

Enhance Drumming Education with Psychology

By Frank Ferraro, Ph.D.

I want to share a few comments I've heard from my students in drum lessons recently: "Drumming is too hard; I need to pick an easier instrument." "I don't have time for this, I want to quit lessons." "I can't play in front of people, I feel judged." "I see all these great drummers on social media, I'll never be that good."

Sound familiar? These are all common feelings (what I call "mental roadblocks"), and I'm sure you have directly encountered them as either a student or a teach-



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er. Through a mixture of evidence-based psychology findings, along with personal student anecdotes, my PASIC presentation aims to help you overcome these "roadblocks" with practical behavioral strategies rooted in the science of psychology.

TOPIC 1: EXPERTS ARE MADE, NOT BORN

The first section will emphasize that learning anything well will take significant effort, especially percussion and drumset. However, the way you practice matters greatly. You can waste time with inefficient practice routines and not see tangible results. I will emphasize the principle of deliberate practice.¹ An important conclusion from psychological research will be emphasized: *experts are made, not born*.

TOPIC 2: YOU'RE NOT A GOOD DRUMMER

Drumming requires two important aspects of motivation: intrinsic drive and growth mindset. Students who are able to be motivated by personal goals (i.e., intrinsically motivated), as opposed to external rewards or praise, will experience more consistent practice and long-term enjoyment of the instrument.^{2, 3} Further, drummers who view musical difficulties as healthy challenges (a component of

growth mindset) will be more likely to overcome obstacles when they arise.

One key aspect of intrinsic motivations and growth involves teachers focusing on the learning process, rather than telling students they are "good" at what they do. Praising "good" playing seems natural, but if used too often, can undermine intrinsic motivation and actually slow a student's progress when material becomes more difficult.

TOPIC 3: OVERCOMING THE JITTERS

Performance anxiety can be reduced with understanding cognitive psychological principles based on the person, the situation, and the task at hand. Understanding the human stress response can also be helpful in managing performance anxiety. I will provide specific examples and relaxation routines that are effective.

TOPIC 4: CONNECT RATHER THAN COMPETE

I will emphasize that cell phones are an outlet for good and bad habits. Specifically related to drumming, social media can lead to unrealistic social comparisons of drumming skills and performances.⁴ The multitude of drummers on social media may create a mental impression that they are "better" or "more successful" players.

MARCHING

DRUMMERS' HERITAGE CONCERT Marching Clinic Rudimental Roots and the Evolution of Marching Snare Drum

This session aims to present a timeline from the early 20th century through the development of the marching snare drum over the past 100 years. DCI Hall of Famer Charley Poole, Fife and Drum Champion Brendan Mason, and former "Old Guard" Bandmaster SGM(R) Mark Reilly have amassed a collective 100+ years of experience in the art of traditional, modern, and hybrid rudimental drumming styles. This clinic will showcase performances, research, and pictorial demonstrations of techniques used and adapted over time, as well as explore the jump in rudimental compositional development that took place when the American drumming world collided with the Swiss drumming world in 1936 and again in 1969. Repertoire performed during this session, influenced by the Connecticut Yanks, Boston Crusaders, Connecticut Patriots, Sons of Liberty, and the "Old Guard" Fife and Drum Corps will entertain, educate, and inspire the next generation of percussionists.

USARD President Brendan Mason has experienced the generational excellence of Connecticut rudimental drumming as it was passed on from generation to generation through the likes of Paul Cormier, Ken and Ed Lemley, and state drum corps meets held in Connecticut for over 100 years, where the best of the best would compete for a chance to win the Northeastern States Drum Corps Association Championship.

DCI Hall of Famer and adjudicator Charley Poole is an expert on the classic Connecticut style of rudimental drumming crafted by Earl Sturtz, whose style later shaped the entire drum and bugle corps idiom through prized student Frank Arsenault as his travels brought him to the Midwest with the Ludwig Drum Company, changing drum corps forever.

World Drum Corps Hall of Famer and former Bandmaster of the "Old Guard" Fife and Drum Corps SGM(R) Mark Reilly grew up in the New York competition style of rudimental drumming developed from the likes of Gus Moeller, evolving with the Charles T. Kirk's fife, drum, and bugle corps, and eventually solidifying with the iconic style of Les Parks, Nick Attanasio, and Bobby Thompson of the Sons of Liberty.

Highly edited and mistake-free performances also create a false impression of drumming that especially affects young drummers.

Despite these drawbacks, I believe social media can be a powerful tool if used to connect with an online community of more advanced players. This can help drummers more rapidly learn their instrument and build confidence. Related to this, it is important to have "good inputs" for your musical ideas, so I will highlight several social media accounts that provide good inspiration, especially for young drummers.

CONCLUSION

No musician, whether student or teacher, can expect music to be a simple path. The difficulties will be numerous, and perhaps a large degree of them will be mental. The goals of this session include learning how to overcome some mental obstacles by adopting a deliberate practice routine, growth mindset, understanding and managing stress, and using social media to your advantage psychologically.

Finally, the future of almost all human abilities will involve understanding the complexities of the brain. Thus, the field of neuroscience will be critical for drum educators to follow. Already, neuroscience research is revealing intriguing ideas about neural pathways (mirror neurons) that may be linked to musical development and creativity. I hope the future explorations of neuroscience will keep you intrigued about the possibilities it holds for drumming education.

In the meantime, the psychological skills discussed in this session should inspire teachers to help their students be better musicians, and ultimately mentally healthier people.

ENDNOTES

1. Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T. & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review*, 100, 363–406.
2. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human be-*

haviour. Plenum Press. New York.

3. Evans, P. (2015). Self-determination theory: An approach to motivation in music education. *Musicae Scientiae*, 19(1), 65–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864914568044>
4. Ferraro, F. (2022, August 23). *Stop comparing your drumming to social media stars*. <https://www.drumeo.com/beat/stop-comparing-your-drumming-to-social-media-stars/>

Frank Ferraro is a psychology professor and drum instructor from Lincoln, Nebraska. He earned a doctoral degree in behavioral neuroscience from Kansas State University in 2003. He has taught psychology courses at the university-level for over 20 years. Frank also is an avid drummer with live and studio recording credentials. He operates his own drum teaching business (Ferraro Drum Lessons), where he privately instructs over 20 students. **PN**