Student Perspectives on Reflective Writing, Improvisation, and Cooperative and Peer Learning in a Collegiate Aural Skills Course

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PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

This study examined the efficacy of these new approaches by comparing students’ experiences, progress, and assessments to those of previous years. Though a comparison of final exam scores did not reveal a statistically significant difference in achievement, results suggest reflective writing was particularly effective for students in increasing self-awareness, organizing and reinforcing learning, increasing retention of course material, and providing opportunities for self-assessment.

METHODS

Participants: 12 students from year 2012 – 2013 and 34 students from years 2009 – 2012

Interview: A series of open-ended interview questions designed to provide in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences, attitudes, and viewpoints regarding ETSS and specifically, of reflective writing, improvisation, and cooperative and peer learning activities within the curriculum, were developed and used to guide semi-structured interviews. All 12 students from the 2012-2013 year were invited to participate in the interviews. In contrast, simple random sampling was used to select 13 students from the 2012 group who had completed the course from year 2009 to 2012.

Survey: An online survey was designed through the digital platform Survey Monkey. Close-ended Likert-type questions asked participants to report the year they took the course sequence; the extent to which they valued what they learned in ETSS; the extent to which the material would serve them as a musician in the future; the amount of time spent on course-related assignments and activities outside of class; and the extent to which they valued what they learned in ETSS.

RESULTS

Interview:

Course value and relevance: To what extent do you value what you learned in ETSS I and II?

Improvisation. Questions addressing improvisation activities and experiences solicited strong reactions, from both groups. However, a discernable difference between the two groups was apparent. Nearly all of the students that comprised the 2012-2013 group made positive comments about improvisation. Conversely, students from the 2009-2012 group had a more difficult time recalling improvisation activities.

Cooperative and peer learning. The interview data from both groups reflected similar views regarding cooperative and peer learning and revealed mixed sentiments for collaborative learning activities. (See table below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Favorable</th>
<th>“It depends”</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2012 n=20</td>
<td>5 (45.5%)</td>
<td>5 (45.5%)</td>
<td>1 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013 n=7</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>3 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1 (12.5%)</td>
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</tbody>
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DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

2012-2013 students responded quite positively to reflective writing and improvisation activities. The 2009-2012 group had positive attitudes towards the idea of improvisation but responses indicated that it had not been used enough to be particularly positive or impactful. Responses to cooperative and peer learning were similar in both groups and reflected mixed attitudes and reported effectiveness.

Students in the 2012-2013 group expressed enthusiasm and support for reflective writing, improvisation, and peer and collaborative learning activities, and generally ranked course activities, tools, and approaches as being more helpful and motivating than the 2009-2012 group. Based on these findings, it is reasonable to infer that the attitudes towards the course and its instructional methods were slightly more positive for the 2012-2013 group. Though a statistical analysis of final exam scores suggest that reflective writing and cooperative and peer learning activities did not significantly impact student achievement in aural skill development, a much higher percentage of students from 2012-2013 scored above average on their final exams than the 2009-2012 group.