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Finding focus : using external focus of attention for practicing and performing music

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Summary of Part I

Part I presented a theoretical background for motor learning and how it relates to musicians, discussed implicit learning and attentional focus – in particular external focus of attention – and explained how external focus could relate to music-making in the form of audiation and musical imagery. The conclusions are summarised here.

Making music involves motor skills that are too complex to fully understand or control consciously. It seems likely that much of the verbal ‘declarative’ processes that are often used in learning and teaching could be effectively replaced with a more procedural approach (even in early stages of learning), for instance by using an external focus of attention – focussing on the intended effect of one’s movements. One way to focus externally could be with audiation – by using vivid anticipatory auditory imagery. The audiation experience could be further enhanced if the musician also practiced singing, gesturing, and varying the phrases or fragments of music.

According to the research findings cited in Part I, one could expect that applying external focus to musicians would result in an enhanced ability to play and perform music – both technically and artistically.

Part II follows with a description of three empirical projects designed to explore the use of external focus – in the form of audiation – in contexts involving musicians’ learning and performance. The section includes a description of the design and implementation of a practice tool based on audiation: APT (Audiation Practice Tool – based on the concepts described in Chapter 3) that was used in all three projects.