taught. Graham described his own learning practices as a 'modern equivalent' to non-Western practices studied by musicologists:

It just occurred to me the other day, thinking about world music and folk music and things like that, and even though I would see myself as a rock or a blues player, I've actually come from that tradition, which is the oral tradition I've learned from. I was thinking of some third-world context the other day, but what I've done is I've learned from listening and copying and then adapting as I went along; that's why I would call myself a blues player, not because I've been taught to play the blues but because I've immersed myself in it and learned to play it. [Graham]

Graham suggested that such practices, transplanted to an exotic location and viewed from 'the West', would be seen 'with some amazement'. He seemed to be defending the authenticity of his own Western musical heritage, based on learning practices which are shared by musicians all over the world, but only venerated when they take place elsewhere. However, Graham went on to claim that this vernacular tradition is broken by being analysed and taught, rather than absorbed and learned:

That's now changing, that's all becoming codified now, to the extent that somebody's realised: "This is what I did, this is what I can now teach", but that's breaking the tradition. [Graham]

Bill caught some of the enthusiasm and excitement of his own past in arguing most forcefully against the homogenising effect of trying to mass-

produce rock musicians. Like Graham, he seemed to resent widespread attempts to teach forms of music which embodied his own spontaneous and individual passions:

Bill: I don't want to lead anybody down the path - I really - that's one of my [taps the table] - get on my hobby-horse now.

Q: Yeah, do.

Bill: I really hate this 'rock school' culture, really, really hate it.

Q: What you mean by that?

Bill: I hate the cadres of professional rock musicians that are being turned out, I hate everything, right from their long hair to their bloody shiny guitars, you know, really can't stand it [laughter] because it's not supposed to be like that!! [taps the table] You know, it's supposed to be about just, er, just going to the record shop, rushing to the record shop, buying the record, going home, listening - fucking hell, this is awesome! And not taking it off the turntable for a month, you know, just listening to it and you think, god, this is great! You know, you can't teach that, and you shouldn't teach it, you know.

Carl also used the term 'rock school', and it is unclear if these teachers were referring to the system of graded exams, the recent feature film (2005, directed by Don Argott), or the Channel 4 TV series which all shared the same name. However, like Bill, Carl clearly saw the term as a watchword for ersatz and embarrassing attempts to appropriate originally meaningful musical forms:

Carl: On one side you've got the classical thing, and on the other side you've got this anarchic rock thing, and now in the middle you've got 'rock school'.

Q: Which is neither fish nor fowl.

Carl: Which is like nervous white blokes trying to teach 'rock'n'roll'!  
[laughter]

Some of the participants seemed to think that teaching forms of popular music could be particularly inappropriate in the classroom because school music teachers, due to their background and ability as musicians, might be ill-equipped to play or teach contemporary forms of music, a point frequently raised in the research literature, as already mentioned (see 5.5.2). As Graham put it: 'people who teach something that they're not good at is always embarrassing, and kids will notice that'. Carl worked part-time as a music technician in a secondary school, and had the most to say about classroom

music lessons, based on his own regular observations. He felt that classically-trained musicians (such as the teachers he worked with) viewed their own musical education as the highest form of training available; as such this would, inevitably, equip them to perform (and teach) any style of music including, for example, folk or jazz. In Carl's view this was simply 'arrogance', and the results of these attempts were 'never great'. Equally inappropriate were attempts to identify with the culture of their pupils: 'both the teachers that I work with, they're constantly trying to be "hip with the kids", and it's embarrassing'.

However, while the participants clearly had significant reservations and resentments around the institutionalisation of different musical styles, there was also an admission from several of the participants that the process whereby musical 'rebellion' becomes absorbed or appropriated into mainstream culture is, in fact, inevitable. Graham argued that any artist, however confrontational or subversive their intentions, was nevertheless trying 'to put a song out there in the world', and in doing so began an inexorable course of assimilation:

There's this process by which it knocks at the door, and gradually that door opens and then it becomes part of the establishment, that's just what happens. [Graham]

Helen and Frank both referred to the way jazz, in its early years, was described as 'the devil's music' before becoming accepted and even respectable. I asked Bill whether he thought 'something happens to the playfulness or the rebelliousness' of different musical forms, and he replied: 'Yeah, you grow up don't you! [laughter] That's what happens!'. Bill attributed the 'rock school culture' in part simply to 'the passage of time' and the fact that there was now 'a generation of teachers who have grown up with popular culture'. Bill also recognised that pop music had developed as 'an historical form':

People can see how it's been done so therefore you can teach people to do it, or to appreciate how it was done, and that's the way - I mean I'm railing against it, but really there's no other way for it to go. [Bill]

Nevertheless, several teachers believed that forms of popular music could still represent a form of rebellion for young people, or at least a chance to

express themselves, even though this was now to some extent accepted by the school system:

I've rehearsed kids for GCSE music, they have the same attitude you know, they're all strutting around with their hairdos and their guitars...They get the stuff together as well, you know, I think it's the same thing, they all want to be rock stars. [Dave]

Graham suggested that 'every school has now got hairy kids who play guitars', and this served at least as 'a sign of individuality, which is still the good bit about it'. However, such behaviour no longer carried the same implicit threat that it might once have done: 'it's lost that little dangerous edge because now your teacher will teach it' [Graham]. Frank saw an inevitable separation between adults and teenagers who 'want to be in the teenagers club, which doesn't allow adults in'. Carl made a conscious decision to maintain what he saw as a kind of healthy cultural divide between himself and his own teenage daughters, even when this involved pretending to dislike current music which in fact he listened to himself:

I always make - especially with my own kids - I always sort of, even if I think a track's quite cool, on the radio, I'll say: "What a load of - ooh, dreadful racket", even though it's on my iTunes, you know, it's true, that [laughter]. [Carl]

Andy was aware that some of his students kept their own musical activities private and apart from instrumental lessons and from him as a teacher; on the other hand some of them asked him for help with tunes they were learning in their own bands. He welcomed this and felt that it was possible, and desirable, as regards the separate musical worlds of adults and teenagers, to 'draw them together'. He thought communication channels between teenagers and their parents were generally more open - and as a consequence, much healthier - than they had been when he himself was growing up. Frank in effect excused himself from considering the politics of learning, as virtually all of his experience of teaching was with children under the age of ten. For such a young age group, autonomous musical learning was less important, and they regarded all styles of music as of equal value: 'the worst we get is they get sulky' [Frank].

Graham suggested that the search for cultural space that is not monitored or approved by adults might lead children away from music altogether, and towards the internet (and elsewhere) instead, prompting inevitable feelings of adult panic:

Where the danger and where the rebellion and where the distance from adults is, is now in chat rooms and this whole thing that's freaking people out...and also video games. [Graham]

Bill seemed to think that, despite generations of modern popular culture, youth would always be able to find forms of expression which would elude the grasp of the adult world:

Bill: You can't contain it in the classroom can you, there will always be some part of youth culture which isn't; which -

Q: Which squirts out the sides.

Bill: Yeah, which absolutely doesn't conform to that model that you're trying to - there are forms of music now that are always ahead of the game.

Q: Still beyond the pale.

Bill: Yeah, I mean the music that I never got into...was rap music, hip-hop, you know I don't know anything about that, it doesn't mean much to me because it wasn't the music that I grew up listening to...but to a whole generation of kids, that's their music of their rebellion isn't it? And I can see that's very effective obviously.

However, Ed had no particular opinions on the subject of resistive music or cultural appropriation, but saw musical choices, and musical expression, as more of a personal than political issue; moreover, he felt that forms of popular music-making could harbour conformity and a lack of creativity to a greater extent than classical music:

I think it comes down to the person, I mean there's lots of people in rock'n'roll, you know, in bands, who are very uncreative un-innovative people, and there are people who do classical music who have been classically-taught - or maybe they haven't - but they really do kind of jump about and think about things in different ways which I find very interesting. [Ed]

While Dave was adamant that 'kids don't like classical music in school' as it was

'too straight', Bill suggested that 'orchestral music' was 'anti-modern' and thus 'actually quite subversive, strangely' since it required dedication and physical as well as emotional engagement in order to play it; this was in contrast to the current trend for the 'push-button', 'cerebral' world of keyboards and computers. Helen could see no virtue in attempts to keep musical worlds apart, and felt that music should be available to be enjoyed by all:

It's kind of snobbish isn't it, saying you don't want a particular group of people to enjoy your music, or listen to your music...That's something that happens a lot isn't it, people really annoyed cos: "That's not who we wrote it for". [Helen]

Dave felt there was no particular reason that young learners were better off left to themselves, nor that being musically trained should inhibit 'authentic' expression: just the reverse. Someone with 'formal training' would be able to express themselves better than someone who's 'just trying to do it on pure ability': 'you get all types of cross-overs' [Dave]. For Helen, music was about personal expression and communication, and 'the more skills you have to enable you to express that, the better'.

The two youngest teachers (Ed and Helen) seemed to be the least inclined to draw cultural boundaries around different kinds of music, and this may in part be a reflection of their own experience of popular music appearing in classroom music lessons (they were both young enough to have seen the first few years of the National Curriculum in action). However, several of the other - older - musicians in this study expressed strong opinions about the politics of popular music and how it related to the formal world of school and teachers and, in a wider sense, adult mainstream culture. Their view of classroom music lessons may have been influenced by their experiences as schoolchildren many years before, and by a cultural divide between pupils and teachers which has since narrowed considerably. Carl and Graham both worked regularly in secondary schools, and their opinions were in part based on their own observations of the musical culture they had seen there. This is not to say, however, that their views were necessarily shared by the pupils involved.

### 5.5.3 Participants' political position

Instrumental teachers have a good deal of autonomy compared to other teachers that their students may encounter, and accordingly may not be seen in the same light. Nevertheless, the participants were themselves both adults and teachers, and were mostly using popular music in their lessons. However, in their own eyes they were clearly not implicated in a process of adult appropriation of youthful, 'resistive' music, or intrusion into autonomous cultural space. In this context, they were suggesting - at least by implication - a distinction between classroom teachers and instrumental teachers like themselves, in terms of their political position and integrity as musicians.

This divide was generally not made explicit, although Graham pointed out the difference between himself and a classroom teacher in considering the difficulties of teaching 'resistive' musical styles one was not proficient in oneself. He agreed that for him to try to teach, for example, rap music would be embarrassing 'but less embarrassing than a classroom teacher doing it'. Similarly, Dave suggested that many schoolchildren would instinctively sneer at any attempts that a classroom music teacher might make to teach pop or rock, but 'a cool trendy peripatetic teacher' with a background in popular music might have enough credibility to be taken seriously as a source of useful knowledge. Peripatetics are themselves potentially 'outsiders' from the school hierarchy; if they have less status as a teacher, they may have more credibility for their pupils as musicians.

However Cope (1999: 63) suggests that instrumental teachers, if they are from a classical background, may also not be particularly inspirational figures for their students, who do not necessarily identify with the musical culture which such teachers embody. For many students, the musical life of a school is symbolised by the school concert:

It is difficult to see what cultural authenticity is represented by a school orchestra struggling to play classical music to an audience who would never otherwise listen to it. (Cope, 1999: 71)

Thus instrumental teachers - depending on their musical background - may be viewed, as classroom teachers often are, as representatives of a musical community which holds little appeal for their students.

The participants in the present study seemed to resist any sense of themselves as belonging to the world of formal education. My sample were not in the same position of power over their pupils as classroom teachers; since their lessons were voluntary, these could ideally be more of a collaborative venture between themselves and their students. They were in any case generally teaching music which they themselves were expert at playing. So it is perhaps understandable that they felt no sense of themselves 'appropriating' someone else's music; they were cultural 'insiders', authentic exponents of the styles they played and taught. If they did introduce informal learning practices into instrumental lessons, they were simply passing on skills from their own experience to someone who had come to them for help.

#### **5.5.4 Politics of popular music: summary**

I suggested earlier in this chapter (5.5) that any debate over whether popular music should be used in schools as a regular part of music lessons was effectively over. Nevertheless, this subject aroused much interest among the participants, though it seemed to divide them into two camps. Those with the least to say were the two younger teachers (Ed and Helen) who had themselves experienced popular music in the classroom, and those (like Andy and Frank) who had grown up playing and listening to more mainstream, culturally 'acceptable' styles like blues, jazz or pop. Perhaps not surprisingly, the teachers who were most expressive about cultural intrusion were the ones who themselves had had cultural space to defend when younger; that is, those who had been most passionate as teenagers about resistive, openly 'rebellious' music such as rock'n'roll (Graham) and punk rock (Bill, Carl, and Dave). Whether consciously or otherwise, this second group had largely avoided teaching the kinds of music about which they had felt so strongly. Bill had turned himself into a traditional, classical double bass teacher, while Dave taught

mainly classical pieces interspersed with occasional diversions into pop or jazz. Carl's teaching (and playing) repertoire was based almost entirely on acoustic folk music. Graham used a variety of musical styles in his teaching, but explicitly avoided teaching 'rock'n'roll' and was wary of spelling out improvisation strategies too specifically lest the opportunities for personal expression be lost; he thus seemed to be keeping something of himself back, as it were. As we saw, Graham spoke eloquently of his place in a cultural tradition of informal learning, and suggested that this tradition was being broken by musicians codifying their own learning practices and teaching others accordingly. He did not seem to identify his own teaching as part of this process, though possibly his instinct to protect aspects of his own musical experience enabled him to resolve this apparent contradiction.

Thus in a sense this second group of teachers all kept their own cultural space intact. As we saw earlier in this chapter (5.2), in their work as teachers they had found ways to draw on what they saw as the successes and failures of their own learning methods, but they did so in a way that did not appropriate, for teaching purposes, music which had had personal meaning for them as teenagers.

## **5.6 Beliefs and attitudes: conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to elaborate on the data presented in chapter 4, in order to suggest not just how these teachers taught, but *why* they taught as they did, and how their identities as musicians and teachers have been shaped by their experiences.

I suggested in 5.2 that they had become the teachers they would have wanted to be taught by; as such, they tried to include in their teaching the learning practices which they valued, supplemented by skills and knowledge which they felt they had missed out on. Although as 'popular musicians' they seemed in some ways to have a good deal in common, their different

experiences of learning, and their different aspirations as musicians, resulted in diverse approaches to teaching.

In 5.3 I described the reluctance with which these musicians became, and remained, teachers. They adopted a range of strategies to resolve the tension between their identities as teachers and as musicians, including humour, altruism and resignation. In 5.4 I suggested that the participants were flexible and obliging as teachers, keen to engage and motivate their students. The relative indifference they encountered was viewed with a mixture of pragmatism, incomprehension and disappointment. While the participants had been in control of their own learning agenda, their pupils seemed on the whole not to bring any particular agenda to their lessons.

In section 5.5 I discussed some aspects of the social and political background to how popular music is used in education, and whether this constitutes 'appreciation or appropriation' (Huq, 2006: 145). Although the participants were, in some ways, representatives of 'formal education', their status and musical persona perhaps allowed them (at least in their own minds) to sidestep any sense of identification with classroom teachers. Most of them remained wary of institutionalised music learning, and saw themselves simply as musicians helping others to learn.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I discuss the key findings of this project in terms of the learning histories and teaching practices of the participants. I consider the possible limitations of the study, and discuss its implications. I offer suggestions for further research which might be warranted, and consider for whom this research might be relevant.

It is clear that the teachers who took part in this project did not simply teach as they were taught. While several mentioned players they admired, very few seemed to have encountered teachers who served as positive role models. On the contrary, they appeared to have invented themselves as teachers, much as they had as musicians. It may be that popular musicians are typically not influenced greatly by teachers, since teaching is less important than self-directed learning in this cultural world; the role of the teacher has to date been simply less valued here than in the classical tradition. Therefore popular musicians may well tend to rely less on teachers, and have fewer of them. It should be noted that with the spread of higher education in popular music the prevalence (and perhaps the standard) of popular music teaching may well be increasing. However, my sample exhibited a somewhat wary or even resentful attitude towards the teachers they had had, and a sense that the most significant aspects of their own learning were achieved independently. These feelings may have been reflected in their own ambiguous stance towards the value of their own role as teachers: they all seemed to share the nagging feeling that really they would rather be playing. Several of them expressed a certain defensiveness towards the intrusion of formal education into what 'should' be (and was for them) a personal and often private realm of musical discovery and meaning.

Equally, these teachers did not simply attempt to replicate how they learned; quite apart from the impossibility of recreating for their students the circumstances under which they learned, they also seemed very clear about the strengths and weakness of their own learning careers, and did not necessarily want their students to be just like them. Instead they had devised teaching strategies to compensate, as it were, for their own shortcomings as players, while adopting in some form methods which had been effective for them. Often it had taken some time (or some training) for them to balance these different influences, but on the whole they seemed to have arrived at a kind of idealised version of what an instrumental teacher should be: that is, the teacher they would have wished for themselves. It seems reasonable to assume that all prospective teachers would seek, consciously or not, to become the teachers they themselves needed, though I am not aware of any research into instrumental teachers which considers this question.

Throughout the participants' accounts it was clear that their teaching strategies were created in response to specific circumstances. In particular, continued exposure to not particularly talented, and not particularly motivated students, had had a profound effect on the way they taught. These teachers spent a good deal of effort attempting to make what they taught 'manageable' [Andy] and 'as simple as possible' [Ed], while trying not to 'put people off' [Bill]. Thus what they themselves might have needed from an 'ideal' teacher had to be balanced against what, on the whole, their students needed most: simple, immediately gratifying activities, and a great deal of encouragement. I would argue that how the popular musicians in this project taught was a result of balancing the influences of these different factors: how they learned, how they thought they should have been taught, and what their students seemed to respond to.

## **6.2 Validity**

I have attempted to acknowledge the main limitations of the study in chapter 2. While there are certainly aspects of my investigation which could

have been strengthened, any study which samples a population rather than investigates every member of it will have limitations. The question of how far one may generalise from a limited sample - in other words, 'what we can say about what we didn't see on the basis of what we did see' (Becker, 1998: 75) - relies on quality of data rather than quantity. Becker suggests that one way of establishing the robustness of our data, and the validity of our analysis, is:

to confront ourselves with just those things that would jar us out of the conventional categories, the conventional statement of the problem, the conventional solution. (*ibid*: 85)

I will give one example of the way the study seemed to confront conventional assumptions. My central research focus was the teaching practices of popular musicians. In my sample I found that these practices varied widely in style, from orthodox classical music teaching to that entirely based on listening and copying, and all points in between: this diversity was unexpected and difficult to account for. Existing suggestions as to why musicians teach as they do, such as 'they teach as they were taught' or (in the case of popular musicians) 'they overlook their own learning practices and adopt a classical model' thus appear to be 'conventional categories' which are inadequate to explain why the participants taught as they did. In a sense the sheer awkwardness of these findings helps establish their credibility; the data require some explanation which doesn't already exist. I have argued that popular musicians teach by balancing their sense of 'value' in relation to their learning histories with what their students seem to need and enjoy. While this explanation may need refining (or indeed replacing) in the light of future research, the data suggesting that popular musicians employ such a wide range of teaching practices may nevertheless be valid, and offers a new framework for understanding the population as a whole.

### **6.3 Research into instrumental teachers**

I have pointed out several times over the course of this thesis that there is relatively little research which considers what instrumental teachers do, and

which observes them doing it (see section 4.2). I would argue in favour of more research into instrumental teachers, particularly those from a popular music background. This was my central research focus, but one small-scale study hardly saturates the field. Players with all kinds of ‘non-classical’ or ‘mixed’ learning histories are at work teaching privately, in schools, in further and higher education and, increasingly, on the internet, yet very little is known about even the most basic questions of their repertoire and strategy. Further research into freelance teachers in particular must overcome significant problems of access: as Louise Gibbs points out:

Private teachers really are ‘private’: they are difficult to reach if they do not declare their professional status or are not members of professional organisations. (Gibbs, 1993: 93)

As I suggested in chapter 2 (2.6), focused research into specific groups of teachers would be worthwhile. For example, a study of popular teachers who have had no instrumental lessons themselves would reveal more clearly the influence of learning histories, and the significance of cultural assumptions about what teachers are ‘supposed’ to do. Equally, being able to compare the teaching strategies of instrumental teachers who have all had pedagogic training would be one way of evaluating the effects of such training.

Following the research interest in the *context* of music learning, there is surely a case (as I have suggested already in section 5.4.4) for studying the experiences of peripatetics working in schools who also teach privately elsewhere, as a way of demonstrating the significance of the circumstances under which lessons take place. Also relevant here would be research into how popular music is taught in higher education, often to degree level, on courses explicitly designed to produce professional players.

#### 6.4 How teaching strategies evolve

Further research into the ways instrumental teachers change and develop would also be helpful. This study suggests that, just as musicians have to learn how to play, teachers have to learn how to teach. Over time, some of the participants had completely transformed their ideas about teaching. It is suggestive that the teacher who had been teaching for the shortest time (Bill) had adopted a teaching strategy which both closely reflected the teaching he had himself received, as well as incorporating the least of his own past. Other members of this group (in particular Andy and Dave) also began teaching with what appears to have been a kind of stereotyped version of the classical model in mind, only for this to mutate over time into one based initially on listening and watching rather than reading notation. Further research would be required to ascertain if such a progression, particularly for popular musicians, is typical. In part it may be that the initial panic of becoming a teacher prompts many popular musicians to reach for an obvious and well-established model to use, only gradually to realise that such a model (or at least their conception of it) may not reflect their own strengths as musicians, nor appeal to many of their students.

I began chapter 1 with a description of the teaching practices of a popular musician relatively new to teaching. Although he was not interviewed for this project, such novice teachers would make interesting participants for future research. Baker reports the views of 20 mature peripatetic teachers, and finds an ‘awareness of high proficiency’ based on their long experience, balanced against a sense of ‘ennui’ and a recognition of ‘negligible career prospects’ (Baker, 2005: 146). Further studies of instrumental teachers, and more in-depth interviews concerning their musical life-histories, might suggest how teachers change, not just in terms of their sense of identity but also in terms of specific teaching practices. Demonstrating commonalities in how pedagogy evolves could have useful implications for teacher training. Such research might also reveal factors which predispose musicians to become teachers in the first place.

## 6.5 Motivated teachers and apathetic learners

The image of these teachers as they describe their own learning histories is one of passionate, committed, self-directed learners. Their students however appear (at least in the eyes of their teachers) relatively apathetic and reliant on others for encouragement. The difference between teachers and learners here is thus emphasised, but this study also demonstrates the significance of apathy in defining the behaviour and attitudes of these teachers. The nature of this study has highlighted the fact that much existing music education research is specific to certain groups of learners, often without acknowledging the fact. Research based on students at universities and specialist music schools often seems to reveal teaching which emphasises an 'instrumental-technical approach' (Hultberg, 2002: 187); it may be that in these circumstances teachers are able to take for granted a certain level of ability and motivation, and are thus able to focus on questions which would be off-putting for those with less determination or humbler aspirations. I would argue that this study makes a contribution towards the literature on instrumental teaching by reporting what teachers do in the face of only mildly interested and not particularly able students, rather than suggesting what they 'should' do based on the behaviour of students who have been selected for their unusual ability and commitment.

There is clearly a sampling bias inherent in the idea that we consider worthwhile only research into prestigious, well-respected institutions (Becker, 1998: 94). As Everett Hughes writes:

We need to give full and comparative attention to the not-yets, the didn't-quite-make-its, the not quite respectable, the unremarked and the openly "anti" goings-on in our society. (Hughes, 1984: 53)

The accounts given by the participants contradict several aspects of research which are apparently widely accepted - for example, the idea that 'successful learning' is largely predicated on active parental encouragement, or that music teachers act as role models for learners. If anything, the present study suggests that much successful learning takes place away from adults, and that in some circumstances teachers may have a negligible or even negative impact on

learning. David Thomas (1995c: 16) suggests that teachers' personal narratives can be 'redressive' or even 'treasonable', since they offer a view of the profession which may contradict, or at least counterbalance, the 'official' version deriving from 'positions of power and policy-making'. This study takes a step towards redressing the imbalance in existing research, by giving a voice to teachers from perhaps a 'not quite respectable' background.

## **6.6 Training and experience**

Only two of the participants had undertaken any training specifically for instrumental teachers, and they had done so, not in preparation for a career as a teacher, but in response to the need for more effective teaching methods - or from a fear of being 'found out'. In both cases this training was highly valued and effective, not in supplying a 'syllabus', but rather in developing a sense of strategy which could be applied throughout their teaching.

I would argue that the lack of widely available instrumental teacher training, and the lack of research into what teachers actually do, creates a culture of secrecy around instrumental teaching. Market forces also play a part; where teachers are, in effect, selling their skills in competition with others, there is economic as well as personal and musical space to be defended. Working in isolation, and mostly 'making it up as they go along', many instrumental teachers (including those in the present study) feel insecure about what they do. There is no shared body of knowledge about instrumental teaching to which teachers can appeal to justify their pedagogical decisions, and no obvious forum for discussing feelings of inadequacy or failure:

In fields where people perceive their knowledge (and their ignorance) as jointly shared, the individual burden is reduced. A person can take comfort from his compliance with normal expectations within the occupation; he can feel that he did everything possible within the "state of the art". (Physicians so argue when they are charged with malpractice.) Thus the individual can cope with unpleasant outcomes by sharing the weight of his failure and guilt; his inadequacy is part of the larger inadequacy of the field. Teachers derive little consolation from this source; an

individualistic conception of practice exacerbates the burden of failure. (Lortie, 2002: 81)

Though Lortie is referring here to school teachers, the isolation of instrumental teachers is surely more profound still, since they lack the training which all classroom teachers share. Thus instrumental teachers may experience contradictory feelings - an instinct to conceal what they do, balanced against a desire to share knowledge and experience.

As Mills says, 'it is difficult to believe that instrumental pupils' learning needs would not be met more effectively by teachers who were trained' (Mills, 2006: 388). However, at present instrumental teacher training is far from universal even in universities and conservatoires, and courses such as the CT ABRSM are voluntary, often expensive and not available in many parts of the country. Baker argues that 'the absence of dedicated instrumental and vocal teaching courses which confer professional status is...extremely worrying' (Baker, 2006: 44). Gibbs (1993: 92) also points out that many teaching diplomas do not include supervised teaching practice, and suggests therefore that the examination boards which award such qualifications may be assuming that musical competence is synonymous with teaching competence. More published research into all kinds of instrumental teaching, and more widely available and affordable training, might help to foster the sharing of best practice and avoid the kinds of painful episodes reported by my sample from their earliest experiences of teaching. Thomas (1995c: 15) suggests that encouraging teachers to share their experiences is potentially empowering, and provides opportunities for self-reflection and growth; indeed, further research among my sample might offer interesting feedback on whether taking part in the present study has had any effect on them.

Purser studies a group of conservatoire teachers, and argues that:

Many fine performers...develop their own sophisticated and successful teaching techniques. These may range from the maverick to the orthodox. I would no more favour homogenising their teaching styles than I would their musical views. A broad church is an essential element of a healthy musical community. (Purser, 2005: 298)

The present study likewise demonstrates the creativity of individual teachers, and this is surely to be celebrated. Perhaps the best kinds of training encourage idiosyncratic and imaginative teaching strategies, as here in the case of Frank. Several of the participants suggested that good teaching could serve as a shortcut for music learners; perhaps good training might serve the same function for teachers.

However, this study also demonstrates the value of experience. The group as a whole received very little training in pedagogy, and had few positive role models among their own teachers; it seems the practice of teaching taught them how best to help others. Much of what the participants described of their own home-grown teaching styles could serve as examples of 'good teaching' as outlined in the many books of advice on the subject (see section 4.2). It is interesting to note, for example, that the participants have on the whole arrived at creative and apparently successful ways of teaching which put sound before symbol, and as such they have fulfilled the advice of much research on music education without actually having read any of it. This emphasis on the primacy of listening rather than reading may be widespread among popular teachers, and more research might establish if this is the case.

## **6.7 Methodology**

While I have described in chapter 2 how my own study was conducted, different methodology might also produce valuable data. Interviewing teachers is certainly one way to gather data about their experience and practice, and Thomas (1995c: 4) notes the growing belief that 'much of value to the educational community can be learned by conversing with, and listening attentively to, what teachers have to say'. Filming teachers at work can serve as a form of triangulation. However, there may be other ways of studying instrumental teaching which could include to a greater extent those taking the lessons as well as those giving them. For example, Jennifer Mason considers the problem of assessing different views of parenting skills when data are

gathered solely from interviewing parents themselves. She argues that one way to expand the limitations of such interviews might be to:

focus on relationships between people, without presupposing anything directional about these, rather than treating “parenting” as a practice done to children, or a set of skills possessed by parents. This inevitably raises the question of *who* has the knowledge, the experience, the defended self, or whatever, that we are interested in. If we see our focus on *relationships* (parent-child) rather than individualized practices or skills possessed (parenting), then parents’ perspectives can provide data on only part of this. We need to interview children too, at the very least. (Mason, 2002: 236)

If we extend this logic to instrumental lessons, teaching is about the relationship between teacher and student, not just about skills ‘owned’ by the teacher. As such, if we’re going to interview the teacher, we should interview the student too, though this may compound problems of access and confidentiality. In the present study, students’ views might have offered another form of triangulation, and also introduced an element of reflexivity into the study. For example, the participants had largely negative reports of the teaching they received; now that they are teachers themselves, what do their students say about them? The participants also had largely negative opinions about the levels of motivation shown by their students; how motivated do the students themselves feel? Some recent studies have included the views of music learners as well as teachers (see for example Green, 2008; Bryan, 2004; Rowe, 2008) and this is to be welcomed. I would also echo Rowe (2008: 337) when she suggests that more research is required into the body language of teachers and students, and the ways this may indicate - or affect - the relationship between them; increased awareness of this may well have an impact on teaching outcomes.

## **6.8 Studying motivated learners**

This project suggests that in-depth interviews with popular musicians can reveal complex learning careers which evolved gradually during different stages of learning an instrument, and these personal histories may not be evident from limited observations. Certainly, some budding musicians will remain completely

'self-taught' and develop only through solitary ear-based practice and group rehearsals, but others will go on to focus on technique, notation and theory. In this sense, the present project seems to complement studies which focus solely on the 'informal' learning practices of popular musicians, such as copying songs and composing in a group, as witnessed in a band rehearsal. It may be perfectly normal for popular musicians, particularly those who are 'serious' about music, to come later to the study of well-established issues of technique and theory (Berliner, 1994; Feichas, 2010). This study thus contributes to the research literature which focuses on musicians as lifelong learners (see, for example, Smilde, 2009). However, autobiographical accounts may be compressed or edited by memory. Longitudinal studies of informal instrumental learners might better inform our knowledge of learning as a process over time.

This study also contributes to the intellectual appeal of informal learning, by presenting the participants as a group of successful, autonomous and highly motivated learners. There is a good deal of music education research into motivation, and in particular why children succeed or fail as instrumental learners (Hallam, 2002, gives a useful overview). By studying those who choose to learn, and for whom practice is a pleasure, even an obsession, we may learn more about successful learning strategies. However, there are fundamental problems in trying to recreate in an institutional setting the content and, in particular, the context of informal learning. Ironically, the present teachers, so motivated as informal learners, and so independent from teachers, now face similar problems of motivating their own students. It should also be noted that this image of informal learners as independent, motivated and universally successful may be somewhat misleading. Mills gives several examples of people taking up instruments and learning, often very successfully, without having lessons, but cautions:

for every one of these success stories, there may be several examples of people attempting to teach themselves an instrument, and giving up, despondent, through lack of progress. (Mills, 2007: 65)

The participants offer a familiar view of successful music learners which is also somewhat exclusive; in other words, that while many people have the

potential for instrumental excellence, in practice only the ‘chosen few’ will be bewitched by some mysterious and potent spell which drives them to master their instrument. Certainly, there were no plausible explanations for the participants’ single-minded determination to play. In this respect they regarded their students as on the whole different from themselves, and acknowledged that most were not committed to becoming highly accomplished players. However, even if we accept this view, this is not to devalue the work of instrumental teachers. Rather than focusing on the requirements of future full-time concert performers, it may be more constructive for teachers to accept that music learning is for most a leisure activity rather than a vocation; competence may be a more realistic goal than excellence (Cope 1999: 72). Moreover, making even modest levels of music learning enjoyable is a considerable achievement. It seems likely that enjoyment is central to successful learning outcomes, and to continued engagement in music-making (Cope, 2003: 312-313); as Frank put it, ‘if it isn’t fun, why bother?’. Recognising that the role of an instrumental teacher may not necessarily involve training future professionals but rather keeping people ‘amused or entertained’ [Graham] also implies that successful teaching requires an element of performance as well as instruction.

I would echo Hallam’s (2002) call for more research into what motivates adults to take up instrumental learning. Adults have more control than children over their spare time, are unlikely to have been bribed or coerced into taking up an instrument, and will probably rely less on praise or encouragement from others to continue; in short, they appear to have ‘no external pressures or extrinsic rewards’ (Hallam, 2002: 239). Wayne Booth (1999) offers an autobiographical account describing the pleasures and frustrations of taking up an instrument as an adult. Similarly, John Holt is a good example of a self-directed learner who, rather like the participants, needs no coercion from a teacher to practise, and is well aware of his own weaknesses as a player. Having spent his career teaching and writing about educational motivation, he is very clear about what he wants, and what he does not want, from a teacher: ‘The right kind of teacher can be a great help to a learner, particularly of music. The wrong kind can be worse than none’ (Holt, 1991: 209-210). He goes on:

The teacher I need must accept that he or she is my partner and helper and not my boss, that in this journey of musical exploration and adventure, I am the captain. Expert guides and pilots I can use, no doubt about it. But it is my expedition, I gain the most if it succeeds and lose the most if it fails, and I must remain in charge. (*ibid*: 217)

This sounds rather like the description of adult learners given by my sample: generally more motivated than children, often specific in their requirements, and harder to please. However, there are also glimpses of such self-directed learners among the teenagers taught by the participants, and indeed the participants themselves needed to be ‘in charge’ of their own learning. This suggests that the more autonomous the learner is, the more flexible the teacher needs to be; however, teachers also need to accept that their presence is not a prerequisite for successful learning.

### **6.9 My own perspective as a practitioner and researcher**

In chapter 2 I tried to acknowledge the effect that my persona, as musician, teacher and researcher, may have had on the research. I also suggested that, while I may have had a licence to challenge or prompt my interviewees, I did not intend to treat the interviews (or indeed the project as a whole) as a platform for my own opinions. However, as a musician and as a teacher it was certainly interesting for me to listen to the interview accounts and watch the lesson observations. In chapter 1 I gave some account of my own past as a learner, and of my initial experiences as a teacher; I end here with some reflexive observations on the data.

My own background as a learner certainly had much in common with many of the participants, and it struck me that in several instances their evolution as teachers mirrored my own. Indeed, an account of my current practice as a teacher could almost be edited together from the interviews and lesson observations of my sample. Like Dave, as a novice I began teaching from notation, before gradually learning to work with beginners by ear, and from memory, subsequently using notation to support aural learning rather than

precede it. Like Andy, I play 'bite-sized pieces...in rhythm'; I also 'constantly play, we play together, I...do loops, and repeat things over and over again' [Ed]. Like Carl I have accumulated a collection of tunes which address different aspects of technique, so that facility is hopefully acquired largely through the playing of particular pieces. Like most of my sample, I offer the study of grade exams but only to those students who actively choose to do them. And, like almost all the participants, I encourage my students to bring in music that they like and want to learn, having found that this can generate high levels of motivation and progress. Certainly many aspects of my teaching were encouraged and supported by training and study, but I would say that in the main my teaching - like that of my sample - is based simply on long-term observations of what seems enjoyable, what seems effective, in short what seems to work. Unfortunately I also share many of my participants' opinions about general apathy among instrumental learners, and my teaching has developed in response to this, as it has for most of them.

I would agree with Andy and Frank as to the value of high-quality teacher training. However, from my own perspective I would also emphasise, perhaps more than most of my sample, the effect that starting teach had on my own playing. With only minimal formal training on the drums, it was only through becoming a teacher, and thus hunting for repertoire, that I stumbled across the body of pedagogic material (relatively limited 25 years ago, though greatly expanded since) which transformed my own playing.

I am still in touch with most of my interviewees, and have followed their careers with interest since the data collection phase of this project. At the time of writing all are still teaching, though there have been some changes. For example, Frank has since produced a series of tuition books with a major publisher, and has an impressive collection of teaching and performance clips available on the internet. Anecdotal evidence from friends, pupils and other teachers would suggest that many informal learners are regularly using the internet as a resource to support self-directed learning. The use of demonstration videos and subscription websites offer audio-visual models which may be replacing (or at least supplementing) purely audio recordings as

'texts' for popular music learners, with social networking sites and discussion forums acting as ways of exchanging information and passing on advice. Teachers themselves may be using video content from, for example, YouTube (see [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) to illustrate specific techniques or show their students clips of well-known performers in action. Research into the ways teachers and learners are using online resources would therefore be helpful. Meanwhile Bill is increasingly turning away from touring to concentrate on his teaching career, and currently has a busy schedule as a peripatetic. In the light of this recent experience it would be interesting to ask him now (some four years after his interview) if his teaching has evolved since then, and if so how; also, whether he has changed his opinion as to the value of the informal, aural learning which drove him to be a musician. Such questions may well form a part of further research.

## 6.10 Relevance of this research

This research is relevant to music education researchers, in particular those concerned with popular music and informal learning. In focusing on the pedagogy of popular musicians, it invites other researchers to adopt a wider frame of reference and look beyond classical music in their studies of learning and teaching. Course designers, syllabus consultants, and instrumental teachers generally will benefit from knowing how individual teachers approach problems which are shared by everyone trying to encourage instrumental learning. While I focus specifically on popular musicians, this study may be of interest to teachers of classical as well as contemporary music, if only out of curiosity about what other teachers do. There may be reassurance and encouragement for all kinds of teachers in the evidence here that not everyone teaches gifted and committed students, and that initial feelings of inadequacy can, over time, be replaced by a sense of professional competence. One could argue that freelance instrumental teachers working with relatively apathetic, not particularly talented students, would need to be especially creative and prolific to survive as teachers; therefore there are specific ideas and approaches demonstrated here which might be useful for all kinds of music teachers.

Finally, I would agree with Purser (2005: 298) that ‘there is an enormous body of acquired wisdom which remains encapsulated in individual teachers’. This study is intended as a contribution towards the sharing of this wisdom, with the hope - ultimately - of helping more people to enjoy making music.

## APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

### **Title of Project: How popular musicians teach**

**Name of Researcher:** Tim Robinson

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

**Information gathered for this project will only be used in ways you are happy with. Please initial the statements you agree to and sign below.**

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 20/12/05 for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I agree to take part in the above project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. As part of this project, an audio-visual recording will be made of me/my child. I understand that I/my child will not be identified in any reports or publications produced from these records.

4. I understand that all identifiable characteristics will be removed in any subsequent use of this material.

---

Name of participant

---

Date

---

Signature

---

Name of person taking consent  
(if not researcher)

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Date

---

Signature

---

Researcher

---

Date

---

Signature

## APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

To: Participant Teachers / Pupils / Parents / Guardians

I am studying for a PhD at Sheffield University, and the title of my research project is 'How Popular Musicians Teach'. It will involve around a dozen musicians (like myself) who learned, at least to begin with, under their own steam and have since gone on to become instrumental teachers. Very little research has been done into how such musicians go about teaching, so hopefully this will be an interesting and informative project. I intend to interview each volunteer teacher about their musical background, their approach to teaching and their experiences as a teacher, recording this interview on film.

I also hope to film an hour's worth of lessons with each teacher to catch some of this in action. I'm looking to record ordinary lessons, with nothing in particular required of either teacher or pupil, other than getting on with it. I will try to keep my intrusion to a minimum; I do understand that an outsider's presence in a lesson can be distracting, so where possible I will set up my camcorder in a quiet corner, put it on 'record' and leave you to it.

These videotapes will be transcribed and analysed and will hopefully shed some light on the activities and approaches of the teachers involved. This recording can only take place subject to the attached consent form being completed by both the teachers and the pupils (each participant will receive a copy to keep). Where the pupils being recorded are children, I would be very grateful for the consent of a parent or guardian to allow this research to proceed. All the information collected during the research will be treated confidentially by those directly involved, and no one taking part will be able to be identified in the finished project, nor in any subsequent use of this material.

The project is being supervised by Dr. Stephanie Pitts and Dr. Nikki Dibben of Sheffield University Music Department, and has been approved by the Department's Ethics Supervisor, Prof. J. Davidson, all of whom can be contacted at the University. You are also welcome to discuss with me any queries or concerns you may have whether in person, by phone or by email.

Many thanks in advance for your help and co-operation,

Tim Robinson

timrobinson@blueyonder.co.uk      0117 904 7160 - 07905 491074

## APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Name, age, gender, ethnicity, what do you teach
2. Could you describe how you first started getting interested in music?
  - how old were you
  - parents/ siblings who played or sang
  - what instruments did you learn
3. What do you remember about the way you learned to play?
  - how did you do it, did you learn different instruments in different ways
  - where did your 'learning strategy' come from
  - did you have any formal tuition
  - how important were, say, playing in bands/performing live/playing along to records
  - do you have any regrets about the way you learned
4. What kind of experience do you have as a musician?
  - any particular styles
  - have you played/ do you play for pleasure or professionally
5. What would you say are the differences you have noticed - if any - between musicians like you who largely taught themselves and those who started off by having formal lessons?
6. When did you start teaching, and how did this come about?
  - how much of a 'career choice' was it?
  - do you have any training specifically as a teacher
7. Can you give me some idea of how you actually teach?
  - where have your teaching materials come from; for example, do you use tuition CDs, books, DVDs, grade exams, which ones
  - how much of your teaching is uniquely 'you'- could you give some examples
  - to what extent do you have a set syllabus that you work through with everyone
  - how would you describe your teaching style - for instance, how much do you insist on getting things right or doing things in a certain way; how much choice does the pupil get
  - how would you compare teaching a complete beginner with teaching someone more advanced
8. Could you tell me about some key moments in your teaching career?
  - are there certain pupils or teaching situations which have altered the way you teach, or the way you think about teaching (and if so, how)
  - could you give me a best and a worst teaching moment
  - how much has your teaching changed over time
9. If you look back on the way you yourself learned to play, how much influence has that had on how you now teach others to play?

- is it possible (or even desirable) to somehow re-create the circumstances in which you learned, have you tried, how did you / would you do it
10. How come you could teach yourself but people who come for lessons apparently can't?
- what is it that you had that they haven't got
  - is it due to environment, is it genetic, have some people just 'got it'
11. How do you approach the idea of 'discipline' in a lesson?
- how do you tell the difference between fidgeting and experimenting- what counts as 'misbehaviour'- what do you do about it
  - what happens if you are distracted, have to deal with something else, or in some other way stop being 'the teacher' for a moment
  - how far is a sense of 'play' or 'playfulness' at stake if you get trained or taught how to do something 'properly'?
12. If you were to compare, on the one hand, formal tuition, perhaps the whole idea of being 'musically educated', and on the other hand the kind of confrontational, subversive anti-establishment feel of say, rock'n'roll, or punk, or hip-hop music, how much of a contradiction or a tension would you say there is between the two?
- do you think kids really need instrumental lessons to play for example noisy rock
  - how much are adults in fact appropriating and sanitizing youth culture by 'teaching' it
13. What do you think instrumental lessons are for?
- to encourage excellence
  - to encourage competence
  - to encourage fun and self-worth
  - to help musicians pay their bills
14. Looking ahead, how do you see your future as a teacher and musician?
- do you have any particular goals
  - would you want to be doing more playing or more teaching
  - would you consider taking qualifications or more training yourself
15. Thank you!

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