Instilling a “Can Do” Attitude in the High School Guitar Classroom

Andrew Pfaff

The College of New Jersey

To the four best teachers I have ever had:
my parents Daniel and Eileen Pfaff,
my wife Tova Felder,
and our son Jesse Felder-Pfaff.

Teaching is love.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the motivation of high school juniors and seniors enrolled in a beginning guitar class, especially those who do not consider themselves musically inclined. A music self-efficacy scale was administered to gauge each student’s belief in his or her own musical ability. Audio recordings of brief individual meetings provided material for narratives on low-motivation students, as well as the instructor’s attempts to improve student self-efficacy with praise and encouragement. An exit survey measured changes in students’ music self-efficacy over time. While a teacher has limited control over students’ belief in their abilities, social persuasion via verbal encouragement had an impact. The findings suggest that efforts made to influence self-efficacy yield a more positive attitude and effort.

Keywords: high school, guitar, self-efficacy, music, instrument, motivation

Question in Context

“How do I increase motivation for the lowest performers in my guitar class?”

As a music teacher with a keen interest in the social and political implications of my work in a public school, I arrived to the process of fashioning a teacher research question with very deeply held opinions about current trends I had been witnessing. I teach in a climate of very high academic pressure and high expectations. My school ranks near the very top in the state on indicators like standardized test scores, college admissions, and AP enrollment. One important omission in these media-generated rankings is the fact that my school is a magnet school with a competitive admission process, and enjoys the luxury of turning away 9 or 10 applicants for every student it admits. With that kind of advantage, we should expect to rank near the top on account of our exceptional students, and have no occasion to congratulate ourselves for being wonderful teachers. Consequently, I have a very low opinion of this kind of ranking, but it is a major selling point for hopeful families in our county looking to send their children to somewhere other than the town high school.

The students I teach are under a level of pressure regarding college applications, SAT scores, and admissions essays that I never had to endure as a high school student. Compared to the students with whom I interact today, I had far more freedom and time for exploring and indulging my curiosities. By contrast, the students in my care are stressed, and they are bound to an academically competitive ethic that does not allow whole evenings or weekends devoted to what they might *really* love to do and learn. Not only do I find this sad for them as individuals, I

worry about what kind of future awaits children who are bred to be academically competitive at the expense of play and exploration.

My students live in what appears to me as an arts-marginalized world; a place where you only sing or dance or paint or act if you have fulfilled all “important” obligations first. In my school, with its great rankings in the media and reputation for excellence, I am the only music teacher for a student body of 655. A nearby town’s similarly sized high school has *three* music teachers. Clearly, access to the arts does not play into the “best of” rankings. When I was a high school student, my world revolved around music and I made it a priority. Unlike my students, I never had to tell my band teacher I would be missing a concert because my parents had paid for an SAT class I must take. Unlike my students, my parents never forbade my participation in a performing field trip because I had fallen behind in my academic studies. Unlike my students, I didn’t enroll in chorus or band because it would make me look well rounded on a college application. I did it *just because I liked it.*

Further, I know that much of my true value as an educator today comes from having done and experienced things that were not “school” and were not part of anyone else’s agenda -- not of parents or teachers or boards of education. My plan never involved becoming a music teacher, but when I became one, I found that the personal experience I called upon to relate to and motivate students did not come from my training in high school and college. It came from the musical pursuits I freely chose and directed on my own time. The value I am able to pass along to my students comes from my experience putting together my own bands, from the age of twelve, and rehearsing them for performances. It comes from the informal ear-training I gave myself in sitting down for hours with a record player and a guitar to learn songs which I would then turn around and teach my band mates. It comes having written my own songs and tried them

out in the various ensembles I put together, learning craft from trial and error. My work feels the most natural and effortless whenever I am connected to my ability to re-live being a musically curious kid and can then teach to that kind of curiosity. In journaling for the first course I took in teacher research, my personal conviction articulated itself thus: “I never daydreamed about growing up to tell kids to stop daydreaming.”

My concern for my own students, as well as what I view more generally as a harmful trend toward high-stakes standardization imposed on students and teachers, inspired my research question. An arts requirement for graduation is undoubtedly a good thing, but in my school’s pressurized academic climate, I wondered about the effect of imposing that requirement on children who may be indifferent to the arts, not want to participate, or not feel sufficiently capable of success. Students with the least amount of enthusiasm or positive feeling going in are likely to be those who get the least out of the experience. I wanted to find out and address the possible causes of this lack of enthusiasm in the hopes that more of my students will emerge from guitar class feeling enriched. The result is a question that reflects my commitment to my students’ development as whole individuals, who are filling a school requirement in taking an arts elective. My question is, “How do I increase motivation for the lowest performers in my guitar classes?” I approach this question with a deep conviction of the importance of the arts in school. I want for the arts to mean more than a graduation requirement for all students in my care.

But how do I get inside of the minds of my students to uncover what would make them feel enthusiastic and empowered to learn guitar? As both a professional musician who spent years upon years practicing and studying, and as a teacher, I have long been fascinated with the nature of my own motivation to learn and grow as a musician, and that of others. I know what it

means to confront difficult and challenging material. I recall vividly the intimidation and self-doubt I felt when, as a new jazz bass student at Temple University; I first opened the Charlie Parker Omnibook or the Bach Cello Suites. What made me decide I was up to these challenges and would work to conquer them? How would I sustain myself through the required effort to achieve my goals as a bass player? By necessity I became interested in what provided me the mental fortitude and drive to keep going. In the teaching environment, when I see a student giving up on a task or saying “I can’t,” I view it through an empathetic lens. In that moment, the student is experiencing the feeling that the task at hand is inaccessible to him or her; that there is no way forward worth pursuing, and that avoidance and resignation is preferable. I know this feeling too. It is uncomfortable and demoralizing. I imagine it is in these moments where we decide if we should stop trying. We judge ourselves. We seal our fates. We articulate our beliefs to ourselves and accept them as fact. Through my own introspection I recognized this phenomenon as a potent enemy of motivation. I hope to better understand the nature of these moments, and help my students to meet them constructively and positively.

My students rarely pose any “classroom management” issues. They are good students and, for the most part, school suits them exceptionally well. The ones who do not demonstrate as keen an interest in learning guitar usually try to “hide” by playing softly, or by giving up on a group exercise instead of trying their best. I suspect they do not think highly of their musical potential. This may be borne of a complicated web of reasons -- family, friends, past experiences -- leading to a negative self-concept with regard to making music. Some students are “dumped” on me by a guidance department charged with filling all the boxes on a student’s schedule. Some reluctantly sign up to fill that gap in their transcript, but look visibly ill at ease in my classroom, holding a guitar as if they were looking forward to putting it away, unwilling to claim or find any

joy in it. I want all my students to perceive value and joy in their exploration of the arts -- not just the ones who arrive on day one already on board with the idea. I want these kids to see the value of *engaging themselves*, in the guitar class, putting in work and time on what they may view (or have been influenced to view) as "extra" or "non-essential."

Background Information

My School. My workplace, Cybernetic Gulch Tenon High School, which boasts of alumni who go on to Ivy League universities, and its place on the "best of" lists, is a nearly windowless building in a heavily industrial area. The school sits along a busy pre-Eisenhower corridor of commerce and industry serving greater metropolitan New York City. Directly across the highway is an airport. Chartered jets zoom in and out all day, the roar of engines and the smell of fuel hanging in the air. This school belongs to a county-level district comprised of a total of four high schools, all of which are free public magnet schools serving the county. The student population is 655 with an ethnic breakdown as follows: Caucasian, 298; American Indian/Alaska Native, 1; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 5; Asian, 210; Hispanic Latino, 108; African American, 33 (PowerTeacher, 2016).

There was no information available about the linguistic breakdown of my school's population, but all students are fluent English speakers who write an essay in English as part of their admission application process. Our total population of 655 includes 94 participants in the Reduced/Free Lunch programs. There are 44 students with identified special needs. There are 279 males and 376 females (PowerTeacher, 2016).

My Classes. For my research, I will be studying my guitar classes. In addition to chorus and band, I have taught beginning guitar since I first began teaching at Cybernetic 14 years ago. For many years I taught one section of the class. About four years ago, in response to the state's

Department of Education mandatory 5-credit arts requirement, my beginning guitar enrollment jumped to two sections, putting me on schedule overload. The popularity of the beginning guitar elective later pushed out a music history elective I had been teaching, which left me teaching three sections of the course. The course meets five days a week for a full school year.

I applaud my state’s commitment to the arts for insisting on an arts requirement. At Cybernetic, students can choose to fill that requirement with one of four 5-credit visual arts electives, by taking a minimum of 2 years of band or chorus (2.5 credits/year), or by taking the 5-credit beginning guitar class. Our student population of 655 over four grades gives an average grade-level population of 164. Given a graduating class size that small, for 59 of them to have chosen guitar class in 2015/2016 as their arts requirement elective is significant. For the 2016/2017 school year, enrollment is 47 total. This may finally be the beginning of a plateau in student numbers. I expect the course to remain a popular option in my building for filling the arts requirement.

Seniors make up the vast majority of my guitar students. The rest are juniors. Freshmen and sophomores do not have the space in their schedules to accommodate an arts elective that meets 5 days a week. One major positive aspect of the 5-day/week schedule for guitar class is in my ability to guide practice as part of my daily lesson planning. I do not have to require any outside practice, or even ownership or access to a guitar. This, along with no prior music literacy or other music prerequisite, may be responsible for the class’s popularity as an elective choice.

Almost entirely, my guitar students have not participated in either my band or chorus, since two years in either of those ensembles fulfill the arts requirement. These ensembles are audition-based due to very great demand, and I do teach a few students each year who have

auditioned and been rejected for one or both of those ensembles. I try to remain conscious of the possible damage a rejection experience may have done to their self-concept as musicians.

Enrollment for the guitar class has ballooned since 2010, my earliest available data. I taught one section of seven students in the 2010/2011 school year and went to 12 the next year. A second section was added in 2012/2013 with a total of 29 students, which grew to 33 the following year. A third section was added in 2014/2015 with 54 students, and the total enrollment swelled to 59 for the year just ended (PowerTeacher, 2016). My administration had to authorize an emergency purchase of extra student guitars for the classroom to keep up with demand. In September of each year, I am now accustomed to guidance counselors continually asking me on behalf of students if there is still room in beginning guitar. I had previously attempted to keep the maximum section enrollment at 18. At a class size of 23, the room is so full that I refuse additional students on the grounds of safety. Thus, my guitar class has evolved from a small elective that students freely chose to a much larger franchise serving a wider cross-section of students with a broader spectrum of needs, learning styles, attitudes, and self-concepts.

Literature Review

Motivating Students in the Music Classroom

As borne out in Chapter 1, the rapidly growing enrollment from year to year since 2010 points to the idea that there must be some things I am already doing well to account for the beginning guitar course's increase in popularity as a means to fulfill an arts requirement. Through my research process, I hoped to more clearly identify the things that are "going right," which are just as important to know as is what is "going wrong." I hope to remedy and improve my teaching practice as a result of my research.

My research question before reviewing the literature had been worded, "How can I improve student *engagement* for the lowest performers in my Beginning Guitar class?" Before even reading my gathered literature, my search for recent literature surrounding my question pointed out that "engagement" was not the best term for my question; what I really mean, and what researchers use, is "motivation."

As a musician, I have long been aware that my ability to persevere and succeed at a task was bound to a belief that I *could* succeed. Positive belief drives motivation and effort. Therefore, I needed to study how my students' beliefs are shaped.

Several theories of motivation provide complementary explanations from several perspectives. Additionally, there is a strong precedent of researchers using surveys to gather information on students' perception of their abilities. "Self-efficacy" is the term coined by Bandura (1977) to describe our opinion of our own abilities and strengths, determining whether we will persevere or give up on a given task or pursuit. Bandura proposed that self-efficacy is

derived from four sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977).

The Oldest Students Are Most At Risk

Bandura's work largely shapes the literature on motivation in music students (Hruska, 2011; Rosevear, 2010; West, 2013; Zelenak, 2010), and provided the template for the survey I administered (Bandura, 2006; Zelenak, 2010). While I did find data on children from elementary and secondary school, none was focused solely on high school juniors and seniors, and none are focused on guitar as the instrument of study in the classroom. Further, I found no literature looking specifically at secondary students as first-time learners on an instrument. The oldest members of the K-12 school population deserve specific attention regarding their self-efficacy in music, and could even be considered an at-risk population.

Juniors and seniors in high school are 16-18 years old, and have developed more definite ideas about who they are, where their strengths and weaknesses lie, and what they "can" and "cannot" do. I have to be concerned with those who may have decided by this point that they "can't." A study over grades 5-12 across 15 schools in the state of Victoria, Australia noted "an overall significant decline in competence beliefs, interest, importance, and usefulness across the school years" (Mcpherson et al., 2015). As I deal predominantly with 12th graders in my practice as a guitar teacher, my job is to contend with the competence beliefs and possibly much more solidified opinions of self-efficacy of older students, as opposed to their younger counterparts. Elementary students appear to exhibit more psychological plasticity and may bounce back from negative experiences better than secondary students. As West (2013) noted, "elementary-age children are not likely to internalize performance outcomes as a reflection of their ability to the same degree as adolescents and are thus more able to 'recover' from a bad rating if an honest

effort was made" (Covington, 1983; Nicholls, 1983, as cited in West, 2013). As I attempt to change students' negative self-concept or self-efficacy in my guitar class, I may be up for more of a challenge in combating what might be much more deeply rooted opinions, on account of age and experience, in my lowest-performing students.

Confirming what I had informally observed for years in my students, research shows that competence beliefs *and* importance of music progressively declines as grade levels increase (Mcpherson et al., 2015). Students generally become less intrinsically motivated as they grow older (Anguiano, 2006; as cited in West, 2013). What effect does this maturation, particularly in my school's academically pressurized culture, do to my students' willingness to learn an instrument? My classroom is populated with young adults who are at risk of not learning guitar to their potential because: 1) their beliefs about their own competence are more solidified than ever and 2) they are likely to be the least intrinsically motivated. This suggests that my students, an overwhelming majority of which are 12th graders, are at the low ebb of their K-12 educational careers with regard to self-concept of musical ability and perceived importance of music. I looked forward to meaningfully addressing this apparent gap in research involving a certain unique population of students.

Theories of Motivation

In the effort to increase motivation for my students, I concerned myself primarily with influencing students' perceived self-efficacy, or, "people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 2006). However, in addition to self-efficacy theory, there are other theories of motivation, which interdependently operate and provide useful windows to understanding. West (2013) framed the motivation of music students with three theories: attribution theory, achievement goal theory, and intrinsic motivation theory.

Attribution theory. Attribution theory centers on how we attribute our successes and failures, and speaks to our self-concept regarding our abilities and efforts. We can attribute our achievements to variable circumstances like the effort we exerted, or to fixed circumstances like belief about ability, which may be harmfully influenced by a system of extrinsic rewards for accomplishments (i.e. grades, praise, rewards, recognition). When students perceive their own ability as fixed and not subject to change, their motivation is more likely to decrease over time. As a child grows, his/her self-concept regarding musical ability may become more solidified and, if that concept is negative, could lead to less effort. Students persist in their effort if they feel successful in doing so, and if they perceive that they *control* that success by their efforts (West, 2013). In my experience, attributing achievements to fixed circumstances like belief about ability can be a real hindrance to student progress. Given that it is impossible *not* to hold a belief of some kind, as an educator I would want to encourage open-mindedness and optimism in any way I could. To the degree that I can *induce* the success that triggers the positive qualities of attribution theory, I want to do so.

Achievement-goal theory. Achievement-goal theory distinguishes between two goal orientations: mastery-goal and performance-goal. Performance-goal is motivation to receive a favorable assessment or a "good grade." Mastery-goal is motivation to increase understanding and mastery of the task (West, 2013). While there can be some positive aspects to performance-goal orientation, I would prefer to encourage a mastery-goal orientation in my students. As an intrinsically driven motivation orientation, mastery-goal is about the task itself while performance-goal is extrinsic, focusing on the recognition or assessment of the task. For me, it is the difference between my students wanting to learn the guitar versus wanting to get an "A" in guitar class. When grades are over-emphasized, performance-goal orientation becomes more

prevalent (West, 2013). Further, the indices on which schools are ranked in the media skew toward measures of performance goals rather than mastery goals: standardized test scores, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) enrollment and scores, graduation rates, and statistical benchmarks of "college readiness" (Morse, 2016). In the academically competitive environment of a highly ranked school like mine, performance-goal orientation is systematically reinforced.

Clearly, I have a bias against performance-goal orientation and instead prefer to focus on fostering mastery-goal orientation in my students. Hruska (2011) offers research-based suggestions on using mastery learning goals to improve motivation in high school students. I want the source of my students' motivation to be the intrinsic reward of success at playing the guitar, as opposed to the extrinsic, performance-goal orientation of a good grade for a transcript or the satisfactory completion of my in-class assessments.

Intrinsic motivation theory. While achievement-goal theory allows for some positive aspects and outcomes from performance-goal orientation as well as mastery-goal, intrinsic motivation theory clearly values motivators "that inspire us to act out of an internal interest for the activity" (West, 2013) over extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation comes from a belief in competence at a task, suggesting that the student is more likely intrinsically motivated when he/she possesses a positive self-concept regarding the task. Literature confirms my common sense belief that I can help foster this self-concept with positive feedback, and additionally suggests that intrinsic motivation and mastery-goal orientation, both desirable qualities, are correlated (Bailey, 2006; Sandene, 1997; as cited in West, 2013). If I consistently praise and encourage students, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to master the guitar-related

tasks I set for them. Each theory of motivation provides an additional dimension of understanding as I contemplate my guitar students and how I treat them on a daily basis.

Intrinsic motivation in students generally declines with age (Anguiano, 2006; as cited in West, 2013). I infer from this that as intrinsic motivation, and the mastery-goal orientation to which it is linked, gives way over the years to performance-goal orientation so routinely emphasized in high school, when students are influenced by SAT scores, college applications, and standardized tests as a requirement of graduation.

Implications of Motivation Theories for Music Students

West (2013) concluded that achievement-goal theory and intrinsic motivation theory both show that students engage more deeply when they have choice or agency in their situation, and that this sense of self-determination leads to greater interest in the task or activity. However, West noted that most of the studies included in the review are of instrumental band students, predominantly of middle school grades. It would be interesting to see if the findings here are consistent when applied to high school, and to a more “social” instrument like guitar. West suggested questions that may address this gap in the research. “For instance, do students' attributional beliefs interact with the ways they value music? Do students' achievement goals in music correlate in any meaningful way with the reasons that they engage with music? To what degree does intrinsic motivation reflect an aesthetic awareness and sensitivity for music?” (West, 2013).

I found this to be a validation of my own question, since I am interested in fostering an environment in my class where students are intrinsically motivated with a mastery-goal orientation, as opposed to the extrinsic performance-goal orientation of fulfilling a requirement

and getting a grade. Further, I hope for increased motivation in guitar class to also bring about an increased sense of the arts as personally relevant for my students.

Mastery-goal versus performance-goal. In a mastery-goal learning environment, students tend to define success in terms of progress and growth, as opposed to the performance-goal model which encourages more competition and less cooperation amongst classmates (Hruska, 2011). Performance-goal environments, while they may hold some positive qualities, also may potentially damage self-concept for many students by encouraging comparisons with each other instead of with their own progress over time.

Even within the mastery-goal environment I strive for, a performance-oriented component can help instill students' sense of accountability to each other, and has a useful place in the music classroom. Hruska (2011) suggests that rehearsals include a stated goal and that there is time planned at the end of the session to discuss and reflect on the goal. Additional suggestions include the selection of high-quality music literature to which the students can easily relate, and to create leadership positions within the music ensemble classroom that encourage a sense of camaraderie, ownership and responsibility. As a music educator, I believe these practices are undoubtedly sound.

Self-Efficacy and Enjoyment

In a study of "year 9 and 10" students in three high schools of metropolitan Adelaide, Australia, Rosevear (2010) explored how students' beliefs about their abilities affects their outcome, specifically with regard to music study, by pointing to a link between attribution theory (the assignment of causes for success and failure) with self-efficacy theory (belief about competency or skill at a task). Via a survey, Rosevear identified lists of "low efficacy" and "high efficacy" beliefs among two groups of students, one involved in music and the other not, to

determine possible differences or similarities in held beliefs and attributions among the two groups.

Rosevear found that "enjoyment" was the most frequent reason given by participants for why they were best at a given school subject. "Although it could be argued that enjoyment itself is not a reason for success, it nevertheless highlights that the participants perceived enjoyment to be an important factor that is a part of doing well or achieving" (Rosevear, 2010). The frequency of this response was similar for music and non-music students. Ability followed fairly close behind, with effort and tangible outcome coming significantly further behind. The research pointed to enjoyment, or more simply "fun," as having a positive correlation with a high student self-efficacy or self-concept regarding music, but noted that enjoyment is an elusive and broad concept, and that students found a task less enjoyable when they perceived their ability as fixed, as opposed to incremental or changeable. It seems that for music study, the same general principles apply regarding self-efficacy and attribution of ability as for other subject areas. As it applies directly to my job as a guitar teacher, this is common sense at its most basic: if I want my students to achieve more, it is in my interest to help them *enjoy* the process as much as possible.

A Way to Measure Self-Efficacy for Music Learners

Zelenak (2010) developed a "Music Performance Self-Efficacy Scale" to measure "four sources of self-efficacy (i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal/social persuasion, and physiological state) in music performance among secondary school students" (Bandura, 1977, 1986; as referenced in Zelenak, 2010). Middle school students from a public middle school in the Southeastern United States were studied. Participants were male and female, ages 11-14 with diverse ethnic backgrounds and in proportion to the diversity reflected

in the school population. The study was designed to compare music self-efficacy and other kind of self-efficacy between music students and non-music students.

Bandura's self-efficacy model (Bandura, 1977) and guidelines for self-efficacy scales (Bandura, 2006) provided the framework for measuring my own students' self-efficacy regarding playing guitar. Using Bandura's guidelines, Zelenak (2010) found a "modest" relationship between music and academic self-efficacy, and between music and writing self-efficacy (Zelenak, 2010). I based my own self-efficacy scale on the one Zelenak employed (Appendix D).

Additional Considerations

Prior experience, gender, and socioeconomic status. Mcpherson et. al. (2015) noted that prior music instruction, gender, and socioeconomic status all have an effect on motivation to learn music at school. These additional factors in student motivation specific to music class influenced my decision to include an additional piece to the self-efficacy scale in my preliminary student survey. This additional portion addresses prior music instruction and prior music literacy (Appendix C).

In Mcpherson, et al. (2015), students' perception of competence beliefs, values, importance, usefulness and task difficulty were measured for a range of subjects including music were measured using a Likert scale of 1-7 for each category. The study found that across all five categories, the music learners reported significantly higher competence beliefs. This finding makes a case for music education in general, which of course pleases me very much! More specifically, this also suggests that music education late in a student's high school career can go some length to *counteract* the trend of progressively declining competence beliefs, intrinsic motivation, *and* importance of music as students grow older (Mcpherson et al., 2015; Anguiano, 2006 as cited in West, 2013).

Relationship of music self-efficacy to self-efficacy in other areas. Rosevear (2010) and Hruska (2011) noted a positive relationship between self-efficacy in music and in other subjects. Also, as noted before, Zelenak (2010) found a "modest" relationship between music and academic self-efficacy. I consider this consensus across researchers to be a strong argument for continued and increased support of music in our schools, as a means of building student self-efficacy across subject areas.

Conclusion

The practical suggestions offered by Hruska (2011) provide a needed sense of outer-directed motivation in which students cooperate in striving for a musical goal, while not losing sight of intrinsic or mastery-goal motivation orientation. None of the motivational theories as they apply to the music classroom operate alone, but together provide a way to understand the interdependent and complex nature of student motivation (West, 2013). The research on motivation and self-efficacy in music students has yet to focus on older students alone, especially late arrivers to first-time music study.

The overwhelming majority of the motivational theory application to music students appears to make good practical sense. In terms of identifying and filling a gap in research, I have an opportunity to learn about the motivation of juniors and seniors in high school learning an instrument for the first time, when the majority of the available literature is for middle school and younger. Also, I have done my research in the context of a guitar class, as opposed to instrumental band or orchestra, which makes up much of the music student motivation study literature. The reviewed pieces provided a useful starting point as I created my own survey to measure my own students' self-efficacy. For my research, I closely modeled the example used in Zelenak (2010), especially as it uses Bandura's widely respected and oft-referenced social

cognitive theory as a framework (Bandura 1977, 2006). I looked forward to gaining insight on the possible differences might be noted when the students are learning a more “social” instrument like guitar, with a broader range of possible applications and relevance outside the instrumental music classroom and auditorium stage. I also looked forward to learning about students’ self-concept when they are approaching a musical instrument late in their secondary school career.

The single most meaningful sentence in everything I read was this: “Teachers communicate what they value through their selection of learning goals for instruction” (Hruska, 2011). I believe deeply in the power of music, and feel that the process of practicing an instrument did more than any other single pursuit to show me how to achieve anything I wanted in life. If I mean to transmit this deeply held, long-standing belief, then my learning goals for my students should reflect that belief. The making and performing of art is one of the true defining characteristics of the human species. If we are to persist as a civilization and a society, we should not marginalize the arts in our educational agenda. When prescribing coursework in the arts as a requirement for high school graduation, the rationale for that requirement should not be merely explained by a standards document from a Department of Education, but *lived* and *breathed* by the teacher with the responsibility of teaching that required coursework. I am charged with living and breathing the importance of the arts and empowering my students through the arts. My hope is that researching what motivates my students, and what affects that motivation for better or worse, will help me empower them and enrich their lives that much more effectively.

Methodology

My research question is: how do I increase motivation for the lowest performers in my guitar class? Related questions include: how does prior experience, or lack thereof, influence my students' self-efficacy in guitar class? To what degree is a student's success in my class attributable to his or her own beliefs? To that end, I gathered information about my students' sense of self-efficacy, motivation and interest in my beginning guitar class. Specifically, I was interested in students with no previous guitar experience and no previous experience with any musical instrument. Eleventh and twelfth grade is unusually late for starting an instrument in school, and these older students are likely to have a more solidly formed self-concept regarding their musical ability and potential than would their younger counterparts. Most research on instrumental music learners focuses on younger children, so my student population offers a unique research opportunity.

Experience has led me to expect that in each school year, I will teach students whose motivation to learn guitar may range from those who are very intrinsically motivated on one end, to those who are only extrinsically motivated to earn a satisfactory grade for themselves. These extrinsically motivated students demonstrate the least amount of personal investment. Through the research undertaken here, I hoped to identify practices that increase student motivation and modify or end practices that decrease motivation. I want to use my data to increase these students' sense of intrinsic meaning and involvement in guitar class and to perceive more personal relevance even if they don't consider themselves "musical." My research provided me insight into these students' beliefs and self-concepts when faced with first-time study of a

musical instrument in fulfilling a high school graduation requirement of five credits in the arts.

Brief Description of Study Setting

I teach three sections of a beginning guitar class in a public magnet high school where I am the only music teacher for a student population of 655. This school has a competitive admissions process and only admits about one in ten applicants. Students are typically very bright and well suited to academics. A range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds are represented in the student body, reflecting the larger demographic makeup of the county served by this school and district. My guitar class has become a popular option for satisfying a five-credit arts requirement, being selected over other visual arts and music options by 59 students last year, out of an average grade-level population of 164.

I studied three class sections, numbering 10, 23 and 14 students. The classes meet five days per week, though seniors are out for internships on Wednesdays for the majority of the year, meaning the majority of my students have four class sessions a week. The class assumes no prior experience with guitar and no prior ability to read music. Over the course of the school year, students learn rudimentary guitar technique and music reading ability, culminating in a class concert given at near the end of the year. Guitars for each student are provided in class. No outside practice or study is required.

Data Sources and Collection

On the first day of school in September 2016, I handed out a brief 2-part survey on paper, which all students completed and returned to me. Students who were added to my class later were also given this paper survey and completed it. The first part (see Appendix C) provides background information allowing me to distinguish which students in my class have no musical experience, have previous musical experience but not on guitar, and who are already guitar

players. This part also includes questions on any prior music instruction either taken privately or in school.

The second part of the survey (see Appendix D) focuses on self-efficacy or the students’ belief in their capacity to attain a given goal or achievement (Self-Efficacy Teaching Tip Sheet, apa.org, 2016). This section of the survey is an adaptation of the Music Performance Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Zelenak (2010). The Music Performance Self-Efficacy Scale (MPSES) was developed to measure Bandura’s (1977, 1986; as cited in Zelenak, 2010) four sources of self-efficacy (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal/social persuasion, and physiological state) in relation to academics and music, for a population of 293 students at a middle school (Zelenak, 2010). I have retained the 0-100 Likert scale, wording of the directions, and wording of many of the questions from the original. Additional student data from school records was also recorded. As the self-efficacy scale pertains solely to experiences in making music, I directed respondents to give a “strongly disagree” response if the statement does not apply. This was the case for students who had never played an instrument, taken music lessons, or belonged to any music-making organization prior to my class. One item (#13) was included as a means to check for accuracy in response. My student population is 47 students, all seniors or juniors in high school, some with no prior music experience. Results from all 47 completed surveys were then compiled in Google Forms to generate charts and graphs of the data.

After this preliminary data was taken and instruction had begun, I recorded audio for each of four rounds of individual student meetings, using a small digital recording unit I left running on my desk during class. In reviewing those recordings, I focused on first-time guitar learners. After the first and second round of individual meetings, I listened to the recordings and noted instances where 1) a student expressed happiness or enjoyment playing guitar, 2) I had

praised a student, and 3) a student expressed nervousness or misgivings about their ability to perform. These expressions often took the form of "I can't" statements. I also used the second round of individual meeting audio to identify a group of 11 students whom I determined to be "low motivation" (LM) for low self-efficacy and achievement in learning guitar. In addition to coding the audio data, I also transcribed and journaled about some noteworthy excerpts. In the third and fourth rounds of individual meetings, I focused my attention on the 11 LM students I had identified. The four rounds of recorded individual meetings took place over a three-month period from September through November of 2016.

After the final round of individual student meetings, I administered the MPSES portion of the survey (Appendix D) a second time, noting any changes in responses from my students.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

From the initial Part A and Part B surveys, along with my additional information from school records, I identified the students in my beginning guitar classes with little or no prior music or guitar experience, as well as those with more prior experience. Then, I recorded four rounds of individual meetings with my 47 students over a period of three months. I listened to the entire captured audio for the first two rounds, coding for 1) student expressions of enjoyment, 2) instances of praise from the teacher, and 3) negative statements by students about their ability. In the third and fourth rounds, I focused on eleven students I had identified as low performers, studying their audio and surveys in much greater depth. I listened for any anecdotal or demonstrated evidence of change in self-efficacy for students with the least prior music and guitar experience. Finally, I re-administered the Part B survey (the self-efficacy scale) to all 47 students and noted any change in self-efficacy (and in specific domains of self-efficacy) for my least experienced students.

My choice of codes for the first two rounds of recorded meetings was an attempt to get additional information and insight as to my students' self-efficacy. I made a note of whenever a student expressed happiness or enjoyment playing the guitar, interpreting this as a student report of what Bandura (1977) would call a "mastery experience" and/or "physiological state" source of self-efficacy information. Similarly, I also coded for every time I praised a student (the verbal/social persuasion source of self-efficacy) and also for every time a student said he/she is nervous about, or not good at, the given task. Here I was looking for information as to self-efficacy coming from students' physiological state in a negative way.

Ethics Review

On the first day of class in September 2016, I disclosed to students that I am studying their reasons for being in guitar class, and their feelings and responses to their experiences in the class. While I required students to give their names along with survey responses, I did not share their names with anyone and used pseudonyms in my research documentation to protect confidentiality. Also on the first day of class, I told students that I would be recording the individual meetings, but that these recordings would be for my use only and not be provided to anyone else. My school's administration approved my use of the guitar classes as a subject of research.

Findings

Initial Survey

All three sections of my beginning guitar class were surveyed. Of all students (N=47), 87.2% (n=41) are in 12th grade. The remaining students (n=6) are in 11th grade.

Of the students surveyed (N=47), 80.9% of the students (n=38) reported that they did not play guitar. Forty-eight and nine tenths percent (n=23) reported not playing any musical instrument. Also, 48.9% of the students (n=23) indicated they could not read music notation. Fifty-seven and four tenths percent (n=27) indicated having taken formal music lessons of some kind. Only 19.2% (n=9) are enrolled in any other music offerings at their school.

Figure 1. Student Information

Figure 2. Student Information

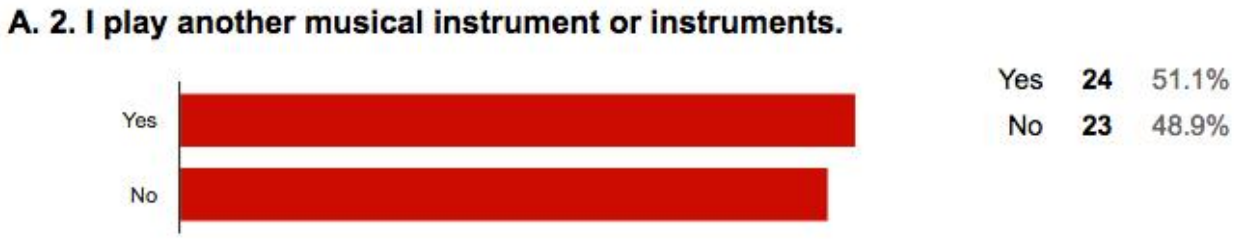
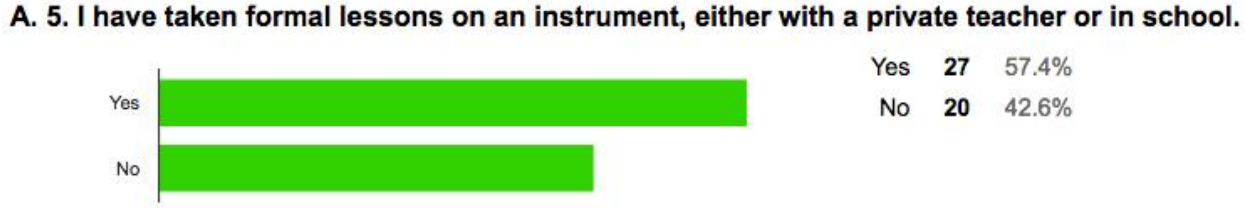


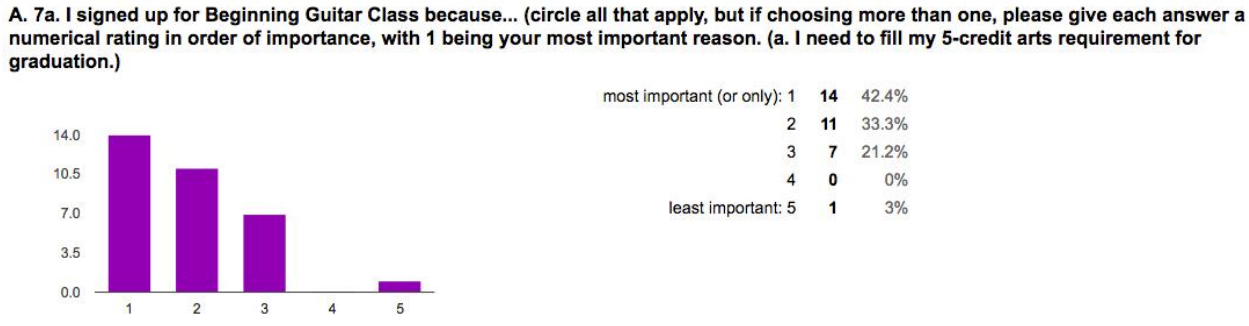
Figure 3. Student Information

Figure 4. Student Information



Twenty-nine and eight tenths percent of students (n=14) reported their 5-credit arts requirement as the most important reason for enrolling in the class (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Reasons for Class Enrollment (percentages given in graphic are out of all respondents who gave a particular answer)



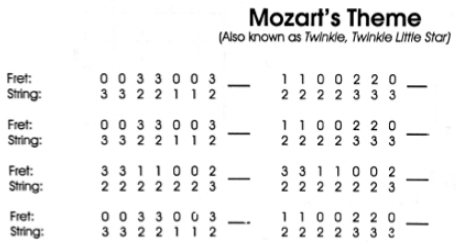
Additionally, all students completed a music self-efficacy scale (Appendix D), which they would complete a second time three months later at the end of my research period. Side-by-side bar graph comparisons for selected items of the self-efficacy scale are given at the end of this chapter.

First Round of Individual Meetings

In listening to recordings of these meetings, I coded for student expressions of enjoyment, instances of praise from the teacher, and negative statements about ability.

At the first meeting, I was checking to see if students could play "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" using a guide (see Figure 6) giving fret number and string number, and the easier 4-string versions of G, G7 and C chords (Bay & Christiansen, 2000).

Figure 6. Excerpt from Textbook



Across three class sections, I noted six instances of a student expressing happiness/enjoyment playing guitar and eleven instances of a student relating that they feel they are not good at the given task.

There were 91 total instances in which I praised a student. These instances were much more regular and less sporadic because I was mindful of giving praise and wanted to be generous with it. Here, I reasoned could have a direct influence and took extra care to deliver praise often and as evenly as possible across all students. However, review of my recording uncovered that I was not always as consistent in praise as I would have hoped. I regretted missing an opportunity to praise a particular student, Elisabeth, who struggled more than most but was obviously trying. In realizing this, after the individual appointments, I went out of my way to be sure to compliment her as I roamed about the room during class as we worked on various guitar tasks. Much of the negative or "I can't" language I encountered at this stage was not defeatist in nature because I could tell it was in the context of "I can't yet." There was still an optimistic tone overall.

One notable respondent in this area of self-doubt was Linda, who has an IEP, and despite her documented attention deficit and poor perceptual organization, is conscientious and hardworking to a fault. She has more trouble than most with reading musical notation, which was entirely new to her as it was to roughly half of the students. Linda has also mentioned her small hands several times, viewing it as an obstacle to good chord construction, where I continue to insist that the right modification of hand placement will allow her to make any chord she likes. I am hopeful that she will persist and not succumb to a defeatist attitude regarding her hands or her notation reading. I encouraged Linda to feel free to pencil in note names in her book when she felt it necessary.

Second Round of Individual Meetings

In the second round of individual meetings, I was evaluating on short, student-chosen pieces in standard notation using a total of 6 notes on the 1st two strings (the notes b,c,d,e,f,g). I once again coded for student expressions of enjoyment, instances of praise from the teacher, and negative statements about ability. Results dipped slightly in expressions of enjoyment but remained stable for the other two codes.

The second round of individual appointments happened over two class periods because now I was looking at more than technique. This was the first time I would ask each student to perform a short selection in standard musical notation. As I began listening to audio from the second round, I was curious about the possible implications of setting a greater challenge. Would students express more self-doubt or hope or satisfaction with their progress?

While still mindful of what I view as my responsibility to praise, I praised each student as regularly as I could, but also offered more diagnostic and corrective help. Students expressed more misgivings in general about their abilities in this second round. Music reading definitely

added a layer of stress. Briana, who did a very good job, prefaced by exclaiming, "I'm panicking!" Deana, a conscientious student who reported she played no instruments and had no music literacy despite brief stints of private instruction on flute and piano, prompted my assurance that "I'm not expecting Carnegie Hall." Priya, who played every note of her chosen piece correctly and with great care said, "I am so bad at this!" to which I responded, "slow and careful is excellent." When struggling, my female students had a tendency to say "sorry" which was markedly absent for boys.

In the process of hearing each student in the second round of individual meetings, I began to identify the students who were progressing the least and whom I felt would be most at risk for disengaging from the guitar class as a result -- my "low motivation" (LM) group. These were the students who played their selections for me haltingly and with the most errors. Alan was one of the least progressed in his ability to play from written notation. Mindful of Bandera's proposed sources of self-efficacy information (Bandera, 1977), I wondered about what the vicarious experience of watching and hearing others in the room playing the same material with greater authority would do to his self-efficacy in the long term. Alan and I spoke about his modest progress as I met with him. "I used to be looking more down here (probably indicates guitar strings) but now I'm looking at the music more."

Nicholas was another student who, while he had learned some guitar by ear prior to my class and expressed eagerness to learn standard notation, struggled more than most at the second individual appointment. Nicholas has an IEP for his attention issues. He reported prior experience playing percussion in middle school band. In talking about his frustration with reading music, Nicholas said, "That's why I quit band. In middle school, they always put me on bells and I couldn't read." To which I responded, "well, this is where we undo that cycle,

whatever the block is where we say ‘I can’t,’ we need to push past that.” But words are only words. Nicholas is the most likely to be off task in guitar class, making noises unrelated to lesson material. Further, I do not see Nicholas’s professed eagerness to learn and avoidance of practice as contradictory. It simply shows me how frustrating and uncomfortable the process must be for him.

After reviewing the audio from the second round of individual meetings, I felt I had heard and seen enough to make a distinction between those who were making very good progress and those who were lagging behind. As my research question focuses on motivation for the lowest-performing members of class, I made the decision to specifically watch eleven students (out of my total 47) whom I considered likely to have low motivation. I identified this group as my “low motivation” (LM) group. As I prepared to observe this subgroup in greater depth and detail, I pulled their survey information for review.

Initial self-efficacy scores for the LM subgroup were very low, including a prevalence of “0” responses indicating “strongly disagree.”

Third and Fourth Rounds of Individual Meetings

In the third round of meetings, I required each student to play a self-selected piece from a page in the textbook which contained short tunes using notes on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings (from open G on the third string, 2nd line treble clef staff, up to the G one octave higher on the 3rd fret of the 1st string, sitting just above the top line of the staff). I also required each student to play full versions (sounding five or six strings in each chord as appropriate) of the G, G7, C, D, and Em chords from memory.

Following the third round of meetings, I began to construct narratives from my notes on the LM subgroup. I followed these students specifically as I went into the fourth and final round

of meetings, searching for any possible changes in level of effort and motivation over time. What follows is taken from my notes and transcriptions of audio data of the third and fourth individual meetings with these students.

David. David began the school year having never played guitar nor any other instrument, and unable to read music. As David took his chair for the third individual meeting, he said, “I’m prepared as much as I can be,” which at the time sounded to me like a preamble designed to lower my expectations of his performance. In hindsight, I also hear the remark more simply as mentally fortifying himself to take on the challenge presented to him.

In spite of having had enough time (in my opinion) to memorize the eight-measure example, he played as if he knew the notes of the instrument but had never seen the music before. Also, David played very softly, so I told him to forget about rhythms and just play every note strong. We worked to identify the note he knew the least well (open B on the second string) so he could focus on it. “I think I understand (the system of standard notation) but I’m bad at multitasking,” David offered. I validated him. “Yeah, I know this asks a lot of you.” I pointed out to him that he probably finds reading E, F and G on the first string easier than B, C and D on the second string because he has known them longer. He agreed with me. I explained that this process would continue to happen in which he would continue to feel more confident with information that had been practiced longer and absorbed more deeply. I also encouraged him to press down harder on the strings with his fretting hand to get a better sound.

On his initial survey, David had indicated no previous history with musical instruments and no music literacy. He had indicated that he needed to fill his arts requirement but also that he was interested in learning guitar, ranking his interest as a more important reason than the requirement. Having observed David for two months, I interpreted this response to mean that the

guitar class represented the most palatable of his options. David appeared to me a clear example of a disaffected, unmotivated student going through the motions and applying a bare minimum of effort.

However, two weeks later I noted his absence in class over three consecutive days. Over these three days, David was absent from my class (1st period) but not marked absent from school. My electronic attendance taking had not triggered a “cut slip,” but as I was concerned he might be cutting my class, I contacted his guidance counselor. The counselor apologized for not informing me earlier, but David had been in a supervisor’s office at those times dealing with “a serious issue.” When I went to the counselor for more information, I learned that David, a high school senior, is the oldest child of four in a single-parent household and is working full-time at a supermarket to help out his mother, who works at a drug store. David is taking two AP courses and, at the end of the first quarter, was carrying a C in one and a D- in the other. His D- in the one AP course was the “serious issue” the counselor had mentioned. All other grades were A’s and B’s.

Given what I had just learned about the circumstances of David’s daily life, I was very impressed with his work ethic at school and that he could put forth any effort at all into learning guitar. The combination of his transcript and his present life circumstances would make a very compelling narrative for a college recommendation letter and tells the story of a hard working student doing his best under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Given everything, the fact that he had learned the basics of standard musical notation and could play some simple melodies on a few notes of the guitar after only six or seven weeks of exposure, suddenly seemed remarkable. This insight gave me all the more reason to act as compassionately as possible in my interactions with David.

At the fourth meeting, that compassionate stance was very much on my mind as David took his seat. He announced which piece he would be playing in standard notation, and then proceeded to play it -- not perfectly, but with considerably more continuity and confidence than last time. I told him I thought he sounded far more musical than he had at our last appointment, and he agreed. I worked with him a little on steadying his tempo and his playing responded well.

My thinking about David had changed. I had to admit that if I were in his shoes, working full time and carrying his academic load, I would not have very much extra focus, concentration or motivation to spend on a class asking me to learn and practice unfamiliar things on a regular basis. I realized that all this time, David had actually been putting in sincere effort, and perhaps wasn’t retaining quite as much one day to the next simply due to a lack of sleep and a lot on his mind.

At David’s fourth and final meeting, his tempo was still not even, but he made very definite improvement in that I could hear his standard notation portion as actual musical phrases, instead of notes laboriously delivered one after another. I heartily congratulated David on what I considered a big leap forward. His chords had improved somewhat as well but there was still work to do. I asked him if there are any songs he has in steady rotation on his phone and he mentioned “I Know What You Did Last Summer” by Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabelo. I told him I’d find him the chord progression for that song, and later emailed him with the chords to the main portion and a link to a good chart with chords and lyrics. My hope is to find something to personally connect with in my class. I cannot lighten his load at all, but if I can give David some way to play a song he cares about, perhaps that song can grow into a larger place of refuge in the future. If David can find some kind of enjoyment or satisfaction in playing an instrument, that means more to me than any vaguely worded set of performing arts standards.

Alan. Alan began the school year having never played guitar, but had some experience with playing the recorder and reading standard notation in middle school. On his survey, he reported that fulfilling his 5-credit arts requirement was his most important reason for being in guitar class.

Alan was absent for a couple of days near the time of the third round of individual meetings and asked me to schedule him late in my sequence of appointments so he would have more time to practice. His standard notation selection sounded very labored. I drilled him on one measure several times to get him to think of a group of notes and to show how to prepare several notes of a phrase in succession. Two minutes of guided practice yielded improvement. Referring to a problem with holding his left hand fingers in position, Alan said, “I feel like my finger just wants to keep coming up.” To which I replied, “But that awareness is good. Just the work you’ve done in the last five minutes has really done a lot.” My intention was to show him that observing his own technique could be a constructive, guiding force.

Working with Alan also made apparent that he needed to be shown how the instrument works to produce sound—that pressing the string down against the fretboard allows the string to vibrate between the point of contact with a metal fret and the point of contact with the bridge at the other end of the guitar. Alan had apparently been operating on a belief about how the instrument works that was not permitting him to lay down additional fingertips on the string outside that vibrating portion established by fret contact. For me, this experience was a reminder that I cannot assume everyone understands how the guitar produces sound. When we act on beliefs that are not based in fact, the results can be frustrating.

At the time of the third round of appointments, Alan had still not learned the full, 6-string versions of the G and G7 chords, while almost everyone else, including David, had. I do not

know why he had not learned those chords when everyone around him would have been working on them, but I made it clear that he needed to learn them as well.

By the fourth meeting, Alan could play the full G and G7 chords, but struggled mightily with transitioning between chords. I had Alan work specifically on developing a reliable, repeatable “plan” for shifting from D7 to G. “Each of your fingertips has one job, so you teach each fingertip its job and then have them rehearse their jobs, in time, the exact same way over and over again.”

Also in that final meeting, I drilled Alan on a two measure section of the standard notation piece to get him to prepare notes in advance. There was an unnatural stall between an open E on the first string and a first fret C on the second string, throwing the rhythm off. Apparently, Alan needed me to demonstrate very clearly how to think ahead when playing; that my C should be premeditated as my open E is ringing. If reading gets in the way of this premeditation, then I need to isolate and practice only that portion until I can technically execute it. For Alan, I likened the premeditation to scaling a rock-climbing wall, in which the climber has to mentally plan each new placement of a hand or foot. As a musician, I live this life every day and have done so for decades. This makes me occasionally forget that it is not a readily apparent way of learning for everyone. Some guided practice with Alan, isolating a small passage and anticipating fingerings, yielded immediate results.

Priya. Priya began the school year having never played guitar or any other instrument, and unable to read standard musical notation. On her survey, Priya rated equally the following four reasons for enrolling: the arts requirement, interest in learning the guitar, this class being recommended to her, and being placed here by her guidance counselor. Priya made definite progress since the last round of meetings, but her single-note lines were still halting and

sounding more like detached notes in a series than a phrase. I worked on fretting and position technique with Priya in an effort to help her prepare notes more effectively. I like to do short “guided practice” episodes of a minute or less to demonstrate the dividends paid by practicing correctly. In Priya’s case, it was to encourage her to keep a fixed left-hand position that would allow her to connect notes together into a musical idea.

At this point, Priya was still also struggling with tuning as well. Her ability to compare and adjust each string to align to a played reference pitch was lagging behind most of the class significantly. By the fourth meeting, Priya was still having trouble tuning her guitar independently but her standard notation technique was improving. When I suggested that she press down harder on the fretted notes of her chords, we both responded to the improved sound. I encouraged her to “dig in” and physically commit more to these chords she obviously knew and could play. As she strummed stronger and harder I heartily approved, “Yeah! Yeah! Own it!”

Elisabeth. Elisabeth reported the need to fulfill the arts requirement as her foremost reason for enrolling. Elisabeth had no history with musical instruments or reading music prior to this guitar class. After performing poorly in the first individual meeting, I was concerned about her ongoing motivation level. I made a point of praising Elisabeth whenever I roamed around the room during class and observed her actively trying. She was seated next to Alexis, another one of my LM students, but also in close proximity to Alejandro and Marcelina, students I felt were good role models.

At the fourth meeting, Elisabeth demonstrated that she knew her chords, but was not getting good enough string-to-fret contact to make them sound their best. I helped her a little with hand position, but then it occurred to me that the action (the string height off of the fingerboard) might be high on her particular instrument, making chords difficult especially for a

beginner. I traded my guitar for hers and there was immediate improvement. I let her keep my guitar for the rest of the class period while I performed a neck adjustment on hers.

Alexis. Like her classmate Elisabeth, Alexis reported the need to fulfill the arts requirement as her foremost reason for enrolling in guitar class, and had no previous musical instrument experience or music literacy. Although challenging, Alexis turned out to be very rewarding to work with, and I would consider my experience with her as one of the "success stories" of this journey.

Alexis is a track and field athlete with long manicured fingernails, from whom I often heard "I can't." As I introduced exercises for the class to work out and practice for a few minutes, I would roam around the room catching people doing the right things. I found myself paying *extra* attention to Alexis if she could get even three of the notes to ring in her C chord or play two measures of a simple tune in steady tempo. Again, I cannot draw a distinct correlation, but I have to believe my positive feedback paid off when two weeks into the school year, to my absolute delight, Alexis showed up with her nails clipped short, ready to work toward the calloused left hand fingertips of a guitarist who plays regularly. She is making amazing progress, and I might have allowed her to believe and hold on to her own negative self-concept as a musician more firmly in an earlier year.

Alexis provided a clear example of the kind of frustration I see in absolute beginners. I identified her early on as an LM student on account of her frustration threshold and penchant for "I can't" statements. She had been absent one day recently so I made a point to save her appointment until near the end of class, to give her some more time to practice. When I finally called Alexis up, she shook her head "no" and her reluctance to play for me was obvious. I tried to make light of the situation by saying, "let me help you! Come on up and let the healing

begin!” I hoped to find a silver lining in the anxiety she must have been experiencing, and found it in her effort she put into right hand technique. When attempting the written notation part of the individual meeting, I noticed she was very focused on her right hand in order to play the correct strings, so I helped her through that problem with a right hand anchoring technique that allowed her to pay more attention to the left hand.

> Me: OK, let’s just stick with that first measure. I can see you’re watching your right hand very intently because you want to make sure you pick the right string. You’re having right-hand insecurity!
>
> Alexis: Yeah *(laughs)*.
>
> Me: So you need a way to feel confident you’ll pick the right string without having to look directly at it. Take your left hand away from the neck entirely and stare off into space and try playing just your open 2nd and 3rd strings.
>
> Alexis: *(looks off into space as directed and plays her open 2nd and 3rd strings a few times)*
>
> Me: Great! But that must be hard to do without anchoring your right hand *(picking hand)* somehow, so you have a physical frame of reference. Try putting your pinky or pinky and ring finger down on the soundboard of the guitar and see if that helps.
>
> Alexis: *(tries my suggestion)* Yeah, that’s easier.
>
> Me: Good! If you’re able to play those strings without having that insecurity of having to look at them, you can look at your left hand instead. So let’s go back to those four notes, A, A, B, C, and look directly at your left hand *(fretting hand)*.
>
> Alexis: *(plays the first four notes while looking at left hand, but un-anchors her right)*
>
> Me: Good! Try that again and see if you can anchor your right hand with your pinky.
>
> Alexis: *(plays example again with anchored right hand)*
>
> Me: Good! Try that a few more times.

Alexis: *(plays the example four more times)*

Me: Great! It sounds better each time you play it, and hopefully it feels more and more comfortable each time like it’s sinking in.

Alexis: Yeah!

Me: So is that starting to feel a bit more…

Alexis: Yeah, it feels better.

I hoped in those few minutes to help Alexis experience some more success and feel that much more motivated to continue to work.

At the fourth meeting, Alexis’s standard notation reading had become considerably more fluent, though she still struggled to anchor her right hand. In addressing her frustration with changing between chords, I suggested that she focus on one transition, Am to D7, and to “just hang out there for a while” in order to experience what a smooth chord change sounds and feels like. I congratulated Alexis on her progress and she seemed pleased.

Deana. On her initial survey, Deana answered “no” to previous experience playing guitar or any other instruments and “no” on ability to read music. However, she answered “yes” to having taken formal lessons on an instrument and explained in the space given that she had “taken private lessons for piano for about six months and played the flute in school for a year.” I found this response noteworthy since she maintains that she does not read music or play any instruments despite having periods of sustained instruction. The time frame of her music study suggests that neither flute nor piano went well for Deana. She reported, as her foremost reason for enrolling in guitar class, that her guidance counselor had placed her there. Deana did join my class late by about a week and had to do some catching up. She is a senior and does need to fill

her arts requirement, but she listed that reason third. All together, her answers painted a picture of reluctance and resignation. On the self-efficacy scale, Deana reported 20 on the statement, “I have had positive experiences playing music.” This answer reflects a fairly strong disagreement and poor mastery experience. She gave only a score of five on the 1-100 scale for “I have overcome musical challenges through hard work and practice.” Deana also entered zeroes in the vicarious experience and verbal/social persuasion portions, and low scores for the portion of the index addressing physiological state. Deana was easy to flag as having low musical self-efficacy.

When we had our third individual meeting, Deana had the G and G7 chords reversed, but she was able to play each of the chords. She showed little evidence of preparation on the notation portion, so I gave my standard routine on “how to practice” in which I demonstrate how to isolate a one- or two-measure fragment and work on it to a point of confidence before moving to additional material.

Deana arrived for her fourth meeting well prepared, but I could see that she was exerting a lot of effort to make sure she was playing the correct string in the right hand while fingering correctly in the left. I suggested that while she was doing a great job, maybe we could make this easier if she became more able to “trust” her right hand and not have to visually check it as much. I praised her efforts. “Between right hand and left hand, it’s a lot, but you’re doing it all, and you’re doing it all correctly. I think the biggest job now is, how do we make this easier?”

Daphne. Daphne reported having played flute for three years and knowing how to read music. She reported high levels in all portions of the self-efficacy scale. One notable exception was a zero, or “strongly disagree” for “I do not worry about small mistakes during performance.” It appears Daphne experiences anxiety in a performance situation. Daphne asked to see me for her appointment outside of class time, citing a field trip as her reason. Other students on that

field trip I simply saw the next day. But given her increased level of worry, she probably preferred to meet with me in an empty classroom rather than in the presence of her classmates.

At the fourth meeting, Daphne appeared considerably more confident and played her chords better than I had ever heard them before. I noticed that she was curling up her left hand pinky finger very tightly, and when I told her about it, she said she had not noticed. I suggested that this tight pinky curling was a way Daphne was collecting extra tension in her hand, and that she may be able to relax that tension over time by being aware of it. I guided Daphne in altering her left hand position while playing one chord to show her how to begin to relax her hand. In turning into a miniature lesson and diagnostic session, Daphne's meeting was one of the longest, clocking in at ten minutes. I hoped the extra attention was helpful, and would build on the progress she had made.

Anya. I chose Anya as part of my LM study group because she answered "no" to all questions about previous musical instrument study and music literacy and because she had tried out for my chorus and done poorly. Anya could not match a pitch in her range when I played it on piano and exhibited little or no ability to remember and sing back a short, simple melody. However, she recorded mostly high scores on the self-efficacy scale. Anya had signed up for an "open-mic" night I ran earlier that month, and to my surprise, sang beautifully with her guitarist friend accompanying. Her intonation and vocal support were very good, and I was very happy for her and praised her successful performance. Anya's one notable low score on the self-efficacy scale was to the statement, "I do not worry about small mistakes during a performance." I wondered if the nerves of a chorus audition for me had been much more severe than that of performing on a stage to her friends. One clue resided in the vicarious experience section of the scale: a 100 score for the statement, "I have watched other students of similar musical ability as

me perform a piece of music, and then decided whether I could, or could not, perform the same piece of music.” Anya scored high for all items in the vicarious experience portion. My data painted a picture of Anya as someone who enjoys music and feels empowered by experiencing it with, and through, her peers.

Of my whole LM group, Anya’s performance for me at the third individual meeting was the most delightful surprise. Anya played all the rhythms and notes of the standard notation portion correctly and confidently. Her chords sounded strong too. I was very happy for her and she was rightfully happy with herself as well. Anya’s fourth appointment was also marked by evidence of hard work and dedication. She navigated a chord progression while keeping her right hand in steady tempo -- a skill with which many find prolonged difficulty. I find it easier to praise and encourage a student who is as fully committed to the work as Anya, and turns the praise I give her into a positive feedback loop.

Devin. Devin reported no prior musical instrument experience and no ability to read music. His self-efficacy scale showed no concept of himself as a musical personality of any kind, but he did rank his interest in learning guitar higher than his need to fill his arts requirement. However, having gotten to know Devin a little, I doubted his interest or enthusiasm were very high.

With Devin (and other beginners as well), I sometimes feel like I am revisiting and re-suggesting the same strategies they did not adopt the last time. They hold on to habits that hold them back. This must be more likely for those who don’t “hear” themselves as the guitar players they want to be -- because they do not aspire to be guitarists. Devin appeared to be a tougher case than most, in that I had yet to find a way to help him personally connect with his guitar learning.

I was aware that I was frustrated with Devin’s progress to a degree that affected my ability to be compassionate and positive. Probably his being a member of my last class at the very end of the day did not help either, as I usually feel less energized by that point. By the fourth meeting, however, Devin had definitely turned a corner. I was happy about this, since his progress exceeded my expectation. I recalled not wanting to ask him what had changed, knowing that some students are guarded about sharing their process, and I wanted to respect that. Instead, I only reinforced Devin by observing that his chord playing was strong and his transitions were coming along well. My only critique was to tell him to play louder. Standard notation was also confident. I was surprised and delighted but concealed my surprise, simply telling him “great job!” I sincerely meant it as well, not that I would have praised certain other higher performing students for that level of quality, but when comparing Devin’s current demonstrated facility on the instrument to his earlier efforts, the difference was notable and commendable. Devin’s progress may actually be one of the more compelling case studies regarding the additional attention and care I paid to my LM group.

Nicholas. Nicholas had played percussion in middle school band. He has an IEP for attention deficit. From talking with him, I knew that in middle school Nicholas was given written parts to play (standard for any school band) but could not read them. He also took guitar lessons from a private teacher who taught songs Nicholas wanted to learn and did not require reading. Nicholas has a significant interest in performing and had demonstrated a keen interest in the school’s musical events through his volunteering with the sound and lighting crew. Playing from written music has been a continued problem for Nicholas, but I feel we are making some headway. He was very receptive to my input on how to make his chords sound better.

I had noted before that Nicholas was consistently the most likely to be off-task in guitar class. At the time for the fourth round of appointments, Nicholas requested that I meet with him on the Wednesday of that week, when the seniors would be out on internship. I was ready for him and had high hopes for his playing that day. Nicholas came in and told me he could not play guitar at all, showing me the splint on his right hand ring finger from an injury in physical education the previous class period. I commiserated with him as he lingered in my office doorway. His injury looked to me as if he could still potentially hold a pick between his thumb and index finger and play fairly normally. I asked Nicholas if he had tried to play guitar at all, and when he answered no, I had to convince him to take a guitar and at least try. He reported that he couldn’t play, but I think he was at least partially using the opportunity to escape having to play for me. I know he enjoys playing guitar but he exhibits a pattern of avoidant behavior around reading guitar music from notation.

Nicholas’s finger was not broken and made a quick enough recovery to sit for a fourth meeting the next day. His standard notation portion was completely unprepared, as he struggled to play each note. Nicholas’s avoidant behavior made this predictable, but I did not want to punish him for it. I instructed him to take the eight-measure exercise and work it out in two-measure blocks, one block exclusively at a time, and come back in fifteen minutes. He returned and played the piece much more fluently. I took the opportunity to tell Nicholas that he had just proven to himself that he could learn to read and play a piece of written music if he broke it down into small enough segments. I hope this lesson will have a lasting positive effect for the remainder of the school year.

Days after meeting with Nicholas, I came across a piece on the internet about ADHD and emotion which reminded me of our meeting and of Nicholas’s behavior in general. One passage

in particular resonated with my impression of Nicholas: “Emotions motivate action- -- action to engage or action to avoid. Many people with untreated ADHD can readily mobilize interest only for activities offering very immediate gratification. They tend to have severe difficulty in activating and sustaining effort for tasks that offer rewards over the longer term” (Brown, 2016). I personally related, and felt that Nicholas probably could as well. In my own extensive experience with music practicing, I found I could only keep myself at a task by breaking it down into small enough goals that I could *create* points of immediate gratification. Otherwise, I would have lost hope long ago!

Linda. Linda played guitar prior to this class but could not read music and had no other musical instrument experience. She was strongly encouraged by two older friends to take my class. Linda scored low across all measures of the self-efficacy scale except for a 90 in response to the statement, “performing with my instrument makes me feel good.” Linda has an IEP for attention issues. She also exhibited considerably more difficulty than most with reading music. In spite of this, Linda’s persistence and work ethic is exemplary. At our third meeting, she reported, “I’ve been mistaking the notes a lot less, but I still mistake them a lot.” Also, as we worked through strategies for practicing for confident execution of short passages, I played a melodic fragment while she had a clear view of my fretting hand, and was able to accurately copy my performance afterward. Linda was similarly quick when I simply dictated notes to her instead of having her read them. Linda’s IEP does not specifically mention reading but her behavior in my class suggests that she has done a lot of work in using her strengths to compensate for her weaknesses. At our fourth individual appointment, Linda played her standard notation portion very well, and her chord progression was excellently performed with a solid, steady tempo.

Exit Survey

In late November 2016, I administered the self-efficacy scale a second time. I also examined the self-efficacy scales more closely for the eleven students who became the focus of my concentration in the latter half of my research. For these eleven students, self-efficacy rose across the board. On the 1-100 Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" for 17 self-efficacy statements, the LM subgroup went from an average response of 25.7 at the beginning of the research period to 65.7 at the end of the research period. I found this significant positive change over a three-month period to be a strong endorsement of applied music education for beginners in high school.

Self-efficacy also rose across the board for the total group of students. The 17 statements on the scale I administered are organized by the four sources of self-efficacy -- mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal/social persuasion, and physiological state (Bandura, 1977). Figures for selected responses are included at the end of this chapter.

Mastery experiences speak to the individual's experience of the results of his or her effort. Before and after results for the total group on the mastery experience statement, "I have overcome musical challenges through hard work and practice" show a substantial rise in agreement over the research time period (Figure 7).

Vicarious experience is a source of efficacy information from the modeling of others. Each student in my class has their fellow students, and me, as models for behavior and performance expectations. Before and after results for the total group on the vicarious experience statement, "I have used other music students as models to improve my performance skills" showed a significant move toward greater agreement by the end of the research period (Figure 8).

Verbal persuasion refers to the feedback, suggestions, instruction and praise a student may receive from me and other students. Here, I was interested in maximizing my potential to influence students through praise to attribute their efforts to their hard work and persistence, invoking the positive qualities of the attribution theory of motivation. Agreement with the statement, “My music teacher has complimented me on my musical performance” showed the most dramatic rise for a “strongly agree” response, from 4.3% at the beginning of the research period to 25.5% at the end. Answers swung heavily toward the “agree” end of the Likert scale (Figure 9).

Physiological state speaks to the emotions of the respondent. Agreement with the statement “Performing with my instrument makes me feel good” also rose by the end of the research period (Figure 10).

Overall, I was very pleased and encouraged with the positive attitude shift reflected in these responses. I look forward to applying this scale to next year’s classes but on a September-June timetable, to see if the positive self-efficacy shift is even greater over a longer period.

Figure 7. Agreement with statement “I have overcome musical challenges with hard work and practice” from early September and late November 2016.

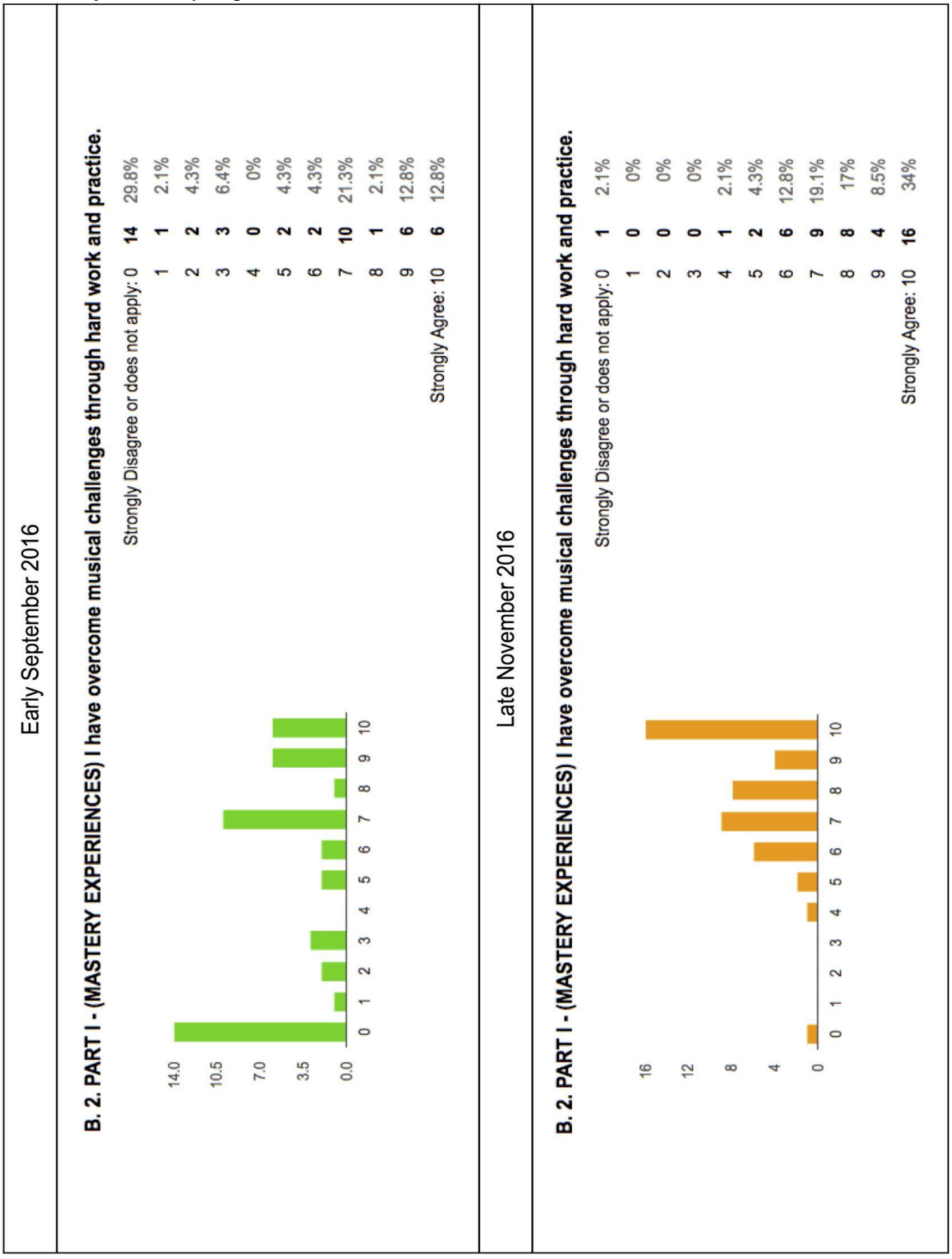


Figure 8. Agreement with statement "I have used other music students as models to improve my performance skills" from early September and late November 2016.

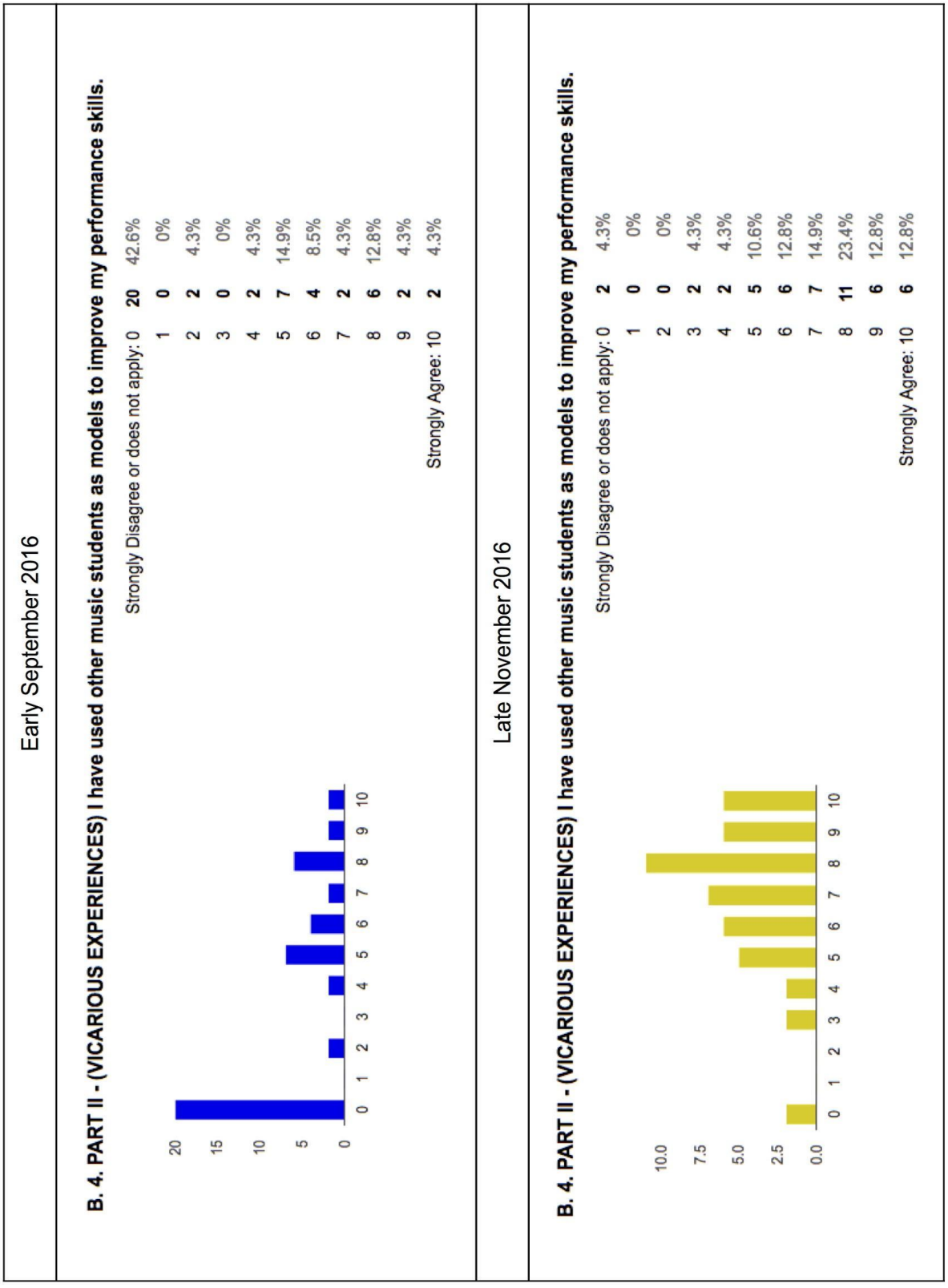


Figure 9. Agreement with statement “My music teacher has complimented me on my musical performance” from early September and late November 2016.

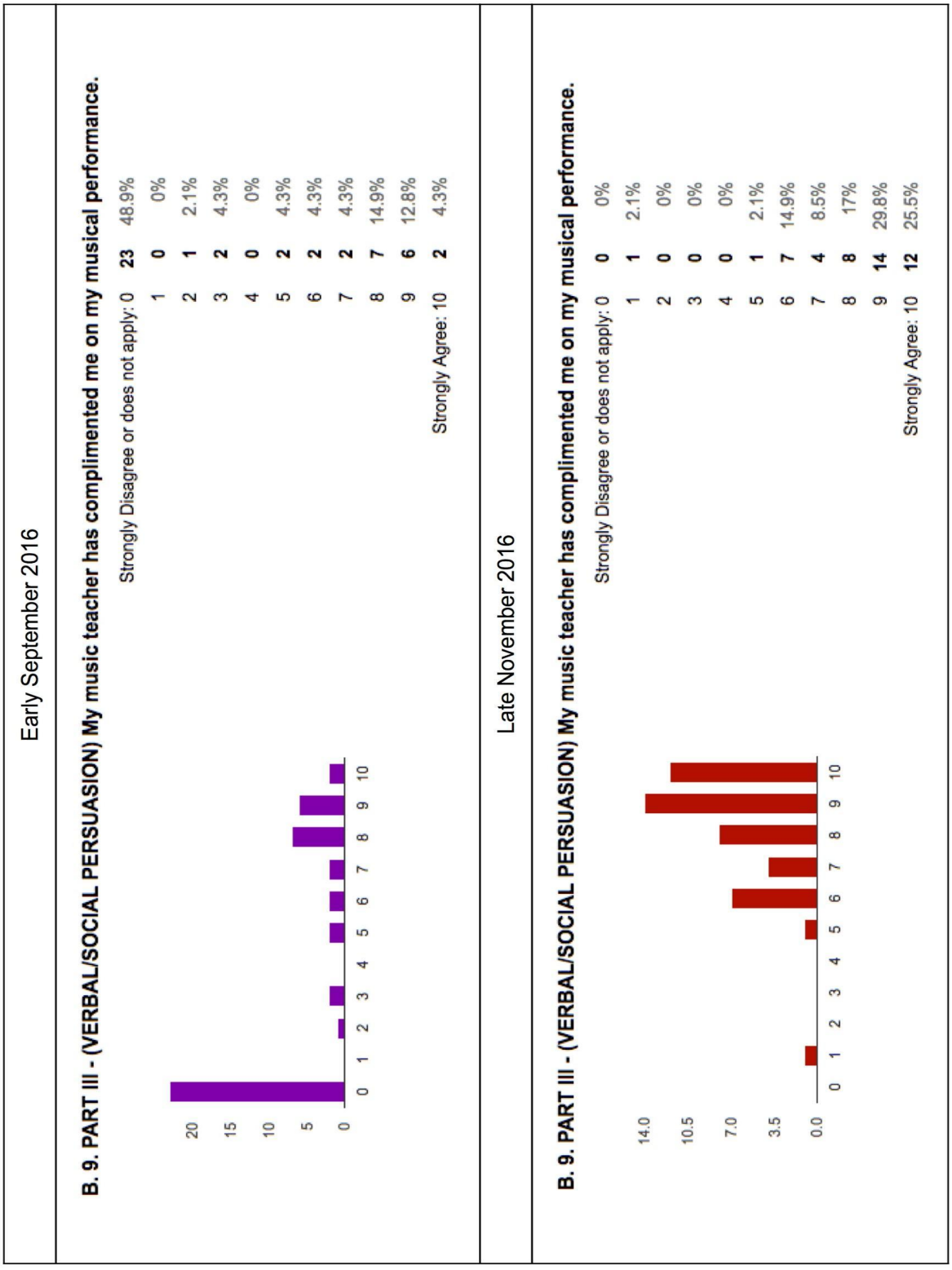
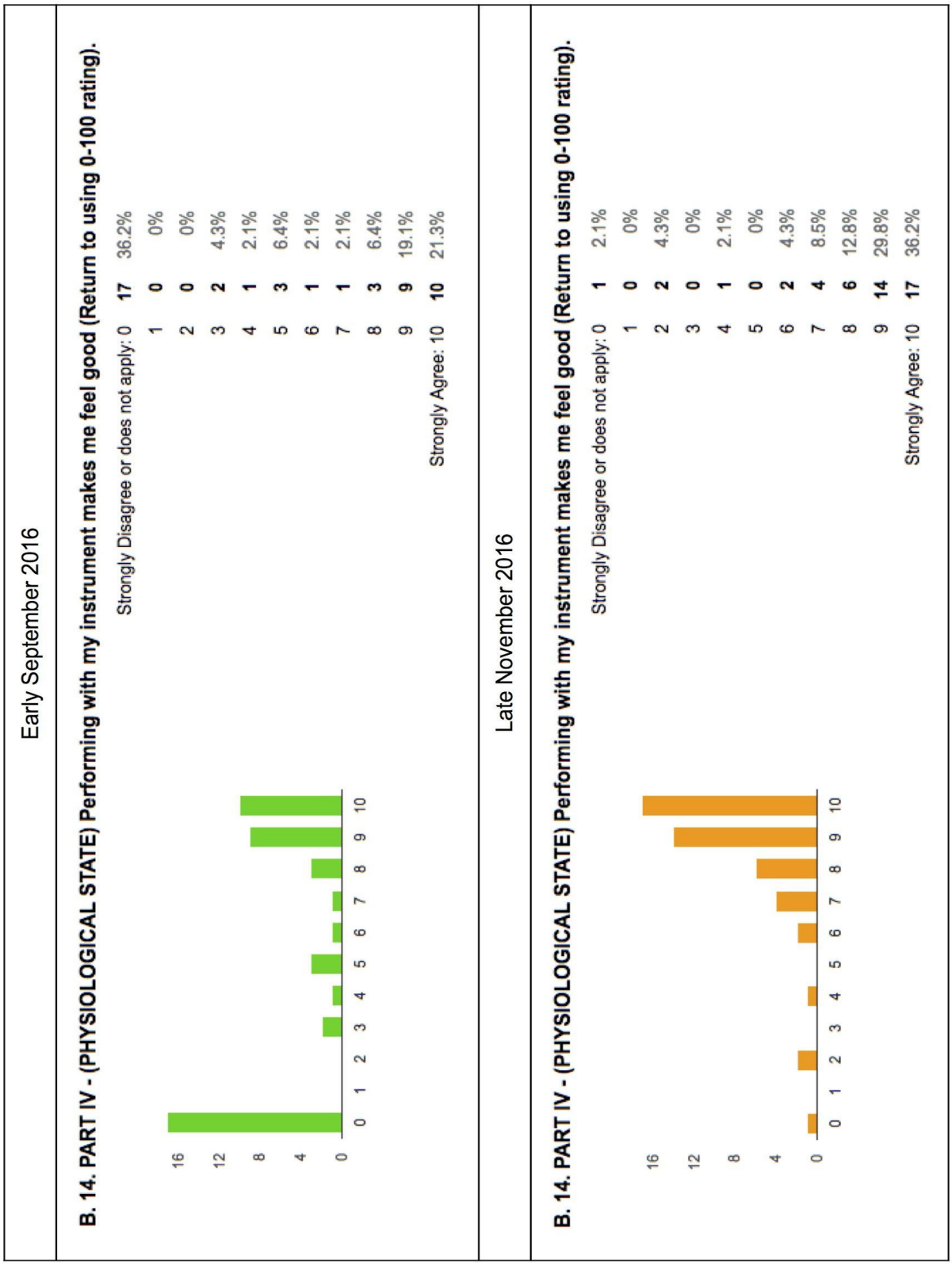


Figure 10. Agreement with statement "Performing with my instrument makes me feel good" from early September and late November 2016.



Implications

As West (2013) notes, achievement-goal theory has two orientations -- mastery and performance. I clearly prefer to foster a mastery-goal orientation. Generally, the students who progressed the least were also the most prone to resist or put off having to play for me individually. This suggested that there was yet another goal-orientation dimension to consider. Performance-goal oriented students may actively seek the recognition they desire (a good grade, for instance), or may actively *avoid* recognition at all. These avoidant students displayed the least amount of security and comfort with their skills on the guitar. This performance-avoidance orientation is prevalent enough to warrant its own label, and investigation in its own right. In performance-avoidance, “behavior is instigated or directed by a negative or undesirable event or possibility” (Elliot, 1999). I could describe the students who resisted playing for me as performance-avoidant. Nicholas, with his struggle to concentrate on reading music notation, comes to mind immediately as a performance-avoidant student, despite his interest in music.

Separating out a group of students thought to be less motivated may have some value. But in doing this, I discovered (or rather, rediscovered) that each of my students is an individual constellation of needs, desires, abilities and, yes, motivations. Everyone wants to feel competent, comfortable and assured. Every student needs to be challenged in an individual way to unlock his or her greater potential.

In the future, I plan to continue using entrance and exit self-efficacy scales in my guitar class. But rather than administer them in a September-November research window, I will use the entire school year, administering my exit self-efficacy scale after the class concert in early June. I can think of no better testament to the value of applied music education for all students than to

be able to demonstrate that these students feel themselves more capable and accomplished for the experience.

In addition to bringing me more in tune with the needs of my own students, I hope to use this research and my ongoing use of self-efficacy scales to advocate for music education. In the performance-goal mindset of junior and senior year of high school, when students are encouraged to land high test scores and grade point averages in preparation for college, a place and time dedicated to the authentic connection with their own learning is vital. To that end, I think "before and after" self-efficacy scales lend useful testimony for the power of music education, and defend the wisdom of requiring fine arts at the secondary level.

Finally, my research has brought me to the belief that the use of self-efficacy scales may be a very useful, if seemingly *radical,* innovation for state-based teacher accountability measures. In New Jersey, for example, all public school teachers are responsible for Student Growth Objectives (SGOs). A teacher is to identify two SGOs, do a pre-assessment pertaining to each with their students, and then a post-assessment several months later, ostensibly demonstrating to the New Jersey Department of Education that the teacher is doing his or her job (AchieveNJ, 2014). Why not explore the possibility of handing at least some of the assessment of educational value to students, and measuring that value in terms of student belief in their ability? After all, students will attach meaning and value to their educational experiences. No one else has the power to do it for them.

Obstacles

Originally I had planned to take audio data on all 47 of my guitar students over the course of four rounds of individual meetings. I did leave the recorder running the entire time for all four rounds, but after listening to the first two rounds in their entirety and coding them, I realized that to get the real depth I needed, I had to modify my approach. By that point I had already generated about six hours of audio and would be generating at least that much more! I therefore made the decision to identify eleven students (my LM group) and study my audio on only those students in more depth. This meant that for the third and fourth rounds of individual meetings, I later spliced out and discarded audio on 36 of my 47 students when taking notes.

My original timeline for the four rounds of meetings would have reflected past practice in my class. However, once the research was underway, I realized I was going to want and need more time to study, synthesize and write about my data. So, I truncated my schedule slightly, making the final round of meetings and second administration of the self-efficacy scale in the fourth week of November rather than in early December as I had originally planned. As I found myself able to move through my curricular material slightly faster this year (possibly on account of better enthusiasm from both teacher and students), this schedule ended up working well.

I made all students aware I would be recording them at the beginning of the school year. This met with no objection. However, I knew that a visible device with microphones and a glowing red light could be distracting. So, I hid my Zoom H4 digital recorder in a music stand that had a storage compartment behind the main panel. With the microphones of the recording unit aimed out of the side of the music stand where I would work with students one on one, I picked up a remarkable amount of ambient noise in a loud room full of students practicing on

their guitars. When I later took the sound files and imported them into Logic (digital audio workstation software) for examination, I sometimes had to strain to hear my students over the loud din of the not very distant background. As I came to understand that I was observing my own behavior with these students more than the students themselves, I faced the microphones toward my side of the music stand, not the student side, in the fourth round of meetings. While the loud background din remained, I heard my own interactions with my LM group more clearly and could infer or remember more specifics about the interaction from the prompt of my own voice.

I believe that teaching beginning guitar to a classroom full of students, even as full as my room of 23, holds some of the same advantages I have noticed in larger sections of chorus classes I teach -- namely, that a larger group enables each individual to play/sing out more because they are less exposed. But there are very significant disadvantages as well. There is no way for me to provide the kind of individual time each student deserves without sacrificing too much group ensemble time and too much planned group lesson activity. My periodic assessments are very minimal and systematic so that I can get through even my largest class in no longer than three consecutive class periods, translating to roughly five minutes per student. Some students can easily do what I ask, and they are done in one or two minutes. This frees me to spend more time addressing the problems of students who are not performing as well. This imperfect system leaves my more talented and advanced students wanting. I make occasional attempts to differentiate for my excelling students, but I have no formal system in place. This research project in all likelihood exacerbated the problem, as I focused all the more intently on my LM subgroup.

Compiling my data and writing my findings became subject to what I imagine is the

perennial teacher-researcher problem, which is that it is difficult to stick to budgeted time. There is always more to do. I had made a practice this school year of coming in an hour early to have quiet time to write, reflect, and organize. More often than not, those mornings were usurped by spontaneous ideas to make my daily lesson plans better and more complete. The teacher in me could not resist the temptation to act immediately on items that would benefit my students and planning for that day! While I was able on occasion to steal a few minutes from prep periods here and there, the bulk of my work ended up taking place evenings and weekends.

This research project underscored for me what I have long known; that I cannot be all things to all people. However, having information on my students’ experience and beliefs will help me be more effective for more of those students.

Emerging Questions

The school where I teach has a very academics-driven student culture. On their way into class, I hear students discussing upcoming tests, homework issues, how they did on recent quizzes, and how their college applications are coming along. This year, 100 juniors out of a class of 167 have been recommended for National Honor Society. Grades and test scores are held in high esteem. I prefer to minimize grade focus, and have always graded leniently on the theory that punishing poor performance too harshly might be more of a deterrent than a help, at least for a mastery-goal orientation. It would be interesting to study the interaction of grades earned with self-efficacy, to see if there is a correlation of any kind.

The eleven students I identified as my LM group for the second half of my research period were picked because they had not progressed as far as others by their second individual meeting, and/or they exhibited no prior musical experience along with low or non-existent musical self-efficacy. In other words, the selection of the eleven was a judgment call as to who really needed more attention from me in order to succeed.

However, I did note that one student, Faheem, had initially progressed well after being added to the class late. Faheem had played percussion in middle school band and retained a working knowledge of how to read and execute rhythms from notation. He caught up to the class admirably despite being added in late September. However, his effort and performance dropped off after this point. He appeared reluctant to play, and seemed to engage with his instrument only when I was watching or roaming around the classroom near him. I wondered if the circumstances of his earlier musical training had any bearing on this turn of events. Had his previous experience

in the music classroom been unpleasant or forced upon him? Was Faheem performance-goal oriented and felt the pressure was off once he could "run with the pack" to a certain degree? What could I do to get a student like Faheem to want to become a better a guitar player? Is there possibly an impact on Faheem's motivation coming from how music (or the arts in general) is or is not valued in his home? Is there perhaps an issue with the choice of instrument? Is there a technical ceiling he has not broken through for another reason? All of these are questions that are bound to arise in the future with new students, and should be addressed.

In this study I did not attempt to break down the self efficacy scores in detail that would reveal things like correlations between types of self-efficacy statements (mastery, vicarious, verbal/social and physiological), but future research could easily plumb these depths. As it is, I am a newcomer to this fascinating area of social science.

Gender issues also bear upon the music classroom. Girls were more apt to apologize when making a mistake during a meeting with me than were boys. My research here did not distinguish self-efficacy between genders, but this would be a worthy dimension to explore in depth.

Additionally, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between technical ability on a musical instrument and a student's previous experience with practicing activities involving fine or gross motor skill. For instance, are those with an athletic or dance background more likely to gain technical proficiency on a guitar or other instrument more quickly than those who do not have that background? If so, can we put the difference down to a variability in self-efficacy regarding sustained practice of a technical skill, or are there other factors in play?

Finally, my school is unusual in offering guitar to first-time instrument learners in 11th and 12th grades. As noted previously, research shows that competence beliefs *and* importance of

music progressively declines as grade levels increase (Mcpherson et al., 2015). Can the offering of a beginner musical instrument class for older high school students significantly offset declining competence beliefs and perceived importance of music for the better? If so, this provides another strong argument in favor of robust public school arts education.

Conclusion

Motivation is as complex as each human being who walks into my classroom. What motivates others may sometimes intersect with what motivates me, and sometimes not. To call a student “unmotivated” is a judgment. It only means they do not demonstrate the *kind* of motivation I want them to have. Perhaps a constructive way for me to frame the purpose of my work as an educator is to say that I harness the varied motivations of all my students, in the service of a pursuit that I believe will bring them a greater satisfaction and quality of life.

The foreword to the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards gives what I would call a predictable preamble to an arts standards document: “The arts have always served as the distinctive vehicle for discovering who we are...They (generate) a significant part of the creative and intellectual capital that drives our economy. The arts inform our lives with meaning…” (NCCAS, 2016). All of which is absolutely true, *but,* from my perspective as a professional musician and music teacher, misses the true practical value of hands-on involvement in the arts. I bring to my work the personal conviction that practicing an instrument showed me how to learn, how to solve problems, how to persevere, how to concentrate. It was the act of *practicing* that showed me I could learn to do anything I wanted. Practicing music is all about breaking down a complex task into several simple tasks, mastering those simple tasks, and reassembling them. Music only becomes the source of expression and inspiration we rhapsodize about *after* the technical mastery is firmly in place. The time spent reaching for that technical mastery is practicing for *life,* whether you are a sanitation worker, an attorney, a computer programmer, a sales representative, or any occupation under the sun. All students should have the opportunity to

engage in the journey of practicing. If it helps any of my students a fraction of what it has helped me, my teaching is time well spent.

My goal in this study was to increase motivation for those of my students with no previous instrumental music experience. I wanted those students in particular to feel more positive regard for, and personal relevance in, their music study. I wanted them to feel more able and empowered. More specifically, I wanted to identify practices that are already having a positive impact on student self-concept and experience in guitar class, and to identify practices that should be discarded or modified based on my findings.

To that end, I began the school year by surveying my guitar students on their backgrounds and reasons for being in my class, and administered a music self-efficacy scale. I then recorded each of four rounds of brief individual meetings with students in a span of three months. Finally, I re-administered the self-efficacy scale and recorded my findings.

The research process brought me closer to my students. Some, whom I had expected to exhibit low motivation and effort based on their survey answers, turned out to be diligent and engaged. Some presented unique challenges for me as a teacher, but working through those challenges was ultimately rewarding for me and, I hope, those students.

I expected those among my students with no previous music background to be the least motivated. I expected at least a few to resist learning even the most basic skills; to give up and attempt to “hide out” in my class early in the year. This was happily not the case. Over time, I felt that all of my LM subgroup made progress of which we could be proud. In my view, whether or not this translates for these individuals into continued guitar playing or other involvement with music, I hope the experience served as an example for how they might be able to approach unfamiliar tasks in the future. I hope they learned more about themselves and their capabilities.

After all, my job is not to turn out “musicians.” It is to provide students another channel through which to find out how they learn, what they like, and ways in which they excel.

The act of carefully observing my students, gathering specific information about them and acting on it, had to have communicated more strongly than in previous years that I care about them as people. In turn, I felt my classes as a whole gave me more effort than I expected. My largest class, 23 students, I had anticipated to be difficult -- full of students only in the seats to fulfill a curricular requirement. That class became the high point of my day. I fed off of their energy and enthusiasm. Of course they required a lot of effort from me, but it was joyful, rewarding effort.

The state mandate that all high school students receive instruction in the arts can be seen as a reflection of our values as a democratic society. As an educator charged with the responsibility of delivering mandated arts instruction, I want my students to perceive a high level of personal relevance in their arts coursework. Students should feel that their arts instruction holds as high an importance as does instruction in other academic areas. I want my students to continue, after high school, to value the arts in their own lives, and those of their families and communities. Further, I want students to experience success in their guitar learning experience, with the hope that they can extrapolate an enhanced sense of self-efficacy to any pursuit they wish.

I hope, and believe, my research and reflection have brought me closer to this ideal.

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Appendix A

Subjectivity

My entrance surveys provided me a deeper knowledge about my students than I normally enjoy. I had never begun a guitar class with a survey before. This, right off the bat, was bound to change the normal guitar class experience I had poised myself to observe. I told all the students before handing them the surveys that I was working on a thesis about self-concept regarding music and learning a musical instrument. I felt it was only fair to disclose my reason for giving them the survey, but it also occurred to me that several students in each of my guitar classes knew me outside of and prior to guitar class. Their opinion of me might have crept into their answers. I am fortunate to enjoy what colleagues and administrators tell me is a good reputation with students, and I imagine this may have made some overstate their interest in guitar on the initial survey and understate the importance of fulfilling the arts requirement. Also, I did have them put their names on these surveys, which may have influenced some to overstate their interest in guitar to their guitar teacher!

Regardless, thanks to the information collected, I knew who considered themselves musically inclined, and who felt ill at ease with the idea of playing an instrument or playing music. Armed with this additional information about each guitar student in my care, it was almost instinctive to make sure I praised the most musically insecure students in my classroom early and often. I wanted to work harder for them, to help them feel some of the success of their more musical counterparts. I started with the basic philosophy that *music should be for everybody.* Therefore, I know I went into my research already poised to be far more conscious of the frequency and potential impact of praise on the students I teach. I am sure I praised and

complimented students, especially those struggling the most, more than I would have otherwise. While I cannot know for certain, my experience with the power of praise suggests to me that my increased praise had to be an extra motivating factor for the students I identified as needing it the most.

I had specific information from my surveys on who felt they had been praised the least on their musical performance or ability in the past. As a caring educator, it would have been unconscionable not to act on that information. In terms of my subjectivity, it is obvious that I went into my research already fully convinced that I could and should bolster my students’ self-concept with more frequent positive feedback and encouragement.

I noticed changes from previous years teaching guitar class as early as three weeks in. I went into my research knowing well that I brought with me certain assumptions. I began with the assumption that a student acting disaffected and not putting in effort is a result of feeling like they cannot do what they are being asked to do. When I go out of my way to demonstrate my belief that yes, they CAN do what I ask them to do, this seems to help. Knowing that the recorder was on the entire time I held individual meetings with students made me far more apt to maintain a positive, upbeat, encouraging demeanor with every student, much more consistently than in the past. I wanted to be able to listen back to an uplifting, empowering educator I could be proud of when I put on my headphones later to code the recordings!

My largest class section this year is 23 students, which is an absurdly large group for a guitar class. Musical experience and skill in the room ranged from Jacob, an accomplished violinist who had previously tried out for and won a chair in regional orchestra, to Alexis, a track and field athlete who never gave playing an instrument a second thought. Because my study focused on students not musically inclined, my attention to Alexis and students like her

undoubtedly caused me to neglect students more like Jacob, who are just as important, and could have brought just as useful a perspective.

Though research is typically considered the product of observation, I realize here that my deliberate influence is pervasive. In reflecting on my findings, I am observing my own behavior as much, or more than, that of my students. From the start of my research, I was personally invested in causing my students, especially my least musically experienced ones, to feel a substantial improvement in self-efficacy. It would be safe to say I was consciously working for that result, and in so doing could not possibly measure my findings as a disinterested bystander. However, I do not see this as a strike against the value of my research. My purposeful and systematic reflection paid real dividends in the success I perceived my students enjoying on an ongoing basis. It also paid a generous dividend in genuine job satisfaction! The class of 23 is my largest section. They are talkative, animated, and hard to quiet down, but I found myself looking forward to their energy each day. In previous years, a class this large was bound to contain one or two students reluctant to try or participate, perhaps acting out or chatting off-topic with each other, quick to ask to go to the bathroom to escape my class for a few minutes. This year’s big class was different. The animated chatter I had to calm down after we played through an ensemble exercise was the best kind of chatter -- excited and engaged students sharing with each other what had gone well and what had gone wrong in the piece they just played. As a teacher, I could not ask for more on-task behavior even if it might have *looked* out of hand at times.

I have heard it said that teaching is love. Love is by its nature unquantifiable and immeasurable, yet I can still know if I am giving or feeling love more or less. My research revealed specific objective data. But what the process really showed me, or reaffirmed for me, is purely subjective to the core: the more love I put in, the more love I get back.

Appendix B

Implementation

Zelenak's music self-efficacy scale (Zelenak, 2010) proved a useful window into students' beliefs about their own abilities. I remain convinced that personal belief regarding ability is a major factor in achievement. Taking a self-efficacy scale and modifying it, as I had, based on how Zelenak (2010) had modified from the guidelines of Bandura (1977, 2006), is a practice I would recommend to virtually any educator in any subject area, especially anything applied or "hands-on."

While the value of increased knowledge of our students is indisputable, this value does not lie only in information that focuses instruction. This increased knowledge brings a deeper personal dimension to the student-teacher interaction, and can yield significant insights for educators.

Implementation in Music Education

Music education is changing. Band, choral and string programs still occupy a dominant position in most secondary school music programs. But just as pedagogy in other subject areas have changed with the times, "music educators, too, can uphold tradition while embracing the future" (Kratus, 2007). Innovations like guitar classes for older first-time instrument learners help keep our craft vital by bringing in many additional students who may not be attracted to, or well suited for, more traditional music offerings. A guitar teaching approach that takes careful account of the self-efficacy and motivation issues of older first-time learners has done much to fill a gap in arts education in my own school, and could bring a new dimension and vitality to music programs in high schools everywhere. Fellow music educators may benefit from adopting

and improving on some of the practices that have made my beginning guitar class a popular arts elective in my building.

In that spirit, I have applied to present this research at the Association for Popular Music Education (APME) 2017 conference. Additionally, I will submit versions of my research to the NAfME *Music Educators Journal* and *Journal of Research in Music Education*, as well as *TEMPO Magazine*, the periodical of the New Jersey Music Educators Association, and *String Research Journal*, the periodical of the American String Teachers Association. Further, I will plan to submit to the 56th NAfME Eastern Division Biennial In-Service Conference, to take place in February 2019.

Implementation in Education Policy

Advocacy for the arts in public education faces an uphill battle constantly. However, with the recent election of a U.S. President who has openly expressed disdain for the public school system (Parker & Gabriel, 2016), and subsequent nomination of a Secretary of Education strongly in favor of diverting public education money to privately owned charters (Westervelt, 2016), the future for arts in education now looks especially grim. In too many American communities, especially poor ones, the policy decision is made to decrease or remove arts in favor of doubling down on tested subjects -- math and English (Strauss, 2013). Position statements from music education advocacy bodies like National Association for Music Education should clearly state the necessity of allowing all children the opportunity for applied music practice. As a path to self-knowledge and self-efficacy, learning music would enhance the self-actualization of most students. For some, like myself, music study is life-changing in its importance.

In keeping with my belief that the self-efficacy scale is a viable gauge of educational

growth, I will request of the administrator in charge of approving my Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) to allow me to use pre and post self-efficacy scales as an SGO instrument to be counted toward my yearly summative rating. Further, I will consider putting my name in to serve on our building's School Improvement Panel (ScIP). Pursuant to the TeachNJ Act of 2012, ScIPs were mandated for every public school in New Jersey. "The ScIP...ensures that teachers have a strong voice and significant opportunity to help shape evaluation procedures within each school" (AchieveNJ, 2015). By having input on the ScIP, I can potentially get the attention of the District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC) to advance my belief that self-efficacy scales can and should be used as SGO instruments. Self-efficacy can provide a useful window into a student's growth, since any person will only act on abilities they *believe* themselves to possess.

Implementation Regarding Colleagues and the Teaching Community

My district is a member of the Montclair State University Network for Educational Renewal (MSUNER). I am applying to be part of Clinical Faculty for MSUNER, which "offers teachers the opportunity to expand their teaching and leadership roles to include being a cooperating teacher or on-site education mentor for student teachers, co-teaching student teaching seminars on campus or on-site, and teaching in the MSUNER professional development series" (Donvito, 2016). With this credential, I would be able to apply for grants to support curriculum development and research, so that I could continue to explore the intersection of self-efficacy and participation in music coursework, and generate professional development for colleagues as well.

Finally, I am a believer in the power of the self-efficacy scale to gain insight on the students we teach, and in the concept of strengthening student self-efficacy as a goal in education. I would be able to share my experience with colleagues and act as a resource for

adapting self-efficacy scales to the variety of subject areas taught in our school and district. In my school, professional learning communities (PLCs) have already been established, allowing faculty a chance to voluntarily participate in discussions and share experience on a variety of issues. My research gives me a solid foundation to start a PLC dedicated to implementing self-efficacy scales and to the goal of increasing student self-efficacy in general. I am excited to share and work with colleagues via a PLC at the building level.

Appendix C
Survey Instrument, Part A

Name_____ Class Period 1 2 9 (circle one)

BEGINNING GUITAR SURVEY -- PART A

1. I play guitar already. Yes No (circle one)
2. I play another musical instrument or instruments. Yes No (circle one)
3. (If "yes" to #2) Please list instruments played.

   _____

   _____

4. I know how to read music. Yes No (circle one)
5. I have taken formal lessons on an instrument,
   either with a private teacher or in school. Yes No (circle one)
6. (If "yes" to #5) Please list instruments for which you have taken lessons, and for how many months or years you took lessons. If you can't remember, take your best guess.

   _____

   _____

7. I signed up for Beginning Guitar Class because…*(circle all that apply, but if choosing more than one, please give each answer a numerical rating with 1 being most important)**
   a) I need to fill my 5-credit arts requirement for graduation. (rating)____
   b) I am interested in learning guitar. (rating)____
   c) the class was recommended to me. (rating)____
   d) I was placed here by my guidance counselor. (rating)____
   e) Other (please describe) _____(rating)____

**for Question 7, students were instructed in class to numerically rank their answers in order of importance, with "1" the most important, if they gave more than one answer.*

Appendix D

Survey Instrument, Part B

BEGINNING GUITAR SURVEY -- PART B *(given in September and again in late November)*

Name_____ Class Period 1 2 9 (circle one)

Directions: Respond to the following statements based on your current level of musical ability, experience, and primary instrument or voice. There are no right or wrong answers. Indicate to what degree you either agree or disagree with the statement by writing *any* number between *0* (Strongly Disagree *or does not apply*) and *100* (Strongly Agree) on the line next to the statement. Carefully consider the number you choose.

0_____10_____20_____30_____40_____50_____60_____70_____80_____90_____100

Strongly Disagree *or does not apply* Strongly Agree

Part I - (Mastery experiences)

_____1. I have had positive experiences playing music.

_____2. I have overcome musical challenges through hard work and practice.

Part II - (Vicarious experiences)

_____3. I have improved my music performance skills by watching other students, who are similar to me in some way, perform well.

_____4. I have used other music students as models to improve my performance skills.

_____5. I have compared my performance skills with those of other students who are similar in musical ability to me.

_____6. I have watched other students of similar musical ability as me perform a piece of music, and then decided whether I could, or could not, perform the same piece of music.

Part III - (Verbal/Social persuasion)

_____7. My friends think I am a good performer on my primary instrument.

_____8. Members of my family believe I perform well.

_____9. My music teacher has complimented me on my musical performance.

_____10. People have told me that my practice efforts have improved my performance skills.

_____11. I have received positive feedback on music performance evaluations.

_____12. I have met or exceeded other people's expectations of being a good musician for someone of my age.

_____13. Write only the number 9 for this answer (not 0-100 rating).

Part IV - (Physiological state)

_____14. Performing with my instrument makes me feel good (Return to using 0-100 rating).

_____15. I enjoy participating in musical performances.

_____16. I am learning, or have learned, to control nervousness during a performance.

_____17. I do not worry about small mistakes during a performance.

_____18. I have positive memories of most, or all, of my past musical performances.

Part B of survey adapted from Music Self-Efficacy Scale included in Zelenak, M. S. (2010). Development and Validation of the Music Performance Self-Efficacy Scale. Music Education Research International, 4, 31-43.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO ATTACH TO EACH STUDENT SURVEY

(information gathered from attendance & electronic gradebook data)

Grade level of student _____9 _____10 _____11 _____12

Student enrolled in Chorus at school? Yes No (circle one)

Student enrolled in Band at school? Yes No (circle one)

(If in Band) What instrument does student play in Band? _____