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## *The optimal piano teacher: Sosniak's model versus Polish teachers from public music schools*

**ABSTRACT:** The author deals with the relationship between a piano teacher and her/his pupil/student at different stages of development. The relationship is defined in the literature as one of the most important features determining musical-artistic achievements. She describes the American research into the nurturing of pianists' talent, and presents the optimal model of piano teacher devised by L. Sosniak, based on interviews with 20 young American pianists with high and significant achievements. The model indicates that the best conditions for artistic development are the sequence of three different teachers, or three different pedagogical strategies, adjusted to the stages of development of young musicians: (1) music teacher for the youngest pupils, whose task is to arouse interest and provide intrinsic motivation and passion for music and piano-playing; (2) instructor teacher (for teenagers), whose task is to help students to build a solid *métier*, acquire the necessary motor skills and piano technique, and to improve their artistic performance; (3) master teacher for young adult pianists, whose task is to help them to integrate the skills gained previously, to shape their artistic personality. This sequence turned out to be extremely favourable for the later achievements of the interviewed pianists. The author then provides an analysis of statements by Polish pianists from the older generation, and an observation of the behaviour of piano teachers from Polish public music schools. These show that in our piano pedagogy there exists only one type of teacher, the instructor teacher who, compared to Sosniak's model, places the greatest emphasis on technical skills and avoids the issue of expression.

**KEYWORDS:** piano teacher, piano-playing, musical, technical development, achievements, development stages

### Introduction

There is considerable evidence that in the music learning process the position of the teacher is stronger and more powerful than in general teaching. First of all, instrumental teaching is carried out through individual lessons, face to face, behind closed doors. Individual instrumental teaching creates an intimacy between the teacher and the pupil, and moreover causes

the pupil to become dependent on his/her teacher to a considerable degree. In the relationship with the pupil, which is asymmetrical in itself, it is the teacher who will always be the stronger party.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the subject matter (that is: music) makes relationships between the teacher and the pupil very emotional. He/she influences the general and musical development of their pupils, and has an impact on their musical achievements, performance skills and attitudes towards music and the musical profession. Instrumental teachers are responsible for shaping the intrinsic motivation, the first musical experience, the musical interests and preferences, as well as for developing personality and for building up the self-confidence of their pupils.<sup>2</sup>

We can only assess how successfully instrumental teachers carry out their tasks from the time perspective, taking into account such results as the professional artistic activities of their former students, but primarily by listening to what the former students themselves say about their ex-teachers' character traits, how they evaluate their methods and pedagogic strategies and what they regard as the factors which positively influenced the level and quality of their current artistic and professional achievements.

Therefore, research aimed at identifying the mechanisms of professional artistic development and the conditions facilitating musical achievement, as well as the social and cultural factors which make self-realization difficult, most frequently concentrate on the early stages of professional development (the preparatory stage which precedes professional engagement and the early stages of professional activity) of outstanding musicians who are highly successful.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this is obvious: one looks in this period for patterns

<sup>1</sup> Krystyna Mierzejewska-Orzechowska, 'Cechy i charakterystyka optymalnego nauczyciela w szkole muzycznej w świetle doświadczeń psychologa', in *Psychologiczne podstawy kształcenia muzycznego*, eds. Maria Manturzevska, Małgorzata Chmurzyńska (Warszawa, 1999), 171-178.

<sup>2</sup> Magdalena Gliniecka-Rękawik, 'Sylwetka pierwszego nauczyciela gry według uczniów szkoły muzycznej', in *Psychologia rozwoju muzycznego a kształcenie nauczycieli*, eds. Barbara Kamińska, Małgorzata Chmurzyńska (Warszawa, 2007), 76-85.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Roger Chaffin, Anthony Lemieux 'General perspectives on achieving musical excellence', in *Musical excellence*, ed. Aaron Williamson (Oxford, 2004), 19-38; Maria Manturzevska, 'Przebieg życia muzyka w świetle badań biograficznych', in *Wybrane zagadnienia z psychologii muzyki*, eds. Maria Manturzevska, Halina Kotarska (Warszawa, 1990), 305-328; Maria Manturzevska, 'A Biographical Study of the Life-Span Development of Professional Musicians', *Psychology of Music* 18/2 (1990), 112-118; Maria Manturzevska, 'Model rodziny wspomagającej rozwój artystyczno-zawodowy i osiągnięcia muzyków w świetle wyników badań biograficznych nad wybitnymi muzykami', in *Psychologiczne podstawy kształcenia muzycznego*, eds. Maria Manturzevska, Małgorzata Chmurzyńska (Warszawa, 1999), 238-241; John A. Sloboda, 'Musical excellence – how does it develop?', in *Encouraging the development of exceptional skills and talent*, ed. Michel J. A. Howe (Leicester, 1990); John A. Sloboda, *Wykłady z psychologii muzyki* (Warszawa, 2008); John A. Sloboda, Michel J. A. Howe, 'Biographical precursors of musical excellence: an

which determine the specific development of a career, which allow us to identify the indicators of success during the studies and later music activity. Apart from the obvious cognitive benefits, this research could aid progress in very important practical tasks – it could contribute to the optimization of education and to creating better conditions for the development and performance of outstanding individuals. This could be the case if there was more access to psychological knowledge in schools.

Such large-scale psychological research was conducted in the 1980s in the USA under the guidance of B. S. Bloom<sup>4</sup> into the development of talent, and the fundamentals of outstanding achievements in various fields. The goals of the project were to identify the regularities and rules which occur in the educational process of outstanding individuals (as the future was to show), regularities that would enable them to attain high results in their fields in the future. This would allow one to stipulate the conditions which education should fulfill in order to arouse the interest, maintain motivation, and provide the opportunities for the development of students' abilities. More than 120 people were interviewed; all were raised in the USA, were relatively young (under the age of 40), but with high and significant achievements, which were confirmed by international experts and judges.

Those interviewed represented one of six chosen and varied areas, such as: concert piano, sculpture (artistic disciplines), Olympic swimming, tennis (psychomotor activities), research mathematics and research neurology (academic fields). Each group of talent was carefully selected on the basis of the opinions of experts from specific fields. Data was gathered by conducting retrospective, semi-structured, individual interviews, both with the interviewees and in some cases with their parents.

The pianists' group consisted of 21 musicians aged up to 39, Caucasian. All of them were finalists of some of the prestigious International Piano Competitions. Therefore, among the interviewed pianists were finalists of the Chopin Piano Competition, the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition, the Leventritt Foundation Competition, the Leeds Piano Competition, the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Competition and the Van Cliburn Piano Competition. An American psychologist, Lauren Sosniak, conducted the interviews. The questions concerned the external conditions of talent development – the role of family and teachers. The results were presented in a number of publications.<sup>5</sup>

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interview study', in *Psychology of music today*, eds. Maria Manturzevska, Kacper Miklaszewski, Andrzej Białkowski (Warszawa, 1995), 338-357.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom, *Developing Talent in Young People* (New York, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Lauren Sosniak, 'Learning to be a concert pianist', in *Developing talent in young people*, ed. Benjamin S. Bloom (New York, 1985), 19-67; Lauren Sosniak, 'Phases of learning', in *Developing talent in young people*, ed. Benjamin S. Bloom (New York, 1985), 409-438; Lauren Sosniak, 'A Long-Term Commitment to Learning', in *Developing talent in*

In the following part of this article I will focus on what the interviewees said about their musical education, their piano teachers, as well as the psychologist's findings, and those regularities she observed which turned out to have positive influence on music development. In the second part of the study I will attempt to compare the American findings with the situation in Polish music schools.

## The optimal teacher's model

On the basis of her interviews with the pianists, Lauren Sosniak distinguished three developmental stages in the process of their music education, which she called (after Whitehead): romance, precision, and generalization (integration). Each of them is characterized by a different structure of interests and musical motivation, different attitudes toward music and piano-playing, and a different function in the musical development of the interviewees. In the subsequent stages their aspirations, and what they expected from teachers, changed as well.

An analysis of the pianists' statements on the subject of their piano teachers allowed the author to devise the optimal piano teacher model, whose behaviour and teaching methods correspond with the pupils'/students' needs at the different stages of their education, and support the development of their musical abilities during their time at school, as well as their achievements in adult concert activities (see Table 1).

Table 1. Optimal teacher model

Development stages in pupil's/student's process of music education	Type of teacher
1. Romance with music up to 10 years old	Music teacher
2. Precision from 10 to 15 years old	Instructor teacher
3. Generalization (integration) 16-25	Master teacher

### 1. Romance with music

According to Sosniak, the right course of action at this stage should result in (as is the case with pianists) arousing a child's fascination with, and intense interest in the realm of sounds, as well as a craving for con-

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*young people*, ed. Benjamin S. Bloom (New York, 1985), 477-506; Lauren Sosniak, 'From Tyro to Virtuoso: A Long-Term Commitment to Learning', in *Music and child development*, eds. Frank R. Wilson, Franz L. Roehmann (St. Louis, 1989), 274-290; Lauren Sosniak, 'The tortoise, the hare and the development of talent', in *Encouraging the development of exceptional abilities and talents*, ed. Michel. J. A. Howe (Leicester, 1990), 149-164.

tact with music, and motivation for piano-playing. For this reason, at this time the child should be provided with wonderful experiences and positive emotions associated with music and piano-playing. In the pianists' case, the beginnings of formal piano lessons were usually preceded by play-time with a piano. Future pianists, not discouraged by parents, treated the instrument as a fascinating big toy. The earliest contacts with a piano were full of joy – the children were spending a lot of time investigating the piano's inside, and experimenting with the sound. They demonstrated great skills in using its sound range – they brought out sounds in various ways, using different parts of their body, and they attempted to tap out their own “melodies” as well as those which they had heard somewhere before.

At the age of about six, the first teacher, referred to by Sosniak as “a music teacher”, appeared in their lives. The vast majority of the parents of the interviewed pianists, when deciding to send their children for music lessons, did not have any high expectations or aspirations – musical education was supposed to enrich their children's development and expose them to new experiences. For this reason, when choosing the first teacher, they did not take into consideration his/her piano performance level and musical competence. As a rule it was a person known to the family, living in the neighbourhood, and possessing not-so-high professional qualifications. Despite this, in the memories of the pianists the teacher was described as “really great with young kids”, “very kind, very nice”, “enormously patient and not very pushy”. The lessons were referred to as fantastic, enjoyable, riveting, funny, an important event in their lives that they used to look forward to.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest years of learning were full of playing with music, and piano-playing was associated with pleasure. The lessons tempted with their variety of absorbing musical assignments, during which pupils could show off their imagination and creativity, which led to immediate praise by the teacher. The music teacher also organized the first public performances, small recitals for friends, families, acquaintances, which were stress-free, during which the sheer participation of a child was important.

The aim of learning devised in this way was not the realization of curriculum tasks, or the acquisition of specific performance competences. During the first period of learning the emphasis was placed on giving optimal variety to the lessons, and to stimulating musical activity in its different forms. The pupils responded to the cordiality and enthusiasm of the teacher, increasingly engaging in musical performance and getting more and more pleasure from piano-playing. Thus a deep emotional bond with music was being formed.

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<sup>6</sup> Sosniak, 'From Tyro to Virtuoso', 281.

## 2. The stage of precision

According to Sosniak's research (and also Manturzevska's <sup>7</sup>) this stage seems to be the critical period for the development of performance competence, for building a solid *métier*, a high level of motor skills and for acquiring piano technique. Isaak Stern, quoted by Sosniak, claims that between the years 10 to 14 the child should feel that they are "possessed" by music, by the sudden desire to play and to excel:

Suddenly the child begins to sense something happening and he really begins to work, and in retrospect the first six years seem like *kinderspiel*, fooling around.<sup>8</sup>

And indeed – the beginning of the stage was characterized by the unexpected appearance of the need to play the instrument. There was a qualitative jump in the development of those interviewed. On the foundations of the previous – very positive – musical experiences, the craving for the improvement of their performance skills was born, as well as for perfection in the quality of their piano-playing, proficiency and mastery. This re-definition in the structure of needs resulted in the necessity of looking for another piano teacher, who would be appropriate for the new pupil's expectations, and would realize with him/her the tasks typical of this stage of development. Thus the future pianists in this period moved to a different piano teacher – perceived as a better one, with higher competence and professional qualifications, one who enjoyed a good opinion in the musical environment; a teacher who would be more demanding, tougher and stricter; a teacher who – according to Sosniak – would be an instructor. Hence the form of work changed dramatically, as well as the pupil-teacher relationship and the course of lessons. The musical games were replaced with instruction. Instead of complimenting and endless praises there was solid feedback and comment. Practicing for hours on end becomes an integral element of daily life of the interviewees. However, they already had the motivation which was strong enough to cope with hard work and enabled them to see the purpose of it.

During the second stage learning became more conscious, intentional, engaging the pupil's mind, as well as being more formal. It was aimed at perfecting artistic musical expression through the acquisition of technical proficiency, musical terminology and knowledge:

We talked about when this composer lived, and what kinds of things were going on. Cultural attachments and the like in the other arts. What this represented,

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<sup>7</sup> Manturzevska, 'Przebieg życia muzyka' 305-328; Manturzevska, 'A Biographical Study of the Life of a Musician', 112-118.

<sup>8</sup> Sosniak, 'From Tyro to Virtuoso', 282.

what this went along with, or what parallel to this. Significance on the very spiritual level. Very detailed. Very intense. Taking about all kinds of things.<sup>9</sup>

Lessons became better organized in terms of pedagogy, conducted in a systematic way but also more disciplined and rigorous:

They were very long. Very, very detailed. Always working on the shape of my hand and all these little tiny things.<sup>10</sup>

The improvement and perfection of technical mastery made new musical dimensions more accessible for these pianists :

[My teachers] continually stressed that there was something behind the notes or underneath the notes that one must respect. That there's something bigger than respect for just the literal facts on the page and that's the heart of the matter, what the music has to say, the content.<sup>11</sup>

[The teacher] had me phrase things. Had me do things over and over to make them as beautiful as possible. With great attention to detail.<sup>12</sup>

During this period the interviewees took part in their first competitions, in which they did badly more often than well. The lack of big successes was characteristic of this group – not only were they child prodigies, but they also did not stand out in the crowd among their peers. They were average pianists. And competitions – as they remembered them – were regarded as feedback about the current level of performance, they had motivational meaning and, for the teachers, they were an incentive to plan further pedagogical schedules.

At the end of the second stage, the interviewees increasingly identified with the profession of a musician and with artistic activity. The idea of becoming a professional pianist began to enter their minds.

### 3. Generalization (integration)

The third stage of artistic musical development of young pianists is characterized (in the words of Sosniak) by moving the emphasis from work on the details of the pianists' *métier* to shaping their artistic personality and their own interpretation style. As the author claims, not all those who succeeded in the second stage of development are able to overcome the next step in becoming an artist. Outstanding master teachers – quoted by Sosniak –

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

point out that, in numerous cases, young highly-skilled musicians suddenly stop in their development and are incapable of going further, of crossing new boundaries; this might be due to deficiency in musical imagination, intellectual deficiency, or an inability to reach the necessary level of depth. Many students turn out to be just excellent followers. One of the teachers commented as follows on imitation in musical performance:

That's fine, if it's a stimulant [to creativity], but not if it remains as a product... We all learn by imitation of sort. But we have [to have] a way of making it our own.<sup>13</sup>

Sosniak also mentions some questions and doubts that the interviewees had at the time; namely, whether they would be able to build up their own artistic vision, their own esthetic attitude, and add something of their own to the already gathered experiences, giving them their own personal and individual dimension, based on all their acquired knowledge and skills.

The appearance of a master teacher in the lives of young musicians is a condition which needs to be met in order for them to progress through to the third stage of the development. Such teachers are eminent authorities, famous and respected in the musical community, mature artists who pursue concert activities (or have pursued them in the past). Work on the development of a student's individual performing style progresses through dialogue between the student and the master teacher.

The interviewed pianists reached the third stage of development and had met their master. He/she became a great authority for them, whom they respected or even admired:

He was an impossible task master. He would just intimidate you out of your mind [...] What she said to me was like the voice of God.<sup>14</sup>

They were awed by fact that they had an opportunity to be taught by a master:

The idea that this man was willing to teach me, to give me his time, overwhelmed me.<sup>15</sup>

Collaboration with the master was based on dialogue and the joint accomplishment of new artistic tasks, which focused on the general musical issues; it concerned masterpieces, differences between musical genres, and performance styles. The interviewees learnt how to use the previously acquired competence in order to transmit all that which constitutes the essence of music. They integrated the skills gained previously with new artistic challenges. Un-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 285.



der the direction of the master-teacher their personality and aesthetic attitude took shape. Following the advice of their master, they increasingly entered the professional environment and began their own independent concert careers.

Lauren Sosniak's optimal teacher model emerged on the basis of experiences of highly accomplished musicians. It shows what conditions must be fulfilled in order that the artistic professional development of an individual should go smoothly and without disruption. To provide the right conditions for development, teachers need to respect the developmental stages of the students and adjust their methods, pedagogical strategies and required tasks, to the students' age as well as their developmental possibilities and needs.

Thus the first years of music education should be devoted to arousing musical interests, and to providing the child with positive impressions by a warm and kind **music teacher**, so that piano-playing is associated with joy, and not with stress and trauma.

This leads to strong motivation and desire for improvement in piano-playing, which provide a strong foundation for the second stage. That stage should concentrate on the optimal development of sensitivity and musical expression, supported by technical development under the guidance of a competent **teacher instructor**. Furthermore, such a high level of performance skills becomes an incentive for students to develop further and to look for the right artistic, aesthetic, and stylistic path, founded on the gathering and integration of previous experiences with the help of the **master-teacher**.

## How well does the Sosniak model match the Polish instrumental teacher?

### 1. Literature review

To begin with, I quote the conclusions of a partial analysis<sup>16</sup> of biographical data collected by IPM PWSM (former UMFC) during the years 1976-80 under the direction of Prof. Maria Manturzevska. The analysis encompassed interviews conducted with 32 pianists, of different ages, most of whom did not achieve any special artistic accomplishments. All of them went through three steps of musical education, and piano teaching became their principal professional activity – they are or were piano teachers in music schools of different levels.

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<sup>16</sup> Małgorzata Chmurzyńska, *Nauczyciel fortepianu – w świetle badań muzyczno-psychologicznych* [Piano teacher – in the light of research in music-psychological research] (in preparation).

Because the topics raised in the interviews concerned a number of issues (home family background, musical and non-musical education, different stages of artistic professional activities, forms of work, personal and family life, state of health, economic status<sup>17</sup>), the research was not aimed specifically at relationships with teachers. In the statements of the interviewees we cannot see any deep reflections referring to the pedagogical methods and their teachers' strategies. From the limited accounts relating to these topics (based on their own experiences both as pupils and students) I concluded that, in fact, from primary music schools to music academies, the interviewed pianists met with only one type of piano teacher – the instructor according to the classification of Sosniak, but with greater emphasis on matters connected with the motor apparatus and technique.

Further information on what happens during individual lessons of instrument playing, can be gleaned from the statements of people involved in musical education. During the 1990s a number of seminars were held which were devoted to music teaching. School pedagogues, psychologists, music teachers and music experts participated in these seminars. During such meetings participants tended to talk about major problems and situations arising during lessons, known from observations or shared with students or their parents.<sup>18</sup> On the basis of these contributions we can conclude that there are disproportionately many cases where the relationship with the teachers becomes a source of pupils' frustration, shaping negative attitudes towards instrumental playing and artistic music, and causing disappointment and disillusionment with the prospect of further music instruction.

The fact that these problems exist in reality was confirmed during the research conducted over a number of years by Prof. Z. Konaszkiwicz.<sup>19</sup> Students of the Instrumental and Pedagogical Department at AMFC (former UMFC) evaluated (including positive and negative traits) their former instrumental teachers in the form of an essay. Among the negative things, the students enumerated the same features and behaviours as did the participants of the seminars. The most common critical comments were:

1. emotional instability (teachers' changeability in moods and attitudes to pupils);
2. arousing fear instead of pleasure during lessons;
3. inclination to keep full control over pupils;

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<sup>17</sup> Manturzevska, 'Przebieg życia muzyka' 305-328.

<sup>18</sup> See Wojciech Jankowski (ed.), *Zagadnienia metodyki instrumentalnej* (Warszawa, 1990); Wojciech Jankowski (ed.), *Kształcenie instrumentalistów i wokalistów. Stan i problemy* (Warszawa, 1992); Maria Manturzevska, Małgorzata Chmurzyńska (eds.), *Psychologiczne podstawy kształcenia muzycznego* (Warszawa, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Zofia Konaszkiwicz, *Szkice z pedagogiki muzycznej* (Warszawa, 2001), 112-127.

4. deficient communication skills – lack of openness, inability to communicate with a pupil, parents, other teachers;
5. aggressive competition with other teachers, and even “stealing” the most gifted students;
6. lack of objective appreciation of some pupils;
7. lack of ability of self-evaluation;
8. inability to motivate pupils towards regular exercise and systematic work;
9. discouragement by choosing too difficult programmes and making excessive demands, placing heavy emphasis on musical professionalism from the beginning, critical comments that undermine the pupils’ self-esteem and gives them a sense of failure;
10. lack of concern for pupils’ general development;
11. using conventional and schematic teaching strategies, without adopting a personal and individual attitude towards each pupil;
12. lack of clear feedback about pupils’ progress and about the principles and criteria of assessment during exams;
13. tendency to attribute pupils’ success to their (teachers’) work and to reject the responsibility for negative results of instrumental playing (instrumental teachers more often attribute pupils’ failures to inadequate ability to learn and insufficient involvement of the latter);
14. inability to convey their knowledge;
15. little musical activity of their own and lack of fascination with music – a negative attitude towards teaching;
16. lack of enjoyment while playing and practising the instruments during instrumental lessons.

It has been said<sup>20</sup> that these are the consequences of the well known fact that, in the process of music education and preparation for working as an instrumental teacher, too much pressure is put on preparing students to become soloists (especially in respect of pianists). This leads to shaping the students’ “artistic attitudes”, often in the absence of objective achievements that would justify such an attitude. Being formed as a soloist, and the acquired artistic attitude (with insufficient pedagogical-psychological preparation), make it difficult to get adjusted to the role of a teacher. Not achieving artistic pursuits, not fulfilling the dreams of having a virtuoso career and, as a result, a feeling of professional dissatisfaction, may lower the teacher’s self-esteem, which is compensated by excessive demands and expectations towards pupils. Such an attitude expresses itself in choosing a repertoire that is too difficult and more appropriate for the teacher’s own ambition rather than the pupil’s capabilities.

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<sup>20</sup> Manturzevska, Chmurzyńska, *Psychologiczne podstawy*, 179-190.

Another criticism of teachers concerns their overly focusing on purely technical issues, and professionalizing the instrumental education as early as the beginning of instrumental playing.<sup>21</sup> It is not a new problem and it is not characteristic only of the state of affairs in Poland. In 1983, in an interview quoted by Sultz,<sup>22</sup> Dalhaus talked about the strong orientation in musical pedagogy towards the technical aspects of teaching. We recall the words of Harnoncourt, to the effect that present-day music education should not rely only on acquiring adequate skills in instrumental playing:

We cannot limit teaching to where they should put their finger to achieve specific sound, and how to achieve the fingers' technique. Excessive technically-oriented instruction creates not musicians but ordinary acrobats".<sup>23</sup>

M. Straszewski also voiced his opinion about the premature professionalizing of instrumental education:

In my opinion, the main fault of our music education system is that teachers train professional musicians from the beginning, destroying their pupils' inner motivation, which is the sheer joy of making music. [...] The sooner we achieve student motivation ("I play for pleasure") the sooner will they succeed, and work with them will go smoothly (...).<sup>24</sup>

## 2. The study: background, aims and methods

In order to empirically verify all the opinions, during the years 2008/09 I conducted research into the sense of competence among piano teachers from primary music schools in different regions of Poland.<sup>25</sup> The questionnaire data revealed that teachers themselves assess their own competence and professional skills highly, with the psychological aspect being judged the highest, followed by the musical, and finally by the pedagogical competence. Against the background of this extremely high self-esteem, it turned out that the same teachers assessed themselves very low in terms of:

1. being able to foster an interest in music;

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Josef Sultz, 'Między lękiem a nadzieją: obraz zawodu, zakres zawodu, wykształcenie zawodowe nauczycieli muzyki dla Europy przyszłości', *Kwartalnik Polskiej Sekcji ISME* 2, 1-20.

<sup>23</sup> Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *Muzyka mową dźwięków* (Warszawa, 1995), 26.

<sup>24</sup> Marek Straszewski, 'Rola nauczyciela w kształtowaniu motywacji ucznia', in *Trwałe wartości edukacji muzycznej w zmieniającym się świecie*, eds. Zofia Konaszkiewicz and Paweł Markuszewski (Warszawa, 2003), 131-140.

<sup>25</sup> Małgorzata Chmurzyńska, 'Self-Efficacy of Piano Teachers' of Specialized Music Schools', in *ESCOM 2009. Proceedings*, eds. Jukka Louhivuori, Tuomas Eerola et al. (Jyväskylä, 2009), 44-51.

2. being able to motivate pupils to practise regularly;
3. being able to make pupils feel joy from contact with music.

Therefore, the aim of the second stage of the research, which relied on lesson observation, was (among others things) to find out how in reality the piano teachers influenced pupils' motivation, interest and attitudes towards music. It was also aimed at discovering whether and to what extent the teachers were aware of their shortcomings, and to what extent the critical opinions about the shortcomings of instrumental teachers in terms of psychological and pedagogical competence could be confirmed; whether they balanced musical and technical training in their teaching; and, finally whether, and if so, what differences existed in the approach of the teachers towards their pupils from I to III forms (when - according to Sosniak's model - the music teacher should dominate over the instructor-teacher) compared to teenagers from IV to VI forms (who should be made to work on their technique and motor apparatus systematically in order to serve artistic expression).

35 piano lessons conducted by 12 teachers (11 female, 1 male) were observed. The age of the observed ranged between 24 and 75. All of them were graduates of higher musical education: 6 full time instrumental playing, 3 part-time instrumental playing, 3 musical education. The lessons involved pupils' aged 6-16 years, from public primary music schools in different Polish cities.

## Results

Lesson observation, apart from a generally positive attitude of piano teachers towards pupils, and their didactic competence, revealed many occasions of inappropriate teacher behaviour, confirming (to a large extent) the critical opinions indicated above. The first issue concerns music teaching as such, and the problem of maintaining the balance between technical aspects of piano-playing and shaping musicality.

As I have mentioned earlier, in the musical and psychological literature there frequently appears criticism concerning the excessive concentration on matters of technique and skill in instrumental pedagogy (this is contrary to the recommendations of the "guru" of piano pedagogy, H. Neuhaus, not to mention Chopin's pedagogy). It creates the danger of separating the technique training from shaping the musical sensitivity of a pupil. Artistic expression stops being an aim, pupil and teacher strive to achieve technical proficiency, and music becomes a pretext to demonstrate the correct movements.

Among the observed teachers I distinguished three groups, presenting different approaches and competences in keeping the balance. In the case of three teachers, the balance was maintained. During all the lessons conducted by them, both with older and younger pupils, the starting point of all peda-

gogical activity was the artistic vision of a piece. The majority of remarks aimed to improve pupils' shortcomings in piano-playing clarity, musical expression through the right tone, phrasing, dynamics and... technique. The teachers drew their pupils' attention to the mood of the piece, its artistic expression, the quality of the sound, dynamic nuances. Together they devised the culminations. And in this context the teachers proposed the right exercises and movement, demonstrating a relationship between the proper movement and a tone, phrase and breath in music. As a result, all the pupils of the three teachers (there were 11) played musically, expressively, and showed the ability to verify the sounds. In addition, they gave the impression that they did not have any technical problems. Loose hands from the arms to fingertips, well-defined mid-hand, curved strong tips, loose wrists, relaxed posture at the piano, deep sound – all those things indicated that their teachers' competence in positioning the playing apparatus is high.

In the case of another six teachers (the second group) the lessons primarily concerned aspects of movement and text. During lessons, remarks concerning movement, fingers and tips dominated: "place the fingers on the keys correctly", "play with strong tips", and, obviously, "act with your fingers". The teachers demonstrated how to use the playing apparatus needed to attain staccato and legato, but this was totally separated from the music. To make matters worse, all these teachers conducted piano lessons with the youngest pupils in the same way. During a lesson with a first form pupil, one of the teachers described the movements thoroughly: "when you move your hands away from the keys you must loosen your wrist... we start with the elbow, now the wrist downwards...", but at no time during the lesson did the word "sound, tone" appear. The other teacher (outstanding in terms of motor skills teaching) proposed a number of various technical exercises, the ways of articulating appropriate for the technical problems which appeared in the piece, but he told one of the pupils to "devise the interpretation yourself at home". Those teachers clearly separated the technical and musical aspects of playing, drawing their pupils' attention to the movement and textual correctness, and leaving the other matters – perhaps – until a later time.

Unfortunately, the correctness of movement required by these teachers did not transfer itself to the technical correctness or sound quality. Most of the students played with raised arms, bent necks, elbows clinging to the torso, tense wrists, protruding, still fingers (which were not in use for some time) – all these show excessive stiffening, making fluent playing impossible. Moreover, they played superficially, without any deeper artistic-musical sense.

What these teachers invariably demanded, and what constituted the essence of the lessons, was precise score reading, which in practice meant playing the proper notes, at the proper time, with the correct fingers and given articulation. This sort of work over a piece, deprived of the musical factor and

any attempt to immerse oneself in the sense of the text, gave the impression of being somewhat superficial. In fact, students' performances relied on the accurate realization of the rudimentary parameters of the music score. They are obviously important and essential to acquire, but it is also very important to keep them in the right proportions. If throughout the lesson the teacher focuses the pupil's attention only on such aspects of performance, then the pupil receives the message that the most important thing in the piece is to maintain the half note in the 4<sup>th</sup> bar, or to complete the rest in the 7<sup>th</sup>. Thus he/she loses track of what is really significant, and it is difficult to expect the performance to have any artistic value. In fact the pupils played listlessly (T. Wroński would say "with the soul asleep"), without any attempt to introduce nuance to the tones, although with textual accuracy.

The message concerning teacher's requirements, if it appeared at all, referred to the general dynamic, or it was unclear, especially as the lessons did not reveal what the teacher meant when giving homework: "In Bach, introduce the voices carefully", "You must play each variation differently" (to an 8 year-old), "Try to play with a different timbre", "Deal with the sound, then the hand will get positioned somehow intuitively". If such issues were not raised during lessons, it is difficult to expect pupils to be able to carry out the tasks on their own at home. These teachers had a significant difficulty in expressing other expectations apart from the obvious ones connected with the score, as well as those relating to the execution. Sometimes, even though appropriate guidance was given, such as "the ending of the phrase needs to be lowered", when the pupil lowered it until nothing was heard, the teacher did not react.

It cannot be denied that these teachers demonstrated both effort and good will, but it also has to be admitted that the actions were largely ineffective. The piano-playing of their pupils during lessons improved neither technically nor musically. However, consistent and thorough work on the text resulted in the pupils making progress. On the other hand, these could be described as piano-playing lessons rather than music lessons.

The third group, consisting of three teachers, showed the lowest competences. During their lessons they did not make any appropriate remarks about either expression or *métier*, or technique. The majority of pupils "tapped" their pieces with a visible stiffening of the whole playing apparatus, still with mistakes. The teachers either tried to identify the mistakes and correct them, or they intervened very little while their pupils were performing the piece. In one case, a pupil was playing a multi-part piece very slowly, with repeated sections, and each time he made the same mistakes. And, despite his making a total "mess" of it in terms of rhythm and application, the teacher let him play till the end, and then commented: "Your playing lacked tempo and expression. Play it once again, it may be better". In this way 20 minutes of the lesson passed by.

Proceeding to the question of arousing the motivation and interests of a pupil, it needs to be pointed out that the majority of the observed teachers (9 out of 12) behaved in a way that showed a lack of awareness of the fact that there exists a relationship between their attitudes and the pupils' motivation. It was obvious that constant criticism, highlighting mistakes, and underestimating the pupils' effort did not encourage them to work harder. Yet the teachers continued to base their pedagogical strategies on pointing out mistakes, and the way in which they did it (with a raised voice, sometimes ironically) could have been a source of frustration and discouragement to pupils: "This is A-flat and not A!", "How are you playing!?", "What are you tapping?!", "This is not the right note!", "Why aren't you able to play this fragment again?!", "You are playing without any sense", "NO WAY!!", "Think a little bit!", "You must think on your own too", "It is hopeless! It cannot be like that", "We have talked so many times about this F-sharp", "As usual, you are making a mistake in the same place", "It's been so many lessons and you still cannot get it", "I can say it once again, but what for? - since you will forget it anyway".

The teachers use of the phrases "as usual", "again", made it clear that they did not expect any positive results on the part of their pupils. However, as has been confirmed by numerous findings, positive expectations have causative power – they can bring out what is best in a pupil. A friendly and supportive attitude of the teacher releases the inner potential of the pupils (the Pygmalion effect). However, demonstrated lack of positive expectations on the part of the teacher discourages pupils from making an effort, they lose self-confidence and may achieve worse results than they are capable of (the Golem effect).

An optimistic reception of a pupil, even a slight overrating of his/her possibilities has great educational value, because it builds up his/her self-confidence and trust in his/her potential. In a musical performance, self-confidence and perceived self-efficacy and self-competence have enormous importance for achieving the right results in the educational process. And teachers possess various means by which they can support these beliefs or ... destroy them. The observed teachers, unfortunately, underestimated the motivational role of positive strategies. Instead, they concentrated on making the pupils aware that they were playing badly.

Another demotivating feature of the observed teachers was their inability to praise. For praise to be effective, it should be sincere and adequate for the achievement. The majority of teachers did not have any difficulty in criticizing the pupils; however, they had a very big problem with expressing recognition sincerely, even in situations where the pupil evidently deserved it. One of these teachers scrupulously and in quite a severe voice pointed out all the pupils' mistakes; yet when one of the youngest pupils performed, correctly



and from memory, a piece which he/she was only supposed to read with each hand separately, the teacher merely said: "not bad". Another pupil, who not only prepared a piece well but learnt it by heart, which was very difficult to do, heard the comment: "You played badly here and here, and here". During a lesson with another pupil, the same teacher kept making new requirements over and over again. When the pupil played a section of a piece in accordance with the teacher's instructions, the teacher immediately found other faults in the performance.

The majority of these teachers (9 out of 12) focused on underlining all the shortcomings of playing, treating it as the basic task in their work, and they became extremely efficient at it. However, when it came to praising, they did it without conviction, very generally and hesitantly: "I can see, you have been practicing", "Oh, ok", "I must compliment you on this", "Not so bad", "Let's assume it was not bad".

Prof. T. Wroński<sup>26</sup> used to say that the vital thing for a teacher is to arouse the interest of a pupil. During lessons with 9 of the teachers one could see that the majority of the pupils seemed to be - if not bored - then tired. Many factors were responsible for this: first of all, the lessons were monotonous. All of them were conducted according to the same scheme (scales, possible exercises, more pieces); moreover, irrespective of the age of the pupil, the level of ability, the stage of education, repertoire, all the comments made by one teacher were formulated in the same way. They concerned the same problems: the movement of the hand, fingers, text. During the lessons nothing happened that could fascinate a pupil with the world of sounds. It is worth emphasising that this way of teaching was also used while working with the youngest ones. They were taught in a similar manner, with similar comments. The teachers did not make any attempts to vary their classes with some form of musical games, or arousing the children's interest in the different possibilities of the instrument's sounds, which was so characteristic of the "music teachers" from Sosniak's research.

Another reason for the tiredness and decrease in pupils' concentration was the fact that the teachers spoke for too long. The pupils were not able to concentrate on what their teachers said; furthermore, they could not suppress yawning. One of the teachers devoted a large part of the lesson to testing the pupils' theoretical knowledge (also the youngest ones): where the semitones in different scales were, how to finger the scales from the white keys, and how from the black ones, and how triads and chords are built.

Another factor discouraging a pupil from piano lessons is too many remarks and tips voiced by teachers during lessons (five teachers were particularly guilty of this). Their corrections were of varying significance: from the

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<sup>26</sup> Tadeusz Wroński, *Zdolni i niezdolni* (Kraków, 1979).

fundamental to trivial ones. In fact, they diverted the pupils' attention from what was really important. Besides, the pupils were not able to grasp all these things at the same time, which led to the teachers' dissatisfaction, expressed with conviction after a while in terms such as: "But we have talked about it so many times". With such a multitude of instructions the main aims of work on a piece became blurred and it became difficult to indicate which problem was the most important one.

During the observation I paid special attention to the way in which the teachers stimulated their pupils: did they put effort into making pupils have a sense of some control over the learning process which – referring to professional literature – may become an important source of intrinsic motivation. The simplest and most effective means of involving a pupil in the learning process is to initiate a verbal dialogue with them, i.e., by questions which encourage them to express their opinions on the subject of musical issues. During the majority of the lessons I did not observe any attempt to stimulate pupils in such a way. They were treated by teachers like objects, as passive recipients and executors of the teachers' instructions. No opportunities were provided for pupils to express their opinions about the performed pieces – hence the majority of pupils kept silent during all the lessons. The communication was entirely one way – from teacher to pupil. The teachers' monologue dominated; it was full of directions which had to be followed by the pupils, and full of reprimands because a pupil was not supposed make mistakes. It was incomprehensible to the teachers that a pupil might have difficulties or problems, that he was not able to carry out the teacher's instruction: "But it's so simple!"

The majority of the teachers who talked to pupils during lessons voiced the conviction that piano-playing is not cheerful playing, but hard and laborious work. And indeed the lessons were like this: tiring, arduous, devoid of any joy.

Creating pupils' positive attitudes towards music during piano lessons is the foundation of further development of their passion for piano-playing. Making pupils derive pleasure from contact with music is one of the essential tasks of instrumental teachers. It is also a very difficult one. Teachers may arouse pupils' interests and evoke positive emotions through demonstrating to them their own enthusiasm, commitment and fascination with music (teachers from Sosniak's research acted in such a way). A pupil does not experience any positive feelings if a teacher "torments" her/him with scales and exercises, bores them with theoretical speeches, disrupts repeatedly her/his piano-playing, criticizes and nags; a pupil feels under great pressure from the teacher to play correctly and faultlessly – that was the case with the pupils of the observed teachers.

## Conclusion

Lauren Sosniak studied cases of the very positive influence of teachers on musical-artistic development of pupils and students who later became outstanding musicians. However, the majority of the observed Polish teachers did not open the pupils to the value of music, and in effect did their best to discourage them from piano-playing, either by always working over the same content or by an inappropriate treatment of pupils. The beginnings of piano-playing in the cases of Sosniak's pianists were associated – thanks to the “music teacher” – with joy, arousing curiosity, creativity and musical imagination. Polish music schools are short of music teachers, and from the earliest years of piano lessons pupils are treated as future professional musicians; for this reason, they face excessive and unreasonable demands. From the beginning, the children are subjected to technical training (extensive scale-etude curriculum), whereas work on pupils' development of musical sensitivity and musical interests and motivation is limited.

On the other hand, few graduates from Polish music academies have had the chance to meet the “master teacher”. The masters played a very important role in the life of the pianists interviewed by Sosniak – they contributed to shaping them as artists with their own distinctive individuality. According to Manturzevska's findings,<sup>27</sup> the absence of master teachers adversely affected the artistic development of Polish musicians from the youngest generation interviewed by her. In turn, in the opinion of music columnists and critics, there is a suggestion that in the performances of young Polish pianists we can detect insufficient individuality and deficient artistic personalities. Increasingly, they are attempting to copy the interpretations of their teachers.

To sum up, in comparison with Sosniak's model, it seems that in Polish music schools (from the first class of primary school to music study at high levels) only one type of piano teacher can be found: that is – applying Sosniak's terminology – the “instructor teacher”.

*Translated by Małgorzata Chmurzyńska*

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<sup>27</sup> Manturzevska, 'Przebieg życia', 305-328.

