

# The Use of Recorded Accompaniment As a Determinative Factor For High School Students in Solo & Ensemble Contest

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*The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using technology in student learning and achievement. Students at School X were provided with a recording of their solo and accompaniment thirty days prior to Solo and Ensemble contest in an attempt to provide extra help to students that have conflicts or limited time during the school day. The results of this five year comparative study overwhelmingly favor the group with the technology supplement.*

The school day may seem long and never-ending for teachers. From the moment teachers step on campus to the time teachers leave, we engage our students in the assignments and lessons that will benefit students and build our programs. In reality the amount of time teachers give instruction and prepare during the school day seems inadequate for the rigorous schedule and commitments of the high school band. In addition to this problem is the focus or intentions held by students and outside sources such as administrators and parents when trying to fulfill the task of musically educating students. In the article (Mikkelson, 2006) band directors see their programs and others being driven by competitions and some directors have an almost obsessive need to achieve accolades and awards. Further evaluation by (Rodgers, 1985) shows that principals see music programs, specifically the large ensembles such as marching band and their associated contests,

as a way to promote public relations in the community.

The scheduling of music classes has long been an obstacle for administrators in that it is inherently problematic because it cuts across grade levels and music classes often compete with other popular classes (Hicks, 1980). Many newer scheduling conflicts exist due to the popular trend of individualizing programs such as, School within a School, Learning Communities, Baccalaureate certification, Dual Credit and Online Courses. These programs offer students opportunities to excel in academic endeavors or to move into activities of special interest. Whatever the reason, the school population is divided into even smaller subcategories allowing students to obtain more individual attention. The mandated state school testing for graduation, Benchmark testing, end of the semester testing or special interest tests including the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)

preparation, American College Test (ACT) preparation, add up to various days and weeks of interrupted class time.

With time being so limited, the high school music teacher must create strategies that effectively manage classroom time, absences and increase motivation. The use of technology might develop into an outlet for practicing music after school. This study hypothesis is that high school students who are provided with a recorded performance of the composition solo and the accompaniment for the solo will effect greater student participation and higher ratings at Solo and Ensemble Contest than students who do not.

The importance of this study to music education is to find a feasible means to enhance and promote student learning and achievement. Though this study might not yield positive results or an application to use in every music program, the benefits of information could lead to other research that could under varied circumstances and situations prove

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to be a positive endeavor. While previous research has focused on in class procedures for productivity such as (Bauer, 1993) and (Salzburg, 1989) newer research has to come with the changing visions of community and school boards. The reason for this particular medium as a study in this musical environment is two fold.

The first reason is the solo performance is the only variable. In other words, the student's performance stands alone and will not be judged in an ensemble setting. Further, barring problems with the compact disc, compact disc player or any other unforeseen technical problems, the accompaniment will be exact as far as consistency of performance.

The second reason for Solo and Ensemble as this choice of event is that it is contest formatted. Various numbers of schools are assembled together and the individual ratings are posted for all participants to view. In accessing the importance of students, parents and administration, referred to earlier in (Mikkelson, 2006), the idea of researching this model only concept seems inviting. A study (Anderson, 1981), using tape-recorded aural models on two sixth grade clarinet classes, yielded no significant advantage between the experimental and the control group. During this study, students were asked to prepare exercises and perform them during class. At the end of the study the level of performance regarding pitch, rhythm reading, tempo accuracy, or number of completed exercises was not analyzed as significant by the use of recordings. The only Solo and Ensemble ratings research (Hamann, 1991), concluded that students with private teachers or students that practiced several times with their accompanist received higher ratings than those who did not. This research will not use the private teacher as a variable, due to prohibitive cost in school districts used for the study.

The study began thirty days prior to the Solo and Ensemble contest and ended with the student's contest performance. All students received their recorded material at the same time. The study was limited to wind instruments because the majority of percussion solos with the exception of mallet instruments were unaccompanied. Each student received a compact disc that contained two tracks, the first was the solo and accompaniment and the second was the accompaniment only. The solo selections for the control group were assigned by the music director and were picked from the University Interscholastic League (UIL) list. On the day of the contest the students used the accompaniment only version as a play a-long track.

### **Method**

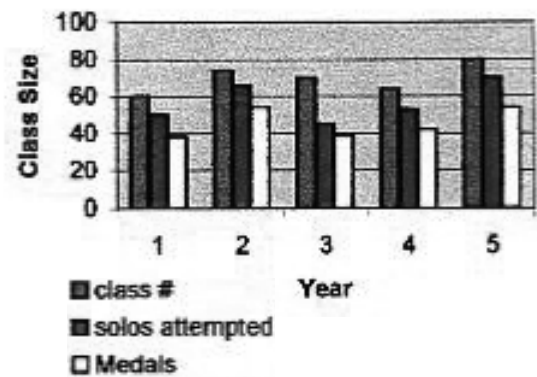
Two high schools with analogous music programs were used in this study. School X was the program that used recorded examples of solo performance and accompaniment as learning strategies and school Y used "live" piano accompaniment. Records of Solo and Ensemble contests from the past five years were reviewed to ascertain the number of participants and the ratings from various adjudicators. Data from document study will show increase or decrease in student participation from both schools comparatively and individually.

### **Results**

The results show that School X over the past five years had more students participate and were awarded more medals than School Y. School X had an average of 57 participants (80%) per year while School Y had an average of 11 participants (18%) per year. School X received an average of 45 medals per year and School Y received an average of 8. *(See charts on the next page.)*

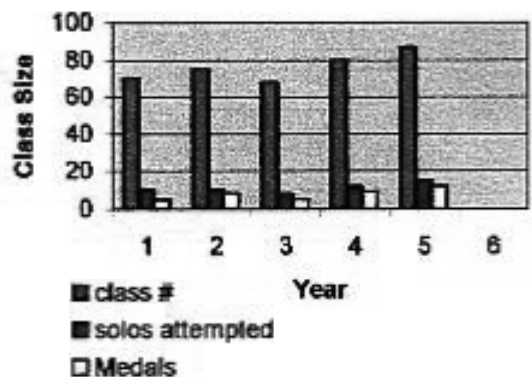
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## School X Recorded Accompaniment



Year	Class #	Solos Attempted	Medals	% Student	% Tryout
1	60	50	38	83%	63%
2	74	66	54	89%	73%
3	70	45	39	64%	58%
4	64	53	42	83%	66%
5	80	70	54	88%	68%

## School Y Live Accompaniment



Year	Class #	Solos Attempted	Medals	% Tryout	% Student
1	70	10	5	14%	7%
2	75	10	8	13%	11%
3	68	8	5	12%	7%
4	80	12	9	15%	11%
5	87	15	12	17%	14%

## Discussion

The use of technology in the field of education has become a standard practice in offering information to students who are involved in academic, technical and skill building advancement. From the simple programs that store information on how to play guitar to the on-line university classes that lead to graduate degrees, the advancement of technology is an avenue for obtaining a large amount of information in a short period of time. This instant access to information and lessons enables the learners to participate at their convenience.

The findings in the study comparing School X and School Y clearly shows a higher level of participation and award accumulation as seen through the records of the past five years. Although the findings are impressive, it must be noted that the participation and awards for the ensemble portion were not part of the study. Another factor to consider is the intent or direction the director at each school takes when preparing for Solo and Ensemble contest. For example, does the director require participation in Solo and Ensemble contest or is it voluntary? Another question to examine is, do the students pick the

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level of difficulty within the requirement or are the solos assigned? By the consistency of participation and awards over the five year period, the element of providing students with recordings of solo performance and accompaniment has shown success.

It is suggested that further research be conducted in the area of technology use in conjunction with Solo and Ensemble preparation. The new study should include replication of the first part

of the study as well as questioning to probe the philosophies of directors and their requirements for participation at Solo and Ensemble contest. Further inquiry should focus to uncover any possible significant patterns in the use of the provided technology that leads to effective ratings. Research of this nature will provide valuable information in determining student learning ability.

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