

Music Mediation as a Game Changer in Music Schools

Manuela Kloibmüller, Judith McGregor and Dagmar Schinnerl
discuss the potential of music mediation as a key to success in music school

Kloibmüller Manuela ^{a*}, McGregor Judith ^{b°}, Schinnerl Dagmar ^{c°}

^a State Music School Grein (Landesmusikschule Grein), Oö Landesmusikschulwerk, Schlossgasse 8, Grein, Austria

^b Department of Music Education Research and Practice, mdw –University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Vienna, Austria

^c Department of Music Education, Alice-Harnoncourt-Platz 1, Linz, Austria

* Correspondence: manuela.kloibmueller@ooe.gv.at

° Correspondence: mcgregor@mdw.ac.at

° Correspondence: dagmar.schinnerl@bruckneruni.at

Abstract

In this expert discussion¹, Manuela Kloibmüller, Judith McGregor and Dagmar Schinnerl explore how music mediation can contribute to the success of the requirements for music schools set out in position papers and specialist literature, and what role actors working across the intersection of instrumental pedagogy and music mediation can play in this. They reflect on the need for "game-changing" at music schools considering social and cultural changes and discuss the extent to which music mediation can support these processes of change. The authors have been active in the field of music schools and music

¹ This is a revised, condensed version of a recorded live conversation.

mediation for many years and contribute extensive experience from practical work, teaching and research. They address the intersections between music mediation and music schools from different perspectives and can thus contribute both theoretical and practical insights into the possibilities and challenges of contemporary music school work.

*In diesem Expert:innengespräch² gehen Manuela Kloibmüller, Judith McGregor und Dagmar Schinnerl der Frage nach wie Musikvermittlung zum Gelingen der in Positionspapieren und Fachliteratur genannten Ansprüche an Musikschulen beitragen kann und welche Rolle Akteur*innen an der Schnittstelle von Instrumental(-Gesangs)pädagogik und Musikvermittlung dabei übernehmen können. Sie reflektieren die Notwendigkeit des „Gamechangens“ an Musikschulen angesichts gesellschaftlicher und kultureller Veränderungen und stellen Überlegungen an inwiefern Musikvermittlung diese Veränderungsprozesse unterstützen kann. Die Autorinnen sind seit vielen Jahren im Feld der Musikschulen und der Musikvermittlung tätig und bringen umfassende Erfahrungen aus Praxis, Lehre und Forschung ein. Sie befassen sich aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven mit den Schnittstellen von Musikvermittlung und Musikschule und können so sowohl theoretische als auch praktische Einsichten in die Möglichkeiten und Herausforderungen einer zeitgemäßen Musikschularbeit einbringen.*

Dans cette discussion entre experts³ Manuela Kloibmüller Judith McGregor et Dagmar Schinnerl explorent comment la médiation de la musique peut contribuer à l'atteinte des objectifs fixés, dans les prises de positions publiques et la littérature, à l'égard des écoles de musique et les rôles que les acteurs intervenants au croisement de la pédagogie instrumentale et de la médiation de la musique peuvent y jouer. Elles réfléchissent à la nécessité de « changer le jeu » des écoles de musiques face aux transformations sociales et culturelles de la société et évaluent dans quelles mesures la médiation de la musique peut supporter ces changements. Les auteures de cet échange travaillent depuis plusieurs années dans le champ de l'éducation et de la médiation de la musique et contribuent activement à la recherche, l'enseignement et la pratique dans le domaine. Riche de cette expérience elles explicitent ici les croisements entre la médiation de la musique et les actions développées dans le champ de l'éducation musicale à partir de perspectives distinctes et contribuent ainsi à éclairer à la fois théoriquement et à partir d'exemples concrets les défis contemporains rencontrés au sein des écoles de musique.

Keywords

music schools, social and cultural change, organisational development, music pedagogy, music mediation

² Es handelt sich um eine revidierte, verdichtete Fassung eines aufgezeichneten Live-Gesprächs.

³ Il s'agit d'une version révisée et condensée d'une conversation enregistrée en direct.

Potential of Music Mediation in the Context of Music Schools

Dagmar Schinnerl: Music schools see themselves as cultural educational institutions that are accessible to all and contribute to a culturally active society, to peace and to international understanding in Europe. They want to encourage artistic and creative engagement with music diversity as well as interdisciplinarity, and fulfil their mission to have a wide-reaching impact and to promote young talent. If music schools want to be openly accessible places for learning and making music in changing societies that fulfil all of these goals, then they need people who can make this happen and drive the necessary developments forward. That is why music schools regard the training and further education of teachers as an essential quality feature for the (further) development of teaching programmes and methods in the spirit of innovation. All these comprehensive and demanding requirements for music schools can be found in a detailed examination of music school curricula⁴, international – especially Europe-wide – strategy papers⁵, as well as specialist literature and mission statements of music school associations.

Music mediation has long been an important opportunity for further training and professional development for instrumental teachers. Judith, in the course of evaluating the data from your study, the category "music mediation as a game changer" emerged among the instrumental teachers interviewed. How can music mediation contribute to the success of the aforementioned demands on music schools? And what role can those at the intersection of instrumental pedagogy and music mediation play in this?

Judith McGregor: Let's first take a look at instrumental teachers at music schools. On one hand, we have the field of instrumental pedagogy⁶ and, on the other hand, the institutional framework of the music school. This distinction is central to our debate. Instrumental pedagogy can be studied as a subject, and graduates later work predominantly in music schools. If we take a closer look at instrumental pedagogy – which was also part of my study (McGregor, 2026) – we see that instrumental pedagogy and music mediation are two closely related fields. While instrumental pedagogy has long been established as an academic discipline, music mediation has increasingly gained recognition as such, with dedicated study programmes and a growing body of scholarly discourse. One could almost say that they act like siblings, because both aim to enable an aesthetic experience of music and participatory forms of relationship-building, communicative music-making and music appreciation. In this sense, instrumental pedagogy is close to the objectives of music mediation in terms of its core mission. Of course, didactic aspects play an important role in instrumental pedagogy, but at the same time it

⁴ See, for example, KOMU-Lehrplan (KOMU – Austrian Conference of Music Schools 2007) and Strukturplan des VDM (VdM – Verband Deutscher Musikschulen 2023)

⁵ See, for example, Weimar Declaration (EMU 1999) and Five Music Rights (EMU n.d.)

⁶ The term "instrumental pedagogy" or "instrumental pedagogical" always includes the term "vocal pedagogy" or "vocal pedagogical".

is essentially about musical perception, musical experience and the corresponding spaces for this musical experience (see, for example, Mahlert, 2016, and Röbbke, 2016). This must be distinguished from the institution of the music school as an organisational framework. This differentiation is an essential factor. Originally, I did not intend to talk in detail about music schools with the teachers who participated in my study. However, the teachers repeatedly brought up this topic during the discussions, so that music schools ultimately became the central theme. Through this, the category "music mediation as a game changer" emerged during the data analysis in my study. The teachers reported on structures that are often perceived as inflexible, on institutional requirements, limited scope for action, on heads of music schools who open up or restrict scope for action, and on mandatory performance assessments to varying degrees. This is where music mediation comes into play. It is perceived by educators as a new impetus, sometimes consciously sought as an alternative to everyday professional life. Encountering music mediation brings to light issues for educators that one might initially assume arose only through this encounter. In fact, however, these are also instrumental teaching topics and target dimensions that take a back seat in everyday professional life⁷ - shaped by the institutional framework of the music school. This is precisely why it is important to make a clear distinction between instrumental pedagogy as a subject area on the one hand and the music school as an institution on the other.

Existing Structures in Music Schools and Their Potential for Innovation

JM: In this context, fundamental questions must be addressed: What framework do music schools currently offer? How are the existing structures organised, and who develops them?

Manuela Kloibmüller: These questions are at the forefront of a discussion that enables music schools to reflect on existing structures and to develop further through innovation. Fundamentally, the overall music school system is strongly influenced by the teachers who work in it. Training and practice in the music school institution influence each other to a considerable extent. The existing framework conditions of music schools have been developed historically and can be traced back, among other things, to the work of influential instrumental teachers. At a higher level, economic and political objectives, strategic planning and innovations at management level in music schools and, on a larger scale, in the various music school associations play a key role in further development.

⁷ Andreas Doerne describes the challenges of everyday teaching as a central resistance that causes overarching educational goals to be lost sight of in favour of routine (Doerne, 2010, pp. 115–116).

A key aspect is that a degree in instrumental pedagogy⁸ is an essential prerequisite for the development of music schools. Training shapes teachers in their professional self-image and in their pedagogical practice. The more music mediation becomes part of a holistic teacher training, the more teachers will become interested in creative teaching approaches. Currently, commitment to music mediation varies greatly.

JM: I agree. The development of music schools has grown historically, and in Austria⁹ there have been efforts to professionalise them for decades and align them structurally with the general school system. This includes financing, salary schemes, curricula and forms of performance assessment. A step towards professionalisation has taken place, which is fundamentally to be welcomed. And my study shows that this institutional professionalisation has led to a greater emphasis on schooling. Certain core topics in instrumental teaching, such as intensive musical experience, have been pushed into the background in some cases. In this situation, music mediation comes into play for some instrumental teachers; to consciously seek creative inspiration from outside, but also out of a certain frustration with their everyday work. In this sense, music mediation takes on a kind of game-changing function. Engaging with music mediation draws attention to fundamental questions: What is teaching actually about? Why do I teach? Who am I addressing, how and what for? These questions are closely related to the institutional and structural context of the music school and are made visible again through music mediation.

⁸ Most instrumental teachers in Austria have completed instrumental teaching training at a music university. This is a full-time course of study in which artistic skills on the instrument are taught alongside sound pedagogical and didactic skills in order to enable students to teach instrumental students, thus preparing them for professional work in music schools. However, music schools also employ teachers who have completed major studies in areas such as elementary music education or dance.

⁹ Music schools in Austria form a nationwide network offering a wide range of programs for children, adolescents, and adults. These include early childhood music education, instrumental and vocal training, dance, music theory, as well as ensemble and orchestral practice. Some institutions operate as music and arts schools, expanding their programs to include fields such as visual arts or (music) theatre. Music schools are predominantly publicly funded by federal states, local authorities or associations, fulfill an educational mandate, and are organized as public institutions. Despite differing frameworks across the nine federal states of Austria, since 1994 they are united by a nationally binding curriculum by the Austrian Conference of Music Schools (KOMU). KOMU serves as a nationwide platform for networking, exchange, development and quality assurance. In total, around 370 music schools employ approximately 7,500 teachers who provide high-quality instruction to about 210,000 students (cf. EMU). Music schools see themselves as places of music-making and social interaction, where musical education and artistic participation are central. In cooperation with regional partners, music schools thus contribute to sustainable cultural development in their respective regions, where they organize a wide range of concerts, events and competitions. In cooperation with universities, they support young people on their path to becoming professional musicians. In the context of music schools, music mediation can take place in a variety of ways. The three authors are active within this context of music education (see Hahn, M., & Hofecker, F.-O., 2016).

MK: Put positively, it means that music mediation brings us back to the core of instrumental pedagogy and strengthens our sense of identity with the profession. Professionalisation within the music school system I work in¹⁰ creates conditions that offer space for music mediation for teachers who have the relevant skills and commitment. At the same time, however, it is clear that not all teachers have a strong awareness of music mediation. My approach is therefore based on innovation at the systemic level, for example in terms of time resources or structural requirements, but more so on the understanding of teaching itself and the fundamental pedagogical approach. My practical experience shows that music mediation is often carried out by teachers who have either acquired the relevant knowledge or have developed their own approach to music mediation methods through creative activity. These committed teachers try to use music mediation consciously or intuitively within the given framework.

DS: So we can distinguish between instrumental pedagogy and music mediation in terms of both training and professional practice. While the two fields share certain similarities, they also exhibit clear distinctions. Music stands at the forefront of both. Both aim to open up access to music and focus on musical and cultural education. Both share common ground in terms of methodological approaches, drawing on an impressively wide range of methods, formats and practices. In my view, this diversity offers a great opportunity for application in the professional field of music schools. Practitioners in both professional fields can work in institutions or on a freelance basis. Although there is some overlap regarding the dialogue groups involved, there are significant differences in the occupational fields, for example in the setting. Instrumental teachers work with students, mainly individually and in small groups, while music mediators work with audiences and workshop participants, usually with groups of people. In music mediation the term "students" is only used when referring to projects in and with schools. Instrumental teachers work at regular intervals, in recurring time slots, with instrumental students who want to develop their musical skills on their instrument. They teach instrumental, musical and artistic skills and competences. Music mediators usually work on a project basis within a limited period of time. Of course, there are also projects that run with a certain degree of regularity over several years, but music mediation activities usually take place over periods ranging from a few hours to several days, weeks or months. These represent some of the key aspects in which the two fields fundamentally differ in their professional settings. Events are one of the core tasks of music mediation within music schools. The formats range from class recitals, traditional concerts, school events and festivals to interdisciplinary events in a regional or even supra-regional context. It therefore seems obvious to first think of ideas for music

¹⁰ It should be noted that there are many different music school systems and that perspectives may vary depending on the context. In Austria music school systems vary from one federal state to another.

school recitals (see, for example, Wüstehube, 2014 and Schinnerl, 2024.) when considering music mediation at music schools. However, the potential of music mediation for music schools goes far beyond this.

JM: What you just mentioned is a key point – it's about different settings and different target or dialogue groups. However, the question arises: why do we assume that something needs to or should change? This question is highly dependent on perspective. It depends on which "hat" you wear when looking at the music school field. One could certainly argue that music schools have become much more professional in recent decades. In Austria, we have a system that is unique in Europe in many respects, with very well-established training for instrumental teachers and many positive developments overall. Much of it works very well. In addition, we have a strong field of music mediation. Against this background, the question of why we still feel the need to talk about change becomes all the more urgent. Why do we assume that some kind of game-changing trend might be necessary or sensible in the music school sector before we even discuss the direction in which things should develop?

Music Schools in a Field of Tension: Social Change and Social Cohesion

MK: To take this idea further, I view the need for more music mediation in music schools as primarily due to social change. In this context, I see music schools as a central institution at the grassroots level. It's about broad impact, about enthusiasm for music and art against the backdrop of cultural tradition and artistic creativity in the future. Singing and dancing together was practised in the family, at celebrations or in church – a natural and original form of music mediation. Structures have changed, and a wide variety of media have emerged. In this landscape, music schools are important players in continuing to cultivate this self-image of cultural practice. Music mediation projects conducted in collaboration with compulsory schools or associations can have a broader impact, inspire enthusiasm and convey the social value of communal artistic practice. In the context of this task, music mediation in music schools can be a game changer. Raising awareness of this not only among teachers, but also among parents, students and associations, is one of the future topics for music schools. The many building blocks – small and large moments of music mediation – lead to a big picture, which must be preceded by a vision of enabling all people in society to access music and art. Music schools currently fulfil this requirement to varying degrees, but the vision is already defined, for example, in the preamble to the KOMU curriculum (see KOMU, 2007).

JM: Comprehensive changes affecting society as a whole are impacting us globally and raising the question of what role culture, art and music in particular play in such processes of change. In my view, this involves a multitude of interrelated aspects. One key

opportunity that music schools offer in this regard is in community engagement¹¹. Music schools can open up spaces where people can connect through art, music and cultural practice and experience their part in their community. This sense of community seems to me to be something that our society is increasingly losing. Instead, we are seeing tendencies towards division in many places. Culture and art play an ambivalent role in this context. They can have an integrative effect, but they can also produce exclusion. In her article, Barbara Hornberger (2020) points out – with reference to Pierre Bourdieu – that art is a means of social distinction. Even seemingly small habitual practices – such as knowing how to behave at a classical concert – can determine whether someone feels included or excluded. Art and culture thus create opportunities for both belonging and separation. In this regard, I believe the current developments in music mediation are particularly relevant. In recent years, there has been a clear focus on socially transformative approaches. Music mediation is increasingly seen as a practice that aims to stimulate thought processes, enable reflection and actively shape social developments. (see, for example, Petri-Preis & Ziegenmeyer, 2025) Music schools in particular, often relatively small, locally based institutions, can play an important role in this context. They are places where cultural practice takes place – through making music, singing, dancing and other forms of artistic activity together. For me, this is linked to the question of fundamental musical rights. I believe access to music education and cultural participation is closely linked to democratic and social values. In Austria music schools are predominantly publicly funded and therefore have public responsibility to guarantee fundamental rights, community and democratic participation. Currently they only benefit a relatively small section of the population.

This finding is somewhat at odds with programmatic self-descriptions. In curricula, mission statements and cultural policy papers mentioned earlier, music schools are described as places of social and artistic exchange, open to all. However, when we look at the reality, it becomes clear that this aspiration is not being fulfilled. In this regard, music schools could consciously draw inspiration from music mediation, which has successfully provided impetus and critically questioned existing structures over the last two decades. Questions about who decides what is culturally relevant, who is or is not addressed, as well as the social effects of cultural practice, are central to this debate.

DS: Music schools in particular have many opportunities focused on cultural education and social cohesion because they are already established institutions, which are often located in the centre of communities and towns, and are therefore well placed to fulfil their role as cultural centres. In many places, music schools have been fulfilling their social responsibility and playing an important role in the local community for many years and decades. The question is to what extent music mediation can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding and fulfilment of this social mission. The demand

¹¹ See Borwick's publications which primarily refer to the concert and cultural sector, but their central arguments and concepts are also applicable to the context of instrumental pedagogy (Borwick, 2012, 2015, n.d.)

for "music schools for all" should be a central pillar of music schools' self-image, because music schools are understood as cultural educational institutions that should be accessible to all and contribute to an active society, to peace and to international understanding in Europe. (see EMU, 1999) On one hand, music schools are very active, and on the other, they are constantly challenged to ask what more can be done. This is especially true when music schools, as you so aptly described, have enormous potential to be game changers for society. And that brings us back to the question: "To what extent can music mediation be a game changer for music schools?" I see great potential for music mediation in music schools, particularly in terms of attitude, formats, projects, but also in terms of professional discourse. In music mediation in particular, questions such as "Where can music and music mediation be socially transformative?" have been discussed in depth for some time. To illustrate this with an example: sustainability and social cohesion are topics that Bernhard König has been addressing for many years in his projects, compositions and publications as a composer, author and interaction artist¹². He is particularly keen to use music as a unifying force to strengthen social cohesion in the long term, knowing that this is of great importance, especially in challenging times. In music mediation, there are many ideas, formats and experiences that could be applied in music schools.

Music Mediation with a Stance

JM: I would like to point out a goal of music mediation that Johannes Voit describes in the *Handbuch Musikvermittlung* [Handbook of Music Mediation]. According to Voit, music mediation also aims to change the attitudes of institutions and actors, or at least to subject them to conscious reflection (Voit 2023). This reflection is directed both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly, it deals with questions such as: Who do we reach as an institution? Who do we want to reach? Who are we not yet reaching – or even: who do we not *want* to reach? Internally, the question of our own mission arises: what do we stand for and how do we understand our role as a music school? In this sense, I see music mediation as a potential game changer, as an impetus for honest and systematic reflection processes in the context of music schools. This can start early on.

When gifted musicians come into contact with music mediation practices at an early age, this shapes their artistic identity and self-image. Artistic activity is then no longer limited to the stage or the immediate performance context, but is understood as something that always has an impact on society and exerts a social influence. In this sense, artistic identity formation is already effective at a very early and fundamental level. In my view, this form of awareness is not only central to the artistic field itself, but also socially relevant. We need outstanding artists on stage, without question. At the same time, we need people who reflect on the fact that their artistic activities always have

¹² See, for example, projects and compositions by Bernhard König and his publication *Musik und Klima* (König, 2024).

social implications. In my experience, many students discover and develop this perspective relatively late, often in a university context. Suddenly, it is no longer just about individual artistic achievement or the next performance, but about broader questions of social impact, responsibility and context.

DS: And that, in turn, can contribute to an "artistic-mediating" attitude at an early age by reflecting on one's attitude towards music, the audience and one's own artistic activity. Reflecting on one's own attitude plays an important role in both music mediation and instrumental pedagogy studies. If this examination of one's own attitude begins early on at music school, then this contributes to training the musicians of tomorrow to see themselves as reflective practitioners. As such, they can be artistically active, question and contextualise their own actions, adapt to complex, challenging situations and provide socially relevant impetus, which is particularly important in view of future challenges.

MK: The fundamental question arises as to who is supported and on what basis. In music schools, the focus is usually on financially supporting those who show talent, particular motivation or passion. How far this support leads – whether to a professional career or to broad musical participation, for example in choirs, dance, music associations, orchestras or other forms – remains open for now and is a matter of individual assessment. With the increased relevance of music mediation as a game changer, an important space for reflection is opening up. Similar developments can be observed in compulsory education, for example through project-oriented teaching, action-oriented learning and experience-based approaches, which have a more lasting effect than rote learning. Applied to the music school system, this means reviewing the concepts of broad impact and gifted education.

Institutional Interfaces and Educational Transitions: Who Gets to Play?

MK: The question of access to music schools is central here. From my own experience in our federal state, I can say that in general it is quite easy to get into music schools. Measures such as the provision of loan instruments, government subsidies of music school fees, or the possibility of participating in group lessons at low-cost offer scope for flexibility. However, waiting lists and a certain cultural and musical orientation that does not appeal to everyone can restrict access in many places.

JM: Access restrictions and opportunities for access to music schools are indeed very complex issues because the situation varies greatly from region to region. For some people, there are very real financial barriers limiting access. This must be openly acknowledged. At the same time, I realise that even in an ideal future scenario, complete openness of access will probably never be fully achieved. Therefore, what seems

crucial to me is not so much the formal statement that anyone can attend music school, but rather the question of what we offer and who these offerings appeal to. In many cases, they are in fact aimed at a specific clientele. This is precisely where I see the need for a conscious process of reflection. This is not about abandoning existing values, traditions or established musical cultures. Rather, it is a question of who we are reaching with our existing offerings and where it might be necessary to adapt formats, content or approaches in order to appeal more strongly to underrepresented groups.¹³ With this in mind, access opportunities cannot be assessed in general terms. They are highly context-dependent and require differentiated, locally sensitive responses.

MK: Music schools often have a wide range of offerings that include classical, folk pop music and many other styles and forms of expression. Despite this musical diversity, music schools are often still perceived as elitist. They do not succeed in appealing to everyone equally. The question arises as to how to reach people that are not represented at music schools. In the tension between quality, standards and accessibility, music mediation emerges as an important game changer.

JM: Of course, you cannot reach everyone. However, when I compare this with the publicly funded cultural sector, I can see what music mediation has already achieved there. Large cultural institutions in particular have begun to expand and break down their own 'spaces' and consciously adopt new perspectives. Because even there, it is clear that many people do not feel addressed by the offerings of institutions like traditional concert halls and would not even cross the 'threshold to so-called high culture' in the first place. Interestingly, this applies not only to groups that would be hastily labelled as "educationally underprivileged", but also to people from academic circles. In this context, music mediation has helped to take this situation seriously and turn the question around: if people do not come to us, what do we need to do to gain an understanding of their world? One possible step is to venture outside our own walls and take an interest in the cultural and musical practices of those people. I believe this shift in perspective is very useful for music schools. If we find that certain milieus are not being reached by our offerings, we should first ask ourselves *why* this is the case. Who are we addressing with our existing formats – and who are we obviously not addressing? In many cases, we know surprisingly little about this. For me, this is precisely where a potential game-changing dimension lies: consciously changing our perspective and questioning our own assumptions.

¹³ See Müller-Brozović (2023) for a distinction between the affirmative function of music mediation, which confirms the existing values and traditions of an institution, and its transformative function, which acts as a driving force for social change and brings about lasting change to existing structures and formats. Although Müller-Brozović bases her remarks primarily on the example of concert situations, the underlying reflection on openness to a diverse society is also relevant to fields of action in instrumental pedagogy.

DS: And that is where non-attendee research (Renz, 2016) and cultural participation research (Renz, 2024) come into play. In the spirit of self-reflection, music schools could investigate questions such as: Who are we not reaching? Who does not feel addressed? And why are these people not represented in music schools? Cultural participation research would be an important tool for music schools to learn more about how music schools are perceived in society. In order to take lessons or attend events at music schools, people need to be aware of the existence of music schools, perceive them as open, welcoming places where they can participate in cultural activities without any preconditions, and be familiar with requirements such as tuition fees, tuition fee waivers, registration procedures, instrument purchases, etc. Researching what can facilitate or hinder access to music schools could provide valuable insights.

JM: As long as institutions like music schools are in such high demand, the pressure to change is relatively low. After all, why change anything if there continues to be enough interested parties? The situation is therefore different from areas where you have to actively recruit participants. Apart from a few regions, music schools in Austria still have long waiting lists. As long as new students continue to enrol, there is no need to make fundamental changes, the system is therefore secure. In some regions, there are isolated subjects that have too few enrolled students, but overall, hardly any music schools are facing the situation of having to close due to a lack of demand. I wonder to what extent a real game-changing movement can be initiated in such conditions. The need for change arises rather from social considerations than student numbers.

MK: The high demand can also be viewed from another perspective. In practice, as a music school director, I deal with limited resources – for example, hourly quotas – with waiting lists, with limited staff availability. And it is precisely for this reason that innovation is needed, opportunities for subjects and artistic practice that explore new spaces beyond classical teaching. On one hand, music mediation can be a path to new formats of teaching. On the other hand, I think it is essential to be more accurate in the search for the right subject and to question dropout rates. What instruments and forms of artistic expression are there? What should I choose? What do I want? What are my expectations and what is expected of me? Asking these questions before entering music school is an important steering element. Elementary music education contributes significantly to this part of music school work. In addition, methodological approaches and impulses from music mediation could help to clarify these questions and open up musical experiences for those interested. If these decisions are made consciously, they have a lasting effect, both from an individual perspective and in terms of the social impact of personal musical experience.

Additionally, financial support should not be based exclusively on criteria such as musical performance or the support of gifted students. It is relatively straightforward to focus on measurable factors such as practice behaviour and to evaluate on this basis. I see it as a central task of music mediation to expand this basic approach to include further perspectives. Traditional concert performances, competitions and exams can be

motivating, are important challenges and essential pillars of music schools, but participatory and interdisciplinary creative work is also an opportunity for music schools. Music mediation has great potential to focus on several levels at once and open up different paths of development.

JM: If you compare how tradition and innovation are handled in the context of large cultural institutions, a similar picture emerges. Traditional subscription concerts and established formats still exist, and I would like to emphasise that these have their place. I, too, greatly appreciate going to a concert that consciously follows this tradition. They are important and should not be questioned. At the same time, over the last twenty to twenty-five years, another concert sector has established itself with very innovative concert formats, workshops and educational offerings. So, it is not a question of either/or, but of both/and.

This also applies to the field of education. We all know that the requirements for artistic entrance examinations at universities have changed very little. Anyone who wants to study art must have certain skills and demonstrate them. I believe this is fundamentally necessary. The question is not so much whether performance is required, but rather what methodological means and formats we use to prepare people for this path. Competitions, recitals, class recitals and talent development programmes in the music schools context fulfil an important function here.

At the same time, the question arises as to what else we as a society expect from music schools. What additional spaces can be developed alongside these established training paths? Perhaps music schools also need formats that move away from traditional weekly lessons and focus on other areas, such as community music. The first initiatives in this direction are already underway at music schools.

For me, there is a key potential for development: to think about where and how music schools can expand their content and diversify their offerings without abandoning what has been tried and tested. It is precisely this question of possible expansions and new areas of focus that I believe is crucial for future developments. It is important to me to emphasise that there is a great deal that already works well in the music school systems. This should be clearly stated. That is why I prefer to speak of an expansion rather than a fundamental change.

Interdisciplinarity, Collaboration and Co-Creation – Music as a Social Practice

MK: I am a classically trained musician myself and greatly appreciate traditional concert formats, such as the concentrated experience of an orchestra concert. At the same time, I find it just as enriching and exciting to sit in an unfamiliar environment, for example on cushions in a warehouse, to experience an adaptation of "La Traviata". My commitment and passion for music mediation stem from my desire to define concerts, theatre, dance, exhibitions, museums and performances as an indispensable part of our

society, as a fundamental right, and to make them accessible to everyone. Regardless of the genre in which an art form is located, I consider it relevant that art inspires people to become active, to want to express themselves or to think about issues. Art must be placed in the present, built on great diversity.

JM: This is precisely where I see an important game-changing aspect of music mediation: understanding music as a social practice (Small, 1998) and a form of social interaction, on a par with its artistic and aesthetic dimensions. I still find this perspective lacking in some instrumental pedagogy contexts. I am aware that such statements can quickly seem generalising and that music schools operate in very different ways. Nevertheless, I observe that the focus on music as a social practice often creates tension where a strongly performance-oriented understanding dominates. For me, social practice in the teaching context also means that I create something together with my students and that we meet on equal terms. Of course, as a teacher, I have professional expertise, but when music-making is understood as a social practice, the relationship between teachers and learners also shifts. It is precisely this shift that has consequences for teaching practices and pedagogical attitudes.

MK: This attitude of equality is central. Practical experience shows that equality is particularly successful when all those involved are taken into account. In music schools, it is not only students and teachers who are relevant, but also parents, school caretakers, communities and associations. Everyone plays a part in the overall structure that enables the success of the musical work. Although we are primarily talking about music, all these considerations could be applied to other art forms, such as theatre. In the field of acting, there are hardly any grassroots training structures. There are no theatre schools in the comprehensive sense. The theatre industry is also caught between entertaining formats such as comedies and easily consumable offerings on the one hand, and highly critical, political or discursive plays on the other. Similar considerations can be applied to the visual arts, although there are now developments, such as art schools, that are already addressing such issues. I find these approaches particularly interesting. Even though we, as instrumental teachers, primarily discuss music from our perspective, the core issue is a broader concern: the question of how art forms can relate to one another. Music does not stand alone, but touches on dance, the performing arts and the visual arts, even in its own practice. The musician's performance, the format and the design of musical spaces are closely interwoven with staging, movement, physicality and posture. With this in mind, I believe it is desirable for music schools to take a pioneering role in interdisciplinary forms of teaching and participation opportunities.

JM: This is where music mediation connects with interdisciplinarity, collaboration and co-creation. The focus is usually on singular interventions, on specific moments: an hour, a concert, a project week. Even though sustainability is also an issue in the context of music mediation practices, there is great potential in this focus on the unique. It is precisely this concentration on the moment that seems to inspire and emotionally appeal to many instrumental teachers. I see this as an attitude from which instrumental

teaching could benefit. Every lesson, every class concert could be conceived and designed more strongly as an independent, meaningful moment. I am aware that this is only possible to a limited extent under real working conditions with high teaching commitments. Nevertheless, I consider this perspective to be productive on an attitudinal level. Even small design decisions – a different room layout, a deliberately set sequence of events, a changed atmosphere – can make a difference. Less permanent thinking in terms of long-term processes, more attention to the concrete moment. In my view, this shift in perspective holds further potential to change the game for instrumental teaching and music school work as a whole.

MK: There is also great potential in talking about music mediation. Instrumental teachers often work in one-on-one lessons. Although projects are usually implemented in teams, there is often a lack of regular, in-depth exchange about and reflection on pedagogical attitudes or music mediation practices. In a positive sense, this would mean being able to say: that aspect is essentially music mediation or this approach I could develop further via music mediation. At the same time, the exchange creates the opportunity to gain new inspiration without having to reinvent everything every time. In this sense, I understand this kind of game changing not as a radical change, but rather as raising awareness of what is already taking place, combined with the question of how this practice can be continued and deepened. This desire for more exchange and enriching joint reflection is expressed by many colleagues.

Instrumental Teachers as Music Mediators

DS: Another strength of music schools is that teachers and students build teacher-student relationships over long periods of time, usually in one-on-one and small group settings. Teachers can have a very positive impact and set processes in motion that have a lasting effect on students. The expectation that music schools should contribute to peace and international understanding (EMU, 1999) may seem rather ambitious and difficult to achieve at first glance. But on closer inspection, it is precisely these teacher-student relationships that are a good example of how music schools can fulfil this demanding mission. The impact that teachers can have on students should not be underestimated. When teachers at music schools demonstrate a respectful attitude that promotes peace and international understanding, and pass this attitude on, they are setting an example for countless people of different ages. If students have a positive experience of their relationship with their teachers, they will absorb this attitude and become multipliers when they pass on these experiences to others. Long-term collaboration is one of the great strengths of the music school profession, which is comparatively rare in music mediation. Conversely, there is this "being in the moment" in music mediation, combined with a high degree of presence. At music schools, there is the opportunity for

both: regularity combined with special moments in lessons and events, where you manage to create "sparkling moments" that can also be refreshing for the teachers themselves.

MK: In this sense, music mediation is the core business of music schools. On one hand, it is about music mediation in the immediate context of the music school, i.e. in everyday teaching. On the other hand, there are the large music mediation projects at music schools. I find it exciting to ask how teachers today define music mediation.

JM: I have often asked myself this question. It ties in with experiences I have had frequently, such as when educators say: Music mediation – we all do that. My inner response to this is usually: Yes and no. In my view, this is precisely one of the reasons why the term music mediation is so polarising. Of course, there is something deeply educational about the term – namely, imparting knowledge. In this sense, we all impart content, facilitate learning processes and pursue educational goals. However, when music mediation is understood as an artistic practice, this understanding goes beyond the mere imparting of content. Music mediation as an artistic practice means that the activity moves in a field of tension between artistic and pedagogical orientation. (Wimmer, 2023) Of course, methods from general music education, theatre education or other areas can be incorporated. However, it is crucial that music mediation is not primarily understood as a didactic translation service, but as an independent artistic practice.

All this considered, I do not believe that every instrumental teacher is automatically a music mediator because they teach. Teaching naturally means conveying content. However, music mediation means something else: a conscious artistic negotiation that intertwines reflection, self-awareness, aesthetic experience and relationship building with and through music in a special way. It is precisely this differentiation that seems important to me in order to avoid misunderstandings and to make it clear why music mediation should not simply be understood as another word for teaching.

Agents of Change

DS: Let's talk about scope for action and concrete levers for change at this point. We now return to the questions we asked at the beginning of our conversation: How can music mediation contribute to the success of the aforementioned demands on music schools? What role can key players at the intersection of instrumental pedagogy and music mediation play in this? And which key players are we talking about?

JM: In my view, teachers are key players. However, I believe that leaders are even more crucial. They shape structural decisions and the institutional attitude of the music school towards openness, diversity and social responsibility. The curriculum offers a

high degree of flexibility, but at the same time requires the responsible use of this freedom. This competence is by no means a given, but requires a certain attitude, a willingness to reflect and a specific understanding of leadership. In this context, I would even go so far as to say that every leader should engage with music mediation¹⁴.

DS: To take this a step further, I would like to point out that music mediators often possess strong leadership qualities. This is evident from the large number of our graduates¹⁵ who hold leadership positions. It would be worth researching to what extent music mediation fosters leadership skills, or whether music mediation attracts people who already possess these skills.

MK: Leaders can enable game-changing when they support initiatives and recognise new innovations. Teachers contribute significantly to the sustainable development of educational practice, and this requires leaders who enable further development.

JM: It is about a fundamental change in perspective among teachers at music schools and universities, decision-makers and umbrella organisations at regional, supra-regional, national and international levels. Teacher training plays a central role. In instrumental studies, the main artistic subject continues to be a dominant pillar that significantly shapes the artistic identity with which young musicians go through their training and later enter the professional field. The artistic and pedagogical self-image of the teachers is crucial here. Through this, students develop different attitudes that they later carry with them into their pedagogical and artistic practice. In this context, I see a definite need for action on the part of universities and educational institutions.

DS: This raises further questions: What does music mediation mean for instrumental teachers at universities who, like primary and secondary level instrumental teachers, have to respond to social change and a changing professional field? And universities must ask themselves what this change means for recruitment, onboarding processes and teacher training in university didactics. How can music mediation be a game changer for teaching and research at universities and the universities themselves? And how do universities take the Third Mission into account in this context?

MK: When we talk about this, we have to ask ourselves: How do prospective students pass the "bottleneck" that is the entrance exam to study instrumental pedagogy? And

¹⁴ Müller-Brozovic (2023, p. 264) emphasizes that music mediation can only unfold its transformative potential if it is embedded in the artistic and strategic leadership of an institution. While her argument refers to professional music ensembles and cultural organizations, the underlying considerations concerning leadership, institutional structures, and attitudes may also be transferred to music schools.

¹⁵ The Anton Bruckner University (www.bruckneruni.ac.at) has been training music mediators at Master's level since 2009, with over 100 graduates. They hold a variety of roles in the field of music mediation, including numerous leadership positions.

are entrance exams as they are currently conducted still appropriate? How do we define artistic excellence? Does this primarily encompass instrumental skills or also outstanding competencies in the context of pedagogy?

DS: Education and the professional field are developing cyclically. Depending on how agile the institutions act, the change processes are more or less flexible. This raises the question: How can universities and music schools strengthen and advance these processes? How can educational institutions act a way that they respond more quickly to social changes? The following levers come to the fore, e.g.: mission statements, guidelines, curricula, entrance and final examinations, feedback and discussion culture, reflective skills, further training opportunities, onboarding, teaching philosophy, etc. And it is highly relevant which stakeholders are involved in such development processes.

JM: Ultimately, all the necessary adjustments must be made to promote contemporary artistic development and a reflective, innovative self-image for music schools.

MK: Music mediation opens up an exciting and motivating space for new ideas in music schools. The core educational area of music schools with lessons, events and musical experiences as well as the field of social developments, methods and attitudes from music mediation both offer the opportunity for creative influence. The siblings that are instrumental pedagogy and music mediation open up opportunities for the further development of music schools in an exciting collaboration and are therefore game changers in the best sense of the word. The major task now lies ahead of us to get all players excited about this collaboration and to sow the seeds for utilising the comprehensive educational, philosophical-artistic and socially effective potential of music mediation and to spread knowledge about it in the context of the various institutions.

References

- Borwick, D. (2012). *Building communities, not audiences. The future of the arts in the United States*. ArtsEngaged.
- Borwick, D. (n.d.). *Engaging Matters. Doug Borwick on vibrant arts and communities*. Retrieved December 20, 2025, from <https://www.artsjournal.com/engage/>
- Borwick, D. (2015). *Engage now! A guide to making the arts indispensable*. ArtsEngaged.
- Doerne, A. (2010). *Comprehensive Music-Making. Fundamentals of Integral Instrumental Pedagogy*. Breitkopf & Härtel.
- EMC (n.d.). *Five Music Rights*. Retrieved 21 December, 2025, from <https://www.emc-imc.org/about/objectives-strategies/the-5-music-rights>
- EMU (1999). *Weimar Declaration*. Retrieved 21 December, 2025, from <http://www.musicschoolunion.eu/about-emu/what-we-do/european-music-school-union-weimar-declaration-music-schools-in-europe/>
- Hahn, M., & Hofecker, F.-O. (2016). *Austria's music schools as cultural and educational Organizations*. Musikschulmanagement Niederösterreich.
- Hornberger, B. (2020). Was wir uns ein-bilden: Musikpädagogik aus der Perspektive der Cultural Studies. In H. Lindmaier, I. I. Berg, & P. Röbbke (Eds.), *Vorzeichenwechsel: Gesellschaftspolitische Dimensionen von Musikpädagogik heute* (pp. 47–68). Waxmann.
- KOMU – Austrian Conference of Music Schools (2007). *KOMU-Lehrplan*. <https://www.komu.at/lehrplan/infos-zum-lehrplan>
- KOMU – Austrian Conference of Music Schools (2007). *Lehrplan für Musikschulen: Visionärer Wegweiser. Allgemeiner pädagogisch-didaktisch-psychologischer Teil*. <https://www.komu.at/content/komu-lehrplan-allgemein-2007>
- König, B. (n.d.). *Projekte und Kompositionen*. Retrieved December 20, 2025, from <https://www.schraege-musik.de/start/projekte/14533>
- Mahlert, U. (2016). Glück im Musizieren: Erscheinungsformen, Bedingungen, Ermöglichkeiten. In N. Ardila-Mantilla, P. Röbbke, C. Stöger, & B. Wüsthube (Eds.), *Herzstück Musizieren: Instrumentaler Gruppenunterricht zwischen Planung und Wagnis* (pp. 65–76). Schott.
- McGregor, J. (2026). *Musikvermittlung in der Instrumentalpädagogik. Kollektives Selbstverständnis und transformative Positionierung von Lehrenden*. transcript.
- Müller-Brozović, I. (2023). Musikvermittlung zwischen Affirmation und Transformation. In A. Petri-Preis & J. Voit (Eds.), *Handbuch Musikvermittlung – Studium, Lehre, Berufspraxis* (pp. 259–267). transcript.
- Petri-Preis, A., & Ziegenmeyer, A. (2025). *Turning Social. The Social-Transformative Potential of Music Mediation*. (1st ed.). mdwPress.
- Renz, T. (2016). *Nicht-Besucher-Forschung. Die Förderung kultureller Teilhabe durch Audience Development*. transcript.
- Renz, T. (2024). Quo vadis Kulturelle Teilhabeforschung? *Kulturelle Bildung Online*. <https://www.kubi-online.de/index.php/artikel/quo-vadis-kulturelle-teilhabe-forschung>
- Röbbke, P. (2016). Von der Unverfügbarkeit des Musiziermoments: Eine Spurensuche in der Instrumentalpädagogik. In N. Ardila-Mantilla, P. Röbbke, C. Stöger, & B.

- Wüstehube (Eds.), *Herzstück Musizieren: Instrumentaler Gruppenunterricht zwischen Planung und Wagnis* (pp. 45–64). Schott.
- Schinnerl, D. (2025). Multifaceted Concert Performances in Music Schools: Instrumental Students as Music Mediators. *International Journal of Music Mediation*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.71228/ijmm.2024.18>
- Small, C. (1998). *Musicking. The meanings of performing and listening*. Wesleyan University Press.
- VdM – Verband deutscher Musikschulen. (2023). *Strukturplan des VdM: Die öffentliche Musikschule. Konzept, Aufbau und Struktur*. <https://www.musikschulen.de/musikschulen/strukturplan/index.html>
- Voit, J. (2023). Begründungsfiguren und -diskurse der Musikvermittlung. In A. Petri-Preis & J. Voit (Eds.), *Handbuch Musikvermittlung – Studium, Lehre, Berufspraxis* (pp. 37–42). transcript.
- Wimmer, C. (2023). Musikvermittlung zwischen künstlerischer und pädagogischer Orientierung. In A. Petri-Preis & J. Voit (Eds.), *Handbuch Musikvermittlung – Studium, Lehre, Berufspraxis* (pp. 211–217). transcript.
- Wüstehube, B. (2014). Musikvermittlung im Kontext Musikschule. In: Wolfgang Rüdiger (Hg.), *Musikvermittlung - wozu? Umrisse und Perspektiven eines jungen Arbeitsfeldes* (pp. 99–113). Schott.

Authors' Biographies

Manuela Kloibmüller studied accordion and elementary music education at the former Bruckner Conservatory in Linz, now the Anton Bruckner University. She is widely known for her diverse concert activities, her musical work in theatre productions, and for creating innovative music programs with bands, singers, and actors, as well as for her real-time composing performances. After completing her degree in theatre studies at the University of Vienna, she began directing plays and operas, combining her musical expertise with a theatrical vision. Manuela Kloibmüller is Head of the *Landesmusikschule Grein*, where she teaches accordion and Styrian harmonica (*Steirische Harmonika*). She also serves as a jury member for several national music competitions. More information: www.manuela-kloibmuller.com

Judith McGregor studied instrumental pedagogy at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (the mdw) and completed the master's program *Music Mediation – Music in Context* at the Anton Bruckner University. She currently works as a university assistant in the field of instrumental pedagogy at the mdw and earned her doctorate with a dissertation on *music mediation in the context of instrumental pedagogy*. Her research focuses on the pedagogical attitudes and action orientations of instrumental teachers who are active in both instrumental teaching and music mediation. In addition, she teaches at a music school and works as a freelance violist.

Dagmar Schinnerl has always been enthusiastic about music as a medium in various contexts; music at the intersection of art, education, communication, therapy, research and management. This diverse interest is reflected in her professional career as well as in numerous studies and further training courses she has completed in all these areas. Schinnerl is Dean of Studies for Artistic-Pedagogical and Artistic-Scholarly Studies, senior lecturer and Co-Leader of the masters programme “Music Mediation – Music in Context” at the Anton Bruckner University. She taught for the Upper Austrian State Music School system and has more than 20 years of experience as a piano teacher and music mediator.

The automated analysis of the work in order to obtain information, particularly concerning patterns, trends, and correlations as defined in § 44b (text and data mining) of the German Copyright Act (UrhG) is prohibited without the written consent of the rights holders.