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## “If I Have Time”: Junior High School Instrumentalists’ Attitudes Regarding Practice

By

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of junior high school students (n = 6) regarding home musical practice through semi-structured interviews. The researcher approached students’ parents (n = 6) and their band director (n = 1) for their views on the subject. He interviewed a sample of seventh and eighth grade band students from a single junior high school in the Midwest, their parents, and their band director to collect and triangulate data. This data related to (a) how junior high school students describe instrumental music practice, (b) how junior high school students and their parents attribute success and failure in the practice room, (c) what motivates junior high school band students to practice their instrument, and (d) what information junior high school band parents feel that they need to help their son or daughter grow musically through home practice. Results indicated that all participants believed that practice was the single best way for students to improve on their band instrument. Pre-adolescent musicians noted a propensity toward internal attributions, such as ability and effort, regarding successful practice outcomes. Students considered contemporary music selection, playing tests, and parental involvement to be the essential motivators toward practice. Parent interviewees indicated that they were not interested in any additional information or training that might help them aid their child in home practice. Nearly all parents and students believed that home practice was solely the child’s responsibility.*

*Keywords: music, junior high school, band, attribution theory, practice, parents*

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Practicing—the action of “learning through systematic experience or exercise” (Austin & Berg, 2006, p. 535)—is one of the most fundamental musical behaviors necessary to achieve success on a musical instrument. Learning a skill-related task requires hours of work to achieve a basic level of understanding or ability; therefore, one may assume that success derives from hours of dedicated work or study. Adults and children alike can thus relate that only through dedicated and focused effort can achievement occur in any activity—the same is true of musical study (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007). Students must make a concentrated effort to improve before they can achieve any lasting behavior and success in music.

Numerous studies note the importance of practice in achieving instrumental music success. Many studies include data on increasing practice time and its positive effects on the developing musician (Ericcson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Miksza, 2007; Sloboda, Davidson, Howe, & Moore, 1996). Sloboda (1994) made the assertion that “the level of skill [on an instrument] is almost entirely dependent on the amount of relevant practice undertaken” (p. 152). Focused practice results in the achievement of particular skill levels on a musical instrument (Sloboda et al., 1996). The amount of focused practice—that is, a person’s commitment to musical development—is contingent upon the quality and quantity of concentrated study. Many educators would likely agree that starting skill acquisition and development at a young age will lead to better overall results.

Research has also noted that adolescents often view music practice differently than adults (Lehman et al., 2007; Austin & Berg, 2006; Miksza, 2006). From a student viewpoint, practice may be regarded akin to homework—often more of a work-related activity than a play-like endeavor. In reality, many students choose to “play” an instrument for the first time due to this very important phraseology—music study is often anticipated to be pleasurable, as the word play accurately implies. Lehman et al. (2007) noted that work’s objective is to provide a reliable and

sustainable behavior. Conversely, the object of play is to further personal well-being in physical, emotional, or cognitive domains. Austin and Berg (2006) investigated the professional musician's view of practice and found that the professional is inclined to view practice as work and therefore derive less enjoyment from their practice sessions. Miksza (2006) found that most musicians appear to be inspired by intrinsic motivators, such as meeting personal goals and challenges. Armed with relevant information of the adolescent musician's attitudes and perceptions of practice, educators could hope to devise learning and motivational strategies that parallel students' attitudes and views. These activities could potentially inspire future musical success through practice over the student's lifetime.

Research has also examined instrumental music success in terms of its relationship to motivational belief theories (Driscoll, 2009; Hallam, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992; Anderman & Maehr, 1994). Children and adolescents choose to spend more time on an activity if they value and perceive a desired outcome as worthy of their effort; many studies confirm that intrinsic motivation is the most important influence to sustaining lasting enthusiasm over time (Driscoll, 2009; Hallam, 2002). Various studies have noted a decrease in motivation for academic-related pursuits and an increase in the importance of non-academic activities, especially athletic pursuits, in school-age children between Grades 4-5 (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992) and Grades 6-7 (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). These unenthusiastic attitudes and behaviors tend to defeat any major investment in schooling during the junior high school years (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). As most instrumental music programs begin instruction in the late elementary or early middle school years, this decrease in motivation may make it even more difficult for the music educator to instill any lasting commitment to musical success in students.

Students at the junior high school level make conscious choices between what they find important, akin to their perceptions of the world, and what they do not enjoy. Over the last two

decades, researchers have found that many children are able to differentiate between what they appear to like and believe is important for their lives and their feelings of competence in completing a given task (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Wigfield, 1994).

Researchers have studied beginning students for their behaviors regarding practice motivation (Berg, 2008). Berg (2008) studied two seventh-grade string instrumentalists in their third year of study. Berg (2008) examined the students' self-regulatory behaviors in the practice room as well as practice motivation via the Music Practice Inventory (MPI), a researcher-developed questionnaire. In this study, participants were partially motivated to practice by a teacher-instituted time requirement. One student was motivated in instrumental music participation by the sound of the ensemble, their past experiences in the group, and a sense of autonomy in the practice room through the playing of her favorite pieces at the end of a practice session. The other participant was motivated more by external factors including receiving attention from others and the mood-altering nature of playing a musical instrument. Berg (2008) noted that, on occasion, one of the participant's motivation was deterred by the difficulty of the musical selection, the equipment being used, and the instructor. These causal attributes of success or failure add to the growing body of research on the subject. The findings seem to suggest that participants are more motivated by varied routines, use of strategies, environment, and behaviors, rather than a practice time requirement.

Researchers have used Attribution Theory as a theoretical lens through which to view music practice. Attribution Theory suggests that humans attempt to understand why achievement events occur based on specific factors (Weiner, 1974), especially true in relation to disappointing outcomes. In building upon Weiner's (1974) seminal research, Austin and Vispoel (1998) suggested that there are four causal attributes to success or failure in a specific task, specifically: (a) ability, (b) effort, (c) task difficulty, and (d) luck. Studies indicated that students often have

greater tendencies toward internal attributions, such as ability and effort, rather than external attributions, such as task difficulty and luck (Asmus, 1995; Austin & Vispoel, 1998). Similarly, perceptions of low achievement and low self-concept appeared to correlate with feelings of a lack of ability and negative family influence as plausible reasons for failure in a task (Austin & Vispoel, 1998). In considering the musical applications of Attribution Theory, the choice to practice or not practice a musical instrument may be due to the student's perceptions of a lack of ability, their inability to expend sufficient effort on the task, an unusually high perceived task difficulty, or their discernment of luck regarding a task. These feelings may also be projected onto other students who appear to display success on their musical instrument, noting that a peer's success in music may be due to attributes of ability, effort, task difficulty, or luck.

Other studies have looked at music achievement motivation from within the two-dimensional model of Attribution Theory. In research by Asmus (1986), 589 students in the 4<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades from eight public schools completed two open-ended responses in which they were requested to indicate five reasons why some students do well in music and five reasons why some students do not do well in music. Eighty percent of participants' beliefs regarding success in music were due to internal attributes, such as ability or effort, while failure in music appeared to have been viewed as being due to external factors, such as task difficulty or luck.

Studies that have viewed Attribution Theory in relation to student success and failure note that causal attributions of success may be internal—attributes that originate from the person—or external—attributes that originate from an outside source. Internal and external attributes can be viewed as stable, meaning not perceived by the person as likely to change over time with repetition, or unstable, meaning perceived by the person to change with repetition (Legette, 1998). In Legette's (1998) study, 1,114 public school students completed a Music Attribution Orientation Scale created by Asmus. Results of the study appeared to indicate that

students placed more importance on ability and effort attributes. This appears to be especially true for females over males, which is different than previous research where females tended to view their success and failure as more external than males (Bar-Tal, 1978). In addition, students from city schools placed more importance on ability and effort than those in county schools. In Asmus' (1986) study, female students included more internal-stable reasons for success than males. A greater number of internal-stable attribution responses increased with grade level, while internal-unstable reasons declined.

One of the most challenging, yet fundamental, aspects of teaching instrumental music is attempting to find ways to encourage student development inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers readily acknowledge the importance of practice to develop musical skill acquisition, often based on their own experiences with practice; however, getting younger students to voluntarily recognize the direct benefits of concentrated musical study may be more difficult. In light of Attribution Theory, Asmus (1986) noted that the “beliefs students have about the causes for success and failure at a musical task will influence how the students approach the task in the future” (p. 274). This is arguably one of the most important reasons that educators need to explore student perspectives of musical practice and create appropriate instructional activities to motivate musical growth through practice. Stake (1995) noted that there is a need for research that uses various data sources, including interviews with students, parents, and teachers, to allow for triangulation of data. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of six junior high school students regarding home musical practice through semi-structured interviews. The students' band director and their parents also provided their views on the subject. The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) How do junior high school students describe instrumental music practice?

- 2) To what do junior high school students and their parents attribute success and failure in the practice room?
- 3) What motivates junior high school band students to practice their instrument?
- 4) What information do junior high school band parents feel they need to help their son or daughter grow musically through home practice?

## Method

### Participants

The participants ( $N = 13$ ) in this study were seventh ( $n = 4$ ) and eighth grade instrumentalists ( $n = 2$ ), their respective parent ( $n = 6$ ), and the students' band director ( $n = 1$ ). All student participants were members of the seventh or eighth grade band program at a single Midwestern suburban middle school (see Table 1) with a total enrollment of 805 students in Grades 5-8 (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). Parent participants were five mothers and one father. Two parent participants had prior musical training, as they had played an instrument in their school band program for at least four years. The middle school band director had been at his present assignment for three years instructing instrumental music in the fifth through eighth grades with three years of overall teaching experience. The band director's primary responsibilities included fifth grade band, sixth grade band, seventh grade band, eighth grade band, and a before-school jazz band. Each ensemble met five days per week. Pseudonyms have been assigned to protect the identity of all participants.

- Insert Table 1 about here -

Each student participant was enrolled in the seventh or eighth grade band at a suburban middle school in the Midwest. All students had elected to begin instrumental music study in the fifth grade at their current middle school and had been playing their instrument for between 3-4 years at the time of this study. Of the six student participants in the study, four were female, two

were male. Two of the six students played woodwind instruments and four played brass instruments. Seventh and eighth grade band classes met five days each week for 45 minutes each day. The research was not affiliated with the school, school district, or its participants in any way.

### **Procedures**

The researcher arranged for the distribution of a written letter distributed to all student participants during their band class. Student participants were instructed via script read by the band director to take the consent forms home to their parents for their review. Through this letter, the researcher found volunteer student participants and obtained consent for the study. The letter expressly stated that participation in the study did not, in any way, affect standing or grading by the school district. The researcher provided sealed envelopes in which to collect consent forms and these envelopes were opened only by the researcher. The researcher, as well as the written letter, advised participants that audio-recorded interviews were a mandatory part of the study and that anonymity would be maintained to protect privacy. The researcher determined student participants and their parents by purposive sampling from the signed and returned consent forms. To determine the student participants for the study, the researcher requested that the band director order the list of student names prepared by the researcher from those who the director felt practiced most to those who practiced least. The researcher chose two students from the top, middle (median), and bottom of the ordered list for participation.

Data were collected over a 2-week period during Spring 2010. Each participant completed a standardized open-ended interview with the researcher within two weeks of returning their consent form. Questions for the interviews were separated into four general areas: (a) parental role, (b) practice environment, (c) attitudes regarding practice, and (d) practice instruction. Student participants completed a 22-question standardized interview with the

researcher during their normal band period (see Appendix A). Student interviews lasted between 18 and 23 minutes and were held in a practice room adjacent to the band room. The practice room was barren except for two posture chairs and a metal workstation that housed an aged computer system. A vertical window in the practice room door provided viewing of the band rehearsal. The researcher contacted parent participants by telephone for their 14-question interview (see Appendix B). Interview times with parent participants ranged from 13-22 minutes. The researcher conducted the 14-question interview with the teacher (see Appendix C) during the teacher's planning time in the middle of the school day after all student and parent interviews had been completed. The teacher interview occurred in the teacher's office and lasted approximately 18 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded on a digital voice recorder (Olympus VN-4100PC) and transcribed using HyperTranscribe software. Data were imported into HyperResearch software in search of emergent themes.

In order to increase trustworthiness in analysis, the researcher utilized member checking, data triangulation, and peer debriefing in this study. The researcher provided transcripts to each participant privately to ensure accuracy or to stimulate any follow-up feedback through member checks. This type of respondent validation sought to understand if the participants agreed with the researchers' conclusions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Triangulation of data from interviews with students, parents, and teacher was also used to increase trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). In addition, peer debriefing aided in enhancing the accuracy and interpretation of coding (Creswell, 2009).

## **Results**

### **Student Participants**

**Students' views regarding practice.** The student participants in the study reported widely differing views regarding instrumental music practice; however, all six students indicated

some degree of positive affect regarding their accomplishments through practice. John, a 13-year-old trombone player, indicated that practicing “makes the whole song sound better,” while other students noted that they practiced to improve note reading, rhythms, “to clean the work,” or to improve pitch accuracy or tuning. In sum, practicing helped the student participants to become more advanced musicians. In regard to pitch, Alyssa, a 14-year-old flute player, suggested that practice would not improve tuning because you would “pretty much have to go to class. I mean, if you want to master your notes or work better at your notes, then you might want to practice.”

In considering the skills needed to be able to practice effectively, student participants in the study indicated a variety of internal and external skills. Most frequently noted were feelings of patience and perseverance. Regarding patience, William indicated, “patience is important and I do get frustrated with myself at times.” Beth, a 12-year old clarinet player, noted, “sometimes when I’m practicing I get very frustrated...but my other hobby of reading is just calming and fun.” Jennifer, a 13-year old trumpet player, suggested, “practice is not hard like track is. I could practice, but if I don’t practice, I don’t get kicked out.” Regarding perseverance, John indicated that a middle school student needed “enough thought... otherwise you’d keep putting it off.” Beth, a 12-year old clarinet player, noted that students would have to “want to do it [practice], because if you don’t want to do it, you’re never going to get anywhere.” Beth continued, “a lot of kids get bored very quickly so they aren’t able to just drill things over and over again.” Other skills regarding practice ranged from “quietness of mind” to “pushing yourself beyond what you think you can do.”

When asked if instrumental music practice was demanding, the general consensus from student participants in the study was that practicing was not inherently difficult. Through this line of questioning, a variety of definitions of practice became evident. William, a 13-year old horn player, indicated that practice was not difficult “if it’s just repetition. The hard work is

expanding your range.” Alyssa, a 13-year old flute player, indicated, “if you know the piece and you’re good at it, then it [practicing] is pretty easy.” John suggested, “I don’t know if it’s difficult, but sometimes it’s difficult to want to do because I’d rather be doing something else.” Similarly, Jennifer, a 13-year old trumpet player, indicated that she thinks “people say it’s hard because they don’t want to practice and come up with excuses to not practice.” Tristan added, “if I have time, I might practice...but it’s not as much fun as my other things [activities].” While none of the students in the study considered the practicing task to be difficult, few found it appealing.

**Student motivation to practice.** All student participants in the study indicated that the primary component of making some students more musically successful than others was increased quantity and quality of instrumental music practice. While some students indicated other elements such as competition, private lessons, and a general desire to improve, across all of the student conversations, participants mentioned practice more frequently than any other characteristic. Moreover, each student expressed positive views of musical self-efficacy. When asked if they were a “good player,” all students indicated a positive affirmation. Tristan, a 13-year old trumpet player, noted that he was a good musician because he had a good tone. William suggested that his positive abilities were due to a general “musicianship.” Beth indicated that she knew how to read music and paid attention in class, ostensibly making her a good musician.

Despite student participants appearing to realize the inherent value of instrumental music practice, their reasons for not practicing varied widely. The primary detractor from practicing in this study appeared to be a lack of contemporary music. Jennifer summarized four of six student participants’ views: “I would buy better music...I’m not a big classical music fan.” Beth added that while the music in band “is not exactly classical, it’s not pop.” John further delineated that he preferred practicing guitar to trombone because he could “play the songs that I hear [from

popular culture].” Alyssa continued that her band’s music had a “classical feel...especially from a student standpoint. It’s not the stuff we’re used to hearing.” Clearly, music selection was important to the student participants in the study.

When asked to assume the role of the teacher in inspiring their classmates to practice, student participants suggested a variety of primarily extrinsic rewards. Students suggested grades, tests, and parties most often. Beth had a different outlook on the situation from her home experience: “We have to practice [each day] before we can go outside.” Beth continued that stickers, candy, and student autonomy in song selection would inspire her classmates to practice. She summarized the student participants’ suggestions with, “kids don’t like the reward of getting better, but they like candy or free time.”

**Parental involvement.** When asked questions regarding parental involvement in their home practice, four of six student participants indicated that their parents were never involved. Participants most frequently cited their parent not being musical as a reason for lack of parental involvement in student practice. Of the two students who indicated that their parents were involved in their home practice, William indicated that his mother might provide regular compliments and suggest that he was improving on his instrument; these comments appeared to be important to William. Proximity was often mentioned as important for student motivation to continue to practice. Jennifer indicated, “last year when I wasn’t very good, I had to be in the basement when I practiced, but now that I’m better, they [my parents] don’t mind.” Similarly, Beth noted, “sometimes if my mom is really tired, she’ll tell me to go practice in the basement.” In both cases, Jennifer and Beth reported less practice time due to various issues with the basement practice regimen. Furthermore, John noted that his mother would be present nearby so that she could see him and keep tabs on his progress, which would positively affect the duration of his practice.

**School involvement.** At various times throughout the student interviews, the researcher asked participants whether or not their band director promoted instrumental music practice. Student participants indicated that they were encouraged to practice by the director approximately once per week. Beth noted that “he [the band director] doesn’t really tell us...well, he does, but he doesn’t remind us constantly.” Tristan suggested that the request to practice was sporadic at best. John also noted that the suggestion to practice only occurred, at most, once per week. In most cases, students indicated that the request to practice came immediately before concerts. Furthermore, when students were asked if they were ever instructed on how to practice, all six participants indicated that they had never been educated on how to practice.

### **Junior High School Parents**

All six junior high school band parents had similar responses to perceptions and beliefs of their son or daughter’s instrumental music practice. In regard to the parents’ hearing their child making music, most indicated a regular pattern of 3-4 days of music making at home each week; however, none of this was on the student’s band instrument. Two parents reported music making in the form of their child teaching themselves a new instrument, such as guitar or piano. This informal learning came through internet-based tutorials found on YouTube™ or sheet music downloads. The other music making activities were on non-band instruments. Two parents reported regular piano practicing, while two other students had not brought their instrument home to practice in at least three months. Reasons parents gave for their child not practicing their band instrument included extra-curricular activities like sports and dance teams, homework, an active home life, and not having an instrument at home to use. All parents indicated homework to be the greatest priority for the use of home time, while sports were indicated by three of the six parents as being secondary to homework. Music practicing ranked third.

All six parents agreed that the school did not have a practice requirement for their son or daughter that they were aware of; however, three of the six parents indicated that the school would like its students to practice regularly. None of these three parents enforced this “requirement.” John’s mother indicated that, “I leave it up to him. If he wants to practice, then he must manage his own time.” Three parents had previously attempted to encourage their child to practice by repeatedly asking them to bring their instrument home a few times each month, asking to see their child’s music on occasion, or leading a child to practice by asking them to perform a piece that they liked followed by a more challenging work.

Timing and location of practice were also similar among the six student participants, as reported by their parents. Four of the six students tended to practice immediately before dinner after their homework had been completed for the evening; the remaining two students tended to practice immediately following dinner. In addition, all six parents indicated that when their child had practiced in the past, the student preferred an open space where others could hear or view their practice. Three students practiced in an open living space where they could be seen or heard, while the other three students tended to practice in their bedrooms with the door always open.

All parents indicated that their child was musical; however, their definitions of a musically skilled child varied. Responses indicated that the six parents felt the following qualities were important for student success: in-school instruction, private lessons, perseverance, being an “excellent [music] reader,” organization, inspiration from other band members and siblings, constant exposure to music, an inherent draw to music, and practice. All six parents indicated practice as being the most important element of success for a musical child.

Two of the six parents interviewed believed that they had a substantial musical background that would benefit their child when practicing. In the words of one parent who stated

that they were not musical, music “feels like a foreign language. I never got into it in school, so my child is on their own.” When asked if they would like additional assistance that would help their child practice at home, all six parent participants indicated that they were not interested in any additional information or education on the subject.

The six parent participants expressed agreement on many points. All six parents indicated that their child was musical and remarked that their child was capable of musical growth. All six parents noted that practice would make their child more successful on their musical instruments. Furthermore, all six parents disclosed that their son or daughter was capable of practicing effectively on their own without additional intervention or instruction. Tristan’s mother noted that “he keeps up in band class, so that’s enough. There’s no need to practice if he’s doing okay.”

### **Mr. W., Band Director**

Mr. W., the students’ band director, acknowledged informing students of the necessity of practice on a regular basis. While there was no instituted practice requirement in the seventh and eighth grade bands, “I try to tell them—even 10-15 minutes a day would be great—I try to say that, but I don’t know if that really happens.” In regard to parental involvement, Mr. W. said:

I would say for the most part that the parents are helping out. They’re pretty supportive with what the kids are doing in school. If you say that they need to practice for something, most times the parents are going to help make that happen.

This was especially true for fifth grade band members where “we have the parents come in so that they can try to help them [the students] out at least a little bit. I don’t know if it lasts for a very long time, but at least it initially helps out.” Not only telling students how long to practice, but also how to practice is important to Mr. W.:

I try to point out how they can practice as we go through things. “If you want to do the rhythm better, try ‘ta ti-ti.’ If you want to practice getting up higher, do this,” especially with the younger kids. I’ll say “here’s what we worked on today, now go home and try it on your own.”

Mr. W. noted a couple of detractors from getting students to practice:

I think a lot of it is that they have a lot of focus on other things. Another thing a lot of kids run into is that they don't want to carry that instrument home. For some of them, it's not the cool thing to do [be in band] because if they get seen carrying their instrument home, or they take it to practice, they think they're going to get made fun of or something like that. I think that deters a lot of kids from taking it home and doing it even though they may want to.

Mr. W. felt that practicing does aid student growth and development. Perhaps the biggest motivators in Mr. W's band are the jazz band, solo and ensemble contest, allowing students to pick songs for the winter concert, and concerts outside of school. Music selection is also important:

Basically, I try to put a challenging piece in front of them so that they have something to work on—something to work towards. That hopefully motivates them to practice a little bit. And then, the other thing is having a test that you get a grade on. If you don't practice, then you'll have a consequence—you don't do as well with your grade. I think the other thing is when they see the other kids be successful.

Mr. W. felt that many aspects influence student development and success:

I'd probably say having a good opportunity to play, taking private lessons help out a lot, playing with other students who are doing things at a high level. For example, we have a jazz band that's more of a select group. Most times, they'll take it up a level when they're with kids who are working hard.

### **Discussion**

Through the use of student, parent, and teacher interviews, this study of six junior high school band members helps to clarify the pre-adolescent's views regarding instrumental music practice. From the student, parent, and teacher perspectives, instrumental music practice is well within a child's abilities and can help to improve note and rhythmic accuracy as well as overall musicianship. The students, parents, and teacher in this study indicated that the difficulty of

practice is not beyond the students' abilities. Students in this study felt that their musically superior peers were better at their instruments due to additional practice, private instruction, and a general desire to play their instrument. These findings are similar to research that noted that students often have a propensity toward internal attributions, such as ability and effort, rather than external attributions, such as task difficulty and luck, regarding success in a musical task (Asmus, 1995; Austin & Vispoel, 1998; Schatt, 2009). This bodes well for educators as junior high school students appear to feel that they are capable of musical growth through practice and admit the effectiveness of practice is in their own hands. The fact that students do not regard luck as the cause for musically talented peers being better at playing an instrument is a good sign, as students may be motivated to practice by their own desire to improve on a musical instrument.

All interviewees in this study indicated that practice is the single best way for students to improve on their band instrument. While most students and parents indicated that patience, self-determination, and focus are necessary skills needed for musical improvement, the question remains as to why students regularly choose to participate in other activities instead of musical practice. Two students help us to begin to answer this question, as they made mention of the social aspects of music practice being important. Four other students noted that having appropriate music to practice was vital to wanting to practice. Three students were particularly motivated by the desire to practice music that they hear in everyday life on the radio, portable music players, and other media outlets. Educators may use this information not only to consider adjusting programming choices for their ensembles, but also to provide supplementary musical material for their students to engage them in practice at home.

Motivation of pre-adolescent students to practice has always been a challenge for the junior high school music educator. While some students indicated extrinsic motivations to practice, most indicated that the primary reason for practicing was to do well on tests or playing

examinations. This is similar to results by Midgley et al. (1998) who noted two types of ability-related goals: (1) Ability-Approach Goals and (2) Ability-Avoidance Goals. Midgley et al. (1998) suggested that Ability-Approach Goals demonstrate a competence or an ability to perform a task. In this study, the Ability-Approach Goal was a playing test. Student participants also noted that the social aspects of being in band were important to improving on an instrument. One of the social aspects of being in band included the opportunity to practice with other students in a communal setting. While some students felt that the songs in band were too easy and did not require practice, other students were more interested in playing popular material and songs that were a part of the contemporary musical scene. Mr. W., the students' teacher, indicated that the extracurricular jazz band, competitions, and concerts helped to entice students to practice; the students in this study indicated otherwise. While no students in this study indicated receiving an extrinsic reward to engage them in practicing their band instrument, students suggested the following as plausible motivators: stickers, candy, autonomy in music played in class, movies, parties, or money. As Beth succinctly put it, "kids don't like the reward of getting better."

Perhaps unknowingly, parents play a larger role in student musical success than they realize. Mr. W. indicated that "for the most part parents are helping out" and that they are "pretty supportive with what the kids are doing in school [musically]." Mr. W. noted that if the teacher was to tell the parents that the students needed to practice for a particular reason, the parents would make home practice a reality. In nearly all instances, the parents interviewed in this study indicated that practicing was the student's personal responsibility and that they were uninvolved with the process. However, this study illustrates that students can find meaning in even the most subtle actions or words of a parent. Jennifer indicated that when she was not as good on her instrument, she had to practice in the basement; however, she practiced less because of the acoustics found in this location. Jennifer appears to have perceived this obligatory practice space

as a sign of her lack of ability, while being permitted to practice upstairs this year is a tremendous accomplishment. Similarly, Beth noted that when her mother is tired that she must practice in a different part of the house. This change of familiar space appears to be indicative of a lack of interest in her musical performance. Conversely, Alyssa, John, and Tristan seem to appreciate their parent's proximity to their practicing as a sign of accomplishment. William's mother uses positive comments like "Pretty good! Sounds like you're making progress!" to indicate her approval. All parents indicated that their son or daughter practiced in an open space or a space with an open door, which would appear to indicate that students desire to be heard. If teachers are able to encourage parents to be proactive and visible during a student's practice session, even just through proximity and the practice location being in an open space, it appears that students may be more inclined to practice, thus deriving positive affect from the experience.

Parents indicated through their interviews that they were not in need of any further information to help their students practice their band instrument. Nearly all parents noted that it was the student's responsibility to practice on their own and to create a schedule in which they could find time to practice around their homework and other activities. Despite beliefs by the teacher that parents were willing and able to aid in student practice, this does not appear to be the case. Interviews with students and parents appear to indicate that parents are rarely directly involved with student practice. Teachers may consider implementing a program where parents and students are taught how to practice together and thus parents may be able to aid students who encounter musical problems at home in their practice. Furthermore, an online support forum might aid parents in providing a resource on how to assist their student with practice.

Throughout the interviews, participants regularly mentioned a lack of access to a musical instrument as being a detractor to student practice. Specifically, the teacher and three parents noted the lack of having an instrument at home, or the transportation of the instrument to and

from school, as prohibitive to practice. Parents indicated that students practiced the piano and guitar more regularly at home due accessibility. Additional instruments for home practice, while perhaps not practical in all instances, may increase the incidence of student practice at home.

The definition of practice appears to have been an issue throughout this study. While at no time throughout the course of the study was practice defined for the participants, all interviewees appeared to have their own pre-conceived notions about musical practice. As many educators will likely attest, simply spending time with an instrument does not count as practicing (Lehmann et al., 2007); students appear to believe differently. A large discrepancy arose between the ideas of practicing at home, informal playing of music, and rehearsal in band class. Alyssa noted that “playing” in band was more helpful than practicing at home because there was an instructor to guide your performance and make the necessary corrections. Beth, however, put the beliefs of four other students to words when she noted that practice was “playing things over and over again...drilling things.” A simple presentation of the definition of practice may help to alleviate the misconception that merely playing an instrument, including during rehearsal, counts as practicing. Such a definition may help educators to begin to inspire students to legitimately practice their instruments through concentrated effort.

When asked if they were taught how to practice at school, all six student participants indicated that they had never been taught how to practice. Mr. W., however, specified that he regularly pointed out how to practice things in class and demonstrated practicing behaviors. This is similar to a study by Barry & McArthur (1994) who indicated that 84% of teachers responded that they “always” or “almost always” included specific instructions on how to practice in their lessons. However, 40% of students entering a musical conservatory in a study by Jorgensen (2000) noted that their instrumental teacher placed “very little” or “no” emphasis on practice instruction. The good news for teachers is that they can successfully teach practice strategies

(Barry, 1992). Research shows that students know what to practice, but they need assistance in knowing how to practice it (McPherson & Renwick, 2001).

There were a few obvious limitations to this study. In order to increase trustworthiness, the sample size may be increased to include students from other school districts. This larger sample could very well include different student attitudes and perceptions regarding practice. The current study only interviewed a single suburban middle school in the Midwest. Analysis of other regions around the country with varying proximity to urban areas and various socio-economic backgrounds may discover different results; this study should be replicated in those situations. The title of the study on the consent form may have caused bias among students and parents toward the intended outcomes of this study. While students did not indicate large amounts of practice time, a few were obviously embarrassed by their admission of a lack of home practice. Providing a workable definition of practice to the students, parents, and teacher may have alleviated any perceived miscommunication on the topic, but may have biased the respondents toward answering more positively toward concentrated practice.

In this study, interviews with students, parents, and the student's band director have illuminated student attitudes and beliefs regarding instrumental music practice in an attempt to improve instructional and motivational practices in the educational community. It appears that junior high school students readily acknowledge the importance of practice in achieving higher levels of musical growth and development. This study may lead to the creation of methods for instruction and materials on practicing as well as devising means of motivating students toward instrumental music practice that are akin to the pre-adolescent musician's views of practice. In addition, educators may consider finding ways to continue to involve parents in the practice process by educating them on the benefits of their involvement with practice. These benefits

include, but are not limited to, procuring additional instruments for home practice and providing readily available resources on how to promote student practice.

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Table 1

*Student & Parent Participant Characteristics*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Parent Relationship</i>	<i>Parent Music Bkgrd (Y/N)</i>
John	7	Trombone	M	Mother	N
Tristan	7	Trumpet	M	Mother	N
Beth	7	Clarinet	F	Mother	Y
Jennifer	7	Trumpet	F	Father	N
William	8	Horn	M	Mother	Y
Alyssa	8	Flute	F	Mother	N

*Note.* Pseudonyms assigned.

## APPENDIX A

## Student Interview Questions

*Do your parents ever help you to practice? How do they help/not help?*

*Do your parents encourage you to practice? What might they say?*

*Do your parents ever offer you a prize or a reward to practice? What might that be?*

*Are your parents ever bothered by your practice? What might they say that gives you that impression?*

*Do your parents like hearing you practice?*

*What do you think an ideal practice environment would look like?*

*Who could you make those changes to your practice environment to make it better?*

*How often does your teacher encourage you to practice? Would you give me an example?*

*Has your teacher ever taught you how to practice/given you instructions?*

*Do you have a practice requirement at your school?*

*If you were not practicing, what else might you be doing instead? Why is that activity more exciting to you than practice?*

*Do you feel practice can make you a better musician/performer?*

*Do you feel that you are capable of practicing?*

*What skills are needed to be able to practice?*

*How would you describe your abilities to practice?*

*What do you feel that you can accomplish through practice?*

*If you worked harder, could you achieve better results through practice? Why/Why Not?*

*Is practice hard work? Why/Why Not?*

*What was the hardest piece of music that you ever practiced? What made it difficult?*

*With more practice, would you be able to be successful at that difficult piece?*

*What makes other students in your band successful? Do you have those qualities?*

*Do you see yourself as a good player? Why or why not?*

## APPENDIX B

### Parent Interview Questions

*Do you hear your child making music at home? How often?*

*Are there certain hours when your child practices? Is allowed to play? Is required to play?*

*Does the school require your child to practice?*

*Does your child have a specific place to practice in your home? What does this environment look like?*

*Do you encourage your child to practice? How?*

*What makes a child skilled at playing an instrument?*

*Is your child musical?*

*What might prohibit your child from practicing their instrument?*

*What skills do you feel that you would like to have to help your child practice?*

*Do you consider yourself musical?*

*Does your child's teacher encourage them to practice at home?*

*Do you believe practice would help your child to get better at their instrument?*

*Do you feel that your son or daughter is capable of practicing effectively?*

*Do you feel that your child is capable of musical growth?*

## APPENDIX C

## Teacher Interview Questions

*What makes your most skilled musicians successful?*

*What makes your less skilled musicians unsuccessful?*

*Are all children musical?*

*Do you have a practice requirement for your ensembles/classes?*

*Are your students self-motivated? If not, how do you motivate students to practice?*

*How often do you address the topic of student practice in your rehearsals? How might you address this topic?*

*Why do you believe that some students practice more than others?*

*What skills would you like to have to encourage students to practice more?*

*Does practice improve student performance? How?*

*Do you believe parents help or hinder your students in practice? In what way?*

*What do you believe are the biggest detractors from getting your students to practice?*

*Have you ever presented ways to practice to your students in class?*

*How much practice time do you encourage your students to practice over the course of a typical week?*

*Do you encourage parents to be involved with their son or daughter's practice? If so, how?*