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1 STRING TEACHING IN GROUP SETTINGS REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE CAMILLE SMITH

ROTE VERSUS NOTE-READING INSTRUCTION

Studies that deal specifically with rote versus note-reading teaching approaches in beginning string classes indicate that the elimination of note-reading in the early stages of instruction not only promotes a high level of skill development, but also has a significant positive effect on the student continuation rate.

Brunson, (1969), taught fourth-grade beginning string students to play 14 folk tunes using rote imitation drills and taped listening activities. A panel of string teacher experts evaluated students after a year of instruction and found this teaching approach promoted the rapid acquisition of basic left and right hand technical skills.

Glenn (1999), compared rote versus note instruction in sixth-grade beginning public school string classes. He assigned 42 students to either a rote or note-reading group. During the first three months of instruction, the rote group learned all the melodies through rote imitation. The note group learned the same melodies reading written notation. At the end of one year of instruction, Glenn compared the performance techniques and reading skills of both groups. While no significant differences in playing ability or sight-reading ability were found between the groups, the students receiving the extensive period of rote instruction had a significantly higher rate of continuation (70%) compared to the reading-centered group (30%).

INTONATION ACCURACY

String researchers have studied various instructional approaches to promote the development of accurate intonation in beginning string students. Cowden (1972) and Maag (1974) conducted two of the earliest studies. Cowden divided 37 fourth-grade students into two groups: (1) one beginning instruction in first position on the violin, and (2) one that beginning in third position. A panel of experts rated each student's intonation at the end of sixteen weeks and found that both teaching approaches had the same effect on intonation accuracy. Maag divided 146 fourth- and fifth-grade students into pentatonic and diatonic instructional groups. A panel of experts rated each student's intonation at the end of six months and concluded that the pentatonic instructional approach had produced the most accurate intonation.

A study conducted in the 1980s by English (1985) examined another approach to developing accurate intonation. English divided 42 fourth-grade students into three groups as follows: (1) Group A used no piano accompaniment during instruction, (2) Group B used piano accompaniment 100 percent of the time, and (3) Group C used piano accompaniment 50 percent of the time. Intonation ratings at the end of nine weeks of instruction indicated that the students who used no accompaniment during instruction made the greatest gains in intonation accuracy; and the students who only used accompaniment 50 percent of the time had better intonation than did those who used accompaniment 100 percent of the time.

Studies conducted in the 1990s by Smith (1995) and Bergonzi (1997) examined two other instructional approaches. Smith studied the effects of an aural-oral pitch-matching training program on students' aural discrimination and performance pitch accuracy. She divided 96 sixth-grade beginning string students into control and experimental groups. The students in the experimental groups were released from string classes for twice-weekly pitch-matching training sessions. Smith indicated that the students in the experimental groups made the greatest gains in both aural discrimination and performance-pitch accuracy.

Bergonzi studied the effects of fingerboard placement markers and harmonic accompaniment on intonation accuracy. He divided 76 sixth-grade students into control and experimental groups. The students in the experimental groups used finger placement markers and audiocassettes with harmonic accompaniments for each song they learned. Bergonzi indicated the students in the experimental groups had the most accurate intonation.