Playing by “the connected ear”: An empirical study of adolescents learning to play a pop song using Internet-accessed resources

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## Sample

Three boys and two girls enrolled in an “Aesthetics activities” class in an upper-secondary school in Sweden and forming a band in it.

## Implications For Educators About

* School innovation
* Professional development
* Other

# Abstract

Learning to play a song from Internet-accessed resources such as YouTube and various forms of notation challenges our understanding of what it means to learn to “play by ear”. Against this background, this article reports an empirical study of 18-year-old students in a music class trying to learn to play a song together from Internet-accessed resources in the form of notation and a sound file. The students were followed with a video camera during three consecutive lessons. The theoretical perspective is sociocultural psychology and its concepts of cultural tools and semiotic mediation (i.e., how tools such as notation provide certain perspectives on phenomena, in this case a popular song). How this novel kind of notation was used, edited and communicated is analyzed in terms of its nature and functions in this learning practice. The result indicates that the notation was primarily used to communicate (instruct and coordinate actions among the participants) about the horizontal (temporal) aspects of the song. Although the notation lacked many of the features that the students asked for and was partly incorrect, it functioned as a central mediating tool in these activities. The analysis highlights the role of the teacher in this kind of activity and what musical features the student needs to be supported in learning.

# Outcome

"In conclusion, two things should be emphasized. First, this empirical study has clarified how, despite the fact that the notation these adolescents have downloaded from the Internet is incomplete in relation to what they ask for and even partly incorrect, it plays a central role in this musical activity. This testifies to what a powerful mediating tool (Luria, 1976; Olson, 1994; Wertsch, 2007) a text—or, in this case, more specifically, a form of music notation—is, even for such allegedly practical capabilities as playing an instrument and learning how to play a song together with others. Second, the changing musical learning practices where these cultural tools are used imply a change in what musical skill of this kind (i.e., transforming a documented version of a song into a performance) consists of and, consequently, what teachers need to assist children in appropriating in music education.... The analysis highlights the role of the teacher in this kind of activity." (Authors, 211, 195)