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Title: 'If you can't describe it, we can't play it': professional conductors' verbal feedback in rehearsals

Year: 2025

Version: Final draft

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Please cite the original version:

Virkkula, E. (2025). 'If you can't describe it, we can't play it': professional conductors' verbal feedback in rehearsals. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 47(1), 19-32.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2023.2224231>

'If you can't describe it, we can't play it': Professional Conductors'

Verbal Feedback in Rehearsals

This article explores the work of conductors to develop an understanding of verbal feedback in the context of professional-level big band orchestras. A big band conductor must have strong musical and social skills to guide a big band to the performance level. This qualitative study is based on Vygotsky's theory of learning as a social process. The collaboration between conductors and big band musicians is understood as a pedagogical relationship in which the conductor supports the musicians in practising the repertoire through different scaffolding tools (e.g., verbal feedback). The scholar analysed conductors' work in three cycles according to the clarity and conciseness of their feedback, how a positive working atmosphere is built, and the big band musicians' participation. The results demonstrate how the conductors gave direct one-sided instructions to refine the musicians' playing. The data also revealed the musicians' occasional involvement in music-related problem-solving through positive interactions. The article contributes to the discussion on the social skills of conductors to be utilised by, among others, professionals in music, conducting education teachers and students.

Keywords: workplace learning, feedback, pedagogy, scaffolding

Introduction – The role of a big band conductor

Conductors – The Maestros – are strong authorities in the work communities of music. Musicians follow the conductor's musical views undoubtedly and without unnecessary discussions (Seaman 2013). Long verbal feedback and oral demonstrations of phrases (e.g., modelling) should be kept to a minimum (Colson 2012; Silvey 2014; Goolsby 1999), and it has been suggested that conductors should limit their speech to 10–20 second intervals (Labuta and Matthews 2023; Manfredi 2006). Only in the context of particularly challenging musical parts may it be considered justifiable to speak longer.

Keeping verbal instructions as concise as possible helps conductors focus on the rehearsal's specific goals while maintaining the musicians' requisite energy and concentration (ibid 2006). In the work of a competent conductor, the amount of speech would seem to have relevance – a

skilled conductor speaks only when the work requires it (Bloomquist 1973; Napoles 2017; Willard 1986).

The literature on orchestral conducting (e.g., Green and Gibson 2004) reveals that musical interpretation should be instructed using conducting gestures. However, musicians are not robots; too minor feedback does not promote good collaboration. In other professional fields, dialogue has positively affected professionals' continuous learning at workplaces (Dahl et al. 2023; de Groot et al. 2014). Anyhow, practical and concise feedback that uses musical terminology is essential to structure the artistic vision in music. As one musician stated, "If you can't describe it, we can't play it" (Seaman 2013, 52).

A big band is a 17-member jazz music ensemble. From the musicians' perspective, big band work has been described as a combination of rigorous orchestral playing, free interpretation of composed melodies, and improvised solos (Bennett 2008; Gridley 2003; Berliner 1994). Big bands are usually conducted using fewer conducting gestures than in classical orchestras. According to Dunscomb and Hill (2002), a big band should be conducted by gestures only when beneficial to the players. The rhythm section takes care of the beat; therefore, the only parts of the music that must be conducted are those with no clear rhythmic pulse, such as rubato, ritardando, or meter changes. The conductor's main focus with a big band is on rehearsal; in a well-rehearsed production, the conductor's task in the concert, in addition to the above, is primarily to count off the tempo and give cues so that everyone stays on the chart (Church 2015).

The present study's starting point is the instruction that conductors should speak as briefly as possible during rehearsals. However, the special feature of big band conducting is only to use gestures when necessary, which sets requirements for the quality of verbal feedback. If the conductor must talk concisely, what can be considered high-quality verbal conducting feedback in the context of big bands?

Conductor's verbal scaffolding tools in rehearsals

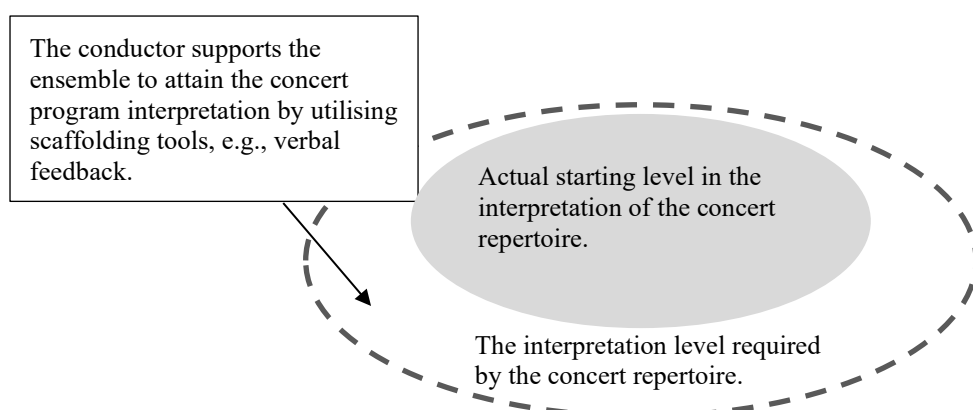
Social and communication skills have been identified as a significant part of the expertise of experts in various professional fields (Touloumakos 2022; Hughes 2004) and music (Sapattinen 2012; Jansson, Elstad and Doving 2019). This study examines conductors' expertise from the perspective of social skills. The collaboration between the conductor and big band is a *pedagogical relationship*, the objective of which is to guide musicians to perform the concert repertoire appropriately in a given time frame (Labuta and Matthews 2023; Angelo 2015; Cain 2013). The theoretical framework for this research is based on Lev Vygotsky's (1978) cultural historical theory on the role of social relationships in interaction (e.g., learning).

Vygotsky (1978; Eun 2018; see also Stone 1993; van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen 2010; Wells and Claxton 2002) asserted that learning occurs on two levels: first as an *intermental* social knowledge construction, then as an *intramental* individual reflection process. Interaction plays a significant role in both, and language is the effective tool to promote learning. According to Wells (1999; see also Eun 2018), intermental and intramental processes interact. As people interact verbally, their perceptions manifest and are shaped by the interaction as a social and individual process. The key factor is the importance of social interaction for the individual's reflection process and learning.

Vygotsky (1978; see also Eun 2018) drew attention to this concept with his zone of proximal development (ZPD) theory, which refers to the distance between the learner's actual development level and their level of potential development. The actual development level represents what has already been learned, while the level of potential development level indicates things that have not yet been mastered but will be learned. To enable learning, an individual must act at a potential level of development, and this is difficult without scaffolding (i.e., support, e.g., verbal feedback) of a "more capable other" (Vygotsky 1978; Eun 2018). Furthermore, individuals' development level and capability should be identified to help them achieve their potential level of development through intermental activities, i.e., scaffolding (Vygotsky 1978; Daniels 2011; van de Pol et al. 2010).

In a collaboration between a conductor and an orchestra, the level of potential development refers to the musicians' collective ability to interpret the concert repertoire appropriately (Church 2015; Seaman 2013). In the present study, I focus on how musicians are supported in orchestral rehearsals through verbal scaffolding tools (see Figure 1): specific and concise feedback, brief instructions, and guiding questions (Graulty 2010). The interaction between the professionals – conductor and the musicians – aims at building the ensemble's common understanding of the appropriate interpretation of the repertoire, i.e., the level of potential development in Vygotsky's terms (Eun 2018; Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976). The research is, therefore, not about developing the playing skills of individual professional musicians.

Figure 1. Actual and required music interpretation levels and the conductor's supportive role in the present study's framework.



In previous education research, scholars have examined the scaffolding theme in the context of verbal feedback and conducting gestures in communication between a conductor and a choir. In her study, Napoles (2014) stated that communication should be clear enough to help singers understand information. Verbal feedback plays an important role, especially in rehearsals, and her study showed that singers appeared to respond better to verbal feedback than to instructions to follow conducting gestures.

Similarly, Emerson, Williamson, and Wilkinson (2019) focused on professional choir conductors' "post-singing" verbal feedback, particularly emphasising speech and communication in rehearsals. The conductors assessed the choir's singing, gave feedback (i.e., what the choir has done), and feedforward (i.e., what the choir should do). In the results, scholars demonstrated that conductors could create change within rehearsals by directing the choir's singing towards the desired artistic goal.

Furthermore, it is clear that verbal feedback supports musicians (Manfredo 2006). Clarity is built on the concrete identification of the musical phrase or section and focuses on subjects such as expression (dynamics, harmony, rhythm) or technique (fingerings, tonguing, breathing). Therefore, the conductor's feedback should focus on using concise language to address specific musical questions (Labuta and Matthews 2023; Silvey 2014).

Studies (e.g., Creech 2012) have also provided evidence concerning how the versatility of scaffolding promotes music learning. In addition to clear verbal feedback and modelling of musical phrases, consideration must be paid to, for example, variation in interaction strategies and a positive work atmosphere (Colson 2012; Hallam 2006). It has been shown that verbal feedback that is too rigid and directive can hinder learning (Kupers, van Dijk and van Geert 2017). Meanwhile, Freer's (2009) research specified scaffolding as a learner-centred activity. To achieve a successful outcome in choral work, singers should be given responsibility and encouraged in rehearsals. Overall, the viewpoint of conductor-centred rehearsals has been challenged recently in favour of activating all ensemble members to participate in "deep listening and creative problem-solving behaviours" (Grauly, 2010, 55).

Research conducted outside the field of music has also demonstrated the significance of active participation. Koopmans et al. (2006) state that the learning experience is often reciprocal in collaborative workplaces—professionals in three groups engaged in activities demonstrating how learning could be improved through experimentation and discussing it. The interaction partners acknowledge and respond to these experimental approaches and offer valuable insights and information in return.

Collaborative interaction and verbal feedback are extensively employed in workplace learning programs for police officers to enhance their performance, boost motivation, and increase job satisfaction (Dahl et al. 2023). This practice aligns with the existing body of knowledge in the educational sector and general literature on workplace learning.

To summarise, previous research has revealed that 1) clear and concise verbal feedback is essential in a conductor's work. In addition, orchestral work at school is very social, so 2) a positive working atmosphere is also crucial. Moreover, studies have emphasised 3) the importance of musicians' active involvement in concert productions' problem-solving processes in recent years.

From the present study's perspective, it is interesting how the subjects and themes that permeate the literature are realised in the work of a big band conductor. To paraphrase Vygotsky (1978), I am interested in how the conductors utilise scaffolding tools (i.e., verbal feedback) and support the musicians to obtain the potential level of development required for the concert. The topics I aimed to examine in this research, in line with the previous literature (e.g., Eun 2018; Freer 2009; Grauly 2010; Hallam 2006; Napoles 2014; Silvey 2014), including 1) the clarity of conductors' verbal feedback 2) positive interaction methods, and 3) musicians' involvement in concert productions' problem-solving processes. Therefore, the present study's research question was: How does the big band conductor use feedback strategies during rehearsals?

Methodology

This qualitative case study examines conductors' verbal feedback in big band orchestra rehearsals. The research follows the method characteristic of case studies: it tries to find an in-depth explanation for a social phenomenon in a real-world context (Yin 2013). The context here refers to the environment of events in which the case is realised, not to an artificial test arrangement.

I collected the data by recording big band rehearsals and analysing it in three cycles, using first theory-driven content analysis and then data-driven content analysis (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2020; Berg and Lune 2012). Both are widely used for systematic analyses of diverse materials in qualitative research. The analysis was based on a conceptual system, the theoretical framework built on previous studies. The data was arranged for the analysis to draw conclusions related to the theoretical framework. The research question defines the precise analysis undertaken, for example, on the transcribed field recordings (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Mayring 2014; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2020; Schreier 2012).

Data Collection and Participants

One professional-level big band orchestra from Finland consisting of 17 musicians (15 males, two females) and nine conductors (all male) participated in this research. The musicians all had a professional education in music and were between the ages of 19 and 61. The conductors had an average age of 46 and represented three nationalities. They were involved in the study according to the big band's concert schedule, and each conductor carried out his production, first rehearsing and then conducting the big band in a concert with his repertoire.

The research was carried out between 2016 and early 2020. The data were collected by recording (using an audio recorder) all 40 rehearsals of 10 different big band concert productions. The total length of the collected data, excluding breaks, was 44 hours and 23 minutes, including 21 hours and 14 minutes of speech (of conductors and musicians).

Analysis

I commenced the analysing process by forming a theoretical analysis framework based on the previously identified and presented a literature review of verbal scaffolding tools; it contained three main categories: (1) *direct instruction* (the clarity of conductors' verbal feedback), (2) *discussion openings* (musicians' involvement), and (3) *positive statements*.

I used the Nvivo 12 computer programme for qualitative research to analyse the data in three cycles (see Figure 2). In the first cycle (cycle 1), I listened carefully to the audio recordings to build an overall understanding of the data. I identified speech units from the conductor's speech that represented possible verbal scaffolding tools.

In identification, I followed the process of "relevance sampling" (Krippendorff 2019), aiming to select all speech units that contribute to answering the research question. An analyst typically proceeds by examining the data to be analysed in a multistage process. I progressed by analysing the speech units in relation to the theoretical framework, systematically lowering the number of units that need to be considered for analysis. The resulting speech units are not meant to be representative of a whole population of conductors' speech; rather, they are the population of relevant speech, excluding the speech units that do not possess related information (Krippendorff 2019, 119).

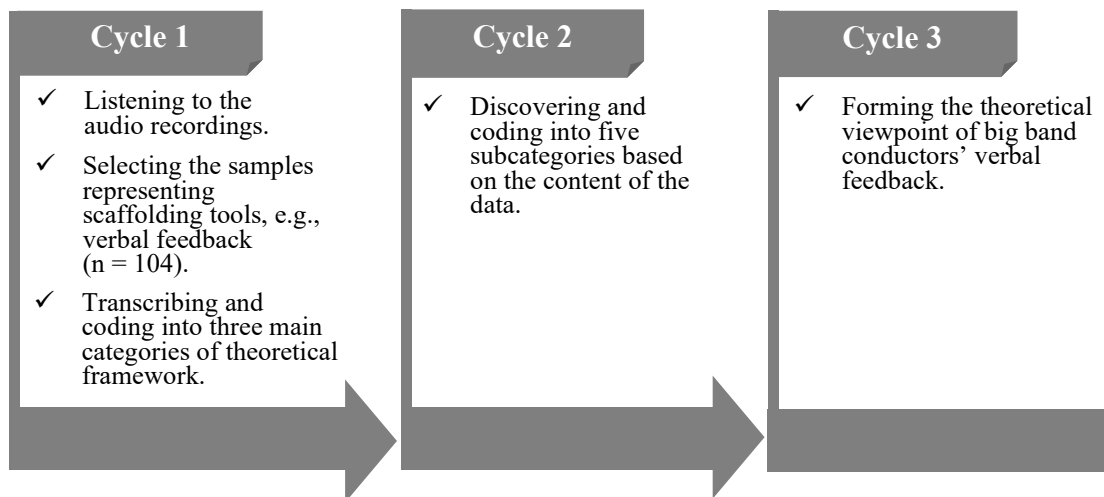
From 824 speech units, 104 proved to be particularly relevant from the perspective of the research question and were selected for more detailed analysis. These samples were then transcribed and coded into the three main categories of the theoretical framework. The chosen

samples ranged between one and 178 words in length and represented all of the ten big band productions examined in this study.

To deepen my understanding, I then performed a data-driven content analysis within the main categories of the theoretical framework (cycle 2). I also further coded recorded data that described the same phenomenon (e.g., musical expression) into five subcategories that were then titled according to their content.

In cycle 3, I formed a theoretical viewpoint describing big band conductors' verbal feedback and concluded by examining the results in relation to previous research (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2020; Berg and Lune 2012).

Figure 2. The Three Cycles of the Content Analysis (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2020; Saldaña 2015; Krippendorff 2019).



Results

A total of 828 speech units (one or several words or phrases) were observed in this study's recordings of big band rehearsals; of these, 104 were selected for a more detailed analysis. The average ratio of speech and music was 46.3 / 53.7%. The share of speech between the conductors varied from 33.2% to 63.7%.

The speech units' average length was 1 minute 32 seconds. Fifty-six per cent of all speech units recorded in the data were less than a minute long. One concert production, in particular, stood out in the data, as the conductor for this production spoke for noticeably longer periods than the average. Only 34% of his speech units were less than one minute long, and 42% were below the average of all speech unit lengths (1:32).

The speech unit samples were coded into the three main categories of the theoretical framework and subsequently further divided into the five subcategories (see Table 1). I will now examine the research results by category.

Table 1. Content Analysis Research Categories

Main Category (Theory-driven)	Subcategory (Data-driven)	Core Content
1. Direct instruction	Musical expression	- Dynamics - Rhythmic articulation - Tonal articulation
	Conductor's initiative	- Checking interpretation - Checking notation - Asking opinion
2. Discussion openings	Musician's initiative	- Ambiguity about the interpretation - Ambiguity about the notation
	Justified positive statement	
3. Positive statement	Positive statement without justification	

Main Category 1: Direct Instruction

The conductors used direct instruction to support the big band in its ability to interpret music at the desired artistic level. Their attention was focused on *musical expression*: how music should sound and how it should change at specified sections of the composition. I divided the *musical expression* subcategory into three core contents: *dynamics*, *rhythmic articulation*, and *tonal articulation*, and explored subcategory results through these three core contents.

The following data samples (see Table 2) represent *dynamics* core content. It is evident from the samples that the notes on the page do not always relay the more precise nuances of the musical expression to the musicians. The conductor used direct instruction to help the musicians refine their interpretation to become consistent with the composition's style. The conductors' direct instruction on dynamics guided the musicians to emphasise the right subjects according to the character of the composition.

When conductors used modelling (i.e., demonstrated the phrase orally), I marked the data samples in italics.

Table 2. Data samples of the Subcategory Musical expression, Core content – Dynamics

Main Category	Subcategory	Core Content	Data sample
1. Direct instruction	Musical expression	Dynamics	<p>Typically, you should play just like that—B's second bar fortepiano, crescendo, and accent to the end. (But here) no crescendo is played. It would normally be like that in the jazz tradition, but not here. <i>Doo-doo-dot</i> is pretty even all the time, except for the trombones, there will be a crescendo for them on (beat) four before the letter C. (ER 2)</p> <p>The sixth bar after G—it doesn't work like that. Forte and (then) no diminuendo. And a more aggressive feel and touch in general—<i>doo-bah-doo</i>. . . Pull those sounds frantically way to the tip (of the violin bow). That's (how we get) the American sound. (OS 10).</p>

The conductor's direct instructions on the second core content *rhythmic articulation* focused on consistency in rhythmic phrasing and tempo (see Table 3). The following samples emphasise the particular precision and accuracy necessary to play the rhythms of African American music.

Table 3. Data samples in the Subcategory of Musical expression, Core Content – Rhythmic articulation.

Main Category	Subcategory	Core Content	Data sample
1. Direct instruction	Musical expression	Rhythmic articulation	<p>This piece lives or dies with this (rhythm) riff. If this doesn't groove, then this piece doesn't groove. You have to imagine that you are all drummers—then it's like the real mindset. Okay, good, let's go (QJ 9)</p> <p><i>Doo-doo-dot-doo</i> . . . it has a lot of notes, so swallow (don't play) them as long as that (head) rhythm comes out—<i>doo-doo-dot-doo</i>. . . Once again, the same place. (the band plays) And then, at the third last bar of this section, <i>doo-dot-doo</i> put a dot to the eight-note on beat four. (the band plays) Good, thank you. Damn good brass. (MB 7)</p>

The particular importance of rhythms emerged because they were the conductors' main focus at the first rehearsals, even at the expense of the notes being played. The interpretation of the composition was built through rhythmically-appropriate playing, with the primary focus resting on the main rhythm and the nuance.

The refinement of *tonal articulation* (the 3rd core content) was focused mainly on fine-tuning a timbre. The conductor helped the musicians obtain the desired tone in the big band's ensemble sound (see Table 4).

Table 4. Data samples in the Subcategory of Musical expression, Core content – Tonal articulation.

Main Category	Subcategory	Core Content	Data sample
1. Direct instruction	Musical expression	Tonal articulation	<p>In B, when the brass theme begins, it must be a really soft mezzo forte. Although it's (written) for the trumpets, it's a bit of a flugelhorn sound. . . Staccatos, or tenutos, are pretty long across. The same with saxophones, when you start playing in C, the slur of phrases should be coherent. Very plain, no vibrato <i>doo-dot-doo-dot</i>. (ER 1)</p> <p>The very first bar. Let's play full legato in those triplets: <i>doo-ooo-doo-doo</i>. Yesterday they were a bit separated, but let's play tying. You can tongue them, but quite full-length—<i>doo-ooo-doo-doo</i> (TA 3).</p>

In the *musical expression* subcategory, the core content of the conductors' speech was regarding consistency in the big band's playing. The appropriate big band expression was based on consistency in dynamics, rhythmic articulation, and tonal articulation, according to the data. The conductors utilised clear, direct instructions and concretised the musical phrases or sections using music terminology or modelling as verbal feedback.

Main Category 2: Discussion Openings

In the introduction, we discussed studies that highlight musicians' involvement in concert production. Based on these studies, the conductor-centred approach has been challenged, and conductors are encouraged to involve musicians in problem-solving.

In the data, both the conductors and the musicians presented speech in the discussion openings main category. Therefore, I divided this data into subcategories based on who opened the Discussion: the *conductor's initiative* or the *musician's initiative*.

The conductor's initiative was then divided into three core contents: *checking interpretation*, *checking notation*, and *asking opinions*.

The artistically-correct interpretation was often checked through Discussion. Below are typical samples of *checking interpretation* and *checking notation* core contents from a discussion between a conductor, a soloist, and a big band musician. The ambiguities or flaws were noted in the musicians' notation; the conductor typically checked the issue by asking (see Table 5).

Table 5. Data samples in the Subcategory of the Conductor's initiative, Core contents –
Checking interpretation & Checking notation.

Main Category	Subcategory	Core Content	Data sample
2. Discussion openings	Conductor's initiative	Checking interpretation	Conductor: In (bar) 45, you have <i>doo-doo-doo</i> . I'd like to have it long if you have time to breathe. Musician: There's time (to breathe), but it came from the guitar (soloist) as short, so there was talk that we should phrase the same way. Conductor: Okay, if XX (soloist name) always plays it short, we will phrase it the same way. (TA 6)
		Checking notation	Conductor: Do you have any marks there (in the bar), in six? Any articulations? . . . Have any corrections been made there? Musician: Not much. Conductor: I remember they were played long. There is no staccato at all. Let's try it that way. (EM 1) Conductor: Saxophones, there's one rhythm. . . Play just like that. It's (bar) 92—it has a weird (written) <i>doo-bah-dot</i> . You played it on off-beat—it sounds much better. Musician: I just said (to a colleague) that we played it wrong. (laughter) Conductor: <i>Doo-bah-dot</i> . . . is better. Let's change it to that. (EM 8)

Possible notation errors could lead to uncertainty about the interpretation to be achieved. The latter example was observed in which a musician made a spontaneous correction to a note they considered "wrong." The repair was discussed with the conductor.

Furthermore, the data revealed how the conductor *asked the musicians' opinion* (i.e., core content *asking opinion*) on an aspect of the composition (see Table 6). Here they clarify a change to a fermata.

Table 6. Data samples in the Subcategory of the Conductor's initiative, Core content – Asking opinion

Main Category	Subcategory	Core Content	Data sample
2. Discussion openings	Conductor's initiative	Asking opinion	Conductor: Would it be fun if you'd led to tempo? There would be no fermata. Musician: Anything goes. Conductor: I think it could be better. Once played through, it stops and then starts again (immediately). Musician: I can play it through (like this). (Demonstrates by playing, and the band continues.) (EM 11)

The musicians took verbal initiative when there was ambiguity regarding interpretation or notation. The musician's initiative subcategory was divided into two core contents: *ambiguity about the interpretation* and *ambiguity about the notation* (see Table 7).

The ambiguities related to the interpretation were generally due, for example, to discrepancies between the notated music and the musicians' sense of style. The musicians suggested changes or spontaneously made them according to their vision.

Table 7. Data samples in the Subcategory of the Musician's initiative, Core contents – Ambiguity about the interpretation & Ambiguity about the notation.

Main Category	Subcategory	Core Content	Data sample
2. Discussion openings	Musician's initiative	Ambiguity about the interpretation	Musician: We extended the half-note at (bar) 92 to minus three. It somehow feels more natural. Conductor: at 92? Musician: <i>Doo-bah-doo</i> . Conductor: On what note? Musician: Minus three. Conductor: Yep, play longer. (ER 9)
		Ambiguity about the notation	Musician: Is this Cuban montuno or more like samba? Conductor: This is Cuban, but that tumbao thing we must avoid. There are a lot of syncopated rhythms here, we cannot play <i>doo-doo-doo</i> . . . You can listen out. No decision needs to be made yet. The ball is in your court. (MB 3)

Like the conductors, the musicians also sometimes sought to clarify ambiguities in their notes. *Ambiguity about the notation* was revealed, for example, when the composition's accompaniment style was not necessarily clear from the notation, as the latter example illustrates.

Overall, discussion openings were related to correcting various ambiguities. The conductors and the musicians spoke up when they identified a need to check the interpretation or the notation. The difference from the previously described *Direct Instruction* main category is clear. The conductor proactively gave explicit instructions, but this main category (*Discussion Openings*) focused on discussions that arose, as I demonstrated in the samples. The musicians also solved problems they perceived independently.

Main Category 3: Positive Statements

The conductors in this study actively strived to create a positive atmosphere in big band rehearsals. I observed this result in the data from all 10 productions. The repertoire to be played was advanced, and as such, demanding, and the conductors made an effort to encourage the musicians through various positive statements. The data for the main positive statement category was divided into subcategories that depended on whether the conductor justified the statement.

In the *justified positive statement* subcategory, the conductors specified why a particular phrase or section in the rehearsed composition corresponded with the artistic goal. Unlike the feedback category, which aims to change musical expression, the focus here is on what works well. As the following quotes demonstrate, justifications for the positive statements focused on key points in the composition. Again, the conductor paid attention and provided detailed comments to the musicians.

The positive statements were typically directed at an instrument section or group—rarely an individual musician. However, the second sample illustrates how the data did contain a few examples in which the conductor addressed an individual (see Table 8).

Table 8. Data samples in the Subcategory of Justified positive statement

Main Category	Subcategory	Core Content	Data sample
3. Positive statement	- Justified positive statement		<p>So, the soli-section. I'm happy with it. It's cool. It just got to be a bit cheesy. . . We had to overdub (re-record) the whole trumpet section on that part on the album because they couldn't do it as cheesy as I wanted it. But you guys sounded great! It's quite understated . . . it's well in tune as well. (PR 3)</p> <p>Bright, well-starting sound. That crescendo is a side issue in that. It's a half-win with this piece when it fits (rhythmically) with that (motif). That's right, very good. (MB 2)</p>

The statements without justification, however, were typically brief and very general. For example: "Good, sounds promising. . . . There's a nice trombone section here" (ER 6); "All right, it's starting to groove" (TA 4); "Yeah. This is good" (OS 13); and "Like that!" (OS 12). A positive statement of only a couple of words does not meet the requirement to support musicians with clear feedback to achieve an artistic goal. Therefore, these conductors were deviating from their general role. Furthermore, a positive statement without justification does not direct the musicians' attention to what was successful or how the success was achieved.

However, according to the data, positivity was explicitly present in the collaboration between the conductors and the big band. Therefore, marking successful passages with positive statements was a scaffolding strategy used by the conductors to support the musicians.

Discussion and Implications for Continued Education

Conductors are versatile music experts who must also have social skills. Regarding musical content (e.g., interpretation and tone quality), it has been emphasised that the conductor has a significant role in making decisions on behalf of the ensemble (e.g., Colson 2012; Emerson et al. 2019; Jansson et al. 2019). In the present study, I observed this rather one-sided

pedagogical interaction as a scaffolding tool when exploring the research question: How the big band conductor uses feedback strategies during rehearsals?

According to the data on main category 1 (Direct Instruction), the big band conductors in the study made decisions and offered the musicians direct, feedforward types of instructions (e.g. Jensen, Bearman and Boud 2023; Emerson et al. 2019). Especially during the first rehearsals, conductors focused on any passages that might need correction. To ensure learning, the conductors, in a sense, cleaned and polished the big band's playing, acting as transmitters of the desired interpretation (Cain 2013). The conductors communicated clearly and used music terminology and modelling to concretise desired changes.

From Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, these big band conductors, as "more capable others," used verbal feedback to help the musicians perform at their potential level of development. Nevertheless, the interaction was one-sided—from the conductor to the musicians. The feedback focused exclusively on the question of *how* the playing had to be changed but did not include a particular description of *why* the playing had to be changed in that musical part. In light of the research question and other studies (e.g., Boud and Molloy 2013; Freer 2009; Grauly 2010), the effect was that the big band conductors did not actually promote the development of the musicians' personal and collective responsibility and problem-solving skills.

Conductors could significantly increase the quality of feedback if they understood the purpose of guidance in the long term. With feedback, a competent conductor consciously aims for a more comprehensive development of the musicians. The recognised challenge of Vygotskian scaffolding is its tendency to focus on short-term learning rather than long-term professional development (see Smagorinsky 2018).

It was, however, positive to notice that the conductors asked some questions (see main category 2, Discussion Openings), which sometimes led to an active discussion during the rehearsals (see Creech 2012). I consider it essential that conductors recognise and trust the musicians' musical vision; then, big band work would appear to be more of an interactive and sociocultural concert program preparation process, as described in Wells' study (1999; see also Wells and Claxton 2002 and Vygotsky 1978).

The demands of the compositions and the limited scheduling opportunities for joint rehearsals put pressure on the big band musicians (e.g., Lehmann 2002). As a solution, the conductors utilised positive statements (main category 3) in their verbal feedback, which created a more supportive learning atmosphere. The occasionally active and open discussion between the musicians and conductor (main category 2) supports this conclusion: musicians asked questions and commented during rehearsals. However, the effect of the conductors' positive statements

would need to be further explored in future research to draw more detailed conclusions. Nevertheless, I observed a relationship between positive feedback and activated interaction.

The instruction that conductors should minimise their speech length to intervals of up to 10–20 seconds (Manfredo 2006) did not fully materialise in this study. Fifty-six per cent of all speech units recorded in the data were less than a minute long. Among the data from 7 (7/9) conductors, I found at least one speech unit longer than three minutes. The deviations between the ratio of speech and music among the conductors were distinguishable. The finding correlates with previous research (e.g., Whittaker 2017) and indicates numerous effective ways to utilise rehearsal time.

As a conductor, I would not be so concerned about the amount of speech. More crucial is ensuring enough time for playing in rehearsals and that musical interpretation is corrected by playing, not talking. However, future studies would be justifiable to investigate the content of longer speech units in more detail. In addition, further research may reveal new insights into how big band conductors can develop their verbal feedback to be more concise and focused.

In this study, I aimed to examine verbal feedback strategies of big band conductors by endeavouring to uncover their practices (see Emerson et al. 2019). I found that it is justified for conductors to develop their social skills to effectively support the musicians' performance. In addition to musical competence, they should understand learning and the factors of quality feedback. Consequently, conductors can enhance musicians' continuous development and problem-solving competencies.

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