

INSTRUMENTAL LEARNING,  
IDENTITY,  
AND STUDENT-TEACHER  
INTERACTION  
IN A SECONDARY MUSIC  
SCHOOL:  
A CASE STUDY FROM ITALY

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

to

The Department of Arts Education and Physical Education

by

Agnese Maria Garufi

Supervised by Dr. Ailbhe Kenny and Dr. Maria Varvarigou

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## Abstract

This study examines how teacher-student interaction influences musical identity development at a secondary music school in Italy, and how the space and the social structures surrounding it shape these interactions. Two theoretical frameworks informed the research: Ellsworth's (2005) concept of *transitional space*—defined as a space of 'learning, change and becoming' (p. 30)—and Bourdieu's (1986) notion of *habitus*, referring to the internalised dispositions and social conditioning that influence behavior. A case study approach was adopted, conducted from September 2022 to March 2023, using a combination of data collection methods: semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and parents; observations of music lessons and rehearsals; teachers' written and verbal notes; and students' photovoice.

The findings highlight the significant role of verbal and nonverbal communication in instrumental learning, with humour emerging as a key element in verbal interaction. The study also underscores how school spaces and *habitus* influence musical development. Moreover, it reveals how teacher-student interactions and broader social structures shape students' musical identities.

This research aims to illuminate the lived experiences within secondary music schools in Italy, offering a reflective analysis of teacher-student dynamics, the social environments of learning, and the formation of musical identity. Ultimately, the study aspires to raise awareness among teachers, scholars, and researchers about these factors, encouraging improvements in instrumental and group music learning.

**Keywords:** instrumental lessons, secondary music school, musical space, interpersonal interaction, musical identity, *transitional space*, *habitus*.



## Declaration of Originality

**College:** Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

**Department:** Arts Education and Physical Education

**Name of Candidate:** Agnese Maria Garufi

**Student ID Number:** 20279167

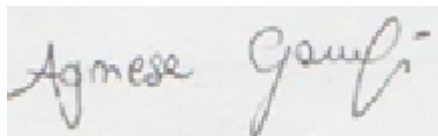
**Title of Thesis:** Instrumental Learning, Identity, and Student-Teacher Interaction in a Secondary music school: a Case Study from Italy

**Declaration:** I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. The work is original, except, where indicated by reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. All sources that have been consulted have been identified and acknowledged in the appropriate way. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

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**Signature of Candidate:**

Agnese Maria Garufi\_\_\_\_\_



**Signature of Supervisors:**

Ailbhe Kenny\_\_\_\_\_

Maria Varvarigou\_\_\_\_\_

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1. Introduction

This study examines how interpersonal interactions between teachers and students in instrumental lessons at a secondary music school influence students' learning and musical identity (Green, 2011). Additionally, it explores how these interactions are shaped by the broader school context in which lessons take place. The focus is on a junior secondary public music school in Italy, specifically Mainero Music School (a pseudonym). In Italy, music schools operate within regular secondary schools as specialised sections consisting of three grades (I, II, and III degrees, which can be compared to the VI, VII, and VIII degrees of the English system). Students, aged 11 to 14, receive instrumental instruction as part of the curriculum, choosing from four available instruments. Lessons are conducted in both one-on-one and group formats, fully integrated into the school's educational framework.

This study offers new insights into the lived experiences of teachers and students within this music school setting. It investigates the nature of interpersonal interactions in both individual and group lessons by drawing on the perspectives of teachers, students, the school principal, and students' parents. At its core, the study analyses how student-teacher interactions in music lessons influence students' learning and musical identity, framed within the concept of *transitional space* (Ellsworth, 2005). This concept views the teacher-student relationship as a co-constructed space for knowledge, where students actively engage in the discovery process of pedagogy. Furthermore, the study explores how interpersonal interactions are shaped by the concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986), which refers to the ingrained dispositions that influence how individuals act, think, and perceive their environment. In this context, *habitus* is shaped not only by teaching practices but also by the values and beliefs held by teachers, students, and their families regarding music education and instrumental study.

## 1.2. Positionality Statement

I'm a saxophone teacher at a music school in Italy. Since I was little, writing has been my passion. I found pleasure and a place for myself in words and books and my dream was to become a writer. During adolescence, I gave up writing because I didn't feel I could do it well enough. I felt 'wordless' for a while, but through encounters with music, and with my instrument, I found a voice for myself. My passion for music increased when I had a school experience in France with the *American Field Service (A.F.S.) Intercultural Programme*<sup>1</sup> during which I attended school and lived with a family of musicians. So, at the end of high school, I decided to attempt admission to the Conservatory for a three-year degree in saxophone. There, I realised that I was able to express myself through the sound of music and words: I liked to transform thoughts into music and make sounds the object of knowledge and study. I was a lucky student because I met teachers who supported and empowered me. I also met educators who used their power to instil fear, and whose choices for the student were not based on merit but rather on inconsequential criteria, for example, professors who selected students based on acquaintances and friendships and not for musical merits or professors who controlled the lives of students by deciding whether they could attend school at the same time as studying music.

I have always had the clear impression that the role of the music teacher has a very important influence on the growth of young students. I think this influence may depend on the commitment to the subject and the large personal investment that students and families make to support music studies. In my opinion, a greater commitment and investment by students and parents leads to the teacher having more power. In addition, Conservatory teachers are both university professors (since

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<sup>1</sup> AFS is an international, apolitical, secular, nonprofit volunteer organisation. AFS offers cross-cultural training programmes aimed at developing an understanding, knowledge of different realities cross-culturally and to build the skills needed to help create a more just and peaceful world (<https://afs.org/>).

the Conservatory is equivalent to a university) and musicians who are often of national or international importance. Their position is recognised as prestigious and this contributes to their very strong authority. Authority and social prestige might also contribute to having a very influential role on students.

One of the most important experiences in my life as a student was the two-year second-level master's degree programme I attended in Rome from 2009 to 2012. There, I met the person I call 'my saxophone teacher': he gave me a great example of how I wanted to approach the role of teacher, through a positive and critical attitude and a constant curiosity about music and people. He taught with a particular sensitivity towards the uniqueness of the students, enhancing their peculiarities, and with great professionalism, without neglecting any didactic aspect. From the moment I met him, I wondered how he managed to be so balanced and careful with his students in such a competitive environment as the Conservatory. Between 2009 and 2012, I had two other important experiences: one was attending and graduating from a three-year music therapy school where I developed the relational and communicative aspects involved in music and non-verbal communication. During my training as a music therapist, which took place mainly with autistic patients, I discovered how music can be not only a performing activity but also above all a communication tool. The other was an Erasmus experience at the Berlin Conservatory, where I spent six months of those three years. During a saxophone masterclass in Rome, I met the teacher at the 'Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler', who invited me to spend some time in his saxophone class in Berlin. The teacher was not only a guide for my study but also took care that I fit in well at the Conservatory and in the city. He paid special attention to the psychophysical approach to the instrument, offering group body relaxation sessions before lessons and discussing deeply about a conscious approach to performance.

Shortly after my return to Italy, I undertook a two-year second-level master's degree in instrumental music pedagogy plus a year of internship called TFA<sup>2</sup> in northern Italy, where I settled. The experience was intense and led me to reflect on many issues related to teaching and music. This master program included a period of internship and thanks to the field experience and theoretical insight, I had the opportunity to elaborate my thoughts on teaching. During this time, however, I saw a great deal of frustration on the part of the students attending, who felt compelled to pursue a career as a music teacher instead of a musician, and on the part of the teachers, who felt a lack of confidence on the part of the students. Later, I realised that this frustration stemmed from the fact that instrumental pedagogy courses do not have a stable structure, but are announced occasionally when there is a perceived need for more instrument teachers in schools. Their organisation is not defined but often undergoes variations. This has created shortcomings in the course structure on the one hand and instability for teachers and students on the other. The structure and purpose of the course were so unstable that at the end of the course of study I had undertaken, the regulations for obtaining a permanent contract at school as an instrument teacher changed and my colleagues and I had to wait three more years and take an exam to enter the school as an instrument teacher.

I became a permanent saxophone teacher in 2018 at a secondary music school. At the end of the school year, as per practice, I had to take an exam to be confirmed at school: the exam focused on a research-action project carried out during the school year. My work was aimed at identifying functional methods to implement student participation in the lesson, reducing moments of distraction in the classroom in favour of active and shared group work. My goal was the inclusion of some pupils with special education needs. With great curiosity, I approached a topic that required

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<sup>2</sup> TFA is the acronym of Tirocinio Formativo Attivo, namely Active Training Apprenticeship, a course decided by the Ministry of Education and University that allows aspiring teachers to obtain the specialisations necessary to become teachers.

me to collect, analyse, and experiment with teaching situations. The research involved the use of observation of individual and group instrumental lessons as a means of contextual analysis to capture individual nuances about both learning processes and group dynamics and the teacher's relationship with the group; classroom experimentation with methods such as peer-to-peer, problem-solving, flipped classroom, cooperative learning and open dialogue on lesson objectives and dynamics; and qualitative tools such as questionnaires, reflection diaries, and focus groups proposed to pupils about the appreciation and understanding of the lesson. I was very surprised by the students' great curiosity and positive learning outcomes. Students showed participation and attention, asking questions about the research-action and collaborating actively in the data collection process. Pupils aimed to be seen in their musical learning needs through the questionnaires and reflection diaries, while teachers often remained distant from the shared outcomes of the research. I had the impression that teachers and students were worlds apart, divided by an invisible barrier that did not allow them to see what the other wanted in terms of musical learning. They looked like two worlds that chased, but didn't find each other: in fact, teachers showed a great desire to give knowledge and skills but often they didn't observe the students in their musical and pedagogical needs, while students wanted to be seen, to be part of the learning process. It seemed to me that this generated a lot of frustration in both the teachers and the students. The few cases in which I saw this invisible barrier overcome were those in which a relationship of trust and mutual respect was built between students and teachers. I noticed a better relationship between teachers and students when, over the following two years, I taught saxophone at the Musical Lyceum in Turin. This was maybe due to the greater number of lesson hours in instrumental learning, ensemble music, and music theory compared to secondary music school or because of the older students who were aged from 14 to 18.

Another experience concerning music schools was held during my Ph.D. time. Thanks to an Erasmus + project, I had the opportunity to study in Greece for 15 days. I was hosted in Thessaloniki, by the Department of Music Science and Art of the University of Macedonia. I was welcomed by the University, where I was able to meet Greek scholars of musical topics and attend some lectures on traditional Greek music. My Erasmus + project aimed to visit a secondary music school in Thessaloniki, where I had the privilege to participate in one-to-one instrumental, music group, and music theory lessons. I was impressed by the wonderful welcome the teachers and students of the school gave me and by the variety of specialties taught in terms of instruments and ensemble music. Students attended three hours weekly of one-to-one instrumental lessons, two for the first instrument and one for the second. The choice was extensive because, in addition to occidental ones, students could also study Greek traditional instruments, such as tambura, bouzouki, qanun, and others. Students also attended several weekly lessons in choir and ensemble music. All students were requested to attend some choral ensemble music, which varied from European classical music to Byzantine music and Rebetiko. Instrumental ensemble music was varied and students could attend all the specialties in rotation with their schoolmates: among the specialties of music ensemble, there were Pop, Jazz, Funky, Traditional Greek music, Classic music, Film music, Chamber music, and others. Differently from the Italian secondary music schools, where just a few classes were dedicated to the musical curriculum, in Greece all the secondary music schools are entirely dedicated to the music curriculum. As said earlier, students and teachers welcomed me with enthusiasm and we could talk and exchange experiences about the different ways of teaching in music schools in Greece and Italy. This experience was very important to me, because, as a teacher and a researcher, I met another reality of secondary music school, similar in some ways to the Italian one, but also very different. The main similarity was that instrumental music was part of the school curriculum and became part of the identity of the school, but the structure of the courses, the

amount of time dedicated to music, and the variety of the musical subjects taught were very different. I hope that Greek and Italian schools can come together to exchange ideas and learn from each other, fostering mutual improvement.

With this study, I'd like to understand if the pedagogical relationship in the teaching of the musical instrument has a significant influence on learning and what kind of pedagogical relationship can take place in secondary music schools in Italy. It seems to me that this is the right time to observe what kind of relationship is created between teachers and students in the pedagogical environment and how this relationship can affect learning because Italian music schools are now finally stabilised after many years of reform and changes (as will be explained in the third heading of this chapter). I would like to understand how teachers and students experience their relationships and if that invisible barrier I observed in the past can be overcome thanks to interpersonal interaction. I wish to understand, through the literature review and the analysis of the data presented in this research, if and how student-teacher interpersonal interaction influences learning. Thus, this research aims to examine how interpersonal interaction influences musical learning and musical identity in a music school. I also wish to understand if interpersonal interaction is in turn influenced by the pedagogical environment in which it takes place. Building on these questions, the present study will delve into the music school context to analyse and understand what kind of student-teacher interpersonal interaction is observed, what they influence, and what they are influenced by.

### *1.3. Research Question*

This study explores interpersonal interaction between teachers and students in both one-to-one and group instrumental learning through the lens of *transitional space* (Ellsworth, 2005). This concept provides students with opportunities for self-awareness and growth, suggesting that they acquire new knowledge and discover their identities through encounters with pedagogy,

pedagogical figures, and learning environments. Understanding how these interactions shape students' learning processes and musical identities is central to this research (Green, 2011; Creech and Hallam, 2011).

Additionally, this study seeks to examine how interpersonal interactions are embedded in and influenced by broader social structures. Instrumental learning is viewed as a socially constructed field (Stahl, Burnard, and Burt-Perkins, 2017), shaped by the cultural and institutional contexts in which it takes place. To analyse these influences, Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of *habitus*, field, and cultural capital provide a framework for understanding how social and cultural structures shape educational experiences. Previous research has highlighted the role of social background and institutional values in shaping students' engagement with music education (Lamont, 2002; Wright, 2018). By applying these theoretical perspectives, this study aims to explore the influence of teacher-learner interaction in musical learning and teaching and in students' identity development. Thus, the main research question is:

**How does teacher-learner interaction influence musical teaching/learning and students' identity development in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons in a secondary music school in Italy?**

There are five embedded questions shedding light on the main research question:

1. How do teachers and learners experience the physical space in the music school?
2. How do teachers and learners experience teaching and learning in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school?

3. What are the learner's and teacher's values and beliefs about attending or working at a secondary music school?
4. What kind of interaction is observed between music teachers and learners during one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school?
5. How does such interaction influence students' learning and musical identity?

#### *1.4. Context*

##### 1.4.1. The Italian School System

Education in Italy is regulated by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of University and Research. Education may be public or private, depending on the legal form of the institution. Compulsory schooling lasts 10 years and covers students between six and 16 years old. The Italian school system provides for different levels of study, as illustrated in the diagram below (see Figure 1.1).

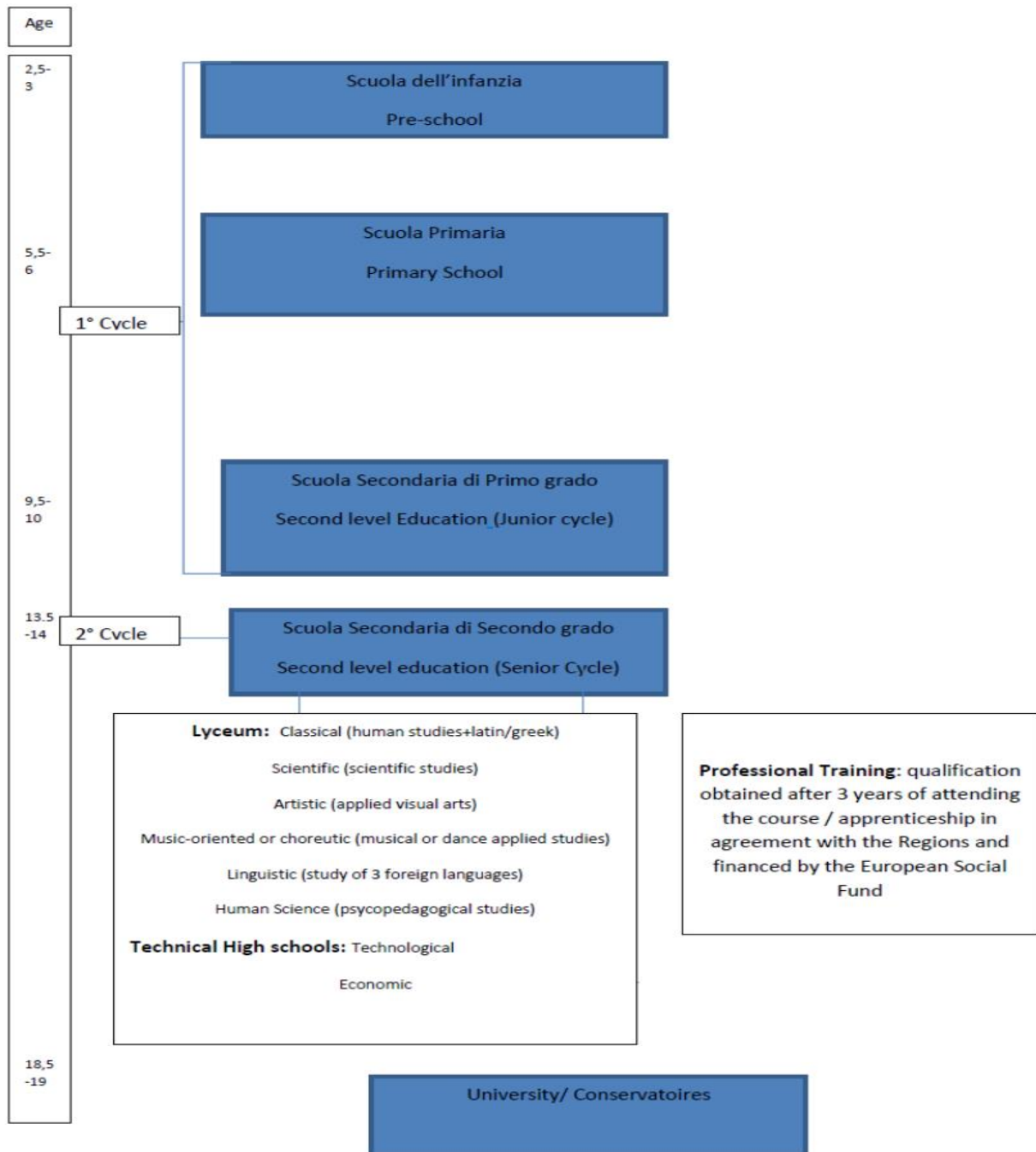


Figure 1.1.: The Italian School System

In the Italian school system, after nursery school, for children from 3 months to 3 years old, which is non-compulsory and fee-paying, schools are structured into two cycles of education.

**First-cycle** schools are:

a. *primary school*, with a duration of five years (from six to 11), which is compulsory for all Italian and foreign children who have turned six years of age by April 30 of the first scholastic year;

b. *secondary school I grade*, which lasts three years (from 11 to 14) and is compulsory for all Italian and foreign children who have completed elementary school. The first cycle of education ends with an exam, the passing of which constitutes a qualification for access to the second cycle of education.

Second cycle schools, also known as *secondary schools second grade*, last five years (from 14 to 19) and are divided into three types:

- Lyceum<sup>3</sup>, divided into six different areas: *Artistic Lyceum* focuses on artistic careers, including drawing, sculpture, design, and architecture; *Classical Lyceum* focuses on humanistic studies, including Latin, ancient Greek, Italian, history, and philosophy; *Linguistic Lyceum* emphasises modern languages and cultures, such as English, French, Spanish, German, and others like Russian, Arabic, and Chinese; *Music and Dance Lyceum* offers two paths, one for music and music theory, the other for dance and choreography; *Scientific Lyceum* focuses on science subjects like math, physics, chemistry, biology, and computer science; and *Human Sciences Lyceum* concentrates on human sciences, such as pedagogy, psychology, anthropology, and sociology;

- Technical Institutes, which offer a broad theoretical education with a focus on a specific field (e.g., economics, law, tourism). Technical Institutes are divided into two main areas: economic sciences and technological sciences. Students often have a practical training period in the final year.

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<sup>3</sup>Lycei: I used this word to indicate the plural form of Lyceum, as in Latin.

- Professional institutes, that offer a complete preparation about a profession and are divided into different branches: agricultural and rural development services, social and health services, hospitality services, and business services. Here again, students have a practical training period in the final year.

Each course of study includes a final examination, called 'Maturità' (maturity), which is necessary to obtain a diploma and have access to university education or A.F.A.M. All secondary schools share a common basic education, while other subjects are peculiar to the specific specialisation.

In addition to secondary schools second grade, there are also professional training courses that offer a professional diploma after three years. Professional Training Courses differ in their organisation and duration and are managed regionally. Students can earn a regional qualification after the third year. These courses focus on practical skills and work experience, helping students enter the job market right after completing their studies.

#### 1.4.2. Secondary Music Schools

In Italy, secondary music schools, known as S.M.I.M.<sup>4</sup>, have a long and evolving history. They were first established in 1975 following Ministerial Decree (D.M.) of September 8, 1975, initially as a three-year experimental program attached to Conservatories in Lombardy.

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<sup>4</sup> S.M.I.M. is the acronym of *Scuola Media ad Indirizzo Musicale* which means "Secondary school I grade music oriented school".

Between 1987 and 1993, several national conferences addressed key issues such as the purpose of these schools, specialisation in instrumental learning, the role and recruitment of teachers, and organizational aspects.

As a result of these discussions, a major shift occurred in 1996: S.M.I.M. schools were no longer required to be annexed to Conservatories and were formally integrated into the national education system. This change granted instrumental studies the same status as other academic disciplines, and music activities were structured within collective planning. At that time, teachers had flexibility in allocating their hours between instrumental practice, ensemble music, theory, and solfeggio. The experimental phase became official in 1999 with Law 124/99, which introduced a formal selection process for teachers of 'instrumental music in Secondary School I grade'<sup>5</sup>. This professionalised the role of music teachers, requiring them to hold specific qualifications for their instrument, rather than relying on general music education graduates from Conservatories. S.M.I.M. schools were also required to develop a structured curriculum, outlining educational guidelines, learning objectives, core content, skill development, evaluation criteria, and teaching methodologies. While schools had considerable autonomy in managing their programs, they were mandated to offer four instrumental specialties. Typically, these included at least one harmonic instrument (such as piano, harp, accordion, or guitar), one percussion instrument (which could be substituted with another harmonic instrument), and two melodic instruments (such as saxophone, flute, violin, or cello). Within the three-year program, students not only learned their instruments but also participated in ensemble music and music theory studies. More broadly, instrumental

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<sup>5</sup>In Italy, teachers become permanent through a competition that is accessed after obtaining a qualification. The ways in which qualifications are obtained change often. In the absence of qualifications or competitions useful for entry into schools, teachers can work annually as substitute teachers. In Italian schools, in the last two decades, the number of substitute teachers has grown a lot because of the lack of competitions and qualifying courses, which is trying to overcome in recent years.

education played a crucial role in students' personal development, aligning with the principles of the Italian Constitution and guiding them toward future academic and professional choices.

Admission to secondary music schools requires an entrance exam, taken midway through 5th grade, which determines placement in 6th grade. This exam assesses rhythmic perception, note recognition, and intonation, with 24 students admitted each year—six for each instrumental specialty.

At the outset of this research, secondary music schools were governed by Interministerial Decree 211 of October 7, 2010. In July 2022, Interministerial Decree No. 176 of July 1, 2022, amended and supplemented the previous decree. These decrees emphasise that S.M.I.M. schools aim to develop students' musical language by integrating technical-practical training with theoretical, lexical, historical, and cultural components. For students enrolled in music programs, instrumental instruction is an essential part of their personalised timetable and contributes to their academic progress and eligibility for the next grade or state exams. Ministerial Decree 211/2010 allocated two hours for instrumental practice alongside two hours of music education. However, Decree 176/2022 expanded this to three hours, incorporating both individual and ensemble music instruction. According to Article 4 of D.M. 176/2022, the curriculum includes instrumental lessons in both individual and group formats; music theory and reading; and ensemble music.

Both decrees outline common learning objectives and skill development goals for all instrumental disciplines, categorising instruments into five families: string, wind, percussion, keyboard, and plucked string instruments. However, they do not prescribe specific study materials, allowing teachers significant flexibility in their methodologies. Notably, D.M. 176/2022 introduced

key updates, including provisions for private schools to open music sections and adjustments to student enrollment and class distribution.

After secondary music school, it is possible to pursue musical study in the musical high school. Musical high schools were instituted as experimentation around 1970 and directly involved the Conservatoires with the authorisation of the Ministry of Education, University and Research (M.I.U.R) and provided for students to attend music lyceums attached to the Conservatories, with very music-oriented programmes.

Both secondary and high music schools require a slightly higher weekly attendance than traditional specialisations. The weekly timetable for secondary school in Italy consists of two alternate plans: one of 30 hours (normal time) and one of 36 hours (extended time). The music school has three more hours per week for each student. Musical activities take place in the afternoon, while the morning is the time for the curricular school subjects.

Music high schools have a 32-hour timetable: in the morning, in addition to curricular subjects, students study *Music Theory, Analysis and Composition, Music Technology, Music Ensemble, and Choir*. In the afternoon, the timetable is regulated by each student with their teachers of reference. These lessons are held on the principal music instrument, the second instrument, as well as some workshops offered during the year and some rehearsals (a music high school timetable is shown in Appendix A). Between morning and afternoon, students are free to take a break outside of school or if requested by parents, may remain inside school in a classroom used as a lunchroom.

#### 1.4.3. The Mainero Secondary Music School

The Mainero Comprehensive Institute is located in a large city, in a residential area with many businesses. The school consists of two elementary school campuses and one secondary school

campus. The main building, which hosts one primary school and the secondary school, was built in the 1950s. The secondary school has more than 800 students and 36 classes, subdivided into 12 sections, named with letters from A to N. Every section has three classes, from sixth to eighth grade. Among those 12 sections, one section has been a dedicated music school since the year 2011. The weekly timetable of a general secondary school includes 30 contact hours per week. The timetable of a secondary music school includes 33 contact hours per week.

The secondary school uses all four floors of this building. The students of the music school use mainly the third floor within its four practice rooms and hall for rehearsals. On the ground floor, they use the gymnasium and an outdoor camp for physical education and the Aula Magna for concerts, rehearsals, and other social occasions organised by the school, and on the first and second floors, they use science and informatic laboratories. The organisation of classrooms and laboratories is shown in Table 1.1.

	<b>Classrooms</b>	<b>Laboratories/practice rooms</b>	<b>Hall</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Ground floor</b>	6	2 laboratories	Entrance hall; Aula Magna	Gatehouse; Gymnasium; Outdoor camp
<b>First floor</b>	9	1 laboratory	1	
<b>Second floor</b>	12	3 laboratories	-	-
<b>Third floor</b>	9	4 practice rooms	Hall for rehearsals	-

*Table 1.1. The Layout of the Mainero School*

On the ground floor, the entrance consists of a spacious hall with some tables and a gatehouse with one or two janitors. Behind the gatehouse is a large gymnasium where students normally engage in physical education (PE) activities with their PE tutors. In front of the janitors' gatehouse, there is a corridor with six rooms: two classrooms for labs, one staffroom for the teachers, and three classrooms for the general secondary school. To the right of the janitors' lodge,

up four steps, is a long corridor along which are the entrance doors of the main hall, a large room used for rehearsals, concerts, or other school occasions that include an audience. This hall is called Aula Magna and contains a vertical piano. At the end of the corridor is another smaller hall with access to the elevator. To the right of the hall are large flights of stairs leading to the upper floors. Outside the school on the ground floor, there is a large space used as a sports field and also used for PE classes or other outdoor activities. Three other classrooms are located at the end of the long corridor before the stairs.

The teaching and learning activities of the music school are located on the third floor of the building. The floor is divided into two parts: one for the morning classes of the general curriculum (e.g. Language, Mathematics, Science, etc.) and two musical classrooms, and the other entirely dedicated to music. The large hall is used for rehearsals. There are two practice rooms across the hall. One is larger than the other and it is used as an orchestra rehearsal room during group lessons and as an instrument room outside orchestral rehearsal. To the left of the hall, there is a long corridor with five classrooms: the first and last are classrooms for instrumental lessons, and the three middle classrooms are for the secondary school curriculum. All classroom doors have no windows and these doors are usually closed during lesson time. All classrooms have big windows on one side of the walls; the bigger room has windows on two sides of the walls. One side of those windows is closed during one to one lessons, while is open during orchestra lessons. A lot of light comes in through the windows however artificial lights are also usually on. The radiators are on from early November to mid-April in all classrooms; however, they are small and heat little. It is often cold in the classrooms, especially in the largest classroom which is also the most difficult to heat.

Instrumental lessons took place in the music classrooms from Monday to Thursday, between 2 PM and 6 PM. On Thursday afternoons, small groups rehearsed ensemble music, each in the classroom dedicated to the instrument A practice classroom organised for ensemble tuition was

presented by Sara's photo for the interview with the photovoice method (see figure 1.2). The orchestras, one for each grade (three in total) had one-hour lessons each on Friday mornings, in the room set aside for orchestra rehearsals.



*Figure 1.2. Sara's Photo. Practice Room Prepared for an Ensemble Lesson*

Table 1.2 shows a fictitious timetable to give an understanding of how school time was organised for pupils. The pupil goes to school every day from 8:10 a.m. to 2:10 p.m., but on Tuesdays, they stay longer for individual instrument lessons until 3:10 p.m. On Thursdays, the students leave at 2:10 p.m. but return to school at 4:10 p.m. for string ensemble lessons.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.10 – 9.10	Art	History	Music Ed.	English	Italian Literature
9.10– 10.00	Art	Italian Literature	Music Ed.	History	Italian Literature
10.00-10.10	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
10.10-11.10	Italian Literature	French	Religion or alternative subject	Italian Literature	<b>Orchestra</b>
11.10-12.00	Italian Literature	Math	French	Geography	<b>Orchestra</b>
12.00-12.10	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK
12.10-13.10	Science	Physical Ed.	English	Technology	Math
13.10-14.10	Science	Physical Ed.	English	Technology	Math
14.10-15.10		<b>String one to one lesson</b>			
15.10-16.10					
16.10-17.10				<b>String Ensemble</b>	

*Table 1.2. Fictitious Timetable*

In addition to the curricular music lessons, Mainero School participates in three music projects organised by numerous local networks that allow secondary music schools to collaborate and interact. These projects are a Network of Music Schools in the Province Orchestra, a string orchestra and a double reed orchestra. These activities were extracurricular and took place in the main hall of the Mainero school or other schools' spaces. A detailed description of the three activities is in Appendix I.

### *1.5. Research Significance*

Few studies have examined Italian music schools but there is a growing body of research on music in secondary schools all over Europe. These include Biasutti and Concina (2018) and some reports on the structure and functioning of music schools organised at the ministerial level (e.g., the 2016 Report edited by G. Fiocchetto). This is probably due to the fact that there are few research or Ph.D. programmes in music education in Italy and they are largely unsubsidised. It was not until 2021 that the possibility of opening Ph.D. programmes was introduced in Conservatories, with DM

226/21. To date, in Italy there aren't any Ph.D. programmes on music education; there are only three Ph.D.s in Musicology at Bologna University, in Musical Philology at Pavia-Cremona University, and in History and Analysis of Musical Cultures at Rome "La Sapienza" University<sup>6</sup>. This means that the research on music pedagogy in Italy is carried out through private associations accredited by the Ministry of Education and Research, which are part of the National Forum for Music Education. The National Forum for Musical Education involves teachers from many schools in Italy and operators of Associations that represent the active methodologies recognised in the field of music education.

This study offers teachers insights into how Italian instrumental teachers in secondary music schools build relationships with students. At the national level, it could raise awareness of the need for an academic field of research on music education in Italy and could be an opener for new doctoral programmes in Italian conservatories. In addition, it could allow scholars and researchers from around the world to learn about the realities of secondary music schools in Italy and introduce a reflection on interpersonal interaction in secondary music schools.

### *1.6. Thesis Overview*

**Chapter One** establishes the purpose and background of the thesis. It sets out the main research questions and sub-questions that guided the creation of the dissertation and gives an overview of the significance of the research.

**Chapter Two** provides a critical review of relevant literature on instrumental music learning in a school context, teacher-learner interaction, and musical identity.

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<sup>6</sup> Bianconi – Gallo – Leydi, 'I dottorati di ricerca in discipline musicali – Il Saggiatore musicale'.

**Chapter Three** examines the two theoretical frameworks that underpin this research, specifically Ellsworth's (2005) *transitional space* and Bourdieu's (1986) tools, such as *habitus*, field, and capital. These theories will be found throughout the data analysis and the chapters.

In **Chapter Four** the methodology and research design employed to investigate the research questions is presented. This includes a rationale for the qualitative methods employed; the reasons for a case study method, semi-structured interviews, observations, analysis of voice message or written notes, as well as motivation for photovoice with students. In addition, the data analysis process and all ethical considerations are discussed.

**Chapter Five** presents an analysis of data on musical spaces based on the main concepts presented in the theoretical frameworks. The chapter is divided into three parts: a first part devoted to physical spaces, a second part devoted to the relationship of the research participants to the school's physical spaces, and a final part devoted to the school seen as a community space.

**Chapter Six** presents an analysis of the data on *habitus* and *transitional space* found in the musical activities of the Mainero School. The chapter is divided into two parts: a first one dedicated to *habitus* and a second one dedicated to *transitional space* and interpersonal interactions in instrumental teaching. A final section of the chapter connects the data through the combined use of the two theoretical frameworks.

**Chapter Seven** offers an analysis of data on the musical identity of Mainero Music School students, an insight into the identity of teachers, and an analysis of the group identity present in the music school. The chapter is divided into three sections: the first on students, the second on teachers and the third on group identity.

**Chapter Eight** offers the conclusion to the thesis, including a reflection and discussion on the study's limitations. This chapter outlines the thesis' contribution to the field and offers recommendations for further research.



# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

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## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature on specialist secondary music schools and key related themes, including one-to-one and group instrumental lessons. It then explores teacher-learner interactions in one-to-one lessons and the concept of musical identity.

The literature search was structured around keywords derived from the central and embedded research questions, such as *instrumental lessons*, *secondary music school*, *interpersonal interaction*, and *musical identity*. The main themes identified include music schools (Koliadi-Tiliakou 2009; Biasutti & Concina 2018), one-to-one instrumental lessons (Creech & Hallam 2011; Zhukov 2012; Pitts 2012, McPherson et al. 2012), group instrumental lessons and interpersonal interaction (Rostvall & West 2001, 2003; Countryman 2009; Lowe 2012; Creech 2012; Coutts 2019), and musical identity (Hargreaves, MacDonald & Miell 2002, 2016; Erikson 1974; Parker 2020).

Given the broad scope of the literature, topics were systematised into headings and subheadings, aligning with the research questions. While alternative classifications, such as contextual divisions, were possible, this approach best highlighted the study's key themes. The review is structured as follows: Secondary music schools, which examines literature specific to this context; Instrumental Lessons, which includes the subheadings One-to-One Instrumental Lessons, Group Music Lessons, and Interpersonal Interaction in Instrumental Lessons; Communities of Musical Practice, which explores links between music learning, interactions, and identity; and Musical Identity and Instrumental Learning, which includes the subheadings Musical Possible Selves and Instrumental Lessons and Musical Identity in Adolescence. Finally, a section called Gaps in Literature identifies underexplored areas relevant to this study.

A preliminary search was conducted via Google and Google Scholar, followed by a more in-depth search using the A-Z Database at MIC. Initially, the focus was on publications from 2002 to 2022, with updates incorporating more recent works from 2023 to 2024.

## *2.2. Secondary music schools*

The main theme of the literature search is the secondary music school. Some studies such as those of Biasutti and Concina (2018), Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009), Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024), and Lowe (2012), were carried out in specialised secondary music schools. Regarding the context of secondary music schools in Italy, the study by Biasutti and Concina (2018) involved, among other participants, secondary music school teachers. Biasutti and Concina (2018) conducted quantitative research, administering questionnaires to 160 instrumental and vocal music teachers in Italy. The participants were all professional musicians who worked as music teachers in one or more institutions: five came from the conservatory, 69 from secondary music schools (junior and high), 73 from private music schools, and 13 who worked simultaneously in private and secondary music schools. Through their quantitative study, Biasutti and Concina (2018) examined the relationships between music teacher self-efficacy, beliefs about musical ability, and social skills in professional music teachers. Furthermore, they considered gender and teaching experience useful variables to define a predictive model of teacher self-efficacy (Biasutti and Concina 2018, p. 275). Referring to Bandura (1977), Biasutti and Concina defined self-efficacy as a personal expectation regarding the success or failure of a specific behaviour. According to them, the development of self-efficacy depends on several aspects, such as the result of previous performances, and the emotional aspects connected with them. Biasutti and Concina (2018) argued that effective teachers must be knowledgeable about their topics and have a deep understanding of music, its qualities, interpretation, production, and performance. Furthermore, music teachers are expert musicians who can become more effective teachers through curricula that develop their pedagogical skills

(Biasutti and Concina 2018, p. 265). According to Biasutti and Concina, effective teachers constantly pay attention to student feedback to adapt their teaching strategies to students' needs. Through such attention, teachers can support pupils' musical learning, adopting a constructive approach to music teaching. The constructive approach, which Biasutti and Concina (2018) take from López-Íñiguez & Pozo (2016), focuses mainly on the learning process and aims to support the autonomous development of musical knowledge by students. Furthermore, Biasutti and Concina (2018) stated that the personal beliefs that teachers develop about teaching and learning and the nature of cognitive abilities can have a relevant impact on the learning process and student outcomes (p. 266). These beliefs can be the basis of didactic, pedagogical, and evaluation choices. After data collection, Biasutti and Concina (2018) conducted a statistical analysis to examine the data and answer their research questions of whether self-efficacy was related to music teachers' gender and level of professional experience, to their beliefs about the nature of musical ability and their social skills, and whether teacher self-efficacy can be predicted under the given conditions. The results of the study suggested that there was a combined effect of personal beliefs and level of experience in the development of self-evaluation and self-efficacy (Biasutti and Concina 2018, p. 277). Biasutti and Concina (2018) found higher levels of self-evaluation and self-efficacy in teachers with more years of service compared to those who had been teaching for less time. Their result was also supported by the research of Hallam et al. (2016) which showed how beliefs about personal musical abilities increased as academic competence increased. These positive beliefs allowed for a greater development of effective teaching and teaching awareness in teachers (Biasutti and Concina 2018). The study also demonstrated how there were gender differences in music teaching strategies, with female teachers adopting a more collaborative relationship with their pupils than male teachers (Biasutti and Concina 2018, P. 276). This study was significant not only because it addressed teacher self-efficacy and its correlations with teacher beliefs and effectiveness in lessons, but also because

it provided this thesis with the perspective of a familiar context, say the secondary music schools in Italy. Nonwithstanding, while Biasutti and Concina (2018) offer important insights into teacher self-efficacy and pedagogical beliefs within the broader Italian music education system, their study remains largely quantitative and decontextualised. In contrast, this thesis builds on their findings by providing an in-depth, situated analysis of teacher-student interactions within a secondary music school in Italy, thus addressing a critical gap in the literature and offering a nuanced account of how pedagogical practice, institutional structures, and social dynamics shape the development of musical identity.

Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) conducted a study on secondary music schools in Athens, Greece, focusing on the significance of a positive self-image in shaping children's personalities. She also explored the role of musical education in emotional development and its impact on fostering positive social behaviours. According to her findings, self-knowledge and understanding of others are fundamental aspects of an individual's perception of the world. The concept of self-image, a complex psychological construct, comprises both descriptive and emotional elements, including self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concept reflects a person's beliefs about their abilities and overall identity, while self-esteem represents the emotional dimension, encompassing one's sense of self-worth (Koliadi-Tiliakou, 2009). A positive self-image, the author argued, enables children to engage more effectively in learning, accept themselves, and exhibit constructive behavior not only in school but also in broader social contexts. A key focus of the study was the 'musical self', which refers to an individual's evaluations of their musical abilities. This self-perception evolves with each musical experience, influencing the attainment of musical goals, participation in activities, and overall behavior. Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) emphasised that the musical self-concept is shaped by significant figures in a student's life, particularly family, teachers, peers, and personal experiences. She

questioned whether systematic music education could contribute to developing a positive self-image.

By examining the relationship between musical education, self-esteem, and social behaviour, Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) compared the musical and social self-concepts, behaviour, peer relationships, and levels of aggression between students from music schools and their peers in general secondary schools. Her findings underscored the importance of a strong self-concept in fostering positive social interactions and promoting socially acceptable behavior in school settings. She also highlighted the need to refine music education practices to enhance students' self-image. The study involved 246 students from secondary music schools and 244 from general secondary schools in the same region of Greece. Music school students, who had actively chosen to pursue intensive musical training as part of their daily education, formed the core research sample. Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) emphasised that the establishment of music schools in Greece represents a significant advancement in educational policy, not only promoting music but also fostering aesthetic appreciation. Her research demonstrated a clear link between musical self-concept and self-esteem, revealing that students' perceptions of their musical abilities influenced their overall self-image. This connection, she suggested, stems from the central role music plays in their daily lives, particularly in the school environment, where it holds deep personal significance (Koliadi-Tiliakou, 2009, p. 267).

Secondary music school students felt that good singing skills made them feel more confident in the music school context. Furthermore, Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) found that self-perception of music reading skills correlated with self-esteem. Self-perception of musical ability was found to be higher when students felt they had fluency in playing a musical instrument and had a good musical ear. Furthermore, Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) found that music school students' general musical self-concept had a positive effect on their overall behaviour. The author interpreted this finding following the general opinion prevailing in educational research, according to which musical

education has a positive effect on the social development of the individual. Finally, as far as aggressive behaviour is concerned, the research results showed no particular relationship between musical self-concept, self-concept, and self-esteem. Nevertheless, boys had higher results than girls in regard to the domain of aggression, and in particular the domains of physical aggression and hostility. On the contrary, girls presented a better picture of their singing abilities, playing an instrument, reading music, and significantly better social relationships with their peers. Instead, no statistically significant differences were found between the two sexes regarding musical self-concept as a view of their general musical ability, or general self-esteem, nor regarding conduct/behaviour. It therefore appeared that a student's image of their musical self-concept and social behaviour is not affected by gender, just as the general self-image is not affected either. Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) finally compared students of general schools with those of secondary music schools. She found that regarding the general self-image, i.e. general self-esteem, children who attend common secondary schools have an average slightly higher than the music school students. She therefore stated that attending a music school did not in itself contribute to the formation of a more positive self-image in the children (Koliadi-Tiliakou 2009, p. 275). However, even if Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) found no particular relationship between aggressiveness and musical self-concept, she noticed that children in music schools had a better picture of their social behaviour and expressed less physical violence and manipulation than the children of the common secondary school. Regarding gender, peer relationships can vary by gender, depending on school and the broader social environment, but also be influenced by a variety of factors. According to Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009), teachers could more systematically cultivate students' self-image, self-concept, and self-esteem through activities that were found to be more functional in creating a positive self-image through her study. Such activities were the use of song, the development of creative ability, the creation of small musical ensembles, and the performance of musical works in public (p. 281).

Furthermore, Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) stated that music schools' educational policy and curricula should place particular emphasis on development, as well as maintaining high self-perception and self-esteem as an important goal of education. Koliadi-Tiliakou's (2009) study was significant because it addressed a similar context to that of this study, namely the context of secondary music schools in Greece. It also investigated self-image, musical self-concept and self-esteem through the gaze of music students, focusing on how self-image is also constructed through the gaze of significant others, such as family, teachers, and peers. One particularly striking yet underexplored finding in Koliadi-Tiliakou's (2009) study was the gendered dimension of musical self-concept and social behaviour. While boys scored higher in physical aggression and hostility, girls demonstrated stronger musical skills and more positive peer relationships. Surprisingly, however, gender did not significantly affect general self-esteem or musical self-concept as a whole. This tension between gendered behaviours and self-perceptions invites deeper investigation, suggesting that gender dynamics—although present—remain insufficiently theorised in relation to musical identity formation in secondary music schools. These findings raise important questions for future research, particularly regarding how gendered expectations intersect with musical engagement and educational outcomes in specialised settings.

Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024) conducted a research project on the collaboration between the music school of Rhodes, Greece, and the student orchestra of the music school of Landsberg in Bavaria, Germany. The project began with great skepticism given the differences in the educational systems. Indeed, the secondary school of music in Rhodes is one of 51 public schools specialising in music in Greece and caters to students between the ages of 12 and 18. In contrast, the orchestra of the Landsberg Music School belonged to one of the 914 music schools (public and private) in Germany that support music education in schools and target students between the ages of two and 99. The collaborative project lasted three years and brought together students between

the ages of 13 and 18 from the two music schools to merge different musical cultures and social contexts, exchanging ideas, and advancing musically, artistically, and culturally (Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou 2024, p. 47). The results of the study presented by Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024) are mainly based on 20 semi-structured interviews conducted among participating students of orchestras and choirs from both countries. The study emphasised the positive effects of transnational inter-school collaboration on students' experiences. It also provided insights into how music school teachers develop their practices, school improvement, and the possibility of professional collaboration. Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024) reported that students showed an improved self-concept regarding their own artistic development and the emergence of intrinsic motivation for professional development during the collaboration period. Finally, Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024) stated that the collaboration between the schools extended to the local communities through the proposal of concerts, the organisation of guided excursions, and the indirect involvement of parents throughout the project. This, according to the authors, could help overcome Greek pessimism about the quality of education caused by the recent economic crisis. Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024) also argue that in music school contexts, interschool collaborations can lead to a broader educational experience for students. Interscholastic collaborations offer alternative models of education, provide designs for community programmes that result in a sharing of resources, and create meaningful community-building opportunities for all involved, including teachers (Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou 2024).

A study on music secondary education in Australia was conducted by Lowe (2012). He focused on students' motivation to continue studying an instrument beyond the first year of secondary school. 48 students aged between 12 and 13 years participated in the study. These students were attending the first year of secondary school in Western Australia where orchestral instruments are taught by specialist staff every week. Students in the first year of secondary school

generally learn in groups (from one to five students) in lessons lasting 20-30 minutes. Lessons are held during the school day, and students are withdrawn from regular classes on a rotating timetable basis to minimise the impact on other school subjects (Lowe 2012, p. 229). The lessons are part of the school curriculum, are free of charge, and enrolment in the programme includes a selective aptitude test. Even if lessons are held in groups and not specifically in the one to one format, I chose to insert this study in the review of the literature because it gave insights into an Australian school with a music curriculum.

Lowe (2012) investigated why several first or second-year students dropped out of the musical pathway, even if the school lessons were free of charge and part of the school curriculum. For this reason, he specifically studied the links between students' perceptions of the instrumental lesson, their motivation to continue, and the role of the instrumental teacher as an influence on students' motivation to continue. In addition, the study aimed to identify teaching practices that could meet the needs of this specific group of students. Lowe (2012) grouped the positive aspects of lessons into five emerging themes:

'these were not discrete entities, but were heavily intertwined. The five themes were: • an intimate, comfortable and non-threatening learning environment that is different from other subjects; • teacher attitude associated with rapport and respect; • professional teacher attributes including organization, enthusiasm, encouragement and patience • professional musician attributes including the ability to model the instrument to a high standard, and • activity selection, relating to repertoire choice and ensemble playing'

(Lowe 2012, p. 233).

Lowe (2012) found that the instrumental lesson plays an important role in determining students' motivation to continue beyond the first year of secondary school. Indeed, it has an impact on the values and competence beliefs of the students involved in the research. According to Lowe

(2012), students' competence beliefs appear to be very influential in future enrolment decisions in instrumental music for this age group. Such beliefs may manifest themselves through fear of failure and may influence cognitive and affective notions of the importance of music for oneself. In the case of fragile self-esteem, the lesson may negatively influence it through comparative evaluation situations within the context of the group lesson.

Lowe (2012) found, however, that the intimacy of the instrumental lesson places instrument teachers in a unique position. In this position, teachers are responsible for creating positive learning environments of which they should be aware. They also should be aware of their key role in the process of improving pupils' retention rates at school. In conclusion:

By consciously attempting to generate a comfortable and non-threatening learning environment, taking an interest in their students, encouraging students' efforts, utilising their skills as professional musicians to inspire students, and selecting appropriate repertoire, instrument teachers could be able to counter some of the unsettling effects of dislocation.

(Lowe 2012, p. 240)

In conclusion, this section has analysed the relevant literature on secondary music schools. The Biasutti and Concina study (2018) involved secondary music school teachers in Italy, while two studies, Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009), and Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024), involved secondary music schools in Greece. Finally, the study of Lowe (2012) was carried out in a Secondary School in Western Australia where orchestral instruments were taught in the traditional school curriculum. While Biasutti and Concina (2018) studied the relationships between music teacher self-efficacy, beliefs about musical ability, and social skills in professional music teachers, the study of Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) analysed the importance of a positive students' self-image, its contribution to the development of children's personalities and the influence of music education on positive social behaviours. Finally, Tsimpouri and Koliadi (2024) emphasised the positive effects of a transnational

inter-school collaboration on students' experiences while Lowe (2012) focused on students' motivation to continue studying an instrument beyond the first years of secondary school.

All studies focused on social and behavioural aspects of teaching and/or learning in secondary music schools. Each study focused on these aspects through different points of view: that of teachers (Biasutti and Concina 2018), of students (Koliadi-Tiliakou 2009), on the relationship between teachers and students in supporting students' motivation (Lowe 2012), and finally on transnational collaborations in music as motivating experiences for students and teachers (Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou 2024).

### *2.3. Instrumental Lessons*

Instrumental lessons have been studied from various perspectives and within differing contexts. As seen earlier, secondary music schools were studied by Biasutti and Concia (2018), Koliadi-Tiliaku (2009), Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou (2024) and Lowe (2012). Other studies analysed instrumental lessons in Conservatories (Gaunt 2008; Carey and Grant 2014), high schools (Zhukov 2012; Parker 2016), and private schools (Rostvall and West 2003; Creech and Hallam 2011). This literature review proposes a classification of the literature according to the type of lesson, i.e. individual lesson and group lesson, and devotes a section to research that has analysed interpersonal interaction in music lessons.

#### *2.3.1. One to One Instrumental Music Lessons*

##### *2.3.1.1. The Teacher-Student Relationship in One-to-One Instrumental Lessons*

Among learning contexts, the one-to-one instrumental music lesson has a particular position. In one-to-one instrumental lessons, pedagogical attention is centered on the individual, and interpersonal relationships between teacher and student are often long-term and intense (Zhukov 2012). The importance of the teacher-learner relationship has been studied by several authors, among them Pitts (2012) and Creech and Hallam (2011).

Pitts (2012) studied the relationship between students and teachers in music education and instrumental learning. The study aimed to evaluate the effects of musical learning across generations and musical traditions to consider how music education fits into the broader context of a lifetime of musical experiences. Pitts (2012) used retrospective accounts of the formative musical experiences of 81 music students interviewed in the UK. She wanted to examine the long-term impact of music education and assess its place among many influences on children's motivation to engage with music throughout their lives. The people interviewed by Pitts (2012) reflected on events that had happened many years earlier, sometimes even 70 years, and often the details of the stories could be partial or obscured. However, among these memories, Pitts (2012) highlighted the significant ones, undertaking an analysis of the coded data collected in sorting according to the strongest influences.

Drawing on theories of memory, Pitts (2012) argued that meaningful encounters have no predetermined impact. An example she reported was a discouraging conversation between a student and the music teacher, which for some students could be a source of motivation while for others a great source of discouragement. Adult experiences collected by Pitts (2012) offered valuable evidence of the effects of the presence or absence of music teachers on ongoing engagement in musical activities. However, this influence was balanced by the opportunities and resources provided by parents and teachers or sought by students. Furthermore, the presence of a radio or gramophone in the home showed the interest of parents, especially fathers, in music. This interest helped shape interviewees' musical tastes and provided a sense that 'music was a valuable part of life' (Pitts 2012, p. 58). Pitts (2012) has also shown how the musical resources, attitudes, and opportunities in both the family and school environment need to be guided but flexible. According to her, musical resources, attitudes, and opportunities should provide students with a positive role model for musical engagement while ensuring their freedom to pursue their musical

interests, thereby achieving intrinsic motivation for learning and engagement. In particular, Pitts (2012) believed that the role of instrumental teachers had a great influence on children's motivation to engage with music throughout their lives. She affirmed that the instrumental teacher could be one of the 'strongest influences on musical development' (p. 92) and a source of confidence and guidance as the learning journey often spans several years, and therefore there is time for in-depth knowledge of the pupil in their different stages of growth. The role of instrumental teachers in 'cultivating the skills and interest of young people in music' (Pitts 2012, p. 92) differed from teaching to the whole class because the one to one relationship increased the level of connection between teacher and student. In fact, Pitts (2012) believed that instrumental teachers offer a more direct role model, as they demonstrate the specific skills they intend to foster in their students, rather than the wide range of musical attributes expected of a classroom teacher.

In her study, Pitts (2012) compared British and Italian music education, highlighting how each system shaped students' musical development. She explained that Italy's approach had traditionally prioritised specialist training over generalist education, with limited school-based music instruction. Italian respondents described music in schools as sporadic, often dependent on individual teachers' enthusiasm, and in some cases, absent from the curriculum. Many recalled minimal exposure beyond singing national songs or basic recorder lessons, with some regretting missed opportunities. One interviewee, however, noted the presence of secondary music schools, stating:

In Italy music is not very present in the school system. Although it is included up to the age of thirteen and in pilot high-schools, it is taught in an amateur fashion, very little practice, no musical ensemble.

(Pitts 2012, p. 76)

Pitts (2012) argued that the structure of the Italian education system had resulted in musical training being shaped more by parental influence than by school initiatives. This contrasted with the

UK's more integrated approach, where school music, private lessons, and extracurricular activities interacted more fluidly. A recurring theme among Italian respondents was the significant role of the conservatoire system in shaping perceptions of musical education. The conservatory route was viewed as the primary path to becoming a musician, creating a divide between formally trained students and those whose musical engagement was considered informal. This rigid and highly specialised training was often criticised for being overly strict and disconnected from personal interests. As one respondent remarked, the system was 'too rigid with little attention to our interests' (Pitts 2012, p. 77). Consequently, students who did not attend conservatories had limited structured opportunities to develop their musical skills. Those who played instruments or composed independently often regarded their learning as secondary or unofficial. The absence of a state-supported amateur music education system meant that students' musical journeys were largely influenced by family support or private initiatives.

While some respondents fondly recalled singing in school or performing in end-of-term concerts, most acknowledged that music had held a low status in mainstream education, restricting access and engagement. Beyond formal schooling, family and social influences played a crucial role in shaping students' musical experiences. Parents, siblings, and friends introduced them to different genres, from classical and opera to rock and pop, filling the gap left by schools. Some learned music through family traditions, listening to inherited records, or receiving informal guidance from relatives. Others, however, expressed frustration at having access to instruments at home without structured instruction. The conservatory-focused system ultimately fostered a narrow definition of musical education, sidelining broader participation and leaving many without clear pathways for continued learning.

Similar concerns existed across Europe, where limited curriculum time for music affected student engagement. The study suggested that both access to music education and prevailing

attitudes toward its role in schooling influenced students' musical development. Italy's emphasis on specialist training had led to a more restricted and exclusive approach compared to Britain's more flexible model. Pitts' (2012) research provided valuable insight into Italian education, a theme that recurs throughout this thesis, particularly regarding the lack of general music training in elementary school and the dominance of specialised instruction, such as conservatoire training. This specialisation was also evident in my study on instrumental education within secondary music schools. While Pitts' (2012) cross-national study provides valuable retrospective insights into the long-term impact of instrumental teachers and the structural contrasts between Italian and British music education, it stops short of offering an in-depth, situated analysis of how teacher-student interactions shape musical identity within the secondary music school context in Italy. This thesis addresses that critical gap. By foregrounding the lived experiences of students and teachers in a secondary music school and by analysing these through the lenses of *habitus* and *transitional space*, this research makes an original contribution to music education studies. It goes beyond general comparisons or reflections on past experiences by clearly showing how relationships, teaching methods, and school structures influence the development of musical identity.

#### 2.3.1.2. The Role of Parental Support in Instrumental Practice

Creech and Hallam (2011) argued that the music teaching studio has the potential to develop close interpersonal relationships. They classified the music teaching studio as the place in which instrumental lessons are held and where pupils often learn with the same teacher for several years (Creech 2006). Thus, the student-teacher relationship should influence pupils' musical development (Creech and Hallam 2011, p. 3). Creech and Hallam (2011) collected pupils' perceptions of their interpersonal interaction with teachers and parents in the context of learning a musical instrument. Their research was part of a UK study investigating the impact of interpersonal interaction on teaching and learning outcomes, in the context of learning a musical instrument.

Creech and Hallam (2011) also explored whether interpersonal interaction could influence learning outcomes by surveying 337 violin students and by collecting data on the interpersonal dimensions of control and responsiveness, as well as measures of outcomes defined as self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, enjoyment of music, and musical achievement from these violin students. Analysis of the data revealed that learning outcomes were influenced by parental support which made a significant contribution to the outcome of pupil self-esteem (p. 22); and by a positive and respectful teacher-student relationship that had an impact on pupils' motivation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Their research showed that interpersonal dynamics among students, teachers, and parents have a powerful influence on students' experiences of instrumental learning and that 'pupils flourish in the context of democratic relationships with both their parents and their teachers' (Creech and Hallam 2011). Creech and Hallam (2011) spoke of democratic relationships in student-parent and student-teacher dyads as supportive relationships that have within them a degree of control on the part of parents and teachers but also a degree of independence on the part of pupils. The term democratic relationship was borrowed from the research of Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) who argued that parents are authoritative when they treat their children warmly and democratically, but with a certain degree of behavioural control.

Still within the British study on the impact of interpersonal interaction on teaching and learning in the musical context, Creech and Hallam conducted research in 2009 on how parental involvement, self-efficacy, and personal satisfaction were influenced by interactions between parent-pupil and parent-teacher. Creech and Hallam (2009) understood interaction as a communication system and interpersonal dynamics as possible predictors of students' involvement, self-efficacy, and personal satisfaction. The article highlighted how parents and teachers can reformulate their relational dynamics within learning partnerships, to bring about a change in communication patterns and potentially foster better outcomes for themselves, teachers, and

students. Their study collected parents' opinions through a survey completed by 352 parents of violin students ages 8 to 18. According to Creech and Hallam (2009), the reciprocity in the relationship between parent-pupil-teacher means that one of the three parties can have repercussions on the entire system, influencing the experiences of others and the functioning of the group as a whole. Creech and Hallam (2009) highlighted how parents' perceptions of instrumental lessons matter from a systemic perspective. In fact, satisfied parents can contribute to teacher job satisfaction and better student outcomes. The results presented by Creech and Hallam (2009) demonstrated how parents, as well as pupils, are potentially vulnerable to interpersonal relationships with teachers. :

Parents as well as pupils are potentially vulnerable to the interpersonal relationships with teachers, and are potential beneficiaries of partnership with responsive leaders. Furthermore, the findings suggest that parents function best when they perceive significant others (in this case teachers) to be both caring and autonomy supportive.

(Creech and Hallam 2009, p. 102)

Creech and Hallam (2009) also noted the potential importance of parents' contribution to collective efficacy in the learning partnership system and suggested that teachers develop and implement strategies that nurture parents' awareness of the importance of their involvement in the learning partnership system (p. 102). Similarly, Pitts, Davidson, and McPherson (2000) explored the factors influencing young musicians' early learning experiences, emphasising the critical role of parental support alongside other key elements such as motivation, practice strategies, and environmental influences. By analysing case studies of young learners over 20 months, the research provides valuable insights into the challenges and successes encountered during early instrumental learning. Their study highlighted that children who receive consistent, sensitive support from their parents are more likely to maintain motivation and develop effective learning habits. Parents

contribute significantly by reinforcing structured yet flexible practice routines, fostering a sense of achievement, and encouraging challenges. Without this involvement, students often struggle with maintaining realistic expectations and may become easily discouraged, increasing the likelihood of discontinuing lessons. Beyond parental support, Pitts et al. (2000) examined the interplay of various factors that determine a child's success in instrumental learning. Motivation plays a central role, as children with a clear understanding of the effort required tend to persist despite obstacles. Those with unrealistic expectations about their progress, on the other hand, may lose interest quickly. Pitts et al.'s (2000) findings further illustrate the complexity of learning an instrument by acknowledging the influence of personality traits and external environments. The study suggests that the most successful learning experiences occur when teachers, parents, and students work together, ensuring that children receive both the structure and emotional reinforcement needed to continue their musical journey. The role of parental support in instrumental practice was also examined by Pitts and Davidson (2007), focusing on how children develop effective learning strategies and maintain motivation. Through case studies of young brass and woodwind players, Pitts and Davidson's (2007) research highlights the challenges children face in structuring their practice and the varying degrees of parental involvement. The study found that while well-intentioned, excessive parental control can hinder independent learning, making practice feel like a chore rather than an engaging process. Conversely, children who receive balanced support—where parents encourage autonomy while providing guidance—are more likely to develop self-awareness and sustain motivation. Pitts and Davidson (2007) emphasise that structured yet enjoyable practice environments are crucial for long-term musical development, reinforcing the need for collaboration between teachers, parents, and students to foster both technical progress and intrinsic motivation.

Behavioural patterns among teachers, parents, and students were also studied by Creech in 2012. She observed 11 violin teachers and their students between the ages of 10 and 16 during 23

individual lessons. The study revealed the existence of six types of interaction developed within a systems theory perspective and based on measures of interpersonal control and responsiveness. The six types of interaction recognised by Creech (2012) are (1) *solo leader*, where the teacher has the main power among pupils and parents; (2) *dominant duo*, in which the dominant voices are those of teacher and parent; (3) *dynamic duo*, where pupils and teachers communicated between each other but where the parent/s was/were not involved; (4) *double duo*, formed by two dyads: parent-pupil and teacher and pupil; (5) *discordant trio* in which the three parts communicated but the teacher had more power; and (6) *harmonious trio*, where all the three parts communicated equally for the benefits of the pupil (Creech 2012, p. 402). The types of interaction analysed by Creech, showed differences ranging from a master-learner teaching model to a student-centered facilitative model. The study suggested that fixed patterns of interaction may place constraints on teaching and learning outcomes. Furthermore, Creech (2012) suggested that, by becoming aware of fixed patterns of behaviour, teachers can choose to reformulate their interaction style to achieve positive changes in teaching and learning experiences for themselves and their students.

#### 2.3.1.3. Parental Support as a Psychological and Motivational Resource

While the previous studies have focused on the practical and behavioural aspects of parental involvement—such as support during practice and the structuring of learning routines—McPherson (2009) complements and extends this perspective by examining the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive motivation and achievement in music learning. McPherson (2009) emphasises that effective parental support is not solely about logistical involvement, but about fulfilling children's core psychological needs: competence, autonomy, relatedness, and purpose. His dynamic model highlights how parenting styles, goals, and beliefs interact with a child's personality and sociocultural context to shape musical development over time. McPherson (2009) presents a reciprocal view in which children actively shape the nature and effectiveness of parental

involvement. This psychological framework adds depth to our understanding of how emotionally supportive, autonomy-enhancing parenting fosters not only musical skills but also long-term engagement, motivation, and self-belief.

Building on these insights, McPherson, Davidson, and Faulkner's (2012) longitudinal study, *Music in Our Lives*, tracks 157 Western instrumental learners over 14 years, providing a valuable perspective on how musical identity and engagement develop through complex personal, social, and educational interactions. The study's rich methodology—interviews, practice diaries, teacher reports, and observations—frames musical identity as a dynamic, evolving construct shaped by experience rather than a fixed trait. Challenging static views of talent, McPherson et al. (2012) argue that sustained effort, motivation, and quality practice better predict success than innate ability. Their transactional approach highlights how musical growth depends on ongoing interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and mentors. The concept of 'syzygies' describes the alignment of biological, psychological, social, and personal factors that foster engagement, while misalignments can lead to disengagement. Psychological commitment, particularly intrinsic motivation and clear long-term goals, is crucial for persistence. Autonomy and self-regulation support sustained engagement, whereas reliance on external control often leads to dropout. The emotional climate at home also significantly shapes motivation, with encouragement promoting positive practice habits.

According to McPherson et al. (2012), relatedness, a meaningful interpersonal connection through music, is central to music identity formation. The authors extend this to 'meta-relatedness,' where music acts as a medium for emotional and social bonding. Emphasising technical skill without emotional or social meaning risks demotivation, while expressive, exploratory play nurtures intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement. Promotive factors include supportive parents and teachers with incremental views of ability, personalised teaching, and opportunities for autonomy. Demotive

factors, such as fixed beliefs about talent, rigid teaching methods, and unsupportive environments, tend to accumulate and erode motivation over time.

In summary, McPherson et al. (2012) argue that musical identity and persistence depend on a supportive ecosystem, namely engaged parents, inspiring teachers, autonomy-supportive environments, and emotionally meaningful experiences. This calls for a music education approach that embraces transactional engagement, expressive play, and individual alignment, recognising music as both a communicative and affective process. While these insights could fit within the section on *Musical Identity and Instrumental Learning*, I have positioned them here to maintain coherence with the discussion of parental support in one-to-one instrumental learning.

What is particularly surprising across these studies—namely, Creech and Hallam (2009), Pitts, Davidson, and McPherson (2009), Pitts and Davidson (2007), Creech (2012), and McPherson et al. (2012)—is the central role parental support plays in sustaining students' motivation, engagement, and musical identity development. While much of the literature tends to emphasise the teacher-student relationship, these findings reveal that parental involvement is equally crucial, functioning not just as logistical or motivational assistance but as a foundational element that nurtures students' feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This insight highlights the importance of viewing musical learning as a systemic, relational process where parents, teachers, and students interact dynamically to influence long-term musical growth. Discovering the depth of parental influence in instrumental learning, especially within one-to-one settings, was unexpected and suggests a need for further exploration of how families can be more actively engaged to support young musicians' development.

### 2.3.2. Group Music Lessons

Group music lessons are the object of study for several scholars (de Bruin 2022; Tan 2017; Ilari, Helfter, and Huynh 2020). De Bruin (2022) analysed students' experiences and perceptions in

jazz improvisation lessons within an Australian tertiary music course. Experiences and perceptions were related to learning, identity, and creative growth during an academic year. Data were collected through questionnaires, journal entries, and interviews. According to de Bruin (2022), ensemble activities may be powerful learning environments in which guidance can promote students' pro-social behaviour such as the ability to develop, acquisition of confidence, and active engagement as co-creators of knowledge (p. 234). Reflective practice within the ensemble activity may promote students' identity and may enable them to cultivate common aspirations and share personal motivation and agency. De Bruin (2022) observed how students develop a sense of identity through involvement and passion for the musical work they do individually and with others. Specifically, in ensemble work, the emergence of identity occurred through involvement in creative decision-making at individual and collective levels. Indeed, through peer interaction in ensembles, students developed a sense of self-responsibility and motivation. Ensemble work 'availed students to a community of practice in which everyone could adopt a starting role from which they knew they would be challenged' (de Bruin 2022, p. 231).

Group music lessons were connected with pro-social behaviours also by Ilari, Helfter, and Huynh (2020). Although their study was different from those mentioned so far because it refers to children between 0 and 54 months, I found it pertinent because, as well as de Bruin (2022), Ilari et al. (2020) asserted that group music activities lead to the development of pro-social behaviour. They claimed that helping, sharing, comforting, and cooperating are often grouped under the generic term of pro-social behaviour (Ilari et al. 2020, p. 400). Ilari et al. (2020) studied 36 children (20 boys and 16 girls) in the age range of 0-54 months participating in group music programs. They stated that when humans make music together, they usually synchronise their voices and bodies with the underlying rhythm. The synchronisation process could be very effective in promoting pro-social behaviour and music could be understood as a means of human communication that offers

individuals the opportunity to experience imitation in a safe space. According to Ilari et al. (2020), making music together could promote well-being.

Finally, Tan (2017) studied the development of the '21st Century Competencies' programme through the musical experiences of students from a high-performing secondary school band in Singapore. He used an ethnographic methodology collecting the voices of the participants through focus groups and informal interviews. After observing, interviewing, and recording audio and videos of band activities in which 88 students and a band director were involved, Tan (2017) found the emergence of three interrelated themes around playing in a secondary school band: performance, peers, and patience. The term 'performance' referred to the nature of the band as an artistic ensemble. Performance can be a great motivator for students and creates a sense of shared responsibility, but can sometimes cause students stress and fear due to the high commitment required. Another motivator for students in music can be the commitment to the group of peers. Tan (2017) stated that in a group of peers, constructive collaboration can be created even though this can sometimes be difficult due to misunderstandings or interpersonal problems that may arise among peers. In fact, during data collection, students stated that patience was a central factor for collaborative work in the group. The need to be patient in the band facilitated the development of social-emotional competencies such as 'relationship management' and 'social awareness' (Tan 2017, p. 478). However, patience was necessary to function in the band but could be exhausted. Tan (2017) therefore believed that the band director should talk about ways of managing peers and juniors, and encourage them when patience runs out.

In summary, researchers found that group music lessons might help to create a powerful learning environment (de Bruin, 2022) that would allow students to foster pro-social behaviour (Ilari, Helfter and Huynh 2020), collaboration skills (Tan, 2017) and students' development, confidence, and active engagement (de Bruin, 2022).

### 2.3.3. Interpersonal Interaction and Instrumental Lessons

Several authors have emphasised the connection between interpersonal interaction and instrumental lessons in different contexts, such as Conservatories, high schools, and private schools. Within a direct teaching-learning relationship, multiple interpersonal dynamics have been examined from both ethical and relational perspectives (Gaunt 2008; West & Rostvall 2003). Several researchers, such as Gaunt (2008), Carey and Grant (2015), and Presland (2005) have analysed teacher-learner relationship through their perceptions, while others focused on behavioural aspects (Rostvall and West 2001, 2003). de Bruin (2018) considered both perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of these interactions.

Gaunt's (2008) research on higher music education highlighted how the one to one instrumental and vocal teaching model plays a valuable and unique role in musicians' training. Examining the perceptions of 20 principal teachers at a U.K. Conservatory, she found that isolation in teaching practice was a common concern, which could be problematic given the intensity and complexity of student-teacher relationships. Gaunt (2008) also noted how the power dynamics invested in the individual relationship may, on the one hand, enhance relationship and learning, but on the other hand, potentially inhibit the development of self-responsibility and students' artistic voice. Throughout interviews, some of the 20 teachers suggested that the relationship with the instrumental teacher had the characteristic of guiding, nurturing, and shaping the student, thus taking on a role close to parenting. For others, the characteristics of this relationship were more compatible with those of friendship; finally, the largest slice of the interviewees saw these two aspects as combined: in general, the positive characteristics of the relationship were indicated in collaborative curiosity and mutual trust (Gaunt 2008). As Gaunt (2008) stated, the teacher-learner one to one relationship was seen as 'an indispensable, intense and intricate part of instrumental/vocal learning' (p. 17). She also stated that the characteristics of teacher-learner

relationships might create asymmetries at times. According to her, the teacher-learner relationship shows significant power dynamics: the power of a teacher could be perceived by a student as almost overwhelming. This led Gaunt (2008) to define the relationship between students and teachers as intricate, due to the combination of artistic identity and individual interaction.

Gaunt and Hallam (2014) studied individual interactions in instrumental learning and their influence on identity and behaviour across the lifespan. For their study, they created a model for mapping the interaction between the individual and their environment relative to the development of an individual's musical abilities. The model was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological theory on the one hand and Hetteema and Kenrick's (1992) biosocial model of interaction on the other. Bronfenbrenner's concept of a dyad (1986) has been used concerning the dyadic relationship in one to one lessons and a set of systems around this relationship. In the dyadic relationship, the two participants do not necessarily have to perform the same activity, but the activities of each of the two could be different and complementary, that is, part of an integrated structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Hetteema and Kenrick's (1992) biosocial model of development drew six categories of interaction and their impact. Each category represented different degrees of influence between the individual and the environment.

By integrating these frameworks, Gaunt and Hallam (2014) identified a dynamic interplay between musicians' individuality and environmental influences, shaping their musical identities. They highlighted different factors involved in acquiring musical skills as well as mutually transformative interaction. According to Gaunt and Hallam (2014), mutually transformative interaction fosters both individual musical growth and the broader musical environment. They also redefined perspectives on musicians' individuality and the impact of the environment on musical pathways and identities. Additionally, they highlighted how formal educational opportunities vary

globally and locally, shaping what and how students learn while influencing each child's unique developmental trajectory. Analysing the choice of a musical instrument by students, Gaunt and Hallam (2014) stated that this choice could be influenced by availability, cost, size, appearance, and familiarity, and its nature also contributes to the development of a specific musical identity. Furthermore, they stated that the instrument's specific physiological differences may prevent some children from approaching certain instruments and that the choice of instrument was influenced by social ideas related to gender (Gaunt and Hallam 2014, p. 469). Gaunt and Hallam (2014) argued that further research is needed to provide a more complex picture of the music community and the social factors that influence its dynamics (p. 473). This PhD research project addresses the need identified by Gaunt and Hallam (2014). Furthermore, Gaunt and Hallam's (2014) study is valuable for the present research because it has addressed some of the major issues placed at the heart of the present investigation, namely how individual interaction and the environment in which students develop can influence the individual and their identity.

Carey and Grant (2015) explored teachers' and students' perceptions of one to one pedagogy in the context of vocal and instrumental teaching. Their research was a part of a broader research conducted within one Australian Conservatoire with over 600 undergraduate and postgraduate students of performance, composition, and pedagogy. The broader project aimed to generate evidence on the one to one transactions in the conservatoire context, to explore and document the one to one teaching and learning processes, and to reflect on how those processes might become more effective (Carey and Grant 2015, p. 3).

Carey and Grant (2015) involved 12 teachers and 18 students using two data collection methods: one-hour semi-structured interviews with teachers and one-hour semi-structured focus groups with students. Both teachers and students were asked to explore their experiences and perceptions of the nature, value, effectiveness, and challenges of one to one learning and teaching.

Four key themes emerged: the personalisation of teaching, the teacher-student relationship, the negotiation between learner dependency and self-reliance, and the placement of one to one instrumental lessons in an institutional context. Carey and Grant's (2015) study identified the nature, the quality, and in particular the diversities of the learning and teaching experiences and perspectives.

In general, all participants, both students, and teachers, viewed the one to one method as 'invaluable, even irreplaceable, because of its responsiveness to the individual, its customizable nature, and its ability to respond to the needs of the individual' (Carey and Grant 2015, p. 17). The challenges met by teachers and students with the one to one model were: the complexity of negotiating an appropriate relationship between teacher and student, the right balance between teacher-led and student-led learning, and the necessity to adapt to each other's personality and teaching/learning styles. Both teachers and students highly value the possibility of one to one teaching to adapt individual teaching to each pupil's needs and learning style. However, teachers and students reported considerably different experiences and perceptions of the nature and value of one to one instruction. It emerged that practices and conceptions of what makes one to one teaching effective diverge considerably between teachers and students. In fact, the teachers' interviews revealed the need to use a pedagogy based on modelling, while only a minority of students confirmed the need for guidance centered on this method in the early years of the study.

Carey and Grant (2015) confirmed Gaunt's (2008) assertion that 'teachers are the musical agents, models, and motivating forces for their students' (2008, p. 215). They found that:

Many student-participants regarded their one-to-one teacher as a musical, professional, and/or personal role model, mentor, or advisor, and placed high value on this mentoring relationship.

Rather, students expressed a desire for greater autonomy. According to Carey and Grant (2015), an over-reliance on teachers could indicate a teacher-centered rather than student-centered approach, generating an unequal power situation. However, teachers seemed to be aware of the dependency-generating potential of modelling and sought to use it only in the early years of study. Teachers also recognised the potential benefits of one to one teaching in pedagogical practice.

Presland (2005) explored teacher-student relationships from students' perspectives, emphasising their significance in the demanding and specialised environment of the conservatory (p. 237). She (2005) argued that a successful teacher-student relationship in the context of Western music is vital 'in the intense, demanding and rarefied environment of the conservatory' (Presland 2005, p. 237). A successful teacher-student relationship, according to Presland (2005), should provide young musicians with a depth of musical understanding and personal security enabling them to navigate the world of music and entertainment. Her study examined the relationship between students and their instrumental teachers through the perceptions of piano students at a UK conservatoire, analysing, in particular, how students viewed their instrumental teachers, and how they believed their teacher training could benefit them. She also investigated other factors within the conservatory curriculum and environment that influenced students' playing, as well as the impact of gender, nationality, and educational background on their experiences. Semi-structured interviews revealed that students were highly satisfied with their lessons, viewing their teachers as sources of inspiration and motivation. All the students also underlined the intensity of the individual relationship with the teacher and the total attention that the teacher had towards their playing (Presland 2005, p. 242). Regarding the influence of gender, nationality, and education level, female students tended to prioritise a personal connection with their tutor, whereas male and

international students expressed a greater need for support in their early university years. Students with prior specialised training valued major studio lessons as the key to their progress, while those without such training considered general music education more beneficial.

Presland (2005) concluded that 'each relationship between a young musician and a teacher is unique' (p. 245) and each student benefits from learning differently. In fact, some students preferred a 90-minute lesson per week, while others preferred a longer lesson every 2-3 weeks. The level of practical support and emotional involvement required by students also differed. Ultimately, Presland's (2005) study found that good communication and a strong personal bond between teacher and student can be crucial.

According to de Bruin (2018), the relationship between teacher and student constitutes a 'highly complex, accelerated, and intense form of learning and interactivity, where learning is facilitated by more micro-social bounce between teacher and student' (p. 174). The teacher's and student's unique personalities and abilities are dynamically engaged during the lesson. de Bruin (2018) studied teacher-student interactive behaviours that support teaching using Thelen and Smith's (1994) dynamic systems theory. Through this theory, he analysed the relationship between micro-social (i.e. teacher-student interaction) and macro-social goals (i.e. outcomes achievement) (de Bruin 2018, p. 162). The aim of de Bruin's (2018) study was to observe and analyse the interpersonal content and structure of the individual improvisation lesson. Specifically, the interaction between five experienced improvisers with more than 20 years of experience and their tertiary students at an Australian conservatoire was studied. The researcher participated as a passive observer in the lessons between teacher and student (one for each pair). Lessons were recorded, and after each session, semi-structured interviews were conducted—first with the student, then with the teacher. These interviews explored both students' and teachers' perceptions, as well as the meanings they derived from their interaction during the lesson. According to de Bruin

(2018), the interviews allowed students' and teachers' thoughts to be explored, 'revealing strengths, fears, frustrations, and epiphanies that emerged during the lesson and that had an impact on teaching and learning' (p. 164).

Through data analysis, de Bruin (2018) noted how in the interactions there was collaboration and negotiation of thoughts and actions that affected learning and influenced the teacher-student relationship. Negotiation occurred, according to de Bruin (2018) through a wide range of sensory, auditory, self-regulatory, and imagination-based skills and processes required to successfully negotiate improvised music production. De Bruin (2018) asserted that teachers' teaching behaviours have a powerful influence on students' comprehension during the lesson. Furthermore, he stated that individual learning analysis is useful for understanding the complex relationships between teachers and students in achieving their goals. According to de Bruin (2018), the interpersonal relationship acts as a channel through which 'the teacher identifies and personalises the processes involved in a task, and makes them visible, understood and realisable' (p. 176). This study underlined the importance of interpersonal interaction in the one to one instrumental lesson, highlighting a process of negotiation and collaboration between teacher and learner. de Bruin (2018) therefore found that interactions between students and pupils influence learning through processes of collaboration and negotiation. This resonates with the fourth research question of this PhD project, namely how interpersonal interactions between students and pupils influence learning and teaching in the context of a secondary music school.

The interaction between teachers and students was also examined by Rostvall and West (2001, 2003), who video-recorded, transcribed, and analysed 11 wind instrument and guitar lessons at a community music school in Sweden. The study involved four teachers and 21 students, ranging in age from nine to 35, and aimed to explore music teaching and learning from an institutional perspective by describing, analysing, and interpreting instrumental lessons. To capture the

interaction from multiple angles, two separate cameras were used—one focused on the teacher and the other on the students. The findings revealed that teachers often neglected key musical elements such as phrasing, rhythm, melody, expressive qualities, and physical aspects of performance. Instead, they primarily concentrated on the score and rarely played their instruments alongside students. As a result, students had limited opportunities to listen to and internalise the melodies they were learning. Rhythm was not explicitly addressed through verbal instruction, while a significant amount of lesson time was dedicated to refining the intonation of individual notes. Consequently, students had to divide their attention between reading the score and mastering complex motor skills, as they had not yet developed appropriate motor patterns (Rostvall & West, 2003, p. 21). However, teachers seldom discussed motor skills verbally, often attributing students' difficulties to poor sight-reading abilities. The study also found that teachers dominated verbal interactions, showing little interest when students expressed their musical preferences or concerns. According to Rostvall and West (2003), this disregard for students' perspectives led to missed opportunities for identifying and addressing learning challenges. The interaction during lessons was characterised by an uneven distribution of power, which negatively impacted both students' and teachers' learning experiences. Many students who felt dissatisfied with their progress dropped out within their first year of learning an instrument, with no follow-up inquiry from the school (Rostvall & West, 2003, p. 23).

Rostvall and West (2003) argued that this instructional approach placed excessive emphasis on verbal explanations, at the expense of emotional and physical engagement with music. They advocated for a pedagogy that integrates emotional and bodily awareness, allowing students to experience music in a more varied and immersive way.

This section analysed six studies, all concerning interpersonal interaction and instrumental lessons. The majority of those studies were conducted in higher education and Conservatories

(Gaunt 2008; Carey and Grant 2015; Presland 2005; de Bruin 2018), while Rostvall and West's study (2001;2003) was conducted in a private school in Sweden. Most of the studies agreed on the importance of the teacher-learner interaction in the one to one instrumental lesson: Gaunt (2008) saw it as 'an indispensable, intense and intricate part of instrumental/vocal learning' (p. 17); Presland (2005) stated that it is 'vital in the intense, demanding and rarefied environment of the conservatory' (p. 237); de Bruin (2018) defined the teacher-student relationship as 'highly complex, accelerated, and intense form of learning and interactivity' (p. 174). Carey and Grant (2015) stated that one to one lesson is 'invaluable, even irreplaceable, because of its responsiveness to the individual, its customizable nature, and its ability to respond to the needs of the individual' (p. 17). Although the positive characteristics of the one to one lesson have been highlighted by most of the authors presented in this section, some of them have pointed out that the one to one lesson can have dysfunctional power dynamics at its core (Gaunt 2008; Carey and Grant 2015; Rostvall 2001; 2003). What emerged as particularly striking across the reviewed studies was the intense, multifaceted nature of the one-to-one teacher-student relationship. While the centrality of this dynamic might be anticipated in instrumental music education, its depth, variability, and emotional complexity were more profound than expected. Across multiple studies, these relationships were described not only as pedagogical exchanges but also as mentorships, friendships, and at times, quasi-parental bonds. This surprising emotional weight reinforces the idea that musical development is deeply embedded in interpersonal trust and mutual responsiveness. At the same time, the studies revealed that such relationships can be both empowering and constraining—marked by power imbalances, dependency, or a lack of mutual understanding. It was also noteworthy how different studies, from conservatoire to private school settings, converged in emphasising the potential for these interactions to shape not only musical skill but also students' broader sense of identity and agency. While gender was not always a central focus, some studies—

such as Presland (2005) and Gaunt and Hallam (2014)—did point to gendered patterns in preferences, expectations, and instrument choice, suggesting this as a relevant factor deserving further attention. These findings underline the necessity of viewing musical instruction not merely as technical training but as a deeply human, relational process.

#### *2.3.3.1. Interpersonal Interaction, Humour and Instrumental Learning*

A particular kind of interaction was recorded in the study of Zhukov (2012). Her research highlighted how humour appeared to be a predominant strategy among verbal interactions in one to one instrumental lessons. Zhukov (2012) stated that teacher-student relationships in instrumental learning was an intimate teaching situation in which a positive relationship plays a crucial role in student learning, and that ‘the use of humour in one-to-one instrumental music instruction is still to be examined and might be unique to the setting’ (Zhukov 2012, p. 3). She (2012) examined interpersonal interaction between teachers and students in instrumental lessons through verbal and nonverbal behaviours, focusing on gender differences. The study was conducted in five higher education institutions in eastern Australia and involved 12 classical music teachers and their 24 students. Participating teachers were chosen based on their national reputations as teachers and artists and the positions they held in their schools. To demonstrate their typical teaching approach in one-on-one lessons with each student, all teachers had to select two first-year students, one male and one female. An observation method was employed, recording 24 lessons over three weeks. Zhukov (2012) identified three types of verbal behaviour: humour (from students or teachers), excuses, and expressions of disappointment. For non-verbal behaviour, she categorised actions such as deception, doubt, dominance, moderation, evaluation, boredom, interest, and courtship. She stated that:

The findings indicate that humour was a predominant strategy among verbal behaviours and gestures of deceit among the non-verbal behaviours, suggesting conflict between verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

(Zhukov 2012, p. 12)

Zhukov (2012) also observed that social interactions between teachers and students during music lessons were typically brief—at the start, they helped students relax before intensive learning, while at the end, they re-established a friendly rapport. The most frequent verbal behaviour found in this study was student jokes, followed by teacher jokes. Students' excuses for their lack of preparation or their way of playing the instrument came in third place, while student disappointment came in fourth. Students used humour mainly as a strategy to save face and resolve difficult situations, while teachers used it as a way to break the intensity of the teaching-learning moment (Zhukov 2012). Among the nonverbal behaviours measured in this study, deception received the highest score, accounting for over half of the teachers' and students' gestures. This was followed by expressions of interest and doubt among students. The findings suggested that teachers and adult students in higher education instrumental music lessons frequently exhibited unconscious deceptive gestures.

Humour seemed to be predominant among verbal behaviours, while gestures of deceit such as hand over mouth or face, touching the nose, rubbing the eyes, coughing and clearing the throat (Zhukov 2012, p. 7) were predominant among non-verbal behaviours. According to Zhukov (2012), this data suggested 'a conflict between verbal and non-verbal behaviours' (p. 13). The conflict between verbal and nonverbal behaviours highlighted the mixed messages in the individual instrumental lessons: verbal behaviours were characterised by humour, while nonverbal behaviours were largely negative and consisted of deceptive gestures. These contradictory messages reflected the frustration and uncertainty often present in instrumental music teaching (Zhukov 2012, p. 14).

Finally, Zhukov (2012) identified gender differences in verbal and nonverbal communication. Male teachers tended to adopt a more authoritarian style, while female teachers fostered a more collaborative relationship with students. Gender differences were more pronounced in nonverbal behaviour, with male teachers and students displaying more deceptive cues, while female students showed more courtship gestures. Zhukov (2012) viewed these gestures as asexual, driven by a desire for pleasure and approval. Her research is central to this literature review, providing key insights into teacher-student interactions in instrumental lessons through verbal and nonverbal behaviours.

#### *2.3.3.2. Interpersonal Interaction, Humour and Non-Instrumental Learning*

Humour in instrumental music remains an underexplored research area (Thompson 2023), though its pedagogical and communicative roles have been extensively studied in other contexts (Bateson 2006, Garner 2006, Hayes 2016, Bakar & Kaumar 2019, Kaur 2021). Bateson (2006) argued that humour plays a crucial role in human interaction, helping individuals navigate complex or sensitive topics by offering indirect yet precise cues about shared perspectives on life.

In educational settings, Garner (2006) and Hayes (2016) emphasised humour's psychological, physiological, and pedagogical benefits. Psychological effects included reducing anxiety, enhancing motivation, self-esteem, and morale (Garner 2006, p. 177; Hayes 2016, p. 252). Physiological effects encompassed muscle relaxation, improved breathing, circulation, immune system strengthening, and the release of endorphins, which lowered stress and blood pressure (Hayes 2016, p. 253). Garner's (2006) study, which involved university students watching lectures with and without humour, demonstrated that humour improved retention and the learning environment (p. 179). Hayes (2016) focused on satire in undergraduate public affairs classes, finding that humour fostered student engagement in political discussions, aiding their sense of empowerment and critical analysis.

Pozsonyi & Soulstein (2019) acknowledged humour's learning benefits but noted that some teachers resisted it, fearing it could undermine their authority—particularly those who were young, female, or from minority backgrounds. However, other teachers used humour strategically to build rapport and challenge students' preconceived notions. Similarly, Bakar & Kaumar (2019) studied five award-winning lecturers in New Zealand, analysing how humour was integrated into teaching. They categorised humour according to three dominant theories: superiority theory (teasing, self-deprecating humour), incongruity theory (sarcasm, puns, jokes that defy expectations), and relief theory (laughter as a response to stress). Teachers used humour either to facilitate learning by reinforcing concepts or to regain students' attention (Bakar & Kaumar 2019, p. 21).

Kaur (2021) emphasised humour as a fundamental human need, proposing a distinction between appropriate humour (which fosters engagement and creativity) and inappropriate humour (which may be offensive or harmful). She identified four categories of positive humour: topic-related humour, topic-unrelated humour, unplanned humour, and self-deprecating humour. Kaur (2021) argued that humour strengthens teacher-student relationships, facilitates stress management, and improves long-term concept retention (p. 415).

These last two sections analysed the use of humour in learning. Zhukov's (2012) research was the only one that addressed humour in one-to-one instrumental learning. Zhukov (2012) saw humour as a predominant strategy among verbal interactions in one to one instrumental lessons. Having analysed literature on humour in general lessons, Zhukov believed that the dynamics of the teacher/student relationship in one to one lessons might intensify the effects of humour observed in the classroom (Zhukov 2012, p. 3). Overall, research strongly supports humour as a valuable pedagogical tool (Garner 2006; Hayes 2016; Pozsonyi & Soulstein 2019; Bakar & Kaumar 2019; Kaur 2021). However, its effectiveness depends on appropriate use. It can be linked to lesson content for knowledge retention or applied more broadly to maintain students' attention (Kaur 2021; Bakar &

Kaumar 2019). While some educators fear it could undermine authority, others see it as a means of strengthening their role and enhancing the learning experience.

#### *2.4. Communities of Musical Practice*

The secondary music school context could be seen as a potential Community of Musical Practice (Kenny 2016). With this term, Kenny (2016) described musical communities through the framework of the Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). The concept of Community of Musical Practice challenged the idea that the teacher holds sole authority over knowledge, instead requiring a community of students and teachers to collaborate to co-construct knowledge.

Kenny (2016), studied three different communities: an adult amateur jazz ensemble, a youth choir, and an online Irish traditional music web platform. According to Kenny (2016), in this kind of community, interpersonal interaction, and musical learning are held and interconnected with musical identity. In her study, she found that each community was developed and sustained by a sense of belonging, collaborative learning, and identity construction.

Kenny (2016) argued that there is a sociocultural learning system at the basis of each practice community. According to her (2016), musical participation within Communities of Musical practice (from now on CoMPs) could strengthen participants' musical identity formation (p. 23). Kenny expanded the notion of 'communities of practice' (CoPs), coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) to music communities. According to Wenger (1998), CoPs are 'communities created over time by a sustained enterprise' in which 'the collective learning results in practice' (p. 45). To better understand, Wenger defined CoPs in 2015 as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'. The conceptualisation of the term Community of Practices was interconnected with the idea of learning

as 'situated' (Lave and Wenger 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) saw learning as the acquisition of context-specific knowledge, that is acquired through participation in a sociocultural context. Wenger (1998) stated that CoPs are characterised by mutual engagement (domain), joint enterprise (process/community), and shared repertoires (practice). Those characteristics were reflected in the CoMPs (Kenny 2016). Indeed, learning was conceived by Lave and Wenger (1991) as being part of events and social interaction through which reality is the result of joint co-construction among participants; thus 'within CoMPs the construction of collective knowledge is central to musical learning' (Kenny 2016, p. 12). Kenny (2016) observed that participants across the three contexts sought stimulating musical learning experiences to shape their identities. In CoMPs, musical identity was not only shared but also negotiated within the group, influencing each individual's sense of self and their disposition toward others (ibid. p. 23). From Kenny's (2016) study of three different CoMPs, three key themes emerged. The first was musical identity, shaped through negotiation in diverse musical settings with multiple participants and influences. This identity played a crucial role in both the development and sustainability of a CoMP, as members formed their sense of belonging through participation. The second theme, collective knowledge, was fostered collaboratively through an apprenticeship learning model. Lastly, membership was established through a learning process that shaped both individual and collective identities (Kenny 2016, p. 115). Kenny's study provides valuable insight for this PhD by examining how musical identity is constructed within CoMPs.

Countryman (2009) studied interpersonal relationships and social connections in Canadian high school music programs, analysing the experiences of 33 graduates from the previous one to six years. Her research was based on the idea that identity is socially constructed. She related to Small's (1998) idea that identity is formed through meaningful participation in social activities. Countryman approaches Wenger's (1998) concept of CoPs, asserting that the term community has gained ground

as a 'socio-cultural activity that implies dynamic interdependence in social and individual processes' (P.5). She found that the definition of community of practice is reflected in her research data. The results clearly showed how 30 of the 33 participants in the study used musical involvement at school as a means of belonging and a tool to develop themselves, even if a true community of practice was experienced only by students who were able to experience it feeling responsible for this community. Countryman (2009) stated that social relationships were considered the glue that kept students engaged in music programmes. Countryman (2009) found that most participants used involvement in school music as a 'means of belonging and as a tool for self-development' (p. 9) and had fond memories of school experiences. She postulated that students involved in programmes with regular opportunities to practice musical action had a greater number of personally transformative experiences. Even though Countryman (2009) studied Communities of Practice in secondary music programmes, she believed that:

While I do not mean to suggest that if music educators can provide conditions conducive to the development of communities of practice in our secondary school music programs all will be well, I do believe that pedagogical moves that simultaneously promote musical community and musical agency are steps in the right direction.

(Countryman 2009, p. 17)

Communities of practice in music schools have also been studied by Forbes (2020) who described social learning as situated in and resulting from social participation. Her research aimed to understand the value of collaborative learning for students working in small, diverse groups within first-year music practice courses in an Australian university's popular music programme. The groups, composed of three to five pupils each, rotated periodically so that all were supervised by the three teachers involved in the research (Forbes 2020, p. 209). Forbes (2020) investigated how collaborative learning in ensemble music could allow students to find new learning opportunities

they had never previously experienced or recognised, such as peer collaboration and mutual learning. Forbes' (2020) theoretical framework was also based on the Communities of Practice theory of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), who argued -as mentioned before- that learning is intrinsically social and is the result of social participation. Following Wenger (1998), Forbes (2020) stated that learning involves not only common practices but also the construction of identities within communities. In particular, she was interested in collaborative learning, which needs the presence of students and teachers to collectively construct knowledge. A key feature of collaborative learning was appreciating students' contributions to learning. In this way, the students acquired trust and authority first in the group and consequently in themselves. However, each student's experience was subjective and each student or group of students could experience collaborative learning differently. To conclude, Forbes (2020) asserted that collaborative learning can create value for students through peer learning. Through this, new skills are cultivated and students' performance is improved, and they are induced to review their criteria for musical and personal success.

Communities of Practice were also analysed by Pollard and Alexander (2019), who studied the music programme and orchestra classes of a school located in a disadvantaged and ethnically diverse area of North London for four weeks. This school's instrumental programme offered students the opportunity to learn a classical instrument free of charge for a minimum of three years, during which time students could hold on to their instrument. The researchers' focus was on the first three years when instrumental lessons were compulsory. The school music and non-music lessons, tutoring periods, intervals, and orchestra rehearsals were observed. The study was framed through Bourdieu's (1986) embodied and cultural capital concepts. As stated by Pollard and Alexander:

Here we frame materiality as the relationships between persons and 'things', and in this case specifically the relationship between teachers, students, and their musical instruments.

(Pollard and Alexander 2019, p. 310)

Pollard and Alexander (2019) stated that although the orchestral programme did not represent an organic community of music practice, it nevertheless resembled such a community in many ways. This caused pupils to develop their instrumental playing through gradual integration in a situated performance context. Pupils learn not only from the teacher's direct instruction but also through the imitation of peers and the gradual recognition of their abilities. The learning environment was carefully cultivated by teachers so that they could emphasise pupils' abilities to identify their flaws and goals (Pollard and Alexander 2019, p. 320).

In conclusion, this section has discussed Communities of Musical Practice. The theoretical basis of CoMP was given by Kenny (2016) from the concepts of Communities of Practice theorised by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). The influence of Communities of Music Practice on participants' identity and the co-construction of knowledge among students and teachers were found in all the studies presented in this section (Kenny 2016; Countryman 2009; Forbes 2020) as well as the importance of social relationships, considered as the glue for students' involvement in musical programmes (Countryman 2009) and as a means for collective peer learning, as in Pollard and Alexander (2019). The three studies analysed in this section are relevant to the present research as they provide insight into what a CoMP in a secondary music school might look like. Furthermore, they explore key themes such as participants' identity and interpersonal relationships in musical contexts, which are central to this PhD study.

### *2.5. Musical Identity and Instrumental Learning*

This section examined the literature on musical identity in relation to the central research question and research question five, namely how interpersonal interaction influences students'

learning and musical identity. According to Green (2011), the concept of 'identity' refers to a universal human condition linked to the development of self-consciousness, namely the ability to distinguish between 'self' and 'other'. Moreover, she stated that the concept of identity arises from historical and social conditions that influence each personal identity. Thus, considering music as imbued in historical and social conditions, the concept of musical identity arises from the development of self-consciousness around music. Green (2011) believed that the different components of musical identities can have transitory or lasting effects and might be continually formed and re-formed. She also asserted that musical identities are connected not only with the tastes, values, skills, knowledge, and practices but also with how music is acknowledged.

Musical identities are forged from a combination of musical tastes, values, skills, and knowledge; and from the musical practices in which an individual or group engages, including not only production practices such as playing an instrument or singing playground chants, for example, but also reception practices such as listening or dancing to music.

(Green 2011, p. 12)

Green (2011) connected this statement to formal, informal, and non-formal music education. She stated that music learning takes place through diverse practices and institutions: from informal self-directed learning to enculturation within socio-musical groups involved in music-making and to formal music education provided by social institutions dedicated to that purpose<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Green (2008), Campbell (2018) and Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam (2020), learning could be formal when is always organised and structured, has learning objectives, and, from the learner's point of view, is always intentional; nonformal learning when it is intentional but in unstructured contexts; and informal or enculturative, when it is not organised, has no established objective in terms of learning outcomes, and is never intentional from the learner's point of view. In 2008, Green conducted an important study on informal musical learning. She investigated how informal learning practices are possible and desirable in a secondary school context and how they can influence young students' acquisition of musical skills and knowledge. According to Green (2008), informal learning practices could be a challenge for teachers that could offer benefits to students in various contexts: from music education to instrumental teaching to ensemble music. Informal learning practices might change the way students listen to, understand, and appreciate music.

According to Wenger (1998) and Hodges (2019) personal identity, social identity, and practice are connected. Wenger (1998) said that ‘issues of identity are an integral aspect of a social theory of learning and are thus inseparable from issues of practice, community and meaning’ (p. 145). Addressing more specifically the realm of music education and musical practices, Hodges (2019) stated that the music of an individual’s life often defines the sense of identity of the person. Furthermore, he noted that ‘one of the earliest identity constructions regarding music is the notion of musician—not musician’ (Hodges 2019, p. 232). The classification between musician and non-musician is often based on whether the individual plays an instrument and has formal training. Thus, children might be influenced because they might ‘think of themselves as nonmusicians, even if they did participate in classroom music activities’ (Hodges 2019, p. 232). Hodges (2019) claimed that musical identity relates to other aspects of lifestyle, acting a critical role in the construction of identity.

O’Neill (2006) stated that each individual may have emergent and opposite identities based on the notion of what it means to be a musician, on gender, ethnicity, age, physical abilities, or qualities. She also stated that ‘the combination of motivational sources, personal beliefs and values, and musical behaviours contribute to the gradual construction and reconstruction of a positive identity in relation to music’ (p. 471). According to O’Neill (2006), individuals have a positive musical identity when they have a sense of being a musical person. The self-identity is also influenced by important others that contribute to shape the construction of the self: thus, ‘the self’ is a social concept (O’Neill 2006, p. 91). Furthermore, O’Neill (2006) stated that musical identity and the self

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They might increase autonomy and motivation in the study of music education; and they might enable the creation of cooperative groups among students.

were not only influenced by musical social structures but also by the past, the present, and the future, which were part of the musical identity.

An insight into the social construction of identity was also offered by Schwarz and Williams (2020). They stated that we do not 'have' an identity but rather, that it 'emerges' and is seen in situations. So, identity is not a fixed entity but mutates and adapts to changing situations and others. Indeed, Williams (2013), said that identities are 'a fluid set of cultural ideals that people in different situations and groups construct through interaction' (Williams 2013, p. 105).

Hargreaves, Miell and MacDonald (2002) agreed with Schwarz and Williams (2020) and Williams (2013), stating that a major influence in the construction of identity was provided by the context in which relationships occur, such as family, school, and extracurricular activities. Musical learning may be one of the contexts in which relationships occur. Moreover, regarding the development of a sense of identity, they suggested that one of the primary social functions of music was to establish and nurture an individual's sense of identity:

Our musical tastes and preferences can form an important statement of our values and attitudes, and composers and performers use their music to express their own distinctive views of the world

(Hargreaves et al. 2002, p. 1).

Hargreaves et al. (2002) argued that how young people define themselves as musicians and the role of specific influences such as school and the family are central reference points for young people's musical identity. They stated that the social purpose of music is demonstrated through three functions: the management of interpersonal relationships, the regulation of mood, and the establishment and development of self-identity (p. 5). The first regards how people use music as a means of developing and negotiating interpersonal relationships: for example, musical preferences

might define belonging to a social group, especially in adolescence. Secondly, mood could be regulated through music, particularly when it is linked with specific listening and social circumstances. This, they claimed, would explain how contexts can influence listening preferences. Finally, self-identity constitutes the central rationale of Hargreaves et al. (2002) dissertation. According to the authors, self-identity is the general view that an individual has of themselves. Self-identity is integrated with self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concepts (or self-image) are the different ways in which we see ourselves and could be 'context- or situation-specific (e.g. how I see myself as being able to cope under stress, or in an emergency), or domain-related (e.g. how I see myself as a linguist or a musician)' (Hargreaves et al. 2002, p. 9). Self-esteem is 'the evaluative component of the self, and has both cognitive and emotional aspects: how worthy we think, and feel we are' (Hargreaves et al. 2002, p. 8). Hargreaves et al. (2002) emphasised that these functions are subject to the influence of other people. They argued that this influence is manifested through the indirect process of comparing ourselves and our behaviour to others to gain a sense of efficacy and value. This happens even if those others are unaware of their effects on us (Hargreaves et al. 2002, p. 9).

Hargreaves, et al. (2016) stated that adolescence and early adulthood is a critical time in the development of self-identity (p. 765). Following Erikson's (1968) statements, they presented three key processes in the development of youth's self-identity: *identification*, which is the process of connecting to significant others or groups, *individuation*, namely the establishment of a personal continuity across different contexts and times, and *integration*, which is the organisation of the new components into a continuum of self-identity (Hargreaves et al. 2016, pg. 765). The school environment could be the place where students can find a space for self-identification about (significant) others. Education and educational institutions should then consider pupils' views about their musical abilities and aspirations, the effects of school transition on musical identity, and

sociocultural context analyses (Hargreaves, et al. 2016). Hargreaves, MacDonald and Miell (2012) stated that musical identities are negotiated through social situations. The social situation provided by the school context has an enormous influence on the development of individuals' musical identities. Hargreaves et al. (2012) explained that students' musical identities are developed by the individual and group encounters that characterise their daily lives. They also emphasised the importance of individual identity in musical development, in accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) basic idea that our social relationships with others form the basis of our individual development. Thus, we are not only influenced by others but are constituted by our interaction with others: we are ultimately social beings and not individuals (Hargreaves et al. 2002).

Agreeing with O'Neill (2016), Hargreaves et al. (2016) suggested that people have several identities, each created in interaction with other persons, instead of a single central identity. They stated that these identities may be conflicting but conflict and change might lead to new constructions. Hargreaves et al. (2016) put forward two typologies of identities as far as musical experiences and musical involvement are concerned: identities in music (IIM) and music in identities (MII). The first derived from broad and generic distinctions between musical activities: the roles of composer, performer, improviser, and teacher are central to the self-definitions of professional or experienced musicians. The second, however, defined how we use music as a means or resource to develop other aspects of our identity (Hargreaves, et al. 2016; 2017). Through these typologies, Hargreaves et al. (2016; 2017) described two kinds of identity: IIM defines oneself in one social role (composer, music student, etc) while MII has more psychological and personal implications. Thus, I believe that IIM and MII in secondary music schools are categories helpful in identifying the different aspects of teachers' and students' musical identities.

### 2.5.1. Musical Possible Selves and Instrumental Lessons

Erikson (2007) conceptualised possible selves as future-oriented self-perceptions that include experiences of agency in forthcoming situations. He emphasised that the ability to envision oneself in the future is deeply linked to self-concept and personal identity. The concept of the possible self was taken up by Creech, Varvarigou and Hallam (2020) who highlighted how music in secondary school has far-reaching implications in the ways in which music can shape students' possible musical selves. Imagining possible selves allowed each individual to tell a story about themselves. Through this story, one might understand how each person experiences the world and perceives themselves in it. 'The story we tell about our life' (Bruner 1987, p. 691) could bring us toward the possible direction of the self in the future. Thus, according to Erikson (2007), possible selves were 'conceptions of ourselves as we want to be or fear to be' (p. 348). Possible selves represent the bridge between an individual's current state and their envisioned future (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989, p. 211). They give personal meaning to life tasks and serve as guiding goals, motivating individuals to strive toward desired outcomes or avoid unfavorable ones. By shaping aspirations, possible selves establish a connection between cognition and motivation, as they involve self-schema influenced by social processes (Erikson, 2007). Reconnecting to Erikson's (2007) possible selves, Creech, et al. (2020) asserted that possible musical selves gave coherence to each one's musical life and were dynamic, which means that they can be disrupted and reconstructed through processes of musical interaction, interpretation, and participation and influence 'orientations toward a musical future' (Creech, et al. 2020, p. 67).

Moreover, Creech et al. (2020) believed that our possible musical selves offer consistency to each one's musical life, acting as a bridge between cognition and motivation, pushing us towards or away from future music experiences (p. 18). Possible selves could also emerge within educational contexts where they gain importance through social interaction, pedagogy, and practice and are

experienced as a motivating agent. Furthermore, Creech et al. (2020) applied the concept of Possible Selves to secondary schools and instrumental lessons in them. They stated that many studies about music secondary education claimed for music experience to be more relevant by 'bridging in-school and out-school musical experiences' (Creech et al. 2020). They questioned how secondary school music education can create an environment for students to develop musical self-stories and argued that learners possess the essential tools for critical reflection on their musical experiences, citing Philpott and Wright (2018). Creech et al. (2020) argued that reflective practices might 'underpin the formulation of musical possible selves' (p. 70) in secondary music education.

Also recognising the potential of formal settings, Creech et al. (2020) considered the complementarity of formal music education with extracurricular music education. The collective practice of music making is used by music educators in both formal, nonformal, or informal settings to support youth development within specific communities. They argued that extracurricular contexts, which are typically voluntary and lack compulsory assessments and externally imposed learning goals, may be particularly well suited to focus on the developmental potential of musical learning and participation, which can be understood in the context of positive and creative youth development. Moreover, they argued that there is great potential in extracurricular activities related to ensemble music for young people engaged in music. In fact, extracurricular music activities aimed at young people's creative development can function as 'a context in which young people can freely explore their possible selves, developing personally meaningful narratives about the role that learning and participating in music plays in their lives' (Creech et al. 2020, p. 118). Creech et al. (2020) believed that it is useful to consider the complementarity of formal and extracurricular music learning to be able to offer students differentiated and student-centered pedagogies.

### 2.5.2. Musical Identity in Adolescence

Musical identity in adolescence was explored by Parker (2020) and Després and Dubé (2020). In her book, Parker (2020) amplified the voices of 30 American teenage musicians, aged 12 to 18, from diverse backgrounds. Through interviews, these young musicians shared their experiences of musical development, creating music independently, and collaborating with others. Parker (2020) invited them to reflect on their personal journeys, influences, social dynamics, motivations, challenges, and their envisioned musical futures. Her questions largely focused on identity, musical identity, and the relationships shaping them. Parker's (2020) research closely aligns with this PhD study, as it examines not only the evolution of musical identity but also the social contexts and connections that continue to shape it.

To study adolescents' musical identity, Parker (2020) focused on three key ideas: the concept of identity development as progressive and transformative, proposed by Erikson (1968), the idea that identities are complex systems built on self-concepts (Hargreaves et al. 2002) and the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) according to whom the person is involved in a series of social systems which influences the adolescents' development. According to Parker (2020), musical identity has three basic components: musical self-concept; musical self-esteem (see definitions above); and musical self-representation, which is the musical self that includes students' past, present, and future experiences.

Parker (2020) stated that, when teenagers describe their music-making, they focus on their relationships with others involved in the musical activity, stating that 'music is woven into their (the teenagers') existence' (Parker 2020, p. 1). Parker (2020) found that the process of adolescents' musical identity development had several stages: the identity was first seen as externalised, then the participants felt musical with a subsequent internalisation of the musical identity, and this led to the possibility of owning the musical identity. Parker (2020, p. 239) reported that participants

cited a condition during childhood and early adolescence that saw identity as an externalised construction in which participants noted that they made music for significant others and that significant others substantially influenced the development of their musical identity. The central phenomenon was identified as feeling musical. Each participant spoke of a pivotal moment when they switched from making music for others to making music for themselves. Participants mentioned that as a result of this phenomenon, identity was internalised and music became more intrinsically constructed than extrinsically constructed. The consequences of feeling musical include experience, ownership, giving back, and branching out. Participants described feeling more self-confident and having a sense of competence in dealing with challenges. The result of the development of participants' musical identity was a positive view of oneself in the future and the desire to make music with others (Parker 2020, p. 239).

Després and Dubé (2020) emphasised the importance of recognising students' musical identities and involving them in decisions about music education. Their literature review focused on studies that amplified student voices, highlighting perspectives on learning and participation. They argued that actively listening to young people and analysing how they can contribute meaningfully leads to improved teaching practices while fostering student empowerment and motivation (p. 3). Després and Dubé (2020) also observed a growing interest in student voice over the past 30 years, particularly since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which emphasised respect for children's opinions. This principle extends beyond merely hearing students to genuinely considering their perspectives in decision-making (p. 2). They noted that global education systems are largely shaped by adult-driven ideas, often excluding student input, although schools exist primarily for them. Many scholars, they reported, have criticised this approach, arguing that designing educational environments without student consultation is inadequate. Meaningful student engagement requires reevaluating traditional structures, listening to their insights, and

translating them into effective teaching strategies that promote empowerment and motivation. Després and Dubé (2020) referenced Robinson and Taylor's (2007) model, which identified four key values of student voice: communication as dialogue, democratic participation in education, recognition of power imbalances, and the potential for transformation. According to this model, collecting student feedback alone is insufficient and educators should also integrate students' perspectives into decision-making to ensure their voices are genuinely acknowledged. Concluding their review, Després and Dubé (2020) stated that traditional music lessons, which focus on specialisation in a single instrument and culminate in annual exams, often fail to resonate with most students (p. 11). Instead, they found that students prefer experiential learning, valuing hands-on engagement and peer collaboration.

In summary, this section explored the concept of musical identity and its expressions. It started by framing the concepts of identity and musical identity through Green's (2011) writings, then musical identity was seen not as a fixed entity, but as a complex combination of identities that could conflict with one another (O'Neill). Secondly, the social functions of music were highlighted by Hargreaves et al. (2002; 2012; 2016) and in particular, the concept of self-identity was analysed. Then, the Literature Review emphasised the concept of Possible Selves applied to music education (Erikson 2007; Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020) and in particular secondary music schools. Finally, adolescents' musical identity was highlighted through their voices with the works of Parker (2016) and Després and Dubé (2020). The themes of identity and adolescence resonate with the central research question of the present study, which focuses on how teachers and students' interpersonal interaction in musical learning can affect the identity development in secondary music schools. In these schools, the students are in the pre-adolescent and adolescent phase of their development.

## *2.6. Gaps in the Literature*

This literature review showed that music instrumental learning in secondary specialised schools for students between 10 to 14 years old has limited literature.

The context of Italian music schools is lacking in specific research. Secondary music schools in Italy were involved in Biasutti and Concina's (2018) study. In their study, they involved music teachers from Conservatories, secondary music schools, and private music schools. Biasutti and Concina (2018) analysed how beliefs about musical ability, musical skills, gender differences, and level of experience in instrumental teaching could be a predictor of teacher efficacy among instrumental and vocal music teachers. Interpersonal interaction in one to one and group lessons in the context of an Italian secondary music school was not studied, nor has any research been conducted on Italian secondary music schools.

Teacher-student interaction in instrumental learning was widely studied (Zhukov 2012; Gaunt 2008; Presland 2005) while the connection between interpersonal interaction in instrumental lessons and music identity development has been studied less (Parker 2020). Thus, this is the first research study on interpersonal interaction in one to one and group music lessons and its influence on students' identity development in an Italian secondary music school.

## *2.7. Summary*

This chapter presented a critical review of the literature on one to one instrumental lessons, secondary music schools, interpersonal interaction in one to one and group music lessons, communities of practice, and musical identity. First, the literature described one to one instrumental music lessons highlighting as a particular kind of lesson in which pedagogical attention is centered on the individual and the interpersonal relationships between teacher and student are often long-term and intense (Zhukov 2012). Many studies saw the role of the instrumental teacher as one of the 'strongest influences on musical development' (Pitts p. 92).

Then, studies on secondary music schools were reported, highlighting different context in which secondary music schools exist, such as the Italian one (Biasutti and Concina 2018), the Greek one (Koliadi-Tiliakou 2009 and Tsimpouri and Koliadi-Tiliakou 2024) and a Western Australia one (Lowe 2012). All the studies of this section focused on social and behavioural aspects of teaching and/or learning in secondary music schools.

The section about interpersonal interaction and instrumental learning collected studies such as Gaunt (2008), Carey and Grant (2014), Presland (2005), de Bruin (2018), Zhukov (2012) and Rostvall and West (2001,2003) with a subsection about interpersonal interaction within the Ear Learning Project (Green 2012; Baker and Green 2013; Varvarigou and Green 2015; and Varvarigou 2014). Most of the studies agreed on the importance of the teacher-learner interaction in the one to one instrumental lesson (Gaunt 2008; Carey and Grant 2014; Presland 2005; de Bruin 2018; and Zhukov 2012) while others pointed out the possible dysfunctional power dynamics at its core (Gaunt 2008; Carey and Grant 2015; Rostvall 2001; 2003). Group music lessons were considered both in school and in extracurricular contexts. The results show that making music in a group enables the fostering of prosocial behaviour in students (de Bruin 2022; Ilari et al. 2020; Tan 2017) and the development of their identity, confidence, and active engagement (de Bruin 2022). After discussing in-depth one to one and group music lessons, the literature review focused on Communities of Musical Practice (Kenny 2016), emphasising how, in these communities, interpersonal interaction, and musical learning were held and interconnected with musical identity.

Lastly, the literature review showed how musical identity is shaped by instrumental lessons. Identity is seen not as a fixed but as a mutable and adapting entity (O'Neill 2006). The social functions of music were highlighted by Hargreaves et al. (2002; 2012; 2016) and in particular, the concept of self-identity was analysed. The musical identities of individuals were found to be shaped by musical experience as well as by the influences of family and school, i.e., significant others for

students (Hargreaves et al. 2002). Musical identity was connected with musical possible selves, namely the possibility of conceiving oneself in the future (Erikson 2007). Creech, et al. (2020) highlighted how music in secondary school has far-reaching implications in the ways in which music can shape students' possible musical selves. Then, a focus on research about student's musical identity through the students' voices were presented (Parker 2020; Després and Dubé 2020).

Finally, gaps in the literature were presented. They are a shortage of studies on music instrumental learning in secondary specialised schools for students between 10 to 14 years old, especially in the Italian context; and a lack of studies concerning the connection between interpersonal interaction in instrumental lessons and music identity development has been studied less.

The literature review here presented, aimed to understand how in one to one and group musical instrument lessons many elements coexist: the teacher and student relationship; the role of the teacher; the teacher's ability to support and motivate the student; relationships between students in the musical context; the development of the student's individuality through encounters with important others; and student development through possible selves.



# CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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### 3.1. Introduction

This study aims to explore the interpersonal interaction between teachers and students in one to one instrumental learning and ensemble experiences and how they influence musical identity development. It also seeks to understand how interpersonal interaction is influenced by the social structures surrounding it, such as the school, and the social values and beliefs. To achieve this, I will use two philosophical constructs: '*transitional space*' (Ellsworth 2005) and '*habitus*' (Bourdieu 1986). I consider these two theoretical assumptions appropriate because Bourdieu's *habitus* allows us to see how interactions are influenced by the social constructs surrounding them. Whereas, *transitional space* is useful for understanding how in pedagogical encounters, such as in the interactions with teachers, pupils can become aware of their capacity to construct knowledge themselves and co-construct it with the teacher. In fact, through the transitional space, the pupil moves from a plane of dependence in learning to a plane of independence and recognises their abilities and individual growth, thus becoming aware of their identity. Through the two frameworks, it is, therefore, possible to recognise the influence of society on interaction and the impact of interaction on the development of musical identity.

Instrumental learning is conceived in this study as shaped by society. Using Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of *habitus*, field, and cultural capital, it examines how social factors influence teacher-student interactions in a secondary music school. These factors include external elements like school rules and internal ones such as shared values, beliefs, and assimilated musical practices.

In a related perspective, Ellsworth's (2005) concept of *transitional space*—described as the 'time and space of being in between' (p. 31)—offers a way to understand how learning involves 'learning, changing, or becoming' (p. 30). This study explores how interpersonal exchanges with teachers might help students access this metaphorical space, where learning means transitioning

from one type of knowledge to another. For instance, when students take up a second instrument, they shift from knowing one instrument to two, expanding their skills and self-awareness. Beyond acquiring competencies, this space of transition may also foster personal and identity growth.

In this chapter, the concept of *habitus* and its use in music research will first be explained; the concept of *transitional space* and the role of the teacher as part of the transition process will then be described, and a connection between *transitional space* and possible selves will be made. Finally, the two theoretical frameworks will be interconnected from both a relational and a physical space perspective and a connection of the two theories will be proposed.

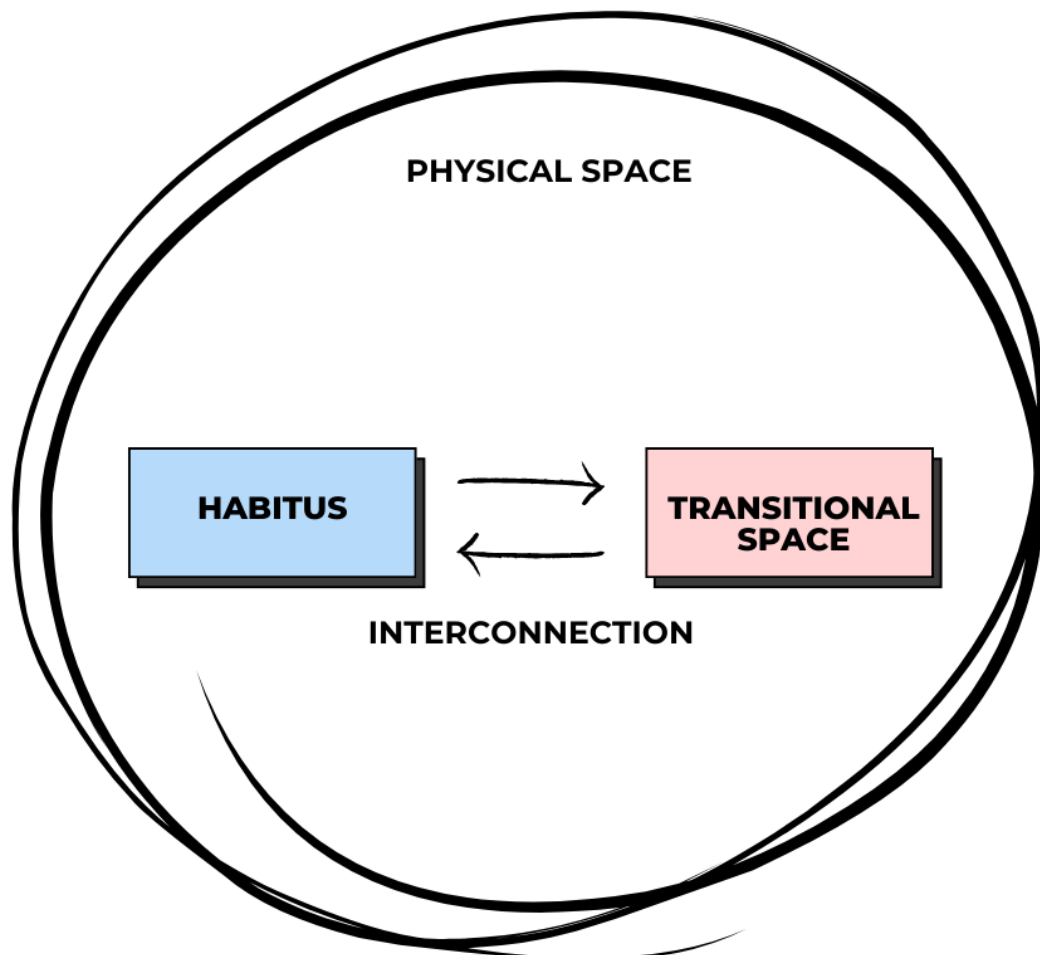


Figure 3.1. Theoretical Framework Overview

However, Bourdieu's (1986) framework was not the first one taken into consideration for this thesis's theoretical background. Firstly, I explored Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological theory, but I ultimately chose Bourdieu's (1986) sociological theory due to its stronger alignment with the analytical aims of this study. Both Bourdieu (1986) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) underscore the importance of social context in shaping individual development, but they do so from distinct disciplinary and conceptual standpoints. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, situated largely within developmental psychology, focuses on the psychosocial determinants of child development and outlines the nested environmental systems influencing the individual, such as family, school, and community. However, as Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) point out, Bronfenbrenner (1979) did not offer a clear conceptualisation of culture or power, making his model less suitable for research that seeks to critically examine how socio-cultural hierarchies and institutional structures impact learning.

In contrast, Bourdieu's (1986) constructs of *habitus*, field, and cultural capital provide powerful analytical tools for understanding how individuals internalise social structures and how these structures shape their practices, perceptions, and aspirations. This is particularly valuable in a study focused on teacher-student interactions and the development of musical identity, as it allows us to explore how interpersonal exchanges are embedded in wider institutional and cultural contexts. As Houston (2017) notes, Bourdieu's starting point is the relationship between agency and structure, while Bronfenbrenner (1979) was primarily concerned with optimal developmental conditions. This difference makes Bourdieu's (1986) framework more suitable for analysing the complex interplay between individual learning trajectories and the social field of music education. Although the two theories have been compared and found to be complementary (Fearnley, 2020; Houston, 2017), the choice to prioritise Bourdieu is further supported by the critiques raised by Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017), who argue that Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model lacks clarity in how culture operates across systems. Fearnley (2020) does, however, highlight how *habitus* and field can

be seen to interact with the learner's ecology of self—a view that aligns well with this study's concern for how students internalise social values through musical practice. Yet where Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory offers descriptive breadth, Bourdieu's (1986) offers critical depth, particularly in accounting for power relations and the reproduction of social inequalities through education.

This choice of Bourdieu (1986) over Bronfenbrenner (1979) also strengthens the conceptual integration with Ellsworth's (2005) notion of *transitional space*. While *transitional space* focuses on the moment of pedagogical encounter—where learners move from dependence to independence and begin to construct knowledge collaboratively with the teacher, Bourdieu's (1986) theory contextualises this process within a structured social world. The learner's movement within *transitional space* is not free-floating. It is influenced by the *habitus* they bring into the interaction and the field in which the learning takes place. Thus, the student's evolving musical identity emerges not only from their internal motivation or dyadic relationship with the teacher but also from the culturally mediated space in which that interaction occurs. The *transitional space* becomes, therefore, not just a psychological or pedagogical site, but also a social one, shaped by institutional norms, cultural capital, and education.

In this sense, Bourdieu's (1986) theory provides the critical sociological grounding necessary to examine how the transitional spaces in music education are differentially navigated by students depending on their background, access, and prior dispositions. The combination of Bourdieu's (1986) and Ellsworth's (2005) frameworks, therefore, enables a multifaceted understanding of how musical identity is co-constructed within a complex web of social interactions, institutional structures, and moments of pedagogical transformation.

### 3.2. *Habitus*

This section will first treat the concept of *habitus* as it was defined by Bourdieu (1986), then the application of the concept of *habitus* in music learning, some critiques of Bourdieu's theory, and finally the relevance of *habitus* for this thesis.

The school represents an institutionalised system of transmission of culture, which becomes embodied and objectified through its acquisition (Bourdieu 1986). According to Bourdieu (1991), the school system is situated between the sociology of education and the sociology of culture, and one of the main roles of the school system is to make the dominant culture of a given society recognised (p. 16). The concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986; 1995) can help us understand how the structure of the school is imbued with social and cultural conditioning. The *habitus* is the set of internalised dispositions, propensities, and predilections to think, feel, judge, and act in predetermined ways that we obtain through societal conditioning and socialisation. It is usually shared with those experiencing similar social conditions and induces and arranges social agents to perceive, judge, and treat the world the way they do (Bourdieu 1995, p. IX). *Habitus* is rooted in the ability to act according to implicit, unwritten, non-deliberate rules and to do what the world expects of a given person in a given environment. In any social context, sub-contexts are represented by families that tend to preserve their social status, including the educational strategies of the social class they belong to (Bourdieu 2011).

*Habitus* is a dynamic concept that changes depending on several variables, such as field, cultural capital, and time. A field is a social space in which certain social activities are practiced and certain dynamics are at work. Cultural capital is the result of economic energies, time, and cultural possibilities acquired by the family or institution during each person's lifetime (Bourdieu 2011). The cultural capital Bourdieu spoke of has three forms (Bourdieu 1980): the embodied state, in the form

of dispositions of the mind and body; the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; and the institutionalised state, in the form of institutionalised education and training (p. 119). Education is, therefore, rooted in cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Reay (1995) explained that Bourdieu developed the concept of *habitus* to illustrate both how the body exists within the social world and how the social world is embodied in the individual (p. 354). She identified a dual influence: the *habitus* shaping the individual and the individual, in turn, shaping the *habitus*. However, she emphasised that *habitus* does not rigidly determine a person's social position. Instead, it operates within a dynamic interplay between personal dispositions, social location (field), and external circumstances

Habitus has been criticised for being a mechanistic theory, which implies passivity, denies human agency and is ultimately deterministic [...]. Bourdieu, himself, stresses that habitus does not determine outcome. Rather there is a dialectic interaction between a habitus and a field, the external circumstances in which an individual finds herself. [...] habitus does not have a deterministic impact on individuals' behaviours. [...] While the habitus allows for individual agency it also predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving.

(Reay 1995, p. 354-355).

While *habitus* guides behaviour toward socially accepted norms, it remains flexible, encompassing a spectrum of possibilities. At one end, it reinforces existing dispositions when aligned with a familiar field; at the other, it evolves as individuals encounter new contexts that reshape their expectations. This flexibility allows for social mobility, enabling individuals to experience life conditions different from those they were initially born into (Reay, 1995, p. 357).

Building on Bourdieu's ideas, Reay (2005) observed that interpersonal interactions not only occur between individuals but also reflect the characteristics of the habitus in which they take place.

She argued that collectively understanding *habitus* is essential, as individuals internalise dispositions shaped by their current and past social environments. While *habitus* is largely formed through early childhood experiences and family interactions, DiMaggio (1979) highlighted its ongoing evolution through engagement with the external world. From this perspective, schools should provide students with an alternative or expanded *habitus*—what Bourdieu (1967, p. 344) termed a ‘cultured *habitus*’—offering a continuum or contrast to their original dispositions. Entering an unfamiliar field may challenge individuals, prompting transformation and adaptation (Reay, 2005). According to Bourdieu (1989, p. 43), a person’s ability to navigate a new field determines whether they feel like a ‘fish in water’, effortlessly understanding and responding to their environment without conscious deliberation.

Butler (1997) stated that to reproduce itself, the *habitus* needed to be reiterated and that in the absence of such reiteration, it could no longer fulfil its function. She argued that the possibility of change following a divergence or defective execution of the processual structure of the *habitus* was implicit in the very structure of the *habitus*. Butler’s (1997) reflections suggested that, due to the processual nature of the *habitus*, it is forced to repeat itself, and this always includes the possibility of unforeseen errors and, consequently, of change or transformation.

### 3.2.1. Habitus and Music Research

Music education, and instrumental learning in particular, can be seen as containing the three forms of capital: capital is institutionalised since the transmission of knowledge takes place in the context of the school; it is objectivised since it exists in the presence of a real object such as the instrument itself or an abstract one such as music; finally, it is embodied, since it is acquired by the learners through a set of dispositions of the mind and body. Cultural capital becomes an integral part of the person and society or *habitus*.

The concept of *habitus* has been central to the sociology of music, and several scholars have discussed it and its functions in relation to musical learning (Burnard 2012; Kenny 2016; Moore 2021; O'Neill 2014; Burt-Perkins 2010; Bull 2020). Burnard, Hofvander Trulsson, and Södermann (2015) argued that Bourdieu's sociological worldview leads to a better understanding of the role of music in young people's identity formation. According to them, an individual's position in society is thus mediated through a *habitus* whose boundaries are permeable and allow for an individual's response to experience (Burnard et al. 2015, p. 84). In 2015, Burnard et al. collected several studies to demonstrate the 'numerous ways in which music enters forcefully into how we construct and negotiate our social identities' (p. XVII). A group of international researchers, academics, and artists have been brought together by Burnard to offer an exploration of Bourdieu's conceptual tools. Using the concepts of field, *habitus*, and capital in relation to music education, the authors explored how Bourdieu's work can be applied to music education in various sectors such as the musical industry or primary, secondary, and higher music education.

Sagiv and Hall (2015) examined classical music *habitus* in an Israeli Conservatory, paying particular attention to students' musical bodies in instrumental lessons. Sagiv and Hall (2015) stated that the conservatory system asks students to reproduce the symbolic capital of classical musicians by emulating their teachers (p. 114). This happens through the accumulation of knowledge and skills, which are created over a long period. These skills are principally bodily discipline and attitudes, music readings, and understanding of musical structures, and are transmitted by a great number of verbal instructions. According to the author, interpretation and self-expression are almost absent, and the biggest part of the lesson is dedicated to perfecting technical skills. Sagiv and Hall (2015) stated that 'every learned and acquired action is directly connected to the environment and field that the actor belongs to' (p. 124), showing how the body is connected with cultural and social context.

Building on this focus on bodily discipline and the reproduction of cultural norms within classical music education, Bull (2020) provides a critical ethnographic analysis of youth classical music ensembles in the UK, exploring how classical music education reproduces social inequalities, particularly along lines of class, gender, and race. Drawing on a Bourdieusian framework, Bull (2020) argues that classical music operates as a form of cultural capital, requiring not only significant financial investment in lessons and instruments but also the embodiment of middle-class social norms, such as refined manners, speech patterns, and bodily comportment. These norms often align with the values of the professional and upper-middle classes, contributing to a sense of exclusion for working-class and racially minoritised young people, who may feel out of place despite their musical talent. Bull (2020) highlights how classical music pedagogy reinforces middle-class identities by promoting values such as delayed gratification, discipline, and long-term planning. While women are numerically well-represented in classical music settings, the field remains gendered in ways that constrain their authority and visibility. Expectations on female students often require them to be modest musicians, while high-status roles such as conducting and composing continue to be dominated by men. Bull (2020) also notes that teachers can exercise emotional and musical control over students—particularly girls—thus reinforcing gendered hierarchies. Racial inequality, although frequently overlooked within classical music discourse, emerges as a persistent issue in Bull's (2020) analysis. The dominance of whiteness within classical music institutions contributes to the underrepresentation of Black and racially minoritised musicians, and diversity initiatives often lack substantive engagement with structural inequalities. Even when racially minoritised families invest in classical music, they can encounter stereotypes that complicate their full participation. According to Bull (2020), the aesthetics and pedagogical structures of classical music encode middle-class, white, and masculine norms, often under the guise of artistic neutrality and technical excellence.

The mechanisms of exclusion identified by Bull (2020) include early access to training, reliance on private tuition, and symbolic boundaries that distinguish 'proper' classical music from other genres perceived as lower in status. These structures uphold a field in which success is often interpreted through a moral lens, with 'talent' appearing as a natural attribute of those already aligned with dominant social norms. Bull (2020) argues that through these processes, classical music shapes subjectivities that reflect and sustain privilege. Despite the conservatism of classical music institutions, Bull (2020) also identifies tensions and contradictions. Classical music demands physical discipline while idealising a transcendent, disembodied aesthetic; it promotes individual achievement alongside collective belonging. While classical music can be a site of personal transformation and even resistance, such possibilities, Bull (2020) contends, require a reimagining of its institutional and aesthetic boundaries. She calls for a more inclusive vision of classical music that actively challenges exclusionary practices, broadens the definition of musical excellence, and increases public support to ensure broader and more equitable participation.

Moore, too, studied musical *habitus* in a higher educational setting (2021). She explained that musical *habitus* has an impact on how students describe their music education experiences and that learning experiences are influenced by the values associated with the musical and cultural *habitus* to which they belong. Through Bourdieu's theoretical tools, Moore (2021) analysed how different musical paths shape students' experiences and how social class influences the pursuit of higher music education. Through surveys and interviews with students, Moore (2021) understood how students enter higher education with particular musical values, knowledge, and skills, influenced by their musical background and previous musical training, and how their musical experiences and values are constructed and modified within higher education and the music department (Moore 2021, p. 193). The data focused on the cyclical nature of the social reproduction of musical values and dominant ideologies from higher education to all levels of music education.

According to Moore (2021), the micro-context (such as the school, classroom context, music department, etc.) and the macro-context (such as the political management of higher education) influenced the student's musical *habitus*, cultural capital, musical background, and previous music education (p. 185). Thus, students enter higher education with musical values, knowledge, and skills, influenced by their musical background and previous training. Students who possessed more similar musical knowledge and skills to those of the institution expressed a sense of affirmation, while students with different knowledge and skills expressed a sense of alienation, bringing into focus how unequal musical opportunities continue to impact students' experiences. Moore's study (2021) showed the nature of the social reproduction of dominant musical values and ideologies in music education and the dominant tradition that characterises teachers' teaching in schools and conservatoires. Moore's study, thus, demonstrated how strong the influence of *habitus* is on pupils and how this *habitus* can reproduce itself, supporting a system of social inequalities.

Pollard and Alexander (2019) examined how students develop, value, and challenge forms of embodied and cultural capital in an instrumental music programme at an English secondary school. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital, they argued that the institution fosters new forms of embodied capital through communities of musical practice. Pollard and Alexander (2019) stated that

Although the orchestra programme does not represent an organic 'community of practice', we argue it resembles such communities in many ways and, as such, pupils develop their instrument playing through gradual integration into a situated performance context.

(Pollard and Alexander 2019, p.. 318)

The programme Pollard and Alexander (2019) examined in their study provided students with the opportunity to learn a classical instrument free of charge for at least three years, during

which they had access to school-owned instruments. Pollard and Alexander (2019) highlighted how learning a classical instrument—often linked to socio-economic privilege—was framed in this context as a pathway to social mobility. Their study also underscored the dynamic relationship between teachers, students, and musical instruments, emphasising how these interactions shape and reproduce Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital. The instrument itself becomes a medium through which cultural capital is embodied. Ultimately, their research illustrated how access to free instrumental education can serve as a vehicle for social mobility while reinforcing the role of the musical instrument in the embodiment of cultural capital.

Kenny (2016), building on Wenger's (2002) concept extended to social musical learning, linked the influence of Bourdieu's sociocultural theories to notions of communities of musical practice (CoMPs). Kenny (2016) identified that practice in musical communities was influenced by the structures and interactions typical of *habitus*, which were, in turn, developed and negotiated through participation within Communities of Musical Practice (p. 14). Culture was understood as the element that bound the various institutions through the creation of communities of practice of which the participants were part.

Burt-Perkins (2010) recognised the need to situate one to one teaching and learning within social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Burt-Perkins (2010, p. 437) argued that it is important to recognise that instrumental teaching in institutions, such as conservatoires in her research, was part of an intricate and complex network of 'values, priorities and understanding'. Instrumental and vocal teaching-learning practices in institutions were constructed within the experiences, values, and positioning of students and teachers within the context. According to Burt-Perkins (2010), these practices were called 'learning cultures' and they were multiple and diverse understandings that reflected the complexity of lived realities, as manifested in different one to one lesson contexts.

Burt-Perkins (2009) also stated that learning culture was ‘a complex amalgamation of agency and structure’ (p. 250) that shaped the individuals and were shaped by them. Thus, students and teachers must contend with an educational system embedded in years of musical, social, and institutional practices; that was the ‘learning culture’ (p. 251). The teacher, thus, was seen as a mediator between music and pupils, while students were invited to explore the field of knowledge in their own way, making personal choices and judgments. Burt-Perkins (2009) stated that learning culture practices influenced both teaching and learning, as well as social relationships. Knowing these practices could identify challenges related to pedagogical and institutional change (p. 439).

Stahl, Burnard, and Burt-Perkins (2017) advocated for the use of *habitus*, field, and capital as analytical tools to explore power dynamics in musical institutions. They viewed instrumental lessons as conceptual sites where musicians are shaped by their social and cultural environments. Stahl et al. (2017) emphasised that music education should not be examined in isolation but rather as an extension of broader socio-cultural immersion. Boyle (2018) supported this perspective, arguing that *habitus*, field, and cultural capital provide a deep and nuanced understanding of individual and social interactions within music education. She highlighted how dominant cultural narratives influence students’ perceptions of music from the earliest stages of learning, shaping both their identities and the broader educational landscape.

This chapter has explored the concept of *habitus* through the lens of Bourdieu (1986, 2011) and its application in music research (Burnard et al. 2015; Moore 2021; Boyle 2018). As Bourdieu (1986) posited, *habitus* is a set of internalised dispositions, tendencies, and ways of perceiving the world acquired through social influences. It operates in conjunction with field and cultural capital, forming a dynamic framework for understanding social reproduction. Although *habitus* is shaped by societal structures, it is not static but continuously evolving. Butler (1997) further suggested that

the possibility of change is inherent within *habitus* itself, reinforcing its role as both a product of and a force within social transformation.

### 3.2.2. Critiquing Bourdieu

A critique of Bourdieu's paradigm was discussed by Prior (2011). He reviewed Bourdieu's influence, position, and legacy in the sociology of music, using these elements as indicators of where the sociology of music is today. Prior (2011) pointed out that Bourdieu lacked an explicit focus on the musical characteristics. In particular, he asserted that Bourdieu rarely dealt with music in a direct or detailed manner, unlike he did with modern literature and the visual arts. He lamented a sporadic focus on music and a lack of specific references, such as the musical form, the practice, and the habits of practitioners. Prior (2011) also criticised Bourdieu for not paying attention to popular music, jazz, and the emergence of a developed commercial system. Therefore, he considered the use of the Bourdieusian paradigm alone in music sociology to be limiting because, while it enabled an understanding of the social structures underlying musical practices, it was not sufficiently attentive to the properties of music itself. Prior (2011) therefore advocated a shift from a sociology of music focused on how a musical activity is socially shaped, to a sociology of music that does not ignore music's discursive and material powers and where music is represented as an animating force in everyday life. Citing De Nora (2003), Prior (2011) stated:

Identifying music's formal properties is crucial, to this extent, because the immanent qualities of music (tone, structure, timbre and so on) are distinct to how they act upon those who come into contact with them. All of which implies that we need to move away from a sociology *of* music – 'a sociology about how musical activity (composition, performance, distribution, reception) is socially shaped' (DeNora, 2003: 36) – towards a sociology *with* music – one that does not ignore music's 'discursive and material powers' (DeNora, 2003: 39).

(Prior 2011, p. 132)

Prior acknowledged, however, that this shift was not without dangers, such as losing the intense sociological debate in favour of a 'weak, murky and anodyne middle ground' (Prior 2011, p. 135).

Following Prior's argument, de Boise (2016) pointed out how Bourdieu's work has enormously influenced sociological research on music and society, particularly in research on the relationship between social inequalities and music. While acknowledging Bourdieusian contributions to the sociology of music, he proposed the challenge of 'updating' Bourdieu's initial approach through a new understanding of musical subjectivity, a broader focus on musical engagement, and greater methodological flexibility. Indeed, he believed that this could help explore the increasingly complex relationships between music and today's social differences. De Boise (2016) found that the terms cultural capital and *habitus* were too restrictive to describe highly complex processes. According to de Boise (2016), it was necessary to put both music and bodies at the centre, without losing sight of a broader analysis of power relations or music's potential to influence them. To do this, he envisioned a more practice-centered approach based on critical conceptions of affection that focus on ways of understanding subjectivity as relational, material, situated processes, capable of reproduction and change. Also, de Boise (2016) did not neglect the importance of large-scale, mixed-method research. De Boise (2016) believed this might have the potential to open up new areas of sociological research and might grant new insights into the value of music beyond deterministic models of socialisation.

Prior's (2011) and de Boise's (2016) critiques provided insights into the limitations of applying Bourdieu's thinking to the sociology of music and invited a sociological analysis of music that did not leave out the discursive, material, and physical powers of music. In my study, I wish to take note of these criticisms by also considering discursive, material, and physical elements of

dynamics in pedagogical relations. For this reason, school spaces were considered as living spaces experienced by teachers and students. Furthermore, my inquiry looks at the way interpersonal interactions were conducted.

Another criticism of music sociology was made by Kenny (2023). Kenny argued that pages and pages of texts related to the sociology of music have been devoted to Bourdieu, Giddens, Foucault, and Small (p.4) but few pages are devoted to authors who are not part of the white, heterosexual, male, and geographically restricted scholarly search. Kenny (2023) has thus argued the need to decolonise music education from this domain to avoid the reproduction of social inequalities within academia.

This section focused on the concept of *habitus* and its use in music research. Burnard, Hofvander Trulsson, and Södermann (2015) and Moore (2021) recognised the impact of *habitus* on students, the first arguing that *habitus* gives a better understanding of the role of music in young people's identity formation. The cultural capital of conservatories was highlighted by Sagiv and Hall (2015) and Pollard and Alexander (2019) while Boyle (2018) stated that *habitus*, field, and cultural capital, could help in the understanding of the nature of individual and social interactions in their context. Finally, this section emphasised Prior's (2011) and de Boise's (2016) critique of Bourdieu's tools in music research, highlighting how music research needs a more practice and music-centered approach that takes into consideration also the subjectivity of the musical experience.

### *3.3. Transitional space*

The term *transitional space*, coined by Winnicott in 1971, is understood in this thesis from the perspective of Ellsworth (2005). Ellsworth (2005) thought that pedagogy should be seen as knowledge in progress rather than knowledge as a done thing (p. 2). She viewed the learning process, not as a phase of acquiescence, but rather as a transition and movement into various ways

of thinking and as being. Those ways were previously unknown to the individual in the learning process

It is the inaccessible – through – cognition – or – awareness event of mind/brain and body that I will locate the experience of the learning self as a self not in compliance but *in transition* and *in motion* toward previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the word.

(Ellsworth 2005, p. 16).

On the one hand, there is the individual, their beliefs, values, needs, body, space, and time. On the other, there is pedagogy, also characterised by time, space, and the individuals who participate in the pedagogical process. Pedagogy is the study of how knowledge and skills are imparted in an educational context and considers the interactions that occur during learning (Kumar Shah, 2021). According to Ellsworth (2005), the characteristics of pedagogy are made visible by each individual's experience of it. Thus, according to her, the educational qualities or value of the pedagogical endeavour exist only in our response to it (p. 23). Specifically, Ellsworth (2005) understands pedagogy as an event in which the materiality of time and space impact the materiality of learning itself.

According to Ellsworth (2005), in the encounter between the individual and pedagogy, knowledge is created. Knowledge is not a mere exercise in transmitting content and skills but is the activity of 'participation in pedagogical becoming' (Ellsworth 2005, p. 28). Experience and becoming are at the centre of Ellsworth's thought. Winnicott (1989) understood *transitional space* as the time

and place from which learning experiences emerge. *Transitional space* is a term that refers to the process of self-change that opens up in the psyche<sup>8</sup> when a learning process is in the making

Winnicott called this time and space of being in between, this interval of change, *transitional space*, a term that refers, in part, to the interval, the space or self-difference, and the process self-change that opens up in the psyche when an experience of the learning self is in the making. [...] For Winnicott, “inside” and “outside” are not simply metaphors for referring to the psyche and to “reality”. They also refer to the inescapable materiality of embodiment.

(Ellsworth 2005, p. 31).

Winnicott (1971, 1984) believed that an individual’s growth process was a transitional process, capable of generating anxiety. According to Winnicott (1957), the anxiety-inducing experiences of learning individuals are similar to those of children when they separate from their mothers. They often overcome this experience of anxiety through the use of transitional objects. Winnicott (1957) described transitional objects as those with which the child relieved anxiety about separation from the mother (e.g., teddy bears or blankets). Winnicott (1957) believed that the transitional object continues to be used in adulthood so as to relieve the tension created by the endless work of placing one’s internal reality above external reality. He was interested in how individuals distinguish between self and other, bridging the gap between egocentrism and recognition of an external world. The transitional object and transitional phenomena were used by Winnicott (1957) precisely to designate an intermediate area of the child’s experience between the internal and external parts of human life. According to Winnicott, the term transitional object opens

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<sup>8</sup> The term psyche used by Ellsworth is taken from Winnicott’s (1954) psyche-soma. The term psyche, derived from the Greek ‘soul’ refers to mental life. The soma is the inner perception of one’s body. The two terms psyche and soma are in a dialectical relationship: neither can be without the other because it loses meaning or turns into something different. Through the hyphen, Winnicott succinctly conveys the meaning of a mind embodied in the body and a body that is the person (<https://www.spiweb.it/la-ricerca/ricerca/psiche-soma/>).

the way to the process of becoming capable of accepting differences and similarities and describes the child's journey from a purely subjective conception of reality to an objective perspective. The transitional object was therefore the object that allowed one's progress towards experiencing and accepting the surrounding reality. Winnicott sustained that the task of accepting the reality of every human being is never fully achievable. According to Winnicott (1971), no one is ever completely free from the tension of relating internal reality to external reality, and the relief from this tension is created by an intermediate area of experience that is never questioned (p. 18). Winnicott (1971) argued that the intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the young child, in which transitional phenomena are enabled by the adult's intuitive recognition of the tension that is inherent in objective perception.

Ellsworth (2005) reinterpreted Winnicott's thought, stating that in the difference between self/other, inside/outside, there is a space and time of potential mutual transformation. This potential experience could be used for pedagogical purposes (Ellsworth 2005, p. 62). In the pedagogical process, the object, which is not only material but also metaphorical, becomes transitional when it is used to discover how to participate in the learning experience. Ellsworth added that 'transitional objects operate in an in-between space of illusion, culture and imagination' (Ellsworth 2005, p. 62).

Ellsworth (2005) stated that pedagogy must create a space in which to think without already knowing what we should think. In fact, the outcomes of pedagogy are, according to Ellsworth (2005) unknown: knowledge is co-constructed in the encounter with pedagogy (for example the encounter between a student and a teacher on a certain subject). The results of this encounter are, thus, open and unexpected:

‘It [pedagogy] must create for us a relationship to the outside, to others, to the world, to history, and to the already thought in a way that keeps the future of what we make of that relation and what we might think there open and undecided’ (Ellsworth 2005, p. 54).

Ellsworth (2005) stated that the experience ‘of the learning self [is] in the time and place of knowledge in the making, which are also the times and places of the learning self in the making’ (p. 2). Ellsworth did not interpret knowledge as a done thing, but as a process to be developed between students and teachers, in time and space, underlining the materiality of learning which is not abstract but involves the body in the places and moments in which pedagogy takes place. Thus, the time and place of learning impact the materiality of learning itself. Kennedy (2003) stated that learning was a process articulated through sensations, space, bodies, and time. Pedagogy was therefore understood as a material event, in which the time and place of learning influenced the materiality of learning itself. Focusing on the architectural space of formal and informal pedagogical places, Ellsworth (2005, p. 124) stated that space unfolds and actualises itself as we experience it, making it an embodied space. The architecture of pedagogical places has, according to Ellsworth (2005), the ability to generate meetings and events. The places of learning and the pedagogical encounters within them allowed for creating a *transitional space*, that is, the time and space of being in between, ‘this interval of change that sees the experience of the self in the making’ (Ellsworth, p. 31). Rethinking her work of teaching under the lens of Ellsworth (2005), Kalmbach-Philips (2010, p. 2) described pedagogy as ‘a process undeniably in relation to the world, others, and our unconscious selves; and as a framework for shattering the illusion of *control*’ in teacher work. She saw subjectivity as fluid and changeable, socially influenced by strong forces such as desire, guilt, ambivalence, and love (p.3). In her view, subjectivity was a place of possibility in which identities were continually remapped, and pedagogy should have been able to recognise the complexity of

subjectivity and the power that the strong forces aforementioned had over it. In this way, pedagogy allowed the creation of a *transitional space* (Kalmbach-Philips 2010, p. 4).

Sojot (2018) echoed Ellsworth's (2005) concept of *transitional space* in pedagogy talking about pedagogical hinge i.e., the moment when an individual generates knowledge from his or her experiences, as opposed to passive acceptance of knowledge. This represented the pivotal moment when an individual learns something previously unknown, something that is not knowledge as a done thing, and such a moment 'speaks of the self in becoming, the self in learning, the self in movement and in relation to the external non-self' (Sojot 2018, p. 895). *Transitional space*, thus, allowed for possibility, creativity, and experimentation and also encouraged encounters with difference. Sojot (2018) stated that *transitional space* was from one standpoint physical (the actual environment) but also metaphorical (in which/through which pedagogical hinging could take place). It is in the encounter between the *transitional space* and the self that is created the condition of possibility for the engagement of the learning self to become conscious. She believed that *transitional space* is personal and temporary, connected to the experience and feeling of the experiencing self, and allows for possibility, creativity, and experimentation (Sojot 2018, p. 896). According to Sojot (2018), *transitional space* is a dynamic rather than fixed concept, and its plasticity has implications for the ability or inability to respond to a constantly changing world. According to Sojot, the focus of pedagogy was not on the object but rather on the relationship the self has with this object. Sojot (2018) stated that *transitional space* offered a way 'to encounter movement and [one's] unfixed learning selves' (p. 901).

This study aims to use *transitional space* as a theory for understanding how teacher-student interaction in instrumental lessons influences students' musical learning and musical identity development. This section focused on the possibility of the existence of a *transitional space*

theorised by Winnicott (1971, 1989) and re-proposed by Ellsworth (2005) in pedagogical terms. Transitional space was also taken into consideration by other authors, such as Kalmbach-Philips (2020) and Sojot (2018), who described the potentiality of *transitional space* in pedagogical encounters. The next section will address how *transitional space* and the role of the teacher are connected.

### 3.3.1. *Transitional Space and the Teacher*

Ellsworth (2005) viewed knowledge not as a fixed entity but as a dynamic process unfolding between students and teachers within the temporal and spatial dimensions of learning encounters. Through this perspective, she emphasised the materiality of the learning self—one that is not abstract but inherently embodied in the places and moments where pedagogy takes place. The time and setting of learning shape the materiality of the process itself, which can be understood as a ‘processual engagement of duration and movement, articulated through networks of sensations across landscapes and vistas of space, bodies, and time’ (Kennedy 2003, p. 4). In this context, Ellsworth (2005) proposed that a potential *transitional space* emerges within pedagogical encounters. The interaction between teacher and learner becomes the site where knowledge is co-constructed, with the teacher acting as an ‘opener to the future’ (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 164), guiding students toward both the limitations and possibilities of knowledge.

Building on this idea, McCrone (2021) argued that transitional spaces could be fostered within pedagogical encounters, particularly in one-on-one instrumental lessons. He described *transitional space* as a liminal state in which an individual experiences change, shifting from one form or activity to another. McCrone (2021) conceptualised transition as a process or period in which someone or something undergoes transformation (p. 65). He further noted that one of the primary drivers of transitions in learning stems from the need for students to navigate internal

liminal states (McCrone 2021, p. 94). These liminal states arise as students confront problematic knowledge—ideas that challenge their previously held understandings. McCrone (2021) believed that the response to such encounters is the creation of a liminal space, allowing for a transition in the learner's subjectivity, ontology, and epistemology. He argued that liminality provides a conceptual framework for envisioning an intermediate space where new ideas and relationships can emerge. While the notions of liminality and transition imply a point of arrival—such as new understanding—McCrone (2021) asserted that learning is not a linear progression but rather an ongoing process of dialogue and development.

McCrone's perspective draws from Turner's (1998) concept of liminality, which envisions an "in-between" space characterised by blockage, misunderstanding, and a '...realm of pure possibility from which new configurations of ideas and relationships can arise' (Turner, 1998, p. 97). In this framework, the teacher assumes the role of a 'liminale personae'—a figure who facilitates change and transition (Pozsonyi and Soulstein, 2019). McCrone (2021) defined transition as a fluid concept that encompasses both tangible and intangible aspects of learning. He viewed transition as a process involving individuals or groups undergoing physical, cognitive, or social movement from one state, space, or activity to another, while transformation entails a profound structural shift in a person's identity or frame of reference. Education, then, consists of multiple, overlapping transitions that unfold within specific contexts and interpersonal relationships. It is through students' encounters with new knowledge that the educational institution itself becomes a liminal space—one that disrupts and reshapes their self-perception.

Regarding the teacher's role, Massumi (2002) stated that it might support students in understanding the value of their learning and how this learning influences them. According to her, the teacher's job is to infuse a potential to be directed differently in each step taken along the road

to knowledge and identity of self and others. Finally, Sojot (2018) stated that the concept of *transitional space* might offer insights for educators into their receptivity to other ways of knowing and being (Sojot 2018, p. 901), with repercussions on the way of teaching and being in the pedagogical process.

This section focused on the connection between the role of the teacher and the *transitional space*. Ellsworth (2005) saw the teacher as an 'opener to the future' (p. 164), who constructs with the student new knowledge. McCrone (2021) defined the teacher as a 'liminale personae', a person capable of helping students to make a transition in pedagogy and discovering the potentiality of knowledge. The potentiality of knowledge discovered with the support of the teacher is also found in Massumi (2002). Thus, the role of the teacher is very important and connected with the *transitional space*, because the teacher can open the way for a transition, guiding and supporting the student in it.

### 3.3.2. *Transitional Space and Possible Selves*

I believe that the concept of *transitional space* could be linked with that of possible selves. In fact, *transitional space* could enable students to communicate in ways that allow a deeper understanding of the students' world, identity, and possible selves. Creech et al. (2020) stated that the idea of possible selves might allow students to observe themselves in the present, in the past, and in the future. I argue that, through a *transitional space* in the educational context, namely a space in which students are not inculcated with knowledge, but are protagonists of the educational experience, students might discover their possible selves. They might, thus, observe themselves in the present, in the past, and in the future. The present is represented by what they are learning, and what they are experiencing in doing; the past by what skills they had learned previously, whether in the family, at school, or through extracurricular courses, what their strengths and

weaknesses were; and the future by what they want to learn and how; how they envisioned themselves in the future and how they wanted to achieve that future. Therefore, Ellsworth (2005) asserted that when pedagogy and students met and influenced each other, they generated a potential force that could break through constraints, creating new knowledge (p. 54). This encounter could generate 'possible selves': giving space to students' possible selves through the *transitional space* could, therefore, allow them to think of themselves in the future. The Italian pedagogue Dolci (1974) wrote that 'everybody grows only if dreamt about' to describe the ability to construct future selves through the possibility of imagining oneself in the future from an understanding of the past and present. Thus, pedagogy ought to be attentive to building knowledge with students and not engage in imbuing students with knowledge. In the co-construction of knowledge, students are invited to break through the barriers of knowledge and thinking for themselves. Pedagogy must 'relate us to the outside - relate us to thinking' (Ellsworth 2005, p. 54). Pedagogy could bring students closer to their musical identity, allowing them to discover themselves and reflect on how they imagine themselves in the future.

Greene (2000), in her work, saw the arts as a tool for opening minds and breaking down barriers that prevent us from imagining realities of worlds other than those imposed by the society. Greene (2000) believed that in education, through imagination, teachers and students could meet and create new knowledge, opening students' minds:

'It takes imagination to break through ordinary classifications and connect with real young people in their different situations of experience. It takes imagination on the part of young people to perceive the openings through which they can move' (Greene, 2000, p. 13).

Greene (2000) viewed teaching and learning as powerful tools for dismantling barriers of expectation, monotony, and predetermination (p. 14). These barriers, she argued, were largely

conceptual and psychological. Among them, she identified the lack of imagination in education as the most significant obstacle. To overcome this, Greene (2000) advocated a form of imagination that was accessible, practical, and participatory—one that required nothing more than a willingness to open the mind to new possibilities. She stated that educators should teach students how to unleash their imaginations, and they should also be aware that they were dealing with people who were active and present in the process of identifying with themselves: in this way, open and effective pedagogical systems could be developed to support students in self-discovery. To be oneself meant, according to Greene (1995, p. 20), ‘to be in the process of creating a self, an identity’. With Greene’s (1995) view, teaching and learning were processes of supporting students filled with a powerful communal potential to make connections across individual, class, cultural, and experiential differences. Thus, in the encounter between the teacher, as an opener to the future, and the students, imagination could be released, and the educational community could fulfil the idea proposed by Greene (1995).

### *3.3.3. Identity Theory and Transitional Space*

The notion of identity has been widely theorised in the social sciences, where it is generally regarded not as a fixed or static entity, but as dynamic, multifaceted, and socially constructed. Giddens (1991) claimed that in late modern societies, the self becomes a reflexive project. That is, individuals are continuously engaged in shaping their identities through ongoing processes of self-examination, interpretation of their social environment, and narrative reconstruction. According to Giddens (1991), modern identity is not something that is given or inherited, but something that is actively made and remade by the individual. This perspective emphasizes the role of agency, choice, and social context in shaping identity development.

In a similar vein, Hall (1996) stated that identity is not a singular or unified concept, but rather a fragmented and evolving process. He argued that identities are ‘never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured’ (p. 3). According to Hall, identity is constructed through difference—it emerges in relation to what it is not—and is shaped by cultural, historical, and institutional forces. He proposed that identity should be understood as a ‘production’, which is never complete and is always in process.

The idea that identity formation is particularly salient during adolescence was suggested by Erikson (1968), whose theory of psychosocial development remains influential. According to the author, adolescence is a stage in which individuals confront questions about who they are and how they fit into society. He described identity as a synthesis of personal experiences, social roles, and future aspirations.

What these perspectives share is the understanding that identity is not fixed or internally generated in isolation, but negotiated in relation to others, through time, and across shifting social contexts. This theoretical foundation is essential for understanding how identity operates in specific domains—such as music education—where individuals engage in meaning-making, relational practices, and self-construction through creative and social processes.

Building on these general theories, musical identity can be defined as the evolving and socially negotiated sense of self in relation to music. It is shaped by individual engagement, cultural and institutional contexts, and the capacity to imagine oneself musically. This identity emerges not solely from musical ability or formal instruction, but from participation, recognition, and the dynamic process of self-construction (Green, 2011; Hargreaves, MacDonald, & Miell, 2002, 2016; Hodges, 2019; O’Neill, 2006; Zhang et al., 2020; Evans & McPherson, 2015).

The concept of transitional space (Ellsworth 2005) is central to understanding how musical identity develops and transforms. These spaces—whether physical, social, or imaginative—act as liminal space (McCrone 2021) where individuals can explore, experiment with, and reimagine their musical selves beyond fixed or institutional definitions. I believe that, within transitional spaces, learners are afforded opportunities to negotiate multiple and evolving musical identities, testing possible selves in supportive environments that blur the boundaries between past experiences and future aspirations.

This interaction between identity and transitional space highlights the importance of imagination in musical development. Evans and McPherson (2015) found that children’s ability to envision themselves as future musicians was a key predictor of sustained engagement and achievement, underscoring that identity formation often precedes technical mastery. Transitional spaces within music education thus provide more than just learning environments—they serve as fertile grounds where students co-construct their musical identities through relational, pedagogical, and imaginative acts.

In this light, I argue that musical identity becomes not a fixed label but an evolving project, co-created through relational, pedagogical, and imaginative acts that acknowledge each student's possible self. The arts, and music in particular, become both medium and metaphor for this identity work, offering students the space to reimagine themselves beyond predefined criteria and institutional boundaries.

#### *3.3.4. The Role of Agency in Transitional Spaces*

Agency can be understood as ‘acted action by which people devise ways to adapt flexibly to markedly different geographical, climatic and social environments’ (Bandura, 2001, p. 22). Through agency, individuals become active participants in shaping their educational and professional

contexts. Teachers' active contributions influence the organisation of their schools and their work conditions, thus embodying agency within institutional change (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 624). Agency in music education refers to the capacity of learners and educators to make choices, exert influence, and actively shape their musical identities and experiences despite systemic or institutional constraints. As Evans and McPherson (2015) illustrate, children who develop a long-term musical identity exercise agency by envisioning themselves as musicians in the future, motivating sustained engagement and deliberate practice.

Burland (2020) and de Bruin (2025) emphasise that agency operates within cultural and institutional frameworks that can both constrain and enable individuals. Burland (2020) critiques how education policies may marginalise students' musical identities, especially those from diverse cultural backgrounds, while de Bruin (2025) examines how early-career music teachers navigate institutional pressures, exercising agency through reflection, future planning, and engagement with their 'possible selves.'

In sum, agency is a dynamic and relational process, shaped by context but driven by imagination and aspiration. It empowers students and educators alike to challenge norms, claim their identities, and co-construct meaningful musical paths.

### *3.4. Habitus and Transitional Space*

This study aims to observe how, from a social point of view, teacher-student interaction might create a *transitional space* in instrumental lessons and how the social and cultural context influences this relationship. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the socio-cultural nature of the educational institution. This allows one to understand the influence of the school on interpersonal interaction, the values and beliefs that teachers and pupils have about the school, and the way teaching and learning are experienced within a specific context.

The preceding paragraphs showed how *habitus* derives from social conditioning, yet both Bourdieu (1986) and Butler (1997) expressed the changing nature of this concept. I believe that the dynamic nature of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986) can intersect with the nature of *transitional space*, that produces self-change (Ellsworth 2005). The concepts are thus in a dialectical relationship with each other: *habitus* can be varied in the *transitional space* and *transitional space* varies according to the *habitus*. Furthermore, with the present theoretical framework, I take up the call of Prior (2011) and de Boise (2016) to make the concept of *habitus* in music less objectifying but integrated with subjectivity.

According to Paolucci (2011), Bourdieu himself devised the concept of *habitus* to overcome the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism. According to Bourdieu (1979), the objectivist approach ignores the subjectivity because it does not include the experience of each individual and their representation of social reality. In contrast, for the subjectivist approach, social reality was seen as the outcome of individual decisions and actions. Such an approach according to Bourdieu (1979) makes the mistake of conceiving society as 'a product of the aggregation of individual actions, independent of objective structures, whose persistence and configuration cannot be explained by the summation of individual actions alone' (Paolucci 2011, p. 3). Bourdieu (1979) believed, however, that the objectivist and subjectivist points of view were in a dialectical relationship with each other and that their opposition was artificial. Thus, with the connection of Bourdieu's (1986) and Ellsworth's (2005) frameworks, the intention here is to place social structures and the experience of the individuals in dialogue with each other.

Such an operation had already been carried out by West, Fleming, and Finnegan (2013). They studied the relationship between social structures and subjective experiences and stated that understanding power relations in an interdisciplinary way creates connections and highlights the

intersubjectivity between external social structures and subjective experiences (p. 119). They linked Bourdieu's work and his sociological understanding with Winnicott's (1971) psychosocial analysis of the place of recognition and self-esteem in human interaction as the basis for processes of transformation. In constructing a more dynamic, acted-out understanding, Bourdieu's ideas on embodied cultures were linked to Winnicott's concept of changing experiences of self-esteem, in the space of transition, and how people can develop more open and less defensive orientations to experience (West, et al. 2013, pp. 213-214). West, et al. (2013) analysed students' experiences and social reproduction in higher education through the narratives of students. The focus was on the complex process of negotiating identity and the resources people draw on to experience themselves and their ways of being in the world. Through their stories, students engaged reflectively, identifying themes and thinking about them with the researchers. The narratives were then seen through Bourdieu's social reproduction (1986) framework and Winnicott's (1971) transitional object theory. Bourdieu's frame included the concept of *habitus*, which represents the embodied culture in which ideas, practices, and ways of being in the world are at play. Such culture shaped how people behaved, spoke, thought, and communicated with each other, and even how they exposed themselves. Bourdieu's ideas about forms of capital and the ways in which they operate in specific fields offered a tool for understanding the lasting impact of the influence of *habitus* in students' lives. Through Winnicott's (1971) theoretical framework, the authors approached the individuals' subjectivity. Through his gaze, West, et al. (2013) thought of the university as a space in which the self and history were in negotiation and in which struggles for separation and individuation could take place - letting go of past ideas and relationships (p. 124). In this sense, the stories people tell may indeed become vehicles for the renegotiation of self, for a kind of narrative embodiment of one's identity, which may be more or less legitimised in the eyes and responses of significant others. West et al. (2013) asserted the existence of deep psychosocial dimensions that are insufficiently

understood in the recognition and transformative processes of learning. They acted both at the level of the self, at the intersubjective level, and at the broader level of society. The study conducted by West et al. (2013) has important implications for my study because it addressed the psychosocial dimension of learning.

Thus, here, teaching is seen as an experience integrated with a social context in which the quality of human interaction and mutual recognition have the potential to empower or undermine self-esteem and development. This development influences in turn the context.

### *3.5. Learning in Physical Space*

One of the aims of this study is to understand the importance of the physical space dedicated to pedagogical activities and its fundamental role in teaching. Thus, to answer the first embedded research question of this study (How do teachers and learners experience the physical space in the music school?) the concepts of physical space as *transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005, Sojot 2018) and Bourdieu's (1986, 2011) concept of the field are here juxtaposed. To this end, Ellsworth (2005) spoke of *transitional space* not only as metaphorical space but also as material space. She believed that space and pedagogy are in a process of continuous change with each other and that this process can be understood as a process of 'knowledge in the making' (Ellsworth 2005, p. 2), i.e. a process in which change is co-constructed and the outcome is unknown. Her thinking was later echoed by Sojot (2018) who argued that *transitional space* in a metaphorical sense is the space in/through which pedagogical articulation can take place while, in a physical sense, it is the actual environment in which it takes place (p. 897). Bourdieu (2011), on the other hand, spoke of the field as the social space in which certain social activities are practiced and certain dynamics are at work. The field can allow the *habitus* to replicate itself if it is kept as such, but if it is varied, it can allow the individual to enact a process that varies its expectations (Reay 1995).

The literature on space in one to one or group instrumental lessons is limited. However, the studies of Roseth (2020; 2023) examined how teachers' nonverbal behaviours and classroom space in secondary band and orchestra lessons were linked. Roseth (2020) noted a lack of space-related research in music education. However, he noted how in the studies by Levasseur (1994) and Kurkul (2007) there were references to the use of space and the proxemic distance between students and teachers. He investigated self-reported immediacy behaviours, ensemble configurations, and the use of classroom space during teaching. Roseth (2020) referred to immediacy as the teacher's nonverbal behaviours that communicate closeness, increasing nonverbal interaction with students. He believed that teacher immediacy, classroom setup, and teacher use of classroom space have important implications for student learning, motivation, engagement, and affect (p. 5).

To this end, Roseth (2020) surveyed 436 secondary school band and orchestra teachers in Colorado and Indiana. The study explored teachers' perceptions of immediacy behaviours and how these perceptions vary based on gender and teaching role. It also examined how teachers organise musical groups, comparing traditional and non-traditional setups in relation to gender, teaching position, and immediacy. Additionally, the research investigated how teachers utilise classroom space during tests. Roseth's (2020) study found that teachers considered nonverbal communication skills, such as eye contact, body language, and movement, less important than other teaching skills. However, women rated their own use of immediacy higher than men and saw it as more important. They also reported using immediacy behaviours more often. Roseth (2020) suggested that these findings could help music teacher educators better understand how to use immediacy and proximity in teaching.

As previously mentioned, Roseth (2020) studied which classroom layout was most functional for teaching. He distinguished between *traditional configurations* ensemble, commonly used in bands and orchestras, usually consisting of concentric arches extending from the podium or

conductor's gallery; *non-traditional configurations* that is, overall arrangements that reflect an overall organisation of chairs and supports that can be considered unusual or uncommon; *closed configurations*, that is, ensemble setups organised in such a way as to limit the movement of teachers to the front of the room or the periphery of the ensemble; *open configurations*, that is to say overall configurations in which the organisation allowed the movement of the teacher towards and between students. Roseth's (2020) study found that most teachers preferred to keep a traditional, closed classroom layout. However, teachers of young ensembles often used open formations, likely because open setups allow better physical access and proximity to students, which is especially important in the early stages of learning an instrument. Roseth (2020) also examined the link between classroom layout and immediacy scores but found no significant differences. However, teachers with a medium level of immediacy were more likely to use open layouts. Additionally, female teachers showed a slightly greater preference for nontraditional setups.

In conclusion, Roseth (2020) believed that the perception of teacher immediacy among students should be positively promoted because teacher immediacy could help facilitate teachers' exploration of different configurations. To this end, teachers should, according to Roseth (2020), be encouraged to teach away from the podium and towards/among students.

In 2023, Roseth studied how classroom layout—closed (traditional) or open—affects immediacy, emotion, motivation, and group cohesion in band and orchestra classes. He also examined the relationship between these factors as reported by both teachers and students. The study involved six teachers and 379 students from a school in the USA, all of whom had participated in his 2020 study. Teachers were asked to teach in both closed and open setups, with the order randomly assigned. They received video instructions on how to arrange the classroom and had a week to practise before recording their lessons. Lessons were recorded to ensure the setup was followed correctly, and both teachers and students completed questionnaires on immediacy,

emotion, motivation, and cohesion using electronic devices. Roseth (2023) found that students perceived their teachers as less immediate in the open classroom setup. This was linked to an increase in behaviours such as looking or walking away, showing little facial expression, having a rigid posture, avoiding gestures, and maintaining physical distance. However, the reason for this change was unclear. Roseth (2023) suggested it might be related to the teacher's proximity to students. He also found a connection between teacher and student reports: when teachers reported using more immediacy behaviours, students also noticed an increase in these behaviours.

With these two studies, Roseth (2020; 2023) analysed the use of spaces in band and orchestra lessons, the layout of the classroom, and the relationship between these and the nonverbal behaviours of teachers.

Many studies outside the field of music have explored how learning spaces function in education and how teachers and students perceive them. These studies examine interactions within learning spaces (Leijon et al., 2022; Granito & Santana, 2016; Casanova, Di Napoli, & Leijon, 2018).

Leijon, Nordmo, Tieva, and Troelsen (2022) conducted a systematic review of 108 peer-reviewed articles on physical learning spaces published between 2009 and 2019. They found that research on this topic increased over the years, peaking in 2016, and was mainly conducted in the USA, UK, and Australia. Much of the early research from the USA appeared in the *Journal of Learning Spaces*. Their review focused on six key themes, including the relationship between space, teaching methods, and learning outcomes; how students and teachers perceive learning spaces; design principles; tools for assessing learning spaces; how teachers use these spaces; and theoretical perspectives. Among these, the connection between space design, teaching activities, and student learning outcomes was the most common theme. Their review showed that while the field is broad, it remains underexplored and lacks strong theoretical foundations.

This was not the first literature review on the topic. Temple (2008) previously examined how learning spaces are designed, highlighting the lack of research on how physical environments influence teaching, learning interactions, and community building. Leijon et al. (2022) later found that while changes in space design are linked to shifts in teaching methods and student learning, space alone cannot be considered the sole factor influencing positive outcomes. They concluded that well-designed learning spaces support active learning approaches, which can help students gain a deeper understanding of subjects. Another key theme in their review was how students and teachers perceive learning spaces. They found that students responded positively to innovative spaces and even to updates of existing ones. The way physical space is designed influences how students and teachers experience and respond to changes in teaching methods, often shaping their emotions towards learning. However, they also noted a lack of research on how teachers are supported in using learning spaces effectively. While studies often mention the need for such support, little research provides evidence on how best to offer it.

Leijon (2016) previously argued that students and teachers interpret and interact with space based on their perceptions, using layouts and available resources to shape the learning experience. She highlighted that space, people, and interactions are interconnected, influencing each other. Her study showed how space plays a role in both designing learning environments and shaping learning processes. She explained that when teachers and students enter a classroom, they develop expectations based on its setup, which affects their engagement with the space. Her findings suggest that teachers and students actively adapt and transform learning spaces as they engage in meaning-making and learning activities. Building on Leijon et al.'s (2022) themes, I propose dividing this discussion into two sub-themes: the organisation of space and the perception of space.

### 3.5.1. Learning spaces: organisation of the space

Granito and Santana (2016) studied how the organisation of classroom space influences interactions between students and teachers. They believed that classroom layout plays a key role in shaping the learning experience. Their research aimed to understand how students and teachers perceive the impact of classroom design on teaching and learning. To do this, they conducted four focus groups—two with university students and two with university teachers. After analysing the discussions, they identified three main themes: *conditions*, *outcomes*, and *values*.

The *conditions* theme referred to aspects of the classroom environment that either supported or hindered learning. Students highlighted the importance of having enough desk space for taking notes and following textbooks, while teachers focused on the overall classroom setup. Other issues raised by students included temperature, acoustics, lighting, and access to technology. Both students and teachers agreed that classroom layout affected how much interaction took place. In traditional classrooms, communication was mainly one-way, from teacher to students. Students reported feeling *alienated* and *excluded*, while teachers described them as *disengaged*. In contrast, classrooms with open layouts encouraged two-way communication, making lessons more interactive. These flexible spaces also allowed teachers to structure lessons differently, focusing more on hands-on activities and collaboration. Both students and teachers reported that these classrooms fostered a more engaging and participatory learning environment. The findings of Granito and Santana (2016) demonstrated that classroom layout and conditions have a direct impact on teaching and learning.

Banegas (2018) also explored the role of educational spaces in shaping learning experiences, particularly focusing on their social and material aspects. His research took place in a province of southern Argentina in 2021, where he studied an English teacher education programme. The

institution where the study was conducted shared its building with a secondary school in the morning, a primary school in the afternoon, and a teacher training programme in the evening. Due to limited infrastructure, different schools had to share furniture, meaning that some classrooms contained seats designed for young children rather than adult learners. Banegas (2023) highlighted an increasing interest in how learning spaces influence social interactions, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced educators to rethink both physical and online learning environments. He argued that space is not just a physical setting but also a social and political construct. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus*, he linked educational spaces with people's behaviours and social practices. He also referred to Lefebvre's (1992) theory that space is shaped by three elements: its physical presence, its conceptual representation (such as maps and plans), and its lived experience. To explore the relationship between space and learning, Banegas (2023) used *walking interviews*, *photography*, and *drawings* to capture participants' perceptions of their learning spaces before, during, and after Covid-19. Participants were asked to take photographs of their educational environment, choose one to discuss, and create drawings to express their feelings about the space. They then took part in *visual-elicitation interviews*, where they explained their chosen images and drawings. This method of using visuals to explore learning environments also influenced the present study, where *photovoice* was used for student interviews.

Banegas (2023) concluded that learning spaces are shaped by various factors, including personal experiences, institutional structures, and external influences such as politics and curriculum. He found that physical and online environments interact to create new learning spaces that blend physical presence, thought, and behaviour. However, he also noted that teachers' well-being, beliefs, and teaching practices are shaped by wider sociocultural and ideological forces embedded in the design and function of educational spaces. His study emphasised that while space

influences learning, it is also shaped by the people who use it, making it a dynamic and evolving aspect of education.

### 3.5.2. Learning spaces: perception of the space

Casanova, Di Napoli, and Leijon (2018) explored how teachers and students perceive learning spaces and how these perceptions shape educational experiences. Their study, conducted at a UK university, involved workshops where participants redesigned a prototype learning space based on their own ideas. They argued that involving students and teachers in designing learning spaces could create more effective educational environments. Their researchers emphasised *agency*, meaning the ability to actively shape one's surroundings, and suggested that giving students and teachers a role in space design could improve learning experiences. Their findings showed that learning spaces influence communication, motivation, and engagement in the classroom. Through discussion and co-design, participants became more aware of how space affects learning and gained skills in interacting and collaborating. Casanova et al. (2018) concluded that co-creating educational spaces allows teachers and students to be active participants in the learning process, reinforcing Ellsworth's (2005) idea of *transitional space*, where physical space becomes a shared and interactive environment.

McArthur (2015) focused on the role of classroom environments in learning. He built on Hall's (1966) research on space and communication and explored how learning spaces influence students' behavior, emotions, and cognitive development. His study involved 234 university students across 15 public speaking classes, each assigned to a different type of classroom. He used Monahan's (2002) classification of flexible educational spaces, which includes fluidity – how easily people, light, and sound move through the space; convertibility – how adaptable the space is for different uses; versatility – whether the space can serve multiple functions; scalability – whether

the space can expand or contract as needed; modifiability – how much the space allows active changes by users.

McArthur (2015) found that traditional classrooms produced more stable learning outcomes, while highly flexible spaces led to more varied results—some students performed very well, while others struggled. This inconsistency was linked to distractions and teachers' unfamiliarity with flexible environments. He concluded that the teacher's ability to adapt to the space plays a crucial role in student learning.

This section also highlights studies on space in education, including Roseth's (2020, 2023) research on classroom layout in music education and its effect on teacher-student interaction. Banegas (2023) and Leijon et al. (2022) noted a growing interest in how space organization affects learning. Banegas (2023) emphasized that space, people, and social practices interact dynamically, echoing Bourdieu's concept of *field*, where school environments shape behavior. Leijon et al. (2022) argued that changes in learning spaces could lead to new teaching methods that improve student understanding. Ellsworth (2005) suggested that learning environments shape pedagogy, influencing how knowledge is created and shared.

Overall, Casanova et al. (2018) advocated for teacher-student collaboration in designing learning spaces, while Granito and Santana (2016) and McArthur (2015) demonstrated that classroom design significantly impacts teaching, learning, and student engagement.

### 3.6. Summary

The theoretical framework presented here relates the concept of *transitional space*, presented in Winnicott (1971) and taken up by Ellsworth (2005), and the influence of society on education, explained by Bourdieu (1986/2000) through the tools of *habitus*, *field*, and social capital. As mentioned by West, et al. (2013), in learning processes there are deep psychosocial dimensions

that act both at the level of the self, at the intersubjective level, and at the broader level of society. This makes it possible to foreground, in education, the quality of interpersonal interaction organised within a structured social framework.

On the one hand, *transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005) theory is useful in understanding how teacher-student interaction in individual instrumental lessons influences students' musical learning and identity development. Furthermore, it was seen by Ellsworth (2005) as a metaphorical space for individuals' growth and as a physical space. On the other hand, thanks to Bourdieu's (1986, 2011) tools, it is possible to investigate the sociocultural nature of the educational institution to understand the influence of schooling on interpersonal and how teaching and learning are experienced in a specific context. Within the institutional and cultural system, the concept of *habitus* is configured as each individual's ability to act according to unwritten rules and to manifest dispositions of thought, actions, ways of understanding and perceiving acquired due to the particular social group or class to which one belongs (Bourdieu 1986).

The two theories are thus in a dialectical relationship for what concerns the influence of social structures on individual and interpersonal interaction, and the importance of the teacher-student interaction in the growth of students. Furthermore, *habitus* can be varied in the *transitional space* and *transitional space* varies according to the *habitus*. Both concepts are in a relationship with musical identity development: *habitus* is the set of internalised dispositions, propensities, and predilections to think, feel, judge, and act obtained through societal conditioning and socialisation in which musical identity flourishes while *transitional space* is a metaphorical space of transition and movement in various ways of thinking and being in which musical identity can be explored, experienced and eventually changed. Thus, I believe that musical identity development has a

dialectic relationship with *habitus* and *transitional space* because it is influenced by them and can in turn influence them.

Finally, this Theoretical Framework, focused on the relevant literature on physical space in learning and teaching in order to understand the way in which educational space is conceived. The concepts of learning space as a transitional space (Ellsworth’s 2005) and field (Bourdieu 1986) found resonance in Banegas (2023) and in Leijon et al. (2022). The former emphasised the dialectical relationship between space, people, and social practices in education while the second emphasised how a change in educational spaces could change pedagogy. The learning space was therefore considered an integral part of learning, the organisation and variations of which can alter the learning process itself.

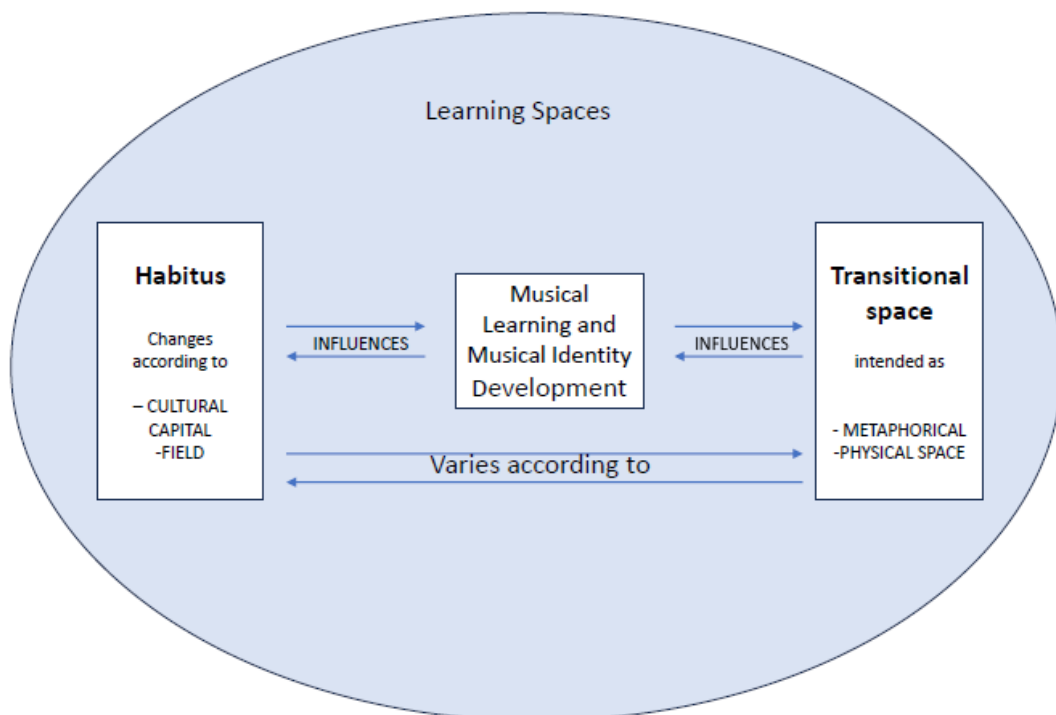


Figure 3.2. Theoretical Framework



# CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

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#### *4.1. Introduction*

The purpose of this research was to examine interpersonal teacher-student interaction in one-to-one instrumental lessons and group lessons. Furthermore, the study aimed to understand how this interaction affected musical learning and student musical identity development as it was embedded in and influenced by the surrounding social structure. The study was conducted in the context of an Italian junior secondary public music school, where students between the ages of 11 and 14 learn to play a musical instrument in one-to-one and group music lessons.

This chapter describes the methodological approach chosen for the study, the research methods, as well as the design and sampling. The study used a case study approach. The research methods used were semi-structured interviews, observations of one to one and group instrumental teaching, teachers' voice messages or written notes, and photovoice during student interviews. At the end of the chapter, data validation strategies, ethical considerations, reflexivity, and limitations of the study are also identified.

#### *4.2. Research Question*

The study aimed to investigate interpersonal interaction in individual and group music lessons in an Italian music school. The methodology was designed to delve deep into the school context in which the relations occurred and to be able to observe and understand interpersonal interaction in instrumental teaching closely. The central research question of this study is:

**How does teacher-learner interaction influence musical teaching and learning and students' musical identity development in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons in a secondary music school in Italy?**

The Embedded questions are:

1. How do teachers and learners experience the physical space in the music school?
2. How do teachers and learners experience teaching and learning in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school?
3. What are the learner's and teacher's values and beliefs about attending or working at a secondary music school?
4. What kind of interaction is observed between music teachers and learners during one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school?
5. How does such interaction influence students' learning and musical identity?

#### *4.3. Social Constructivism*

My research adopted a social constructivist paradigm. This paradigm is especially suited to qualitative research (Creswell 2009) and has been one of the key concepts of many educational psychologists, particularly Vygotsky (1978). According to Creswell (2009), social constructivism assumes that individuals seek to understand the meanings of their social contexts through their own experiences and points of view. Therefore, meanings are varied and multiple, and their sum provides a picture of reality that is not static, but multifocal and in motion (Creswell 2009, p. 24). Creswell (2007) also stated that the creation of meanings always has a social basis; therefore, qualitative research involves collecting data from the participants' environment to understand the complexity of a situation. Using a social constructivist approach, researchers wanted to offer an interpretation of the meanings that others have of a given context. Meanings were thus constructed from the interaction of human beings interpreted through the historical and social perspective of the researcher, who generates meaning through interaction with a community or group of individuals (Crotty 1998). An individual's learning occurs through interaction with others and within groups, and there is no single, absolute, or verifiable 'truth', but the reality is seen as continuously

constructed through social interaction (Schwarz and Williams, 2020). The aim of the investigation was, therefore, to understand how individuals and groups produce relevant knowledge about their social world. According to Schwarz and Williams (2020), social constructionists do not deny the existence of objective reality, but often set it aside in favour of the study of subjective meanings. They enter the phenomenon studied, observing it from multiple points of view, and describe it in the network of the phenomenon's connections, trying to keep the identity and authenticity of each individual in the study intact (Schwarz and Williams 2020).

In my research, I used the lens of social constructivism to understand the different perspectives and experiences of musical teaching and learning among teachers and students in a secondary music school in Italy. Creswell (2009) argued that qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meanings that each person or group of people attaches to social problems. In this case, social constructivism allowed the researcher to reveal people's insights into how they interact with the world. Social constructivism allowed me to discover the reality of the music school by observing it from many facets: the view of the pupils and teachers through the interviews and photo-voices of the pupils; the interpretation of the events through the researcher's observation, through the teachers' voice notes and interviews, through other non-instrumental teachers in the school, the school principal, and parents of the students.

In this sense, the lens of social constructivism does more than support the methodological approach of this study; it also resonates with the theoretical framework previously outlined. The idea that learning is socially and contextually situated, mediated by relationships and cultural practices, mirrors the dialectical interplay between *habitus* and *transitional space* (Bourdieu 1986, Ellsworth 2005). Just as Bourdieu's (1986) notion of *habitus* highlights the internalisation of social structures and their influence on practice, Ellsworth's (2005) concept of *transitional space*

foregrounds the emotional and relational dynamics through which individuals experience transformation. Social constructivism enables an inquiry into how these negotiations unfold through interaction and meaning-making (Schwarz and Williams 2020), offering a view of learners not as passive recipients of culture but as active agents who navigate, resist, and reconfigure the meanings embedded in their educational experiences. By integrating this epistemological stance with the psychosocial dimensions discussed earlier, the research embraces a holistic view of musical teaching and learning—one that acknowledges both the shaping influence of social structures and the agentive capacity of individuals to interpret and reshape their realities.

#### *4.4. Case Study*

This study used a single case study approach, which has been considered the most appropriate for a thorough exploration of teacher-student interaction in the context of instrumental teaching and learning in a secondary music school in Italy. A case study focused on one or a few instances of a particular phenomenon to provide an in-depth account of the events, relationships, experiences, or processes occurring within it. The researcher, therefore, analysed a circumscribed system over a long period through detailed data collection that includes multiple sources of information (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, Morales 2007). According to Creswell (2009), cases were limited by time and type of activity, and the researcher could collect detailed information using a variety of procedures over a long period. Denscombe (2007) stated that a case study focuses on a phenomenon to provide an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences, or processes occurring in that particular case. This type of methodology is particularly prevalent in small-scale research. It aims to ‘illuminate the general by observing the particular’, specifically, to study phenomena in detail, emphasising the detailed workings of relationships and social processes (Denscombe 2010, p. 53). A case study allows the researcher to investigate parameters in detail and use a selection of data collection methods to understand reality from different perspectives.

Therefore, Denscombe (2007) stated that the researcher enters the context with the clear intention of observing its salient aspects and evaluating different points of view, like a *flaneur* (Delamont 2013, p. 29).

Several scholars have used case study approaches in both school and music practice contexts. For example, Pollard and Alexander (2019) conducted a single case study in the context of instrument teaching and learning in a secondary school. They explored class, capital, and aspiration for social mobility in an English secondary school. In particular, they emphasised how students develop, value, and contest forms of embodied and cultural capital in the context of the musical instrument curriculum (Pollard and Alexander 2019, p. 309). The framework of Pollard and Alexander's (2019) study was Bourdieu's concept of cultural and embodied capital in relation to school and situated learning. The study was conducted over four weeks in 2014. The focus was on the school's music lessons and orchestral programme. Observations covered lessons, intervals, and orchestra rehearsals. In addition to the observations, 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and teachers. Topics such as the nature of the instrument lessons, the types of music the children engaged with most in and out of school, the role of instruments in the learning process, and the importance of music for the school were covered during the interviews. Finally, Pollard and Alexander (2019) distributed a survey that covered a similar range of topics across the groups surveyed. The case study was an in-depth analysis of the school context that allowed for careful observation during four weeks. The interviews, which were conspicuous in number, were addressed to all participants, both students and teachers. Finally, a questionnaire validating the interviews supported the findings.

#### *4.5. Sampling and Research Design*

The participants of this study were 11 students and four instrumental teachers in a junior secondary music school in Italy. The principal, three teachers of other subjects at the school, and three volunteers from among the students' parents were also involved in the research. The participants were recruited voluntarily after the project was presented by me to the four instrumental teachers and the principal.

As shown in Table 4.1, this research unfolded in four stages. Stage 1 was the preliminary organisational phase. During this stage, I contacted the school, sending an information letter about the project, and asking for an in-person meeting with the school principal. During this meeting, I provided detailed information on the study and asked for the school's participation. After the approval from the school principal, the project was presented to the students of all year groups, inviting them to participate. This first phase was held between July and September 2022.

In Stage 2, I undertook the first round of interviews with 11 students and four instrumental teachers from the music school. Students were recruited strictly on a voluntary basis: teachers introduced the project to their classes, and those interested were invited to participate. A total of 12 pupils initially volunteered, and consent was obtained from both the students and their families. However, one student withdrew after the consent phase, as their family reconsidered participation. In accordance with ethical research practices, no pressure was exerted to reverse this decision. I respected their right to withdraw at any point and chose not to replace the participant, even though it resulted in a smaller sample. By avoiding substitution, I aimed to reinforce the message that participation was genuinely voluntary and that students were not interchangeable data sources (BERA Ethical Guidance 2018). This decision was also informed by an awareness of the power dynamics inherent in school-based research. Although participation was voluntary, I remained

sensitive to the possibility that students might feel obligated to participate due to the involvement of their teachers in recruiting them. To mitigate this, I made clear during presentations that declining to participate—or withdrawing—would have no negative consequences and would not be communicated to teachers in a way that identified individual choices. The absence of the twelfth participant did not significantly alter the course of the study, though it serves as a reminder that ethical integrity sometimes requires sacrificing ideal sample sizes.

In Stage 3, I observed one-to-one instrumental music lessons (four one-to-one instrumental lessons for each learner) and group music-making activities (three orchestral and four ensemble rehearsals), and three concerts or musical events organised by the school. Data were collected between November 2022 and March 2023. During Stage 3, I also asked the four instrumental teachers to send me voice messages or written notes concerning the one-to-one instrumental lessons with the students who participated in the study (from two to four students for each teacher) after each instrumental lesson. Learners were asked to take pictures of the place where music happens at the school and to comment on them, using the photo-voice method, during the second interview in stage 4.

In stage 4, I undertook the second phase of interviews with 11 learners, four instrumental teachers, three student’s parents, the school principal, and three other school teachers teaching curricular subjects, including Maths, Science, and Language. This stage took place between March and May 2023.

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Data collection procedures</b>	<b>Participants</b>
<b>1: Project Planning</b>	<b>July to September 2022</b>	-	<b>Recruiting the participants</b>
<b>2: Interviews (Round 1)</b>	October to November 2022	Interviews (15)	11 learners and 4 instrumental teachers

<b>3: Observations, Voice message or written notes, Photos</b>	November 2022 to March 2023	Observations (54)  Photos from learners  Instrumental teacher voices message or written notes	44 observations of one-to-one instrumental lessons  3 observations of orchestral lessons  4 observations of ensemble lessons  3 observations of concerts
<b>4: Interviews (Round 2)</b>	March to May 2023	Interviews (23)	Parents (4)  School Principal (1)  Instrumental teachers (4)  Non-music teachers (3)  Learners (11)

Table 4.1. The Study Design

#### 4.6. Methods

I employed various methods of data collection to answer my research questions and allow for the triangulation of data in the analysis. Data collection methods included observations, semi-structured interviews, teacher’s voice messages or written notes, and photovoice.

##### 4.6.1. Observations

I undertook participant observations of instrumental lessons in the school in focus, a list of which is presented in Appendix D. The observation allowed the researcher to collect data by drawing on the ‘direct evidence of the eyes to witness events as first-hand’ (Denscombe 2010, p. 196). Observation has been mainly associated with sociology and anthropology and helped the researcher to infiltrate situations and understand the culture and process of the groups being investigated. Using observations as a research tool had several benefits: it showed understandings that people may not articulate with words; it demonstrated the sequence of events and it revealed the context

in which behaviours happened. I chose a participant observation in which I was present for each observation and my role as an observer was openly recognised. However, the presence of the researcher during observation might affect the behaviours of participants and this method could be time-consuming (Denscombe 2010). To overcome the first issue, the researcher must write notes for each observation. Notes helped to remember impressions of the details, the environment, and emotions during the observation (Sclavi and Giornello 2014, p. 45). Rereading the notes of the observations made it possible to rethink the observed moments in a more detached manner. This was useful to detach oneself from the subjectivity of the here and now that characterised the moments of observation and achieve a greater degree of objectivity.

My first intention was to undertake a structured observation: this was a form of participant observation that uses previously defined categories (Martin 1982). Griffiee (2005) stated that in structured observation, the researcher defines certain categories to be observed and takes notes on them. The researcher could also create a log and record in detail each step of the process, recording observed facts through the use of categories (Griffiee 2005, p. 36). An observation table was created by the researcher (see Appendix B). A pilot trial of the observation schedule was organised in a private music school during a one-hour piano lesson on 3 October 2022. During this observation, I used half of the time using the observation schedule and the other half taking notes on the interpersonal interaction in the lesson. It was evident that structured observations were too restrictive and didn't let the researcher observe the entire lesson. Without a schedule, the researcher was freer to observe and take notes of the most important moments for interpersonal interaction during the lesson. This pilot application of the observation schedule helped to choose non-structured participant observation. A page of the field notes is given in Appendix C.

#### 4.6.2. Semi-structured Interviews

The second and fourth stages of data collection focused on semi-structured interviews (an example of which is found in Appendix E). Abdula and Owusu-Ansah (2014) reported that interviews could be unstructured, semi-structured, or structured. Unstructured or informal interviews have no specific questions or a specific order but have a prepared guide on the areas or topics on which the questions are intended to be asked. Semi-structured interviews are more organised than unstructured interviews: specific questions are asked, although not in a specific order, and space is left for the interviewee to offer information outside the simple interview questions. Denscombe (2007) stated that with semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be proposed, but is willing to be flexible in terms of the order in which topics were considered and to let the interviewee develop ideas and talk more broadly about the issues raised by the researcher. Finally, for structured interviews, an interview schedule is prepared in which questions are presented in the same order and wording to all interviewees (Abdula and Owusu-Ansah 2014).

Denscombe (2007) stated that interviews are more than just a conversation, as they involve a set of assumptions and an understanding of the situation that are not normally associated with casual conversation. Denscombe (2007, p. 173) further said that through interviews, the researcher delves into 'people's opinions, feelings, emotions, and experiences' and completes the observation process by exploring the research content through the participants' verbal descriptions. Notably, semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in discussion and for the respondents themselves to develop topics in their own way. Responses were open-ended and more emphasis was placed on the respondents' elaboration of points of interest. Interviews allowed the researcher to clarify the participants' perspectives, but, at the same time, were subject to the interviewee's bias.

For my study, I chose semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the interviewees, although, for practical reasons related to lesson organisation and interview time, some interviews were conducted in the presence of two pupils. Interviews were conducted with students, instrumental teachers, the school principal, non-instrumental teachers, and parents. The duration of each interview was planned to be approximately 30 minutes, and the planning of the interviews was created by the researcher based on the participants' previously expressed availability. The interviews with the students and teachers focused on the value of music and the music school, the way of teaching and learning in the context of the middle school music school, and the places where the music took place in school. Parents/legal guardians and the school director were asked about the values of the music school, how it differed from traditional schools, and how it was experienced by students. The main themes of the interview schedule (see Appendix G) for both teachers and students were musical identity, perception of the music school and musical experiences in it, interpersonal interaction, and instrumental teaching and learning. The central topics of the interviews with the non-instrumental teachers, the director, and the students' parents were their perceptions of the music school and the impact instrumental learning had on the students.

The interviews were conducted in Italian and were transcribed with the help of the online programme *Transkriptor*<sup>9</sup>. An Italian copy was created and then translated with the help of the online programme *DeepL*<sup>10</sup>. A Word file was created for the interview's Italian and English versions. Six hours and 34 minutes (394 minutes) of interview time were analysed. A list of interviews is shown in Appendix D.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://app.transkriptor.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.deepl.com/>

#### 4.6.3. Teacher's Notes and Voice Messages

In my study, I collected and analysed documents such as teachers' voice messages and written notes. The teachers were invited to write or record a short note after each instrumental lesson with the students of the study as a retrospective account of their personal experiences of what happened during the instrumental lesson about their interpersonal interaction with the learners. These notes offered the interpretation of personal perceptions from the teacher's viewpoint filtered through their experience, identity, personality, and aspirations (Denscombe 2010). Voice messages or written notes were used as a non-intrusive source that could contain important details on the experience of the individuals. They acted as individual narratives, which were points of connection between the individual and his or her social environment, and in this process of connection, a multitude of voices were included and related to each other (Kaun 2010). Through narratives, each individual assigned meaning to experiences or aspects of experiences. They allowed the researcher to verify the information gathered through observation and interviews with a source created by the participants themselves. However, they could be short or superficial and offer little information, or may be an extra commitment for the participant. In fact, in the research project sent to the school, I only proposed a written version of the notes. This created concerns among teachers who normally have a lot of written and bureaucratic paperwork to complete during the school year, and some of them would not have participated if there was a written version of the notes to produce. To overcome this problem, I proposed voice messages or written notes so that the teacher could choose the best way to create the data. I encouraged them to send me voice messages or written notes after each lesson but tried to reassure them that they were not obligated to do so. This allowed me to receive some voice messages relating to some observations and, in the meantime, to reassure the teachers about the commitment my research would require of them. The teachers' voice messages or written notes were thus juxtaposed with

the observed one-to-one classroom moments and allowed the researcher to look through other eyes, through the teacher's narration, at what was observed by the researcher.

No written note was given to me by the teachers; however, I received vocal notes on 11 lessons from 1 minute to 11 minutes of length.

#### 4.6.4. Photovoice

According to Shaw (2021), research on children has often relied on qualitative interviews, as they are considered an effective tool for capturing children's perspectives. However, interviews alone may not always allow children to express abstract processes or experiences effectively. Researchers must therefore determine the most suitable methods to facilitate communication. To address this challenge, Shaw (2021, p. 338) recommended incorporating multimodal approaches to capture not only spoken words but also what remains unspoken. One such method involves using photographic images during interviews to enhance expression and engagement. Through pictures, children can convey meanings and viewpoints that may be difficult to articulate verbally (Shaw 2021). Harnad (1991) stated that a picture can be worth more than a thousand words—not only because it conveys meaning instantly, but also because processing verbal information takes time. Two prominent approaches to integrating images in research interviews are photo-elicitation and photo-voice. Harper (2002) described photo-elicitation as a method in which photographs are introduced during interviews to stimulate discussion. These images can be provided by either the researcher or the participant (Shaw 2021). In contrast, photo-voice requires participants to produce their own images and later reflect on them during interviews (Sutton-Brown 2014). Both methods encourage deeper engagement by enabling participants to explore and communicate their experiences visually. In photo-elicitation, the researcher presents images for interpretation,

whereas in photo-voice, participants actively create visual representations of their experiences, effectively becoming co-researchers in the process (Shaw 2021).

In my research, I employed the photo-voice method, asking students to document their musical lives at school using available tools such as mobile phones or cameras. They collected photos between the first and second interviews, which were then discussed in the latter session. This approach not only provided a valuable means of recording experiences but also fostered active participation. Hayes (2013), who used photo-elicitation in his research, emphasised the value of artistic methods for amplifying student voices and offering alternative ways to represent data. He argued that photography yields more authentic insights, as images tap into different layers of human consciousness beyond verbal interviews. Similarly, Weber (2007) highlighted that images hold multiple meanings, shaped by the observer's perspective. While their denotative meanings stem from the intrinsic qualities of the image itself, their connotative meanings provide deeper insights into the observer's personal and cultural reality.

The inclusion of photovoice in this study was not only a methodological choice aimed at diversifying data sources but also a deliberate attempt to engage with a communicative channel that I do not usually employ—the visual one. As someone trained primarily in verbal, textual and musical analysis, incorporating photographs into the research process allowed me to step outside my habitual interpretative framework. This challenged me to consider meanings conveyed through images and to reflect on how visual elements could both complement and complicate the verbal data gathered through interviews and observations. In this way, photovoice enhanced my reflexivity as a researcher, forcing me to acknowledge and confront the limitations of my own perceptual habits and analytical preferences. It encouraged a deeper, multi-sensory engagement with the students' experiences, particularly their ways of seeing and representing their musical lives within

the school environment. I chose photovoice instead of photo-elicitation specifically because it allowed students to take the photos themselves, allowing them greater agency in selecting the aspects of their experience they felt were meaningful. This empowered them to shape the content of our conversations and positioned them as active participants, rather than passive respondents, in the research process.

Nevertheless, an important challenge of photovoice was that pupils might refuse to take photographs or might not have devices, such as mobile phones or cameras, that would allow them to take photos (Nelson 2019), or might, given their age, not have understood the task (Shaw 2021). For this reason, I made myself available for any questions regarding the pupils' request for explanations during the fieldwork period and encouraged those who told me that they could not use a camera, to nevertheless choose a meaningful image related to the musical address even from those already in the pupils' possession (e.g., pictures of old concerts, class photos, drawings, etc.) to conduct the final interview.

Seven students brought me a total of 10 photos: Alessia brought 3 photos; Bernardo 1; Enrica 1; Ernesto 1; Sara 1; Carolina 1; and Valentina 2. Regarding the other students who did not bring the photo, three of them forgot it, while one pupil did not show up for the second interview.

#### *4.7. Data Analysis Process*

A range of data collection tools was utilised in this study to obtain multifaceted, rich, and contextualised data reflecting the reality of the secondary music school. As a result, a significant amount of data was generated. The data analysis process combined both inductive and deductive approaches to ensure a comprehensive examination of the findings. Thomas (2006) argued that deductive analysis tests whether data align with prior assumptions, theories, and hypotheses identified or constructed by the researcher. In this study, deductive analysis was used to assess the

data in relation to existing theoretical frameworks. However, the researcher also found it necessary to incorporate inductive analysis to allow for an exploratory and investigative approach. Inductive analysis, following the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), enabled the identification of patterns and themes without imposing pre-existing coding structures or analytic preconceptions (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 83). By integrating both inductive and deductive methods, this study ensured a balanced approach—allowing for both the testing of theoretical assumptions and the emergence of new insights from the data.

Data analysis began with transcriptions and translation of data, which allowed me to get acquainted with the data analysis process before using any type of software. I then entered the data into qualitative analysis software (NVivo 12). Such software helped the researcher streamline the analysis process but did not take the researcher away from the analytical task. The software made it possible to make all stages of the analysis process transparent and traceable by recording data movements and coding patterns. To carry out the analytical process, I used the six phases of data analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Table 4.2 shows the different steps and their connections:

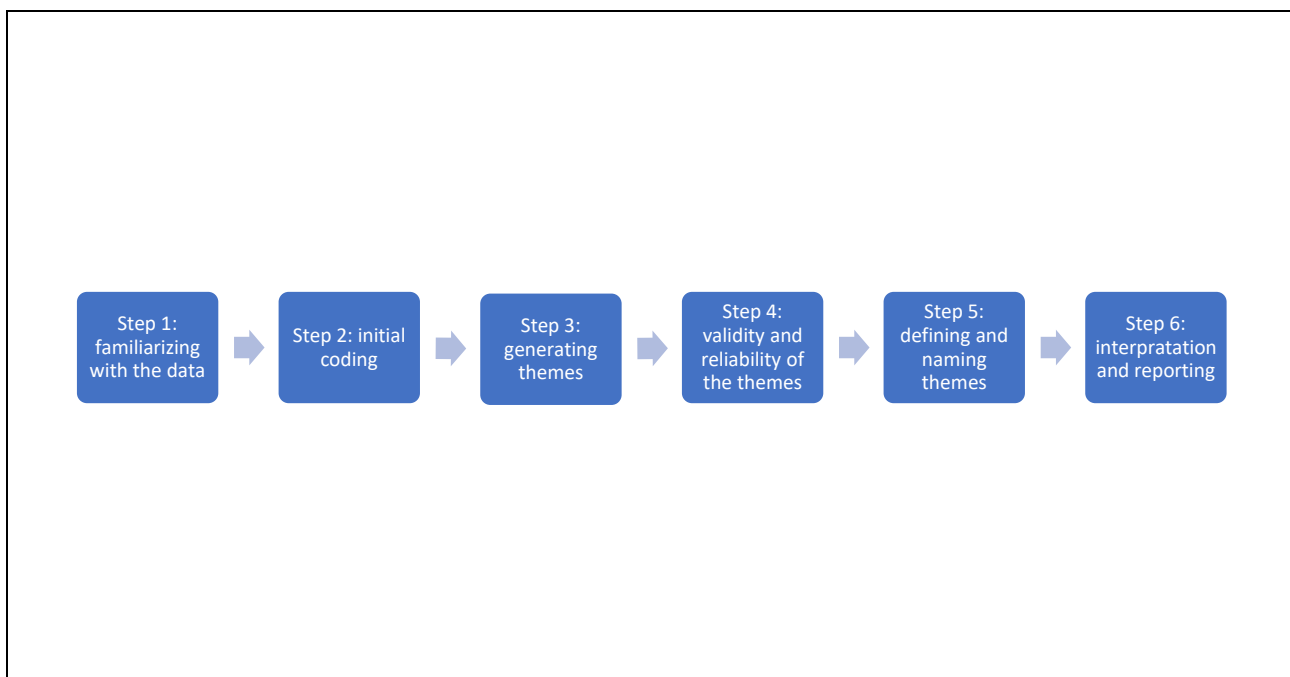


Table 4.2. Data Analysis Process

In the first step, I transcribed, revised, and translated the interview recordings and the voice messages sent by teachers. I also re-read and translated the notes taken during the observations. Then, the files were then anonymised and uploaded into NVivo to begin the analysis process. After re-reading the transcriptions of interviews, vocal notes, and observations, I started coding the interesting features of the data systematically, defining codes for the data, and collecting the data relevant to each code, as Braun and Clark (2006) described in step 2. The third step involved the collection of codes into potential themes and the collection of all relevant data for each theme. Six main themes were identified: 'Musical space', 'Beliefs and values about music school', 'Musical identity', 'Learning and teaching habits', 'Interpersonal interaction', and 'Significance of music in shaping identity'. Two other codes, identified as 'Impact of Covid-19 in teaching and learning' and 'Impact of the researcher's presence' do not respond to any of the research questions but helped to understand the influence of the recent Covid-19 on the context and the impact of the researcher's presence on the study.

In step 4, I underlined the relation between the codes, the research questions, and the body of literature reviewed earlier in the thesis and theoretical framework, resulting in the refinement of the categories. Then, a thematic map of themes and sub-themes was generated (see Appendix H). In the fifth phase, a continuous analysis was undertaken to refine the specifications of each theme, and the final theme names were generated.

In step 6, I selected the excerpts for inclusion in the writing of the results in the body of the study and produced the report of the data.

#### *4.8. Ethical Considerations*

Before presenting the research to music school principals and recruiting participants, ethical approval for the study has been granted by the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). After ethical approval, consent has been first sought from the school principal.

The participants in the study were 11 students between 11 and 14 years old, their families, four instrumental teachers, three teachers of other subjects, as well as the principal. A project leaflet and informed consent were given to all participants and, in the case of students, their families. Students and teachers were eligible to participate if they returned the informed consent signed; students' families signed the consent for their children because they were underage. Both the family and the individual children agreed to participate in the study.

The researcher was committed to treating individuals fairly, with sensitivity, dignity, and freedom from bias, recognising both their rights and differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, marital status, faith, disability, political belief, or any other significant characteristic (BERA Ethical Guidance 2018).

I described strategies for the protection of participants' data: the researcher committed to using pseudonyms instead of personal names and to omit significant data that allowed recognition of individuals to ensure the anonymity of participants. I was also engaged in developing a relationship of trust with participants and promoting the integrity of the research, to protect against misconduct and impropriety that could reflect on their organisations or institutions (Creswell 2009, p. 92) and respecting participants and research locations, not putting them at risk, and respecting vulnerable populations (including minors). Interviews with learners were conducted in designated classrooms in the school, with the door open and access visible to safeguard the safety of the pupils in the presence of an adult from outside the school community, such as the researcher. The timetable of observations and interviews was organised to not interfere with the curricular activities and not to imply additional hours for the participants. As far as the interviews with teachers and the principal were concerned, they were conducted at school during non-school hours (before or after their teaching starts) so as not to interfere with their work.

The data were stored in a password-protected external hard drive and on the researcher's Microsoft OneDrive. Only the researcher had access to the material. The data will be retained for five years after the conclusion of the research, as recommended by MIC guidelines. They will be deleted once this period has elapsed. The researcher informed all participants of the results of the research, giving them copies of publications or producing a specific report in Italian to disseminate the research findings to all participants.

#### *4.9. Validity and Reliability*

As Brink (1993) stated, research validity concerns the accuracy and veracity of scientific results, so a valid study must demonstrate that what is observed exists and is assessed through a valid instrument or measurement. Reliability concerns the consistency, stability, and repeatability of informants' reports and the ability of experimenters to accurately collect and record information (Brink 1993, p. 35).

Creswell (1998), proposed eight strategies that could enable the authentication of data. These are prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field; data triangulation; peer review or debriefing; negative case analysis; researcher bias; member checking; dense and rich description; and external review. The eight categories proposed by Creswell (2007) are:

- prolonged engagement and persistent observation, i.e. the participation in the field to learn or understand the culture, social setting, or phenomenon of interest for a sufficient time;
- triangulation, i.e. the use of multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding;
- peer review or debriefing, namely a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling analytical sessions;

- negative case analysis, i.e. the search and discussion of data that do not support or appear to contradict what is emerging from data analysis;
- clarification of researcher bias or reflexivity, i.e. the attitude of attending systematically to the effect of the researcher on the study at every step of the research process;
- member-checking, i.e. the process through which data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained;
- rich, thick description, i.e. the description of a phenomenon in sufficient detail;
- external audits, i.e. the presence of a researcher not involved in the research process that examines both the process and product of the research study. The purpose of this researcher is to evaluate the accuracy and evaluate whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data.

Creswell (2007) suggested that qualitative researchers should use at least two of these criteria in data analysis. To this end, my study used three of the eight criteria proposed by Creswell (2007), namely:

- data triangulation, facilitated by the variety of data;
- the prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, proposed in the three different phases that can enable the analysis of the context from different angles;
- the researcher's bias analysis, which engages in understanding one's position through the positionality piece and reflection on it after/during observation.

I also used member checking with the participants' checked their interview transcripts to ask them for feedback on the accuracy of the data; negative case analysis with the search for disconfirmation evidence: actively seeking disconfirmations of what is believed to be true; and dense and rich description, with and in-depth description of the context or environment in which the study took place and a thorough description of the procedures from beginning to end.

Related to the analysis of researcher bias, it must be said that this point could help reduce the researcher effect by guiding toward a more objective interpretation of the data. However, it is important to remember that 'our writing is an interpretation by us of events, people, and activities, and it is only our interpretation' (Creswell 2007, p. 237).

According to Brink (1993), researcher bias can also be introduced by the tendency of researchers to observe subjects and interpret results in light of their values, the tendency to selectively observe and record some data at the expense of others. To reduce bias, therefore, it is important to be aware of the possibility of introducing it at various points in the research process.

#### *4.10. Reflexivity*

As a reflexive researcher, it was necessary for me to explore my position about the phenomena of my study, especially as a function of my knowledge relative to the context studied. As Kenny (2016) states, it is impossible to be detached from the observed situations, and the researcher must take this limitation into account when interpreting events and writing conclusions. Having worked in a secondary music school (but not the same school as in this study), my position as a researcher was made more complex by my previous knowledge of the context from the aspect of being a teacher. However, none of the students who participated in the case study were my students. Notwithstanding, my beliefs and values might alter the reception and interpretation of the data. For this reason, the positionality statement in the introduction chapter was important and

was constantly re-evaluated throughout the research process. My engagement in reflexivity, therefore, was continuous throughout the research. For example, during structured observation, I noted down my impressions and emotions felt during the observation to reread the observation with a greater degree of objectivity. During the rereading of data, I was then able to take distance from those emotions and impressions and understand in a more objective way the data.

Additionally, I encountered several challenges that required further reflexivity, particularly in my interactions with teachers. In some interviews, I perceived that teachers felt judged, which may have inhibited open dialogue. This made me increasingly aware of the influence of my role as both an insider (due to my professional background) and an outsider (as a researcher) and the importance of maintaining a sensitive and non-evaluative stance throughout.

Moreover, the first round of interviews with students turned out to be shorter than I had anticipated. This required me to reconsider my approach and expectations, and to better understand the communication style of adolescents, who often express themselves more briefly or guardedly in formal interviews. This insight was important for adjusting my strategies in later stages of the research.

Another reflexive point concerns the photovoice activity. Although I reminded students regularly throughout the months of observation to bring their photographs, three of them ultimately forgot, and one student did not attend the scheduled photovoice interview. These occurrences highlighted the need for flexibility in fieldwork and reminded me of the challenges of working with adolescent participants in a school environment, where competing priorities and limited agency can affect participation.

#### *4.11. Limitations*

The main limitation of my study was the possible bias in the interpretation of data. My bias as a music school teacher and my beliefs and values regarding the school context could influence the interpretation of the data. Therefore, constant reflexivity was necessary to overcome my biases.

Another limitation might be the translation between two languages - Italian and English. Translation might not capture the sense of the discourse because of the language and cultural differences. The interviews were conducted in Italian and the teachers' voice messages or written notes were also in Italian. However, the results were presented in English. To overcome this problem, an attempt was made to translate all the interviews, observations, and voice messages or written notes as faithfully as possible, using a transcription programme and a translation programme. This was done, on the one hand, to speed up the process but, on the other, to double-check the accuracy of the writings produced, first by using the programme, the other by double-checking the transcripts and translations individually.

Another limitation was that the sample was small. That said, due to the very in-depth investigation in the chosen school and the different methodological tools used, this limitation could actually be turned into a strength in this particular study, as a bigger sample would have become too complex to synthesise (Yardley 2000, p. 218).

A further limitation emerged from the photovoice process: although I had planned this method carefully and provided students with consistent reminders, three participants did not bring photos, and one failed to attend the photovoice interview altogether. This reduced the depth and completeness of the visual data and affected the triangulation I had hoped to achieve across data sources.

Finally, there was a small number of voice messages and a lack of written notes received from the teachers compared to the observations made. This was to be expected, as teachers were already overburdened with practical and bureaucratic tasks, making it difficult for them to dedicate additional time to these contributions. Therefore, I focused on the few voice messages received, linking them— as initially proposed in the data collection phase— to the corresponding observations. This approach aligns with Creswell's (2007) concept of triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources to enhance understanding and strengthen the validity of the findings.

#### *4.12. Impact of COVID-19 and Researcher's Presence*

COVID-19 changed the way of going to school for students and teachers from March 2020 until September 2022. Students engaged in online teaching and learning for six months, when social activities were restricted, and came back to school wearing masks or visors. The mandatory use of masks and visors has been abolished as of September 2022. The data collection phase of this study was conducted starting in November 2022, so students and teachers no longer had to wear them. It was the first time after three school years of masks. Some teachers still wore masks, mainly during ensemble and orchestra rehearsal, where there were many people in confined spaces. Occasionally, they wore masks during one-to-one lessons, too. Students appeared to be happy about the return to school without distance rules and masks. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students did not make group lessons all together but were divided into two smaller groups, so as not to have many people all together in the same room. Concerts were not allowed, so for many students, the first concert after the restriction period was at the end of the 2021/2022 school year. The return to normality allowed the orchestra to rehearse together and hold more concerts. The presence of the researcher was treated in various ways. The researcher was always introduced by teachers at ensemble and orchestra rehearsals, and pupils who were not participating in the research were often curious about it. Some would meet me in school hallways asking me why I was doing my work and I could

have interviewed them as well. During lessons, the presence of the researcher was unusual for teachers and students, who joked to emphasise how someone other than the teacher was listening to them, both in what they said and what they played. Sometimes it was necessary to bring attention back to the fact that I was not there to judge but only to observe in order to moderate the excessive attention or fear that the pupils showed toward me during the lessons. In some cases, by turning to me, the teachers were able to explain, both to me and to the students, the intrinsic reasons for some of the studies, exercises, and topics covered.

#### *4.13. Summary*

This chapter examined the methodology of the study and presented the methods for data collection. A case study approach was identified as the most appropriate to investigate student-teacher interaction in the instrumental lesson from different perspectives, and in-depth. The ways of recruiting participants, the phases of data collection, and the research methods adopted were described. Research methods were: semi-structured interviews with teachers, learners, and parents; observations of music lessons and rehearsals; teachers' vocal and written notes; and students' photovoice.

Issues of reliability and validity were considered. Finally, the research design was outlined, alongside ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter presented some methodological limitations of the study and two issues that arose during the research, namely the influence of the pandemic on the school and the presence of the researcher.



# CHAPTER FIVE: MUSICAL SPACE

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### *5.1. Introduction*

In this chapter, I discuss the findings related to the school's musical spaces and the musical communities created within these spaces. Data analysed was gathered from observations, teachers' and students' semi-structured interviews, and students' interviews with the photovoice method. The following research questions are addressed in this chapter:

- How do teachers and learners experience the physical space in the music school?
- How do teachers and learners experience teaching and learning in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school?

In presenting the results in this chapter, I first present the learning space of the school. Then, I present the school's physical space, its sound, and the relationship of teachers and students to the space. Finally, the school is analysed as a community, i.e., a space in which social and affective ties are experienced by those who attend such a community.

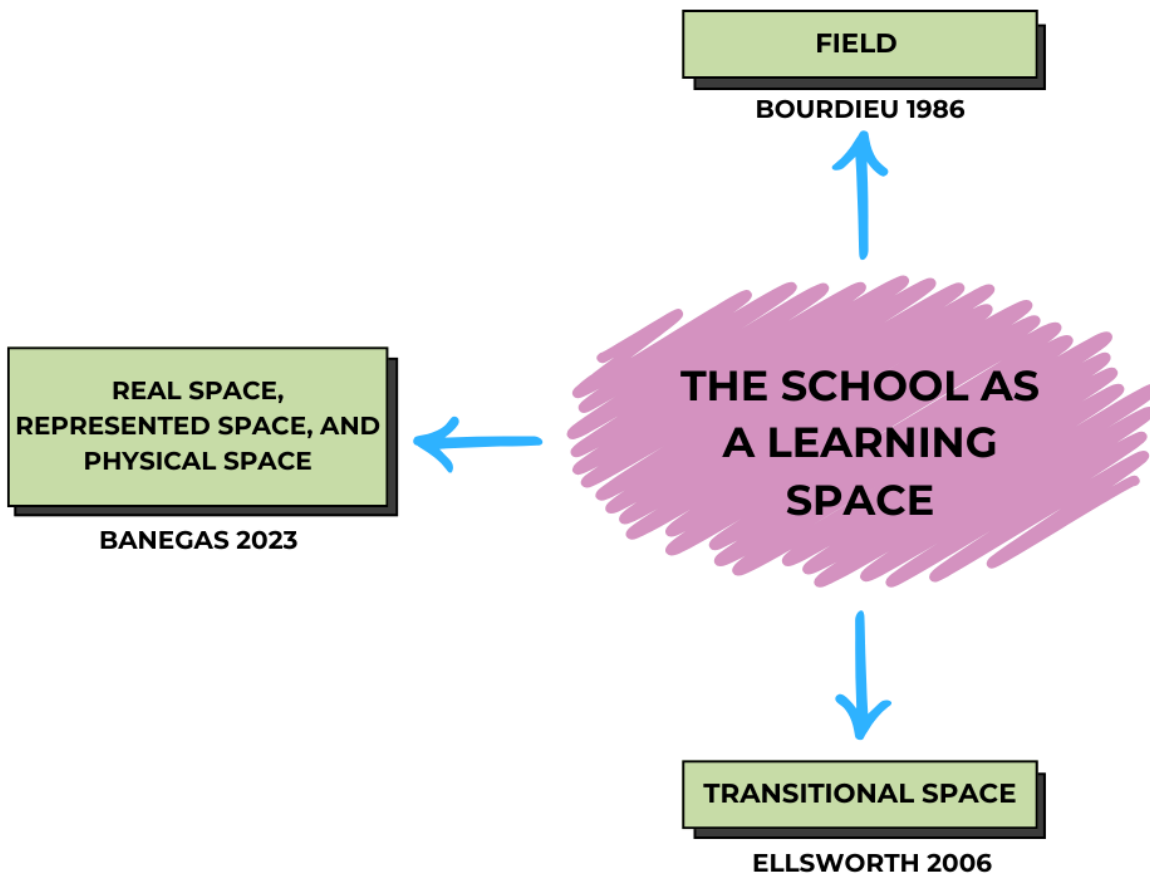
### *5.2. Learning Space*

This section analyses the learning space of the school in its physical and sound characteristics and the participants' relationship to that space. A first description of the school was presented in the introduction to this thesis when the scene of the study was set (see Chapter One). This section investigates in particular the spaces of the music school, namely the four practice rooms on the third floor and the two halls, one on the ground and the other on the third floor.

The learning space of the school was analysed as a transitional space (Ellsworth 2005) and as a field (Bourdieu 1986), according to the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter Three. Ellsworth (2005) saw the learning space as a transitional space in which knowledge might be constructed between the participants in the pedagogical process (such as in this case, pupils and teachers). According to Ellsworth (2005), space and time contribute to the learning process because

they are the material features of the learning process. Space is represented by the places of learning, while time is represented by the duration of the learning process of the self in making (Ellsworth 2005, p. 2). Echoing Ellsworth (2005), Sojot (2018) argued that the physical space of the school is a transitional space, namely the environment in which the pedagogical process takes place (p. 897). Through this perspective, the Mainero school is understood here as the place where learning takes place and is co-constructed by students and teachers, and its spaces are designated to facilitate learning. Similarly, Bourdieu (1986; 2011) spoke of the field as the social space in which certain social activities are practised and certain dynamics are at work. Thus, the physical space of the school could also be considered from a Bourdieusian perspective, as the field in which the *habitus* manifests itself. The field can allow the *habitus* to replicate itself if it is kept as such, but if it is varied, it can allow the individual to enact a process that varies their expectations (Reay 1995). The relationship between institutions and social practices was later emphasised by Banegas (2023), who noted a dialectical relationship between people, space, and social practices. Banegas, echoing Lefebvre (1992), asserted that space contains a triad of elements: real space, experienced on a daily basis by participants in the activities of a given space (in this case, the school); space represented in its physical characteristics; and physical space, which can be perceived. These three characteristics have been analysed in detail in the next subsections, where the space is described, and the experience and perception of the participant are reported and analysed.

The complex interplay between the physical and social dimensions of the school space and how these factors contribute to the learning process is shown in the following diagram:



*Figure 5.1. The School as a Learning Space*

### 5.2.1. Physical Space

In the introduction (Chapter One), the Mainero School was presented. The ground, first, and second floors were dedicated to the general curriculum school, the offices, and teachers' spaces. On the ground floor, the only room dedicated to the music school is the Aula Magna, where several concerts of the music school and some ensemble or extracurricular music activities take place, such as the String Orchestra project (see Appendix I). The Aula Magna has a rectangular shape, with one of the longer sides adjacent to the corridor. The other longer side has large windows facing outwards that allow the room to be naturally lit. A first area is designated for musicians, and there are enough chairs to accommodate the orchestra of each class. A second area is intended for the public and contains around 200 seats. At the bottom of the Aula Magna is an empty area that was used to set

up refreshments for families, students, and teachers after a concert held during data collection. The first area of the Aula Magna is presented later in this chapter in Figure 5.2, while the whole room is shown in the following photo:



Figure 5.2. Aula Magna

A description of the Aula Magna was reported in the following quotes when the secondary music school held a concert for their primary school students

*'Entering the Aula Magna, the pupils are seated at their orchestra seats and are rehearsing a piece. They are all dressed in black, as are the teachers. After a few minutes, the primary school children arrive outside the door to listen to the concert. [...] The hall is large and spacious, there is little light because it is a dark day outside and they have not switched on the artificial lights'. (Teachers and VII grade orchestra students, all instruments, field notes)*

While on the ground floor, only the Aula Magna is dedicated to the music school, on the third floor, there are the instrumental teachers' practice rooms and a large entrance hall used for rehearsals. The entrance hall serves as a transitional area and is not typically defined as a separate room. It is the arrival point of the stairs and is separated from the region by a door. The entrance hall is also the location of the elevator, which opens to the right of the stairs. On the same side of the elevator, there is a balcony from which a lot of light enters. Further on, there is a door leading to the wind and bowed instrumental classrooms, on the wall to the right of the elevator. After that, there is a door leading to five classrooms: two dedicated to string instruments and three in which regular classes are held.

The entrance hall, used as a place for group music lessons, is shown in Figure 5.3. and described in the following quote from the observation of a wind ensemble rehearsal

*'The pupils are in the woodwind class and are arranging their instruments while chatting and comparing the latest television programmes. [...] The teacher enters the classroom and puts down her things, arranges her instrument, takes the scores, and invites all the pupils to follow her into the entrance room. The pupils sit on chairs arranged in a semicircle [...] while the teacher sits on a chair that is higher than the pupils', and proposes to do an A round to check intonation'. (Anna and six VI-grade students, wind instrument, teacher and students, field notes)*



*Figure 5.3. Entrance Hall*

There are four practice rooms, so each instrumental teacher has a dedicated one. Instrumental teachers' practice rooms were very different from each other. Each contains a desk and several chairs (at least six in each room), except for the largest, Anita's classroom, which contained 24 chairs because it hosted orchestra rehearsals. Some classrooms contained furniture brought in by the teachers themselves, such as shelves and tables. Only one classroom, Ginevra's practice room, had a piano. Instead, the largest classroom, Anita's practice room, contained six large bowed instruments. The practice rooms were furnished and decorated by the teachers and students. For example, the teachers brought plants, utensils, and sometimes electrical equipment to make a hot drink during the lessons. The students decorated the walls with their drawings, paintings, and

souvenirs. Therefore, the practice rooms were very hospitable spaces, and each had its own style.

The practice rooms were placed as far away from each other as possible so that the sounds from practicing an instrument did not disrupt students and teachers during their lessons. However, the two rooms were adjacent. Table 5.1 describes the organisation of the practice rooms.

	Marcella	Anita	Ginevra	Anna
	String	Bowed instrument	String	Woodwind
1. Position on the floor	Far from other practice rooms but near the hall	Next to Anna's room	Far from other practice rooms	Next to teacher Anita's room
2. Door (no door has a glass window on)	Always closed, the teacher is turned sideways from the door; Students are far from the door.	Always closed, with a drawing pinned to it outside representing a fist knocking. The teacher and student look toward it but are far from it.	Sometimes open and sometimes closed. Students have their backs to the door and the teacher looks toward it.	Sometimes open and sometimes closed. The teacher's station is turned sideways from the door. Students are far from the door.
3. Windows	Four big windows to the right of the teacher desk. Blinds always open.	Four big windows on the left side and four on the right side. The blinds on the right-hand window are only raised when there are group music lessons.	Four big windows to the right of the teacher desk. Blinds always open.	Four big windows to the right of the teacher desk. Blinds always open.
4. Tables / desks	The teacher's desk, occupied with scores and chancery, well organised.	A big table always free on the left of the door; a little table near the teacher's and student's station, entirely occupied by chancery items.	A little table near the door, full of scores, sometimes in order sometimes not.	The teacher's desk, free, normally hosts the teacher's iPad. A medium-sized table to the left of the door where students sit when they are waiting for their lesson.

5. Furniture	The school furniture (a big desk, one iron closet, one big chair for the teacher, several small chairs for students) plus a big closet where an instrument is kept.	School furniture, two large closets and a long wooden table to the left of the door.	School furniture and old furniture brought in by the teacher, all wooden: a cabinet, a shelf and a vertical black piano.	School furniture plus a wooden table and a cabinet behind the door and a large mirror (in the cabinet, students keep their toothbrushes: the teacher asks students to wash their teeth before playing the instrument).
6. Instrument inside other than teachers and students' instruments	An old string instrument	Six bowed instruments owned by the school	A vertical piano	X
7. Position of teacher and student/s	Each student sits in their own chair at about two metres from each other. The teacher rarely approaches the students. (Maybe this habit is a remnant of the pandemic and the regulations that teachers had to follow). Instruments are positioned in a mirroring position.	The student and teacher are next to each other, sitting on two chairs. The teacher, with the permission of the student, often touches students' arms or shoulders to explain the best posture with the instrument. Instruments are parallel.	The student is positioned in the centre of the classroom, standing in front of the lectern. The teacher moves from her chair, near the desk to the lectern. The teacher, with the permission of the student, touches the hands or shoulders of pupils if the posture is incorrect	The teacher is seated at the desk or between the two students lecturing in pairs, at the centre of the room. They sometimes move in front of the mirror to check their posture and the teacher, with the permission of the student, corrects pupils' posture by touching them.
8. Flowers/Plants	A few	None	Many	Two
9. Refreshment utensils	None	None	Kettle with a large supply of tea and cookies that also shared with pupils during class	Coffee machine

10. Student's drawings	Many	Some	None but some panoramic calendar photos	Some
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*Table 5.1. Organisation of the Practice Rooms*

Marcella's classroom (strings), shown in Sara's photo, Figure 5.8. was located away from the other practice rooms, at the beginning of the corridor to the left of the entrance hall. When group music lessons were being held in the hall and simultaneously in Marcella's classroom, the sounds of instruments overlapped, creating difficulties in conducting lessons. Also because of that, the door was always closed, with the teacher often positioned next to it, near to a desk full of neatly arranged scores. Students were positioned a few feet away from the teacher, sitting on chairs in the centre of the room. The distance between the teacher and the pupils was about two meters. When the ensemble music lessons were held inside the room, the pupils were positioned apart from each other, similar to the spacing required by the COVID-19 containment measures, which were recently dismissed. The room was furnished with equipment provided by the school, namely a large desk, an iron closet, several chairs for the students and one bigger for the teacher, and a large closet inside which stored an instrument owned by the teacher who leaves it at school for the students. The teacher kept a few flower seedlings on the windowsill and had many drawings of the pupils hanging on the walls, often music-related.



*Figure 5.4. Ginevra's Practice Room*

At the end of the same corridor, there was Ginevra's classroom, a string teacher (see Figure 5.4). Her classroom was far from all the other practice rooms and, because of this, the door often remained open. The teacher was positioned in front of the door, near a large table full of sheet music, which was not always tidily organised. The students were positioned in the centre of the room, with their backs to the door and looking toward the teacher. Pupils often stood in front of the music stand so they could read their music study books and sheet music. Usually, the lesson began with the teacher sitting in the chair looking at the pupils, but very soon the teacher stood up

to correct the student's posture or take her instrument to play with or for the student. To the right of the teacher's desk, there were four large windows with the upper windows always open, and on the windowsill, there were many lush plants. In addition to the school furniture, the teacher had brought furniture: a low wooden table, and a wooden English-style shelf, and a black upright piano. In the iron cabinet given by the school, the teacher had a kettle and a large supply of tea and cookies that were shared with the pupils during class. On the walls, there were panoramic photos and no student's artistic work.

Anna's and Anita's classrooms were both on the other side of the third floor. The front door of Anita's classroom had a drawing made by a pupil depicting a fist knocking on the door, thus with humorous intent. Entering the classroom, there was a very large space because it was the space where orchestra lessons were held. The room had four large windows, each positioned on both sides of the doors. When the room was used for orchestra lessons, all the blinds were up, while only two of the four blinds covering the windows were open when it was used for one-to-one lessons. The teacher and students were positioned in the classroom area in front of the door facing towards it, near windows without blinds, receiving light from them. The door was usually closed but sometimes it was left open. As furniture, there was a large table to the left of the door which was always bare; a small table next to the teacher's and student's stations, entirely occupied by chancellery items. In addition, there were two large cupboards and a long wooden table to the left of the door. Many chairs were located in the classroom so that all the instrumental students could sit during orchestra lessons attended by all 24 pupils in each class (a photo of the room organised for the orchestra lesson is shown in Figure 5.5). In the classroom, there were six bowed instruments, owned by the school. The student's and teacher's chairs were positioned next to each other, with the instruments parallel. The teacher, with the student's permission, often touched the students' arms or shoulders to explain the best posture with the instrument. There were no plants or flowers

in the classroom, but many drawings by the pupils. Anita was often attentive to students, making sure they ate if the lesson was close to lunchtime and often asking questions about the students' lives (school progress, family, sports, etc.).



*Figure 5.5. Anita's Practice Room Organised for an Orchestra Lesson*

Anna, the woodwind teacher had the class next to Anita's. The two classrooms shared a wall, so the sound from Anita's classroom could often be heard in Anna's classroom and vice versa. The door was not always closed, it would often stay open for about 10 minutes at the beginning of each lesson to allow pupils to put their things down in the classroom, pick up their toothbrushes, go to

the toilet to brush their teeth, and return to class<sup>11</sup>. The teacher's desk was positioned in front of the door, and Anna often sat there to load data on the electronic register via iPad. The teacher often moved to sit next to the students, positioned in the centre of the classroom. To the right of the teacher's desk, there were four large windows, which were always open, and had a plant on the windowsill, which the pupils often took care of. In addition to the furniture provided by the school (desk, two cupboards, a low iron cabinet), the teacher brought a large mirror and a cabinet from home and she put them behind the door. The mirror was used by the students to check their posture and the teacher, with the students' permission, corrected it by touching their shoulders, arms, or chin to indicate the correct position. There was also a coffee machine in the classroom, which Anna used to offer her colleagues coffee at break times. On the wall, there were some students' drawings depicting the wind instruments. Anna's practice room is shown in the following picture:

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<sup>11</sup> Anna asked students to wash their teeth before playing their wind instrument so as to prevent food residue from settling in the instrument.



*Figure 5.6. Anna's Practice Room*

The description of the music spaces offered in this section allows one to see how the musical spaces, in general, are organised and how instrumental teachers' classrooms are set up. The description reveals how individual spaces for each instrumental teacher are managed differently by each of them, both in the organisation and in the way they are used. The spaces had an impact on the instrumental lessons because they conveyed intrinsic relational modalities. Relational modes were also closely related to the relational attitude and approach of instrumental teachers, which is better described in the section on instrumental teachers' identities in Chapter Seven. An example of the different relational modes is given by the comparison between Ginevra's and Marcella's attitudes. In the description of Ginevra's classroom, a moment of relaxation from the lesson was foreseen and was materially represented by the presence of a kettle that allowed her to offer and share tea with the pupils. Differently, in Marcella's classroom, no relaxation moment was foreseen, but a need for a certain interpersonal distance between the pupils and the teacher emerged in the

positioning of the chairs. A connection between the teacher, the student, and the teaching space emerged from the description. This was in line with McArthur (2015), who worked on the concept of the interconnection between the learning environment and the subjects in it, highlighting how the physical space affected the behavioural, affective, and cognitive learning of students. McArthur (2015) emphasised how flexible spaces enable better learning, referring to Monahan's (2002) categorisation to describe the flexibility of spaces and the different functions of space: fluidity, convertibility, versatility, scalability, and modifiability. Instrumental teachers' practice rooms could be analysed referring to these categories. All four practice classrooms were fluid because they allowed students and teachers to move around the classroom without the obstruction of chairs or desks; they were also versatile and convertible because they were used for both individual and group music lessons. In fact, all four practice rooms were used for ensemble lessons for each instrumental specialty. Anita's classroom was also changeable and scalable because it was the largest classroom, used like the others for individual and group lessons, but also for orchestra lessons. While half the room was used for individual and group music lessons, during orchestral activities, the whole room was used, the windows were all open, and 24 chairs were available for the instrumental students. In addition, not only each instrumental teacher's classroom but also another space on the third floor was used in a convertible mode: the entrance hall could be used for ensemble music lessons, transforming from a transition area to a teaching space. McArthur (2015) argued that the study area related to space has enormous potential for future research that evaluates the extensive reconstruction and re-imagining of learning spaces. In this regard, the Mainero school was innovative because an entire floor was dedicated to musical spaces. This represented an important difference from most secondary music schools in Italy, where, due to a lack of space, lessons took place in common classrooms and teachers did not have dedicated spaces. Pupils and teachers normally had to adapt to the numerous desks and chairs already present in the

classroom for curricular lessons. Instead, the Mainero school allocated a classroom for each instrumental teacher, and this was exceptional compared to other schools. This exception had positive repercussions in the teaching of the musical instrument because the space was organised entirely for instrumental or group lessons, and the materials in the classroom were only those needed for teaching the instrument (and not for teaching many different subjects, as is the case in other secondary school music classes). Although it is not possible to make a comparison with other music schools in Italy, as the work presented in this thesis is a case study and therefore collected data from only one school, it is nevertheless possible to state that the presence of dedicated instrumental classrooms has represented a change in the instrumental pedagogy of secondary music schools in Italy. This change was prompted by Inter-ministerial Decree No. 176 of 2022, which states that institutes wishing to set up a music school must undertake to provide themselves with the facilities and instrumentation needed to ensure that all musical activities can be carried out. The decree is in line with Duncanson (2014), who emphasised the need for dedicated spaces. According to Duncanson (2014), the presence of dedicated spaces for the subject can make a change in pedagogy possible. In this case, the change was represented by the personalisation of classrooms, which, as shown later in this chapter, allowed teachers and students to have agency over their own teaching and learning. Supporting Duncanson's (2014) theory is the quote of Anita, the bowed instrument teacher, who realised how important it was for the school to have individual practice rooms all on the same floor

*'We certainly have a favourable space compared to many other situations. It didn't used to be like that, we had classes on the first floor and went up to the third floor for the orchestra: several cellos broke on the way. Then a former principal thought that it was useful to have everything on the same floor and dedicate one classroom for each instrumental teacher. And it was actually quite ingenious!'. (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)*

The importance of the individual practice rooms was emphasised also by the school principal

*'In this school, they are very lucky because we have so many spaces, every instrumental teacher has a classroom and it is a classroom that only the instrumental teacher uses, which is an absolute privilege'* (Principal, interview).

Furthermore, Duncanson (2015) stated that a benefit in pedagogy is derived from the reduction of the number of materials and furniture in classrooms to free space. The presence of classrooms dedicated to instrumental teaching allowed for such a reduction as there were no longer materials pertaining to other subjects nor desks for students in the classrooms, but only materials for instrumental teaching and a few seats for pupils to sit on during individual or group lessons. The absence of desks in the practice rooms also allowed for fluidity in the environment (McArthur 2015), making movement possible. As was shown by the photos of the practice rooms, the entire space was devoted to musical activities, and the presence of desks was very limited (all classrooms had a teacher's desk and none or only one desk for students to rest their belongings on).

Regarding the arrangement of the pupils during the orchestra lessons, it must be said that the configuration of the orchestra was not traditional, as only four instruments were studied in the school. Students were positioned in a semicircle in two rows according to their instrumental specialty: in the centre back, the six bowed instruments were positioned, in the centre front, six wind instruments, and on each side, six string instruments were positioned in two rows. In addition, each chair was spaced apart to allow the teachers to move from one side of the room to the other. With regard to the arrangement of the pupils in the orchestra lessons (see Figure 5.5), Roseth (2020) showed that the unconventional and open arrangement of the instrumentalists allowed physical access and proximity of the teachers to the students. These characteristics were considered by Roseth (2020) to be particularly important in the early stages of the learning process of an

instrument, as they allowed a feeling of immediacy for the teachers by the pupils. According to Roseth (2020), the perception of teacher immediacy on the part of pupils should be positively promoted, as teacher immediacy can help facilitate teachers' exploration of different configurations. I therefore believe that the organisation of the orchestra space in the Mainero school allowed for physical access, proximity of teachers to students, and immediacy of teachers. This observation aligns closely with Roseth's (2020) findings, which emphasised the benefits of open and flexible spatial arrangements in fostering teacher immediacy. The deliberate spacing of chairs and the semicircular layout in the Mainero school appear to reflect the open configuration described by Roseth (2020), enabling greater teacher mobility and enhancing opportunities for nonverbal interaction. Such spatial organisation not only facilitates pedagogical effectiveness but also supports emotional and motivational engagement in the early stages of instrumental learning.

#### 5.2.2. Sound of the Space

The sound of the music school was distinctive. The description and analysis of the school's sound, its peculiarities, and the perception of it by pupils and teachers complete the descriptive picture of the physical space of the Mainero Secondary Music School. Walking through the corridors, instruments could be heard playing alone or with the accompaniment of the teacher, mingled with the voice of teachers and students. From inside the classrooms, one could hear the sound of instruments from adjacent classrooms or of people's steps and voices from the corridors. Every hour, a bell rang to signal the conclusion of one lesson and the beginning of the other. From the windows, came the sounds of passing cars and ambulances and occasional road works, as for example in the following quote where, during an observation, the sound of the space was recorded in the field notes

*'Anna sits in her usual seat and tunes her instrument. From outside we hear a student playing a string instrument, the ringing of the bell, and the voices of some pupils'* (Anna, wind teacher, field notes).

The sound of the space could be considered, through Granito and Santana's (2016) analysis of the space, as a condition of the learning space, capable of influencing the learning self. Granito and Santana (2016) found that classroom conditions, such as temperature, acoustics, lighting, and technology, affected the interaction in the classroom and could have an impact on teaching and learning. This impact is shown in the following quotes, where the sound of each classroom appeared to be both motivating and disturbing. The first example presents a quote from an observation. Here, teachers Anita and Anna, who have two adjoining rooms, heard each other's musical results. The two classrooms shared a wall, and the doors were not always closed, which augmented the possibility of hearing each other's music. Sometimes, when the teachers heard the sound of the other class during the lesson, they would go to the neighbouring colleague and compare results or complement each other, especially when the pupils were practising orchestra and ensemble parts.

*'When the students finish playing the piece, the wind instrument teacher enters the classroom and asks if the 'eagles', i.e., her pupils playing very high-pitched parts, had been heard'*. (Anita, Anna, and ensemble students, bowed and wind instruments, teachers, and students, field notes)

This condition lets them open up the communication (Granito and Santana 2016) and confront and compare the results in an informal way. In contrast, the sound of the space could also cause discomfort, as in the case of Marcella, who complained about the rumbling in her practice room

*'There is so much rumbling here...the room is big [...]. Of course, this rumbling doesn't help, because I have a hard time getting everybody to hear me, and a little bit better acoustics would definitely help'. (Marcella, string instrument, teacher, interview)*

Thus, in the case of Marcella, the acoustic condition influenced the instrumental learning negatively. Moreover, Marcella's room was located near the entrance hall. When group music lessons were held in the entrance hall and simultaneously in Marcella's classroom, the sounds of instruments overlapped, creating difficulties in conducting lessons. Also because of that, the door was always closed.

Ginevra's classroom was at the end of the corridor where Marcella's classroom was. Her classroom was far from all the other practice rooms, and the sounds from the other classrooms came fainter. For this reason, she always kept her door open. Ginevra concentrated part of her work on the correct intonation of the instruments, correcting out-of-tune pupils and giving examples of in-tune notes, both singing and playing her violin. An example is given in the following quote, in which Ginevra helps Cinzia work on the tuning of her violin

*'Cinzia mistakes the intonation of a note, Ginevra sings it to her and helps her correct it. Ginevra tells Cinzia to play Gounod's Ave Maria, then sits down at the piano and plays the accompaniment to the piece with confidence while the pupil plays the string part. However, the instrument is out of tune and Ginevra asks the pupil to give it to her to tune it'. (Ginevra and Cinzia, string instruments, teacher and student, field note)*

Again, we find an example of how the sound of a space has a positive influence. In this case, in fact, the quieter condition of the class allowed the teacher and student to focus more on tone and intonation. In contrast, noisier areas of the music school, such as the room in which orchestra

lessons and concerts were held, could negatively impact learning. In the following quote, it is shown how a student used the presence of the bigger, voluminous sound of the orchestra to mask her musical errors or to avoid playing. She was convinced that, in this way, she would avoid the anger of the teacher in the case of a mistake.

*'In the orchestra, if you make a mistake nobody notices, instead, maybe if you are in ensemble lessons, you notice. In the orchestra, sometimes I pretended to play because I was*



Figure 5.7. Valentina's Photo

*lost and you can't hear it'* (Valentina, wind instrument, student, photovoice interview, Figure 5.7)

This image captures a moment during an orchestra rehearsal, showing several students—primarily wind players—seated in formation, engaged in a collective musical activity. The students are positioned closely together, each with their own music stand, dressed uniformly, and focused on their parts. At first glance, the setup conveys organisation and seriousness. However, when viewed in light of Valentina's testimony and the broader discussion on the acoustic environment, the photo takes on added interpretive weight.

The orchestral configuration seen here contributes to what Roseth (2020; 2023) refers to as a “closed” yet immersive layout. While not entirely rigid, the proximity of students, the limited spacing between chairs, and the fixed directionality of their gaze (toward their stands) may restrict teacher movement and limit direct interaction. More critically, the visual elements—combined with Valentina's comment—reveal how the sound density in such a space can obscure individual performance. The layered and voluminous sound of a full ensemble, especially in a reflective acoustic environment, allows students to ‘hide’ musically, as Valentina describes. Her confession—that she sometimes pretended to play—highlights how the collective nature of sound in this space can act as both a support system and a shield from accountability. This duality has clear pedagogical implications: while the ensemble offers students the experience of playing in a large group, developing skills in listening, blending, and timing, the acoustic cover it provides may discourage risk-taking or honest engagement, especially for less confident learners. As the photo suggests, even in a controlled and visually disciplined context, the invisible influence of sound may shape student behaviour more than the physical space itself.

Therefore, the photo does not merely document a rehearsal; it symbolises the acoustic dynamics of learning, reinforcing Granito and Santana's (2016) claim that the characteristics of educational spaces—particularly sound—are central to how students experience and navigate learning.

### *5.3. Relationship to the Space*

In this section, the relationship with space is first viewed with a general look at how students and teachers perceived musical spaces, then two foci are made on agency and open-mindedness in instrumental teaching.

The spaces in which the music lessons occurred provided a lot of insights into the school, and how the pupils and the teachers experienced and perceived music in it. Most of the pupils described these spaces as colorful, quiet, and cozy. For example, Enrica saw the bowed instruments practice room as colorful and big, as shown in the following quote.

*'I really like the instrumental room because I find it so colorful, then compared to what I have seen it seems bigger than the other classrooms. I like the colors. Then there are furnishings, decorations like drawings, even in front of the door we put things and pictures and ... it's cozy'* (Enrica, bowed instrument, student, interview).

Regarding the practice room itself, Alessia agreed with her classmate regarding the size but added

*'It's cold in the instrument room, I mean it's usually cold when we go in because everything is closed. [...] But it's not a bare room, I mean it's full of drawings. [...] It's a beautiful classroom. And it's big, there's space'.* (Alessia, bowed instrument, student, interview)

The space in the bowed instrument practice room was also commented on by teacher Anita. She confirmed the size of the classroom and the need to implement some conditions (such as heating). She stated

*'Of course, in this school, everyone has their own classroom, which is no small thing. My classroom coincides with that of the orchestra. There are always things that can be improved: for example, the heating, the aesthetics, the functionality, then the equipment, but I cannot say that over the years there has been a standstill in this respect, that is, every year there has been an evolution. Every year there has been something, like [acquisition of] the bowed instruments, for example'.* (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)

Again, the conditions emphasised by Granito and Santana (2016) are here presented. While in the previous section, the condition analysed was the sound, in the last three quotes, other conditions emerged. They were: the temperature of the room and the equipment. As seen in Alessia's and Anita's quotes, the temperature influenced their instrumental lessons. Alessia, in fact, signaled the cold in the room, while the teacher signaled the need to have better heating. Furthermore, Anita claimed the need for better musical equipment, even if she noticed constant care for the music school's needs over the years (such as the acquisition of six bowed instruments for the school). Furthermore, Anita emphasised how fortunate she was to have an individual space for the lesson. This statement echoed what was said earlier about the need for dedicated spaces for instrumental lessons and how individual practice rooms can help to change pedagogy positively (Duncanson 2014).

Finally, in the first quote, Enrica described the practice room as a place she liked, colourful and welcoming. Her words about the drawings the pupils made for the classroom will be explored in the next section, which focuses on the theme of agency.

### 5.3.1. Learning Space and Agency

The presence of an individual space that students and instrumental teachers had the possibility to furnish, organise, decorate, and curate can be linked to the concept of agency. Agency was understood as the 'acted action by which people devise ways to adapt flexibly to markedly different geographical, climatic and social environments' (Bandura 2001, p. 22). Through the agency, the teacher became an actor in organisational change, and in the continuous improvement of the school in which they work. Teachers' active contribution to the school organisation shapes their work and their conditions (Biesta et al. 2015, p. 624). In the Mainero school, instrumental teachers manifested the importance of having a room dedicated only to music lessons and separate from the other classes. This was seen as a great achievement, obtained after many years in which the teachers requested dedicated spaces for music from the principal. Ginevra said in this regard

*'So, the spaces we basically... created (the space). This was a completely abandoned floor with leaks from the roof and buckets full of water. Nothing, it was not accessible. So, the only accessible spaces were the ensemble music room and a couple of other classrooms. Instead, with a change of management and a let's say enlightenment, there was an opportunity to do some renovations and put our classrooms [...] on the same floor... and also the four of us. Everything takes place here. And I made this classroom: I brought things from home...the furniture, the piano... I made it into a cozy place, and I'd to say that where an activity takes place that should be joyful. That is, to make the people there feel good, in short'* (Ginevra, string instrument, teacher, interview).

Thus, it can be seen that in the Mainero School of Music, teachers had agency first and foremost in the organisation and management of their classes. This was in line with Casanova et al. (2018), who defined agency as 'the ability and opportunity to act and participate in a given situation proactively' (p. 489). Casanova et al. believed that the agency of teachers enabled them to promote

the construction of meaningful learning spaces for their users. Casanova et al. (2018) argued also that when teachers are actively involved in the design of spaces, they can create spaces with an interpersonal communicative function and space can become a motivational factor in the pedagogical process. In particular, this was seen in the active involvement of the pupils in the decoration and care of the classrooms, either by creating drawings to hang on the walls or by taking care of the plants in the room. An example of a drawing is reported in the following image, Figure 5.8.



*Figure 5.8. A Student's Drawing Hung in Front of Anita's Classroom*

The space became shared, familiar, and comfortable through students' involvement. Sara manifested her sense of familiarity in the classroom during an interview with the photovoice

method. In fact, she decided to show me a photo of the instrumental classroom in which she took string one to one and ensemble lessons, namely Marcella's practice room. She stated

*'I decided to choose this classroom<sup>12</sup> because it's where I feel most comfortable playing [...]'<sup>13</sup>. In the photo, there are six chairs because there are six of us per instrument and so during an ensemble lesson, we usually sit in a circle so we can all see the teacher directing and helping us. Over the years, the students have brought drawings or objects to decorate the room, [...] and this helps to give a sort of element of familiarity because knowing that there's something you've done in that room anyway, and so you feel a bit more comfortable.*

(Sara, string instrument, student, photovoice interview, see Figure 5.9)

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<sup>12</sup> Author's note: Sara decided to choose the classroom as the photo's subject

<sup>13</sup> In presenting the participants' comments, some sections may have been shortened. In this case, a square bracket with dots indicates cases where additional comments have been removed to improve the fluidity of the prose of the results.



*Figure 5.9. Sara's Photo*

Sara's sense of familiarity made it possible to understand how the students welcomed the agency enacted by the teachers and allowed them to feel at ease in the space and to be agents themselves, firstly in the decoration of the classrooms, which often featured the students' drawings on the walls, and secondly in the care of the plants in each room. These dynamics reflect a broader understanding of agency as a context-sensitive and future-oriented process. As discussed in Section 3.3.4, agency empowers both students and teachers to imagine and shape their musical

environment despite institutional constraints (Bandura, 2001; Biesta et al., 2015). At the Mainero school, this was not only about negotiating existing conditions but also about reimagining the space as a site of shared identity and aspiration. Teachers contributed to structural change by creating personalised classrooms, while students responded to this openness by bringing objects and decorations that made the space their own. This reciprocal shaping of the environment illustrates what Casanova et al. (2018) describe as the creation of meaningful learning spaces through participatory agency. It also echoes de Bruin's (2025) argument that educators and learners engage with their 'possible selves' when they invest emotionally and creatively in educational spaces. In this sense, the classrooms at Mainero evolved into transitional spaces (Ellsworth, 2005), where learning, identity, and environment were co-constructed in ways that promoted belonging and long-term musical engagement. In conclusion, it is possible to argue that the agency allowed instrumental teachers to promote the construction of meaningful learning spaces for their users, whereby the space allowed students to perceive a sense of belonging to the music school and a desire to actively participate in its organisation (Casanova et al. 2018). From these observations, I believe that agency in learning spaces could lead to the creation of a transitional space, i.e. a space in which students feel able to co-construct knowledge together with teachers (Ellsworth 2005).

### 5.3.2. Learning Space and Open-Mindedness

The instrumental teachers talked about their personal ways of making their one to one instrumental classroom cozier, such as burning incense sticks, speaking in a calm manner during the lessons, making tea for the students, and offering biscuits.

*'First of all, with incense [sticks], then with a comfortable, friendly environment, with tones of voice as unadulterated as possible. Give the sense of one who is doing something that tends towards freedom, the freedom of the person. That is, this duty to do certain things that do not tend to lock them up, but to open other doors. Other possibilities exist in this*

*sense of lightness and also of coming to do something that feels good and beautiful. Pupils must come here knowing that there is a moment of happiness'. (Ginevra, string instrument, teacher, interview).*

Italian teacher Eugenia also spoke about the fact that learning can open pupils' minds. During the interview, the teacher showed great enthusiasm for teaching at the music school and said

*'In the music school in general [...] there is the idea of teaching Italian, history, geography with an extra gear, because anyway I have in front of me students who have...how to say...a little bit broader vision. Or anyway I have to accept the challenge to open them, their minds to try to work more on a multidisciplinary level, especially because then the history of music, but also just concretely, the fact of studying an instrument and then being together is very important'. (Eugenia, Italian teacher, interview)*

The two quotes could be related to the idea of open-mindedness. In fact, Ginevra speaks of 'opening other doors' while Eugenia speaks of 'opening the minds' of pupils. Both teachers saw in musical learning what Greene (2000) saw in the arts in general, namely a tool for opening minds and breaking down barriers that prevent them from imagining worlds other than those imposed by society. Greene (2000) believed that teachers had the educational task of enabling students to create new knowledge through imagination and open-mindedness. The imagination of teachers as proposed by Greene (2000) could be seen in Ginevra's creativity in creating a welcoming learning environment, including through the scent of incense or the proposal of moments of relaxation within the lesson (in fact, as seen in the Physical Space section, Ginevra offered tea to the pupils to give them a moment of pause during the lesson). Imagination was also found in the words of Eugenia, who describes her teaching as multidisciplinary, allowing pupils to range between musical and non-musical disciplines.

Furthermore, Greene (2000) hoped that teaching could break down the conceptual and psychological barriers represented in particular by expectation, tedium and predetermination. In Ginevra's words, these barriers are overcome. Expectation and predetermination were overcome through the possibility for students to do something that tended towards the freedom of the person, without locking them up. To solve the problem of tedium in learning, Ginevra proposed to give students the sense of doing something beautiful and looking at the lesson as a moment of happiness. Therefore, Ginevra's quote responded to Greene's (2000) need of support teaching and learning positively through teachers' openness in favor of students' open-mindedness and imagination.

#### *5.4. School Community Space*

Students, teachers, families, and the principal often referred to the Mainero Secondary School as a community, in which musical, social, and affective relationships were experienced. Through observations and interviews, the sense of community was shown on different levels. Instrumental and curricular teachers, students and their families, and the principal, showed their interest in supporting the musical community, manifesting their will to create and participate in the school musical community, with responsibility and mutual help. A sense of belonging to the community and collaboration among community members were seen by Kenny (2016) as tools to develop and sustain a Community of Musical Practice. The concept of CoMP developed by Kenny has been described and analysed in relation to the Mainero Music School later in this section. The members of the school community are shown in the following diagram

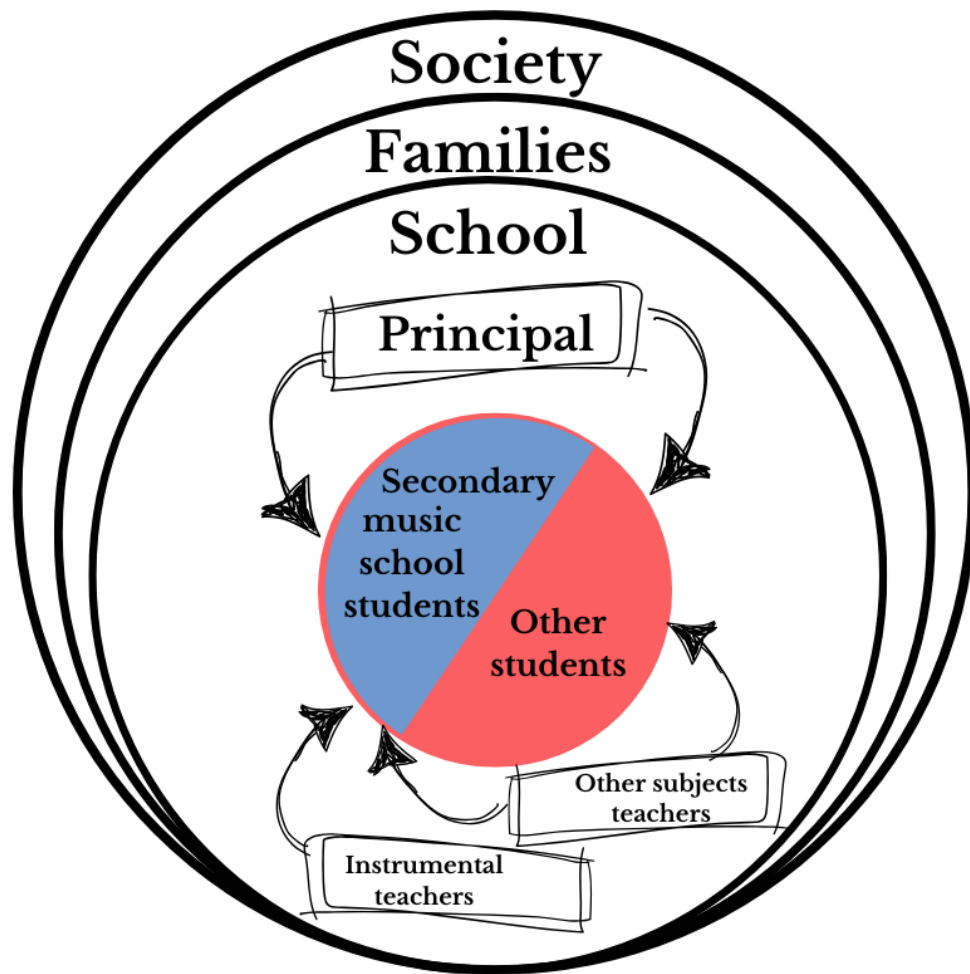


Figure 5.10. Members of the School Community

Although the diagram visually resembles Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model—with its nested layers of influence from society to school—it is conceptually grounded in Bourdieu’s (1986) sociological theory. The positioning of actors and relational arrows reflects a focus not on developmental psychology but on how social structures and institutional positions shape practice and perception. The diagram illustrates the field of the Mainero school as a social space in which interactions are mediated by institutional roles, access to cultural capital, and shared dispositions. In this sense, it aligns with Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of *habitus*, highlighting power dynamics, relational tensions, and the ways individuals internalise or challenge institutional structures, particularly within a music education setting.

#### 5.4.1. Sense of Belonging

During interviews, teachers and students emphasised their sense of belonging to the school community. The instrumental teacher Anita underlined the need to create a community where all participants felt a sense of belonging.

*‘Constructing the group is a job that for me starts from day one. [...] The sense of belonging is created with the peers in the activities, [...] that is to say, you create an identity, even a very important class identity’.* (Anita, teachers, bowed instrument, interview)

Anita’s words emphasised not only the centrality of students’ sense of belonging to the school community but also how this sense of belonging is connected to the group identity of the music class. This statement resonates with what Wenger (1998) and Hodges (2019) asserted, namely that personal identity, social identity, and practice are connected. Indeed, her quote showed how practices within this school community created connections between students and how these elements fostered a sense of community. Thus, individual identities come together through practices to form the group identity, which also supports and sustains the sense of belonging.

One school practice used to develop pupils’ sense of belonging to the Mainero school was to hold a drawing contest among the pupils of the three schools (primary, secondary, and secondary music). The winning drawings would then be included in the year diary which is distributed at the beginning of each new school year. This was what Tetyana was talking about when she enthusiastically recounted how she felt in the school community

*‘Every year there is this diary drawing contest. And so, you pick a drawing at the end of the year. The big winners are those whose drawing is put on the cover of the diary. At the end of fifth grade, I was the winner of the back cover. [...] For me it was fantastic. I felt very happy!’* (Tetyana, string instrument, student, interview)

According to the Italian teacher Marisa, a common goal among students reinforced the sense of belonging to the school. In particular, a musical goal for the music school allowed them to work together in co-constructing knowledge and strengthened students' sociality

*'Probably, the fact that we are there with a common goal makes a difference. [...] So, I think the big difference [from a general curriculum secondary school] is the fact that we are there for a reason that unites the kids, which is for everybody the same and still reinforces a lot of sociability'. (Marisa, Italian teacher, interview)*

Knowledge co-construction will be analysed later in this chapter through Ellsworth (2005) and Kenny (2016) in the dedicated section: Collaboration. In the section below the focus is on the sense of belonging. Marisa's quote confirmed what Wenger (1998) stated, namely that the sense of belonging is connected to practices and identity. Also, her words emphasised how the sense of belonging is reinforced by sociability. Sociability as a glue for the school community was also found in Sara's words, where she manifested the pleasure of attending the musical community of the school, because of her relationship with her classmates. She said

*'Here I have found a group of friends who have the same tastes as me, with whom I feel comfortable and who I know can, let's say, understand me. We have a lot to share, even outside of music'. (Sara, student, string instrument, interview)*

Musical practices in the school environment and interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers have been linked by Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009) who stated how the connection between the two concepts can enable students to create a positive self-image. This positive self-image can, in my opinion, could implement a positive identity in students, and by connecting to practices, this can stimulate a sense of belonging to the music school.

Until now, it was seen that the sense of belonging existed on two fronts: a general sense of belonging to the Mainero school and a particular sense of belonging to the music school there. The two realities intersected through the participation of people not directly involved in musical practices in the music school. One of these persons was the Italian teacher Eugenia, who showed her sense of belonging in an interview, where she explained how she was also motivated by the fact that she had also studied piano when she was younger:

*'I'm also a musician because I have a diploma in piano, so [...] I feel very comfortable teaching in a music school because since music has always been part of my education, I've been playing since I was a child and it seems normal that it's among the main subjects of a course... of study, so for me it's a matter of fact, the basis that music is part of everyday life'.*  
(Eugenia, Teaching Italian, interview)

The interconnection between the primary school and the music school was shown in the following quote, in which Alessia narrated her impressions of a concert held for the primary school.

*'When we played for the primary students, they were happy to hear us play. They were asking questions, some a little strange, some not so much. It was also nice to talk to someone smaller, and let them hear what the music section is all about'.* (Alessia, student bowed instrument, interview)

Even if the musical community and the school community were one part of the other and interconnected, one student underlined the separation from the rest of the school and the difficulty in socialising with the pupils from other classes. The student manifested a need for more nearness.

*'We have a whole floor for ourselves and so we are let's say a little bit far away from the other classes, so we can't socialise much because then it's a very closed section, however, it's nice'.* (Bernardo, bowed instrument, student, interview)

As shown throughout this section, instrumental and non-instrumental teachers, students and their families, and the principal felt a deep sense of belonging to the musical community. The sense of belonging was also fostered by the friendship among students. It was seen that friendship plays a crucial role in connecting individuals through shared experiences and common goals. As Anita and Marisa pointed out, practices within the music school, along with friendships and group identity, create a supportive environment in which students feel valued and part of a larger community. However, according to Bernardo, the community of the school was separated from the community of musical practice (Kenny 2016) because all the music classes were located on the third floor, while the normal curriculum classes were collocated from the ground floor to the second. This created a sense of separateness because students also felt themselves to be an integral part of the whole school community. This feeling could be reconnected to Kenny (2016) when she stated that the sense of belonging might not always be a positive aspect of a community because it might require others not to belong (p. 24). In this case, the sense of belonging to the music community required Bernardo not to belong to the general school.

#### 5.4.2. Student Families' Participation

An important role in the constitution of the musical school community was recognised by instrumental teachers with regard to students' families. Instrumental teachers wanted to involve families in musical activities as well and they wanted to create bonds not only between students but also between their families. This was in line with Creech and Hallam (2009), who advocated the importance of dynamic relationships between parents and teachers to create learning partnerships. This was aimed at potentially fostering better outcomes for musical learning. According to Creech and Hallam (2009) this partnership could be created by reformulating the relational dynamics between pupils, teachers and families. Instrumental teachers at the Mainero school tried to bring about the relational change proposed by Creech and Hallam (2009) through the active involvement

of families in musical activities, both in and out of school. For example, teacher Anna said that she organised activities out of school to involve families:

*'I organise evenings at the theatre or at the concert hall, where we can have cost reductions, offering them to families and going to hear the concert with families'.* (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)

She also added

*'The family is fundamental, in the sense that if the family supports my proposals, clearly the group is created. You can also help, I say, by creating a kind of mutual aid society'.* (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)

The parents appreciated that instrumental teachers wanted to involve families in musical activities and their interest in building a group by involving families in musical activities. This was seen in Valentina's mother quote, when she confirmed the teachers' interest in involving them in musical activities.

*'The teacher does a lot to suggest family participation in musical activities'.* (Valentina's mother, wind instrument, parent, interview)

The active involvement of parents in musical activities in school is shown in the following two quotes. In these quotes, two extracts of students' interviews are reported. Students described their feelings about a concert at the end of which a refreshment break was organised by teachers and families. In their quotes, Bernardo and Alessia recognised the commitment of families as important also for them.



*Figure 5.11. Bernardo's Photo*

*'This is the picture of an essay at the end of the year. It was a very important moment for me because [...] it's my first performance. I did some orchestra piece that we did during the year and we performed it to the audience, that is to our parents and also to the principal. After the recital, there was a table full of snacks, and drinks and we had a little party in the courtyard as well. The moment of the snack was very refreshing, because...I'm not saying I was anxious during the essay, however, it was a tense time, and then after the snack had been for quiet to...to calm us down'. (Bernardo, student, bowed instrument, photovoice interview, see Figure 5.11)*



*Figure 5.12. Alessia's Photo*

*'This photo shows last year's end-of-the-year concert that didn't go very well because we had messed up several things, however in the end it was nice because of the snack we had at the end of the concert. In the end, everyone brought something to eat. We were in the courtyard the whole rest*

*of the time, it was fun to be outside with the others: families, teachers, and all the students of three classes of music school'. (Alessia, student, string instrument, photovoice interview, see Figure 5.12)*

Both photos focused on the students as they played. The images depict a large, bright music hall with neutral-toned walls and acoustic paneling, suggesting it is purpose-built for musical instruction and ensemble practice. The room is filled with rows of students, each seated with their instrument. The students are dressed uniformly in black, likely indicating a formal rehearsal or performance setting. Music stands with sheet music are placed in front of each student, contributing to the organised and disciplined atmosphere. The students are focused on their instruments, demonstrating concentration and engagement. The layout of the room—with students facing inward toward a conductor or central focal point—suggests a structured, collaborative learning environment. This organisation reflects a shared purpose and the values of discipline, cooperation, and community central to the music school. While the photo brought by Bernardo emphasised the group of stringed instruments, Alessia was more focused on the image of herself playing the instrument, looking at the sheet music. In both interviews, however, the students emphasised how happy they were with the presence of their families: Alessia emphasised how fun it was to be with the school community of teachers, parents, and musician schoolmates after the concert, while Bernardo emphasised the excitement of being heard in the performance by that community, whose presence of the principal and families were highlighted. The collaboration between instrument teachers, students, and families was manifested in the concert described by Bernardo and Alessia. In fact, the students were responsible for studying the parts to make a beautiful concert, the parents were responsible for preparing and bringing food and drinks to share at the end of the concert, and the teachers collaborated with the students to create the musical moment and with the parents to organise the refreshment break afterward. In addition, Creech and Hallam (2009) stated that parental involvement, self-efficacy, and personal satisfaction are influenced by parent-pupil and

parent-teacher interactions. Interaction was viewed as a communication system and interpersonal dynamics as predictors of student involvement, self-efficacy, and personal satisfaction. According to Creech and Hallam (2009), interaction between teachers, parents, and students can be considered a possible predictor of student engagement, self-efficacy, and personal satisfaction. In addition, parents' perceptions of music activities have great significance from a systemic perspective (Creech and Hallam 2009). In fact, parents' perceptions can influence the entire teacher-parent-student system, and for this reason, collaboration among families, teachers, and students can enable positive parental perceptions of music activities. Creech and Hallam (2009) suggested that teachers develop and implement strategies that nurture parents' awareness of the importance of their involvement in the learning partnership system (p. 102). One strategy illustrated in this section is that of involvement in music activities outside and inside the school, in which collaboration in organising events is also included. Active involvement, as stated by Anna, is useful for building a social structure of collaboration, in which communication between teachers and pupils can also be improved through activities to be done with them, such as going to concerts together or organising a time for refreshments after pupils' recitals. As demonstrated by this example, the interplay of roles between instrumental teachers, students, and parents fosters a sense of community and collective achievement that significantly influences students' engagement, self-efficacy, and satisfaction with their learning. Thus, the social aspect of music played a pivotal role in creating a rich and supportive learning environment, where collaboration between students, teachers, and families enhances both the educational and emotional experience.

The importance of family involvement was also highlighted by Pitts (2012). She offered valuable evidence that the interest of parents in music education was important to provide musical resources, attitudes, and opportunities to students. This importance is evidenced in Valentina's mother's assertion. She said that she was the one to suggest Valentina apply for the music school.

And then, after following her suggestion, the daughter became passionate about music. Thus, the parental support allowed the student to discover something new and interesting:

*‘Valentina enrolled in the music school because I suggested it to her, but now I see that she likes it and just having the chance to discover something is enough to get her passionate about it’.*

(Valentina’s mother, wind instrument, parent, interview)

This quote also shows how the family can have a very strong influence and reference point for musical identity (Hargreaves et al. 2002). Indeed, Valentina’s mother suggested that her daughter try to enter the music school, imagining her daughter’s musical potential and guiding her towards a choice that would allow her to learn to play an instrument. The theme of musical identities is analysed in Chapter Seven.

#### 5.4.3. Collaboration

Collaboration and mutual help among students, teachers and families acted as a glue for the school community. Teachers, parents and the principal believed that the students of the music school compared to the students of the general school were more motivated, united, and collaborative. The instrumental teacher Anita for example stated that mutual help can be a positive stimulus for students

*‘In the group in general, mutual help [...] becomes a positive stimulus, because if the pupils help each other, they stimulate each other’.* (Anita, bowed instruments, teacher, interview)

The Italian teacher Eugenia, stated that music school students have a better capacity to collaborate with their peers because they learn how to collaborate during group music making activities, such as ensemble and orchestra lessons and concerts

*'The children who play the instrument, make ensembles and orchestras, and have [...] a capacity to relate to others that their peers may not have. Precisely because they have been educated and have grown up in the love of music, in the love of building something together. So, this idea of the orchestra as a team emerges so much'. (Eugenia, Italian teacher, interview)*

A parent said that students in the music school should increase their responsibility towards each other because they play in group and perform the music

*'I believe that one of the major strengths of the music school is that engaging in ensemble music and performances is constructive and formative, it builds the team and increases one's responsibility to others' (Enrica's mother, bowed instrument, student's parent, interview)*

The principal also agreed that music school students were more collaborative and united than curricular school students

*'The music school classes are [...] generally more close-knit classes, they are more collaborative classes [...]. In particular, in ensemble music, they have to wait for each other, they have to respect everyone's times [...]. Thus, collaborative work plays a fundamental role'. (Principal, interview)*

These four quotations mentioned themes such as mutual help as a stimulus for students (Anita), the ability to relate to peers in order to collaborate and co-construct knowledge (building something together, Eugenia), mutual responsibility among peers (Enrica's mother), and the importance of collaboration (Principal). These four themes resonated with Tan (2017), who noticed the emergence of three themes in a secondary school band: performance, peers, and patience. According to Tan (2017), performance is fundamental for bands and an music making groups and could be a great

motivator for students. Furthermore, Tank (2017) believed that performance creates a sense of shared responsibility. Similarly, in the words of Enrica's mother, the sense of mutual responsibility was seen as one of the major strengths of the music school. Tan (2017) also believed that a motivator for the students can be seen in the commitment to each other and to the group. The idea of mutual commitment as a motivator was also seen in Anita's word, when she said that mutual help can serve as a stimulus for students. This stimulus (or motivation, in Tan' words) can help to create constructive collaboration among students (Tan 2017). Tan (2017) also believed that patience is a central factor for collaborative work in the group so as to overcome this kind of difficulties. Patience is not mentioned in the quotes above, but teacher Eugenia stated that pupils who play in a group have a marked ability to relate to others. This can be associated with what Tan (2017) called 'relationship management' and 'social awareness'. Thus, it can be said that playing in groups stimulates social-emotional skills.

Finally, the theme of collaboration for co-constructing knowledge resonates with Ellsworth (2005) and Kenny (2016). In the Mainero music school, the pedagogical process was group music learning, and knowledge was constructed by students guided by teachers during group music activities. Thus, knowledge became a process of the learning self in the making (Ellsworth 2005). Furthermore, knowledge was built collaboratively in a musical group. This collaboration could be compared to what Kenny (2016) called mutual engagement, namely the common effort to legitimise each other and create a sense of common identity. Mutual engagement is explained later in this chapter in the section: A Community of Musical Practice.

Thus, collaboration and mutual help were important values for teachers, families, and the principal. Already during group music lessons, teachers invited pupils to collaborate and help each other. An example of pupil collaboration during group music lessons can be found in the following

quote, where VI-grade pupils were helped by their older seventh-grade schoolmates during bowed instrumental ensemble.

*'The VI-grade ensemble is already positioned in a semicircle and the teacher is in front of them. Six harps form the semicircle, and for each of the harps, a first-grader is positioned in a useful position to play the harp and a second-grader to his or her left. The second-graders help their younger classmates to read the score. While Anita conducts, some of the older students sing the part into the ear of the first graders next to them, others correct the position of their classmates' hands'* (Teacher Anita and 12 VI and VII students, bowed instruments, teacher and students, field note)

Regarding the collaboration shown in the previous example, sixth grader Serena said that although it is strange to have a student's help, it is very effective both for learning and for creating a positive classroom environment.

*'The ensemble is the best lesson because the VII graders are also there and they are so nice. [...] Having one person watching you all the time was a little strange, but [...] it was a way of getting to know each other and I know I'm always covered, because anyway having eyes looking at you all the time gives you confidence and then maybe if you miss pieces there's a person there nearby... can help us find each other and then I don't know, but there's just [...] a nice environment in ensemble'.* (Serena, bowed instrument, student, interview)

In the two quotes presented here, is possible to see an example of peer-to-peer collaboration. This resonated with de Bruin (2022) who stated that peer collaboration in group music allows for the development of a sense of responsibility and collaboration. In fact, the quotes showed how VII-grade students were responsible for VI-grade students, helping them play their instruments during ensemble rehearse. They helped them to understand the score better. VII grade students

explained how to approach difficult passages to their younger schoolmates, or sang the part to make VI grade students understand where to play during the rehears. This was in line with what de Bruin (2022) called engaging in the co-creation of knowledge. Furthermore, the presence of VII-grade students helped the VI-grade students, as told by Serena in her interview. She stated that the presence of the older schoolmates gave her confidence and helped her to find herself during the piece. As for the theme of confidence, de Bruin (2022) stated that ensemble music activities allow one to develop and gain confidence through peer collaboration. In conclusion, the two quotes above confirm de Bruin's (2022) assertion that ensemble activities can be powerful learning environments for promoting pro-social behaviour to develop confidence building and active engagement as co-creators of knowledge (p. 234).

The importance of collaboration and mutual help among peers was also emphasised by students during their interview. For example, Ernesto said that during group music making, students help each other, without criticising

*'I like to make music with my classmates because when someone makes a mistake first of all nobody criticises them. You always try to help them; this is something I like very much. Another thing I really like is that nobody thinks they are better than others. We all think we are at the same level or at most less good than others, so we also make ourselves humbler.'*  
(Ernesto, student, wind instrument, photovoice interview, see Figure 5.13).



*Figure 5.13. Ernesto's Photo*

For the interview with photovoice, Ernesto chose a photo that does not represent a musical activity in the school, but a play in which Manzoni's 'The Betrothed' was performed. Although not in line with the request to bring a photo representing musical activities at school, Ernesto's photo is very meaningful. The pupils are at the end of the play, on a stage (Ernesto did not specify which theatre space was used). In the photo, students are all standing, holding hands and some are half bowing. Ernesto explained that the photo was taken during the applause and greetings at the end

of the play. The photo shows how the sense of belonging in a musical environment is deeply intertwined with friendship, collective effort, and performance. The student's reflection highlights how music fosters a supportive atmosphere where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth rather than moments of judgment. In this space, collaboration and mutual respect are essential, as no one is deemed superior or inferior, creating an egalitarian environment that strengthens friendships. The photo reflected Ernesto's words that all the students should be on the same level. He also added that one has to be humble to collaborate with one's peers. The shared goal of making music together reinforces a collective identity, where each individual's contribution is valued and everyone works toward the success of the group rather than individual awards. This shared commitment not only enhances performance but also deepens the sense of belonging, as students feel united through their shared practice and mutual support, making them more connected to one another and the community.

Themes such as mutual help and collaboration, and the absence of criticism between peers emerged in Ernesto's quote. These themes are in agreement with those proposed by Ilari et al. (2020) who argued that in group music activities, it is important for participants to help each other, support each other, and cooperate. According to Ilari et al. (2020), these skills, grouped under the generic term of pro-social behaviour, are implemented by music activities together. Ernesto's quotation confirms that during group music activities, students strengthen pro-social skills such as cooperation, mutual help and mutual support. Furthermore, Ilari et al. (2020) stated that when humans make music together, they usually synchronise their voices and bodies. The synchronisation process could be very effective in promoting pro-social behaviour, and music could be understood as a means of human communication that offers individuals the opportunity to experience imitation in a safe space. A reference to this can be found in the next quotation, where Cinzia stated the importance of the contribution of all students in creating ensemble music and listening to each

other. Cinzia described ensemble music activities as a means through which students can synchronise and tune in through listening to each other. She stated that

*'Most of the time we (students) are able [...] to tune in and it creates in my opinion this kind of harmony that binds everybody while making music together. We tune it out by listening to each other and producing music that without each of us we wouldn't... that is, we would be missing an element, the same kind of music wouldn't come out anyway, and that means that everybody contributes and so you need everybody's help. That's why you have to listen to each other.'* (Cinzia, string instrument, student, interview)

Furthermore, Cinzia emphasised the importance of the group and each individual within it. This leads to the idea of the sense of belonging, which was analysed in depth in the section: Sense of Belonging.

#### 5.4.4. A Community of Musical Practice

The school community of the Mainero school has, within it, a sub-community represented by the music school. The music school community might be associated with what Kenny called the Community of Musical Practice. The concept theorised by Kenny (2016) is derived from the notion of 'Community of Practice' (CoP), coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). A socio-cultural learning system in which learning is conceived as part of social events and interactions is the basis of any community of practice. According to Kenny (2016), each community was developed and supported by a sense of belonging, collaborative learning and identity building. The school community could be considered a CoMP if it is characterised by three characteristics: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Kenny 2016). These concepts are found in the following sections.

### *Mutual engagement*

Mutual engagement was defined by Countryman (2009) as the common effort to legitimise each other and create a sense of common identity. Mutual engagement requires work, shared competence and commitment and leads to the formation of relationships. Students believed that pupils' commitment to music created a good atmosphere in the music school. As seen earlier, mutual engagement can be compared with student collaboration. Other examples of mutual engagement are presented in the following quotes in which pupils showed the will to share their musical ability with others and collaborate with them.

*'When we all play together, we can hear...with each other, as we can also study together even if we are from different instruments and also, we do ensemble'. (Tetyana, string instrument, student, interview)*

Students showed the desire to share their confidence in being in the musical group, and their musical progress and excitement about performing together. In particular, the orchestra activity and concerts were considered by students as the places in which they collaborated with responsibility and mutual help:

*'The orchestra period is a time when you learn many things: for example, to get along with others and to play together, which is not something you do every day and....nothing, so you learn to get along and respect each other'. (Cinzia, string instrument, student, interview)*

*'Concerts were beautiful because not only there is the part where you play, there is the part where you are with others'. (Alessia, bowed instrument, student, interview)*

Students' mutual commitment was also noted by instrumental teachers (see also the section: Collaboration). According to instrumental teachers, music helped create strong bonds and friendships. Moreover, the teachers found it gratifying to note the commitment and enthusiasm of

the pupils. Teacher Anita emphasised how pupils felt responsible for their group and this led them to become more engaged:

*'Music school is about learning a path for the instrument on an individual level, but still bringing it into the community'.* (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)

Throughout the quotes presented in this section, I noticed that mutual engagement was a characteristic of the Mainero Secondary Music School of which pupils, teachers, the principal, and parents were aware.

#### *Joint enterprise*

Kenny (2016) defined joint enterprise as 'the process itself and the interactions, shared goals and negotiation that it entails' (p. 110). The ongoing process of negotiation through shared practices (Kenny 2016, p. 116) was revealed when members of the community negotiated responses to situations. For example, it was usual to extend a pupil's lesson if the next pupil was absent, mutually accepting (among teachers, students, and families) this extension of the lessons. Another example of the negotiation of common practices was manifest on Fridays, for orchestra rehearsals. There were three orchestras, one for each school grade, and their lessons followed each other. However, if one of the orchestras needed to rehearse for a few minutes longer, this was welcomed by the comrades of the next round, who waited more or less patiently for their moment to begin the lesson.

Also, during orchestra lessons, all four teachers were supposed to be present: one conducted while the others checked pupils and helped them if needed. This practice was accepted by all participants, in particular, the instrument pupils often kept their eyes on their instrumental teacher to confirm the correctness of the performance, while all the teachers often reminded the students that it was necessary to watch the teacher who was conducting the performance at the time.

Collective decisions were not part of the joint enterprise as the teachers chose the repertoires to be played, the setting of the lessons and the activities to be performed, having a leading role in the lessons. However, the sense of mutual responsibility that students showed one another could be seen as part of the joint enterprise. This sense of responsibility was supported and nurtured in the school community. This was also shown in Bernardo's words:

*'Playing in the orchestra is complicated because you have to go together with the others and you have to play your piece together with the others. You have to organise yourself with the timing, and not make mistakes because otherwise, it's like you're doing it for the whole orchestra...the orchestra is something that has to work because every single member is doing their job. So, there is also a part of responsibility'. (Bernardo, bowed instrument, student, photovoice interview, see 5.3)*

#### *Shared Repertoire*

A common repertoire of jokes, laughter, and traditions was found in the data collection. This common repertoire, called shared repertoire by Kenny (2016, p. 121, helps to promote a casual atmosphere, a sense of belonging, and the common values of the school. In this PhD thesis, jokes and laughter will be analysed deeply in Chapter Six and will be identified as humour in teachers-students interpersonal interaction. Rather, in this section, jokes and laughter, together with traditions, are seen as tools for the community of musical practice. A shared repertoire of jokes and traditions was found during orchestra observations.

*'Some oboe pupils arrive in the classroom and they ask the teacher Anita if she wants coffee. The teacher replies that at that moment it is the biggest favour anyone can do for her, and much laughter follows'. (Anita and some second-year students, teacher and students, bowed instrument, orchestra field notes)*

*'During the lesson, one pupil shyly asks a question about the musical tempo and Anita responds by asking him to speak louder because she is deaf. Anita resumes the song with the orchestra at a faster speed but the pupils stop before the refrain and Anita resumes imitating the pupils terrified by the refrain, making the pupils laugh. She then asks if they are all ready to play again and proposes a world premiere of the piece'. (Anita and first-year students, teacher and students, bowed instrument, orchestra field notes)*

*'While conducting, Anna tells the students to tune their instruments. They start playing again but they all are out of tune, so she repeats in the local dialect, that they are out of tune'. (Anna and third-year students, teacher and students, bowed instrument, orchestra field notes)*

The use of jokes and elements of the tradition allows us to see how the *habitus* is rooted in the school community. *Habitus* is seen as the predetermined way of thinking, feeling, and acting shared with those experiencing similar social conditions (Bourdieu 1986, 1995). Indeed, in the quotations, certain assumptions are shared with the confidence of being understood because the participants experience similar social conditions. In the first quotation, it is taken for granted that the teacher needs coffee, emphasising the idea that the teacher is an adult (who drinks coffee) and that she is tired (hence the need for coffee). This assumption is confirmed by the teacher, who underlines it, creating laughter. In the second quotation, a humorous effect is created on the imaginary figures of the teacher, the pupils, and the musician. The teacher has poor hearing; the pupils are terrified, by the terrible teacher; but in the end, they all prepare to make a world premiere of the piece, like real successful musicians. Finally, in the last quotation, we note the use of the local dialect, so the teacher implicitly asserts that everyone knows it because they all have the same *habitus*. This also showed how teachers' and students' social identity (Green 2011) was manifested in their interactions during musical activities. Such activities, seen as practice by Wenger (1998), are

related to social identity. Indeed, according to Wenger (1998), identity is an integral aspect of learning and is therefore inseparable from issues of practice and community. Since they are linked to community, they are therefore also linked to the sense of belonging to that community and to the shared repertoire within those communities.

### 5.5. Summary

This section offered a description of the spaces of Mainero School, an analysis of the perception of this space by teachers and students, and the community developed in these spaces. The theoretical framework is deeply connected with the topics presented in this section: learning space was seen by Ellsworth (2005) as the place where learning takes place through the time and space of the school. Then the learning space was also seen as the bourdieusian field (1977) in which *habitus* could manifest itself making the relationship between institutions and social practices evident. The concept of the field was connected to Banegas (2023) who saw a dialectical relationship between people, space, and social practices.

Learning space was analysed in three sections, two described the physical spaces of the school and its sound, while the third narrated the relationship of the participants to that space. Teachers, students and teaching space were seen as connected and analysed through McArthur's (2015) idea that the physical space affected the behavioural, affective and cognitive learning of students and through his categorisation of the space according to its functions: fluidity, convertibility, versatility, scalability and modifiability. The sound of learning space was analysed as a unique characteristic of the music school and as condition of the capability to influence the learning self positively or negatively (Granito and Santana 2016). Finally, the section about the relationship to the space emphasised other conditions of the space, such as eating (Granito and Santana 2016). It also showed how instrumental teachers manifested agency in the organisation of the spaces on the third floor, where their dedicated classrooms were allocated (Bandura 2001, Biesta et al. 2015). Teachers'

agency in the organisation and management of their classes was also reflected in the students' sense of ease and their involvement in caring for the school space. Furthermore, learning space was also seen as a space for opening the mind of students. Two teachers spoke of the idea of learning for opening (students minds or learning doors) reconnecting with Greene (2000), who saw in the arts a tool for opening minds and breaking down students' barriers that prevent them from imagining worlds other than those imposed by society.

Then, the chapter presented a section on the learning space as a space of community. Community was nurtured and sustained by a sense of belonging and by the collaboration of the students. The sense of belonging was seen through Wenger (1998) as connected with practice and identity. A particular emphasis was given to the participation of the students' families to the community of the school. This participation was in line with Creech and Hallam (2009), who advocated the importance of dynamic relationships between parents and teachers to create learning partnerships and support student learning. In the last section of the chapter, the Mainero music school emerged as a Community of Musical Practice and analysed according to Kenny (2016). In particular, three characteristics of the Community of Musical Practice, were taken in consideration. These three characteristics were mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (Kenny 2016).

# CHAPTER SIX: HABITUS AND TRANSITIONAL SPACE

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### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter explores two fundamental themes within the theoretical framework of this thesis: *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 1986) and *transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005). Specifically, it examines how teacher-student interaction in instrumental lessons creates a *transitional space* for students and how social and cultural structures shape this interaction through the concept of *habitus*. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study aims to shed light on the interplay between social forces and interpersonal dynamics in shaping instrumental learning experiences.

Addressing the first part of the main research question—how teacher-learner interaction influences musical teaching and learning in a secondary music school in Italy—this chapter is structured in two parts. The first part focuses on the Mainero school *habitus*, investigating the values and beliefs that shape the experiences of both learners and teachers. It responds to the second embedded research question:

- What are the learner's and teacher's values and beliefs about attending or working at a secondary music school?

The second part shifts the focus to teacher-student interaction and the creation of transitional space within instrumental lessons. It addresses the fourth research question:

-What kind of interaction is observed between music teachers and learners during one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school?

By examining these aspects, the chapter provides insights into the social and pedagogical dimensions of instrumental music education.

Chapter Five already addressed the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1986) and Ellsworth (2005) in relation to space. The space was seen through Bourdieu's thoughts (1986; 2011), as a field - a social space in which certain social activities are practiced and certain dynamics are at work -, and as a *transitional space* - the physical place where knowledge might be constructed between the participants in the pedagogical process. In the present chapter, however, the two theoretical

frameworks are used not to analyse the concept of musical space but to delineate how interpersonal and social dynamics shape learning trajectories and how pedagogical encounters can help students find a self-space to individualise and personalise these learning trajectories.

### 6.2. *The Mainero School Habitus*

This section explores the social and cultural dynamics shaping the school's environment and *habitus*. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical framework, the school is viewed as an institutionalised mechanism for transmitting culture, where cultural norms are embodied and objectified through their acquisition. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1967; 1986) elucidates how social and cultural conditioning permeates the school structure, shaping a set of ingrained thoughts, judgments, and actions acquired through socialisation processes. The preceding chapter introduced Bourdieu's tools in relation to the concepts of space and shared repertoires: the former framing learning spaces as arenas where the *habitus* of the school and its societal context are enacted, and the latter presenting *habitus* as a shared framework for thinking, feeling, and acting among individuals in similar social conditions (Bourdieu 1986; 1995). Students and teachers bring a set of musical values, knowledge, and skills shaped by their prior experiences and training to the educational setting (Moore 2021). This set of previous experiences also highlights the social reproduction of dominant musical values and traditions in instrumental learning, demonstrating the pervasive influence of *habitus* within educational settings.

This investigation draws on data from observations and interviews, focusing on two key dimensions to understand the school's *habitus* and social context: the values and beliefs of teachers, pupils, and families concerning the music school, and the teaching and learning practices. This section presents data on the social and cultural context in which the school is embedded and school *habitus* is manifested.

### 6.3. Investigating Values and Beliefs in the Mainero Music School

This study explored the Mainero Music School's *habitus*, field, and cultural capital by examining the values and beliefs of teachers, students, parents, and the principal. Drawing on Folkestad (2006), educators' articulation of their values and beliefs about teaching, learning, and participation—whether in informal or formal contexts—significantly shapes how individuals and groups experience and perceive their music education. These values and beliefs serve as powerful influences, acting as filters through which individuals interpret their experiences and guide their intentions and actions (Shouldice, 2019, p. 189). Furthermore, O'Neill (2014, p. 5) stated that learners should experience a sense of connectedness with the people with whom they share the context in order to internalise beliefs, values, and quality of relationships. These theories shed light on the interplay between individual values, educational structures, and musical culture in the Mainero Music School context.

Data about Mainero Music School's values and beliefs emerged mainly from semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, their families, and the principal. Values and beliefs about the Mainero Music School are subdivided according to the main themes that emerged through data collection, namely opportunities for fostering interpersonal and musical skills, dedication, collaboration, cooperation, listening, and communication, and challenges of the music school.

#### 6.3.1. Opportunities for Fostering Musical and Interpersonal Skills

As mentioned earlier, *habitus* is rooted in the ability to act according to implicit, unwritten, and non-deliberate rules and to do what the world expects of a given person in a given environment (Bourdieu 2011). *Habitus* belongs to micro and macro contexts (Moore 2021). For example, school is a macro context. The family is a micro context that tends to preserve its social status, including the educational strategies of the social class to which it belongs (Bourdieu 2011).

During the interviews with a student's parent, one mother said that one of the main reasons why the Mainero school was chosen for her daughter was precisely the presence of a family-like *habitus*:

*'We chose to send Enrica to this school firstly because I was convinced that she would find an [...] environment with values more similar to ours. Secondly, because I think everyone should know the rudiments of a musical instrument and music in general'. (Enrica's mother, bowed instrument, student's parent, interview).*

Enrica's mother's first sentence echoes what Bourdieu (2011) said, namely that the family tends to preserve its status by seeking a place in the educational context that offers a similar status through educational strategies. In the second sentence, instead, Enrica's mother affirmed that they chose the music school because she believed that it is important for all children to learn music education in general and instrumental education in particular. Thus, she believed that the Mainero Music School could offer opportunities for fostering musical skills to her daughter.

Enrica, from her side, agreed with her mother, stating that the Mainero Music School provided unique learning opportunities despite its challenges. She acknowledged that the school was demanding in terms of time and commitment, but she recognised its value:

*'Sometimes it happens that there is something I can't study. But in the end, I always managed to do it. It's a good experience. In my opinion, it's good to try: it's not an experience for everyone, but it's very nice'. (Enrica, bowed instrument, student, interview)*

In her statement 'It's not an experience for everyone', Enrica invokes the concept of Bourdieusian *habitus* (1986), emphasising that the music school experience is suited to students who possess specific attributes. Indeed, to attend and succeed in studies at the music school, according to Enrica

*'You have to study the instrument every day, then there are also the other subjects, you also have to be able to organise yourself to find time for you, because otherwise, you're studying all day'. (Enrica, bowed instrument, student, interview)*

Thus, it is shown here how important it is to have acquired a conscious habit of studying and to know how to organise studying on a daily basis. What Enrica proposes, therefore, is the idea of a *habitus* acquired in a macro context, i.e. in the school context, where students have learned how to study but are also supported by the family, which can help students to manage the organisation of the homework.

According to the instrumental teachers, the music school offered not only musical skills but also personal and interpersonal skills, fostering growth and forming strong bonds. The principal for example stated that

*'The musical address is a wonderful opportunity for children and young people because it really is an educational pathway that deeply affects their growth'. (Principal, interview)*

As already seen in Chapter Five, the music school offered numerous possibilities to improve the interpersonal qualities of the students, such as collaboration, mutual listening, and communication. For example, the principal believed that

*'Music classes also generally more close-knit classes, they are more collaborative classes, they are adapted really to expect, to look at what their neighbour is doing to achieve something' (Principal, interview).*

Furthermore, the music school offered students the opportunity to increase their personal skills and self-esteem, as proposed to Anita

*'(During the three years of school) I saw students grow in self-esteem and blossom. Some came in as the shyest, most introverted students and emerged more confident. That's the goal of the music school.'* (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher interview)

Anita explains that the purpose of music schools is to help students overcome shyness and introversion through music, allowing them to express themselves and develop greater self-esteem. This aligns with Interministerial Decree No. 176 (which regulates secondary music schools; see Chapter One), stating that music schools should promote fundamental values such as inclusion, respect, belonging, and active citizenship, fostering personal growth through creativity and artistic practice. Anita's perspective highlights how institutional frameworks influence and shape the *habitus* of the Mainero School, which, in turn, converges with the *habitus* of instrumental teachers and students. These insights resonate with Burt-Perkins' (2010) concept of learning culture, where instrumental teaching is embedded in broader social and cultural networks. The instrumental teachers at the Mainero school act as mediators between ministerial directions and the pupils and their families. They encouraged the students to explore their musical journey, fostering personal and musical growth, as reported by Anita in her interview and found in the ministerial Decree No.176. Furthermore, the ability of the music school to implement self-esteem in students was also found in Koliadi-Tiliakou (2009), who found that the music schools she studied in Greece have the potential to place particular emphasis on developing and maintaining a high perception of self and self-esteem as an important goal of education.

### 6.3.2. Dedication and Commitment to Music School

Parents and teachers highlighted how school music students demonstrated dedication and commitment to both general and musical studies, motivated by their commitment to mastering musical instruments. Enrica's mother reflected on the unique environment created by this commitment:

*'It is a class of kids who are very dedicated to studying because they have chosen a more challenging course. Engaging in group music activities and performances is constructive and formative; it fosters a sense of responsibility to others. Moreover, all the teachers are highly skilled and tenured.'* (Enrica's mum, bowed instrument, parent interview)

In the words of Enrica's mother, the theme of the students' *habitus* intersects with that of the school: the students have decided to study an instrument and this makes them very motivated in studying in general because they have a common goal. The driving force for motivation, however, is that of the common purpose rather than that of the common *habitus*. Thus, as Reay (1995) stated, *habitus* does not inexorably determine an individual's position in society, but there is a significant interplay between *habitus* and other variants, such as the field, or conditions experienced in it, among which motivation could be counted. *Habitus*, therefore, does not have a deterministic impact and offers a wide range of possibilities that can be seen as a continuum. At one end of this continuum, it can be replicated, as is the case when families choose to enroll pupils in music school because of similar values to those of their own family. However, the *habitus* could also be transformed through processes implemented by individuals, among which I believe it is necessary to include the dedication and commitment of students to pursue a course of study, and the motivation that sustains them in this process.

Furthermore, Enrica's mother emphasised that the teachers' status as permanent staff played a crucial role in fostering continuity and deeper student engagement. Unlike many other Italian schools, where frequent turnover due to non-tenured positions disrupts learning, the stability of permanent staff at the Mainero School allowed for stronger teacher-student relationships, consistent pedagogical approaches, and a more cohesive learning environment. This continuity not only enhanced students' sense of belonging but also contributed to a structured and reliable educational experience, reinforcing the school's *habitus* and its role as an enabling structure for

artistic and personal development. Moreover, the long-term presence of teachers allowed them to better understand students' needs, tailor their instruction accordingly, and cultivate a shared institutional culture rooted in trust and mutual growth.

The Italian teacher Eugenia recognised the commitment of her students, not only in the musical subject but also in her subject. According to her, in a music school, the study of music helps students become more committed to other subjects, as it enhances their overall engagement and understanding through a multidisciplinary approach:

*'For me personally, in the music school, there is the idea of teaching Italian, history, geography with an extra gear, because anyway, I have in front of me students who have [...] a great commitment and a little bit broader vision. I have [...] to try to work more on a multidisciplinary level, especially because then the history of music, but also just concretely, the fact of studying an instrument and then being together is very important'. (Eugenia, Italian teacher, interview)*

The principal also emphasised the dedication and commitment of music school students to study, saying that

*'I think that music classes are better than the regular ones. Students are committed to the study because students collaborate, are united, and share a common goal, such as making music together. Certainly, they are strong classes. (Principal, interview)*

Thus, students' dedication and commitment to the music school are seen by teachers, parents, and the principal as important values to be fostered in the Mainero Music School.

### 6.3.3. Challenges within the music school

Despite its strengths, the music school faced several challenges. One, in particular, was highlighted by the parents of the students. They pointed out how the music school presented social

disparities because instruments should be acquired by the families and there were no school instruments available for lending to families. Valentina's mother stated that

*'The major challenge of this school is buying the instrument. The wind instrument is moderately expensive and it is a pity that schools do not have the instruments available to lend to families'.* (Valentina's mother, wind instrument, parent)

Music education and instrumental learning contain three forms of capital: institutionalised; objectivised; and embodied (Bourdieu 2011). The musical instrument represents the objectivised form through which the capital could become embodied (Pollard and Alexander 2019). Public secondary music schools offer free instrumental tuition, which can be seen as a tool for social mobility (Pollard and Alexander 2019), allowing people to explore possibilities of *habitus*, even if they are different from that of origin (for example, it might allow a family with low financial means to offer their child a classical instrumental education, which is usually very expensive). However, the fact that each student has to buy their own instrument could limit the music school's potential as a tool for social mobility because families have to face high costs to buy a musical instrument. As Bull (2020) argues, classical music serves not only as a cultural resource but also as a class-coded practice, through which value—both economic and moral—is produced and reproduced. This link between classical music and class reinforces social inequalities by privileging those who can afford the economic costs of participation, even within ostensibly public institutions.

Instrumental teachers identified several structural weaknesses in the music education system, and, in particular, in instrumental learning. These weaknesses included insufficient integration across different educational levels and limited collaboration among staff. Anna highlighted this disconnect, describing it as a missed opportunity

*'It's like a beautiful book without a library—resting on a shelf without broader support.'*

(Anna, wind instrument, teacher interview).

Anna specifically pointed out the lack of music education and instrumental learning in primary schools. Despite the Ministry's attempt to integrate music education into primary schools, as outlined in Ministerial Decree 8/11 of 2011, music still does not form part of the official curriculum. The DM 8/11 proposed the introduction of 'Music Practice Courses' for students in third to fifth grade in primary schools, which schools could voluntarily join. However, the bureaucratic system designed to organise these courses was so complex that many schools were unable to participate, leading to the failure of the project. Anna's words underscore the need for a more cohesive structure within Italy's public instrumental education system, which currently lacks instrumental music education at the primary level. The lack of music education at the elementary school level in Italian education had also been highlighted in Pitts (2012). In her research, Italian respondents pointed out that music in elementary school was not present at the curriculum level or in some cases was present only for an hour of choral singing, but they were still dependent on the enthusiasm of individual teachers.

Anna also believed that the Italian music school system suffers from organisational inefficiencies between secondary schools, high schools, and Conservatories. These issues align with Moore's (2021) findings, which emphasise the importance of linking micro and macro educational contexts. In this case, Anna claims for the integration of secondary music schools more efficiently within the broader Italian instrumental education framework and addressing systemic challenges in the political management of education.

Eugenia, an Italian teacher, also identified a key challenge in the music school: the lack of involvement from all curricular teachers in appreciating the significant commitment required of students engaged in musical activities. She explained

*'The difficulty I feel is sometimes that of involving all the teachers in the specificity of this school, which among other things involves a greater commitment for students than others because they come more, they should study in the afternoons and this is sometimes not felt by all teachers, because those who are not musicians do not know that music is more demanding.'* (Eugenia, Italian teacher, interview).

Eugenia's comments reveal a fundamental divergence between the *habitus* of curricular teachers and that of instrumental teachers, or musician-teachers, as she had previously said she was. Indeed, Eugenia studied classical music, graduating from the Conservatory but not pursuing a career as a musician in favour of a teaching career. According to Eugenia, the lack of understanding on the part of non-music teachers concerning the students' commitment complicated the collaboration between teachers and pupils and the understanding within the school. This lack of understanding of students' musical commitments and their study management by non-musician teachers was also felt by the students, who experienced a very demanding study load. Some students identified this workload as one of the challenges of the music school. For instance, Federica expressed her disappointment

*'[Because of my school commitment and studying in the afternoon] I had to give up the afternoon sports classes outside school. I liked them and leaving them made me a little sad.'* (Federica, wind instrument, student interview).

Her experience highlights the commitment and the personal efforts students often make to pursue instrumental learning, underscoring the need for greater institutional support to balance academic and musical commitments.

In conclusion, this section investigated the values and beliefs of the Mainero Music School's staff, students and their families, focusing on the interplay of teaching, learning, and the social

structures surrounding music education. The findings revealed that the school's environment fosters personal and musical skills, self-esteem, and strong interpersonal connections, deeply rooted in the shared values of students, teachers, and families. Challenges included social disparities due to the financial burden of purchasing instruments, insufficient integration with other educational levels, and limited collaboration among staff. While dedication and commitment emerged as a central characteristic of the Mainero Music School *habitus*, the need for broader institutional support to overcome structural weaknesses and ensure inclusivity was highlighted.

#### *6.4. Teaching and Learning in One-to-One and Group Instrumental Lessons*

This section examines the interplay between social structures and individual experiences in the context of instrumental learning in a secondary music school, drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of *habitus*. In the context of education, the school provides an alternative or complementary '*cultured habitus*' (Bourdieu, 1967) to that of the students' origins, enabling them to navigate unfamiliar fields and potentially fostering change and transformation. For instance, an individual's ability to adapt to these new environments determines whether they can seamlessly integrate and feel 'like a fish in water' (Bourdieu, 1989). Furthermore, Reay (2005) stated that interpersonal relations are central to the *habitus* because they convey its characteristics and encompass dispositions shaped by both past and present social structures. Thus, interpersonal relations help to reiterate the *habitus*, but also to transform it.

Understanding these dynamics is critical in the analysis of how teachers and students experience instrumental teaching and learning at the Mainero Music School. This section specifically investigates the cultural and social conditioning inherent in the school's structure, as reflected in the internalised dispositions and practices of its participants (Fearnley, 2020). Data were collected through observations, voice notes, and interviews, focusing on how these processes unfold in individual and group lessons as well as home practice.

The analysis is divided into two sub-sections, each addressing a key area of practice: Home Practice, and Teaching Routines. Together, these sub-sections illuminate the teaching and learning practices at the Mainero Music School, offering insights into the reciprocal influences of *habitus*, education, and cultural transmission.

#### 6.4.1. Home Practice

This section explores how teachers guided students in their home study routines, emphasising the importance of effective preparation for individual and ensemble music lessons. Teachers provided detailed instructions on organising home practice, and advising students on methods, duration, and specific techniques to enhance their learning.

*'Anita explains to Serena how to tune her bowed instrument daily because - Anita explains - students do not bring their instruments to school<sup>14</sup>, and this increases the risk of incorrect intonation when practicing at home. Anita tells Serena that it is important to understand the mechanics of tuning and that it ensures students' independence. Then, Anita proposes to play a D+ scale, providing Serena with clear and calm instructions on practicing chords and scales throughout the week. She demonstrates how to move her fingers effectively and suggests using a handle as a reference point to position the hand correctly after playing a chord.'* (Anita and Serena, bowed instrument, teacher and student, field note)

In this quote, it is shown how the teacher Anita takes care in particular of tuning and scale teaching. She provided an in-depth explanation of both the arguments, underlying their importance. Tuning and scale practicing can be seen as being part of the cultural capital of classical musicians (Sagiv and Hall 2015). Thus, the quote reports how symbolic capital is transmitted and reproduced

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<sup>14</sup> The pupils did not bring the instrument to school because of the large size of the instrument that requires the use of a car for transport. For this reason, there are six bowed instruments in the school so that a maximum of six pupils at a time can play them.

in instrumental lessons. Furthermore, Sagiv and Hall (2015) stated that the transmission of the cultural capital of classical music happens through the transmission of knowledge and skills in music. Precisely, the skills Sagiv and Hall (2015) talked about, were principally bodily discipline and attitudes, music readings, and understanding of musical structures. According to Sagiv and Hall (2015), these skills were transmitted by a great number of verbal instructions, as shown later in this chapter in the section on verbal Interaction. The previous quote showed how the interaction between teacher and learner is focused on the transmission of an understanding of a musical structure (the D + scale) and the transmission of a musical discipline, such as tuning one's own instrument daily. In the following quote, instead, it will be shown how a skill of body discipline is transmitted

*'Anita advises Serena on how to position her sheet music on the stand to avoid discomfort while playing the harp slung over her shoulder, emphasising the importance of proper positioning to prevent back pain from improper use of the instrument. Anita provides guidance on effectively studying the pieces and demonstrates how to perform 'pinches'<sup>15</sup> on the instrument. Anita encourages the student to control her hand movements, pointing out that her large hands are an advantage for playing the bowed instrument but stressing the importance of learning proper techniques to prevent future articulation problems.'* (Anita and Serena, bowed instrument, teacher and student, field note)

Here, it is shown how the classical music *habitus* is transmitted through bodily discipline and attitude, stressing the importance of instrumental techniques to avoid articulation problems.

In this research, it was also found that the instrumental teachers wished to convey the importance of coming to rehearsals, knowing their parts thoroughly. This preparation is essential

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<sup>15</sup> Pinches is the way in which the teacher called short, staccato sounds

for an effective performance and reflects respect for the group. However, despite these efforts, teachers expressed concern about the effectiveness of students' home practice routines. For example, the teacher Anita shared her concern about her student, Alessia, whose approach to practicing was overly mechanical and disconnected from the overall flow of the piece:

*'Between the orchestra parts and Network of the music school in the Province Orchestra<sup>16</sup> parts, Alessia is pretty loaded. What worried me about yesterday's lesson was seeing how a very simple and repetitive piece is so behind. It's not because she didn't study it, but it's the way of studying that is slow and never has a connection. She sees the notes as if they were little lines that don't connect, and instead of thinking of meaning, she thinks of every single thing, and so it never has a connection with the rest.'* (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, voice messages)

In this quote, the teacher complained that the pupils had not yet assimilated the typical characteristics of the classical music *habitus*, i.e. the ability to study proficiently, read music, and understand musical structures. Similarly, the following quote shows how a failure to assimilate the cultural capital of classical music, reflected in the responsibility to study the scores of musical ensembles in order to respect the group's work, could be damaging to the whole group. Bernardo attended a rehearsal with an outdated score, leading to confusion and disruptions during the ensemble session. The teacher had to stop the rehearsal to address the issue, as captured in the following field notes:

*'Anita suggests playing 'Sad Tango,' and the ensemble begins to play it. After a few bars, however, the teacher asks the ensemble to stop and asks Bernardo what part he is playing; he jokes that he found this version in a market. Bernardo gets up to show her what*

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix I

*part it is, and the teacher notices that it is the old part she gave him last year. She starts searching for a new score to give him.'* (Anita, Bernardo, and ensemble students; bowed instruments, teacher and students, field notes)

These examples highlight the centrality of effective home practice to both individual and group success. They underscore the critical role of instrumental teachers in guiding students and fostering the skills and preparation necessary for productive musical learning experiences.

#### 6.4.2. Teaching Routines

As seen in the previous section, meticulous work was done daily on good intonation and musical ear by always reminding pupils to tune their instruments and devoting time to this both in home practice and during lessons. Thus, instrumental teachers transmitted the *habitus* of classical music to their pupils by leveraging its cultural capital, instilling discipline, cultivating proper bodily posture for the instrument, and fostering skills in music reading and comprehension of musical structures (Sagiv and Hall 2015). However, the instrumental teachers of the Mainero School not only carried with them the *habitus* of Western classical music but also that of the school as an institution of which they were part and which they represented.

The use of diaries and online registers in the school was an internalised disposition (Bourdieu 1986) for students, teachers, and families. Diaries and online registers were two tools of family-school communication used to inform the families about the children's progress, needs, and problems and for organisational communications. An example of communication from teacher to families is the following

*'At a certain time on certain a day, a concert will take place at a certain place. Please accompany your children 30 minutes in advance. Families are warmly invited to listen to the concert'.*

An example of families to teacher's communication could be

*'My daughter/son cannot come to school on a certain time/ date because he/she will be engaged in a medical examination'.*

The online register is a software that allows teachers to manage their class register, teacher register, and report communications with families. So, the two tools have similar functions and are complementary. Nonetheless, the register also had the function of a diary for the teacher: the teacher wrote in it the information needed to follow the pupil's progress, such as lesson content, homework, and grades. The use of online registers and diaries characterised the school and family *habitus*, acting as an internalised disposition for teachers and parents, linked by a common interest in daily communication about the pupils in the school.

A routine often observed during lessons was the evaluation of students by teachers at the end of each lesson. This was done at least three times each school term (there are two periods, one from September to January and the other from February to June) so that the students could be assessed at the end of the school year employing a grade chosen on a scale of one to ten, where 4 represented an insufficient preparation and 10 an excellent preparation. Dates were then set for students to be assessed in practice on the instrument. At the end of the assessment test, the teacher would enter a mark in the register representing the student's preparation. This is shown by Marcella commenting on the grade chosen to assess Sara in the voice note:

*'Yesterday she did a beautiful test. She had studied well: I gave her a 9 and I'm also contemplating putting a 9 on the final year evaluation. The first four months would be an 8 and ½ - 9, but I would like to reward her enthusiasm and participation'.* (Marcella, string instrument, teacher, voice note)

Occasionally, some teachers involved the student in self-assessment. The purpose of the self-assessment was to stimulate the students to perceive themselves, their resources, and their

performance in a way that was in line with reality so that they could reflect on these issues and how they could improve their performance and develop better skills and competencies. The following example shows a case of student self-assessment which demonstrated a disconnection between what the student believed about his performance and how the teacher perceived it

*'At the end of the lesson, Anita asks Bernardo to self-assess his lesson so as to put a grade. Bernardo proposes a grade that the teacher does not agree with because it is too high, so the teacher writes him the grade she thinks is appropriate and explains to Bernardo that she would like to increase his grades in the next school period. Bernardo shakes the teacher's hand, then gets ready and takes his leave'. (Maria and Bernardo, bowed instrument, teacher and student, field notes).*

This example of student self-assessment highlights the mismatch between a student's self-perception and how a teacher evaluates their performance. It seems like Bernardo has an overly optimistic view of his own work, suggesting a grade that the teacher feels do not reflect his actual performance. In this situation, the teacher, Anita, provides feedback that helps reframe Bernardo's self-assessment, offering a more realistic perspective on his performance while still expressing a desire to support his future improvement. By encouraging him to work towards improving his grades in the next school period, the teacher fosters a growth mindset. This approach helps the student recognise where they can improve without discouraging them.

In general, the instrumental teachers stated that they wanted to encourage pupils' motivation to learn music in a variety of ways. For example, Marcella had the pupils listen to music before playing it, both through recording and by playing it herself, and she sent videos of performances of the repertoire the pupils were working with to encourage individual practice at home. She also tried to motivate students through the choice of a familiar repertoire.

*'I make them listen to the piece, before playing and I suggest they listen to many recordings of pieces for our instrument [...]. I try to fascinate them in this way and to the ensemble I also try to bring pieces that they know: soundtracks and songs'. (Marcella, wind instrument, teacher, interview)*

This quote shows how the cultural capital of Western music might be used as a motivating force to stimulate students. In this way, students were offered examples of classical or pop music that represented their social *habitus*. According to Marcella, the students, fascinated by the genre of music they heard, would be eager to reproduce it (Reay 1995) and would study to do so to the best of their ability.

In contrast, according to Anna, student motivation could be stimulated by recognising the importance of the acquisition of skills and knowledge related to the cultural capital of classical music (Sagiv and Hall 2015):

*'I explain that the motivation lies in following the rules (e.g., practicing daily) to continue having fun. Students have to understand that not being able to perform a piece because one has not followed the rules of that game (e.g. studying at home) prevents one from having fun'. (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)*

Finally, according to the string teacher Ginevra, motivation was implicit in the cultural capital of the music school. She believed that students were already motivated to learn and practice a musical instrument because they had enrolled in the music school.

*'In my case, it's also a quality that comes even before having to stimulate it, in the sense that they already sign up here because they are already motivated to do so'.*

The integration of online registers and diaries exemplified the shared *habitus* of school and family communication, fostering a consistent exchange about students' progress and needs. Teachers employed both objective assessments and self-assessment exercises to motivate students, blending clear expectations with opportunities for reflection and growth. Additionally, motivation was cultivated through exposure to diverse musical repertoires, aligning students' social *habitus* with the cultural capital of classical music, and emphasising the intrinsic value of discipline and skill acquisition in their musical journey.

### 6.5. Summary

This first part of the chapter explored the Mainero Music School's *habitus*, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1967, 1986, 1995) theoretical framework to analyse how the school transmits cultural norms and values. *Habitus*, as a socially ingrained system of thoughts and practices, is seen as a key factor in shaping students' and teachers' beliefs and behaviors (Bourdieu 1986). Findings revealed that the music school community's shared values and beliefs, which in turn shaped the educational experiences, aligning music education with familial, cultural, and institutional goals. Teachers, students, and families believed that the music school fosters personal and musical opportunities. In particular, they thought that instrumental learning fostered dedication and commitment to the school. Thanks to shared goals, mutual help, and motivation, students focused both on music and on curricular subjects. Teachers and parents highlighted the importance of instrumental learning for students' growth and its interdisciplinary and community-building aspects. However, some emphasised the limits of the music school, namely: the cost of purchasing instruments restricts access, challenging the school's potential to promote social equity; the lack of cohesion between primary, secondary, and higher education music programs; and the lack of participation from non-music teachers, who were limited in understanding how music students' demands create workload conflicts, exacerbating students' frustrations over sacrifices required for the program.

Through Bourdieu's (1986) lens, the school's practices reflected the interplay between cultural transmission and individual dispositions. Teachers' instructions emphasised discipline, technique, and precision, embedding classical music's cultural capital (Sagiv and Hall 2015). However, gaps in students' preparation often strained ensemble work, highlighting the importance of home. Furthermore, teachers used Western music repertoires to engage students, emphasising self-assessment, collaboration, and reflective learning. Communication tools such as online registers and diaries reinforced a culture of shared responsibility between teachers and students' families. Through these first two sections of the chapter, Mainero Music School emerged as a microcosm of cultural reproduction and adaptation, where students navigate between their social origins and the cultured *habitus* provided by the institution (Moore 2021). While fostering personal growth, the school must address financial, systemic, and collaborative shortcomings to enhance inclusivity and long-term success. The findings of this section are shown in Figure 6.1.

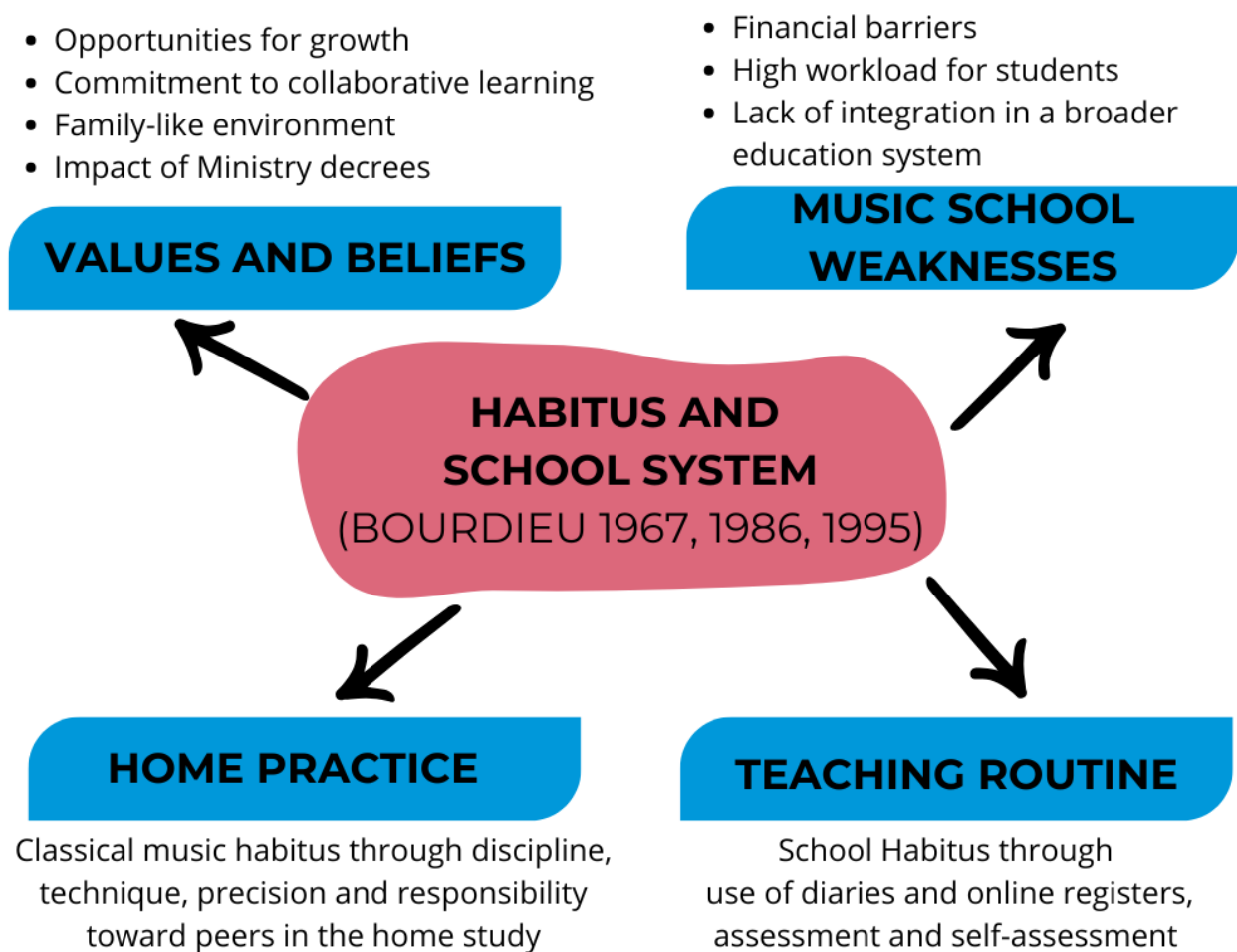


Figure 6.1. The Mainero Music School Habitus

Starting from the critique of Bourdieu’s framework (Prior 2021; De Boise 2011), the next section addresses the *transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005) found in the music school’s instrumental and group lessons. Through the use of Ellsworth’s (2005) framework, this PhD aims to explore broader and more dynamic processes of musical engagement and subjectivity, as claimed by Prior (2021) and De Boise (2011).

#### 6.6. Transitional Space at the Mainero Music School

This section delves into *transitional space* in the interaction between music teachers and learners during one-to-one and group instrumental lessons in a secondary music school in Italy. The notion of *transitional space*, as theorised by Ellsworth (2005), aligns closely with the desire to

understand how individual and social interactions are structured and how they are socially influenced (Boyle 2018). Ellsworth (2005) conceptualised pedagogy as a dynamic encounter where teacher and learners collaboratively construct knowledge. The teacher-student encounter represents a potential *transitional space*—a site of growth and discovery where students and teachers confront the boundaries of knowledge and its possibilities. The teacher, described as an ‘opener to the future’ (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 164), facilitates this exploration, enabling students to navigate their personal and musical development within the cultural and social framework of music education.

Building on these theoretical foundations, this section examines the interpersonal dynamics of teacher-student interactions during instrumental lessons. The analysis reveals two primary modes of interaction: verbal and non-verbal communication. These modes serve as the foundation for understanding how students engage with their environment and with their teachers as influential figures in their educational journey. Verbal interaction encompasses spoken exchanges that guide instruction and provide feedback, while non-verbal interaction involves gestures, facial expressions, and other forms of embodied communication that shape the learning experience.

To provide a comprehensive understanding, the discussion is organised into four sub-headings. The first two focus on the distinct characteristics of types of non-verbal and verbal interaction, highlighting their respective roles in the teaching-learning dynamic. The third sub-heading examines humour as a significant element in interpersonal interactions, emphasising its role in fostering engagement and connection between teachers and learners. Finally, the fourth sub-heading explores the experiential perspectives of both teachers and students, offering insights into how these interactions influence their mutual growth and identity formation.

#### 6.6.1. Non-verbal Interaction

The analysis of non-verbal interaction between teachers and learners during instrumental lessons reveals a complex and nuanced dynamic that includes various modes of communication

such as eye contact, facial expressions and mirroring, humming and singing, musical and rhythmic gestures, musical imitation and repetition, and physical touch. These forms of interaction emerged as pivotal elements in shaping the teaching and learning experience, offering a silent yet powerful layer of communication that facilitated musical understanding, emotional expression, and interpersonal connection. The following table shows the types of non-verbal interaction encountered during the data collection period, sorted in descending order, i.e. from the date that emerged most and the date that emerged least.

CODE	FILES	REFERENCES
Musical and rhythmic gesture	34	63
Facial expressions-mirroring	24	38
Musical imitation-repetition	25	37
Physical touch	17	31
Eye contact	16	19
Humming and singing	14	19

*Table 6.1. Types of Non-Verbal Interaction during Instrumental Lessons*

Among these, musical and rhythmic gestures stood out prominently. These gestures, which included rhythmic movements, attack and direction signals, and accompaniment on instruments, were helpful in guiding tempo, dynamics, and other musical elements. For example, in both individual and ensemble lessons, teachers employed rhythmic gestures to mark tempo or facilitate the execution of musical phrases, often complementing their instructions with physical demonstrations. In ensemble settings, gestures like attack signals were frequently used to coordinate group performance, as exemplified when teachers guided tempo with specific

movements or conducted rehearsals through precise, rhythmic cues, as in the following quote during the ensemble lesson

*'The ensemble tries the scale again in canon and then Anna suggests doing an ensemble piece called 'Fatou Yo.' Anna reminds the students at what tempo to play the piece, and gives the attack in three movements. The pupils start playing following the teacher's gesture'. (Anna and VI-grade ensemble students, bowed instrument, teacher and students, field notes).*

The expressive use of musical gestures as a tool to convey cognitive ideas, as in this case, was also found by Levasseur (1994). Levasseur (1994) believed that the use of musical gestures develops a simultaneous code between students and teachers that allows an immediate understanding that, with time and practice, becomes increasingly precise. Over time, therefore, gestures become increasingly associated with the teacher's musical requests and expectations. In Anna's case, the ensemble was formed by VI-grade students, the first year of the music school. In fact, before Anna proposes the gesture, she verbally recalls at what tempo the piece will be played and then gives the cue. Probably, in time, when the attack gesture is consolidated, there will no longer be a need to verbally remember the tempo, but the gesture will carry a cognitive idea immediately understood by the students.

Facial expressions and mirroring also played a significant role, serving as tools to communicate emotions, moods, and musical concepts without verbal mediation. Teachers often used facial expressions to convey joy, satisfaction, reassurance, or attention, fostering an environment of encouragement and understanding. This is shown in the following quote, where Marcella expresses her joy about her students' musical progresses:

*'Sara enters the classroom with a beautiful new semi-rigid case over her shoulder. Marcella rejoices because Sara has bought a new instrument. Sara starts playing Gossec's Gavotte. She plays with concentration and goes with confidence. Marcella spreads her arms wide and smiles happily as the pupil plays; the pupil blushes and continues to play. Sara finishes playing and is very excited, happy with the result'* (Marcella and Sara, string instrument, teacher and student, field notes).

It is possible to see the teacher expressing her joy at Sara's new instrument and Sara's progress in her studies in the field note suggested here. Marcella's joy was immediately transmitted, received and welcomed by the pupil, who was excited and happy after playing. Here non-verbal communication is used to convey an affective state (Levasseur 1994). According to Levasseur (1994), students are extremely susceptible to how teachers evaluate, perceive and instruct. In the case of Marcella and Sara, a positive evaluation, conveyed through an animated facial and bodily expression, was a vector for the transmission of a positive affective state. This created satisfaction and joy in Sara. For instance, a teacher's smile could boost a student's confidence during performance, while mirroring was employed to physically demonstrate abstract musical ideas. Conversely, facial expressions also reflected fear, confusion, or frustration, which could reveal a student's emotional state or struggles during a lesson.

Physical contact was observed as a functional and affective component of non-verbal communication. Teachers used touch to correct posture, guide instrumental technique, or offer reassurance. For instance, a piano teacher might adjust a student's hand position on the keyboard, while a wind instrumental teacher might touch a student's chin to illustrate proper embouchure, as in the following excerpt

*'Valentina performs the scale and as she does so Anna gives her some advice about the position of her shoulders, chin, and fingers. Anna gently touches Valentina's hands to*

*explain how to position them on the instrument keyboard'* (Anna and Valentina, wind instrument, teacher and student, field notes).

Beyond technical adjustments, physical contact sometimes conveyed affection and support, such as demonstrated in the following field note, when a teacher gently touched a student's hair as a gesture of encouragement during a performance for primary students

*'During the concert for primary students, a moment was dedicated to a Q&A session about the music school. A child asks whether coordinating all the instruments in an orchestra is challenging. A secondary music student responded thoughtfully, explaining that while it is difficult, rehearsals are designed to address such challenges. The instrumental teacher, Anna, praises the student for her precise and articulate answer, then approaches her with a warm gesture of affection, gently touching her hair'. (Anna, the 111-year orchestra pupils, and the public, teachers and students, wind, bowed, and string instruments, field notes)*

The two examples above are in line with what Levasseur (1994) called appropriate touch. In the first case, appropriate touch conveys cognitive ideas, while in the second case it conveys an affective state (Levasseur 1994).

These findings should be situated within the specific cultural context in which the data were collected—Italy—where certain forms of touch, such as gently placing a hand on a student's hair, are culturally understood as appropriate and affectionate, particularly in nurturing educational relationships. This cultural framing plays a crucial role in how such gestures are interpreted by both students and teachers. As Kurkul (2007) notes, nonverbal communication—including physical contact—is shaped by broader relational and cultural dynamics. While touch can foster both instructional clarity and emotional connection, it must be understood through the lens of cultural norms and individual preferences. Kurkul's (2007) research highlights that nonverbal sensitivity—

the ability to recognise and respond appropriately to such dynamics—is closely linked to lesson effectiveness. Teachers with greater nonverbal sensitivity were found to calibrate their behaviors more appropriately to individual students, fostering stronger rapport and more effective instruction. Importantly, Kurkul (2007) emphasises that nonverbal behaviors do not need to be frequent or extended to be effective; rather, they must be contextually appropriate.

These findings also reinforce Levasseur's (1994) conclusion that nonverbal communication in music instruction is not fixed, but 'interactively ongoing', relying on a teacher's skill, sensitivity, and cultural awareness. Thus, in educational contexts such as the Italian secondary music school where these field notes were gathered, understanding the cultural acceptability of gestures like touching a student's hair becomes essential. Nonverbal behavior, especially physical touch, is not only a pedagogical tool but also a relational one, shaped by and responsive to both immediate interpersonal cues and wider cultural expectations.

Eye contact, although less frequently recorded, played a critical role in individual lessons, acting as a medium for mutual understanding and musical communication. It was often used to synchronise musical actions, provide reassurance, or signal corrections, and was sometimes paired with rhythmic gestures to reinforce its communicative function.

*'Anita then asks Enrica to play the initial rhythm on the instrument's sound box, and as the pupil does so, she plays over a melody. However, Enrica plays the rhythm part too many times and Anita looks at her questioningly'* (Anita and Enrica, string instrument, teacher and student, field notes).

Eye contact is in line with the non-verbal characteristics identified by Levasseur (1994) in his research. Constant eye contact, together with facial expressions and appropriate touch, are non-verbal characteristics that increase learning effectiveness (Levasseur 1994). Furthermore, teachers

who are sensitive to non-verbal interaction can adapt their communication to the needs of their students by modulating non-verbal expressions in order to enable better communication with pupils (Kurkul 2007).

Humming and singing emerged as a valuable tool for non-verbal scaffolding, allowing teachers to model musical phrases, intonation, and rhythm. Teachers often sang or hummed alongside students to demonstrate how a passage should sound or to correct specific elements of their performance. Students also engaged in this form of interaction, using it to internalise musical ideas or clarify their own understanding during lessons. This is the case of Anita, who sang the musical phrase to Enrica so that she would understand it better

*'Enrica is playing a part of the score, but she is out of rhythm. Then Anita asks her to repeat the musical phrase and sings it softly while Enrica plays her instrument in order to make Enrica understand the rhythm better. Enrica listens to the teacher while playing and plays the passage with the right rhythm'. (Anita and Enrica, bowed instrument, teacher and student, field notes)*

Musical imitation and repetition were widely used to reinforce learning and correct mistakes. Teachers and students frequently imitated one another's playing, allowing for a direct and intuitive exchange of ideas. In group contexts, imitation often took on a playful dimension, fostering camaraderie among students while reinforcing technical skills, as in the following example when the teacher Anna proposed a game to the VI-grade wind ensemble

*'Anna suggests performing a passage to fix the rhythm and proposes a game in which she first performs four short notes and they respond with the same short note, then she proposes doing the opposite to let the pupils hear how short the note should be. Finally, she*

*plays the first version again. Then the game acquires some melodic and rhythmic variations'.*

(Anna and VI-grade wind ensemble, wind instrument, teacher and students, field notes)

Although the characteristics of humming and singing and musical imitation and repetition were not found in Levasseur's (1994) categorisation, they can equally be included in non-verbal communications that convey cognitive ideas or affective states. In the first example, in fact, Anita conveys a rhythmic idea to Enrica, softly singing the melody while Enrica played it. This served as a guide and reinforcement for the pupil's rhythmic cognition of the tune. In the second case, Anna proposes a game of repetition of musical items between the group and the teacher: in this way, she not only enables the pupils to understand a musical idea, but also reinforces the idea of a group that learns by playing.

In summary, non-verbal communication in instrumental lessons encompasses a rich repertoire of gestures, expressions, and actions that support technical instruction, emotional connection, and collaborative learning. These types of interaction highlight the intricate, multilayered nature of teaching and learning in music education, where verbal and non-verbal cues intertwine to create an immersive and responsive educational experience. The findings underline the critical role of teachers' non-verbal sensitivity and adaptability in fostering meaningful and effective musical interactions. The findings of this section resonate with prior research, such as Kurkul (2007) and Levasseur (1994), which emphasise the importance of non-verbal communication in music education. Kurkul (2007) highlighted the multifaceted role of non-verbal sensitivity in lesson effectiveness, noting that it enables teachers to adapt their communication to the individual needs of students. Similarly, Levasseur's (1994) investigation into non-verbal communication in voice studios underscored its ability to convey cognitive ideas and emotional states, fostering a deeply personalised and affective learning environment. Key elements identified by Levasseur (1994), such as eye contact, expressive gestures, and appropriate touch, align closely with those

observed in this study, underscoring their universality across different musical contexts. Moreover, as Bull (2020) argues, musical ability itself can be understood not merely as an individual trait but as something constructed through an interpretive act grounded in non-verbal, interpersonal cues. Processes such as musical mirroring, shared energy, eye contact, and gestures function as subtle invitations to join, follow, and co-create, encouraging participation through suggestion rather than directive instruction. These dynamics, which emerged in many of the field notes, illustrate how judgments of ability and learning progress are socially mediated and often rely on moment-to-moment relational cues rather than explicit instruction. In this sense, the teacher’s non-verbal expressiveness does not just support learning; it participates in constituting what counts as musical competence in the first place.

#### 6.6.2. Verbal Interaction

Verbal interaction played a significant role in the dynamics of one-to-one instrumental lessons and ensemble rehearsals. The field notes highlighted various forms of verbal exchanges, including humour, musical questioning, explanations, corrections, compliments, and reassurances. Each category contributed uniquely to the *transitional space* between teacher and student, influencing the learning atmosphere, interpersonal dynamics, and pedagogical outcomes. Table 6.2 shows the types of verbal interaction seen during data collection, sorted in descending order from the most and the least.

CODES	FILES	REFERENCES
Humour	48	184
Musical questioning	42	131
Explanation	43	118

Corrections	42	89
Compliments and reassurances	29	54

*Table 6.2. Types of Verbal Interaction during Instrumental Lessons*

Humour was particularly prominent in fostering a relaxed and engaging learning environment. Since humour is the most frequent type of interaction in data collection, it will be discussed individually in the next section of this chapter.

Musical questioning was a critical method for eliciting student responses and fostering engagement. Teachers used questions to prompt specific exercises, clarify theoretical concepts, and encourage students to articulate their understanding. This approach paralleled the findings by Coutts (2019), who observed that musical questioning might create a non-judgmental and exploratory climate that allows students to take ownership of their learning. Questioning can help students and teachers discuss musical arguments, which can support students in making sense of their knowledge. This was evident in the following excerpt when Anna guided a student through the concept of scales by progressively refining her questions and ensuring that the student arrived at the correct answer through reasoning.

*‘Federica tries again to play the C minor melodic scale but gets a few notes wrong, she stops and Anna asks her to say aloud the notes of the scale and reminds her how the melodic scale is composed. Anna then resumes explaining the C minor scale card and tells Federica that it is important to know the rules of scale construction and in this case of the melodic minor scale. By asking more and more specific questions, the teacher leads the pupil to answer correctly about musical scales.’ (Anna and Federica, wind instrument, teacher and student, field notes).*

Such interaction highlighted the dialogic nature of instrumental teaching, where teachers scaffolded learning by balancing challenge and support. This approach emphasises understanding the ‘why’ behind the notes, fostering critical thinking. By breaking the correction process into clear steps, Anna helps Federica turn mistakes into learning opportunities while deepening her theoretical and practical knowledge.

Explanations formed the third-largest category of verbal interaction. Teachers provided detailed verbal instructions on music’s technical, theoretical, rhythmic, and expressive aspects. Often, these explanations were complemented by non-verbal demonstrations, such as teacher modeling or physical guidance, aligning with Hallam’s (2006) concept of scaffolding in music education. In the following excerpt, a detailed and iterative process of technical explanations and guidance is illustrated. Anna, the teacher, uses a combination of precise technical feedback and direct interventions to help Ernesto, her student, improve his playing technique.

*‘Anna advises Ernesto to breathe ‘shallower’ and [...] corrects Ernesto by giving him technical information about the mouthpiece and shoulder position. After playing some bars of the score with his wind instrument, Anna stops Ernesto and gives him further technical details on the throat setting, suggesting that he breathe well. The Ernesto resumes playing, following the teacher’s direction.’* (Anna and Ernesto, wind instrument, teacher and student, field notes)

Corrections were essential for addressing technical, rhythmic, or expressive errors. Corrections were often constructive and accompanied by explanations. For example, in the following excerpt, Ginevra corrected Carolina’s mistakes by combining theoretical reinforcement with practical guidance.

*'Carolina plays the B major scale with rhythmic variations and, when she gets lost, Ginevra explains to her what the mistake was that led her to get lost. Carolina plays the scale again, being careful not to make the same mistake, and manages to complete the task efficiently. Ginevra then asks Carolina to play the arpeggio in the same key and approaches her pupil to better explain what to do with the violin. Carolina, however, misses the intonation of the first note and Ginevra asks her what the mistake was, receiving the pupil's answer that she had misplaced her fingers on the fingerboard.'* (Ginevra and Carolina, wind instrument, teacher and student, field notes).

In this interaction, Ginevra corrects verbally Carolina's mistakes on the B scale. The verbal feedback Carolina received allowed her to complete the task on a second attempt. Then Ginevra asks Carolina to move on to a related skill: playing the arpeggio in the same key. Then, when Carolina misses the intonation of the note, she questions her about the mistake, making the student think critically about her hand movement and what should be done to have a correct sound. This process is also in line with Hallam's (2006) concept of scaffolding in music learning.

Compliments and reassurances served to motivate students and build their confidence. Teachers expressed appreciation for students' musical progress, offered encouragement for new challenges, and reassured them in moments of doubt. The following quote shows how Anita's recognition of Serena's improvement reinforced her self-esteem.

*'When Serena finishes, Anita asks me if I have seen how much improvement Serena has made and I nod, she turns to me and says that Serena always gets down looking at the things she cannot do and not the progress she has made. She asks her to play the passage again and asks her to tap 5 when she is done because she did so well'.* (Anita and Serena, bowed instrument, teacher and student, field notes)

Compliments and reassurances reflect de Bruin's (2018) findings on the teacher's role of encouragement and reflective practices in enhancing student development.

In conclusion, this section showed how verbal interaction plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of one-to-one instrumental lessons and group music lessons, encompassing various forms such as humour, musical questioning, explanations, corrections, compliments, and reassurances. These interpersonal exchanges influenced the learning environment and fostered the pedagogical outcome. Humour, the most frequent type of interaction, fosters a relaxed and engaging atmosphere and will be explored further in the next section. Musical questioning, critical for eliciting responses and engaging students, encourages reflection and fosters ownership of learning by exploring musical concepts through dialogue, as seen when Anna guided Federica to understand the C minor melodic scale through progressively refined questions.

Explanations, the third most common type of verbal interaction, provide technical, theoretical, and expressive guidance, often combined with non-verbal demonstrations to effectively support learning, as illustrated by Anna's iterative technical advice to Ernesto on breathing and posture. Corrections, essential for dealing with errors, combine theoretical reinforcement with practical feedback to help students critically reflect on mistakes and correct them, such as Ginevra's guidance that enabled Carolina to perfect her execution of scales and arpeggios. Compliments and reassurance, although less frequent, play a significant role in boosting students' confidence and motivation, as demonstrated by Anita's encouragement of Serena's progress.

These types of interpersonal interaction between students and pupils can enable pupils to gain a deeper understanding of musical learning, moving beyond the limits of their knowledge towards a deeper knowledge, built together with the teacher, thus helping in the creation of a *transitional space* between teachers and students. The role of the teacher becomes that of an

opener to the future (Ellsworth 2005), and emerges as central to guiding students through the acquisition of knowledge, and cognitive, emotional, and social transitions.

### 6.6.3. Humour and Interpersonal Interaction

Humour emerged as a prominent feature in the interpersonal interactions observed during the data collection. While humour has been explored in educational settings, there is relatively limited literature focusing specifically on its role in music education with children. Most existing studies tend to centre on adult learners or general classroom contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how humour functions pedagogically in instrumental settings with younger students. This finding aligns with Zhukov's (2012) research, which highlighted humour as a significant strategy in verbal exchanges within one-to-one instrumental lessons. While Zhukov (2012) primarily focused on student-initiated humour as a face-saving mechanism and a means of deflecting criticism, the present study revealed that teachers employed humour extensively, albeit for diverse purposes. Data showed that the Mainero School instrumental teachers used humour to achieve several objectives, such as minimising mistakes, acknowledging students' efforts, conveying musical concepts, and relaxing the classroom atmosphere. Marcella, for instance, humorously described a rehearsal as resembling 'a drunken choir on a bridge in Venice', which made both teacher and student laugh and set a relaxed tone. This interaction was recorded in field notes:

*'Marcella proposes to do a lesson on the string ensemble pieces because the rehearsals went 'like a drunken choir on a bridge in Venice' (Marcella and Tetyana laugh at Marcella's joke). In particular, Marcella wants to work on the part of Cantata 146 from Chorale. Tetyana says she has studied it a lot and Marcella jokes about Tetyana's neighbors, saying they too would know the piece by heart.'* (Marcella and Tetyana, string instrument, teacher and student, field note).

Through her analogy of a 'drunken choir,' Marcella humorously highlighted the issues of tempo and intonation, drawing on a vivid and light-hearted image to explain why they would be focusing on ensemble pieces. By doing so, she underscored a significant musical problem, but the humour softened its seriousness. This excerpt is categorised among instances where humour is used to minimise mistakes. Later, Marcella's joke about Tetyana's neighbours knowing the parts by heart served a different purpose: it exaggeratedly complimented the pupil's dedication, showing how humour could acknowledge students' efforts. This excerpt aligns with Garner's (2006) and Hayes's (2016) observations that humour has psychological, physiological, and pedagogical effects on students. According to Garner (2006) and Hayes (2016), humour can decrease anxiety, increase motivation and cognition, and boost self-esteem. Marcella's humorous compliments likely bolstered Tetyana's confidence and made the learning environment less stressful. Pedagogically, humour strengthened teacher-student relationships and facilitated complex concept delivery.

Humour was also employed to convey musical concepts in a memorable way. Teachers used imaginative analogies to make abstract ideas tangible. For example, Marcella mimicked the movements of a minuet dance to explain note duration. Field notes document this vividly:

*'When Tetyana finishes, she tells her that there are no sleeping children in the wardrobe and that she can play louder. Tetyana plays louder and Marcella compliments her. When the piece ends, Marcella tells the student that it was fine, but that some notes were descending. She then mimics the movements of the minuet dance and explains to Tetyana that if she holds the notes too long, the dancers dancing the minuet would have to wait too long on one foot.'* (Marcella and Tetyana, string instrument, teacher and student, field note)

In this extract, humour, and imagination are used twice to engage the student. First, Marcella reassures Tetyana that she need not play softly to avoid waking sleeping children, humorously asserting that none are hidden in the wardrobe. This reassures Tetyana and encourages her to play

louder. Later, Marcella uses the image of the minuet dancers, an imaginative and humorous scenario, to explain the importance of timing and keeping notes properly. This adds a playful element that links the music to a real (or imaginary) activity, making the concept more memorable. The idea that dancers have to wait awkwardly on one foot is inherently funny and conveys the message that the musical phrase cannot be interrupted in the middle because it loses its internal balance, just as a dancer cannot wait in a pose with difficult balance. Humour diffuses the seriousness of criticism and contributes to a favourable learning environment. Furthermore, Marcella's use of humour shows that she appreciates Tetyana's effort (e.g. 'it was fine') and gently guides her towards improvement. The joking tone probably keeps Tetyana motivated and engaged and bridges the gap between technical feedback and personal involvement, ensuring that Tetyana processes criticism positively and constructively. From a pedagogical perspective, the use of humour in this quote aligns with Hayes's (2016) findings on its role in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Hayes (2016) identified two key applications of humour in the classroom: improving teacher-student connections and effectively covering proposed topics. He also argued that humour could increase participation, enhance comprehension and retention, build relationships, stimulate curiosity and creativity, and maintain focus on tasks (Hayes 2016, p. 252). These insights resonate with Marcella's teaching approach, where humour not only conveys technical feedback but also strengthens the teacher-student bond and encourages active participation. Moreover, Marcella's imaginative teaching approach echoes Greene's (2000) perspective on education as a tool for breaking down barriers of expectation, tedium, and predetermination. By blending humour and imagination, teachers like Marcella embody Greene's ideal of fostering creativity and connection, ultimately creating an educational environment that empowers students and unlocks their potential.

Interviews with teachers further illuminated their deliberate use of humour as a teaching tool. Anita explained that she used humour to create a personal atmosphere and alleviate the tension in the classroom

*'I use humour more to defuse the tension in the classroom. In my opinion [...] the human relationship influences the lesson. Also, I use humour to motivate students: when you enrol in music you would like to play an instrument but you don't know what you are getting into. So, you may have extremely motivated people, but it can also often happen that the kids realise later that they have to take a much more difficult path. Somehow, though, you have to convince them to take these bricks and make a construction, and then the humour, manages to play down the students' great commitment, to make it lighter. (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)*

Anita thus points out how humour can have a relaxing function defusing the tension in the classroom and motivating the students by lightening the weight of their school commitment. Anita's perspective aligns with Marcella's approach:

*'I use humour - even too much! - [...] to dilute the climate, to create a more personal relationship with the student [...] and to create a more personal climate'. (Marcella string instrument, teacher, interview)*

These statements resonate again with Garner's (2006) and Hayes's (2016) observations on humour's psychological, physiological, and pedagogical benefits. A more positive and effective learning environment might decrease anxiety, and boost students' motivation and self-esteem. However, Marcella's admission that she uses humour 'even too much' reveals a potential tension, as noted by Pozsonyi and Soulstein (2019). They argued that some teachers might feel vulnerable when employing humour, fearing it could undermine their authority. This vulnerability is evident in

Marcella's hesitation, reflecting a concern that humour might conflict with the hierarchical norms of the school context. Despite the significant benefits of humour in education, Pozsonyi and Soulstein (2019) cautioned that its misuse could undermine a teacher's authority, highlighting the need for a thoughtful application to foster mutual respect, maintain professionalism, and fully realise its pedagogical potential.

Anna described humour as an essential tool for explaining abstract concepts, relying on non-musical analogies to help students visualise ideas.

*'I use humour always trying to create examples that have nothing to do with the music but are relevant to what they are doing. To this end, I use my imagination a lot, because I find it very useful [...] to be able to visualise images. It is not always possible with sounds to concretise what in the end is abstract so if they give you the example of the mountain rather than the butterfly, the flight, or the pachyderm that is coming, if they play too heavy it can help them because that is an image that they can identify, they can focus in their head.'* (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)

Anna says she uses both humour and imagination as pedagogical tools to create vivid and imaginative examples that are tangential to the music but relevant to the task. This approach made abstract musical concepts more relatable and easier to grasp by transforming them into concrete, often humorous, images. In this way, humour served as a bridge between the abstract and the tangible, fostering understanding and engagement. This is similar to the excerpt from Marcella and Tetyana where imagination was used as a tool to break down the barriers of boredom and pre-determination in education (Greene 2000). In this quote, Anna's imaginative use of humour connects to Greene's (2000) vision of teaching as an encounter that releases imagination and supports learning. By encouraging students to visualise and identify with creative analogies, Anna exemplified

Greene's (2000) idea of education as a tool for bridging individual and experiential differences while unlocking the students' potential.

Finally, Ginevra states that her use of humour stems from her cultural identity and personal background rather than a deliberate pedagogical strategy

*'I don't use humour on purpose: it's a peculiarity that distinguishes a bit the past, the experience of each one of us. I lived in South Italy until I was 29 and did a lot of theatre; I couldn't take everything seriously, in short, and I think this is perceived. And young people perceive it too.'* (Ginevra, string instrument, teacher, interview).

For Ginevra, humour arises naturally from her lived experiences—growing up in South Italy, known for its vibrant culture and humour, and engaging in theatre, which likely nurtured a lighthearted, performative approach to communication. Her humour is an intrinsic part of her personality and interactions, fostering an atmosphere of warmth and approachability. While not consciously designed as a teaching tool, her humour resonates with young people, creating a bridge of authenticity and connection that facilitates engagement. This resonates with Garner (2006), who emphasised the role of humour in building psychological bridges between teachers and students. Ginevra's use of humour can also be understood through Bourdieu's (1986) concept of *habitus*, a dynamic framework shaped by cultural capital and social fields. Ginevra's humour reflects her embodied cultural capital, shaped by her upbringing and theatrical background, which becomes a dynamic aspect of her *habitus* in the teaching field. Through these two lenses, Ginevra's humour not only enriches her teaching practice but also exemplifies how personal and cultural experiences influence educational dynamics.

In conclusion, humour emerges as a multifaceted and valuable tool within the pedagogical practices of instrumental teachers, as evidenced by the varied examples from Marcella, Anita, Anna,

and Ginevra. Whether employed deliberately to diffuse tension, clarify abstract concepts, foster a positive learning environment, or arising naturally from cultural and personal identity (Bourdieu 1986) humour serves as a bridge between teacher and student. It enhances motivation, builds confidence, and facilitates understanding through relatable and imaginative analogies. These findings align with the research of Garner (2006) and Hayes (2016), which highlighted humour's psychological, physiological, and pedagogical benefits. However, as Pozsonyi and Soulstein (2019) caution, effective use of humour requires balance to maintain authority and professionalism. Ultimately, humour, when thoughtfully applied, becomes a transitional element in music education fostering a dynamic and engaging environment that supports students' growth and creativity (Greene, 2000).

#### 6.6.4. Experiential Perspectives on Interpersonal Interactions

This section deals with the experience of interpersonal interaction between students and teachers in instrumental lessons at the Mainero School. The data presented in this section comes from the semi-structured interviews, where I could gather what students and teachers said about their experiences of interpersonal interaction.

Students valued communication positively with their teachers, appreciating the ability to discuss music and broader topics. Enrica, a student, described her teacher as approachable and supportive, saying

*'A lot of times we laugh and joke, then, of course, you play music, we study together, and if there's some problem that you don't understand you can ask her quietly'. (Enrica, bowed instrument, student, interview)*

The comment from Enrica reflects the positive interpersonal dynamics and communication she experiences in their lessons, aligning with findings from Presland (2005), who emphasised how strong personal bonds and effective communication are crucial in building satisfaction and

supporting students' progress. This is also seen in Serena's quote, in which the student admires her teacher's consistent positivity and willingness to explain concepts until they are fully understood

*'I like Professor Anita, her manner, always laughing. She is always smiling [...] and if you don't understand something she explains it back to you a thousand times until you get it'. (Serena, bowed instrument, student, interview)*

Stating that the teacher 'explains it [...] a thousand times [...] if you don't understand', Serena emphasised her teacher's patience. This resonates with Lowe (2012) who saw patience on the teacher's part as one of the positive aspects of the instrumental lessons. According to Lowe (2012), a patient teacher attitude could contribute to fostering students' self-esteem and motivation. The instrumental teacher's patience was also appreciated by Carolina, who stated that her teacher never raises her voice (even if there are mistakes), is gentle, and gives constructive feedback.

*'My teacher is kind and gentle and never raises her voice, never gets angry. And if she tells me to correct something, she doesn't stop me in the middle of a piece, telling me I made a mistake but she says 'Good, now stop for a moment and check a C minor sharp, intonation, etc.' And I find this delicacy thing useful in teaching because then the students' awe of the teachers doesn't allow for good humour, or balance'. (Carolina, string instrument, student, interview)*

According to Carolina, Ginevra's kindness and gentleness, created a good balance of dynamics in the lesson, making it enjoyable for the students. This recalls Gaunt (2008) when she highlighted that the complexities and nuances of teacher-student relationships in instrumental learning can enhance learning but demand careful attention to power balances.

The comments from students like Enrica, Carolina, and Serena reflect the positive interpersonal dynamics and communication they experience in their lessons, aligning with findings from Presland (2005), Lowe (2012), and Gaunt (2008). This mirrors the students' appreciation for

approachable, supportive, and constructive teachers who foster a balanced and respectful learning environment.

While students' perceptions of interactions with their teachers tended to be uniformly positive, emphasising approachability, humour, and patience, teachers expressed a more diverse range of attitudes regarding the boundaries and dynamics of these relationships. This aligns with research highlighting the intricate and multifaceted nature of one-to-one instrumental teaching, where roles and relational dynamics are deeply individualised (Gaunt 2008). For example, Anita believed in blending her personal and professional personas to establish honest communication. She remarked

*'I chat a lot, we say a lot of things. I bring my persona into my profession. I think this has always served to establish an honest relationship, not always easy, for goodness's sake, but then again, ease creates neither stimulation nor fascination. So, fortunately, sometimes is easy, sometimes not'* (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview).

In contrast, Anna emphasised the importance of preserving a formal teacher-student dynamic to avoid being perceived as a friend or relative. She explained

*'I'm the teacher, I'm not a relative and the kids more and more tend to identify you as a friend, as a relative...In my opinion, teachers need to remain in their function. It is the teacher who decides how to establish the relationship, in the sense it has to be a support especially in our disciplines'* (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)

Anita's teaching philosophy involved blending her personal and professional selves to foster honest communication, acknowledging both the ease and challenges this approach entails. Her remarks underscore the balance between intimacy and authority, illustrating a collaborative approach that aligns with Gaunt (2008) emphasising trust and mutual curiosity as central to effective

teaching. Conversely, Anna advocated for maintaining a more formal teacher-student dynamic, emphasising the importance of professional boundaries to avoid being perceived as a friend or relative. This reflects the complexity of teacher-student relationships described in studies, which note that while such interactions are indispensable for musical development, they can involve asymmetrical power dynamics and the need for careful negotiation of roles (Gaunt, 2008).

The diversity in teachers' perceptions highlights the nuanced challenges of the one-to-one model, where the balance between authority, collaboration, and relational closeness must be tailored to individual circumstances, reflecting both opportunities and tensions in these interactions.

In this section, students' comments showed how positive interpersonal dynamics and good communication enable them to feel at ease during lessons, and to feel they are in a balanced and respectful learning environment. The presence of humour, patience, and the teacher's positive and open approach to listening, also found in Anita's words, can enable the creation of a space for the co-construction of knowledge (Ellsworth 2005). Patience proves to be the tool through which teachers can wait for each pupil's time to acquire and create skills; kindness and humour can create a positive learning environment in which pupils feel free and serene to learn, feel motivated and supported in their discovery of knowledge. Applied to pedagogy, these considerations emphasise the importance of fostering environments that balance support and independence, allowing pupils to navigate their artistic and personal development.

### 6.7. Summary

This chapter explored the concept of *transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005) in teacher-student interactions within one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school in Italy, excavating into the understanding of individual and social interactions. Drawing on Ellsworth's (2005) view of pedagogy as a dynamic and collaborative encounter, the analysis highlights the social and cultural dimensions of instrumental learning. In this context, *transitional space* is defined as a

space for growth in which teachers and students co-construct knowledge, with the teacher acting as a facilitator, an 'opener to the future' (Ellsworth 2005).

The chapter delves into both verbal and non-verbal interaction as key tools shaping the learning experiences. These forms of interaction contribute to a responsive and immersive learning space, serving as the foundation for understanding how students engage with their environment and with their teachers in instrumental learning. Non-verbal interaction is particularly important and includes elements like musical gestures, facial expressions, mirroring, touch, eye contact, and humming. These actions foster musical understanding, emotional connection, and collaborative learning. Musical and rhythmic gestures, often used to guide tempo and phrasing, are central to both individual and ensemble contexts. Physical touch helps correct techniques and reassure students while humming and singing support the internalisation of musical ideas. These non-verbal forms of communication are complementary to verbal feedback and play a vital role in building a supportive and productive classroom atmosphere. Findings on non-verbal interaction resonate with Kurkul (2007) and Levasseur (1994), who emphasised the importance of non-verbal communication in music education.

On the other hand, verbal interactions such as humour, musical questioning, explanations, corrections, and reassurances also contribute to the learning process. Musical questioning encourages reflection and fosters ownership of learning by exploring musical concepts through dialogue. As stated by Coutts (2019), musical questioning might create a non-judgmental and exploratory climate that allows students to take ownership of their learning. Explanations provide technical, theoretical, and expressive guidance, frequently accompanied by non-verbal demonstrations to support learning. Corrections, essential for dealing with errors, helped students reflect on and correct mistakes. Both explanations and corrections align with Hallam's (2006) concept of scaffolding in music education. Compliments and reassurance, although less frequent,

emphasised the teachers' role of encouragement and reflective practices in enhancing student development, reflecting de Bruin's (2018) findings.

Humour was the most frequent type of interaction and emerged with several functions, such as minimising students' mistakes, acknowledging students' efforts, conveying musical concepts, and relaxing the classroom atmosphere. Teachers used humour to soften the seriousness of musical issues and praise students or employed imaginative analogies to explain abstract concepts, making them more relatable and easier to grasp. Humour also had psychological and motivational benefits, helping reduce anxiety and build students' self-esteem (Garner 2006; Hayes 2016).

Humour in teaching was not always a consciously applied strategy but could emerge naturally from teachers' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital which impacts the field (Bourdieu 1986). While humour can significantly enhance engagement and student-teacher relationships, it requires a balance to avoid undermining a teacher's authority (Pozsonyi and Soulstein 2019). In conclusion, humour is a valuable pedagogical tool in instrumental learning, offering a means to engage students, make abstract concepts more tangible, and foster a positive learning environment. When used thoughtfully, humour can encourage creativity, deepen emotional connections, and support students' musical and personal growth.

A later section of the chapter highlighted instrumental teachers' and students' experience of the interpersonal dynamics between them during instrumental lessons at the Mainero School. Students emphasised the significance of teachers' communication, patience, and kindness in fostering positive learning environments. They uniformly praised their teachers for approachability, humour, and constructive feedback (Presland 2005; Lowe 2012; and Gaunt 2008). Instrumental teachers demonstrated diverse perspectives on balancing authority and intimacy in their

interactions in instrumental lessons. The diverse perspectives went from the need to establish honest communication as central to effective learning to the importance of preserving a formal teacher-student dynamic to avoid being perceived as a friend or relative. Findings reflected the complexity of teacher-student relationships in instrumental lessons, highlighting that this relationship is indispensable for musical development, but needs careful negotiation of roles because it can involve asymmetrical power dynamics (Gaunt, 2008).

The chapter underscores that interpersonal interaction plays an essential role in creating a *transitional space* where learning, emotional development, and social connection can thrive. Findings underscore the value of cultivating respectful and supportive relationships, which not only facilitate students' artistic growth but also promote autonomy and confidence, reflecting the possibility of co-constructing knowledge in the learning environment (Ellsworth 2005).

The main themes emerging from the findings in this section are summarised in the figure below:

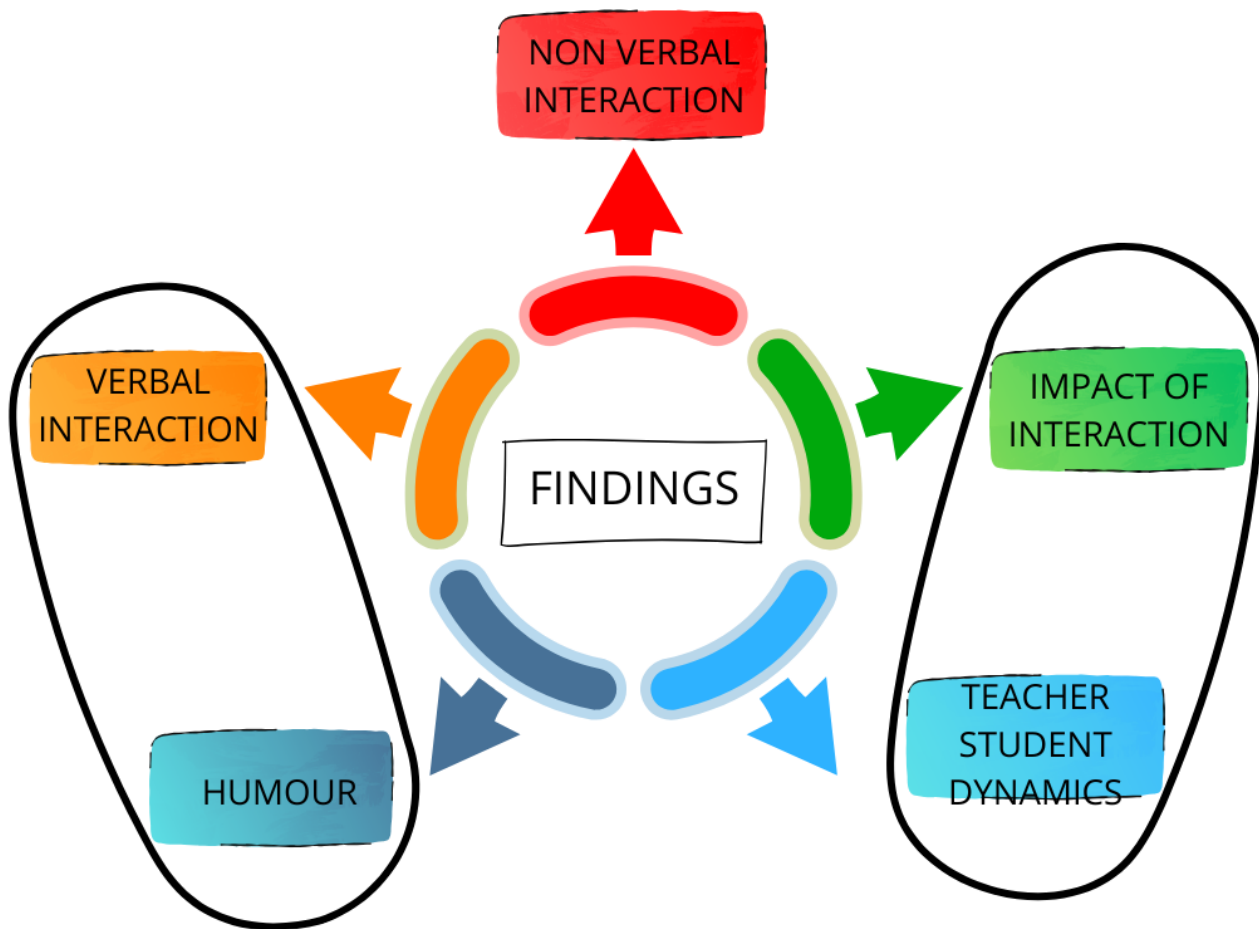


Figure 6.2. Key Themes Emerging from the Findings

### 6.8. The Relationship Between Habitus and Transitional Space in the Mainero School

This study examines how teacher-student interactions during instrumental lessons create *transitional spaces* for learning and how socio-cultural contexts shape this dynamic. Central to its framework are two key concepts: Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of *habitus* and Ellsworth’s (2005) concept of *transitional space*. *Habitus* refers to the internalised dispositions and values shaped by an individual’s social background, which influence thought, behavior, and perception. *Transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005), on the other hand, is a metaphorical site for personal and social growth, where learning and identity development occur. These concepts are positioned in a dialectical relationship, with *habitus* shaping and being shaped by *transitional spaces*, thus enabling self-change. This approach resonates with the works of Prior (2011) and de Boise (2016), emphasising

the integration of *habitus* and subjectivity in music education to explore the interplay between societal structures and individual experiences.

The study highlights teacher-student dynamics as a foundation for *transitional spaces*, where collaborative knowledge construction fosters musical learning and identity development. Verbal interaction - including humour, questioning, feedback, and reassurance - encourages reflection, emotional growth, and ownership of the learning process. Non-verbal interaction - such as gestures, facial expressions, and physical touch - provides essential guidance in technique and phrasing, while also establishing emotional connections. Yet the value and meaning of such interactions are not universally fixed. For example, physical touch, while culturally accepted in the Italian context of this study, may be perceived quite differently in other educational settings where stricter safeguarding norms apply. A gesture like touching a student's hair might be interpreted as warm and supportive in one culture, but inappropriate or discomforting in another. This highlights the importance of examining the cultural specificity of non-verbal interactions and avoiding assumptions of shared interpretation across diverse student populations.

Humour emerges as a particularly impactful element, reducing anxiety, enhancing engagement, and conveying complex concepts. Although often stemming from personal background, as in Ginevra's example, rather than deliberate pedagogical strategy, humour creates an approachable and relatable learning atmosphere. However, the use of humour also warrants closer scrutiny. While it can foster connection and enhance learning, it may also risk alienating or confusing students if not carefully attuned to individual sensitivities, linguistic nuances, or power dynamics. This raises the question of whether humour functions equitably across all teacher-student relationships, or whether it might inadvertently reinforce exclusions or miscommunications for some learners.

The socio-cultural context also plays a significant role in shaping these interactions. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986, 1967) framework, the concept of school *habitus* is explored as the collective disposition and cultural norms that influence students' and teachers' beliefs, values, and practices. In this study, the school *habitus*, while promoting personal and musical growth, also reflects systemic challenges, including financial barriers and inequities in access to resources. The educational context, shaped by *habitus*, influences how teaching and learning are experienced, demonstrating the deep interconnection between cultural reproduction and individual agency. This duality within the school *habitus*—supportive on the one hand, yet structured by inequality on the other—deserves critical attention. While the institution may appear to foster inclusive learning, it also reproduces classed and institutional norms that not all students can easily navigate. One might ask: do all students experience the same degree of access to *transitional spaces*, or does the *habitus* favour those already aligned with dominant cultural expectations? Such questions highlight the tension between transformation and reproduction inherent in educational contexts.

The relationship between *transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005) and musical identity is pivotal. *Habitus* (Bourdieu 1986), as the internalised set of cultural dispositions, provides the foundation for how students engage with music, while *transitional space* (Ellsworth 2005) offers opportunities to explore and transform musical identity. Together, these concepts operate in a dynamic interplay, shaping students' self-concept and musical journeys. As a microcosm of cultural adaptation and reproduction, the school reflects the broader societal structures within which students navigate their identities. Existing research reinforces the importance of this interplay. Studies by West, Fleming, and Finnegan (2013) integrated Bourdieu's sociological insights with Winnicott's psychosocial theories, illustrating how social structures influence identity negotiation within educational spaces. Similarly, Banegas (2023) and Leijon et al. (2022) emphasised how the relationship between educational spaces, people, and social practices can transform pedagogy.

These findings underscore how changes in learning environments influence the pedagogical processes that unfold within them.

Key findings from this study reveal that instrumental learning emphasises dedication, collaboration, and community, yet faces accessibility challenges and systemic cohesion issues. The Mainero Music School's instrumental teachers use communication strategies to foster shared responsibility among educators, students, and families. Teacher-student dynamics act as a space for students' growth where boundaries of knowledge and identity are explored, reflecting the transformative potential of *transitional spaces* (Ellsworth 2005).

In conclusion, teacher-student interactions, shaped by verbal and non-verbal interaction, create *transitional spaces* (Ellsworth 2005) essential for learning, emotional development, and identity formation. These interactions are deeply influenced by the socio-cultural context, as framed by Bourdieu's *habitus* (1986, 1967) and Ellsworth's *transitional space* (2005). Together, these concepts illuminate the complex interplay between social structures and individual experiences, offering a nuanced understanding of how musical identity develops within educational settings. By fostering responsive and inclusive environments, educators can enhance students' growth, bridging the gap between cultural expectations and individual potential.



# CHAPTER SEVEN: MUSICAL IDENTITIES

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### *7.1. Introduction*

In this chapter, I discuss the findings related to individual and group musical identity and the importance of music to research participants. Data analysed was obtained through observations, teachers' and students' semi-structured interviews, and students' photovoice.

This section addresses the following research question:

- How does interpersonal interaction influence students' musical learning and identity?

In addition, the chapter aims to answer how instrumental teaching and one-to-one student-teacher interaction influence students' musical identity development. It is tightly related to the central research question, namely:

- How does teacher-learner interaction influence musical teaching and learning and students' musical identity development in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons in a secondary music school in Italy?

Identity is a fundamental human condition tied to self-awareness, allowing individuals to distinguish between 'self' and 'other' (Green, 2011). It is shaped by historical and social conditions, which also influence the formation of musical identity. Green (2011) argued that musical identity is continuously shaped and reshaped through tastes, values, skills, knowledge, and personal experiences with music. This chapter analyses musical identity as a result of the construction of a self-concept around music and as a result of students' school, family, and background influences.

In presenting the results in this chapter, I first presented the significance of music for instrumental teachers' and students' identity, then the impact of the music school on students' musical identity, and the influence of musical background and families in shaping musical identity. Finally, teachers' musical identities were profiled in order to understand how they influence students' musical identities.

## 7.2. *The Significance of Music in Shaping Identity*

This section explores the importance of music in identity formation, particularly the significance of music for teachers and pupils. Through the words of the students and teachers during interviews, it was seen how music had a fundamental value in their lives. Students and teachers particularly emphasised three characteristics of music: the communicative abilities that music offers, the ability to regulate mood through music, and the expression of personal identity through music. This is in line with Hargreaves et al. (2002), who argued that music has three social functions: managing interpersonal relationships, regulating mood, and establishing and developing self-identity. While the functions of mood regulation and identity expression are specifically found in Hargreaves et al. (2002), music's communicative abilities are not directly matched. However, communicative abilities have emerged as a useful tool for interactions with others and can thus be compared to the social function of interpersonal relationship management proposed by Hargreaves et al. (2002). Moreover, Hargreaves et al. (2002) argued that these three musical functions are subject to the influence of other people. The influence of other people on the three musical functions was also seen in the Mainero School. When students talked about the significance of music for themselves, they expressed the importance of other people in their musical experience. In particular, Cinzia and Ernesto said that music could connect oneself with the other.

*'For me, it's something special because it makes you talk to people, in a way... that is, without talking. You say everything with your heart. It's something special'.* (Cinzia, string instrument, student, interview)

*'So, for me, music is art. Mainly it is also a tool to pass on messages to people'.*  
(Ernesto, wind instrument, student, interview)

Thus, in these two quotes, music was seen as a means of developing and negotiating interpersonal relationships (Hargreaves et al. 2002). According to Cinzia, music connects people

deeply, without talking but through emotions. Ernesto related to the concept of art as a tool for communication, capable of connecting people through the exchange of messages.

Music as a mood regulation tool was described by two students, Carolina and Enrica, and by an instrumental teacher, Marcella. Carolina and Enrica said that music could help relax and calm down:

*'Music connects feelings, it produces them... sometimes I need it to relax, to unwind for a moment. I have two brothers and sometimes they make me a little bit angry and confused, and I get upset [...] these times, I take my violin, I lock myself in my room, and play a little bit to relax my nerves'.* (Carolina, string instrument, student, interview)

*'Well, a sound that relaxes me, calms me down. I mean maybe it soothes me if I have to do something and I have anxiety, I listen to music I'm calmer.'* (Enrica, bowed instrument, student, interview)

Furthermore, Marcella asserted that music nourishes the soul, so it not only helps regulate the mood, as the teacher also asserted, but also supports the development of the person in his or her individuality, what Marcella calls the 'soul'.

*'Music is nourishment for the soul. When I am tired, if I make music right away, I already change my mood. Even when I am exhausted in the evening and get into the car, the first thing I do is turn on the radio to listen to music.'* (Marcella, string instrument, teacher, interview)

This quote also emphasised how music is important in the establishment and development of self-identity. All the instrumental teachers also emphasised how music is connected to self-identity. Ginevra defined music as a 'form of life', Anita as 'everything', and Anna as 'the mirror of my life'.

*'Music is a form of life'. (Ginevra, string instrument, teacher, interview)*

*'Music is Everything. It is a satisfaction. I said 'everything' because it encompasses such a vast world that I couldn't define it in a few words'. (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)*

*'Music is the mirror of my life. It's part of my life, I couldn't do without it. So, it's an addiction, like going out, eating, sleeping...a necessity. It helps to give me balance, so if it's missing, something is missing'. (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)*

Although Anna's quotation also showed music as a mood regulation tool, the main theme of the instrumental teacher's quotations was the musical function of creation and development of self-identity. Diversely, in the students' quotes, the most discussed themes were the interpersonal relationship management and mood regulation functions of music. The fact that the instrumental teachers spoke more about the concept of self-identity than the students may be due to the fact that they had a longer musical history than the students and thus had time over the years to deepen their view of their musical self and recognise the beneficial aspects of their musical identity. In this regard, Hargreaves et al. (2002) stated that self-identity is an individual's overall view of themselves and is integrated with self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concepts are the different ways in which we see ourselves depending on the context, while self-esteem is the evaluative component of the self and has both cognitive and emotional aspects (Hargreaves et al. 2002, p. 8).

### *7.3. Students' Musical Identities*

Music school, familial backgrounds, and involvement in extracurricular activities play crucial roles in shaping students' musical identities. The interaction between formal music education and the informal environments in which students engage with music—at school, at home, and in extracurricular settings—creates a dynamic space for the development of musical identity (Green 2008; Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020). This section explores how school and family influence

and extracurricular musical experiences contribute to students' engagement with music, using the narratives of participants in the study. This chapter refers to musical identities because identity is not one fixed entity but several different identities emerge in seen situations, mutating and adapting to changing situations and others (Schwarz and Williams 2020). An example of this was found in the case of Tetyana. Through data triangulation, Tetyana's musical identity was seen in a multifaceted view, not just as a fixed entity (Schwarz and Williams 2020). Tetyana's musical identity data came from interviews with the instrumental teacher, the student, and the parents, as well as from the instrumental teacher's voice notes.

*'For me, music is like a feeling, because music has different sounds and tones, and each tone you can reciprocate with a feeling. Sometimes, when you have dark, sad times, music takes you out of your world'. (Tetyana, string instrument, student, interview)*

*'My daughter was very interested in the music school: attending music school was first of all her wish. I see that she feels happy because she is a more artistic person. She is growing as a person and because she is growing as a human being, she is another person. And I understand her finding her own way'. (Tetyana's mother, string instrument, parent, interview)*

*'Tetyana was born in Italy but her parents are from another country. She is in love with the orchestra, and the ensemble, she likes to do the orchestra on Friday mornings and the ensemble lesson. She is very exuberant'. (Marcella, string instrument, teacher, voice messages)*

However, in a voice note regarding the lesson I observed some days before, the instrumental teacher stated that Tetyana was distracted and didn't study at home

*'I tell you about Tetyana's lesson which wasn't great because she could not perform study number 3 from the second volume of the Suzuki. Even the ensemble pieces, during the last lesson, she got lost, and that made me think that she hadn't studied the ensemble pieces well. Sometimes I think she could have concentration problems'.* (Marcella, string instrument, teacher, voice note)

The four quotes reported showed how Tetyana had many identities, some convergent and others divergent. Tetyana talked about her musical identity concerning what music could give to her in terms of emotions. The quote showed how music was seen as a mood regulator (Hargreaves et al. 2002), whose function was discussed in the previous section.

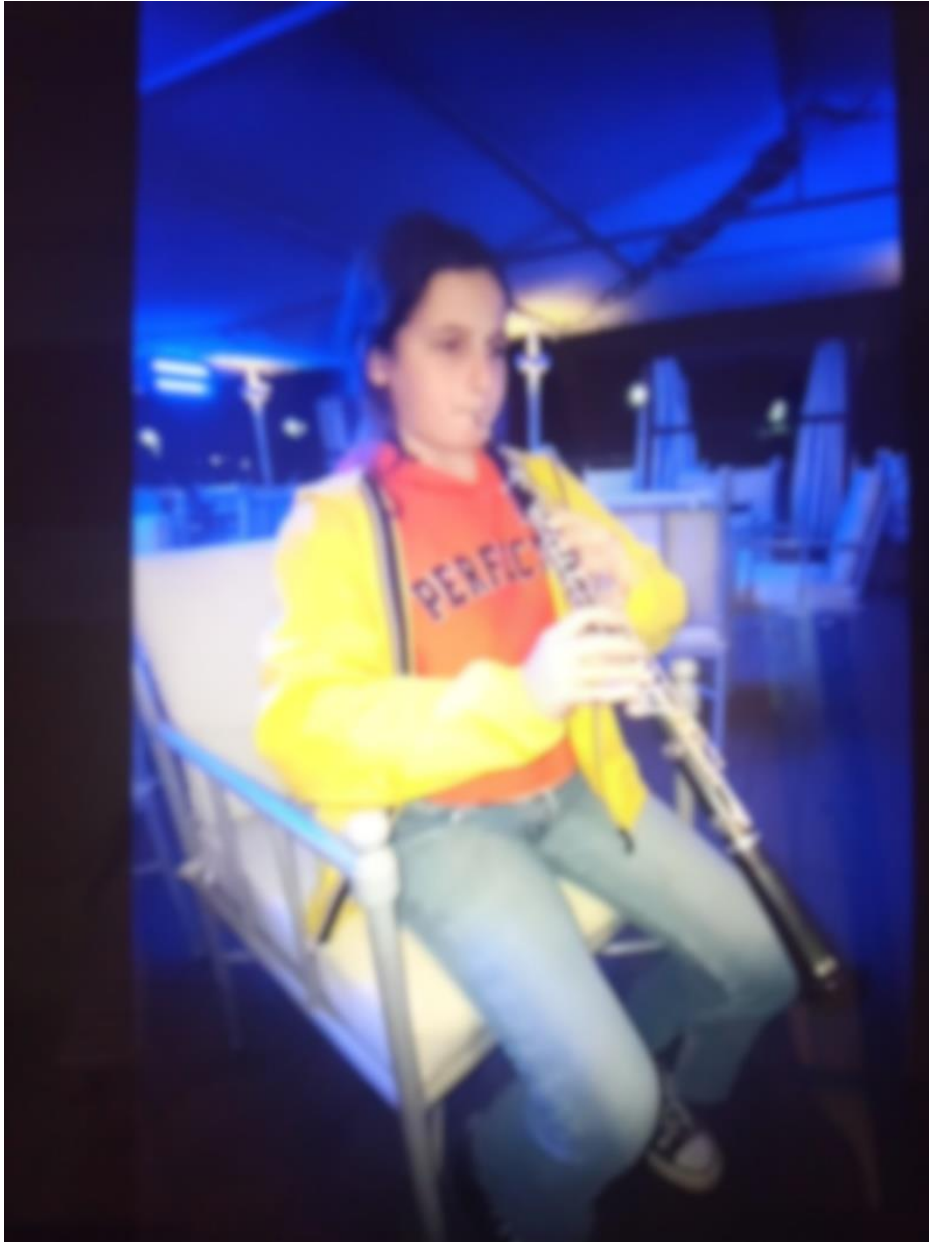
The teacher and the mother focused their description on Tetyana's character and motivation. The teacher mentioned that Tetyana came from a foreign country, a detail confirmed by her mother during the interview. Additionally, Tetyana's instrumental teacher noted that the young girl once played a traditional instrument from her home country, although the teacher could not remember which instrument it was. However, Tetyana no longer plays that instrument, as it was something she used to do in her home country but not in Italy. This shift highlights how intersectional identities evolve in new cultural and educational contexts. In Tetyana's case, the school did not specifically address her intersectional identity, but this was not necessarily due to a lack of support. Rather, her transition into classical Western music suggests that she naturally adapted to the school's musical environment, making it unnecessary for the institution to actively intervene in preserving her cultural heritage.

Both Tetyana's instrumental teacher and her mother agreed that she was highly motivated to attend music school; she had a strong desire to study music and was particularly passionate about the orchestra. While her mother highlighted Tetyana's enthusiasm for music, the instrumental

teacher observed a certain exuberance that could be seen both positively—as a sign of engagement in music—and negatively, as a trait that could disrupt lessons. In fact, the teacher mentioned that Tetyana’s preparation might have been affected by her difficulty concentrating, which could be linked to her exuberance. Thus, a variety of musical identities emerged: one connected to her country of origin’s music, another driven by passion and emotional regulation through music, and yet another marked by distraction or lack of commitment. This aligns with O’Neill (2006), who suggested that individuals may develop emergent and even conflicting identities based on factors like ethnicity, age, physical abilities, motivational sources, and musical behaviors.

Musical identities are not only multifaceted entities, as seen earlier, but they also mutate through the life of people, in particular in adolescence, which is a delicate phase for identity formation (Erikson 1968). Parker (2020) believed that young people talk about their musical identity in relation to important others involved in the musical activity in several ways (peers, instrumental teachers, families, etc.). In the process of musical identity discovery, students firstly externalised musical identity, seeing themselves as musical through other people’s eyes. They then internalised musical identity, feeling a sense of being musical by themselves (Parker 2020). According to Parker (2020), there is a pivotal moment when students switch from making music for others to making music for themselves. This pivotal moment was described by Valentina when she told me about her experience of music during a cruise with her family

*‘In this picture, I am on the boat that was taking me on the Nile, in Egypt. I took a picture because I wanted to remember this moment when I was playing on the Nile and there were also the other people who were listening to me, the animals everything. And it was evening, it was very beautiful, however, it was cold. This picture to me means the freedom to play wherever you want, without being ashamed of when you play’.* (Valentina, wind instrument, student, photovoice interview, see Figure 7.1)



*Figure 7.1. Valentina's Photo*

Figure 7.1 visually represents this pivotal moment in Valentina's musical journey. The ambient lighting, nighttime setting, and casual posture suggest a relaxed, self-directed engagement with music. Her statement emphasises freedom and self-expression, marking her shift from performing for others to playing for her own fulfillment. The image captures the essence of internalised musical identity—one that is no longer dependent on the gaze or judgment of others but grounded in personal meaning and agency.

Like Valentina, Carolina described her musical identity by talking about a pivotal moment: the moment in which she received her instrument as a present.

*'This was a photo of my birthday, which is in September and often happens to be the same day that school starts. My parents gave me this dress as a present for my birthday and I had just gotten the violin, which was just recently. In the photo, I'm on the balcony of the house, on the terrace. So, it was a year before I started here'.* (Carolina, student, string instrument).



Figure 7.2. Carolina's Photo

Unlike Valentina, Carolina's image (Figure 7.2) captures a more staged and symbolic scene: she is dressed in a formal gown, holding her newly gifted violin, standing proudly on the balcony. The composition reflects an aspirational quality, signifying the anticipation and excitement of beginning a new chapter. The photograph encapsulates the moment when a long-desired imagined identity began to materialise. Her expression and posture exude pride and joy, hinting at the internal motivation and parental support that catalysed her entry into music education. In this case, the

pivotal moment was not a passing moment between the externalisation and internalisation of musical identity but a passing moment between the imagination of a possible self and the realisation of it. In fact, as Carolina had previously explained to me, playing a string instrument was a desire of hers, and by giving her the instrument as a gift and allowing her to enroll in music school, her parents helped her create one of the possible selves she had hypothesised through desire and imagination. The concept of possible selves, conceptualised by Erikson (2007) and taken up by Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam (2020) is found in the present quote. According to Creech et al. (2020), secondary music schools have far-reaching implications in how music can shape students' possible selves. In this case, the existence of the music school and Carolina's desire to attend it acted as a bridge between Carolina's motivation and her future music experience.

Both Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2 therefore illustrate different but equally important dimensions in the construction of musical identity during adolescence: one through experiential affirmation and emotional resonance (Valentina), and the other through symbolic initiation and the realisation of imagined futures (Carolina). These examples highlight how young people's musical identities are not only shaped in social contexts but also deeply connected to personal agency, emotional significance, and transformative life events.

### 7.3.1. The Influence of Music School on Students' Musical Identity

As said in the previous section, Creech et al. (2020) stressed the importance of music in secondary schools in students' musical identity. Thus, within educational contexts, students' possible selves could gain importance through social interaction, pedagogy, and practice, and are experienced as motivating agents. The influence of the school context in the construction of musical identity was also highlighted by Hargreaves, Miell, and MacDonald (2002), Schwarz and Williams (2020), and Williams (2013). They all agreed that the school environment is one of the most significant contexts for building relationships (with family and extracurricular activities) and has a

major influence on the construction of identity. The instrumental teacher Anna emphasised the importance of music school in shaping students' identities, and her quote is in line with the authors cited above

*'Music school helps students a lot, it's very important. First, we teachers entrust them with the right instrument because, let's say, each child has an instrument that suits them best. Surely it allows them to discover themselves. And then it will be up to them to decide whether to continue to understand music'* (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)

Anna stated that music school helped students to discover themselves through music and that, after three years of school, they can decide whether to continue with music (with secondary schools second grade, Conservatories, or extracurricular activities) or to quit music. She also said that instrumental teachers helped students in the choice of their instruments. As explained in Chapter One, students undertake an entrance exam to attend secondary music school. After the entrance exam, students are asked to try the four musical instruments and express a preference. Despite expressing preferences, not all students get the desired instrument, but in the cases in which students don't get it, teachers often suggest they play another of the four instruments taught at school. The choice comes either from the psychophysical characteristics of the student or from the need to have students even on less popular instruments. An example of that was found in Sara's interview when she told me that she wanted to enroll in another instrument at first

*'At first, I didn't want to study the instrument I now play, I had heard about the music school so I talked to my parents about it. They told me that my grandfather played the violin and I wanted to play my grandfather's violin. Then at the exam, I was comfortable with the bowed and the wind instruments, but the teachers suggested I play the string instrument I*

*play now. I'm glad I chose to do the music school'. (Sara, string instrument, student, interview)*

In Sara's quote, it is possible to notice how instrumental teachers had a central role in the choice of the instrument, which choice influenced the student's musical identity and might have an influence on the student's motivation and commitment growth. On this, Gaunt and Hallam (2014) argued that the nature of the instrument contributes to the development of a specific musical identity. According to Gaunt and Hallam (2014), some children can choose their instrument, while others need support from teachers to navigate through the range of instruments available or use demonstrations to influence their choice. Choices can also be influenced by other factors, such as the familiarity of the instrument, cost, and appearance, physiological requirements, and the nature of the sound. An example of a choice guided because of the nature of the instrument sound was given by Enrica when she told me how she chose her instrument

*'In this photo, I played for my first concert. [...] At first, when I tried the instrument, I wanted to play a string instrument however, after trying it, I didn't like it so much. And I liked the bowed instrument better because it was sweeter'. (Enrica, bowed instrument, student, photovoice interview)*



Figure 7.3. *Enrica's photo*

Figure 7.3 shows a group of students during a performance, all playing bowed instruments and wearing black face masks. The photo captures a moment of concentration and participation, highlighting the importance of ensemble work in music education. The students are arranged in a row, showing both individuality and collective effort. The presence of the large and visually striking instruments draws attention to the physical and emotional commitment required to play them. The focus of the girl in the center, looking directly at the camera, suggests confidence and involvement. The image reflects how playing music in a group can shape students' musical identity and sense of belonging.

Another example of the choice of the instrument was reported by Ernesto. His choice of attending music school depended firstly on his familiarity with the school because his grandmother taught there, and secondly on the nature of the sound and physical qualities of the instrument

*'First of all, I wanted to come to this school because my grandmother taught here. So, I started looking at the list of instruments: one instrument had a shrill sound, so I ruled it out, another was played by my uncle in a big National Orchestra, so I kept it aside because eventually he could teach it to me. So, I chose the wind instrument because I wanted to try a wind instrument'. (Ernesto, wind instrument, student, interview)*

The influence of the nature of the instrument on student's motivation (Gaunt and Hallam 2014) is shown in the next quote. In this quote, Enrica's mother stated that the choice of the instrument positively influenced her daughter

*'My daughter is enthusiastic about the choice of the instrument she has been assigned, she loves the teacher, she has grown a lot and her attitude is very positive, she has increased her autonomy, she goes to school willingly and with enthusiasm'. (Enrica's mother, bowed instrument, parent, interview)*

Enrica's mother also said that her daughter had a very positive attitude toward music school, which she attended with pleasure and enthusiasm and through which she had improved her autonomy. This recalls O'Neill (2006) when she said that in instrumental teaching, motivation can contribute to positive identity-building toward music. In this case, therefore, the music school had a positive impact on the student's musical identity, manifesting her enjoyment of participating in musical activities through enthusiasm and desire. Enrica's positive attitude was also motivated by the relationship built with her instrumental teacher. This confirms how student-teacher relationships might influence pupils' musical motivation and development (Creech and Hallam 2011). Furthermore, this quote is in line with Gaunt (2008) who asserted that 'teachers are [...] motivating forces for their students' (2008, p. 215).

Both parents and teachers stressed that motivation influenced pupils' identity. During an interview, the instrumental teacher Anita described how students became passionate about music during their school years. In particular, she noticed an increase in motivation in April, a time when the period of concerts and music competitions began, in which students preferred to stay longer at school to work on performing pieces with the teacher

*'When April starts, maybe you have music competitions, it usually happens that you don't take pupils out of school anymore. Music starts to become something that is so much a part of them that going out of school means leaving it at that moment and instead not going out means continuing to live it. It's a very pleasant, gratifying thing, that is, to see that you don't come to school just because it's imposed, but because you enjoy it and, in any case, you create a lot of bonds, even in future friendship'. (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)*

Some key concepts in Anita's quote are relevant to the discussion of this thesis: music begins to become something that is part of the students; staying in school means continuing to experience it and the musical experiences in it; and school becomes a place to willingly stay and make connections. These concepts can be viewed through the three key processes in the development of musical self-identity in young people proposed by Hargreaves et al. (2016). The first of the three processes, identification, is a process of connecting with significant others and groups, which, in Anita's quote, is found in the fact that pupils identify with the music class group and participate in activities willingly also to make connections. The second key process was individuation, i.e., the creation of personal continuity in contexts, found in the pupils' desire to continue their musical experiences at school by staying longer to rehearse pieces for concerts. The third key and last concept is integration, which is the organisation of new components into a continuum of self-

identity. The integration mentioned by Hargreaves et al. (2016) is found in what Anita describes when she says that music begins to become part of the student's life.

Furthermore, instrumental teachers believed that music school helps students in their growing process and learn how to express themselves.

*'There are kids who come in, don't speak, don't say anything, don't bring out a feeling. Instead, maybe they slowly start to trust you. They start to love the instrument and so they somehow want to bring out what might be feelings, desires, and problems. And they also start to verbalise, to speak in this way, maybe they also learn how to express themselves, or simply the fact that sometimes they have to fight their shyness for performance'. (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)*

*'This photo was taken in the primary school where we went to make a concert for fifth-grade students. It's a nice memory. These make me remember myself three years ago, in the fifth grade. I was too shy three years ago [...] Now I'm less shy maybe because I'm in the third year of this school and I feel a little bit liberated from everything. I overcome shyness by doing concerts with my peers together, talking to new people, and having new experiences. When you're afraid you have to be brave, right?'* (Alessia, bowed instrument, student, photovoice interview, see Figure 7.4)

Figure 7.4 shows a group of students arranged in a semi-formal performance setting. The image conveys a strong sense of concentration and collective involvement. The use of face masks suggests a recent context, possibly related to pandemic conditions. The students are captured in action, looking attentive and engaged, which underlines the discipline and dedication required in group performance. The way they are seated in proximity to one another suggests the importance of peer relationships and mutual support in their musical journey. The photograph also visually

reflects the process described in Alessia's narrative: a transition from individual shyness to shared expression within a group context. The structured yet emotionally rich environment of the music school, as shown in the image, appears to provide a safe space for self-development and identity transformation.

These two quotes show how music school, interactions with teachers and peers, and opportunities to play at concerts enable students to change from being shy to having a more open attitude. Anita stated that students learn to overcome fear, express themselves, and communicate their desires, problems, and interests. Alessia confirmed what the teacher said, stating that she felt liberated and able to express herself freely over the years. Students could manifest their identity once they overcame the barrier of shyness, thanks to the music school and the support of the teachers. The social situation of the music school and the encounters with peers and teachers thus influenced the students' identity (Hargreaves et al. 2012).



Figure 7.4. Alessia's Photo

### 7.3.2. The Role of Family in Musical Identity Formation

Family influence on musical identity is evident across the students' varied experiences. For some, the family plays an integral role in fostering a musical environment at home, shaping their musical interests and preferences. For instance, Sara, a student of string instruments, recalled how her father's music collection influenced her initial musical tastes:

*'I started to think about music a bit more when I started middle school because I had found the flyer for the musical school at the Open Day. Before then I knew almost nothing about music, in the sense that I listened to what my father listened to.'* (Sara, string instrument, student, interview)

Sara's narrative reflects how her family's music listening habits, specifically those of her father, laid the groundwork for her musical identity even before formal education began. This influence was further evident when Sara engaged with her father to select a piece for her lessons.

During a one-on-one session with her instrumental teacher, Marcella, Sara suggested playing 'Stairway to Heaven' by Led Zeppelin, a piece she chose in consultation with her father. Marcella, though unfamiliar with the song, was receptive to Sara's preferences, highlighting the supportive and flexible nature of the teacher-student relationship:

*'Marcella asks Sara which piece she wants to play and she replies that she is looking with her father for some musical pieces. She would like to play 'Stairway to Heaven' by Led Zeppelin. Marcella does not know the song but is willing to take it.'* (Marcella and Sara, string instrument, teacher and student, field note)

This interaction underscores the importance of the family in influencing students' musical choices and their musical identity. The father's involvement not only affects Sara's musical preferences but also extends to her educational experiences, where the teacher accommodates these preferences. The involvement of Sara's father recalls what Pitts (2012) stated about parental involvement. Pitts (2012) recognised that the instrumental teachers' influence was balanced by the opportunities and resources provided by parents for students and in particular by fathers.

The role of the family is not limited to direct involvement in musical decisions. For Valentina, her family's music collection shaped her tastes and musical identity. Valentina recalls listening to music from the 1970s, a genre predominantly influenced by her mother's extensive record collection:

*'I listen to some classical music and music from the 70s because my mom has many, many records so I can listen to them.'* (Valentina, wind instrument, student, interview)

For Valentina, the family collection is a key element in her musical exposure, with her mother's records serving as a repository of musical culture and taste. This highlights how family

music collections and shared listening experiences can profoundly shape a student's early musical identity.

In the case of Carolina, family involvement was more directive. Her parents enrolled her in a private music school at the age of seven, which provided her with structured and formal musical training from a young age. This direct parental intervention contrasts with the more casual influence observed in Sara's and Valentina's experiences. It suggests that family expectations and values can also shape a student's musical development trajectory.

*'When I was seven years old, my mom suggested that I play the musical instrument. I was overjoyed because since I was little, four or five years old, string fascinated me.'*  
(Carolina, string instrument, student, photovoice interview, See Figure 7.2)

### 7.3.3. Extracurricular Activities and Their Impact on Musical Identity

Beyond the family, extracurricular musical activities offer a vital space for students to explore and deepen their musical identities and possible selves. These activities often provide students with opportunities for creative exploration, collaboration, and exposure to a wider range of musical genres. As Creech et al. (2020) argued, extracurricular music activities allow young people to 'freely explore their possible selves, developing personally meaningful narratives about the role that learning and participating in music plays in their lives' (p. 118). This exploration of musical identity was seen in the experiences of students like Valentina, who participated in both a school orchestra and an extracurricular ensemble. She reflected on the differences between the two:

*'I am also part of another orchestra where I go every Tuesday and play with them. In the school orchestra, we only play classical pieces, instead, in the other orchestra, you play so many musical genres, for example, 'We Will Rock You,' which is something that is just... rock.'* (Valentina, wind instrument, student, photovoice interview)

In Valentina's account, the extracurricular orchestra provides a diverse musical experience, allowing her to explore various genres outside the classical canon. This setting offered a more inclusive and flexible environment for students to experiment with different musical forms and discover their preferences. The fact that the extracurricular orchestra included students from different cultural backgrounds and levels of musical ability also enriched Valentina's experience, as she noted the different skills and perspectives her peers brought to the group:

*'There are kids of all ages so there you can also see that even the other younger kids can play. And there are people from different cultures and educations, they come from different places, so maybe you see that someone plays better than another, you see that someone can read rhythm better, someone who has better aural skillsabl, so it's still different...'* (Valentina, wind instrument, student, photovoice interview)

This diversity in the extracurricular setting allows students like Valentina to engage with a broader community of musicians and to develop a more well-rounded sense of musical identity, transcending the more rigid structures of formal education.

Furthermore, the music school provided students with a wide range of extracurricular activities, as shown in Appendix I. These extracurricular activities were organised by the network of music schools in the province where the study took place. There was an interschool orchestral music activity, an activity dedicated to the creation of a large double reed instrument ensemble, and a last one dedicated to the creation of a large string ensemble. Often, during lessons, students would have their instrumental teachers listen to their parts related to the above three musical groups. For example, during a wind instrument lesson, Anna helped Ernesto study parts for the orchestra:

*'The teacher suggests that Ernesto study parts for the intraschool orchestra under time during the week to learn how to do the sestinas. Anna then explains that the function of*

*the study is to perfect the pieces for orchestral activities*'. (Anna and Ernesto, wind instrument, teacher and student, field note).

Thus, although these activities were extracurricular, there was active participation of the instrumental teachers at school who helped the pupils in preparing the parts.

#### *7.4. Music Teachers' Identity Profile*

In this section, I examine the construction of music teachers' identities based on the data collected through interviews and observations. Teachers' identities were explored through two main aspects: teachers' personal histories and musical backgrounds, and how these factors influence their practice and their roles as educators in music schools. Through these reflections, the data reveals the presence of two distinct, but interconnected, conceptualisations of identity: identities in music (IIM) and music in identities (MII), as proposed by Hargreaves et al. (2016; 2017). These two typologies help us understand how music teachers construct their identities and the role of music in shaping their lives. Identities in music (IIM) refers to professional roles within the musical world, such as performer, composer, or teacher. These roles define one's identity through engagement in specific musical activities. In the case of the music teachers in this study, their identities as instrumental teachers are key elements of their professional self-definition, as well as their identity as professional musicians. Music in identities (MII) refers to the role of music as a resource for developing broader aspects of one's identity. For many teachers, music is not only a profession but a means of self-expression and emotional balance. For instance, one teacher shared that music helped her achieve a sense of balance in her life, illustrating how music can shape personal identity beyond the professional realm.

Teachers' identities in this study were significantly shaped by their musical experiences, both instrumental and curricular, and by their personal histories. Each teacher recounted their journey into music education, shedding light on how their life stories intertwined with their professional

roles. Ginevra, for example, highlighted principally her IIM, sharing her story of a musician in theater who became, later, an instrumental teacher. After completing her studies, she toured with theatre concerts and only later, in her forties, she began teaching at a music school, after a suggestion from a pianist friend:

*'My strongest experience was after graduation and with touring theatre concerts. The school job came about by chance: I was already in my forties and I moved to a small town [...]. A friend, a pianist, said to me: "But why don't you apply for music schools?" So, I applied and got in straight away.'* (Ginevra, string instrument, teacher, interview)

Differently, for the bowed instrumental teacher, Anita, teaching had always been a part of her life since she was young. She began working with children in early education and workshops, which she considered an essential part of her identity as a teacher. In her description, her IIM and MII are both mentioned and appear to have the same value:

*'I started teaching when I was 20, so it has always been my bread and butter. I started teaching little ones, the whole part of the workshops with kindergartens, with primary schools, dealing with little children, trying to get inside their heads to make them do something and explain it to them, and so on. That, in my opinion, was my background. Then I taught instruments in the music school.'* (Anita, bowed instrument, teacher, interview)

The two identity components (IIM and MII) of music were also supported in Anna's interview. The teacher's words revealed not only music as Anna's job role but also the passion that moved her to pursue this work. This passion could also explain Anna's strong desire to create a strong sense of community in the school, as seen in Chapter V. Anna started teaching at a very young age. During

the first interview, she recalled her involvement in teacher strikes in the 1990s, advocating for teachers' rights in Italy. Her journey involved significant activism in the education sector:

*'From there a lot of riots, demonstrations, and whatnot ensued because it is unfair that there is no work. If I have the right to take part in a competition<sup>17</sup> to become an instrumental teacher, I must have the opportunity to give it. All this then generated the whole revolution that you are younger and maybe even experienced later, which I experienced from the beginning'. (Anna, wind instrument, teacher, interview)*

Anna's experience reflects what was discussed in Chapter Six regarding the importance of permanent teachers, demonstrating how their long-term presence not only ensures stability in education but also fosters a strong sense of community and shared purpose among educators and students alike. Her activism and passion for teaching further illustrate how the security of a permanent position enables teachers to fully invest in their roles, build meaningful relationships, and contribute to a cohesive institutional culture.

Finally, Marcella described the story that led her to teach a string instrument in the secondary music school. She highlighted her IIM as an instrumental teacher. She recounted that she first started teaching in parochial schools, with young children, then in Steiner-style schools. However, seeing that the profits were not enough to support herself, she tried to enter as an instrumental teacher at music schools, moving from her town to another:

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<sup>17</sup> In the 1990s, according to Anna, the Ministry of Education had announced competitions to become instrumental teachers, but these competitions had not then been held as planned. This triggered many protests among instrumental teachers.

*'I decided to move here since there are more instrument classes here in middle school.*

*I worked a few years as a substitute teacher and then finally got the permanent position.'*

(Marcella, string instrument, teacher, interview)

Each teacher's journey reflected a unique path that combined musical practice with their personal histories, revealing how their background influenced their teaching identity. The data also provided insight into the personal pedagogical attitudes of the teachers, and how these attitudes shaped their relationships with students. The teachers' attitudes were also revealed through the use of space in their practice rooms. These attitudes were closely linked to the teachers' identities and could be categorised as follows:

Marcella demonstrated a 'rules-conscious' approach to teaching, maintaining physical distance and order in her classroom. While friendly, her interactions with students were marked by a degree of detachment.

Ginevra fostered a more intimate classroom environment. She was 'friendly' and welcoming, often using humour and offering tea to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Anita was perceived as 'maternal' due to her caring and attentive approach, prioritising emotional support alongside musical instruction.

Anna, with a more 'reserved' attitude, maintained emotional and physical detachment, using little humour and focusing more on the technical aspects of music, than on the emotional aspects of the music instruction.

These varying styles reflect the diverse ways in which teachers' identities, shaped by their personal and professional histories, influence their pedagogical approaches. Moreover, the instrumental teacher's attitude was also seen in the way they intended interpersonal relationships

with their students: Marcella's rules-conscious approach shaped a formal and ordered relationship with her students, maintaining a clear professional boundary while offering limited personal connection. Ginevra's friendly demeanor and humour created a warm and welcoming environment, fostering closer bonds and a sense of ease in her students. As seen in Chapter Six, Anita's maternal attitude encouraged open and intimate relationships, where students felt comfortable sharing aspects of their personal lives, creating a trusting and emotionally supportive dynamic. In contrast, Anna, with her reserved and distant approach, focused on maintaining professionalism and authority, emphasising technical instruction while minimising personal interactions to sustain a hierarchical relationship. These different approaches align with two of the six types of interaction identified by Creech (2012), namely the solo-leader, where the teacher has the main power (Anna and Marcella); and the dynamic duo, where pupils and teachers communicate with each other but where the parents were not involved (Anita and Ginevra). The dynamics of collaboration and community building between teachers, pupils, and families observed in Chapter Five of this thesis could be traced back to the harmonious trio, where all three parts communicated equally for the benefit of the pupil (Creech 2012, p. 402). Furthermore, the varied teaching approaches observed—ranging from Marcella's rules-conscious formality to Anita's maternal warmth—not only reflect distinct teacher identities but also shape the emotional and motivational climate of the learning environment. This diversity underscores the importance of McPherson et al.'s (2012) concept of 'musical matching,' which advocates for aligning teaching strategies with individual learner profiles to create differentiated, context-sensitive instruction. Such alignment fosters competence, confidence, and sustained motivation by ensuring that teaching styles resonate with students' unique needs and promote meaningful engagement, rather than relying on uniform approaches that may disengage or demotivate learners.

Relative to the hierarchical dynamic between students and teachers, advocated by Anna and challenged by Anita, Pozsonyi, and Soulstein (2019) believed that the idea of eliminating a rigid hierarchical relationship between students and teachers presupposed a specific dynamic of which many teachers may not dispose of because it would create a challenge to their authority that could be difficult to sustain (p. 152). However, as Chapter Six shows, humour could be useful for navigating and transforming teacher-student relationships (Pozsonyi and Soulstein 2019).

In conclusion, the data collected through interviews and observations revealed how music teachers' identities are deeply intertwined with their personal histories, musical experiences, and pedagogical practices. By using the typologies of identities in music (IIM) and music in identities (MII), it is possible to understand how teachers perceive themselves within the musical world and how music serves as a central element in shaping their broader identities.

### *7.5. Group Identity*

The concept of identity is multifaceted, encompassing both personal and collective dimensions. In particular, in instrumental music education settings, individual musical identities are often shaped and influenced by the dynamics of collaboration, shared experiences, and collective practice experienced during group music activities. This was already seen in Chapter V when the school was analysed as a community. This section explores the development of group identity within the context of group music lessons, drawing on both student and teacher perspectives to investigate how musical identities are formed, negotiated, and sustained through ensemble practices. By examining the experiences of students such as Ernesto and Sara, as well as the insights of their instrumental teacher Anita, this section argues that group music lessons provide a rich environment for fostering both personal and collective identities, which in turn support the development of pro-social behaviors, empathy, and collaborative skills (Ilari, Helfter, and Huynh 2020; Tan 2017; de Bruin

2022). For example, Ernesto stated that the group identity is found in students' cohesion and collaboration:

*'And we are, in my opinion, a very united group in that respect. I think everybody likes what we do, I like to play. Playing in a group is a new thing that I started here in middle school, I think it's a beautiful experience that in my opinion can also serve later, because being able to be in a group in my opinion means being able to know each other, being able to understand, think more, and develop empathy.'* (Ernesto, wind instrument, student, interview)

According to Ernesto, playing in a group requires a different set of skills, including empathy, communication, and the ability to understand others' perspectives.

Sara echoed similar sentiments in her reflection:

*'I take home the satisfaction of a verse played with my peers that I was able to overcome obstacles that I had in playing or even emotional ones because from my experience, being with friends helps a little bit to... in my case to be less shy. So also playing in a group helps me express myself.'* (Sara, string instrument, student, interview)

Sara noted how peer support helps her overcome technical and emotional obstacles, particularly her shyness. Moreover, she highlighted the importance of shared musical tastes in creating a bond with her fellow musicians, even when their individual preferences differ

*'With two of my other companions we have a pretty close bond, both when we play, and also when we don't play. When we play, the fact that we like similar music makes us understand better one to each other better. [...] I think you can tell from the sound of our instruments that we are similar people'* (Sara, string instrument, student, interview)

Sara captured the tension between individuality and group unity that can characterise ensemble playing. Through these individual experiences, it becomes clear that group music lessons

offer more than just the development of musical skills—they provide a space where students can navigate and express their personal identities in relation to others.

As seen in Chapter V, the role of instrumental teachers in fostering a sense of community and group identity is pivotal. The instrumental teacher Anita emphasised the importance of creating a shared identity within the classroom. She stated that one of the first jobs of the instrumental teachers was to create the group, which has its own identity (for the entire quote, see Chapter V, subheading: Sense of Belonging). Anita emphasised how group identity in music classes is not something that happens passively but is actively cultivated through the daily practices and interactions between teachers and students. By guiding students through collaborative activities, she helped to create a community in which students not only develop musical skills but also a sense of connection to one another. This aligns with de Bruin (2022) who argued that learning environments could encourage students to work actively and collaboratively toward the construction of group identity.

### *7.6. Summary*

This chapter discussed the role of music and interpersonal interaction in shaping students' musical identities in a secondary music school in Italy. It addressed key research questions on the impact of teacher-learner interactions on musical learning and identity formation.

The concept of identity, especially musical identity, was explored, drawing from Green (2011) and Hargreaves et al. (2002). Identity was seen as fluid and evolving, influenced by social, and personal factors. This was seen in examples such as the one of Tetyana, illustrating how musical identities can be multifaceted, shifting over time due to various influences, such as cultural background and emotional needs. Music was recognised as having a significant role in shaping identity by aiding self-expression, regulating mood, and managing interpersonal relationships. Interviews with students and teachers highlighted how these aspects of music impacted individuals'

sense of self, with teachers often emphasising music's role in self-identity development, and students focusing more on music's role in interpersonal relationships and mood regulation.

The chapter further explored how factors like the music school environment, family, and extracurricular activities contribute to students' musical identities' development. Formal education at the music school and informal music experiences at home and through extracurricular activities were been recognised as factors that can shape students' engagement with music. Additionally, the concept of 'possible selves', proposed by Erikson (2007) and Creech et al. (2020), was discussed concerning students' motivations and aspirations, with music schools offering a pathway for students to explore these possible selves. Parental influence was seen primarily in terms of exposure to music and motivation to pursue musical pursuits, both school and extracurricular. It was recognised that such influence played a significant role in shaping students' identities.

The role of instrumental teachers in shaping students' identities was also examined. Teachers influenced students' choices of instruments, motivation, and attitudes toward music. The chapter highlighted how instrumental teachers' own identities, shaped by their personal histories and musical experiences, affected their teaching attitudes and interactions with students. Different attitudes towards the pedagogical interaction, such as being more emotionally supportive or more focused on technical aspects, reflected the teachers' identities and influenced students' learning experiences.

The chapter discussed the existence of a group identity, which was mainly formed during group activities. This identity is supported by a sense of belonging to the group, as seen in Chapter V. Music group membership helped students develop social skills such as empathy, collaboration, and communication. Finally, the chapter emphasised how teachers play a crucial role in cultivating

group identity and creating a sense of community that supports students' emotional and musical growth.



# CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

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### 8.1. Introduction

This study sought to investigate how interpersonal interaction in one to one and group music lessons in a secondary music school influences music learning and the students' identity development. In particular, the study explored the interpersonal interaction among students and teachers through a case study using several data collection methods such as interviews, observations, teacher's voice messages or written notes, and photovoice.

The research aimed to illuminate the context of a secondary music school in Italy and the interpersonal interaction that occurred in the music school. Furthermore, the research focused on the school's three-year music course, involving 11 students across all classes, four instrumental teachers, three students' parents, three non-instrumental teachers, and the principal.

This study examined how teacher-student interactions in instrumental lessons, influenced by the sociocultural context, foster *transitional spaces* (Ellsworth 2005) where musical learning and identity development occur, intertwining with Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of *habitus*, field, and capital. By framing educational spaces as dynamic sites shaped by social structures and interpersonal interaction, this theoretical framework underscored the dialectical relationship between *habitus* and *transitional space*, showing how both influence and are influenced by musical spaces, musical identity, teaching and learning practices, and the broader psychosocial dimensions of learning.

The key findings of this PhD research are presented through the following section and its five subheadings, each addressing a research question. Finally, limitations, implications for research and practice, further study, and contribution to knowledge are highlighted.

## 8.2. Addressing the Research Questions

8.2.1. How does teacher-learner interaction in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons in a secondary music school in Italy influence music learning and students' identity development?

Teacher-learner interaction in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at the Mainero Secondary music school profoundly influences music learning and the development of students' identities by intertwining pedagogical practices, interpersonal dynamics, and community engagement. This interaction fosters technical and expressive musical proficiency, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of cultural continuity, while also shaping students' personal and social identities through collaboration, self-expression, and a shared commitment to musical growth.

The school's music learning process is deeply embedded in both the technical and expressive dimensions of instrumental education, with teachers employing a combination of verbal and non-verbal interaction to guide students. Teachers offer students tangible tools to refine their understanding of musical phrasing, rhythm, and intonation through imitation, repetition, humming, and singing. These practices, characteristic of the Western classical music *habitus*, not only develop students' technical abilities but also foster a sense of cultural continuity. Teachers further encourage students' intrinsic motivation, enabling them to take ownership of their learning and engage in consistent practice, which reinforces their capacity for self-assessment and independent growth (de Bruin 2018).

The interactive nature of music education at the school extends to group lessons, where collaboration among students enriches their learning experience. Within ensembles, students learn to navigate the complexities of collective performance, fostering mutual engagement and co-construction of knowledge (Ellsworth 2005). At the Mainero music school, knowledge was co-constructed through group music activities, where students, guided by teachers, developed both skills and confidence. This collaborative process aligned with Ellsworth's (2005) and Kenny's (2016) ideas of mutual engagement, where students and teachers played key roles in constructing

knowledge and building community. As seen in Chapter Five, this shared endeavour cultivates interpersonal skills and a group identity centered on cooperation, accountability, and a collective sense of responsibility. The role of humour in these interactions emerges as a key pedagogical tool teachers use to create a relaxed and inclusive atmosphere while minimising errors and enhancing students' confidence. The interplay of humour, encouragement, and constructive feedback exemplifies the relational aspect of music teaching, wherein teachers balance authority with approachability to build trust and connection with their students.

Students' musical identities, shaped by these interactions, are multifaceted and dynamic, as already stated by Hargreaves et al. (2017), reflecting their experiences as learners, performers, and members of a broader community. Instrumental teachers, by integrating their own musical identities into their pedagogy, inspire students to explore music as a medium of self-expression and emotional discovery. This process of identity formation is further enriched by the collaborative culture of the school, where ensemble activities and shared musical goals foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect. The school's emphasis on cooperation and shared enjoyment of music underscores its role as a Community of Musical Practice (Kenny 2016), where the collective pursuit of artistic growth strengthens students' social bonds and interpersonal competencies. Teachers, students, and families together create a supportive ecosystem that nurtures both individual and collective development (Creech and Hallam 2009).

The role of the physical and symbolic space within the school also plays a crucial part in shaping the educational experience as will be shown in the dedicated research question subheading. Through the use of space teachers can involve students in organising and personalising their classrooms, fostering a sense of agency and ownership (Bandura 2001, Biesta et al. 2015).

In sum, the interactions between teachers and learners at the Mainero Secondary Music School represent a dynamic interplay of pedagogical strategies, interpersonal relationships, and

community values. These interactions serve not only as a means of facilitating musical proficiency but also as a foundation for personal and social development, enabling students to explore their potential and develop a sense of identity within a rich and multifaceted educational ecosystem. Through its emphasis on collaboration, mutual growth, and the unifying power of music, the school provides a transitional space (Ellsworth 2005) where students can grow both as musicians and as individuals.

#### 8.2.2. How do teachers and learners experience space in music school?

Teachers and learners at the Mainero Music School experience space as a dynamic, multi-dimensional construct that profoundly shapes their educational and social experiences. The learning spaces are not only physical but also social and cultural, influencing behaviour, emotions, and cognition. The physical environment and the soundscape of the school were revealed to be as an integral part of the learning process. These spaces are flexible, modifiable, and characterised by their ability to influence students positively or negatively, as was previously seen in McArthur 2015 and Monahan 2002. In particular, their classifications of the space resonated with the characteristics found in the present study. This highlights how sound, as a unique feature of a music school, influences learning. Instrumental teachers at the Mainero Music School reflect on how students feel comfortable and take responsibility for the school space, demonstrating agency (Bandura 2001) in the organisation and management of their dedicated classrooms. They also involve the pupils in the decoration and care of the school spaces, thus transmitting to the pupils a feeling of agency in relation to the school space. This dynamic points to a reciprocal relationship between the organisation of space and the personal agency of both teachers and learners.

The understanding of the space in the Mainero school is not only physical but also symbolic. Teachers envision the school as a space of intellectual and imaginative development for pupils. They emphasise music as a means of fostering creativity and student engagement, in line with wider

educational goals of personal and collective growth. Furthermore, collaborative practices between peers, students, and teachers sustained mutual engagement and knowledge co-construction, as seen in the section on the school community space in Chapter Five. This aligns with the idea that pedagogy and music learning are inherently social and interactive, involving the shared creation of meaning.

The social character of instrumental learning was reflected mainly in the sense of community nurtured by the music school. Thus, the school was seen as a social space, a community in which students, teachers, and families were engaged in social interactions. The sense of community was fostered through students' and teachers' collaboration, and family involvement. This was in particular shown in the section on student family participation, in the description of the organisation of a shared moment among school staff, students and their families. In this occasion, families were in charge in organising a buffet to be shared at the end of the concert, while teachers and students collaborated to organise a nice concert to be heard by their families and the school staff. Pupils, teachers, and families form a network of support that promotes a shared sense of identity and belonging. In addition, the school was seen to operate as a Community of Musical Practice (CoMP), characterised by mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire (Kenny 2016). These aspects create a structure for collaboration and shared learning, emphasising the social dimensions of music education, as seen in Chapter Five.

In summary, space at the music school is experienced as a blend of the physical, social, symbolic, and cultural, deeply intertwined with teaching, learning, and community-building. This integrated perspective highlights the interplay between the environment, personal agency, and collaborative practices in shaping the educational experience.

8.2.3. How do teachers and learners experience teaching and learning in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school? What are the learner's and teacher's values and beliefs about attending or working at a secondary music school?

Teachers and learners at the Mainero Music School experience teaching and learning in one-to-one and group instrumental lessons as a dynamic interaction between traditional practices and individual growth, deeply rooted in the Western classical music *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986). Instrumental teachers prioritise imparting practices typical of the classical music *habitus* such as effective home study methods, musical phrasing, and achieving good intonation, often providing detailed guidance to students on study techniques and fostering intrinsic motivation as a driving force for consistent practice and active participation. The transmission of classical musical *habitus* in instrumental learning was also emphasised by Sagiv and Hall (2015) who argued that in Conservatories the reproduction of classical musicians' symbolic capital is nurtured by requiring students to emulate their teachers through a long-term accumulation of skills, bodily discipline, musical understanding, and extensive verbal instruction.

In this PhD work on instrumental learning at the Mainero Music School, certain practices are assumed rather than explicitly taught, reflecting the school's shared cultural understanding (Bourdieu 1986, 1995). For instance, daily diaries serve as an essential communication tool between the school and families, emphasising the collaborative nature of the educational process. Teachers aim to develop not only students' technical and musical understanding but also their ability to self-assess, equipping them with tools for independent learning and long-term growth in their musical journey.

The values and beliefs underpinning the school community further enhance this learning environment. Cooperation, communication, and the shared enjoyment of music as both a form of self-expression and interpersonal connection are central characteristics of the school. These values, reinforced by interviews with teachers, students, parents, and the principal, highlight music's role in

building strong interpersonal bonds and fostering a sense of community. This finding aligns with Kenny's (2016) concept of a Community of Musical Practice (CoMP), which is rooted in Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) framework. According to Kenny (2016), a community is developed through a sense of belonging, collaborative learning, and identity building, and the school community may be considered a CoMP if it exhibits mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire.

The Mainero Music School is perceived as a unique space that nurtures students' artistic, personal, and cultural development, enabling them to explore their identities while mastering their instruments. Teachers and the principal consistently note that music school students, compared to their peers in general education, demonstrate higher levels of motivation, collaboration, and a commitment to mutual growth, which they attribute to the unifying power of music and its capacity to foster discipline and cultural appreciation.

These shared values and beliefs align with the concept of *habitus*, which includes not only teaching practices but also the cultural, social, and personal ideals that shape the school's identity. The integration of family into the educational process, through tools like online registers and diaries, underscores a communal sense of responsibility, reflecting the interconnectedness of all stakeholders in supporting students' development. However, these positive aspects are accompanied by notable challenges. Financial constraints, such as the high cost of acquiring instruments, limit accessibility and inclusivity, creating tension between the school's mission and socioeconomic realities (Pollard and Alexander 2019). Systemic misalignments between primary, secondary, and higher music programs add to these difficulties, making it harder for students to navigate a seamless educational trajectory. Collaboration issues with non-music teachers, who may not fully understand the unique demands on music students, further complicate the learning experience, as students juggle intense workloads and the need for consistent preparation.

In conclusion, the Mainero Music School is characterised by a strong commitment to musical and personal development within a supportive community, where shared values drive both teaching and learning. Yet, this commitment is tempered by systemic and structural challenges that underscore the need for more inclusivity, alignment, and understanding among all stakeholders. By addressing these issues, the school could enhance its ability to provide an equitable and enriching educational experience for all its students.

#### 8.2.4. What kind of interaction is observed between music teachers and learners during one-to-one and group instrumental lessons at a secondary music school?

Teachers and learners engaged through both verbal and non-verbal interactions. Among non-verbal forms, rhythmic and musical gestures played a significant role, followed by facial expressions and mirroring. Musical imitation and repetition emerged as key methods of non-verbal communication during instrumental lessons. Students replicated musical phrases and rhythms introduced by teachers to gain a deeper understanding, while teachers occasionally mirrored students' playing to highlight errors. Humming and singing were employed to demonstrate the intended performance of musical phrases, articulate rhythm, and correct intonation. Additionally, eye contact and physical contact were observed, particularly in individual lessons. Eye contact served various purposes, such as coordinating play with the teacher, interpreting the music, providing reassurance, and clarifying misunderstandings.

Verbal interaction was prominent in one-to-one instrumental lessons and rehearsals. The data analysis identified several types of verbal interaction: musical questioning, explanations and correction about technique, theory, rhythm, and expressiveness, often supplemented by teacher demonstrations and non-verbal cues (Coutts 2019; Hallam 2006); compliments and reassurances, used to acknowledge students' performances and support their learning process.

Humour emerged as a pivotal element of interaction in this study. While Zhukov (2012) highlighted its role in one-to-one instrumental lessons primarily as a face-saving mechanism and a

way to deflect criticism, this research found that teachers used humour extensively for various purposes. In both individual and group lessons, humour was frequently employed to minimise errors, acknowledge effort, explain musical concepts, and foster a relaxed classroom atmosphere. Beyond its pedagogical function, it also provided psychological and physiological benefits, such as boosting motivation, reducing anxiety, and enhancing self-esteem (Garner 2006; Hayes 2016). Moreover, humour functioned as a pedagogical tool to make abstract ideas more accessible and to cultivate a positive learning environment. Teachers' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences also influenced their use of humour, aligning with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. However, while humour can strengthen student engagement and teacher-student relationships, some argued that it should be used judiciously to maintain the teacher's authority (Pozsonyi and Soulstein 2019).

Interviews with students and teachers highlighted the significance of interpersonal interaction. Students valued teachers' approachability, humour, and constructive feedback. Teachers, however, offered varied perspectives: some emphasised honest communication, while others prioritised maintaining interpersonal boundaries.

Interpersonal interaction transcends mere knowledge transfer, enabling deeper emotional and relational exchanges. These interactions can create a *transitional space*, as described by Ellsworth (2005). In this dynamic, the external relationship between teacher and student fosters internal reflection and self-connection for the student. Ellsworth (2005, p. 57) questioned the implications of educators recognising pedagogy as a *transitional space*, proposing that such spaces encourage an 'economy of moving forms and selves' driven by open-ended relationality. Thus, by embracing this perspective, educators can cultivate learning environments that not only facilitate skill development but also nurture students' evolving identities, fostering adaptability, critical thinking, and personal growth.

I believe that this open-ended relationality thrives on positive interpersonal dynamics that prioritise safety and inclusivity. In such environments, students could feel secure in their journey of learning, allowing them to explore and grow both musically and personally.

#### 8.2.5. How does teacher-student interaction influence students' learning and musical identity?

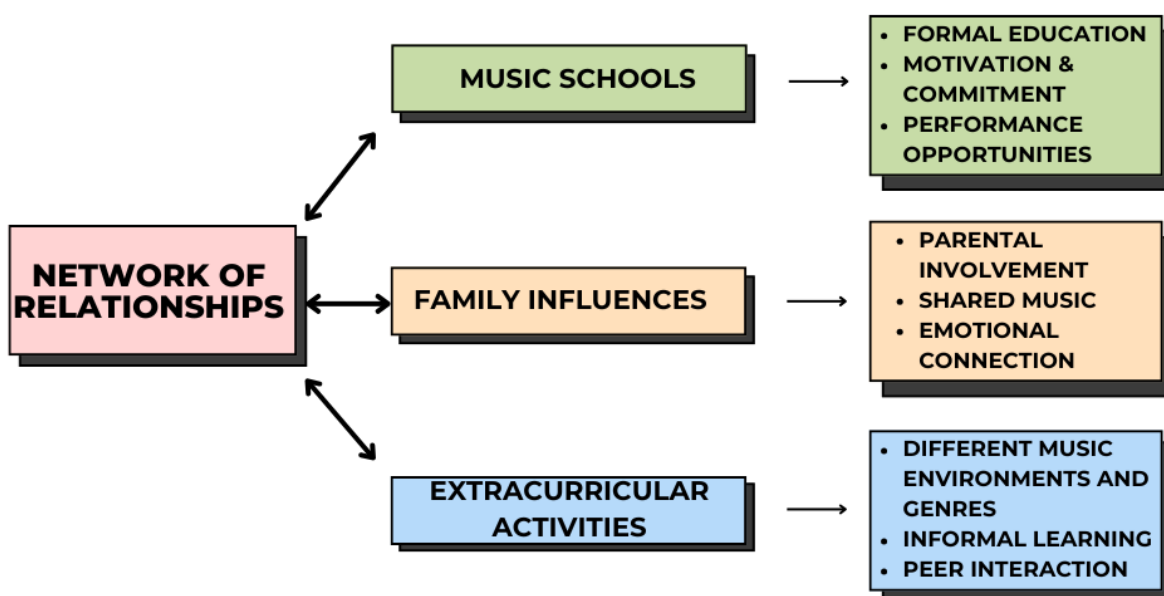
Students' interaction with peers, teachers, and parents profoundly influences students' learning and the development of their musical identities at the Mainero Secondary Music School by shaping their individual growth, sense of self, and group dynamics. Students' musical identities are multifaceted, emerging not only from their roles as learners and performers but also as members of their families, classmates, and broader musical communities. These identities are influenced by prior exposure to music, family engagement, and the guidance they receive at school, particularly from instrumental teachers who act as pivotal figures in their musical and personal development.

Instrumental teachers significantly impact students' motivation and self-perception through their teaching styles and the ways they integrate their own musical identities into their pedagogy. Teachers' experiences as both musicians and educators inform their interactions, inspiring students to explore their potential and develop aspirations related to music. By fostering a sense of purpose and passion, teachers help students view music as more than a scholastic pursuit—it becomes a medium for self-expression and emotional exploration. This guidance is particularly crucial in helping students navigate their 'possible selves' (Erikson 2007; Creech et al. 2020), envisioning their future within the musical world and reinforcing their commitment to their studies.

Group identity plays an equally vital role in shaping students' musical and social development. Participation in ensemble activities encourages students to build strong interpersonal connections and a shared sense of purpose (de Bruin 2022). Teachers cultivate these group dynamics by emphasising cooperation, mutual respect, and accountability within musical ensembles, which in turn influences students' interactions beyond the music classroom. The principal and teachers

observed that students who participated in group music activities were more likely to exhibit collaborative skills in other academic contexts, highlighting how music fosters broader interpersonal competencies. These group interactions, rooted in shared goals and responsibilities, can help students develop empathy, patience, and effective communication skills (Ilari, Helfter, and Huynh 2020; Tan 2017).

Finally, students' engagement with music extends beyond school, often influenced by family involvement and extracurricular activities, as seen in Chapter Seven. Family members' encouragement and shared musical experiences contribute to students' sense of identity as



musicians and enrich their learning processes. This network of relationships—teachers, peers, and family—creates an ecosystem where musical identity is nurtured and continually shaped, as seen in the following concept map:

*Table 8.1 Network of Relationships*

### 8.3. Limitations

The study was limited by the small scale of its sample, which was deliberately circumscribed to enable an in-depth investigation of a single school using diverse methodological tools. While this

constraint might initially seem like a limitation, it can also be seen as a strength in the context of this research, as a larger sample would have introduced excessive complexity, making synthesis difficult (Yardley, 2000, p. 218). The case study design inherently required a well-defined and focused sample. Furthermore, the choice of a single-case study, rather than a multiple-case approach, was dictated by the practical considerations of having only one researcher, prioritising depth of analysis over a breadth of data.

A second limitation of the study was the potential for researcher bias in data selection. My experience as an instrumental teacher in music schools, although never as a teacher at the Mainero Music School, may nevertheless have influenced the way I interpreted the data. To address this, I engaged in a continuous process of self-reflection throughout the research to mitigate the impact of personal biases. This involved critically examining my hypotheses and seeking alternative perspectives through discussions with my mentors and participation in conferences, ensuring a more balanced and objective analysis of the results.

Another limitation was the potential impact of translating between Italian and English on the reliability of the text. The interviews, observations, teachers' voice messages, and written notes were all conducted or recorded in Italian, while the results were presented in English. To address this issue, every effort was made to ensure accurate translations. This involved using transcription and translation software to faithfully translate interviews, field notes, and other materials, as well as seeking the assistance of an Irish translator to help with more complex sentences, ensuring their meaning was effectively conveyed in English.

Finally, there were some methodological limitations. The study received a relatively small number of voice messages from teachers compared to the number of observations conducted. This was anticipated, as creating voice messages was time-consuming for teachers already burdened with extensive practical and bureaucratic responsibilities. To address this, I focused on the few voice

messages received, linking them to relevant observations and analysing the commonalities and differences that emerged between the two data sources. Similarly, not all students provided a photo for the photovoice interviews. Of the 11 students, seven submitted photos, one did not attend the interview, and the others, lacking photos, spoke freely about topics they deemed important. For the photovoice analysis, I only included interviews with students who provided photos, integrating the interview content with the photos and connecting them to key themes in the research.

While observation provided the advantage of being immersed in the field, it also carried a significant limitation: the potential impact of the researcher's presence on participants' behaviors. To address this, I made it clear at the outset of the research—and whenever I noticed my presence influencing the observations—that my role was solely to collect data for anonymous analysis, without making any judgments or comments. My mentors were instrumental in guiding me to recognise and avoid personal biases, ensuring that the research remained objective, professional, and nonjudgmental throughout the process.

#### *8.4. Implications for Research and Practice*

The findings of this study shed light on the complex and interconnected nature of teacher-learner interactions within the context of music education, drawing attention to the crucial role that the learning environment plays in shaping musical outcomes and identity development. These interactions are not limited to the immediate teacher-student relationship but also extend to the broader physical, social, and symbolic dimensions of the educational setting. In particular, how the classroom or learning space is structured—both physically and emotionally—can deeply influence how students engage with music, develop a sense of belonging, and grow as both musicians and individuals.

Future research should explore these aspects more comprehensively, focusing on how the interplay of physical space (e.g., room layout, acoustics, access to instruments), social space (e.g.,

peer relationships, school community), and symbolic space (e.g., cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), musical symbols, educational values) shapes students' experiences. The impact of these dimensions on musical identity development, which is the way students see themselves as musical individual and musicians, needs to be carefully examined across different cultural and educational contexts. For example, while the symbolic meaning of music may vary across cultures, the physical and social environment can either support or hinder a student's capacity to see themselves as part of a musical community. Understanding how these dynamics differ across diverse settings can help provide insights into how music education practices can be adapted to suit a variety of contexts, allowing for more inclusive and holistic teaching practices.

As a practical step, schools could implement an instrument lending program to ensure that students who cannot afford personal instruments still have access to quality tools for practice and performance. Such a program could be supported through local sponsorships or school fundraising initiatives. In addition, rearranging classroom spaces to allow for flexible group configurations could help foster peer interaction and shared learning experiences.

Additionally, incorporating an exploration of elements like humour, non-verbal communication, and collaborative learning into the conversation would broaden our understanding of how music education contributes to more than just musical expertise. These often-overlooked components—humour as a tool for building rapport, non-verbal cues to communicate musical ideas, and collaborative practices fostering group cohesion—are fundamental not only for musical proficiency but also for social and emotional development. Music, being inherently social in many ways, thrives in environments where students feel comfortable expressing themselves, interacting with others, and learning collaboratively. The emotional and social growth of students, such as developing empathy, communication skills, and confidence, can be enhanced through these

informal yet meaningful practices, and it would be beneficial to study their role in the context of instrumental learning more closely.

For educators, these findings stress the importance of creating dynamic, inclusive, and adaptive learning environments that cater to the individual needs of students while simultaneously fostering a collective spirit. Teachers should be intentional in creating environments that balance personal growth with a sense of community, drawing on strategies that foster active participation and engagement. The use of humour, for example, can help ease anxiety and create a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere where students feel free to take risks. Non-verbal communication techniques, such as gestures or body language, can help clarify musical ideas in a way that words alone may not, fostering a deeper, more intuitive understanding of music. Encouraging collaborative practices, whether through group performances or peer learning, not only enhances musical skills but also nurtures social connections and teamwork. Schools might consider creating structured peer mentoring systems where more advanced students can support younger or less experienced peers, thereby fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual support. Workshops or short training sessions for teachers on the use of humour and non-verbal techniques in instruction could also be valuable for enriching teacher-student interaction.

Furthermore, engaging students' families in the educational process can help foster a more supportive and inclusive community. Family involvement in shaping the learning environment, whether through regular communication with teachers or active participation in school events, contributes to a sense of agency for students and their families. This involvement can help strengthen the link between home and school, reinforcing the value of music education and creating a community where everyone feels connected and valued.

On a broader, systemic level, addressing the structural challenges faced by music education is essential for ensuring that opportunities for growth are available to all students. Financial

constraints, lack of access to instruments, and discrepancies between primary, secondary, and higher education curricula can create significant barriers to musical learning. For instance, without access to instruments, or if students experience a disjointed musical education across grade levels, they may struggle to develop the skills or confidence necessary to succeed in music. Policymakers and educational leaders should strive to eliminate these disparities by promoting greater accessibility to instruments, supporting teacher professional development, and ensuring continuity between educational stages. By fostering a more equitable music education system, we can ensure that all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to the resources and support they need to develop their musical potential. On a broader, systemic level, addressing the structural challenges faced by music education is essential for ensuring that growth opportunities are available to all students. Financial constraints, lack of access to instruments, and discrepancies between primary, secondary, and higher education curricula can create significant barriers to musical learning. For instance, without access to instruments or if students experience a disjointed musical education across grade levels, they may struggle to develop the skills or confidence necessary to succeed in music. Policymakers and educational leaders should strive to eliminate these disparities by promoting greater accessibility to instruments, supporting teacher professional development, and ensuring continuity between educational stages.

In conclusion, the integration of these insights into music education practice—whether in the classroom, at the policy level, or through systemic reforms—holds the potential to transform instrumental education into a more inclusive, socially enriching, and empowering experience. Teachers, researchers, and policymakers must collaborate to create a framework that not only nurtures musical skills but also fosters personal and social growth, ultimately empowering students to explore their fullest potential within a rich, inclusive educational ecosystem. Through such efforts,

music education can truly become a transformative force that supports the development of both musicians and individuals.

#### *8.5. Further Study*

This study illuminates the intricate ways in which interpersonal interactions within one-to-one and group music lessons shape the learning experiences and identity development of students at a secondary music school in Italy. However, the complexity of these dynamics invites further exploration to deepen our understanding and expand the scope of the findings. Future research could examine how the interplay of physical, social, and symbolic spaces observed at the Mainero Secondary Music School manifests in other cultural and educational contexts. Comparative studies across different countries or music education systems could offer valuable insights into the universality or specificity of the relationships between space, interaction, and identity.

Additionally, longitudinal studies could shed light on the evolving impact of these interactions over time, particularly as students transition through various educational stages or into professional or amateur musical careers. Such investigations might reveal how the seeds of identity planted during secondary music education continue to influence personal and professional trajectories. The role of systemic factors, such as curricular continuity and financial accessibility, warrants deeper exploration to identify practical strategies for mitigating barriers and enhancing inclusivity in music education.

Another promising avenue for future research lies in the examination of non-verbal communication and its pedagogical potential. The use of gestures, mirroring, and musical imitation, as highlighted in this study, opens up questions about the broader applications of such methods across disciplines. Furthermore, the use of humor as a teaching tool, while acknowledged for its benefits, merits further investigation into how its effects vary depending on cultural, social, and individual differences among students and teachers.

Finally, given the significance of family involvement in shaping students' musical identities, future research could explore strategies for fostering more robust family-school collaborations. Although research has already been conducted on this topic, such as that of Creech et al. (2009), further studies on how familial and educational influences interact to support or hinder students' musical development could inform more holistic approaches to music education that engage all stakeholders in a shared mission of nurturing young musicians.

#### *8.6. Contribution to Knowledge*

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in music education by offering a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between teacher-student interactions and the socio-cultural environment of a secondary music school. It advances the theoretical discourse by framing educational spaces as transitional sites where *habitus*, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1986), interacts with the symbolic and social dimensions of learning (Ellsworth 2005). It examines how students' internalised dispositions interact with the symbolic and social dimensions of learning. The study also highlights the broader socio-cultural forces shaping these interactions, particularly the role of school *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986) in influencing educational norms, beliefs, and access to resources. While instrumental lessons promote dedication, collaboration, and community, systemic challenges such as financial barriers and inequities in access to musical education impact students' experiences and opportunities. As Bull (2020) argues, classical music often reinforces existing social hierarchies, offering limited mobility for less privileged students. While working- and lower-middle-class students may see music as a path to advancement, they face cultural and economic barriers not shared by their more privileged peers. Standards of musical excellence often reflect middle-class norms, raising urgent questions about who is included, who is excluded, and on what terms.

By integrating sociological and pedagogical perspectives, this research underscores the transformative potential of instrumental lessons, revealing how cultural structures shape and are

reshaped by individual agency (Bandura 2001). In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on music education, positioning instrumental learning as a site of negotiation between tradition, innovation, and personal expression.

By situating the analysis within the context of Italian secondary music schools, this research bridges a critical gap in the literature, offering a culturally specific perspective that complements and extends existing studies reviewed in this thesis. While there is a growing body of research on music education in secondary schools across Europe, studies focusing on Italian secondary music schools remain limited. The few available sources, such as Biasutti and Concina's (2018) study, primarily adopt quantitative methodologies, leaving a notable absence of qualitative research that explores the lived experiences of teachers and students in these institutions. This study, therefore, makes a significant contribution by providing an in-depth, qualitative examination of teacher-student interactions in Italian secondary music schools, shedding light on the socio-cultural factors that shape pedagogical relationships and musical identity development.

One of the main reasons for this research gap is the underdevelopment of music education as an academic discipline in Italy. Unlike other European countries where music pedagogy is a well-established field of research, Italy has historically lacked dedicated Ph.D. programs in music education. Although the 2021 ministerial decree (DM 226/21) introduced the possibility of doctoral programs in Conservatories, no such programs currently exist. By addressing this gap, this study has implications at multiple levels. First, it offers practical insights for instrumental teachers, helping them better understand how pedagogical relationships are formed and maintained within the unique socio-cultural context of Italian secondary music schools. Second, at the national level, it contributes to raising awareness of the need for a formalised academic field of music education in Italy, potentially advocating for the establishment of doctoral programs in Conservatories. Finally, at the international level, this research introduces global scholars to the realities of Italian secondary

music schools, providing a foundation for comparative studies and fostering a broader reflection on interpersonal interactions in music education across different cultural and educational contexts.

Furthermore, by emphasising the role of collaborative practices and shared values, this study highlights the potential of secondary music schools to serve as Communities of Musical Practice (Kenny, 2016), where interpersonal connections drive both collective and individual development. This builds on the idea that learning in music education is not merely an individual pursuit but a socially embedded experience, shaped by participation, relationships, and shared cultural practices.

Moreover, this research adds a detailed exploration of humour as a pedagogical tool, demonstrating its multifaceted role in fostering a supportive and inclusive learning atmosphere. This research illustrates how humour, as observed in the teaching practices operates on multiple levels: it can diffuse tension, clarify abstract concepts, foster a positive learning environment, and create a sense of shared identity between teacher and student. Whether intentionally integrated into lessons or arising spontaneously from cultural and personal identity (Bourdieu, 1986), humour acts as a bridge that enhances motivation, builds confidence, and facilitates understanding through relatable and imaginative analogies. Beyond its role as an instructional strategy, humour functions as a transitional element in music education, shaping the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship and reinforcing a sense of belonging within the classroom. This highlights the importance of fostering learning environments that are not only rigorous but also emotionally and socially enriching.

In conclusion, this research contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of music education. It illuminates the complex interactions that shape learning and identity, providing educators, researchers, and policymakers with valuable insights into fostering environments that nurture the holistic development of young musicians. Through its focus on the power of music education, the study reaffirms the role of music schools as vital spaces for creativity, community,

and self-discovery. What emerged as particularly distinctive about the Mainero school is its strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships and the integration of families, teachers, and students into a cohesive musical community. The Mainero music school nurtures a collaborative atmosphere where the social and emotional dimensions of music learning are central. This approach was most evident in how teachers involved families in musical activities and the emphasis placed on shared experiences, creating a unique environment where learning was deeply embedded in social connection.

In reflecting on this research process, I also came to understand that my own PhD journey functioned as a transitional space, just as the students experienced in their musical learning. This journey allowed me to explore, challenge, and ultimately affirm my own pedagogical identity. Through this experience, I discovered that my teaching is not a technique I apply, but a reflection of who I am as a person and educator. I can now say with clarity: I teach as I am.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A. Music High School Timetable

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
8.30	Italian Literature	Italian Literature	Religion/Alternative subject	Art	Art
9.20	Italian Literature	Italian Literature	Maths	English	M. Theory, Analysis, Composition
10.10	English	Physical Ed.	Maths	M. Theory, Analysis, Composition	M. Theory, Analysis, Composition
11.00-11.20	<b>Break</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Break</b>	<b>Break</b>
11.20	Geography	Physical Ed.	Music History	Philosophy	History
12.10	Physic	Maths	Music History	Philosophy	History
13.00	Physic	Music technology	Music technology	Group music	Choir
13.50	<b>Lunch Break</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>
14.30		Saxophone			
15.20		Saxophone			
16.10				Piano	

Table 9.1. Music High School Timetable

*Appendix B. Observation Table Used for Pilot Trial*

		Notes
Space	Organisation of the space	
Teacher/s	Verbal interaction	
	Non-verbal interaction	
	Proxemics	
	Eye contact	
	The tone of the voice	
	Communication (mutual listening/dialogue/clarity/encouragements/...)	
Student/s	Verbal interaction	
	Non-verbal interaction	
	Proxemics	
	Eye contact	
	Tone of the voice	
	Communication (Mutual listening/ dialogue/asking questions/giving personal musical opinion...)	
Other		

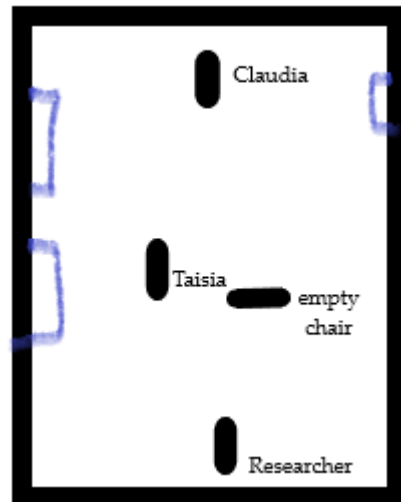
*Table 9.2. Observation Table Used for Pilot Trial*

Tetyana and Carla Observation n.1: One to one Instrumental lesson

Tetyana is 5 minutes late, at 14.45, she is not aware that she is in late and the teacher make her notice that it is 14.45. On the left of the follow . draft

there are the windows with some coloured flower and on the right the door. The researcher is positioned in the bottom of the room. T. sits down with her instrument (that she mounted while a female classmate, is finish her lesson.)

C. make plays an A and the student follow her, tuning her instrument. She continued till C. says 'ok, it is good now'.



Meanwhile the classmate come out and come back because she forgot something in the classroom.

C. propose to make a lesson on orchestra pieces because rehearsals went 'as a drunk choir on a bridge in Venice' (say C. and T. laughing). C. proposes to play scales at 50 but T. wants to play a 60.

'She likes competitions' says the teacher with a smile. T.'s metronome doesn't work, so C. takes her saying that it is old but it works. C. wants to hear a scale with two notes for each bit. (Little interruption of a student looking for Brando).

The teacher proposes to continue with more difficulties: now she wants to hear 4 notes for each bit and then 8. T. starts with the eight one, but the teacher corrects her. T. play the right one and the teacher says 'brava (good)'. C. congrats with T. because she is very centred and asks her if she is centred because the researcher is there,

laughing and saying that it is good to have someone who listened for concentration and that, if so, she will ask the researcher to assist lessons each week. T. continues playing scales but not in time with metronome. So, C. remembers her to play always with metronome and keep headphones if necessary.

C. wants to hear a part of Corale Cantata 146. T. says that she had studied it very much and with shut eyes. C. jokes about the T.'s neighbours, stating that they would know the piece by heart too. C. asks to T. if she wants to use metronome and the student says no: she prefers without because she studied it very much. C. gives the tempo and remembers to T. that she has to play a detached. While T. is playing, the teacher smiles.

In the meantime, a pupil from other instrumental class come into the classroom asking about the tempo of some piece for the Christmas concert. He didn't say the titles clearly, so the teacher though he was asking about 'We wish you a merry Xmas' and 'Gloria'. The teacher says that she doesn't know and T. helps to understand which piece the pupil is talking about. C. says that it is 110 (bpm/m) but it is better to study it at 80. She says: 'If it is good slow, it will be good fast too'. The pupil comes out and T. wants to play from where she stopped. She wants to start from where violas start. The teacher congrats with her saying that it is good to write in the score what the other instruments do, but T. answer that she hasn't written anything but she knows. C. says 'even better'. T. plays her instrument and the teacher follows with attention the score in her bookrest saying that in a certain bar there is a mistake and making listening how it has to played. T. continues and the teacher appears satisfied: it seems that she wants to say something but she waits. About one minute later, she stops the students and says: 'I stop you. It was good but I have something to say'. She then shows how a certain passage has to be done and T. copies. The first time the student does the passage, the teacher shows again how it must be but then T. does it again and C. says: 'Good, here it is. You see how it has to be done but the other students do that in the wrong way (she indicates the wrong position with her instrument)'. C. shows then a passage on triplets and T. imitates her. C., indicating T. with a smile, says 'here it is!'. T. proposes to change the piece, standing up to change it, but the teacher asks her if she is in hurry, ironising about this and saying that maybe T. thinks that the researcher is in hurry and that T. wants to show her everything. Then, C. proposes to play Corale

starting from bar 39. T. starts playing and then the teacher accompanies her playing the main theme of the piece. T. is surprised and stops playing. C. ironises about that and C. and T. play together. A beautiful sound is the result of the two instruments playing together. C. says 'brava' to T. and asks her if she is excited, because she has red cheeks. C. narrates that the day before a student of the third year played for the students of the first year. Even if this student is normally brave and sure of himself, he got emotional because of the emotion of playing in front of somebody.

C. starts again playing instrument and looking to T. to make her understand the start of the musical sentence. The teacher maintains the rhythm with the foot and she looks T. with intensity to make her understand the final part in *rallentando* (slowing down) of a musical sentence. C. proposes to redo it because it was not right. They play and the teacher looks at T. with a smile (like she has done a mischief) and indicating her, she says that she ate a quarter note. They redo the same part of the piece, but this time C. says that T. doesn't follow her and proposes to play the piece one more time. Even this time, one quarter is missed, so the teacher asks T. to play alone from bar 63 with a not so large hand. T. does as request and this time it is fine. They play together but this time the teacher seems confused about the results and, laughing, says that this time she is the one who made a mistake. The teacher suggests to play notes in a less 'martial' way, in a smoother way but still short because if they will play in the Aula Magna, there is too much rumbling. 'Good' she says to T. that tries out short but smoother notes, but she makes her notice that she has a 'revolutionary finger' that needs to be closer to the keyboard. C. asks: 'how many hours did you study this week? It seems you studied a lot!' T. answered that she played every day and the teachers ironise about the neighbours that know all the stuff she studies.

T. starts playing another piece 'Fantasia di Natale' and C. stops her to make notice that there is a mistake. T. already knows and C. listens to her with satisfaction. T. starts to play again and the teacher keeps the tempo with a finger snap. T. stops and the teacher makes the mimic of a

movement. Meanwhile the door opens: there is A., the next student for the next lesson. It is indeed 15.20. A. starts to assemble the instrument. T. continues playing and when she finishes the teacher says to her that she is very tuned. A. sits near T. with his instrument. C. asks T. to play the introduction while A. is preparing himself to play. C. sings the main theme while T. plays. The teacher indicates with a finger the hear as to make understand that the tuning is not correct. When T. finishes, C. verbalises the movement with the finger. A. starts to tune his instrument; T. disassembles hers and goes toward the door with the researcher coming out with her. Some chat between the teacher and the researcher before coming out about the qualities of the instrument and the problem with the instrument at school: school doesn't have its own instrument so the teacher left a her own (not the best) instrument at school to have it there. She showed the researcher an old broken string instrument in a corner that was used years before by the previous teacher.

*Appendix D. List of Observations and Interview*

Below is a table listing the observations made at Mainero Secondary School:

Observation	Date	Location	Lesson	Length
N. 1	22.11.08	Marcella Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 2	22.11.14	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 3	22.11.14	Anna Practice Room	Wind Instrument	40 minutes
N. 4	22.11.14	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 5	22.11.15	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 6	22.11.15	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 7	22.11.16	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 8	22.11.16	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 9	22.11.16	Anita Practice Room	Orchestra	60 minutes
N. 10	22.11.21	Marcella Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 11	22.11.22	Ginevra Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 12	22.11.22	Ginevra Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 13	22.12.02	Great Hall on the ground floor	Orchestra concert	65 minutes
N. 14	22.12.02	Anita Practice Room	Orchestra rehearsal	40 minutes
N. 15	22.12.02	Anita Practice Room	Orchestra rehearsal	60 minutes
N. 16	22.12.12	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 17	22.12.12	Marcella Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 17	22.12.12	Marcella Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes

N. 18	22.12.12	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 19	22.12.12	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 20	22.12.13	Ginevra Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 21	22.12.13	Ginevra Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 22	22.12.14	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 23	22.12.18	Primary school hall connected to music secondary music	Orchestra concert	100 minutes
N. 24	22.12.20	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 25	22.12.21	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 26	23.01.09	Marcella Practice Room	String Instrument	40 minutes
N. 27	23.01.16	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 28	23.01.16	Marcella Practice Room	String Instrument	40 minutes
N. 29	23.01.16	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 30	23.01.16	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 31	23.01.17	Ginevra Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 32	23.01.17	Ginevra Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 33	23.01.17	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 34	23.01.24	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 35	23.01.24	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 36	23.01.31	Marcella Practice Room	String Instrument	40 minutes
N. 37	23.02.01	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 38	23.02.01	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 39	23.02.14	Marcella Practice Room	String Instrument	40 minutes

N. 40	23.02.27	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 41	23.02.27	Marcella Practice Room	String instrument	40 minutes
N. 42	23.02.28	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 43	23.02.28	Great Hall on the ground floor	String Ensemble	40 minutes
N. 44	23.03.01	Marcella Practice Room	String instrument	60 minutes
N. 45	23.03.02	Marcella Practice Room	String Ensemble	60 minutes
N. 46	23.03.03	Great Hall on the ground floor	String instrument	30 minutes
N. 47	23.03.03	Great Hall on the ground floor	String instrument	30 minutes
N. 48	23.03.06	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 49	23.03.06	Anna Practice Room	Wind instrument	40 minutes
N. 50	23.03.09	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 51	23.03.09	Entrance Hall on the third floor	Wind Ensemble	60 minutes
N. 52	23.03.09	Anita Practice Room	Bowed Ensemble	40 minutes
N. 53	23.03.09	Anita Practice Room	Bowed instrument	40 minutes
N. 54	23.03.14	Marcella Practice Room	String instrument	60 minutes

*Table 9.3. Observations*

Below a list of interviews is shown:

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Length</b>
Teacher Anita	First Interview	22.11.14	24 minutes
Teacher Anita	Second Interview	23.03.07	24 minutes
Teacher Ginevra	First Interview	22.10.14	13 minutes
Teacher Ginevra	Second Interview	23.03.27	10 minutes

Teacher Anna	First Interview	22.10.14	33 minutes
Teacher Anna	Second Interview	23. 02. 27	17 minutes
Teacher Marcella	First Interview	22.10.14	20 minutes
Teacher Marcella	Second Interview	23.03.07	10 minutes
Alessia	First Interview	22.11.03	10 minutes
Alessia	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.21	9 minutes
Bernardo and Enrica	First Interview	22.11.03	12 minutes
Bernardo	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.21	9 minutes
Enrica	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.21	6 minutes
Carolina	First Interview	22.10.25	17 minutes
Carolina	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.21	8 minutes
Cinzia and Serena	First Interview	22.11.06	13 minutes
Cinzia	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.21	5 minutes
Serena	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.22	8 minutes
Ernesto and Federica	First Interview	22.10.24	15 minutes
Ernesto	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.23	7 minutes

Sara	First Interview	22.10.24	14 minutes
Sara	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.21	13 minutes
Tetyana	First Interview	22.10.24	12 minutes
Tetyana	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.21	5 minutes
Valentina	First Interview	22.10.26	11 minutes
Valentina	Second Interview: Photovoice	23.03.22	15 minutes
Tetyana's mother	Interview	23.03.07	7 minutes
Enrica's mother	Interview	23.03.06	10 minutes
Valentina's mother	Interview	23.03.08	8 minutes
Carlotta_Music Education teacher	Interview	23.02.27	9 minutes
Marisa_Italian teacher	Interview	23.02.14	7 minutes
Eugenia_Italian teacher	Interview	23.02.14	6 minutes
Principal	Interview	23.01.31	7 minutes

*Table 9.4. Interviews*

## *Appendix E. Interview's Transcription*

Here, I present the first interview with one of the instrumental teachers as an example of interview:

**Researcher:** As premise, I want to tell you that I am here just precisely to observe a school environment in which I am not involved and can observe in a detached and neutral way. The first question I want to ask you is if you would like to tell me about your musical background and how that has influenced your choice to teach instrument in middle school music.

**Instrumental Teacher:** I went to middle school attached to the Conservatory, I entered when I was 11. I am not the daughter of musicians. I used to strum a Bontempi pianola with two fingers. I have a very good musical ear, so by ear I used to play the little songs. Then I entered the middle school Conservatory, I wanted to take piano, but there were only two places, there were many of us, and they told me, 'But you have a big hand!' There's room for a big instrument!' I got in, got hooked, and continued. In the meantime, I also went to high school for science. It was hard because it was a very strict school, with old, strict teachers. Then I started to be an adjunct in the orchestra... I started auditioning in various orchestras, I collaborated for 25 years, with various symphony orchestras, especially the RAI, but also the Toscanini of Parma, the Haydn of Bolzano municipal of Bologna. Why do you know the Padua Chamber? Less than the others, although I had two qualifications with B. and G.<sup>18</sup>, but evidently they did not want me there. In the meantime I was also teaching since there is very little work for the my instrument in my native city, I came up with the idea of creating instrumental schools and I created them in two parish schools run by religious, one of nuns and there is a house of mine and the other an Episcopal college.

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<sup>18</sup> B. and G. are the initial of two famous musician playing the same instrument of the interviewee teacher.

And so I started teaching in these parochial schools, where there was both elementary and middle school and in the bishop's college there was also high school, and I had a lot of fun with the little kids as young as six years old...it was very nice. After that, there were problems with the nuns, and in the meantime, I also taught four years at the Steiner school, both elementary and sixth seventh eighth, as they call it, which would be middle school.

Then I scored in an experimental scientific high school in a big city in the north of Italy, after which I couldn't work anymore, I starved for a few years, and then I decided to move to Turin, since there are more instrument classes here in middle school. I moved here and did a few years of support and then finally came the instrumental class in middle school.

I took lessons from the Suzuki School for a year as an auditioner. I learned a lot. It's not easy with young children because I had a hard time when I was teaching the little ones there in elementary school I turned to another senior teacher at the Conservatory, who gave me the teacher's picture book and I studied so much about setting the bow with these little hands and all the aids, the stick and the callus guard, from there and now I still use all these that have to be used for three-year-olds. They're forced to be used for middle schoolers as well. Because I find that the manual dexterity of such young children has regressed over the years.

I don't know, I lived in a small town, but I remember when I was little, we were kind of free-range in the sense that we were on skates. I still have the scars on my knees-skates and scooters. And that improved manual dexterity and we used to build kites. Now I see these sixth graders, they even struggle to pull the zipper of the case, so much so that the first few days it takes them 25 minutes to put all the pieces in.

So now I've realised that I have to give order there too, but that it's against my nature...so we put the bow down, we pull the tip in, we clean the strings, then that way we can take 5 minutes, otherwise if I let them loose one had all the stuff scattered on the floor and they look around.

**Researcher:** Well, thank you. I go on with the questions. What is music to you?

**Instrumental Teacher:** Nourishment of the soul. When I'm tired, making music already changes my mood. Even when I get in the car in the evening that I'm exhausted, I get out of here, really overwrought... The first thing I do, I turn on the radio to listen to music of all genres. And I'm not really just classical, not rap (that one really puts a little bit of angst...) but however it's the nourishment of the soul what I tell the children, that's the nourishment of the spirit of the soul.

**Researcher:** So this question is a little bit more about music school. How do you find this teaching in the music-oriented middle school compared to other places where music can be taught? Does it have any special characteristics?

**Instrumental Teacher:** Other places, that is, schools...

**Researcher:** Private rather than precisely a Suzuki course or... a conservatory.

**Instrumental Teacher:** So at the conservatory in recent years they've also been doing these little orchestras of little students, and this is a very nice thing, didactically pedagogically speaking, in my opinion, because by playing together you learn a lot, you learn the principles of civil coexistence, you learn a certain mental discipline. Um. Here it seems to me that the beautiful things are precisely the ensemble. The student orchestra is very nice. With Covid there was the blockade for two years, so you know better than me that not being able to perform outside created big problems. I now have a student that I want to have a competition and this eighth grader has never played in public I'm a little bit worried about that because I don't know the nervousness of this little girl once she

gets a commission of 10 people or maybe even the full audience and I don't know if they're going to let in there, I'm a little bit worried because this one is good but she's never played in public objectively. It seems to me that we are on the right track. As we were talking last night in a meeting with colleagues, it's a bit of a penalty that we have to do all our classes in the afternoon. I see especially the first ones who come to my class even at the seventh hour have their eyes just -- I see them tired, I see them not being able to listen, and we have all the afternoon classes and so I'm going to have class, for example, from 5:20 p.m. to 6 p.m. That in my opinion is a little bit of a limitation, why? Because at that time, they basically make the tenth.

**Researcher:** And that statement of yours leads me straight to the next question: how are the interpersonal interactions with the pupils? His with his pupils inside the middle school musical address?

**Instrumental Teacher:** In what way?

**Researcher:** How would you describe interpersonal interactions during individual lessons. Interpersonal interactions are all those things that happen within a dyadic two relationship between the teacher and the student.

**Instrumental Teacher:** I like to joke, I like to make jokes. Which then in retrospect, sometimes I've realised that kids don't even understand, but they maybe go home and say strange things that are then reported to me, they say, but look we didn't understand each other, so now I also have to limit myself a moment because sometimes I make joking jokes, but then I understand later that kids didn't understand them. But even the third graders...I like to joke, which ones? I like smile, laugh,

and make funny examples so that the similarity remains with them. I say, for example, when they are out of tune, 'Oh, this sound is as abominable as the Yeti', I mean I like to make jokes.

But I'm also wondering on the other side, isn't it that my making jokes makes me lose authority? I compare myself with my other colleagues and I doubt that this joking, sympathetic way of me, almost like a friend may affect my authority a little bit and so that's why I then come to find problems with it that when I say do this do that, they don't obey. For example, I found two that still didn't have the name tag on the bow, after one year they were second, one year I said take care, the other week there was a bow there three days and I said by eye and that 'student there, but we are not sure because they are all the same. And yesterday when I said but how come I'm not forgotten but a year and a month?

Then I say to myself, but how come the other colleagues say 'Do this' and everyone immediately does it? In the essay, an incident particularly hurt me. So three of my first-graders, and only my first-graders, were 20 minutes late and stood outside the door laughing and joking, waiting for their parents to be able to be around them. Me inside with gray hair or God, God I'm missing three already in line to go to the Aula Magna test with the minutes counted. I had three to go. Finally, at 15:20 they came in, me agitated, I had to leave my little ones with my colleagues, and I had to run with them, who takes 15 minutes to tune in? So the whole mess. After that, the string colleague said to me 'You who have a powerful voice, you say that we come inside to the Great Hall.' The third graders sit and play and the first graders stay leaning against the wall.

I shouted powerfully, I have a powerful voice, now I am hoarse, but I recommend, let's do this to 24 pupils, 18 heard me on hearing, six, all of mine, did not hear, did not obey. We went in, and 18 leaned against the wall. Mine sat down, I had to go there, ashamed. Only mine, six now this makes me think.

We don't know that the relationship with the teacher let's say it's worth 90 percent because I had a teacher in the fourth year who was obnoxious and he may have been good, but he used to give me two and a half hours of lessons, he always played and in the end you play once twice. He was also a little petulant--I'm a preciser too, I'm a perfectionist too, and that maybe sometimes doesn't help. But this one at the end I was on the verge of giving up. Then, another more pragmatic scorer came along, we changed, I said okay, let's continue.

**Researcher:** So that brings me to the next question. The next question is how does learning a musical instrument shape a student's identity? In what way can this thing happen? If it happens, of course.

**Instrumental Teacher:** I believe that teaching an instrument, teaches mostly a form of mental discipline... that we if we don't have the right discipline to understand how we have to move the hand, what do we have to calculate? And we struggle to play the instrument, but also for you woodwinds as well as for us strings that we have to build intonation. It's a form of mental discipline as well as developing the part of the brain that otherwise wouldn't develop with what the studies already have, but I find it enriching and especially having done two schools at the same time I see that those who do two schools among which they also have a musical instrument have a more open mind and are more used to solving problems, that is given these elements how can I manage? I know many graduates who did Conservatory, then maybe now they are doctors, engineers, not as many as abroad where they do quartets at home in the afternoon.

But you find a different mental form in those who have done normal, traditional, scientific and humanistic studies. And also the Conservatory is a mental form just, too different in my opinion is an extra enrichment, it's something extra that also helps in the study of other humanities science subjects. Because one learns a method of study given the objective elements. How they arrange them is really a mental form, in my opinion useful.

**Reasearcher:** Then the very last question. This one I'm going to read: Can you describe the places where music lessons and music activities take place in your school? You were telling me earlier about the rumbling of the classroom, which affects the interaction anyway, because if there is rumbling, you have to shout...

**Instrumental Teacher:** I have to shout it among other things...there is so much rumbling here...the room is big and a bit dingy, I also try to improve it, I buy flowers...the room was a laboratory, they wanted to make the Cinema Classroom there...I got the flowers, I make sure with the pupils that they make drawings for me, I try to attach stuff but in short, it's not really the most beautiful. As musical we do here, individual lesson, there in the atrium we did all last year orchestra. Because of the Covid, spacing and the wind instruments, we also do it here, this one is quite wide. Of course, this rumbling doesn't help, because I have a hard time getting everybody to hear me, and a little bit better acoustics would definitely help.

*Appendix F. Link Between the Main Themes and RQ*

<b>Musical Spaces</b>	Question 1
<b>Values and beliefs about music school</b>	Question 2
<b>Learning and teaching habits</b>	Questions 2 and 4
<b>Identity</b>	Question 5/ central question
<b>Interpersonal Interaction</b>	Question 3/ central question

*Table 9.5. Link Between the Main Themes and RQ*

*Appendix G. Interview Schedule*

*Questions for student's interviews*

1. What is music for you? What kind of music do you listen to and how often?
2. What instrument do you play and why did you choose to study it?
3. What do you like best about your instrument teacher's way of teaching?
4. What do you think of your school? What do you like most and what do you like least?
5. What are the most important experiences you have had so far while attending this school?
6. Would you like to describe the places where music lessons and musical activities take place in your school?
7. Is there anything else that you consider relevant/that you would like to discuss?

**Photo(s):** In these months, before the next interview, take some photos of the places where you make music with the school. You can use your phone or a camera. During the next interview, I will ask you to comment on the photo(s) you took

*Questions for teachers' interviews*

**Question for instrumental teacher's first interview:**

1. Would you like to tell me about your musical background and how this brought you to teach in music school?
2. Would you like to tell me about yourself and what is music for you?

3. How do you find teaching in a secondary music school?
4. Can you describe the places in which music lessons and music activities are carried out in your school?
5. How would you describe the interpersonal interaction during one-to-one lessons?
6. Can you tell me how learning a musical instrument and music in general might help your students explore their identity?
7. Is there anything else you feel is relevant/would like to discuss?

**Questions for teacher's vocal notes**

Please, describe your last lesson (interpersonal interaction/ enjoyment/ teaching/ learning...)

**Question for instrumental teacher's second interview:**

1. How does the student's mood affect your teaching? How does it affect the student?
2. Are there strategies you use to create a particular atmosphere?
3. Do you use humor and anecdotes, if yes, why? if no, why?
4. What strategies do you use to motivate pupils?

The group identity is very strong, it is seen especially during orchestra lessons and concerts.

How do your support helps the formation of this identity?

*Questions for learners' parents or legal guardian*

1. Why did you decide to send your child to a secondary music school and not to a mainstream secondary school?
2. What do you feel are the greatest strengths of the secondary music school?
3. What might be some challenges of the secondary music school?
4. How does your child find the experience of attending a secondary music school? What do they like? What do they not like?
5. Is there anything else you feel is relevant/would like to discuss?

*Questions for school principal and for the three teachers of other subjects*

1. What are your feelings about directing/teaching in a secondary music school? How is this different from other schools?
2. Does music instrument teaching and learning impact on learners and on other subjects? How?
3. Can you describe the places in which music lessons and music activities are carried out in your school?
4. Is there anything else you feel is relevant/would like to discuss?

## Appendix H. List of Themes and Sub-themes

### **Music spaces**

- Movement through spaces
- Organisation of the space
- Sound of the space

### **Beliefs and values about music school**

#### Parents' beliefs and values about music school

- about differences between music school and traditional school
- about the strength of music school
- about the challenges of music school

#### 1. Students' beliefs and values about music school

- about the differences between music school and traditional school
- about the strength of music school
- about the challenges of music school

#### 2. Teachers and principal's beliefs and values about music school

- about the differences between music school and traditional school
- about the strength of music school
- about the challenges of music school

### **Learning and teaching habits**

- Organisational practices
- Studying practices
- Teaching practices

### **Identity**

#### 1. Significance of music in shaping identity

#### 2. Student's identity

- Identity in general
- Musical background
- Musical preferences

#### 3. Teachers' identity

- Identity in general
- Musical Background

#### 4. Group identity

### **Interpersonal interaction**

#### 1. Non verbal interaction

- Eye contact
- Facial expressions-'Mimic'
- Humming and singing
- Musical and rhythmic gesture
- Musical imitation-repetition
- Physical touch

#### 2. Verbal interaction

- Agreement

- Disagreement
- Compliment and reassurances
- Corrections and reproach
- Explanation
- Musical questioning
- Humour and anecdotes:
  - Use of anecdotes about the musical history of the teacher
  - Use of anecdotes to give musical advices
  - Use of anecdotes to relaxing
  - Use of humour- normalising the presence of the researcher
  - Use of humour to compliment with students
  - Use of humour-giving musical advices-correcting errors
  - Use of humour-minimising student reproach
  - Use of humour-relaxing function

**Significance of music in shaping identity**  
**Impact of the researcher presence**  
**Impact of Covid 19 on teaching and learning**

Name	Files	References
<b>Beliefs and values about music school</b>	19	56
<i>Parents' beliefs and values about music school</i>	3	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about differences between music school and traditional school</li> </ul>	2	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the strength of music school</li> </ul>	3	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the weakness of music school</li> </ul>	2	2
<i>Students' beliefs and values about music school</i>	8	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the differences between music school and traditional school</li> </ul>	5	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the strength of music school</li> </ul>	7	8

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the weakness of music school</li> </ul>	4	4
<i>Teachers and principal's beliefs and values about music school</i>	8	28
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the differences between music school and traditional school</li> </ul>	4	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the strength of music school</li> </ul>	7	13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the weakness of music school</li> </ul>	5	10
<b>Identity</b>	41	113
<i>Student's identity</i>	32	75
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity in general</li> </ul>	24	44
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Musical background</li> </ul>	10	16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Musical preferences</li> </ul>	10	15
<i>Teachers' identity</i>	15	38
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity in general</li> </ul>	13	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Musical Background</li> </ul>	9	13
<i>Group identity</i>	6	7
<b>Interpersonal interaction</b>	66	913
<i>Nonverbal interaction</i>	49	208

• Eye contact	16	19
• Facial expressions-'Mimic'	24	38
• Humming and singing	14	16
• Musical and rhythmic gesture	34	63
• Musical imitation-repetition	25	37
• Physical touch	17	31
<i>Verbal interaction</i>	54	654
• Agreement	5	7
• Disagreement	1	2
• Compliment and reassurances	29	54
• Corrections and reproach	42	89
• Explanation	43	118
• Interaction about organisation and school habits	24	30
• Musical questioning	42	131
• Humour and anecdotes	48	184
➤ <i>Use of anecdotes about the musical history of the teacher</i>	3	3

➤ <i>Use of anecdotes to give musical advices</i>	9	9
➤ <i>Use of anecdotes to relaxing</i>	21	26
➤ <i>Use of humour- normalising the presence of the researcher</i>	10	13
➤ <i>Use of humour to compliment with students</i>	4	4
➤ <i>Use of humour-giving musical advices- correcting errors</i>	23	32
➤ <i>Use of humour-minimising student reproach</i>	29	49
➤ <i>Use of humour-relaxing function</i>	33	48
<b>Learning and teaching habits</b>	68	186
• <i>Organisational practices</i>	28	34
• <i>Studying practices</i>	35	50
• <i>Teaching practices</i>	37	61
<b>Music spaces</b>	64	200
• <i>Movement through spaces</i>	44	108
• <i>Organisation of the space</i>	55	73
• <i>Sound of the space</i>	15	19
<b>Significance of music in shaping identity</b>	13	17

<b>Impact of the researcher's presence</b>	14	17
<b>Impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning</b>	4	5

*Table 9.6. Themes, Sources, and References*

*Appendix I. Extracurricular Activities*

<p>Network of Music Schools in the Province Orchestra</p>	<p>The Network is a system that connects all public music schools in the province. Miré Network is the result of collaboration between the junior secondary music schools, music high schools, the Conservatory and the University, Local Authorities, private foundations, and Theatre Entities. The aims of the network are manifold and they include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The promotion of pedagogical research and experimentation, both in terms of music education, as well as for the practice of an instrument;</li> <li>2. the enhancement of educational activities aimed at ensemble music and solo;</li> <li>3. the formation and management of the OMT- Mirè Orchestra with the involvement of all the schools of the network;</li> <li>4. the organisation of concerts and meetings with professional musicians, including through national and international exchanges;</li> <li>5. participation in European projects of mobility and vocational training;</li> <li>6. the creation and publication of educational materials;</li> <li>7. a constructive dialogue between the schools belonging to the network; and</li> <li>8. the elaboration of opinions and proposals regarding legislation and organisation of instrumental and music education teaching in secondary school.</li> </ol>
<p>String Orchestra</p>	<p>Formed through a collaboration between Mainero school, another school, and a private association, the network aims to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To promote the study of the original repertoire for string instruments;</li> <li>2. Organise initiatives for practicing and perfecting the practice of ensemble music for string instruments;</li> <li>3. Deepen knowledge of the repertoire for string instruments from the Baroque to the twentieth century;</li> <li>4. To proceed with the creation of musical ensembles and orchestras of students and alumni of member Institutes, dedicated to music for string instruments;</li> <li>5. Realise economies of scale in organising, managing, and conducting teaching and performance;</li> <li>6. Coordinate joint initiatives of any nature concerning the scope of intervention and interest of the Network</li> </ol>
<p>Double Reeds Orchestra</p>	<p>The project aims to create a workgroup around the topic of double reeds. The institutions participating in the network are junior secondary music schools, music high schools, and the Conservatory.</p>

*Table 9.7. Extracurricular Activities*

