

SELF-REPORTED PERFORMANCE GOALS PREDICT ACTUAL PRACTICE BEHAVIOUR AMONG ADULT PIANO BEGINNERS

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Background

The numbers of adult instrumental beginners are soaring, yet published research on this group is still lacking. Also, practice has been recognized as a central aspect of skill acquisition and individual differences in efficiency of practice have been documented in child beginners. To date, no study exists about the practice behavior of adult beginners.

Aims

This study investigates the motivation of adult piano students and searches for links between motivational antecedents and practice behavior.

Method

A preliminary survey study was undertaken with 39 piano students (ages 19 to 74), assessing their goals and motivations in instrumental music. The questions dealt with their achievement goals and desire for recreation/relaxation. We found large individual differences regarding subjects' achievement goals. Subsequently, subjects with particularly high and low achievement expectation scores were videotaped during typical practice sessions in their homes. The video sequences were analyzed for proportions of activities qualifying as deliberate practice.

Results

The survey revealed that subjects' performance expectations were related to the reported duration of practice, with more ambitious persons reporting longer practice times. In the analyses of the videos we found a very strong association between observed deliberate practice activities and self-reported performance expectations. Subjects with high performance goals displayed a great variety of deliberate practice behaviors occupying major portions of the practice session, while subjects with low expectations did less so.

Conclusions

The strong link between self-reported achievement goals and use of deliberate practice behavior shows how instrumental learning in the absence of a teacher is guided by self-imposed goals to either reach certain levels of mastery or simply to enjoy oneself.