**Teacher Perceptions of Memorization in String Instructional Settings:**

**An Exploratory Study**

Jacob M. Dakon1

University of Kansas

University of the Free State

Abbey L. Dvorak2

University of Kansas

Memorization forms the foundation of all human learning (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956). Additionally, memorization increases long-term retention of information (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006), and develops the mental representations needed to cultivate expertise (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993). From a musical perspective, memorization alleviates performance issues (e.g., page turns), allows for greater focus on non-score related performance aspects, and increases performers' understanding of musical works (Aiello & Williamon, 2002; Ginsborg, 2002). Memorization may even develop sight-reading, playing-by-ear, and improvisation ability (McPherson, Bailey, & Sinclair, 2006). Evidence, however, suggests that instrumental music teachers are reticent about encouraging their students to memorize musical patterns and contexts beyond developing basic pitch- and rhythmic-reading skills. These skills, instead, seem relegated to jazz or other specialty ensembles (McPherson, 1997; Woody & Lehmann, 2010). As a result, instrumental students tend to perceive memorization as difficult or virtuosic, rather than a natural mode of learning (Woody & Lehmann, 2010). This predicament brings to light a topic largely unexamined in music memory research. How do music teachers use memorization in class and studio settings?

The purpose of this study was to acquire baseline data regarding string instructors’ perceptions on the use of memorization in string instructional environments. The researchers surveyed string instructors (N = 126) from two Midwestern states about memorization conceptualization, curricular importance, perceived benefits, personal level of ease and enjoyment, and application in string-based learning environments. Results indicated that the majority of string teachers perceive memorization as cognitive recall without the presence of visual stimuli. Although correct, this definition overlooks the cognitive encoding and retrieval processes associated with memorization. String teachers also reported supporting the use of aural and visual memorization strategies, but only used them rarely or sometimes to teach fundamental technique, solo material, or specialty music. Additionally, string teachers may not recognize a standardized method of teaching memorization. Implications for music education are discussed.

Works Cited:

Aiello, R. & Williamon, A. (2002). *Memory*. In R. Parncutt & G. McPherson (Eds.), The science and psychology of music performance (pp. 167-182). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Anderson, L. W. & Krathwohl, D. R. (eds.) (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Bloom, B. S. (ed.) (1987). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: Book 1-cognitive domain.* New York, NY: Longman.

Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Romer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review, 100*(3), 363-406.

Ginsborg, J. (2004). Strategies for memorizing music. In A. Williamon (Ed.), *Musical excellence: Strategies and techniques to enhance performance* (pp. 123-141). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

McPherson, G. E. (1997). Cognitive strategies and skills acquisition in musical performance. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 133*, 64-71.

McPherson, G. E., Bailey, M., & Sinclair, K. E. (1997). Path analysis of a theoretical model to describe the relationship among five types of musical performance. *Journal of Research in Music Education, 45*(1), 103-129.

Roediger, H. L., & Karpicke, J. D. (2006). Test-enhanced learning: Taking memory tests improves long-term retention. *Psychological Science*, *17*(3), 249–255.

Woody, R. H., & Lehmann, A. C. (2010). Student musicians’ ear-playing ability as a function of vernacular music experiences. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *58*(2), 101-115.