

Conceptual Paper

Exploring the Mechanisms of Narrative-Experiential Integrated Pedagogy in Promoting Accordion Performance Skills within Music Education

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Abstract

Traditional accordion pedagogy has relied heavily on technique-decomposition approaches — scale drilling and etude repetition — leaving a persistent gap between technical proficiency and artistic expression, particularly across bellows control, finger articulation, and interpretation. Narrative pedagogy and experiential learning have each proven effective in music education, yet their integration for developing instrumental performance skills remains theoretically underdeveloped, especially for the accordion, whose bellows-driven embodied demands fall outside both frameworks. This paper proposes a Narrative-Experiential Integrated Teaching Framework (NEITF) comprising three components — narrative, experiential, and integrative — and analyzes how each contributes to accordion performance skill development. The analysis suggests a differentiated theoretical role for each component: bellows skills are proposed to benefit primarily from the experiential channel's sensorimotor feedback loop, finger articulation from narrative reframing of touch selection, and interpretation from the integrative layer's reflective synthesis. As a conceptual contribution, this study develops testable propositions rather than empirical findings; pilot studies and quasi-experimental designs are identified as priorities for future validation. The framework carries implications for theory development in instrumental music education.

Keywords

Narrative pedagogy, Experiential learning, Accordion performance, Integrated teaching framework, Music education

1. Introduction

Among keyboard instruments, the accordion is unique in that it utilizes the method of bellows-based sound production. This method forces the student to develop finger dexterity along with the constant physical manipulation of air flow to shape dynamics, phrasing, and tone. These dualistic demands introduce a distinctive layer of pedagogical complexity to accordion instruction. While complexity in keyboard pedagogy is shaped by multiple factors — including the number of keys, positional shifts, and the breadth of repertoire — the bellows-driven dimension adds an embodied control challenge that is less prominent in piano or electronic keyboard instruction. While significant movement is being made towards a renewed pedagogical paradigm at the level of music education in general (Bin, 2026), the specific world of accordion-based instruction has been slow to abandon an established paradigm based on decomposed technical practice, scale-based practice, and *étude*-based practice. Such practice, while effective in developing technical facility, has consistently been unable to address an acknowledged gap in the ability of the student to translate what they are capable of producing technically into what they are capable of producing musically. Research into the world of accordion-based instruction has noted that students are capable of reproducing the physical actions described in the score, but are unable to translate this into any form of musical expression (Wang, 2021).

Two orientations have emerged as possible remedies to this problem: narrative pedagogy and experiential learning. Each offers a distinct approach to framing and contextualizing learning, and each has been shown to be effective in music education contexts. Narrative pedagogy, for example, has been found to be successful, especially in the context of vocal music and music appreciation, with a focus on contextual framing and story-based contextualization to create cognitive and affective anchors for providing purpose to technical tasks and activities. Experiential learning, on the other hand, is based on a different logic, one that emphasizes the role of bodily experience and engagement in internalizing skill and ability, and has also been found to be successful, especially in the context of improvisation and playing ensembles. Although these two approaches address different aspects of the technique-expression dichotomy, they have rarely been synthesized. Research integrating them for the development of instrumental performance skills remains extremely rare, and within accordion pedagogy specifically, it is virtually non-existent.

The present study proposes a Narrative-Experiential Integrated Teaching Framework (NEITF) and explores, at a theoretical level, how this framework may contribute to the development of three crucial components of an accordionist's skill set: bellows control and dynamic expression, finger technique and articulation expressiveness, and musical interpretation. In the following analysis, after reviewing relevant literature and clearly articulating the theoretical rationale behind the framework, the operation of NEITF in these three dimensions of skills is explored, along with the implications and limitations, which are considered as areas for future research. It should be noted at the outset that this

paper presents a conceptual and theoretical contribution rather than an empirical investigation. The analyses that follow develop testable theoretical propositions about how NEITF may operate, which are identified as priorities for empirical validation in Section 4.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Narrative Pedagogy in Music Education

The cognitive roots of such a pedagogical approach can be traced to Bruner's theory of two modes of thought, paradigmatic and narrative, with the latter allowing for a temporally organized, intention-based form of storytelling, through which individuals can make sense of materials in terms of their own experiences, even when those materials are necessarily abstract in nature. This theory has provided a foundation for a growing body of practice in music education, whereby narrative inquiry has been shown to be capable of providing music educators with a means through which to link a student's experience with musical materials, in such a manner that allows for a deeper level of emotional engagement and a more nuanced level of meaning perception (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). However, the scope of such a practice remains necessarily narrow, in terms of its ability to engage with musical activities, and remains necessarily focused on those levels of musical engagement that are interpretive and receptive in nature, with little consideration given to its potential benefits in terms of the development of performance-based musical skills, and those skills in particular that are necessarily complex in nature.

2.2. Experiential Learning in Instrumental Performance

The experiential learning process developed by Kolb, which entails movement from concrete experience to reflective observation and then to abstract conceptualization and finally active experimentation, and the corresponding philosophy of learning by doing propounded by Dewey, provides a basic paradigm upon which the conceptualization of the process of acquiring performance skills can be constructed. In the context of instrumental music training, the corresponding paradigm has been constructed around the philosophy of embodied cognition, with research revealing the music teacher's bodily engagement as a dynamic system that continuously interacts with and influences students' technical internalization (Bremmer & Nijs, 2020). More recent applications of the 4E cognition framework — emphasizing that musical learning is embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended — have further argued that pedagogical settings function as self-organizing systems in which skill development emerges from the interaction of learner, instrument, teacher, and context (Schiavio & Van der Schyff, 2018). Though the applications of this paradigm's findings have been centered more on more traditional instrumentation, such as the piano and violin, the inclusion of the accordion brings an element of control that was previously not considered within this work, specifically in terms

of the bellows action, where coordination between arm movement, respiration, and hearing is required in real-time, thus providing an embodied form of interaction that was previously not considered within this work.

2.3. Accordion Performance Pedagogy and Convergence of Gaps

Instruction in the performance of an accordion has been based on a technique decomposition paradigm. In the paradigm, most of the instruction time has been spent on finger exercises, scales, and simple bellows techniques, while a general pedagogical objective has been set on the accuracy of score replication. Within the broader instrumental pedagogy literature, scholars have argued that the over-emphasis on score reproduction at the expense of expressive engagement constitutes a systemic limitation in conservatory-based instruction (Stijnen et al., 2024). In the accordion-specific context, while discussions of bellows training, repertoire expansion, and instructional media have appeared in pedagogy literature (Wang, 2021), these contributions have largely operated at the level of curricular content rather than reconceptualizing the underlying logic of skill formation. The meaning-making and embodied-cognitive structures through which skill is acquired remain under-theorized within this discourse. When viewed in relation to the findings presented in the previous two sections, a common research gap emerges in terms of a lack of expansion of scope in terms of narrative pedagogy, a lack of consideration of experiential learning theory, and a lack of consideration of learning-cognitive theory in terms of accordion pedagogy itself. The coincidence of these three areas provides a foundation for the integrated theory presented in the following section.

2.4. Theoretical Foundations of the NEITF

The convergent gap identified in the above sections calls for a framework that can address both the meaning-deficit of technical training and the embodiment-deficit of narrative instruction at once. The Narrative-Experiential Integrated Teaching Framework (NEITF) is based on two pillars of theories, connected by a bridging rationale.

The narrative pillar utilizes Bruner's concept of the narrative mode of thought, where the main function is meaning endowment. Narrative cognition organizes individual components of experiences into temporal, causal, and purposeful structures, thus transforming disparate information into meaningful understanding. If one considers this concept in relation to the pedagogy of accordion technique, it can be seen how disparate technical instructions, such as keeping a steady speed in the bellows or coordinating left-hand bass shifts, can be contextualized within an overall musical narrative, providing students with cognitive meaning anchors in relation to technical objectives rather than physical memorization.

This experiential component is based on Kolb's model of the learning process as a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation,

and on Dewey's claim that the experience which is valuable in terms of education must satisfy the conditions of continuity and interaction. The bellows-driven feedback mechanism of the accordion, as discussed in Section 2.2, provides a highly appropriate setting for experiential engagement, which corresponds to the 'body-mediated cycle of action and perception' according to the embodied music cognition approach (Leman, 2007).

Neither part, on its own, is sufficient. Narrative pedagogy without physical practice is liable to result in the "know what, but cannot do" split, in which the learner is able to articulate the intention behind the music but lacks the physical capacity to perform the action. The experiential learning process without the guidance of the narrative is liable to result in the learner's repetitive practice being meaningless and mechanical. Theoretical contributions to the process of musical creativity have been made in the last few years, and they highlight the fact that the cognitive and sensorimotor aspects are not separate entities but are co-constitutive, acting as a coupled dynamic system in the creation and production of meaning and movement (Van Der Schyff et al., 2018). The NEITF model is based on this coupled system as the fundamental proposition, where the "why" is the direction provided by the narrative, the "how" is the physical practice, and the "how" and "why" are combined through the integrative reflection as the learner's technique is internalized. This is the theoretical foundation upon which the analysis of the mechanism is based in the following section.

3. NEITF Model Design and Mechanism Analysis for Accordion Performance Skills

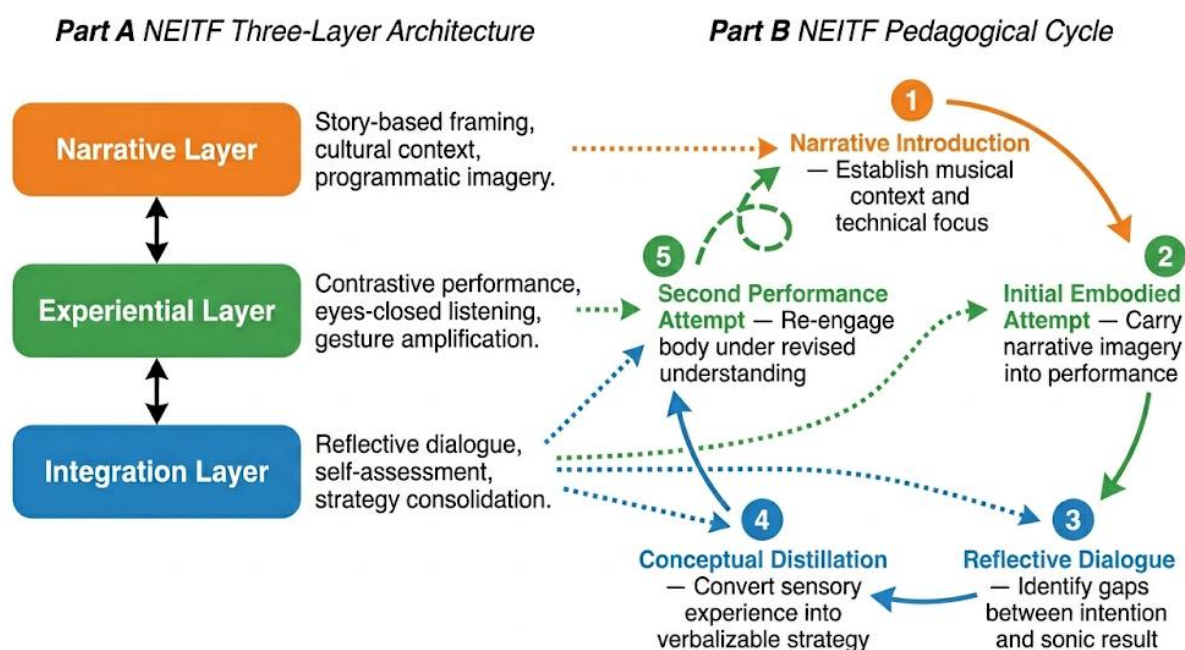
3.1. Three-Layer Architecture and Pedagogical Cycle

The structure of NEITF consists of three functionally differentiated, yet interdependent, levels (see Figure 1). The Narrative Layer serves as a meaning generation mechanism, whereby the instructor constructs a story-based framework around the cultural, emotional, and/or programmatic imagery associated with a particular piece, such that technical requirements such as bellows force, finger transition time, and timbrality are translated into a performative intention. This layer offers a directional rationale for subsequent skill development. The Experiential Layer offers a mechanism for delivering the embodied engagement aspect, whereby a variety of approaches such as contrastive performance (where a phrase is performed with different technical approaches side by side for immediate comparative effect), eyes-closed listening to heighten auditory-kinesthetic connections by reducing visual cues, and amplification of gestures to heighten somatic awareness of specific technical actions are implemented, whereby the student becomes aware of the causality between physical actions and sound production through the act of playing itself. Music and movement research has provided a foundation for the efficacy of such approaches in heightening musical understanding through bodily engagement (Juntunen & Sutela, 2023). The Integration Layer serves as a

consolidatory mechanism whereby dialogue and self-assessment enable the student to integrate the narrative understanding provided through the meaning generation mechanism and the bodily knowledge provided through the experiential mechanism, leading to the development of stable and transferable performance strategies.

Figure 1

NEITF three-layer architecture and pedagogical cycle



As illustrated in Figure 1, the first instructional cycle consists of the actualization of the three constituent layers. The narrative introduction establishes the context and explanation for the musical context and nature of the technical focus; the first bodily attempt is an interpretation of the narrative imagery into bodily action; the dialogue of reflection between teacher and student identifies discrepancies between intended expression and actual sound; conceptual distillation transforms the sensory experience into verbally articulable technical strategies; and the second bodily attempt re-engages the bodily action with the newly conceived cognitive-physical model. The instructional cycle is an integration of Kolb's experiential learning cycle with the function of adding meaning with narrative cognition.

3.2. Bellows Control and Dynamic Expression — Experiential Channel as Primary Driver

The bellows function as the principal pathway through which expression is regulated in an accordion. Competency in the domain depends on the consistency and speed of the push-pull action, as well as the modulation and transition of the application of force, which are done intuitively rather than through computation. The experiential dimension has been identified as the principal pathway in

the meeting of the first criterion. The process of playing while one's eyes are shut requires the learner to depend entirely on the movement of the arms in order to control the speed of the action. The contrastive method, which involves the playing of a particular phrase while the bellows are moving constantly and changing, respectively, enables the learner to intuitively recognize, through physical experience, the differences in physical input and feedback, which gives rise to the centripetal cycle, in which sound is fed back into action (Reybrouck & Schiavio, 2024). Within the proposed framework, the narrative dimension is theorized to play a supporting role in this domain, in which the learner is offered imagery, such as the sound of the crescendo resembling the sound of the wind picking up in an open area, in order to assist the learner in the control of the gradient of force. Under this framework, the internalization of bellows action is hypothesized to occur primarily through experiential mediation.

3.3. Finger Technique and Articulation — Narrative Channel as Primary Driver

With regard to articulation in accordion music, it entails the integration of fingering in the keyboard with chord changes in the left-hand bass, depending on various modes of operation, where legato, staccato, and staccatissimo touch forms have a direct effect on the rhetorical style. The major challenge, however, lies not only in playing various touch form articulations, but also in developing contexts for applying a particular articulation and basis for application. The narrative level is theorized to play a prominent role in this process, whereby different types of touch are imbued with different types of functions associated with characters in a story. For instance, legato might be seen to represent a narrator moving forward in a story, while staccato might represent a dramatic turn in a plot. Studies into expert pedagogy in instrumental music suggest that metaphor-based approaches, whereby a student might be asked to “play like a cloud” or “breathe with a phrase,” engage embodied cognition through metaphorical projection rather than through more mechanical means (Alves & Nogueira, 2024). Under this framework, articulation types are no longer seen as a mechanical execution of score indications, but rather as a means to an end, whereby the end is determined through an expressive direction provided through the narrative framework. The experiential level is proposed to play a validating role in this process, whereby a student may verify, through bodily experience, whether a particular type of articulation most effectively accomplishes a particular type of narrative goal, although the reason for doing so stems from an expressive direction provided through the narrative framework.

3.4. Musical Interpretation and Holistic Competence — Integration Layer as Core

Musical interpretation encompasses phrase shaping, structural pacing, stylistic awareness, and personal expression, representing a holistic competence that cannot be assembled from discrete technical components alone. The framework posits that the integration layer assumes its most

prominent role at this level, unifying the outputs of narrative meaning-making and embodied experience into a coherent interpretive scheme. The instructor constructs a macro-level narrative arc for the entire work, mapping structural sections onto a storytelling trajectory such as departure, conflict, and resolution. Following a complete performance, reflective dialogue guides the learner to identify discrepancies between intended narrative expression and actual sonic realization. Research on creativity transfer in music education has indicated that such reflective cycles, in which pedagogical knowledge is actively reconstructed through practice, are essential for developing interpretive autonomy (Ho & Kong, 2025). Through repeated iterations of this interpretation-experience-reflection loop, isolated technical decisions regarding bellows treatment and articulation choice are proposed to be progressively woven into a unified and persuasive performance narrative.

3.5. An Illustrative Teaching Vignette

To illustrate how the three NEITF layers might interact in practice, consider the following hypothetical teaching scenario involving an intermediate accordion student preparing Astor Piazzolla's *Oblivion*. This piece is chosen because its expressive demands — sustained bellows control, shifting articulations, and a pervasive atmosphere of melancholy — foreground precisely the technical-expressive tensions that NEITF is designed to address.

The teacher begins with the narrative layer, framing *Oblivion* not merely as a tango but as a sonic evocation of memory and quiet loss — a solitary figure recalling what has slipped away. Technical parameters are then translated into narrative terms: the long opening bellows phrase becomes “a breath held against forgetting,” while the subtle staccato articulations in the accompaniment figures are cast as “the pulse of a memory that refuses to fade.”

In the experiential layer, the student performs the opening phrase with eyes closed, attending solely to the relationship between arm movement, bellows resistance, and resulting sonic trajectory. A contrastive exercise follows: the same phrase is performed with two different bellows distribution schemes, allowing the student to perceive — somatically rather than analytically — how each produces a different expressive contour.

The integration layer emerges in the subsequent reflective dialogue. The teacher and student identify a discrepancy: although the student's bellows control is technically stable, the phrase fails to sustain the intended sense of “held breath” because of a premature bellows change at measure 8. The student re-attempts the phrase, now aligning the bellows turn with a narrative pause rather than a purely metrical one. Over several iterations of this narrative-experience-reflection cycle, a stable interpretive strategy is proposed to emerge, in which the technical choice and the expressive intention are no longer separately managed but co-constituted.

This vignette is illustrative rather than evidentiary; it is offered to clarify the proposed mechanism of NEITF, not to demonstrate its empirical effectiveness. The differentiated role of each NEITF layer across the three skill dimensions is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Differentiated role of NEITF layers across three accordion performance skill dimensions

Skill Dimension	Primary Driver	Supporting Layer	Key Mechanism
Bellows Control & Dynamic Expression	Experiential Layer	Narrative Layer	Sensorimotor feedback loop; somatic recalibration through auditory monitoring
Finger Technique & Articulation	Narrative Layer	Experiential Layer	Metaphor-driven expressive decision-making; narrative reframing of touch selection
Musical Interpretation & Holistic Competence	Integration Layer	Narrative + Experiential	Reflective consolidation of localized technical choices into coherent performance narrative

4. Discussion

4.1. Dialogue with Existing Research

The mechanism analysis process outlined above contributes to the corpus of existing research in several ways. Past research has already demonstrated that narrative engagement contributes positively to meaning construction and emotional investment in music learning settings that involve listening and appreciative activities (Barrett, 2011). The current analysis extends this existing research into the domain of performance skill acquisition, hypothesizing that narrative contribution may exert a stronger influence on articulation skill development than on bellows control — a proposition that awaits empirical examination. The examination of bellows control contributes to current conceptions of experiential learning in music settings by proposing a particular characteristic that is absent in generalized classroom settings: the millisecond immediacy of each physical action's translation into audible sonic feedback compresses the process of reflection in the experiential process more than current models would suggest. With regard to current trends in music education, NEITF contributes a three-layered framework rather than making a generalized recommendation about incorporating situational elements into music education, such as that which has been recommended in current trends in accordion education.

4.2. Pedagogical Recommendations

The analysis suggests the following implications for the application of the model in the teaching and learning of the accordion. The inclusion of the narrative contextual framing can be incorporated within the existing time allocation, as the model does not require additional instructional time, merely the development of the capacity to translate the cultural and programmatic context into an effective form of storytelling. The instructional potential of the course may be improved through the differentiated application of the NEITF layers, with the inclusion of bellows sessions prioritizing the development of experiential strategy, articulation prioritizing the construction of the narrative context, and the provision of comprehensive performance preparation, with the allocation of dedicated time to the integration process. The advancements in the instrumental pedagogy suggest the potential applicability of the model to other instruments with complex control demands, including the pipe organ, bandoneon, and concertina (Nijs & Bremmer, 2026).

4.3. Limitations

This investigation employs theoretical analysis and case-based reasoning, as informed by published descriptive accounts of instrumental pedagogy practice, without controlled or quasi-experimental verification of the effects of NEITF. The analysis of the mechanism also appears to assume an intermediate- to advanced-level adolescent and adult learner of the accordion, without examining the applicability of the model to beginner learners and younger age groups. The scope of the analysis could be extended to consider the interaction between the NEITF and learner age, ability, and instrumental type, to inform the model's boundaries and applicability. Recent scoping reviews have highlighted the importance of methodologically diverse evidence regarding the effects of music learning interventions on development, across diverse populations (Goopy & MacArthur, 2025).

A further limitation concerns learner level. The mechanism analysis presented here implicitly assumes intermediate to advanced learners who already possess foundational motor competencies. For beginners, particularly young learners still building basic finger coordination and bellows stability, the cognitive load of holding a narrative frame in working memory while executing unfamiliar motor sequences may exceed available cognitive resources, potentially undermining rather than supporting skill acquisition. This boundary condition warrants explicit empirical investigation before NEITF is generalized to early-stage instruction.

4.4. Directions for Future Research

The conceptual nature of this study defines several empirical pathways needed to test the theoretical propositions advanced here. First, a pilot study comparing NEITF with conventional technique-decomposition pedagogy across 10–20 intermediate accordion students would allow pre/post assessment of bellows control, articulation, and interpretive coherence using validated performance rubrics and recorded performance samples, with both quantitative indicators and

qualitative analysis of student performances. Second, action research designs embedded in conservatory studio teaching could capture the iterative refinement of NEITF in authentic instructional contexts, offering insights into how teachers adapt the three layers to individual learners. Third, quasi-experimental designs with matched comparison groups would permit stronger causal inference about the differential contribution of each NEITF layer to each skill dimension. Fourth, the framework's transferability to other instruments with complex embodied control demands — including pipe organ, bandoneon, concertina, and bowed strings such as the violin — should be tested through parallel mechanism analyses. Fifth, emerging digital and immersive contexts, such as virtual reality-based embodiment training environments, may provide novel platforms for isolating the experiential layer's contribution under controlled conditions. These directions are identified as priorities for the next phase of this research program.

5. Conclusion

The present study is an introduction to the Narrative-Experiential Integrated Teaching Framework (NEITF), and the distinct contributions that the three structural levels of the Narrative-Experiential Integrated Teaching Framework make to the development of fundamental competencies in the performance of the accordion are investigated. The analysis suggests that bellows control may be supported primarily through the experiential channel's sensorimotor feedback loop, in which physical trial and auditory monitoring operate as co-processes. Finger articulation is proposed to be supported through the capacity of the Narrative-Experiential Integrated Teaching Framework to reframe touch as expression rather than obligation. Musical interpretation, as the most integrated competency, is theorized to be supported through the integrative layer's capacity to synthesize disparate elements of performance through reflective dialogue. The NEITF is presented as a potential response to the tension between technical and artistic expression that characterizes instrumental music instruction. Action research, quasi-experimental designs, and the framework's extension to other instruments are identified as priorities for future investigation.

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