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An important goal for music performance classes is students’ documented progress in performance achievement. Contests provide external feedback about student achievement, with one of the most widespread contests being the All-State ensemble audition process.

Studies have analyzed the scoring consistency of All-State judges (Dugger, 1997), investigated external factors such as time of day that may affect various contest audition outcomes (Adderly, 2001, Bergee & Platt, 2003; Bergee & McWhirter, 2005; Lien & Humphreys, 2001), documented the procedures and practices related to All-State auditions (Elliott, 1995), and described All-State auditioners’ practice procedures (Rohwer, 2002) and All-State participants’ backgrounds (Rohwer & Rohwer, 2001). Two of the commonly cited background activities that the band, choir, and orchestra musicians in Rohwer and Rohwer (2001) documented were attending at least one All-State camp (51% of the 498 subjects) and taking private lessons (79% of the 498 subjects).

Those studies investigating private lessons have documented students’ attitudes toward lessons (Duke, Flowers, & Wolfe, 1997; Hamann & Frost, 2000; Rife, Shnek, Lauby, & Lapidus, 2001), private lesson activities and characteristics (Barry & McCarthur, 1994; Kostka, 1984; Siebenaler, 1997), and motivation factors in relation to private lesson participation (Schmidt, 2005). There have been mixed findings in the literature as to whether private lesson study positively affects achievement. Killian and Henry (2005) documented private study and All-State participation as important background characteristics of high achieving choral sight singers. Similarly, researchers in the band area found that private lesson students tended to perform at a higher level than those with less private lesson experience (Hamann, 1982, 1983, 1984; Hamann & Sobaje, 1983). May and Elliott (1980), however, found no such benefit for orchestra and band private lesson students on Gaston Test of Musicality scores. In addition, while Sloboda, Davidson, Howe, and Moore (1996) found a strong correlation between private study and achievement, the more skilled students in Sloboda and Howe (1991) had taken fewer private lessons in their youth than had the less skilled students in the study. These inconclusive findings point to a need for further research on achievement in relation to private lesson participation.
While there are mixed findings in relation to private lessons and achievement, there is a notable dearth of research concerning summer camps as a preparation mechanism for performance success. Articles on summer camps can be found in non-research journals describing opinions on how to choose a camp (Fair, 1986; Lockhart, 1984; Ponick, 1997; Thornson, 1990), or providing yearly camp directory lists (see the Instrumentalist), but there is a clear need for research investigating whether there are musical achievement benefits based on camp participation.

The purposes of the current study were 1) to describe the summer camp and lesson participation behavior of auditioning subjects, and 2) to compare All-State summer camp participants and non-participants, and lesson participants and non-participants on All-State audition results.

Method

The students in this study (N = 222) were all high school females, singing soprano or alto. The study focused solely on females, given the inherent differences between male and female students (Cox, 2002). The students participated as part of their audition for the Texas All-State Choir.

Each student auditioned from behind a screen for a panel of five judges in a southern metropolitan high school classroom. The following voice parts were divided between two different panels of judges, given the large number of participants involved: Alto I, Soprano II, and Soprano I. The Alto II participants all auditioned for the same panel. The screen, and the use of volunteer student monitors, helped make the auditions anonymous. The students sang segments from three different selections: “Salve Regina” by Javiar Busto, “The King Shall Rejoice” by G. F. Handel and “Neckerein” by Johannes Brahms. The judges were all either certified public school teachers or were private voice teachers currently employed in one of the 18 schools who participated in the study. As the primary music teachers of the participants in the study, they had a thorough knowledge of the three audition selections.

Each judge scored each selection on a scale ranging from 1-100, and then added the three selection scores to create a total score for each student of 3-300. The five judges’ scores were then averaged for this study, to create a composite audition score for each student.

Results

The All-State audition scores for the subjects (N = 222) ranged from 60.80 to 251.40 on the 300 point scale, with a mean score of 164.76 (SD=41.90). There were 87 subjects (39% of the 222 subjects) who neither attended summer camp nor took private lessons (M=151.09, SD=44.40). There were 19 subjects (9%) who attended summer camp, but did not take private lessons (M=158.93, SD=39.15). There were 52 subjects (23%) who took lessons, but did not attend summer camp (M=165.55, SD=35.90). There were 64 subjects (29%) who attended summer camp and took private lessons (M=184.44, SD=366.37). Hence there were more subjects (n=135, 61%) participating in some form of extra-curricular preparation activity such as camp, lessons or both, than there were subjects not participating (n=87, 39%).

The mean audition score for those attending summer camp (n=83) was 178.60 (SD=38.32); for those not attending summer camp (n=139), the mean was 156.50 (SD=41.89). For those taking private lessons (n=116), the mean was 175.97 (SD=37.22), and for those not taking private lessons (n=106), the mean was 152.49 (SD=43.44).
After testing the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance, we performed a two-way ANOVA (variable 1: All-State summer camp participants and non-participants, and variable 2: lesson participants and non-participant). There was a significant main effect for camp participation, $F(1, 218) = 4.55, p = .03$, favoring those attending summer camp. There was a significant main effect for lesson participation, $F(1, 218) = 10.17, p = .002$, favoring those taking private lessons. There was no significant interaction between camp participation and lesson participation, $F(1, 218) = .78, p = .38$.

**Discussion**

The lowest scoring group of auditioners was the group of singers who participated in no extra-curricular audition preparations, followed by group who went to camp but did not take private lessons. Higher still was the mean score of the 52 singers who took private lessons but did not attend camp. The mean score of the 64 subjects who both took voice lessons and attended a choir camp was the highest.

The finding that a majority of students sought out some type of formal assistance in their audition preparations is consistent with Rohwer and Rohwer (2001) and Killian and Henry (2005), in which summer camp and private lessons were both commonly documented activities of high achieving subjects. It seems, then, that perhaps one characteristic of many high achieving musicians is their desire to hone their skills in a formal way. Perhaps, then, those students who wish to excel at an audition might want to consider also taking lessons, attending camp, or participating in both activities.

While it is not surprising that the subjects who sought out the most extra help by attending camp and taking private lessons also had the highest mean audition scores, it may actually be important for high school students to know that many high achieving musicians take part in these activities. For these high achieving musicians, the extra time, money, and attention to the audition materials may have made the difference in their performance success. It must also be noted, however, that due to the lack of experimental control in this study, cause and effect cannot be determined; it may be that high scoring auditioners also practice longer and more efficiently than lower scoring auditioners, or that the high scoring auditioners have highly supportive parents or highly developed musical environments.

With regard to the second research question comparing lesson participation and camp attendance on audition scores, students who took private lessons and those who participated in All-State camp scored significantly higher on their audition than did singers who did not. This finding is consistent with those reported by Hamann (1982, 1983, 1984), Hamann and Sobaje (1983), and Sloboda, Davidson, Howe, and Moore (1996), all of whom found benefits of private lessons. The results conflict with the findings of May and Elliott (1980) and Sloboda and Howe (1991). It may be that the differences between these findings may be simple, yet plausible, explanations such as the paper pencil format of the study by May and Elliott, and the lack of an audition to motivate the students in the study by Sloboda and Howe.

While the data support the use of private lessons and camp as positive techniques for audition score achievement, it is important to remember that every individual is different, and that these trends do not necessarily mean that an individual cannot succeed in the audition process unless they take voice lessons or go to a summer camp. Moreover, it was not possible, for the purposes of this study, to measure specifically the length of time or number of lessons of each student who took private voice lessons. Similarly, there are a number of all-state camps, and they each vary both by length of time and by intensity of instruction.
Nonetheless, the data for this study show that voice lessons and summer camp participation, however they were implemented, had a significant effect on the students’ audition scores. Both should be considered as viable improvement activities in a student’s audition preparation.

References


