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**Enrichment and acceleration of highly motivated children's instrumental music learning.
A case study of a pilot development project**

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Abstract

This case study examined a pilot development project to intensify the learning of instrumental music and enrich the development of highly motivated music school children in Finland. The project built on four core components: (1) increased tuition, (2) integration of peer learning alongside one-on-one instruction, (3) parallel teaching and (4) an emotionally nurturing environment. The school-year-long project was implemented in three music schools in collaboration with a higher education institution. The research findings suggest that all the core components intensified the children's instrumental music learning and that group lessons and activities increased their motivation. Parallel teaching served as continuing education for the teachers and diversified the children's learning, but it also occasionally caused confusion among the children. The nurturing learning environment, coupled with collaboration between teachers and families, as well as the commitment and support of caregivers, sustained the children's socio-emotional development and ability to cope with the concise schedule. Regarding the further development of such practices, based on this study, it can be suggested to better prepare the collaboration and parallel teaching of different teachers and to offer a clearer vision, negotiated with the participants, of what the child is expected to do at home and what the parents' role is. The project was perceived very time-consuming and intense. Therefore, finding the right balance in an extended instrumental education that integrates several elements is a challenge that needs further reflection. Overall, the project raised questions about how to reconcile providing equal opportunities for all children with the legitimacy of special treatment in music education. These issues should remain the subject of careful, critical and open consideration in music education policy and research.

Author Chosen Keywords: Accelerated learning, Instrumental music learning, Motivation, Music school system, Music education

Journal Keyword List: Instrumental pedagogy, Children and adolescents, Motivation, Music education, Policy

Introduction

This article presents a case study on a pilot development project (2022–2023), organised in collaboration with music schools and a higher music education (HME) institution in Finland. The project aimed to intensify the learning of instrumental music and enrich the development of highly motivated music school students aged 5–8 years old. The Finnish music school system offers extracurricular instrumental music education primarily for children and young people. It is guided by the national core curriculum, which is divided into general and extended syllabi (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). The extended syllabus receives public funding and offers students the opportunity to deepen their musical expression and skills in a more varied and sustained way than the general curriculum. In most cases, the instrumental music studies include a weekly 45-minute one-on-one lesson as well as tuition in music theory and solfège (integrated), music history, and ensemble or orchestra playing. The project was prompted by recent concerns of families and music professionals in the Finnish music education system regarding the opportunities for highly motivated children and adolescents to efficiently learn instrumental music (e.g., Ojala & Pohjannoro, 2024). It was initiated by an experienced instrumental teacher in HME who, like many other teachers, considered current practices, including only one lesson a week, insufficient to meet the great enthusiasm of highly motivated children to learn music and play an instrument. More broadly, the project was motivated by a general concern regarding the abilities of music schools to adequately prepare students for professional studies in music, as well as the high drop-out rates in Western classical music education programmes at all levels (e.g., Ruth & Müllensiefen, 2021; Tucker & Winsler, 2023).

Providing highly motivated children with enhanced learning and development opportunities

Motivation is typically defined as the desire, need or drive that people have for learning anything that particularly interests them throughout their lives (e.g., Reeve, 2015). In music, motivation in relation to learning and development has been discussed from multiple theoretical perspectives (see discussion in Evans, 2015). In recent years, however, there has been growing consensus to apply and adhere to the theory of self-determination (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000; also, Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT proposes that motivation 1) directs people's behaviour in different situations and challenges and 2) is connected to the fulfilment of humans' basic psychological needs, which include being in relation to others and feeling a strong sense of competence and autonomy in performing any activity. According to seminal research on motivational development (e.g., Austin et al., 2006; Lepper, 1981; Deci et al., 2001), when children experience a sense of belonging in a nurturing and caring environment, receive positive and relevant feedback, are exposed to optimal

learning challenges, have the ability make decisions about their learning and have the agency to express their ideas and feelings, their motivation is usually internally driven (*intrinsic motivation*), which helps them to take on more responsibility. On the other hand, when young learners are undermined by criticism and competition, excessive challenges, negative feedback, imposed learning goals or threats, their internal motivation either diminishes towards a complete lack of motivation (*amotivation*) or transforms into an externally driven behaviour (*extrinsic motivation*). Either scenario can cause children to become more reclusive and susceptible to behavioural and psychological issues.

All in all, motivation is a crucial aspect to consider in studying the learning, development and well-being of children, since it is the driving force that helps them to act and successfully overcome learning challenges. Therefore, it is important for parents and teachers to understand the level of motivation of young learners and guide and support them accordingly in their learning and development (e.g., McPherson, 2009). For instance, Shestra (2011) acknowledges that motivating children to learn requires exposing them to high quality education, which includes providing a friendly educational environment, improving access to educational opportunities, supporting the development of teachers' pedagogical skills, and implementing effective management procedures by stakeholders across institutions. In this context, many studies have been conducted on the learning and development of musically gifted children (e.g., McPherson, 2016), as well as on strategies for supporting the motivation of young musicians (e.g., Haroutounian, 2002; Parncutt & McPherson, 2002) and inspiring demotivated learners to continue their music studies (e.g., West, 2013). However, besides specialist programmes in formal and non-formal music education settings aimed at cultivating professionalism and at enriching and accelerating the learning of gifted and talented learners (e.g., López-Íñiguez, 2023; López-Íñiguez & Westerlund, 2023), to the best of our knowledge, no studies have focused on providing highly motivated children at the music school level with enhanced learning and development opportunities beyond what the general music school curriculum offers.

In light of the above, the objectives of the pilot project were in accordance with the *accelerated learning* method, which aims to optimise the efficiency and speed of learning of a given group of students through curricular choices (e.g., Hattie, 2009). The primary goal of accelerated learning is to foster long-term student success, advocating for a holistic learning experience that encompasses the emotional, playful and collaborative aspects of development (McKeon, 1995). To that end, the project focused specifically on group activities that benefitted children's musical attainment (in line with Nielsen et al., 2018). The principles of the approach were further reflected in actively engaging

the learners, their parents/caregivers and the broader education community (Lucas, 2005; Tatum, 2010). The project also considered the *enrichment* methodology, which aims for ‘richer and more varied educational experiences’ by modifying a curriculum ‘to provide greater depth and breadth than is generally provided’ (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p.120). Thus, the project did not simply provide more lessons but aimed to create a nurturing, enriching and stimulating learning environment.

At the beginning of the project, it was considered necessary to monitor its implementation through research. Therefore, the authors of this paper were invited to review the project’s implementation to further develop and refine its structure and practices, with the goal of establishing a more effective model for music schools to provide additional support and opportunities for highly motivated students. From this starting point, the present study was motivated to investigate the perceived influences of the project on the learning and development of highly motivated music school children. These include the identified advantages and challenges throughout the school-year-long project, according to the perceptions of the participating children, their parents and the teachers.

Methods

Design

Utilizing various qualitative research data generated using a multi-faceted approach, this evaluation research (Clarke, 1999), in the form of a case study (e.g., Stake, 2008) sought to comprehensively analyse the implementation of the project. The objective was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot project for further development and refinement in subsequent academic years. Following Stake (1995), the present study focused on examining what could be learnt from this case, exploring the key factors of the school-year-long project, including its benefits and challenges, as perceived by all participants.

The pilot project

The school-year-long pilot development project (August 2022–May 2023) was implemented in three state-subsidised music schools (extended syllabus) in collaboration with an HME institution. Motivated by the concern about the music school's ability to support sufficiently highly motivated students (as discussed in the introduction) and devised by the HME teacher who initiated the project, it built on four core components of (1) *increased tuition* (more lessons), (2) *integration of peer learning* alongside one-on-one instruction, (3) *parallel teaching* and (4) an *emotionally nurturing environment*. The HME teacher considered these components effective in providing additional support to young students who were considered to benefit from a more intensive learning path, while

providing them with a learning environment where they could develop at their own pace. She thought that, beside increased tuition and a variety of teachers, children would benefit from group activities and emotional support from the entire ecosystem surrounding them.

Motivated by concerns about the music school's ability to sufficiently support highly motivated students (as discussed in the introduction) and devised by the HME teacher who initiated the project, it was built on four core components: (1) increased tuition (more lessons), (2) integration of peer learning alongside one-on-one instruction, (3) parallel teaching, and (4) an emotionally nurturing environment. The HME teacher considered these components effective in providing additional support to young students who were believed to benefit from a more intensive learning path, while also allowing them to develop at their own pace. She thought that, in addition to increased tuition and a variety of teachers, children would benefit from group activities and emotional support from the entire ecosystem surrounding them. The pilot project also offered pre-service music teachers the opportunity to develop their skills in a safe environment supervised by more senior instrumental teachers (i.e., *practicum*), thus benefiting the educational community in diverse ways. Furthermore, it built a collaborative partnership between music schools and HME, which reflects the aims of the Vision 2030 for Finnish Music Education (see, <https://www.uniarts.fi/en/projects/musiikkikoulutuksen-visio-2030>).

The project received external foundation funding to facilitate the implementation of increased tuition. This included a parallel teaching model where one child was taught by more than one teacher. Each child had two 30-minute one-on-one lessons per week and one 30-minute group lesson with another child under the guidance of an instrumental teacher at the music school. The group lesson was integrated with the individual lesson (one after the other). In addition, each child received one 45-minute lesson at the HME institution with a student teacher teaching alone or together with a supervising teacher (every other time) as part of an instrumental pedagogy course (Figure 1). At the end of each semester, a half-day event was organised, in which the children first rehearsed both the previously learned repertoire and the new ensemble repertoire through singing, playing, and moving and then performed both solo and with the ensemble in a concert.

Participants

The project originally involved seven children studying violin, flute or cello, recruited by the instrumental teachers. One child dropped out in the middle of the project. At the start of the project, the children had been learning to play an instrument for about a year. All the participating children were identified by their teachers as displaying high motivation for instrumental learning. The study

participants included a) three instrumental music teachers (n=3) from the music schools, b) six children (n=6) and their parents (n=12), c) three teachers of instrumental pedagogy (n=3, one of whom was also an instrumental teacher) and d) seven student-teachers (n=7) from the HME institution. One instrumental teacher was on sick leave for almost the entire spring semester, and thus the children had several substitute teachers who were not part of the study. In each family, at least one of the parents had an immigrant background.

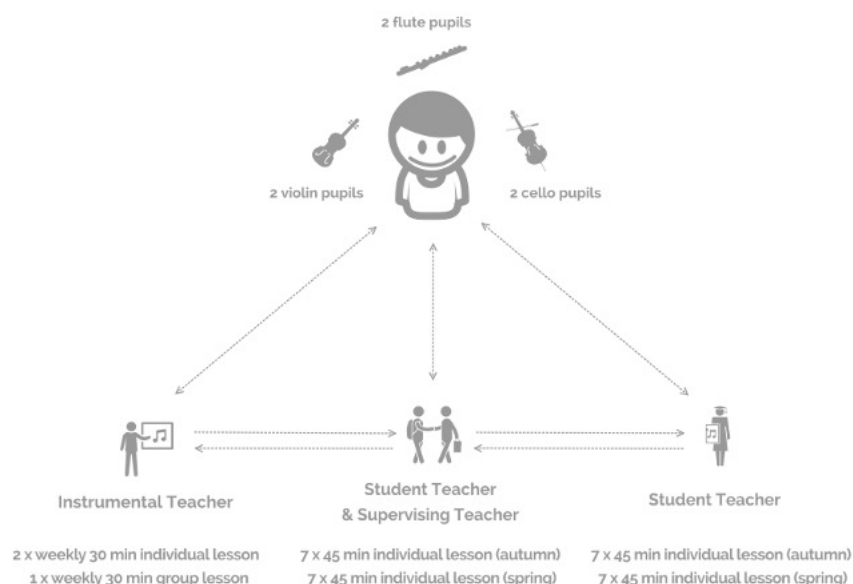


Figure 1. Organisation of the instrumental tuition in the project.

Materials and procedures

The teachers (n=5) and student-teachers (n=7) were tasked with maintaining detailed records of their experiences and observations pertaining to the project by responding to a series of survey questions (as provided in Appendix 1) either in Finnish or English. This documentation took place throughout the entire 2022–2023 school year. Children were not tested because the whole music school system in Finland is in the process of eliminating standardised exams and numerical assessments. Instead, it advocates for school- and student-specific assessment criteria, verbal assessment, and self-assessment, thereby enabling a process of student-centred development (Kauppinen, 2018). Thus, assessing children's learning and progress was based on formative assessment by teachers, observations by parents, and the children's own perceptions. At the end of the spring semester, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2) of six children and eight parents were conducted by the first author either in Finnish or English. The parents had the option to be present during their child's interview. The children's interviews typically lasted 15 minutes, while those with the parents present lasted approximately 30 minutes. One parent wanted

to complete the interview responses by email the day after the interview. The interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. The research material, including interview transcripts and diary entries, was collected partly in Finnish and partly in English.

Analytical approach

A qualitative inductive and descriptive content analysis, as outlined by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018), was conducted by the first author, who speaks both Finnish and English. With the research task in mind, the process of reviewing the data began with a careful reading and highlighting of passages commenting on factors considered to have influenced children's learning and/or development. Then, the data were coded and organised according to the emerging themes. The main themes related to the core components of the project were formulated as follows: *intensifying learning through increased tuition, increasing motivation through group lessons and activities, diversifying learning through parallel teaching and supporting socio-emotional development through nurturing learning environments*. The most discussed factor in the data was parallel teaching. Within the rest of the data, the identified themes included *time management* and *other influencing factors*, including children's concentration skills and flexibility of all the participants.

Ethics

The ethical acceptability of this study was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Arts Helsinki on 28 April 2022. Ethical questions were addressed according to the standard national guidelines for responsible conduct of research (Finnish National Board of Research Integrity, 2022). Informational letters describing the study were sent through email to the teachers, student-teachers and parents. All the project participants agreed to take part in the study and signed the informed consent forms. Participants were afforded the option to withdraw from the study at any point without the need to provide a specific reason. The study is reported in a manner that ensures the pseudonymity of all participants.

Findings

To support and illustrate the results presented below and amplify the voices of the participants, direct quotes from the data are incorporated. The quotes in Finnish were translated into English by the first author. Interviewees are identified with the following participant codes: IT (instrumental/supervising teacher), ST (student-teacher), C (child) and P (parent). (To preserve anonymity, the participants are not numbered.).

Intensifying learning through increased tuition

Having multiple weekly lessons offered several advantages, including frequent reinforcement of learning, increased supervised practice for the children and the ability for teachers to provide repeated corrections or clarify any potential misunderstandings, such as proper playing positions. The teachers believed this arrangement fostered not only instrumental and musical learning but also motivation for learning, supported children's self-efficacy, strengthened the teacher–student relationship and enhanced the children's commitment to their studies. For instance, the teachers commented:

...I can teach the same children more and more often, [therefore]they progress faster than in the normal music school lesson system. I can correct playing positions more easily when I see the children several times a week, so technical skills also develop more quickly. This in turn helps the children to produce more expressive qualities out of the music, to express personal interpretation and inner feelings, which in turn motivates them even more. (IT)

Now that the children have had many more lessons than last year, they have improved their playing at a completely different rate than last year, when they had only one 30 minute lesson a week. It's quite an improvement in such a short time. Teaching playing positions has become easier, as I see the children several times a week. I can teach in much more depth, and there is no sense of rush in the lesson. (IT)

The children are more engaged in playing [than the previous year], which in turn motivates them and increases their self-efficacy. Once you learn and know more, it is easier to keep learning, thus completing the positive cycle. On the other hand, as a teacher, it is easier to intervene if, for example, there is a lack of motivation or a problem with playing. (IT)

Now, at the end of the school year, I can see that the project has taken the children forward in their playing much faster than if they had had a lesson once a week. Because I have had the opportunity to teach these children several times a week, the work has been easier. [...] The experiment has had a positive effect on the motivation of the pupils. Both student's home practice has increased as a result of the project. (IT)

The children themselves expressed their enjoyment with the lessons and their eagerness to learn, with only one student finding the number of lessons excessive. Initially, families expressed concerns about the increased number of music lessons potentially overwhelming the children.

However, as the project progressed, many families conveyed that their children remained enthusiastic and motivated about attending lessons. One family would have preferred to have at least one day of rest between each lesson to allow their child sufficient time to absorb and process what he had learned.

Increasing motivation through group lessons and activities

In the interviews, all the children expressed how they enjoyed the group lessons, with teachers noting the substantial positive impact of these group sessions on the children's motivation and musical advancement. Friendships were made during the group lessons, and in some instances, the children extended their interactions into their free time. As a result, many teachers expressed a strong interest in increasing the frequency of group lessons in the future while potentially reducing the number of one-on-one lessons.

The pupils are clearly delighted to finally be able to play together again. Good concentration and presence in group lessons. (IT)

The group lessons have been the most fun [for the children] and could be increased in number. For example, one lesson by a student-teacher, one one-on-one lesson, and two group lessons could work well. (IT)

Diversifying and enriching learning through parallel teaching

Having two or three different teachers regularly during a week had both benefits and challenges. The children adapted easily to this arrangement and even enjoyed the presence of different teachers. They found joy in the diverse personalities and teaching styles, perceiving these differences as an asset rather than an obstacle to their learning. Some teachers resonated more with the children than others. The children particularly liked the energetic student-teachers who introduced diverse repertoire choices and pedagogical ideas and thus enriched their musical development.

It has been good to have different teachers. (C)

It is quite normal to have several teachers. (C)

Sometimes the teachers teach in different ways, but it has not bothered me. (C)

The student-teachers also noted the positive influences of having several teachers. They suggested that having several teachers offered the children several safe adult role models and ‘inspiring spaces in their lives in which to mirror their needs for belonging, community and creativity’. (ST)

[Having several teachers] provides the student with a variety of lessons, which can make playing, and especially home practice, more meaningful. (ST)

I do believe [the student's] motivation was affected positively by this project, as it gave him a more versatile idea about playing through additional learning tools that differ from the lessons with their own [instrumental] teacher. (ST)

According to the parents, the positive influence of having several teachers and different educational environments was mainly related to increasing the children’s flexibility, improving their social skills and promoting an appreciation of diversity.

It was a great experience for my child to get to know and meet many different teachers, and many ways of teaching, and many kinds of places. (P)

Maybe just when they are little, it is good to get from the very beginning the idea that people do things differently, and as long as you trust the person you are learning from, that is all positive input, and you can absorb all of these ideas and go forward. (P)

It was just a nice introduction to the idea that there’s not only one way to play the [instrument], and not only one way to think about music. And I found that actually very fulfilling. (P)

However, the parents and student-teachers also identified challenges associated with the differing terminology, pedagogical or methodological approaches, and instruction practices, occasionally causing confusion among the children. Different teachers gave different exercises and repertoire, which in turn increased the children’s workload. In part, the differences and subsequent confusion were due to a lack of time for more intensive teacher collaboration. The complexity of mixed instruction was acknowledged by only a few children but was a particular concern for several parents. The student-teachers were also mindful of this challenge:

In some cases, practice and learning was challenged by the child's confusion over the different teachers' differing instructions. Some children found it confusing to be taught by several different teachers. (P)

There were so many subjects that my child found it a little confusing. One teacher asked this, and another asked that. I wish the teachers had got together at the beginning of the year and made a plan. (P)

It was a little awkward that different teachers did different things in the lessons, and sometimes I felt that this was very confusing for the children. (ST)

Some children solved the problem of receiving mixed instructions by making a distinction between following the instructions of one teacher or another.

In recent weeks, the child has shown frustration and confusion in lessons where the supervising teacher has been present. The child himself describes his own stress due to the teachers' over-enthusiasm. My supervising teacher and I give too many cross instructions and too much homework. Because the student learns so quickly, we get carried away and [the child] can't keep up with the crossfire of two teachers. Finally, I slowed down my teaching pace and the child was happy and energetic, even after the lesson. (ST)

In some situations, the enthusiasm and guidance of several teachers at the same time was too much for the child and caused stress:

The parallel teaching approach was appreciated by all teachers, although the challenges of organising meetings was recognised. Sometimes the children's parents acted as messengers between the teachers:

[The student's] mother tells me in detail what was done in the pedi lessons, so I'm always aware of what's going on there as well. (IT)

The collaborative approach yielded benefits such as collegial support and peer learning among teachers, including the acquisition of fresh pedagogical ideas, tools and approaches. The student-teachers, in particular, were seen as bringing fresh ideas, as they integrated repertoires and activities from general music education not often applied in instrumental teaching and learning. They also

held a unique position because they not only delivered instruction but also received valuable feedback and supervision from their mentors. This feedback was warmly embraced.

In the project, I get more specific guidance from the supervising teacher, and I can mirror my work with the student's other "regular teacher" and his or her teaching style. This puts me in a constant reflective and flexible position with my teaching. [L] [SEP] I find that the experimentation greatly increases teacher motivation. (ST)

Of course, specific guidance and personal development comments on my teaching during the project keep me constantly moving forward, which keeps my own motivation high. (ST)

I feel that I have been able to discuss with the other teachers everything that has been bothering me. We may have had a slightly different approach to elementary teaching, but that hasn't necessarily been a problem. ...I think I've learned a lot from this project myself, because I've followed closely two different ways of teaching the basics of [instrumental] playing and have been able to... grow my own toolbox.

It is an advantage that teachers can learn from each other, gain new tools and approaches to teaching. This also gives the student a variety in lessons, which can make playing and especially home practise more meaningful. (ST)

Supporting socio-emotional development through nurturing learning environment

In their diaries, the teachers reflected on children's coping and well-being, which obviously were their concerns. The teachers also demonstrated their care for the children by being flexible in scheduling and adapting activities to their needs. Despite the rigorous schedule of lessons, some teachers found that it brought a reassuring sense of rhythm and stability to the children's lives. The stress experienced by the children was often linked to the changing instruction times and scheduling challenges, rather than the frequency of lessons.

I care about my student's well-being, and I monitor the situation a lot, so I am very motivated to adapt my teaching to the needs and life situations of my students. (IT)

Parents have praised the past year, which they say has been rewarding for the children, even if it has been stressful. The stress has been caused by scheduling challenges and the fact that the child has sometimes felt uncomfortable coming to class when there was a nice

event at school that [they]wanted to go to. When I have been aware of these, we have rescheduled, but I may not have been aware of all of them. (IT)

Both teachers and parents reported an increase in the children's socio-emotional development, which group teaching provided a good opportunity to observe. Weekly group lessons notably advanced peer learning, as observed by the teachers, and fostered positive experiences and heightened motivation. Additionally, the presence of a collaborative teacher team deeply invested in the children's development supported the children's learning. It was generally recognised that good teacher–student relationships were highly important and meaningful and supported the children's motivation and well-being. Both parents and children held the teachers in high regard, valuing their qualities such as humour, patience and dedication to the students and teaching. The children especially enjoyed their interactions with the student-teachers.

With the pedagogy teacher, the child has already discussed a little bit about the approaching separation when the lessons end. The child really likes the student-teacher's lessons, and would not want them to end. This shows how meaningful teacher-student relationships can be. It's great that they've had a good year playing together. (IT)

Yeah, I think [the student-teacher] was excellent, always being patient with the child. And [the other teacher] had such a great manner and connection with him, right from the beginning .. I think the first day we were there [my child] was really mad at me because we had to leave school early and [he]wanted to play more with his friends, and [he] was whispering: "I'm not going to do this." But when [the teacher] opened the classroom door and said, "[the name of the child], so wonderful to meet you", [he] just, wow, went in. What amazed me in those lessons was how those teachers were able to keep him focused... [He] often had like an hour in there...but [he]never complained about his lessons. (P)

Time management as the biggest challenge

The biggest identified challenge of the project related to time management, mostly to the experienced lack of time. The project was conceived as time consuming. Only the children did not bring it up. As a result of the increased number of lessons, parents encountered difficulties finding time for their child's home practice, other hobbies and transportation. Similarly, the teachers struggled to collaborate effectively.

Organising children's home practice proved challenging, yet most of the children practised regularly, some even daily, either with a parent or independently. On the other hand, because of the increased frequency of lessons, many topics were rehearsed in class, and there was less need for extra practice at home. A few parents thought that having a lesson and practising on the same day was overwhelming for their child.

At some point we tried to play the same day that there was the lesson, to play twice some days. We noticed that [practising on the same day that there was a lesson] was not possible—I don't think it was necessary. (P)

However, some teachers occasionally expressed concern in their diaries that home practice was inadequate and felt that the responsibility for this lay with the parents.

During the lesson, progress is made, but I'm not sure how much [the child] and the parents remember to practise at home. One of the parents is always present in class and writes down the instructions, so they should be able to practise at home the way we do in class. Perhaps the parents need to be reminded of this more clearly. (IT)

I can see that the child is not making much progress at the moment, and this is clearly due to the lack of practice at home. I have spoken with the parents, and they have promised that this will change. The child is concentrating and is doing great in the lessons! (IT)

The families encountered difficulties finding time to transport their children to the music school several times a week. They also faced challenges in reconciling the schedules of different family members and coordinating the schooling and music lessons of their child. Some parents and student-teachers wished that the children would also have time for other hobbies and activities. On the other hand, it was considered that other hobbies would take time away from the children's music studies and increase their workload even more.

My worry is that so much of [my child's] time is devoted to this single hobby that we don't have time or energy to take another, something completely different outside music, which I think we should. (P)

...doing something like this three times a week makes my heart hurt a little bit. Just because I want [my child] to have time to, you know, play soccer and spend time with his friends, or ...take a drawing class, just anything. (P)

A disadvantage could be that the number of activities can be too high if the child has other activities in addition to playing, as there are lessons at least three days a week. The project is probably best suited to children who are well motivated to play the instrument, but who have perhaps only one other hobby, so that more lessons do not overload the child. While it is important to have a counterbalance to playing, hobbies should not be a burden on a young child, to keep the enthusiasm for learning alive. (ST)

Other influencing factors

In addition to the factors discussed above, the children's concentration skills and the flexibility of all the participants significantly supported the children's learning and development. Every child involved in the project exhibited good concentration skills, as recognised by both teachers and parents. The children's concentration was further supported by the efforts of both their teachers and parents, who actively facilitated the children's concentration during lessons, home practice and the instrumental practice itself. As parents described it:

My child is like that by nature, [he] concentrates on what he's doing, he's got a phenomenal ability. Even though everything is so hectic nowadays and, generally speaking, the ability to concentrate is much weaker in children than it used to be because of all the smart devices and so on, when [he] picks up the instrument, [he] can concentrate, and certainly playing has developed that further. (P)

[The teacher] has a wonderful way of bringing [my child] back when [they are] just away, with the stars somewhere during a lesson. (P)

Another influencing factor was the flexibility of all the participants. The parents demonstrated flexibility in transporting their children, accommodating travel to varying locations, on weekends and changing lesson times. The teachers were flexible in aligning lessons with the needs of the children and their families, for example, by changing lesson hours according to the child's other activities. The student-teachers were flexible in negotiating between their supervising teacher's views and their own views on music teaching. The children showed a lot of flexibility in adapting

to changing schedules, different teachers and varying practices. The summary of the main findings is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the main findings of the pilot project

Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intensification of children’s learning ● Children’s increased motivation ● Enrichment of children’s experiences and social, musical and psychological development
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parallel teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Professional development of teachers ○ Supportive teacher team ○ Several safe adult role models for children ● Diverse pedagogical approaches lead to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children’s varied learning experiences ○ Children’s resilience and adaptability to change ○ All participants’ appreciation for diversity ● Peer learning through group lessons and activities ● More intense teacher–student relationships
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Occasionally, mixed instruction as a result of parallel teaching ● Time management challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Finding time for the children’s home practice ○ Difficulty of juggling children’s additional hobbies and resting time ○ Commuting issues as a result of bringing the child to different learning venues ○ Lack of time for facilitating teacher collaboration and exchange of ideas

Discussion

This study investigated a school-year-long pilot project that aimed to intensify the learning of instrumental music and enrich the development of highly motivated young music school students. The main differences of the project compared to the usual music school practices were the increased number of lessons, the integration of group teaching (already applied in some music schools) and parallel teaching and the emphasis on creating a nurturing learning environment. This study aimed to investigate the key factors that influenced children’s learning and development across the entire project, including the benefits and challenges, as perceived by all the participants.

The participants perceived that all the chosen core components of the project significantly intensified and enriched the children’s learning and development compared to the ‘regular’ music school practice. According to the teachers, the project also clearly fostered motivation, which has

been found to play a major role in all aspects of musical achievement (Rados et al., 2003). Frequent lessons reinforced the students' learning and strengthened the teacher–student relationship. Parallel teaching brought about versatility and diversity, enriched children's musical development and taught them flexibility, although the varying teaching methods and repertoires occasionally caused confusion among the children.

The teacher collaboration was considered satisfying, inspiring and useful by the teachers themselves, functioning as further pedagogical training. Yet, to encourage and monitor teacher collaboration stronger leadership should have been provided (see, Burton, 2015). Group lessons and matinees enabled collaboration and promoted peer learning as engaging 'in mutual interactions with other students in order to learn' (Nielsen et al., 2018, p. 2). Group teaching was well received by all participants and was perceived to increase motivation. The teachers were keen to increase its role in their future practices. The findings were in line with previous studies in higher education suggesting that collaborative activities with peers benefit learning (Hanken, 2016) and that teacher collaboration offers a context for co-learning (e.g., Zanner & Stabb, 2016). Reinforcing the collaboration can be considered a transforming factor in instrumental music education, as it has been characterised as a system valuing individuality at the expense of collaboration and sense of community, as noted by Kingsbury (2001) in the context of Conservatory education.

Furthermore, group activities, along with a nurturing environment created by the constant monitoring of the children's progress by teachers and parents, enriched the children's socio-emotional development. These factors balanced the demands of a busy study schedule. Learning was also supported by the participants' flexibility in practical matters and the children's ability to concentrate, which was further enhanced by the efforts of both teachers and parents. According to previous research, the support and involvement of parents in their child's music studies during primary school age are closely associated with the child's performance efficiency (Rados et al., 2003; Zdzinski, 1996; 2013).

In sum, the time-consuming nature of the project appeared to be its biggest challenge. Some of the parents were concerned about their child's free time being focused on only one hobby. The families also encountered difficulties finding time for the children's home practice, while some teachers expected the children to practise more than they did (with the exception of one child, who was overly eager to practise). The responsibility for home practice was laid with the parents, as it is believed to accelerate progress and support practice when done in a sensitive manner (e.g., Pitts et al., 2000). However, it might not be the best way to support the development of children's own

agency in this area. Extensive research indicates that children's individual agency in their musicking and practice can be observed in their own intrinsic motivation to play and learn (see discussion in Wiggins, 2016). Indeed, various music research studies suggest that preschool-level children who are intrinsically motivated can self-direct their learning in a multitude of domains (Deci & Ryan, 1981; in music, see McPherson & Renwick, 2001; Pozo et al., 2020). Whether parents' encouragement of their children's home practice is a question of control or progressive autonomy support (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1987) is outside the scope of the present study, but it is important to note that children should be allowed a certain degree of freedom and autonomy in order to foster their confidence and progress (McPherson, 2009). Furthermore, although parental support might play a pivotal role in children's musical development when considering a large variety of factors and children's own desires (McPherson, 2009), the parental supervision that young learners receive during home practice does not necessarily influence their attainment levels and can even be experienced as a negative type of support by some children (e.g., Margiotta, 2011). On the other hand, it was surprising that the parents did not express concerns about their children not having sufficient time to rest, which is a critical aspect in children's healthy upbringing and is highlighted by the United Nations Convention as one of the basic rights of a child (UNICEF, 2010). This finding likely reflects the current efficiency discourse based on neoliberal values, which urges us all to use our time productively (e.g., Ball, 2016; Valovirta & Mannevu, 2022). These implicit tensions could perhaps have been addressed among the teachers and families during the pilot project.

Conclusion

The aim of the examined school-year-long project was to intensify and enrich the learning and development of music school students in instrumental music education. To further develop the partnership between music schools and HME and teaching practices in this project, the study findings suggest investing more time and preparation to collaboration and parallel teaching. More active collaborations among teachers, including student-teachers, would be needed to increase consistency in teaching, set a stable and workable timetable of lessons (when and where) and carefully consider how to reconcile different pedagogical styles. Even more lesson time could be allocated to group/peer learning, which was welcomed by all participants. Furthermore, a clearer vision, negotiated with the participants, of what the child is expected to do at home and what the parents' role is would be beneficial. The project was perceived to be very time-consuming and intense. Therefore, finding the right balance in an extended instrumental education that integrates several elements is a challenge that requires further reflection. On the other hand, future studies

examining the possibilities and effectiveness of the project could include additional assessment methods for the learning and progress of the participating children. However, comparing them with music school students who do not study according to the intensified curriculum would not align with the value base of the core curriculum of Finnish music schools.

From a broader perspective, the project raises questions about educational equity, an issue which some participating student-teachers also pointed out. In the project, the music school students who were considered highly motivated received extra educational resources compared to other students. In Finland, equity is a core value and principle in education (e.g., Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2012; Niemi, 2016), which implies that all children and young people should have equal educational opportunities. Accordingly, educational support and attention are directed to children with educational needs and challenges. In a wider sense, these viewpoints highlight the difficult question of who deserves special treatment in education. It is also related to the phenomenon of meritocracy. In the study of Elmgren (2019), the research participants experienced implicit and explicit merit-based hierarchies and exclusionary practices in Finnish music schools. For example, students who were considered talented and progressed faster received more resources (also, Elmgren, 2021). Hierarchies excluded some pupils from certain practices and undermined their belief in their own potential, thus producing self-fulfilling predictions of student progression. The question of emphasising talent and professional success over other educational values is present in the existing tensions in the Finnish music school network, especially in the music education debate, as discussed in recent studies of music education (Laes et al., 2018; Juntunen, 2021; Björk et al., 2018; Väkevä et al., 2022). Thus, especially from an equity perspective, future implementations of the project could consider applying this pedagogical approach across diverse student backgrounds.

In the past few years, both research (Laine & Tirri, 2021) and public debate have highlighted the opportunities for gifted and motivated children to receive individualised and targeted support to strengthen their development, especially since Finland does not have an official education policy for such learners (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). The examined project is in line with this thinking, suggesting that talented or highly motivated children should be eligible for extra resources and receive education that meets their needs and precisely supports their progress. However, in the field of gifted education, there have been considerable debate and criticism on whether such practices are helpful, beneficial or necessary for children's learning and development (e.g., Pfeiffer, 2003, 2013; Rogers, 2004)—particularly their social and psychological development (Kulik, 2004)—as well as in music education for the gifted and talented (e.g., López-Íñiguez & Westerlund, 2023). To what extent these studies are also applicable to children who are highly motivated, but do not necessarily

fall within the umbrella of giftedness, is a topic for further studies. In any case, further discussion related to equal opportunities for all children, as well as the justification and selection criteria for special treatment in music education, should be carefully, critically, and openly considered and discussed.

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Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

With the help of this Survey Pal survey, we collect (student) teachers' experiences and observations about Next Generation activities for research purposes during the 2022-2023 school year.

The answers will not be used for any other purpose.

We hope you answer the survey **at least once a week**. You can use the help questions below to help you answer but you don't have to answer all the questions every time.

Thank you for your participation!

Questions to support journal entries:

1. Observations related to student participation, experience and learning

Help questions:

How is the Next Generation experiment (including, for example, an increase in the number of lessons, university students as teachers) reflected in the child's participation and experiences?

What does the child talk about his/her experiences? What do the parents say?

What observations do you make about the child's learning?

How does the child manage to participate, concentrate, pay attention? How willing is (s)he to participate in the lessons?

How do you think the experiment affects the child's motivation in instrumental learning?

2. Observations related to teaching and interaction

Help questions:

What special features related to the experiment do you notice in your teaching?

Do you as a teacher act differently (in the teaching situation) than "usually", if so, how?

What is the relationship between the teacher and child like?

3. Teacher's experiences related to teacher's work, cooperation between teachers and with families

Help questions:

How is the teacher's work in the experiment different from the "usual" work?

How does the experiment affect the teacher's motivation?

How is the cooperation among instrumental and pedagogy teachers and with families going, is this matter discussed?

What kind of effect do you think the collaboration has on learning, activities and/or interaction?

4. Other observations

Help questions:

What advantages or possible disadvantages do you recognize in the experiment?

What works particularly well and why?

What should be done differently?

Appendix 2: Outline for the semi-structured interviews with parents and children.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed!

Introducing oneself (interviewer) and the study briefly.

“This conversation will be recorded and used only for the research, in which your name, affiliation or any other personal information that would allow anyone to identify you will not be included.”

Parents' interview frame:

- How has it been like to take part in the project (intervention)?
- What are you satisfied with; what could have been done differently?
- How has the child been talking about their experiences of the project?
- What have you observed regarding the child's participation, concentration, interaction, coping, learning, and development?
- How has the interaction/information worked in the project?
- What do you think are the strengths/weaknesses of the project?
- Would you like the project to continue?
- What else would you like to say?

Children's interview frame:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed!

Introducing oneself (interviewer) and the study briefly.

“This conversation will be recorded and used only for the research, in which your name or any other personal information that would allow anyone to identify you will not be included.”

Some general talking to warm up.

I would like to discuss with you your experiences of instrumental learning this past year.

- You have had quite many more lessons during a week compared to last year. How has it been; have you enjoyed it, has been it tiring, how would you describe it?
- What do you think you have learnt?
- What have you enjoyed the most?
- What has been most difficult?
- Can you remember any positive/negative experiences?
- How has it been to have different teachers?
- How have the group lessons been? What about the events at the end of the semester?
- If the project continued, would you like to continue; what do you think should be done differently?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?