

SECONDARY INSTRUMENT STUDY

By

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Introduction

Secondary instrument study is frequently a problem for persons who build a music curriculum. Should it get the same amount of academic credit as primary instrument study? How much practice time should be expected of the student? Secondary instrument students also contend with this problem. A second-year Music Education student who has piano as the primary instrument and voice as the secondary said, "There is a difference between primary and secondary instruments that the professors have a tendency to forget." A senior piano performance major taking organ as a second instrument said, "I am not very interested in the secondary at all. I always feel like I should be doing my primary instrument instead."

Second instrument study is an important part of a college or university's music offerings, especially for music education majors. Because of the interest in this subject in the United States, we expanded a study of primary instrument study habits to include a shorter examination of what persons studying a second instrument are doing with that instrument. The data collected from this study should provide some interesting information for persons involved in teaching secondary instruments, for students, for administrators and for persons who design a music education curriculum at the collegiate or university level.

The Survey

Nine hundred seventy-seven students in the United States and a Japanese Conservatory were surveyed about their practice habits. Of that group, three hundred fifty-four took both primary and secondary instrument lessons. The subjects attended one of two liberal arts colleges or one of three schools of music at major universities in the United States or a conservatory of music in Japan. The study was based upon work done at Norges Musikkhøgskole (Norwegian Conservatory of Music) by Harald Jørgensen (Jørgensen 1997).

All subjects filled out a five-page survey about their practice habits on the primary instrument. Questions focused upon efficiency, motivation, concentration, planning, influences upon planning of practice and time spent practicing alone and/or with other students. We asked the students not to count rehearsal time as practice time. The students were also asked if they practiced as much as their peers and as much as the applied teacher wished them to practice. The students who also studied a secondary instrument filled out an additional page on the survey that asked for time spent practicing and if they practiced as much as their peers and as much as the applied teacher wished them to practice. In each area space was left for comments, two of which you read above.

A description of the subjects who filled out the survey in the two countries is shown in Table 1. The information from that table then listed in Table 2 by types of instruments the subjects study. Emphasis will be upon those subjects studying the secondary instrument, with comparisons made to primary instrument study and between the five schools,

described above, in the United States and the conservatory in Japan.

Table 1: Subjects by Gender/Majors/Program of Study*

	US	Japan	Totals
Male	266	28	294
Female	406	251	657
Totals*	672	279	951
Music Majors	379	233	612
Non-Majors	309	56	365
Totals	688	289	977
Music/Music Performance	258	199	457
Music Education	121	34	155
Totals	379	233	612

Table 2: Subjects by Primary and Secondary Instruments*

Instrument	Primary Instrument			Secondary Instrument		
	US	Japan	Totals	US	Japan	Totals
Vocal	191	42	233	44	8	52
Keyboards	134	151	285	105	113	218
Wind/Percussion	231	57	288	48	6	54
Strings	115	21	136	24	6	30
Totals*	671	271	942	224	133	357

*Although 977 subjects filled out the survey, some totals are less than that number because students studying electronic and non-traditional instruments are not included and some subjects did not identify their instrument or gender on the survey.

Results

How much time do students actually practice a secondary instrument and how does that compare to the time they spend on their primary instrument or the time students spend on the same instrument if it is their primary instrument? Table 3 below compares practice times (exclusive of ensemble rehearsal time) in four categories between primary and secondary instrument study and between the US schools and the Japanese conservatory. Upon reading this table, the reader may be shocked to see that there are students who do not practice! Eight primary instrument students reported they do not practice. Five of those were in the voice area and of the eight, six from the United States and two from the Japanese conservatory. Nine secondary instrument students reported that they do not practice, three from the United States and six from Japan. Four of the secondary instrument students were in voice, three in brass/woodwind/percussion and two in the keyboards area. These subjects may be performing in ensemble, but report that they do not practice alone or with another student at any time.

Another statistic that is very apparent is the large range of practice times that produce

large standard deviations. These statistics may be seen at each of the institutions that were studied. For persons interested in either secondary or primary instrument study, there is something in this table to ponder. Some questions that might be considered after perusing Table 3 could be: "Why register to study if you are not going to practice?" or "What am I doing as a teacher, administrator or student that could improve these numbers?" The answer to the latter question for students is rather easy; just practice more. For the teacher or administrator the questions above and many more that could be asked are not as easy to answer or for many not even easy to discuss.

Table 3: Practice Time by Primary and Secondary Undergraduate Students in the United States and at a Japanese Conservatory (Minutes per week - MPW)

Instrument & Country	N	Range(MPW)	Mean(MPW)	Standard Deviation
Voice (Primary-US)	173	0 - 1080	194	179
Voice (Secondary-US)	37	0 - 225	93	57
Keyboard (Primary-US)	114	60- 2520	542	459
Keyboard (Secondary-US)	83	15 - 450	173	87
Brass/WW/Perc (Prim-US)	213	0 - 2520	475	424
Brass/WW/Perc (Sec-US)	32	0 - 315	125	79
String (Primary-US)	100	15 - 2520	454	454
String (Secondary-US)	15	20 - 540	174	130
Voice (Primary-JC)	30	0- 900	330	268
Voice (Secondary-JC)	6	0 - 300	75	114
Keyboard (Primary-JC)	129	0 - 2940	799	449
Keyboard (Secondary-JC)	74	0 - 630	140	132
Brass/WW/Perc (Prim-JC)	36	120 - 2100	959	466
Brass/WW/Perc (Sec -JC)	5	0 - 90	42	40
String (Primary-JC)	18	90 - 1260	628	362
String (Secondary-JC)	3	20 - 60	47	23

We divided the subjects into three categories that became quite easy to identify as natural breaks in the raw data among all subjects of the primary instrument. Those three categories are: (1) those that practice five or fewer hours per week, five to twenty hours per week and more than twenty hours per week. Table 4 shows the percentages of students in each of the three practice time categories. The percentages listed on that table are meant to be another way of describing the data in Table 3. Those that practice more than 1200 minutes per week are perhaps aiming for a performance or similar career. The percentages in that category are small, but what one might expect for the serious study of the major instrument. It should not be surprising that there were no secondary instrument students in the highest category. Ericsson (Ericsson 1997) and Hallam (Hallam 1997) have studied practice time needed to become a high level performer as well as other aspects of that line of study. Practice times of more than twenty hours per week (1200 MPW) reflect what Ericsson and Hallam report in their work with developing and professional performers.

The category of five or fewer hours per week was chosen because we again saw a natural break at that point. Most of the secondary instrument students report practice times

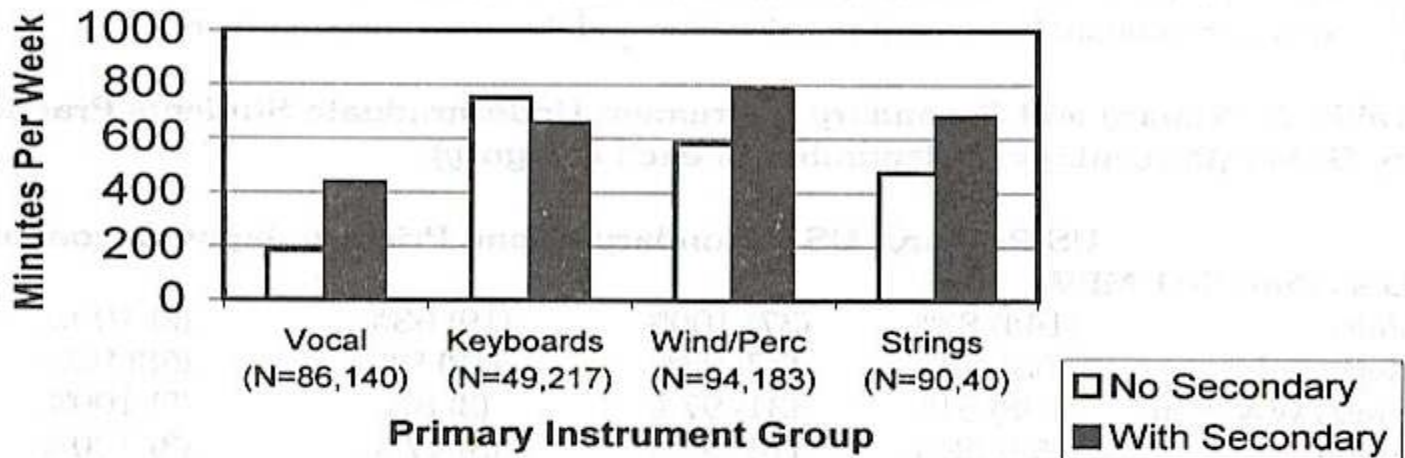
in that category. The third category, between five hours and twenty hours of practice time per week, shows a healthy percentage of students on secondary instruments in the keyboard and string areas. Those instruments may require enough practice to make the student respectable at the lesson thus making for increased practice time. The low number of subjects (N) or lack of subjects in some of the cells in Table 4 are to be expected when considering secondary instrument practice time and the areas they represent.

Table 4: Primary and Secondary Instrument Undergraduate Students Practice by Group (Percentages) (N=number in each category)

	US Primary	US Secondary	Japan Primary	Japan Secondary
Less than 301 MPW				
Voice	(144) 83%	(37) 100%	(19) 63%	(6) 100%
Keyboard	(53) 47%	(77) 93%	(12) 9%	(68) 92%
Brass/WW/Perc	(108) 51%	(31) 97%	(3) 8%	(5) 100%
String	(52) 52%	(14) 93%	(3) 17%	(3) 100%
Between 300 & 1201MPW				
Voice	(29) 17%	(0) 0%	(11) 37%	(0) 0%
Keyboard	(48) 42%	(6) 7%	(93) 72%	(6) 8%
Brass/WW/Perc	(87)41%	(1) 3%	(18) 50%	(0) 0%
String	(44)44%	(1) 7%	(13) 72%	(0) 0%
More than 1200 MPW				
Voice	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Keyboard	(13) 11%	(0) 0%	(24) 19%	(0) 0%
Brass/WW/Perc	(18) 8%	(0) 0%	(15) 42%	(0) 0%
String	(4) 4%	(0) 0%	(2) 11%	(0) 0%

Voice students report less practice time than other students. The tables here will do nothing to deflect the standing argument that exists among many students and teachers in that regard. However, from earlier work, we found that voice students who study a secondary instrument start to approach total practice times of the two (primary plus secondary) instruments of other groups who take two instruments. Figure I (below) shows the effect of second instrument study upon the total practice time of each category of instruments. The bar to left in each category signifies mean practice times when there is no secondary instrument and the one to the right the mean practice total times of primary plus a secondary instrument. The graph clearly shows that voice students profit as far as time in the practice studio by studying a second instrument, while keyboard students reduce their practice on their primary instrument when studying a secondary instrument.

Figure 1: Effect of Secondary Instrument on Practice Time



The gain in combined practice time by string, wind and percussion instrument students taking a second instrument are somewhat less than those of voice students. Wind instruments gain about two hundred minutes per week and string students gain a little less than two hundred minutes per week, compared to the increase of more than two hundred minutes per week by the voice students.

Is the effect of a second instrument on total practice time dependent upon what type of instrument you study? Are there some combinations of primary and secondary instruments that are more successful? Table 5 shows the impact of each of our four categories of instruments within each category of primary instrument. The reader should take special note of those areas where there is less combined practice time than when a student practices just the primary instrument. Although these results do not establish that taking a secondary instrument causes reduced practice time on the primary instrument, as a practical matter they do suggest that those students who elect to study two instruments in some cases also practice less. Both students and instructors should be aware of this pattern.

Table 5: Data for Two Instrument Study

Instrument(s): Primary/Secondary	N	Mean Minutes per Week	Standard Deviation
Vocal/No secondary Instrument	140	184	187
Vocal/Keyboard	71	473	283
Vocal/Winds-Percussion	9	354	257
Vocal/String	6	590	368
Keyboard/No secondary	217	751	521
Keyboard/Vocal	24	651	447
Keyboard/Keyboard	8	879	434
Keyboard/Winds-Percussion	9	422	213
Keyboard/String	8	723	369
Winds-Percussion/No Secondary	183	583	526
W-P/Vocal	16	449	213
W-P/Keyboard	59	949	508
W-P/Winds-Percussion	16	583	441
W-P/String	3	395	132
String/No Secondary	90	473	424
String/Vocal	2	460	42
String/Keyboard	29	724	355
String/Winds-Percussion	4	495	267
String/String	5	675	197

The questions on the survey that concerned how the student sees him/herself in relation to other students as well as the studio instructor is one that is not usually asked, but is certainly on the minds of most students. The information shown in Table 6 might often be perceived, but not discussed among students or teachers. The information may, however, be important enough to be considered by all participants in this enterprise.

It is interesting to observe that there are only three areas in which students rated themselves fifty-percent or better in these self-ratings. Two of the areas are from the school in Japan and one in the United States, but all three in secondary instrument study. Researchers who work with Japanese subjects suggest that they tend not to use extreme positive or negative choices. The figures above do not necessarily verify that observation when reporting practice time in the two exceptions noted above and in the number of zeros seen on the table.

Table 6: Undergraduate Secondary Instrument students responses to the Survey Question, "Do you think you practice about the same number of days and minutes as your fellow students (Others).....as your teacher wants you to practice (Teacher)?"

	<u>US Primary Instrument</u>		<u>US Secondary</u>		<u>Japan Primary</u>		<u>Japan Secondary</u>	
	Others	Teacher	Others	Teacher	Others	Teacher	Others	Teacher
Voice	31	23	20	8	21	4	0	0
Keyboard	48	38	48	23	21	3	28	9
Brass/WW/Perc	39	22	42	31	38	19	60	0
String	21	25	53	33	25	0	50	25

The figures in this table represent percentages, ie 31% of US Voice students think they practice as much as their peers, etc.

Summary

The reader should understand that a comparison of schools of music and departments or schools of music in the United States with a conservatory of music in Japan is perhaps not a comparison that can be made on equal footing. Each of these three types of institutions have different missions. However, the study is of students interested in learning to play an instrument for one reason or another and if that is the case, comparisons will follow.

Is five hours of practice per week enough? That seems to be the question for both primary and/or secondary instrument study. Half or more primary instrument students in the United States practice less than five hours per week. The students at the Japanese Conservatory score better, but that may be a reflection of the type of institution it represents. Most of the secondary instrument students in both countries are in the practice studio less than five hours per week. Is that enough?

Are we comfortable knowing that our students think they do not practice as much as their peers or as much as their studio teacher wishes them to practice? There may be aspects of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation factors involved with this question, but we believe that there is an issue here that should be addressed.

Some Recommendations

We wish to offer some recommendations for changes that might help what we see as a problem with secondary instrument study. There might also be some recommendations for primary instrument study after viewing the data in the tables and the graph in this paper, but the focus here will be on secondary instrument study. In that regard, we are aware of the known questions of staffing, practice room availability, schedules and so forth. In addition, each institution has its own set of problems and those schools might take the information reported here into consideration while making the changes that could improve not only secondary, but also primary instrument practice. With some changes, perhaps the effectiveness or the attitudes toward the instruction in both areas might be improved.

Recommendation #1: Separate secondary instrument offerings from primary instrument offerings in all communications with students and faculty. The listings of these courses should clearly show the course expectations and goals of practice time in each

area. If this is done, students and teachers may understand what is expected of both parties which could possibly improve the respect for second instrument study by the students and consequently, improve the time spent practicing.

Recommendation #2: Review where second instrument instruction is successful in regard to practice time before allowing a second instrument to be elected. For instance, voice students might be required to study a second instrument as it seems clear it would be an advantage to them. Other doubles might be permitted on a student by student basis depending upon the combination of instruments as well as the motive and practice history of the student.

Recommendation #3: If five or fewer hours is considered to be enough practice for some student programs, such as Music Education, create a faculty supervised, but a graduate or senior student operated class that meets from three to five hours a week. This would create supervised practice time for most of what is needed by the student without the stigma of a "less important" offering.

Recommendation #4: Increase and continue the communication among and between students and faculty about practice. We have found that this issue is often ignored. The instructor thinks she/he is telling the student of the expectations of the instruction, but the students report otherwise. One student wrote, "Of all the voice and trumpet teachers I've had through the years, very few, if any, talked about practice habits and the importance of concentration, developing concentration, and so forth." This was not an isolated statement, many students wrote similar comments about relationships with the studio teacher. Fifty-seven students were interviewed as a part of the larger study. Many of those students also reported that no one had ever spoken to them about how to practice or any of the other aspects of practice. They also told the interviewer that students do not discuss how to practice among themselves. There was one exception, a highly successful, senior, string bass student who started that instrument as a third-year student in college after playing bass guitar. He said, "I talk to everyone about practice; my teacher, other teachers, students — anybody who will discuss the topic with me!"

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