

Public Abstract

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For many years, researchers have been investigating how and why certain people develop into experts in a given field. A primary difference between experts and non-experts is how they practice. Experts spend considerable amounts of time in deliberate practice, i.e., an intense, targeted form of practice (Ericsson, 1996), rather than mindless repetition. While this explains expertise in musicians, chess players and medical students (Ericsson, 2008), it does not fully explain the differences among athletes (Starkes, Deakin, Allard, Hodges, & Hayes, 1996). At first, sport psychologists were not able to understand why some athletes were able to change sports and learn the skills for the new sport with less than predicted amounts of deliberate practice. While studying athletes, sport psychologists developed a more comprehensive model to explain athletic expertise by including activities in a new category, deliberate play. The Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) includes the intense activities of deliberate practice, and the more flexible, play-like activities of deliberate play.

Like many other fields, music study requires a great deal of time and effort before a student can progress to expert levels of performance. DMSP has clarified how athletes develop, particularly by accounting for the skills gained before intense, deliberate practice becomes a priority. Research has shown that musicians also gain skills through deliberate practice; however, deliberate play activities have not been considered in a music setting. Given recent advances in research related to the development of expertise in athletes, the purpose of this dissertation was to apply these theories to the development of expertise in musicians, through three studies.

The first study is a review of literature pertaining to expertise development and the activities of development. The second study was based on interviews to determine if DMSP and the concept of deliberate play could be applied to expert musicians. Findings from the two studies indicated that DMSP did explain music expertise development, and that a new aspect termed awareness should be added to the model for musicians.

The third study was an experiment to investigate the use of deliberate play activities in band classes, carried out with two groups of middle school students. One group of students replaced traditional music scale practice as part of their group warm-up with deliberate play scale games. The second group of students continued to practice their scales using the traditional methods. Each week, the students audio recorded a scale for the researcher. The weekly scale performance scores were compared for accuracy and overall skill level, but there was no difference between groups. Results of a practice behavior and motivation questionnaire indicated that attitudes did not change during the short study.

By considering the results of the three papers, I have determined that music deliberate play is an idea relevant to musicians' development, and that students can learn through music deliberate play activities. Although more research is needed to determine how deliberate play functions in a classroom setting, educators should consider using these types of activities because they may be more enjoyable than traditional practice techniques.