Bow Arm Deficiencies and the Remedial Strategies of Postsecondary Violin Instructors

Vanessa Mio, Ph.D., Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada
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Statement of the Issue

- Applied violin instructors at the postsecondary level often implement remedial pedagogy with incoming first-year students in order to address technical/musical habits or deficiencies (Lowe & Cook, 2003)
- In the early stages of learning, motor patterns are formed and they become habitual (Salzberg & Salzberg, 1981)
- “The right hand . . . generally cause[s] most of the trouble for the violinist” (Galamian, 1999, p. 44).

Objectives

- Investigate how postsecondary instructors implement remedial practices with their first-year students in an applied context
- Bring awareness to current and future violin pedagogues about the importance of correct early development

Methodology and Research Design

- Descriptive qualitative research design based on elements of multiple case study
- 10 postsecondary violin instructors from across North America were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol
- Interview data, external data sources, and artifacts were analyzed through the theoretical framework of empiricism, Social Development Theory, Scaffolding Theory, Attribution Theory, and Teacher Attribution Scaffolding Theory

Results

- Most pressing deficiencies with bow holds, knowledge of articulations and basic bow strokes, stiffness, immobile fingers and wrists, tension in the arm, poor tone production; bow arm affected by posture and body awareness
- Participants use scaffolding strategies to internalize technique: holding pencil; shoulder bowing and tapping fingers; understanding transfer of weight and balance from finger to finger; holding bow vertically and allowing the bow to slip to feel ideal finger pressure
- Mobilizing “springs” through martelé, détaché, and collé bow strokes
- Understanding three-dimensional nature of the string
- “Air violin” to feel freedom with the instrument
- Deficiencies as a result of: “bad teaching;” incomplete dissemination of information; students often have the knowledge of correct technique, but have made the choice to not internalize the information, either
because of laziness, rebellion, discomfort, or a failure to discern future implications

Conclusions

• Correction based on the individual psychological wellbeing of every student, their level of self-efficacy, resistance to change, and postsecondary pressures in meeting performance deadlines (Smith, 2005)
• Awareness of the “psychology of words” and how students respond to correction/information throughout the remedial process (Brian Lewis)
• Importance of establishing a personal connection and cultivating trust within mentor-student relationships (Hays, 2013); supporting students emotionally as they undergo physiological (technical) changes (William Wolcott)
• Participants agreed that although some first-year students resist remedial work, the majority exhibit an increased sense of self-efficacy through a positive feedback loop of practice, motivation, feedback from their instructor/peers, and tangible documentation of improvements

“AS TEACHERS, WE AFFECT CHANGE IN OUR STUDENTS WHEN THE ISSUE BECOMES IMPORTANT TO THEM” (Brian Lewis)

References


Contact

Vanessa Mio, Ph.D., MMus, BMus, Perf. Dipl.
vessamio5@gmail.com