

What would happen, if we would decide to do more creativity with our students?

Prof. Dr. Christopher Azzara (Eastman School of Music Rochester/NY USA) in interview with Prof. Dr. Almuth Süberkrüb.

[00:00] Almuth: Welcome to the artistic talk of the Hamburg Online Open university at Hochschule fuer Musik und Theater podcast. Our topic today is “preparatory audiation” from various perspectives. My name is Almuth Süberkrüb. I am professor of music education, early childhood music education and I am in charge of the Project “Elementary music practice international” here at the HfMT Hamburg. My guest in the studio today is Christopher Azzara, professor of music teaching and learning and Affiliate faculty Jess studies and contemporary media at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, USA. Professor Azzara, since preparatory audiation, Bass takes place with very young children. I would like to start our talk with this age group.

[01:21] Christopher: Well, thank you for having me on this program. It's so nice to see you and to spend time in Hamburg with all of the students and the musicians that I am working with, and I appreciate the opportunity. Preparatory audiation is something that is the foundation for learning music and being a musician. The importance of early childhood cannot be understated. It is a very critical and important time for learning music. The most important thing that parents can do and teachers can do is to sing and move with children. Many different songs from different places around the world, in many different, tonalities. We call them major and minor, many different meters. Music that moves in twos and threes and in sevens and in fives ways to stimulate this, musical expression in from children because they've heard so many pieces of repertoire. For that context, they need.

[02:28] Almuth: That's very interesting. You talked about the importance of the environment and, what kind of music should be heard. What I think would be interesting if you could talk a little bit about the relationship between the children and the parents and, how important this is for learning.

[02:50] Christopher: Yes, of course. The foundation of music learning and most any learning happens from the beginning of life. And parents. By learning lots of songs and pieces of repertoire that they're comfortable singing or chanting rhythms or moving with their babies. And the young children is a key part of a musical relationship that will nurture, the learning of music for the for the child's entire life. Many times when parents bring their, children to classes, it's the parents that are learning what is necessary for developing this audiation skill throughout life because they are learning repertoire, being comfortable, singing and moving their body, enchanting rhythms and having lots of interactions. One thing that's quite interesting to me is the interaction between parents and children. Where a child, is very attentive when parents are singing and making music. And it's important for parents to be able to listen to the child as well and leave time and space for the child to both respond or even to initiate some kind of music interaction. Sometimes the children will, have some kind of musical rhythm or melody that they're singing, and parents can listen and improvise. Or you might say, play off of what the child is doing. And keep the conversation musical. As the child makes music, the parent can respond as the parents makes as the parent makes music. The child can respond. And this relationship is very important for the beginnings of audiation. What we're calling preparatory audiation.

[04:58] Almuth: You talked about very important things. You talked about space and time and about singing. And I think all three of them. We have two little in our communities. And so I think the the homes have to compensate for that. So maybe, you could say something about this because I think, if we look for quiet time at home, if, if people are outside, they won't get it

because it's noisy almost everywhere. So how can, for example, parents help to give space and quiet time listening? And how they can be active with the children so they get music from a real person face-to-face?

[05:52] Christopher: Yeah, this is so important. The importance of active music making as compared to passive listening from a radio or a handy or something. The idea would be to have an engaging conversation with music. And so if you think about how children learn to speak, they speak because they are spoken with and there is an interaction this way, and in music, the same potential exists that we sing and the children sing, and it's active interaction that that's a key, element of creating the pathways necessary for making music and having ways to express yourself musically. It's important to remember that music is unique in its ability to, be something or a vehicle for expression, like like nothing else. It's not always that we have words for things. We have music for things as well. And this music vocabulary is developed from the very beginning of life by this conversation we're speaking about. Now, when children only are passive and, listen to some kind of, something on the handy or on the radio. There's something there, of course, but it is much, much, much better for them to have interactions and conversational music making with the community. And if we can expand that community is a ripple effect, sort of. When you throw a stone in the water and all the ripples happen, the same thing can happen with music, where the parents and the child are doing this. And the ripple effect to other parents and other members of the community all the ages grandparents, parents, children across the community can grow. And it's a very healthy way for students to develop these musical skills for their music expression.

[08:12] Almuth: Yes. Thank you. I would like to take in another view on preparatory audition. I would like to look at the students. So for all students to become an effective teacher, they have to develop their own skills and and their pedagogical knowledge.

[08:39] Christopher: So this topic is inspiring to me because the best musicians ought to be teaching music with skills in music. We have the confidence to be convincing as a musician, and if we're interested in teaching music, we should have an awareness for how we learn music. So when we talk about the development of understanding pedagogy, we need to understand what to teach, when it might be appropriate to teach it, why we are teaching, how we are teaching, who we are teaching all of these words. These questions are essential for effective teachers. When you marry the idea of skills in music with an idea of when and what and how and why, then you're able to have a context for learning that is the best for, students to grow in music.

[09:45] Almuth: You talked about what, when and why. Could you please talk about those concepts a little bit more in depth?

[08:39] Christopher: Absolutely. The importance of understanding how learning is happening for students is best described when we have an understanding for the vocabularies we're learning as musicians and music learners, beginning with listening and speaking music. In music, we all use the word improvisation to describe, how we are having conversations musically. And this foundation of listening and improvising is an important context for other levels of learning. Learning to read music, learning to write music, and learning music theory. Many students may be learning music theory and are missing some of the important listening and improvisational experience that in, enhance and expand their audiation. Audiation in music is the ability to think and feel and embody music and comprehend it. So in order for this to happen, we need to be able to group musical sounds into meaningful chunks. We need to be able to interact with others and predict what might come next and make comparisons. So one foundation, theoretically, is how can we provide context for students where they're comparing? And the first way we can compare it is by ear. Now, theoretically speaking, in music learning theory, the term aural oral means to listen and to

sing or chant in a way that is cyclical. So we can develop this base of understanding of the sound, and then we might begin to name those sounds, theoretically that might be called verbal association, and we might improvise with this foundational level of understanding. As we move into becoming more confident and we have more vocabulary, children will be able to make all kinds of inferences about learning. They'll be able to investigate things that are not as familiar to them because they have familiar contexts for what they're doing. And so songs that are in major and in minor, in Dorian and in Mixolydian, these are modes of music. These are sounds that are made in various songs that we learn, songs that are in duple and triple songs in five eight and seven eight. These are the rhythms of many songs, and we don't start with the theoretical concepts. We start with just singing the songs. We would refer to that as whole, whole part, whole. So as we learn the parts of the vocabulary, we have the context of the whole. And by understanding curriculum this way teachers can be more effective. And this theoretical perspective gives folks a way to talk about it so that they can design curriculum that is the most healthy for student learning. The real simple way to describe the theory is that it should be sound before sight, or it's a way we express that would be to experience music before theory, and then the theory and the reading of notation has much more meaning when you can provide this context orally. So I think to summarize, we're talking about listening, improvising, reading, writing and having theory. Music theory for all of the, music we're learning. And getting back to the idea of preparatory audiation. It all starts with the singing in the movement and expressive performances, expressive things like dynamics and phrasing and tone quality and articulation all very important and necessary to learning to be a good musician. That's the foundation for all the other learning that will take place.

So I think these theoretical ideas just help us to describe more scientifically what is quite natural for people to do. Sometimes I'm found of saying that our grandmothers knew this already without all the theoretical terms, because, we might have had an experience with a person in our lives that did put us put, put a child in their lap and sing and rock the baby. And that's the beginning of what we're referring to as preparatory audition.

[15:02] Almuth: The theoretical perspective of music learning theory you talked about has been researched for understanding the best practice for teaching and learning. Maybe you could explain some of those ideas.

[15:15] Christopher: Yes. So many research studies have been done at all ages. My particular interest in research is with Improvization, and I'm fascinated by the improvizations of birth to three year old children, all the way to more advanced musicians at Eastman, and even adult learners. So there's, this idea that everybody has some potential for music and being able to interact with, teachers and students in a systematic way for research helps us to improve our instruction. One of the things, for example, that I'm very curious about is how do we learn to improvise and can we benefit from paying attention to the music making of birth to three year olds? And how would that affect learners that are older? Who may not have had rich experiences as a youngster? I know that, my latest research project has to do with how can some of these ideas be effectively taught with, seventh grade students in a choir? But I've also researched what do college students do when you invite them to improvise? What do people who are in elementary school. So, fourth or fifth grade, if we invite them to improvise and you may say, well, how are you considering this? Well, with the purpose of improving, teaching and learning and instruction, you ask several questions. For example, what if we were to teach students these songs by ear and establish a way for them to, learn a musical vocabulary that they can express spontaneously and give them opportunities to do this through singing and moving and chanting and playing on instruments. What would somebody perform for us? What would a fifth grader, for example, make? What kind of creativity could they express in the moment? I'm also very curious about how the improvisation might have, relationship with composing music, all coming back to listening and ideation. So audiation is to music. What thought is to language? So what if we had students who had ideas that they were spinning in their bodies and in their minds, and can

they express those spontaneously through improvisation and reflectively, through composition? What would they be able to, create? And how can we study that in ways that helps us teach better? So those are some of the ideas that, I've been fascinated by. But many researchers have over the decades of, this sort of idea of ideation. Many people have done research on all the age groups, and mostly it's for the purpose of, improving how we are teaching.

One thing to remember is that in some way, at some point in every musician's life, they'll be called upon to teach and so how can we understand learning better so that we can improve our teaching at whatever level we find ourselves doing that with whatever level we find ourselves in, engaged in? And I think through the research, making it a musical, endeavour, having folks examine, oh, what would happen if we decided that we would do more creativity with students, or what would happen if we compare their creativity to their ability to read music or write music or whatever concept you might have? These are all studies that have been done and will continue to be done at all. The different levels of music learning.

[19:40] Almuth: So we started with the parents and the babies, ended up with research studies and I would like to ask you if you have kind of a closing remark for us.

[19:57] Christopher: Yes. I think that one of the things that I'm inspired by with coming to Hamburg and, working with the everyone here, is the passion for how preparatory audiation is a foundation for music learning. As as, students and children, as folks grow, their audiation can expand and grow so they have more and more awareness for musical ideas and are comfortable singing and moving their body in ways that is confident and convincing when they're making music. These ideas of how music essentially is invisible, and what we can do is express those ideas confidently. And even when we read these, these, symbols on the page are, are reminding us of how musical we are, and how we have musical thoughts. We have musical ideas that can be expressed. So by laying a foundation and then preparatory ideation and expanding that audiation to greater and greater depth, we will have opportunities for lifelong learning and ways to express ourselves in the unique ways that we can through music.

[21:20] Almuth: Thank you very much for being here and sharing your thoughts.

[21:28] Christopher: Well, thank you for the opportunity. It's been my pleasure.

Transcript: Roos Kengen