***Research Proposal: Practice Methods and the Middle School Student***

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MUSC 772

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At the Middle school level, students in instrumental music are held to expectations for practice (put all of your references here). However, most of these students do not understand how to practice, how to set practice goals, or what is important to focus on while practicing. Students are given very little guidance on practice, its benefits, and how practice works. According to a study by Peter Miksza, Jennifer Blackwell, and Nicholas Roseth (2021), many students are unaware of ways to self-regulate in practice sessions outside of the classroom. Provided guidance, methods, and goal setting strategies for students can prove successful growth in their role as a musician and a member of larger ensemble community.

**Rationale**

The purpose of this study is to understand how students view individual practice, set and acquire goals for individual practice, and gain understanding of the benefits of individual practice. Research questions for this study include: 1.) What strategies do students use in individual practice? 2.) How much time is spent on individual practice? 3)How is it demonstrated in their ability as a musician? 4.) How did goals help to focus or demonstrate growth in musicianship and skills?

There may be several benefits to this study. Music educators require each student to practice a minimum amount of time each week to attain growth, demonstrate understanding, and apply to ensemble building. Often, with required practice time, music educator’s do not provide or demonstrate strategies for the different ways in which to practice, what to practice, or how to use appropriate technique during individual practice (support). This study may help students understand different methods of practice, what types of material upon which to focus during practice, and create renewed excitement as students improve the ability to play their instrument. This study may demonstrate ways that students can grow individually and as an ensemble community. Improved practice may also establish better understanding of musical concepts and categorize teaching strategies for teaching individual practice.

**Participants and Methodology**

Participants in this study will be fourth through seventh graders at one charter middle school in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts. Students ages 9-13 will have the opportunity to participate as part of a three-week intervention. During this time, the students will be assessed on current practice methods, taught new methods of practice, and instructed how to set practice goals both in-class and outside of class.

A qualitative approach will be utilized in this study. The data collection will occur through questionnaires, in-class observations, private lesson observations, and practice records/goal setting documents. After the data are collected and analyzed, an exit questionnaire will be given regarding participants’ opinion on growth and attitude about achievements. Data that are gathered during the first session will set the base and expound upon that data throughout the course of the study. Different strategies will be taught to the group, which will be determined by what the group already knows. As the researcher, I will record the strategies taught and how practice goals were applied, thus determining which were successful.

**Ethical Concerns**

This study will not yield any ethical concerns. The information used will solely be based on data collection of in-class instruction, out-of-class practice sessions, practice/goal setting/achievement records, and prior information submitted by the music educators such as player ability, and the number of years that they have played their instrument. Participants will be provided with information about the research study prior to its beginning. Each student’s information and progress will be made and remain confidential throughout the study.

**Conclusion**

An increase in understanding about how to practice, what to practice, and how to set practice goals can help develop self-regulation in instrumental music students which may benefit all segments of the music program. Participants will be given opportunities to discover and demonstrate growth and understanding of how to practice and how to apply various strategies and methods to in-class work as well. This study may provide current and future educators guidance in how to implement ways to teach individual practice, serving to motivate and facilitate growth for middle school students.

**References**

Miksza, Blackwell, J., & Roseth, N. E. (2018). Self-Regulated Music Practice: Microanalysis as a Data Collection Technique and Inspiration for Pedagogical Intervention. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *66*(3), 295–319. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429418788557