EXPERT LEARNING IN THE DOMAIN OF JAZZ GUITAR MUSIC

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Background

Although the acquisition of expertise and expert learning has been investigated in many different domains, we have little information about the domain of jazz music performance, which seems to be more entrepreneurial than that of classical music.

Aims

We try to adapt the notion of "deliberate practice" (Ericsson et al., 1993) to explain expert learning in jazz and compare it to the classical music domain.

Method

Subjects were six expert jazz guitarists and twelve sub-experts (jazz guitar students). A biographical questionnaire was administered to obtain retrospective data about the subjects' musical developments, professional lives and achievements, and amounts of deliberate practice at different stages of their development.

Results

While classical musicians generally start playing their instruments during childhood, the jazz musicians interviewed only started playing and practicing during their early teens. Classical musicians typically receive lessons when they start playing their instruments, while our experts did not start taking lessons until their late teens. The experts showed far more engagement in demanding training activities than the sub-experts. The important role of the teacher for classical musicians was less pronounced for our jazz musicians, who defined their own learning goals and means of attaining them, including working with recordings of famous musicians.

Conclusions

In general it is possible to adapt the notion of deliberate practice – previously developed in the area of classical music – to describe expert learning in the domain of jazz music. The main difference is that individuals here start their instrumental training relatively late, often lack the institutional support found in classical music, and therefore have to rely more on their intra-personal resources in attaining their goals.