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The Effect of Method Book Content on Adult Instrumental Musicians' Reported Understanding and Enjoyment

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Pedagogical articles have provided guidance through method book evaluation sheets (Pizer, 1971) or context-based questions (Buehman, 1973; Gowman, 1977; Olson, 1982; Tatton, 1994) to help educators choose an appropriate book. Other non-research articles have provided descriptions of method book content to enable educators to compare scope and sequence (Buehman, 1973; Ely & Stowers, 1995; Warrick, 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, 1989).

Descriptive research studies have reviewed method book content (Tullberg, 1992), and described directors’ use of method books (Heavner, 1994; Monty, 1986/1987). Experimental studies have investigated the effect of method book use on the performance ability of young musicians, and found that performance achievement did not vary with the introduction of different method books (Kress, 1981; Monty, 1986/1987; Rivera-Diaz, 1992/1993).

It is unclear whether the aspects advocated in non-research articles or the results of research studies would be the same if the beginning band members were adult musicians instead of youngsters. In articles specifically addressing adult learners, Klotman (1961) asserted that it may be appropriate to use the same teaching materials for adults as would be used with younger learners, while others have advocated using different materials for older learners (Burley, 1987; Orlofsky & Smith, 1997; Oseng & Burley, 1987; Solbu, 1987). For whatever learning materials that are used, writers on adult learning have stressed the need for materials to be relevant to the adults learners’ present needs and congruent with the learners’ past experiences (Friedmann, 1992; Myers, 1989). In a music pilot study of adult learners, the issue of material relevance and congruence was highlighted through many of the adult beginning band directors’ statements that they commonly chose music because it was familiar to the adult musicians (Rohwer, 2004).

While method books are commonly used as the learning material in the beginning instruction of adult ensemble classes (Black, 1999; Rohwer, 2004), Black (1999) warned that a method book should be specifically chosen “that is appropriate for mature adult students” (p. 47).
As adult ensembles are becoming a more common entity in community music education settings, there is a greater need for an in-depth understanding of material appropriateness in relation to adult learning potential. Since method books are often used as the source material for beginning ensemble instruction, there is a need to investigate if adult learners report greater understanding and enjoyment using various lesson book formats. The purpose of the current study was to compare the content of three method books on adult instrumental musicians’ self-reported understanding and enjoyment.

Method

The adult instrumental musicians in the study were 24 beginning to intermediate level wind, brass, and percussion members of a Senior Citizen Beginning Band. The 13 men and 11 women in the band played the following instruments: flute (2), clarinet (4), alto sax (5), tenor sax (2), trumpet (6), trombone (1), baritone (1), tuba (1), and bells (2).

The musicians played two method book pages, one introducing the concept of cut-time meter and one introducing the concept of six-eight meter, from one unpublished and two published method books. The musicians had all been playing their instrument in the band for at least one year, and hence, level two method book content was used so as to be appropriate to the musical level of the musicians. The two published method books were chosen based on a past study that cited the Essential Elements 2000 and Standard of Excellence as the two most widely used method books in a study of 35 surveyed adult bands (Rohwer, 2004). The researcher formatted a third method book that used music commonly preferred by mature adults (Broadway songs and standards) to teach each of the two concepts. The songs in the Broadway songs and standards pages were chosen: 1) to highlight the metrical concept, and 2) to approximate a comfortable and realistic range and key center (see Table 1 for a complete list of songs and musical concepts addressed).
Table 1

*Method Book Content*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cut-time Meter Page</th>
<th>Six-eight Meter Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential Elements (Bk 2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Standard of Excellence (Bk 2)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Rap&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Cut and Paste&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Cut Above&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
<td>Oats, Peas, Beans&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in Eb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yankee Doodle&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in Eb)</td>
<td>The Victors&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in Eb)</td>
<td>Over Easy&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (in Ab)&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Victors&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
<td>High School Cadets&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential Creativity&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential Elements (Bk 2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Standard of Excellence (Bk 2)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm Rap&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>C Major Scale&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt; (in C)&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy Day&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt; (in Eb)</td>
<td>Over the River&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row Your Boat&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
<td>Oodles of Noodles&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (in C)&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolly Good Fellow&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in Eb)</td>
<td>Ups and Downs&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (in Eb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanson&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in Eb)</td>
<td>Specific Instrument&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (in C)&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny Comes Marching&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (in Bb)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Warm-up<br>
<sup>b</sup> Folk song<br>
<sup>c</sup> March<br>
<sup>d</sup> Method book composition<br>
<sup>e</sup> Broadway song<br>
<sup>f</sup> Standard

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The musicians were given one week to practice the three cut-time sheets. All of the songs were then played in a full band rehearsal. Performance order of the pages was randomly chosen. Evaluation sheets were passed out after each page was played. The same procedural format was followed for six-eight meter, starting one week after the completion of the cut-time evaluation sheets.

Musical understanding and enjoyment were assessed using a 10-item questionnaire. Each musician was asked the same 10 questions for each method book format, for a total of 30 cut-time questions and 30 six-eight questions. Each question was in a Likert format containing five response options that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Two of the items were
negative items, and hence, were reverse scored. The set of 10 questions rating each method book was summed to get a self-reported attitude score for musical understanding and enjoyment.

Content validity for the 10 items was assessed through a panel of three experts in the field. The experts, who were all conductors of music education ensembles for adults, revised the wording of the questions, but made no content adjustments. Two adult musicians who were not in the main study then checked the clarity of the questions. Because a comparable group of adult musicians at the more beginning level of instruction was not available, internal consistency for the 10 items was checked with a group of 10 middle school students in their second year of playing. The students played the Essential Elements cut-time method book page and answered the 10 questions. The internal consistency (coefficient alpha) reliability estimate from this group was .91.

Data were analyzed descriptively through the use of means and standard deviations. Comparisons were calculated through the use of one repeated-measures ANOVA for the cut-time pages and one repeated-measures ANOVA for the six-eight pages. Effect size and power estimates were calculated to add further clarification to the statistical analyses. Effect size information was based on eta squared ($\eta^2$) criteria of .01=small, .06=medium, and .15=large.

Results

Results of the study showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the adult musicians’ musical understanding and enjoyment for the three method book formats in either cut-time meter, $F(2, 46) = .58, p = .57$, ($\eta^2 = .02$, power = .14) or six-eight meter, $F(2, 46) = 1.20, p = .31$, ($\eta^2 = .05$, power = .25).

Descriptively speaking, the means for each of the 10 questions on the cut-time method book pages were highly similar, with Essential Elements having slightly higher means for the questions “I enjoyed the songs on this page”, “I feel that I learned the concept well”,”The songs flowed smoothly from one song to the next” “The songs on this page sounded nice when played by the band”, “From this example page, I feel like this would be a great method book”, and “I would feel motivated to practice if I used this method book”. Standard of Excellence had slightly higher means for “I liked the layout of this page”, “I think the songs were good examples to teach the concept” and “The songs were too difficult” (reverse scored). The Broadway songs/standards method page had slightly higher means only for “I feel that the songs were more appropriate for children than they were for adults” (reverse scored).

The means for each of the 10 questions on the six-eight method book pages were also similar, with Essential Elements having slightly higher means for many of the same questions as the cut-time example (“I feel that I learned the concept well”), “The songs flowed smoothly from one song to the next” “The songs on this page sounded nice when played by the band”, “From this example page, I feel like this would be a great method book”, and “I would feel motivated to practice if I used this method book”) in addition to the item “I liked the layout of this page”.

Response means for “I enjoyed the songs on this page”, were identical for the Essential Elements and the Broadway/standards pages. Standard of Excellence had slightly higher means only for “The songs were too difficult” (reverse scored). As in the cut-time page, the Broadway songs/standards method page had slightly higher means for “I feel that the songs were more appropriate for children than they were for adults” (reverse scored). Response means for “I think the songs were good examples to teach the concept” were identical for the Standard of Excellence and the Broadway/standards pages.
It should be noted that in all likelihood these slightly higher means for the various method pages are attributable to measurement error and not to any important differences in perception between groups.

Discussion

In conclusion, the current study participants did not differ on their perceived understanding and enjoyment for the three method book formats, (two of the formats being the standard school-age method book and one format containing what might be considered as more “adult” musical styles as the content). Therefore, results of the current study seem to indicate that there may not be a need for publishers to develop a method book specifically intended for adult musicians.

Informal feedback from individual study participants also supported this finding. Due to the fact that the songs on the Broadway/standards page were all “older” tunes, the participants did note the difference between the three formats. At the completion of the study some of the musicians wanted to add their verbal opinion to the questionnaire data. One musician said, “I feel like I can go quicker through a school method book because the songs are easier and I am smarter than youngsters would be”. Another musician explained her lower markings on the Broadway/standards page by saying, “While I liked the songs on this page, I don’t think it helped me to learn cut-time or six-eight time because I was playing by feel instead of really thinking about the rhythm”.

The “playing-by-ear” instead of reading and analyzing scenario may be especially true with Broadway/standards songs, since popular music (which the Broadway/standards examples were in many cases) is often transcribed with stylistic rhythmic accuracy, and hence is more complicated for music reading. If watered-down, the tunes lose their authenticity, which can undermine the familiarity and preference usefulness for the adult musicians. This authenticity versus beginning-stage-of-learning dichotomy is a continuing challenge for those working with adult learners.

Another possible explanation for the lack of greater perceived understanding and enjoyment for the Broadway/standards method book pages may be the musicians’ desire for greater variety in their method book examples. For the Broadway/standards method book pages, all of the songs were in the same meter and were all common “adult” songs. It is possible that variety of style, tempo, and key, may be just as enjoyable to adult learners as familiarity would be. The variety of keys and songs in method books could be used in adult band settings to reinforce basic concepts in interesting ways. Especially when teaching challenging concepts, directors may wish to consider supplementation of content from multiple method book formats to aid in instructional variety.

Clearly, it is encouraging for instructors of adult ensembles to know that level two method book content and format seem to be useable by adult musicians; the songs and format contained in the level two method examples were generally pleasing to the study’s participants. While responses to the statement “I feel that the songs were more appropriate for children than they were for adults” were less favorable to the traditional method book format in both the cut-time and six-eight formats, the other favorable aspects in the published books seemed to lessen the importance of this aspect for the adults.

Further research may still need to address whether level one format and content would produce the overall same results as found in the current study, especially since level one method books commonly contain the songs that are traditionally considered to be childhood songs such as “Twinkle, Twinkle” and “Hot Cross Buns”.
Continued investigation is needed into the materials used to most efficiently and effectively instruct adult musicians. While the current study provides an initial look at adult musicians’ self-reported understanding and enjoyment, experimental studies utilizing performance measures instead of self-report would be able to provide more stringent conclusions. Studies that investigate content other than method book formats with adult learners would also be beneficial.

Future research in the area of content for adult musicians should also, if at all possible, address sample size issues. While it is sometimes difficult to find large populations for adult education research, the statistical power for the current study would have been inadequate to find important differences if they indeed had existed, in most part due to the small sample used.

References

Warrick, J. (1988a). Through the author’s eyes: A new look at class method books part III. The Instrumentalist, 42 (9), 82-86.
