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Abstract

Practice, skill and competition are important aspects of participating in school bands and orchestras. However, writers have questioned their value. In this philosophical paper, I mine the writings of the American pragmatists—in particular, their theories of habit and experience—to construct a theory of action for instrumental music education, that is, a proposed framework of active musical doing in large instrumental ensembles. It comprises two facets: effortful practice and effortless performance, and serves as lenses to address issues with respect to practice, skill and competition in instrumental music. Central to this paper is the thesis that the active doing of music in bands and orchestras enables students to encounter the aesthetic peak experience.

Keywords: *practice, skill, competition, instrumental music education, aesthetic experience*

Practice is necessary to acquire skill needed for participation in an instrumental ensemble. Sosniak (1986) estimates that at least 16 years of practice is required for an instrumentalist to achieve skills of an international standing. Although not all or even most instrumental educators regard producing internationally acclaimed musicians their primary *raison d'être*, the need to cultivate some form of skill in the school instrumental program is inescapable. As I shall discuss, this reality has led to the following questions in the literature: Should instrumental music education be skill-based and train for automatic skill? What is the value of instrumental skill? Should teachers focus on the intrinsic experience of instrumental music or the extrinsic goals of competition?

First, music educators debate over whether instrumental music education should be skill-based. More specifically, should it take on the approach of focusing on the acquisition of instrumental skills, or should it center on the aesthetic experience of the students? The next several sources, published between 49 and 84 years ago, provide a historical perspective of the

On Practice, Skill and Competition

debate. On the one hand, directors who see themselves essentially as performance teachers favor a model of teaching where the focus is primarily skill-based and advocate the use of technical etudes to build skill (e.g., Mattern & Church, 1936; Norman, 1939). On the other hand, music educators who regard themselves as aesthetic teachers reject the notion that ensembles ought to focus on technique (e.g., Gary, 1966; Mursell, 1931; Rush, 1955). Although the distinction between the performance and the aesthetic teachers appears less pronounced in recent discourse, several music educators continue critiquing the emphasis on skill in instrumental music education (e.g., Cope & Smith, 1997; Kratus, 2007; Woodford, 2005). For Allsup (2007), instrumental educators tend to be product- rather than process-driven. He challenges them to combine “a love-of-process with a love-of-product so one cannot make sense without the other” (p. 55). Allsup and Benedict (2008) observe that band teachers go beyond “training” to “conditioning” students (p. 158). They argue that well-known American band conductor Eugene Corporon’s approach to band rehearsals is “Fordist” as the emphasis is on achieving “motorized efficiency” (p. 159). Does skill training foster or hinder the aesthetic goals of instrumental music education? Should directors train their musicians for automatic skill using etudes? How should one, as Allsup suggests, combine “a love-of-process with a love-of-product”? These questions warrant a theory of action for instrumental music education.

Second, a number of writers question if instrumental skill is of any value for students. Kratus (2007) argues that the technical skill that students acquire through bands and orchestras are of little use to America today. Similarly, Williams (2011) posits that instrumental skills that students learn have no lifelong utility as they cease playing upon graduation. These claims are paralleled in the United Kingdom by Cope and Smith (1997), who note that students’ instrumental skills are relevant only while students are in school. This supposed lack of value of

On Practice, Skill and Competition

instrumental skill is serious given the tremendous amount of time needed to foster it (e.g., Cope & Smith, 1997; Kratus, 2007; Tan, 2015; Williams, 2011). If so, why should general education include bands and orchestras? Since instrumental skill is an inextricable aspect of bands and orchestras, an examination of the value of skill is crucial.

Third, music educators have been divided with respect to the educative value of competitions. As competitions often quantify technical competence in numerical scores, do they promote or hinder musical growth? On the one hand, one may argue that competition serves as an effective form of extrinsic motivation, provides feedback on the standard of performance to teachers and students, and has historically played an important role in increasing the standards of instrumental ensembles worldwide (e.g., Akiyama, 1994; Fennell, 1954; Gallops, 2005; Heuser, 2011; Ivey, 1966; Moore, 1972; Tan, 2015). Given the global trend towards standardization and accountability (e.g., Biesta, 2004; Harris & Herrington, 2006), the presence of quantifiable data in the form of competition scores may also help to justify the place of instrumental music in schools. On the other hand, one may argue that competitions promote an overly technical approach and detract from the artistic and musical goals of instrumental music education. Educators in favor of this position maintain that instrumental music programs should focus on the intrinsic experience of music rather than extrinsic competitive goals (e.g., Feldman & Contzius, 2011; Lee, 2004). Does competition constitute an educational good? It appears that philosophical theorizing on the nature of competition may be helpful to school instrumental programs.

The research questions of this paper then, are: (a) Should instrumental music education be skill-based and train for automatic skill? (b) What is the value of instrumental skill? (c) Should teachers focus on the intrinsic experience of instrumental music or the extrinsic goals of

competition? These questions are worth addressing, as they are fundamental questions that shape practice in the rehearsal hall. In this paper, I mine the ideas of the American pragmatists, in particular, John Dewey (1859-1952) and William James (1842-1910), as sources of inspiration to address my research questions. I have chosen these philosophers as they wrote richly on the nature of practice, skill and competition; furthermore, instrumental music education has traditionally received philosophical support from pragmatism (Mark & Gary, 2007). I begin by drawing on Dewey's distinction between "the artist and the mere technician" to construct a theory of action for instrumental music education. Next, I turn to the story of "Crossing the River to New York City" recounted by Dewey to probe the proposed theory in detail and address the issue of competition. Finally, I address the value of instrumental skill.

The Artist and the Mere Technician

In his construal of the nature of habit, Dewey (1922/1978) distinguishes between the "artist" and the "mere technician" (pp. 51-52). On the one hand is the "artist" whose habit is of the intelligent and artistic kind. She does not construe the mind as being separated from the body, nor thought from action. She fosters habit via thoughtful exercises that aim towards the integration of skill and thought, and engages in "practice *of* skill" rather than "practice *for* skill" (p. 51). Over time, she develops into a masterful technician with a set of flexible and sensitive habits that operate spontaneously and automatically. These habits form the basis by which she can be artistic, imaginative and expressive in her performances. On the other hand is the "mere technician" whose habit is of the routine and mechanical type. She engages in "practice *for* skill" rather than "practice *of* skill" (p. 51). Like the "artist," she acquires a set of habits. Unlike the "artist," however, her habits are inflexible, rigid and devoid of thought and feeling. Consequently, she becomes a mechanical performer who allows the mechanism of action to

On Practice, Skill and Competition

dictate her performances. Whether it concerns “the cook, the musician, carpenter, citizen, or statesman” (p. 52), Dewey prizes intelligent and artistic habit over its routine and mechanical counterpart. He clearly admires those who possess intelligent habits, and even gushes at skilled artists: “How delicate, prompt, sure and varied are the movements of a violin player or an engraver! How unerringly they phrase every shade of emotion and every turn of idea!” (p. 51).

The distinction that Dewey makes between the “artist” and the “mere technician” offers a nuanced theoretical framework to view the issue of skill in instrumental music education. Dewey is for a skill-based approach to music education insofar as it leads towards intelligent and artistic habit, and against an emphasis on skills insofar as it results in routine and mechanical habit. He does not advocate practice *for* skill or the acquisition of skill for its own sake, but practice *of* skill as a means to artistry. For Noddings (2010), a frequent misconception of Dewey is that he wants teachers to ban skill acquisition from the classroom. Noddings maintains that instead, Dewey wants teachers to ask: “Where will this acquisition of skill lead?” (p. 273). To this question, one may add: “How should one acquire skill?”

To assist instrumental educators in addressing these questions, I draw on James’ and Dewey’s writings on habit to propose a theory of action. There are two aspects to Dewey’s construal of the “artist”: effortful practice whereby the “artist” engages in “practice *of* skill,” and effortless performance whereby she displays “delicate, prompt, sure and varied” movements. I now proceed to construct the theory in turn, beginning with effortful practice before proceeding to effortless performance.

James (1899) observes that practice enables us to do something which we may find difficult at first with increasing ease. This is due to a person’s inherent “plasticity”: “the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all

On Practice, Skill and Competition

at once” (James, 1890, p. 105). While it is commonplace to think of practice in terms of repetition, Alexander (1987) argues that for Dewey, “repetition is not what makes habit possible”; instead, “habit is what makes repetition possible” (p. 143). Drawing on Dewey’s theory of doing and undergoing, Howard (1992) argues that as one obtains proficiency through practice, she becomes “smoothly coordinated, absorbed, and focused *through* the repetitions in an almost trance-like way.” When this happens, one experiences “the pleasures of repetition” and achieves a “balance between outgoing effort and undergoing” (p. 92). For Dewey (1934/1985), such an experience is an “integral experience”: it is “*an* experience” that has consummated; experience is no longer “anesthetic” but takes on an “aesthetic” quality (pp. 47-48. See also, Zeltner, 1975). In like vein, when students practice etudes, obtain proficiency and achieve a balance between doing and undergoing, they reap the rewards of a pleasurable aesthetic experience as defined in the Deweyan sense of the term. This brings to mind Dewey’s (1916/1978) comment that even the most instrumental of educational activities should, at some phase of its development, possess an aesthetic quality for the individual concerned.

Repetitive practice, for Dewey, is neither mechanical nor thoughtless drill. As noted earlier, the “artist” does not construe the mind as being separated from the body, nor thought from action. Thinking in terms of continuity and interaction while practicing are important. By continuity, Dewey (1938/1985) refers to the ways in which previous experiences influence future experiences. The implication for instrumental practice is to engage in thoughtful sequencing whereby one builds on pre-existent techniques to foster new ones (Dewey 1922/1978). While continuity is the longitudinal aspect of experience, interaction is its lateral counterpart: what one learns in one situation becomes an instrument to understanding and dealing with other situations (Dewey 1938/1985). By implication, one should think about how a particular skill that is learned

On Practice, Skill and Competition

in one situation can be used as a tool to deal with other situations, thereby unifying learning into a coherent whole. Notwithstanding the benefits of thinking in terms of continuity and interaction, students invariably encounter difficulties while practicing. If they give up, no habit can be fostered. Students require what James (1899) describes as “effort of will” (p. xxii), that is, an earnest attempt in attending to difficulties in life. Discipline, the “power to endure in an intelligently chosen course in face of distraction, confusion, and difficulty” (Dewey, 1916/1978, p. 128), is crucial. In short, it is necessary to persevere with single-mindedness.

It can be seen, therefore, that the facets of repetitive practice, thoughtful sequencing, unifying learning and persevering with single-mindedness emerge from a synthesis of James’ and Dewey’s writings on habit. All aspects require what James (1899) calls the “bracing oxygen of effort” (p. 42). They constitute the first part of this present theory of action: effortful practice. With this established, I now proceed with a discussion of effortless performance.

Earlier, I noted that through constant intelligent and effortful practice, the “artist” develops a set of physiologically engrained, flexible and sensitive habits that operate spontaneously and automatically. Similarly, the instrumentalist who practices thoughtfully obtains skill mastery over time and achieves a sense of spontaneous freedom on her instrument. This freedom is not mindless behavior: it is neither “caprice” (i.e., “things are to be just as I happen to like them at this instant”) nor “routine” (i.e., “let things continue just as I have found them in the past”) (Dewey, 1916/1978, p. 153). Consider Sean, an eleventh-grade clarinetist who has mastered the opening solo of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*. His performance is not mere caprice as he has thought through how he wants to execute this passage. Nor is it mere routine. Although he has practiced to the point of automaticity, the rather treacherous *glissando* remains fraught with uncertainties. He cannot consign it wholly to automaticity. For Dewey (1932/1985),

On Practice, Skill and Competition

“if habit fails, the sole alternative to caprice and random action is reflection” (p. 185).

Furthermore, if reflection happens in the midst of active doing, “activity does not cease in order to give way to reflection” (Dewey, 1922/1978, p. 133). In negotiating the *glissando*, Sean engages in a brief moment of reflection-in-action, after which “recovery” (Dewey, 1922/1978, p. 134) enables him to return to spontaneous freedom. Thus, spontaneous freedom, reflection-in-action and recovery emerge as facets of effortless performance.

One additional facet appears to be present. Earlier, I noted that Dewey gushes at skilled artists: “How delicate, prompt, sure and varied are the movements of a violin player or an engraver! How unerringly they phrase every shade of emotion and every turn of idea!” (Dewey, 1922/1978, p. 51). Dewey uses exclamation marks sparingly. His use of exclamation points in this passage not only reveals the admiration that he has for skilled artists, but also reflects the joy that accompanies the attainment of skilled artistry. When performing with skilled artistry, experience is no longer inchoate, but unified, integrated and perceived as a whole. As noted earlier, it is *an* experience, that is, a consummatory experience or an aesthetic experience (Zeltner, 1975). For Mead (1981), such an experience is special due to the sense of “joy and satisfaction that suffuse its successful accomplishment” (p. 296). In short, the skilled artist is a joyous virtuoso.

In progressing from effortful practice to effortless performance, the artist moves from the instrumental to the highest form of experience: the aesthetic and the consummatory. Building on Dewey’s work, Maslow expands the notion of the consummatory experience into a theory of peak experience: moments of intense insight and joy (Dennis & Powers 1974; Maslow, 1971). Maslow regards the peak experience as the culmination of a specific hierarchy of needs whereby humans achieve transient moments of self-realization. For Maslow (1968), the two immediate

On Practice, Skill and Competition

ways to peak experiences are music and sex. As an active means of achieving peak experience, music seems particularly important in the school curriculum. The central thesis of this theory of action, then, is that the active doing of music in instrumental music education through effortful practice and effortless performance enables students to encounter the aesthetic peak experience. This bears resemblances to recent empirical research that has found that the grittier instrumental students are towards practice, the more they are likely to experience a psychological state of effortless absorption (e.g., Miksza & Tan, 2015; Miksza, Tan, & Dye, 2016).

There is, however, a paradox in this model. Earlier, I noted that for Howard, repetitive practice leads to a consummatory experience (Howard, 1992). How is it that experience can consummate in both practice and performance? As I will illustrate via Dewey's story of a group of men crossing a river, the consummatory phase of an experience is, for Dewey (1934/1985), "intervening as well as final" (pp. 143-144).

Crossing the River to New York City

In this story borrowed from American author Max Eastman (1883-1969), a group of men are crossing the river on a ferry boat to New York City (Dewey, 1934/1985, pp. 140-142). Although all the passengers have the same end (i.e., reaching New York City), they have different attitudes towards the means of arriving there (i.e., the boat journey). Most of the passengers regard the journey simply as "a means to be endured." One man reads the newspaper, while another glances at and identifies buildings such as the Metropolitan Tower, Chrysler Building and Empire State Building. A third man, impatient to arrive, looks out for buildings as landmarks to ascertain progress towards his destination. Still a fourth man, who is on the ferry boat journey for the first time, looks around him eagerly, but is overwhelmed by the multiple buildings around them; he sees neither the whole nor the parts. A fifth man—who is interested in

On Practice, Skill and Competition

real estate—looks at the skyline, the height of the buildings, and lets his imagination roam.

Although he sees the Empire State Building, he does not regard it simply as a building to be identified (as it is for the second man) or a landmark to judge the progress of his destination (like the third man). Nor is he overwhelmed (like the fourth man). Instead, he sees the Empire State Building in relation to other buildings, and forms a scene in his imagination whereby the buildings are not in isolation but “a perceptual whole, constituted by related parts.” He is seeing aesthetically, “as a painter might see” (Dewey, 1934/1985, p. 140).

The story above offers us an interesting pair of lenses through which to view instrumental practice. Like the first four men on the ferry boat, many instrumentalists construe practice merely as “a means to be endured.” The first man who reads a newspaper may be likened to those who regard practice as drudgery. Although they are physically in the rehearsal room, they create their imaginary “newspapers” and mentally wander off to distant lands. The second man who notices a couple of buildings may be compared to students who express some form of interest in what they do. However, they do not see the connection between the various aspects of their practice; consequently, their experiences remain inchoate and do not consummate. The third man who uses the buildings as signposts to judge the amount of time left before he reaches the destination is like students who work on etudes with the sole motivation that each one brings them closer to the end of the practice session, while the fourth man who is overwhelmed is like beginning students who have too much to attend to. For Dewey, only the fifth man has an aesthetic experience. From a Deweyan perspective, students who are like this man engage their imagination in perceiving the relationship between the various practice activities. They do not regard practice as a “means to be endured,” but delight in the “pleasurable activity of the journey

On Practice, Skill and Competition

itself” (Dewey, 1934/1985, p. 11). They have an aesthetic rather than a mechanical experience due to the manner in which they go about their activities (Stroud, 2009).

The above analysis suggests that whether one’s experience consummates or not during practice depends on at least three factors. First, the attitude of the student is crucial: one must delight in the journey itself and not regard it as drudgery. Second, the student should perceive relationships between the various practice activities. A practice session cannot consist of a series of isolated starts and stops. Instead, the various activities should come together as a whole. Third, the skill must match the challenge. During practice, when the difficulty overwhelms the student (as in the fourth man), experience remains inchoate. As noted earlier, Howard argues that as proficiency is obtained, experience runs its course to fulfillment and consummates. The key is not so much whether one is practicing or performing as whether a balance between doing and undergoing is obtained. As students actively play on their instruments (“doing”), they simultaneously receive aesthetic delights (“undergoing”); they create *and* appreciate at the same time. This balance creates an “artistic-aesthetic” experience which Dewey (1934/1985) rather unwillingly calls an “aesthetic experience” (p. 53) as there is no single word in the English language that encapsulates both aspects simultaneously. Similarly, Mead (1926) argues that it is the balance of “employment” and “enjoyment” (i.e., doing and undergoing) that “gives joy to creation” (pp. 385-387). Teachers then, should pace their students carefully. When technical demands are progressively difficult, the likelihood of a match between skills and technical challenges increases, and the more likely an aesthetic experience.

It can be seen then that one can attain a consummatory experience whether one is practicing or performing, thus accounting for the apparent paradox noted earlier that experience can consummate in both practice and performance. The consummatory phase of an experience is,

On Practice, Skill and Competition

as cited earlier, “intervening as well as final” Dewey (1934/1985, pp. 143-144). For Dewey (1929/1985), in art, “means and consequence, process and product, the instrumental and consummatory,” are “simultaneously present” rather than “in alternation and displacement” (p. 271). In line with pragmatist anti-dualism (Dewey, 1916/1978), practicing as means and performing as ends are not dualistically opposed; they are two sides of the same coin. In Dewey’s (1934/ 1985) words, “means and end coalesce” (p. 202). Nonetheless, one may ask: if, as Howard suggests, an aesthetic experience may be obtained via repetitive practice of etudes, wherein lies the value of actual musical works? In other words, if one may arrive at an aesthetic experience by playing etudes, why then is there a need to engage in actual musical works of art?

To address the questions above, I draw on Dewey’s theory of experience. Dewey theorizes a continuum of experience that moves from “anesthetic” experience to aesthetic experience “in the raw,” culminating in aesthetic experience “refined” (Dewey, 1934/ 1985, pp. 9-11; Zeltner, 1975). While one may obtain an aesthetic experience “in the raw” from virtually all aspects of everyday living, an aesthetic experience in its “refined” or “ultimate and approved forms” (p. 10) can only be accessed through art. By extension, the aesthetic experience that one obtains through the practice of etudes may be in its raw form, while the aesthetic experience that one obtains through the practice or performance of art works is in its refined form. From a pragmatist perspective, therefore, although one may obtain an aesthetic experience through practicing etudes to the point where “doing” balances “undergoing,” the aesthetic experience is concentrated, crystallized, heightened and foregrounded when one practices or performs actual art works. (It must be noted, however, that pragmatist philosophy is unlikely to construe a strict dichotomy between etudes and actual art works: etudes may be rather artful, and art works may be useful to build skill. My distinction between etudes and actual art works here are categories to

On Practice, Skill and Competition

facilitate discussion only; in the phenomenal world, boundaries between the two are often blurred.) For Dewey (1934/1985), as we delight in this experience through art, we “forget ourselves” (p. 110). This experience is Maslow’s aesthetic peak experience. Arguing from the perspective of religion, Maslow (1973) notes that over time, humans tend to forget the subjective aspects of the religious experience. They redefine religion as a set of legalistic and bureaucratic dogmas; in so doing, they become *antireligious*. Similarly, as music education institutionalizes and subjects itself to myriad forms of measurement and evaluation, it is easy to neglect these subjective aspects of music making.

Does this mean then, that the aesthetic peak experience serves as an intrinsic form of motivation, rendering competitions and other forms of extrinsic motivation unnecessary? James (1899) takes a nuanced view towards competition in schools. On the one hand, he sees its use as a means for students to know how well they perform and to spur effort. Drawing from his work in human psychology, he argues that since “the feeling of rivalry lies at the very basis of our being,” teachers should not eliminate the competitive incentive or “spectacle of effort” (pp. 52-53). He further claims that since students are naturally eager to know how well they do, teachers should “acquaint them, therefore, with their marks and standing and prospects” (p. 37). On the other hand, James cautions against the harmful aspects of competition. Although he maintains that all social improvement is largely due to human rivalry, he distinguishes between rivalry of the “noble and generous” kind, and that of the “spiteful and greedy” type (p. 52). Consequently, he recommends teachers to use competition in ways that “reap a maximum of benefit with a minimum of harm” (p. 53).

Applied to the school instrumental classroom, teachers can use James’ caution to impress upon their students that competitive rivalry should not be allowed to degenerate into the “spiteful

On Practice, Skill and Competition

and greedy” sort. While preparing ensembles for competitions, teachers should stress to their students that their focus should not be on beating their opponents or winning at all costs, but on using competition as a tool in learning. Returning to our ferry boat adventure, Dewey indicated that the fifth man, who was the sole person who had an aesthetic experience, had an interest in real estate. This interest led him to regard his journey differently from the rest of the passengers. He allowed his imagination to roam and perceive relationships between the buildings. This man’s interest in real estate may be likened to competitions. Students preparing for competitions are encouraged to regard practice differently from mere drudgery, just as the fifth man’s interest in real estate led him to construe his journey differently. Insofar as students approach competitions with “refined and noble” forms of “pride and pugnacity” (James, 1899, p. 41), competitions can be a tool to spur effort, lead students to practice imaginatively, obtain the requisite skills to meet the challenge, balance the doing and undergoing, and obtain an aesthetic experience. From this line of reasoning, competition, commonly regarded as extrinsic motivation, need not conflict with the intrinsic aesthetic experience itself. In any case, any sharp distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation runs against the grain of pragmatist anti-dualism.

For Dewey (1916/1978), “every end becomes a means of carrying activities further as soon as it is achieved” (p. 106). In working towards competitions, students can improve their skills that then become the means for future musical and aesthetic experiences. Construed as such, competitions are not ends per se, but “ends-in-view” (Dewey, 1929/1985, p. 81). While ends-in-view refer to what one desires as aims, ends are the actual goods obtained. Although people may have many ends-in-view, the only final end or *telos* that is of real value for Dewey is growth (Savage, 2002). Competitions are justified insofar as they are ends-in-view that lead to

growth. Conversely, if competitions are regarded as ends rather than ends-in-view whereby students are motivated by what James terms “spiteful and greedy” rivalry, they degenerate into what Dewey (1916/1978) calls “externally imposed” (p. 108) ends that are miseducative.

The Value of Skill

Given this present theory of action, it appears that the pragmatists regard skill as a legitimate form of knowing. Why then do some educators claim that Dewey does not advocate skill development in the classroom? Are there resources in Dewey’s writings that suggest so? If so, what insights can we gather with respect to the value of skill and its place in the instrumental curriculum?

On the one hand, Dewey appears to reject training for skill in the classroom. Consider, for example, his comment that “a given experience may increase a person’s automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience” (Dewey, 1929/1985, p. 11). This passage has often been taken to mean that educators should banish drill from their classrooms (see Noddings, 2010). Dewey’s (1916/1978) warning that factory-like skill efficiency results in the narrowing of intelligence recalls Allsup and Benedict’s critique of band rehearsals as being “Fordist” (p. 91). Further, Dewey’s (1916/1978) comment that “music and literature are theoretically justified on the ground of their culture value” but “are then taught with chief emphasis upon forming technical modes of skill” may be interpreted as a caution against teaching for performance skills (p. 267). Jorgensen (2011) suggests that Dewey leans towards treating music as a “field of study in the humanities” rather than as a “skill-oriented subject” (p. 307). In short, there appears to be a case against an emphasis on skill in Dewey’s writings.

On the other hand, it appears that Dewey does not repudiate the acquisition of automatic skill. He critiques the ancient Greek notion that theoretical knowledge has higher value than skill knowledge (Dewey, 1916/1978). For Dewey (1922/1978), those who wish a “monopoly of social power” find it desirable to separate thinking and doing so that “the dualism enables them to do the thinking and planning, while others remain the docile, even if awkward, instruments of execution” (p. 52). Claiming that “any striking exhibition of acquired skill in physical matters, like that of an acrobat or billiard-player, arouses universal admiration” (Dewey, 1922/1978, p. 47), Dewey (1934/ 1985, p. 103) notes that “a surgeon, golfer, ball player, dancer, painter, or violin-player has at hand and under command certain motor sets of the body,” without which “no complex skilled act can be performed.” He sees the acquisition of skill as a basis for creative expression, and posits that skill is “admired not as part of the external equipment of the artist, but as an enhanced expression belonging to the object” (Dewey, 1934/1985, p. 145). Jorgensen (2011) argues that for Dewey, any subject of study should be “engaged personally, vitally, experientially, and performatively” (p. 341), the implication being that “in order to understand music, one must understand how it is made” (p. 217). She further argues that Dewey’s theory of doing and undergoing, which suggests that students need to do and undergo music in order to learn about it, resonates with Swanwick’s (1994) performance-based approach to music education. Thus, contra the preceding paragraph, Dewey may be taken to argue for an emphasis on skill.

The two differing emphases may be resolved as follows: Dewey is against skill acquisition as an end in itself, but for it as a tool to move students towards aesthetic experience and the understanding of the cultural value of music (Dennis, 1967). With respect to the relation of skill and aesthetic experience, he explicitly argues that “motor preparation is a large part of

On Practice, Skill and Competition

esthetic education.” For Dewey, a “skilled surgeon is the one who appreciates the artistry of another surgeon’s performance; he follows it sympathetically, though not overtly, in his own body.” He further posits that a person who has studied the piano “will hear something the mere layman does not perceive—just as the expert performer ‘fingers’ music while engaged in reading a score” (Dewey, 1934/1985, pp. 103-104). By implication, the active doing of instrumental music not only leads the student towards aesthetic experiences while practicing and performing (as I have shown), but also assists in enabling an aesthetic experience while listening to music. Dewey can thus be taken to regard *praxis as a tool of the aesthetic*. And since the aesthetic experience is fulfilling and motivates students towards further doing, his ideas can also be extended to regard *aesthetic as a tool of the praxis*. Both are ends-in-view that lead to the other; the end is growth. Construed as such, the aesthetic and the praxial are continuous, thus “dissolving” (Stroud, 2011, p. 7) the dualistic debate (e.g., Reimer, 1970; Elliott, 1995) that has occupied music education philosophy for several years.

With respect to skill acquisition as a tool to assist in the understanding of the cultural value of music, Dewey (1928/1985) writes that learning comprises “at least three factors: knowledge, skill, and character. Each of these must be studied” (pp. 267-268). Dewey explicitly approves education that provides a framework of cultural understanding, and he sees skill and performance as vehicles that ought to be placed in proper balance with the active aspects of life. By implication, an instrumental curriculum should include an understanding of the musical traditions that one performs and their cultural value (i.e., “knowledge”), technique acquisition (i.e., “skill”), as well as “socially desirable attitudes and habits” of performing in an ensemble (i.e., “character”). For example, students in an orchestral program not only understand what a Strauss waltz is and its cultural value in European history (“knowledge”), but experience what a

On Practice, Skill and Competition

Strauss waltz is for themselves while performing (“skill”) in the context of cooperative ensemble (“character”). Through the school instrumental program, all three aspects of learning as identified by Dewey are fulfilled.

To summarize, skill is a legitimate form of knowing in Deweyan philosophy. Still, it should not be pursued for its own sake, but as a means towards the aesthetic experience and the study of music’s cultural value. From a Deweyan perspective, it has a place in the school instrumental curriculum as one of the three aspects that should be studied.

Conclusion

Using the distinction between “the artist and the mere technician” as a point of departure, I have proposed a two-fold theory of action that comprises effortful practice and effortless performance. Effortful practice consists of repetitive practice, thoughtful sequencing, unifying learning and persevering, while effortless performance comprises spontaneous freedom, reflection-in-action, recovery and joy. While these two facets are conceptually distinct, their differences cannot be overly emphasized. As noted in the story of “crossing the river to New York City,” experience can consummate even when one practices. For this to occur, however, the student must perceive relationships between the various activities, and reach a point whereby the skill matches the challenge. Pragmatism construes continuity between means and ends, practice and performance, the instrumental and the consummatory, and praxis and aesthetic, thus dissolving the question of whether one should focus on the process or product of performance.

To answer my research questions explicitly: (a) Should instrumental music education be skill-based and train for automatic skill? Yes, but only insofar as the habit cultivated is of the intelligent and artistic type. (b) What is the value of skill? As a means towards the aesthetic experience which, in turn, leads to more praxis, with the net result being musical growth. Skill

also has value as one of the three aspects of education that should be studied. (c) Should teachers focus on the intrinsic experience of instrumental music or the extrinsic goals of competition? The answer is neither, as pragmatist continuity dissolves the hard boundaries between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Competitions may effectively be used as ends-in-view to incentivize students to regard practice positively, thereby aiding them towards an aesthetic experience and growth.

I conclude this paper by reiterating its central thesis: the active doing of music in instrumental music education through effortful practice and effortless performance enables students to encounter the aesthetic peak experience. If Dewey (1926/1985) were right to say that the aesthetic experience is “the most precious thing in the real world” (p. 112), instrumental music education certainly has a place in the school curriculum. In seeking such experiences, educators enable students to go beyond the cognitive to embrace the affective, the subjective and the ineffable.

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On Practice, Skill and Competition

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