Aims and objectives

The main aims of the study are to develop and evaluate a training program for teachers of music schools and their pupils. The program aims to improve pupils’ ability to recover from setbacks by developing realistic attributions, to improve their feeling of control over achievement outcomes (self-efficacy), and to improve their ability to cope with stressful performances.

Context

Playing a musical instrument requires considerable motivation and self-regulation to cope with failures, setbacks, the daily hassles of practicing, and stressful events like concerts and competitions. Teachers and parents often assume that the highly skilled relish a challenge and persevere in the face of setbacks (Dweck, 1999). In fact, the most talented students are often the most worried about failure and the most likely to question their ability when they encounter obstacles (Leggett, 1985).

To understand why some pupils display mastery-oriented qualities and others do not, it is necessary to consider their implicit self-theories (such as theories of musical ability). An entity theory portrays a personal attribute as relatively fixed, whereas an incremental theory portrays it as relatively malleable (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Entity and incremental theories orient an individual toward different goals and different internal factors when explaining their performance. Implicit theories create a meaning framework involving attributions that are important for motivation, and are preferable because they tend to reinforce motivation in spite of failures. Hong et al. (1999) observed the greatest differences between entity- and incremental theorists when people are informed that their performance was bad, or when they fear such a negative appraisal. In such cases, entity theory makes individuals vulnerable to helpless and defensive behaviour; entity theorists are reluctant to take remedial action. This model is important for music education because it facilitates the understanding of motivational processes and the achievement-behaviour of pupils in the face of setbacks. If teachers comprehend these complex
motivational processes, they can influence the implicit theories of their pupils by the feedback they give during a lesson. For example, Schober (2002) demonstrated that careful, systematic feedback by teachers can foster mastery-oriented learning behaviour of mathematics students.

Most studies in this area address participants’ beliefs about general intelligence as an entity or incremental ability in the context of traditional school subjects. If beliefs about musical talent play an important role in determining musicians’ motivational processes, the non-musical research findings can also be applied to music.

Methodology
Participants in the first training phase (April to July 2005) were 7 female and 3 male children aged 12-14 who had been playing for at least one year. They attended 8 weekly sessions (1 to 4 on theoretical content, 5 to 8 on practical application). The training was multimodal, involving both stress management and the development of mastery-oriented patterns in the face of failure. The children’s attributions, self-efficacy, and coping-skills were continuously monitored. Data were subjected to an analysis of variance with age and gender as between-subject factors.

The teacher training was carried out during the same period. It involved effective communication with students by means of feedback that fosters motivation and self-esteem. Teachers kept a record of their evaluations of pupils’ performances and of the feedback they gave during lessons. At the end of the training phase, the teachers applied their newly acquired strategies in a real concert situation.

Results
Results will be presented at the conference. We expect improvement in children’s attributions, self-efficacy, and coping-skills, as well as teachers’ self-efficacy. We also predict stabilization after a further six months. On the basis of previous data, we expect that girls, who tend to be less confident of their musical abilities and less able to control achievement outcomes than boys, will improve in these areas more than boys. The tendency of girls to attribute success to external factors such as luck or task difficulty should decrease. For both girls and boys, the ability to manage stress should improve, and involve a wider range of strategies. Finally, we anticipate that pupils will improve their ability to apply the emotion-focused coping strategy “distraction and recovery” (Hampel et al., 2001).

Key contribution
We expect to demonstrate that the mastery-oriented achievement-behaviour of young musicians, and hence the realisation of their musical potential, can be improved by training. The program was welcomed and appreciated by both pupils and teachers in music schools. A further step after this pilot project should be to more closely examine the effectiveness of the individual training modules.

Keywords
Music education, motivation, attribution, coping, training
References


