



Learning is Fun, You Can Really Hear It: Teacher Training and Chopin's Etudes

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The history of education is not relevant for education students. Therefore, it has almost completely disappeared from the curriculum of teacher training institutions. One of the reasons is that historical research of education has avoided what actually took place in the classroom itself, fifty, one hundred and two hundred years ago, *inter alia*, because it is so very complicated a research area. This research complexity should be dealt with in a wide variety of ways. To that end, the article proposes mobilizing the sense of hearing, as well, to learn about this history, for example, by listening to Chopin's études, revealing the didactic insights submerged in them, and trying to connect them to the world of school teaching. That is likely to make the history of education attractive to education students and to return it to their training institutions.

Key words: Teacher Training; history of education; Chopin's etudes



Part One: Teacher Training and the History of Education

The curriculum for teacher training includes two parts: the academic-theoretical part and the practical part. The academic theoretical part can also be divided into two: One part directly involves the realm of specialization and actually, what the teacher will later teach in the classroom; in the teacher training track for teachers of history, for example, this will be the didactics of history teaching. In the second theoretical part, there are lessons which have a more wide-ranging educational context and which aim to touch upon more comprehensive and encompassing subjects, widening educational perspectives. Daniel Tröhler terms them “soft subjects” (Tröhler, 2006:3). This teacher training structure may be described as two concentric circles with teaching at the center. In the first circle are the academic courses directly and immediately connected with active teaching, usually didactic courses, and in the outer circle are the soft subjects. The farther the subjects are from the center, the larger their radius from active teaching, the more ambiguous is our ability to point to their contribution to teaching, and the more subject they are to interpretations and discussions, making them more likely to be influenced by prevailing educational fashions.

Indeed, during the nineteenth century, the history of education dominated the outer circle of the teacher training curriculum. But during the twentieth century, the role of education history was gradually reduced and ultimately it almost disappeared from teacher training institutions. Its place was taken by educational psychology. The cognitive revolution whose roots date from the 1950s, transferred learning research from a focus on the study of manifest behavior (the behaviorist model) to focusing on the study of thinking processes, aiming to understand the entirety of mental processes involved in human activity. Thus, a productive framework of explanation, research and scientific discourse was created, dealing with questions of information, learning and memory. Psychological investigation attracted educational research, both due to the new research horizons it opened and because it contributed greatly towards raising the scientific-academic reputation of the education discipline. So educational research actively joined the cognitive revolution during the 1960s (Royer 2005: 4), and at present, the field of education is entirely dominated by it (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2012: 324). This shortly led to its dominance of teacher training institution agendas.

However, it appears that it was not only the cognitive revolution but also research on educational history itself which bears responsibility for its banishment from the teacher training



agenda. For example, in 1907, the United States National Educational Association recommended that the history of education be a central subject in teacher training in the United States. Ten years later, in research investigating the implementation of this recommendation in the state of Washington, it was found that the recommendation had indeed been implemented. Out of 451 teachers who had participated in the research, 330 testified that they had taken history of education courses. But when they were asked about the contribution of learning about the history of education to their teaching, they reported that it had contributed very little. These findings aroused the researchers' doubts as to the need to continue including the history of education in the teacher training curriculum (Hodysh, 1970: 204).

Regarding pedagogical studies in the inner circle of the teacher training curriculum, if questions are raised, they refer to what type of pedagogy is needed or what to stress in these studies, while, in regard to the history of education in the outer circle, the question is more unambiguous and fundamental: "to be or not to be" (Kestere & Ozola, 2014:13). The researchers who investigated teacher training in Washington recommended "not to be". The irrelevance of the history of education to teacher training has made a real contribution towards eliminating it from the curriculum. And it appears that new teachers today know less than all those who came before them about the history of their profession (Vincent, 2003: 420). But if we want the answer to be "to be!", with an exclamation point, if we want the history of education to return as an integral part of teacher training curricula and think that it is important, it seems that this depends on making it more relevant for student teachers. But how can this be done? This article will attempt to present a possible answer.

The history of education is an unstable discipline. It is fragile, unsure of itself, searching its way, wondering about its very necessity (Iowe, 2002), its very significance (Depaibe, 1993: 1), anxious about its future (McCulloch, 2011: 1), with low status in academia and in the public (Lagemann, 2000:232). Jürgen Herbst, in his well-known article about the history of education on the threshold of the twenty-first century, provides a very forlorn description of the discipline: the fact that it makes no progress, that it lacks innovation or creativity, that the issues it raises have been researched and that historians again and again repeat themselves, and continue to do that using the same methods and examining the same sources.



Researchers of the history of education, except for a few exceptions, have spent the last one hundred and fifty years mainly examining the voices of those who have determined educational policies: protocols of government meetings, official reports and the opinions of professionals who have implemented these policies, and sometimes even disagreed with them (Armstrong, 2003: 201). It is “top-down history”, the history of the “winners”, which investigates and analyzes documents left behind by representatives of the educational system, people of the Ministry of Education, and politicians: reports, speeches, articles and books (McCulloch, 2011: 78). An examination into the history of “the history of education” surprisingly reveals that everyday educational reality, what actually happens in the classroom between the teacher and the students, “the interpersonal sphere”, has almost been completely ignored. Depaepa and Simon (1995: 9-10), and others in their footsteps, term classroom history as the “black box” of the pedagogical historiography (See also, for example: Braster, Grosvenor & del Mar del Pozo Andrés, 2011; Grosvenor, Lawn & Rousmaniere, 1999:17). I think that if there is a chance to make the study of the history of education more relevant for teacher training and for student teachers, if there is a chance to pull it into the inner circle and bring it closer to actual teaching, alongside pedagogical learning, that chance lies within the same “black box”. The history of classroom events, the history of what really took place in classrooms ten, fifty, one hundred and two hundred years ago, could provide clues for teachers of the future to embrace and to draw practical insights for their own future. To know the past and to learn from it.

The existence of the black box, the fact that what occurs in the classroom space is an untouched realm of research, is both surprising and unsurprising. It is surprising because what takes place in the classroom is the very center of education, the place where it really happens. The classroom is the “most educational realm” of the educational system. But it is also unsurprising since it is so very difficult for research to peer into the black box and to try to crack open what goes on there.

In recent years there have been more and more attempts to deal with the history of the classroom (Goodman & Grosvenor, 2009: 605). More and more historians have tried to look into the black box of education, attempting to discover its contents. But because it is so complex, evasive and abstruse, (Grosvenor, Lawn, & Rousmaniere, 1999: 8), and after all, it is a black box, historians try to make use of the widest possible range and variety of sources such



as pictures (Braster, 2001), school log books (Wright, 2011), oral testimony, autobiographies, teachers' diaries, children's drawings, observation reports, films, students' diaries, architectural sketches (Braster, Grosvenor, & del Mar del Pozo, 2011: 177), school desks (Depaepa, Simon, & Verstraete, 2014) and more. But as classroom events are so complicated, the sources can ultimately only allow us to peek through the classroom keyhole and cannot enable us to break down the door and enter. Moreover, what goes on in the classroom is so complex that even today, we cannot do much more than peek in, let alone try to investigate the black boxes of twenty, thirty and one hundred years ago. The following is an example.

Example

Students' lack of interest in their lessons not infrequently leads to a lesson as an arena of struggle between teachers who want to teach and students who don't really want to learn. Each side tries to advance his/her agenda. Teachers try to teach and students, on their part, make every effort to realize their own agenda, whether passively (by daydreaming, for example) or actively (talking to friends sitting next to them, for example).

How does this tension between teacher and students appear in actual fact in the classroom? How is it expressed among pupils? In order to clarify this issue, researchers make the attempt to peer into the classroom in two ways: either they try to extract evidence from the testimony of teachers (see for example, Arieli, 1995: 25-34) or the researcher him/herself is an observer of/witness to what is occurring in the lesson (see for example Rufino, 1985: 17). Teachers' and principals' workshops devoted to discipline problems, for example, make use of these two information sources, using either filmed examples of various discipline difficulties, or teachers raising problems they have had to cope with during the lesson (Bar-Lev & Frankel, 1994: 51).

I have also done that. I too have raised this question among classroom history teachers. What do students do during the lesson?, I asked. The answers I received did not surprise me. "It's clear that the class is a battlefield. We want to teach and they want to do anything but learn. We don't really interest them. They can read it in the book. Itamar writes a note: "I love you"; the only thing that interests Yoni is himself smoking a nargila, and he fantasizes about it all day. His great contribution to the lesson is to disturb from time to time to gain attention; Nadav delivers two sentences to placate the teacher and then dives into his own world – arranging the



performances of the theater course – and returns for another two sentences after ten minutes; Roi actually likes history until the moment he has to write something down in his notebook, and then he is lost, with no return; Ori is concerned with everything except history, “in my opinion, nothing interests him”; Noa is listening to every word but not because it interests her, but because it will be on the test; Tamar is doing homework, either in English or Math, where the teachers really frighten her. Roy and Shani have to finish a really important discussion that started during the break, and Nurit and Efrat want to find out what he really said to her in that telephone call before the last one...

As I talked to the teachers, I understood that actually, I was dealing with the right question but directing it to those who could only provide partial answers. Many things that are taking place during the lesson are invisible to the teacher. Indeed, the teacher cannot reach the level of “withitness”, as termed in the research (see for example, Dor, 1994: 27). The teachers cannot really know what is happening in every corner of the classroom despite their declarations to recalcitrant students that they have eyes in the back of their heads, and that nothing escapes them, not to mention the inability to hear what is occurring in each corner of the room.

It would have been much more logical to ask the students themselves as I am interested in what **they** are doing during the lesson. Thus, one morning in late winter, 2015, we entered a classroom and I asked them, eleventh grade students, “What do you do during the lesson?” The answers were both surprising and unsurprising. Despite the presence of the history teacher, and the homeroom teacher, who was also the grade advisor and whom I had invited to the discussion, the children spoke frankly and revealed to me some of their hidden secrets. They let me look into the dark side of the lesson, into what happens under the surface, beneath the lesson plan prepared by the teacher and his/her attempts to implement it in the classroom.

At the beginning, the children found it difficult to understand what I wanted to know. “What do you do during the lessons?” I asked. “We talk”, they replied. “Yes that’s clear. But what do you talk about; what are you doing”, I insisted. “We talk with each other”, was the response. But once they understood, it was difficult to stop them. They talked with great enthusiasm mixed with bursts of laughter.



The children's social realities are stronger than the school rules. The desire to talk about subjects which are completely unconnected with the lesson is impossible to restrain: what happened over the weekend; what happened yesterday; have they broken up; are they back together; what did she say; he's not bad looking; what cake did I eat yesterday (food is one of the main topics of conversation, especially among the girls); these conversations take place as orderly face to face exchanges, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century, they also take a modern electronic form: SMS messages among their friends within the classroom and to friends in other classes as well as those who are outside the school walls. "Most of the mess", Roni concludes, "is a result of the children talking to each other, making loud comments to the teacher about whatever she is talking about and responding with all kinds of remarks about what she is saying. One of the students, for example, was repeating everything the teacher was saying, not to make sure that he understood the material, but rather to disturb!"

In addition, the lesson also serves as a break for taking care of errands, "things that we haven't had time to do": arranging notebooks from other courses; pasting things, making up material. Yesterday, for instance, Hagar made a greeting card for her mother for Mother's Day. "If one of the buttons from my clothing has fallen off at home", says Chen, "I take it to the lesson and sew it on"; downloading from the internet to one's cellphone; taking pictures; listening to music in pairs – one earphone for each child; and of course, hidden eating with a wide range of concealment strategies. And one can simply go to sleep. That is an option which is frequently taken advantage of. One day Nadav, dozing in his seat at the back of the classroom, found a spider busy spinning its web. For the next few days, he fed the spider with crumbs of bread and took care of it – until it "like died".

In addition, of course the lesson is also a game scene. There are two types of games: those which are meant for individual fun and avoiding boredom, like Snake, played on a cellphone, or constructing origami "cootie catchers" and playing with them, or the traditional Scattagories, and even though they know every country, every city, every plant, every animal, every profession starting with every letter of the alphabet, the game never fails to fascinate them. (When I asked about a country starting with "z", I immediately received the answer "Zimbabwe".) Another type of games are those which are just meant to torture the teacher like "Word Bingo": The class chooses a word that is "really hard to get from a teacher like "nymphomaniac" or "impotent" or... But when I asked if all the words were connected to sex,



they said no, just “all kinds of words that are difficult to hear from a teacher”. So what is the common denominator of the words which are chosen?,” I stubbornly asked. The answer was that there was no chance that the teacher would use them, that they weren’t deeply connected to the lesson. The aim of the game and the aim of pupils in the lesson is to bring the teacher to say that word. The closer s/he comes to the word, the higher the tension in the class, and when s/he distances herself from saying it, there is disappointment. The lesson, or rather the teacher, becomes an instrument in the hands of the students who are trying to lead him/her to realms which are unintended. Who cares what the teacher is teaching? They also gave me an example. The word which they chose to tell me about was “lesbian”. It was quite complicated, they explained. The last stage in the operation seems to have been as follows: They were reading a play in which Mother Courage’s daughter takes red shoes from some woman. Yoav suggested that perhaps, beyond that, maybe the shoes only symbolized a broader desire of the daughter for the woman; maybe it could possibly mean that she was lesbian. The teacher ignored this and continued the lesson but the pupils did not let her go on. They were so close. What did Yoav say? What did he say? They loudly insisted, making believe that they had not heard. The teacher: “Yoav brought up the possibility that she was a lesbian”. The class was filled with enthusiastic applause, the excitement of victory. The teacher had no idea of what was going on. Who had taken part in this game? I asked.

They answered in a smiling chorus – everyone.

And that’s only the tip of the iceberg, regarding what students do during a lesson, not to mention how teaching appears and what happens when learning which, in my opinion, are much more complex issues. And this is at present. And this, at a time when I could place a camera in the classroom and what was really happening there would still ultimately be unclear. And the truth is that, in my opinion, this is the magic secret of teaching and learning. Their beating heart. As the French artist Georges Braque once said: “In Art there is only one thing that counts: the thing you can’t explain”. I think that that is also true of what happens in the classroom. Therefore, “we are not looking for absolute ‘proof’ about classrooms of the past, but justified possibilities” (Grosvenor, Lawn, and Rousmaniere, 1999: 9).

In order to approach this magic secret, which cannot actually be explained, and which has taken place in many classes in many schools for many years, absolutely every means must be used so as not to abandon the attempt, to again and again delve deeply into the school classroom,

and from there, to try to create relevant links to teacher training; but parallelly, we must do other things in other realms, and activate other senses, using absolutely every means at our disposal! The more we succeed in doing that, the more we will be able to turn the history of education into a relevant concern in teacher training. And I think there is a chance we can do that.

Part Two: Teacher Training and Chopin's Etudes

I think that to be interesting, to cause the child to love to learn, is the central goal of the teacher. Making learning fun. Like Mick Waters, a multifarious English educator who feels that learning should be an important and valuable treasure, and that teachers should make it the kind of experience which is irresistible, just as children cannot resist soap bubbles:



The picture first evokes a broad smile. It is hard to stop looking at it. The happiness/gaiety/wonder/curiosity spread over the children's faces floats out of the photograph and spreads over the faces of the observer. The soap bubbles are responsible for all that. They spread magic among children. By nature, one cannot remain indifferent to them: either you raise your hand to touch them, or you try to smash them with both hands, or you try to blow at them and make them rise so that they don't disintegrate on the floor, or you try to catch and attach them or... That's the way learning should be – so that students cannot ignore it, as it turns into an experience that they cannot resist, turns it into fun.



But as often occurs, that is not the situation in school classrooms. When Naomi and Shira, my twin daughters, were in the first grade, they had a lined notebook for Hebrew, a graph paper notebook for math and a blank notebook, usually used for drawing – called a “fun notebook”. As learning math and learning Hebrew is not fun, and there is a drawing notebook which is fun. The need to break this dichotomy is critical and necessary. Learning must be interesting, and must be fun (as well). Can the history of education contribute to this concern while training students to be teachers, and if so, how? My answer is yes, it can! And I would like to describe how.

Friedrich Chopin (1810-1849) was born in Poland, not far from the capital, Warsaw, and after he had completed his studies and musical training, at the age of 21, he settled in Paris which became his home for the following 18 years, until his death. He never returned to his homeland during his lifetime. But after his death, he did return. He was buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, but in accord with his wishes, his heart was transported to Poland, to be buried in his beloved homeland, in Warsaw’s Holy Cross Church, where it remains today. Throughout his years as a pianist, beginning as a youth in Poland, and later in Paris, until his final visit to England, he performed only about 30 times. He despised performances and appeared only when he was forced to (Szulc, 1999: 36-37). For that reason, he earned his living by writing music, and primarily from teaching. And this is the way he divided his year: During the summer months he composed, and between October and May he taught. He met with an average of five students per day (Eigeldinger, 1988: 6). A lesson lasted from 45 minutes to an hour. But sometimes, with students that he liked, the lesson could last for as long as a few hours. Through the years he taught about 150 students (Ibid.:7). Chopin was an especially popular teacher, primarily among the high society women in Paris. One of them was, for example, Betty de Rothschild (Baron Edmond de Rothschild’s mother) who was, in those years, a close friend of the French queen, Maria Amalia, Louis Philippe’s wife and the daughter of Ferdinand, king of Sicily. But there were also professional composers and pianists among them, and even the daughter of the well-known pianist Ignaz Moscheles studied with Chopin.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the popularity of the piano was growing tremendously. This began in three central cities: London, Vienna and Paris, and from there it spread across the continent. There are many reasons for this new popularity, among them, the



technological evolution of the piano itself (Good, 1982: 145) and the development of the phenomenon of virtuosity as a salient motive in the Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century, which was most fully expressed when sitting opposite the keyboard of a piano (Todd, 2004: VII). The piano became so popular that “learning to play” became synonymous with “learning to play the piano”, and “music master” meant “piano teacher” (Plantinga, 1990: 9). What is important here for our discussion is that this development gave rise to a great demand for piano pieces, didactic literature, and this especially enhanced the demand for didactic compositions for the piano – études (Rowland, 1998: 145-146).

The étude originally was a musical piece, usually short, which was meant to develop the technical abilities of the pianist by isolating and developing skills for specific technical problems, enabling him/her to deal with them within a musical context. The emphasis is on developing technique. The first études precede the nineteenth century (for example, the *Clavier-Übung* by Johann Sebastian Bach), but the great flowering of the genre took place throughout the nineteenth century, beginning with the études of Carl Czerny, Charles Hanon, Muzio Clementi, Friedrich Kalkbrenner, and also Chopin.

Chopin composed 27 études. The *Douze Grandes Etudes*, Op. 10, which were published in 1833 (and a second group, *Opus 25*, published four years afterwards, and later still, another three) provided the world of music with the first decisive proof of the depth of Chopin’s creative talents. And he was only 23 years old. Unbelievable! They constitute a crucial stage in his development, both as a composer and as a pianist. And they symbolize Chopin’s transition from an undeveloped artist to a mature one (Finlow, 1992: 50). But no less, in my opinion, the études indicate what a great teacher he was. What enabled his genius as a composer and a pianist was creating high quality, celestial teaching which arouses inspiration.

In the introduction to the book *The Age of Chopin*, Daniel Stone writes: “As we all are, Chopin was a product of his time.” (Stone, 2004:9) And that of course is true, but in many other senses, it is not true. In many aspects, Chopin was not a product of his time. In achieving “a complete renewal of pianoforte music” (Samson, 1996: 83), he was a revolutionary, a revolutionary almost lacking roots. “He was as free from debt to predecessors as any composer in the whole history of music” (Abraham, 1939: X). For that reason, he succeeded in crossing far over the lines drawn by those of his generation, in his fingering, as well as his use of the damper pedal,



and in his general approach to playing (Xian, 2002: 30-36). So, for example, most of the keyboard exercises in his time were meant to grant equal strength to all of the fingers. Chopin thought the opposite. He believed that it was preferable to maintain the natural tendency of the fingers to greater weakness and greater strength, and to develop an approach which would use these difference as an advantage. In *Projet de Méthode*, a guidebook on the principles of piano playing and its teaching which Chopin never managed to finish due to his illness and early death, he wrote:

"Each finger's power is determined by its shape: the thumb having the most power, being the broadest, shortest and freest. The fifth finger is the extremity of the hand. The third as the middle and the pivot, then the second. The fourth finger is the weakest one., The Siamese twin of the third, bound to it by a common ligament, and which people insist on trying to separate from the third, which is impossible, and fortunately unnecessary. As many different sounds as there are fingers" (Eigeldinger & Shohet, 1988: 32-33).

Chopin also radically breached the boundaries of piano teaching, and the most shining evidence of this, in my view, is in the études he composed, and in the genre that he actually invented – the concert étude (*étude de concert*). The concert étude was a contradiction in terms for people of Chopin's era (Jones, 1998: 160), as the études which had been written up to that time had been meant for classrooms and not for concert halls. They were written as class exercises to improve the technical abilities of the pianist and to make them more precise so that s/he would be skilled enough to play a variety of piano pieces during a concert appearance. The following link provides such an example of an étude: Etude in C major, op. 740, no. 1 (1844) by Czerny: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrENMqH6Adg>

But this étude, like the others of Czerny (and like all of the other études which had been written until then), as argued by Abby Whiteside, the very influential piano teacher of the first half of the twentieth century, was responsible for creating "untold boredom" among pupils, and that is exactly the reason, claims Whiteside, that Czerny's études should be discarded (Whiteside, 1969: 177).

Chopin did it differently. He did it in style, as was his way. He did it uniquely. Chopin understood something very deep about learning. And he had the ability to realize this insight.



He understood that exercise and musical beauty were not necessarily contradictory. Regarding his études, Chopin wrote to his friend, Countess Delfina Potocka:

“This isn’t Czerny’s sugary stuff,, I strove so that, in addition to being intellectual, they should also contain art. Not to be bored to death, a virtuoso, who must practice long, must be given an exercise which he will find worthy food for his ears and heart” (Mizwa, 1949: 64).

Chopin understood something very deep about learning. He understood that it could simply be “fun”. “Fun” is the answer that I would get from my daughters when I asked them how school was, or how they liked the trip, or how the movie was. “Fun” is an answer that, for parents, usually arouses the feeling that the response is unsatisfactory, a sense of discomfort, of laconicism which dominates the discourse. But its connection to learning is deep, perhaps as deep as can be. And that was something that Chopin could not only present as a pedagogical option, but being a composer genius, he could also implement it: Taking the étude out of the classroom space and elevating it to the concert hall stage, raising it to a breathtaking, intoxicating level.

In contrast to Czerny, this is what Abby Whiteside thinks about Chopin’s études:

“Each Etude brings into relief a special balance in activity. One can say, ‘here are the ingredients. For this or that Etude add a bit more of this or that action.’ In these Etudes there is a completely fascinating handling of the various problems of a skilled coordination. There is no other set of Etudes which so comprehensively presents every necessary aspect of virtuosity, always combined with musical beauty” (Whiteside, 1969:43-4).

At this stage, it would be possible to turn to the wide-ranging musical research literature which can, in an educated way, with the use of jargon, with examples using musical staves, to demonstrate the great chasm between Czerny’s études and those of Chopin. I would like to examine this from a different direction, from one which has value for everyone, and also for me, but also for student teachers. I would simply like *to listen and to hear* the wonderful uniqueness of Chopin’s études. I have chosen to listen to Etude No. 3, Opus 10, called *Tristess* (Sadness) or *L’Adieu* (Farewell) (titles which were not given by Chopin who was careful not to give names to his musical works, but only numbers). His pupil, Adolph Gutmann relates that Chopin admitted to him that this was the most beautiful melody that he had ever composed (Niecks, 1902). The following is the link to the étude as played by the Chinese pianist Lang Lang: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yjnLmv1hHU>



This is a concert étude, a musical “creature” which melds two elements from two different worlds, so to speak. Chopin took the étude out of the classroom and into the concert hall. He turned boring technical exercises into a living exciting story which also develops the technical abilities of the pianist/student. In that sense, his études are revolutionary. They are superior in quality and in the possibilities of playing them as independent musical compositions to those of any who preceded him (Klein, 1989: 14). And they stand alone at the peak (Tovey, 2015 [1900]: 124). They are so beautiful that it is difficult to determine that they are actually études. It is almost difficult to distinguish that these are exercises for learning, seemingly Sisyphean and uninteresting, but so integrated into a celestial esthetic, into musical beauty. Chopin’s études equip the pianist with everything he technically requires, but at the same time, supplies him/her with the excitement which exists in learning – the fun.

I think this chapter of the history of education, which took place outside the classroom, could be a source of powerful inspiration for teachers considering classroom activity. Chopin’s études enable us to have a look into his pedagogy, a pedagogy which filled the living room of his home, the “black box”, during the lessons which he gave almost 150 years ago. I believe that this kind of education history has no substitute in the teacher training curriculum. Such history of education should take its place alongside pedagogical learning in the inner circle, close to teaching itself, and thus, will be less sensitive to changes in academic fashions.

In 1831, the German composer, pianist and music critic, Robert Schumann heard Variations on La Ci Darem la Mano from Mozart’s Don Giovanni for Piano and Orchestra in C Flat Major, Opus 2, which Chopin had written at the age of 17(!). The composition cast a spell on Schumann. In the music newspaper of Leipzig, he wrote an enthusiastic review about the then-unknown composer in which he included the sentence which has since become well-known: “Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!” (And that was even before he had heard Chopin’s études!) Let us take Schumann’s advice and remove our hats to Chopin. Let us doff our hats to him and allow his deep pedagogical understanding and its spectacular implementation to strike our eardrums. From there it will likely penetrate the rest of our bodies, and especially our hearts.

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