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A General Guidelines on Practical Teaching with the Concentration in Instrumental Pedagogy

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A GENERAL GUIDELINES ON PRACTICAL
TEACHING WITH THE CONCENTRATION IN
INSTRUMENTAL PEDAGOGY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
The School of Music
of
Wright State University

By

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Wright State University

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ABSTRACT

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Over the decades, music training becomes more popular, and more and more senior students are intended to enter the entertainment industry. Instrumental performance degree becomes more competitive compare to the past fifteen to twenty years, and because of this high level of competitiveness, the quality of it increase, more outstanding young artists are trained. The early training lay the foundation of one's ability and future. This research paper explores the potential challenges and issues regarding to instrumental teaching, and generate the ideas to music teacher on their awareness on these issues.

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Music is an art form and cultural activity whose medium is sound organized in time. Elements of music comprise of pitch, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, tone color and texture (Harper). Throughout the decades, music education has been widely developed and sophisticated. Music courses have been included in the academic curriculum from kindergarten to college. Music also becomes one of the most common topics for researchers and scientists. Base on the positive results of findings of the experiment, such as a better development of the brain; better coordination between the left and right brain; better personalities, etc. Thus, most parents will let their children start learning an instrument at an early age. Children usually start with piano as their first instrument because of the limitation of other musical instruments. However, because of the high competitiveness of the society, some parents, especially in Asian countries, are too hasty to urge their children to learn an instrument regardless of their ability, which distorts the original meaning of music education. There should not be any age minimum of learning an instrument because it depends on the ability of understanding and the muscle's development. Furthermore, children will encounter different obstacles as they reached to different levels. In this research paper, I am going to discuss the importance of music and to examine different problems of piano teaching.

Purpose. The purpose of conducting this research is to further explore the instrumental pedagogy more intensively. The idea of doing this should chased back my own

observation through my teaching experiences for the past few years. There is a serious circumstance of lacking qualified music teacher that students who are taking instrumental lesson or group classes are facing. A situation in music teaching that we are facing in Macau SAR is the excessive demand of practical qualification's exam in music.

Main causes of this are as follow:

1. Small city with extremely high competitiveness
2. Parent's hope their children to have bright future
3. The well-rounded development offer by the school and the government
4. Demand of prove of qualifications
5. Demand of music teacher with high salary

The two common practical examinations in Macau are the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music (ABRSM) and the London College of Music (LCM). The original purpose of taking these exams are to generate the ideas of level that students are approaching and giving them a goal as encouragement to approach the next level. However, due to the competitiveness between students, parents distort the purpose of these examinations and they become the tool of showing off. As this circumstance continue, the demand of music teacher is increasing. However, music is not a very common major in college study because the main government income for the past 20 years is tourism, and among the colleges in Macau, only one college offer music program with mainly concentration on music education for K1 to K12, and those who study

oversees in performance are not willing to return because of the future prospect. As the society is changing over time, performing arts become more popular and attract more students to learn performing arts including instruments, dance, visual arts, and so on. Therefore, under this shortage of qualified instrumental teacher with such a high demand, the certifications from the two-common examination board are used to replace the performance degree earn in college. These assessments are scored in four aspects:

1. Pieces: A piece chosen from each of the three categories.
2. Scales and Arpeggios
3. Sight Reading
4. Aural Test/ Musicianship

The passing grade of these graded exams are around sixty six percent overall, and the pieces account for the largest proportion of the grade, which attract more students just focus on practicing three pieces without any fundamental study before they take the exam, which they may pass the examination and get the certification easily without actual qualification. In addition, a lot of parents who do not have any knowledge of music think it is unnecessary to spend a lot money having a professional or qualify teacher for beginners. Because of the increasing demand in the market and the attitudes of parents towards teachers, more music organizations are set up to earn profit. In order to earn more profit, these organizations will hire teachers who are not qualifying to teach beginners in order to satisfy the market. And this practice arises a lot of issues when

students approach a higher level with another professional or qualified faculty since they attain many bad habits and techniques which affect the entire learning progress because they need times to change it once they formed bad habits. As there are so many misunderstanding of instrumental pedagogy, I would like to conduct this research to parents and teachers on the awareness of proper music learning.

Beginner's Level. The first step of starting music for most kids aged from 2 to 3 in recent days may be attending pre-music classes such as Orff Schulwerk, Dalcroze Method, etc.

Orff Schulwerk, also known as Orff Method, Orff Approach or Music for Children was developed during the 1920s to 1930s by Carl Orff, a German conductor, composer and music educator. The most famous composition of his is the oratorio “Carina Burana”. The ideas of Orff Method based on the importance of rhythm and movement. Kids build their musical sense of harmony, melody, texture, and musical elements through integrating music into body movements, drama and speaking and playing instruments. Kids who participate in these classes will not learn a particular instrument, instead, they have chances to play all major instruments within an instrument family such as Strings, Woodwinds, Brass, and Percussion. These classes can develop their further musical concept of creativity of the execution and improvisation of music (Estrella).

After taking these pre-music classes, kids should know that whether they are interested in music or not. If they are interested to continue to explore the music world,

choosing a particular instrument will then be the next huge question for both parents and kids. The first question for all parents is how to choose the best instrument for their kids. Not all instruments can be played by kids due to their understanding, muscles' development, dental, coordination, and their body type. In addition, there are a lot of factors that affecting the selection of an instrument. For instance, the smallest size of a double bass is approximately 61.4 inches. It becomes too big for a kid at the age of under 8 with normal height at that age. However, the size of a piano will never be a factor regarding to their age or body type. Thus, it is very common that kids start with piano as their first instrument ("Choosing an Instrument?").

Another major factor for most parents to consider is the cost of learning music. The main cost for most of them first is purchasing an instrument. For example, the cost of a brand-new piano for beginners range from approximately U.S.\$3,000 to U.S.\$ 120,000. Besides, some instruments are limited to the height of a kid because of its structure. For example, the size of a violin depends on the kid's arm length. As kids grow, they will then need to change their violin to a bigger size until they reach the full-size violin. These costs may not be affordable for all low-income families ("What It Cost"). Furthermore, tuition of learning music is definitely a long-term investment on kids. No one can estimate the time period of this investment. It mostly depends on their talents and abilities. Other costs that bring forward include instrument maintenance, consumables such as reeds for woodwind instruments, re-hairing for string bow, sheet music, etc.

(“Other Cost”). Moreover, “practice makes perfect”, practice is so important to success. If a kid would like to start learning music, time management is inevitably vital beyond their coursework assigned by the school (“Doing Your Practice”). As a result, coordination between these factors are the key of success in music.

Intermediate Level. When students come to intermediate level, they start to develop comprehensive musicianship. At this point, they will encounter different challenges regarding to technical problems, musicianship, musicality, repertoire selection and the basic understanding of composer’s styles. Since intermediate level can be the first step of accessing music literatures, teachers should oversee and build a curriculum for their students in order to track their progress. Having a good design of curriculum can assist students to maximize their learning objectives and outcomes.

Performances are important for students at this level, no matter the performance is good or not, students will gain a lot of experiences through different stages. It is not late for them to refine and hone their craft after failure. And failure is the best tool of success. No one will succeed without failure, failure makes you grow, and this is the cultivation of a successful artist. Teacher may also encounter challenges in repertoire selection since all strength and weakness, the musical understanding, and technical device should all be taken into consideration, and yet, proper selection of repertoire becomes difficult. Teachers should select repertoire to assist students to strengthen their weaknesses, and simultaneously encourage them to get through these difficulties (Burton, Alden).

Students are easily being discouraged at this level because they have to practice a lot of fundamental music to solid their technical skills, students will easily get bored and yet reduced their interest in learning music. Good music teachers are responsible to tackle all these problems and help students to grow mentally and physically (Burton, Alden).

Advanced Level. Most piano students reached to advanced level will encounter a dilemma of being a professional musician or an amateur player. If they would like to be professional musicians, it may be a wise choice to choose music as major in college.

Major in colleges is the specialization of one area to prepare for the future career. There are some factors that usually affect the consideration of your choice including your own potential occupations, subjects you love, tuition, learning outcomes, etc. However, students can choose to be a music minor if they are passionate in music but cannot achieve the basic requirement of being a music major or they would like to specialize in another academic field (“Guide to Choosing College Major”).

THE IMPORTANCE OF TECHNICAL FOUNDATION

The differences between beginners’ to advanced level lie on the complexity of music that is being studied (Watson). The main purpose of the foundation is to hold the models being built for musical advancement.

Solid foundations are inevitably important since it will affect later musical development. Although repetitive practice of basic materials is boring, foundation is the basic platform of everything. Take building a house as an example, having a good and

powerful foundation supports the load of the entire building and keeps the building strong and standing and make up the esthetic qualities of the house (SA Homes). And the same theory applies to every profession. In music, techniques are the foundation and it is something that need to be developed years by years from the very first music lesson. Danielle Salamon called “technique” as the “craft” of instrumental playing. It includes reading skills, musicianship, theory knowledge and musical styles, fingering technique, and understanding of piano literature. Instrumental teaching is a collaboration between teacher, student and parents. Teachers should not blame students with bad fingering techniques, poor pedaling and accuracy, poor listening skills because students doesn’t know how to practice. And Thus, she concluded that teachers should teach students “how to learn”, which is beneficial for them whatever their musical ability (Watson).

Scales are the collection of pitches ordered by fundamental frequency. They are the basis of tonal music and important building blocks of melody and harmony (Dillen). Besides their theoretical importance, scales, when played on an instrument, increase the fluency of motion and the performer’s connection with that instrument, and help familiarize the performer with the different keys. Unfortunately, students often consider practicing scales a frustrating waste of time and only reluctantly run through them with a machine-like lack of focus (Mason).

Despite students’ reluctance to practice scales, professional performers often attest to their value. Legendary American flutist Julius Baker practiced scales, arpeggios

and other basic elements for at least 45 mins everyday as his warm up before practicing any of his music. He concertized and taught masterclasses until the end of his life and often told students why the persistent practicing of technique was so important and how it could threaten his concert life if he did not practice them (Ragusa).

Given that performers like Baker think scales are so important, teachers need to convince students of the same thing.

MUSICALITY

Musicality refers to a sensitivity to, knowledge of, or talent for music, or the quality or state of being musical, and is used to refer to specific if vaguely defined qualities in pieces and/or genres of music, such as melodiousness and harmoniousness.

Musicality is generally about the musician's thought or ideas present to the audience, and eventually transferring the messages or words from the music.

Brandstrom examined "Music teacher" and found two different conceptions of "musicality" among music teachers. An "absolute view" and a "relativistic view". He claims that those teachers with an "absolute view" perceive that musicality is biologically inherited, and assumes that it is measurable, innate, directly tied with western music tradition, and reproduction. Meanwhile, those teachers with and "relativistic view" perceive that musicality is socially constructed. They assume that it is not measurable, focus on the musical expression, full of creativity, it can be cultivated and not strictly tied with music tradition (Brandstrom).

Teaching musicality to students is the most challenging among all practical teaching in real pedagogical world since it is not theoretical, explainable, but imaginative and illusory. Students at a younger age seem to have a bigger challenge on musicality because their own experiences and knowledge are not enough to fit in all music style, which greatly affect the maturity of the performance and the progress of understanding music pieces.

Basic elements of musicality such as tempo, pulse, articulations should not be separate from techniques regardless of levels. Teachers should combine fun activities for kids to learn about these musical elements. Through working with different activities, kids should feel less imaginative with such elements when applying to their playing (Mermelstein). The integration of theory is the bridge and connection to the understanding of musical expression, and should not be separated from practical lessons (Pamela). However, the most important element of musicality said by all greatest musicians in years is the extraordinary languages and expressions thrilled to audiences deeply from the bottom of your heart (Su).

With my own experiences, analyzing the music or reading the music before starting it is crucial to understand the music and figure out the musical contents and moods or expressions within the music. Meanwhile, combining your own emotions and experiences to express the mood will be more realistic rather than imaginative. Theory and musicianship are essential to understand music. However, playing with all these

theoretical understanding does not account for the most important part during a real performance. Those performers who can tackle the most demanding pieces technically but insensitively are not good performers. Master performers can always combine excellent skills with expressions (Markea).

Teachers' will face different challenges in teaching with different age group of students. For me, the younger the kids, the harder to teach about musical elements. First, their thoughts are not maturing enough to understand or to handle every knowledge. Hence, they do not have a lot of different experiences from different aspects. With these two factors, it makes it harder to talk about musicality. Therefore, inspiration is inevitably vital leading them to feel the mood by imagination. Thinking about different stories in their lives or imagine the circumstances from cartoons and television shows can help them to go into the emotion.

In conclusion, this examined different perspectives from different music teachers talking musicality and they agree that expressions over techniques are more essential in a performance. Musicality thus should not be excluded starting from the first lesson.

PERFORMANCE

Performance is essential in the process of music learning. Since performances can always be different than practices due to psychological and mental factors. Getting use to these factors that influence students psychologically and mentally will enhance their practice skills and learning process (Chang).

There's always some pitfalls during performance because the psychological and mental factors are not considered when developed when practicing. Thus, students regardless of age and teacher should take these into consideration in their teaching and the way of practicing (Chang).

Performances and competitions require high concentration. The most common psychological and mental issue that will directly affect our concentration and thought is nervousness. Nervousness can make a performance or competition becomes an unhappy and frightful experience. Any discussion on performance should include a treatment of stage fright. Stage fright is undoubtedly related to stress which leads to the loss of concentration in mind. Many good music teachers tend to hold different size of recitals and performances for their students to gain experiences to alleviate nervousness.

Although experience is an important factor on reducing nervousness and stage fright, teachers should not ignore these psychological issues to students who never perform or compete since none of us even very experienced performers cannot assume accidents. Therefore, the guidance of these issues is inevitably important to all students (Chang).

The first step of guiding students to deal with nervousness is to understand the fundamental cause of it. Nervousness is a natural human emotion of anxiety and worry. It arises from a mental perception of a situation in which performance is critical. A certain amount of nervousness can be another survival tool because it forces us to concentrate all our energies towards a critical task more than usual. However, it can be a

worse element which leads us to failure under extreme conditions such as playing a virtuosic solo flawlessly in front of a mass amount of audiences, for instance, a violinist can be very nervous playing solo compare to playing in an orchestra because the situation of playing in the orchestra is not extreme. The mental perception of situation is really sensitive. Thus, in order to perform well under this circumstance, controlling this mental issue is really essential.

The way to control nervousness is to understand the cause and to develop ways for controlling it. Obviously, sufficient preparation is inevitably important to a performance. A Performance is an interactive communication between the performers and audiences.

Nervousness typically reduced after the performance starts since you involve your entire body in making music rather than worry about the nervousness. Although nervousness can be a good or bad element to a performer, the ideal thought is not to pretend that nervousness does not exist. The best way to deal with this is to develop the proper mental attitude for controlling stage fright.

This mental attitude development should be aware of before students first go on to perform on stage in music lesson, teachers should be familiar on how to response and react to various circumstances to all types of students especially youngsters (Chang).

INJURY RISK

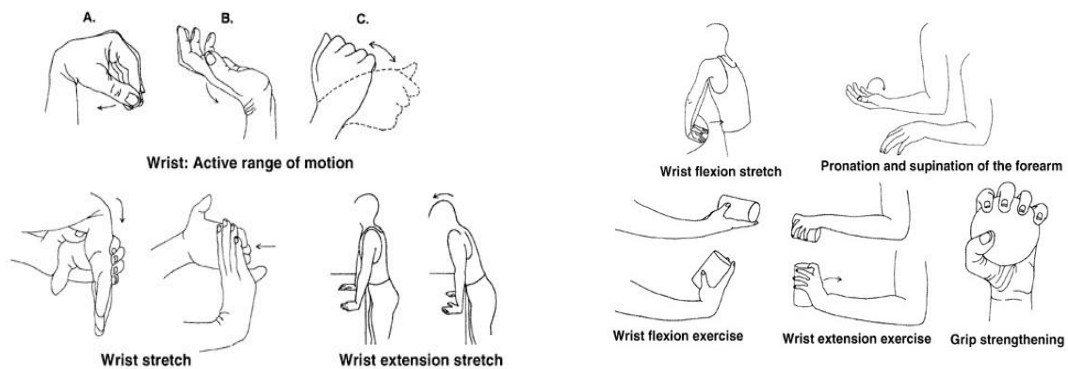
Practice makes perfect. Practice is inevitably essential to a musician. However,

there is one common condition that might happen to every musician is performance injuries. Musicians tend to perfect their performance by undergoing extensive practicing, so as athletes, they share a lot of similarities (McKagan).

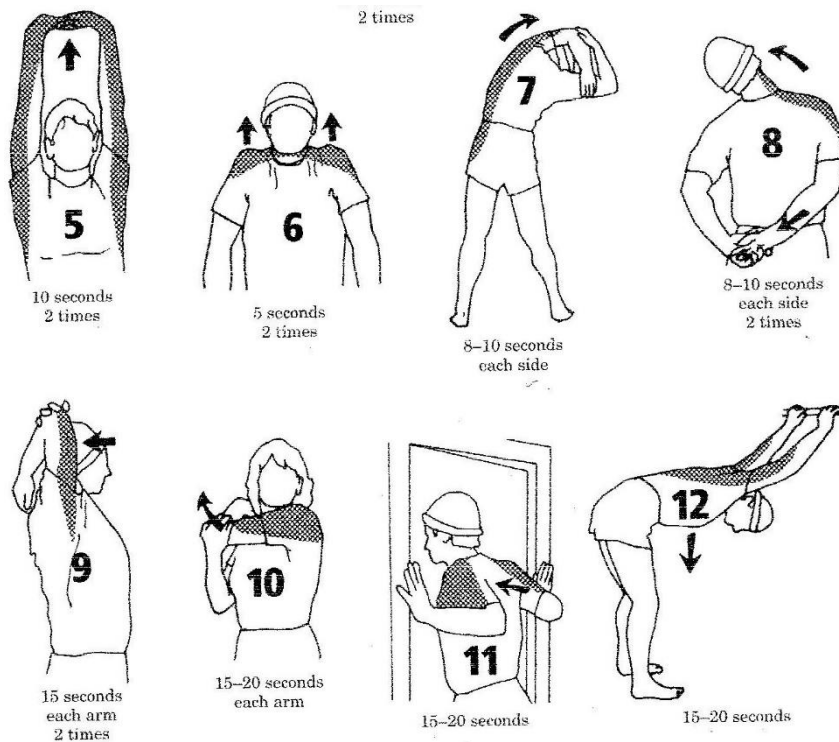
Musicians can become injured because they do not understand the importance of conditioning their muscles, especially warming up and stretching their muscles. Unlike most musicians, highly skilled athletes almost always warm up their muscles and get the blood flowing before they engage in any extensive training. This warm-up lets athletes protect against over-working their muscles at the beginning of a training session. Furthermore, athletes also do strength training to build their muscles and to sustain those muscles' strength (Cordell).

Examples of Warm Up Exercises

Wrist Exercises (How to Prevent Repetitive Motion Injuries with Transcription)



Neck, Shoulders and Arms Exercise (Routine Stretches to Help Your Neck, Shoulders and Arms)



Comparison table between athletes and musicians

	Athletes	Musicians
Muscle and muscle strength requirement	X	X
Rehearse or training for countless hours	X	X
Energy consuming	X	X
Strong stress tolerance	X	X
Strong concentration	X	X
Strong effectiveness and efficiency	X	X
Specialization within an area	X	X
Competitive career life	X	X

As there are similarities between athletes and musicians, music teachers and students should definitely know how to prevent injury as athletes. Practicing is not only

on the instrument itself, but also have to understand the muscle's condition that will be used to play or perform on their instruments. Appropriate training for muscles and muscle strength will actually enhance the performance quality. Musicians should not ignore the warm up sections and leap directly into intense practices. After those stretching exercises, musicians should start with playing scales to warm up all their fingers, don't go straight to pieces because scales are the best tool for all finger's movement.

The other common factor that musicians get injuries due to repetitious practices and the countless practice time. However, over practicing may not be the best way to increase performance quality. The difference between athletes and musicians several days leading to their big day or performance. Athletes tend to reduce their training several days before to keep their energy for the game day while musicians tend to increase their practice to try to perfect everything for the performance. Often times injuries occur due to over practicing in these few days (Cordell).

Another possibility of being injured is athlete's trainers are always monitoring and instructing their daily training and they usually have a shorter career life which may help with recovering their injuries later. However, musicians usually meet their teachers or mentors once a week and practice by themselves throughout the day which bad habits may formed during practicing and become difficult to change. Most teachers teach postures and techniques in lesson, but they might ignore the instruction of practice which leads to long term injuries. (Cordell).

Possible Injuries Example and It's Cause Table

INJURIES	SYNTOMES	CAUSES	PREVENTIONS
Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nerve entrapment; - inflammation of tendons and muscle; - Sac of fluid that forms around a joint and tendon; - Compression of nerves and blood vessels (NHS). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overuse of hands practicing and performing all day; - misuse or insufficient use of the body; - Chronic muscle tension; - Fatigue; - Insufficient rest breaks; - Undeveloped upper-arm, shoulder and back muscle (Mitchell). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Break long practice time into sections; - Stop practicing when muscles and tendons are pushed to limit;
Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pain; - Numbness; - Tingling; - Atrophy (Williams). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustained and repetitive wrist flexion. - Median nerve to be compressed against the ligament (Williams). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced wrist flexion during practice; - Rest when pain produced. - Physical treatment if needed (Williams).
Tendinosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Pain syndromes of the muscle-tendon unit; - Carpel tunnel syndrome; - Burning pain (Williams). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tearing and abrasions of a tendon due to overuse under high muscle stress; - Repeated movements within muscles and tendon (Williams). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take relative rest; - Reduce and modify the playing or practice schedule; - Modify the posture and technique; - Rest if playing pain producing (Norris).
Musculoskeletal Strain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pain at the upper or lower back; - Fatigue (Williams). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Postural strain; - Prolonged immobilization (Pain Management: Musculoskeletal Pain). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modify the sitting posture; - Stretch before playing and instrument (Williams).

Perhaps the most useful and effective treatment is stop practicing and performing

and rest for a period of time. However, it is very difficult for professional musicians to achieve unless their injuries are deeply affected to their performance which compel them to stop. Depending on the severity of the injuries, musicians should understand the concept of cutting back and know what to do in order to minimize the aggravation of injuries. Teacher should bring this concept to all of students because it is too late after injured. When injury occurs, consult a doctor or certified physical therapist as soon as possible for suitable treatments.

MUSICIAN'S FUTURE AND CAREER LIFE

The career life of a musician is extremely critical. When students come to high school level when they have to make decision on their future career goal, they have to accept all the challenges and the extreme and critical situation they are going to encounter once they decide to enter this academic and career industry.

Academics. Since most of the school offers general performance degree or education degree for undergraduate study, therefore, music students will choose their career track within the entertainment industry after undergraduate study. And graduate degree offers more different professional tracks for students who want to combine their advanced studies in one area of specialization such as solo performance, collaborative piano, art administration, pedagogy.

When it comes to higher education in music, students have to consider attending music conservatory or college. Conservatories such as The Julliard School, San Francisco

Conservatory of music, etc. concentrate solely on performing arts, where they provide a strong artistic environment for all artists. It is highly competitive when you study in a conservatory where all people surround you are artists as well. Music schools or colleges within the college of liberal arts of universities such as The School of Music, Theatre and Dance of University of Michigan, USC Thornton School of Music of University of South California provide wider variety of school life. They offer more variety of sports and other activities. You will also have chance to meet students from different colleges and major. However, general education classes are compulsory beyond music classes.

Another unique benefit provided by colleges that students can get a minor degree of other subjects such as business administration and engineering; students can also enjoy a wide variety of classes besides music. Study in colleges gives you a sense of the intensity of music school experiences as well as the balance of the college life (Burrell). No matter you go to a conservatory or music school in a university, the learning environment is very competitive and intensive. The graduate graded average point is usually higher than other majors, because the school prepare you for the real world of performing arts. You will be trained to be an outstanding artist when you choose to be professional during your college year.

Audition. The application process in higher education institutes of performing arts can be different compare to other subjects. Performing arts always involve an additional audition beyond the normal application. The ability of performing is usually the first consideration

in such institutes other than academic.

Some auditions can be done through media such as recording or video while some schools require a live audition. When you have a live audition, you will be performing live in front of the audition committees. That means you are performing at a real stage, and there is no second chance given to you at that phenomenon. As a result, live audition is more stressful and students may have a greater opportunity to encounter stage fright. However, these anxieties may optimize the performance outcomes (Spahn et al. 893). Therefore, preparation before the audition day is inevitably essential.

Teachers act as an important role confronting these anxieties with their students both physically and psychologically. Get to know your students' thoughts and keep communication with them are the key factors of successful performances. Help increasing their self-confidence by providing small performance classes such as studio classes and annual studio concerts will lower the performance stress, as they are familiar with stage performances. In order to have better performances on stage, teachers should help students to understand performances are sharing and expressing their thoughts in terms of compositions. They should inspire students to perform or do their best rather than forcing them to achieve perfectionism. Teachers should also give ideas to students of accepting mistakes or errors because nothing is perfect. However, one key factor that teachers should never do is using the threat of competitions or performances as a tool of practice motivation. It gives too much stress to performers which may bring negative

results. The best result is students practice spontaneously with their heart and soul.

Helping them to develop their motivation and saponaceousness of practice will help them to learn more and more willing to play (Boyett).

Jobs in Music. Musicians are always encouraged to obtain advanced degree including a master's or even doctoral degree to hone their crafts by perfecting their technical skills, understanding stylistic nuances and interpretation and memorizing enormous number of repertoires. Most likely graduates in instrumental performance will switch to instrumental teaching or go for orchestra's auditions as orchestral players or both. In addition, the reality of a music career involves many different musical activities such as art administrator, adjudicator, write books or articles for music journal and magazine and so forth. Therefore, apart from maintaining excellent performance skills, a successful musician should be well-rounded, not just an outstanding performer (Leung).

During the college year, students should acquire as many skills as possible in different aspects of the career options, including solo performance, collaborative artist and chamber player, member of the orchestra, art administrator, instrumental teaching, teaching music courses and so on. Besides, students should also acquire some knowledge in music business and marketing since they may set up their own studio or organization after they graduate. It is highly unlikely that music major, will perform as often as they are in college. And most often, musicians will involve in teaching at all age level, therefore, gaining knowledge and experiences from instrumental pedagogy are highly suggested

(Leung).

Serious consideration of your career goal is very important because there are not many career options as musicians. Before you consider entering this field, think twice. Teachers should address these psychological and social issue to their potential students before they decided to enter this career field and prepare them to confront all upcoming challenges that they might encounter.

CONCLUSION

This concludes different components and perspective on instrumental pedagogy for music teacher. It is not easy to become a successful instrumental teacher because every student is unique and successful teachers should be able to individualize the lesson plan for each student since one lesson plan applies to one's does not mean that it applies to another. High awareness to different students are vital in instrumental teaching.

Furthermore, clear curriculum is important among teachers, students and parents. Be familiar to everything that you learn in lesson is very helpful for a student's future. Giving proper guidelines to students for their development are inevitably important, teachers are the key milestone for student success.

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