

‘Transmodal’ translation in ‘teaching-and-learning’ music

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Based on a qualitative empirical study about affordances and meaning-making processes where students in Compulsory junior high school learn to play music together, this paper presents how multimodal instructions create embodied musical cognition. The data consists of 13 observed music lessons in two 8th grade classes, video recorded in the course of one term. In order to explore multimodal aspects of sign making and interaction in teaching and learning excerpts from teacher and students’ singing and playing music on different occasions were transcribed into scores in which musical notation together with other graphic signs and written descriptions represent the events. The scores visualise multimodal aspects of musical interaction, which made a 'fine grained' analysis of meaning-making processes possible. As the teacher rarely demonstrated the parts on the instruments the students’ interpretation process took place with the aid of the teacher’s graphic, bodily and verbal combinations of signs. In the repertoires of expressive signs cohesion was achieved largely through recognition represented by different modes. Especially conspicuous was how instructions that were linked to the beat of the music were most important for understanding, compared to signs off the beat. Significant was also how the teacher used the voice to make signs which had the effect of producing kinaesthetic experiences. The students in turn changed the sound into movements that facilitated their playing. Learning could be observed in the way in which the movements of the students became increasingly embodied during practice. Learning also revealed itself by how, in keeping time, the students made ‘transmodal’ translations of the teacher's multimodal signs. The findings exemplify the human ability to translate corresponding signs in and the role of pulse and rhythm to make cohesion. In addition the findings highlight the significance of being aware of these affordances in music education.