Deliberate Practice in Learning Music

Kata Practitioner Day
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Purpose

- KPD: Sharing experiences on making scientific thinking a practical skill, which anyone can learn through practice.

- My Presentation: Start the day with some thinking about how adults learn, and the role of deliberate practice in developing new skills.
Agenda

• How not to learn/practice
• Ingredients of Deliberate Practice
• Deliberate Practice in Music, generally
• Deliberate Practice in Music, specifically
• Suggestions for all teachers and learners
• Questions?
How not to learn

• Trying to teach myself
• Spending hours at the driving range
• Attempting to play golf
Paths to success in learning new skills

• Take lessons from a professional
• Practice productively
• Let go of adult mental roadblocks
• Realize that we can’t always feel exactly what our bodies are doing
• Self-evaluate non-critically
• Keep a journal, with reminders
Some Ingredients of “Deliberate Practice”

• Passion, enthusiasm, motivation
• How you practice is important, not just simple repetition.
• Work on your errors. Get outside your comfort zone.
• Get immediate coaching input for corrections. *Practice make permanent.*
Deliberate Practice in Music

• Practice intentionally
  – Set goals (long-term and short-term)
  – Keep a practice journal

• Practice S-L-O-W-L-Y (“The more slowly you learn something the more slowly you’ll forget it”)

• Develop muscle memory

• Practice mindfully

• Practice musically

• Use principles of variety and repetition
Deliberate Practice in learning how to play an instrument

- Good teaching
  - Good modeling
  - Teaching how to practice correctly
- Practice mindfully and regularly
  - Keep a journal
- Use audio and video feedback
- Use both private and group lessons
- Listen to recordings and attend recitals
Deliberate practice in participating in a large ensemble

- Practice one’s part individually
- Practice in a sectional rehearsal
- Learn and practice *listening* skills
- Learn and practice *watching* skills
Deliberate practice in learning how to play in a handbell choir

- Learning to play one or two notes at a time
- Exercise
  - Singing “Happy Birthday” the way a bell choir would (approximately)
Deliberate practice in learning how to conduct a musical ensemble

- Practicing right hand skills
- Practicing left hand skills
- Practicing independence of hands
Deliberate practice in conducting

• Exercise
  – Drawing opposite circles
  – Showing dynamics
Suggestions for TEACHERS on learning for mastery

• If the student hasn’t learned, the teacher hasn’t taught.
• DEMONSTRATE, then have them try. “Teaching isn’t telling.”
• Learn with the body. Let the student experience it.
• Let the student repeat the exercise as many times as necessary, but correctly. Give corrective feedback to work on the errors.
Suggestions for LEARNERS on learning for mastery

• Practice slowly and one chunk at a time.
• Get a coach!
• Write it down.
• Fake it till you make it.
• Remember how you learned as a kid.
• Try redirection.
• Start with simple routines. You won't be an expert right away.
What were some of the first things you remember learning as a child?

- How to tie your shoes
- How to tell time
- How to read
Adults aren’t that different from children

- Embrace new challenges.
- Be ready to learn.
- The better you can do something, the more you want to do it; the more you do it, the better you become at it.
- And the more fun you have!
Questions?