

Try This Now

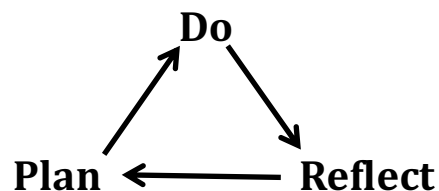
How to start learning and teaching the ways the brain learns music best

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Deliberate Practice

The most important things to know

- **All practice/work is not equal.** Research has found that a specific type of work named deliberate practice is the kind that makes the most improvement. Anything less than this type of practice will result in less progress.
- **Most people do little of this** and spend considerable effort using strategies that take more time, don't work as well, and are very discouraging. In fact, most any progress that is made is a result of deliberate practice, and any lack of progress is a result of how little we do it.
- **We can do deliberate practice** by following a specific process while working. In learning music, every time we do a repetition, go over something in rehearsal, or practice anything our process should look like this.



- **The natural way most of us tend to work** is without the “reflect” piece, and that is a key difference between many of us and those who are exceptionally good.

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Deliberate Practice-Teaching Focus

Eventually this process becomes automatic and fast, but we learn it slowly at first.

Start by training metacognition (reflect)

1. During practice or rehearsal choose a time in which specific work is being done on a particular section, whatever type of work that may be.
2. Following the diagram first make a plan as to what we want for the result, i.e. play the right notes, rhythm, a crescendo, ritard, etc.
3. Play the section (do).
4. This is the most crucial step, ask ourself, or our learners, something like, "How was that?" Many times there is little response, and this is an opportunity to point out how little we focus when working (leaving out the reflect piece). We may want to put up a graphic of the diagram and continually reference the "reflect" part when it should occur.
5. Now play it again (do) and this time focus on what we are doing while we are doing it to gather information for the reflect phase. This may make things worse and that is fine. We are training focus and awareness, not performance, right now.
 - At first it may be hard to come up with things in the reflect phase. The smallest thing is all we need to start. After several repetitions of this we will notice more and more things. The skill of reflection will gradually grow before our eyes. I call this the opening of focus. Don't be disappointed if our observations are simplistic at first. This is part of learning, and once we get better at it we won't have to go back and learn it again.

Add the plan guided by reflection

6. As soon as we get any type of feedback in the reflect phase use that to make a plan to improve. It does not matter what we try or even if it is a good plan. Trying anything, and then reflecting, will teach the ability to problem solve on our own in practice.
 - For instance, if a finger missed a string or a key by being too far to the left then try again overcorrecting to the right. If it is then too far to the right try to overcorrect less etc. etc. keep trying and refining. We may be surprised how quickly this leads to improvement, and as we do more it will go more quickly as we get better at it. As we experience more of this process our observations will become more and more sophisticated as well.
7. Execute the plan by playing the section while observing closely (do).
8. Now reflect. How did it go? Was the plan successful? If not why? Use that information to make a new plan. Did it go well, but now we notice something else? Make a plan for that.
9. Execute the plan...you get the idea.
10. Do this three step process over and over.
11. If you are teaching this to a group eventually you should be able to ask for this type of focus and have students lock in and reflect as you rehearse. The rapid significant improvement will provide the motivation.

Deliberate Practice

More information

- **The Dunning Kruger Effect** is a psychological phenomenon in which the less skilled someone is during the learning process the better they will think they are at that skill. This is because, at the early stages of learning, we have very little idea what to look for as we are not skilled yet, a catch 22. This is one reason it is hard at first to reflect. We are the worst at evaluating our progress accurately (reflect) in order to focus our work (plan) when we start learning to do deliberate practice. No wonder so many people become frustrated and think they cannot improve in the early stages of learning/skill development. They just need to learn about the importance, role, and application of deliberate practice. Just start finding one or two little things to improve and it will grow from there.
- **The opening of focus.** As we try this we will begin to notice more and more things that are not quite right and need to be addressed. Our mental model, over time (minutes and days/weeks), will grow and we will begin to notice finer and finer details that had escaped our attention before. Keep doing this past the initial stages, as there are more and more layers we can uncover, *and this is a transferable skill* to all other areas of practice. The more things we notice the more we will be able to notice in other things on which we work. It works the same for academics and athletics, but is not as manifest in that teaching as it is in the arts.

This is where the magic connection between music and academics exists.
And research is beginning to show this.

References

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