

A Review on Research of Motivation in the Music Classroom:  
Synthesizing Motivational Techniques for Pedagogical Practices

Scott Fairdosi

Indiana University

### Abstract

The purpose of this review is to investigate and synthesize literary works regarding the numerous motivational techniques applied in music classrooms. The review is organized in 5 categories including (a) attitude, achievement, and self-esteem, (b) applications of attribution theory, (c) correlations between task outcome and self-efficacy, (d) protection of self-worth in adolescents, and (e) motivational responses to pedagogy. A remarkably high number of empirical studies have been done on the issue of student motivation in the classroom as it has a lasting effect on the overall student achievement in public schools. While the 20 studies and articles covered in this review range in date conducted from 1979 -2013, there are many parallels found in the results, which is worth considering in order to further signify the accuracy of the latest studies. Many of the theoretical conclusions in these studies are made accurate by past similarities; however, other possible flaws in some studies are also considered. With the literature gathered on the subject of motivation in music students, this review aims to seek out the most considerable applications for teachers in an attempt to synthesize the information into a practical approach that will be applicable in the field.

Student motivation has been a leading factor in level of achievement in public school and is a leading issue for most public school teachers. Particularly, intrinsic motivation has been considered to be one of the strongest relations to motivation in competence, achievement, self-determinations, and when considering failure attributions, resilience (Schmidt 2007). Along with intrinsic motivation, level of effort has been taken as a leading attribution for success and failure as opposed to external attributions such as task difficulty and luck (Martin 2012). This factor should be considered a success for music teachers.

Music educators are invariably seeking out new approaches on how to motivate students in the classroom. While extrinsic motivation has proven to be a successful short-term motivator for some students (Austin 1988), it must be considered that the motivation given to those who achieve may be coming from a retraction of motivation from those who fail. There are also very few studies that examine the long-term benefits and/or setbacks of extrinsic and competitive based motivation.

#### Attitude, Achievement, and Self-Esteem

The initial expectation one may have on the idea of competition in the classroom may be that it can be a great motivational tool. However, if used excessively, there is a possibility that it will have a negative effect on self-esteem for those who are not successful (Austin 1988). This is partly the reason why competition is much more common in high school and late middle school than in the earlier years of child development. To examine this further, a study on whether extrinsic motives (rating) can negatively affect self-esteem on elementary students. The study consisted of two treatment groups in which one group received ratings and comments for a particular

performance while the second group received only comments. The students then completed the MAT (Musical Achievement Test) in order to calculate whether rating students had an affect on self-esteem. While the test was 20 years old at the time, it was still used for this study and resulted in the rated group scoring higher (Austin 1988). While this study supports extrinsic motivation, it may be worth considering whether extrinsic motivation is simply a short-term tactic for motivation or if it may have a long-term effect.

In the past, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were believed to have been two separate acts. However, it has been considered in the more recent past that peak motivation takes place most often when an already intrinsic motive is enhanced by an extrinsic motive (Austin 1988). In this way, both motivations are capable of working together at the same time interdependently. It is also believed that full extrinsic motivation is capable of deteriorating performance quality and personal drive, however this is a counter argument to what was demonstrated in this study.

Another factor in motivation to consider is the age of an individual as well as an individual's social status. In a study by Vander Ark (1980), the relationship in the attitudes of students based on social status and grade level were examined. The study takes a strong-numbered pool of 5,697 elementary students from various grade levels and social classes. The devices used for data collection were Nolin's *Musical Attitude Inventory* and Coopersmith's *Self-Esteem Inventory*; both instruments were created in 1967. According to age, test results indicated that as grade levels increased, attitudes toward singing decreased. The tests also indicated that both high and low social classes tend to have lower attitudes while middle classes tended to have higher attitudes.

According to music reading, students scored lowest on the attitude level on this particular section. This indicates one of two possible reasons; students have not received proper motivation for music reading skills, or perhaps the music reading tests for this study should have been adjusted to properly meet the skill level of the students.

### Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is a frequent application when conducting and/or inferring literature, studies, and also a practical tool in the classroom when considering motivation. Attribution theory is a way of perceiving the reason behind success and failure (Schatt 2011). In a study examining students' beliefs and attitudes toward the results of practicing for example, M.D. Schatt indicated that students truly believe achievement is a complete result of practice and that success is directly related to internal attributions (Schatt 2011). In the study where 218 music students filled out a survey, students often view practice as a form of homework, labeling it as a boring task. While the study indicates that students seem to understand the importance of practice, they often look for ways to expend less effort while still succeeding. Of course, no matter the level of one's ability, certain quantities of focused practice time are required for achievement.

According to Chandler, Chiarella, and Auria (1987), there are two main focuses of attribution, internal and external. Internal behavior involves taking ownership in the task at hand and being able to adjust effort for success. In order to master a task, one must take responsibility for the outcome and take the credit regardless. Both a student's ability and amount of effort fall under internal attribution. External behavior involves putting the credit towards an outside factor (Chandler et al. 1987) It is important for band directors to decipher the kind of attribution different students have in order to know how

much of an emphasis to put on the significance of effort. If the student puts the blame of failure on an external factor, this only ensues helplessness and a lack of motivation to succeed. Along with the role of the band director as a guide for motivation, the extremely significant impact a parent can have on the role of student motivation must not be overlooked. The younger a student is, the more significant the role of motivation is on the parent; the older the student gets, the more significant the motivational role falls on the teacher (Legette 2012).

It is not the causes of success and failure, but the perceived causes of success and failure that effect the motivation of students (West 2013). In an article examining motivation through attribution theory, achievement goal theory, and student engagement, C. West (2013) expresses that teachers often provoke external attributions and helplessness among students when they offer condolences, over-scaffolding, and excessive praise for low achievement. West also points out that family interaction can affect a student's attributions and tip towards a belief in external causes. However, teaching style, student perceptions, and student motivation are all known to be highly interrelated (Gumm 2004).

M. D. Schatt (2011) also describes three sub-theories under the attribution theory umbrella: goal orientation theory, ability goal orientations, and expectancy belief theory. Under goal orientation theory, it is explained that people have many different motives for aiming for certain tasks. Under ability goal orientations, students choose a task in order to demonstrate ability. Finally, an example of expectancy belief theory students may not practice something because they believe that they do not possess the ability to succeed in the task (Schatt 2011). This theory can be related directly to self-efficacy.

In terms of attributions toward success and failure, Chandler et al. (1987) conducted a study on 234 band members who were asked if they could go back in time would they change their instrument. Those who said yes were the ones with more external attributions and had less success in performance. Those who said no had more internal attributions and experienced more success in past performances. One possible approach in minimizing low self-efficacy would be to help facilitate control of environment. Being in control of one's environment can result in intrinsic motivation, and an example of giving a student repertoire that fits their ability would help accomplish this (West 2013).

Another approach toward attribution theory would be the inclusion of locus of control, which helps us understand whether someone believes they have control over an outcome (Schmidt 2005). Four major factors in attribution theory are ability, task difficulty, effort, and luck (Asmus 1985, Legette 1988). All four of these factors can be organized by locus of control and stability.

### **Locus of Control**

	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>
<b>Unstable</b>	Effort	Luck
<b>Stable</b>	Ability	Task Difficulty

Studies have shown that students tend to have internal attributions over external (Schmidt 2005 & 2007, Chandler et al. 1987, Austin 1992). In a study by J.R. Austin (1992), 107 middle school band students were asked what would happen to a fictitious student who had a failed experience. Students mostly said he would respond to failure by practicing more, improving his performance, and possibly seek support from the director and peers in the future. Beyond internal attributions, studies have also proven that effort

has been known to be the most facilitative factor (Austin 1992). This is possibly due to its capability of being modified, unlike the others.

#### Attributions Involving Self-Efficacy

In a study of 300 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>-grade band students in New York and Massachusetts, a survey was conducted collecting age, gender, instrument, experience, and practice time per week. Other variables collected by the survey were mastery, intrinsic, individual, cooperative, competitive, ego, and avoiding failure. The results of the test reported that commitment to band correlated positively with intrinsic, cooperation, and mastery. To no surprise, competitiveness and ego correlated as well. However, there were no correlations with motivation to neither sex nor instrument group. The strongest positive correlation, however, was intrinsic orientation with commitment to band and teacher ratings on performance. Overall, the study concluded that students tend to have greater tendencies toward internal attributions over external (Schmidt 2005). The only possible issue with this study may be that 6 different teaching styles are involved among the 300 students in the study, which cause skewed student views on the subject of internal vs. external attributions. No social status or geographic location (urban/rural) is mentioned either, which has been proven to effect self-efficacy.

Other findings indicate that when effort is at a maximum and failure still results, students are often confronted with possible lack of ability and humiliation (Austin 1992). An unfortunate residual of such an event sometimes causes students to minimize their effort at times to hide their image and to keep others from knowing what they are capable of.

Another teaching tactic that may raise student effort involves individualized goal structures in the classroom. Means in which students are evaluated and/or rewarded tend to follow obvious patterns of motivation and achievement. Often competitions in the classroom can be the cause to students' ability attributions for failure. This leads to avoiding the task at hand, minimal effort, and procrastination. Individualistic goal structures can help alleviate these symptoms of low self-efficacy. Tailoring a particular activity for a student to follow will help simplify a task at the same difficulty, raising self-esteem.

In a study on self-efficacy beliefs in middle school students (Martin 2012), 45 volunteer-students completed a questionnaire measuring these beliefs. The results indicated that students in middle school band in general had high self-efficacy beliefs in music. Students with low self-efficacy tended to have more memories of both success/failure stories, indicating that a failure story may have a greater impact on these individuals than others. The fact that only 45 students participated in this study gives reason for doubt. Also, having volunteers for any study could have an impact on their self-efficacy.

In a later study by Schmidt (2007), self-efficacy and intrinsic mastery were related to students' commitments to band. From 456 participants in grades 6-12, correlations between all motivations (internal/external) and self-efficacy orientations were strong. The study concluded that students tended to attribute success to internal over external reason, which relates back to a previous study (Chandler et al. 1987). Schmidt also mentions entity vs. incremental theory. An entity student believes in stable intelligence, feeling the need to prove themselves to others, avoiding any relation to

being unintelligent. An incremental student believes that intelligence is malleable, and finds satisfaction in the process of learning as opposed to demonstrating their own knowledge (Schmidt 2007). The fact that students tend to be incremental in band makes sense, as they also have a tendency of internal attribution.

#### Correlations Between Success and Failure

In a study on 6<sup>th</sup> grader views on success/failure and how their motivation coincides, the locus of control/stability table is again introduced (Asmus 1985). 118 6<sup>th</sup> grade music students filled out a survey asking why some students succeed and others do not. As assumed, students with higher achievement tended to fall under the internal column and those with difficulty in achievement tended to fall under external attributions. As this study and previous studies have found (Schmidt 2005 & 2007, Chandler et al. 1987, Austin 1992), students tend to cite internal attributions when finding reasons for success, particularly in the effort factor. This often comes to a surprise to the general public, who tend to consider music and other arts as a form of gifted talent. The fact that most studies contradict this assumption should leave the average music teacher generally content in their motivation strategies. This also indicates the importance of effort based teaching styles and how they can adjust a students' internal focus toward effort instead of ability (Asmus 1985).

A similar study, but perhaps more broad, is Asmus' study a year later on utilizing attribution theory to help understand students reasoning behind why some are successful in music and some are not. In a study of 589 music students from grades 4-12, a similar procedure was used as in the 1985 study, except the addition of background info. Grade level was the most significant difference in the two studies, where results indicated that

as grade level increased, students moved from internal-unstable conditions to internal-stable conditions (Asmus 1986). This suggests that as students get older, their beliefs would be that there will be a point that ability is either there or it is not and effort will have much less effect. This is possibly due to the social notion that exposing a child to something when young will have a greater effect than when they become older, characteristic of an optimal or critical learning period. Another possibility may also indicate a shift toward ego protection in adolescence, a time period when self-worth becomes invaluable.

One factor not often considered is demographic areas of participants. Perhaps it is because very few differences have been found. In a Legette (1998) study on students' attributions toward success and failure, 1,114 students are sampled from both rural and urban areas. However, no significant difference in attribution rating was found. Students were studied based on the Asmus (1986) Music Attribution Orientation Scale. Again, as made apparent in previous studies (Schmidt 2005 & 2007, Chandler et al. 1987, Austin 1992), students rated high on ability and effort attributions. The study concludes that attributing success to ability can give a student pride and confidence while failure with ability can give a student shame (Legette 1998). The most significant point being made here and previously is that students want successes to be stable, increasing self-worth, and failures to be unstable, allowing them to adjust the situation accordingly.

Another teaching perspective based on attributions of success and failure comes from R. M. Legette (2012). Research on the study concluded that teachers are able to raise a student's self-efficacy by reminding the student of past successes when moving to a new challenge. The study also found no difference in gender, countering past research

that females tend to have more external attributions. Finally, Legette (2012) concluded by suggesting teachers should assume a similar role as a scientist when deciphering a student's behavior. This way, teachers are able to avoid making attribution errors when students fail in certain areas, writing it off as lack of intellectual ability; they may just be lacking effort (Legette 2012). Another conclusion one could make is that when students to achieve, ability attribution is a feasible factor to relay to the student, allowing the student to believe that they can succeed in a task any time it comes back up. The opposite is also true; when students fail, effort is a more suitable attribution, allowing students to believe they have the power to change the outcome (Legette 2012).

#### Self-worth in Adolescents and Pedagogy

During the time of adolescence, students often find significance in ego protection and increasing self-worth whenever possible. This can be a considerable issue in motivation and pedagogy. In a study examining students' lack of effort in order to hide their level of ability, Covington (1979) observes self-worth theory. In an act of self-defense and fear of failure, teachers often find adolescents lacking in effort in order to hide self-image. The theory is based on the idea that success equals ability and failure equals inability, a much more stable-internal view according to the locus of control table (Asmus 1985, Legette 1988). Expending effort when failure is a possibility can pose a threat on their self-worth. In an attempt to hide their actual level of ability, students will sometimes aim for an impossible goal so that failure does not imply inability (Covington 1979). In some cases students will even often use excuses for failure with effort in order to save their self-worth, which is an external viewpoint that teacher aim to avoid.

Unfortunately, while teachers often reward students for effort, students avoid effort to hide their level of ability.

In an article by C. Ames (1984), 3 systems of motivation with 3 complementing goal structures are described. The 3 systems of teacher motivation are ability-evaluative (competitive), task mastery (individualistic), and moral responsibility (cooperative). Ability-evaluative motivation is often considered teacher-centered and self-enhancement. The main focus in this motivation is the teacher's ego, and protection of the teacher. As one could assume, this is considered often a negative motivation for the student, however it unfortunately takes place often. The second motivation is task mastery (individualistic), a focus in which the end goal is student accomplishment. This motivation attributes almost entirely to effort. The only issue with this motivation in a setting with adolescents is the possibility of students reflecting the option of effort. The third motivation is moral responsibility (cooperative), and is often an end goal shared by others. This motivation can be easily demonstrated in a music setting when a band is working on a concert program, or a variety of other musical tasks in which the students rely on one another (perhaps a chamber setting). The article suggests that the teacher embrace any combination of individualistic and cooperative motivation in their pedagogy (Ames 1984). This model can be applied to grade levels based on previous studies (Vander Ark 1980, Asmus 1986). Because unstable-internal motivations move toward stable-internal motivation and adolescents often tend to protect self-worth as they get older, it may be more beneficial for a teacher to use task mastery on younger students and transition to more of a moral responsibility approach as students get older.

In a study examining the correlation between levels of motivation and band directing success, Caimi uses the MAT, similar to a previous study (Austin 1988), to measure 3 areas of band directing success, ensemble musicianship, ensemble performance rating by peers, and director rating by the students. The results of the study concluded that the areas measured are not entirely reliable measuring band success (Caimi 1981). Some issue may involve accuracy of the instruments used, and possibly the heterogeneity and homogeneity of the sample used. Perhaps using a larger sample-size and more valid area of band directing will result in a more accurate study. Aiming to expose different band directing traits may also be useful as well.

As stated previously that teaching style is strongly related to student perceptions in motivation (West 2013), another study supports this notion (Gumm 2004). This study aimed to find a relation between learning styles and motivation as well as how they view a particular teaching style. The study included 273 students in grades 6-12, both in rural and urban areas. The instrument used in the study was Asmus' measures of motivation for music. As the results from West (2013) pointed out, student perceptions on teaching style are highly interrelated to student motivation.

#### Closing Remarks

Upon research of these studies, many factors were often reiterated through different means. It has been made consistently apparent that intrinsic motivation is an overshadowing blueprint that is capable of being linked to competence motivation, self-efficacy, achievement motivation, task mastery motivation, and internal locus of control. A teacher who is able to provide a student with a properly controlled environment with the necessary means of internal drive resulting in intrinsic motivation should be

considered a successful teacher. It has been made apparent that the overwhelming majority of students fall under the internal column in terms of locus of control (Schmidt 2005 & 2007, Chandler et al. 1987, Austin 1992). As student increase in grade level, beliefs in effort can often times shift to beliefs in ability. A practical tool to combat this issue would be for teachers to create an individualized learning environment for young students and to develop a cooperative learning environment as students enter adolescence (Asmus 1986).

If music teachers feel the need to advance their competency for motivation, further research is still needed in the broad field of motivation in public schools. While the information supplied in this review allows for a general understanding of the various approaches to motivation, there are still many other areas to consider. Questions left up to the reader and to future possible studies in the field may be: What are the possible reasons that students give up their instruments? Why does a student choose not to practice, or why does a student decide to leave the practice room before any sense of achievement? A common issue in young students is that if they have not put in the necessary effort for achievement, they may never realize the capabilities of internal-unstable approaches. In realizing this, one of the most significant utilizations of this research would be to make effort the primary focus in young students before they reach adolescence. This will help alleviate the issue of attributing failure to ability as students get older.

## References

- Ames, C., & Ames, R. (1984). Systems of student and teacher motivation: Toward a qualitative definition. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76(4), 535-556.
- Asmus, E.P. (1985). Sixth Graders' Achievement Motivation: Their Views of Success and Failure in Music. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 85, 1-13.
- Asmus, E. P. (1986). Student Beliefs about the Causes of Success and Failure in Music: A Study of Achievement Motivation. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 34(4), 262.
- Austin, J. R. (1988). The Effect Of Music Contest Format On Self-Concept, Motivation, Achievement, And Attitude Of Elementary Band Students. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 36(2), 95.
- Austin, J. R. (1993). Motivation after Failure in School Music Performance Classes: The Facilitative Effects of Strategy Attributions. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, v111, 1-23.
- Caimi, F. J. (1981). Relationships between Motivation Variables and Selected Criterion Measures of High School Band Directing Success. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 29(3), 183.
- Chandler, T. A., Chiarella, D., & Auria, C. (1987). Performance Expectancy, Success, Satisfaction, and Attributions as Variables in Band Challenges. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 35(4), 249.
- Covington, M. V., & Omelich, C. L. (1979). Effort: The double-edged sword in school achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71(2), 169-182.
- Gumm, A. (2004). The Effect of Choral Student Learning Style and Motivation for Music on Perception of Teaching Style. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 159, 11-22.
- Jones, B. D. (2009). Motivating Students to Engage in Learning: The MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation. *International Journal Of Teaching And Learning In Higher Education*, 21(2), 272-285.
- Legette, R. M. (1998). Causal beliefs of public school students about success and failure in music. *Journal Of Research In Music Education*, 46(1), 102-111.
- Legette, R. M. (2012). In-Service Teacher Beliefs about the Causes of Success and Failure in Music. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 1(192), 75-81.
- Macintyre, P. D., Potter, G. K., & Burns, J. N. (2012). The Socio-Educational Model of Music Motivation. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 60(2), 129-144.
- Martin, L. (2012). The Musical Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Middle School Band Students: An Investigation of Sources, Meanings, and Relationships with Attributions for Success and Failure. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 1(191), 45-60.
- Miyamoto, K. (2001). Japanese High School Students' Motivation in Band as It Relates to the Gender of the Band Director and the Students. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, n150, 81-85.
- Pitts, S. (2004). Lessons in Learning: Learning, Teaching and Motivation at a Music Summer School. *Music Education Research*, v6 n1, 81-95.

- Schatt, M. D. (2011). High School Instrumental Music Students' Attitudes and Beliefs Regarding Practice: An Application of Attribution Theory. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 29(2), 29-40.
- Schmidt, C. P. (2005). Relations among Motivation, Performance Achievement, and Music Experience Variables in Secondary Instrumental Music Students. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 53(2), 134.
- Schmidt, C. P. (2007) Intrinsic-mastery Motivation in Instrumental Music: Extension of a Higher Order Construct. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*
- Vander Ark, S. D. (1980). Relationships Between Musical Attitudes, Self-Esteem, Social Status, and Grade Level of Elementary Children. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 62, 31-40.
- West, C. (2013). Motivating Music Students: A Review of the Literature. *Update: Applications Of Research In Music Education*, 31(2), 11-19.